

# Preface

*Books are like imprisoned souls  
till someone takes them down from a shelf  
and frees them.*  
(Samuel Butler)

Dear Readers, a few of you may still remember that eleven years ago, in our previous book, we wrote: *Alas, we have to inform you that this is absolutely and definitively the second and last volume of the trilogy*. Its self-contradictory nature was only meant to be a joke, but imagine how puzzled we were some years later when we received the following somewhat remarkable letter, which appears to have been found tightly corked up in a jug floating on the Mare Tenebrarum.

“Do you know, my dear friends,” says the writer, “that not long ago, during my explorations in the wilderness of India, I found an old library. While wandering in its meanders, my attention was drawn to a small manuscript lying upon a high shelf. Its title was ‘Computational Linear and Commutative Algebra’, and you were its authors! With the utmost care I picked up the manuscript, and with the permission of the librarian, copied it. I append the copy for your perusal.”

The date of this letter, we confess, surprised us even more particularly than its contents; for it seemed to have been written in the year 2048, and the writer, a certain E.A.P., remained elusive and enigmatic. Slowly, but clearly, the truth began to shine in front of our eyes: we had to write this third volume. In the following years, we painstakingly transcribed the manuscript and unearthed its secrets. Innumerable struggles, errors, fallacies, and jokes later we are proud to present the result, and hope for your benevolent reception.

While carrying out this demanding job, we were supported and sustained by our wonderful families: our wives Bettina and Gabriella, our children and grandchildren. They cheered us up whenever we were getting too serious about our jokes, and they brought us down to earth whenever our mathematics became too light-headed. Further inspiration was provided by the great achievements of our favorite soccer teams, Bayern München and Juventus Turin.

Special thanks go to many people who helped us in various ways. John Abbott helped us to make the English used in the introductions *commendable* while we take the responsibility for the *derogatory* English in the remaining parts of the book. Anna Bigatti and Elisa Palezzato aided the creation of the CoCoA code for the examples, and Le Ngoc Long supported the proofreading. We are also grateful to them for useful discussions. Last but not least, it our pleasure to thank the Springer team which assisted us in a highly professional and efficient way.

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