



Power, Sex, Suicide: Mitochondria and the Meaning of Life

Nick Lane

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If it weren't for mitochondria, scientists argue, we'd all still be single-celled bacteria. Indeed, these tiny structures inside our cells are important beyond imagining. Without mitochondria, we would have no cell suicide, no sculpting of embryonic shape, no sexes, no menopause, no aging.

In this fascinating and thought-provoking book, Nick Lane brings together the latest research in this exciting field to show how our growing insight into mitochondria has shed light on how complex life evolved, why sex arose (why don't we just bud?), and why we age and die. These findings are of fundamental importance, both in understanding life on Earth, but also in controlling our own illnesses, and delaying our degeneration and death. Readers learn that two billion years ago, mitochondria were probably bacteria living independent lives and that their capture within larger cells was a turning point in the evolution of life, enabling the development of complex organisms. Lane describes how mitochondria have their own DNA and that its genes mutate much faster than those in the nucleus. This high mutation rate lies behind our aging and certain congenital diseases. The latest research suggests that mitochondria play a key role in degenerative diseases such as cancer. We also discover that mitochondrial DNA is passed down almost exclusively via the female line. That's why it has been used by some researchers to trace human ancestry daughter-to-mother, to "Mitochondrial Eve," giving us vital information about our evolutionary history.

Written by Nick Lane, a rising star in popular science, *Power, Sex, Suicide* is the first book for general readers on the nature and function of these tiny, yet fascinating structures.

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