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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Colossal Wrecks

Bernard Michael Patten
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Some books boldly defy classification by genre, and Dr. Bernard Michael Patten's *Colossal Wrecks* is just such a piece of work. Patten enabled himself to pen this "post-modern meta-fictional travel adventure romance novel" by "forgetting the idea of linear construction."

If rated only for originality and audacity, *Colossal Wrecks* is deserving of four stars on a five-star scale. Mainstream readers of any of the component genres Patten tosses into this stew pot of a novel, however, are unlikely to find enough of their favorite themes to satisfy their hunger for a filling literary meal. A few of those readers would give this bizarre yet clever and difficult-to-describe book two stars. There may not be enough of anything here to make all readers happy, yet there is much of everything here–and as such there is at least something for almost everyone who bravely forays into this tortuous tale.

Patten's story begins in what appears to be the era of the Crusades, at least until the main character, Duke Morgan the Magnificent, responds to crossbow fire by pulling out a .357 Magnum. From that moment, the reader is taken down a confusing, if intriguing, path into what may be an alternate universe, or the nightmare of either a madman or a junkie on an acid trip.

The "storms of thoughts" that "are forever blowing though one's mind" come fast and furious, as Patten's protagonist puts it, as do the *bon mots* and *non sequiturs* he spouts, including: "War in the Middle East is always a good diversion."

Duke Morgan's story flits from medieval crusader battlefield to modern-city confessional, and it is filled, as his boy consort Nelson says, with "bad vibes and many things pagan." In reading this book, as Nelson notes, "the key thing to keep in mind is don't freak out."

Patten's chapters are interspersed with contemporary news reports, both authentic and manufactured. Some deal with the wars in the Middle East, for which this book can be seen as a metaphor. Others are invented, such as the faux interview with Patten, in which he reacts to a journalist's claim that the author is "trying to pass off a concealed book of essays as a novel."

That accusation is not refuted. Patten does use the book to comment on everything from the "stupidity" of modern presidents to the "scam" of HMOs. His jabs and jibes are aimed at religion, television, social and sexual mores, writers, the wordsmiths' craft, and even himself.

"I am not good enough to be a successful writer," Patten admits in an aside to the reader, "nor bad enough, like James Patterson, to be a successful writer." Citing the eighteenth-century lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson, Patten quips that, "Only a fool writes for anything but money," adding: "I could make more money as a blood donor or a gigolo, so I guess that makes me …"

Patten had fun writing this novel, this collection of essays, this scribbling of random thoughts. It is at times a bit unsettling, always surprising, and sometimes very amusing. Refreshingly, Patten does not appear to take himself seriously, and that is *Colossal Wrecks'* true saving grace.

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (August 16, 2011)

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