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Planet Ocean: A Story Of Life, The Sea, And Dancing To The Fossil Record



Synopsis

This is the paperback edition of the great pop-paleontology book with the fabulous art that inspired a show that toured the nation's natural history museums. In its own way it has inspired many people to take a new look at the fossil record and imagine creatures and things as they might have been; a blend of word and image unlike any other. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The late Carl Sagan thought that science should be "user-friendly," presented not in jargon but in regular English. He believed that the general public could -- and should -- have access to the latest scientific discoveries. Sagan would be proud of *Planet Ocean*. The central theme of the book is stated clearly on page 1: "Nature is a workshop, not a temple." Matsen spends the rest of the book supporting this concept, explaining that life is not a stately, well-executed design where species climb a ladder of progress; rather, evolution is an inescapable and completely random condition. Animals and plants breed, have offspring that are slightly different, and continue to become slightly more different with each successive generation until the distant grandkids look nothing like the original parent. In addition, through totally weird, sometimes avoidable and sometimes unavoidable circumstances, the species as a whole will either do very well, or get pushed out of the scene. The environment works like the stock market -- fortunes are made, and fortunes are lost. (The metaphor of "rolling the dice" comes up more than once.) Matsen's prose is engaging, entertaining, and extremely informative. In one of my favorite sections, he describes the success of the trilobites (who survived for 300 million years in Earth's oceans): "They would eat anything and breed anywhere,

and they made themselves as unattractive to predators as possible. We all have relatives like them. From [trilobites] and their success and longevity, an evolutionary rule of thumb has emerged: 'The more specialized a species, the less able to cope with change it will be once the inevitable happens and old habitats change beyond the point of recognition' [...].

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