



# Mappa Mundi

*Justina Robson*

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**Mappa Mundi** Justina Robson

The map of everything you know

everything you are

everything you ever will be

just got rewritten

A novel of hard SF exploring the nature of identity both inherited and engineered, from one of Britain's most acclaimed new talents. In the near future, when medical nanotechnology has made it possible to map a model of the living human brain, radical psychologist Natalie Armstrong sees her work suddenly become crucial to a cutting-edge military project for creating comprehensive mind-control. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, Jude Westhorpe, FBI specialist, is tracking a cold war defector long involved in everything from gene sequencing to mind-mapping. But his investigation has begun to affect matters of national security-throwing Jude and Natalie together as partners in trouble-deep trouble from every direction. This fascinating novel explores the nature of humanity in the near future, when the power and potential of developing technologies demand that we adapt ourselves to their existence-whatever the price.

## Mappa Mundi Details

Date : Published September 5th 2006 by Pyr (first published October 2001)

ISBN : 9781591024910

Author : Justina Robson

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# From Reader Review Mappa Mundi for online ebook

## Michelle says

(review originally posted on my livejournal account: <http://intoyourlungs.livejournal.com>)

I have never heard of this book before. I've heard of Justina Robson before, but I've never read her or really had any inclination to (not that I think she's a bad author, but the one book I heard about by her, *Natural History*, looked a little too heavy of a sci-fi for me at the time, so I didn't pay it much mind.) I was more than happy to read it for this month's pick though, and while this is a fairly heavy book (both literally at 500+ pages and figuratively), it was still fun. And that's usually what matters, right?

One of the things that made this book so much fun was how everyone was intertwined and related to one another. I didn't pay as much attention to the first chapters found in 'Legends' which was a bit to my disadvantage, because I forgot a lot of the names that I had read there. So, note to readers who may check this book out, make sure to remember the names! I mean, it's kind of obvious because they're there, but they're definitely important, so don't skim those chapters. Especially the one on Guskov.

Actually, I don't know what was up with me, but I had a hard time concentrating on this book, which is a shame, because it is really, really good. Part of it was that there were a lot of sciency bits. I try really hard to follow those parts, but they get into all kinds of complicated theory, and I'm really not a science kid. At all. So, my eyes kind of start to glaze over, and because of that, I think I missed some important details. This caused me to be a bit confused at parts. I also could never figure out exactly WHAT Nerve Path was, or the difference between it and Selfware. Again, this isn't Robson's fault, but rather mine, because for whatever reason, I couldn't concentrate on this title very well (but oh how I wanted to.) This didn't really deter the reading experience though, because I did know that the fault was with me.

Despite all those science bits confusing me a bit, I was saved by the great cast of characters that Robson has conjured here. I liked pretty much everyone (even Guskov for some reason) with the exception of Mary. I HATED HER. I don't know why I hate her SO much, but I do. I'm sorry, but I just can't feel sorry for her despite her 'woe-is-me' plight over being a double-agent and in love with Jude. I would get upset when he would find himself wanting to sex her and could hear myself screaming in my mind: "NO!! You're meant to be with Natalie even though you've only really met her like, two times. DDD:" The fact that I feel attached and care what these characters do though as shown that Robson has created characters that I \*care\* about, even when I dislike them.

There's all kinds of moral dilemma in this book too, due to Nerve Path and Selfware and Mappa Mundi and all that jazz. The whole "we should follow through with this project because we could control people for the greater GOOD" vs the "yeah, but you could also use it to unethically control people to do a whole lot of BAD" was an engaging topic, and one that will make this book great for discussion. Really, the line for morals and ethics here is somewhat blurred. I mean, yeah, it's unethical to make people believe in democracy when they actually DON'T, or to make people disbelieve in religion when they actually DO, but if it's going to be for the greater good, where do you draw the line? Also, it's stated several times throughout the novel that it won't make people automatons; they'll still be able to more or less think for themselves, so will the effects of the mind-altering really work in the long-run? I don't know, but it was interesting stuff.

Final Verdict: Unfortunately I had a hard time concentrating on this title, and I'm not too sure why, but I don't fault the author. However, because of said unable-to-concentradness, I didn't pick up on important

details which led me to be a little confused. So with that, I give a word of caution: this isn't a light read and you have to be ready to pay attention when you read. However, despite being a little confused at times, I still really enjoyed this novel. The characters were fantastic, and while I didn't necessarily LIKE everyone (re: Mary; stupid stupid Mary) I still FELT something for each character, and I did really root for the ones I like. There's also all kinds of discussion to be had with this book as it does delve into all kinds of questions of moral ethics. I do want to point out that if you're looking for sci-fi with spaceships and stuff, you won't find it here; this book falls mostly in the speculative fiction umbrella because it mostly takes place in our world as we know it, but with a touch of the futuristic (with gadgets like the Pads, and the whole 'mapping the brain' science going on.) Robson has obviously done her research for this novel as well and it shows. I do think I'll be checking out more Robson in the future; I hope to read *Natural History* by her, and maybe check out her sci-fi series too (the name eludes me at the moment.) A definite recommend.

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## **Diana says**

*Mappa Mundi* is a cleverly written and engrossing sci-fi thriller, with interesting characters who are central to the plot. The story embraces scientific questions about the nature of consciousness (ghost in the machine?) and problems of motivation toward moral action when it conflicts with loyalty and self-interest. The central theme is a struggle between competing individual, political and institutional interests in controlling an emerging biotechnology of mind alteration. The author, Justina Robson, thoroughly develops these themes, although her perspective is dominated by scientific assumptions about the nature of consciousness; but I can't complain too much -- I'm happy that this is well-written and courageously explored science fiction. In the beginning of the book we are introduced to five utterly unrelated central characters through illuminating vignettes in their lives, told from their point of view, followed by a chapter of a dramatic scene involving a fire on an Indian reservation and told from yet another character's point of view, whose significance and interrelationship we slowly come to understand. Robson has incorporated theoretical neuroscience and leading edge medical technology, and included weighty themes of social justice and domination. The narrative is brilliantly paced, with sufficient tension, development, and action to keep one turning pages. I found this book hard to put down, despite my finding some central premises to be barely believable.

I note that we're well into the era when it's easy to find bad guys in the powerful interests controlling the United States government and justice system (yes, and well deserved, U.S., way to go.)

There is attention to accuracy of setting including York, U.K., and the Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia. My town, Charlottesville, even gets a mention. However, atmosphere is not center stage in this book.

There is a much currency to the problem of surreptitious mind control, which we're in the midst of in our societies today. One can become cognizant of how people and culture are being manipulated by powerful corporate and political interests through advertising, entertainment, media messaging, and political sloganeering. I think the forces that act upon our minds are already deeply in play, and we don't need to imagine an elaborate technology to explain how we could be dominated without our realizing it.

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## **Simon Mcleish says**

Originally published on my blog [here](#) in December 2006.

After an odd, disjointed start before the plot proper starts - fifty pages describing formative events in the lives of those to become major characters - Mappa Mundi settles down into familiar near future techno-thriller territory, rather like (say) Neal Stephenson's *Zodiac*. The NervePath project is a psychological equivalent to the Human Genome Project: mapping out how the mind and brain structure relate to one another. Natalie Armstrong is interested in the obvious spinoff: software that can alter brain state, something she sees as a major tool in psychiatric treatment (she works in a clinic in York). But she is strangely unable to get funding for her Mappa Mundi project, and a series of bizarre crimes in the US suggests that someone else with a more sinister agenda may already be ahead of her.

The plot proceeds predictably enough - are the people who used the software to attack the village in the Native American reservation really good guys desperate to make it politically impossible for the work on the software as a weapon to continue? who can be trusted? Then, just before the halfway point, there is a huge surprise, the rug being pulled out from under the feet of the complacent reader who thinks that they have read it all before. The western rationalist approach to the mind expected in a hard(ish) science fiction novel is suddenly interrupted by ideas from Eastern religions: the patient who is a test subject for Armstrong's work is accidentally enlightened, and leaves the physical plane, or at least, this is what appears to happen. Such an event would be humorous if Robson had not spent so long persuading the reader that Mappa Mundi is a serious novel. From this point onwards, the novel picks up a gear, and it becomes much less predictable.

Mind altering viruses, akin to the scourges of today's computers, are increasingly common in science fiction. I have written about Amusica, from Alastair Reynolds' *Century Rain*, only recently. It's a frightening idea, that we might be as malleable as a zombie PC is in the hands of today's virus writers.

The difficulties with producing this kind of virus are many: it is quite some way beyond today's knowledge (unless one starts to entertain paranoid notions that of course "they" would want us to think that). It is possible to obtain access to parts of the mind from outside, for hypnotism clearly does just that. But hypnotism, psychoactive drugs and brainwashing do not provide the delicacy of control and the permanent re-conditioning that is required by science fiction writers. They eyes, closely connected to the human brain (indeed, I have read that some scientists consider them and the optical nerve essentially part of the brain) and a principal means by which we, as a species, obtain information about the world, are the obvious means to use to infiltrate commands and programs into the mind (rather in the way that psychedelic patterns were used in sixties TV such as *The Avengers*). The defences, the biological equivalents to firewalls and virus checkers, seem to be quite weak, as we already have these methods of influencing the mind through the optical system. Breaching the defences, though, is only the first stage.

In order to make it possible to carry out the sort of reprogramming described in Mappa Mundi, the way that the human mind handles abstract concepts needs to be understood in detail. It is not even clear that concepts such as patriotism are implemented in the same way in the brains of different people - after all, patriotism is closely connected to whatever it is you are patriotic about, and even testing individuals to see how such a concept is structured would be hard (how would you stimulate the brains of people from different cultures so that you could scan brain activity for patriotism?). Abstract concepts are quite vague, and hard to pin down; there is a good reason why we don't program computers to be loyal, or jealous even though we know precisely how a computer should work. (Simulating loyalty or jealousy is a slightly different idea.) On the other hand, this feeling that the theory that would underlie the software described in this novel is infeasible doesn't mean that it will never be correctly formulated: after all, a medieval theologian would have considered a single law of gravity describing the motions of the planets to be unlikely, given the belief that an individual angel was responsible for the movement of each one.

Whether or not the vision of the mind control software painted by science fiction is likely, it is a disturbing one. Scenarios like warring factions of zombies (John Barnes' Kaleidoscope Century), the musical deprivation of Alastair Reynolds' Century Rain, or Robson's government sponsored suppression of discontent are in no way comforting, pleasant pictures of the future. And yet some people think that science fiction is all about escapism!

Mappa Mundi would be thought provoking as a technological thriller even without the wonderful twists. Not a cheerful read, however, by any stretch of the imagination.

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## **Roddy Williams says**

‘As medical nanotechnology completes a map of the human brain, radical psychologist Natalie Armstrong sees her cutting-edge research suddenly leap out from the sidelines and into the heart of a black project intended to create comprehensive mind-control...

FBI science specialist Jude Westhorpe is on the trail of an elusive genius who's involved in everything from gene sequencing to biological warfare. But Jude's investigation has started to dig too deeply into matters affecting national security, putting his own and others' lives on the line...

Could there really be a conspiracy among the international scientific community, bent not only on changing the world order but on creating a radical shift in human identity? When Mappa Mundi reaches completion, the race will be on to seize control of it – for winner takes all when you can alter a human mind with the flick of a switch.’

Blurb from the 2002 Pan paperback edition

Natalie Armstrong is a cutting edge researcher, engaged in a branch of the Mappa Mundi Project which seeks to initially map the human brain and ultimately, to use nanotechnological programmes to effect repairs to victims of aberrant brain functions. The US government has its own plans for the potential of ‘Selfware’, as does Mikhail Guschov, a sociopathic genius who has worked his way through several identities and criminal careers to a position of power in the Mappa Mundi hierarchy.

The potential for Selfware is terrifying. Solid religious belief (or indeed belief of any sort) could be spread through the population like a virus.

Jude Westhorpe, a Native American CIA Agent, travels to England to speak to Natalie following an incident on a Native American reservation where several previously sane individuals went on a destructive and murderous rampage.

Natalie concludes that the incident was caused by a crudely altered Selfware programme which had been released into the community as a test of Selfware's military potential.

Robson shows a flair for characterisation and it is to her credit that all her characters have depth and flaws; are strong, yet vulnerable. The very nature of Selfware and the Mappa Mundi project is that it can correct the fatal flaws within the self and yet, Robson seems to be asking, would that not make us perhaps happier but less human? Dan, Natalie's gay friend, is a case in point. His dependence on drugs and his lax attitude to work might be corrected by nanotechnology. Dan dies, as does Jude's sister, White Horse, as indeed do others as a result of their basic natures. Selfware may have prevented this, but would the same people be living their lives? Robson does not make a major issue of this question, but it is one which surfaces subtly, long after the novel has been finished.

The novel is split between settings in England and North America, bringing a sense of vivacity to both. It's a

fast-paced conspiracy-based thriller, as well as being a first rate science fiction novel and Robson keeps the elements well-balanced while also fleshing out fully-rounded characters who live and breathe easily on the page, as consistently real in York as they are on the highways and reservations of the USA.

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## **Kim Zinkowski says**

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## **Nicholas Whyte says**

[http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2006/04/mappa\\_mun.shtml](http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2006/04/mappa_mun.shtml)[return][return]Mappa Mundi was published in 2001, a year in which many things changed in international politics. It is a tensely paced and densely written novel, techno-thriller in substance but not at all in style, set a very few years from now indeed, reality has caught up with Robson's setting rather more quickly than she perhaps anticipated. It is also a good read, which deserved its Clarke Award shortlisting.[return][return]The book centres on the development of new technology which will change the human condition forever, perhaps the most fundamentally scientific of sf themes. In this case, it is the Mappa Mundi software which offers its creators the chance to directly reproduce and control human thought processes. But where many authors would simply concentrate on the Gosh-Wow stupendousness of the technology (a problem I sometimes find with stories featuring nanotech, the Singularity, etc), Robson links in the human dimension effectively and memorably.[return][return]She does this in two ways. First off, the book begins by offering us glimpses from the earlier history of the main characters, making their stories human and convincing. Her central character, Natalie Armstrong, has a history of mental illness and an uncomfortable professional relationship with her father. (A good choice of name, too, for a scientist taking humanity in a new direction: "Natalie" has connotations of rebirth and redemption, and "Armstrong" is surely intended to remind us of the first man on the moon.)[return][return]While the story is largely Natalie's story, her friends and enemies are also well portrayed: Jude Westhorpe, half-Cheyenne US agent; Mikhail Guskov, Russian defector with many identities; Mary Delany, Westhorpe's partner, whose game is much deeper; Ian Detteridge, the man who is the first to be transformed by the new technology; Dan Connor, Natalie's vulnerable gay colleague (and flatmate); and White Horse, Jude's half-sister, still attuned to traditional ways.[return][return]The second aspect of the human dimension of the book is the battle for control of the new technology, effectively between Delany's branch of the US security services and Guskov's scientific team. Although this is an ideological conflict Delany and the American government seeking state control, the ex-Soviet Guskov with a more libertarian agenda seeking to establish a Free Republic of mind (an intriguing concept which could have been explored more thoroughly) Robson portrays it as a conflict of personalities; nobody's motives are completely admirable or despicable, every one of her characters has reached their position for their own individual reasons. There are no sock-puppet debates or Ayn Rand expositions of belief here.[return][return]Mappa Mundi attracted some unjust criticism when it first came out. Those who complained about the presence of a sexy male FBI agent and red-haired scientist side-kick must surely have seen very few episodes of The X-Files, however; Natalie Armstrong, an outsider in her own office and unwilling subject of her own reality-bending experiments, is a very different character to Dana Scully. There is better ground for the charge that the author skimmed on her research of the US system of government, but it didn't interfere with my enjoyment of the book, and anyway we all know that the future is not going to be exactly like the present. (Indeed, the PATRIOT Act has already brought the US markedly closer to the security state Robson portrayed it as, writing in early 2001.)[return][return]Having said that, and having

praised the book for its concentration on the human impact of the Mappa Mundi technology on its characters' lives, I could have done with a bit more exposition early on about what it was actually for, and the means and motivation of the research team in general; some more telling as well as showing. I was also a bit puzzled by a causality paradox arising out of Natalie's actions at the end of the book, which didn't really tie up the loose ends of plot from the beginning for me. But these are minor cavils about what is a very good book.

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### **Mike Franklin says**

In the near future scientists have successfully mapped the human brain – the Mappa Mundi of the title – using nanotechnology and, using the same technology the nanytes, can be used to read and modify a person's mind. Not in any detail; thoughts can't be directly read but meme patterns can and they can be modified as well, allowing the possibility of fixing many mental problems or creating them, removing phobias or introducing them, making people compliant or making them aggressive. As with many technologies it is clear this one can be used for good or ill, and it rapidly becomes apparent that someone or some government has already done the latter. The two main protagonists make an unlikely team, though actually spending little time together within the books pages; a scientist working on Mappa Mundi and an FBI agent caught up in unofficially investigating a test of its capabilities. All the major powers are racing to develop the technology and the winner has the potential to control, literally, the whole world. The stakes are high and the solution elusive.

Mappa Mundi is certainly science fiction, and hard science fiction at that, but is closer to a Michael Crichton style techno-thriller which it manages pretty well. But it could have been so much better. The plot is excellent with lots of intriguing twists and turns, the characters are very real, neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil, though possibly a little too self-absorbed at times but maybe that's a fair portrayal of most real people! This is Robson's second book and, whilst better than her first – Silver Screen – it still lacks the assured smooth writing style of her later Quantum Gravity books, taking itself much more seriously than those seriously fun books; a little ponderous at times or maybe pretentious would be a better, if harsher, adjective. The action, often exciting and fast paced, especially in the latter half, as befits a good thriller, is frequently interrupted by rather long winded internal philosophising; some of which is important but much of which could have been streamlined to give the book more consistent pace without losing anything of significance.

Despite that uneven pacing this is still a good book, just not a great one. It takes an interesting premise and follows an all too realistic abuse by a Government looking to control its own citizens as well as other rival states. In fairness it sees the need for the latter before it is done to themselves; a classic cold war style arms race.

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### **Linda Robinson says**

Grittier, like film noir science fiction: this book more than "Silver Screen" is likely to be the one an enterprising producer ambitiously undertakes to put on the screen. Would fit perfectly in the dark comic book cinematography realm of "The Spirit" and "Sin City." Robson's characters are complex, some grimly twisted, others swept into the night vision by circumstantial winds. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions..." Robson's writing has teeth and she's not afraid to use them.



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## Ian says

I bought this when it was published 16 years ago, but I seem to have missed reading it and it's only now I've finally got around to it. The novel opens with six prologues, each of which is based around one of the main narrative's major characters. I've never been a big fan of prologues, but I like books that play around with narrative structure... And six introductory prologues strikes me as an interesting structural choice, even if their content doesn't add all that much to the plot. Which concerns a pair of government projects, one in the UK and one in the US, based around some sort of neurological mapping technology, which could allow governments to control, and program, the thoughts of their citizens. Elements within the US security apparatus want control of the technology – and have already run a hugely illegal, and unsuccessful, test on human beings on a Native American reservation. In the UK, the research is being performed by a company owned by a mysterious Russian scientist (whose chain of identity changes forms one of the six prologues). When a test on a human subject is sabotaged, leading to a Dr Manhattan-like series of events, and infecting main character Natalie Armstrong with a more powerful version of the Mappa Mundi software... it kicks off a transatlantic techno-thriller plot that reminds me a little of a Cronenberg film, and in which the science-fictional technobabble floats uneasily on a well-realised real-world setting. The two main characters, Armstrong and half-Cheyenne FBI agent Jude Westhorpe, also felt a little good to be true. I suspect I'd have been more impressed with Mappa Mundi had I read it in 2001 (it made the Clarke Award shortlist, but lost out to Gwyneth Jones's *Bold as Love*, and rightly so), but Robson's subsequent novels have all been very good indeed and she's one of the authors whose books I buy as soon as they're published – even if it takes me sixteen years to get around to reading them...

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## Haris says

Justina Robson's hard-science, philosophical novel "Mappa Mundi" -- shortlisted for the Arthur C. Clarke Award -- is occasionally well-written, occasionally clunky, and it's not as persistently thrilling of a thriller as I'd hoped. It does offer a few morsels of moral, philosophical, and scientific "food for thought" about the nature of (quantum) consciousness, the universe and the self, the soul and the psyche, and individualism and intolerant ideology/the nation-state. Although I can't blame Robson for failing to acknowledge the problems of intolerance, violence, and the nation-state as products of modernity, I find it troubling that she views these problems as a direct result of the science of the individual. She makes little distinction between culture, nationality, and religion but instead views them all as a product of genetics, psychology, and evolution, failing to recognize that all of these are not only consequences of the individual -- or of society as a composite of individuals (which is an arguable point of view in itself) -- but also are consequences of history.

She also seems to assume that science and religion are by definition mutually exclusive without letting each side work out its philosophical end of the debate to full potential. Furthermore, she views religion as a detriment to social harmony, using a zealous Turkish Muslim as the first example of her argument. In her Acknowledgements, she credits Native American colleagues for advice on her Native American characters -- but she does not refer to Muslims to comment on her Russian/formerly-Muslim semi-antagonist. I'm also getting sick of seeing Turkish Muslim bad guys. With its secular background, and speaking from personal experiences, Turkey is one of the last places I'd use for an example of an over-zealous Muslim -- even today, novelists can't seem to get out of their heads this Orientalist obsession with embodying Islam through "the Sick man of Europe" mentality. Her ignorance on this issue demonstrates that even a "scientific," "rational-

minded" thinker can still perpetuate prejudice.

Despite my initial disagreements with Robson, I read (and enjoyed many parts of) the 500-page thriller, and I give her credit for concluding that, ultimately, we cannot presume to escape our own paradigms ("Memecubes"), that our conflicts originate from human nature more than nationality or religion (though there are still problems with that argument). I especially appreciated her eerie, "Invasion of the Body Snatchers"/"Feed"-esque conclusion, which implies that a utopian, "pre-Tower of Babel" world peace -- via a deconstruction and amalgamation of our differences, cultures, nationalities, and religions -- may not be the future we want for the next generation. As the protagonist concludes (in reference to the famous idiom of the baby and the bathwater), "The bathwater may be the best thing about us."

Lots of hard science, with some food for thought and enough thrills and solid characters to keep you reading.

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### **Judy says**

Very interesting but the very last page was a total turnoff. My friend who borrowed it from me loved it until I pointed out that she hadn't read the last page, and then she changed her mind!

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### **Alexandra says**

Really enjoyed the story as a whole. It opens with a series of vignettes, "Legends," mostly set in the childhood of various characters. One of the games I played as I read was figuring out which character had had a legend (this shouldn't have been very hard, given they are all named... but I have a poor memory and I read too fast, so you know. It worked for me). This was a really cool technique. However, the characters are not a strong point - more to the point, I think the female characters are not a strong point. Some of the men weren't great either, but more of them were interesting and appealing and relate-able than women, for me.

The story as a whole is a compelling one, dealing as it does with mind-mapping and (potentially) -controlling technology. The world is a very near-future one - even closer than when Robson wrote it, actually, since some of the technology she throws in that in 2001 may have seemed quite 'tomorrow' is already here! Most of the story flows nicely, with only a few only-for-the-narrative moments, none of which were tooo jarring. It's well-paced, and the shifting between characters works nicely to build tension and provide juxtaposition.

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### **David King says**

Full review can be found on my blog: <http://killie-booktalk.blogspot.com/>

The first thing I noticed when reading the book was that Justina Robson must have put a lot of research into the novel as I could imagine that some of the technologies detailed may really just be around the corner. However, I found that at times it did get quite deep into some of the technicalities and science involved and this felt a little bit too heavy at times.

I also found that none of the characters within the novel really appealed to me. I know that some of this was due to the characterisation being weak and inconsistent at times, especially in regards to the supporting

characters. However, even the characters that were well rounded and consistent couldn't keep me interested in their predicament. I will say however that the characters were more realistic than some basic good and bad characters, with none of them being completely admirable or despicable in their actions.

Overall, I have to say that this was not a book I enjoyed hugely. The parts of the book that should have had me on the edge of my seat just didn't work due to both the overall slow pace of the novel and the characterisation. I suspect some people will really like this book, especially those who would enjoy a deep philosophical dive into psychology, personal freedoms, etc. in the near future but it just wasn't for me.

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### **William S. says**

Mappa Mundi By Justina Robson is a science fiction novel about a woman named Natalie, along with her company trying to unlock and utilize all the power of the human brain. Along the way a lot of strange occurrences start to happen especially after she gets information from an American FBI agent that someone plans to use her selfware program as a weapon.

This book is extremely well put together, all of the characters and the story line work together really well. The insight on all of the individual characters helps you better understand the inner workings of all that's really going on. Furthermore the characters develop in a natural way giving another layer of realistic advancements to the story. On the other hand the book might be extremely well put together but it lacks a lot of action. At some points it just seems too real which makes it boring.

In general people who like books with a lot of action and plot twists most likely would not enjoy reading this book. On the other hand this would be a book for people who like slightly more complex story lines and characters.

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### **Ben says**

It was OK. Not great. Not terrible. It failed to make much of an impression on me really. I will not be in a hurry to re-read this again in the future - and probably won't.

On the other hand, before I completely damn this book into total mediocrity, there were a few things I liked about it. There are a few different characters and the story flips around between them, which makes the story that much more enjoyable to read and definitely enhances the plot. The plot itself has a certain thriller feeling to it, which was fun as it is not a genre I delve into so much, so getting a bit of a cross-over is always nice. The characters were well developed and Robson did a pretty good job of presenting the different settings such as York or Washington in as much as they needed to enhance the story and provide a backdrop for the characters' actions.

And of course, the idea behind the book - which is always an important thing in a good science fiction book - is interesting. What would happen if we could selectively reprogram elements of the mind itself? What would happen if we could unlock significantly more of the human brain's untapped potential? Robson takes a look at these issues and presents us with a perfectly decent read.

Why then have I only given it two stars and not a three, if there were so many good things about it? I really do not know. Perhaps it deserves an extra star. However, at the end of the day it just failed to grab me really. Maybe I am being too harsh.

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