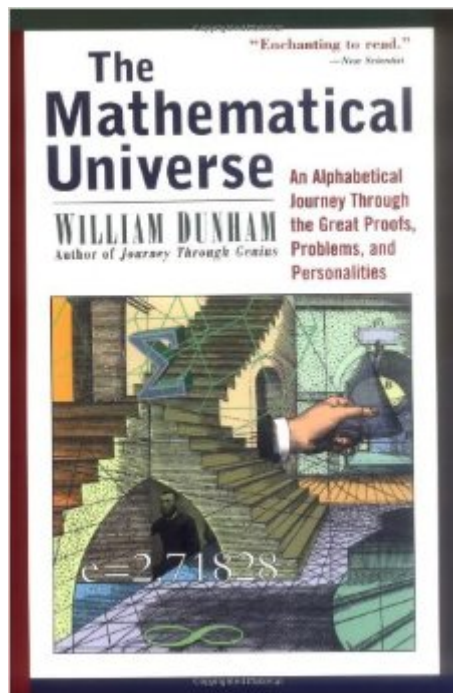


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The Mathematical Universe: An Alphabetical Journey Through The Great Proofs, Problems, And Personalities



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Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Wiley; 1 edition (February 18, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0471176613

ISBN-13: 978-0471176619

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.8 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

I really enjoy this book, and I keep consulting it. But I really don't know whether what I'm learning from it is correct or not. Here's the problem: The two entries with which I have the most familiarity are just plain wrong. The entry on the "Russell Paradox" reads like a hagiography of Bertrand Russell. It makes it appear that Russell ceased working on the Principia Mathematica because he could not find a solution to his paradox--whether a set, all of whose members are not members of themselves, contains itself. According to Dunham, his inability to find a satisfactory solution spelled the end of his quest for the development of a logical foundation for mathematics, which he communicated to Frege, who gave up on his attempts as well. This is pure fiction. The entire Principia Mathematica is based on Russell's theory of ramified types (the stipulation that a set cannot be a member of itself), which he confidently asserted as being the solution to the paradox throughout the work. What put an end to Russell and Whitehead's project, as well as Frege's, was Goedel's incompleteness theorem, totally ignored by Dunham. Dunham's treatment of Venn

diagrams is even worse because it is deprecating of John Venn and his work--and totally wrong. Dunham states that the diagrams that are named after him were Venn's only contribution to mathematics and then makes disparaging remarks about them, particularly that they lacked any originality. Here's the reality: John Venn was an extremely competent mathematician/logician whose many contributions included the furtherance of George Boole's innovations.

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