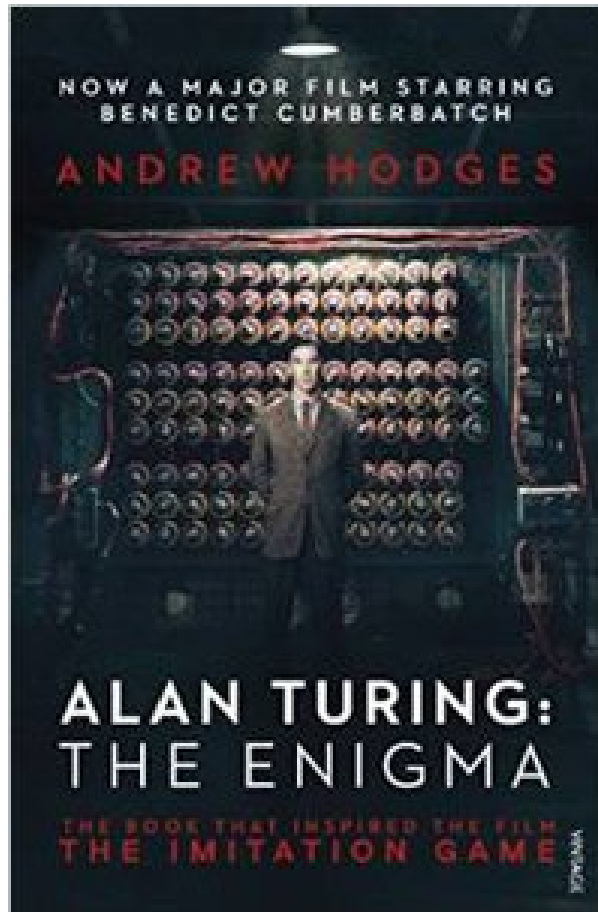
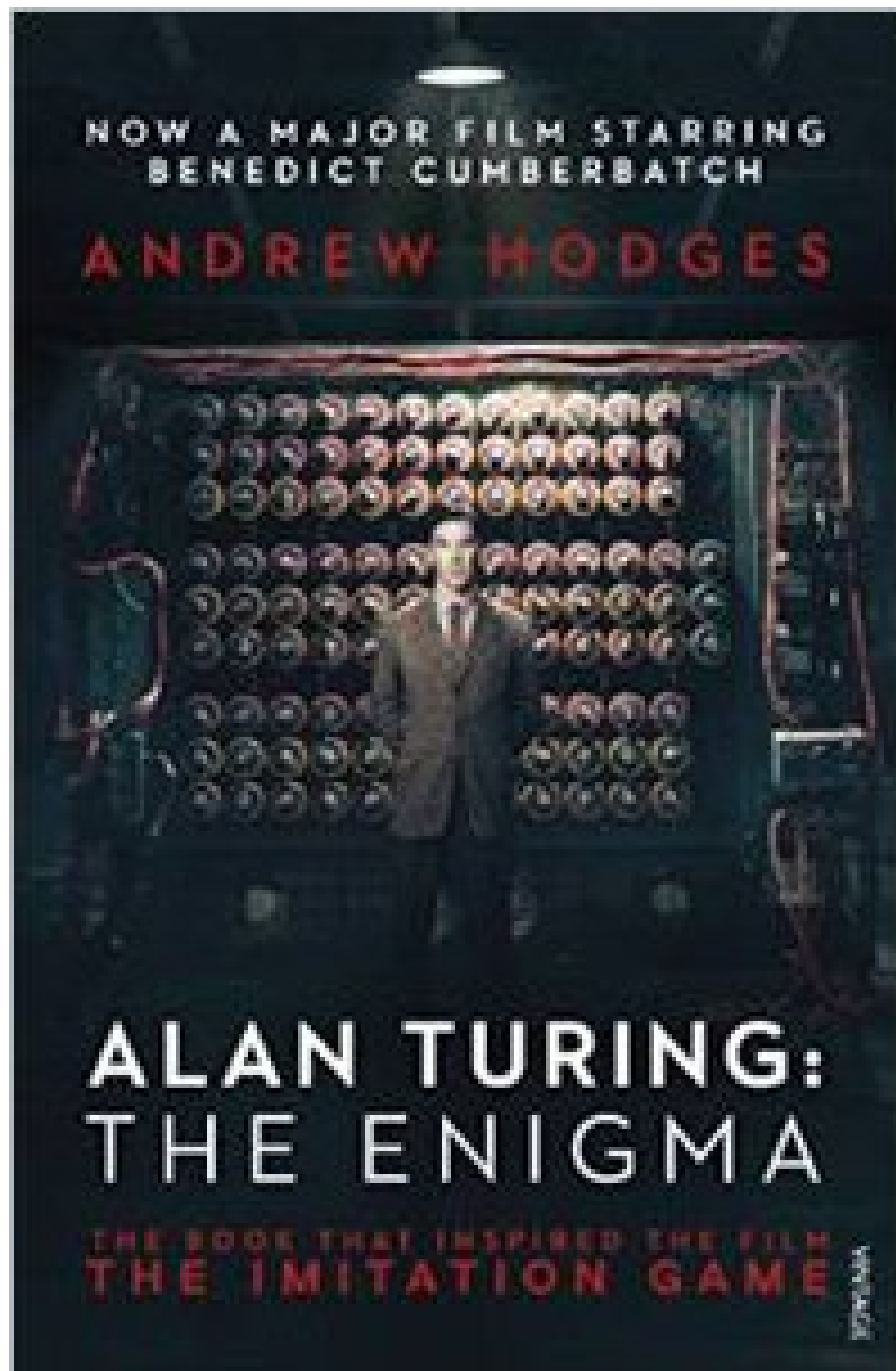


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A title that inspired the film *The Imitation Game*, which stars Benedict Cumberbatch and Keira Knightley, and which has received eight Oscar nominations, including: Best film; Best Actor in a Leading Role; Best Supporting Actress; Best Adapted Screenplay; and Alan Turing was the mathematician whose cipher-cracking transformed the Second World War.

- Sales Rank: #8911532 in Books
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- Binding: Textbook Binding

Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

An enjoyable historic read...

By Quella

Where does *Alan Turing: The Enigma* rank among all the audiobooks you've listened to so far?

A bit more difficult to listen to than a fiction book because of the material it discusses, however it was a good book and audiobook combination. Highly recommend it for people who are interested in historic events and computers or encryption.

Who was your favorite character and why?

The story is about Alan, so I would have to say he is the one I like the most in this book.

Which scene was my favorite?

Not any one scene, but being able to see his passion and drive to get to a solution, often it was a detriment to him in the end (lost sleep, non compliant with work role, etc.) or others around him.

Was there a moment in the book that particularly moved me?

Not one specific point of movement for me. Maybe the ending of the book and seeing how his life ended and that he did not receive the credit due his name until recent history.

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Still an Enigma, but thought-provoking

By Evelyn Uyemura

This is a re-release of a book that was first published in 1983 (and largely researched during the 10 years prior to that), so it first came out in a very different time than today--a time when World WarII secrets were still being somewhat protected, and when the details of a homosexual man's life were still not easy to explain to the average audience without giving offense. Also, it was written and published in Great Britain. As a result, there are many allusions and off-hand references that are opaque to an American living in 2015.

Although the author is a gay rights activist himself, as well as a mathematician, and wrote this book in part to try to see Alan Turing's life from a sympathetic point of view, some of his narration comes across as coy to the point of obscurity--he mentions Turing's trip to Sweden, but it is not till much later that it finally becomes

clear that he went there to pick up young men. It is never completely clear which of his friends were also lovers and which were just colleagues. And perhaps that was necessary when those men were still alive, or were only recently deceased, but if the book is going to be re-issued, it needed to be re-edited as well. The intro, which details places where changes should or could be made, was not an adequate substitute for a revised edition.

The explanations of code breaking is detailed, but perhaps necessarily obscure as well. I still have no idea of how Turing's insights were different than what the Polish codebreakers had already accomplished. One point that was a big issue in the movie, about how the Allies should use the information that they from their ability to read the Enigma code was never mentioned in the book, yet it is a crucial question--the movie has the military allowing a ship carrying one of the codebreakers's brothers go to its death, because otherwise the Germans would know that the Brits were able to read their messages, and would then change it. This is not in the book (fine, maybe it was fiction), but it's a key aspect of game theory--how do you use your hard-won information without tipping your hand? And if you can't use it, what's the point of having it?

It is a bit ironic that a book whose title implies that Alan Turing himself is the biggest enigma manages to leave him still an enigma in many ways, but that is the case.

I think the aspect of the book that I most grasped and that was the most thought-provoking was Turing's ideas about machine intelligence. Turing was not actually most interested in making machines that were intelligent; he was most interested in exploring intelligence in machine form in order to understand what human intelligence actually is. He posited an extreme statement: machines can (and will some day) do everything that human brains do. But his point was to show that there was no "ghost in the machine," no special non-material "spirit" or "will" or "intuition" or "insight" necessary to explain human intelligence.

Like most people, I resist this idea to some extent. Could machines (computers, that is) ever make judgments? At first, my answer is no. But then they made computers that play chess at a Grand Master level (in the 1980s!). Ok, but that seems like a sort of a stunt. Recently IBM's Watson beat Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter at Jeopardy. Still, it seems more like looking things up on Wikipedia really fast, rather than actually thinking. But then I read that Watson is actually being used to diagnose illnesses, and that computers are more accurate than physicians, less liable to be led astray by forgetting or overlooking or dismissing crucial details. Hmmm, In advance, I would have said that the ability to diagnose a disease was an example par excellence of the sort of human judgment that computers would never have. And if they can drive our cars, and avoid accidents better than human drivers? Who would have thought it? Apparently the answer is, Alan Turing would have!

One off-hand remark in the afterword is that the author wonders if some day, a computer will be able to write a book such as his. Unimaginable, I think. But my daughter reminds me that computers already compose news items (rather badly, but still.) And we discuss the possibility that a basic undergraduate research paper could be composed by a computer today, and I think the answer is Yes. I can imagine that one could teach a computer to write a paper that discusses Domestic Violence, pulling together statistics on its frequency, demographics, causes, effects on children, possible solutions, and so forth.

I am left still puzzled by Alan Turing, finding it hard to picture him as a man, but deeply impressed by his mind, by his foresight and his insight, and I think that perhaps in some ways, he is in fact as significant a figure as Darwin and Einstein. What a tragedy that he died so prematurely, whether his death was in fact suicide, or possibly murder, or even more unlikely, a weird accident. How fitting and how odd that he died by (apparently) eating a poisoned apple. If it were fiction, it would just be too neat.

19 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

A Frustrating read

By bravhat1234

Alan Turing: The Enigma by Andrew Hodges covers a fascinating and important subject in the life of Alan Turing, but I would not recommend it to a math layman like myself. Much of the book outlines the history of mathematical and scientific ideas of the first half of the 20th century, Alan's included of course, as well as describing the machines that he helped design and build. This makes for extremely rough reading, especially since the book is over 500 pages. I commend Hodges for the large amount of research that went into this book especially since Alan was so secretive.

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