



© 1997–2009, Millennium Mathematics Project, University of Cambridge.

Permission is granted to print and copy this page on paper for non-commercial use. For other uses, including electronic redistribution, please contact us.

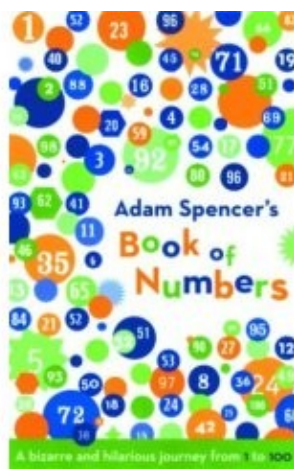
---

March 2007

Reviews

## 'Adam Spencer's Book of Numbers'

reviewed by Rachel Thomas



## Adam Spencer's Book of Numbers

By Adam Spencer

Have you got a favourite number? I have two 3 and 8 but I'm afraid my reasons aren't particularly interesting: I am born on the 3rd and 8 is two 3's joined together. But from now on I am going to say that it is because they are both Fibonacci numbers, and if a number is divisible by 3 its digits add up to 3, and that the square of every odd number over 1 is a multiple of 8 plus one. Also that 3 places claim to be home to the world's biggest egg, 3 is the most popular number of members for a girl group, it takes 8 minutes for light to reach the Earth from the Sun, and that a chocolate bar contains, on average, 8 insect legs. There, that sounds a lot more convincing doesn't it!

These facts are thanks to *Adam Spencer's Book of Numbers*. I think if you were to ask Adam Spencer what his favourite number is and you might have to give him a while to answer. He seems to have a reason to be keen on every number from 1 to 100.

I have to admit to being a little biased in my review of this book. Spencer did a lot to make my love of maths

## 'Adam Spencer's Book of Numbers'

slightly less dorky thanks to his success as a DJ on the youth radio network JJJ in Australia. Spencer, with a honours degree in pure maths and studying for a PhD at the University of Sydney, won the state round of a stand-up comedy competition. When the JJJ breakfast show visited the university, Spencer was challenged to spice up the weather report by saying something "sexy" about the temperature for every city. By a combination of comedy and mathematical facts he did: "Brisbane fine and 19: that's a prime number just near 20... Canberra fine and 22: that's the square root of 484; Adelaide fine and 22: the number of people in a particularly nasty rugby union match where eight people have been sent off...". Adam ended up hosting the JJJ breakfast show for several years, and managed to convey his enthusiasm for maths in between the usual DJ banter in a way that endeared him to mathematicians and non-mathematicians in the audience alike.

This book, like what I remember of Spencer's usual radio chat, is a bizarre mix of mathematics, science, history, and music, movie and general knowledge trivia. I was familiar with some of the maths that appears (Fibonacci numbers, perfect numbers, primes, abundant numbers, the birthday paradox, magic squares, Kaprekar numbers), but there was a lot I had never heard of before (betrothed numbers, untouchable numbers and weird numbers). And for such a short and informal book he doesn't shy from getting down and dirty with the subject. He even gives an overview of Euclid's proof that there are an infinite number of prime numbers, which starts with the phrase "The big guy did it something like this..."

But of course, this book isn't just about maths. It also highlights Spencers love of science, movies, music and a whole lot of strange, strange trivia. We find out that there are 4 proteins in a strand of DNA, hear a lot about the orbits of comets, and that elephants are pregnant for 21 months. Five is the preferred number of members for a boy band, and that Elizabeth Taylor changed costume 65 times in Cleopatra. And he seems to know more about the TV shows Get Smart, South Park and Seinfeld than is probably good for him.

Way back in Spencer's first radio appearance in 1996 he said he was studying for a PhD to "gain a greater understanding of complex group theory and to impress chicks". His popularity gave hope to many maths nerds, and you never know you might find a pick-up line or two in this book. If you don't fancy "I see your only having the one drink, did you know 1 is the multiplicative identity?", you could always go with "Did you know that snails only get to have sex once in their lives, but they get to do it for a whole 12 hours..."

### **Book details:**

*Adam Spencer's Book of Numbers*

Adam Spencer

hardback – 238 pages (2004)

Four Walls Eight Windows

ISBN: 1568582897

You can buy the book and help *Plus* at the same time by clicking on the link on the left to purchase from amazon.co.uk, and the link to the right to purchase from amazon.com. *Plus* will earn a small commission from your purchase.

---

Rachel Thomas is co-editor of *Plus*.

---



*Plus* is part of the family of activities in the Millennium Mathematics Project, which also includes the NRICH and MOTIVATE sites.

This page was nominated for deletion on 5 January 2015 (UTC). The result of the discussion was redirect to Adam\_Spencer#Book. Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Adam\_Spencer%27s\_Big\_Book\_of\_Numbers&oldid=642117993".

Navigation menu. Personal tools. See more of Adam Spencer's Big Book of Numbers on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of Adam Spencer's Big Book of Numbers on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account? My Big Book Of Numbers also celebrates language and the numbers inherent in alphabets. i've always loved pangrams - sentences containing every letter of an alphabet. here's a few crackers from my book - which is available, autographed and personalised from. [www.adamspencer.com.au](http://www.adamspencer.com.au). See more. Adam Spencer's Big Book of Numbers. 21 October 2014. I'll be so good at signing my name in a month! How can a prime number be "sexy" and "safe" at the same time? Why shouldn't Aussie cricketers be scared of the number 87? And how many bacteria live in your pants? All the answers and more are in Adam Spencer's Big Book of Numbers. This is a book for readers of all ages who love numbers, who want to love numbers, or who just love to laugh and learn about the wonderful world we live in. For 15 years Adam Spencer has been entertaining us. On triple j and ABC radio and television, he's established himself as Australia's funniest and most famous mathematician. And now, by popular demand, we have hi

Adam Spencer. Publisher: Four Walls Eight Windows. Eighty-three is the percentage of people hit by lightning who are men. Adam Spencer's Book of Numbers provides entertaining facts about the numbers 1 through 100. For those of you that are more serious this book is also filled with mathematical facts and definitions as they relate to the numbers 1 through 100. For example, seven is a Mersenne prime. Forty-seven is an Ulam number. Seventy is a weird number (an abundant number that isn't equal to the sum of any of its divisors). This book is arranged into 100 chapters each one or two pages long, beginning with a number from 1 to 100. For 15 years Adam Spencer has been entertaining us. On triple j and ABC radio and television, he's established himself as Australia's funniest and most famous mathematician. And now, by popular demand, we have his Big Book of Numbers, a fascinating journey from 1 to 100. Praise for Adam Spencer's Big Book of Numbers. "If you find this book boring, you should be in a clinic." John Cleese. "Funny yet with hidden depths, like its author. A brilliant introduction to the world of numbers." Brian Cox. "Even the page numbers will start to look fascinating once you've read this book!" Amanda Keller. "Start by marking 'Adam Spencer's Book Of Numbers' as Want to Read: Want to Read savingâ€¦| Want to Read." Fourth, since Spencer has made an obvious attempt at uncovering the cultural significance of the first 100 numbers (and I think that is a fine idea) he really needed to do more research in that area so that he could come up with something more significant than say "20/20 is the name of a Beach Boys album" for inclusion in his remarks. about the number 20. If Spencer had spent more time looking at the historical and cultural significance of numbers, he would have had to weight his remarks heavily toward the lower numbers since the human significance of especially the single digit numb...

Adam Spencer. How many people do you need in a room before thereâ€™ll be a birthday in common? Why is 70 weird, and what can we do about it? How can 56 people eat 1 pizza? In 100 bite-size chapters of no more than three pages each, Adam Spencer gives each number, 1 to 100, its place in the limelight. For example, take 65. Itâ€™s the constant of a 5 x 5 â€œmagic squareâ€ a square that contains the numbers 1 to 25, where all the rows and columns and each diagonal add up to 65. Elizabeth Taylor had 65 costume changes in Cleopatra. And sharks can travel up to 65 kilometers per hour (about 40 mph). Afte