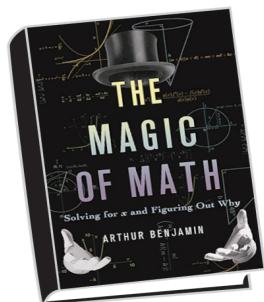




BOOKSHELF

A man is known by the books he reads. —Emerson

New and Noteworthy Titles on Our BookShelf January 2017

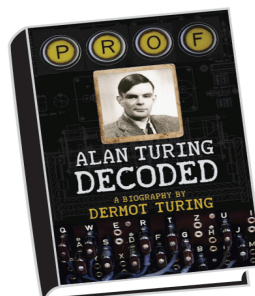


The Magic of Math: Solving for x and Figuring Out Why, by Arthur Benjamin (Basic Books, September 2015). In 2000, the Mathematical Association of America presented its Haimo Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics to Arthur

Benjamin. And this year, he is receiving the Communications Award of the Joint Policy Board for Mathematics, for his work in public outreach. These two roles, as outstanding teacher and math proselytizer, come together in his latest book, *The Magic of Math*. The book is an outgrowth of his video course “The Joy of Mathematics,” produced by Great Courses. In addition to being a mathematics professor at Harvey Mudd College, Benjamin is a professional magician and gives dozens of performances a year as a “mathemagician,” doing lightning fast calculation tricks and other mental feats. While exuding all the pizzazz and appeal of a professional entertainer, Benjamin aims in the book to show that in mathematics there are no tricks, no illusions, no sleights of hand, and that what is really magical in mathematics is its beauty. The book has twelve chapters focusing on such topics as the integers; algebra; Fibonacci numbers; geometry; the numbers i , π , and e ; and calculus. The closing chapter is “The Magic of Infinity.” Sprinkled here and there in the book are explanations of mental math tricks that readers can use to impress their friends, as well as to deepen their mathematical understanding. Aimed at a wide audience, *The Magic of Math* would be accessible to just about anyone. Benjamin’s unpretentious, humorous authorial voice invites readers to relax and have fun. According to a review in *Publisher’s Weekly*, “[the book’s] energy and enthusiasm should charm even the most math-phobic readers.” An interview with Arthur Benjamin appears in the Graduate Student Section of this issue of the *Notices*. (See p. 32)

Suggestions for the BookShelf can be sent to notices-booklist@ams.org.

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Prof: Alan Turing Decoded, by Dermot Turing (The History Press, September 2015). In 1983, Andrew Hodges published to wide acclaim his monumental biography *Alan Turing: The Enigma*. Since then—and especially in conjunction with the centenary of Turing’s birth in 2012—the story of his life has been told

and re-told in various media, including the popular film *The Imitation Game*. In 2015, an unusual contribution to the literature about Turing appeared: *Prof: Alan Turing Decoded*, written by his nephew, Dermot Turing. Although the book is a personal account, author and subject never met: the son of Alan Turing’s older brother John, Dermot was born in 1961, seven years after Alan’s death. Nevertheless, Dermot’s book offers some new insights. Like his uncle, he attended Sherborne School and Cambridge University. After receiving a doctorate in genetics at Oxford, he moved into the legal profession. He is a trustee of the Bletchley Park Trust, which is dedicated to preserving the history of the extraordinary code-breaking operations that Alan Turing and others carried out during World War II. Dermot Turing’s book draws on many unpublished documents and photographs available to him through his family and through Bletchley Park. “What results is a cheerfully anecdotal account of a slightly grubby, surprisingly athletic, formidably clever and pleasingly humorous and humane man,” writes Clare Mully in a review in the February 2016 issue of *History Today*. While the book says that the dominant passion in Alan Turing’s life was ideas, it focuses less on those ideas and more on a personal portrait of Turing the man. As Mully notes: “[T]his is not an academic book and should perhaps be read with a glass of wine at hand.” Dermot is not the only Turing to have written about the genius in the family. In 1959, Sara Turing published a biography of her son Alan. In the twenty years that followed, her elder son John worked on his own account of his brother’s life. The memoir John produced was found after his death by his son Dermot and included in the 2014 edition of Sara’s biography. Condensed versions of John’s frank and fascinating memoir are available on the internet, for example on the website of *The Atlantic*, under the title “My Brother the Genius.”