Letters to the Editor

The Pythagoras Game

John Bonaccorsi's letter to the editor in the November 2007 *Notices* asks about a "Pythagoras" game that B. L. van der Waerden had as a child. I think that he refers to the "gadget" (*médaille* in French, but nothing to do with awards) distributed by the Paul Kramer factory based in Neuchâtel, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

I received it several years ago as a present, and I went to the factory: the grandson of Paul Kramer was as fascinated as I was.

Unfortunately, they have no archives. I would have liked to see this game distributed in our local high schools… A technican made a prototype for me, but there is no chance of having any re-edition so far.

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Editor's Note: In adition to Alain Robert, many other readers have written letters to the *Notices* and/or John Bonaccorsi identifying the Pythagoras game and their experiences with it. The two printed here are representative.

In the November 2007 *Notices* there is a letter querying the game "Pythagoras", which came up in an interview of van der Waerden. I have an old game called "Pythagoras", manufactured by Tryne Games Mfg., Inc. (Lindenhurst, L.I., New York), with copyright date 1961. This is a puzzle with seven plastic pieces to be arranged into squares and various shapes, fitting the description given in the letter. The puzzle is in fact precisely the classic Tangrams puzzle.

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I also grew up playing the Pythagoras game and my kids play it now. Although the game describes itself as a Greek game it is exactly the same as the Chinese game Tangram. The pieces consist of one square, one parallelogram, and five right isosceles triangles of various sizes (2 large, 1 medium, and 2 small). The set comes with almost a hundred puzzles to solve, which consist of shaded shapes one needs to construct using all seven pieces. I highly recommend Tangrams for all kids 8 and up.

Younger children might prefer versions where the puzzles are the same scale as the pieces. Most popular is fitting the pieces together as a square to put them away in the box.

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F. Schur, not I. Schur

Among the authors who developed, about 100 years ago, axiomatic frameworks for geometry, Charles Weibel mentions in his "Survey of non-Desarguesian planes" [*Notices*, November 2007, p. 1294] the name I. Schur. It was not Issai Schur (1875–1941) (who worked in the representation theory of groups, number theory, and analysis, but not in geometry), but Friedrich Schur (1856–1932) who is meant. F. Schur's work on the axiomatic foundation of geometry was summarized in his book *Grundlagen der Geometrie*, Teubner, Leipzig, 1909. He received the Lobachevsky Prize in 1912.

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Submitting Letters to the Editor

The *Notices* invites readers to submit letters and opinion pieces on topics related to mathematics. Electronic submissions are preferred (notices-letters@ams.org); see the masthead for postal mail addresses. Opinion pieces are usually one printed page in length (about 800 words). Letters are normally less than one page long, and shorter letters are preferred.

Identifications

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