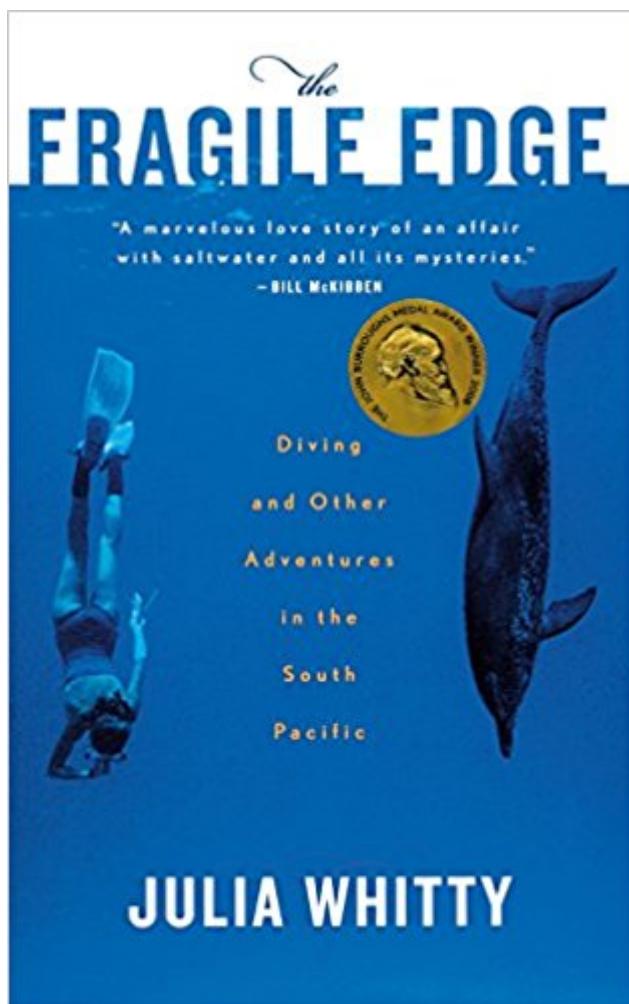


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The Fragile Edge: Diving And Other Adventures In The South Pacific



Synopsis

In *The Fragile Edge*, the documentary filmmaker and deep-sea diver Julia Whitty paints a mesmerizing, scientifically rich portrait of teeming coral reefs and sea life in the South Pacific. She takes us literally beneath the surface of the usual travel narrative, in an underwater equivalent of an African big-game safari. Hammerhead sharks rule a cascading chain of extraordinary creatures, from eagle rays to reef sharks, as the sound of courting humpback whales reverberates through the deep. Inspiring for both armchair and expert divers, *The Fragile Edge* reveals how science can extend our understanding of unfathomable waters, opening our eyes to the threats facing coral reefs and explaining why these fragile oases are vital to human survival. In this passionate, spiritual narrative of her adventures in the big blue, Julia Whitty emerges as one of our finest writers on the mystery, beauty, and fragility of the undersea world.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; Reprint edition (June 13, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 054705372X

ISBN-13: 978-0547053721

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,468,361 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Ecosystems > Coral Reefs #131 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Nature Travel > Adventure > Scuba Diving #364 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Outdoor Recreation > Scuba

Customer Reviews

This is a moving and illuminating love story about one woman and the fathomless deep." Whitty is emerging as one of the must-read voices about the wet three-quarters of the planet." -- Bill McKibben

"This important book makes clear the absolute urgency of saving the coral reefs of the world." - actor/activist Ted Danson

"Extraordinarily absorbing." - Santa Rosa Press Democrat

"Whitty's prose is supple and scientifically informed (a rare and graceful mix) ... her intimacies with the ocean's curiosities captivate." Whitty is emerging as one of the must-read voices about the wet three-quarters of the planet." -- Bill McKibben

For those of us who can't visit the

South Pacific ... writer and producer Whitty gives us the next best thing."Whitty is emerging as one of the must-read voices about the wet three-quarters of the planet." -- Bill McKibben

JULIA WHITTY's first book on oceans, *The Fragile Edge*, was awarded the John Burroughs Medal Award, the PEN USA Award, and the Kiriyma Prize. Her cover articles have appeared in Harper's Magazine and Mother Jones, where she is an environmental correspondent. She blogs at the Blue Marble and DeepÂ Â Blue Home.

The extraordinary thing about Julia Whitty's book is that it allows the reader a unique view into the underwater world of the coral reef. It somehow gives us new eyes and senses to perceive this miraculous world. The world of the coral reef is not an abstraction but rather a universe of myriad living creatures. *Fragile Edge* gives me a sense of this world I've never had before so that when I enter it the experience is more deeply meaningful.

Julia takes us to a 4th or perhaps 5th dimension in this book, as concerns her writing ability and style....it is almost as though she's found a way to compete with "retinal resolution", without requiring that dimension!But never fear, all you need is whatever visual resolution you have, and as you read this astounding (ASTOUNDING) book, you will have more visual and other clarity than you've ever had, as to the life and vitality and wonder of the undersea world. And perhaps of the above-sea world as well. A tour de force, and beyond.

Julia whitty is awesome

I grew up in this world of tropical coral reefs and sharks and tiny bright fish but that was over fifty years ago. Tonight as I sat on the deck of my house overlooking a bay in Washington's temperate Puget Sound, I finished Julia's book and felt those long ago times flood back. And I felt joy and sadness. Joy for the memories of reef sharks suddenly appearing in the Northeast pass of the Truk Lagoon; and me swimming free a hundred yards from our skiff. Joy for Moorish Idols escaping into coral forest. Joy for just being there. And sadness, for a world dying before our eyes. People, we've got too many people. When will we figure that out?But oh my! Can this lady write. Thanks.

Most people think of coral reefs as part of the tropical paradise they seek when they jet off to "the islands" to get away from the cold of winter. Reefs are associated with palm trees and blue water

and sun tans and romance. Biologists and oceanographers know that reefs are the most diverse communities on the planet, built into enormous structures by some of the smallest and most interesting animals on the planet. In many ways, coral reefs are the basis of life in the ocean. But in the South Pacific, reefs and the islands they surround and support are in deep trouble (no pun intended). Julia Whitty has been filming reefs for 15 years, so she knows them well, and she has seen their deterioration first hand. Now she has turned her considerable talents to writing a book, and if there's any justice, this book will do for coral what Rachel Carson's books did for the oceans and shores nearly half a century ago. "The Fragile Edge: Diving and Other Adventures in the South Pacific" is a three-part work that unflinchingly examines the world of coral reefs from three perspectives, each set on a different island in French Polynesia. In part one, she describes the atoll of Rangiroa from the perspective of a diver. Writing about the underwater world is no easy task. Photographers and film-makers have always done a better job of describing the life aquatic. Perhaps that is because it is such a visual experience that most divers perceive it only from the right side of the brain, so it's easier to capture and present great images in lieu of thousands of words. Whitty has managed to capture the experience with words as powerful and colorful and well-composed as any photo or video clip she has ever made. But her descriptions are not just artful. They are well grounded in science. She knows the biology of the reef and the intricate web of relationships in the coral ecosystem. The reader can learn with a sense of awe. Part 2, Whitty moves to the dying atoll of Funafuti. This is no paradise. She takes a room in a guesthouse owned by a terminally alcoholic German expat and his wife Emily, a nurse who works for the atoll's local government. Funafuti is devoid of tourists and is rapidly losing its only source of economic support -- the reef around it -- to overfishing and pollution. Western influence has turned the formerly self-sufficient island into a throwaway society that is in deep denial about the threats surrounding it from all sides, especially the rising of the sea as far away glaciers in Antarctica and Greenland turn liquid. Even in that, Funafuti is a victim of Western influence as the locals choose to believe Australian denials that the sea level is rising, in spite of the evidence in front of them. In the final part, Whitty visits Mo'orea, where she introduces the reader to the inhabitants of the island's lagoon and reef in lyrical but unsentimental prose. From her encounter with a pelagic octopus to the tense, inevitable demise of a pod of spinner dolphins when inconvenient winds trap them inside the reef, where they normally rest, but have no food, Whitty shares her sharp observations and insights, flavored with references to Hindu mythology (she hints at having a South Asian heritage) to try to explain states of mind that humans and some animals might actually have in common. Whitty concludes this astonishing work with an epilogue set on Marlon Brando's private atoll Teti'aroa,

where she contemplates the evidence of the planet's demise and consoles herself with the lesson from geology that reefs have come and gone throughout the history of the Earth."Whatever role we might play in the next great extinction will surely have less effect on the tenacious reemergence of reef-builders than it will on us. Reefs, we know, can survive without us. The opposite may not be true."Julia Whitty has a lovely voice, but it's a voice bringing dire warnings that we had better heed soon.

"All day we have been observing the surgeonfish..." Julia Whitty begins, and from that first sentence onward, the reader of "The Fragile Edge" is one of the party. Whitty is there with you, chuckling good-naturedly at the antics of an undersea creature or (more likely) of those crazy humans topside. In one of my favorite moments, an account of how the funky old hotel with its peculiar charms has been taken over by new owners whose pampered guests pay \$500/night to lounge by the infinity pool is interrupted just at the moment when you think she might succumb to sentimentality or some other curmudgeonly temptation by her confession that, "I like the pool, too." Similarly, Whitty clearly and firmly presents her environmental concerns without, so to speak, wallowing in them. Instead of putting the book aside because you're tired of hearing about how the end of the world is at hand, you're motivated to keep swimming along with a guide whose curiosity and expertise extend to the natural history of molecular plants and animals, as well as the more glamorous sharks and dolphins, from Western science to Eastern metaphysics, and from dissolving atolls and bleached corals to the raw fish marinated in coconut milk served at a Tuvaluan wedding reception. Finally it's her love of the coral reefs she has come to know over many years of diving and study, rather than her fear that global warming will destroy them, that Whitty is most eager to share.

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