

MARTIN GARDNER

There were many reasons to be thrilled when I landed a job at *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. The first and most obvious was the chance to work along side Isaac Asimov—a man I'd admired since my childhood. A second, very important reason that I was doing my little happy dance, was that I would also get the chance to work with another childhood idol—Martin Gardner.

I'd first fallen down the rabbit hole and into Martin Gardner's wonderful work with *The Annotated Alice*. In middle school and high school, I read and reread his notes about Alice, both in Wonderland and through the looking glass, and I've continued to dip into that book in all its various editions ever since. As a teenager, I avidly turned to Gardner's Mathematical Games column in *Scientific American* as soon as the magazine arrived in our mailbox. I'm sure it was an early exposure to his work in *SA* that led to my own life-long love of logic and math games. On some level, these essays may even have contributed to my decision to pursue a graduate degree in philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis. In one of life's circuitous routes, it was a fellow grad student who introduced me to Gardner's famous pseudoscience debunking *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*. Once I got to know Martin, I subscribed to the *Skeptical Enquirer*, both because I found it an intriguing journal and because I wanted to keep up with his Notes of a Fringe Watcher column.

"The Doctor's Dilemma" appeared in the inaugural issue of *Asimov's*. It was introduced briefly as "the first in a series of SF puzzles that Mr. Gardner has promised us." The series of puzzles took the form of short science fiction stories and lasted for more than nine years and one hundred and eleven columns. I was lucky enough to work on nearly half of

them and I edited a little sixty-four page booklet of his puzzles that was used as a premium by our circulation department. The columns took us "Around the Solar System," escorted us along "The Road to Mandalay," and introduced us to "The Jinn from Hyperspace." They included correspondence with Paul Dirac and explored errors in William Goldman's *Lord of the Flies*. The columns could be challenging to run because they were often accompanied by complex images and because we had to find space at the bottom of several stories for all the solutions. They were a lot of fun, though, and I enjoyed working closely with Martin and shepherding the puzzles through the production process. I was very disappointed when he called one spring day to let me know that he intended to retire from his duties as our columnist once "Thang the Planet Eater" appeared in our November 1986 issue.

It was a very active retirement that saw the publication of at least thirty-five books. One of the last, *The Jinn from Hyperspace: And Other Scribblings—both Serious and Whimsical* (2007), showed that the little puzzle pieces in *Asimov's* were not lying fallow.

Martin continued to write essays and books right up until his death last May at the age of ninety-five. His passing occurred just a month after the loss of *Asimov's* first editor, George H. Scithers. Both men deserve thanks for the magazine's firm foundation.

I decided that a good way to memorialize Martin was to reprint one of his puzzles from the pages of *Asimov's*. Now you have the chance to turn time back to July 1980 and see how ably you can resolve the puzzles presented in "The Backward Bannana." ○