



The Colossal Book of Mathematics: Classic Puzzles, Paradoxes, and Problems

By Martin Gardner

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No amateur or math authority can be without this ultimate compendium from America's best-loved mathematical expert.

Whether discussing hexaflexagons or number theory, Klein bottles or the essence of "nothing," Martin Gardner has single-handedly created the field of "recreational mathematics." *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* collects together Gardner's most popular pieces from his legendary "Mathematical Games" column, which ran in *Scientific American* for twenty-five years. Gardner's array of absorbing puzzles and mind-twisting paradoxes opens mathematics up to the world at large, inspiring people to see past numbers and formulas and experience the application of mathematical principles to the mysterious world around them. With articles on topics ranging from simple algebra to the twisting surfaces of Möbius strips, from an endless game of Bulgarian solitaire to the unreachable dream of time travel, this volume comprises a substantial and definitive monument to Gardner's influence on mathematics, science, and culture.

In its twelve sections, *The Colossal Book of Math* explores a wide range of areas, each startlingly illuminated by Gardner's incisive expertise. Beginning with seemingly simple topics, Gardner expertly guides us through complicated and wondrous worlds: by way of basic algebra we contemplate the mesmerizing, often hilarious, linguistic and numerical possibilities of palindromes; using simple geometry, he dissects the principles of symmetry upon which the renowned mathematical artist M. C. Escher constructs his unique, dizzying universe. Gardner, like few thinkers today, melds a rigorous scientific skepticism with a profound artistic and imaginative impulse. His stunning exploration of "The Church of the Fourth Dimension," for example, bridges the disparate worlds of religion and science by brilliantly imagining the spatial possibility of God's presence in the world as a fourth dimension, at once "everywhere and nowhere."

With boundless wisdom and his trademark wit, Gardner allows the reader to further engage challenging topics like probability and game theory which have plagued clever gamblers, and famous mathematicians, for centuries. Whether

debunking Pascal's wager with basic probability, making visual music with fractals, or uncoiling a "knotted doughnut" with introductory topology, Gardner continuously displays his fierce intelligence and gentle humor. His articles confront both the comfortingly mundane?"Generalized Ticktacktoe" and "Sprouts and Brussel Sprouts"?and the quakingly abstract?"Hexaflexagons," "Nothing," and "Everything." He navigates these staggeringly obscure topics with a deft intelligence and, with addendums and suggested reading lists, he informs these classic articles with new insight.

Admired by scientists and mathematicians, writers and readers alike, Gardner's vast knowledge and burning curiosity reveal themselves on every page. The culmination of a lifelong devotion to the wonders of mathematics, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* is the largest and most comprehensive math book ever assembled by Gardner and remains an indispensable volume for the amateur and expert alike.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This weighty collection, containing 50 of what the Annotated Alice annotator and popular science journalist considers his best *Scientific American* "Mathematical Games" columns, is sure to please the relatively small but intensely loyal coterie of Gardner fans. Arranged in 12 broad categories (arithmetic and algebra, plane geometry, topology, infinity, etc.), these pieces cover subjects that will delight recreational math buffs, such as Penrose tiles, hypercubes, Klein bottles and fractal music. In addition to an up-to-date bibliography, each section includes a new, sometimes lengthy addendum, which should be the main hook for those who already own the 15 volumes of Gardner's complete *Scientific American* columns. While books on math for general audiences by authors such as Amir Aczel have been in vogue of late, they've tended to focus on personalities and to avoid equations. Since this collection is filled with problems and expressions (illustrated with 320 line drawings) that require solving with pencil and paper, its appeal should be mainly limited to puzzle nuts, but Gardner's elegant style could draw in new aficionados. An enemy of charlatany and pretension, who appreciates the beauty and complexity of language as well as numbers (and still actively writing at age 86), Gardner remains a model of clear prose, understated wit and intellectual honesty.

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Review

"For more than half a century, Martin Gardner has been the single brightest beacon defending rationality and good science. . . . He is also one of the most brilliant men and gracious writers I have known." (Stephen Jay Gould)

About the Author

Martin Gardner (1914-2010) is regarded as one of the world's leading experts on Lewis Carroll and his work. The author of more than a hundred books, he wrote the "Mathematical Games" column for *Scientific American* for twenty-five years and has been hailed by Douglas Hofstadter as "one of the great intellects produced in this country in this century."

Users Review

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