

Book Review of January 15, 2003

The Parrot's Lament by Eugene Linden, Plume/Penguin Putnam, New York, 1999

(This book is recommended, not for speedreading, but strictly for pleasure.)

Linden, who has written on nature and the environment for various publications, describes the many ways that we can see evidence of intelligence in a variety of animals. One of my favorite stories relates the way that Willy B., a gorilla, behaved on his twentieth birthday. "As part of the fun, the keepers organized a tug-of-war with the gorilla at one end of the rope and about twenty people pulling on the other ... he dropped the rope, causing the humans to fall down laughing." The descriptions of animals' behavior include not only games but cooperation, barter, tool creation and use, empathy and heroism. Linden concludes with a description of his trip into a jungle so remote that its animals had never seen humans before. He relates his concerns about the many ways that destruction of the natural environment is occurring, and wonders whether humankind's "superior" intelligence may be our undoing.

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