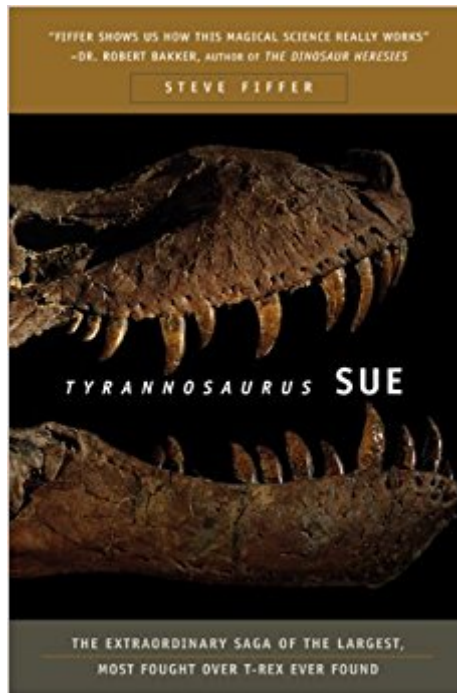


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Tyrannosaurus Sue: The Extraordinary Saga Of The Largest, Most Fought Over T-Rex Ever Found



Synopsis

Over 65 million years ago in what is now South Dakota, a battle-scarred Tyrannosaurus rex matriarch -- perhaps mortally wounded in a ferocious fight -- fell into the riverbed and died. In 1990 her skeleton was found, virtually complete, in what many have called the most spectacular dinosaur fossil discovery to date. And then another battle began -- a "survival of the fittest" free-for-all involving commercial dinosaur hunters, gun-toting law officers, an ambitious federal prosecutor, a Native American tribe, jealous academics, an enterprising auction house, major museums, and corporate giants, all making their claim for the dinosaur named Sue. Before it was over, there would be claims and counterclaims; charges of checkbook-polluted science, criminal larceny, and vengeful prosecutions; and devastating prison terms. And the gavel would come down on the largest-ever (\$8.36 million) auction price tag for a fossil, paid by Chicago's Field Museum, with help from Disney and McDonald's. Capturing the whole range of characters and issues embroiled in the fight for Sue, Steve Fiffer communicates both the excitement over Sue's discovery and the motivations, maneuverings, and absurdities of the various forces attempting to control her destiny.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the summer of 1990, a team of fossil hunters representing the Black Hills Institute of Geological Research, led by Peter Larson, unearthed the nearly complete skeleton of a mighty darn large Tyrannosaurus rex dinosaur buried on South Dakota land owned by one Maurice Williams. Larson paid Williams \$5,000 for the skeleton, named it "Sue", and then moved it to the Institute's facility at Hill City for preservation and restoration. In May 1992, the Bandini hit the fan with an FBI raid and

confiscation, and TYRANNOSAURUS SUE is the story of the 7-year legal mess that resulted. A mess that could only happen in America, the Land of the Free and the Home of Eternal Litigation. Steve Fiffer, a Windy City journalist, has ably reconstructed Sue's saga, from the time her bones were spotted by Sue Hendrickson in a sandstone cliff, to their auction years later to an unlikely consortium comprised of the Field Museum of Natural History, Disney Corporation, and McDonald's. Most of the narrative details the protracted and acerbic civil and criminal litigation that surrounded custody of the fragmented skeleton, the chief contestants being Larson, Williams, the Cheyenne River Sioux, and the U.S. Justice Department. If the reader is a paleontologist, or just otherwise fascinated by big, toothy lizards, then this book is a must read. However, my interest was only mildly inquisitive, so I found parts of it dry going. First of all, there are no photos - not a single one. I find this hard to fathom, since Sue's excavation site was extensively photographed, the various court sessions heavily (if only locally) covered, and the reconstructed skeleton was put on permanent display before the book was published. I mean, c'mon Steve!

Steve Fiffer does a splendid job detailing the sad state of affairs that exists in the world of paleontology. Until recently, paleontology had been a science that depended upon (and valued) the participation of amateurs and even the "profiteers". To this day, the vast majority of important fossil discoveries have been unearthed by non-academics and subsequently donated or (heaven forbid) sold to scientific institutions. The halls of natural history museums were once filled with cases of fossil trilobites, crinoids and paleozoic fishes for all to see. Sadly, nearly all of them have been packed away to make room for more flashy, interactive displays that pull in large crowds and generate the higher returns on investment which curators seek. Huge storerooms filled with significant fossils remain hidden, gathering dust, while research collections are off-limits to all but a handful of academics. Tyrannosaurus "Sue" was one fossil everyone wanted, since any huge dinosaur is certain to become a popular attraction and this giant, meat-eating fossil was a "star" attraction - one capable of packing 'em in at any institution and predestined for mass merchandising at the gift shop. Steve Fiffer gives readers a disturbing picture of the greed, political and legal nonsense behind the ownership battles that followed the discovery of "Sue". Someone once described most legislation as "the influence of public policy for private gain" - the case of Tyrannosaurus Sue provides able evidence. Careers are made, money and property changes hands, justice is hardly served, powerful institutions and large corporations triumph and the taxpayer foots the bill.

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