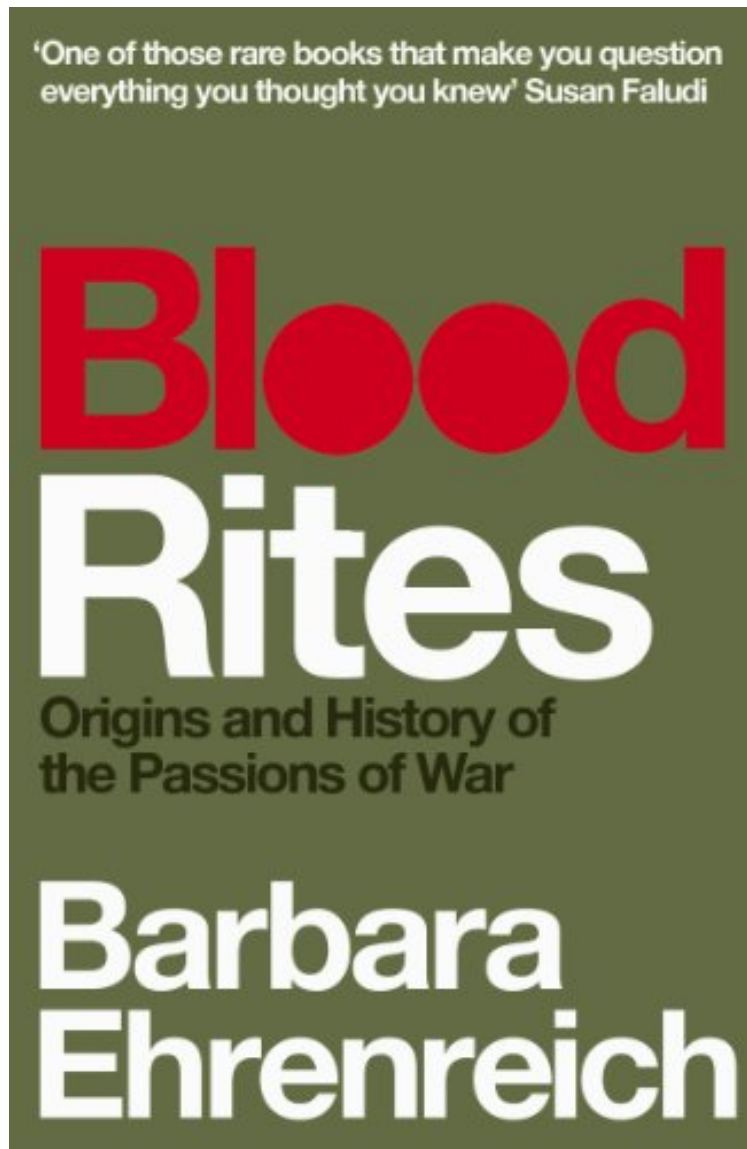


[E-BOOK] Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War

## Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War

Von Barbara Ehrenreich

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**Von Barbara Ehrenreich : Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War:

Kundenrezensionen Hilfreichste Kundenrezensionen 1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich.  
(Wo)man Kills God Von Charles F. Hawkins The original thinking that underlies this work should propel Barbara Ehrenreich to the fore of military and combat theorists of any era. Her thought provoking analysis in "Blood Rites" is a

refreshing challenge to conventional wisdom about the nature of war and fighting in particular. As a veteran of British infantry combat, I intuitively fell in line with Ehrenreich's reasoning that man (or woman) did not spring combat-capable from the woodlands and savannah of pre-historic times. Yet something happened in the dark recesses of our cultural antiquity to cause a fundamental change in the human psyche so that war and fighting became an accepted norm. The "Beast" is Ehrenreich's universal term for the enemy--what we term the "threat" in today's military parlance. The Beast--be it sabre tooth tiger or man-eating shark--represented a deity. The Beast could kill early man at a whim; likewise, the carrion of kills left behind by the Beast were also sustenance for early human scavengers. Only a god can give and take life. Imagine, then, the cultural shock a society must have felt when, finally, one of its members (or group led by one more able) managed to foil the Beast's depredations and kill it. Once the giver and taker of life had been slain by a human it must have seemed tantamount to killing god to others in the society. And, the initiator of this act of ultimate rebellion was very likely a woman. Ehrenreich works through her ideas in great (and sometimes laborious) detail. But the weight of evidence is compelling, and her analysis is direct and forceful. Although several years in print, Ehrenreich's literary coin is as fresh as yesterday's mint mark. "Blood Rites" should be read again for the first time by military thinkers everywhere.

1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Daring, original and extremely thought provoking  
Von fluxk@mindspring.com  
Blood Rites rekindled my long held interest in (almost non-existent) theories of war. I recalled running around playing "guns" with neighborhood kids; long and involved role-playing fantasies from my pre-teen years; and my later interest in movies like Full Metal Jacket and books like Blood Meridian and Citizens. Blood Rites manages to tie my youthful digressions into a theory about the larger, bloodier, more despairing and bleak world of historical warfare. According to the book, my obsession with war is part of long-running tradition that equates "becoming-a-man" with the indoctrination into the ways of war. She doesn't claim that war comes from aggressive hunter males (in fact, she tries to thoroughly stomp that argument into the ground). She claims that our aeon-long status as prey created a long running fear and admiration of animal predators. Later, after we became predators, the fear and admiration was shifted to the small band male hunters. (She states recent archeological evidence that suggests that small band hunters were preyed by tribal herding practices. These practices ended after we drove most of the large herdable herbivores into extinction.) The hunters started providing a smaller portion of the tribal food (around 90% of our ancestor's diet was provided by gathering). And at some point, they turned their predator skills against other tribes and demanded the fear and admiration once exclusively belonging to animals. (Kind of... it's a little more involved than that.) Warriors (almost exclusively male) ascended to total power on the back of war. However, once created, War had a "life" of its own. No one could be totally peaceful unless completely cut-off from contact with war-like states (which was hard to do unless you were an Eskimo or an Australian Bushman). Once war was discovered or invented no one could ignore it. Every society had to escalate the potential and possibility of war. This constant escalation of warfare changed the rules and eventually led to today's "total war." In today's war there is almost no notion of civilian. Everyone is forced into war. However, her book fumbles near the end. She states that a theory of war is needed in order to fight it, but the end of the book sounds false and forced. She starts to throw ideas at the wall, hoping one or two will stick. (She does admit to having no real working idea on how to stop war.) Still, the ending doesn't take away from the brilliant originality of the majority of the book... One of things I'm interested in is any connection between her theory and Deleuze and Guattari's theories of the "war machine." Their "war machine" seems to be largely a theory about the effects of war and hers is largely about the origin and perpetuation of war.

1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. An enlightening interpretation of an ancient problem  
Von Theron Fairchild (theron@kyoto.email.ne.jp)  
The author takes us on a trip through time to better understand the scourge known as warfare. Because she is not a social scientist by trade, but a trained biologist with writing background in the social sciences, she provides both a fresh and instructive perspective on the world's oldest killing phenomenon, which she describes as something close to a living disease. Her interpretation is enlightening because she goes beyond many of the tired explanations that war is a mere problem of human principles, an equation of materialism, or a failing of the male species. Warfare is something far more complex with roots not only in civilizations and cultures, but also in our psyche and biology. As the evidence suggests, warfare is more than a politico-economic phenomenon or an instrument of the state which has undermined the peaceful progress of humanity. It is a plague of unprecedented proportion that defies culture, civilization, and time itself to prey on humans. It has been institutionalized and culturized in ways that defy all logic or modern material and gender theories. The author is not so presumptuous as to solve the ancient riddle of warfare, but she makes one invaluable point that should be incorporated into any contemporary warfare study: humans were not always predators, but originally prey. Her point, based on the latest anthropological, historical, and biological writing is a direct, yet overdue criticism of the traditional belief that humans have always been the superior creature on earth. In fact, her arguments support the idea that humans learned how to be predators precisely in an effort to overcome being the food of beasts. This basic fact has had enormous ramifications since it has been imprinted within us for tens of thousands of years, inspiring and dictating our religions and philosophies ever since the dawn of civilization. Natural predators, such as the lion or bear, being secure in their natural predatory status, have never developed what we might identify as a form of warfare. However, humans are not natural predators, but made the huge evolutionary jump from prey to predator. Our mastery over beasts--the first

human warfare campaigns--combined with our continued insecurity in our new role as predator, has led us to master each other through the same socio-cultural campaigns we used to conquer the animals. On a critical note, Ehrenreich could have made a stronger case if she had included more concrete evidence in her analysis. The book does not hold together well in places, which leads to some weaknesses. However, the work is mostly intended as food for thought, and should not be judged too harshly for its potential lack of theoretical (or political) correctness. To any reader interested in the evolution of the human species, civilization, culture, religion, or the ancient problem of war, Ehrenreich's book is an interesting read.

**Kurzbeschreibung** What lies behind the human attraction to violence? Why do we glorify war, seeing it as an almost sacred undertaking? Barbara Ehrenreich is known for the originality and clarity of her thinking, and in *Blood Rites* she proposes a radical new theory about our attitudes to bloodshed. From the trenches of Verdun to today's front lines, Ehrenreich traces the history of warfare back to our prehistoric ancestors' terrifying experiences of being hunted by other carnivores. Written with wit, tenacity and intellectual flair, this is vintage Ehrenreich, and an account that will transform our understanding of human conflict. In this ambitious work, Barbara Ehrenreich offers a daring explanation for humans' propensity to wage war. Rather than approach the subject from a physiological perspective, pinpointing instinct or innate aggressiveness as the violent culprit, she reaches back to primitive man's fear of predators and the anxieties associated with life in the food chain. To deal with the reality of living as prey, she argues that blood rites were created to dramatize and validate the life-and-death struggle. Jumping ahead to the modern age, Ehrenreich brands nationalism a more sophisticated form of blood ritual, a phenomenon that conjures similar fears of predation, whether in the form of lost territory or the more extreme ethnic cleansing. *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* may not offer a cure for human aggression, but the author does present a convincing argument for the difficulties associated with achieving peace. **Pressestimmen** Ehrenreich has outdone herself in breaking with conventional history, and the result is thrilling in that seeing-the-world-anew way. Susan Faludi, *The Nation* Splendid . . . A fascinating perspective on our staunch devotion to mass, mutual slaughter. *Blood Rites* is that rare animal, a nonfiction page-turner. *Newsweek*