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An Imaginary Tale: The Story of $\hat{-1}$ (Paperback)

By Paul J. Nahin

Princeton University Press, United States, 2016. Paperback. Condition: New. Revised edition. Language: English . Brand New Book. Today complex numbers have such widespread practical use--from electrical engineering to aeronautics--that few people would expect the story behind their derivation to be filled with adventure and enigma. In *An Imaginary Tale*, Paul Nahin tells the 2000-year-old history of one of mathematics most elusive numbers, the square root of minus one, also known as i . He recreates the baffling mathematical problems that conjured it up, and the colorful characters who tried to solve them. In 1878, when two brothers stole a mathematical papyrus from the ancient Egyptian burial site in the Valley of Kings, they led scholars to the earliest known occurrence of the square root of a negative number. The papyrus offered a specific numerical example of how to calculate the volume of a truncated square pyramid, which implied the need for i . In the first century, the mathematician-engineer Heron of Alexandria encountered i in a separate project, but fudged the arithmetic; medieval mathematicians stumbled upon the concept while grappling with the meaning of negative numbers, but dismissed their square roots as nonsense. By the time of Descartes, a theoretical use for...



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