Des MacHale: Comic Sections Plus: The Book of Mathematical Jokes, Humour, Wit and Wisdom, Logic Press, 2022. ISBN:978-1-4717-6147-8, EUR19.99 , 266+viii pp.

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Prior to reaching the preface, it is written that "nothing in this book should be taken too seriously". It's a book filled with 'anecjokes' (anecdotes and jokes) about mathematics or mathematicians and includes limericks, riddles, endless wit, and even an exam at the end. This is an extension to the Des MacHale's earlier book, Comic Sections [1], now including an additional thirty years worth of witty mathematical material.

The preface sets the scene particularly well - MacHale's passion for this project has at its core his desire not only to humanise mathematics and mathematicians but to use this humorous content to aid in the study and understanding of mathematics. As in every good joke book, logic is spun on its head time and again; when paradoxically coupled with the ever-logical mathematics, wit shines through. To emphasise this, MacHale cleverly quotes Einstein: "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality".

The book is filled with many 'inside' jokes that non-mathematicians may (i) be puzzled by and (ii) regret letting this be known to a mathematician after this leads to a lecture about what Euler's number and imaginary numbers are (see: "Old MacDonald was not a great mathematician. He couldn't work out the value of $e^{i^{e^{i^0}}}$."). However, this is what made the book feel special; it felt like a place of community. It's the first joke book I've read where my academic education has been a blessing rather than a curse. As a maths book, it's as rare as a four-leaf clover - it may not quite satisfy uniqueness, but it certainly fits into the small subset of maths books that can be easily picked up by anyone in, or even on the cusp of, the field (although, MacHale jibes that some branches of mathematics are less susceptible to humour).

This book is an excellent aid for the classroom. MacHale explains the importance of humour in this setting and how best to use it, recommending it to be used as "dessert" or "seasoning". He reasons that a paradoxical proof that $2 = 1$ and the resulting discussion and analysis will provide elementary students with a greater understanding and interest than lengthy axioms or theorems. Such humour can not only be insightful but also be an excellent memory aid for students.

The book is split into twelve chapters, ranging from a dictionary of mathematical terms ("clearly" et al.) to riddles to humorous journal reviews that will be sure to hit at least one nerve. A "Questioner's Handbook" is included to help eliminate the uncomfortable silence accompanied by "any questions?" after a seminar that failed to resonate with the audience. "Mathematical Wit and Wisdom", a chapter devoted to what has previously been said about mathematics both by those within and outside the field, may be my favourite, containing a remarkable collection of insight into the many

attitudes towards mathematics. Chapter 11, "Those magnificent men on their Turing machines", sums up the tongue in cheek nature of the book, reminding us of the all too familiar funding struggles imposed by those without an understanding of what is truly essential in mathematics. The book ends with "The Final Examination", where you're reminded not to "attempt to write on both sides of the paper at the same time" and an extra credit question tells you to "persuade the first passer-by you meet to accompany you through life, using irony where necessary".

Ultimately, this is an excellent concept well-executed, reinforcing that humour can be found in every level of Mathematics. It is a brilliant compendium whether you're looking for a page-turner to dip into during a coffee break or looking to bring wit into the classroom in a way that remains thought-provoking.

References

[1] D. MacHale: *Comic Sections: The Book of Mathematical Jokes, Humour, Wit and Wisdom*, Boole Press, Dublin, 1993.

Róisín & Aoife Hill are a mother-daughter duo. Aoife pursued a BSc in Applied Mathematics from University of Galway in 2012, and intrigued by this, Róisín followed suit the following year. They both completed computational PhDs from University of Galway in 2022 in the fields of Applied Mathematics and Biomedical Engineering, respectively. Róisín is currently an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at University of Limerick while Aoife is working on a Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund project at University of Galway.

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