

Some Early 15 Puzzle Book Reviews - March 2006

Martin Gardner, Author of 15 Classic Books on Mathematical Recreations

Jerry Slocum and Dic Sonneveld have written an amazing *tour de force*. It covers in fantastic detail the history of the greatest mechanical puzzle craze ever to sweep not only the United States but also England and Europe. The Rubik's Cube mania was modest in comparison. Did Sam Loyd, America's greatest puzzle maker, invent the notorious 14-15 sliding block puzzle? He claimed he did but the claim was a total lie. Loyd had nothing whatsoever to do with either the puzzle or its popularity.

Who was the actual inventor? The authors of this book will tell you. Their history is crammed with color photographs of the incredible variety of marketed versions of the unpatented puzzle, and with scores of cartoons and comic poems poking fun at the millions of people almost driven crazy by trying to solve the puzzle.

For mathematicians there are clear summaries of proofs of impossibility, clever pseudo-solutions, and ingenious variants using words and pictures instead of numbers. The research done by the two authors is awesome. It is a book hard to put down.

Will Shortz, Crossword Editor, *NY Times* & PuzzleMaster, National Public Radio

The 15 Puzzle is the granddaddy of all sliding-block puzzles. It was a worldwide sensation more than a century ago -- the first major novelty craze of the industrial age, the progenitor, in a way, of Pigs in Clover, crosswords, Rubik's Cube, sudoku, and all the other mental manias in the years since.

... this is a surprising, entertaining, and painstakingly researched book...

This is a book that everyone interested in puzzles will enjoy.

David Singmaster, Professor of Mathematics and Metagrobologist

An outstanding feature of *The 15 Puzzle* is the profusion of quotations from contemporary newspapers and photos of examples of the puzzles and their boxes and advertising. The whole story is a bit like an Indiana Jones film, but has the immense advantages of being true and coherent! This is a monumental work which resolves one of the great historical puzzles of puzzledom. Many congratulations to Slocum and Sonneveld!

Professor Don Knuth, Stanford U., Author of *The Art of Computer Programming*

This book is a visual delight in addition to setting incredible new standards in historical research about the world's fascinating puzzle subculture. Reading the book has made me substantially more optimistic about being able to track down sources of ideas that I once thought would be impossible to trace.

Jerry Guild, Amazon.com Book Reviewer and Puzzle Lover

This new book is simply delightful for any puzzle lover. They take one of the most common of all puzzles, the 15 Puzzle, and show that it has a background that arguably makes it the most popular puzzle craze of all time. The book is a great read, filled with everything about the puzzle from its creation and how it took the whole world by storm. Much of what the book covers is unknown to many who love puzzles and have seen this puzzle from the days we first became interested in them. Most of us had never imagined what an intriguing history it has had. They have run down all the legends and things said about the puzzle over the years and sorted out the fact from fiction; a major puzzle in itself.

I have been a puzzle fan for over 50 years and have over 500 puzzle books in my library; however I have no hesitation in saying that this one will become one of my favorites. It is sure to become a classic among puzzle books.

There is another excellent aspect to this book that is not at first obvious. Even if someone is not particularly interested in puzzles; they will find it does an excellent job of showing how a "craze" gets started and takes off like a firestorm. We have all seen it with things like Yo-Yos, Hula-Hoops, and the latest, Sudoku.

An excellent treat for yourself or for anyone who likes puzzles.