

Juval Noah Harari

illustrated by

Ricard Zaplana Ruiz



# UNSTOPPABLE US

FROM THE  
AUTHOR OF THE  
BESTSELLING  
*Sapiens*

HOW HUMANS TOOK OVER THE WORLD



VOL.  
1





*Yuval Noah Harari*

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HOW HUMANS TOOK  
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To all beings—those gone, those living, and those still to come. Our ancestors made the world what it is. We can decide what the world will become.

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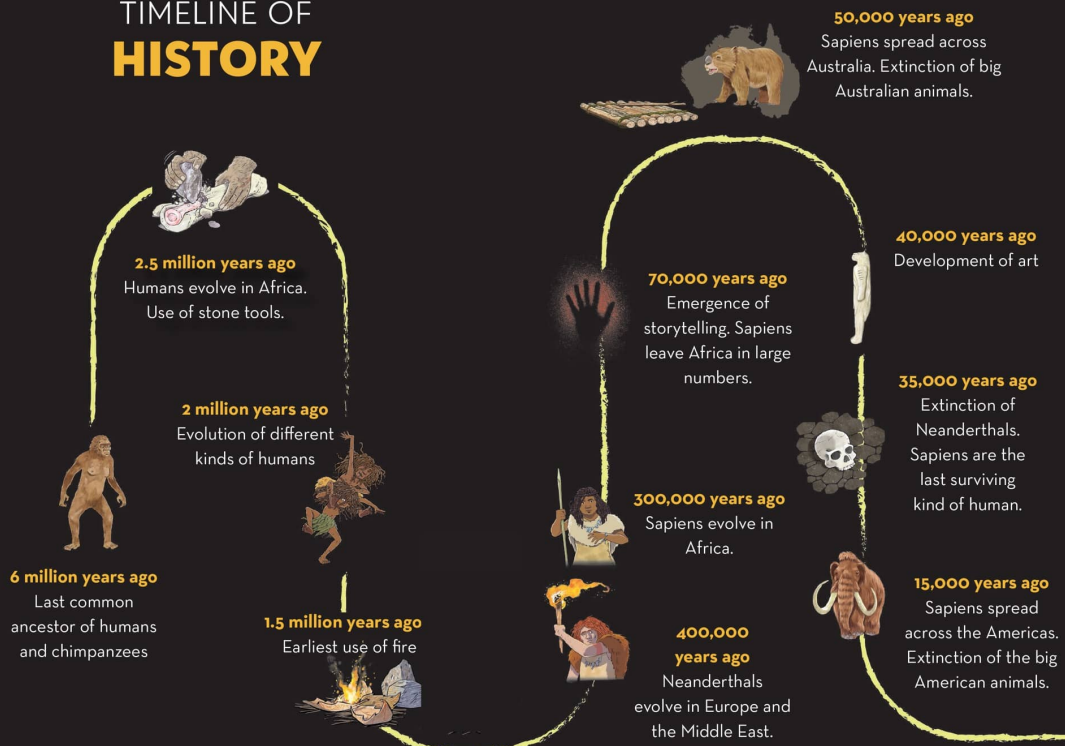
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# TIMELINE OF HISTORY



# WHAT ARE HUMANS **ALL ABOUT?**

**G**rowing up is hard work. Not just for you and your friends, but for everybody, including animals. For lion cubs to grow up, they need to learn how to run and hunt zebras. A young dolphin must learn how to swim and catch fish. An eagle chick needs to learn how to fly and build a nest. And none of that's easy.

But growing up is even harder for humans because we're not sure what we need to learn. Lions run and hunt zebras, dolphins swim and catch fish, eagles fly and build nests—what do humans do?

When you grow up, you might drive a race car faster than any lion can run. You might sail a ship farther than any dolphin can swim. You might pilot an airplane higher than any eagle can fly. You might do a million other things that animals can hardly even imagine. Like invent a computer game, discover a new kind of medicine, lead an expedition to Mars, or sit at home all day and watch TV. Humans have so many options! That's why being a human is really confusing.

But no matter what you end up doing, it's good to know why humans have so many options in the first place. It's because we rule planet Earth.

Planet Earth was once ruled by many different animals. Lions, bears, and elephants ruled the land. Dolphins, whales, and sharks ruled the sea. Eagles, owls, and vultures ruled the sky. But now we humans rule everything: the land, the sea, and the sky. Wherever we go in our cars, ships, and airplanes, the lions, dolphins, and eagles need to move aside—and fast! Animals can't stop us from building highways through their forests. They can't stop us from building dams across their rivers. And they can't stop us from polluting the oceans and skies.

In fact, we humans are now so powerful that the fate of all other animals depends on us. The only reason lions, dolphins, and eagles still exist is because we allow them to. If humans wanted to get rid of all the lions, dolphins, and eagles in the world, we could make it happen by next year.

That's a lot of power, and it can be used in good ways or bad ways. To be a good human being, you need to understand the power you have and what to do with it.

And for that, you need to know how we got our power in the first place.

We humans aren't strong like lions, we don't swim as well as dolphins, and we definitely don't have wings! So how did we end up ruling the planet? The answer to that is one of the strangest tales you'll ever hear.

AND it's a true story.





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HUMANS ARE  
**ANIMALS**

# WE USED TO **BE WILD**

**O**ur story starts millions of years ago. Back then, humans were just ordinary animals. People didn't live in houses, didn't go to work or to school, and didn't have cars, computers, or supermarkets. They lived in the wild, they climbed trees to pick fruit, they sniffed around looking for mushrooms, and they ate worms, snails, and frogs.

The other animals—giraffes, zebras, and baboons, for instance—weren't afraid of humans and didn't pay them much attention. Nobody imagined that one day humans would fly to the moon, make atom bombs, and write books, like the one you're reading now.



At first, humans didn't even know how to make tools. Sometimes they used stones to crack nuts. But they didn't have bows and arrows, spears, or knives. **Humans were relatively weak animals**, and whenever a lion or a bear appeared, humans had to run away—and fast!

Nowadays, a lot of kids still wake up in the middle of the night, frightened that there's a monster under the bed. This is a memory from millions of years ago. In the past, there really were monsters that sneaked up on children in the night. If you heard a noise in the dark, it could have been a lion coming to eat you. If you quickly climbed to the top of a tree, you survived. But if you went back to sleep, the lion ate you.

Sometimes, when lions killed a giraffe and ate it, people would watch from a safe distance. They wanted some meat for themselves, but they were too afraid to come close. Even after the lions left, the humans still didn't dare approach. Because the hyenas had moved in to eat the leftovers—and humans were afraid to pick a fight with that quarrelsome bunch. Finally, when all the other animals had gone, the humans tiptoed carefully to the carcass to look for scraps...but the only thing left was bare bones. So they shrugged and went off in search of figs.

**Then one human had a great idea.** She took a stone and used it to crack open a bone. Inside, she found the marrow—that's the juicy stuff in the middle of bones. She ate the marrow and thought it was delicious. Other people saw what she had done and copied her. Soon everyone was using stones to crack bones and eat marrow. Humans finally had something that only they knew how to do!

Each animal has its own special talents: spiders weave webs and catch flies, bees build hives and produce honey, and woodpeckers extract grubs from tree trunks. Some animals have very weird talents. Take cleaner fish, for example. These small fish follow sharks around, waiting for the sharks to eat. Once a shark has had a little tuna snack, he opens his mouth wide, and all the cleaner fish swim inside to clean up bits of tuna stuck between the shark's teeth. The shark gets free dental care, and the cleaner fish get a

good meal. Somehow, sharks recognize the cleaner fish and never eat them by mistake.



Now ancient humans also had their special thing: they knew how to use stones to crack open bones so they could eat the marrow inside. Even more important, **humans learned that making tools is a good idea.**

They started using sticks and stones to make all kinds of other tools. Not just for cracking open bones, but for prizing oysters off rocks, for digging up wild onions and carrots, and for hunting small animals like lizards and birds.

Eventually, humans discovered a tool far more amazing than sticks and stones: **they discovered how to use fire!** Fire is ferocious and terrifying. When a lion eats a zebra, he's no longer hungry, so he lies down and sleeps. But when a fire eats one tree, it only gets hungrier, and leaps wildly from tree to tree. It can eat an entire forest in a day—leaving nothing but ash. If you try to touch or hold fire to stop it from spreading, it will burn you



too. So all animals are afraid of fire. They're even more afraid of fire than they are of lions. In fact, even lions are afraid of fire.

**But some ancient humans started taking an interest in fire.** If only they could use it the same way they used sticks and stones...

Do you sometimes like to just sit and stare into a fire, watching the flames dance? That's another memory from ancient humans. At first, humans approached fire very cautiously, observing it from a distance. Perhaps they discovered that if lightning set fire to a tree, they could sit around it and enjoy light and warmth. Better still, as long as the tree burned, no dangerous animal dared approach them.

## COOKS HAVE **BIG BRAINS**

Humans watched fire again and again and came to understand it better. They realized that even though it was wild and ferocious, it did obey some rules. They could befriend it. They pushed a long stick toward a burning tree, and when the tip of the stick caught fire, they pulled it back again. They now had fire on a stick. The fire didn't burn them, but they could burn anything they touched with their stick. This was so useful! **They could take fire with them from place to place to stay warm and scare lions.**



But there was still one big problem: people didn't know how to start a fire. Waiting for lightning to strike could be very frustrating. You could sit near a tree for a whole year—and still no lightning would strike that tree. And if a lion was chasing you, you couldn't even wait two seconds.

You needed fire NOW!

**Eventually, humans figured out how to solve this problem.** One way to create fire was to knock a flint stone against another kind of stone called pyrite. If you struck the pyrite very hard, it produced a spark, and if you directed the spark toward dry leaves, they sometimes caught fire and started to burn.

Another way was to find a large piece of dry wood, carve a hole in it, and put dry leaves inside the hole. Then you sharpened one end of a twig, put the sharp end into the hole, and twisted the twig between your hands very quickly for a couple of minutes.



Friction caused the end of the twig to get hotter and hotter, until it eventually set light to the dry leaves. Smoke started to drift out of the hole, then a flame leapt up. Fire! Now, if a lion showed up, you just needed to wave your fire stick, and the lion would run away.

**The way humans used fire made them unique.** Almost all animals depend on their own bodies for power: the strength of their muscles, the size of their teeth, or the sharpness of their claws. But thanks to fire, humans gained control of a limitless source of power that had nothing to do with their bodies. A single weak human with a fire stick could burn down an entire

forest in a matter of hours, destroying thousands of trees and killing thousands of animals.