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### Who Solved the Secretary Problem?

[Thomas S. Ferguson](#)

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**Abstract**

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#### Abstract

In Martin Gardner's Mathematical Games column in the February 1960 issue of Scientific American, there appeared a simple problem that has come to be known today as the Secretary Problem, or the Marriage Problem. It has since been taken up and developed by many eminent probabilists and statisticians and has

been extended and generalized in many different directions so that now one can say that it constitutes a "field" within mathematics-probability-optimization. The object of this article is partly historical (to give a fresh view of the origins of the problem, touching upon Cayley and Kepler), partly review of the field (listing the subfields of recent interest), partly serious (to answer the question posed in the title), and partly entertainment. The contents of this paper were first given as the Allen T. Craig lecture at the University of Iowa, 1988.

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