



e: The Story of a Number (Princeton Science Library)

By Eli Maor

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The interest earned on a bank account, the arrangement of seeds in a sunflower, and the shape of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis are all intimately connected with the mysterious number e . In this informal and engaging history, Eli Maor portrays the curious characters and the elegant mathematics that lie behind the number. Designed for a reader with only a modest mathematical background, this biography brings out the central importance of e to mathematics and illuminates a golden era in the age of science.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Until about 1975, logarithms were every scientist's best friend. They were the basis of the slide rule that was the totemic wand of the trade, listed in huge books consulted in every library. Then hand-held calculators arrived, and within a few years slide rules were museum pieces.

But e remains, the center of the natural logarithmic function and of calculus. Eli Maor's book is the only more or less popular account of the history of this universal constant. Maor gives human faces to fundamental mathematics, as in his fantasia of a meeting between Johann Bernoulli and J.S. Bach. *e: The Story of a Number* would be an excellent choice for a high school or college student of trigonometry or calculus. --*Mary Ellen Curtin*

From Library Journal

Everyone whose mathematical education has gone beyond elementary school is familiar with the number known as pi. Far fewer have been introduced to e , a number that is of equal importance in theoretical mathematics. Maor (mathematics, Northeastern Illinois Univ.) tries to fill this gap with this excellent book. He traces the history of mathematics from the 16th century to the present through the intriguing properties of this number. Maor says that his book is aimed at the reader with a "modest" mathematical background. Be warned that his definition of modest may not be yours. The text introduces and discusses logarithms, limits, calculus, differential equations, and even the theory of functions of complex variables. Not easy stuff! Nevertheless, the writing is clear and the material fascinating. Highly recommended.

- *Harold D. Shane, Baruch Coll., CUNY*

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From Booklist

The discovery of e (the base for natural logarithms) did much to confirm the faith--central to modern science--that the empirical world is encoded in mathematics. Indeed, today scientists and engineers rely heavily on e and its derivatives when solving numerous real-world problems. Yet many who routinely employ this powerful number know little of its history. Maor recounts the rich drama surrounding the number that emerged at the center of the investigations of some of the most brilliant thinkers of all time--Fermat and Descartes, Newton and Leibniz, Laplace and the Bernoullis, Euler and Gauss. Though the exposition inevitably requires many formulas and some abbreviated derivations, the author tries to smooth the way for general readers who do not know calculus or analytical geometry, while still conveying some sense of the imaginative daring of the pioneers who opened up these fields of mathematics. Through appendixes and footnotes, mathematicians can find their way to more rigorous and exhaustive treatment of the subject; nonspecialists can easily wend their way around the more theoretical questions while still enlarging their understanding of intellectual and cultural history. *Bryce Christensen*

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