



Life: A Natural History of the First Four Billion Years of Life on Earth

By Richard Fortey

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A New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice

"Extraordinary. . . . Anyone with the slightest interest in biology should read this book."--*The New York Times Book Review*

"A marvelous museum of the past four billion years on earth--capacious, jammed with treasures, full of learning and wide-eyed wonder."--*The Boston Globe*

From its origins on the still-forming planet to the recent emergence of Homo sapiens--one of the world's leading paleontologists offers an absorbing account of how and why life on earth developed as it did. Interlacing the tale of his own adventures in the field with vivid descriptions of creatures who emerged and disappeared in the long march of geologic time, Richard Fortey sheds light upon a fascinating array of evolutionary wonders, mysteries, and debates. Brimming with wit, literary style, and the joy of discovery, this is an indispensable book that will delight the general reader and the scientist alike.

"A drama bolder and more sweeping than *Gone with the Wind* . . . a pleasure to read."--*Science*

"A beautifully written and structured work . . . packed with lucid expositions of science."--*Natural History*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"The excitement of discovery cannot be bought, or faked, or learned from books," London Natural History Museum senior paleontologist Richard Fortey writes in *Life*. The first chapter, an engrossing account of an Arctic fossil-hunting expedition he undertook as a university student, will bring shivers to anyone who has ever ignored cold hands, hunger, and filthy socks to keep looking for something new, some piece of rock or bit of plant that may hold the key to the gleaming certainty of understanding. Fortey's descriptions of scruffy field assistants and eccentrically brilliant scientists are easily as interesting as the billions of years of evolution he so imaginatively describes. After all, the fossil record has not been accepted without controversy, and the arguments among fallible evolutionary biologists as they refined their theories make for great reading. But it is the little animals that make up our distant ancestry that are the focus here. The often mysterious fossils they left behind are like a history book in a language we don't know--the history of bugs and birds, humans and cauliflowers. One by one, Fortey reveals how the puzzles of paleontology have been subjected to the scientific method and to the politics and personal ambitions of academia, until a beautifully clear path is traced from the very first traces of life all the way across the eons to the advent of *Homo sapiens*. Fortey's elegantly written tour lets us share his passion for ancient seas and the animals that frolicked in them, and understand how time and chance contributed to the biography of us all. --*Therese Littleton*

From Library Journal

The diversity of Earth's evolutionary history are preserved in its stones. Fortney enlivens this broad paleontological survey with anecdotes from his own fossil-hunting expeditions.

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From Scientific American

"The narrative of life requires a scale of thousands to millions of years, acting over a drama of more than 3,000 million years." It is a grand narrative, told grandly by Fortey, a senior paleontologist at the Natural History Museum in London. Drawing on a great breadth of knowledge, he flavors the narrative with illuminating and often surprising analogies and quotations from the likes of Pope, Swift and Yeats. His story takes life from the first single-celled organisms to prehistoric humans--over "the vast tract of time after the Sun blazed into heat ... and before humans started making pots, building ceremonial centres, and recording the details of their daily transactions on pottery slabs."

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Geneva Richardson:

Life: A Natural History of the First Four Billion Years of Life on Earth can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to place every word into delight arrangement in writing Life: A Natural History of the First Four Billion Years of Life on Earth nevertheless doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource data that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial thinking.

Johnnie McCormick:

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