



A Hologram for the King

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In a rising Saudi Arabian city, far from weary, recession-scarred America, a struggling businessman pursues a last-ditch attempt to stave off foreclosure, pay his daughter's college tuition, and finally do something great. In *A Hologram for the King*, Dave Eggers takes us around the world to show how one man fights to hold himself and his splintering family together in the face of the global economy's gale-force winds. This taut, richly layered, and elegiac novel is a powerful evocation of our contemporary moment — and a moving story of how we got here.

A Hologram for the King Details

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From Reader Review A Hologram for the King for online ebook

MJ Nicholls says

Conscientious moralist and all-round Good Egg(er) Dave Eggers in another era might be literary kryptonite. In these times, writers like Eggers who are devoted to giving voice to the voiceless need to be respected in spite of the contemptuous hauteur of educated neurotics like me who delight in turning our schnozes heavenward at this sort of thing. Even in the event of prose streamlined to within an inch of its life that wears its Beckett homage like a proud badge stating I'M DOING A WAITING FOR GODOT THING HERE. Eggers is an American novelist who seems to care about something outwith his navel and funnels his funds into excellent causes. I will continue to read this charming man even when his novels reach the apogee of finger-wagging let's-all-be-kind-together liberalism and cool-dude whimsicality as long as this bepermed nicemeister continues to demonstrate exquisite Human Being skills and writes more illuminating novels pitched at the exact reading level for the masses to absorb on the off-chance some of them might look outwith their navels and give a flying patootie about the rest of the world. Dave 4 Prez.

Megan says

This is what I imagine Dave Eggers' thought process was like in composing *Hologram*:

"I want to write another novel. Haven't done that in a little while.

But I want it to be socially relevant, a commentary like *Zeitoun*.

But it would be so obvious if my protagonist were another clear victim of global catastrophe, like *Zeitoun* or *What is the What*.

I know! I'll make him seem like one of globalization's possible bad guys – an American businessman who's helped bring the catastrophe on himself! Except he still gets to sit in expensive air-conditioned hotel rooms. But then I'll weave in brief scenes – groups of poorly paid immigrant workers packed into poor living conditions – to highlight the greater economic plight of the world."

Eggers' moves to be 'not obvious' seem to me exactly what makes so much of this particular piece, well, obvious. Eventually, there was just nothing surprising to me about the book. I read the first half with high expectations, definitely enjoying it – because yes, it's a well-written novel, sentence by sentence, it's true; and yes, I think many who were not fans of *Heartbreaking* will enjoy this instead – but still, I wanted more of a punch, more of the emotional wave that I think he excels at creating.

Of course, I think many will say that is precisely the book's strength: it manages to pull you along despite its complete calm, and the fact that it is essentially a story about waiting. But for all those critics who are already flowing with praise about its capturing 'a moment of history,' its status as a 'socially revealing emotional tale' or some such bit, I want to ask: what about this story don't we already know?

Because what *Hologram* gives us is the story of a man who created the very economic conditions that are now undoing him, but whose concern is mostly for its effects on his personal and family life, who is turning his attention again to another money-making venture, while keeping himself at arms-length from that

venture's possible consequences for others. This is the story of a great many American businessmen, of the complete nearsightedness of our financial endeavors, and we should know it already. If we don't: well, then Eggers' newest work definitely has a job to do, and I wish it well.

Nancy Sirvent says

I was off to a very enjoyable start with this book. However, I became utterly distracted by some very obvious things that were not caught by a copy editor (I suspect that there was no editor). It was mostly inconsistencies.

On one page a character is having a phone conversation with his ex-wife and then several pages later he tells us that he hasn't spoken with her by phone for two years.

The character arrives at a location at noon. He has a couple of meetings, watches a film, gets a tour, and meets many people. He then joins his colleagues, at which time we are told that it is "just after noon."

The character is given a certain kind of drink, in a bottle, by someone. He later takes some sips from it. A few pages later, the bottle has become a glass and in some places is referred to by two different names. It looked as though that section had been heavily edited and no one went back to check that it still made sense.

There were a couple of others, believe it or not, and I actually started flagging them. Once an editor, always . . .

Lee says

A perfectly enjoyable, effortlessly proceeding, airily formatted, short novel. It's not really 312 pages, more like 250 with lots of extraneous white space between frequently occurring sections. A tone so accessible it almost seemed like a YA version of some classic salesmanzy novel teleported to 2010 Saudi Arabia. Loved the inclusion of nonfictional bits like about Schwinn's fall and the blast-resistant glass for the Freedom Tower made in China. Loved the snorkeling frolic and didn't really mind the end (won't give away whether the King comes or not). Loved the attempt to dramatize the moral complexities related to the current reality of international commerce. *Loved* the sad little story about the wall the main guy built in his hometown. Generally though Adam Clay felt fictional to me -- his issues felt like a limited number of balls tossed in the air and juggled but they never really transformed into birds of paradise and prey. I therefore had some trouble believing he wasn't something of a fictional holograph himself, which may have been totally intentional of course? The other characters, particularly the other Americans, suffered from Disembodied Proper Noun Syndrome -- that is, their only physical presence in the novel's world was their name. Overall, it's a beautiful product proudly made in the USA -- in the acknowledgements, every single person who works at the Michigan-based printer is listed -- but I sort of felt like its innards were overcrafted for me, too careful, restricted, self-consciously mature, maybe too off-handedly newsy (a single mention of the concurrent BP spill), luminous thanks to spacious formatting more than the brilliance of its bright-shining horizon (by which I mean: its distant ideal narrative destination, beyond the shimmering desert or the expected eventual arrival of the King). I liked *a lot of it* a lot and enjoyed reading it most of the time -- and of course I've seen

people put out of work by outsourcing and fear at any minute I could be next! -- but I prefer the similarly toned, wrenchingly readable *Zeitoun*. As with the recent non-fiction "novels," there's something to this that feels like he's doing a good deed maybe? And maybe something apparently philanthropically/generously motivated doesn't distribute throughout the prose and subsequently the reader's guts the same sort of viral barbaric yawp as something apparently born of aesthetic self-indulgence, obsession, greed? I've followed this author for years now but would love for him to take off the gloves and claw the world's eyes out. Or at least revisit the kingdom of smart funny inventive metafictional maximalism now that he's older. I'd love to read an evil Eggers, essentially -- more expressive, adventuresome, unconventional, improvisational, indulgent; less intentionally artistically inclusive -- but maybe that's logically impossible at this point? Anyway, a beautiful hard cover and an ultimately memorable story.

Erica David says

It's two and a half stars, really. Almost three. Goodreads needs a rating for "Meh" because that's pretty much my reaction to it. Is it well written? Yes. Is it topical and relevant to our particular historical moment, this tale of a former manufacturing executive in existential crisis who finds himself in Saudi Arabia hoping to win an IT contract for the newly founded and still unfinished King Abdullah Economic City? Yes. Is it our mistaken belief as Americans who once made good product but have since outsourced our manufacturing to burgeoning superpowers such as China, that the only way we can possibly save ourselves from our recent economic sins and moral malaise is to once again build something with our own gnarled, guilt-ridden American hands? Yes. Do I care? No.

Actually, that's unfair. I do care and I care about the thought and time that Eggers put into this novel. It is chock full of important ideas that a number of us are struggling to parse these days. My issue is that the ideas outweigh the characters. The characters feel sketchily drawn, typical, and seem to exist solely to service the plot. This is completely acceptable in an allegory or a political cartoon where everything is meant to be clearly labeled, but there's something about the thinness of character in what is meant to be an extremely timely and cogent novel that I find unforgivable.

Elina says

Πολ? τρυφερ? και ταυτ?χρονα πολ? θλιβερ?. Προτε?νεται.

Hadrian says

Well, the hardcover edition has a pretty cover. The plot also looks interesting in summary as well.

The rest is just a disappointment. Eggers' style, a vast improvement over AHWOSG and used to great effect in *Zeitoun*, seems oddly flat here. The setting is a flat caricature of Saudi Arabia, with a deformed businessman somehow seducing two women over there, (one Danish, one Saudi), earning a large commission while simultaneously moping about the end of the American Dream and the Yellow Menace of the Chinese.

Despite this spot of ichor I just spewed, I still have the greatest respect for Zeitoun, for his work at McSweeney's, for his philanthropy and his archaeology in discovering new writers. For the love of God, Eggers, please don't become Philip Roth and write banalities for the next thirty years. If this is a slump, don't let it get to you.

Dan says

UPDATE 10/10/12: NBA finalist?! Give me a break.

-Hey, Dave Eggers has a new book out and it looks wonderful.

-What's it about?

-Who cares, it's a lovely book to hold.

And that's probably the most exceptional thing about the novel. McSweeney's has continued to impress me with the effort and care that they put into the packaging and physicalness of their books. Maybe the publishing industry should take note of what they're doing and start copying it.

Now for the story: A mid-fifties businessman struggling both in work and in life goes to Saudi Arabia for the chance to breath some life into his career and more importantly to improve his financial standing. But of course there's much more to it and the chance for his life to be turned around in a more meaningful way.

Ultimately the story was unsatisfying because it wraps up in the blink of an eye. Ending it in that indie-film sort of way to keep you wondering what happens next may have been the goal. But it doesn't pull it off very effectively and just left me sort of annoyed.

To be fair, the book was a lovely, easy read with the decent writing many expect from Eggers until page 309. It also offered an interesting glimpse into the kingdom of Saudi Arabia that I hadn't before seen.

So for these reasons, and the handsomeness of the book, my rating is somewhere between 2.5 and 3 stars.

Dave Harrison says

I read this book professionally but, as part of the Eggers faithful, I was looking forward to it on a personal level ever since I first heard rumours of it existing. It proved itself worthy pretty damned quick.

The plot is a simple one - an American man travels to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in order to sell holographic technology to the King. What the book is really about is the state of the U.S. following the recession, with a hypothesis on how it got to where it is today, and how it is affecting the average American family.

A man in his fifties travels to Saudi Arabia on behalf of his company, a global IT concern. Despite making what he feels were the right decisions for his life and his family, he finds himself terribly in debt, with no

prospect of ever getting out save one - making the sale to the king will earn him a fat commission, with which he will be able to pay for his teenage daughter's college tuition and put a healthy amount into his own savings.

The book speaks plainly about how the greed of the West has been its own downfall, and has helped crush the American Dream. It notes the plight (and eventual downfall) of Schwinn, the Norman Rockwell of bicycle-makers - instead of outsourcing the manufacturing of its bikes to cheaper Eastern countries, it stubbornly kept making its bicycles on U.S. soil, and subsequently went into bankruptcy in the early 90's. Through this example, the book speaks to the problem with the "Made In China" ideal of manufacturing - if you build your product in China in order to cut costs and make more money, eventually the Chinese are going to learn how to make the product themselves. And then what will they need you for?

I found myself entirely sympathetic to the plight and worries of protagonist. His needs were simple (to provide for his family), yet the world spun past him. I found myself thinking that I could easily become this man, and I haven't been able to quit thinking about it since putting the book down. Despite my trying to do the best I can for me and mine, there's a very real possibility that it will be out of my hands, and that the world will move on and leave many of us stumbling along trying to catch up.

To my mind, this is one of the first novels to emerge from the post-recession world that comments on it so heavily, and it is certainly the best. Its story and message is simple, and makes it very accessible. It felt to me like a snapshot of our moment right now - in a thousand years, if there is still a civilization kicking around and if they have any interest in us, they will be able to read this book and get a clear picture of what happened to the American Dream. It moved to China.

switterbug (Betsey) says

It is 2010, and Alan Clay is waiting. Not for Godot, but for King Abdullah, in the King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC), which is a developing Red Sea port in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He is a 54-year-old failed American businessman in serious debt, evading his creditors and anguishing over how he will pay for his daughter's next year in college. He also has an angry ex-wife and a worrying lump on his neck. This is his last hurrah, a chance to turn his life from sad and broke to flush and secure, if he and his young team from Reliant can pitch this hologram presentation to the King and win an IT contract.

Alan is a bit of a sad sack, arriving at his failures largely due to the outsourcing of American business manufacturing. He was once a confident, prosperous sales executive with Schwinn, until he made some bad decisions, such as trying to convert a Soviet-era factory in Budapest to a capitalistic model. Sometime after that catastrophe, he followed the trend of globalization, and was instrumental in shipping Schwinn's labor to China. That was the end of Schwinn's American prosperity.

"How did your suppliers become your competitors? That was a rhetorical question...Teach a man to fish. Now the Chinese know how to fish, and ninety-nine percent of all bicycles are being made there in one province."

Moreover, his father, now retired, had been a committed union man with Stride Rite, and treated Alan with contempt for his past misdeeds and his new job with Reliant.

"They're making actual things over there, and we're making websites and holograms...while sitting in chairs made in China, working on computers made in China, driving over bridges made in China. Does this sound sustainable to you, Alan?"

As Alan recalls various high points and assaults on his career and personal life--his tense years wedded to the high-strung Ruby; a sentimental trip to Cape Canaveral with his daughter, Kit, to watch the last shuttle; the affluent years with Schwin--he continues to wait, either in his lonely hotel with no alcohol, or set up with his team of three in a tent with anemic wi-fi and no air conditioning, in 110-degree heat.

Fortunately, Alan has forged a connection with a local, a young, enigmatic, chubby driver named Yousef, who is constantly looking under the hood of his car/taxi for explosives that may have been set by the husband of an ex-fiancé. Yousef is usually the comical straight man to the blundering Alan. As Alan shares his dreams and visions of selling his ideas to the King, Yousef tamps it down with some biting realities. Apparently, the King hasn't even been back to Jeddah in about 18 months.

Yousef gives Alan a tour of this unrepentant desert region, a vast place tremendous with possibilities, but appears to be in a stage of arrested development. A billboard advertises the development, and there's a road that cuts through nothing, then a pair of stone arches, and a dome hovering over all of it. He imagines the city rising from its ashes. Presently, it looks like anywhere and nowhere--it could be Los Angeles, or Orlando, as there is nothing to give it distinction, except for its looming neutrality and the few towering or squat, square buildings.

Alan attempts to make contact with the liaison, Karim al-Ahmad, at the building they call the "Black Box," and is given the royal runaround. Back to the stifling tent, he reminisces and deliberates some more. Is the lump on his neck malignant? Are they going to be served food? Is the King going to come soon? Days turn into weeks, and Alan has some interactive adventures. He meets a Danish beauty with an office in the Black Box and a secret stash of moonshine. He makes an appointment to have his lump evaluated and meets a serenely beautiful doctor. He even has an opportunity to prove himself an able marksman.

Eggars has pared down his prose since the exuberant narrative style in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. Here it is streamlined--lean, economic, slyly impassive. I enjoyed what was unsaid as much as what was said--the spaces between sentences, the pregnant pauses to ponder, the measured rhythm, the quivering tension, the elegy of a man feeling his impending absence more than his indefinite presence.

There's a risk of the story being an agit-prop against the creeping ambush of globalization, a pithy cry about America's decline. Certainly that point is made, but not forcefully. Readers are already aware of the economic struggles, the backlash of end-stage capitalism and the pros and con arguments of outsourcing. Eggars is more interested in shaping a character we will identify and empathize with, and laugh at occasionally.

Clay is a maladjusted baby boomer from the age of entitlement, losing his footing in the new privileges and prohibitions of global finance. His wounds, both physical and emotional, are palpable. Alan Clay is a suffering everyman, in the throes of unsustainability. There are wisps of Willy Loman, Herzog, and other memorable literary figures, aging tragic-comic men who suffered from obsolescence.

It reads partly like a fabled allegory, but achingly real and plausible. Can the imminent foreclosure of a man's life be reversed? Will the King show up? I was touched, and considerably moved, by the story, characters, and themes. Don't expect a neatly wrapped up resolve. The droll and beguiling Eggars will hook you on page one, and won't let go, even when you reach the end.

Cheri says

In the late '60's my father, who was a pilot, was approached about taking over the Saudi Arabia route, with a not inconsiderable jump in salary, plus other bonuses, paying our mortgage for the period of time we were gone, paying for whatever place we lived in there, or where my parents would have lived. My brothers and I would have been sent to various places for school, for me it would have been Switzerland, a boarding school. My father proceeded to "remind" us of the differences in the "customs," including attire, and so on. At the mention of walking behind my father in public, my mother promptly announced she would do no such thing, and more or less stormed out of the room. Since then the idea of Saudi Arabia has intrigued me, my father still flew there often enough and I've seen his photographs of some beautiful places and people there, but it's the people that seem to me, from this very American viewpoint, out of another time.

So this little book, "A Hologram for the King" was a little like visiting it for a brief time, in the quirkiest way, through the eyes and mind of Dave Egger's Alan Clay, a wishful dreamer for a return to a way of life that has slipped out of his fingers, and even though he can see, in hindsight, his contribution to the outsourcing of America, he still clings to it the dream, can't really believe that this is what its come to, not in this post 9/11 world.

While they play a game of sit-and-wait for the King to arrive, or even Alan's contact, Alan's "team" of twentyish beings who seem to have left whatever initiative they may have somewhere else. Day after day they sit in a large "Presentation Tent" without air conditioning, without being given food or water, inadequate Wi-Fi to work on their presentation, waiting to be told what to do. They have no interest in their surroundings outside the tent, hoping that when / if they King is to arrive that someone will do something about it. Alan sees himself through their eyes, succumbs to that vision for a while, but eventually tries to do something about it.

For Alan, this is more than a job. He has a college tuition for his daughter he needs to come up with, a daughter he keeps trying to write letters to which don't make his ex look bad, but offer some solid advice, and maybe some consolation about why her mother is so awful. In order to return, be able to face his life back home, Alan needs this sale. He desperately needs it, and so he desperately believes it will happen. When he's not desperately praying for this to happen, he's worrying about a growth on his neck that he is sure will turn out to be cancer.

I loved Alan's friendship with his driver that begins the first morning when he sleeps in too late and has missed the shuttle that drove his team to King Abdullah's Economic City. I loved the humor, occasionally subtle, in Eggers writing, and the underlying theme throughout.

Tom LA says

I was lured by the cover and the title. I was hoping for a quick, fun, brilliant story that would give me some insight into Saudi Arabia and international business Big mistake. I found a French movie from the '70s instead. Seriously: a French Movie from the '70s, one of those where nothing happens, and actors are trying

to convey despair in thousand of different ways, but all they can express is boredom.

But hey! If you have a sudden craving for a story about a weak, self-pitying, sad, aimless loser who just has to kill time for the ENTIRE book, and if you truly, truly would love the whole thing to be soaked in an aura of confusion, despair and depression, you're in for a fucking TREAT with "A hologram for the King"!!

my wonderful blog is here

Annet says

A book that I liked and disliked at times so I'm not quite sure yet how to rate. Between 3 and 4. Can't really bring it to 4 stars...

Alan Clay, an ageing business man with money problems, is in Saudi Arabia to present the newest IT technology, including a hologram to the King. While struggling with his personal issues, lack of sleep, problems with his daughter, and a growth in his neck that worries him, he and the team wait for the King... This is what the author says: *"So I'd been thinking about this guy, Alan Clay, who he was and where he was in his life, and then one day I heard about the King Abdullah Economic city, and about American businessmen waiting in the desert for an audience with the king. That seems the perfect place for Alan, for a guy who knows he's in trouble but doesn't know how to find his way out. So he travels thousands of miles, to a desert, to wait for the approval of a despot. I liked that; it has a strong parallel to our own economy. The American economy has a lot of problems, and for solutions we tend to look everywhere but the mirror."*

Not my usual type of story, but intriguing all the same. Also intriguing Tom Hanks I hear that he is playing the part of Alan in a movie of this book. I can't quite see him in this part, but then he is a good actor.... Curious to see the movie and compare it to the book.

Note: just watched the trailer... mmmm... yeah... I think I do want to see this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UW4OE...>

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

Dave Eggers. I know right? You weren't quite expecting that.

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I mean, there are worse candidates for that level of popularity. And it's only his sixth most popular book. His first one, which I've read (my only Egger so far) and much enjoyed, gets up in the 100,000+ range. Frankly, I can't fathom that kind of massive readership.

Dude turns out a book *yearly*. And of course that's not all. He's got the whole publishing thing down. I really don't know where his eternal literary reputation is going to land fifty plus years hence, but I hope he's at least remembered for having the chutzpah to place *Rising Up and Rising Down* into the public sphere. That along with....

I have three more Eggers books on the shelf now for a good long time ; not knowing really why I've not gotten to them yet. I will. Thing is, he is so easy to read. An easy reading pleasure I really ought to indulge in more often being usually after those experiences of wtf is going on?!! Maybe I'll do an Eggers week here on vacation this Summer. That might be the thing.

I like Eggers and I probably won't back down from that position.

[thank you to the gr=Angel who sent me this beautifully built personally inscribed copy. I'll treasure it.]

Elyse says

Update: This is an old review ... almost 4 years old. If you haven't read this book ... (it's a quick read...enjoyable) .., You might consider it ... before seeing the movie which is being released in weeks ahead.

Tom Hanks.. (we went to the same High School), is playing the lead in this film - adapted from Dave Eggers book!

Dave Eggers seems to have an excellent understanding of the many problems we face in today's world. Yet, instead of forcing facts down our throats -- he creates a story-line (the context), in which we can discover and explore our own feelings. (even formulate possible global and personal solutions). Its one BOLD-UNIQUE-BOOK. (I would love to join a group discussion with this book). Many interesting topics to expand on from this story. ---It hits hard on three levels: (head, heart, and gut).

A side note: I've admired Dave Eggers for years. (I live in the Bay Area), yet I've never met him. I'm just a 60 year old fart---happily married for 33 years --- but I've got a little crush on the guy...AND his wife). I adore who these people are in the world --I thank them both Dave & his wife (deeply from my heart), for being 'amazing' human beings!

Their work touches many!

Kim G says

BLAH. I'm going to need the publishing industry to start putting on warning labels for Modern American Middle-Aged Upper-Middle-Class White Male Pathetic Protagonists, because I am all done with them. No more crazy bitch ex-wives, no more weird medical issues that strike at their sense of mortality, no more managing to bang (poorly) hotter younger ladies (who are also, of course, crazy) even during their downward spiral, no more disconnect with their flighty and disappointed children, no more random heavy drinking or drug experimentation (often with their random younger fun friend they just picked up along the way), no more insane money schemes (that they mostly ignore for adventure, even though their livelihoods depend on them) to save them from foreclosure/bankruptcy/yadda yadda, no more young corporate upstarts tweeting away and rolling their eyes at the old guy, no more surreal and emasculating moments when they are humiliated by a bunch of younger (and almost always POC) men, no more crying that Corporate America doesn't love me anymore, no more nice guy complex at all, just no more. I am alllll done for right now, thanks.

Charlie Quimby says

Back in the early '70s a co-worker of mine shipped off to Saudi Arabia to take a job as a construction project manager for the giant company building King Khalid Military City. John was supporting three ex-wives, and he decided making triple his U.S. salary, with no way to spend it and living beyond reach of the telephone, was preferable to his current state.

A year or so later, he returned for a visit and dropped by the office. He showed us pictures of his home in a remote part of the Saudi desert, a sort of cross between an Airstream trailer and a row house of portable toilets, plus his duty station. The view from his porthole was breathtaking, but not in a good way. You could see the curvature of the earth, and everything between you and it was drab, sandy hard pan.

Finally, one guy asked the only possible question about the only feature in the barren landscape, "How big is that rock?"

Alan Clay, in Dave Eggers' *A HOLOGRAM FOR THE KING*, represents the next generation of contractor, still journeying to the forbidding and unfamiliar country to make fortunes by building prosaically named cities in places where no one in four thousand years had ever lived. Development of King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC, pronounced "cake") has been moving at a pace akin to say, an Alaskan golf course retirement community. Its unfinished state is both a national joke and an unfulfilled royal promise to allow some Saudi women lives akin to those enjoyed by U.S. housewives in the Nixon era.

Alan's company, Reliant, is a leading IT services outfit that wants to win the contract to wire the city and provide the latest telecommunications and computing technology. Alan, once a hot shot sales guy who became an increasingly ineffective marketing executive and then unemployed consultant, has persuaded the company his remote connection to a peripheral relative of the king will provide the entree it needs to acquire the business. As a sales consultant, Alan's fee is contingent on making the sale.

His entire team consists of three 20-somethings responsible for staging a dog and pony show involving a holographic communications system. They're not interested in the business or the country and can barely be persuaded to move from the large tent where the demonstration is supposed to take place. Alan is both their nursemaid and highly superfluous leader.

They can barely get a wi-fi signal, let alone a firm date to deliver the presentation, so they spend their time on a couch trying to connect their laptops and perhaps hook up with each other.

Alan commutes between faraway Jeddah and the nascent city, often oversleeping and missing the shuttle. He starts letters he'll never send to the daughter whose college tuition he can't pay. He has some tangential encounters with the local and expat cultures without really catching on. And he frets about a growth on his neck that may be responsible for his malaise.

He has opportunities with willing women but he can't quite bring himself around.

In other words, Alan Clay is America in decline. Still a representative of the most powerful nation/company on earth, capable of amazing technological feats. And no wiser about another culture than we have ever been.

No multinational I worked for would be capable of mounting such a feeble attempt to acquire such a lucrative contract. I imagine Eggers, who clearly researched the novel, means Reliant and Alan to be symbols and their focus on the bright and shiny object rather than the actual cost and strategic value of the relationship to represent the road we've taken by outsourcing our fundamental industries.

Eggers is writing about larger themes here, but not in a didactic way. The story moves. The prose is clear and engaging. Alan is a weak character, but not annoyingly so. The book would make a good book club selection and probably would be made better by the discussion.

I hate to call anything Dave Eggers does a summer read because HOLOGRAM resonates. It is also his most accessible book yet.

The rocks in HOLOGRAM may not look that big, but they are.

Eric says

A brilliant snapshot of the times. Lean, but powerful, and at times beautiful, Eggers does what he does best -- captures the anxiety, humanity, and confusion of living in a world where the lines of country and culture are slowly eroding.

I felt it was perfect that Eggers used a Beckett quote at the beginning of the book. The book is bleak and tragicomic, like much of Beckett's work, yet very much focused on the human condition. Eggers brilliantly illustrates the absurdity and surreal nature of life, and how we have become slaves to our own makings. How are we to exist in this world when none of the rules apply anymore? How long can we sustain societies built with smoke and mirrors?

Praxedes says

This book is about a character slowly imploding into his own manias. It reads like the memoir of a 21st century Willy Loman, so readers will either love or hate it.

Thrust into a foreign country while battling his inner demons, the protagonist makes it clear that this is a do or die sales opportunity. Everything in his life somehow hinges on making this business deal go through. I happened to like the morosely interesting insights from a man caught in the grip of a debilitating, paralyzing mid-life crisis. In spite of the pressure to succeed there is room for learning, challenges, and subsequent reflection.

The main character is 54 years old --same as yours truly-- so there were parts that definitely spoke to me! And I liked the fact that Eggers did not tie everything up neatly in the end. A very satisfying read.

Gary the Bookworm says

I really disliked this. I preordered it from Amazon last July after reading glowing reviews in newspapers and

magazines. Other "goodreaders" commented that it was another self-indulgent exercise in navel-gazing by an angry white American male, but I dismissed them as too harsh-until I read it. Now I'm in that camp, too. I really admired another novel in this vein called Dear American Airlines, but this one never lived up to the hype. I found the plot to be sketchy and the characters underdeveloped. Alan, the narrator and protagonist, is a divorced father who is facing bankruptcy and chronic unemployment. He is also drowning in self-pity and hooch. He is hoping that this Saudi deal will save him, but as a character he is unsalvageable. I wouldn't want to sit next to him on a plane; reading about him for 312 pages is painful enough. There are some intelligent insights into the economic forces which have shaped the last 30 years, but that I could get from reading Newsweek. This probably should have been a short story.

(view spoiler)
