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Two hundred and sixty million years ago, life on Earth suffered wave after wave of cataclysmic extinctions, with the worst--the end-Permian extinction--wiping out nearly every species on the planet. The Worst of Times delves into the mystery behind these extinctions and sheds light on the fateful role the primeval supercontinent, known as Pangea, may have played in causing these global catastrophes. Drawing on the latest discoveries as well as his own firsthand experiences conducting field expeditions to remote corners of the world, Paul Wignall reveals what scientists are only now beginning to understand about the most prolonged and calamitous period of environmental crisis in Earth's history. He describes how a series of unprecedented extinction events swept across the planet in a span of eighty million years, rapidly killing marine and terrestrial life on a scale more devastating than the dinosaur extinctions that would come later. Wignall shows how these extinctions--some of which have only recently been discovered--all coincided with gigantic volcanic eruptions of basalt lavas that occurred when the world's landmasses were united into a single vast expanse. Unraveling one of the great enigmas of ancient Earth, The Worst of Times also explains how the splitting apart of Pangea into the continents we know today ushered in a new age of vibrant and more resilient life on our planet