



The Red Hourglass: Lives of the Predators

Gordon Grice

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Snake venom that digests human flesh. A building cleared of every living thing by a band of tiny spiders. An infant insect eating its living prey from within, saving the vital organs for last. These are among the deadly feats of natural engineering you'll witness in *The Red Hourglass*, prize-winning author Gordon Grice's masterful, poetic, often dryly funny exploration of predators he has encountered around his rural Oklahoma home.

Grice is a witty and intrepid guide through a world where mating ends in cannibalism, where killers possess toxins so lethal as to defy our ideas of a benevolent God, where spider remains, scattered like "the cast-off coats of untidy children," tell a quiet story of violent self-extermination. It's a world you'll recognize despite its exotic strangeness--the world in which we live. Unabashedly stepping into the mix, Grice abandons his role as objective observer with beguiling dark humor--collecting spiders and other vermin, decorating a tarantula's terrarium with dollhouse furniture, or forcing a battle between captive insects because he deems one "too stupid to live."

Kill. Eat. Mate. Die. Charting the simple brutality of the lives of these predators, Grice's starkly graceful essays guide us toward startling truths about our own predatory nature. *The Red Hourglass* brings us face to fanged face with the inadequacy of our distinctions between normal and abnormal, dead and alive, innocent and evil.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Red Hourglass: Lives of the Predators Details

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From Reader Review **The Red Hourglass: Lives of the Predators** for online ebook

Shawn Thrasher says

Writing moving, elegant prose about any subject is difficult enough, but Gordon Grice writes elegant, moving prose about some of nature's most feared creatures. In three essays, he writes reverently and lovingly about black widows, tarantulas, and brown recluse spiders - the triumvirate of nightmares for most of us, feared and loathed. Three other essays - about rattlesnakes, pigs and dogs - round out nature's house of horrors. The essay about rattlesnakes is the best among the other three (fascinating and strange creatures). But it's when he's writing about spiders that his evocative language and adoration truly come to life. Grice is obviously an arachnophile and an amateur (I guess) arachnologist who has succeeded in making spiders if not more likable (they really are still scary) then at least a little bit more understood (as much as he's able; we STILL don't know a whole lot about how spider venom even works). This book certainly isn't for extreme arachnophobes; but I recommend it if you like reading essays about Mother Nature and all her wonders.

Andi says

Don't read if you're afraid of creepy crawlies!

Jason says

Gordon Grice is crazy. He's an English instructor at a community college who likes to raise black widow spiders for fun...and then gets them to duke it out with beetles, mantids, and any other nasty little thing he finds in the backyard of his rural Kansas home. Yikes! But he's also a darn good writer...if a bit creepy. And he doesn't limit his topic to just black widows here. Each chapter focuses on a different predatory species, including pigs! Fun stuff, but perhaps not a read for just before bedtime.

Koroviev says

This book contains some interesting information, and also a lot of stories and opinions that did not interest me. The author is not a scientist (but an English professor), and this is not exactly a work of popular science, but somewhat a diary of his observations and thoughts.

While the chapter on the black widow was very fascinating, most others had problematic elements:

1. In "Canid", he talks of the Indian dog of the street called "Dhole" which he says does not belong to any particular breed and hunts deer. This is highly inaccurate. "Dhole" (*Cuon alpinus*) is Asiatic/Indian Wild Dog, that does not live in the streets, but in the forests. It hunts deer as well as tigers sometimes. In contrast, the dog of the street is actually fed by humans. usually, these dogs are pets of the poor, who feed them, but can't really keep them.

This makes me skeptical about his other accounts. This information was not very hard to find, a simple google search gives you the right information. But if I am supposed to google everything, then there's no point reading the book really.

2. When he describes the interaction of some insect that he calls "cricket beast" with a mantid in a jar, he says he never found the insect in any book, he does not know the name, and neither does he present a photograph. This is bad science. He tells us several times that he does not believe other peoples' stories, but we are expected to believe him.

3. "Rattlesnakes": Most of this chapter is about how horrific and terrible rattlesnakes are and how to kill them. No information is provided about their ecological usefulness. There are numerous accounts detailing the hunting of these snakes (including a few by the author himself, although for purposes of protection) and also a long description of a "Rattlesnake Round-up/Rodeo" (these are events in Southern United States where thousands of snakes are captured, displayed and killed in a single day in front of a large audience). He fails to mention that as a result of such hunting, a lot of the species are threatened. The tone of these hunting sections is almost celebratory and he seems to suggest that the world will be a much better place if the rattlers would go extinct. Again, bad science.

The other troubling aspect was the random gender assignments. Sometimes the assignments make sense like for the Black Widow in her web or the mantid female, but then she always seems to prey upon the males of other species (Why?). The wolf spider is a female and tarantula is a male. Crocodiles, Dinosaurs and dogs are males. Am I supposed to take the gender seriously, or is it just an artifact of sexism? This random assignment is just scientifically inaccurate and culturally sexist.

The chapter on the widow is the only interesting part of the book, and that too excludes the male widow completely (except when he appears to mate). I would have liked some information on him too.

Patrick says

As an animal lover and young reader, I picked this book up when I was very little and it profoundly affected me. Gordon Grice takes a passionate look at different predatory animals, namely the black widow. He recollects personal experiences, histories of attacks, mating behaviors, dietary habits and much more. Rather than seeming like merely a straight-forward reference guide, Gordon Grice adds many stories involving his or his friend's experiences with spiders, snakes and other deadly predators. (It's quite fun to see how he plays God with some of the spiders.) While the book can be first and foremostly used as a reference and factual guide for zoology, it also makes a very interesting and entertaining non-fiction story. Gordon doesn't shy away from the details and manages to weave an exhilarating and thrilling story. The book is an easy read, but still extremely fascinating. I devoured it at a young age and can imagine myself doing it again.

Andrew Fear says

I picked this book up on a whim and am very glad that I did. It's mainly about creepy crawlies with a couple of mammalian intrusions. These latter work. but I couldn't help wondering whether a couple more creepies

wouldn't have preserved its unity better. Its rare to find a scientific book which non scientists enjoy reading and perhaps the fact that the author is an enthusiast rather than a pro helps in that respect. Anyway I found it fascinating: an engaging mixture of data, personal anecdote, and interesting musings on what these animals tell us about creation in general. I learnt a lot about spiders etc and also a lot about our dealing with them. The author is engaging, though I wondered at times whether he wasn't being a bit right-on with his pronouns (I know she is usually right with insects, but wondered about some of the he's...) still one must pity anyone who has to live in a town called Liberal....

Linda says

I really enjoyed this book but would have rated it higher if it hadn't been so anemic toward the end. Grice richly researches the black widow spider but does not investigate his remaining predators with a similar depth. His chapter on the brown recluse, in comparison, is disappointing. Part of what makes the black widow chapter so entertaining is because Grice has such a deep personal experience with this particular spider. Just the same, he has uncovered so many interesting stories and research on the black widow that the book is worth reading just for this chapter.

Jenny Schmenny says

This stuff's like gold to me! Detailed, reverent, lightly personal, nerdy, pragmatic, philosophical, and often astonishingly disgusting. Seriously, if you're squeamish, you do *not* want to read about scientists injecting themselves with black widow venom, or mantids eviscerating frogs. But if you love biology and enjoy narrative that's both pensive and descriptive, you should read this book. Grice's chapters are limited to: black widow, mantid, rattlesnake, tarantula, pig, canid, and recluse, but he ties their anatomy and behaviors to those of other predators.

Shane says

Gordon Grice is an English professor and armchair entomologist, and his book contains 7 engaging essays on the practices of various predators, mostly invertebrates like spiders and mantids. The essays are best enjoyed as showcases of English-language mastery instead of as scientific treatises, as Grice's writing often strays into sensationalism and anthropomorphism. Still, the essays are enjoyable and I must admire the man for being so passionate about such unlovable creatures.

Jennifer says

I DNFed this book. I dislike nonfiction books without references, and it was almost entirely based on his own experiences. As a biologist, I had greater expectations.

Peacegal says

Gordon Grice's *The Red Hourglass* is a fascinating, and at times squirm-inducing, look at a handful of predatory and poisonous species. The title of course refers to the signature markings on the body of the infamous black widow spider, whose profile is the debut chapter. After finishing this *Hourglass*, I'm no less frightened of the spiders but have more respect for their role in nature.

Grice looks at creatures with a scientist's eye, interested but not empathetic. He relates their battles to eat, mate and survive in a detached manner, as well as the harrowing medical ordeals of the victims of poisonous bites. The author at times becomes something of a Michael Vick of the bug world, pitting various arthropods against each other for feeding purposes or occasionally for personal amusement. Allow me to note from experience that *Hourglass* not always a good book to read while eating.

In this book we have a front-row seat to not only the brutality of nature but the brutality of two-legged, big-brained creatures who should know better. We learn that every species imaginable was introduced to black widow venom in every way imaginable during laboratory studies. A scientist's horrifying account of being bitten by a widow and its aftereffects gives us insight into what these countless uncomprehending animals may have faced. The chapter on rattlesnakes devotes a rather large amount of its text to how the hated reptiles are destroyed, by both humans and other species. At one point Grice profiles a man who "loves rattlesnakes." What he actually meant is that the man loves to kill rattlesnakes—the man estimates he's killed about a thousand for sale and collecting purposes. Sure, it's hard to have much sympathy for rattlers—until you consider the role the species plays as both predator and prey, and what might happen to the ecosystem were they to be wiped out.

Like David Attenborough's fascinating species, *The Red Hourglass* will give readers a renewed appreciation of the complexities and mysterious ways of nature.

Cody S. Green says

I was a little disappointed in the context but it's still a good book. I thought this was more an informative book on the habits and rituals of Spiders and other venomous animals. Really, it's more the author telling you of his encounters with the animals he covers with the book. It's well thought out and worded wonderfully though. Easy to read and easy to follow along, but to me, I thought he began to ramble a bit after the first few chapters and he tends to talk about things no one would really care about.

Kelly says

I've always had a thing for predators, even as a child. I used to capture spiders in jars, and one of my favorite childhood nature memories was the time I found a large praying mantis in the backyard. So this book was right up my alley. Plus it was, surprisingly, beautifully written.

The black widow, mantis, rattlesnake, and tarantula chapters were, of course, amazing. The chapter that surprised me that most was the one on pigs. Fascinating.

Some may call this book morbid and gross. It's certainly not for everyone. If you like snakes and spiders, though, then this is a must-read.

M— says

The opening essay on black widow spiders was incredible — well written, informative, deeply thought, passionate, and vastly interesting; five stars for it alone — but the subsequent essays weren't good. Still recommended, mind, just... of lesser quality. Figure three-star average for them.

Of the seven essays here, three of them are on the topic of spiders (and a fourth, on the mantid, that touched on spiders). I don't consider myself a victim of arachnophobia, but I felt invisible fantasy spiders crawling on me for the next full day. The final essay featured an antidote about a woman discovering she'd been sleeping on bed with dozens of brown recluses living beneath it. I had a very hard time sleeping that night.

Grice has an excellent website up with information on these essays and many others:

<http://deadlykingdom.blogspot.com/p/r...>

Paul says

Absolutely first-rate natural history -- nice to see pigs given their due, fit company for venomous spiders. Funny, gruesome, laconic, unforgettable. A curiously American book, too. These are the creatures that fill our empty spaces and our imaginations.
