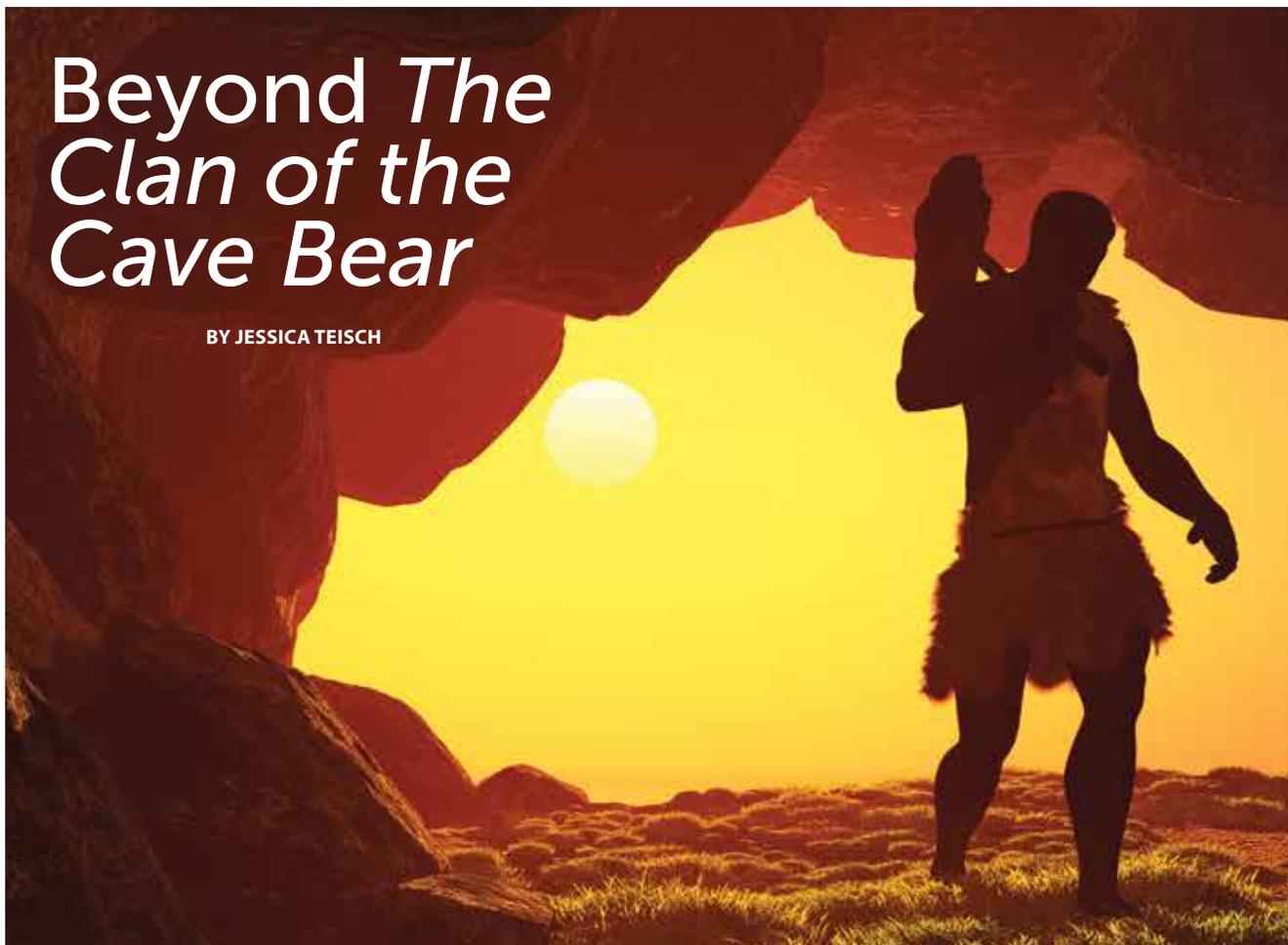


Beyond *The Clan of the Cave Bear*

BY JESSICA TEISCH



Homo sapiens (that's us!) arose in eastern Africa some 200,000 years ago, during the Ice Ages and millions of years after the dinosaurs went extinct. When these early modern humans ventured beyond Africa about 70,000 years ago, they found the Eurasian continent already populated by our close relations—the *Homo neanderthalensis*, or Neanderthals. It is generally thought that the newcomers (informally called Cro-Magnon, after the fossils found in 1868 in southwestern France), who likely outthought and outcompeted the Neanderthals, rendered them extinct in fewer than 10,000 years.

Paleontologists still debate the exact nature of the relationship between the different species of early humans and ponder what, if any, contributions the Neanderthals made to modern humans. Although scientists incessantly add to our knowledge of these early people as they uncover more fossils and analyze genomes, the field is also intriguing for novelists, who rely on solid paleoanthropological findings to create worlds vastly different from—yet in some primal aspects, very similar to—our own. Below, we present some fiction that explores “upright man,” the Neanderthals, early modern humans, and their fateful interactions.

Our Oldest Ancestors

A Different Flesh

By Harry Turtledove (1988)

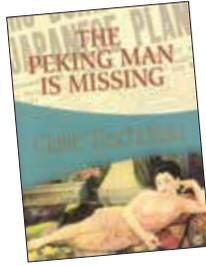
What if, instead of finding Native Americans when they reached the New World, Europeans discovered *Homo erectus* (known here as the sims, a hunter-gatherer group with a shaky grasp on fire and primitive stone tools) and various Pleistocene-era megafauna such as mastodons and sabre-toothed tigers? Turtledove explores this premise while questioning what makes us human in this collection of short stories, which range in time between 1610—when a man must rescue his baby from a tribe of wild sims—and 1988, when a group of sims' rights activists protest experimentation on their species. In between, Samuel Pepys, who owns several sims, develops the theory of evolution long before Darwin; steam trains race against mammoth-pulled wagons; and African slaves are freed since sims nicely fill their niche. Turtledove limns the broad outlines of American political and moral history here, but with a strikingly different bent.



The Peking Man Is Missing

By Claire Taschdjian (1977)

Peking Man refers to the important collection of human fossils of *Homo erectus* unearthed near Beijing in the early 1920s and 1930s. In 1941, with Beijing under Japanese occupation, the fossils mysteriously vanished en route to New York's Museum of Natural History. Taschdjian, who served as secretary to an anthropologist who directed the excavation, was one of the last to have seen the fossils; this thriller, based on a real-life mystery of anthropological and political importance, speculates what might have happened. Mixing fact and fiction, Taschdjian invents a murderous marine, a young beauty, a Chinese double agent, and Claire herself, in China during World War II. Also see *Lost in Translation* (1998) by Nicole Mones, a novel that marginally discusses the Peking Man, and *Dragon Bone Hill: An Ice-Age Saga of Homo erectus* (2004) by Noel Thomas Boaz, a nonfiction account of the famous fossil site at Dragon Bone Hill where Peking Man was found.



Further Reading

BEFORE ADAM | JACK LONDON (1906)

ALMOST ADAM | PETRU POPESCU (1996)

YOU SHALL KNOW THEM | VERCORS (PEN NAME OF JEAN BRULLER, 1954)

DAUGHTER OF KURA | DEBRA AUSTIN (2009)

ORPHAN OF CREATION | ROGER MACBRIDE ALLEN (1988)

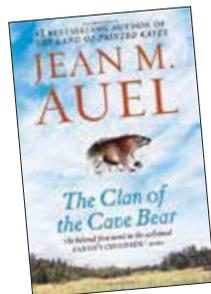
Neanderthals and the Arrival of *Homo sapiens*

The Clan of the Cave Bear

By Jean M. Auel (1980)

The popular Earth's Children series, the pioneer in the genre, speculates on interactions between Neanderthals and modern *Homo sapiens*. Set 30,000 years ago during Europe's Ice Age, this first novel introduces Ayla, an intelligent, orphaned Cro-Magnon girl raised by a tribe of Neanderthals who embarks on a journey of personal discovery and quest to find her own kind.

Auel, who conducted impressive archaeological and anthropological research into the era, immerses readers in a colorful culture with its own ceremonies, traditions, religion, and morals. Later books in this coming-of-age and journey of self-discovery series (six total) introduce Ayla's lover (with ample sex scenes), their travels through



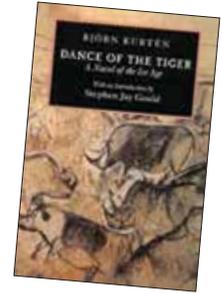
a frozen Ukraine and France, and Cro-Magnon culture and technology. The series enables readers to enjoy a fictional, sometimes overly romanticized and allegorical, but generally accurate portrait of our rich human past.

Dance of the Tiger

A Novel of the Ice Age (1980)

By Björn Kurtén

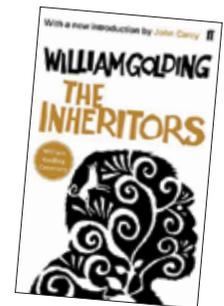
Kurtén, who was one of Europe's foremost evolutionary paleontologists, bases this unsentimental novel on solid scientific information as he imagines what might have happened when *Homo sapiens* began to supplant Neanderthals across Europe during the Pleistocene—and theorizes why the Neanderthals disappeared so suddenly after their arrival. Set roughly 30,000 years ago in Scandinavia, *Dance of the Tiger* follows Tiger, the son of a the chieftain of a Cro-Magnon village who sets out to avenge his father's death. Along the way, he becomes enmeshed in a Neanderthal clan. *Singletusk* (1982), the sequel, continues the tale. In his introduction to the novel, Stephen Jay Gould asserts, "Kurtén has managed to insinuate into his story—in a way so subtle and natural ... —every fact and theory that I know ... about Neanderthals, Cro-Magnons, human evolution during the Ice Age, glacial geology, and ecology and behavior of the great Ice Age mammals, including mammoths and saber-toothed tigers."



The Inheritors

By William Golding (1954)

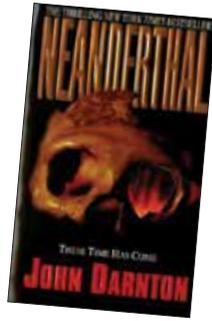
Best known for *Lord of the Flies*, Golding also imagined the decline of the Neanderthals and rise of *Homo sapiens*. He reconstructs the lives of a band of Neanderthals primarily through the eyes of Lok, a being with limited language and skills and definitely not the brightest of his clan. Writing the novel as Lok interprets often puzzling events allows readers to peek into the Neanderthals' minds and experience their predominantly external, sensory experiences as they struggle for survival—particularly when the group of "new people" with more sophisticated tools and communication encroach on their territory. "*The Inheritors* seems like an exercise in fictional kinaesthesia, with its author trying to slip not just into a Neanderthal skin, but also into one of those unimaginable minds," wrote Penelope Lively about this emotional, sometimes difficult account of the Neanderthals' demise.



Neanderthal

By John Darton (1996)

A best-selling novel by a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, *Neanderthal* is more exciting, fast-paced, and imaginative yarn than verifiable treatise as it ponders the question: What would happen if modern-day humans encountered a group of Neanderthals still surviving in their mountain home? When two rival archaeologists and ex-lovers are sent by the U.S. government to search for a missing anthropologist, their only clue to his disappearance is a surprisingly recent Neanderthal skull find in Tadjikistan. As the scientists rush to the remote Asian country and discover two reclusive, cave-dwelling Neanderthal tribes—one peaceful, the other martial, both with large brains but no verbal communi-



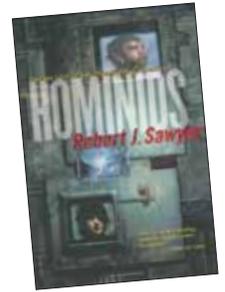
tion—they must jeopardize the safety of the peaceful tribe in order to save their own lives.

Hominids

By Robert Sawyer (2002)

◆ HUGO AWARD

In the first novel of the Neanderthal Parallax trilogy, Neanderthals have developed a dominant and intelligent culture on a parallel Earth. Quantum physicist Ponter Boddit, a Neanderthal implanted with a curious AI device that solves his species' language problems, accidentally pierces the barrier of his universe and enters a Canadian underground research station where humans predominate. While his scientific partner faces an inquiry into his Neanderthal



friend's disappearance, Pontar starts to navigate the strange world of *Homo sapiens* and shed light on his own. Sawyer, an acclaimed Canadian SF writer, intelligently explores a complex world very different from our own, in which Neanderthals, instead of *Homo sapiens*, survived and developed a sophisticated civilization with diverse social, gender, economic, moral, and religious norms. The sequels are *Humans* (2003) and *Hybrids* (2003).

Further Reading

DEATH IN THE TIME OF ICE | KAYE GEORGE (2013)

QUEST FOR FIRE | J.H. ROSNY AÏNÉ (1982)

FIRE DANCER | VICTOR KELLEHER (1996)

THE UGLY LITTLE BOY | ISAAC ASIMOV AND ROBERT SILVERBERG (1958; 1992)

The Spread of *Homo sapiens*

The Evolution Man

Or, How I Ate My Father (1960)

By Roy Lewis

This comic, witty, and joyful novel, written in elegant Oxford English rather than a crude version of the language, purports to be a firsthand account by the son of the first man to discover fire. Ernest, a perceptive, likable boy, grows up in a cave-dwelling, late Pleistocene Cro-Magnon family in East Africa. His father, Edward, pushes for humankind to evolve more quickly via “modern technology” (such as fire); his uncle, who thinks they are flirting with disaster, believes they should go back up in the trees. Edward’s zeal for progress leads to all sorts of trouble—eventually leading to the accidental action of the novel’s subtitle and Edward’s realization that in his father’s passing, “he helped to shape the basic social institutions of parricide and patriphagy which give continuity both to the community and to the individual.” The novel wrestles with the implications of technology and cynically suggests that humanity can never progress quickly because technology erases our sense of security and sanity.



Reindeer Moon

By Elizabeth Marshall Thomas (1987)

Marshall Thomas, a writer and anthropologist (*The Hidden Life of Dogs* [1993] and *The Harmless People* [1959]), participated in various expeditions to study the lives of the !Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in Namibia and Botswana. Her vast knowledge about the bushmen’s hunter-gatherer lifestyle informs this imaginative but never romanticized standout novel about Paleolithic life in Siberia, in which a young, intelligent, and headstrong young woman,

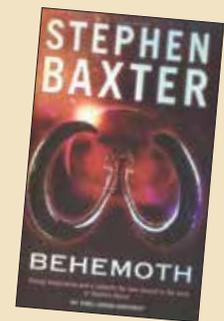
Don't Forget the Woolly Mammoths!



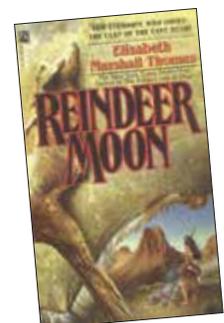
Behemoth

By Stephen Baxter (2004)

This Mammoth Trilogy omnibus, a blend of prehistory and science fiction, brings the great prehistoric animals to life. The first book, *Silverhair* (1999), takes the story of the last living family of highly intelligent mammoths, who have survived the Ice Age, into modern times as they fight for survival against a group of marauding humans pushing them from their isolated Russian island into the Northern icecap. In *Longtusk* (1999), set about 15,000 years before the coming of the Ice Age, a legendary figure in mammoth history leads the animals across the ocean; the novel also explores the mammoths’ early relationships with the Dreamers (Neanderthals) and Fireheads (*Homo sapiens*). *Icebones* (2001) partly takes place on Mars far into the future. After being colonized, humans have disappeared, and *Icebones*, calf of the matriarch Silverhair, must fend for herself and lead her herd to greener pastures.



Yanan, experiences puberty, marriage, pregnancy, the death of her parents, social rules and taboos, and a struggle for status within her group. Unlike Auel’s Ayla, nothing stands about about Yanan except the realities of daily life—and her narration as a spirit already dead, who can take the form of animals and must serve the members of her lodge. Also see *The Animal Wife* (1990), set in Siberia 20,000 years ago.

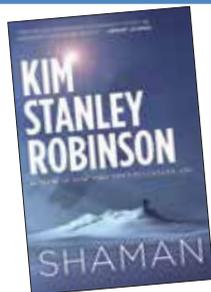


Shaman

By Kim Stanley Robinson (2013)

While traveling back 30,000 to the last Ice Age may seem like a stretch for the SF master (the Mars Trilogy), Rob-

inson, as he does in his far-future speculative fiction, tells a story about human survival and adaptation that is rich in descriptions of the power of the natural world. In this ancient, cold world, a boy named Loon, whose tribe hunts game and struggles for survival, undergoes a rite of passage: cast into the wilderness naked and without provisions, he must endure for several days. When Loon returns to his tribe, he's recognized as a man and the tribe's future shaman. Loon comes of age, gains responsibility, finds a wife—and then must set out on a long, perilous mission. (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2014)



survive among flash floods, lion attacks, patriarchal raiders, and more. In its descriptions of spirituality and the natural world and allusions to female power, readers describe *Circles of Stone* as a cross between *Clan of the Cave Bear* and Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*—but with a slightly preachy tone.

Further Reading

DAUGHTER OF THE RED DEER | JOAN WOLF (1991)
THE DOG MASTER | W. BRUCE CAMERON (2015)

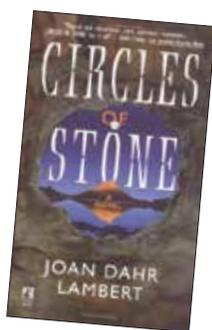
Some Nonfiction Titles

SAPIENS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANKIND | YUVAL NOAH HARARI (2015)
NEANDERTHAL MAN: IN SEARCH OF LOST GENOMES | SVANTE PÄÄBO (2013)
THE NEANDERTHALS REDISCOVERED: HOW MODERN SCIENCE IS REWRITING THEIR STORY | DIMITRA PAPAGIANNI AND MICHAEL A. MORSE (2013)
LONE SURVIVORS: HOW WE CAME TO BE THE ONLY HUMANS ON EARTH | CHRIS STRINGER (2012)
CRO-MAGNON: HOW THE ICE AGE GAVE BIRTH TO THE FIRST MODERN HUMANS | BRIAN FAGAN (2011)
BEFORE THE DAWN: RECOVERING THE LOST HISTORY OF OUR ANCESTORS | NICHOLAS WADE (2006)
THE SINGING NEANDERTHALS: THE ORIGINS OF MUSIC, LANGUAGE, MIND, AND BODY | STEVEN MITHEN (2006)
MASTERS OF THE PLANET: THE SEARCH FOR OUR HUMAN ORIGINS | IAN TATTERSALL (2012) ■

Circles of Stone

By Joan Dahr Lambert

The first novel in the Mother People series, the *Circles of Stone* saga, which ranges in time and place from one million years ago in the East African Rift Valley to the caves of the Pyrenees during the Paleolithic era, features a series of healer-women named Zena. With a religion centered on a Mother Goddess, the novel follows these women, born generations apart, and their traditions as they encounter obstacles and strive to



Young Adult Fiction

Maroo of the Winter Caves

By Ann Turnbull (1984)

At the end of the last Ice Age in southern France, Maroo and her family regularly travel from their winter caves to the seashore during the summer months. When she is a young girl, her father dies, and it falls upon Maroo and her younger brother, Otak, to lead the remaining members of their family to their winter camp, fight off lions and mountain spirits, find their tribe, and survive—no easy feat.

The Kin

By Peter Dickinson (1998)

Two hundred thousand years ago, at the birth of the modern human race in Africa, the Kins are forced to leave their traditional homelands. When a small band of children becomes separated

from the Moonhawk Kin, they set out to find the Good Places—areas of safety and peace—but instead struggle to survive as they come of age and encounter others. This volume, which also reflects on the “Oldtales,” or tribal creation stories, gathers the four novels originally published separately: *Suth's Story*, *Noli's Story*, *Ko's Story*, and *Mana's Story*.

The Boy of the Painted Cave

By Justin Denzel (1988)

In prehistoric France, Tao, 14, cannot fulfill his dream of becoming a cave painter because he is not a Chosen One; instead, he is crippled and fatherless. When the clan members discover Tao's secret artistic talent, they cast him out into the wilderness, where he befriends a wolf dog, learns to fend for himself, and starts to question the long-held taboos of his tribe.

Further Reading

SHIVA: AN ADVENTURE OF THE ICE AGE (SHIVA, #1) | J. H. BRENNAN (1991)
WOLF-WOMAN | SHERRYL JORDAN (1996)
THE GHOSTS OF HEAVEN | MARCUS SEDGWICK (2015)
DAR AND THE SPEAR-THROWER | MARJORIE COWLEY (1994)
TIME OF THE BISON | ANN TURNER (1987)
ADVENTURES IN THE ICE AGE (GOOD TIMES TRAVEL AGENCY) | LINDA BAILEY (1994)

Nonfiction

THE SKULL IN THE ROCK: HOW A SCIENTIST, A BOY, AND GOOGLE EARTH OPENED A NEW WINDOW ON HUMAN ORIGINS | LEE R. BERGER AND MARC ARONSON (2012)
THEIR SKELETONS SPEAK: KENNEWICK MAN AND THE PALEOAMERICAN WORLD | SALLY M. WALKER AND DOUGLAS W. OWSLEY (2012) ■