



Fermat's Enigma: The Epic Quest to Solve the World's Greatest Mathematical Problem

By Simon Singh

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$x^n + y^n = z^n$, where n represents 3, 4, 5, ...no solution

"I have discovered a truly marvelous demonstration of this proposition which this margin is too narrow to contain."

With these words, the seventeenth-century French mathematician Pierre de Fermat threw down the gauntlet to future generations. What came to be known as Fermat's Last Theorem looked simple; proving it, however, became the Holy Grail of mathematics, baffling its finest minds for more than 350 years. In *Fermat's Enigma*--based on the author's award-winning documentary film, which aired on PBS's "Nova"--Simon Singh tells the astonishingly entertaining story of the pursuit of that grail, and the lives that were devoted to, sacrificed for, and saved by it. Here is a mesmerizing tale of heartbreak and mastery that will forever change your feelings about mathematics.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

When Andrew Wiles of Princeton University announced a solution of Fermat's last theorem in 1993, it electrified the world of mathematics. After a flaw was discovered in the proof, Wiles had to work for another year--he had already labored in solitude for seven years--to establish that he had solved the 350-year-old problem. Simon Singh's book is a lively, comprehensible explanation of Wiles's work and of the star-, trauma-, and wacko-studded history of Fermat's last theorem. *Fermat's Enigma* contains some problems that offer a taste of the math, but it also includes limericks to give a feeling for the goofy side of mathematicians.

From School Library Journal

YA The riveting story of a mathematical problem that sprang from the study of the Pythagorean theorem developed in ancient Greece. The book follows mathematicians and scientists throughout history as they searched for new mathematical truths. In the 17th century, a French judicial assistant and amateur mathematician, Pierre De Fermat, produced many brilliant ideas in the field of number theory. The Greeks were aware of many whole number solutions to the Pythagorean theorem, where the sum of two perfect squares is a perfect square. Fermat stated that no whole number solutions exist if higher powers replace the squares in this equation. He left a message in the margin of a notebook that he had a proof, but that there was insufficient space there to write it down. His note was found posthumously, but the solution remained a mystery for 350 years. Finally, after working in isolation for eight years, Andrew Wiles, a young British mathematician at Princeton University, published a proof in 1995. Although this famous question has been resolved, many more remain unsolved, and new problems continually arise to challenge modern minds. This vivid account is fascinating reading for anyone interested in mathematics, its history, and the passionate quest for solutions to unsolved riddles. The book includes 19 black-and-white photos of mathematicians and occasional sketches of ancient mathematicians as well as diagrams of formulas. The illustrations help to humanize the subject and add to the readability. APenny Stevens, Centreville Regional Library, Centreville, VA

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From Library Journal

For over 350 years, despite the efforts of many ingenious mathematicians, the postulate known as Fermat's Last Theorem remained unproven. It seemed that the 1993 solution proposed by Princeton professor Andrew Wiles would become another casualty until he rescued it with a brilliant insight. Singh, a physicist who also directed a documentary film on this topic, relates the theorem's story over 2500 years, moving from ancient Greece, where it was first conceived, to its recent, triumphant solution. Through his engaging renderings of the mathematicians who took on Fermat's challenge over the years, the author captures the joys and frustrations of this quest for an extremely elusive proof. Readers with a high school-level knowledge of number theory will have no trouble following the text. Comparatively, Amir Aczel's *Fermat's Last Theorem* (LJ 10/15/96) is more concise (it can be read in two hours) and somewhat easier to understand, but Singh's book has more perspective and builds to a truly engrossing climax. It's a mathematical page-turner. Gregg Sapp, Univ. of Miami Lib., Coral Gables, Fla.

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Users Review

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Jennifer Bryan:

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