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Perhaps some will recognize the sinister feeling that comes over one when entering the carnivorous plants greenhouse in a botanic garden—the feeling that the vegetation is watching, waiting to pounce, to make a meal of you. Dan Torre’s entertaining book on the world of carnivorous plants gives some insight into where that feeling comes from and convincingly argues why, as a culture, we need to abandon it and respectfully embrace the bug-crushing flora of the world.

Easy to read, stockpiled with anecdotes, and beautifully illustrated, Torre’s short book offers an introductory overview of the key themes of vegetative carnivory (a word I learned while reading). It is his second book of the kind, having started with *Cactus* in 2017. *Cactus* and *Carnivorous Plants* are both part of Reaktion’s Botanical series, but Torre’s new work adopts a more thematic approach than his last. Instead of an individual family, Torre looks at a shared characteristic—and a fascinating one at that.

Beginning with biology, chapter 1 looks at some better-known species of carnivorous plants that can highlight the different ways they attract, capture, and digest their prey. The range of approaches these plants have evolved are incredible. From nectar-laden pitcher pots filled with rainwater to leaves covered with sticky, debilitating hairs, carnivorous plants are alike only in their intent to kill, as a way of accumulating vital sustenance that their nutrient-deficient habitats do not provide. Expanding into the ecological, chapter 2 explores examples of plant-animal relationships that have coevolved over millennia, demonstrating their ecological codependency. These examples do get slightly repetitive—there are only so many ways to describe a plant digesting an insect—but they certainly serve to demonstrate the wonderful diversity of the seven hundred species of carnivorous plants and make the reader productively con-
sider the important scientific questions that still occupy academia, the most fundamental of which being: What actually is a carnivorous plant?

The next section of the book brings humans to center stage. Torre provides a high-level, somewhat chronologically confusing narrative of when, why, and with what results, naturalists from the West engaged with these plants and realized their carnivorous natures. Indeed, as Torre explains, the idea of animal-eating plants was so outside their understanding of the natural order of things that it was rebelled against for many years. One of the strengths of the book is how effectively it shows how the biology of these plants rocked the established scientific community and led to frantic questions about the “natural” hierarchy of the world. This narrative is enriched with numerous primary sources—particularly entertaining are those that come from historical figures who fear the “vegetable wickedness” and predict the coming of man-eating flora.

The final three chapters explore the representation of carnivorous plants in the cultural zeitgeist of the West. It notes the different personalities that the carnivorous plants have been assigned in mainstream media since their carnivority was established in the nineteenth century: monstrous man-eater, beautiful collectable, beloved pet, commercial product, and endangered victim, to name just a few. However, the enjoyment of reading the impressive body of examples which adorn the book—ranging from the familiar character Audrey II from *The Little Shop of Horrors* to the lesser-known Nike flytrap shoes—is slightly dampened by the limited analysis. There is a lack of engagement with the deeper contextual background of the sources, and it is not clear to the reader why they were chosen or how they link together to offer a fluid, cohesive narrative about the ways carnivorous plants have featured in cultures across time and space. This is also true of the images, which are often placed randomly throughout the book without reference to the preceding text. Despite this, the fascinating information that Torre offers cannot be overstated. For anyone interested in this wonderful family of plants—these quirks of evolution—this is the place to start; by the end of the book extensive knowledge will have been acquired, fears will have been overcome, and the reader will find themselves running excitedly toward the once-terrifying carnivorous greenhouse.
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