



Eurekas and Euphorias: The Oxford Book of Scientific Anecdotes

Walter Gratzer

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The march of science has never proceeded smoothly. It has been marked through the years by episodes of drama and comedy, of failure as well as triumph, and by outrageous strokes of luck, deserved and undeserved, and sometimes by human tragedy. It has seen deep intellectual friendships, as well as ferocious animosities, and once in a while acts of theft and malice, deceit, and even a hoax or two. Scientists come in all shapes - the obsessive and the dilettantish, the genial, the envious, the preternaturally brilliant and the slow-witted who sometimes see further in the end, the open-minded and the intolerant, recluses and arrivistes. From the death of Archimedes at the hands of an irritated Roman soldier to the concoction of a superconducting witches' brew at the very close of the twentieth century, the stories in Eurekas and Euphorias pour out, told with wit and relish by Walter Gratzer.

Open this book at random and you may chance on the clumsy chemist who breaks a thermometer in a reaction vat and finds mercury to be the catalyst that starts the modern dyestuff industry; or a famous physicist dissolving his gold Nobel Prize medal in acid to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Nazis, recovering it when the war ends; mathematicians and physicists diverting themselves in prison cells, and even in a madhouse, by creating startling advances in their subject. We witness the careers, sometimes tragic, sometimes carefree, of the great women mathematicians, from Hypatia of Alexandria to Sophie Germain in France and Sonia Kovalevskaya in Russia and Sweden, and then Marie Curie's relentless battle with the French Academy. Here, then, a glorious parade unfolds to delight the reader, with stories to astonish, to instruct, and most especially, to entertain.

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