

## The Game of Life

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# The Game of Life

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Not the children's game of chutes and ladders  
but the mathematician's toy of rules and repetition,  
model of a world whose cells will toddle through  
successive states of on and off, life and death, evolve  
into the steady states of blocks or beehives, boats,  
or blink endlessly in patterns we name beacons,  
pulsars, toads—or else the future zips across  
our screen like spaceships passing—  
gliders, glider guns,

unless it all blinks off.

The game a matter of John Conway's simple rules:  
your neighborhood a grid of three by three,  
you a cell who can be born  
if exactly three neighbors already live;  
if fewer than two exist, you die  
of loneliness; if more than three, you die  
of overcrowding, event repeated across the board—  
birth and death,

but no love or mourning,  
no gold-winged warblers moving through the rain,  
no redbud bursting its bark to flower, no wild leeks  
simmering, no way to knock on a stranger's door.