



Great Feuds in Mathematics: Ten of the Liveliest Disputes Ever

By Hal Hellman

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Praise for Hal Hellman

Great Feuds in Mathematics

""Those who think that mathematicians are cold, mechanical proving machines will do well to read Hellman's book on conflicts in mathematics. The main characters are as excitable and touchy as the next man. But Hellman's stories also show how scientific fights bring out sharper formulations and better arguments.""
-Professor Dirk van Dalen, Philosophy Department, Utrecht University

Great Feuds in Technology

""There's nothing like a good feud to grab your attention. And when it comes to describing the battle, Hal Hellman is a master.""
-New Scientist

Great Feuds in Science

""Unusual insight into the development of science . . . I was excited by this book and enthusiastically recommend it to general as well as scientific audiences.""
-American Scientist

""Hellman has assembled a series of entertaining tales . . . many fine examples of heady invective without parallel in our time.""
-Nature

Great Feuds in Medicine

""This engaging book documents [the] reactions in ten of the most heated controversies and rivalries in medical history. . . . The disputes detailed are . . . fascinating. . . . It is delicious stuff here.""
-The New York Times

""Stimulating. ""

-Journal of the American Medical Association

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Editorial Review

Review

* "...genuinely insightful...accurate...rapid and fluent..." (London Mathematical Society, January 2007)

Review

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"Hellman's fascinating book illustrates what can happen when great scholars employ weapons of math destruction."--William Dunham, Muhlenberg College, author of *The Mathematical Universe: An Alphabetical Journey Through the Great Proofs, Problems, and Personalities*

"A very engaging effort and a good introduction to the human side of mathematics."--Mathematics Association of America

From the Inside Flap

Mathematical disputes offer indisputable proof that great mathematical minds are calculating in more ways than one. Fueled by greed, jealousy, ambition, and ego, they have plots worthy of a soap opera, pitting brother against brother, father against son, and student against mentor.

In the sixteenth century, Cardano and Tartaglia battled over credit for finding a method for solving cubic and quadratic equations; the plots and counterplots ended when Tartaglia, using Cardano's son as an informant, turned Cardano over to the Spanish Inquisition. In later centuries, Descartes battled Fermat over analytic geometry and optics; Newton and Leibniz feuded bitterly over the credit for the calculus; the Bernoulli brothers fought over calculus problems; and Poincaré tussled with Russell over the logical foundations of mathematics. In a notable twentieth-century math conflict involving Hilbert and Brouwer, Einstein took a neutral stance and described the controversy as the War of the Frogs and the Mice.

Hal Hellman explores both the mathematics and the spirit of the times in this fascinating exposé. He draws from letters, articles, and books in which the debated ideas were propounded or refuted, and from the works of historians who have assessed the contributions of the participants to mathematics. Many of the ideas that sparked the feuds are prominent in mathematics today. For example, Hilbert's proof theory is a powerful mathematical tool, especially in computer science. Russell's logicism has modern-day proponents. And Cantor's set theory became the basis for today's topology and fractals and led to advances that provided a rigorous grounding for infinitesimal calculus.

Providing insight into math and history, and spiced with cunning, deception, and subterfuge, this book shows how great feuds propelled great progress in mathematics.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Deemer:

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