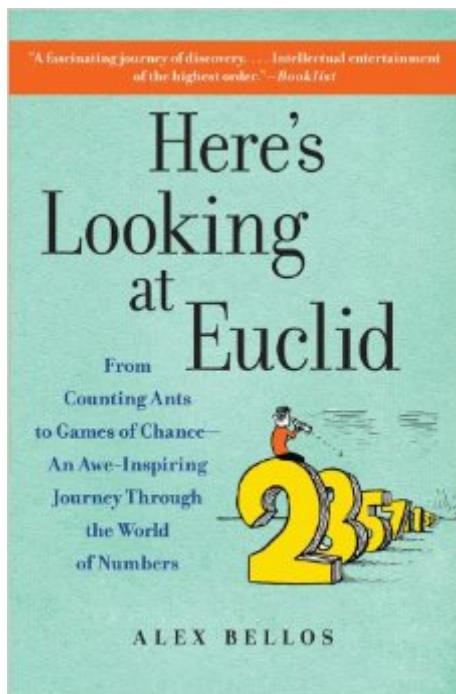


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Here's Looking At Euclid: From Counting Ants To Games Of Chance - An Awe-Inspiring Journey Through The World Of Numbers



Synopsis

Too often math gets a bad rap, characterized as dry and difficult. But, Alex Bellos says, "math can be inspiring and brilliantly creative. Mathematical thought is one of the great achievements of the human race, and arguably the foundation of all human progress. The world of mathematics is a remarkable place." Bellos has traveled all around the globe and has plunged into history to uncover fascinating stories of mathematical achievement, from the breakthroughs of Euclid, the greatest mathematician of all time, to the creations of the Zen master of origami, one of the hottest areas of mathematical work today. Taking us into the wilds of the , he tells the story of a tribe there who can count only to five and reports on the latest findings about the math instinctâ "including the revelation that ants can actually count how many steps theyâ 've taken. Journeying to the Bay of Bengal, he interviews a Hindu sage about the brilliant mathematical insights of the Buddha, while in Japan he visits the godfather of Sudoku and introduces the brainteasing delights of mathematical games. Exploring the mysteries of randomness, he explains why it is impossible for our iPods to truly randomly select songs. In probing the many intrigues of that most beloved of numbers, pi, he visits with two brothers so obsessed with the elusive number that they built a supercomputer in their Manhattan apartment to study it. Throughout, the journey is enhanced with a wealth of intriguing illustrations, such as of the clever puzzles known as tangrams and the crochet creation of an American math professor who suddenly realized one day that she could knit a representation of higher dimensional space that no one had been able to visualize. Whether writing about how algebra solved Swedish traffic problems, visiting the Mental Calculation World Cup to disclose the secrets of lightning calculation, or exploring the links between pineapples and beautiful teeth, Bellos is a wonderfully engaging guide who never fails to delight even as he edifies. Hereâ 's Looking at Euclid is a rare gem that brings the beauty of math to life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've read a lot of recreational math books and this one is superb. It's as good as those written by the greatest popular mathematics author of them all, Martin Gardner. In the preface the author states, "I have included a fair bit of historical material...". The first chapter makes it seem that the book will be 90% historical background and information ancillary to math, but within a few chapters that is no longer the case. Even with subjects that will be familiar to most math devotees, he adds many new interesting tidbits, e.g. if you remove all the terms of the harmonic series that contain the digit 9, the formerly infinite-summing series now sums to just under 23. "Remove all terms including ANY number and the thinned-out harmonic series is convergent." if you remove all the terms that contain the string of digits 314159, the series sums, amazingly!, to a little over 2.3 million. And mixed in with all the interesting math bits, the author constantly adds interesting asides; Peter Roget of thesaurus fame invented the slide rule log-log scale, which enabled the calculation of square roots and fractional powers like $3^{2.5}$. There are five pages about sudoku puzzles. They discuss the puzzle's background and also its math; the minimum number of clues needed to produce a puzzle with a unique solution seems to be 17, because although a man named Gordon Royle has collected over 50,000 17-clue puzzles, there has never been a 16-clue puzzle and Royle has a gut feeling that none exist. I could go on and on describing the many things I found extremely interesting in this book, but I'm too lazy to type them all out.

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