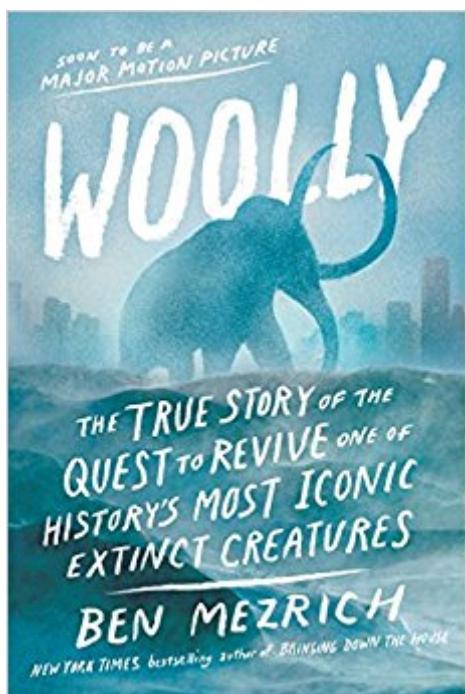


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Woolly: The True Story Of The Quest To Revive One Of History's Most Iconic Extinct Creatures



Synopsis

Science fiction becomes reality in this Jurassic Park-like story of the genetic resurrection of an extinct species—the woolly mammoth—by the bestselling author of *The Accidental Billionaires* and *The 37th Parallel*. “With his knack for turning narrative nonfiction into stories worthy of the best thriller fiction” (Omnivoracious), Ben Mezrich takes us on an exhilarating true adventure story from the icy terrain of Siberia to the cutting-edge genetic labs of Harvard University. A group of young scientists, under the guidance of Dr. George Church, the most brilliant geneticist of our time, works to make fantasy reality by sequencing the DNA of a frozen woolly mammoth harvested from above the Arctic circle, and splicing elements of that sequence into the DNA of a modern elephant. Will they be able to turn the hybrid cells into a functional embryo and bring the extinct creatures to life in our modern world? Along with Church and his team of Harvard scientists, a world-famous conservationist and a genius Russian scientist plan to turn a tract of the Siberian tundra into Pleistocene Park, populating the permafrost with ancient herbivores as a hedge against an environmental ticking time bomb. More than a story of genetics, this is a thriller illuminating the race against global warming, the incredible power of modern technology, the brave fossil hunters who battle polar bears and extreme weather conditions, and the ethical quandary of cloning extinct animals. Can we right the wrongs of our ancestors who hunted the woolly mammoth to extinction—and at what cost?

Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Atria Books (July 4, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1501135554

ISBN-13: 978-1501135552

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.3 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 30 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #20,589 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural History #40 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Zoology #69 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Scientists

Customer Reviews

“Paced like a thriller Woolly reanimates history and breathes new life into the

narrative of nature." (NPR) "Step aside Jurassic Park, make way for the new and improved woolly mammoth." (USA Today) "Jurassic Park, a bit of The Big Bang Theory...[mixed] with jaw-dropping scientific findings...for science-minded readers, thrill-lovers, or dreamers, Woolly is a mammoth-sized read." (Quad-City Times (Iowa)) "A page-turning tale. . . . [a] rollercoaster quest for the past and future. . . . Mezrich's ability to weave the details of DNA science into an easily accessible narrative does much to broaden the lay reader's understanding of the tremendous developments and awe-inspiring capabilities of some of today's most groundbreaking science." (Christian Science Monitor)

Ben Mezrich graduated magna cum laude from Harvard. He has published eighteen books, including the New York Times bestsellers *The Accidental Billionaires*, which was adapted into the Academy Award-winning film *The Social Network*, and *Bringing Down the House*, which has sold more than 1.5 million copies in twelve languages and was the basis for the hit movie *21*, and most recently the national bestseller *Once Upon a Time in Russia*. One of the most influential writers in Hollywood, he lives in Boston.

I couldn't wait to read this - the premise is so interesting, reviving a Wooly Mammoth. But I found the storytelling exhausting. Back and forth to different locations and different characters. Different times. Sort of a novel, but sort of not. I almost stopped reading, but made it through to the end. It might have been better as an article in the New Yorker. But as a book, it didn't work for me.

I live close to the Mammoth Site which is in Hot Springs, South Dakota. I ordered thinking this might be of interest to my Book Club. I was very impressed with the treatment of this subject. It is much too technical for the casual reading I was anticipating. However, it answered many questions for me regarding the obstacles to cloning of any sort.

Spectacular storytelling.

As a fan of all things Pleistocene, Ben Mezrich's book jumped out at me from a display table at Dallas' newest independent bookstore, Interabang Books. How

could I resist a title like *Woolly: The True Story of the Quest to Revive One of History's Most Iconic Extinct Creatures?* True, even fans of woolly mammoths (you didn't think the book was about sheep, did you?) know only too well that the great Ice Age beasts no longer walk the earth. But until if living mammoths can be cloned or otherwise brought to life, we can feed our hopes with the possible ways that might happen. The book's cover notes, soon to be a major motion picture, and Mezrich's mosaic of opening scenes consciously mirror those of that other major motion picture about extinct monstrous animals, *Jurassic Park*.

Mezrich's technique can, however, be disconcerting in book form, with readers forced to jump from the viewpoint of the very last living woolly mammoths 3,000 years ago to a hypothetical scene of the future of the 21st century; from the early childhood in steamy Florida of American geneticist George M. Church to a truck drive across the icy Siberian wilderness; and on and on. Scientifically minded readers should be warned that Mezrich (or his editors) can have a cavalier way with words. Elk antlers are blithely referred to as

“horns, small herbivores as

“omnivorous, and musk oxen as hybrids of an ox, goat and sheep. (Or possibly as hybridizing with all three of these species. I can't quite make out which Mezrich has in mind.) Less mammoth-infatuated readers may also wonder why anyone would spend the time (and money) to resurrect a long-extinct species when so many modern ones are in danger of extinction. *Woolly* tries to answer these skeptics, and in doing so skims through a host of stories as fascinating in their own right as any thriller. There's the eccentric and dyslexic scientist Church, zoologist turned geneticist intent on re-engineering the genomes of creatures from rodents to humans to mammoths. Church, Mezrich writes, decided after visiting the 1964-1965 World Fair that he was a time traveler from the future, desperate to find his way back. And his wife, Chao-ting Wu (Ting to her friends), a Chinese immigrant whose race, sex, and yes, marriage blocked her scientific career path for years. Or Stewart Brand, founder of the iconoclastic bible, *Whole Earth Catalogue*, and his wife, biotech entrepreneur Ryan Phelan, have dedicated themselves to resurrecting extinct species. (In an afterword to *Woolly*, Brand reports that the first proxy passenger pigeons may be alive as early as 2022.) Other leading candidates for revival, he writes, include the Tasmanian tiger, New Zealand moas, and ivory-billed woodpecker. Most intriguing to me are Russians Nikita Zimov and his father Sergey, who for decades have worked to restore moss and lichen Arctic tundras to their Pleistocene lushness, which once supported vast herds of giant herbivores. Including woolly mammoths. The

Zimovs' dream doesn't involve resurrecting extinct species for their own sake, but using restored Arctic grasslands to halt global warming. (The Zimovs believe the tread of large herbivore hoofs makes the upper permafrost area of soil more amenable to the growth of grass.) So, even without living woolly mammoths, there would be plenty to report. Woolly, however, fails to deliver adequately on these promises. Near the beginning, and again near the end, Mezrich tempts readers with possible views of mammoths four years from today. . . and three years from today. Maybe he hopes that by the time of the cover's promised "major motion picture" materializes, there will be more to show.

As a scientist (meteorologist) and someone who has always been fascinated with prehistoric mammals and dinosaurs I had to read this book. This true quest to revive the Woolly Mammoth is for a very, very good reason and it involves climate change. Scientists have learned that under the melting permafrost of the Arctic lies such a massive quantity of methane and carbon dioxide (two greenhouse gases) that if released could exacerbate the rate of global warming at a more alarming rate than even present day pollution. The Woolly Mammoth would actually help alleviate that melting, but you have to read the book. Dr. George Church is the man behind the genetics research and his spinoff studies have done so much already for humanity that you likely don't know. I'll leave it there... It's a fascinating read and you can find out just how close we are to making this quest a reality.

A reader with a meager science background should not be deterred by the genetic and bio-technological vocabulary of this book. Mezrich's writing is both clear and entertaining throughout. Above all, this is a hopeful book in a time when many feel despair. The author's main "character" is George Church, a Harvard geneticist who spear-headed the Human Genome Project to sequence the genetic code of humans. He has also developed the Personal Genome Project to sequence the genes of people who know they are carrying genetic disorders for serious diseases. The hope is to identify defective genes and replace them so that future generations do not need to suffer. A second hope is presented in restoring extinct flora and fauna of our ecosystems through biotechnology. Since the extinction of the dinosaur, we have never faced such a rapid loss of species than we experience today. Over time, using biotechnology, we can restore and protect thousands of plants and animals which are currently extinct or endangered. The author discusses the work of Stewart Brand, co-founder and president of the Revive and Restore Project which has this as its mission. Finally, this book provides hope for the use of genetics to reverse the effects of

climate change. With the "revival" of the woolly mammoth and other large herbivores to the tundra, our planet's largest biome, we may prevent the massive release of carbon dioxide and methane due to the melting of permafrost. It is a clean way to reverse the warming of our planet's atmosphere. The book includes a forthright discussion about the concerns for "scientists playing God" and tinkering with the make-up of organisms. But we have reached a tipping point in terms of the current and future survival for all living organisms on Earth. By reading this book, you too can be both informed and hopeful.

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