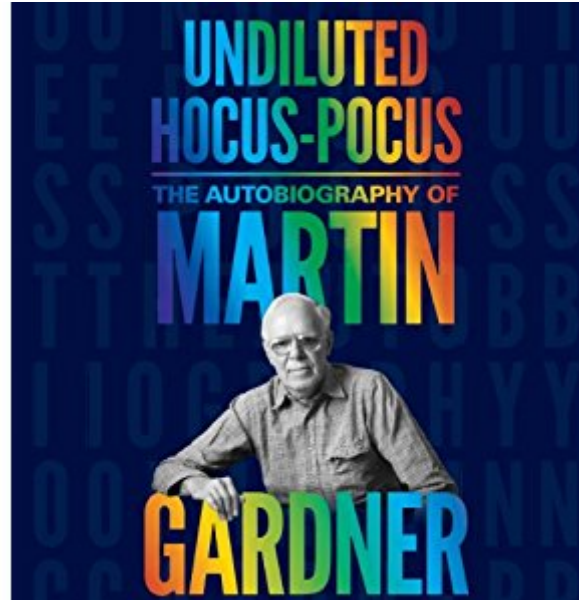


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Undiluted Hocus-Pocus: The Autobiography Of Martin Gardner



Synopsis

Martin Gardner wrote the Mathematical Games column for Scientific American for twenty-five years and published more than seventy books on topics as diverse as magic, philosophy, religion, pseudoscience, and Alice in Wonderland. His informal, recreational approach to mathematics delighted countless readers and inspired many to pursue careers in mathematics and the sciences. Gardner's illuminating autobiography is a disarmingly candid self-portrait of the man evolutionary theorist Stephen Jay Gould called our "single brightest beacon" for the defense of rationality and good science against mysticism and anti-intellectualism. Gardner takes readers from his childhood in Oklahoma to his college days at the University of Chicago, his service in the navy, and his varied and wide-ranging professional pursuits. Before becoming a columnist for Scientific American, he was a caseworker in Chicago during the Great Depression, a reporter for the Tulsa Tribune, an editor for Humpty Dumpty, and a short-story writer for Esquire, among other jobs. Gardner shares colorful anecdotes about the many fascinating people he met and mentored, and voices strong opinions on the subjects that matter to him most, from his love of mathematics to his uncompromising stance against pseudoscience. For Gardner, our mathematically structured universe is undiluted hocus-pocus - a marvelous enigma, in other words. Undiluted Hocus-PocusM offers a rare, intimate look at Gardner's life and work, and the experiences that shaped both.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This slender autobiography will be a chore to read, even for long-time admirers of Mr. Gardner. It is

very much an old man's book, meaning that it is incessantly rambling and digressive. Like many such books I have read, it tends to pile on detail where no reader would care, and ignore detail where most readers would most want it. For example, in Chicago and later in New York Gardner "sessioned" with most of the most famous magicians of the day, yet there is hardly a word in the book about them, other than a listing of their names. [The book is crammed with name-dropping.] And then Gardner goes into endless detail about two long-forgotten cranks, Hutchins and Adler, who were rattling about at the University of Chicago when Gardner was there as an undergraduate. Gardner also displays some exceedingly strange and unhealthy obsessions. For instance, he goes into great detail about his attempts to find out if numerous philosophers and thinkers had any religious beliefs, even when the individuals in question not only never mentioned any religious tendencies in public, but even never mentioned them to wives or children. There is also a lot of self-promotion (an annoying feature of about the last 10 years of Gardner's literary output). His novel THE FLIGHT OF PETER FROMM seems to be mentioned on just about every other page, and another late novel, VISITORS FROM OZ, gets mentioned on what seem to be at least a quarter of the book's pages. Gardner does explain how a man who in high school and college had little interest in math became, through his long-running SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN column, a gateway for millions of readers into the world of 20th Century math, and a close friend of many of the most famous 20th Century mathematicians.

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