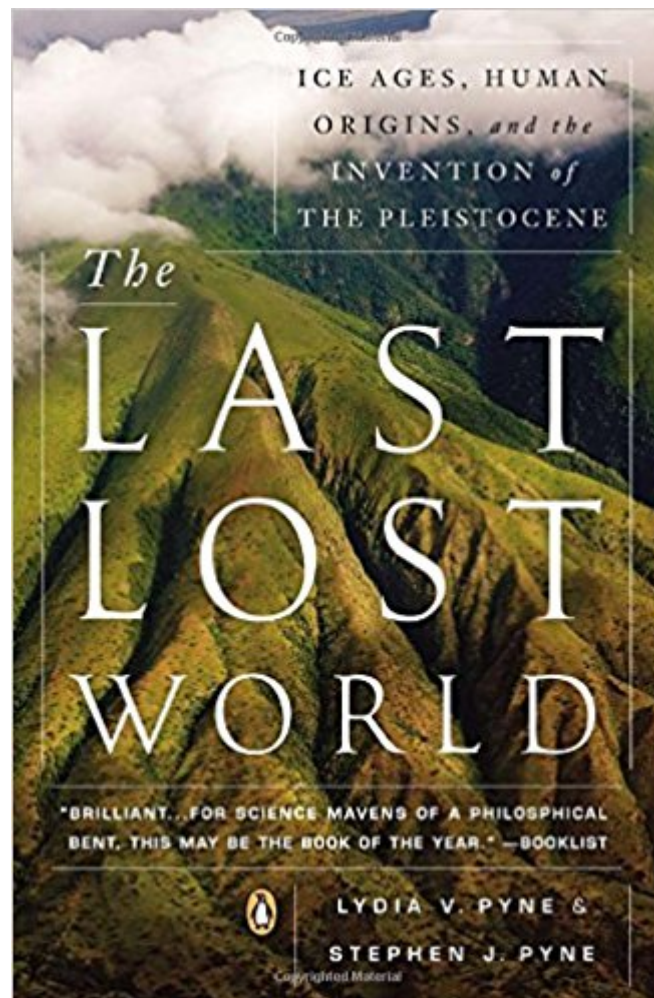




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The Last Lost World: Ice Ages, Human Origins, And The Invention Of The Pleistocene



Synopsis

An enthralling scientific and cultural exploration of the Ice Age—•from the author of *How the Canyon Became Grand* From a remarkable father-daughter team comes a dramatic synthesis of science and environmental history—•an exploration of the geologic time scale and evolution twinned with the story of how, eventually, we have come to understand our own past. The Pleistocene is the epoch of geologic time closest to our own. *The Last Lost World* is an inquiry into the conditions that made it, the themes that define it, and the creature that emerged dominant from it. At the same time, it tells the story of how we came to discover and understand this crucial period in the Earth's history and what meanings it has for today.

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Customer Reviews

Praise for *THE LAST LOST WORLD* "Daughter-and-father historians of science pretty fully justify their profession in this brilliant explanation of the most recent geological epoch [the Pleistocene]. For science mavens of a philosophical bent, this may be the book of the year, a font of knowledge and, what's more and better, intellectual exercise." —Booklist "Written in clear, supple prose, this title will interest historians, anthropologists, and anyone fascinated by the Ice Ages, human evolution, and the history of science and culture." —Library Journal "Lasting from about 3 million to 10,000 years ago, the Pleistocene is both a geological epoch and an idea, write science historians Stephen Pyne (*Voyager: Exploration, Space,*

and the Third Great Age of Discovery, 2011, etc.) and his daughter Lydia, who proceed to deliver a perceptive account of both." • Kirkus Reviews "[Pyne] and his daughter dig right into the subject of the tumultuous, fascinating Pleistocene and do [] a lively, bang-up job of it." • Open Letters Monthly

Lydia V. Pyne, a lecturer and visiting fellow at Drexel University, has done extensive fieldwork in archaeology and paleoanthropology. She lives in Philadelphia. Stephen J. Pyne is the author of *Voyager*, *Year of the Fires*, *The Ice*, and *How the Canyon Became Grand*, among many other books. He lives in Glendale, Arizona.

I'm fascinated by this subject matter, but I'm always disappointed when an author is more concerned with appearing brilliant than with just telling an interesting story. Impressive vocabulary loses its luster when you bludgeon your readers with it. This author is too impressed with herself and less interested in conveying clear and concise facts. If you're really interested in this subject, find another source.

Review *The Last Lost Word: Ice Ages, Human Origins and the Invention of the Pleistocene* by Lydia Pyne and Stephen Pyne. When I buy a book about the Pleistocene I guess I think it should be about the Pleistocene; unfortunately, *The Last Lost World* isn't about the Pleistocene era. It's about science and the history of science. There is almost nothing about the climate of the Pleistocene and nothing about the geology. Discussions about human evolution are plentiful, but there isn't anything new. In Chapter 5, *Out of Africa*, there isn't a thing of substance on the migration of humans 100,000 or so years ago. On the front cover flap it says: "The Pleistocene is the epoch of geologic time closest to our own. The last Lost World is an enthralling tour of the conditions that made it, the themes that define it, and the creature that emerged dominate from it." None of this is true. The conditions of the epoch are not closely discussed and the "themes" that define it are lost in its too bookish prose. Here is an example from the book page 9 (hardcopy): "When that happened the Pliocene, acting as a kind of historical rift, segued into the Pleistocene. The warm-wet exuberance of the Miocene gave way to the cool-dry violence of the Pleistocene, in which the frost-thaw of glaciation subjected biotas to relentless rhythms of firing and quenching. What the Pliocene had sifted, the Pleistocene then shook, warmed, froze, and set forth into the modern world." How worthless is that? Outside of a lot of shabby analogies what did you learn? The entire book is like this. Overblown with prose and lacking in content. Why spend time on *Pittdown Man* (a hoax), *Plato*,

Popper, Bertrand Russell, or Arthur C. Clarke? The book is a quasi (and I do mean quasi) book of philosophy where science vs. literature in the definition of what it means to be human. I didn't buy that kind of a book. The title and the advertising literature misrepresent what this book is all about. If you want facts about the Pleistocene go elsewhere. If you want a shallow philosophic dissertation about science and literature go ahead and buy it. AD2

I really, I mean, really liked this book. Lydia Pyne is a terrific writer, and she covers a broad and complex canvas well. Her understanding of the glacial epochs and influences, and the influence of such climate changes on human development, is profound. Well written, clear, and fascinating, she presents the many narratives of the ice ages and human development clearly and with authority. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in learning of the time of ice and the great animals.

This book is overwritten. Where a simple declaration or word could do, the authors choose spin and cotton candy. Thus, themes and objectives are lost to the reader (at least this reader). Names and statements are dropped back in hundreds of pages after the initially being introduced. I referred constantly to the internet while reading this book, and this is not my first reading on the subject. The real problem with this book is that the professionals who might understand what the author is trying to say would be concerned about the generalized and sweeping statements, untethered to fact. The rest of us spend time with the Internet--not a bad thing--but the book does not cover enough new ground to earn that time. One reviewer stated that readers should start with Tattersall's books. I would also suggest Chris Stringer's books. The authors's concluding statements that humanities and the arts "can no longer claim--even pretend to claim--that they can make valid statements about the material world and how it works. ...But philosophy, literature and history can help explain how the sciences work, and they can turn the data excavated by natural science into prisms of meaning." p 262 are head-scratching material and belie the fact that one author "has an MA and Phd in the history and philosophy of science."

Potential buyers beware. The title and subtitle of Pynes' book provide a fine example of misdirection. To my chagrin, the strategy worked -- I bought the darned thing. The best aspect of the book is the authors' paragraph structure. Nearly everything else disappoints. The philosophy wades in the shallow end of the pool, nearly every literary reference can be found in a freshman college reader, the science is presented in a superficial manner, the rhetoric is boringly parallel from one

chapter to the next, and the authors' points are seldom clear. Instead they are weakly supported and pretentious. Normally, obscure writing can be misinterpreted as profound, but not this time. The Last Lost World is simply disappointing. Undoubtedly, the contents are meaningful to the authors; the same can be said for most amateur poetry. In both cases, it is best to keep the work private -- no need to share.

The Pleistocene era of Geologic time (2.6 million to 12 thousand years before present) has been one grand time of global climate change. The authors, father and daughter, clearly document in novel style, that the dramatic fluctuating climate and the plate tectonics fashioned the ecological stresses that drove our species, homo, to evolve in both body and brain into us. Our ancestors had to change to cope with these stresses in order to survive and thrive in vastly different environments. We are now one species of almost 12 billion beings linked by one DNA capable of mating with any ethnic group and producing viable offspring to carry on our genes into an unknown future. Rejoice in climate change. Climate change is the major factor in bringing us, you and me, to the apex of physical and mental condition.

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