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Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

2.9

**1** At certain times of the year in the Arctic circle, the sky looks as though it’s on fire. The colours are so vivid – like neon street signs – that you think they can’t be natural. You imagine that they must be man-made and that someone must be projecting disco lights into the sky or something. And yet they are completely natural. In the past, people thought they might have a religious significance and more recently scientists speculated that they could be a form of radiation. So what exactly are these lights? We now know that they are the result of particles in the Earth’s atmosphere colliding with each other. The colours come from different kinds of particle. When the particles are mainly oxygen, the sky looks green. If you see a lot of red, on the other hand, that comes from nitrogen.

**2** This might be a painting or a work of art. There’s something very composed about it. It looks as if the green spiral is holding the orange ball. Or it might be protecting the ball. But look carefully – the amount of detail is incredible. That’s because it’s a close-up – or macro-photograph. It shows a butterfly egg on the stem of a plant. Why do butterflies lay eggs in such places? They must have a reason. Scientists think that this species of butterfly may choose this spot to keep the eggs safe from ants and other predators.

**3** Plants that eat animals? That can’t be true … or is it? It may not seem logical, but there are indeed plants that catch insects – mostly flies, beetles, ants, and so on. But how do they do it? They must use a very special technique, because obviously they can’t move and chase after things. Well, one way of catching food is to pretend to be something else. Take this Australian sundew plant. To an unfortunate insect, these shiny drops look like water. But the insect must get a nasty surprise when it tries to take a drink and gets caught on the sticky spikes. Then the plant’s chemicals dissolve the insect so that it can ‘eat’ it.