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## Book Review - The Light Eaters by Zoe Schlanger

I picked up Zoe Schlanger's *The Light Eaters* to take with me on a botanizing trip to Tatlyoko Lake last spring with a friend. The plan was to spend our days hiking around in the subalpine in search of spring ephemerals and I thought it might make a good read tucked into bed at night. Well, the heavens opened on our first day there and the rains that followed were torrential. Fortunately, *Light Eaters* provided all the plant entertainment I craved as we waited out the storms.

Schlanger is a journalist who specializes in writing on climate change. Her work has appeared in such publications at *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine. In 2017 Schlanger was noticing that she was becoming numb to the deluge of bad news she was consuming and reporting on and she decided to focus on something that lit up her imagination; something hopeful. Plants seemed like an obvious choice. In constant cycles of creative motion, plants, she felt, were well positioned to teach us a thing or two about resourcefulness, survival, and their specialty, adaptation.

Over the course of the next several years, Schlanger ventured deep down the plant rabbit hole interviewing botanists and other plant scientists around the world to learn about the greatest questions of who plants are and how they do what they do. She came to understand along the way that there is a seismic shift happening in the realm of plant science right now. Scientists are asking some very big questions: Are plants intelligent? Conscious even? And if so, are we doing them any service trying to explain their sophistication in this way or is it all just anthropomorphizing? The camps, you will find, are divided but Schlanger looks deeply at the research into some very fascinating and intriguing areas: Plant memory, plant communication and plant kinship to name a few.

Like many of you reading this review, I am deeply fascinated by all things "plant". This book was saturated with the sort of facts and details that I find particularly captivating. The kind that caused me to see the world around me through altered lenses. Many times, while reading this book by the fire as the rains continued to fall, I found myself muttering out loud to the point that my hiking companion asked if I could read the book faster so she could borrow it when our trip was done. Did you know, for example, that some species of tomatoes have the ability to secrete a chemical that causes the caterpillars attacking them to turn away from eating the plant and begin eating each other? Or that some weeds in crop fields can adapt to physically imitate the crop they are competing against? Through this type of mimicry, I learned, rye developed into a valuable food crop more similar to wheat.

Whether you balk at the idea that plants could be conscious beings or that seems like an obvious fact, if you are plant lover as I am, I am certain you will find this book hard to put down. It will, no doubt, make your next walk through the woods an altogether different kind of experience.

Charlotte Lundeen, Master Gardener in Training

