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## BOOK REVIEW

**Sex and War: How Biology Explains Warfare and Terrorism and Offers a Path to a Safer World.** Malcolm Potts, Thomas Hayden. Dallas, TX, USA: Ben Bella Books Inc., 2008. ISBN-13: 978-1-93377-157-1. Price: £18.99. Pages: 457 (hardback)

War is a great horror. All right-thinking people agree on this. War has brought more misery to humanity than any other single thing. Why, then, do we as a species indulge in it so often and so easily? This question has never been as urgent as it is today. The world has never been more fractious and humankind's ability to destroy itself has never been greater. One might think that the need to understand why we kill on an organised and industrial scale should be among our most

urgent preoccupations. It need hardly be said, though, that this is not so. Malcolm Potts and Thomas Hayden are not afraid of the question. In their book they plumb the biological origins of what they call the "team aggression" impulse and describe how evolution has favoured its participants. They show how the impulse is an ineradicable part of the creation of society and civilisations. Now, however, we have outgrown it, but the urge is still with us, embedded in our nature.

We might think, in the so-called "advanced" societies, that the drive to war is a low impulse that impels others, not us. But recent experience gives the lie. The reasons that were given by the UK and the USA for their wars that still rage in the Middle East were forced and artificial, and

were rapidly dropped and changed when they wore thin. An open-minded person could only conclude that the UK and the USA wanted to go to war. In answering why this dark desire exists Potts and Hayden offer a way of defusing it. Their thesis is an intriguing one – enhance the role of women; give them a greater part in society, more control over their own lives, and the rate at which they reproduce. This amounts to an effective curb of the dark impulse – and here lies the rationale for readers of this journal having not only an interest but also potentially a vital role to play, in the prevention of war. Nothing less.

Reviewed by **Lester Venter**  
Freelance Writer, London, UK

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