Deep time and deep seas: Enigmatic echinoderms and what bizarre animals can tell us about life on Earth

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Dr. Rich Mooi is Curator of Invertebrate Zoology & Geology at the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco. He studies the origin and evolution of echinoderms (starfish, sea urchins, sea lilies, and related forms), and will provide a tour of their odd body forms and habits, focusing on enigmatic fossils that go back over half a billion years. How did echinoderms come by their 5-part, radial strangeness, and how do they exploit such traits to inhabit nearly every oceanic biome, including the greatest depths of the sea? The answers lie in understanding unique developmental pathways, as well as the unusual interactions these animals have had with their environment over their long geologic history. These include fossils of animals that would not look out of place in any Star Wars pub scene.