



The Mad Scientists' Club

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A strange sea monster suddenly appears on Strawberry Lake, a fortune is unearthed from an old cannon and a valuable dinosaur egg is stolen. Who's responsible? Those seven junior geniuses -- and their wild ideas. Watch out as the Mad Scientists' Club turns the town of Mammoth Falls upside down!

The Mad Scientists' Club Details

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Author : Bertrand R. Brinley , Charles Geer (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Mad Scientists' Club for online ebook

Christine says

I thoroughly enjoyed these stories, written in the 1960s, and so did Danny. The names of the characters alone make it fun! I actually bought the omnibus of all the stories and novels, reprinted by Purple House Press, and hope to read them all.

Holly says

This is the best kids book ever. It probably appeals to boys more than girls though. In a way it saddens me when I re-read it. I don't think our kids today have as much freedom as these did (or my generation). I remember staying out until dark, riding my bike EVERYWHERE, clubhouses on vacant lots...Or maybe it's responsibility. Kids today have freedom but little responsibility. I'm getting off my soap box now. but this is a cool book and it will make your kids fall in love with science. I imagine the Mythbusters grew up like this- or maybe their dads did!!

Michael Rutland says

A book that every boy (and girl) should be given for one of the summers of their pre-teen years. The stories are funny, very creative, and most impressively, make the reader truly feel that they could build the contraptions and emulate the Mad Scientists' hijinks. 20 years after reading it for the first time, I still pick it up and find the characters as fresh and rewarding as ever.

Rob says

If your kid is the curious, science-minded type who gets into trouble because of it, like I was (am), you need to get them (and yourself) all of Bertrand Brinley's long out-of-print, but now reprinted hard-cover editions (published by Purple House Press) of all the "Mad Scientists' Club" books, and Brinley's two other books as well.

I discovered them on my own at school when I was 7 years old, and they're the best type of kid's book (I took a "Children's Lit" course in college) - when I bought the reprints (thanks, Chip!) I enjoyed them as much as I did from 7 years old through high school.

The best Children's Lit books are ones that work for all ages, where a 6-7 year old "early-reader" like myself, or I'd guess 11-13 year old "normal" kid will love the stories - they're somewhat like a Hardy Boys book but much more fun, with real science behind crazy adventures. By high school I enjoyed the Real but Goofy Science, and today I enjoy the writing style, excellent story telling without the "formula" of the Hardy Boys and "adult" things I get now but not when I was young. So they're a fun read for all ages.

I've given copies of them to fellow geek / enginerd pals, who then read/give them to their kids. It's too bad

more weren't written, since these are true classics, but Brinley died right when they finally started selling.

I'd rank these as the "Where the Wild Things Are" for kids 5-6th grade and up. And if your kids don't like them, and you like goofy adventures about science-based pranks gone wrong, and madcap results, you'll love these books yourself. The illustrations are spot-on perfect in a unique style, much like the original "Alice in Wonderland" or "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" stuff. It's a very 1950's style and shows "nerdy, outsider" kids as being very hip and fun.

Half-Kidding Warning: I did the "fake UFO" siting prank, and blew up a tree, and faked a "Loch Ness Monster" in a nearby lake, like in the books... so you might want to keep an eye on any kid who really takes to the stories. I still like to do the "UFO" thing even as an adult, but blowing stuff up was pretty stupid... but being "stupid" is part of being a kid I believe, and why I'm still a pyromanic and prankster, but with ethics and safety in mind being a reluctant adult.

Don't let that joking warning put you off - if your kids decide to learn how to make a remote-controlled submergeable "monster", they'll probably take to science courses in high school and then go on to do wondrous things in their life / career. And likely have a good sense of humor about it all.

Timeless classics all. Recommended!

Sara says

This one is a very tricky book to review. I'm going to do a detailed review at Plumfield and Paideia where I show photos of specific sections. The science in this book is irresistible. It's absolutely enchanting to a science minded reader, and a boy in particular. The bad behavior, however, spoils some of the fun. I really wish these boys were more respectful, more sensible, and more worthy of recommendation.

Denise Hunsaker says

Family favorite, Love the whole idea & fun of the neighborhood boys getting into trouble.

girl writing says

A favorite from grade school reading days that I found while book collecting and recently reread. I so wished I could be in a club like this one that had exciting adventures (and good clean fun) and used their wits to stay/get out of trouble. Reading it as an adult, this book is a great example of kids using their intelligence, humor, physical abilities to interact with each other and explore their world...things that seem lacking today (don't I sound old).

Cheryl says

Some of the science is a bit outdated. And of course there are no girls (not even a token girl, thank

goodness). And these 'boys' (mostly about 14 years old, I think) do disrespect other people's property and stuff.

Minor quibbles, really. They also prove themselves to be good kids who can be trusted not to do any real harm, so I felt comfortable laughing at the funny bits.

But, I'm not an adventurous boy. Without enough characterization to know the boys apart (the fat one, the youngest, the inventor is about all I got), and without any thoughtfulness/ depth/ resonance/ substance, I, personally, just don't feel charmed.

For fans of Encyclopedia Brown and Danny Dunn.

Marvin Goodman says

My 9 and 11 year old daughters STILL let me read to them a few nights a week. This book, and its sequel (The New Adventures of the Mad Scientists Club) did much to shape my childhood curiosity about scientific adventure, and probably explains why I teach elementary school kids how to build machines and robots with Legos. Oh, the dialogue is hokey (these were written in the early to mid 60's), but the stories were utterly enthralling to me as a boy, and captivate my 21st century daughters as well. It doesn't have to be THIS book, but little girls need to be exposed to gears, levers, rockets and others things not generally associated with stereotypical "girl toys."

Steve McKee says

One of my all-time favorite books, especially the dialogue between the Mayor and the Flying Man.

Rick Bauer says

I first read this book in elementary school back in the early 1970's. To this day, it remains one of my all-time favorites. In 2004, I picked up the hard-cover reprint published by Purple House Press. That summer I re-read the book with my son. It was a marvelous way to share the magic of reading. Now he loves these stories as much as I did when I was his age.

In my humble opinion, this is Bernard Brinley's finest work. A definite children's classic.

Ed says

I re-read this book a few years ago and these stories really hold up. They are just as fun and clever the second time around.

Miriam says

The "mad scientists" here are a lot more Scooby Doo than HG Wells. They're like, if the Scooby Doo villains were kids playing pranks rather than adults after cash. We'll cover this sheet in luminescent paint and pretend it's a ghost! We'll make a lake monster out of this raft and some stuff from the junkyard!

They're small town boys trying to have fun, mostly, although there is a definite strand of mean-spiritedness that I didn't care for. Especially one story, where the boys put a mannequin in a jetpack atop a monument and pretend it is a person threatening suicide, I did not like at all. I'm sure the situation was not amusing to all the emergency services personnel who were called out. In several stories the kids waste the time of the police, fire department, even the air force and never seem to get in trouble, which I found implausible. It's not specified how old the boys are, but old enough to have girlfriends and stay out at night, so old enough to know better.

I found it mildly entertaining, but probably not enough to look for more by this author. Although for this sort of boys' hijinks genre he is a better writer than average.

Terry says

When I read this in sixth grade, I thought that my father must have lived a childhood something like this, and I experienced an early form of nostalgia for something I'd never known. There is timeless magic in this story.

Connie says

This book wound up surprising me. I wasn't liking it too well at first. It seemed like it was about a bunch of boys who used their STEM skills to prank their fellow townsfolk. While they definitely did their fair share of that, they also did some pretty amazing things.

This book was written at a time when unsupervised free time was a thing. I think it could potentially be very inspirational for boys. It shows the good, as well as the fun, that can be done when you have some knowledge in science, technology, engineering and math. I'm trying to get my son to read it. I'm hoping it's not too old fashioned to be relatable to modern-day kids.

Jim says

The ultimate pre-teen boys' adventure series, The Mad Scientists Club details the exploits of a group of boys intensely interested in electronics, radio transmitters, physics, aviation, etc. From a seemingly limitless supply of equipment they construct elaborate pranks, experiments, and rescue devices to astound, confuse, vex, impress, and otherwise impress their fellow townsfolk. Before there was Make magazine there was The Mad Scientists Club.

Feliks says

A gem. Almost unknown; but one of the most hilarious and memorable laugh-out-loud books you could ask for. It's never mentioned by anyone; it's never recommended, placed on book lists or chosen by reading-groups. This just might be because it's a series of books which represents a 'philosophy-of-parenting' which has fallen out of favor. That's my suspicion, anyway.

I mean, just think about it. These stories are about kids who are unmonitored; who are allowed to just go off on summer afternoons and hang out on their own; and do whatever they want.... because they are trusted by their folks. Today, this is the last thing parents want to hear. No one in today's control-freak, micro-managing America wants to imagine that children can be trusted like this.

Books for very young children ('Little Prince' or 'Giving Tree') are in abundance on Goodreads. They're sweet and harmless. There's also a new genre called 'YA' ('young adult'). But guess what? They're all very sanitary, careful, cautious, and timid. Antiseptic. Content-supervised and Content-controlled. They always instruct youngsters on the 'correct' thing to do, the 'sensitive' thing to do, the 'courteous' thing to do...blah blah blah.

'Mad Scientists' is different. Instead of caution, the author praises problem-solving, solidarity, daring, and initiative. It's a book written for kids illustrating how NOT to follow the rules. It's a book which shows that rules are made to be flouted.

These stories are from a time when today's endless complexities and anxieties just weren't around. It's a book that deals with kids just..having fun. I say, there need to be a LOT MORE books like this.

The gang of boys in Brinley's tales are pre-teens; somewhere between 11 and 14. This is a strange interval in a boy's matriculation, when they need to figure out a lot of things about life (and it's also a time when adults have the least relevant advice to offer). This is the space Brinley plays in: the theme of personal responsibility.

Teens NEED to create a few *genuine catastrophes* in order to learn the weight of 'cause' vs 'effect'. 'Intention' vs 'outcome'. 'Actions' vs 'harm'. They need to learn the ins-and-outs of friendship and loyalty and paying-one's-dues.

The 'Mad Scientists Club' (*this is the name carved on their clubhouse door*) demonstrate these themes grandly. These young scamps are precisely in that age where you learn how to make a mess and how you clean it up afterwards. By yourself!

The crazy scenarios which afflict these affable 'troublemakers' reminds us--should remind everyone-- that this process can be **fun**. Making mistakes and learning from them. The best way --nay, the ONLY way--to shape character.

Far cry from today, huh? Yeah. Today, we don't let kids have 'secret clubs', 'hideouts', codewords, or 'mysterious friends'. We don't let them play with equipment or tools. They must not 'wreck' anything of ours. They're certainly not allowed to 'gallivant all over creation' (*love that phrase*).

Modern parents are rule-mongers and control freaks. When our kids want to play, we take them to 'Sesame Place' and we monitor their nutrition and we deck them in flashing sneakers and put them in helmets and on

leashes. We place them in soccer, swim class, softball, karate, dance, gymnastics.

The result? Modern kids have no idea what real 'freedom' means. We never give it to them. They turn out to be vegetables.

But Brinley's kids show the other way it can be done. This boy's club makes their own fun. They don't 'ask for permission' to do stuff--they just do it! They embrace wildness, zaniness, and unpredictability. The outcome? Well, they aren't brought up on charges from the Department of Homeland Security, for the trouble they cause. That's for sure. This is a part of small town-Americana we've let slip away.

Just one example: in one of the adventures undertaken by the Mad Scientists, they build their own hot-air balloon (using scraps from a local junkyard) and they enter it in the town's annual homemade hot-air balloon race. With no adult supervision at all. Once aloft, (!!) they engaged in an air-battle with their arch-foes and fire potato-cannons and slingshots back'n'forth in mid-air. Finally, they manage to send the enemy gang's balloon into the lake! Can you stand it? I can't friggin' stand it, can you?

This book reminds us that children used to be perfectly capable of taking care of themselves if we let them...if we weren't all scared out of our wits by molesters and semi-automatic weapons and drugs and porn and stalkers and computers, we'd still remember the kind of America found in this hilarious read. It's to our shame that we can't.

Jerry says

I read the sequel, *The New Adventures of the Mad Scientists' Club* in grade school. It's pretty much what the title says: a bunch of kids start a club to do science stuff, and much of it is practical jokes. They have a ham radio that they use to coordinate, and a junk yard to scavenge strange parts from.

In this book, they impersonate ghosts, send a mannequin flying over a local celebration, and start a myth about a sea monster in the local lake. It's all almost doable, even by the sixties-era technology they would have had access to.

It's also amazing for what's left out. They take a rope hand-over-hand across a chasm, and that's barely worth commenting on. They spend most of their time without adult supervision. They—and other kids—enter a balloon race. There they have adults watching—from the ground.

These kids are going to be real cranks when they get older and have kids and grandkids of their own. “Why, when I was a kid, we used to dig all day for dinosaur eggs, search for lost treasure, and hide away in a clubhouse planning ways to prank adults.”

Which is, of course, what we did.

Robert says

This was simply a great childhood book for any inquisitive kid who likes science, haunted houses, dinosaurs, flying machines, etc. I read this book in about seventh or eighth grade and actually a couple of times since. I believe this book helped me on my career to being a rocket scientist but it also gave me many ideas as I was growing up. Brinley managed to capture the perfect mid-west US town and the guys in the book were great caricatures of fun loving, science minded boys with a bit of good natured mischief up their sleeves. Then Brinley took this setting and boys and produced a series of wonderful stories capturing so many things that so many boys growing up find so intriguing. I bought a copy recently for a nephew and he was enraptured by it. The follow ups while good never really reached the level of this first book but were fun in their own right. It will always hold a special memory of growing up back in the '60s.

Michael Emond says

I sometimes like to read children's books because a) Some of them have more creativity and are better written than adult novels and b) I like to see how these classic hold up. I think it is fair to say anyone's favourite children's books will always be the ones they fondly remember as a child. Some of them hold up on rereading and some don't. I was coming at THIS book having never heard of it before but the glowing reviews made me think I would love it. So this review is by an adult that wasn't reliving a fond childhood memory which all of the others seem to be doing. My final verdict is I don't put this up there with the classics I read as a child (which I freely admit might be because I read them as a child :) such as the Great Brain series or Lloyd Alexander's books, but I see the appeal of this book.

What I love about this is how it is a very unique kind of story in that the boys are very proactive in the stories, and they use their wizardry of science and technology to help out or pull a prank. For example, there is a story of the boys creating a haunted house and fooling their rival Harmon and the Mayor when many stories would take the approach of the boys figuring out how someone else made the house haunted. The main character Henry is a nice device, super smart and always up to stir up a little trouble. The stories have a good pace to them and each one has a unique idea and unique "science" involved in the plot.

What I wasn't as thrilled about was some of the storytelling itself. One main complaint is that it is written in first person but it is inconsistent who that first person is. One story he is called Rod and one story he is Charles and most stories he never gets named. I am not sure why Brinley did this but it makes little sense and it is a missed opportunity to develop a consistent character (like the Great Brain books did having it told through the younger brother's eyes). I was also irritated by how the Mayor hates the club so much. In the last chapter he acts as if they are thugs and doesn't want their help in finding a downed pilot. But why does he hate them? They are a group of smart boys who, in earlier chapter, either helped the town out or did a harmless prank that nobody connected them to. Why? Well the author wanted him to be the antagonist so he hates them because the author says so. That's lazy writing. At least the other antagonist, Harmon, is given enough of a back story we understand why he is their rival. I also thought the characters could have been given more characterization - it took a long time before one stood out from the other (with the exception of Henry who drives the stories).

These stories are at their best when the boys are using science to help out - the Night rescue is a particularly strong one - and the science is explained well - The Great Gas Bag Race. And weakest when the science is not explained well - The Great Egg. I am on the fence that half of these stories (The Strange Sea Monster of Strawberry Lake; The Unidentified Flying Man of Mammoth Falls; the Voice in the Chimney) are driven by the boys wanting to pull a prank since it seems to conflict with their good nature BUT I will admit it is realistic young boys would have this mischievous side to them so it makes them more human and less like

little perfect creations.

Overall, these are solid stories from a different time but they are still interesting, if imperfect reads, today.
