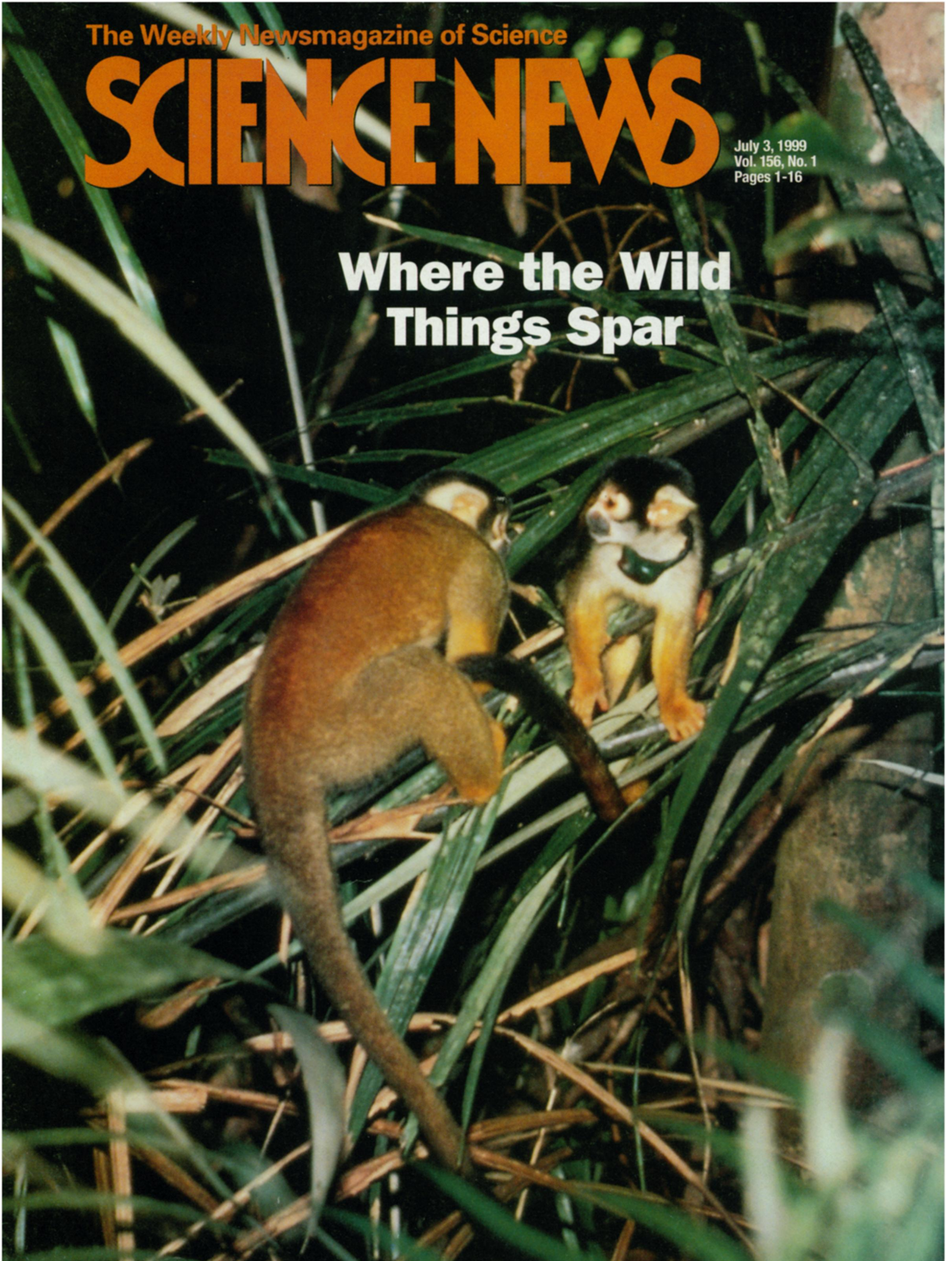


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Where the Wild Things Spar



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For over half a century, at almost any hour of the day, a mathematician anywhere in the world might answer a knock at the front door to find a short, frail man wearing thick eyeglasses and a rumpled suit, carrying in one hand a suitcase containing all his belongings and in the other, a bag full of papers, who would announce, "My brain is open!" The visitor was Paul Erdős, one of the greatest mathematicians of the 20th century.

Having no home or job, and incapable of the most ordinary household tasks, Erdős was sustained by the generosity of colleagues and by his own belief in the beauty of mathematics.

Born in Hungary, Erdős was a member of a generation of remarkable Hungarian scientists (among them, John von Neumann, Edward Teller, and Leo Szilard) who shaped the 20th century. By age 17, he had gained international recognition as a prodigy. As a Jew, he left Hungary in 1938, eventually arriving in the United States; 15 years later he was exiled for a decade during the McCarthy era.

Erdős believed that the meaning of life is to prove and conjecture. He was fascinated by numbers and became one of the century's leading numbers theorists. He worked in fields of mathematics that would prove pivotal to the development of computer science, even though he had never touched a computer. He was the most prolific mathematician who ever lived, writing or collaborating on more than 1,500 papers with more than 450 different collaborators.

Witty, filled with the sort of mathematical puzzles that intrigued Erdős and continue to fascinate mathematicians today, *My Brain Is Open* is the story of this strange genius, a journey in his footsteps through the intriguing world of mathematics, where universal truths await discovery like hidden treasures and where brilliant proofs are poetry.

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