

Why nice guys tend to blow their own trumpet

By Roger Highfield, Science Editor

NICE guys finish first in life — so long as others find out about their good deeds, scientists have discovered.

Our ability to co-operate with strangers, rather than engage in Darwin's "struggle for existence" — in which the strong trample the weak — has always marked out humans.

This ability to be Good Samaritans emerged because of our capacity to "gossip" about our good deeds, according to the results of a computer simulation published today.

Darwin's ideas were modified this century when it was accepted that there is an incentive to help kin, relatives and other carriers of our genes, accounting for why ants co-operate in a colony, for example.

Recent work on reciprocity — how we trade favours with a known individual — fails to explain why a Good Samaritan would help a stranger he

is unlikely to see again. "Humans are peculiar because, unlike animals, they have solved the problems of large scale co-operation among non-relatives," said Prof Martin Nowak of Oxford University, who with Prof Karl Sigmund of the University of Vienna answers the riddle today in the journal *Nature*.

They present computer simulations and mathematical models that show that co-operation can emerge in a society according to the principle "give and you shall be given". Winning strategies in the computer model are those that help individuals who have helped others in the past.

But one must advertise "nice guy" co-operative credentials, so that an individual's cost of an altruistic act is offset by an improved chance of becoming a recipient of help from another at a future date.

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