



Genes, Girls, and Gamow: After the Double Helix

By James D. Watson

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In the years following his and Francis Crick's towering discovery of DNA, James Watson was obsessed with finding two things: RNA and a wife. **Genes, Girls, and Gamow** is the marvelous chronicle of those pursuits. Watson effortlessly glides between his heartbreaking and sometimes hilarious debacles in the field of love and his heady inquiries in the field of science. He also reflects with touching candor on some of science's other titans, from fellow Nobelists Linus Pauling and the incorrigible Richard Feynman to Russian physicist George Gamow, who loved whiskey, limericks, and card tricks as much as he did molecules and genes. What emerges is a refreshingly human portrait of a group of geniuses and a candid, often surprising account of how science is done.

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Genes, Girls, and Gamow: After the Double Helix By James D. Watson Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Readers unfamiliar with James D. Watson's previous memoir, *The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA*, may be surprised that his new one pays as much attention to his pursuit of the perfect woman as to the pursuit of knowledge. But Watson's 1968 book wasn't a bestseller because of its scientific material (though it was lucidly written for the general public); it was his candid portrait of professional rivalries, consuming ambition, and personal eccentricities that made it both popular and controversial. Even today, Watson's lively prose and decidedly frank opinions are still far from the norm. Oh sure, *Girls, Genes, and Gamow* contains plenty of information about his efforts (with colleagues ranging from bongo-playing Richard Feynman to the free-spirited George Gamow) to unravel the complexities of the RNA molecule from 1953 to '56. But Watson--still in his 20s at the time--also devotes pages to hard drinking, bitter marital breakups, and unwanted pregnancies among his not-so-high-minded peers, and his own anguished affair with a Swarthmore undergrad who left him for a German engineering student. It's not every Nobel Prize-winning biologist who would admit he was thrilled to have his photo in *Vogue* because it would "make 'with it' American girls more eager to know me," but that boyish openness gives Watson's book its charm. --Wendy Smith

From Publishers Weekly

This classy memoir reads like a Who's Who of 20th-century science and picks up where the author left off in his classic book, *The Double Helix*. In 1953, Watson, then 25, and colleague Francis Crick discovered the structure of DNA, a historic achievement that won them both the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Here Watson, who quickly became an icon for biology students worldwide, gives a detailed, journal-writer's account of the aftermath, recalling with subtle humor his younger self's professional and equally pressing amorous ambitions. Professionally, the goal was to unravel the structure of a then still-mysterious molecule called ribonucleic acid, or RNA. Watson's scientific highs and lows are mingled with his adventures in academic high society, some of which have the flavor of Wodehousian lark, as when Wilson and fellow pranksters "temporarily absconded with the experimental lobsters" belonging to a boorish lecturer at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on Cape Cod. Readers also encounter the "pope-like" figure of Caltech chemist Linus Pauling, the bongo-playing genius physicist Richard Feynman and of course Russian theoretical physicist George Gamow, the "zany," card-trick playing, limerick-singing, booze-swilling, practical-joking "giant imp" who founded with Watson the RNA-Tie Club. Reading Watson is a delight, an opportunity to breathe the rarefied air of his generation's greatest scientists and to crash a faculty cocktail party or two along the way.

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From Library Journal

This second autobiographical work by Nobel prize winner Watson provides additional details of his personal life and experience during and after his and Francis Crick's discovery of the double helix as the model for DNA structure in 1953. His first work, *The Double Helix*, has been widely read and republished in different editions. That work focused on the discovery of the structure of the DNA molecule; the current work uses the same conversational style to fill in more of the story and talk about what happened after the discovery was announced. Watson includes many personal details, devoting a sizable portion of the book to his romantic life. He also discusses his encounters with the likes of Linus Pauling, Richard Feynman, and Russian

physicist George Gamow. Because of the wide appeal of *The Double Helix* and the extensive publicity on current genetic research, this work will likely be popular as well. Accessible to many levels of readers, it is recommended for public and academic libraries. Eric D. Albright, Duke Univ. Medical Ctr. Lib., Durham, NC

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Users Review

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