

Alice in Puzzle-Land

Raymond M. Smullyan

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A range of puzzles dealing with word play and logic, mathematics and philosophy, featuring Alice and the creatures of Wonderland.

Alice in Puzzle-Land Details


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Author : Raymond M. Smullyan

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Dave says

This was a fun read. The puzzles in this book required a different kind of problem solving than what I am used to.

Some of the puzzles can be solved by simply enumerating all of the possible answers, then checking if they are correct. Those ones are not very entertaining.

The fun ones are the puzzles where you can figure out a trick to lead you quickly to the answer. Of course, finding the trick isn't easy if you haven't seen it before, but fortunately you get several chances to try the trick, and over time you can pick it up.

The first time I read the book it was from the library. I picked up my own copy and reread it. This book, along with Smullyan's "To Mock a Mockingbird" taught me a few things about logic.

Swarner says

Raymond Smullyan is my Logician Dumbledore. I own and read every book of his I can get my hands on. Which is well over a dozen.

Alanna says

This book is pure magic. The puzzles get harder and harder as you go along until your scribbles in the margin get quite manic. This is a gem that will remain on my bookshelf for my children and grandchildren.

Faisal Shamas says

An absolutely awesome book on deductive logic

Riku Sayuj says

Raymond Smullyan is famed to be a philosopher, logician, mathematician, musician, magician, humorist, writer, and maker of marvelous puzzles, and all these aspects and interests come forth in various chapters of the book, which follows on in his unique tradition of parodying great works of popular fiction. As the author says, "This book, like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and *What Alice Found There*, is truly for readers of all ages. By this I do not mean that all of it is for every age, but for every age, some of it is for that age."

Some of his famous works include *The Chess Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes: Fifty Tantalizing Problems of Chess Detection*, where the indefatigable duo of Holmes and Watson is enlisted to solve strange conundrums and *The Chess Mysteries of the Arabian Knights* where Scheherazade is called upon to give the puzzles some good twists. The real beauty of the book is how similar the characters feel to the originals, not only in talk and behavior, but also in the word plays and their convoluted logic and paradoxes.

The puzzles do increase in difficulty as the book goes along, but the sheer delight at the inventiveness and playfulness of the author keeps us going with breaks only to think or to laugh. So even as the Duchess prompts Alice with “As to *confusing* puzzles, these are nothing compared to some I *could* tell you if I chose!”, we are far from Alice’s feigned indifference as she says, “Oh, you needn't choose!” as politely as she could.

Vasily Sabirov says

Good mix of canonic math olympiad tasks. Characters who are familiar from the original book are better explained by their logical way here.

Morris Nelms says

Everything Smullyan writes is worth reading. He's just interesting. I get the feeling he'd be delightful company.

Margie says

This is a fun book of math, logic, and philosophical puzzles. The joy for me came from Smullyan's ability to channel Lewis Carroll. He used the characters, humor, and story lines from *Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* to great effect.

This is not, however, a math, logic, nor philosophy book. The answers are given in the back, along with a brief explanation of how the answer was reached. It doesn't explain the math/logic etc. I would have liked to have had more of an explanation of how to set up the problem-solving. Because I'm that kind of a nerd who doesn't understand higher math.

Maximilian says

Pretty sure the way the author came up with many of these "puzzles" is by taking some pure logic statements (I don't know logic): $A \wedge B \supset C + A$. Then scrambling these statements using logic rules: $ABAB \& CA^{\wedge} \supset Q$. Then translating this into a story with Alice in Wonderland names. It is honestly uninspired and the resulting puzzles are inelegant and just painful to think about. There is just no respect to the "non-mathematical" story part of these logic scenarios: why should every member of a hearts club love every woman not in the hearts club? why does Humpty Dumpty sneakily change the established definition of "liar" that has been used half the book? Because it served the weird, twisted mathematical bowl of spaghetti that is the backbone of the

book.

Many problems require "brute-force" solutions wherein you must check every possible case and make tables out of said cases. While this may be a useful homework exercise for a logic class, it's not elegant like actually fun riddles are. And I'm certainly not going to waste my time solving these problems just because I read them in a fanfic about a book inside a book about an insane drug land. The mystery of the "tarts," surrree.

At least the character and style well-replicates its inspiration. It may even be worth a read just because of that. This is in the spirit of the originals, of course. And this is as close to a sequel as you'll get. Wonderland is a dream world, when the brain is encased in darkness with nothing to do but play "logic" with itself and extrapolate on its knowledge, so it makes sense that the next book in the series would be like it is, another logic book.

Other than that, my reason for reading (which is certainly not for these "puzzles") is the dual purpose of the narrative: story and riddle. This is relevant to my attempts at such metafiction where the narrative is at once both story and an outline of game mechanics. I have a talent for this and have done in the past a dry yet humorous news article, and a story that doubled as an app to an exclusive community. The book does a mediocre job at this at some points. One whole chapter the queens randomly decide to give Alice an exam, and in another the king recites a whole book about logic puzzles he once read. Most of the book is just Wonderland characters unabashedly telling each other logic puzzles, unfortunately.

My favorite chapters were the few ones without the puzzles, of course, and with just narrative. Toward the end, there are some of these chapters that explore some very strange, complex logical curiosities in the same spirit as "Godel, Escher, Bach" (another strong follower of Carroll!), however with significantly less clarity (not as well explained) and also just plain absurd and purposeless. I will admit, though, the setup and structure of the ending puzzle, which was about Alice dreaming about herself, was pretty cool.

I would only recommend this book to Carroll fans or mental masochists.

Maurizio Codogno says

La Dover ha da poco ristampato, come sua abitudine a prezzo abbordabile, uno dei tanti libri di Raymond Smullyan, matematico noto per essere uno dei principali esponenti della corrente "esperti di problemi di logica". In questa sua opera, come dice il nome stesso, Smullyan si ispira ai libri di Lewis Carroll con protagonista Alice: i problemi hanno pertanto come personaggi il Cappellaio Matto, la Lepre Marzolina, lo Jabberwocky, il Cavaliere Bianco, Humpty Dumpty e via scorrendo. Smullyan è delizioso e molto carrolliano nel testo: ma lo dice anche nel sottotitolo, "una storia carrolliana per bambini fino a ottant'anni". Insomma è un piacere leggerlo anche senza darsi la pena di risolvere i problemi: questo va benone per uno come me che dopo un po' si ingarbuglia nelle definizioni. Per esempio, la "logica attraverso lo specchio", con la differenza tra quello che si crede esser vero e quello che è vero, dopo un po' fa venire il mal di testa.. Tanto per cambiare, ci sono anche un paio di capitoli di "problemi per cui non serve l'algebra", semplici problemi aritmetici che possono per l'appunto essere risolti con un po' di attenzione e di conti ma senza dover scrivere un sistema di equazioni. Lettura insomma piacevole.

Charles says

He is "simply the best" is the phrase that most accurately describes the ability of Raymond Smullyan to create puzzles in logic. Written at a lower level than some of his other books, no background in formal logic is necessary to understand and solve all of the problems in this collection.

While the novice will find the problems understandable, even the veteran will experience new levels of logic consciousness as they twist their way through to the solutions. As the name implies, all of the problems in some way involve characters created by Lewis Carroll, and solutions to all are given at the end of the book. If you wish to have your intellectual muscles worked and smile while it is done, then this book is for you.

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James Swenson says

This is a nice collection of logical brain-teasers, by a famous and well-respected logician. The Alice in Wonderland hook unifies the book nicely, making it much more readable than a typical puzzle book.

I can't rate it more highly because, by the middle of the book, all the puzzles begin to seem the same, and one generally knows they can be solved simply by enumerating cases. Alice in Puzzle-Land is a nice resource for someone who's teaching a course in logic, but for people trying to entertain themselves with puzzles, I'd recommend dipping into this one for a while, then switching to something by Martin Gardner.
