



Mammoth

John Varley

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Never afraid of risks, award-winning author John Varley took readers and critics by storm with his previous novel, *Red Thunder*. Now, Varley takes another leap into the great unknown with *Mammoth*...

In a barren province of Canada, a mammoth hunter has made the discovery of a lifetime: an intact frozen woolly mammoth. But what he finds during the painstaking process of excavating the huge creature boggles the mind. Huddled next to the mammoth is the mummified body of a Stone Age man around 12,000 years old. And he is wearing a wristwatch.

Mammoth Details

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From Reader Review Mammoth for online ebook

Wanda says

I enjoyed this time-travelling adventure, still musing about the star-rating it deserves. Was it really a four-star read, or was it just so much more fun than my current book club selection, which is boring me mightily? I think I'll leave it at the 4 stars.

A billionaire who is obsessed with prehistoric animals is having a frozen mammoth excavated from the barren wilderness of Nunavut with plans of cloning it. As the excavation advances, it becomes obvious that there is also a person frozen into the tundra. And that person is wearing a wristwatch. Eventually, we find out there are two people (a man & a woman) and a silver brief case as well. How did these modern items come to be frozen into a Pleistocene grave?

You could call some of this book *The Battle of the Nerds*, as the eccentric billionaire clashes with the famous physicist who was hired to figure out the time-travel aspects of the case. Throw in an animal-rights activist and an elephant trainer (who become the love interests of these two guys) and the cast of characters is complete.

I appreciated the amount that Varley knew/learned about elephant behaviour & husbandry. I thought his portrayal of most of the elephant and mammoth behaviour was pretty realistic (the behaviour of human females, however, was maybe not so much). I also found his view of Canada interesting. And I appreciated the twist at the end—even though I was anticipating it, I thought it was well done.

Tracey says

Howard Christian, an eccentric multi-billionaire (think Bill Gates crossed with Howard Hughes) has a new interest: cloning mammoths. However, his newest find, a male Columbian mammoth frozen in the Arctic, has a surprising companion - a human male... with a wristwatch and an aluminum attaché case.

Howard hires Matt Wright, the finest mind in mathematics to explore the mysteries of the attaché case, as it seems to be a time machine. Along the way, a few more mammoths pop up, and a romance develops between Matt and Susan Morgan, the head of the mammoth project.

The story takes some interesting twists & turns, and was a very quick read for its 368 pages. There were a couple of smallish plot holes, but in general, I found it very enjoyable. It's a departure from Varley's early work, being set in the almost here-and-now instead of a future where humankind lives among the planets, but he still shows off his wit and imagination, as well as getting a jab in at himself, when a character dismisses a science fiction story where "people were taken off airplanes before they crashed." :)

Debra Howe says

I am a really big fan of alternate history/time travel stories. This was a great example, of which category I'm not sure!! Great characters and a fast pace kept me reading, barely able to put it down.

Rudy Miller says

This book didn't do much for me. I like books that delve into a character's backstory and motivations. I operate under the presumption that what we understand of ourselves and our world is often distorted and inaccurate. This notion is only superficially explored by author John Varley. We are asked to accept that Howard Christian is a ruthless capitalist and the Matt Wright is a fogheaded scientist without really looking into what makes them tick. How did they get to be who they were? We have no clue. That's not the point of the book, I guess. So what is the point? I had a hard time accepting that Christian could pay his way out of all of his problems. I had a hard time accepting that the public would be ravenous for the mammoth circus, that interest in the spectacle wouldn't just fizzle out over time. I had a hard time believing Christian would survive in the prehistoric world when he had been catered to and taken care of his whole life. (Why would he have all the world's books downloaded onto his laptop if he could just google what he needs to know? And wouldn't the laptop's batteries die at some point?) And I had a hard time caring about what happened to any of these characters. The twist at the end with Christian going back in time gave this an extra star, up from the one star I had planned on giving it most of the way. Until the very end, I kept wanting to point Christian's Beam of Death at each of the characters and Varley himself. That would have given me the satisfaction the prose failed to deliver.

Paul says

Multi-billionaire Howard Christian is an eccentric sort who likes to actually play with his toys. His latest obsession is to clone a woolly mammoth. During an expedition in northern Canada, an intact, but mummified mammoth is found. Huddled in the mammoth's fur is a Stone Age man approximately 12,000 years old...wearing a wristwatch.

Matthew Wright, science prodigy, is brought in to figure out what is in the metal suitcase clutched in the Stone Age man's arms. It's some sort of time machine, involving what look like many glass marbles. One day, Matt gets it to work, and takes himself, Susan Wright, who is taking care of a herd of elephants involved in the cloning plan, the elephants, and a Santa Monica warehouse, about 12,000 years in the past. After several days in the past, Matt gets the time machine to work again, and brings himself and Susan back to the present, along with a herd of half a dozen mastodons that happened to be nearby at the time. A baby mastodon, nicknamed Little Fuzzy, and Big Mama, his mother, are the only survivors when they appear in the middle of L.A. traffic.

Five years later, Little Fuzzy is the star of a multi-media extravaganza of a circus in Oregon. Susan is still his handler, because Little Fuzzy won't work with anyone else. She comes up with the idea of kidnapping Fuzzy, and freeing him in the wilds of northern Canada, where he could have something resembling a normal life. But Howard Christian is not about to let that happen.

Does any circus, no matter how progressive, automatically equal mistreating of animals? That's one of the

questions explored in this fine piece of storytelling. It is more than just a really good time travel story, and it's well worth reading.

Brent says

The charm of this time travel story really becomes apparent as it nears its close. Makes me want to see current touring exhibit about mammoths and mastodons at Fernbank Museum, Atlanta. The phrase "Cenozoic Park" actually may appear in the novel.

Adam Richter says

Didn't think I'd make it all the way through a John Varley book (*cough* "The Golden Globe" *cough*), but this was a fun read. More mammoths than the last book I read, "Rabbit is Rich." And that one, frankly, could have used a few.

Colin McEvoy says

I was interested in reading *Mammoth* in part because the story sounded interesting, and also because I saw that *The Washington Post* declared John Varley "one of science fiction's most important writers," and yet I had never read any of his work. But I suppose I'll have to read some of his other books to determine whether that description is accurate, because I certainly don't think it's the case based on the strength of *Mammoth* alone. That's not to say it's a bad book. Quite the contrary, I found it to be an amusing story, with a fun premise and some very interesting and quirky characters. I just didn't find the writing to be anything particularly extraordinary, and the story felt a little light -- even despite such mind-bending concepts as time travel -- for such a glowing endorsement of an author.

In fact, this felt less like a science fiction book to me than it did a mystery/thriller with some sci-fi elements. At times, it felt very much like a Carl Hiaasen novel, particularly during some of the moments involving the baffoonish eco-terrorist characters and a few of the wackier moments, like one involving a rich guy and a tower which I will not spoil. There are only a handful of times when it feels like *Mammoth* is veering into full-blown science fiction mode, usually when the protagonist stops to pontificate about quantum physics or string theory. These moments felt to me somewhat removed from the rest of the story, and occasionally slowed the action down.

So no, *Mammoth* doesn't strike me as a work worthy of "one of science fiction's most important authors," and some of the temporal paradoxes that are commonplace for time travel tales such as these sometimes feel like they are convenient excuses to avoid explaining loose ends (like how the damn time machine came to exist in the first place, and how Matt managed to get it working). The book isn't necessarily structured exactly how I'd like either; at one point, the narrative jumps ahead a couple of years, and then we get several chapters with characters basically explaining what had happened in that time. But it's a enjoyable enough read, and the archaeological discovery in the opening chapter of this book has to be one of the best and most

creative teases for a time travel story ever written.

Algernon says

[7/10] A good story, it reads more like a thriller than a SF genre book. It has some speculations on time travel and the nature of reality, but they feel a little shoehorned into the story.

I liked the main characters: the slightly addled mathematician, the spirited elephant handler, the nerdy billionaire. I picked this up mainly to read about mammoths and the book did the job in an entertaining way. The storytelling is functional, without many wow elements or impressive metaphors, but also well paced and focused enough to keep me reading.

I'm tempted to check the Mars books by Varley.

Christina Zable says

I spent most of the book annoyed at the author. Varley used to write fascinating stuff about gender and life, and now this is just, hum, implausible silliness. I heartily disliked the billionaire mammoth collector, didn't believe in his girlfriend at all, found the accounts of what wealth and privilege can achieve... spotty, and was lukewarm about the other two characters. The story was redeemed a bit by the ending which was a nice twist, even though someone's change of heart was "told not shown". The ending was a nice fake-out and somewhat redeemed things, earning the book its second star.

unknown says

Interesting sci-fi yarn so far. Very fast read, amusing, but the characters are paper-thin. Sort of waiting for something to happen, as the climax seems a forgone conclusion, but that's what you get with a circular time travel narrative I suppose.

Ok, so I finished. It ended pretty well, but that doesn't really excuse a lot of the tedium that it took to get there. The ending IS predictable, but the way Varley pulls it off is quite nice. Bumped it up a good half star in my estimation. Call it 2.75.

Luann says

This is John Varley's answer to Jurassic Park - including a mammoth theme park and circus! I was immediately interested in reading this when I read the premise: a frozen mammoth is found with a mummified Stone Age man and woman huddled next to it. The man is wearing a wristwatch. Sounds interesting, huh? I recommend it if you like time travel stories with a bit of science, a fair amount of action, a touch of romance, and a cute baby mammoth.

Note: I really liked how the chapter numbers were chronological, even though some of the chapters weren't. Also, now I need to read the "ridiculous" science fiction story Varley mentions about "taking people off of airplanes that were about to crash." It's called Millennium by John Varley. :)

Jo Lisa says

This book started out with GREAT potential! I was hooked early on, but the story lost a bit toward the end. I would have given it 3.5 if possible, just because the beginning was so good.

Daniel says

I hadn't realized how much I have missed reading Varley until getting into this.

The title, and the premise as described on the jacket, didn't do anything for me, but as I have always enjoyed a John Varley book I decided to read this as well, and am glad I did!

Varley has a way of engaging the reader, bringing us into his story, rather than keeping us as observers.

This is not Varley's best ... there are a number of "problems" I had with it, and it was moderately easy to predict the outcome, but a mediocre Varley is still better than most.

Part of the problem was the dual focus that was distracting rather than intriguing. The idea of creating new mammoths from the DNA of a found mammoth implanted in modern elephants would be enough for a book, but then that's been done with Jurassic Park. The modern creation of the time machine would also be enough for a book, but has also been done in abundance. The idea of the protesters didn't really go anywhere even though there was a slight tie to them later.

Still, despite the faults, this was a fun science fiction read.

Neil says

This was actually a fun book to read. I thought it was a 'different' book the cover reminded me of that I had seen well over twenty years ago, but that is okay. It was still a fun read. It involves time-travel, mammoths, a mystery-or-two, love, romance, crazy science, "self-discovery", and a whoooooole lotta money. The character development was pretty good, overall. I would say the none of the primary characters were villains, although two of the "villains" in the piece were annoyingly offensive (and I blame the author for that as opposed to the characters he created).

I thought it was an interesting concept to have none of the "primary characters" be "the villain" of the piece. Both Howard Christian and Susan Morgan could each be said to be "villains" at one time or another, but they would be "sympathetic villains," I suppose, because neither of them is truly "evil" or "bad, deep-down" where it counts. (view spoiler) They both seemed to be villains, at times, albeit sympathetic.

(view spoiler)

In regards to the 'true' villains of the piece, I would say they were the "fringe groups" of animal rights lovers. They were constantly portrayed in the worst light possible, which kinda makes sense, considering the lengths

to which they were portrayed in the book and appear, at times, in "real life." (view spoiler)

The numbering of chapters in the book really threw me off, at first, hahahah! (view spoiler)

(view spoiler)

It was a fun book to read; it had plenty of enjoyable moments in them. There is a lot of dialogue, though, and not much 'action' (which kind-of surprised me, to be honest). I enjoyed Howard's interactions with Matt, Susan, and other individuals. His interacting with others always struck me as funny, especially with Matthew Wright. It seemed to me as if he and Matt Wright were "two sides of the same coin" or a "similar coin" in how they interacted with other people and handled other people. Howard had his wealth to his hind behind, which Matt did not, but it still seemed they were quite similar to each other in terms of character and personality and whatnot. I also enjoyed Matt and Susan (view spoiler). (view spoiler)

The latter third of the book was a weird mix of boring-and-interesting. It is mostly exposition, of Matt telling Susan about the last five years of his life, how he travelled the world to "rediscover himself" in an attempt to "unlearn everything he has learned" (view spoiler). It was really boring, and it did get hard to follow at times. There is a lot of exposition in the first two-thirds of the book, but it was interesting and felt like it kept the story moving along. Matt's exposition during the last third of the book really took away the energy of the book and slowed the narrative down dramatically; slowed it down too much (view spoiler) The story did pick back up, though. (view spoiler)

All things being equal, I am glad I read the book. It was entertaining (for the most part). The last one-third probably could have had large chunks take out without damaging the overall narrative. I wanted to give it 3.5 - 4 stars, but the issues I did have with it keeps it at three stars. That being said, I did enjoy reading it and am glad I finally got around to reading it.
