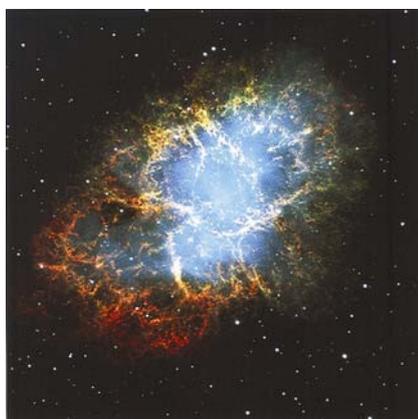


Beyond the Stars. Our Origins and the Search for Life in the Universe. Paolo Saraceno. World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte Ltd, 5 Toh Tuck Link, Singapore 596224. 2012. x + 377 pp. Price not mentioned.

There are a number of books dealing with issues of the search for life in the universe, but only a handful of them do justice to the whole range of related problems and concerns. The difficulty lies in the fact that the topic of emergence of life in the universe is intimately connected to many diverse field of studies, and it is impossible to provide even a glimpse of all these facets in the span of a book. Paolo Saraceno's book is a welcome exception to this list. It not only manages to take the reader through the myriad facets of astronomy, planetary physics, geology, biology, chemistry and evolution that have a bearing on the origin and evolution of life, but does so with a simple and clear language without using too many jargons. It is a wonder



The Crab Nebula in Taurus (VLT KUEYEN + FORS2).

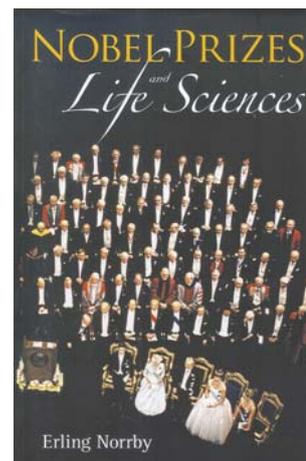
that such a whirlwind of a tour through the universe of planets, stars, elements and life does not end up being chaotic and the author deserves accolades for making it a stimulating experience for the general reader.

In the first three chapters, Saraceno discusses our knowledge of the origin and evolution of the universe, the origin of stars and planetary systems, and the evolution of matter through the cycle of origin and end stage of stars. His account is up-to-date and is not biased towards either theoretical or observational aspects. In the course of these discussions, the author also delves into the issues of religion and science.

After introducing the current ideas of the origin and evolution of life on Earth, he takes up the case of Earth as a habitable planet. It appears that the origin and survival of life is inseparably connected to the planetary properties of the Earth, the surroundings, such as the Moon, the near-Earth objects, comets and even the orbit of the Sun around the galaxy. Life on Earth has evolved through the interconnection of so many astronomical phenomena, apart from geological, biochemical and biological ones, that it is difficult to predict which way it is headed in the future. Saraceno's book makes us aware, once again, of our precious and unique habitat in the universe, and wonder if we are doing enough to ensure its continuation. These topics predictably brings in political issues to the discussion table, and it is to the credit of Saraceno that the discussion is fairly unbiased. However, one must admit that it is difficult to do justice to such a range of issues in a book that also deals with the evolution and origin of life on Earth and elsewhere. Some issues have not been given enough space. For example, while discussing the issues of power generation, the reader does not get to hear much about solar energy, and while the opponents of nuclear power are criticized, the issue of radioactive waste management is glossed over. On the whole, however, Saraceno has written a thought-provoking book, and we also owe it to David Goodstein for a readable translation of the original Italian book.

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Nobel Prizes and Life Sciences. Erling Norrby. World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte Ltd, 5 Toh Tuck Link, Singapore 596224. 2010. xv + 317 pp. Price: US\$ 68.00.

Every scientist, living or dead, has a dream about the Nobel Prize. The Nobel Prizes have the reputation of being the ultimate accolade for scientific achievements. For this reason, the choice of selecting an awardee or set of awardees indeed becomes a complicated and difficult task. In this book, Erling Norrby describes the trials and travails for the selection of a Nobel Prize winner.

Norrby is a world authority on viruses. He was professor and Chairman at the Karolinska Institute School of Medicine, Stockholm, Sweden. He has been involved in various ways for more than 20 years in the selection of recipients of Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. He also has responsibilities for Nobel Prizes in Physics and Chemistry. Who but a scientist of the caliber of Norrby, closely connected with the Royal Swedish Academy and intimately associated with the process of selection of Nobel Prizes for several years can provide a better account of the intricacies of this process. Norrby has given orations at many international forums on the topic of Nobel Prize, and the present book also harbours the text of some of these lectures. This volume attempts to review the selection process and the discoveries that have been awarded in the life sciences. It evidently represents a factual narration and compilation of facts. I have only attempted to highlight some of the interesting facts and therefore, quoted extensively from the text without daring to make any significant modifications.

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