

Dear Librarian,

It starts with a story. A story about heroism and self-sacrifice. A story about putting others' needs before your own. A story about an ant.

*Forelius pusillus* is an ant that lives in the parched landscapes of southern Brazil. Every evening, a few individuals perform a poignant and selfless act. By day, the ants forage above ground but, as evening falls, they retreat to the safety of their nest underground. Not all of them, though. A few workers remain at the entrance, waiting for the last ant to scurry down the tiny tunnel. Then they get to work, dragging and carrying grains of sand to completely conceal the nest entrance from the outside. In doing so, they seal their own fate: the ants cannot survive overnight above ground. Dying near the nest could attract predators. In a final stoic gesture, they therefore march off into the desert night, dutiful protectors to the last.

This is a book about the staggering diversity of cooperation on Earth. In a colloquial sense, the word cooperation has become synonymous with bland corporate metaphors, evoking images of firm handshakes and cheerful teamwork. But cooperation is much more than this. We may take it completely for granted, but cooperation is the unsung hero of life on earth, the puppet-master behind each of the pivotal transitions that allowed us to progress from scraps of genetic material floating in a primordial soup to the modern-day nation states that many of us live in.

I tell this story from my own vantage point as an evolutionary biologist who specialises in understanding social behaviour. Although I now mostly study humans, I followed a winding path round the globe to get here. I've studied pied babbler birds in the Kalahari Desert, and Damaraland mole-rats in a broom cupboard in Pretoria; apostlebirds in the Australian outback and cleaner fish living on tropical coral reefs. This may sound like a motley assortment, but these species have something important in common: they all cooperate. In babblers, apostlebirds and mole-rats, cooperation occurs primarily within families. Cleaner fish do things differently, by helping complete strangers - fish they have never met and might never encounter again. And humans are especially interesting because we do both.

This is a story about you and me and every other living creature on this planet. I want to take the reader on a voyage of discovery - to appreciate what we have in common with other species - and what it is that sets us apart. Thank you for your support in making that happen.

Best,  
*Nichola*

**Let us know what you think about the book!**  
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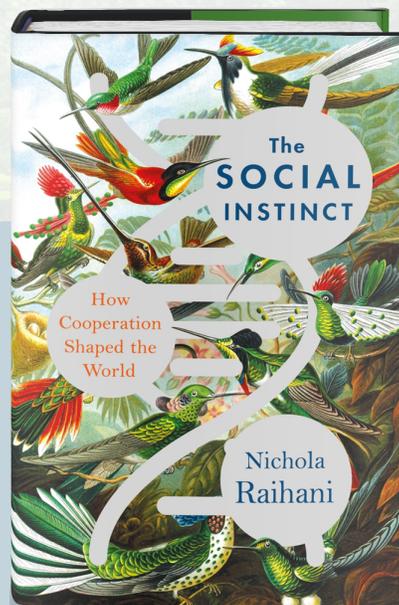
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