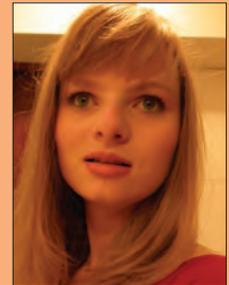


A review of 10 of the best Origin of Life books



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As soon as man gained consciousness, it is almost certain we began to wonder where we and everything else came from. For a few thousand years now, this has been a topic for which religion has always found some sort of explanation, and, for many thousands of years, this seemed satisfactory. In the most recent centuries, science has undergone a revolution and it has been possible to date, trace, and even begin to envisage our past like never before, forever getting closer to the origin of life itself.

Of course, this had led to controversy, exaggeration and plain myth in many different areas. Since the origin of life is a topic which still mystifies everyone, it is best to be able to evaluate the many theories that stand today for oneself. So here is a list of books which feature the theme of our origins:

The Origin of Life – by Paul Davies. It is simple and informative, but broad - a great start to thinking about how life ended up, was created or appeared on earth. It allows the reader to create their own hypothesis as to how it all began before presenting the present-day ideas using evidence from a range of sciences.

Seven Clues to the Origin of Life – a scientific detective story by A.G. Cairns-Smith is an enjoyable read, explaining the different pieces of biological evidence with regards to the origins of life with a lot of inspiration from Sherlock Holmes. Although some interpretation of primitive Earth's atmosphere has changed since this was written, it gives you a complete sensation of the biological enigma – where

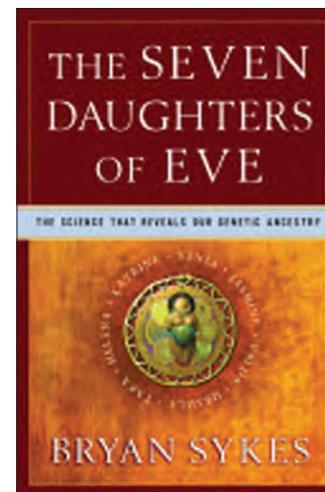
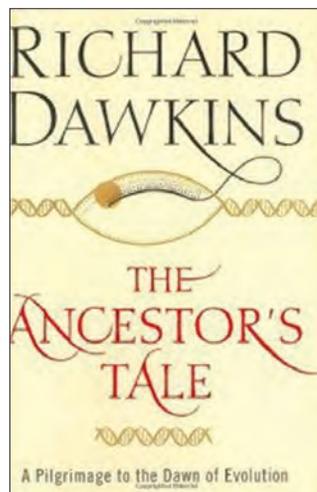
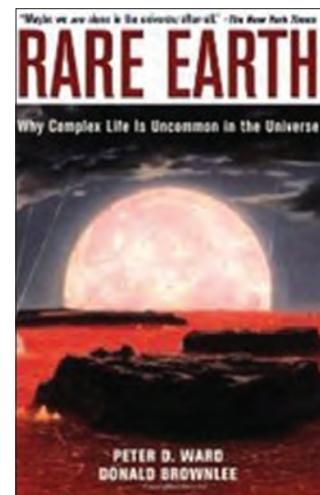
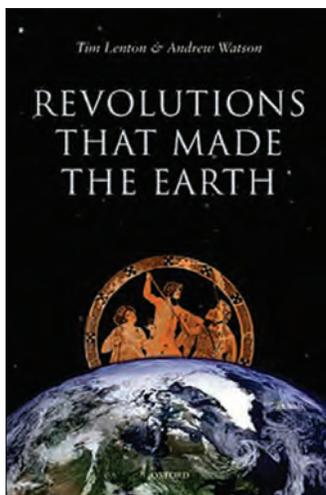
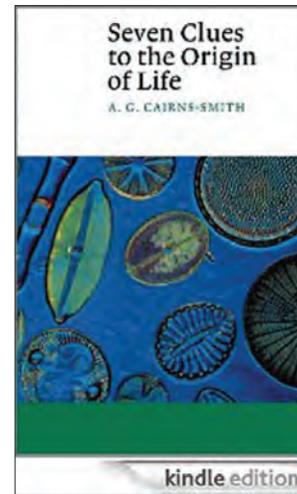
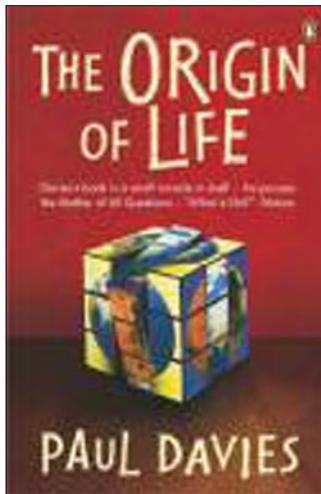
did this life come from? Somewhat the extreme opposite to a murder mystery.

Revolutions that Made the Earth – by Tim Lenton and Andrew Watson is a detailed and vivid account of the creation of the Earth and life, according to our present day scientific knowledge. An interesting read, which links earth-changing events to the origin of life, to show how the basic necessities for life, which we take for granted, all ended up on our small blue planet.

Rare Earth: Why Complex Life is Uncommon in the Universe - by Peter Ward is easily comprehensible and describes effectively how the conditions for complex life that are found on Earth are at least very scarce in the universe. It gives balanced accounts on most information and considers the frequency of simple life forms in the universe, arguing that this may not at all be a rare occurrence.

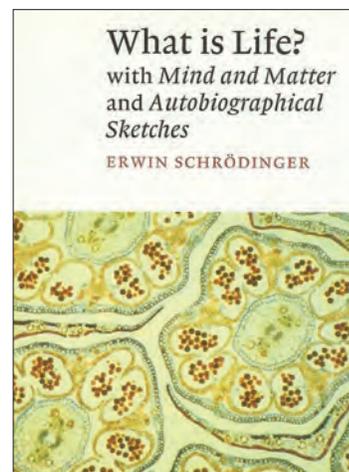
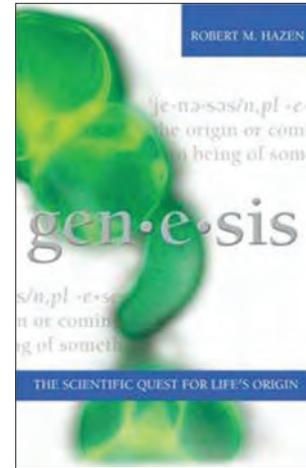
The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Life - by Richard Dawkins. Starting with the present day *Homo sapiens* and ending with the creation of RNA, each chapter traces back the evolutionary tree for each species that produced mankind. This looks at the origin of life from an evolution perspective.

The Seven Daughters of Eve: the astonishing story that reveals how each of us can trace our genetic ancestors by Brian Sykes. This book, focusing on human origins, begins with the gruesome discovery of a frozen body in the Alps and ends by finding that



almost all Europeans are related to one of seven women. It is an intriguing story and you soon find yourself well “informed of what has gone before and ignorant of what [lies] ahead”, as was the author, on his own autobiographical adventure. It is written with

humour and in itself can be read for plain leisure. Although it must be well noted that the depictions of the European ancestors are fictional, you are left with a true appreciation of genetic inheritance, time and the lives of our ancestors.



Are we alone? – by Gloria Skurzynski explores the possibility of extra-terrestrial life: as a research team in the Brazilian jungle await radio signals from other life in the universe, some are observing moons and planets which potentially have the ideal conditions for life to exist and others contemplate the possibility that the origin of life may be from elsewhere – that we may be the aliens.

Genesis: The Scientific Quest for Life's Origins - by Robert M. Hazen is quite a personal account in which he considers the value of many of the present day theories, such as primordial soup and the origin of life, from thermal vents and highlights others as plain myths. It mostly considers how the chemical processes and molecules necessary for life came about.

What is life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell - by Erwin Schrödinger. Although written before the discovery of DNA, this book presents the idea of life from the point of view of a physicist. In broad terms, it implies how it is necessary to abandon ideas of

interactions on the quantum scale, when dealing with life on its similarly complex macro scale.

The Origins of Life - Melvyn Bragg and guests (Richard Dawkins, Richard Corfield, and Linda Partridge) discuss when and how life on earth originated. For those who prefer listening to reading, this 45 minute, informative BBC radio four program covers many views on the origin of life including the definition of life itself. It is easy to listen to and explains almost everything from basic to complex ideas on this topic. The broadcast is found on this link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/p004y29f>

Bibliography – all images sourced from www.google.co.uk/books, www.amazon.com and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/p004y29f>

About the Author

Fiona Jenkinson is 16 years old and goes to The King's School Canterbury where she is currently studying for her AS Levels. She is studying Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Maths. In her free time she enjoys art, music, photography and reading. She is unsure of what she wants to do in the future.