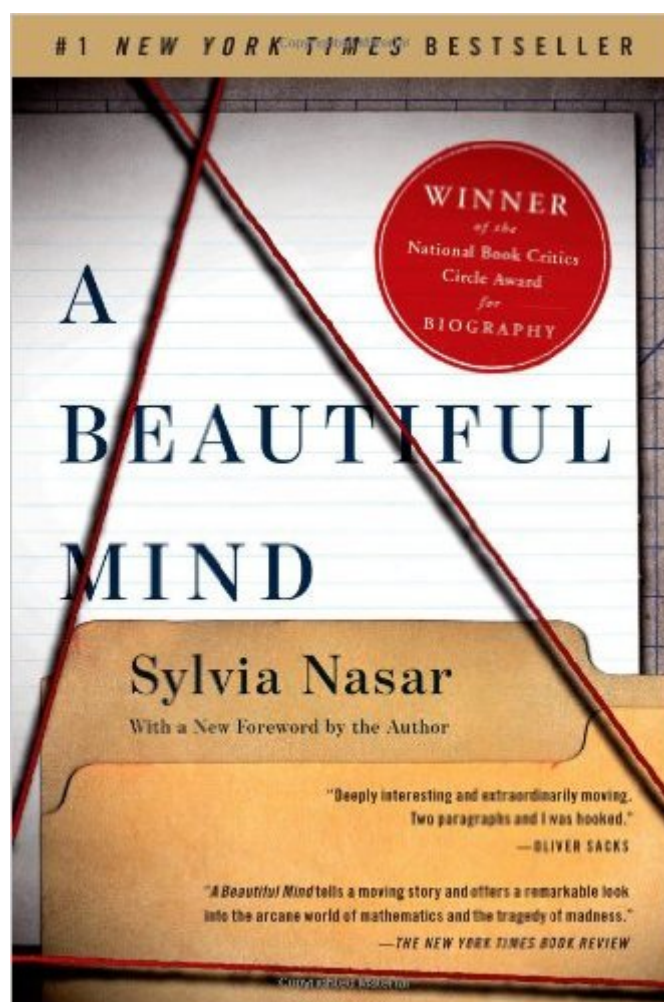


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A Beautiful Mind



Synopsis

In this powerful and dramatic biography Sylvia Nasar vividly recreates the life of a mathematical genius whose career was cut short by schizophrenia and who, after three decades of devastating mental illness, miraculously recovered and was honored with a Nobel Prize. "How could you, a mathematician, believe that extraterrestrials were sending you messages?" the visitor from Harvard asked the West Virginian with the movie-star looks and Olympian manner. "Because the ideas I had about supernatural beings came to me the same way my mathematical ideas did," came the answer. "So I took them seriously." Thus begins the true story of John Nash, the mathematical genius who was a legend by age thirty when he slipped into madness, and who "thanks to the selflessness of a beautiful woman and the loyalty of the mathematics community" emerged after decades of ghostlike existence to win a Nobel Prize for triggering the game theory revolution. The inspiration for an Academy Award-winning movie, Sylvia Nasar's now-classic biography is a drama about the mystery of the human mind, triumph over adversity, and the healing power of love.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you enjoyed the movie "A Beautiful Mind" you will love this book. It is far richer in detail, context, and let's us a bit deeper into why what Nash accomplished was so beautiful. If you find the movie a bit of a problem because it seems a bit too glossy for the facts, again, you will love this book. For me, the movie did a marvelous job of embodying the spirit of the book. To delve more deeply into

the facts of Nash's life and accomplishments and his illness would require a documentary or a mini-series. The movie is really a narrative poem about Nash. This book is about the people and their experiences. It is NOT a direct exposition of Nash's technical achievements. There are other books such as "The Essential John Nash" that provide that information. In this masterful book we find out more about his youth, his life at college, his work after he received his doctorate and his breakdown and illness as well as the nature and scope of his recovery. There is real sorrow and loss in the book, but there is also strength and tenacity that refuses to yield to hopelessness and despair. This is a book about the people and how they lived during the storms of his achievements and his illness. I am not qualified to discuss the quality of Nash's achievements, but from the admiration lavished on him by his peers and how they rallied round him it is clear that Nash was given immense gifts that he developed and used in ways that have benefited all of us even if we are unaware it. It seems that this is the nature of the gifts scientists and mathematicians give us. We are unaware of them until another person makes them part of other products, services, and policies that directly affect us.

John Forbes Nash, Jr. was a genius who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and was in and out of mental institutions for most of his life. Nasar's book, as she states so succinctly in her prologue, is Nash's story, "in three acts: genius, madness, reawakening." Naturally introverted, even at a young age, Nash was described as being "bookish and slightly odd." His mother had him reading by the time he was four and instead of coloring books, his father gave him science books to read. But despite his parents' efforts, the young Nash was prone to daydreaming in school, which led his teachers to describe him as an underachiever. A loner and the ultimate nerd, his best friends were books, his bedroom resembled a science lab, he was always the last to be chosen for baseball, and at a school dance, he danced with chairs rather than girls. Although his elementary school math teachers complained he couldn't do the work, his mother noticed he wasn't following the teachers' instructions because he had devised a simpler way of solving the problems. By high school, he was deciphering problems his chemistry teacher wrote on the blackboard, without using pencil or paper. In college, his math professors would call on Nash when they themselves ran into problems solving complex equations they were presenting to their classes. But together with his brilliance were eccentricities that became more evident as Nash aged. Those close to him characterized him as "disconnected" and "deeply unknowable." He had little use for textbooks and was known for solving difficult (and often previously unsolvable) problems using "no references but his own mind.

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