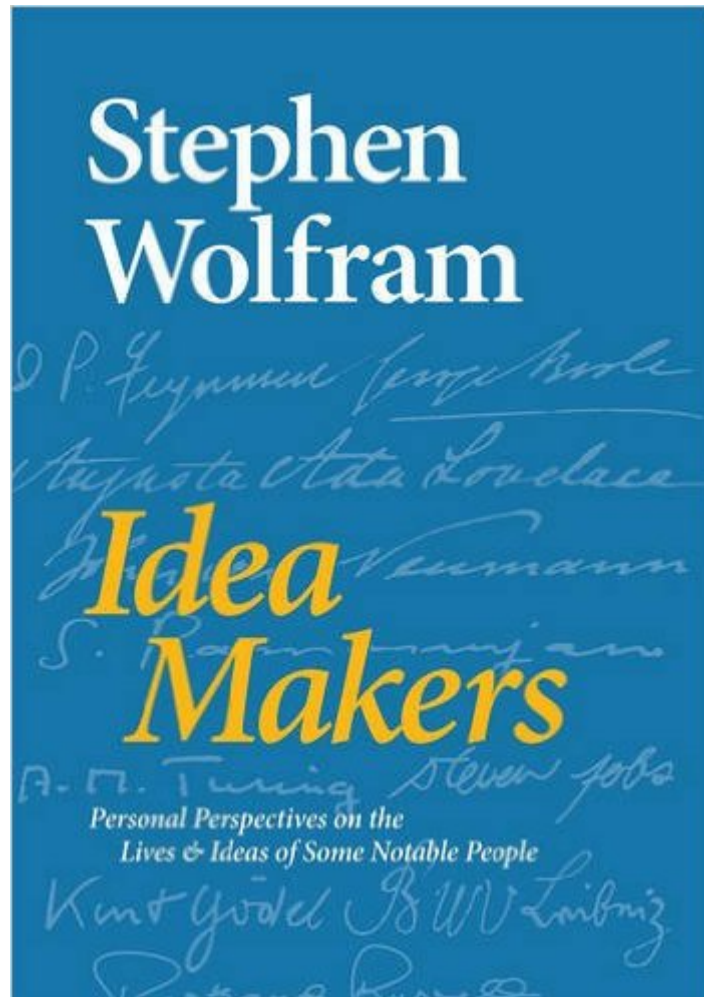


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Idea Makers: Personal Perspectives On The Lives & Ideas Of Some Notable People



Synopsis

This book of thoroughly engaging essays from one of today's most prodigious innovators provides a uniquely personal perspective on the lives and achievements of a selection of intriguing figures from the history of science and technology. Weaving together his immersive interest in people and history with insights gathered from his own experiences, Stephen Wolfram gives an ennobling look at some of the individuals whose ideas and creations have helped shape our world today. From his recollections about working with Richard Feynman to his insights about how Alan Turing's work has unleashed generations of innovation to the true role of Ada Lovelace in the history of computing, Wolfram takes the reader into the minds and lives of great thinkers and creators of the past few centuries and shows how great achievements can arise from dramatically different personalities and life trajectories. Contents: Preface Richard Feynman Kurt Gödel Alan Turing John von Neumann George Boole Ada Lovelace Gottfried Leibniz Benoit Mandelbrot Steve Jobs Marvin Minsky Russell Towle Bertrand Russell and Alfred Whitehead Richard Crandall Srinivasa Ramanujan Solomon Golomb

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Customer Reviews

The general public is usually supplied by books on mathematical scientists written by "science communicators" and other outside observers--the worst by far being the academic historians of science. Their books are like reviews of comparative squid ink recipes written by anorexics, or descriptions of the Loire Valley by visually impaired travel writers. They are well written, which masks the BS. The descriptions focus on "interesting" traits of the personalities; scientists are

discussed as if they were partaking of spectator sports. This fellow "was the best...", this fellow "was the first to...", "Einstein made a big blunder", etc. This book, "Idea Makers", is written from an insider. It is the real thing on several accounts. Primo, Wolfram deserves to be in the book as an "idea maker", in his own right. Secondo, Wolfram is the developer of a new way to do (useful) mathematics, an entirely new method, which allows us to tinker with mathematics, something that is an anathema to purists. Thus he depicts Ramanujan, not with the usual mathematical prism of the theorem crowds, but as someone who, starting with intuitions, does experiments till a mathematical identity feels right. As an eyewitness, I spent almost all my career in quant finance and probability toying with Mathematica (Stephen Wolfram's invention), and saw it accumulate special functions and tools. Mathematica allowed me to be a car mechanic who looked under the hood; such experience makes us look at the pompous theoretician as a cook would a nerdy chemist. The book is about this refreshing perspective: theorems were to Ramanujan a thing used by European mathematicians to convince other European mathematicians. Terso, Wolfram is fair.

Review for of: Wolfram, Stephen. Idea Makers "Idea Makers" is an uneven collection of essays by Stephen Wolfram about 15 men and 1 woman who have been involved, in various ways, with mathematics and calculatory techniques over the past four centuries. In Dr. Wolfram's order, the subjects are: Richard Feynman, Kurt Gödel, Alan Turing, John von Neumann, George Boole, Ada Lovelace, Gottfried Leibniz, Benoît Mandelbrot, Steve Jobs, Marvin Minsky, Russell Towle, Bertrand Russell and Alfred Whitehead (in one essay), Richard Crandall, Srinivasa Ramanujan, and Solomon Golomb. For me, the essays can be grouped into the following three categories: (a) mostly about the subject, but including comments on how the subject's work affected Wolfram's development of Mathematica and Wolfram|Alpha; (b) mostly about how Wolfram interacted with the subject's mathematical and/or computational work; and (c) mostly about how Wolfram interacted personally with the subject. Foremost in category (a) are the lengthy essays on Lovelace and Ramanujan. Both of these essays are for me the most detailed and instructive discussions that I have ever read about these two people's lives and works. Furthermore, the Lovelace essay contains much interesting and instructive information about Charles Babbage and the interactions between him and Lovelace. (I am somewhat surprised that Wolfram did not title this essay as, "Ada Lovelace and Charles Babbage".) Similarly, the Ramanujan essay contains many interesting comments on G. H. Hardy. Only slightly less instructive for me were the somewhat shorter essays on Leibniz and Golomb. In category (b) are the essays on Gödel, Turing, von Neumann, Boole, and Russell and Whitehead.

IDEA MAKERS is a fun read about many famous figures--many of whom were mathematicians. Some of these figures the author met and know personally, but many of them have been gone for years. The author is clear, right from the start, that this isn't any type of systematic overview of great men of science. And it's certainly not a book on mathematics or physics. Rather, IDEA MAKERS presents his thoughts on people that have caught his interest for many different reasons. Notice that the subtitle is "Personal Perspectives on the Lives and Ideas of Some Notable People." So, although this book has many discussions on mathematics, it's not so much a science book, as a PEOPLE book. Dr. Wolfram makes an interesting autobiographical point about his interest: He's not just interested in the science--he's also interested in the people themselves: "There's a stereotype that someone focused on science and technology won't be interested in people. But that's not me. I've always been interested in people." True to this statement, the author gives quite a bit of detail about the person--not just the science, in each of these essays. The author has also grown in his appreciation of history. Sometimes for selfish reasons, he admits: "What can I learn from historical examples about how things I'm involved with now will work out. How can I use people from the past as models for people I know now. What can I learn for my own life from what these people did in their lives?" The author offers some unique insights on the subjects of this book. On Steve Jobs, Wolfram suggests Jobs was exceptional for his "clarity of thought."

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