



Strange Brains and Genius: The Secret Lives Of Eccentric Scientists And Madmen

By Clifford A. Pickover

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Never has the term *mad scientist* been more fascinatingly explored than in internationally recognized popular science author Clifford Pickover's richly researched wild ride through the bizarre lives of eccentric geniuses. A few highlights:

"The Pigeon Man from Manhattan" Legendary inventor Nikola Tesla had abnormally long thumbs, a peculiar love of pigeons, and a horror of women's pearls.

"The Worm Man from Devonshire" Forefather of modern electric-circuit design Oliver Heaviside furnished his home with granite blocks and sometimes consumed only milk for days (as did Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison).

"The Rabbit-Eater from Lichfield" Renowned scholar Samuel Johnson had so many tics and quirks that some mistook him for an idiot. In fact, his behavior matches modern definitions of obsessive-compulsive disorder and Tourette's syndrome.

Pickover also addresses many provocative topics: the link between genius and madness, the role the brain plays in alien abduction and religious experiences, UFOs, cryonics -- even the whereabouts of Einstein's brain!

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

What is the connection between genius and madness? IBM-based polymath Clifford Pickover approaches the question in a characteristically eclectic way. First he looks at the lives of a collection of eccentric scientists, from Nikolai Tesla to the Unabomber, giving each a name ("The Fly Man from Galway"; "The Rat Man from London") deliberately reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's names for his cases. Then Pickover discusses obsessive-compulsive disorder and the relationship between brain structure and genius. The book is organized less by an overall thesis than by what interests Pickover; thus, it includes descriptions of vaults filled with brains in formaldehyde, what it means to say that we use only 10 percent of our brains, e-mail replies to a poll on what a supergenius might be, and the latest research on the biochemistry of intelligence. Dedicated "to the cracked, for they shall let in the light," the book is engaging, haphazard, thought-provoking, and genial. --*Mary Ellen Curtin*

From Publishers Weekly

Filled with 200 years of eccentric geniuses, this delightful collection of profiles assembles an eclectic and fascinating sampling of scientists (as well as some artists and writers) with a far-ranging assortment of phobias, compulsions, odd belief systems and extraordinarily weird habits. Chief among the scientists is Nikola Tesla, father of alternating current and countless other electrical devices, who could be seen on New York City's streets covered in pigeons, was obsessed with the number three and repulsed by jewelry, particularly pearls. Then there is Oliver Heaviside, a Victorian mathematician and electrical researcher who painted his nails bright pink, signed his correspondence "W.O.R.M." and cruelly kept the woman charged with his care a virtual prisoner in her own house, later driving her into catatonia. Also explored are the lives of Samuel Johnson, van Gogh and legendary mathematician Paul Erdos, among others. Pickover, a high-tech inventor and researcher at IBM and a prolific author (*Time*AA Traveler's Guide; *Forecasts*, Apr. 20) shows genuine fondness for his subjects and an appreciation of their accomplishments, which he explains clearly and succinctly. More than simply cataloguing unusual traits, Pickover also speculates on causes and diagnoses, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE). This is lively and immensely enjoyable scientific history. Photos throughout.

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From School Library Journal

YA-Pickover tackles an attention-grabbing topic with clarity, understanding, and a sense of fun. The dedication summarizes the tone of the volume: "This book is dedicated to the cracked, for they shall let in the light." Among the "strange brains" discussed are Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber; and Francis Galton, world traveler, inventor, and racist. Each chapter has a "Fact File" of basic information on the individual, while the "Straight Dope" section delineates that person's history, achievements, and compulsions or oddities, often including diagrams or reproductions of their famous accomplishments. In the chapter on Nikola Tesla, the lesser-known proponent of AC current in opposition to Edison's DC, readers learn of his strange abhorrence to pearls that rendered him incapable of conversation with a pearl-wearing companion. The author concludes with a summation of mental disorders that have often afflicted the talented and genius among us: bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and temporal lobe epilepsy. An interesting topic, presented in a readable manner.

Carol DeAngelo, American Chemical Society Library, Washington,

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