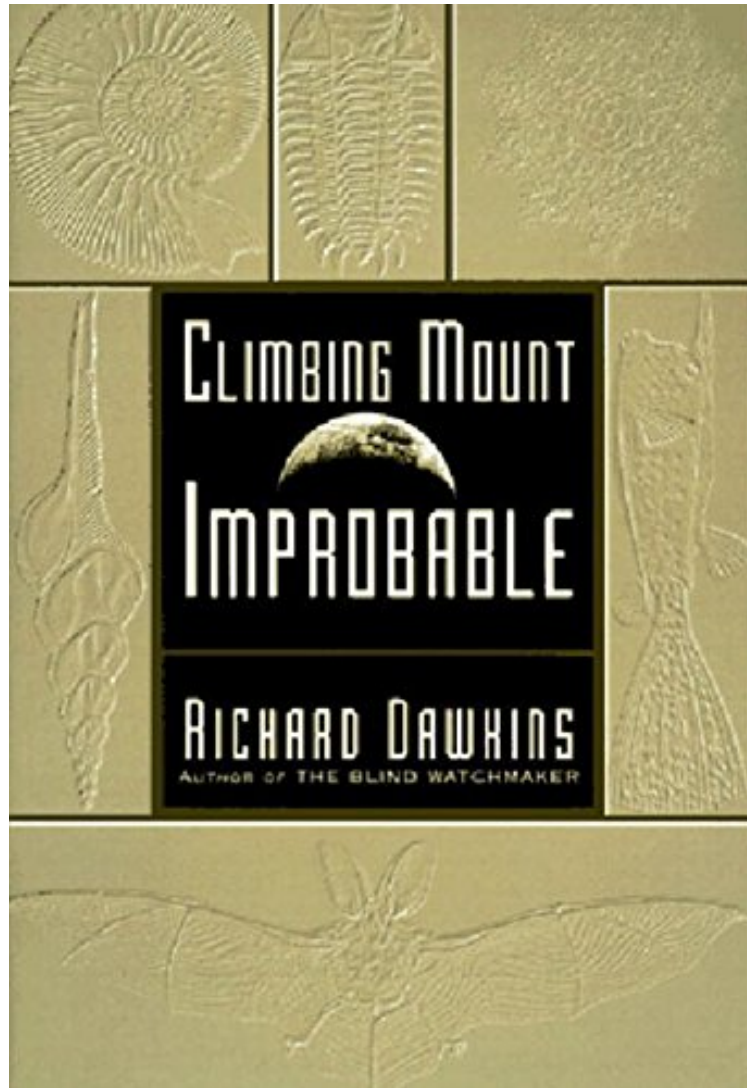


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## Climbing Mount Improbable

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**Richard Dawkins : Climbing Mount Improbable** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Climbing Mount Improbable:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A FOLLOW-UP TO HIS BOOK, "THE BLIND WATCHMAKER"By Steven H ProppClinton Richard Dawkins (born 1941) is an English ethologist and evolutionary biologist, as well as an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford. He has written some of the most creative and challenging defenses of evolutionary theory [e.g., The Blind Watchmaker, The Selfish Gene] of anyone other than the late Stephen Jay Gould. He more recently wrote The God Delusion.He wrote in the first chapter of this 1996 book, "I

think that the distinction between accident and design is clear... but this chapter will introduce a third category of objects ... I shall call them 'designoid'... Designoid objects LOOK designed, so much so that some people---probably, alas, most people---think that they ARE designed. These people are wrong." (Pg. 6) He adds, "we firmly... classify the wasp and bee pots as designoid not designed: not shaped by the animal's own creative volition." (Pg. 16-17)He argues that "What Hoyle and Wickramisinghe miss [in Evolution from Space] is that Darwinism is NOT a theory of random chance. It is a theory of random mutation plus NON-RANDOM cumulative natural selection. Why, I wonder, is it so hard for even sophisticated scientists to grasp this simple point?" (Pg. 75) He adds, "Either your god is capable of designing worlds and doing all the other godlike things, in which case he NEEDS an explanation in his own right. Or he is not, in which case he cannot PROVIDE an explanation. God should be seen by Fred Hoyle as the ultimate Boeing 747." (Pg. 77)He says, "The ease with which small animals can float suggests that we have only to assume that flying evolved originally in small animals, and the flying peak of Mount Improbable immediately looks less formidable. Very small insects float without wings at all." (Pg. 113) He speculates, "it may turn out to be a general rule that a version of the gene taken from a donor in one part of the animal kingdom can induce eyes to develop in recipients in an exceedingly remote part of the animal kingdom... Were we wrong to think that eyes have developed forty times independently? I don't think so. At least the spirit of the statement that eyes evolve easily and at the drop of a hat remains unscathed." (Pg. 194) Even more speculatively, he proposes, "My tentative conjecture is that an ancestral Scyllarid mutated homoerotically, slipping the developmental sub-routine appropriate to a uropod into a segment where an antenna ought to be, and that the change conferred some benefit. If I am right, it would constitute a rare example of a macro-mutation's being favoured by natural selection..." (Pg. 253)He suggests, "as far as we know, [life] may have happened on only one planet out of a billion billion planets in the universe... So the sort of lucky event we are looking at COULD be so wildly improbable that the chances of its happening... could be as low as one in a billion billion billion in any one year. If it DID happen on only one planet, anywhere in the universe, that planet has to be our planet---because here we are talking about it. My guess is that life probably isn't all that rare and the origin of life probably wasn't all that improbable." (Pg. 283) He concludes on the note, "Even the most difficult problems can be solved, and even the most precipitous heights can be scaled, if only a slow, gradual, step-by-step pathway can be found. Mount Improbable cannot be assaulted. Gradually, if not always slowly, it must be climbed." (Pg. 326)Dawkins' book (as well as his earlier 'Blind Watchmaker') are absolutely "MUST READING" for anyone interested in contemporary evolutionary theory.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Yes, Evolution Builds Complex Structures!By F SabellaYou should read this book if you are interested in learning how complex biological structures could have developed through evolution.Writing a review of this book is fraught with danger given the strong emotions that surround the concept of evolution. From reading other reviews, it appears that, not surprisingly, reviewers are somewhat polarized in favor of Dawkins (and evolution) or against Dawkins (and likely against or skeptical of evolution). I am impressed by the fervor of some reviews, and so I think Dawkins was successful in getting his points across. A problem with reading a book like this is that it really is impossible to read it without its implicit argument for evolution, and, while this is obvious, such an overriding argument detracts somewhat from the purpose of the book: to demonstrate that an unguided mechanism (evolution) can produce over many years increasingly complex biological structures.I argue that an emotional response should be put aside in evaluating the value of the ideas in the book. Dawkins is really just saying that it does not take design or any other sort of divine intervention for an evolutionary process to come up with a wing or an eye. He argues that such biological structures can be, and were, developed over a very long time as a result of evolutionary processes, and presents several examples to support his arguments. These examples are very interesting and presented in a more or less topical fashion. Dawkins cannot necessarily go into more extensive detail since that would require a much longer book - his light treatment of the science may be prompting some of the criticism that the book does not have the depth of more serious science writing.I think this book is important since it builds a foundation for arguing the science behind evolution. Dawkins cannot necessarily write this book (and his other books) without an implicit opposition to myth-based theories of creation, since to support evolution at all necessarily argues against many of the concepts running through religion. Thus, this book is going to annoy a lot of people. Dawkins ideas are valid nonetheless, and his arguments are sound enough to push back against the various ID and other myth-based creationist theories. He might strengthen his arguments if he did not take jabs at creationists and just stuck to the science, but he has his opinions and I find them amusing.I recommend this book because it is written by an intelligent evolutionary biologist who presents some fascinating biology in the course of demonstrating that evolution, in fact, works to develop complex structures.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great insight.By CustomerThe book seemed to be a dated response to creationism.Loaded with detailed information about eyes, sea shells and trees. All good info that will not change the minds of the faithful.Great insight into the vast complexity of evolving life.

A brilliant book celebrating improbability as the engine that drives life, by the acclaimed author of *The Selfish Gene* and *The Blind Watchmaker*. The human eye is so complex and works so precisely that surely, one might believe, its current shape and function must be the product of design. How could such an intricate object have come about by

chance? Tackling this subject in writing that the New York Times called "a masterpiece" Richard Dawkins builds a carefully reasoned and lovingly illustrated argument for evolutionary adaptation as the mechanism for life on earth. The metaphor of Mount Improbable represents the combination of perfection and improbability that is epitomized in the seemingly "designed" complexity of living things. Dawkins skillfully guides the reader on a breathtaking journey through the mountain's passes and up its many peaks to demonstrate that following the improbable path to perfection takes time. Evocative illustrations accompany Dawkins's eloquent descriptions of extraordinary adaptations such as the teeming populations of figs, the intricate silken world of spiders, and the evolution of wings on the bodies of flightless animals. And through it all runs the thread of DNA, the molecule of life, responsible for its own destiny on an unending pilgrimage through time. Climbing Mount Improbable is a book of great impact and skill, written by the most prominent Darwinian of our age.

.com How do species evolve? Richard Dawkins, one of the world's most eminent zoologists, likens the process to scaling a huge, Himalaya-size peak, the Mount Improbable of his title. An alpinist does not leap from sea level to the summit; neither does a species utterly change forms overnight, but instead follows a course of "slow, cumulative, one-step-at-a-time, non-random survival of random variants"--a course that Charles Darwin, Dawkins's great hero, called natural selection. Illustrating his arguments with case studies from the natural world, such as the evolution of the eye and the lung, and the coevolution of certain kinds of figs and wasps, Dawkins provides a vigorous, entertaining defense of key Darwinian ideas. From Publishers Weekly While an enzyme molecule or an eye might seem supremely improbable in their complexity, they are not accidental, nor need we assume that they are the designed handiwork of a Creator, asserts Oxford biologist Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*). This foremost neo-Darwinian exponent explains the dazzling array of living things as the result of natural selection?the slow, cumulative, one-step-at-a-time, non-random survival of chance variants. Both a frontal assault on creationism and an enthralling tour of the natural world, this beautifully illustrated study is based on a set of BBC lectures, imparting a tone at once conversational and magisterial. Dawkins explores how ordered complexity arose by discussing spiders' web-building techniques, the gradual evolution of elephant trunks and of wings (birds, he concludes, evolved from two-legged dinosaurs, not from tree gliders) and the symbiotic relationship between the 900 species of figs and their sole genetic companions, the miniature wasps that pollinate specific fig species. Using "computer biomorphs" (simulated creatures "bred" from a common ancestor), Dawkins demonstrates how varieties of the same plant or animal species can vary in shape because of differences in just a few genes. Author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Dawkins (*The Blind Watchmaker*, LJ 2/1/87 and *River Out of Eden*, LJ 3/15/95) holds the chair in "Public Understanding of Science" at Oxford University and, if this book is any measure, does so with distinction. This readable, elegantly written, fascinating assessment of why and how living things evolve and how?improbable as it may seem?seemingly random systems abet evolution is the sort of book Stephen Jay Gould would write if he were at Oxford. (Dawkins is Masterpiece Theatre to Gould's National Geographic.) This is not easy science; Dawkins discusses genetics, natural selection, and embryology for hundreds of species spanning millions of years, but he does so in a way that both delights and instructs. This is a book for Gould lovers, certainly, but life scientists of all sorts would appreciate it, as would teachers in the life sciences: it's an invigorating trip through the history of life led by one of Darwin's most articulate disciples.?Mark L. Shelton, Univ. of Massachusetts Medical Ctr., Worcester Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.