

Read It, November 2015



Figure 1: Word Cloud

***The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* by Douglas Adams**

I finished out the month of October with the Douglas Adams novel *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*. This is the second (out of, sadly, only two) Dirk Gently novels, featuring anti-hero private detective Dirk Gently, that investigator of highly unorthodox methodologies who seems to solve cases despite his best efforts to simply scam his clients instead. This is a re-reading; It is nice to re-read it as an older adult. This is in many ways a more coherent story than the first Dirk Gently book, and it sticks with characters long enough that the reader can start to develop a liking for them. In particular, there is a female character named Kate who is as just as scattered and unconventional as Gently is. She is quite a strong character, in fact, and it saddens me all over again that we will not see what Adams might have done with her in future books. Or, in fact, really, in this one, as the book has a good beginning and middle but a weak ending.

In retrospect, it is frustrating to read Adams. The *Hitchhiker's Guide* books, at least the first few, remain some of the funniest humor ever published. They are funny in spite of Adams' apparent lack of interest in developing characters and plots. At his best Adams is up there with Pratchett in writing deeply humane and touching satire.

I believe Adams might be sort of the Phil Collins of British humorists. Collins is

best known for his collaborations — he is a brilliant session musician, and his finest work was with Genesis. he did produce a few really amazing songs as a solo artist, but for the most part he was better in collaboration. Adams may be remembered the same way; recall that he worked in collaboration on *Doctor Who* and the *Hitchhiker's Guide* saga, which was originally a radio serial, and amazing as a radio serial.

That material was so good that it survived the transformation to book form, for the most part. It was a little less successful as a TV show. The big-studio *Hitchhiker's Guide* movie, long stuck in development hell, has a few funny bits and pieces, but really is only of interest to viewers who were already Adams fans. The Dirk Gently books show Adams developing a greater ability to write characters and sustain storylines, but he clearly had room to improve. His death at the age of 49 (one year older than I am today) is still a shock to me, and a reminder that I should do what I can, with whatever gifts I have, every day.

I'm continuing to read my kids *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I will try to read them the second half of it this week remotely, via Facetime, from Ann Arbor. I'm working on the original Larry Niven novel *Ringworld*. I figure that as the last few days of the year approach, I'd rather spend those dark days reading something relatively light, than Knausgaard's *My Struggle*.

Books Completed in November

Here's the final tally:

- *The Long Ships* by Frans G. Bengtsson
- *The Rim of Morning: Two Tales of Cosmic Horror* by William Sloane
- *Proper Doctoring: a Book for Patients and Their Doctors* by David Mendel
- *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* by Douglas Adams

Ringworld will probably be the first book I complete in December. I am not sure whether I ever read it, back in the day; it is not ringing bells yet, but I may have simply been very young when I read it. I know I read some other Niven novels, such as *The Integral Trees*, but again, I don't remember them very well.

On to December, and the end of the year!

Saginaw and/or Ann Arbor, Michigan
November 28, 2015

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