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Catastrophes and Lesser Calamities: The Causes of Mass Extinctions

Tony Hallam

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In Catastrophes and Lesser Calamities, renowned geologist Tony Hallam takes us on a tour of the Earth's history, and of the cataclysmic events, as well as the more gradual extinctions, that have punctuated life on Earth throughout the past 500 million years. While comparable books in this field of study tend to promote only one likely cause of mass extinctions, such as extraterrestrial impact, volcanism, and or climatic cooling, Catastrophes and Lesser Calamities breaks new ground, as the first book to attempt an objective coverage of all likely causes, including sea-level and climatic changes, oxygen deficiency in the oceans, volcanic activity, and extraterrestrial impact. Hallam focuses on the so-called 'big five' mass extinctions, at the end of the Ordovician, Permian, Triassic, and Cretaceous periods, and the later Devonian, and he also includes less well-known examples where relevant. He devotes attention especially to the attempts by geologists to distinguish true catastrophes from more gradual extinction events, and he concludes with a discussion of the evolutionary significance of mass extinctions, and on the influence of Homo sapiens in causing extinctions within the last few thousand years, both on land and in the seas.

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