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Richard Feynman, the rock star of theoretical physics, has left an image that belies his nerdy side. Not many bongo-playing surfer beatniks would have spent hours of their spare time proving Newton's law of elliptical planetary motion using only plane geometry. But Feynman's Lost Lecture: The Motion of Planets Around the Sun shows that the great man did just that. Originally delivered to an introductory physics class at Caltech in 1963, this 76-minute CD and book set contains everything the math-savvy listener needs to savor the pleasures of applied math. Caltech physicist David L. Goodstein and archivist Judith R. Goodstein found the notes and tape amid another professor's papers and set to work making sense of them; unfortunately, photographs of the blackboard drawings didn't survive. The book briefly covers their find and recovery work, then presents the proof as reconstructed--crucial reading if one is to follow the lecture. There's nothing easy about it, as Feynman acknowledges in the lecture:

I am going to give what I will call an elementary demonstration. "Elementary" means that very little is required to know ahead of time in order to understand it, except to have an infinite amount of intelligence.