



The Inner Life of Cats: The Science and Secrets of Our Mysterious Feline Companions

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Our feline companions are much-loved but often mysterious. In *The Inner Life of Cats*, Thomas McNamee blends scientific reportage with engaging, illustrative anecdotes about his own beloved cat, Augusta, to explore and illuminate the secrets and enigmas of her kind.

As it begins, *The Inner Life of Cats* follows the development of the young Augusta while simultaneously explaining the basics of a kitten's physiological and psychological development. As the narrative progresses, McNamee also charts cats' evolution, explores a feral cat colony in Rome, tells the story of Augusta's life and adventures, and consults with behavioral experts, animal activists, and researchers, who will help readers more fully understand cats.

McNamee shows that with deeper knowledge of cats' developmental phases and individual idiosyncrasies, we can do a better job of guiding cats' maturation and improving the quality of their lives. Readers' relationships with their feline friends will be happier and more harmonious because of this book.

The Inner Life of Cats: The Science and Secrets of Our Mysterious Feline Companions Details

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From Reader Review The Inner Life of Cats: The Science and Secrets of Our Mysterious Feline Companions for online ebook

Christina says

Great read. Loved the anecdotal accounts from the author, Thomas McNamee, of his own cat Augusta. His personal accounts of his own cat elevated the book from being just an account about studies on feline behaviors, to a touching dedication between a man and his feline companion. This book helped me to better understand my cat and appreciate him for all his complexities. I took for granted the notion that all cats are picky and have weird quirks, but reading this book gave me pause to consider why my cat might be picky about certain things and to reflect on my cat's behaviors. I would highly recommend this book to anyone seeking to learn more about their feline companions.

Harrison says

I was expecting this to be about cat psychology, animal intelligence, biological information.. the inner life of cats is about this sort of thing but I feel somewhat lied to by the title and subtitle on the cover. this book is mostly a personal memoir of the author's own cat as well as a general handbook about caring for your cat. nothing wrong with that but this isn't the book I wanted to read.

Jennifer says

DNF 75% through no flaw of its own. I enjoyed the memoir slant and found much of it compulsively readable. Spent a couple of days analyzing the vocalizations of my cat (open mouthed vs closed mouthed sounds - the amount of effort required for the open mouthed meow is definitely commensurate with how much she wants food / attention) after reading the bit from the cat linguist, and also enjoyed reading about the results of a cat socialization study. I found myself reluctant to read the last two chapters, however, in which the author's beloved cat is on a downhill spiral. I've lived that, it sucks more than just about anything, and I don't want to go through that again - even vicariously - until I have to.

So that's that. Oh well.

William Nist says

I love my cats; my cats love me; and this author is a cat man. His insightful and delightful book is an ode to this marvelous animal, who has, to a mutual advantage, decided to live with us in our homes.

I especially was touched by the chapter on losing your cat to old age or accident As I face one of my cat's senior years (he is 16 now), and can't even bear the thought of losing him; the author shares in his pain when losing his beloved Augusta. The richness of the experience of living with a feline obviously has penetrated the mental landscape of this author, and his response to his cat's passing honors both his beloved and himself.

A fine book worthy of your attention.

Jeff says

I love cats and that love makes me virtually incapable of disliking books about them, so my 4-star rating is likely "too high" if you're not as biased as i am in that way.

For my meta-review i'll focus on the 2 things i noticed most as i read others' reviews: the title and the "Illness, Aging, and Death" chapter.

Consider only the subtitle as you decide whether this is the cat book for you. McNamee believes that cats have *inner* lives but his book is not a philosophical or scientific or personal argument in support of that belief. It's also not an attempt to justify that belief. Instead, it's a combination of personal experiences and research about what's good for the human-cat relationship (which also, of course, sometimes details what's *not* good).

If you're avoiding Chapter 7 (Illness, Aging, and Death) because you still acutely feel the loss of a cat, you might not be ready for a new cat but consider reading about McNamee's grief as an opportunity for silently helpful commiseration from someone who probably understands how you feel. Another reason not to avoid Chapter 7 is that it mostly consists of information on aging and illness as the quite apt title implies.

Amy says

This is a decent behavioral overview about cats that also serves as a memoir. Some general essays about cat behavior (and a chapter that reads like it was written by Jackson Galaxy's publicist) are interspersed with stories about the author's cat, Augusta.

The story goes from Augusta's kittenhood to her death. I don't recommend reading a book about the imminent mortality of your beloved pet while you have PMS. I was a crying mess for the last few chapters, which was awkward, since I was listening to the audio book at work.

Other than the tear inducing, soul crushing agony that is the penultimate two chapters of this book, it's an interesting glimpse into the mindset of our furry friends.

Séanin says

Got tricked into reading a book about an animal's life where the animal dies at the end and I'm left sobbing uncontrollably while forcing my cat to stay with me. But the science about how a cat thinks, how they are really still half-wild and may never be fully domesticated and that as their caregivers it is important that we understand that, was enlightening and interesting.

James Scheid says

A wonderful book for anyone who has been loved by and loved a cat. Especially touching were the author's heart felt stories about the life and death of his cat Augusta. As I type this, my cat Twyla is laying on the left outer reaches of my key board. I wouldn't have it any other way. It has been my experience that cats are affectionate, loving beings. This book confirmed that.

Elle Maruska says

Welp this book left me a messy sobbing wreck.

I love cats. Love them. I rescue abandoned cats/kittens and find them new homes and I live my life surrounded by cats pretty much and this book was such a wonderful, beautiful, painful, honest meditation on cats and living your life beside them. It goes into the science of cat cognition and understanding, the social history of cats and feral cat colonies from Rome to San Francisco, and it discusses how the standards of cat care have changed but at its heart, it's a story of a family and their beloved cat Augusta from the beginning to the end. Moments of quiet joy and overwhelming terror, sadness, grief, love, amusement...it's all there and in this one story of August and her people, cat owners can find themselves and their beloved pets...how we make mistakes and hurt one another and try our best always to be worthy of the love we receive. The essence of this book is really about love, and about how cats love, how we love cats, how we earn love and lose it, how we work at it every day, how we try to understand these mostly wild animals who choose to live with us and love us, even when we don't deserve it.

ANYWAY THIS WAS SO GOOD PLEASE IF U LOVE CATS READ IT

Diane says

Being a cat lover all of my life, I really enjoyed the insight that this book provided. This book is well written and I liked that much of it was a love letter to the author's cat, Augusta, who arrived as a kitten one cold day in winter when the author lived in Montana. The book also provides terrific information about the psychology and biology of cats both domestic and those in feral colonies. He makes the reader think about the needs of a cat and what owners need to insure to make the cat's life a good one. There was much in this book that made me smile like when he discussed how his cat and his wife "mastering the art of the slow turn in bed at night" so as not to disturb the cat sleeping in the fold of one's legs. This is something that I grew to love and now miss that our Lily is gone. At times I found myself in tears as the author explained signs to look for when your cat be very sick since cats do an excellent job hiding illness (we missed many of the early signs ourselves). He describes the euthanasia process and his decision to have his 15 year old beloved cat, Augusta put to sleep. This part was tough to read about for me since it was just (7) weeks ago that we had our sweet Lily put to sleep but, I was also appreciated reading about how the grieving process for a beloved pet is very normal and that it takes months and sometimes longer to heal (I still feel our sweet girl's presence everywhere and hardly a day goes by when I don't tear up at some point thinking about her). I really enjoyed this book overall, very readable, even the research and scientific material was interesting and not dry in the least.

(4.5/5 stars)

Kim Stallwood says

The author, Thomas McNamee, is a writer of books about animals who live in the wild (e.g., bears, wolfs). As this is the only book I've read of his, I'm assuming from "The Inner Life of Cats" that his writing style is weighted toward the scholarly as opposed to the popular. Though this book is most definitely a mix of the two. For example, Chapter Two "Becoming a Cat" and Chapter Three "Thinking? Talking?", read as if they have been written for a popular science book. Whereas, elsewhere, the book is unashamedly a love letter to Augusta, the cat he and his partner lived with and whose life runs the book's narrative arc. This mix of popularism and science mostly works but sometimes it felt like I was reading two different books stitched together. Moreover, there's a tension between the unashamed "cat lover" and the "scientist" as the author works through the customary set of issues that books about cats generally address. I have some trouble with Chapter Five "The Wild Animal at Large" because of the way it describes and discusses feral cats and the issues associated with them. He gets things wrong, makes incorrect assumptions, and omits key points. In the next chapter, he quotes at length Bernard Rollin without referencing him. Nonetheless, McNamee clearly likes cats and loved Augusta as it shines through the writing. His positions about cats is generally strong and correct but there are times when I think he is ill-informed and wrong. And confused or conflicted but fails to recognise this. For example, he calls for various measures to address the population of feral cats because they hunt and kill birds, mice and other animals (he buys into the flawed meta-analysis) but always set Augusta free to go outside to live out her natural instincts to, er, hunt and kills birds, mice and other animals.

Sarah Ferguson says

Another book that would have been far better as long-form magazine-type writing. The first half of the book was the only part worth reading, and most of that could have been edited way down.

Also, this made me appreciate my dog even more, as it seems clear cats do not have as much to offer their companions as their canine counterparts. I was really hoping this book would give me some insight/appreciation of cats (one of whom shares my house thanks to being married to a cat lover), but it failed to do so. It is too bad, because I want to see more into that which makes people love cats so much - this was the main reason I picked up the book in the first place.

Canadian Reader says

I enjoyed McNamee's book and encountered quite a bit of new information about the problem of feral cats and cat communication and vocalization. However, the book is generally not about what the title claims that it is: the inner life of cats. There is also some information presented that seems unnecessarily obvious: what to do if your cat goes missing, for example. Prospective readers who have recently lost a beloved animal should also be advised that McNamee describes the decline and euthanasia of his longtime feline companion, Augusta, in a fair bit of detail.

Although it is largely expository, The Inner Life of Cats does contain engaging memoir elements. McNamee tells us the story of Augusta, who was abandoned as a three-month-old kitten on a road near his Montana

ranch. I mostly enjoyed reading about Augusta's adventures, and I certainly understand the author's desire to give her an enriched life of outdoor freedom, though it is not what I would choose to do. However, I have to say I was very uncomfortable with his decision to let Augusta out of doors when he and his wife moved to San Francisco. To give McNamee his due, he does discuss the many dangers of a cat's being allowed out of doors (along with the challenges of keeping a cat entirely indoors). Oddly, however, he omits any discussion of the possibility that a cat can acquire F.I.V.--the feline equivalent of H.I.V.--often contracted in territorial disputes by male cats from bites by infected toms.

A quibble of mine: McNamee's references to feline nutrition are quite superficial. He appears to suggest that because the American Association of Feed Control Officials identifies nutritional requirements for cat food, it somehow oversees pet food production and ensures the quality of commercial foods. It does not, and neither does the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In fact, according to Susan Thixton, "The United States Department of Agriculture has no regulatory authority over pet food. The USDA does have a voluntary pet food certification program, but it is not acknowledged by FDA or State Department of Agriculture." Pet food is poorly regulated indeed, and poor diet is linked with a number of modern feline medical problems, including inflammatory bowel disease and hyperthyroidism. Interested readers may wish to visit Thixton's Truth about Pet Food website for more information.

Beth says

Marvelous book getting into cats' ancestry, behavior (plenty on that!), the life cycle of a cat, issues surrounding cats these days such as feral cats, and all illustrated with the woven-in tale of one of the author's cats. I learned a lot that made sense considering what else I've read (such as John Bradshaw's "Cat Sense") and experience with our own 12 year old cat (with us 11 years). Some might find the personal stories intrusive but I think they blend in well. The part about death and grieving of a cat seems most helpful (as someone with a senior cat) and if you're the sensitive type have tissues handy. McNamee is a bit preachy about humans' responsibility to take *good* care of a cat (playing with them, vet visits) but I happen to agree with him. A bit information dense so best read in sections.

Recommended for any "cat person" and excellent for someone who's considering getting a cat but wants to know *everything* first.

Nore says

So, to be honest, what brought this up to four stars is that I really relate to McNamee's experiences with his cats, and it hit me right where it hurt - I frequently joke about how they need to work on extending the lifespan of cats so that my cat, Wentworth, can live forever. I'm not going to be able to handle it when she dies; I worry frequently about whether she's happy enough, if she's bored, if she likes her food, if her bad hip is hurting her; I bought a bed that's low to the ground specifically because I don't want her to have to jump too high to join me at night. I've mastered the slow turn he describes his wife doing, the one that lets Wenny move with me when I want to lie on my side. Roughly a full star of my rating is due to the emotional writing.

But as a cat book by itself, this book is very, very thin. The actual scientific content of this is maybe a third of the book; this is more an autobiography of McNamee's life with his cats with some science sprinkled in than it is a book about how to properly care for your cats. What's there, though, is great, and well worth the

read. Definitely something I'd recommend to someone who loves their cat and wants a starting point for how to take better care of their tiny, furry family member.
