

Xenophilia

True strange stuff

September 13, 2007

Life's ingredients may have 'sprinkled' on Earth

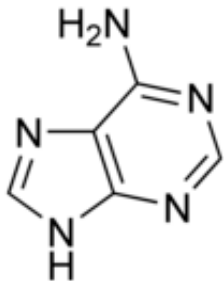
by xeno735 @ 7:41 am. Filed under [Physics](#), [Space](#), [Biology](#), [Religion](#), [Aliens](#)

Some crucial ingredients for life on Earth may have formed in interstellar space, rather than on the planet's surface.

A new computer model indicates clouds of adenine molecules, a basic component of DNA, can form and survive the harsh conditions of space, and possibly sprinkle [onto planets](#) as the stars they orbit travel through a galaxy.

“There may be only a few molecules of adenine per square foot of space, but over millions of years, enough could have accumulated to help [make way for life](#),” said study co-author Rainer Glaser, a molecular chemist at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Glaser and his team's findings are detailed in a recent issue of the journal *Astrobiology*.



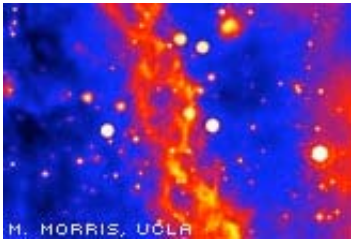
Spacey chemistry Adenine is one of four “letters” of DNA's alphabet used to store an organism's genetic code. Glaser said the idea that large, two-ringed organic molecules like adenine formed in space may seem outrageous, but current evidence leaves the possibility wide open.

“You can find large molecules [in meteorites](#), including adenine,” Glaser said. “We know that adenine can be made elsewhere in the solar system, so why should one consider it impossible to make the building blocks somewhere in interstellar dust?”

Using computer simulations of the cold vacuum of space, Glaser and his colleagues found that hydrogen cyanide gas can build adenine. Like pieces in a set of tinker toys, hydrogen cyanide serves as adenine's building blocks; the small molecules bond together into chains and, with a little wiggling, eventually assemble into rings.

Although adenine's first ring needs a tiny energy boost from starlight to form, Glaser said the second ring of the molecule self-assembles without any outside help.

“When you want to have a reaction, you usually need to heat it up,” Glaser said. “It's remarkable to find a reaction that doesn't require activation energy. If you do this reaction in space, this is a huge advantage because it takes a long time for a molecule to be hit by a piece of light.” - [nbc](#)



See [panspermia](#). The idea that part of our DNA (and life itself) self-assembles drives some of my religious friends nuts. This can't be right, they say. Where is God in this process? How can a jumble of dumb atoms know to combine to form "a [heterocyclic aromatic organic compound](#), consisting of a [pyrimidine](#) ring fused to an [imidazole](#) ring" with no outside intervention? The answer is, of course, atoms have different attractive forces based on their composition. They have properties and when you jumble them together randomly, they stick to each other in ordered ways based on their properties. This happens on bigger and bigger scales all the way up to human life. "Ah, but God gave them the properties!" No, their constituent parts, protons, neutron and electrons give them their properties because these subatomic particles have different charges, some negative, some positive, and positive and negative charges attract and repel according to certain rules. "Ah, but who makes the rules? God, that's who!" Yes, sure, why not ... perhaps. Sometimes "God" is a word that means, "I don't know and I don't want to try to figure it out because I don't believe anyone can." What's up with that [DNA shaped nebula](#)? As above so below?



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Xenophilia *n.* Love of the strange.



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