

Are we not men?

Meet the family...

Henry Gee

After that they started popping up all over the place. Not that this was always advisable. Sometimes they were shot by loggers even before they could catch colds from Discovery Channel camera crews.

Sometimes they ran into one another. A press conference given by a group of media-savvy pygmy indigenes from Northern Sulawesi was disrupted when a rival group of hitherto unknown hominids of enormous size ate the pygmies and ran off with the A/V equipment.

And sometimes they just tripped over their own feet. Like the centuries-old Alma chieftain who admitted (on live, prime-time TV, and in rounded Oxford tones) how much he liked Tolkien, and went on to describe in toothsome detail the sado-masochistic sexual cannibalism at the heart of Yeti religion. Post-modernist chatterati were left in agonies of indecision about which solecism was worse.

What was so remarkable was how soon the fuss died down. It was as if the hominids had been waiting for the right time to emerge from their fastnesses, a time when *Homo sapiens* wouldn't automatically seek to destroy them. That after our own sorrows — the abandonment of much of Africa in the 2020s due to AIDS and famine, and the haemorrhagic plagues that killed one in three people in the 2030s — we were now mature company for any self-respecting species on Earth.

When the time came, they just settled down with us, side by side. Just ten years after the first Sasquatches came out of northern British Columbia in '39 in search of whiskey, the hominids were everywhere, and nobody raised a brow-ridge. It would be commonplace to find (say) a Sumatran Pendek driving your cab to work; your lunch cooked and served by a Malaysian Jive Monkey (and before you complain, that's what they called themselves); and an eight-foot Kaptar from the Pamirs, pole-dancing to Earth, Wind and Fire in a club after work (but only if you were into that kind of thing).

But this acceptance came at a cost. Many of us continued to assume that we (or 'We', or 'People', or 'HomSap') were a breed apart. And so we were: just one among 20 or so species of hominid, and by far the most numerous. But what some of the remnants of religion could not stomach was that we were no longer The Elect, The Chosen. These remnants were small, but vocal. But who were they? The Muslims had long since decreed that the woes of mankind were the will of Allah, and that was that. The Catholics were, well, catholic, and in a famous encyclical, *Undique humanitas*, Pope Eusebius decreed that all hominids were ensouled creatures

Kingdom of Granada in 1492, their pretext (it turned out) was that the Emir had had 'Devils' as bodyguards. When we finally got to the sub-cellars beneath the Alhambra, we found them — the great, hulking bones of classic Neanderthals. And we could take their DNA.

Once we thought that Neanderthals weren't closely related to Us. But the Neanderthals used in ancient-DNA studies were Ice Age examples from long ago. We had never seen DNA from Neanderthals living so recently. And all of a sudden it made sense — the reason why Clovis was Hairy; the big noses and brooding, beetling expressions of everyone from — say — Leonardo to Einstein.



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of God. The Jews welcomed the opportunity for God to choose someone else for a change. The last hold-outs were sabbatarian enclaves in the United States and parts of West Africa who refused to countenance that the hominids were really human — the first for reasons of racial superiority, the second so as not to disturb the bush-meat trade.

It took one event to convince everybody. No, it wasn't when Serumthrep Okk, an Alma from the Altai, was declared the next Incarnation of the Holy One. And not even when one Jjkkaa' HhkHoj, millionaire scion of a Jacksonville rental car business, became the first Tibestian Sand-Druid to be Bar-Mitzvah (*mazel tov*). But it came from an echo of the past.

There's nothing new under the sun, you see, for we'd met hominids before. Those fairy stories were firmly based in fact. When Ferdinand and Isabella invaded the

After that they started popping up all over the place. Abraham Lincoln had been at least 35% Sasquatch. Most of the Khmer Rouge had been Malaysian Jive Monkeys. (I still can't believe that name. But they're a fun crowd.) The final knell came when it was announced that Charles Darwin had been more than 65% Neanderthal, a value that turned out to be typical of British aristocracy, exceeded only by the immediate parentage of (you guessed it) His Holiness, Pope Eusebius, whose family had lived in southern Spain since time immemorial.

With typical political aplomb, the Pope had been ahead of the game all the time. Now we'll all have to get used to it. There are hominids in us all. ■

Henry Gee is a senior editor of *Nature*. His latest book is *The Science of Middle Earth* (Cold Spring/Souvenir).