



Martin Gardner: The Magic and Mystery of Numbers

Scientific American Editors

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How many people achieve a cult following because of their writing in mathematics? Only a handful, and Martin Gardner is among the most well known and well loved. Not only did he present a notoriously difficult subject in an engaging and accessible way, but in doing so, he attracted an incredibly broad readership. His correspondents ranged from academics like Roger Penrose and John Horton Conway to artists MC Escher and Salvador Dali to writer Isaac Asimov. His "Mathematical Games" column in *Scientific American* ran nearly every month for 26 years and was one of the most popular in the magazine's history. Gardner would have celebrated his 100th birthday this October, and to mark the occasion we've created this eBook collection, Martin Gardner: The Magic and Mystery of Numbers. In this anthology, we strove to create a new "slice" through his wealth of material. Here, we focus on all flavors of number, from common integers and negative numbers to figurate numbers and the exotic random number, Omega, which can be described but not computed.

Some of these columns are less well known than, say, his writings about flexagons, but they are no less fun. In true Gardner fashion, they leap from magic and games—as well as art, music, and literature—to flashes of deep mathematical insight. Lattice integers become a billiards challenge and surreal numbers spawn a host of related games. The "abracadabric number e," quoting French entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre, leads to spiders' webs and compounded interest. The binary Gray code inspires a poem and cracks the classic Chinese Rings puzzle. And binary numbers unlock mind-reading tricks and the Tower of Hanoi. Almost every column offers up problems for readers to solve and test their understanding—along with the answers for anyone easily frustrated. We hope that they will prove as inspirational to readers now as they did to earlier audiences.

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