



Wonderful Life The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History BY Gould

Stephen Jay Gould

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This is a book on the evolution of Cambrian fauna by Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould. The volume was the 1991 winner of The Aventis Prizes for Science Books, and a 1991 finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. The theme of the book is still being debated among evolutionary thinkers today. Gould explains why the diversity of the Burgess Shale is important in understanding the past and in shaping the way we ponder the riddle of existence and the awesome improbability of human evolution. Gould proposed that given a chance to "rewind the universe" and flip the coin of natural selection again, we might find ourselves living in a world populated by descendants of Hallucigenia rather than Pikaia. This seems to indicate that fitness for existing conditions does not ensure long-term survival, especially when conditions change rapidly, and that the survival of many species depends more on chance events and features, which Gould terms exaptations, fortuitously beneficial under future conditions than on features best adapted under the present environment. "[An] extraordinary book. . . . Mr. Gould is an exceptional combination of scientist and science writer. . . . He is thus exceptionally well placed to tell these stories, and he tells them with fervor and intelligence."- James Gleick, New York Times Book Review High in the Canadian Rockies is a small limestone quarry formed 530 million years ago called the Burgess Shale. It hold the remains of an ancient sea where dozens of strange creatures lived-a forgotten corner of evolution preserved in awesome detail. In this book Stephen Jay Gould explores what the Burgess Shale tells us about evolution and the nature of history.

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