



Motel of the Mysteries

David Macaulay

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It is the year 4022; all of the ancient country of Usa has been buried under many feet of detritus from a catastrophe that occurred back in 1985. Imagine, then, the excitement that Howard Carson, an amateur archeologist at best, experienced when in crossing the perimeter of an abandoned excavation site he felt the ground give way beneath him and found himself at the bottom of a shaft, which, judging from the DO NOT DISTURB sign hanging from an archaic doorknob, was clearly the entrance to a still-sealed burial chamber. Carson's incredible discoveries, including the remains of two bodies, one of them on a ceremonial bed facing an altar that appeared to be a means of communicating with the Gods and the other lying in a porcelain sarcophagus in the Inner Chamber, permitted him to piece together the whole fabric of that extraordinary civilization.

Motel of the Mysteries Details

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Author : David Macaulay

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From Reader Review Motel of the Mysteries for online ebook

Matt Mikesell says

This is a fun quick read. Interesting concept of how future archaeologists will interpret our modern life. It makes me wonder if theories about lost civilizations we've discovered are on the mark, or if we're totally misinterpreting them?

Olivia "Don't Blame Me I Voted for Hillary" says

The premise of this book was really funny.

Michael says

The first anthropology text I was required to read as an undergraduate was a delightful and instructive satire by Horace Miner, "Body Ritual among the Nacirema," which originally appeared in *The American Anthropologist*, vol. 58 (1956), pp. 503-507, and which has been reproduced many times since. The point was to warn aspiring anthropologists against the dangers of interpreting other cultures based on inadequate information or lack cultural understanding. It was both instructive and humorous. When I was in my first year of graduate school, my adviser shared with me a cartoon with two panels. On the left was depicted a nondescript shard of pottery labeled "Archaeological Find." On the right was a drawing of a triumphal procession of chariots down a street lined with elaborate columns surmounted with intricate friezes in bas-relief while trumpets blared and crowds in elaborate costumes cheered. It was labeled "Archaeologist's Reconstruction." Motel of the Mysteries is an illustrated and humorous look at the excavation and (mis)interpretation of a twentieth-century North American motel, "TOOT 'N' C'MON," and its associated artifacts by a forty-first century archaeologist, bow-tie-wearing Howard Carson. And if you don't get the angle Macaulay is going for, just consider that the discovery happens in 4022, 2100 years after another famous discovery by an archaeologist working in Egypt with the financial backing of Lord Carnarvon. Carson's faithful assistant, Harriet, wears some of the recovered artifacts in a sly reference to Sophia Schliemann, who was fond of wearing ancient jewelry discovered at Hisarlik. The book also skewers museums and their gift shops and reenactments of ancient cultures. It is cleverly executed, even if it is a bit of a one-trick pony.

Miriam says

Pretty much a one-note joke, but fun.

Αλ?ξανδρος says

Τι θα γιν?ταν αν ?νας ?λλος πολιτισμ?ς στο μακριν? μ?λλον ?κανε εκσκαφ?ς στη γη κι ?βρισκε ?να ερειπωμ?νο μοτ?λ; Π?ς θα ?βλεπε την τηλε?ραση; (αφο? δεν ?χουν εκε?), την τουαλ?τα; (αφο? στο μ?λλον θα ?χουν ?να διαφορετικ? τρ?πο αποχ?τευσης) Αυτ? απαντ?ει βασικ? το εικονογραφημ?νο βιβλ?ο με ?ναν αστε?ο τρ?πο και μας δε?χνει π?σο ε?κολο ε?ναι να ?χουμε παρερμηνε?σει αυτ? που ?χουμε βρει εμε?ς στους Αιγ?πτιους τ?φους.

Antonis says

Η πρ?τη μου γνωριμ?α με το βιβλ?ο αυτ? ε?χε γ?νει π?νω απ? μια δεκαετ?α πριν, στο σπ?τι μιας βιβλιοφ?γου Ολλανδ?ζας φ?λης μου. Παρ?τι τ?τε ε?χα απλ?ς ξεφυλλ?σει παρ? διαβ?σει το αγγλικ? πρωτ?τυπο, μου ε?χε φανε? τ?σο ασυν?θιστο που μου ?φησε μια ανεξ?τηλη εντ?πωση. ?ταν λοιπ?ν το βρ?κα σχεδ?ν τυχα?α στο φιλ?ξενο βιβλιοπωλε?ο της "?γνωστης Καντ?θ" στη Θεσσαλον?κη κ?τι σκ?ρτησε μ?σα μου και το π?ρα χωρ?ς δε?τερη κουβ?ντα.

Και μετ? απ? αυτ? την προσωπικ? ν?τα, δυο λ?για για το βιβλ?ο: στα 4022 ?νας ερασιτ?χνης αρχαιολ?γος ανακαλ?πτει τυχα?α ?να μοτ?λ που ε?χε θαφτε? για αι?νες στη γη μετ? απ? μια μεγ?λη καταστροφ? που βρ?κε τις «?πα» το 1985. Καθ?ς το μεγαλ?τερο μ?ρος της γν?σης για την εποχ? εκε?νη (την εποχ? μας) ?χει χαθε? στο μ?λλον, ο ν?ος Σλ?μαν θεωρε? -ε?λογα με β?ση ?λα τα ευρ?ματα- πως το αν?παφο δωμ?τιο του μοτ?λ απ? ?που ξεκ?νησε η ανασκαφ? ε?ναι ταφικ?ς θ?λαμος και ?λο το μοτ?λ νεκροταφε?ο. Οι παρεξηγ?σεις της χρ?σης και της σημασ?ας των αντικειμ?νων του δωματ?ου δημιουργο?ν ?να ξεκαρδιστικ? αποτ?λεσμα (πχ. το καρτελ?κι "Μην Ενοχλε?τε" π?νω στο π?μολο της π?ρτας θεωρε?ται ?νδειξη της ταφικ?ς χρ?σης του χ?ρου, η τηλεοπτικ? συσκευ? βωμ?ς, το καπ?κι της τουαλ?τας τελετουργικ? στολ?δι κοκ.), εν? η σ?τιρα αφορ? τ?σο τον σημεριν? τρ?πο ζω?ς, ?σο και τον τρ?πο θε?ρηση των αρχα?ων πολιτισμ?ν με β?ση τα σκ?ρπια και αποσπασματικ? ευρ?ματα που ?χουμε γι' αυτο?ς. Παν?ξυπνο και πολ? αστε?ο! Ψ?ξτε το!

Rebecca says

A classic. Post-year-4000, a buried motel is discovered. The future citizens' wild misinterpretations of the sacred objects found (TV, toilet, drain plug) is a hilarious consideration of how much WE have likely gotten wrong about past civilizations.

Don says

This book has one comedic idea - that future archaeologists, unaware of how our technology is used, will misinterpret their function and assume most items had a religious purpose. It's an absurdist anti-intellectual work that tries to be funny but failed for me. Mildly amusing in the first few pages but once you perceive the one idea it has it becomes predictable and tedious for the remainder.

Matthew says

If you give children books as gifts (as I do) I suggest that at some point you give them this. It probably wasn't intended for children when written and illustrated, but you would be hard-pressed to associate any particular age of child as its ideal audience. I found this in second grade on my homeroom teacher's bookshelf. My reading of it aroused that special kind of terror children will get when encountering something especially unique and weird and slightly out of grasp of their full understanding.

Basically it's an anthropologist trying to make sense of the remains of something like a Super 8 motel many years after our current civilization perished. It's very funny.

What stood out for me as a child were skeletons on beds watching television, held in place as if in a mummy's tomb and the interpretations of common bathroom paraphernalia as idols and ritual objects.

It could get a child thinking about the mortality of cultures and civilizations, elastic interpretations of the materials of past cultures, the hilarity of familiar objects without proper context, and so on.

Converse says

I think David Macaulay is better known for his non-fiction illustrated books, often aimed at children, that explain how things were made, but I loved this illustrated spoof of archaeology.

In 4022, archaeologists excavate a cheap motel buried in the 1985 disaster that covers North America with a solidified crust composed of junk mail, and solidified air pollution – and proceed to systematically misinterpret the site as an ancient mortuary, based upon the one room that contained a couple of skeletons. The “do not disturb sign” becomes “the gleaming Sacred Seal Placed on the door by the officials after the burial to protect the tomb and its inhabitant for eternity” and the bathtub becomes a highly polished white sarcophagus.” I liked the puns that referenced actual archaeologists, such as naming the main character Howard Carson (the discoverer of Tutankhamen was Howard Carter; like Carter, Carson sees “wonderful things” when he opens the “tomb”), and the illustration of his assistant, Harriet Burton, wearing the “Sacred Collar, matching Headbandthe magnificent *plasticus* ear ornaments and the exquisite silver chain and pedant (respectively toilet set and lid, “sanitized for your protection” paper strip around same, two toothbrushes worn by Harriet as earrings and the stopper for the bath tub) which eerily resembles the photograph of Sophia Schleimann wearing” the jewels of Helen” excavated by Heinrich Schleimann in 1873 from Hisarlik, the probable site of ancient Troy. All of this leads to insight into the “Yank” culture of the country of “Usa.”

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Rob Slaven says

My fiancée bought this book for me as a Christmas Gift but upon receiving it found it so absurd that she gave it to me early. At first glance, I too was rather perplexed but upon more detailed perusal this book is subtly amusing.

Set centuries in the future, the author takes us through an archaeological dig exploring a common motel room. Our protagonist works diligently to identify all manner of artifacts from toilet seats to televisions and proceeds to get them all completely and utterly wrong. The outcome is a definite skewering not only of the archaeological sciences but also of society in general.

So while on its surface the book is absurd, if you look deeper it really has a keen message. You just have to keep plugging away and give the story a chance to grab your attention.

Sesana says

I've read quite a few of David Macauley's books, mostly the ones like *Castle*: meticulously illustrated and highly researched nonfiction. *Motel of the Mysteries* is another thing entirely. Set nearly two millenia after the destruction of the U.S., (apparently by being buried under a junk mail explosion) it describes the excavation of a motel, as interpreted by archeologist Howard Carson. See what he did there? If so, you are the target audience.

It can be a pretty funny book, driven by Carson's wildly inaccurate (yet oddly understandable) conclusions about the site. Obviously, it's a burial chamber (motel room), with altar (TV) and sarcophagus (bathtub). The joke can run a bit thin towards the end, though the reproductions (available for sale at the museum gift shop!) ended the book on a high note. Silly though it is, it does raise a few good questions. How much do we really know about prehistory? What has archeology really taught us about the past? And, most importantly, how would the distant future view us?

Nate D says

Like many, I was long familiar with Macaulay's more direct and informative works -- I had a copy of *Castle* as a child -- but the one that stuck with me was this one, after a brief brush with it in a bookstore: a

meticulously-drawn account of amateur anthropologist in the 4020s bungling the interpretation of our current (long lost) civilization. A strange satiric treatment of the distance of interpretation and our assurances in what we know of other cultures, perhaps, as a mysterious picture book for unknown ages somewhere between children and adults, or for anyone, maybe.

Joy Pixley says

I'd enjoyed this book as a child and was recently reminded about it. What great timing for me, as I happened to pick it up and read it just after seeing the Tutankhamun's Treasures exhibit in LA. I had forgotten that it's a direct spoof on the Tut's tomb discovery and the mania that went along with it. I don't think I'd even noticed the first time around that they set up certain names and photos to mimic the Tut photos.

The drawings are high quality, and the commentary is a wonderful dry parody. The message hits you over the head repeatedly – that there are risks in interpreting cultural symbols of long-distant cultures – but it works. It's funny, it's a clever idea, and it offers plenty of in-jokes for you to laugh at long afterward (sacred point, anyone?). This is more of a picture book than anything else, and it's a quick read; don't expect in-depth coverage. But that, too, is a virtue: it says what it came to say and then stops before it gets dull.

I'm caught between a 3 star and 4 star rating, because although I really liked the book for what it was, it feels too lightweight and short to properly match up to other books I rate as 4 stars.

I would definitely recommend this to anyone who enjoys intellectual humor, especially if you're a fan of archeology and the Howard Carter Tut discovery story.
