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W. Michael Gear, Kathleen O'Neal Gear

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After being asked to raise Umber, a bonobo chimpanzee, in his home as part of an experiment to discover the differences in learning patterns between humans and chimps, Dr Jim Dutton, an anthropology professor, begins to suspect that his primate pupil has been genetically altered.

Dark Inheritance Details

Date : Published March 6th 2001 by Warner Books (NY) (first published January 1st 2001)

ISBN : 9780446526067

Author : W. Michael Gear , Kathleen O'Neal Gear

Format : Hardcover 519 pages

Genre : Fiction, Science Fiction, Thriller

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Jim says

Can you tell I am on a kick? Trade paperback, oh sweet pulp fiction. This book was a more educated thriller than most and well-written to boot!

I am not a fan of the Crichton-like writers, mainly because techno-thrillers do very little for me; however, throw a bit of genetics, ethics, horror and the occult in there and I'll read till my hearts content. Now add a killer and I am hooked.

What's best about this style of book though is that they are often decently researched and have some educational value. This book, with its heavy emphasis on anthropology, has quite a bit of information on bonobo/chimp/human evolution.

Learning and a good book? How can you go wrong! Two words: you can't.

Linden says

Interested in animal intelligence, I bought this book for 50¢ at the A.R.F. Thrift Store a month ago. True, the plot is based upon secret gene combining between human DNA and that of the bonobo in order to develop the primate brain. Smyth-Archer Chemists, a fictional multi-billion dollar company, has been quietly exploring this questionable field, giving out promising results--the resulting young--to be raised by primatologists all across the country.

From her earliest years, Dr. Jim Dutton has raised and socialized a bonobo, Umber, alongside his own daughter, Brett, in what is called cross-fostering. He has known for years that Umber is special. She has grown up like a sister to Brett, understanding spoken English, able to spell and write. Umber can also respond in American Sign Language or by using her keyboard voice synthesizer. Her progress has become so amazing that Dr. Dutton has begun fudging his report back to Smyth-Archer, soft-pedaling her abilities.

True, Umber is one of the promising results, but no one has been wondering about the products of other experiments, the less successful ones. Or how these augmented bonobos might behave if their own cultural mores might be violated by people.

Everything begins to change. Another cross-fostered bonobo is about to become negatively news-worthy. Smith-Archer leadership is worried their private genetic explorations may be about to become public, so they fast forward to the next stage for Umber. She is to be released into the wild in Equatorial Guinea, Umber, a clothing-wearing, intelligent, American teen-aged ape. How can Dutton and his daughter let her go? They can't.

The blend of current fact, true studies of named scientists, the knowledge of the human and bonobo genome, animal behavior and psychology, all rings true in *Dark Inheritance*. And the dark part of the genetic inheritance may not necessarily come from the ape genes. Geoffrey Smyth-Archer explains of early ape experiments with Washo, Viki, and Lucy,

"They were placed in families of psychologists, but when they outgrew the research design, they were cast off. In some cases those same animals ended up in cages, infected with HIV and hepatitis. The betrayal was morally reprehensible, but we've developed a society that believes in throwaway animals, be they dogs, cats, horses, or chimps. The research community was just as corrupt as anyone" (p. 434).

This book was also of interest in that I learned something about reading from it. I became aware that the process of reading sets up mental rules about places the plot or character may or may not go. I still remember my upset from a young adult novel when, in the final pages, the protagonist had aquamarine eyes. Two hundred pages earlier, in the first chapter, I thought they were described as green. Thinking I'd been mistaken, I thumbed back to check the truth of the mental image I had sustained over so many pages. Green, it said.

This explains my frustration in a couple of recent books I've read and reviewed, when the establishing rules weren't followed, such as the conflict of information in *Rebel Island* by Riordan and *Hunt* by Fukuda. It reminds me of something I occasionally see on the playground. If spoken, it would sound something like, "If I'm about to lose, I'll change the rules to favor me, and then I can win fairly."

Such informal world-establishing rules remind me of what happens when reading science fiction. If we readers take in and trust the parameters of a new world or the capabilities of a space ship, we can enter a cohesive story like the Ender series, or that of Terry Pratchett's Discworld or a Ray Bradbury short story. When an author breaks faith with us, goes contrary to the rules, it is disturbing, sometimes even upsetting.

The last pages of *Dark Inheritance* did take away from my appreciation of the book. It was not a fatal flaw, but certainly sad. From the chase in the forest on page 489 to the conclusion on page 517, the story seemed to have been created by another writer. The serious information about behavior and animal cognition devolved into a beach-read with characters conveniently coming to their senses and giving dime-novel speeches. This ending took away from a worthy exploration regarding the morality of future genetic experimentation, embodied in the tragedy of Umber's loss of innocence through events which ultimately made her experience still more human.

Three and a half stars

Caitlin Ahern says

I read this book while my husband was in the hospital and it was perfect for the frame of mind I was in. I needed something that could distract me, wouldn't require too much brain power to comprehend, and could easily be put down and picked up again as nurses and doctors were coming in and out of the room. This fit the bill perfectly. It was an easy read, entertaining, and interesting. It was good enough to keep me reading, but I wouldn't necessarily seek out another novel from these authors again.

Scott says

I thought this book was very Crichton-esque, in that it used lots of actual science to set up a believable fictional premise. A pharmaceutical company is secretly genetically engineering apes to be more human.

Obviously, things are not going to work out as the company planned and events spiral horribly out of control. Death and mayhem ensue. Can anthropologist Jim Dutton, his teenage daughter Brett, and their genetically enhanced bonobo, Umber, figure out what is going on and manage to escape from the jungle with their lives?

Alex Telander says

The latest novel from husband-and-wife authors, W. Michael Gear and Kathleen O'Neal Gear, features essentially man's creation of the missing link between apes and humans. *Dark Inheritance* transcends the realms of the current genome project and genetic engineering to bring the first ape of the endangered Bonobo species, to contain the larger and more intelligent human brain.

Some of you may remember Lucy, the ape who could communicate through sign language. *Dark Inheritance*'s main character, Umber the Bonobo, can do this and more: she has a little keyboard with a voice synthesizer by which she can communicate with people, albeit with a monotone, robotic voice. Umber can also read and write, though only at a child's level.

Umber has been a part of the family, Bret's sister and Jim Dutton's daughter, for many years now. Even though she is considered a member of the Dutton family, she is the property of the pharmaceutical giant SAC. SAC is the company which has bred these super-intelligent apes. There are many scattered over the globe, each part of the a different family.

Then there is the clandestine facility in northwest Africa, where SAC's full program is slowly but surely coming to term. The genius scientist who se brainchild this is, Geoffrey Smyth-Archer, has one aim: to return this "altered" ape to the wild, with the hope that their small numbers will grow and multiple, while their survival skills drastically improves. Sadly, there are other members of the team who have ambitions ranging from power to monetary gain.

Though the characters are strong and multitudinous, they serve more to trip each other up at times that help the story along. At some points their actions seem forced and artificial, and even though *Dark Inheritance* is professed to be similar to Michael Crichton's work (according to Douglas Preston), but Crichton would never create such complicated characters, nor would he let any sense of synthetic characterization take place.

Originally published on December 3rd 2001.

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J.M. Northup says

Smart and riveting!

This book was smart and riveting. The relationships show incredible complexity and again, the story challenges you to define what it means to be human or "superior." There wasn't anything about this book that was predictable. I was deeply engrossed in reading it and absorbed in the characters and story alike. I loved Umber and her family and lived the drama she faced with every turn of the page, rooting for her all the while!

Punk says

SF. Oh boy, when you can buy a used hardback for \$0.95 it is not a good sign. Apparently I'm not the only person who thinks this book stinks. It's basically Congo crossed with Jurassic Park, except neither of the Gears has Crichton's talent for getting across difficult information with user-friendly efficiency, and the writing is awful. Rape is used as a threat against women (and/or the men who love them) at least four times, from two different sources. The plot has a major hole in it, but I guess we had to get that thirteen-year-old blonde girl to Africa somehow and logic wasn't doing it. Also hilarious is how they kept referring to Equatorial Guinea as deepest, darkest Africa. It's on the coast, you ninnies. Avoid.

Tracy says

An entertaining science fiction type of thriller that is skillfully written with well-developed characters.

I especially liked the skill in which the ape character of Umber was gradually revealed. She was an important character and one that made me think.

About my only criticism of the book is that it really checked off all the requirements for a Hollywood script. It has the broken family reunited during crisis thing going on. It's forgiveable. Overall I found myself thinking about the book when I was not reading it. It kept me interested enough to keep reading and enjoying.

I plan to read some more books by this writing team. They have a lot of work out there and judging from the wordsmithing skill and intelligence displayed in this novel, I bet they have some even better titles.

Leonca says

There was a lot of potential here, but I think the authors missed out on a chance to focus on the most interesting elements of their story. I was drawn in by what I thought would be an exploration of identity and intelligence seen through non-human eyes. We get some of that with Umber and the other bonobos, and those were the best parts. What the summery leaves out is the enormous chunk dedicated to a romantic plot between characters with awkward dialogue who feel like they have little chemistry. Less of that and more of Umber or Sky Eyes would have been fine with me.

Theresa says

Review of Dark Inheritance

By Kathleen O'Neal Gear and W. Michael Gear

A Dark Inheritance is a genetic series showing the abilities and potential disaster that genetic manipulation may culminate. The idea that with science we can change and manipulate the balance of plants and animals. Umber is the bonobo ape that the scientist have begun to experiment on. The scientist find that the animals

were diversely affected by the experiences. We have found the mysterious link between man and ape. But does that stop our role as man. If we are to protect wildlife and people with different rules, if they are less different than before do we now treat them like humans. This thriller looks at the responsibility of man for his decision in nature as a person.

Natalie Barkhouse-bishop says

A quick and easy read. I thought the characters had great depth and I got hooked on the storyline right off. I enjoyed the science and it was explained well with just enough and not too many scientific terminology. All in all, a great read!

David Donaghe says

When scientist alter the genes of bonobo chimps and add human genes to their gene code, they develop super smart chimps, but when poachers in Africa kill one of these super smart ape's mate, the ape becomes psychotic and turns on its human handlers. I found this to be an entertaining read.

David H. Donaghe
author of Monroe's Paranormal
Investigations and The Tale
Spinner

Deelighted says

Not usually into suspense/thrillers, but this was an excellent novel.

Dee says

Liked the writing about chimps and bonobos. Disliked the violence and obsession with rape. Would skip this one.

Mitchell Kaufman says

Anthropology, genetic engineering, an idealistic tycoon and unscrupulous pharma executives create "augmented" bonobos, and that's where our story starts...our heroes are an anthropologist, his 13 year old daughter, his former lover (mother of the daughter) and Umber, the most unforgettable ape since King Kong.

This was a great read.

