

3-1-1999

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Pat Mower

Washburn University

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Recommended Citation

Mower, Pat (1999) "Mathematical Fiction," *Humanistic Mathematics Network Journal*: Iss. 19, Article 16.

Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/hmnj/vol1/iss19/16>

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Mathematical Fiction

Pat Mower
Department of Mathematics and Statistics
Washburn University

The course History of Mathematics provides an excellent forum for students and educators to explore different approaches to understanding mathematics and the development of mathematics. During the fall of 1996, students enrolled in this course were asked to consider the aesthetic and literary qualities of mathematics and mathematics history through their creations of fiction. The assignment and three examples of their efforts follow.

ASSIGNMENT:

Write a piece of mathematical fiction (poem, short story, play, letter to a mathematician, etc.) that uses some of the themes or a theme or mathematician explored or that will be explored later in this class.

GRADING:

Content / accuracy / relevancy (40 points)

Creativity / effort (30 points)

Mechanics / clarity (30 points)

A Day in the Life of Diophantus (c. 251 A. D.)

Rebecca Pekrul

"This is Good Morning Empire, coming to you from our studio in downtown Rome on this very sad day in A. D. 251. Earlier this week we were all shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Emperor Decius during a battle near the city of Dobruja. We will hear more on this sad story later in our broadcast.

Also, coming up we will have a report from the Weather Desk where Seeum Clearly is watching the sky for us, and later we will go to our Man on the Street reporter, Gofar A'Field, for the latest of his reports on "Future Historical Figures," but first to our news desk where Telly True has the year's top stories."

"Thank you, Talkum Muchly. Our top story this year is the shocking news of Emperor Decius' violent death near Dobruja, where his troops have been valiantly repelling yet another invasion by those vicious Goths. These barbarians have been sacking and pillaging in the region again despite numerous pay-offs and a negotiated cease fire accord.

"Decius was in the area to encourage regional officers to take a stronger military stand against this type

of incursion on the Empire. There are rumors of disloyalty and intrigue flying in all levels of the military this morning.

"Senate investigators are on the scene but are not speaking to reporters because some of the rumors and allegations involve high ranking officers. The person whose name is most frequently mentioned by anonymous sources close to the investigation is, in fact, Gaius Vibius Trebonianus Gallus, who is the highest ranking military officer on the scene. In fact, he is one of the principal candidates for the next Emperor.

"Members of Gaius' personal staff have had no comment, except to confirm that they believe that Gaius will announce his decision on whether to accept the office of Emperor at an appropriate time in the not too distant future. Private sources close to the Citizen believe he will assume the office under the official name E. Valerius.

"Reaction from the Senate is as divided as that august body was during Decius' confirmation hearings just two years ago. Those who were supporters of E. Phillip I are as gleeful as they can be on such a dis-