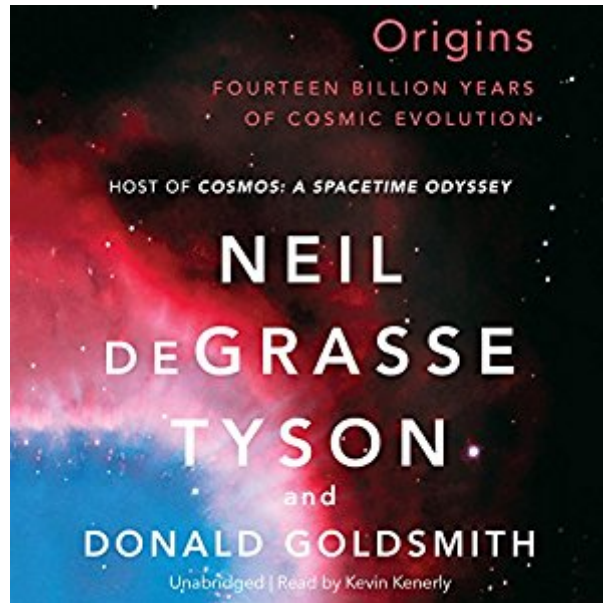


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Origins: Fourteen Billion Years Of Cosmic Evolution



Synopsis

A thrilling and accessible tour of the cosmos Our true origins are not just human, or even terrestrial, but in fact cosmic. Drawing on scientific breakthroughs and the current cross-pollination among geology, biology, astrophysics, and cosmology, Origins explains the soul-stirring leaps in our understanding of the cosmos. From the first image of a galaxy birth to Spirit rover's exploration of Mars, to the discovery of water on one of Jupiter's moons, coauthors Neil deGrasse Tyson and Donald Goldsmith conduct a galvanizing tour of the cosmos with clarity and exuberance.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Tyson and Goldsmith distill a complex subject of both immense philosophical and physical implications into 300 pages of readable text. The format is interesting, although it poses some material early on that is fairly daunting. The introduction to this subject I received by watching the 4-hour PBS production motivated me, however, to push through the tough stuff. As it turned out, the authors used the first chapter as an overview of everything, then used subsequent chapters to expand on individual concepts presented in the first chapter. I would have preferred the first chapter at the end, allowing the Preface to suffice as an introduction to the material. You may want to try reading the preface, then skipping ahead to the second chapter, saving the first chapter for last. This may keep you from tossing the book aside before giving it a fair chance. Just a thought. The title "Origins" threw me because I assumed it focused on Darwin's theory; however, this book is more than that, and combines elements of astrophysics, biology, and geology to describe how the

universe was created, and the possibility of extra-terrestrial life. As Sagan would say, there appears to be billions and billions of opportunities for life in the universe. For the serious scientist, I would further recommend: Steven Weinberg, author of several books on the subject, including: the "Quantum Theory of Fields" Volumes I and II, and "The First Three Minutes." Also, B. Reed's book "Quantum Mechanics: A 1st Course," and Brian Greene's "The Elegant Universe," seem to be popular. These books give a more detailed, math-heavy version of Origins. As an amateur scientist, rather weak in mathematics, I am happy with the depth of studying Origins, and enjoyed the color photos in this book. Carl Sagan's books "Cosmos" and "Billions and Billions" are good supplements to this book, written at a similar level, approachable by non-scientists.

If you saw the PBS special on "Origins," you know that Neil DeGrasse Tyson does a great job of translating astrophysics into normal human language. This book goes into much greater detail and merits a gradual reading by non-scientists like myself. The Preface is a clear introduction to the issues. The next section, Overture, is intentionally overwhelming with its "Greatest Story Ever Told." If you are not frustrated by this chapter, you know a lot more about physics than I do! Ah, but that is the point. Hang in there, because the rest of the book explains the Overture, one topic at a time. I am reading part of a chapter each day at lunch and find something amazing each day. This is a good book for people who want to challenge their assumptions about reality.

"Origins", Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Donald Goldsmith's new book, subtitled -the search for ourselves in the universe, has attempted much in tackling the real 'biggest story ever told'. It is largely successful. It presents a general survey of cosmologic history from the 'big bang' through the formation of galaxies, planets, and life with most of the emphasis on the earliest period. All of this is accomplished almost entirely without math, with some humor, and is a good starting point for the high school or college undergraduate student without a scientific background. It presents a more detailed scientific picture with less 'wonder' than the late Carl Sagan's "Cosmos" but some readers may want more depth. For those I would recommend Steven Weinberg's "The First Three Minutes", or from the biologist's viewpoint, Morowitz's "The Emergence of Everything" which starts with the 'big bang' and continues the story step-wise to explain complexity and emergence. For the general reader "Origins" presents an introduction to much mind-opening material including the mysterious 'dark matter', isotropism, discussions about the curvature of space-time and the inflationary model of the universe that has the potential to stimulate further study or simply be enjoyed for itself.

There is no way we can think of for the elements that make up most of the world we know such as oxygen and carbon to exist except for them to have been 'cooked' in the center of stars. This is not exactly a simple concept, and the story of how we have learned this is remarkable in its own right. In this companion to the PBS 'Nova' four hour special, the story of the origin of everything is explained by two excellent writers. Some years Carl Sagan did a similar book/show called 'Cosmos.' This new story is Cosmos brought up to date with the latest discoveries and theories, and done without so much of the 'Wow, how marvelous' that Sagan used. Of particular interest to me was the discussion on the likelihood of extra-terrestrial life in the Universe. Obviously no conclusion can be reached because we have not made contact with any other civilization, but on the other hand, it is impossible to prove a negative. The approach in this book is strictly scientific. Here is the Drake equation, here is what the terms mean, we really have no idea of the answer.

This book was fantastic in terms of its scope and presentation of astrophysics. Its easy to follow style and plain language make it a good read for even the most amateur science lover. Mr. Tyson does a great job of showing us how insignificant we really are in this galaxy (let alone the universe as a whole).

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