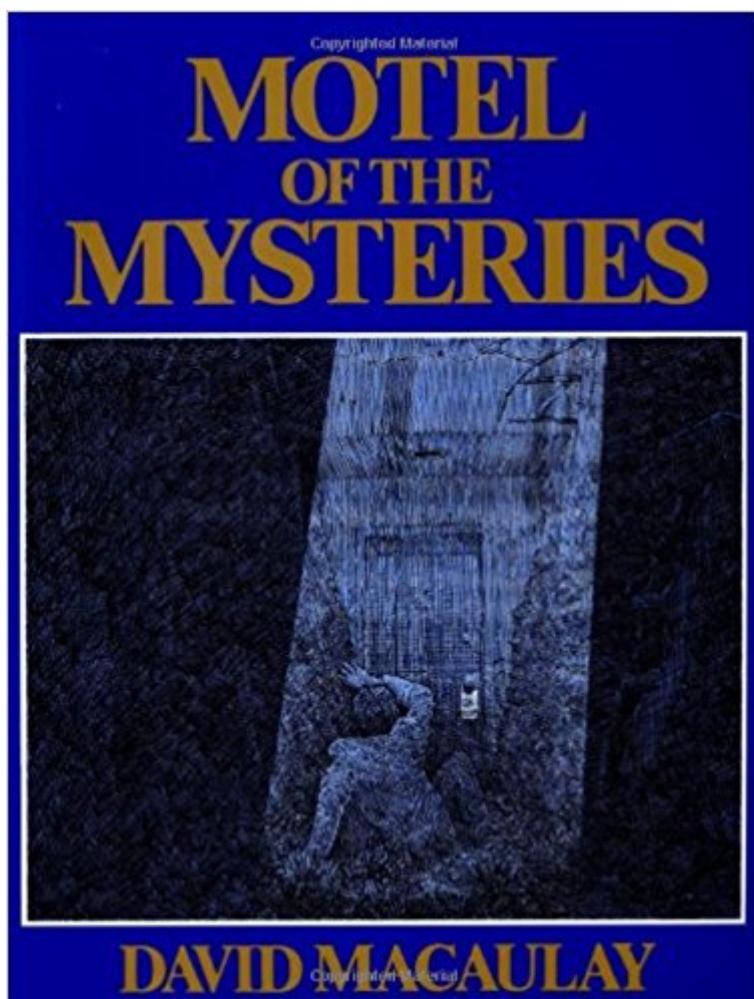


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Motel Of The Mysteries



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book was actually a gift from my Mother who knows I enjoy things archaeological and historical. Since she's more than a trifle eccentric and has a marvelous sense of the absurd, I've a sneaking suspicion she was poking a little fun at me--which is something I probably need once in a while for my own good. The Motel of the Mysteries is a wonderful send up of the fields of archaeology and history. Its aim is doubtless to entertain, at which it's vastly successful, but over and above that the book makes quite clear what archaeology legitimately can and cannot do. I think it also points out that what is taken as "The Reality" of the past is often as much a function of current cultural biases and of the personal motives of individual researchers as it is of what actually occurred in the past. (This was made quite clear to me when I saw Knossos on Crete for the first

time and realized that a great deal of imagination had gone into the reconstruction of the "Minoan" buildings there). My favorite parts of Motel were Archaeologist Carson's interpretation of the hotel bathroom as the inner sanctum of a religious structure and the subsequent depiction of his assistant--ala Heinrich Schliemann with the Trojan treasure and Leonard Wooley with the Ur III treasure--wearing bathroom accoutrements as religious paraphernalia. The author also pokes fun at museums and at all of us, when he includes a collection of "Souvenirs and Quality Reproductions" available for sale at the end of the book. My favorite is the coffee set based on the "sacred urn" (toilet). Goodness knows I've purchased my fair share of quality reproductions on my travels throughout the world! This should be suggested reading for every college history and archeology major and required for those seeking degrees over BA in these fields!

If you are a fan of David Macaulay's books about the construction of such wonders as a Cathedral, Pyramid, City, Mill, etc ... then you will really enjoy this book about future archaeologists / explorers "discovering" the buried ruins of an American motel room in the 41st century ... and the miss-identification of just about every item found. I think that this is a book that every archaeologist / historian should read because it perfectly explains the traps that we may fall into when trying to explain the past using present day knowledge and sensibilities. The events portrayed in this book show the reader just how easy it is to make a mistake ... even when one's best intentions are at stake. Then again, it is a David Macaulay (always great) and it is funny! Especially the Museum Gift Store items displayed at the end of the book.

David Macaulay is widely known for his writings, which include such works as Cathedral and Pyramid. As a boy, Macaulay was fascinated by simple machinery. Years later, he published many award-winning books, and eventually produced his comic work, Motel of the Mysteries. Motel is about an historical dig in the distant future. In the year 4022, all the North American continent has been buried under billions of tons of debris from a combined postal error and bad luck which occurred in 1985. Howard Carson, an amateur archaeologist, is running in a marathon, when he crosses the site of an old dig from years past. He falls into an undiscovered, underground room with a door on one side. Finding a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door, he realizes he has discovered an ancient tomb of the inhabitants of the nation that once existed there. Gathering a small team of archaeologists and assistants, including his wife, Carson sets to work on the site to uncover the secrets of Usa. After three years of excavation, the site is uncovered fully and Carson begins to understand some of the strange burial practices of the citizens of Usa. Once the work is complete,

Carson's findings, including the Sacred Urn and Music Box (a toilet) are displayed in a special Yank museum. Motel of the Mysteries is a short book, but within its cover lies spellbinding material. With wit, brains, and spectacular illustrations, David Macaulay relates an undeniably witty story of a camel-hump scientist and his fall into the history books.

Macaulay's other books, such as CASTLE, show our archeologists' recreations of times past. But what if it's ALL WRONG??? In MOTEL OF THE MYSTERIES, we get a marvelous story of a future archeologist finding, and completely misunderstanding, an ordinary motel room. Great fun, and you'll never watch a Discover Channel special with quite that credulity again.

This book pokes definite fun at my career but I still love it. It reminds us to be mindful of our conclusions and it's funny to adults and children. I had a prof read it to my class during undergrad and the class was laughing out loud.

Motel of the Mysteries is simply one of the funniest books I have ever seen. And "seen" is the word, as the joy is in the illustrations. A parody of archaeologists' tendency to declare what we "know" about past civilizations based on their artifacts, the book presents the unearthing of a nondescript motel two thousand years after the sudden collapse of Western civilization. The fun is in the labeling of the various elements discovered: a showercap becomes a ceremonial death cap, a dinner tray an offering to the gods, a toilet seat a piece of sacred religious neckwear. Macaulay makes his point and has fun doing it. I pick up this book again and again whenever I'm in the mood for an intelligent chuckle.

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