



Sex, Drugs, and Sea Slime: The Oceans' Oddest Creatures and Why They Matter

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When viewed from a quiet beach, the ocean, with its rolling waves and vast expanse, can seem calm, even serene. But hidden beneath the sea and reminding us of the need to protect it.

Sex, Drugs, and Sea Slime: The Oceans' Oddest Creatures and Why They Matter Details

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From Reader Review Sex, Drugs, and Sea Slime: The Oceans' Oddest Creatures and Why They Matter for online ebook

Alex Templeton says

I eagerly awaited for this book to come in to the library, as I adore weird sea creatures. They give credence to the ideas that the world is full of wonders, and science can be crazy interesting. I unfortunately found this book a bit of a disappointment. There were, indeed, many wondrous creatures to behold. Sea cucumbers can apparently eject their inner organs when threatened. Hagfish emit an astonishing amount of slime. And don't even get me started on sea stars, whose many sucker-filled arms give me nightmares, due to their resemblance (to me) of the face-huggers from Alien. Still, the book was unexciting in its writing, and repetitive in structure. Each chapter would start with a creature, describe how it looked, lived, ate, and reproduced, and rinse and repeat many times so that they began to run together a bit. I think what I found most disappointing was that there weren't more pictures. I was delighted by the beautiful plates that did appear in the book, as some of these things had to be seen to be believed. I think that the excitement of these creatures is probably best conveyed in words and pictures (or videos--thanks, You Tube!). Only reading about them in words leaves something out.

J. says

There's a lot of really fascinating stuff in here, but does this book need more pictures! Prager goes through long explanations of what these weird creatures look like, but a picture would really do the job better. Anyway, her love of weird creatures is evident, and there's a ton of fascinating stuff. But there's also some rather mundane stuff, and the "what's important about these creatures" in every chapter gets a little repetitive--food chain, possible pharmaceuticals, blah blah. I would really like something a little more specific about the creatures.

Kaitlyn says

At least the pictures were ?

A little bit dumbed down for me, and a little too much of convincing people we should only care about the ocean and its creatures based on how much economic value and impact to human life they hold.

Lisa says

The pattern in the chapters got a little wearing, but the writing was clear and humorous; the subjects interesting

Marlowe says

Despite its racy, *Sex, Drugs, and Sea Slime* is actually a fairly tame overview of marine life. Each chapter features a group of species sharing some common trait, giving a few facts for each before the chapter closes with a "why they matter" section (which usually covers edibility and medicinal uses).

As intended, it was the title of the book that really caught my attention. Unfortunately, I only got a few paragraphs in before I knew that I was in trouble. While the title promises humour, the narrative style is really lacking. The book is written in bullet list style, except without the benefit of bullets. Because I was never given any time to process each fact before being ushered along to the next one, I found it extremely difficult to absorb anything that I was reading. It made reading about the dietary habits of the hagfish feel like *work*, and failed to convey a solid impression of Prager's subjects.

The "why they matter" sections were very meh. The lists of 'things you can make with a hagfish's skin' quickly grew tiresome and uninteresting. The stated goal of the book was to make me care, but lists of how a particular fish's various parts are used in Chinese medicine to cure impotence does not, actually, make me care. Rather than throwing reasons at me, Prager's time would have been better spent using her narrative descriptions to evoke my feelings. It's a classic issue of "show don't tell."

The book's strength is that it *is* full of facts. If I had a burning desire to know about seahorses but didn't know where to start (and, for some reason, had access to Prager's book but not to Wikipedia), the encyclopedic nature of the book would be perfect. Unfortunately, I don't see that being a very common scenario.

I did really like Prager's "what you can do" section at the very end of the book. In it, she lists a number of ideas, organized by participation level. There are ideas for people who want to run for congress, and then there are ideas for people who just want to know what to buy when they go to the supermarket. If she expanded that section a little, maybe added a few narrative touches, it would have worked very well as an article.

I don't want to come down too hard on Prager, because she clearly knows her stuff and the book is nothing if not well-researched. Besides that, it's obvious that she's passionate about the subject, and I can never fault passion. It's just that you can't make people share that passion by trying to trigger their selfish consumptive desires - and certainly not in the same book where you are trying to convince people to participate in preserving and protecting our oceans! Rather than trying to convince her readers to care about our oceans through rational arguments, I wish that Prager had just unleashed the passion she so clearly has, and let me feel it for a little while.

Paige says

Despite the promising title, I didn't actually finish this book. I'm kind of surprised that it was put out by University of Chicago Press. Like, it's all factual I'm sure, but... the writing is very repetitive and none of the information has stayed with me. Basically, she'll take a sea creature, tell you what it looks like, any distinguishing features/behaviors that it has, tell you how it mates, and bring up some use that modern medicine has found for it. Over and over. It's just uninspired. Peter selected it for me to read aloud to him from a long list of books because he loves loves loves the sea and after the first couple chapters he wanted to read something else. That's how boring it is. Sorry Ellen D: It seems like a really interesting subject and

clever at times but it was just not, um, gripping enough.

Last Ranger says

Secrets of a Hidden World.

If there is a final frontier on Earth then it must be in the ocean. In many ways we know more about the Moon than we do about this watery realm. And there is life everywhere, from the tropics to the poles, in incredible numbers and diversity. In her book: *Sex, Drugs, and Sea Slime* author Ellen Prager spotlights some of the strange and wonderful creatures that call the sea their home. Ranging in size from microscopic bacteria and plankton to the largest sharks, kelp, whales, the variety of plant and animal life examined is astounding. Although the book has several nice photos of sea life you may want to have a computer or reference book handy to get a look at some of the animals not shown. This is not an in depth work but it will serve to introduce you to marine biology and maybe even encourage you to read other, more advanced, books. Prager's writing approach is laid back and non-technical with a little added humor thrown in. Each chapter spotlights a different group of organisms, giving their biology and behavior. How they impact the human world is also covered: medical research, industrial uses, entertainment and tourism. I was amazed by how much information Prager included in this short book (under 200 pages). Stand outs for me were the sections on sea horses, sea stars, jelly fish and their kin, Cephalopods and, well, the list goes on. The chapter on animals living in extreme environments such as deep-sea hydrothermal vents, cold hydrocarbon seeps and in methane seeps - pools of hyper-saline brine was mesmerizing. Also covered is life in the freezer; the poles, from ice-worms to polar bears. The book closes with a look at how these environments are being threatened by over fishing, waste disposal, pollution from farming, industry and untreated sewage all combine into a dark and foreboding message to all of us. That's the bad news, the good news is that we are making great strides in reversing the trend and what we, as individuals, can do to help. If you're at all interested in marine biology or just nature in general then you may enjoy reading this book. I found it to be a fast, enjoyable read. I had no technical or formatting problems with this Kindle edition. The book's many beautiful photos came across fine on both the Kindle and my iPad.

Last Ranger

Lizsquid says

I hated this book! It kept me from doing my homework, I wasn't even able to eat (and that's hard). I couldn't put it down for a single second.

This book focused on several marine organisms, from the smartest of cephalopods to the stinging cnidarians. I loved how at the end of each chapter the author wrote why these organisms were important and how they affected us. The writer has an amazing sense of humor, thus the title, *Sex Drugs and Sea Slime*. She is a very

creative author when introducing new marine organisms, especially the deadly cone snail. It made me wonder and it made me think, a very entertaining mix.

I would recommend this book to any future marine biologists, even oceanographers. But of course you have to be willing and mature to talk about this subject. Teens would like this book even some adults, as a nice review. *Sex Drugs and Sea Slime* is a great and easily understandable book. Future marine biologists, I recommend you read this book.

Elizabeth says

As heard on "Fresh Air".

Sam says

This book gives me the oddly-discordant sensation of feeling talked-down-to and front-loaded with too much information at the same time.

The text is not compelling nor informative. It's ironic that the book purports to show us a world of alien creatures living among us, yet fails to give us any sort of firm footing into what they are actually like. It's far too dumbed-down for that, and far too dumbed-down to carry itself without pictures embedded in the text. It's like reading the narration script of a nature documentary without the benefit of having seen it yourself. Oh, and also the documentary the script belongs to is geared towards children ages 4-8. It all makes for an incredibly boring read. Yet, with such a racy title, a novelized format lacking in natural bumpers like embedded pictures, and the information overload, I can't even give this to a scientifically-inclined child in my family.

If you want to read a book about the weirdness of the ocean and a little about the human relationship with the odder invertebrates, *Spirals in Time: The Secret Life and Curious Afterlife of Seashells* by Helen Scales, a pop-science book about mollusks, is an excellent place to start. In fact, Prager's book was so painfully bad, I actually went back to my review of Scales book and bumped it up a star, as I can now appreciate the writing of a passionate and talented scientific writer on this subject.

And a note for those reviewers complaining that Prager has a weird capitalistic bent when she explains why the sea creatures in her book matter: This book was sponsored by Walmart, Cruise Lines International Association, and a cruise line focused on recreational cruises around the Galapagos (among other sponsors.) Judging by how these things have gone in the past, I'd bet there was "input" on what sort of topics it was acceptable for the author to talk about and what was off limits.

Emma Sea says

Prager takes a tack in this book that I've been noticing more frequently in non-fiction books. Each chapter ends in a section basically called (to paraphrase) "Who Give A Fuck?"¹ This details the human uses, or potential uses, of the organism being discussed e.g. "In Korea, the deslimed skin of hagfishes is used to make 'eel skin' products such as handbags, shoes, wallets and briefcases" (p. 30).

Presumably this is what readers want and therefore how publishers direct writers to approach the material. I find it incredibly distasteful. The idea that I should only be enchanted by the silent beauty of a bioluminescent dinoflagellate because the plankton-based food chain leads to "three hundred thousand jobs along with hundreds of billions of dollars in retail, local, state, and federal tax revenues" (p. 13)² . . . well, I find it difficult to communicate in a review my utter disdain and repulsion.³

The is one of the factors that contributed to my overall dislike of the book. Another is that on the single spread pp. 12-13 there are five - count 'em, five - exclamation marks.

Material = 5 Stars

Photographs = 4 stars (would have liked more, please)

Overall writing = 2 stars

Annoyance factor = -4 stars

¹ Actually called "Why They Matter."

² Leading to my most hated quote of the entire book: "Instead of 'Show me the money,' we should yell, 'Show me the fish,' and therefore, 'Show me the plankton!'" (p. 13). SO. MUCH. NO.

³ And yes, I *know* it's in the title of the book, but I thought this would involve looking at the delicate balance of the biosphere, not looking at the value of kelp in "kelp wraps and mud baths" as part of a "industry" with an "estimated annual value of more than \$70 million" (p. 126-27). And definately not flat out stating, "All of the sea's elite athletes [ugh] . . . are worth much more to society alive and abundant rather than dead" (p. 128).

Kyla says

I love it; this is, in fact, my second reading. It's probably not everybody's cup of mucus, but if you'd like to learn more about some of the odder creatures of the ocean, with plenty of facts and tons of slime, but with a gentle humor to keep it from being a dry, scholarly experience, then this is your book. Prager admits she threw in the sex because everybody wants to read about sex, but it's not a tease - she tells you in family-friendly scientific prose about the mating behaviors of each animal she mentions. She also tells you what uses we're finding for the slimes, cells and venoms of these creatures in our own medicine (that would be the "Drugs" part) and an overview of why each of these squishy beasts matters to us and to the earth. Sea slugs, sea pigs, squids and hagfish and more - they're here in all their gooey glory and well worth reading about.

Wendell says

In a world in which what most people know about science could be nestled comfortably inside a toothpaste cap, Prager joins the ranks of such "popularizers" and "divulgators" of the arcane and mysterious "ologies" as E.O. Wilson, Lewis Thomas, Stephen Jay Gould, and even, in his way, Farley Mowatt. In other words, with writers like these for colleagues, popular-science writers face a bar that is set fairly high. Prager, however, doesn't even bother to stretch. As her title suggests, and as she explains in her introductory

chapters, slime turns out to serve a myriad of important functions in marine life: as a defense mechanism, as an aid to reproduction, as an impromptu sleep sack for fish on the open reef. Ocean life, Prager says, is enveloped in slime. Unfortunately, her book is enveloped in it, too, only the slime in Prager's insufferable writing style takes the form of bogs of imbecilic puns; ropes of anemic, anthropomorphizing similes (which she appears to believe are necessary because you'd be too stupid to understand what she was talking about otherwise); and a steady ooze of peepee/caca humor that Prager deploys with Tourette's-like doggedness and which reaches its apex every time she gets to talk about sex (and she talks about sex a lot). If she has to describe the mating habits of the sea urchin, well, she can at least find some way to make the whole thing seem scatological, smutty, and slightly icky. Just as though you were in junior high and she were the kid in the lunch room who could take even the most innocent-sounding word and somehow relate it to sex. As you're reading, you can literally hear Beavis and Butt-Head sniggering in the background: "Heh. Heh-heh. She said 'sperm cloud.' Heh-heh-heh." If this is what it takes to popularize science these days and teach "average" Americans something about the natural world in which we live, I say the Chinese more than deserve to win every single educational contest they challenge us to. (Personal to University of Chicago Press: Ed Ricketts' *Between Pacific Tides* hasn't been updated and re-issued since 1992; make Ellen Prager return her advance and give us back the "Doc.")

Daniel says

A book about the stranger creatures of the ocean told with a whimsical style. Each chapter is a general overview of a category of strange creatures and then its broken up by each individual animal in that category. It is a perfect bathroom book and is small enough that it doesn't overstay its welcome.

Karyl says

Such a promising title!! I only wish it lived up to it.

As someone who adores the ocean and the creatures within it (including dining on them!), I wanted to love this book. Weird, creepy, sea creatures that are extremely different from anything on earth?! Lots of goo and slime and crazy non-hetero sex?? SIGN ME UP.

If only it were that interesting.

There were quite a few interesting quotes in this book, generally involving the aforementioned crazy non-hetero sex of sea creatures. But that's the problem -- it's just a few quotes that are interesting. Whole chapters passed by my nearly-unseeing eyes, and it was difficult to retain much. The author was either beating you over the head with too much technical information, or she was talking down to you like you're five years old. The format of the chapters became so repetitive, which also led to my zoning out between fun facts. By the last two chapters, I was already done with reading this book, but then Prager decided to preach at her readers as to how we can save these weird and strange sea creatures and their environment.

What really got me was the major typo, made not once but twice (!!!) on page 153, with Prager quoting Donald Trump. Both times, it's written "YOUR FIRED!" Um. That's grade-school grammar right there. I cringed so hard.

I also have a hard time with a supposedly scholarly book that is sponsored by Walmart (WTAF), Celebrity Xpeditions, and the Cruise Lines International Association. It smacks of a conflict of interest.

Prager did choose some beautiful and colorful photographs to include, which was handy. It was difficult to imagine some of the creatures she described solely in prose.
