

The Mouse That Snored

Mel Horowitz

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Mel Horowitz's *The Mouse That Snored* is an amusing farcical reinterpretation of American revolutionary heroes and myths.

Humboldt "Humby" Yolo Stanislaus IV is a restless college graduate. He's descended from a long line of Gold Rush pioneering families and seeks adventure. While vacationing in Bermuda, Humby stubs his toe on a bottle and uncovers a map of an uncharted island, New Britannia. Humby shares his discovery with a college librarian, who turns it over to State Department agents, Miss Figg and Mr. Fonsbons. They reveal that the British originally sent descendants of American revolutionaries to the island with the promise of repatriation once the English won the war.

Mr. Fonsbons devises a plan to hide a chip containing the nation's military secrets inside a hunk of cheese and sends unwitting Humby as "special trade representative" to deliver the package to New Britannia's administrator, the cheese-loving Countess, for safekeeping. Humby's inept behavior turns the mission into a history-altering comical caper.

With its masterful slapstick comedy and comedic timing, the story is entertaining. However, much like its main character's thought processes, it gets lost in detailed and meandering plotlines involving myriad quirky characters. These side plots work as individual skits but do little to advance the central story. The mission is all but abandoned midway through the book; it does not make an appearance again until the very end.

Although the book's secondary characters are drawn from historical legends, there is much mixing of history with nonsensical additions. Legendary stereotypes are expanded upon in a tongue-in-cheek way, and famous phrases play as prominent a role in the plot as do the people uttering them. For example, Paul Revere's refrain "The redcoats are coming!" offers comic relief in mock-tense situations, while George Washington's "I cannot tell a lie!" becomes the rallying cry for Washington's own sense of moral justice. Halfway through the book, Humby ends up playing second fiddle to ostensibly secondary characters like Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and the Countess.

The most consistently competent characters are inventive Ben Franklin and egotistical Alexander Hamilton, though even they become oddball caricatures in their own plotlines. Ben Franklin's attempt to explain the new government hierarchy modeled on a bureau of drawers becomes an overly long description of a wardrobe malfunction involving a corset and Martha Washington; it is funny at the beginning but becomes repetitive as the paragraph progresses.

Creativity and imagination are shown in abundance in the offbeat names of the story's nonhistorical characters and in its unique setting. The narrative excels in establishing surface-level historical contexts from which to launch its subsequent plotlines.

The Mouse That Snored is whimsical and original, with often excellent comedic timing, if its meandering plotlines and bombastic characters take it over.

NANCY POWELL (September 21, 2018)

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