Poincare's Legacies, Part II: pages from year two of a mathematical blog

Terence Tao

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There are many bits and pieces of folklore in mathematics that are passed down from advisor to student, or from collaborator to collaborator, but which are too fuzzy and non-rigorous to be discussed in the formal literature. Traditionally, it was a matter of luck and location as to who learned such folklore mathematics. But today, such bits and pieces can be communicated effectively and efficiently via the semiformal medium of research blogging. This book grew from such a blog. In 2007, Terry Tao began a mathematical blog to cover a variety of topics, ranging from his own research and other recent developments in mathematics, to lecture notes for his classes, to non-technical puzzles and expository articles. The articles from the first year of that blog have already been published by the AMS. The posts from 2008 are being published in two volumes. This book is Part II of the second-year posts, focusing on geometry, topology, and partial differential equations. The major part of the book consists of lecture notes from Tao's course on the Poincare conjecture and its recent spectacular solution by Perelman. The course incorporates a review of many of the basic concepts and results needed from Riemannian geometry and, to a lesser extent, from parabolic PDE. The aim is to cover in detail the high-level features of the argument, along with selected specific components of that argument, while sketching the remaining elements, with ample references to more complete treatments. The lectures are as self-contained as possible, focusing more on the ``big picture'' than on technical details. In addition to these lectures, a variety of other topics are discussed, including expository articles on topics such as gauge theory, the Kakeya needle problem, and the Black-Scholes equation. Some selected comments and feedback from blog readers have also been incorporated into the articles. The book is suitable for graduate students and research mathematicians interested in broad exposure to mathematical topics.

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