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An increasingly decrepit God and a merely ill-tempered Satan are reconciled and attempt a mission to Earth, where their misadventures point up the comedy and tragedy of modern life.

Old Man and Mr. Smith: A Fable Details

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Author : Peter Ustinov

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From Reader Review Old Man and Mr. Smith: A Fable for online ebook

Megan says

This was one of Max's earliest book suggestions, and definitely one of my favorites. God and the devil come to earth together to try and make sense of things...

It's a bit dated, but still has many funny bits -- definitely good for a laugh or six.

Reinhold says

Sir Peter Ustinov legt ein Buch vor, wie es kaum ein anderer fabrizieren kann. Immer leuchtet sein Genius durch. Dies betrifft die Geschichte und ihren Verlauf ebenso wie die sprachliche Fassung und die vielen versteckten Anspielungen, die man oft erst beim zweiten Lesen findet. Gott und Satan, so postuliert er gleich zu Beginn, sind keine Gegner, sondern vielmehr notwendige Gegensätze damit der andere überhaupt existieren kann. Es gäbe kein Weiß, wenn es kein Schwarz gäbe.

Gott und Satan sind daher einander nicht spinnefeind, und so treffen sie sich nach vielen tausend Jahren auf Erden um zu begutachten was aus der Schöpfung wurde. Satan (=Mr. Smith) hat da noch den besseren Überblick, aber Gott (=der alte Mann) wird ununterbrochen von der Realität überrascht, gab er sich doch bisher einem sehr naiven Weltbild hin.

Und so beginnen sie ihre Reise in den USA, wo sie gleich mal etwas Geld brauchen um Leben zu können. Der alte Mann macht schnell welches und schon sind die beiden als Falschmünzer auf der Fahndungsliste des FBI. Dass sie sich als das ausgeben was sie sind, kommt ebenfalls nicht ganz so gut - und der Auftritt in der Show eines Fernsehpredigers geht ebenfalls in die Hose. Nicht besser ergeht es ihnen in England, wo sie mit gestohlenem Gepäck und gefälschten Tickets verhaftet werden. Und so geht es immer weiter, sie reisen noch nach Russland, Israel, China, Japan und Indien; und überall treffen sie auf Probleme, denen sie sich immer wieder nur durch weiterreisen entziehen können.

Ustinov schreibt eine wunderbare Parabel auf die Welt in der er lebt. Er ist ein feiner Beobachter und bleibt dennoch nur an der Oberfläche, denn die ganze Tiefe des Elends auf das Gott träfe, käme er wieder auf die Welt, lässt sich kaum in einem solch dünnen Buch niederlegen.

Sprachlich und stilistisch ist das Buch durchaus gelungen, wenn auch nicht unbedingt große Literatur. Es liegt im guten Mittelfeld und das reicht absolut aus für ein Buch das vor allem Spaß machen möchte. Die beiden Hauptfiguren sind liebevoll gezeichnet und irgendwie sind sie wirklich glaubhaft - wenngleich das natürlich reine Spekulation bleibt.

Ein wirklich nettes Buch also, das man jedem empfehlen kann, der sich einmal auf etwas humorvolle Weise mit den Schwierigkeiten der Welt befassen möchte. Natürlich ist das Buch schon einige Jährchen alt, und manches sieht heute anders aus; nichtsdestotrotz ist es dennoch aktuell.

Saskia says

This is one of the books I re-read at least twice a year. It explores human behaviour and morals seen through the eyes of God and the devil.

God and the devil meet up on earth to see what has become of God's creation, the human race. While they travel to different continents and meet a variety of people (including psychiatrists and the FBI), the devil starts to question the reasons God cast him out of heaven.

Even though the book is quite philosophical at times, it's still easy and entertaining to read. Imagine God and the devil arguing about human (and their own) behaviour while being chased by the FBI or exposing a fraudulent television-angelist and you know that this book has the potential to make you both laugh and think at the same time.

Robert says

Stangely, the book reads like a travelogue of ideologies. The narrative is both whimsical and thought provoking, and filled with uniquely detached commentary on the things that we as a civilization hold important- and how important those things really are in the Grand Scheme. While it does occasionally get lost in it's own prose and there are a few parts of it that are out of date (The Soviet Union, for instance) it is nevertheless a book that you will get something out of each time you read it at a different age and with a different point of view.

Elina says

Θεός και Σατανός ?ρχονται στη Γη....μετ? ο καθ?νας ?τι καταλαβα?νει!!!

Bob says

The book was entertaining at times, and a little slow at others. Ustinov used a non-traditional, mortal portrayal of God and Satan to make some points about religion and the nature of belief. The book was not quite as clever as the author seemed to think it was and got repetitive on occasion (the same conflicts with the same resolutions, over and over).

However, there was some good banter back and forth between the two supernatural beings, and some interesting theological ideas. The idea that most people would reject a physical, concrete form of the deities they worship was a prevalent theme, and probably fairly accurate. The author also got in a few well-deserved (if not original) digs at televangelists.

Mostly this was a collection of the author's theological musings and religious jokes covered by a thin veil of a story. It makes me wonder if the story part was even necessary, or if Ustinov would have been better served by writing a lighthearted treatise on the subject of religion instead.

Laura-Leigh says

I really did enjoy this book. Hadn't read anything ever by Ustinov before. Found it very funny in places but thought it was written much earlier than it was. Like reading fiction on and off between other works.

Aletha Tavares says

very few know of Peter Ustinov as a writer- this book is absolutely brilliant & one could also set a play on this- the dialogues are fabulous- god & the devil descend to earth in 20th century & get locked up in jail nd then are on the run getting chased by the FBI, the Interpol and they land up in India and are recognised for who they are. It depicts how God is so out of date with things on earth & it is the devil, mr. smith, who has to keep getting GOD out of trouble.

Absolutely brilliant writing- so too with his other books- what a writer

Stephanie says

a must read. hilarious book. drôle malgré le desespoir de la condition humaine, un livre à offrir à tout le monde !

Chanel Earl says

I was too young to understand this book completely when I read it. I remember that I enjoyed it, but that I was shocked by it at the same time. I would like to read it again.

Corleen gallinger says

I think this was one of THE most enjoyable books I have ever read. Helps I heard SIr Ustinov do a reading from the book and as such I had 'voices' for the Old Man and Mr. Smith. If you can find a copy you must read it!

Sam says

This book had a lot of potential, but for me, it never fully delivered. I was absolutely sucked in at first, and the concept is very unique: God and Satan decide to meet up on Earth to catch up and see how humanity is doing. They're almost immediately arrested by the FBI on charges of forgery (since God can make his own currency but apparently isn't great with details). They "escape" (read: disappear into thin air) and so begins the FBI's hunt.

So based on that opening, I was expecting a theological crime caper! Fun! And for the first little while, it is. But once the story moves out of the US, it lost me a bit. It was a lot of the same, just in various countries throughout Europe and Asia. It started feeling a little slow and repetitive, and the laughs were fewer and fewer.

Full points for creativity, but I do wish there had been more meat to the story and a little less of the throwaway dialogue of "good vs evil" between the two characters.

Katerina says

Ξυπνη υπ?θεση και ?να βιβλ?ο που καυτηρι?ζει ?ντονα καταστ?σεις της νε?τατης ιστορ?ας και τον τρ?που της σ?γχρονη καθημεριν?τητας. Ωστ?σο με κο?ρασε και το τελε?ωσα με δυσκολ?α. Οι δ?ο ασυν?θιστοι γ?ροι ?που και να πηγα?νουν μπλ?κουν. Γυρνο?ν τον κ?σμο ολ?κληρο, τους κυνηγ? η αστυνομ?α και ?σο περισσ?τερο μ?νουν στην γη τ?σο χ?νουν απ? τις υπερκ?σμιες δυν?μεις τους.

Pawanraj says

God and Satan visit the Earth, and experience what us mortals live through every day. Lovely book, lot of satire, humour, lot of contemplation about the brilliance and the follies of human race...

A touch personal, and it would seem like Ustinov has given voice to his views about humanity via the characters, but then, he at least considered two sides of the coin.

Recommended.

T4bsF (Call me Flo) says

With Peter Ustinov being extremely accomplished at everything he touched, actor, dramatist, screen designer, author etc, etc (the list of his talents is endless), I was expecting a good read, and I definitely wasn't disappointed. The story is about God (the Old Man) and the Devil (Mr. Smith) deciding to become mortal on earth for a while, whilst becoming re-acquainted with each other and 'burying the hatchet'. The story was funny, thought-provoking, and interesting, bringing into the equation some concepts of how, perhaps, this pair would be treated during their stay. Not too sure what genre I would put it in, as it has so many strings to it's bow.

Pmurph07 says

I didn't enjoy the book all that much, but we read it for book club and I really enjoyed the discussion surrounding it. It's a story about god and the devil returning to earth in modern day. It really brought out a lot of assumptions about how we think about god and the devil and forced you to really consider "what would Jesus do?"

PJ says

Me lo vendieron como libro de humor desternillante y solo encontrado reflexiones y crítica. No está mal para quien busque esto último, hace reflexionar con algo de humor, pero muy leve.

Djinnie says

Couldn't finish it. Having other more interesting books interrupt my involvement in this book has meant that I can't be bothered going back to pick up the thread. Oh well, another one for the charity shop pile.

Katharina says

This book is very well written, but it is very hard to read. It has a lot of impact and a lot of stuff to think about, so I would recommend to read it in steps and have time to relax in between. It gives you a lot of ideas and it is often quite philosophical, but it is definitely worth a try.

The story is quite easy to tell: God and the Devil are together on earth.

But what happens in this book is quite surprising, so I will not tell you.

And if you think now, this book will be too hard for you, then go on and read it! There are a lot of funny moments too and if you do not want to think so much, you can just read on read on and just capture the funny moments in their story.

Chris Cantor says

A story about an elderly rather doddering God traveling the world with the Devil who is not as bad as you might think. Nice idea. They visit many of the major countries of the world where they have stereotypical/satirical observations that are somewhat funny, but there is no real plot or movement through the book. You could completely reorder the chapters and it would not make a huge difference.
