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The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Life

Richard Dawkins

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"The Ancestor's Tale" is a pilgrimage back through time; a journey on which we meet up with fellow pilgrims as we and they converge on our common ancestors. Chimpanzees join us at about 6 million years in the past, gorillas at 7 million years, orang utans at 14 million years, as we stride on together, a growing band. The journey provides the setting for a collection of some 40 tales. Each explores an aspect of evolutionary biology through the stories of characters met along the way or glimpsed from afar - the "Elephant Bird's Tale", the "Marsupial Mole's Tale", the "Lungfish's Tale". Together they give a deep understanding of the processes that have shaped life on Earth: convergent evolution, the isolation of populations, continental drift, the great extinctions. The tales are interspersed with prologues detailing the journey, route maps showing joining lineages, and life-like reconstructions of our common ancestors. "The Ancestor's Tale" represents a pilgrimage on an unimaginable scale: our goal is four billion years away, and the number of pilgrims joining us grows vast - ultimately encompassing all living creatures. At the end of the journey lies something remarkable in its simplicity and transformative power: the first, humble, replicating molecules.

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