Alan Turing: The Enigma
By Andrew Hodges

Review by Jeanette S. Ferrara, NYU School of Journalism

Even though Andrew Hodges' *Alan Turing: The Enigma* is now thirty-two years old, it is still regarded as one of the best-researched biographies of Alan Turing. Its relevance prevails despite its age, and the book was the inspiration for the Academy Award-winning film, *The Imitation Game* (which, ironically enough, was heavily criticized for its manifold historical inaccuracies that in no way came from the book that supposedly inspired it). Despite *The Imitation Game*'s particular failures, the film's impending release led to a re-release of Hodges' book. The new "movie-tie-in" edition's cover is a scene from the movie, showing Benedict Cumberbatch as Turing from behind, facing his famed Enigma decryption machine. That was about the extent to which the book tied in to the movie.

The film was well-received by audiences who were willing to ignore—or were perhaps unaware of—its historical inaccuracies. After seeing the film, I wanted to learn more, having heard Turing's name mentioned repeatedly in my brief undergraduate career as a programmer. Though I found the book a thrilling and fast-paced read (albeit a bit hefty at 736 pages), I was wildly disappointed that someone responsible for the making of *The Imitation Game* could have read the same book and come out with the screenplay for said film, particularly because the extreme care with which Hodges researched and wrote *The Enigma* is ever-present in his prose, which the film idly cast aside. Hodges sought to provide his audience with a detailed and accurate account of Alan Turing, a brilliant man whose work provided the foundation for modern computing as we know it.

Given the role Turing played in helping the Allies crack German codes during World War II, one might expect him to have been the subject of myriad biographies, with Hodges' only being one of the many. Yet the top-secret nature of Turing's work meant that for many years his contributions went unrecognized. His universal machine, something we today recognize as a fundamental concept of computing, was ahead of its time. Hodges' biography helped garner recognition both for Turing and for the importance of his research in broader cultural circles. And, as I mentioned previously, it provided inspiration for *The Imitation Game,* which despite its inaccuracies made Turing a household name in an age of technology that arguably would not exist without his contributions.

Whether you saw *The Imitation Game* and want to learn more or you just have an interest in the history of computing or codebreaking or World War II (or all of the above), Hodges' book is an excellent read, and one that I highly recommend.