

## BOOK REVIEW

STANLEY A. RICE. 2011. **Life of Earth: Portrait of a Beautiful, Middle-Aged, Stressed-Out World.** 2011. (ISBN 978-1-61614-225-4, hbk.). Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197, U.S.A. (**Orders:** <http://www.prometheusbooks.com/>). \$28.00, 255 pp., photos, 6" x 9".

While we are all certainly familiar with the old adage, "You can't judge a book by its cover," it is a genuine delight to report that this one not only has a beautiful cover, it is a genuine "page-turner" from start to finish. Biologist Rice has provided us with an unexpectedly unique and inclusive, well-balanced coverage.

A glance at the Table of Contents certainly peaks the reader's interest. After *List of Illustrations* and *Introduction: A Pile of Rocks in the Middle of Kansas*, the reader encounters Chapter 1. Meet Mother Earth; Ch. 2. Inevitable Evolution; Ch. 3. Innovation; Ch. 4. Symbiosis; Ch. 5. Sex; Ch. 6. Altruism; Ch. 7. Religion; Ch. 8. Science; and Ch. 9. Faith in Photosynthesis. How could anyone possibly not be fascinated by that line-up?

This volume is not simply a recitation of various biological episodes in the history of our planet. (We are approximately half-way through Earth's estimated ten-billion-year "life span.") Obviously human occupation throughout the ages has had a tremendous impact on Gaia, the name the ancient Greeks had bestowed upon planet Earth, and retained here. Rice has provided a very thorough analysis of the impact—both positive and negative—that mankind has had since its presence and interaction. And, he has done so with skill, humor, and an obvious love and concern for the planet. He does not mince words when it comes to extreme human religiosity among populations that impact the care and protection of Gaia. (Interestingly, he tells of his dismissal from a church-sponsored university for being "too liberal." He still considers himself "somewhat conservative.")

Rice writes with ease, obvious knowledge and love of Gaia and its life-cycles, as well as our home planet—and with a great sense of humor. It is fun, entertaining, enlightening—and encouraging!—to read.—*Helen Jude, Assistant Editor, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 1700 University Drive, Fort Worth, Texas 76107-3400, U.S.A.*