



WE ARE WHY IT MIGHT

a true story for children of every age

written by
JED ANDERSON

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adapted from the essay · A Planet Without Minds Is a Planet Already Condemned



Look at our planet.

It is small. It is blue. It is alive.

And it lives in a much bigger story
than most people tell.



**Earth has been making life
for four billion years.**

Whales. Trees. Beetles. Mushrooms.

Things with shells. Things with fur.

Things that glow in the deep.



The universe has been making things for a very long time.

First it made stars. Then it made stardust.

Then it made Earth. Then it made life.

Then it made minds.

We are the universe learning
how to take care of itself.



But Earth lives in a rough neighborhood.

The cosmos is full of rocks, and storms,
and stars that explode.



**Five times,
something terrible happened here.**

Almost everything that was alive—stopped being alive.



The dinosaurs never saw it coming.

They couldn't have. They had no telescopes.



For a very long time,

every creature on Earth had the same problem.

They could grow. They could hide. They could run.

**But none of them
could think their way out of trouble.**



and I am small.

Then, very recently—

a blink of geological time—

something new appeared.

Not stronger. Not faster. Not bigger.

A creature that could ask: “Why?”

why?
why? why?
why? why?
why?

“Why does the rain come?”

“Why do the stars shine?”

These questions are a kind of magic.



At first, the answers came slowly.

*A new idea once a thousand years.
Then once a hundred. Then every year.
Then every month. Then every day.*

Every discovery built on the last one, faster and faster, until knowledge was unstoppable.

**"Learning how to learn was the most powerful invention
in the history of life on Earth"**



We built telescopes.

We learned the sky's clockwork.

We started counting the rocks that pass near our planet.

For the first time in four billion years, Earth had eyes.



But our learning had a cost.

*The skies got thicker. The seas got fuller of stuff
that doesn't belong. Other creatures suffered for it.*

This is true. It still is true.



*Some people heard about the trouble
and said:*

**“We should be small.
We should hide.
We should leave Earth alone.”**

Some people still say it.



But the Earth doesn't need us small.

The Earth needs us AWAKE.

Because the asteroid is still coming someday.

Because the volcanoes are still there.

*And no whale, no oak tree, no wolf, no coral
can build a telescope. They never could.*

WE CAN.



On September 26, 2022,

*a small spacecraft called DART
flew quietly through the dark
toward an asteroid named Dimorphos.*

[this really happened]

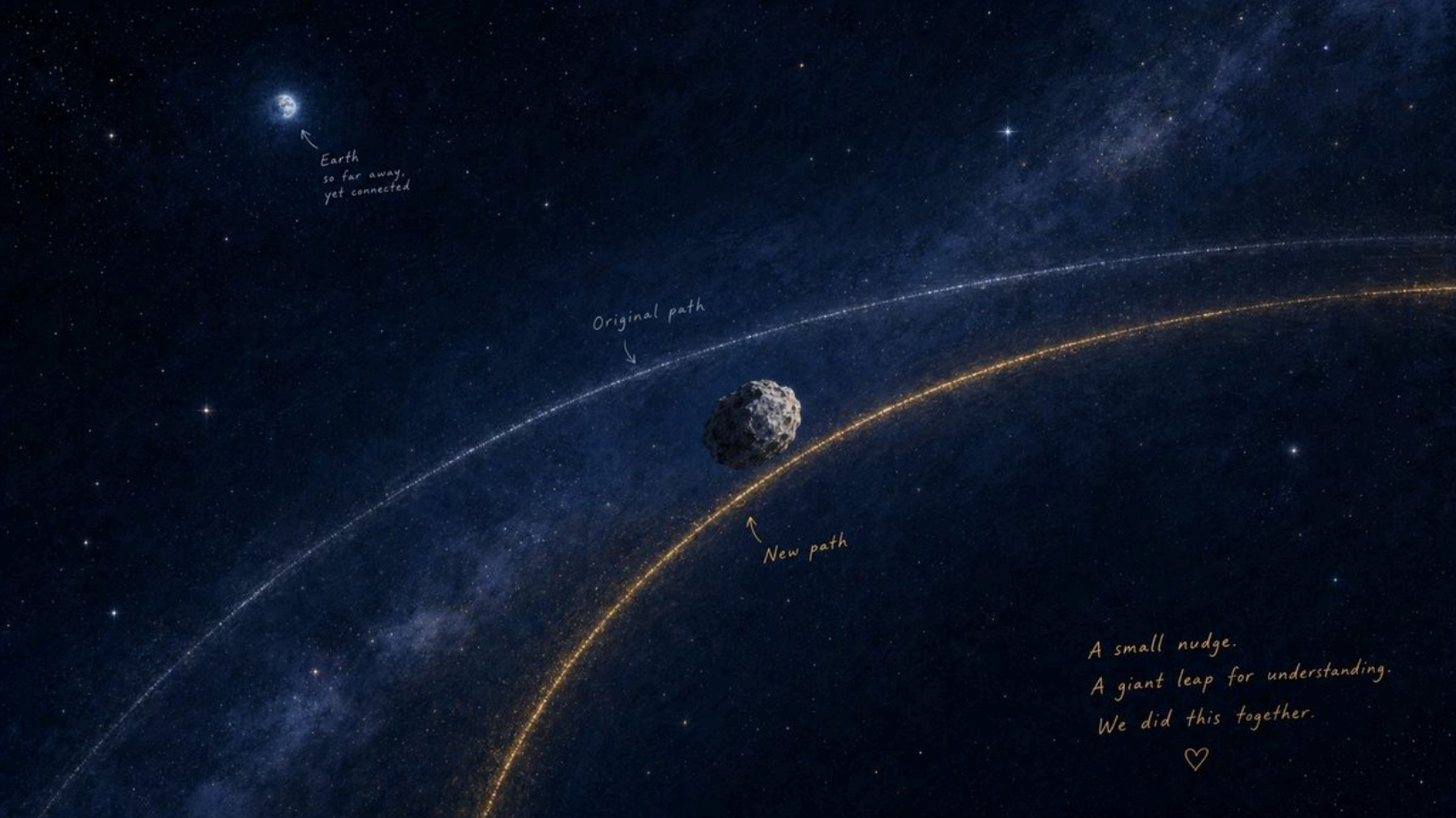


DART CRASHED INTO IT.

On purpose.

**At fourteen thousand
miles per hour.**

(faster than any bullet ever fired)



The asteroid moved.

Just a little.

About a fifth of a second on its long path around the Sun.

No bigger than a heart's beat.

**But for the first time
in four and a half BILLION years—it MOVED.**



We are not Earth's enemy.

We are the part of nature that finally grew old enough
to look after the rest of nature.



There is a lot to do.

smarter food · smarter cities · better tools to think with



Now we are teaching machines to help us think.

*Faster than ever. About the air.
About the rivers. About every living thing.*



We made some of the trouble.

We are also the only ones who can answer it.

Both things are true at the same time.

**Holding both
is what growing up means.**



*The forest needs you to grow up curious.
The reef needs you to grow up brave.
The whole sky needs you to grow up kind.*

Every child who learns to ask "Why does that happen?" and "How could I make it better?" is part of the most important work on the whole planet.

"Every problem has a solution . . . if someone grows curious enough to look for it."



**Earth was never going
to make it.**

**We are why
it might.**

onward. upward.



A NOTE FOR THE GROWN-UPS

Every fact in this book is real, and every number can be checked.

Earth has had five mass extinctions in the last 500 million years. The dinosaurs were ended about 66 million years ago by an asteroid roughly ten kilometres across that struck the Yucatán peninsula at about 20 km/s.

On 26 September 2022, NASA's DART spacecraft struck the asteroid moonlet Dimorphos at about 14,000 mph (6.6 km/s). The impact shortened Dimorphos's twelve-hour orbit around its parent asteroid Didymos by 33 minutes. In March 2026, follow-up research published in *Science Advances* confirmed that the same impact also altered the Didymos–Dimorphos system's 770-day orbit around the Sun by 0.15 seconds.

That last sentence is the one that matters. It is the first time in the 4.5-billion-year history of the solar system that a human-made object has measurably changed the path of a celestial body around the Sun.

This book is a children's translation of an essay called “A Planet Without Minds Is a Planet Already Condemned,” which is itself built on the philosophy of David Deutsch and the work of many scientists. Its wager is simple, and it is what I would most like a young reader to walk away holding:

We are not separate from nature. We are the first part of nature that has ever been able to ask why — and use the answer to defend the rest. Both things are true at once: we have hurt the Earth getting here, and we are the only thing in its long history that has ever arrived in time to save it.

Hold both. Get to work.

—J. A.

WHERE THE FACTS COME FROM

Mass extinctions and recurrence intervals.

“Extinction event,” Wikipedia. Our World in Data, “The history of the planet's biodiversity.”

Chicxulub impactor (the dinosaurs' asteroid).

NASA, “Deep Impact and the Mass Extinction of Species 65 Million Years Ago.” “Chicxulub crater,” Wikipedia.

DART mission overview and impact velocity.

NASA, “DART (Double Asteroid Redirection Test) Mission.” Impact 26 September 2022 at 6.6 km/s.

Dimorphos orbital-period change of 33 minutes.

NASA Press Release, October 2022 (refined value).

Didymos–Dimorphos solar-orbit change of 0.15 seconds.

Makadia et al., “Momentum Enhancement from the DART Impact on Dimorphos and Implications for Heliocentric Orbits.” Science Advances, March 2026. NASA JPL Press Release, 6 March 2026: “NASA's DART Mission Changed Orbit of Asteroid Didymos Around Sun.”

Philosophy of “good explanations” and the Enlightenment as the first knowledge-creating culture.

David Deutsch, The Beginning of Infinity (Allen Lane, 2011).

Original essay this book is adapted from.

Anderson, J., “A Planet Without Minds Is a Planet Already Condemned” (2026).