Moreover, all the cabinets containing the exhibits are laid out in a way that extends these curves to the rest of the room indeed even the T-shirts available in the gift-shop carry a design reminiscent of it. This produces a design in which several spaces in the exhibition are left empty to accommodate this awkward curvature (they are only displaying around a quarter of the objects its predecessor did). This also makes for a rather confusing lay-out: it is easy to find yourself walking along the displays only to find you've accidentally wondered into one of the other sections by mistake and very-likely over-looking some of the displays in the process. Combined with the gallery being accessible from two different ends and the gallery over-all can be rather difficult to follow. The display around the plane itself is somewhat over-bearing with several of the curved pieces around it so low that several visitors feel the need to duck under them just to navigate the display.

As a consequence of the galleries emphasis on mathematics' role in society there is not a single equation in sight and even many of the more esoteric features of the old display – the brightly coloured polyhedra, the elaborate glass Klein bottles and the vast number of slide rules – are essentially all gone making for a much-more surface-scratching display. (One is tempted to make comparisons with the National Museum of Mathematics in New York that this reviewer visited a couple of years ago with hands-on machines for demonstrating how basic probability works, devices showing how equations can be translated into beautiful curves and logic-problems galore – a much more hands-on experience!) Given that elsewhere in the museum the opening pages of both Shannon's *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* and Turing's *On Computable Numbers* are proudly exhibited, this lack of substance is a little frustrating to the expert. Items that are on display include 'Guinevere', one of the National Lottery's original random-number generators; The LSE's famous 'Moniac' economic model; an impressive cabinet of early 19th century weights and measures for keeping track of trading standards and an elaborate 1920s calculating device designed for performing computations as specialised as working with reinforced concrete.

This exhibition was a lost opportunity. The exhibitors avoided any real maths because of the widespread view that mathematics is off-putting to most people. It is bit like having an art gallery without modern art as this is not always understood. It would have been nice to have topics such as fractals and tessellations or four dimensions. Even bring back the Platonic solids and the Klein bottle! The audience could have been challenged.

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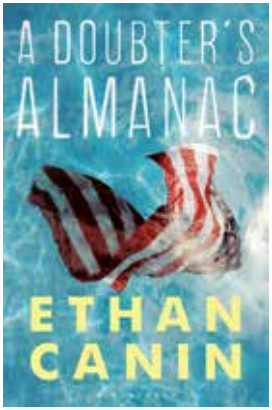
A DOUBTER'S ALMANAC

by Ethan Canin, Bloomsbury Publishing,
hb 2016, £18.99, ISBN 978-1408879641, pb 2017, £9.99, ISBN 978-1408879566.

This is a novel about Milo Andret, an imaginary pure mathematician who in the story wins a Fields Medal. The first part is from Milo's point of view; the second is from his son's.

The first part of the story contains some pacey and interesting sections, which can be absolutely gripping. I particularly liked the sections where Milo is a PhD student. The author does well to give a feel of the life of a researcher, explaining how Milo finds a problem, understands its current state, and forms his plans of attack. We care for Milo as these attacks fail. The mathematics plays a pivotal role in this first part and is mostly well researched.

After this, however, the mathematics appears to be filler rather than integral to the story. Much of the book then dwells on the characters wallowing in self-pity, mostly through internal monologues. These sections felt particularly slow due to my lack of empathy for the characters, and they are made more frustrating by the issues not being discussed, let alone resolved.



The author has made Milo cold and uncaring, and therefore awkward and unlikable. Although initially offset by his genius, it eventually feels tedious and unnecessary. This is a shame, and need not have been the case: at times Milo is a witty character. When put in the same department as physicists, he commented that "the two fields [pure mathematics and physics] were like cricket and baseball: alike only to those who knew the rules of neither".

On the whole the novel is difficult to read: the characters are strange and self-obsessed, making them hard to relate to, and the plot is slow and meandering. In the second part, I had the impression that the author had come to regret using a mathematician and wanted to write about something else. I felt I was reading a different book, and one that had departed from the promising themes and direction the author had started with.

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