



The Doubter's Companion: A Dictionary of Aggressive Common Sense

John Ralston Saul

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Doubter's Companion: A Dictionary of Aggressive Common Sense Book Description John Ralston Saul has contributed to Doubter's Companion: A Dictionary of Aggressive Common Sense as an author. Saul holds a Ph.D. from King's College (London).

The Doubter's Companion: A Dictionary of Aggressive Common Sense Details

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TheIron Paw says

A thoroughly challenging book. It not only challenged my thinking and beliefs, but it also challenged my reading ability: Ralston Saul is not an easy read. He tends to use words and phrases in unconventional ways and assumes we understand them. In addition, I found it difficult to tell when he was being facetious, satirical, silly, or playing it seriously. However, there is wonderful material for thought in this book, providing different ways to view many things we accept or take for granted. While this book is somewhat old, it is not out of date - he clearly understands the phenomenon of the current U.S. president.

Though I read the book from front to back, I would recommend reading it by following Ralston Saul's "see also" suggestions. This might assist in understanding the main themes he is putting forward.

Michael says

A great compendium of non-normative definitions of key words used often.

Not exactly a book to read from the first page to the last, but an enjoyable index.

Some of the definitions are redundant and vague, but all in all The Doubter's Companion is a great supplement to the most common buzz words.

David Rankin says

Fun book I go back to from time to time.

Vince says

Saul's text follows the form of a brief encyclopedia, offering critical commentary and unique takes on familiar terms. Not really meant to be read cover to cover, I picked at a few entries and either appreciated his angle or found the tone condescending. I've dabbled lightly in Saul's philosophy and intend to do so again, at some point.

Did not finish.

Jake M. says

Saul's unique work is a combination of philosophy and satire presented in dictionary form. The dictionary is

far from comprehensive, and Saul seems to choose his words as they relate to the four central themes of doubt, balance, language and corporatism. His criticism of academic and specialist language/dialects is especially interesting. Written language in critical theory is nearly suffocating, impenetrable and self-referential among those in a specific field, thus isolating self-christianed experts to communication amongst themselves and irrelevant to everyday life. It is not without irony that Saul's writing is occasionally stilted, requiring more effort than necessary on the part of the reader. The Doubter's Companion is worth a read-through or quick browse for those thinking of conquering Saul's other, more comprehensive titles.

Lenna says

Liberate yourself from the tyranny of language!

Not that reading this book will do that but it is great fun. A dictionary of modern political and social terms without the usual bullshit.... It's a different set of bullshit.

Rob says

This is a damned interesting and amusing book.

It's a dictionary in the same vein as Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary*. It ruminates on the meaning of words and phrases rather than sets the meaning in stone. The author makes it very clear that this is his opinion and not **The Truth**.

Here's an example:

ERROR Error is the result of a particular human strength: the ability to act in an unprogrammed, that is illogical, that is conscious, manner, by thinking and communicating unconventional thoughts. To err is a sign of intelligence.

As you can see, this goes against common thought which regards error as equivalent to stupidity or even evil.

The book slashes at what we believe, questions how in tune with the world we are. Every ideology whether capitalism, Marxism or neo-conservatism is given a brass knuckle's worth of thought. Indeed, thanks to this book and others of Mr. Saul's I discovered how little difference there is between them.

If you want your mind jarred, if you want a fresh perspective, if you just want a good laugh, I highly recommend this book.

Maggiemuggins says

Considered "Canada's leading public intellectual", declared a 'prophet' by TIME magazine, Saul was also included in the Utne Reader's 1995 cover story list of "100 Visionaries Who Could Change Your Life," during the interview for which he is reported as saying: "You will be digital, privatized, and obedient to the modern economy . . . or you will be nothing."

So why, given the publication date of this book, are we still, more than twenty years later, in the same mess against which he railed? And why don't we see him popping up with the same kind of frequency in support of causes as some other well-known Canadians? I think I'd be prepared to follow wherever Saul might lead while I tend to stay well away from causes espoused by various other so-called, usually self-styled "popular leaders".

I have long despaired of the idiotic antics of the human race; I can't begin to image Saul's despair. Preaching to the converted supports the converted while they keep soldiering on; it doesn't, sad to say, really change anything.

Zarina says

This is definitely a fun read, but one that'll resonate with a very small audience. At one point, Saul places emphasis on the education of the general populace over the elites and admonishes novelists who make their writing inaccessible. To get anything out of *The Doubter's Companion*, though, one would need more than a basic understanding of modern ideologies and their founding philosophers (Hobbes, Machiavelli, Burke, Descartes, and the like). It's not for the general populace either.

I don't like that the population on behalf of which Saul advocates in his book is almost entirely disjoint from the intended audience of the same book. It makes me think that, while he did his job well, he did not do it correctly. I really enjoyed it for its humour and entertaining wit, but this'll probably be one of those lonely books that collect dust on my shelf because I feel that I can't lend it or talk about it with anyone who'd enjoy it. Lonely books are the worst.

Colin says

In case the subtitle left any doubt, this book is delivered in a dictionary format. It's not the kind of book I read cover-to-cover, but one I dip into from time-to-time, just to read a few entries. The definitions are simultaneously acts of political and social protest, and acts of radical clarity (in a time when mere clarity is far too radical). Hilarious at times, cutting at other times, and always sharp, this book defines "strong authorial point-of-view."

Nelson says

Este libro es el Diccionario del Diablo y su autor el Ambrocio Bierce de este siglo. Imposible no reírte y preocuparte al mismo tiempo.

Mark Desrosiers says

Imagine Keats's negative capability being put to practical political and economic use. Too bad we Americans don't read Canadian writers, because if this book were as omnipresent as *Freakonomics* hereabouts, the world would be an entirely different place. Essential.

Mark says

Not bad by any means, but Saul definitely had more fun writing this smartass dictionary than I did reading it. A lot of the ideas here are just retreads of what he already went over, to great effect, in Voltaire's Bastards, and as much as that book demands some organized manner of picking through its many ideas and anecdotes, it'd be better served through adding an index to that one than the spinoff we've got here.

The definition for Florida is hilarious.

Leftbanker says

A brilliant dictionary, *à la* Voltaire, by the most astute thinker on all things political, economic, and cultural that I have read in my lifetime. My favorite definition is how he calls the Big Mac the communion wafer of capitalism. Reading Saul can be very frustrating because he challenges so many truths that I once held...unchallengeable.

Nick says

My wife was concerned, when she bought it for me as a birthday present, that this would turn out to be some kind of Daily Mail-esque grumpy old men nonsense about how everyone except the author is some kind of namby pamby idiot.

In fact, this book is more of the opposite. The central theme of this book is balance and the importance of doubt, and the perils of not having any. Covers a wide range of subjects, from capitalism to dessert.
