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Starred Review. In this wonderful book, Lane (Power, Sex, Suicide), a biochemist at University College London, asks an intriguing and simple question: what were the great biological inventions that led to Earth as we know it. (He is quick to point out that by invention, he refers to nature's own creativity, not to intelligent design.) Lane argues that there are 10 such inventions and explores the evolution of each. Not surprisingly, each of the 10—the origin of life, the creation of DNA, photosynthesis, the evolution of complex cells, sex, movement, sight, warm bloodedness, consciousness and death—is intricate, its origins swirling in significant controversy. Drawing on cutting-edge science, Lane does a masterful job of explaining the science of each, distinguishing what is fairly conclusively known and what is currently reasonable conjecture. At times he presents some shocking but compelling information. For example, one of the light-sensitive pigments in human eyes probably arose first in algae, where it can still be found today helping to maximize photosynthesis. While each of Lane's 10 subjects deserves a book of its own, they come together to form an elegant, fully satisfying whole. 20 illus.