



Genius At Play: The Curious Mind of John Horton Conway

Siobhan Roberts

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Conway is a creative genius." --Martin Gardner

An unabashed original, John Horton Conway is Archimedes, Mick Jagger, Salvador Dali, and Richard Feynman all rolled into one--a singular mathematician, with a rock star's charisma, a sly sense of humor, a polymath's promiscuous curiosity, and a burning desire to explain everything about the world to everyone in it.

Born in Liverpool in 1937, Conway found fame as a barefoot Cambridge professor. He discovered the Conway groups in mathematical symmetry, and invented the aptly named surreal numbers, as well as the cult classic Game of Life--more than a cool fad, Life demonstrates how simplicity generates complexity and the game provides an analogy for all mathematics and the entire universe. Moving to Princeton in 1987, as a mathemagician he deployed cards, ropes, dice, coat hangers, and even the odd Slinky as props to extend his winning imagination and share his mathy obsessions with signature contagion. He is a jet-setting ambassador-at-large for the beauties of all things mathematical.

Genius At Play is an intimate investigation into the mind of an endearing genius, laying bare Conway's personal and professional idiosyncrasies. The intimacy comes courtesy of the man himself. He generously granted Roberts full access, though not without the occasional grudge and grumble: "Oh hell," he'd say. "You're not going to put that in the book. Are you?!?"

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