



Maze

J.M. McDermott

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From every corner of time and space, sometimes people go missing without a trace. They never come back.

Get lost in the long stone halls of the maze with the ones that find each other, form tribes, scrape out a life from rocks and sand. Their stories interweave. Maia Station is a scientist ripped from stasis, but she has no tools to test the way things are. Instead, she raises her daughter as best she can and survives. Wang Xin once had his head dipped in water, and a djinni in the water entered his eye. He sees the future, exactly as it was supposed to be if he hadn't seen the light, but it does him no good in the life he has. In a world much like our own, Joseph comes home from a ten year high school reunion and encounters a light in the darkness. The light speaks.

My name is Jenny. Put me in your lung. Breathe deep.

Maze Details

Date : Published January 13th 2014 by Apex Book Company (first published January 10th 2014)

ISBN : 9781937009212

Author : J.M. McDermott

Format : Paperback 214 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Science Fiction, Fiction

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From Reader Review Maze for online ebook

Anna Janelle says

I was glad to receive the Kindle edition of this book as part of LibraryThing's Early Reader's program.

Part science fiction, part supernatural fantasy, Maze is a dark, desperate, dystopian novel. Composed of multiple narratives, Maze follows a group of persons condemned to a stark, threatening, ever-changing and, ultimately, unknowable labyrinth where time and space mean nothing. Pulled from all time periods and geographic locations, these refugees band together to try and survive in a world populated by monsters - trolls, minotaurs, shadow ghosts and tree-creatures. At the mercy of the unforgiving elements, these strangers each tell a tale of survival in an unlivable location.

The story, itself, is framed by the mother-daughter narratives of Maia and Julie Station. Maia has come to the maze from a space station, where she was in suspended animation dreaming liquid dreams. She becomes pregnant with Julie while in the maze, and, as such, part of Julie is the maze. Later, we meet Julie as an adult, who has ventured into a love affair with a half-breed caveman. We also meet Joseph, a man living in apocalyptic Texas, who births a piece of light into an African woman he names Jenny Ghost. My favorite narrator was the poor, misunderstood warrior, Wang Xin, who believes he has seen the future in the very same light and strives to maintain that true path to much trouble. Each narrator gives the reader a slice of who they were before coming to the maze and what they have become since arriving there. Each narrator has his or her own experience with the light known as Jenny (or DiJinni) who has asked for help and lured them to the maze.

It's strange. Whacked out weird. Dark, dismal, and disgusting. Things don't make sense in the maze - which can be enjoyable and entertaining for the reader. BUT things really don't make sense outside of the maze either - which is definitely frustrating for a reader like me, someone who demands answers and resolution. Don't get me wrong. I enjoyed the read for the most part, but I'm still not really sure what I just read. And I know that I didn't understand it. I've got so many questions that don't even have a hint of a possible answer buried in the text. I can support ambiguity in art, but I need more than I was given here. I think that many readers may get discouraged or confused by this tale. As such, I'm not really sure how to recommend it.

Rjlouise says

Maze's description goes like this:

"From every corner of time and space, sometimes people go missing without a trace. They never come back.

Get lost in the long stone halls of the maze with the ones that find each other, form tribes, scrape out a life from rocks and sand. Their stories interweave. Maia Station is a scientist ripped from stasis, but she has no tools to test the way things are. Instead, she raises her daughter as best she can and survives. Wang Xin once had his head dipped in water, and a djinni in the water entered his eye. He sees the future, exactly as it was supposed to be if he hadn't seen the light, but it does him no good in the life he has. In a world much like our own, Joseph comes home from a ten year high school reunion and encounters a light in the darkness. The light speaks.

My name is Jenny. Put me in your lung. Breathe deep."

It was interesting and made me think a little bit of Madeline L'Engle, an author I loved as a child. So, I put in a bid and won MAZE.

I did not like it. In the least.

Why? Because there are some serious issues with how this manuscript treats women. Reproductive terrorism and blatant sexism are ALL OVER the place. There were two rapes (one female victim, one male victim - I will give this book that much), a near-deadly assault, a mystical pregnancy or two, adultery, and spousal abuse! A man narrates a part that should have been a woman's story to tell. It seems we're supposed to sympathize with one of the rapists (the male rapist), but demonize the other (the female rapist). There is so much internalized sexism in the female characters. I THINK the author genuinely meant for the first and last sections to be good, independent women, but instead all I read was women at the whims of the men in their life. The scientist who suffered through a mystical pregnancy and ACCEPTED it as fact when she had the ability to change the course of her life from the future. The woman who worked her entire life to be self-sufficient and was then thrown out with her lover into barren wilderness for the crime of adultery, only to revert to entirely depending on her lover. Oh, and she did not marry her lover, but his BROTHER, because she got in a snit fit. And so much male gaze.

I honestly only finished the book because I needed the complete the darn thing so I didn't have to wonder how it finished and have this book stay in my head. There is so much wrong here.

Now, with that out of the way:

The narrations are written in what I call internal monologue, a type of more structured stream of consciousness. I appreciate that choice. Stream of consciousness combined with the maze of interconnected plots would have been too much.

The interconnectivity is well-resolved. Not everything is resolved, but most of it is. I appreciate that this book is not a neat package.

The writing itself is not bad. The content is what gets me. This book needs trigger warnings. If you are at all sensitive to issues like I have listed, please don't read it.

D (acceptable writing, interwoven plots well handled; unacceptable attitudes, terrifying treatment of women, triggers, sexism)

Phillip M says

Life in the maze is not pleasant or easy. In one part of the story, the boy saves the girl from the shadow people, but it was actually his poor judgement that got her trapped in the maze in the first place. After the rescue, do they live 'happily-ever-after'? No, she says to him, "I'll never forgive you for this" and he can only answer, "I wish that saving you meant a happier life."

Words that can describe this book are: brilliant, weird, creative, confusing, disgusting, complicated and dangerous. My speed of reading tends to vary with my interest and I read this book slowly so that I could both enjoy the book and try to understand it. Amazingly, the author made these tasks as difficult as he could

for me. I'm not sure I enjoyed all of it and I'm not sure I understood it, especially the ending. All these things, however, are not reasons to pass on this book. It is definitely a must read. Why? So that you can decide for yourself. You may find the book to be one of the best things you have ever read, or one of the worst. Either way, I think the author has accomplished his goal – to evoke emotion.

Now days, modern art is not concerned with rendering real life, but instead it is concerned with evoking emotion. That is exactly what McDermott does. As an artist, he is capable of evoking emotion in very simple ways. Just remember, disgust and confusion are emotions too.

Phillip M. Johns

Steve says

I'm not having much luck with books in 2015... :/

I've read over 25% of this book and I have no idea what's going on. There's a maze, with monsters. Maybe. Or not. Maybe the maze is a 10-year high school reunion. Or something. Is this allegory? Is this just fantasy?

One thing I do know: This book is now in the DNF pile.

Judy says

The Maze is a strange place. It is weird and awesomely scary. It makes no sense to the reader, or to the characters within its grasp. The maze is populated by a diverse mix of characters who have arrived there from places as far afield as a space station in the future and from the earth in prehistory. The maze not only plays with concepts of place and space, but also with time.

The Maze begins with Maia's story. She was in hibernation on a space station, but suddenly she is within the maze. She tries to approach her survival by using her science background, but nothing makes sense in this weird and crazy world.

A group of refugees form a village where they each attempt to survive as well as they can. The village is made up of such diverse characters as a young boy who fell off his bike one day and woke up in the maze, a Neanderthal man, a young man from a post-apocalyptic US city who is dragged into the maze by a Djinni (in a truly disturbing scene), Julie, Maia's daughter, born in the maze, and Wang Xin, a warrior who sees the future.

The Maze is also populated with hideous creatures. Everything is a potential threat. Not only do plants, birds, animals and insects threaten at every turn, but there are minotaurs and monsters and gargoyles as well. Every day, every moment, it's kill or be killed.

There is not enough food and water is hard to find. Traps must be set for edible creatures, but even the very act of eating some of these things can result in death. When a villager dies, their bodies are placed on one of the maze's walls in order to attract scavengers which can then be eaten in turn.

This is a dark and desperate tale, told in short, sharp prose. McDermott has imagined a world so odd, so eerie, and so bizarre that I was never comfortable reading this book. It has left me with little understanding of what The Maze is or does. I am still unsure of what I have just read. But, I never for a moment considered giving up on it, feeling compelled to see just what was going to happen next.

Frank Errington says

Review copy

Having just finished J. M. McDermott's epic novel Maze the only thought that comes to mind is the line from the Grateful Dead's classic Truckin' "What a long strange trip it's been." Some questions come mind that beg to be answered. "Did I enjoy it?" "Yes." "Did I understand it?" "No. Not at all."

Here's the italicized opening...

My name is Jenny.

I was in a city inside of a city inside of a city.

In the shadows there, I slept. I knew only my name--nothing else--and nothing, and nothing else for a very long time.

I slid from behind a shadow and a shadow. I saw you sleeping here.

Put me in your lung.

Breathe deep.

And from there it got weird.

Maze is a set of four separate, yet interconnected, stories set in a complex world the inhabitants refer to as the Maze. A place where some people stumble in and never find a way out, yet others are born and live their entire lives there never knowing any other existence.

The Maze is full of monsters. Gargoyles, minotaurs, trolls, harpies, dogmen, and that's just scratching the surface. It's a dangerous place with a focus on survival, while living a primitive, tribal existence.

The experience of reading this novel was at times surreal . In fact there were moments when I thought this must be what it's like to be on a hallucinogenic drug.

The people who live in the Maze were constantly looking for food and a fresh supply of water, but even that wasn't always available. "Then, before I could talk myself out of it, I drank the water from the sewer. It tasted like rotten eggs, dirt, and something else indescribably awful. I choked down the urge to puke. I expected that this water was going to make me horribly ill--possibly kill me. I did not drink enough to quench my thirst. I couldn't."

Bizarre doesn't even begin to describe Maze, but despite the overall strangeness and leaving me with more questions than answers, when I finished the book, I actually found myself wanting more.

Maze is available now in both trade paperback, and various ebook formats, through Apex books and Amazon.com.

If you count your self among the adventurous in your reading selections then I can definitely recommend J. M. McDermott's Maze.

Laila Blake says

Really 3.5 stars, and I think that's probably generous.

It's really sad because when I started this book, I thought it would be 5 stars for sure, it was so beautiful and strange and creative. And then it kind of went down-hill from there.

Maze is parted into 4 individual novella-esk stories, connected by location, sometimes the same side characters, and a very very vague over-all arch. This didn't really work for me, I must say. I thought it just tore the story apart and it ended up being very much concept/world-building over substance. Kind of like "I built this amazing world, look at what could all happen in it." But that does not really a story make, for me. Especially the middle two sections didn't add much to the book, and the only reason I gave it 4 stars or 3.5, is because the last one had a connection with the first and provided a nice arch. The middle two were also the ones I had huge issues with in terms of the way it treated women and non-white folks.

I mean you have everything in there, the woman in refrigerator (only extra gruesome), the hijacked womb, the generally patriarchal society, all that stuff. But it sort of makes sense, so I wouldn't have marked him down for that (I mean everything about the book has this weirdly poetic gratuitous gore, that's kind of awesome, so... okay), but there are two obviously non-white characters in it. One is a black woman, who turns out to be demon who ends up eating the pretty white girl. And the black women as demons trope really needs to burn in a fire somewhere. The next is Wang Xin, who is a brutal guy and a rapist and the picture of male entitlement who still feels like he did women some good by raping them and when they say otherwise he beats them. He's a horrendous character and he's contrasted to the nice Joseph, who yeah, is white. I did have major issue with that, because when it came to humans in this story, those two were the worst.

Having said all that, the world-building is incredible. I LOVED that. It was so creative and gritty and dark and beautiful. That was really, really special, and I kind of understand how someone might get lost in that and then forget to really concentrate on character development and/or plot.

In the end, it was just okay for me, slightly disappointing after how much I loved the beginning.

Jd weber says

This was a great read! You can see my full review here on A&A: <http://bit.ly/1mFU4HO>

Nikki says

Ehhh, definitely not for me. Maze is really, really bizarre, not a little disgusting, it can be pretty violent, and it made no sense at all to me. I won it from LibraryThing's First Reads program, since I've been meaning to try this author for a while, but just... nope. It's creative, sure. Weird, if that's what you like to read. It's not even badly written -- maybe indifferently, from my point of view, but not badly.

It's not like I necessarily mind weird, disgusting, violence -- I read China Miéville with glee, after all. It's just... I had nothing to get a grip on here, not even the kind of verve that characterises Miéville's work.

I have another of this guy's books to read, I think retelling Greek myths? I hope I enjoy that more.

Anton Cancre says

I like bizarre, complicated stories. The kind that warp and wrap themselves into intricate designs of opaque obscurity and leave you scratching your head and rereading the same paragraph thirteen times to be sure what you think happened really did just happen and not the other thing that you suspect may have occurred and holy fuck what is the deal with that guy who just did the thing he shouldn't be able to do? When I'm in the right mood, I get a kick out of those and I was certainly in the mood when I picked up *Maze*.

I've complained before about the dearth of imagination put into much science fiction and fantasy, but there is no problem with that here. McDermott takes both tropes and myths we think we are familiar with and spins them into new yarn. This world and the creatures that inhabit it feel wholly new and vibrant, in their own brutal way. J.M. then uses our expectations of these myths and tropes as misdirection to get us looking up when he pulls the cloth from beneath our feet. It's a nice trick and it's used to marvelous effect in bending minds.

At the same time, everything seems very organic. The society we experience exists and operates the way it does as a direct result of the way the world is constructed. They are people adapting to their surroundings and it fits seamlessly. The world building is outstanding here.

Similarly, the arcs and conflicts of the characters were quite engaging. A woman struggling to survive, alone, in an alien world. A man trying desperately to hunt down and save someone he doomed to this existence by his own sad attempts to end his isolation. Another man pushing to reconcile the world he exists within and the one expects. A young woman struggling between the expectations of society and her own needs. None of these are simple problems, none result in simple solutions and no one gets the happily ever after treatment.

However, there were some problems with readability. The writing style is very clunky and uncomfortable, especially when it comes to dialogue. Take this bit of dialogue as an example: "Joseph, I have to tell you this, Joseph, and I want you to not forget this. You have your children and had your great love. I have had none. I am in love with this woman." It is technically grammatically correct, but hits the tongue all wrong. I get the strong feeling that this was a stylistic choice, and I respect that, but it pulled me out of the narrative and kept me from being able to settle into the story. That could very well be an experience killer for many people. It certainly made the whole less enjoyable for me.

By and large, I was left with a story full of interesting ideas, an intriguing central philosophy and complicated characters facing complicated situations that was nearly destroyed by the way it was told. If you can power through the style choice, there is plenty to love here, but it asks quite a bit in return.

Bob Milne says

Normally, I would be cautious . . . hesitant, even . . . about any book described as a weird/dark fantasy novel. It just sounds either artistic or pretentious, conjuring memories of high school texts that were very literate indeed, but about as entertaining as a line at the license bureau. About the only reason I decided to give *Maze* a shot was that it came from Apex, and I've come to expect solid entertainment from them.

J.M. McDermott is to be commended for delivering on his rather ambitious concept. This is, first and foremost, the story of a maze . . . but it's also a tale of interwoven lives inside that maze. There is that of Maia, who remembers life aboard a space station, even if her daughter knows nothing but blood. There's Joseph, who returned home from his high school reunion to find something in the darkness. There is Wang, who sees a future that could have been. There's Julie, who knows nothing but a life inside the maze, and Lucius, the Neanderthal who loves her.

And then there's Jenny, the ghost, who just may be much more than that.

There is some very weird, very visceral horror surrounding these stories - the bug-like, plant-like, and beast-like monsters just scratch the surface. More than that, though, there's a palatable sense of hopelessness and dread to the maze and those who exist within it. It is neither a safe nor a happy place to be. For that matter, it's not a healthy place to be either, with the hopeless denizens surviving on blood, maggots, and even cannibalism. One character describes it as a sort of Bermuda Triangle that people stumble into it, but which is indifferent to them. What is it really? Why is there? What is its purpose? Well, we never really find out any of that, but that's not really the point.

To get back to that idea of being literate, this is a very well-written, carefully-crafted tale. It's structured just so, with a mother and daughter bookending not just the pages, but the ideas and lives within. The language is short and abrupt, taking unexpected turns on a regular basis, and often doubles back on itself to repeat words, phrases, and more. It reads like a maze, but that's not to say it's futile or frustrating. Reading is itself an experience, with the stories a part of that experience.

To be honest, I'm not sure if there's a great purpose or deeper message to the work, or whether this is just a story of survival against all odds. What I do know is that *Maze* makes for a fascinating read that may try a bit too hard, at times, to be literate, but which never forgets that it's higher purpose is to entertain.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

David Ledeboer says

Maia Station says it best when describing J.M. McDermott's *Maze* at the very beginning of the book. She talks of everything being, "...disjointed, wrapped in silver gauze..." and also "...sand ground away at her mind..." *Maze* is truly a piece of human art and each layer is peeled back like skin to show the bloody tissue and bone beneath the surface.

The stories of those living inside the maze are formed by what at first appears to be a jumbled mass of hodgepodge characters. Maia Station is a scientist from the future somehow sucked into this bleak and unforgiving world. Joseph lives in a similar time stream to us, just in a more apocalyptic world before birthing a Djinni from his flesh and then is dragged through pipes into the Maze. Wang Xin is a young boy turned fearless warrior, who sees all his paths laid out before him by the water Djinni splashed into his eye.

Then finally, there is Julie Station, born inside the Maze by Maia and her closing chapter. This diverse group of characters and different periods of time, are all interconnected as we weave through the maze, one life at a time.

Life in the Maze is cruel, harsh, and only those with a strong desire to survive can flesh out a meager existence for themselves. Feast on maggots, berries, vultures, or even minotaurs and harpies to quench the ache of hunger in your stomach. McDermott knows the very depths humans can go to in order to survive. Joseph's story is particularly graceful in his downward spiral for survival. Just an average guy who finds love at a high school reunion, except for the ball of light he sucked into his lungs and births from his chest. A creature known as Jenny, who rips his life and that of his loves apart when it spits them out into the hostile world of the maze.

Each page you turn grabs hold of your hands and yanks you deeper into its clutches until you're so far entrenched in the Maze you can't find your way back out. Each of our characters hopes to carve out a better life for themselves and possibly gain some understanding of the maze along the way, all the while each of them are somehow linked together by a bond of blood.

I won't claim to fully understand the circular closure in the novel, but I do appreciate McDermott's story-telling prowess. Not often am I left in a dark tunnel with a glimmering light dangling in front of me and I totter after it on uneasy steps. Maze did that to me. If you want to lose yourself into a hostile world with only a small chance of survival and comprehension, then I dare you to step into the Maze.

Fantasy Literature says

J.M. McDermott's Maze is about a maze. Or possibly the maze: An unending series of stone halls and corridors which lurks in our primordial past, populated by monstrous creatures, loops and fragments of non-linear time, and a ragged band of humans who somehow got stranded there. The maze is never revealed to have any moral or mechanical logic; it just is, and the people who live there just do. Maze operates as a disjointed series of narratives about the people who have fallen into the maze. There are glimpses of their past worlds (a spaceship, medieval France, dystopian Texas), but the bulk of the novel is about the gritty, ugly process of surviving in an inhospitable place. It's surreal, scattered, gruesome, and sometimes excellent.

Many books with ambitions towards literary surrealism leave me floating in ... Read More:
<http://www.fantasyliterature.com/revi...>

Philip Athans says

I stand by my statement on the back cover of the book -- BRILLIANT!

M. Fenn says

I found J.M. McDermott's Maze to be an interesting read. It's the latest LibraryThing Early Reviewer book on my TBR list and is quite different from a lot of what I've read recently.

Maze is divided into sections: the mazes of four different characters, Maia Station, Joseph, Wang Xin, and Julie Station. They all find themselves trapped in the same place, it would seem. A lot of repeating characters, and places. But they each have their own issues to deal with. Having thought about it since I finished the book, I feel like there are four separate mazes (at least) that all lie on top of one another. They interact and yet are somewhat separate. That probably doesn't make any sense, unless you've read the book.

And even then...

I found McDermott's prose to be solid and, occasionally quite lovely. The stories themselves are dark, violent, and in some cases, downright gross. The book is a mix of genres. Science fiction when we're in Maia's maze; she comes from a space station and looks at the maze from a scientific point of view. She's the only one who does. Julie, Maia's daughter, is born into the maze and doesn't really understand the science her mother tries to teach her.

The two men's stories are told more from a fantasy/horror point of view. They both came to the maze from a more prosaic planet Earth, stumbling into it. Well, Wang Xin trips over his bicycle, literally stumbling; Joseph is dragged into the sewer system by a ghost he brings to life.

I found Wang Xin to be the most interesting character of the bunch. Jenny Ghost, who has her own interlude in the book, drags Joseph into the plumbing, but gets to Wang Zin through his eye, and he (as a young boy) believes he can see the future because of this. A lot of things happen that convince him he's right, and even when things don't match up to his vision, he's still convinced.

Wang Xin's section of the book, his maze, is also the most disturbing. Part of his vision includes two women he is sure are in love with him. They aren't and he ends up treating them badly—raping one, in fact. Xin pays for his bad behavior, and the author's tearing down of his visions bit by bit is part of the payment.

Unlike most fiction I read, Maze has no resolution. Our protagonists never find their way out of their mazes, unless death is the way out. As Joseph says at the end of his story:

We made the best life we could in this terrible place.

This may be frustrating for readers who like a definitive ending to their stories. I didn't mind it so much. My main problems concerned certain sections that weren't as well written as others. Joseph's section, in particular, felt stiffer and more confusing than the rest. And the scene with Parks on the bed reminded me of the first Evil Dead movie, and not in a good way. And the grotesqueness of what was done to her felt gratuitous. What was the point?

In general, though, I would recommend Maze. If you're up for dark and troubling read with no easy answers, give it a try.
