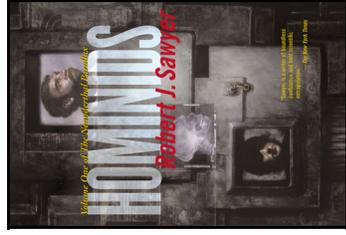


# Hominids

## Robert J. Sawyer



Ponter Boddit, a modern-day Neanderthal, slips through a quantum portal to our version of reality, where he meets Mary Vaughan, a geneticist trying to recover from a brutal attack by a male of her own kind. As Ponter and Mary learn about each other's cultures, they grow close emotionally and discover what it really means to be human.

**TOR BOOKS, New York**

US\$25.95 • Cdn\$35.95 • ISBN 0-312-87692-0

**The following questions should stimulate an interesting group discussion. Please note that they reveal much of the novel's plot; to preserve your reading pleasure, please don't look at these questions until after you've finished the book.**

1. The Neanderthal world has males and females living largely separate lives. What did you think of Sawyer's portrayal of this? What are the appeals of this concept? The downsides? How would our society be different if children were only born in discrete generations every ten years?
2. Is Mary Vaughan's rape gratuitous? If not, what do you think Sawyer was trying to accomplish with it? Should Mary have reported the rape? Do male *Homo sapiens sapiens* get a raw deal in this novel?
3. Sawyer makes a strong case for the benefits of the

Companion implants. Is this really a workable system? Do the Neanderthals give up too much in the way of privacy for the protection offered by this? Do we really have privacy, or is the quote from Sun Microsystems's Scott McNealy at the beginning of the novel accurate: "You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it."

4. Some readers think Sawyer spends too much time on the negatives of our society and the positives of Neanderthal society. Is that a fair criticism? What are the positives of our society? What negatives are implicit in the Neanderthal society?
5. What did you think of the Neanderthal practice of sterilization, instead of execution, for capital crimes? What about the notion of also sterilizing those who share fifty percent of the criminal's genetic material? Is there any circumstance under which eugenics such as this can be positive?

6. The Neanderthals have no concept of religion. Is this realistic, or would all intelligent beings develop creation myths? Does Sawyer reasonably extrapolate the psychological consequences of having no religion? Is Ponter Boddit right about all the damage the belief in God and an afterlife has done to our society? Is Mary Vaughan a reasonable spokesperson for the religious point of view?

7. What do you think of Hak, Ponter's Companion implant? Did you think Sawyer succeeded in making Hak a real character, or was he just a handy way to deal with the translation problem?

8. Did the Neanderthal justice system seem realistic to you? Do you believe what the process server said to Adikor Huld: "Justice postponed is no justice at all." Did Jasmel Ket do the right thing in speaking on behalf of Adikor? If Ponter had never returned, and Adikor had been found guilty, would Jasmel have turned her back on Adikor?

9. Do you think it's likely that our species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, wiped out the Neanderthals 30,000 years ago? What do you think happened on Ponter's world? Did the Neanderthals wipe us out there? Does it matter what happened that long ago? Have we evolved from what we were back then?

10. What did you think of the news items at the beginnings of three of the chapters in the book? Did they add to the realism of the story, or were they a distraction? What about the use of real people (Jean Crétien), real companies (Inco), and real places (Sudbury) in the novel? Did you feel the story benefited from being set in the here-and-now?

11. What did you think of the relationship developing between Mary and Ponter? They are two different species. Could they ever have come to really understand each other? Were you surprised when Ponter spoke in favor of re-opening the gateway at the end of the book, given what he thought of our world?

12. Does *Hominids* stand on its own as a novel, or is it really only a prologue to the rest of the Neanderthal Parallax series? Do you like the idea that there is more story to come? What do you think is going to happen in *Humans* and *Hybrids*, the remaining two volumes?

**Robert J. Sawyer** — "the dean of Canadian science fiction," according to *The Ottawa Citizen* — is the only writer in history to win the top SF awards in the U.S., Canada, Japan, France, and Spain. His thirteen novels include **Calculating God**,

**Factoring Humanity**, and **The Terminal Experiment**, which won the Science Fiction Writers of America's Nebula Award for Best Novel of the Year. Born in Ottawa in 1960, Rob lives just west of Toronto with his wife, poet Carolyn Clink.



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