



# **An Imaginary Tale**

By Paul J. Nahin

Paperback. Book Condition: New. Not Signed; Today complex numbers have such widespread practical use--from electrical engineering to aeronautics--that few people would expect the story behind their derivation to be filled with adventure and enigma. In An Imaginary Tale, Paul Nahin tells the 2000-yearold history of one of mathematics' most elusive numbers, the square root of minus one, also known as i. He recreates the baffling mathematical problems that conjured it up, and the colorful characters who tried to solve them. In 1878, when two brothers stole a mathematical papyrus from the ancient Egyptian burial site in the Valley of Kings, they led scholars to the earliest known occurrence of the square root of a negative number. The papyrus offered a specific numerical example of how to calculate the volume of a truncated square pyramid, which implied the need for i. In the first century, the mathematician-engineer Heron of Alexandria encountered I in a separate project, but fudged the arithmetic; medieval mathematicians stumbled upon the concept while grappling with the meaning of negative numbers, but dismissed their square roots as nonsense. By the time of Descartes, a theoretical use for these elusive square roots--now called imaginary numbers -- was suspected, but efforts...



#### Reviews

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