



The Place That Didn't Exist

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Junior creative Tim Callaghan can hardly believe his luck when he's flown out to Dubai to supervise the filming of an advert for an international charity. He is immediately entranced by the city - a futuristic environment unlike anywhere he's ever been before, with an almost uncanny level of customer service. Shimmering and seductive, it seems as though nothing bad could ever happen in Dubai. But when a crew member is found dead in in mysterious circumstances, Tim learns that if a place seems too good to be true, it probably is . . .

The Place That Didn't Exist Details

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From Reader Review The Place That Didn't Exist for online ebook

Isla Scott says

I found this book quite a light read but it was an enjoyable one. Being set in Dubai, I was interested to read about the area, never having been but certainly being aware of what its image, a bit like a Las Vegas for the East. There are various characters who have their own quirks and indeed the main character, Tim, is someone I found quite likeable - a bit of an awkward clutz, I felt sorry for him at times and found myself trying to guess what truths might be discovered and who had committed the crime the novel is about. Its not a very dark read but its perfectly entertaining regardless.

I'm not sure I'd call it a crime novel, nor a mystery, although there are elements of both genres contained within the plot. I'm happy to recommend this book in general, although if I were to criticise it, I'd say that towards the end, the final outcome seemed a bit obvious (not for the whole book but towards the end) and also the last chapter seemed a little unnecessarily long drawn out but otherwise its a light and enjoyable read and I'm perfectly happy to try out more of Marks books, given I wasn't aware, previous to buying and reading this book, that he wrote, only being aware of Mark from when he was on the TV series Taskmaster.

Paige Belfield says

I went into this book expecting to love it and to be broken by it. Somehow it exceeded my expectations in both aspects. In another beautiful addition to Mark Watson's work, The Place That Didn't Exist is an individual take on murder mysteries that showcases his brand of humour and insight flawlessly. My copy is already packed with post it notes next to lines that charmed me.

The best way I have been able to describe this book is that it healed the scars upon my heart then tore open a hundred new ones. It is a book that if you don't have to put it down every few pages to let a paragraph sink in then you aren't paying enough attention.

All I really have to say is that you should read this book.

Antonio Marrero Jr says

Usually when I read a summary of what a book is about I know that it's only a small portion of what the story is, but not in this case. The main character Tim is working in Dubai creating a commercial for a charity, and one of the members of the team dies. The story doesn't stray much from that unless it takes the time out to anti-advertise Dubai.

For most of the book it read more like a critique on Dubai, as the main character wanders around the city we get criticisms about everything. How fake the place is, how the customer service is, the food, the malls, the construction of buildings, the people, billboards, the country clubs, the driving, the weather, the hotels, and how rich people are trying to take advantage of this rapidly growing city. There was more talking bout Dubai then the character or the person who died.

I thought this would be a murder mystery of some kind, but I was wrong, the only person who even attempted to look into the death was a journalist who appeared here and there. All the easily forgettable characters mentioned it but quickly moved on, which was a trend in this book. There were a lot of times where something seemed significant, like a fight or an argument, but then after this event everybody just moves on like nothing happened, it was weird. It was as if each character was a robot who glitched out sometimes with a quick and fleeting emotion, then returned to their emotionless selves again.

The best part about this book was Chapter 12, where we switch character perspectives. Without spoiling anything, this change was more than welcome. The new character was way more interesting than Tim, I think they should've been the main character the whole story. They had more depth and more complexity to them. It was like I was reading a completely different book, a better book. The sudden shift in quality was shocking, the pages that were before this chapter seem irrelevant. 2 stars of my rating go directly to that chapter.

Overall this was disappointing, besides Chapter 12 this was a miss for me. The story didn't really go anywhere, characters were oddly swift with emotions, and the critique on Dubai was just too much. I can't say I recommend this.

Sana says

As someone who lives in the UAE, I found Watson's portrayal of Dubai quite insightful and in depth, to the point where this was a story focused more on Dubai as opposed to its label of a murder-mystery novel.

There are stages of Dubai which one experiences when one visits. It's surreal; it's glamorous; it seems to good to be true, at first. But there is such a vast difference in experience for those who visit it as rich folks and those who are the hands supporting the rise of this "picture perfect" city.

I was far more interested in the representation of Dubai rather than the plot line, and recommend this book on said basis.

The murder mystery therefore served as more of a subplot, and unfortunately is one which didn't end as well as I'd hoped - it seemed rushed, as if Watson was far more enthused and invested in Dubai to fully consider the conclusion of his actual story.

Anne says

Mark Watson is a well-known comedian and writer. His dry wit and sharp sense of humour is apparent throughout *The Place That Didn't Exist*, although this isn't a comedy-novel. The plot revolves around a murder, but this isn't a crime novel, or a mystery story. It's a really compelling, quite refreshing story about an ordinary guy, in an extraordinary place, in the middle of some very strange goings on.

The lead character, Tim, is an advertising executive. He's creative, full of ideas, but a little bit reserved. He pitched for a big advertising campaign, highlighting the inequalities of poverty throughout the world, and his firm won the contract. Tim finds himself in Dubai, surrounded by high-profile charity campaigners, more than a little strange celebrities and a crew of film-makers.

Dubai is a crazy place. Tim is overwhelmed by the luxury and the wealth. He doesn't even have to turn down his own sheets, everything is provided, every last thing is done for him. This is like nowhere else he's ever been. Unfortunately, not everything is perfect in Dubai, and the ad shoot is rocked when one of the crew is found dead, in one of the perfect chalets, not far away from Tim's.

The Place That Didn't Exist is driven by the characters, who are well-drawn and believable. Alongside the human cast, is the location of Dubai, which is as much a character as Tim and the others. Mark Watson details a peculiar yet very atmospheric place. Starkly clean and clinical, yet teeming with darkness and hidden secrets.

Sharp, well written, astute and clever. The Place That Didn't Exist is a novel with bags of emotion and great shots of warmth. I enjoyed it.

<http://randomthingsthroughmyletterbox...>

Jake Jones says

Barely a two act novel. The protagonist turns out not to be the protagonist at all. There is no antagonist because no one 'wants' anything. An odd perspective shift is employed in the brief (and concluding) second act. It seems this perspective shift is simply to 'explain' what happened. There is no causality.

An easy read, but a truly disappointing story.

Hilary Rowell says

So good until about three quarters of way in then totally ran out of steam, as if the author lost interest in the story and the characters. Such a shame, because it was deliciously well written up to then, reminiscent of JG Ballard's last few novels.

Dan says

Another great read from Watson. It's one of those books which is hard to define as any one thing. People seem to be calling it a murder mystery and whilst it has elements of that this is not really the story of someone solving a murder.

Tim has had relative success in the advertising business but when an idea leads him to work on a huge charity advert in Dubai he thinks things are really on the up. He quickly gets to know the team working on the advert but he can't help but feel something is being kept from him. Then one of the team is found dead...

Tim is a lot like Xavier from my favourite Watson novel, Eleven. He's a passive, awkward man but is generally likeable and amusing. I couldn't help but be reminded of the author himself which is no bad thing as I have enjoyed Watson's comedy for years.

The best thing for me about this book was the setting. Its rare when an author manages to really capture the feel of a place and Dubai almost becomes another character here because of how well Watson does that. He

describes Dubai as a place of luxury but gradually delves into the excess and pretendness of it all.

I very nearly gave this five stars but I wasn't totally sold on the ending. It just felt a little rushed and like the author didn't entirely know how to finish the book.

Another unique and enjoyable read from a great author- I await the next book impatiently.

Edith Wasserfall says

I actually bought this book because I loved the cover artwork (confessions of a graphic designer). It was an easy and engaging read. The ending was not quite what I expected, and I almost expected some more interesting secrets to be revealed at the end. I still had some unanswered questions about why some of the hotel employees acted so strange and treated Tim and the other guests in such an odd manner, why his internet stopped working, who knocked at his door, etc. When I got to the end I actually thought I may have missed some subtle cues that would have answered these questions (I may have), but I do feel there is still quite a bit of unsolved mystery when you reach the end of the book. Perhaps this is what the writer wanted - to make clear the strangeness and unexplained oddities of Dubai. Overall I found this book very interesting and the insights into Dubai's culture were fascinating - the mystery kept me reading till the end.

Kristina says

Not being familiar with the author's stand-up comedy repertoire I approached the book with a clean slate. I expected a humorous mystery novel but soon learnt that the comedy simply stems from the protagonist's hopeless existence. Tim Callaghan is a klutz who is not only out of his depth in Dubai but also in life. He won't stand up for himself when a co-worker of equal position berates him in front of an audience. His role in the novel remains confusing throughout the story as he barely contributes to the ongoing television production. Was he written as an alter ego to the author? Comedians often like to portray themselves as mumbling dopes. Or was he conceptualized as a blank everyday man to encourage readers to identify with him? I failed at the latter as his immaturity irritated me more than it produced sympathy.

The book's happenings are told through an omniscient narrator who focuses on Tim's point of view. However, the story makes a 180 degree turn towards the end of book when it changes perspectives from Tim to his colleague Ruth. Such an unexpected shift in perspective inadvertently reveals the identity of the murderer to me. One could have been spared of the following 30-odd pointless pages. Nevertheless I dislike to skip parts so I persisted.

We learn more about Ruth's life than we ever learn about Tim despite the book primarily focusing on him (what does that tell you about how empty his character is). Ruth's life is an unoriginal sob story peaking at the death of her teenage son. Watson's dry words "He was dead" didn't make me feel sad for Ruth - they made me feel enraged. "Of course he died, of course he did," I shook my head at the poorly conceived emotional blackmail. I didn't get a chance to identify with her so now I was rejecting her.

Watson told us Ruth's life story in order to explain her motive for murdering Raf. Yet nowhere did we learn that there was anything "wrong" with her. She's obviously not a sociopath and I am sure there are many people with terrible lives who don't murder the first person who reminds them of it. Hence the motive is

poor.

The only interesting moment was the chapter where Tim dreamed of murdering Raf while sleepwalking. I became excited at this potential plot twist only to be disappointed when it was revealed as a simple dream.

The book is a very easy read written in simple English with the occasional fancy word (I had to google what are “tureens”). Topics include the conflict between dreams (sleep-induced or heart-produced) and reality, and how humans change their reality for it to take the shape of their dreams. I have never visited Dubai so perhaps I would have appreciated it more otherwise as much of it is focused on describing the city. If there is a positive to carry from reading this book it is the knowledge that anyone can write a novel these days! I can use this book to encourage my book-writing friends in their endeavors.

Michael Ritchie says

Creepy, unreal and insidious, but very, very good.

Tina *KillMonotony* Wagner says

„Die Stadt im Nichts“ erzählt die Geschichte um Werbetexter Tim, der für einen Werbespot, den er getextet hat, nach Dubai reisen soll. Dort lernt er sein Team kennen und ebenso die schöne Stadt der Emirate. Tims Erwartungen an Dubai werden nicht enttäuscht, Dubai ist tatsächlich genauso dekadent, wie er gehört hat. Alles läuft in geregelten Bahnen, der erste Drehtag ist geschafft (ohne etwas auf Band zu bekommen), und die After-Work Party in Tims Domizil uferl ein bisschen aus. Morgens dann die Ernüchterung: Der Produktionsleiter Raf wird tot aufgefunden. Die Stimmung kippt, wilde Vermutungen und Rätselraten, was genau passiert ist, sind an der Tagesordnung. Doch nach Tims Geschmack kehrt man viel zu schnell zur Normalität zurück, und während er sich noch über Verschwörungstheorien und verschleierte Morde, die als Missbrauch von Alkohol und Drogen dargestellt werden, lässt das nächste Unheil nicht lange auf sich warten. So geraten nicht nur Marks Kollegen und er selber in Verdacht, sondern auch die Organisation WorldWise, für die der Spot gedreht werden soll...

Mark Watson hat hier einen Roman vorgelegt, der teils Gesellschaftskritik, teils Krimi und teils Portrait Dubais ist. Mit seiner klaren, flüssigen Schreibe beschreibt er aus der Sicht Tims die Geschehnisse in der luxuriösen Stadt. Was anfangs noch sehr an „Ein Hologramm für den König“ von Dave Eggers erinnert, wird bald zum Verfolgungswahn-Trip: Tim fühlt sich nach den Ereignissen in Dubai nicht mehr willkommen, will abreisen, doch seine Karte ist gesperrt, das Internet wird ihm verweigert, und dadurch, dass er Schlafwandler ist, verdächtigt er sich selbst, Raf ermordet zu haben – er konnte ihn sowieso nicht leiden. In diesem Zwiespalt bewegt sich Tim, als ihm eine Frau des Teams unerwartet näher kommt.

In dieser Nacht konnte er lange nicht einschlafen. Das Bild des [Obdachlosen] in dem Türeingang ließ ihn nicht los. In gewisser Weise stand er für die vielen Notleidenden [...] und hielt Tim vor Augen, wie wenig er das Leid dieser Menschen an sich heranließ. [...] Die Welt war voller Katastrophen, die der Einzelne zumeist überhaupt nicht beeinflussen konnte. Politische Gefangene, Flüchtlinge, Hungernde. Da es unmöglich war, alles zu verändern, beschloss man irgendwann, gar nichts zu tun.

Weitab vom egozentrischen Gefühlstrip meiner aktuell gelesenen Bücher wollte ich mal wieder etwas mit

einer spannenden Handlung lesen. Krimis sind absolut nicht meins, dennoch las sich der Klappentext von „Die Stadt im Nichts“ sehr gut und auch das Buch hat einen soliden Eindruck hinterlassen. Allerdings habe ich mich daran gestört, das trotz des abrupten Wechsels der Erzählperspektive im dritten Teil (der mich zugegebenermaßen sehr überrascht hat), nie wirklich aufgelöst wird, wie es zu einigen Gegebenheiten gekommen ist. Diese Tatsache und auch die, dass ich mich permanent an „Ein Hologramm für den König“ erinnert fühlte, nicht wegen der Handlung, sondern wegen der vorherrschenden Stimmung und auch aufgrund der Charakterisierung Dubais. Wobei in Eggers Roman die in Dubai geltenden Regeln noch als strenger beschrieben wurden, beispielsweise war Alkohol und dessen Konsum streng verboten, es gab keine Minibars und das Personal hätte es mit Sicherheit nicht geduldet, wenn dort getrunken worden wäre. In Watsons Dubai hingegen war es öffentlich bekannt, dass die Westler viel und gerne trinken und auch Drogen konsumieren, und das einfach so in ihren Suiten und Hotelzimmern. Ich weiß nicht, wie es in der Realität aussieht, aber das hat mich doch teilweise etwas verwirrt.

Die vollständige Rezension findet ihr auf meinem Blog: <http://killmonotony.wordpress.com>

Tamim Sadikali says

Think of Dubai and what comes to mind... Kitsch Arabia, third-world labourers and decadent Westerners negotiating medieval law. Or pristine beaches, unblemished blue skies, world-leading architecture and a shoppers' paradise. Unless one has lived there, one's perspective will likely be influenced by glossy promos or the international media, wherein Dubai gets measured via rudimentary metrics: millions of dollars, thousands of feet tall, and number of years in jail for kissing.

To get under the skin of the place, any place, one must travel – in person, or via the imagination. And in *The Place That Didn't Exist*, Mark Watson's Dubai-based novel brings together a number of strong ingredients: well-heeled ex-pats, a Hollywood star, and young guns seeking a career high amidst personal abandonment...

Read my full review on Bookmunch.

Tripfiction says

Murder Mystery set in DUBAI

3.75*

This review plus author chat first appeared on our blog: <http://www.tripfiction.com/murder-mys...>

“You are in Dubai, things are a little strange”

If you have ever visited Dubai, then this book will transport you back to the city, with all its glitz and foibles. It is absolutely what TripFiction is about, a way to connect with a place through fiction.

Tim is flown out on location to Dubai to oversee the filming of an advert for a big charity, and you can sense his awe and wonderment at the sights he encounters. It is clear the author is familiar with the city and with the process of filming a commercial.

This is a slow burning murder mystery, that radiates from the fictional hotel 'The Village', where the guests reside in chalets. The rooms are spotless, the electronics to regulate air conditioning and lights are at first baffling. Each chalet is just a little hub, each a microcosm of the bigger, eye-boggling Dubai, the mirage city that is all light-suffused modernity and pulsing energy. But the absurd is never far from the visitor experience, whether it is pressing one's nose to the big windows of the snow globe that is Ski Dubai in Mall of the Emirates, where it is permanently Winter; or the multitude of retail experience that are integral to any visit, Gucci, Fendi, Prada – rip-offs thereof are ubiquitous. The edgy and fragile co-existence of the Western tourist, alongside the traditional values of the Emirati, is never far from the surface.

Tim's team get into filming, however soon one of the team is found dead.... but under what circumstances? Was it murder most foul or an accidental death? The book is divided in 3 sections, it is the last part where the mystery is unfurled. A readable mystery set in Dubai.

Martin says

If I were able it would have been 2 1/2.

The plot was a little implausible and for me half way through the book I was wanting to get to the end as it ran out of steam.

Having been to Dubai it did bring back a visual of how the city is a dichotomy of cultures...I was told by the locals the Middle East riviera! Mmmmm..think France and Italy would beg to differ!
