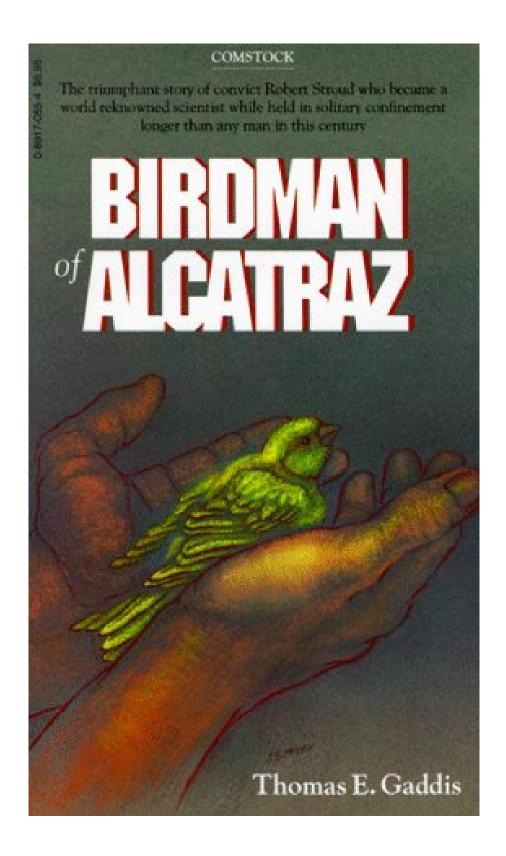


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- 270 pages

Most helpful customer reviews

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

An Incredible book of the strength of human endurance

By A Customer

Thomas E. Gaddis has produced an absolutely incredible work! The story of Robert Stroud's life in prison in solitary confinement, is thoroughly interesting, gripping and thought-provoking. The reader really gets to know Robert Stroud, and is left with a feeling of great respect and admiration for a man who, despite the absolute horrors of a life spent mostly in solitary confinement, was nevertheless able to develop his potential to become a world famous ornithologist and author.

Birdman of Alcatraz is a story of human endurance under monumental restrictions and difficulties. An immensely encouraging book, as it demonstrates the incredible potential in man to overcome enormous hardship and injustice, and the ability to rise above it all and make an highly respected contribution to the world.

28 of 35 people found the following review helpful.

The story of a man who was never defeated

By A Customer

Depicted in this book, not as the bizarre "Birdman" of legend, but as a real man with great courage, fortitude, and intelligence, Robert Stroud is seen as a man who, despite his 54 years of incarceration (43 of which were in isolation of one form or another) maintained a dignity rarely equaled. Even with the enormous obstacles in his way, Gaddisis was able to unveil many of the injustices shown to Stroud throughout his life in prison, the ways he struggled to keep his sanity, to go from a third-grade dropout to a world-renowned expert in the health and care of canaries to an old man who was not even allowed many of the sparse comforts afforded fellow inmates. Gaddis does not try to hide the violence in Stroud's past, yet he also makes it possible to view glimpses of the man that Stroud could have been. With the last words written only one year before Stroud's death, this book was able to lay open for public view not only one man's life but also many of the injustices and atrocities with which the history of the American prison system is riddled. I would highly recommend it to anyone.

4 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

An enticing biography... By Harkius ... but perhaps not an accurate one.

All biography is nothing but lies. Even a biography based entirely upon facts will have to suffer for the interpretations that lie between them and the motivations that are used to frame them. As such, those who call this book compelling or farcical have missed the point.

We will never know with real accuracy who Stroud was any more than we will who Jesus was. As a dead man who did not have the advantage of having his entire life transcribed by witnesses and whose thoughts were not captured for posterity, with the exception of his own writings which seem to portray a man who felt victimized and who was likely a bit of a hypochondriac, we have little to go on.

Moreover, the inclinations and purposes of Mr. Gaddis are also mysterious. Based on his other works, we can fairly, I think, assume that Mr. Gaddis was a proponent of change in the American penal system. It shouldn't surprise me overly if he had spent time within it himself, although I have no proof, of course.

It is automatically clear upon a careful reading that the book is not accurate (in case the disclaimer in the front was not enough). This is clear from the ever changing and growing list of people permitted to exchange letters with him, despite the claim that he was only permitted to exchange letters with three people (it actually became entertaining to watch the list grow throughout the novel, sometimes approaching hundreds).

One interesting thing about the book, however, can be noted on pg. 207 of the 1989 Comstock edition, wherein it cites the forces that caused convicts to slowly, inexorably go mad. Insightfully, it mentions that these same forces were operating on the guards. This, if present in the original edition, significantly predated the Stanford Prison Experiment and the Lucifer Effect (both by Philip Zimbardo) which elucidated the role of these forces on the guards.

Despite these problems, it was an interesting book. To those who would like a clearly biased book describing one inmate's time in the prison system in the early 20th century, pick this up. Otherwise, feel free to read something else.

Harkius

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