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Neanderthals had dominated Europe for the unimaginable span of 400,000 years before modern man arrived on the scene from Africa. Yet they disappear from the fossil record not long after.

Why? Neanderthals were incredibly strong. They had better eyesight than homo sapiens and could withstand worse cold and high elevations. They were champions of the Ice Age.

True, paleontologists think Neanderthals weren't especially innovative. They stuck to the same way of making tools they'd always used. But they weren't the brutes that early scientists first thought. There are signs that they wore jewelry, buried their dead and may have left crude cave art, all indications of higher thinking.

So, what happened?

A new theory is that the first dogs helped modern man outhunt the Neanderthal, and in a time of climate changes and dwindling resources, outlasted him.

How modern man won out is the subject of a theory explored in [*The Invaders: How Humans and Their Dogs Drove Neanderthals to Extinction*](#) by Pat Shipman, a retired professor of anthropology at Pennsylvania State University.

Somewhere in modern man's travels out of Africa and across Asia, he struck up a profound and telling friendship. Canine remains at sites like Predmosti in the Czech Republic paint a compelling picture. They're mixed with scores of woolly mammoth bones and a scattering of human remains.

Neanderthals didn't hunt mammoths. They didn't use distance weapons like homo sapiens did. They got in close, jabbed with spears and grappled with their prey. Mammoths were far too big and powerful for this approach.

The canines at the Czech site and others were no ordinary dogs. They were huge and wolf-like, but they were not wolves. It's believed that they were a prototype dog, a species now extinct but from which the modern dog came.

With their aid, modern man hunted woolly mammoths by the scores. The domesticated wolf dogs helped track large game, hold it in place until men arrived and afterwards guarded the remains from other predators while man cut it up and hauled the meaty booty away.

The partnership extended man's reach and meant he could bring down big game more safely.

The dog was man's secret weapon against the Neanderthal. There's no evidence of sustained violence between the two species. Modern man was simply a better hunter, thanks in part

to his huge wolf dog friends. Soon, homo sapiens poured across Europe and the Neanderthal vanished.

Well, not altogether. Neanderthals live on in one to two percent of the genes of most Europeans and Asians. Apparently there was limited interbreeding shortly after homo sapiens left the African continent.

Interestingly, man teamed up with the wolf dog around 40,000 years ago during the period in which paleontologists think man underwent an artistic and spiritual sea change. It's reflected in cave art, this sudden surge of awareness. It's found in homo sapiens burial practices and body art. It's when science thinks man first got religion, when complex language grew and when man developed a new sense of imagination and empathy that allowed him to understand the minds of animals.

There's no evidence that Neanderthals ever partnered with dogs. The dog was a gift unique to modern man that ensured he survived and thrived.

It sounds like a friendship that was meant to be. So, who's a good boy now, eh?