



# Gamma: Exploring Euler's Constant (Princeton Science Library)

*Julian Hovil*

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Among the myriad of constants that appear in mathematics,  $p$ ,  $e$ , and  $i$  are the most familiar. Following closely behind is  $g$ , or gamma, a constant that arises in many mathematical areas yet maintains a profound sense of mystery.

In a tantalizing blend of history and mathematics, Julian Havil takes the reader on a journey through logarithms and the harmonic series, the two defining elements of gamma, toward the first account of gamma's place in mathematics.

Introduced by the Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler (1707-1783), who figures prominently in this book, gamma is defined as the limit of the sum of  $1 + 1/2 + 1/3 + \dots$  up to  $1/n$ , minus the natural logarithm of  $n$ --the numerical value being 0.5772156. . . . But unlike its more celebrated colleagues  $p$  and  $e$ , the exact nature of gamma remains a mystery--we don't even know if gamma can be expressed as a fraction.

Among the numerous topics that arise during this historical odyssey into fundamental mathematical ideas are the Prime Number Theorem and the most important open problem in mathematics today--the Riemann Hypothesis (though no proof of either is offered!).

Sure to be popular with not only students and instructors but all math aficionados, *Gamma* takes us through countries, centuries, lives, and works, unfolding along the way the stories of some remarkable mathematics from some remarkable mathematicians.

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