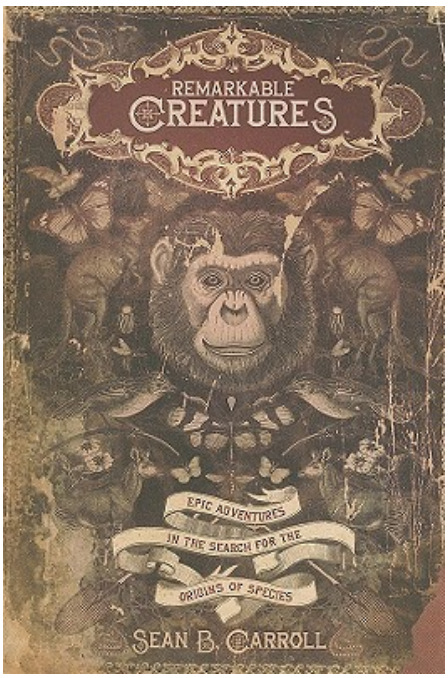


# Remarkable Creatures: Epic Adventures in the Search for the Origin of Species

*Sean B. Carroll*

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**Remarkable Creatures: Epic Adventures in the Search for the Origin of Species** Sean B. Carroll
**An award-winning biologist takes us on the dramatic expeditions that unearthed the history of life on our planet.**

Just 150 years ago, most of our world was an unexplored wilderness. Our sense of its age was vague and vastly off the mark, and much of the knowledge of our own species' history was a set of fantastic myths and fairy tales. In the tradition of *The Microbe Hunters* and *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*, Sean Carroll leads a rousing voyage that recounts the most important discoveries in two centuries of natural history: from Darwin's trip around the world to Charles Walcott's discovery of pre-Cambrian life in the Grand Canyon; from Louis and Mary Leakey's investigation of our deepest past in East Africa to the trailblazers in modern laboratories who have located a time clock in our DNA.

## Remarkable Creatures: Epic Adventures in the Search for the Origin of Species Details

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# From Reader Review Remarkable Creatures: Epic Adventures in the Search for the Origin of Species for online ebook

### Raluca says

This book is difficult to classify. It contains biographies, historical accounts, scientific explanations and lots of adventure. Like other reviewers have pointed out, the *Remarkable creatures* are both those being explored and the explorers themselves. Overall, this was one of the best natural science books I've had the pleasure of enjoying and I recommend reading it together with Between Man and Beast: An Unlikely Explorer, the Evolution Debates, and the African Adventure That Took the Victorian World by Storm for a similar feeling.

(P.S. As an avid dinosaur enthusiast, I particularly enjoyed the chapters about the K-T extinction and the discovery of dino fossils - especially the "birds-are-dinosaurs" revelation.)

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### Jenny Brown says

Carroll's earlier book about evolutionary biology, "Endless Forms Most Beautiful" was an amazing book that takes the reader me deep inside the science underlying evolution and explained in ways comprehensible to the nonscientist how a limited number of genes go about building the myriad forms our bodies take. Given how great that book was, my expectations were high for this one.

Unfortunately, for me at least, this book turns out to be a very lightweight survey of several explorer/scientists whose explorations provided raw material from which theories of evolution were developed. The reading level is suitable for Junior High School students, the science rudimentary, and the stories Carroll tells will already be very familiar to anyone who keeps up with the history of science.

That doesn't make it a bad book. It would be a fine introduction for a young person with an interest in science or an adult whose knowledge of pioneers like Darwin was limited to what he'd seen on TV documentaries.

But there is little here for the adult reader who keeps up with the history of science.

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### Nurul says

I've read several of Dr. Carroll's scientific papers. So, standing on science section of a book store and finding a natural history book authored by him was like a tiny adventure for me, a successful one. I couldn't wait to read this book and follow his journey in tracking the pioneers of scientific natural history research in search for all the remarkable lifeforms on earth.

From Darwin, Wallace, Eugene Dubois with his 'Java man', back to the "Cambrian period which marked the early life on earth" with Charles Walcott, to the CSI work on finding the difference of Neanderthals to modern human by Allan Wilson and others, seemed timeless.

In the afterword, Sean Carroll offered the universe as the great challenge for exploration of lifeforms as long

as you use the right key by following the right path to seek. I, myself thought that the earth is still challenging, and opening our minds to seek the right question to answer is the key to keep exploring. Just like Roy Chapman Andrews said, "always there has been an adventure just around the corner-and the world is still full of corners!"

Anyway, Roy who explored the Gobi desert in 1925 and found the first dinosaur's eggs and some Cretaceous mammals, was thought to inspire George Lucas on Indiana Jones character. He was also afraid of snakes!

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### Donna says

I liked this book because it was as much about the scientists included as their discoveries. Of course now I want to go pick up more thorough biographies about some of the people that it covers...

The very end of the book starts to drag though. After a good overview of Pauling's political activism, things get a bit jargon heavy and we stop getting the same level of personal detail that made the rest of the book so interesting.

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### Donna says

In an extremely close, affectionate, life-long marriage, Charles Darwin and his wife Emma were able to tolerate and transcend their philosophical differences. (She was a devout, conservative Christian who believed in the Biblical version of creation.) He entrusted her with the disposition of his writings in the event of his early demise.

Louis Leaky, a son of English missionaries in Africa, was initiated into the native Kikuyu society at the age of 11. He received an African name (*Wakuruigi*, "Son of the Sparrow Hawk"), constructed a dwelling of his own, and thereafter lived apart from his family. His eventual wife, Mary Leaky, enjoyed relaxing with a cigar at the end of the day.

On April 29, 1962, Linus Pauling picketed the White House with a group of protesters opposed to the U.S. resumption of nuclear testing. Then he changed his clothes, went inside, and joined President Kennedy for a dinner honoring him and other American Nobel Prize winners.

With details like these, Sean B. Carroll brings to life some of the "remarkable creatures" whose discoveries have furthered human understanding of the history of life on earth. A very readable book, *Remarkable Creatures* does a credible job of putting into context about two hundred years of scientific accomplishments. Highly recommended.

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### David says

This is a wonderful book about naturalists and their adventures in search for the origin of species. Sean Carroll is an excellent author. He is also a professor of molecular biology, and his previous books have been excellent, too.

Most chapters follow a naturalist into the wilds. The first chaptera are about the adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Darwin, Alfred Wallace, and Henry Bates and their subsequent analyses of findings. When Humboldt visited the United States, he visited the president, Thomas Jefferson and talked about science, not politics!

Then come some fascinating chapters about paleontologists, like Charles Walcott who discovered the remarkable Burgess Shale. Roy Chapman Andrews led an expedition into the Gobi desert in Mongolia in the 1920's. While looking for ancient human fossils, he found instead a treasure of dinosaur and mammal fossils.

Probably because of Sean Carroll's background, the last chapters are about molecular biology, DNA, and recent discoveries about the time clock embedded in the DNA of all creatures.

Sean Carroll's writing is superb. I highly recommend this book!

I didn't read this book--I listened to it as an audiobook. Jim Bond was the narrator, and he does a good job narrating this non-fiction book.

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### Philip says

Excellent overview of the search to explain how species evolved, as told through the stories of the individual scientists/explorers - from Humboldt (who I didn't really know anything about other than that they named a Squid and a Current after him) through Pauling and Wilson and the latest genetic advances. Would have been 5 stars except for the last two chapters - DNA/RNA, chemistry, etc - which I found a slog and ended up skimming; but I'm sure other readers probably liked that part best - everyone has their own preferences.

For me, the earlier the better - I loved the first section on Humboldt, Darwin, Wallace and Bates, (and it was nice to find out that Darwin wasn't quite the schmuck he appears to be if you only focus on how he screwed over Wallace - long story). The next section on "the dinosaur guys" was also excellent - I'm already a huge fan of Andrews, but Walcott was a welcome surprise.

Anyway - strongly recommended for anyone who enjoys natural history, and the stories of the natural historians who discovered it all.

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### Kay says

I very much enjoyed this author's style and method of presentation of the material. He makes complex subjects accessible for the non-scientist but doesn't dumb the material down so much that it's robbed of its vigor. While I was familiar with a number of the episodes and scientists portrayed, there was plenty that was new to me and I learned quite a bit. Each chapter is a mini-biography for a key researcher or explorer, combined with the major he advances made. What becomes clear is how each new breakthrough owes much to prior discoveries and theories.

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### Stephanie says

Science has a reputation for being boring. I've made the acquaintance of many a science textbook in my time, and I can say that, in spite of my love for science, that reputation is not unwarranted. Textbook writers could stand to learn a thing or two from Sean B. Carroll, author of *Remarkable Creatures: Epic Adventures in the Search for the Origin of Species.*

In *Remarkable Creatures,* Carroll tells the stories of many of the men and women that have made great discoveries in the field of evolutionary science. It turns out that these scientists are not the stodgy, grey-haired stereotypes that we'd expect. Henry Wallace Bates lived 11 years alone in the Amazon. Alfred Wallace spent 10 days in a leaky lifeboat after his ship burned and sank. Paleontologist Roy Chapman Andrews may be the real-life inspiration for Indiana Jones, right down to his fear of snakes and his ever-present pistol.

Their stories are fascinating, and while I read them, I couldn't help but learn an awful lot about evolution. Perhaps if science was presented with a little more personality, more people would be interested in studying the sciences, or (if the threat of inhospitable environments and tropical diseases are just too daunting) at least reading about them.

The last two chapters leave the field behind and dwell almost exclusively in the laboratory where the science can get a little intense (I had to read those chapters very slowly and more than once), but otherwise, I think this is a book that almost anyone would enjoy.*

* Unless you aren't a fan of evolution, but I probably didn't need to say that, did I?

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### Webby43 says

Really loved this book, it's a wonderful read about the progress of evolutionary science. Fascinating and well written.

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### Pouting Always says

A really good book for anyone interested in the origins of life and the history of archaeology or paleontology. It's gives a good idea of the history for the idea of evolution and how it came to be and how it has been shaped since. The writing is simple and straight forward and it's written for the average reader rather than the academic so anyone who is interested in the evolution and emergence of life can enjoy it. It's not comprehensive but it gives a good idea for anyone not familiar with the field though it focuses on the scientists behind the ideas more than the science. I found the balance between the scientists biographical information and the discussion of the ideas and their impact to be really great though. I think it's pretty hard to get that right with these non fiction books so I enjoyed this one a lot more than most.

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### Leslie says

Sooo.....we *did* evolve from apes. I knew it! That explains so many things, all the hair in unusual places, the urge to groom my husband, why my youngest hangs on me like a monkey. Carroll includes a quote on the last page of this book, *talk is cheap, exploration and discovery is hard*. Boy, oh boy is that true! Some people are just born to find stuff. Some people are just premade to tackle decades of dealing with sunburns, throwing up, fire ant bites, fevers, sea-sickness, more throwing up, starvation, bitter cold, gale force winds, spear-holding natives, being buried in sandstorms, and sore bums from riding donkeys. But I don't know, being the first to set foot in unexplored wilderness, places no humans have treaded in thousands of years, if at all, may make it worth it. Just maybe...

A great group of mostly men (and a few briefly mentioned women - Mary Leakey), some tiny men (Darwin), some Indiana Jones types (Roy Chapman Andrews), and some nerdy, but cute multiple Nobel Prize winning scientists (Linus Pauling) are included along with several others in this book. I learned a lot of things I didn't know about some the greatest explorers of the last centuries. What trials they went through to make their discoveries. What great determination!

After reading this I felt a great urge to marry a determined explorer and let him take the credit for all my discoveries, or maybe take up rock collecting again, or visit the nearest fossil beds, as I live in Idaho and there are a lot of past tense creatures buried around here, not including our current state political leaders....

Ahem.

Read this book if you are the least bit interested in science, discovering something new, and if you've ever in your life hit a rock with a hammer to find a diamond inside.

Just be sure to wear protective glasses if you do that.
Trust me I know.

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### Ryan says

Possibly the best of three books of his I have read so far, as the previous ones dealt with the specific mechanisms of evolution and were therefore more technical. The author is passionate about evolutionary biology, and this is perhaps his way of paying homage to the giants of the field, from Darwin and Wallace to the lesser known but more recent paleontologists and scientists that have made significant inroads into our understanding of the timeline of evolution on Earth and the major events that have marked it's long history, leading right up to our own species.

Each chapter delves briefly into the lives of one of these famous persona, serving as a sort of biographical sketch, and how their discoveries proved to be significant. They are short, concise and highly readable, but obviously not meant as a detailed biography or treatise on the particular subject concerned. For elaboration, the reader can refer to the end notes and references at the end. By organizing itself in chronological order, the book is a good recap of the major advances in the study of evolution and shows how far we have come in our understanding of the mysteries of how we arrived at the present state of life on Earth. It is thus grand in

scope and highly stimulating and exciting reading, even for those with prior knowledge of the key players.

Carroll postulates at the end of the book that the next great breakthrough will be the discovery of life on other planets, which is logical given we have already more or less established the timeline of evolution on our own. The high probability of there being extraterrestrial life given the sheer number of potentially habitable planets out there makes it a matter of time before we should find them. However it is also slightly ominous that we have had no contact so far with other intelligent beings given the same. One can perhaps surmise that it is also equally likely that any technologically advanced civilizations out there could well have died off, through internal conflict or other self made cataclysm, before contact with others could be made. Given our own bleak prospects of reaching planetary limits to growth and self destructing in the not too distant future, I give such reasoning quite high credibility.

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### Koen Crolla says

Carroll writes a fieldwork-centric, mostly paleontology-centric book on evolution, which is interesting. You sometimes get pretty interesting paleontological popular science (Neil Shubin's *Your Inner Fish*, which Carroll covers, being a recent example), but they tend to be quite narrow in scope. It's easy to see why: you can't really give a broad overview of the whole of evolutionary biology without tackling more theoretical work. That work may be borne out in the fossil record, but using the fossil record itself to demonstrate broad principles will generally require a whole lot of writing.

So what Carroll does is focus on stories: the life of Darwin and his trip to the Galapagos; Wallace's expeditions in South America; Walcott's discovery of the Burgess Shale; the discovery that birds are descendants of dinosaurs and that many dinosaurs were more birdlike than we thought with Archaeopteryx and Deinonychus; Shubin's discovery of Tiktaalik; Louis Leakey's entire life. Most of these stories are heavily edited, perhaps unconsciously, to make the people involved look more significant and generally much nicer than they actually are (Wallace really wasn't that relevant; Leakey was by all accounts a twathead, but you'd never know it from Carroll's retelling), but I guess that's to be expected from a book that sets out to inspire at least as much as to inform.

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### Susan says

Surprisingly engaging read (my track record with nonfiction is not that good -- I tend to pick up books that I read about / heard about somewhere else that has engaging summaries and find them incredibly dull and long winded once I actually start reading them). It's kind of a...dramatized serial biography of people who are involved in studies of evolution. FAST read, which I definitely appreciate. Note that it IS written by a male Caucasian professor though and so the stories are, with very few exceptions, centered around male Caucasian scientists. There are a few lines where it seems like the author was going the lines of "oh those silly natives don't know what TREASURES they have", while discussing paleontology that makes me uncomfortable. It is however, a much lesser degree of problematic than Darwin's depiction of natives. So that's good. Shows we've come somewhere since 1800s.

Would recommend for people interested in evolution. Note I didn't say scientists because one thing this book does really well is making the research accessible to a generalized audience (I think so, anyway, but I'm a scientist so I'm obviously biased) (but I really do think the author did this particularly well.).