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Título: Unfinished Game: Pascal Fermat And The Seventeenth Century Letter That Made The

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Starred Review. Prior to the development of statistics in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even rationalists were convinced that no human could speculate on the future. Devlin, NPR's "Math Guy" and the author of numerous books on the subject, shows us how that belief was transformed through the 1654 correspondence between mathematicians Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat. Devlin uses the critical letter from Pascal to Fermat in which he discusses "the problem of points"-that is, how to determine the probable outcome of a game of chance-as a framework for a history of probability theory and risk management, fields which now dominate our social, political and financial lives. Devlin interweaves the specific issues discussed in that famous letter with the work of other mathematicians, like the London businessman John Graunt, whose ingenious, groundbreaking work analyzing London parish death records helped predict a breakout of bubonic plague and essentially founded the science of epidemiology. Devlin also introduces the remarkable Bernoulli family, eight of whom were distinguished mathematicians, and the Reverend Thomas Bayes, whose formula has enabled the calculation of risk in a variety of fields.