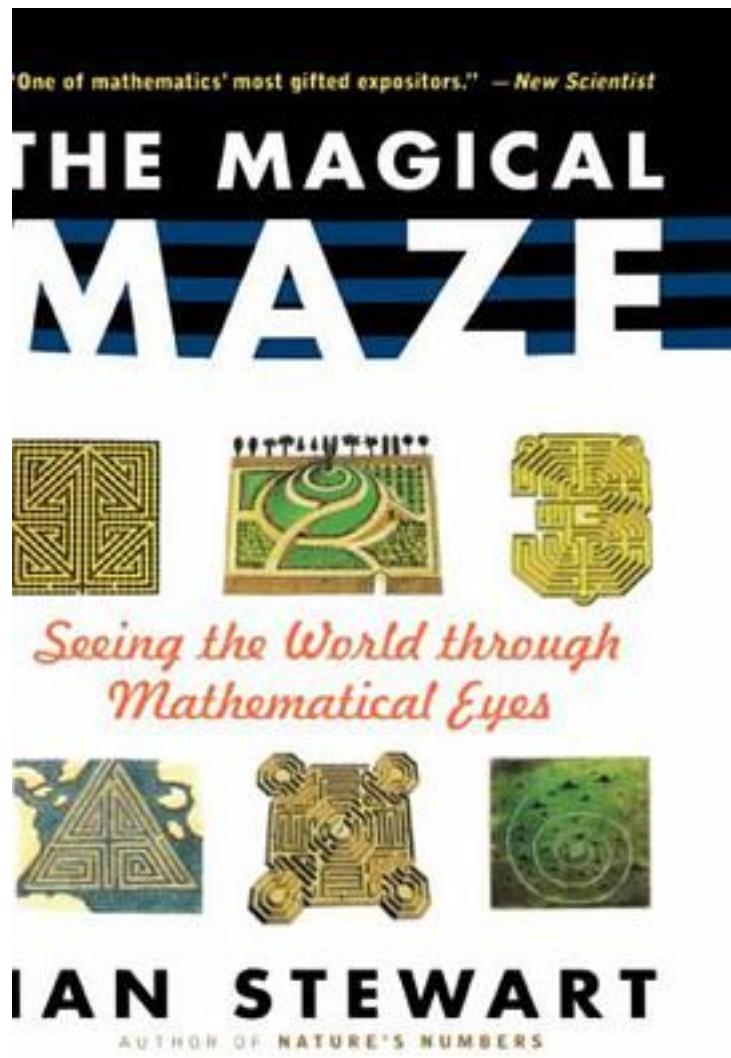


# The Magical Maze



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"Welcome to the maze. A logical maze, a magical maze. A maze of the mind. The maze is mathematics. The mind is yours. Let's see what happens when we put them together. What is mathematics? What do mathematicians do? What is a mathematician? Someone who does mathematics? Not exactly. That's too easy an answer, and it creates too simple a maze--a circular loop of self-referential logic. No, a mathematician is more than just somebody who does mathematics. Think of it this way: what is a businessperson? Someone who does business? Yes, but not just that. A businessperson is someone who sees an opportunity for doing business where the rest of us see nothing; while we're complaining that there's no restaurant in the area, he or she is organizing a telephone pizza delivery service. Similarly, a mathematician is someone who sees opportunities for doing mathematics that the rest of us miss. I want to open your mind to some of these opportunities."--from The Magical Maze Praise for Ian Stewart's Previous Books About Nature's Numbers: "Stewart achieves what other popular mathematics writers merely strive for: an accurate, informative portrayal of contemporary mathematics without a single equation in sight."--Nature About The Problems of Mathematics: "From one of mathematics' most gifted expositors . . . challenging and interesting. Those with no knowledge of the subject will be able to glimpse its beauty and appeal."--New Scientist About The Collapse of Chaos: "This ambitious book fearlessly asks some big questions, challenging us to look at science a new way."--San Francisco Chronicle About Another Fine Math You've Got Me Into: "Ian Stewart's quirky humor and imaginative storytelling entice readers into a fascinating world of mathematical curiosities."--Ivars Peterson author of The Jungles of Randomness Enter the magical maze of mathematics and explore the surprising passageways of a fantastical world where logic and imagination converge. For mathematics is a maze--a maze in your head--a maze of ideas, a maze of logic. And that maze in your mind is a powerful tool for understanding an even bigger maze--the maze of cause and effect that we call "the universe." That is its special kind of magic. Real magic. Strange magic. Infinitely fascinating magic. In this adventure of a book, acclaimed author Ian Stewart leads you swiftly and humorously through the junctions, byways, and secret passages of the magical maze to reveal its beauty, its surprise, and its power. Along the way, he reveals the infinite possibilities that arise from what he calls "the two-way trade between the natural world and the human mind." On your travels you will encounter number magic--both the stage-act variety and the deeper magic of animals, plants, and the physical world. You will come to understand the amazing pattern-forming abilities of the humble slime mold, the numerology of flowers, and the feeding habits of pigs and panthers. You will discover how to solve puzzles the algorithmic way, the artistic way, and the army way. You will be amazed by the deep connections between the founding of Carthage, soap bubbles, and communications networks. You will discover how to use a toy train set as a computer, and find out why this implies that there are unavoidable limits to mathematics. You will join the controversy over cars and goats, find out the terrible truth about confessions, and win endless bets about birthdays. You will see how a new idea about ferns can lead to a multi-million-dollar computer graphics company, and how Jupiter and Mars can combine forces to hurl cosmic rocks at Earth. And you will never again be able to watch a kitten, a kangaroo, or a Chihuahua without noticing the delightfully rhythmic patterns with which they move their feet. If you've always loved mathematics, you will find endless delights in the twists and turns of The Magical Maze. If you've always hated mathematics, a trip through this marvelous book will do much to change your mind.

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