

DOUGLAS ADAMS

DIRK GENTLY'S
HOLISTIC
DETECTIVE
AGENCY

By the bestselling author of

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE
TO THE GALAXY

Dirk Gently's Holistic
Detective Agency

By

Douglas Adams

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to my mother,

who liked the bit about the horse

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The physical descriptions of St Cedd's College in this book, in so far as they are specific at all, owe a little to my memories of St John's College, Cambridge, although I've also borrowed indiscriminately from other colleges as well. Sir Isaac Newton was at Trinity College in real life, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge was at Jesus. The point is that St Cedd's College is a completely fictitious assemblage, and no correspondence is intended between any institutions or characters in this book and any real institutions or people, living, dead, or wandering the night in ghostly torment. This book was written and typeset on an Apple Macintosh Plus computer and LaserWriter Plus printer using MacAuthor word-processing software. The completed document was then printed using a Linotron 100 at The Graphics Factory, London SW3, to produce a final high-resolution image of the text. My thanks to Mike Glover of Icon Technology for his help with this process. Finally, my very special thanks are due to Sue Freestone for all her help in nursing this book into existence.

Douglas Adams
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CHAPTER 1

This time there would be no witnesses.

This time there was just the dead earth, a rumble of thunder, and the onset of that interminable light drizzle from the north-east by which so many of the world's most momentous events seem to be accompanied.

The storms of the day before, and of the day before that, and the floods of the previous week, had now abated. The skies still bulged with rain, but all that actually fell in the gathering evening gloom was a dreary kind of prickle.

Some wind whipped across the darkening plain, blundered through the low hills and gusted across a shallow valley where stood a structure, a kind of tower, alone in a nightmare of mud, and leaning.

It was a blackened stump of a tower. It stood like an extrusion of magma from one of the more pestilential pits of hell, and it leaned at a peculiar angle, as if oppressed by something altogether more terrible than its own considerable weight. It seemed a dead thing, long ages dead.

The only movement was that of a river of mud that moved sluggishly along the bottom of the valley past the tower. A mile or so further on, the river ran down a ravine and disappeared underground.

But as the evening darkened it became apparent that the tower was not entirely without life. There was a single dim red light guttering deep within it.

The light was only just visible--except of course that there was no one to see, no witnesses, not this time, but it was nevertheless a light. Every few minutes it grew a little stronger and a little brighter and then faded slowly away almost to nothing. At the same time a low keening noise drifted out on the wind, built up to a kind of wailing climax, and then it too faded, abjectly, away.

Time passed, and then another light appeared, a smaller, mobile light. It emerged at ground level and moved in a single bobbing circuit of the tower, pausing occasionally on its way around. Then it, and the shadowy figure that could just be discerned carrying it, disappeared inside once more.

An hour passed, and by the end of it the darkness was total. The world seemed dead, the night a blankness.

And then the glow appeared again near the tower's peak, this time growing in power more purposefully. It quickly reached the peak of brightness it had previously attained, and then kept going, increasing, increasing. The keening sound that accompanied it rose in pitch and stridency until it became a wailing scream. The scream screamed on and on till it became a blinding noise and the light a deafening redness.

And then, abruptly, both ceased.

There was a millisecond of silent darkness.

An astonishing pale new light billowed and bulged from deep within the mud beneath the tower. The sky clenched, a mountain of mud convulsed, earth and sky bellowed at each other, there was a horrible pinkness, a sudden greenness, a lingering orangeness that stained the clouds, and then the light sank and the night at last was deeply, hideously dark. There was no further sound other than the soft tinkle of water.

But in the morning the sun rose with an unaccustomed sparkle on a day that was, or seemed to be, or at least would have seemed to be, if there had been anybody there to whom it could seem to be anything at all, warmer, clearer and brighter--an altogether livelier day than any yet known. A clear river ran through the shattered remains of the valley.

And time began seriously to pass.

CHAPTER 2

High on a rocky promontory sat an Electric Monk on a bored horse. From under its rough woven cowl the Monk gazed unblinkingly down into another valley, with which it was having a problem.

The day was hot, the sun stood in an empty hazy sky and beat down upon the grey rocks and the scrubby, parched grass. Nothing moved, not even the Monk. The horse's tail moved a little, swishing slightly to try and move a little air, but that was all. Otherwise, nothing moved.

The Electric Monk was a labour-saving device, like a dishwasher or a video recorder. Dishwashers washed tedious dishes for you, thus saving you the bother of washing them yourself, video recorders watched tedious television for you, thus saving you the bother of looking at it yourself; Electric Monks believed things for you, thus saving you what was becoming an increasingly onerous task, that of believing all the things the world expected you to believe.

Unfortunately this Electric Monk had developed a fault, and had started to believe all kinds of things, more or less at random. It was even beginning to believe things they'd have difficulty believing in Salt Lake City. It had never heard of Salt Lake City, of course. Nor had it ever heard of a quingigillion, which was roughly the number of miles between this valley and the Great Salt Lake of Utah.

The problem with the valley was this. The Monk currently believed that the valley and everything in the valley and around it, including the Monk itself and the Monk's horse, was a uniform shade of pale pink. This made for a certain difficulty in distinguishing any one thing from any other thing, and therefore made doing anything or going anywhere impossible, or at least difficult and dangerous. Hence the immobility of the Monk and the boredom of the horse, which had had to put up with a lot of silly things in its time but was secretly of the opinion that this was one of the silliest.

How long did the Monk believe these things?

Well, as far as the Monk was concerned, forever. The faith which moves mountains, or at least believes them against all the available evidence to be pink, was a solid and abiding faith, a great rock against which the world could hurl whatever it would, yet it would not be shaken. In practice, the horse knew, twenty-four hours was usually about its lot.

So what of this horse, then, that actually held opinions, and was sceptical about things? Unusual behaviour for a horse, wasn't it? An unusual horse perhaps?

No. Although it was certainly a handsome and well-built example of its species, it was none the less a perfectly ordinary horse, such as convergent evolution has produced in many of the places that life is to be found. They have always understood a great deal more than they let on. It is difficult to be sat on all day, every day, by some other creature, without forming an opinion about them.

On the other hand, it is perfectly possible to sit all day, every day, on top of another creature and not have the slightest thought about them whatsoever.

When the early models of these Monks were built, it was felt to be important that they be instantly recognisable as artificial objects. There must be no danger of their looking at all like real people. You wouldn't want your video recorder lounging around on the sofa all day while it was watching TV. You wouldn't want it picking its nose, drinking beer and sending out for pizzas.

So the Monks were built with an eye for originality of design and also for practical horse-riding ability. This was important. People, and indeed things, looked more sincere on a horse. So two legs were held to be both more suitable and cheaper than the more normal primes of seventeen, nineteen or twenty-three; the skin the Monks were given was pinkish-looking instead of purple, soft and smooth instead of crenellated. They were also restricted to just one mouth and nose, but were given instead an additional eye, making for a grand total of two. A strange-looking creature indeed. But truly excellent at believing the most preposterous things.

This Monk had first gone wrong when it was simply given too much to believe in one day. It was, by mistake, cross-connected to a video recorder that was watching eleven TV channels simultaneously, and this caused it to blow a bank of illogic circuits. The video recorder only had to watch them, of course. It didn't have to believe them all as well. This is why instruction manuals are so important.

So after a hectic week of believing that war was peace, that good was bad, that the moon was made of blue cheese, and that God needed a lot of money sent to a certain box number, the Monk started to believe that thirty-five percent of all tables were hermaphrodites, and then broke down. The man from the Monk shop said that it needed a whole new motherboard, but then pointed out that the new improved Monk Plus models were twice as powerful, had an entirely new multi-tasking Negative Capability feature that allowed them to hold up to sixteen entirely different and contradictory ideas in memory simultaneously without generating any irritating system errors, were twice as fast and at least three times as glib, and you could have a whole new one for less than the cost of replacing the motherboard of the old model.

That was it. Done.

The faulty Monk was turned out into the desert where it could believe what it liked, including the idea that it had been hard done by. It was allowed to keep its horse, since horses were so cheap to make.

For a number of days and nights, which it variously believed to be three, forty-three, and five hundred and ninety-eight thousand seven hundred and three, it roamed the desert, putting its simple Electric trust in rocks, birds, clouds and a form of non-existent elephant-asparagus, until at last it fetched up here, on this high rock, overlooking a valley that was not, despite the deep fervour of the Monk's belief, pink. Not even a little bit.

Time passed.

CHAPTER 3

Time passed.

Susan waited.

The more Susan waited, the more the doorbell didn't ring. Or the phone. She looked at her watch. She felt that now was about the time that she could legitimately begin to feel cross. She was cross already, of course, but that had been in her own time, so to speak. They were well and truly into his time now, and even allowing for traffic, mishaps, and general vagueness and dilatoriness, it was now well over half an hour past the time that he had insisted was the latest time they could possibly afford to leave, so she'd better be ready.

She tried to worry that something terrible had happened to him, but didn't believe it for a moment. Nothing terrible ever happened to him, though she was beginning to think that it was time it damn well did. If nothing terrible happened to him soon maybe she'd do it herself. Now there was an idea.

She threw herself crossly into the armchair and watched the news on television. The news made her cross. She flipped the remote control and watched something on another channel for a bit. She didn't know what it was, but it also made her cross. Perhaps she should phone. She was damned if she was going to phone. Perhaps if she phoned he would phone her at the same moment and not be able to get through.

She refused to admit that she had even thought that.

Damn him, where was he? Who cared where he was anyway? She didn't, that was for sure.

Three times in a row he'd done this. Three times in a row was enough. She angrily flipped channels one more time. There was a programme about computers and some interesting new developments in the field of things you could do with computers and music.

That was it. That was really it. She knew that she had told herself that that was it only seconds earlier, but this was now the final real ultimate it.

She jumped to her feet and went to the phone, gripping an angry Filofax. She flipped briskly through it and dialed a number.

‘Hello, Michael? Yes, it’s Susan. Susan Way. You said I should call you if I was free this evening and I said I’d rather be dead in a ditch, remember? Well, I suddenly discover that I am free, absolutely, completely and utterly free, and there isn’t a decent ditch for miles around. Make your move while you’ve got your chance is my advice to you. I’ll be at the Tangiers Club in half an hour.’

She pulled on her shoes and coat, paused when she remembered that it was Thursday and that she should put a fresh, extra-long tape on the answering machine, and two minutes later was out of the front door. When at last the phone did ring the answering machine said sweetly that Susan Way could not come to the phone just at the moment, but that if the caller would like to leave a message, she would get back to them as soon as possible. Maybe.