



Dancing Naked in the Mind Field

Kary Mullis

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Here is a multidimensional playland of ideas from the world's most eccentric Nobel-Prize winning scientist. Kary Mullis is legendary for his invention of PCR, which redefined the world of DNA, genetics, and forensic science. He is also a surfer, a veteran of Berkeley in the sixties, and perhaps the only Nobel laureate to describe a possible encounter with aliens. A scientist of boundless curiosity, he refuses to accept any proposition based on secondhand or hearsay evidence, and always looks for the "money trail" when scientists make announcements.

Mullis writes with passion and humor about a wide range of topics: from global warming to the O. J. Simpson trial, from poisonous spiders to HIV, from scientific method to astrology. **Dancing Naked in the Mind Field** challenges us to question the authority of scientific dogma even as it reveals the workings of an uncannily original scientific mind.

Dancing Naked in the Mind Field Details

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Author : Kary Mullis

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From Reader Review Dancing Naked in the Mind Field for online ebook

TrudyAn says

This was an interesting book in parts. The writer was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1993 and the book was published in 1998. Some of the content is fascinating, but much is very dated and some is just plain weird. For example, the author mocks the link between the burning of fossil fuels and climate change, and the link between HIV and AIDS. He believes in astrology, writes a lot about his use of LSD and other drugs, once saw a glowing green raccoon while not under the influence, and believes he may have encountered aliens. There was too much information about his personal life, especially his opinions about women, some of which made my skin crawl. There was so much strangeness in this book, it was hard to focus on the interesting scientific bits that are still relevant.

ferrigno says

Disorganico, provocatorio, narcisista. A tratti divertente.

È un libro disorganico. Non c'è un progetto, non c'è un inizio né una fine, non è una raccolta di saggi, non è un'autobiografia. È più o meno «tutto quello che mi passava per la testa mentre avevo una tastiera a portata di mano».

È pieno zeppo di provocazioni riguardanti argomenti caldi, come AIDS, buco dell'ozono, riscaldamento globale.

Il "messaggio" (forse l'unico messaggio che Mullis intenda veicolare realmente) è: «Mantenete sempre un atteggiamento critico nei confronti delle teorie scientifiche».

Sacroscanto. Però l'AIDS è un argomento terribilmente serio e la teoria secondo cui il virus dell'HIV sarebbe la causa dell'AIDS è universalmente accettata. Se vuoi contestare questa teoria, DEVI farlo nel contesto adeguato e con la documentazione adeguata, altrimenti passi per esibizionista.

Cosa non difficile, visto che Mullis è palesemente narcisista. Provocatorio, egocentrico, compiaciuto, esibizionista. Il Morgan della scienza, compresa l'apologia degli stupefacenti, basta sostituire a .

Scrittura brillante, anche se per niente elegante. Molti aneddoti divertenti. Lettura nel complesso divertente.

Leggendo questo libro ho compreso la differenza tra Genio e geniaccio.

Per sapere chi è il genio, leggere una qualsiasi opera di Steven J Gould.

Jenny says

The LSD fueled meanderings of an arrogant man

Cristian says

Should one wait for tenure or winning the Nobel Prize to become controversial? You can become anytime, but then you may wait longer for honors, seems to be the answer of Kary Mullis, the Nobel prize laureate in Chemistry that propelled DNA research by discovering the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Kary seems to be at odds with public and political beliefs and the ones of the scientific establishment. He implies that many ideas that the scientific community dismisses could be further investigated, as there are reasonable evidence to support them, while widely accepted facts by the scientific community may have little scientific support.

Kary dismantles the conceptions that HIV causes AIDS, that humans activity causes Global Warming, or that all drugs necessarily harm. According to him, though there are multiple grants and research projects that act based on the assumption that HIV is leading to AIDS, there is no paper in a recognized scientific journal proving this connection. In other words, this idea is a bogus. Plus, the fact that AIDS is spreading is not because it is really so, but because the definition of what AIDS is expands. While some drugs that should help cure it (like AZT), only help kill the person. He compares those drugs to chemotherapy. However, in chemotherapy you know that the treatment is killing you, as well as the cancer, and you would hope that the cancer would die before you. In case of AZT you do not have this reassurance. He also challenges the global warming and the way state institutions measure its effect, by looking at the spread of people with cancer. While, he argues that it would be wiser just to place some panels near the North Pole to measure if the content of radiation is changing over the years.

On the other hand, Kary tends to suggest that Astrology could have some truth to it (a number of people determined his zodiac sign by observing him). He also may have had an alien encounter, and a telepathic connection with a friend. These are mostly his own experiences, and he did not go as far as verifying them scientifically, however he seems to accept the possibility of their truth.

It seems that the approach Kary has is to contest the established consensus in the scientific community, be it what everyone believes to be true or what everyone believes to be false. He seems to be tackling mostly simple problems and finds simple solutions, but those solutions are neglected by others. How did he get this way? A part could come from his natural genius. Another part could be related to the fact that he is a child of the '60s and '70s with their rebelliousness, random sex and drugs experimentation. Kary had multiple experiences with LSD and other drugs. We can recall some other unconventional scientists of that time like Timothy Leary of Harvard University that combined LSD with Tibetan Buddhism. Do we still have this type of scientists now?

Zina says

Here we have a true scientist in the real sense of the word. He bases his findings on valid research, not just what most people accept as a theory. He has a valid question that no scientist can satisfactorily answer: Where can he find any reference on the claim that HIV is the probable cause of AIDS? No one can answer this and there is no research or findings to support the claim, yet many PhD scientists get angry at any other suggestion. The book is utter brilliance, including his views on astrology (which I share). His storytelling skills are impeccable and so is his story about inventing PCR and later receiving the Nobel prize. The more I

read about him, the more I like this guy. This is why modern day science has turned into the new religion: because nobody is allowed to ask the real questions. Kary Mullis is banned from several scientific conventions and is deemed crazy. Well, if this insanity, I'd love more scientists to be this kind of insane. In fact, they are required to be.

Ken Householder says

Hilarious and informative. This book contains some of the most entertaining stories from one of the greatest minds of the 20th century and it goes on to challenge some very large assumptions we make about the world around us. From LSD to global warming and HIV.

Jean says

My uncle lent me this book and told me that, in his scientific opinion, Kary Mullis will be as famous as Einstein a century from now. I figured that would be a book worth reading; it didn't disappoint, but it did provoke.

There is an entire chapter that talks about horoscopes. Mullis describes his sign as one that comes on strong and then backs off. That is EXACTLY how this book is. About 10 pages in, I was ready to throw the book across the room and give it negative stars; Mullis is arrogant, opinionated, and controversial. But then he backs off, and you realize how brilliant, creative, and thoughtful he is, too. I definitely do not agree with a lot of what he writes and believes, but the book made me uncomfortable in the best possible way and made me ask questions about some very fundamental things. It also gave me a better grasp of the major developments and controversies in the very modern science.

Artie says

This would be the second somewhat autobiographical book I've read involving a Nobel laureate, and the two are vastly different. Mullis is a serious hippie kid who experimented with mind-altering drugs and has the utmost disdain for his own scientific community, not to mention a delightfully caustic wit for (in my opinion) the majority of the world. He's entertaining is you're a fan of debunking scientific myths, the bitter rants of a biochemist, or the O.J. Simpson trial (of which he was nearly a participant). Oh, the guy invented the PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) process that allows basically all DNA work today to be done because previously they couldn't replicate DNA in large quantities sufficient to be used for stuff like DNA testing. Oh but like Feynman, he's also kind of a slut (woohoo free love!)... I guess even Nobel prize-winning boys will be boys.

Pat Cummings says

I knew *The Emperor of Scent* was jogging my memory about something, and finally recalled the flavor of thought from Nobel Laureate Kary Mullis' autobiographical *Dancing in the Mind Field*. There it was again—that joyful sense of discovery you remember from your childhood explorations of the world, the

belief that you can learn it all if you just keep your eyes and mind open.

Of course, not many of us have childhood memories that include compounding tear gas or keeping laboratory refrigerators stocked with radioactive isotopes.

Kary Mullis was awarded the Nobel for chemistry in 1993, but even before the prize ceremony in Stockholm, his discovery was changing lives. Before Mullis, DNA evidence had to be fresh and abundant in order to be useful in forensic science. Mullis uncovered a way to replicate DNA, expanding the existing sample of whatever size until you have enough to be useful. Move over, Gil Grissom—Kary Mullis is the real star of CSI!

Mullis doesn't hesitate to discuss the use of his discovery—one essay titled "Fear and Lawyers in Las Angeles" covers the multi-layered part he played in the sensational trial of OJ Simpson. But the collection of essays in the book is more about that journey of discovery than it is about the road signs along the way. Don't look to learn how to put together a polymerase chain reaction. You might learn how to survive the bite of the brown recluse spider, choose nutritional foods, determine which scientist is telling the truth in a debate.

Or you might simply trip the light fantastic with Kary Mullis. He's a marvelous dancer!

Audrey says

This guy is my new hero.

So I just finished Mind Field(Sunday 16SEP07) and it was so awesome, I would give it an additional star if I could. This is a truly remarkable book written by an extremely intelligent, eccentric, and keenly observant individual. Be sure to read the dedication, despite the author's admitted wanderlust, it is quite sweet. I have to include some of the last words in the book, found them very moving:

The appropriate demeanor for a human is to feel lucky that he is alive and to humble himself in the face of the immensity of things and have a beer. Relax. Welcome to Earth.

Giulia Crepaldi says

La prova regina del perché non bisogna fidarsi di quello che dice un Premio Nobel, solo sulla base del Premio Nobel.

Questo libro è un'accozzaglia di capitoli quasi sempre sconnessi l'uno con l'altro in cui la scoperta della PCR viene trattata en passant e molto superficialmente, mentre scopriamo che per l'autore non è assolutamente credibile un intervento umano nei mutamenti climatici, ma lo sono sicuramente le proiezioni astrali ed i procioni spaziali (no, non Rocket Raccoon), e che non ci sarebbero prove di un nesso causale tra HIV ed AIDS, ma, oh, l'astrologia è un mezzo di indagine del carattere umano molto più affidabile della psicologia.

TY says

It wasn't as funny as I thought it would be from reading all the reviews.

And I just couldn't accept many of his views. His AIDS denialism, believing in astrology and denying that global warming is taking place. Since the book was written in 1998, I wonder if he has changed his mind of some of his views, seeing that there had been more evidence supporting these issues.

The few chapters he wrote on AIDS was absolutely horrible. You can almost say that he has no clue as to what a virus is or even know the definition of immunology. It was a misguided and ignorant viewpoint.

What's worse? He was so vocal about all these theories and believes lacking scientific evidence, especially the one on HIV, complaining they did not have proper citations or references, but guess what, his book does not even have a reference section. Most books I've read written by scientists have had a reference section at the end, even if it is a biography, that's what they're trained to do. His doesn't. Maybe my book is missing a few pages.

Hypocrisy. Oh hypocrisy.

Regardless, he deserves credit for PCR and there are a few pages that I did enjoy in the book. That earned him the extra star.

Philipp says

tl;dr: trolling is a art

The problem with ebooks is that you can't throw them against the wall. In this case of Mullis' autobiography, or rather loose collection of essays, I wanted to do exactly that about 5 times - it has been a long time since I've been this physically angry at a book.

The first quarter of the book is alright - he details how he perfected PCR, how he got the Nobel Prize for that, etc. The one thing that starts to annoy is his constant drive to portray himself as such an unconventional person - "Hey everybody, I go to strip-clubs! I'm OK with drugs! I was totally spontaneous and cool when I met the wife of the Japanese tenno![1]"

You just expect at some point to read "hi every1 im new!!!!!! holds up spork my name is kary but u can call me t3h PeNgU1N oF d00m!!!!!! lol...as u can see im very random!!!!" etc. pp.

Some of the early chapters are interesting, for example, when he tries to explain the scientific method. Why he then goes and throws everything out of the window is beyond me - I think it's because he loves being in a position opposite to the mainstream, even if that means distorting and twisting the truth until it becomes a lie.

First, the chapter about his belief in astrology - his evidence that it exists: 3 people guessed his star-sign. Also, a program used the constellation of planets at his birth to describe his character, and I quote: "Most of the things that the fifty-page document said about me were correct. But some of them were entirely wrong." (p. 118). Guess what, that's how horoscopes are written! Make them so vague and general that "most of the

things" are correct! It doesn't take a scientist to notice that, yet Mullis constantly assures us that he's a scientist. Literally: "I am a scientist", at least 3 or 4 times in the book.

Then it gets worse and he "goes full retard" (Tropic Thunder, 2008), in his views on global warming: "What is the trouble with something being out of balance if the natural state of that thing is change?" (p94). He then goes on: "The concept that human beings are capable of causing the planet to overheat or lose its ozone seems about as ridiculous as blaming the Magdalenian paintings for the last ice age" (p 96). That's his entire rhetoric - he doesn't cite any proof to the contrary, he just does his impression of Rush Limbaugh. That's it!

We humans can and have changed this planet massively, starting with "small things" like the artificial Suez Canal, to changing the entire picture of earth at night. We got enough weapons to irradiate and destroy the surface of the earth. And of course the state of earth is change, the problem we humans might get is that this change might wipe us out. He conveniently doesn't mention this - it doesn't fit his story.

The chapter that made me truly angry is the one where he starts to deny the HIV->AIDS causality, and that's when he gets so self-satisfied and the smugness just oozes out of the pages, into your lap, forcing you to take a shower. He says that the presence of HIV-antibodies shows that HIV has been defeated: "Antibodies signaled that the virus had been defeated. The patient had saved himself." (p 139). That's like saying that the presence of soldiers shows that there is no war.

This shows that he either doesn't know a thing about the human immune system or he outright lies to save his worldview, I don't know if Wikipedia was very big in 1998, but a look into an encyclopedia could have certainly helped him. And then he goes in and does these absolutely dirty tricks: "They didn't show that everybody with the antibodies had the disease. In fact, they found some healthy people with antibodies." (p 139). That is so dishonest that I'm getting angry again just typing this - it takes *time* for the symptoms of a disease to develop [2].

He goes into his descriptions of some of the major players of the early HIV "controversy", notably Gallo and Duesberg. He uses language again to make one look good and one look bad: "In spite of his lack of luster as a scientist, Gallo had worked his way up in the power structure. Peter Duesberg, despite his brilliance, worked his way down" (p 142). Peter Duesberg is one of the biggest douchebags in recent history, and one of the first HIV-denialists. He used to be the editor at PNAS and used that status to circumvent peer-review for one of his denialist articles, something which Muller describes this way: "Duesberg pointed out wisely from the sidelines in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science that there was no good evidence implicating the new virus." (p 143). He again conveniently doesn't mention that Duesberg used his (former) status to get his article into PNAS. He also ignores the HIV-AIDS evidence that was already available in 1998, most disingenuous by saying that "no-one had proven that HIV causes AIDS". The problem with proving that is that you have to literally infect a human with HIV, something which no ethics committee in the world will approve. But there are some cases from before the publication of this book which Mullis could have had a look at.

There's the Florida dentist case from 1990, in which a dentist unknowingly infected some of his patients, who were all tested positive for HIV and later died of AIDS, same as the dentist, Wikipedia has an overview: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kimberly...> This case was the first case in which someone proved that HIV causes AIDS, something which Mullis conveniently forgets. That was 8 years before this book! Another big case was when three lab workers got infected with HIV and developed AIDS, that was in 1997, maybe too close to the publication of this book (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/90...>). There's a mountain of evidence for the causality HIV->AIDS, but Mullis always pretends as if he's the lone warrior showing the world that "the big pharma-companies" just want to make money with the disease of others. See here for

evidence: <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/HIVAI...>

By the way: after the publication of this book, Duesberg became a member of the advisory panel to Thabo Mbeki in South Africa, and his denialism prevented the use of antiretroviral drugs, one of the main reasons why AIDS spread so much leading to literally hundreds of thousands who died of AIDS in South Africa. That man has *a lot* of blood on his hand! (Check Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Du...)

And then, the prime piece, the one that made me throw my Kindle across the room, the most disgusting sentence I've read all year: "If a person has three hundred sexual contact a year - with people who themselves are having three hundred contacts a year - that's ninety thousand times more opportunity for infections than a person involved in an exclusive relationship". (p 146) YES IT'S THEIR OWN FAULT THAT THEY HAVE AIDS. THESE DISGUSTING PIGS AND THEIR FILTHY POLYGAMY!! [3] LET'S ALL SHAME MORE VICTIMS. Edit: According to the WHO, 2% of the 8 million children who die per year die because of AIDS. Did these have too much sex too? (Source: http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/press_...)

Does he cite peer-reviewed publications for any of his viewpoints? In one chapter he makes fun of a nutritionist for not citing any sources in her "crusade" against margarine, and writes that you should always cite sources. Yet there *isn't a single paper cited* in this book, a thing you would think a scientist would do.

Of course, there are the other crazy things [4] I don't want to go into because to him, they happened, and I can't criticize that. There's a lot more going on in this book that for the purpose of my sanity I will now forget so I can't write about it here.

The only thing you'll learn in this book is that you shouldn't trust people just because they got a prize, even if it's the Nobel Prize.

[1] Apparently the official title is "chief wife"? http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_...

[2] especially in HIV that can take up to 3 months, in some cases several years:
<http://aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-a...>

[3] capslock is cruise control for rage

[4] Glowing raccoons abducting him over night. Someone saving him from a laughing gas overdose via astral travelling. His telepathy with a friend. That said friend's face morphing into other faces, even though Mullis was sober, etc.

Marielle says

This book is just short enough for me to call it entertaining. My assessment of Mullis is that he is brilliant but bat shit insane. Take everything he says with .1 moles of NaCl.

Jennifer says

(review originally written for Bookslut)

It is widely accepted in the scientific community that Kary Mullis is a kook. Which is a rather odd reaction to a man who has won a Nobel Prize in chemistry and who invented PCR, a tool that not many microbiologists or biochemists would happily live without. But I suppose that it's to be expected, as most press attention that Kary Mullis receives is not centered around his scientific achievements, but rather around his passion for surfing, his past use of LSD, and his reputation for chasing women.

So a book by Kary Mullis is bound to be more interesting than the average book of essays written by a chemist. And oh, is it. To sum up: Mullis believes in astrology, traveling through the astral plane, recreational use of LSD and other psychedelic drugs, and glowing raccoons that talk. He doesn't believe in global warming, the advice of nutritionists, or the fact that HIV causes AIDS. To put it mildly, the theories and opinions expressed in his book, *Dancing Naked in the Mind Field*, are controversial.

They are also terribly fascinating. Amongst the many things that Kary Mullis is, he is also an excellent story teller. I ended up reading at least 80% of this book aloud to my husband. It would start out, "Oh, you have to hear this!", and then I would inevitably back up and read him the whole chapter. In this book, Mullis meets the empress of Japan and calls her "sweetie," nearly kills himself with nitrous oxide, is bitten by several brown recluses back when the only known treatment was surgery, speaks to a glowing raccoon in the forest, accidentally causes an explosion during a science demonstration, and also accidentally makes tear gas in a friend's garage the summer after they graduated from high school. He has no shortage of interesting stories to tell, and he tells them well.

He's also very persuasive. I read the chapter on astrology and was ready to go out and buy an astrological chart. I read the chapter on appropriate use of scientific funding and inquiry and was ready to write a letter to my congressman, asking him to defund the relativistic heavy ion collider (RHIC) in favor of funding the search for near-Earth asteroids that could collide with our planet. (This is especially significant because I spent two years working on projects related to RHIC while pursuing my masters degree, and actually have two friends employed at RHIC right now.) Of course, most of these conversions were short-lived, and on some issues he never had much of a chance of convincing me (in fact I think it's dangerous to assert that human beings could not possibly alter the climate), but some of his arguments linger. For instance, there is a disturbing lack of scientific evidence supporting the claim that the HIV virus causes AIDS. It sounds like a crazy conspiracy theory at first to doubt something that we've all taken for granted for so long, but if it were true, why aren't there articles in peer-reviewed journals offering evidence to that end?

Kary Mullis can mess with your mind just as effectively as a dose of LSD. So if you read this book, read it with a healthy dose of scientific skepticism. As Mullis himself points out, just because something is published (and even in a scientific journal), that doesn't make it so. And just because the man won a Nobel prize, that doesn't mean he's an expert on every topic he discusses. But read this book because it's fun.

I promise it will make you laugh. And shake your head in disbelief. The only thing it won't do is bore you.
