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Darwin's Lost World: The Hidden History of Animal Life

Martin Brasier

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It greatly puzzled Darwin that the most ancient rocks, those dating before the Cambrian period, seemed to be barren of fossils when he would expect them to be teeming with life. Decades of work by modern paleontologists have indeed brought us amazing fossils from far beyond the Cambrian, from the depths of the Precambrian. Yet hidden in these depths is a great mystery--something happened around the Cambrian to dramatically speed up evolution and produce many of the early forms of animals we know today--and scientists don't really know what provided that spark.

In this vibrantly written book, Martin Brasier, a leading paleontologist working on early life, takes us into the deep, dark ages of the Precambrian to explore Darwin's Lost World. Brasier is a master storyteller. As he explains what we now know of the strange creatures of these truly ancient times--540 million years ago--he takes readers to many far flung places around the globe, interweaving an engaging account of cutting-edge science with colorful and amusing anecdotes from his expeditions to Siberia, Outer Mongolia, and other remote places. As he shows, decoding the evidence in these ancient rocks--piecing together the puzzle of the Cambrian Explosion--is very challenging work. What they have discovered is that, just at the beginning of the Cambrian period, animals (mostly worms) began burrowing into the mud. Why they suddenly began burrowing, and how this might have changed the atmosphere, may be important clues to the mystery. Brasier gives his own take on the emerging answers, as one of the leading players in the field.

A richly readable account of far-flung expeditions and leading-edge science, *Darwin's Lost World* is a must-have book for all natural history buffs.

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