

Eurypterids don't have fingers, just legs. Some have swimming paddles. In class we have to label their body parts. Prosoma. Mesosoma. Metasoma. Walking legs. Swimming legs. Telson. They're arthropods, like millipedes and horseshoe crabs and scorpions (from which eurypterids get their colloquial name, "sea scorpion"). Rather, they *were* arthropods, like trilobites. The Permian extinction killed off all of them. The Permian extinction almost killed off everything, even my ancestor, some four-legged synapsid.

The eurypterid is the state fossil of New York. There are thousands of them here. There were millions of them when they were alive, back when the land I'm standing on was a shallow sea. The area was known as the continent Laurentia. Eurypterids are Laurentians. I am a Laurentian too. I grew up in this area. And I attend St. Lawrence University, where we are all called that name. It's written across our t-shirts. I am a Laurentian by both nature and nurture.

Fossils are a fickle thing. The conditions have to be just right for one to form. Watery environments are best. Quick burials are best. Because of this, over 95% of fossils found today are marine invertebrates. How boring.

I'm holding a eurypterid head. It's the size of my thumb and forefinger curled together. The head is dark, almost black, almost a little bit shiny. It was easy to find. The shale splits along the weakest plane, and that's usually where the fossil is. You just have to look for the cracks, places in the rock where the breaks are. And thank God for that because I am terrified of splitting a perfectly preserved specimen in two with my rock hammer. I have no sense of my own movements or strength. I much prefer to lift the rocks out of their dishes, peeking underneath for legs and bodies, like a kid looking for roly pollies in the backyard. Allan won't pay me for my eurypterid because