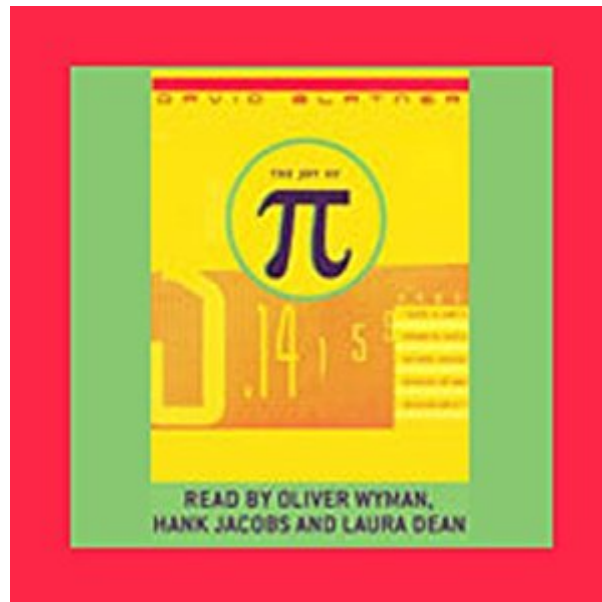


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The Joy Of Pi



Synopsis

No number has captured the attention and imagination of people throughout the ages as much as the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. Pi is infinite and, in *The Joy of Pi* it proves to be infinitely intriguing. With incisive historical insight and a refreshing sense of humor, David Blatner explores the many facets of pi and humankind's fascination with it - from the ancient Egyptians and Archimedes to Leonardo da Vinci and the modern-day Chudnovsky brothers, who have calculated pi to eight billion digits with a homemade supercomputer. *The Joy of Pi* is a book of many parts. Breezy narratives recount the history of pi and the quirky stories of those obsessed with it. Sidebars document fascinating pi trivia. Dozens of snippets and factoids reveal pi's remarkable impact over the centuries. Mnemonic devices teach how to memorize pi to many hundreds of digits (or more, if you're so inclined). Pi-inspired poems, limericks, and jokes offer delightfully "square" pi humor. A tribute to all things pi, *The Joy of Pi* is sure to foster a newfound affection and respect for the big number with the funny little symbol.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Probably no number has so fascinated mathematicians and non-mathematicians as much as pi, that enigmatic and unending number that begins 3.14159265. Pi is simple to define: it is the ratio of the circumference of any circle to the diameter. Beyond that simple definition lies much that is fascinating, as much for the behavior of those who have studied pi as for the number itself. David Blatner's *"The Joy of Pi"* presents many anecdotes about pi and its history, and these stories span from the inchoate stages of geometry to the recent, computer-assisted explorations (indeed, running

through the book is a one-million-digit expansion of pi). For the serious mathematician, "The Joy of Pi" probably contains little new and is too brief in the topics it does cover. But Blatner's apparent aim is not to produce a weighty intellectual tome. Instead, Blatner has written what might aptly be called "Pi 101." As a brief survey of one of the more fascinating mathematical enigmae, "The Joy of Pi" succeeds swimmingly. When Stephen King, John Grisham, or Patricia Cornwell writes a new book, the audience is pre-sold. With a book about mathematics, however, the opposite is probably true. With math phobia (or innumeracy, as another author calls it) all too common, far too many people will pass up this breezy book for fear of being in over their heads or being bored to the point of tears. Anyone with such a fear should do his or her best to overcome it long enough to pick up "The Joy of Pi." The result might very well be a brief glimpse at the beauty and mystery of mathematics--and some of the more interesting and amusing pieces of its history (such as the misguided attempt to legislate pi!).

There is a lot of very interesting information presented in David Blatner's *The Joy of Pi*, but it is well hidden behind a precipitous writing style and the worst graphics and design work ever presented in a general science book. But then why four stars? Well, this one little tidbit alone was worth the price of admission: "The height of an elephant (from foot to shoulder) equals $2 \times \pi \times$ the diameter of the elephants foot". This is just one example of how Blatner attempts to show his audience how intrinsic and real and relevant Pi is to the everyday world. And he does it with a type of bombastic style and confident fun oftentimes not seen in general science books. Well, at least it is fun for the first seventy-five pages or so. In the final chapters of the book, Blatner falls into a twenty-plus page flame of cyclometers (i.e. mathematical diletantes who are still trying to square the circle -- if you don't know what this means, then you really need to read the book!). His diatribe includes more than a dozen call-out boxes, 15 quotes, and various other assorted and sundry techniques for trying to make cyclometers look ridiculous (I don't believe that cyclometers will be successful, but it's their kind of energy and passion that put the human race in space).
Net/net:1) Wealth of interesting facts about Pi
2) Design and formatting of text and graphics couldn't be worse
3) Questionable value to the last chapters which include a 20+ page flame on cyclometers
4) Three hour read to learning all the general enthusiast needs to know about Pi

I just received this book yesterday for winning a mathematics award at my high school. It's an interesting little book about this number that has captivated people for centuries. There's nothing new here - it's essentially a compilation of all the pi anecdotes and proof sketches that the author

could find. But it's a fun little book. Scattered throughout the book in really small print are the first million digits of Pi. The text is broken by many little sidebars and quotes, and there are formulas to calculate Pi throughout. If you have computer software that will allow you to calculate these series to at least 100 decimal places or so, see how fast the series converge. One of the great themes in Pi calculation is finding series that converge faster and faster. Some series for Pi are, of course, quite elementary: $4(1 - 1/3 + 1/5 - 1/7 + 1/9 - \dots)$ comes to mind, but this takes forever to converge. Then there are the "mystical" formulas - the ones where I have no idea how they equal Pi, but they do. For example, this formula, from the Chudnovsky brothers on p. 71: $1/\text{Pi} = 12 * (\text{the sum on } n = 0 \text{ to infinity}) (-1)^n * (6n)! / ((n!)^3 * (3n!)) * (13591409 + 545140134n) / (640320^{(3n+3/2)})$ which looks much more formidable, but gives 14 decimal places per term. This mystical aspect of Pi has attracted many geniuses over the centuries (including Ramanujan - there's a sidebar about him), and it isn't lost on Blatner. Buy this book. You don't have to read it cover to cover - in fact, it's probably better to just dip in at random points here and there and see what you find.

I used to hate math. I had no use for it other than balancing my checkbook, and even that was a laborious task. Then while visiting my brother, who happens to be an engineer, I noticed this book lying on his coffee table. Tired of feeling "out of the loop" in the math world, I picked up the book. What a page-turner! I spent the entire next day discussing Pi with my brother, and in turn learned more about math and the laws of physics in one day than I ever had in school! Who knew that a number I once dismissed could be so transcendental and enigmatical??? My only regret was that the book ended, and now my view of math has forever changed. What a whimsical and paradoxical subject! I cannot WAIT to show this book to my son. He's only a toddler now but believe me, he will come to fully know the true magic and mysticism of a little number called Pi.

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