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## \*Cracking Coulton's Code

### From Computer Programmer to Rock Performer

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Yale graduate Jonathan Coulton woke up one day and decided to ditch his job as a six-figure-a-year computer programmer to stay at home and write a song per week for a year. "My wife certainly wished I had more of a plan," he jokes. It was 2005, Coulton was 36, and he and his wife were new parents.

"When my daughter was born, I reprioritized my life," Coulton says. "I realized we are all running out of time. I wanted to be a good example for her. I wanted to be a complete person, not someone hiding from what might be a harder road, but a more honest one."

Living off savings and his wife Christine's income as a television producer, Coulton launched "A Thing a Week," writing, recording and publishing a new song on his Web site every week for a year. Self-described as a geek, Coulton's best-selling songs covered nerd-like topics—a mad scientist's unrequited love in *SkullCrusher Mountain*, the semi-autobiographical *Code Monkey* about a dissatisfied software engineer. "I acted as if this was my job, and the reason I was able to do it was the public declaration on the Internet. As a creative person, it forced me to finish things."

Initially he asked only for tip donations from fans, but now his loyal following pays for

downloading his music. His fans clearly identify with Coulton's lyrics about misfits and nerds and his anthem to restless software designers everywhere.

His ambitious project quickly resulted in 3,000 listeners per day, with his most popular songs downloaded as many as 500,000 times. He started making up to \$5,000 a month selling CDs and digital downloads and \$1,000 a performance at small venues. He's also launching *Best Concert Ever*, his first live-concert DVD, available in retail stores. On top of all that, Coulton and his wife just had a son.

Now that he's left computer code behind, what does Coulton like best about his success as a musician? "I feel like I should come up with something deeper and more important, but I like how I can go buy groceries in the middle of the day. I can't imagine how I got anything done when I had an office job."



#### Geek or Rock Star?

"Even though I am a rock star, I still love sci-fi and technology. And I still feel uncomfortable dancing and playing sports."

#### Why Take a Risk?

"To be a happy and complete person is the point of it all."

#### Biggest Challenge?

"You spend 90 percent of your time doing the last 3 percent of excellence and polish."

#### What He Says to His Wife Now

"There's a lot of, 'I told you so.' Just kidding—she's thrilled. Part of my sale of this idea is that a happy, fulfilled daddy is better for everyone."

Photo by Dale May; DVD Cover Art By Elizabeth Connor