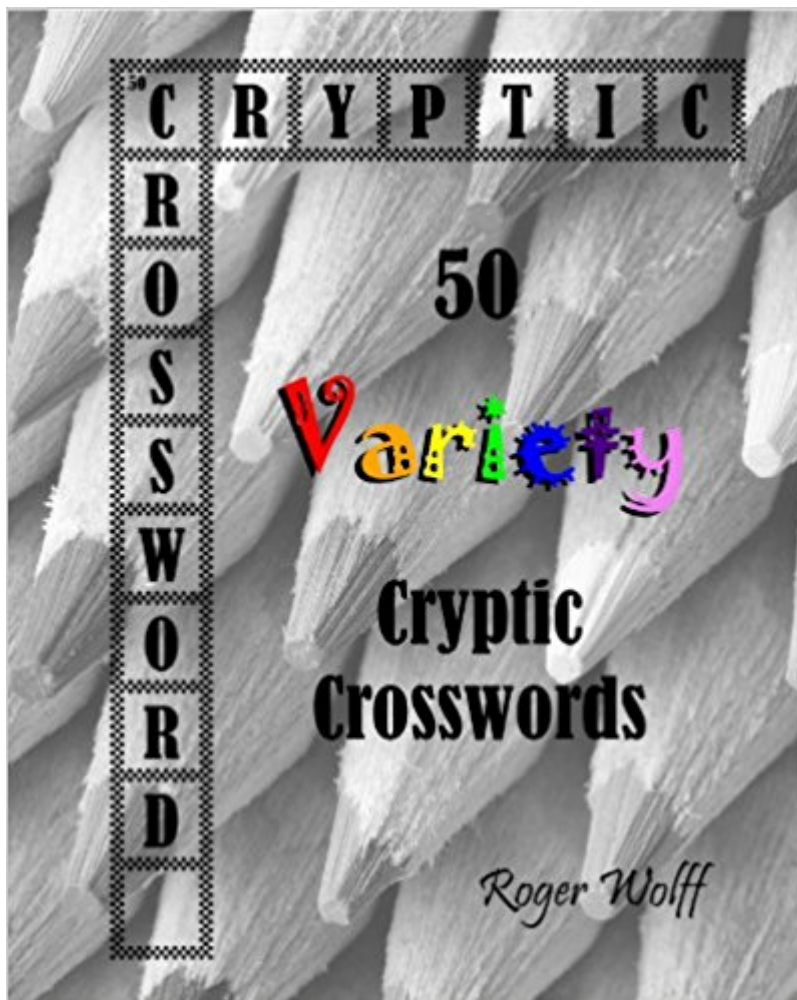




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50 Variety Cryptic Crosswords



Synopsis

The title just about says it all. This book is a compilation of 50 (American style) variety cryptic crosswords. A small handful have previously been published (in GAMES, and GAMES World of Puzzles magazines, and The Enigma, the newsletter of the National Puzzler's League). The rest are a compilation of never-seen-before puzzles sure to provide hours (and hours) of brain-racking entertainment.

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Customer Reviews

The title just about says it all. This book is a compilation of 50 (American style) variety cryptic crosswords. A small handful have previously been published (in GAMES, and GAMES World of Puzzles magazines, and The Enigma, the newsletter of the National Puzzler's League). The rest are a compilation of never-seen-before puzzles sure to provide hours (and hours) of brain-racking entertainment.

I am perhaps tempted to be overly generous in handing out the stars to variety cryptic collections because such collections are a rare commodity and I'm grateful whenever I learn that a new one has been published. But this collection by Wolff earns its 5 stars hands down. This is not to say that it's perfect. The page layout is rather amateurish, and there could have been more thorough editing. (Who is President "Hays"?) But these flaws are (much) more than made up for by the amazing creativity of the author. Frequently, he weaves not just one but multiple variety "gimmicks" into a puzzle. These don't necessarily make the puzzle harder to solve, but they do leave the solver marveling at Wolff's artistry. I can't imagine that there is a fan of variety cryptics who wouldn't be happy to acquire this item. UPDATE: "Sixteen" should be "Twenty-five" in the instructions for the

puzzle on page 26. (Maxwell Smart: "Missed it by that much.") Did I mention that Wolff could have used an editor? UPDATE 2: In the puzzle on page 48, 25 Across makes a lot more sense to me if "exit" is replaced by "enter", and in 30 Across "siestas" needs to be "siesta", I think.

I remember a joke I heard years ago: What's grey, has four legs, is filled with concrete, and howls at the moon? The answer is: A Wolf. What about the concrete, you ask? I just threw that in to make it hard. I share this for a reason. I ordered this book with great anticipation. I've worked through several cryptic crossword books, and have come to really enjoy them. So, I opened to the first puzzle, and here are the instructions: "This diagramless puzzle has standard crossword (180 degree rotational) symmetry. To help you out, all Qs have been entered into the grid. If you find yourself shouting '17 Across,' you should at least be thankful that you have this 25 Down to help." Second puzzle: "Fourteen answers need to be modified before being entered into the grid. If you can't figure out how to make the modifications and are 19 Across, then perhaps you should try it." And so the puzzles continue. Each one has one or more bags of concrete along with the cryptic clues. Thank God they aren't all diagramless (my least favorite puzzle type), but none are just what I had come to expect as a "Cryptic Crossword" per se. I am not writing this to complain. Just wanted to warn folks that this book is a level or three above any cryptic crossword book I've previously purchased, and I wasn't expecting it. I'm taking it as an educational opportunity, but so far I am totally overmatched and it does take some of the fun out of the solving since I have to refer to the answers in the back early and often. If I manage to slog through the entire collection, I'll revisit the review and see if I still feel the same.

Having done cryptics for many years, not only have I gotten a bit tired of the same old stuff, I've also exhausted most of the well-regarded cryptic book options (Cox/Rathvon, Henry Hook, etc.). I bought this one partly at random and partly to explore the new-to-me world of variety cryptics. And oh what a joy it is! It's worth noting that there are no first-timer instructions included on how cryptic clues work. Furthermore, these are harder than the "industry standard" Cox/Rathvon cryptics you will find in the Mensa books of theirs, and there are lots of curve balls both in terms of grid construction and the clues themselves. Some puzzles involve two separate grids, some are diagramless, some answers have unknown lengths or require alteration prior to putting them into the grid, etc. So this is not suitable for cryptic-beginners (the puzzle books from Fraser Simpson are great for learning...lots of instructions and easy puzzles). The idea of having these extra layers of obfuscation will either make you excited or frightened. Or perhaps both. Back when I first started solving conventional

cryptics in Games magazine, I became obsessed due to the amount of satisfaction I got in solving just a single clue. I have since done so many hundreds of cryptic puzzles that I no longer get the same pleasure anymore, but this book brings back that feeling somewhat. So if regular cryptics don't hold the same difficulty or excitement that they once did for you, this is a mandatory purchase. Can't wait until Roger's next book.

As one other reviewer noted, this book is an editor away from perfection. Roger Wolff is incredibly creative, both in clue writing and puzzle creation. The same "AHH!" you get from finally figuring out a tricky entry is multiplied tenfold when discovering the puzzles' themes. Some of these are as good as any cryptics I've solved (and yes, that does include Cox and Rathvon). Variety cryptics are far and away my favorite type of puzzle...and they are hard to find. Here's hoping that Wolff catches on with a good editor/publisher, because the single drawback to the book is the scattered mistakes. I'll buy anything the man puts out, but with a little help I'd buy even more as gifts.

My wife and I have been enjoying variety cryptics for many years, and have mined every source we can find in search of more. Having exhausted the entire archive of The Atlantic (Emily Cox & Henry Rathvon), Harper's (Richard Maltby, Jr. (thirty-seven years of monthly puzzles!)), many years of the National Puzzler's League's 'Enigma' publication, as well as any others we could get our hands on, we were thrilled to find this book. I will say without hesitation that these puzzles are easily the equal of the best puzzles we've done. Rarely do we complete a puzzle without expressing our admiration for the cleverness of the construction. These are seriously brilliant puzzles, folks. Put this in your shopping cart without reservation. Do not be put off by the complaints. The errata mentioned in other reviews are infrequent, and have never prevented us from solving a puzzle. Without looking at the answers, of course! Scott Cramer Lancaster, NH

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