

Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency Study Guide

**Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency by Douglas
Adams**

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Plot Summary

In Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency, private investigator Dirk Gently draws his old college friend Richard MacDuff into a twisting investigation to ultimately save the world. A ghost, millions of years old, has been roaming the Earth in guilt and loneliness. Driven mad, he wants only to go back in time and correct the mistake that killed him and his friends, a group of aliens on their way to establish a Utopian paradise on another planet. With the help of the only time machine on Earth, Dirk at first agrees to assist, until he realizes that the aliens' intended paradise is Earth itself. With some tricky time-travel, Dirk and Richard must stop the alien ghost from preventing the accident that started life itself on primordial Earth.

As the story begins, Richard MacDuff goes to visit his old college tutor, Reg. Unbeknown to Richard, the ghost of an alien who's wandered the Earth for billions of years has, during the evening, tricked Reg into bringing his secret time machine to an alien planet to pick up an Electric Monk, which the ghost believes he can easily possess. The Monk, though, is faulty, and the ghost follows Richard home, trying to take over Richard's mind. The ghost tries to get Richard to change his past mistakes, but Richard unconsciously rebels. The ghost then finds a more willing victim, Michael Wenton-Weakes, an ousted magazine editor who is willing to slay the man who took his place.

Meanwhile, the Electric Monk is loose in a strange society. Without meaning harm, he ends up shooting and killing Richard's employer, Gordon Way. Dirk Gently, a former college friend of Richard's, has run across Richard by accident and noticed Richard's odd behavior under the ghost's influence. He also realizes that Richard is a person of interest in the bizarre murder of Gordon Way. Intuiting that something strange is happening, Dirk hypnotizes Richard to find out as much information as he can.

Based on the information Dirk learns from Richard under hypnosis, Dirk realizes that Reg has a time machine and that a ghost is trying to manipulate events. He goes to see Reg and learns that the time machine is actually Reg's rooms on the Cambridge campus. Reg has been aware of the ghost, who tried to lure him into changing one of his past mistakes by saving the dodo birds from extinction. Reg is ancient and doesn't remember anymore who he is or what he used to do or where his time machine came from.

The ghost finds Richard, Reg, and Dirk at the time machine. Now in control of Michael Wenton-Weakes, he pleads to be brought back in time to change his mistake and save his friends. The aliens had landed on Earth, and one of their engines had a problem. Mistakenly believing the engine was fixed, the ghost had caused an explosion that killed all the aliens. What the ghost does not tell them is that the same explosion caused the start of life on Earth. Against his better judgment, Dirk agrees to help the ghost. At the last moment, Dirk realizes what's really going on. Dirk, Richard, and Reg travel back in time to change events so that the ghost cannot make a connection with Michael Wenton-Weakes. Unknown to anyone, they save the human race.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

In Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency, private investigator Dirk Gently draws his old college friend Richard MacDuff, into a twisting investigation to ultimately save the world. A ghost, millions of years old, has been roaming the Earth in guilt and loneliness. Driven mad, he wants only to go back in time and correct the mistake that killed him and his friends, a group of aliens on their way to establish a utopian paradise on another planet. With the help of the only time machine on Earth, Dirk at first agrees to assist, until he realizes that the aliens' intended paradise is Earth itself. With some tricky time-travel, Dirk and Richard must stop the alien ghost from preventing the accident that started life itself on primordial Earth.

A light rain falls on primordial Earth, after an unrelenting rain. A tall object is stuck, towering blackly in a river of mud flowing past it. No one is there to see as a light appears, flickering, moving through the tower. A figure appears at the bottom of the craft and then disappears. No one is there to see the object begin to glow then explode.

Time passes. On a foreign world, an Electric Monk sits atop his horse, perfectly still, in a valley. The Electric Monk is an Electric believing machine, meant to believe all the dreary things people are supposed to believe. The Monks look coincidentally exactly like humans and completely unlike the occupants of the alien planet. This one is broken, and he's been abandoned in the desert and replaced by a new model. The Monk wrongly believes that the valley is unnavigable because everything is the same color pink. His horse thinks it's silly.

Time passes. Susan Way is sitting by the telephone, waiting for her boyfriend, Richard MacDuff, to call. He's over half an hour late for their date, and she's torn between worrying about him and wanted to kill him. For the third time, he's stood her up. She decides not to take it anymore, and she calls Michael Wenton-Weakes, who has been after a date with her. She agrees to meet him at a club and leaves her answering machine to answer the phone if it rings.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Douglas Adams begins his novel at the very beginning, the moment that all life on Earth begins. This gives the novel a grand scale, almost beyond belief, which contributes to its humor. The opening is also the beginning of the story, the moment the ghost was created and the moment the characters will arrive back at when the story climaxes. This is foreshadowed as the narrator notes that this time there is no one to observe the events, implying that at some other "time" there will be an observer.

The first character that Adams introduces is the Electric Monk, a concept that is humorous in itself. The Monk is a device invented to believe things for people. The

Monks will take on deeper meaning as the story progresses. In addition to the Monk itself, this takes the story to a far-flung planet in the universe, much as the first chapter takes the story to a far-flung time, billions of years ago. The first two chapters set up the scope of the story's setting across space and time. This is humorously contrasted with the everyday normalcy of Susan's annoyance when she is stood up by her boyfriend.



Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary

Tall, lanky Richard MacDuff and elderly Professor Urban Chronotis, Regius Professor of Chronology, also known as Reg, walk across the St. Cedd's College, Cambridge campus to have dinner in the hall, where former student Samuel Taylor Coleridge is being honored. Reg, whose memory is starting to become unreliable, is Richard's former tutor from his college days. Reg once explained to Richard that his chair was created by crazy King George the Third to answer whether there was a reason why things happen in sequence and if there is a way to stop it. Reg says "the answers to the three questions were, I knew immediately, yes, no, and maybe," so he hasn't had to work at all. Reg is evasive about the former professors who held the chair.

At the Coleridge dinner, Reg and Richard catch up. Since college, Richard has unexpectedly become successful. Reg exhibits his annoying propensity for sleight-of-hand by making a salt cellar disappear, delighting a little girl at the dinner. Also at the table are a professor of English who, because of his startlingly odd nose, no one has spoken to for seventeen years, a sour old Classics professor, and the new head of Radio Three, the father of the little girl. Two professors are trying to convince the radio executive that there is no such thing as too much Mozart.

The restless little girl kicks the table and is scolded by her father. Richard explains that he first started programming computers in college and got so distracted by writing a word processor that he never finished any essay. He was also in a rock band. After a series of menial jobs and programming a computer to play "Three Blind Mice," he now works for WayForward Technologies, the famous Gordon Way's computer company. Gordon's employees need serious answering machines, because Gordon likes to call people's answering machines and talk out his thoughts. Richard wrote a financial spreadsheet called Anthem that translates a business's financial numbers into tunes.

The little girl, Sarah, tells the table that her family went to Patmos, Greece, and that she found a pot. She wants to know if it's old and passes it around the table, only to be disappointed to learn that it's valueless and only two hundred years old. Meanwhile, Reg has made another salt cellar disappear, saying that it's wherever Sarah put it. He breaks the pot to reveal the salt cellar inside, amazing Sarah. Then, Reg asks Richard about an old schoolmate, Svlad Cjelli, also known as Dirk.

Meanwhile, the Electric Monk begins to doubt the pinkness of the valley he's overlooking. His doubt is quickly replaced with a new belief, that there is a door to a distant world on the side of a rock in the valley. The Monk heads down into the valley. He is briefly distracted by discovering an unknown cave painting protected by an overhang and considers bringing back news of it to the town, and hopefully being rewarded. Then, he realizes he must follow his belief in the Door. He passes through the surprisingly pinkish dust, experiencing momentary fear that the Door doesn't exist



and fights the realization that his water won't last much longer. In surprise, the Monk finds his belief rewarded. The door is there, and the Monk enters with his horse. Later, a figure comes back to the door and enters, and in a moment, the door disappears.

Chapters 4-5 Analysis

When Reg talks about the creation of his post by King George the Third, he says several odd things. He first starts to say that George the Third spoke to him, personally, and then he tries to hem and haw his way out of it. Reg also only lists two questions that George the Third asks, but he lists three answers. Then, he deflects a question about his predecessors, the former professors who have held the post. All of these are clues to the secret about Reg that Dirk Gently will later deduce.

Reg's trick with the two-hundred-year-old pot and the salt cellar will also take on increased importance, as one of the impossible things associated with Richard that evening. The pot is two hundred years old, and yet the salt shaker is imbedded inside it, something that defies physics.

Besides the events that will take on greater importance later in the story, chapter four sets up much of Richard's background. It introduces Gordon Way and WayForward Technologies, as well as the software Anthem. Finally, it introduces Dirk Cjelli, whose name the reader will associate with the title's Dirk Gently. This setup gives important background for the plot.



Chapters 6-8

Chapters 6-8 Summary

At the Coleridge dinner, a reader is reciting Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan." Richard begins to fall asleep to the rhythmic reading. He begins to wonder about Dirk Cjelli, who he hasn't seen in years. Dirk made a name for himself denying stories of his psychic powers. Dirk's denials sparked rumors of his mysterious psychic powers. Finally, one of Dirk's roommates noticed that Dirk recited what seemed to be test questions for upcoming midterms in his sleep, especially when well-fed and drunk on good wine. Students began to wine and dine him to get questions for upcoming tests. The questions were no more than the average student might guess at with a minimum amount of research.

At finals time, Dirk made a bet supposedly to disprove his psychic abilities. He predicted the questions on the final exam, and then locked them up to be revealed after the test. Then, citing his mother's medical troubles, Dirk began selling chances to look at the psychically predicted questions to students, still denying that he was at all psychic. However, when the test questions were finally revealed, they were exactly the same as the exam questions, to the letter. Dirk was arrested and thrown out of Cambridge.

Meanwhile, Gordon Way is unaware that it's the last day of his life. He is driving to his "cottage," a huge country house, and he stops at a gas station. He is Richard's wealthy boss, who built a fortune in computer hardware with WayForward Technologies and then, after the company collapsed, built another fortune in software with WayForward Technologies II. He gets out of his car and talks, oblivious, to the gas station attendant about the software industry.

After Gordon fills up the gas tank on his expensive Mercedes, he calls his sister Susan's answering machine to beg her to get Richard back to work on the newest version of Anthem. He hears a noise from his trunk and tells the answering machine to hold on while he checks it. Gordon gets out of his car and walks around to the trunk. The trunk opens, and a figure stands up. The figure shoots him in the chest with a shotgun and runs off. Gordon is surprised to find himself dead.

Back at Cambridge, the Coleridge dinner has ended. Richard MacDuff comes back to Reg's small apartment on the campus. Reg fiddles with the finicky hallway door to get in, and they pass through two doors into the cluttered, old-fashioned room, which even sports an abacus on the table. Reg apologetically mentions how uncomfortable his sofa is, and Richard admits that he's never sat on his own sofa, which has been mysteriously stuck in the hallway for three weeks and can't be dislodged. Richard has created a three-dimensional computer model of the sofa problem, and the computer says it's impossible to dislodge the sofa, and also impossible that the sofa got into that position. The computer model must be broken, he determines.



Richard admits that he's involved with someone special, Susan Way, and that she's moved out because of the stuck sofa. When talking about Susan, Richard mentions Gordon Way's second, more profitable, software project, Reason. The user feeds the answer he or she wants into the software, and the software comes up with a plausible argument for the desired result based on the data. The project was bought up by the Pentagon. As Reg is making tea, Richard finds, in a book about Greece, a slip of paper that says, "Regard this simple salt cellar. Regard this simple hat."

Reg hears a noise upstairs that disturbs him. He tells Richard to wait downstairs, and if he acts strangely when he returns, to tackle him. Reg returns, saying that it's just a horse in the bathroom, and Richard tackles him. Nothing is wrong with Reg, though. There really is a horse in the bathroom, and Richard confirms it. The bizarre issue of the horse is suddenly thrust out of Richard's mind, though, when he realizes that he was supposed to bring Susan with him and forgot.

Chapters 6-8 Analysis

The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the poem "Kubla Kahn" will also be important later in the story. The narrator describes the reader continuing on to read a second, stranger part of the poem that a reader familiar with "Kubla Kahn" will know is fictional. The contents of the second part of the poem are left to the reader's imagination and curiosity.

Chapter six gives more background to the story, this time relating the strange situation that led to Dirk's expulsion from Cambridge. The situation seems to imply that Dirk actually was what he fervently denied being (though his denial was meant to encourage the belief): a psychic. Although on the surface, Dirk is only a clever con artist, he seems to have real abilities that underlie his facade of fakery. Dirk uses a backward, minimalist approach to acquire the answers to the test, and this approach, never meant to succeed, turns out to be one hundred percent successful, surprising even Dirk. Dirk's approach to his private investigations will mirror the backwards approach through which he gains the test answers. He will follow irrelevant-seeming clues and go down what always seems the wrong path, and somehow end up with the right answers.

Gordon Way's death is foreshadowed from the first moment his character is introduced. Like many elements of the early chapters, his long-winded voice message on Susan's answering machine will be revisited later in the story, taking on greater importance. Gordon is shot by a hooded figure that the reader will immediately associate with the Electric Monk. At the end of the chapter, the writer inserts a new piece of foreshadowing. Gordon is surprised at what happens after his death, implying that Gordon survives after his death, at least long enough to be surprised.

The double doors to Reg's apartment are a neat detail, which will explain why no one notices that Reg's door is missing when the time machine is away. Other important details that will be woven into the later plot are the stuck sofa and the note Richard finds in the book. The thematic content of this section, though, is contained in the discussion

of Reason, WayForward Technologies' never-released software that takes a user's desired conclusions and puts together reasonable-sounding arguments to support them. This technology is eerily similar to the way the ghost ultimately uses the Electric Monk, which dooms his party to death and himself to an eternity of walking the Earth. It underscores the danger of only seeing what you want to see, instead of using reasoning and logic to look at the true facts.



Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

Gordon steps out of his body, surprised that he's still conscious, though he is dead. He is upset at the stupid expression on his body's face and tries to fix it, but he cannot easily manipulate physical objects. In a rage, he ends up strangling his own dead body. He manages to make the face look worse instead of better, and he's left bruise marks on his body's neck. Gordon realizes that the phone line to Susan's answering machine is still open, and he tries to talk to her. He can't handle the phone, though, and after getting a few words in, he accidentally hangs up. After sitting in a depressed stupor for a while, Gordon decides to try to get to his cabin. When he gets out of the car, he sees that his body is missing.

Back at Reg's place, Richard leaves quickly, noticing that on the landing outside of Reg's front door there are no scratch marks from the horse's hooves, as there are inside. Richard knocks on a neighbor's door and is confronted with the professor with the large, strangely shaped nose. Richard asks if the man noticed a horse, and the professor tells Richard that he's counted each of the seventeen years, three months, two days, five hours, nineteen minutes, and twenty seconds since the last time anyone's talked to him and shuts the door. Richard stops and asks the college porter about the horse. After Richard leaves, the two porters talk. A strange priest stopped by earlier and listened to the radio. The porter told him to "shoot off." He mentions it because the priest said he'd left his horse in a washroom.

Meanwhile, Gordon Way heads toward his cabin, disappointed that, as a ghost, he can't float or drift. He can only walk down the deserted road. Gordon wonders about the state of his will and what will happen to his company. He keeps thinking that he'll need to check with people in the morning, and he has to stave off these thoughts, which bring home to him the truth that he won't ever talk to his associates again. Gordon wonders if the figure in his trunk was really wearing a hood and what it could have been doing in his trunk. He wonders if he can make himself more visible and hitch a ride.

Richard is driving in his car and trying to call Susan. He's also lost and can't find his location on the map. He almost runs into someone he thinks is carrying a body, but he thinks he must be imagining things. He leaves a message on Susan's answering machine, apologizing and offering to take her away for the weekend, even though he has to do his work for Gordon. As he's talking to her, he suddenly sees Gordon Way's ghost in the road and brakes to a halt. In shock, Richard sits in his car long after the ghost has vanished.

A police officer finds Richard, and Richard stumbly explains that he was thinking about ducking out on work and imagined he saw his employer in the road. The officer admonishes him to drive carefully, and Richard heads home and has a brandy. He's shaken up about the accident and seeing Gordon. He muddles around in his computer



rooms, toying with the 3D model of the sofa stuck in his stairwell and unsuccessfully dumping data about the pattern of birds' flights into his converter to try to make music. Richard is horrified because he can't take Susan out for a holiday, as he's promised. He needs to work. Another unfulfilled promise could spell the end, and there's nothing Richard can do about it. Then, he has a surprising idea.

Chapters 9-12 Analysis

As foreshadowed, Gordon lives on after his death, but without his body, Gordon is impotent to act on the world. He is infuriated by his inability to affect the things around him. Gordon has always been in control, and he runs a successful company. Now, separated from his body, he seems unable to control anything.

The lack of scratches outside Reg's doorway is an indication to the reader that Reg's inner door is the Door that the Electric Monk entered in the desert. Reg's apartment seems to have mysteriously traveled to an alien planet. The elements of the story begin coming together, as the reader realizes that the porter's command to the Electric Monk to "shoot off" in all likelihood led directly to Gordon Way's death by shooting.

Emphasizing the way the elements of the story are coming together, Gordon and Richard literally come together on the road, when Richard's car is stopped by the appearance of Gordon's ghost. The encounter is traumatic for both parties. Richard puts down the apparition to guilt at thinking of ducking work for the weekend. Gordon's trauma is not immediately explained, but he's seen something in the car behind Richard. This is another piece of foreshadowing intended to pique the reader's interest as the story progresses. Similarly, at the end of chapter twelve, Richard's idea of how to deal with his promise made to Susan's answering machine is not revealed. The reader must continue turning the page to find out what happens.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary

Dirk Gently scans the London skyline through his binoculars with interest. He spots someone climbing a building. It's an amateurish burglar attempt, and the man almost falls then realizes he's forgotten something to force the window. He finds the window open and makes it inside. Dirk pauses as he sees the man's face through the window. He looks up the number of the apartment and lifts up the phone to dial.

Meanwhile, Richard is in Susan Way's apartment. Though it's smaller than Richard's apartment, it's less crowded. Climbing up the wall was harder than Richard thought, and he nearly fell. He washes up and then goes to the answering machine, realizing that a message from Gordon is probably on the tape. He starts listening to bits of the tape to find his own message, and he hears odd, out-of-context tidbits from Gordon's call. Then, he finds a long, empty section with music playing in the background.

The phone rings, and Richard answers it automatically. The caller chides him for answering the phone and tells him to go to the window. When Richard obeys, the caller chides him again for letting himself be photographed. The caller knows Richard's name and identifies himself as Dirk Gently, formerly Svlad Cjelli. He tells Richard to meet him at a pizza place. After Dirk hangs up, Richard hears a noise at the door. Hastily, he ejects the tape, but at the last minute, he puts it back.

The door opens, and Michael Wenton-Weakes walks in. Richard dislikes Michael because Michael is both wealthy and sorry for himself, and Michael dislikes Richard back. Susan enters behind Michael and slaps Richard in the face. She's angry and unwilling to listen to his apologies. Michael mentions an article Richard wrote in Michael's former magazine, *Fathom*. Michael starts complaining about Ross, who he says stole his magazine. Susan gives Michael a book and shoves him out the door. When he's gone, Richard relaxes.

Susan notices the open window, and Richard tells her again that he climbed up the building. Susan realizes that it's true. Susan begins to listen to the answering machine tape, but she can't stomach Gordon's message and gives it to Richard to bring into the office. Susan also tells Richard that she has to work this weekend. She forgives Richard. At least he doesn't pressure her. Later, Richard goes to meet Michael at the pizza place and finds out that it's closed.

Michael Wenton-Weakes takes a taxi home. He's the son of Lord Magna, a newspaper publisher who let his son have *Fathom*, a social magazine. The magazine bled money as Michael ran up huge bills, but he showed his father numbers that seemed to balance on the surface. When Lord Magna died, his wife, believing Michael had been spoiled, took over the business and sold the magazine to a new owner, Gordon Way, on the condition that he keep Michael on for three issues. Michael was, of course, fired by the



new owner after three issues, and A. K. Ross took over Fathom. At home, Michael broods over the loss of his beloved magazine and the death of his father. Suddenly, a calm seems to overtake him, just before he punches his hand through a window.

Gordon's ghost arrives at his seven-bedroom "cottage" that he once joked seemed haunted. He finds the door ajar and manages to swing it open. The house is readied for his visit, and he tries to watch television. He knows he can't sleep. He goes to the kitchen and struggles to turn on the light. He's noticed that he gets stronger in waves, and he seems to be at a high point. Gordon tries to work as many things in the kitchen as he can, and finally, he opens a cupboard door. He finds his own dead body and falls into a faint. Just after he wakes up, the gas cooker explodes.

Chapters 13-15 Analysis

Dirk Gently, the title character, is first introduced in person a third of the way into the book. The book is not truly Dirk Gently's story, although he is the detective. The story is truly the story of Richard MacDuff, who plays an unwilling Watson to Dirk Gently's Sherlock Holmes. Dirk becomes involved in the twisting plot when he sees Richard MacDuff, a man he knows to be logical and cautious, amateurishly climbing up a high-rise wall into an apartment. Dirk is drawn in by the oddity of this behavior, and his instinct leads him unerringly in the right direction, even before he is aware that serious danger to the whole human race is afoot.

When Richard listens to the tape recording of Gordon's message, he only listens to bits and pieces. Out of context, the recording is humorous and even surreal. Although this is amusing, it is also thematic. Gordon's message is like the vast interconnected patterns in life. One person only sees a small portion of everything that is going on, and so events seem random and disconnected, like the portions of Gordon's message that Richard listens to.

Richard's action in replacing the tape is an important one. Although Richard doesn't realize it, he is possessed by a ghost. By refusing to correct his past mistake and instead facing up to the choices that he's made, Richard frees himself from the ghost. He is unsuited to the ghost's needs. Michael Wenton-Weakes, however, already shows the propensity to blame someone else, instead of taking responsibility for his own actions and facing up to his regrets. He calls A. K. Ross a thief, although Ross had nothing to do with Michael losing his beloved magazine. Instead of taking responsibility for his failure, Michael blames Ross.



Chapter 16-17

Chapter 16-17 Summary

Richard awakes the next morning twice. The first time, he thinks he's made a mistake and goes back to sleep. Once he's actually awake, Richard thinks of bringing Susan to an expensive restaurant to apologize to her. Gordon has mentioned L'Esprit d'Escalier, a new French restaurant, and Richard phones it. He can't get reservations at the elite restaurant, though. They need to be made three weeks in advance.

Richard leafs through the phone book, looking for Dirk Gently's number. He can't find Dirk Gently listed, either under his old name, his new name, or any alternate spelling Richard can think of. Richard wonders what people do to find someone, which leads him to think of private detectives. On a whim, he looks at the listings for private investigators. While he's thumbing through the phone book, the telephone rings. It's Kate Anselm, another of Gordon's programmers. She can't get in touch with Gordon. Meanwhile, Richard is glancing at the phone book and sees a listing for Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency.

Richard goes to the address listed in the phone book. He gets to Dirk's office in time to see Dirk's un-paid secretary storm out and hear Dirk explaining on the phone that he doesn't investigate fingerprints or footprints but tries to find a pattern in the holistic interconnectedness of all things. Dirk takes another call, trying to get a woman to pay her bill for Dirk finding her cat. Yet another client calls, complaining about Dirk's charges, and Dirk, writing notes to Richard, gets him to go get cigarettes. When Richard returns, Dirk is defending a trip to Bermuda, where he claims to have traced the interconnectedness of all things. Dirk finally hangs up the phone and takes it off the hook.

Dirk mentioned Schrödinger's Cat on the phone, and Richard questions him about it. Richard is able to describe Schrödinger's Cat, a thought experiment to illustrate the bizarre concepts of quantum mechanics by imagining a cat whose life or death depends on the decay of one quantum particle. According to quantum mechanics, the cat would be neither alive nor dead until it is observed. Dirk tells him that some researchers were performing the experiment, and Dirk retrieved their missing cat, which became the start of his detective business.

Richard points out that Dirk's story is nonsense. No one could actually perform the experiment, because once the cat is observed, it is either alive or dead. No one can know what is happening while the cat isn't being observed. Dirk suggests that someone might observe the cat clairvoyantly, but Richard counters that clairvoyance would simply be another type of observation. Dirk mentions Gordon, but Richard doesn't understand what he's talking about. Dirk tells Richard that Gordon was murdered. He was first shot, then strangled, and then moved to his house, which was set on fire. Dirk also notes that Richard was stopped on the road, saying something about feeling guilty about his boss



Gordon, near where Gordon's car was found. Dirk offers Richard his services as a detective.

Meanwhile, the Electric Monk is confused and disoriented and misses his horse. He's spent the night in a tree. He'd carried Gordon's body to his home as a sacred duty and doesn't quite understand why Gordon didn't get back up after being "shot off," like the people on TV on his world. As the Monk is wondering what to do, two men come and drop off his horse in the pasture. The horse is at first thrilled with his freedom, but when he strolls under the Monk's tree, the Monk drops down on the horse's back.

Chapter 16-17 Analysis

Richard's failed reservation at L'Esprit d'Escalier is another small, irrelevant-seeming detail that will be weaved into the larger plot as it develops. Unknown to the reader, Richard's desire to get a reservation at the restaurant will lead to his sofa having gotten stuck in the stairwell, unlikely as the relationship seems. This is another example of the theme of interconnectedness woven throughout the story.

In another nod to interconnectedness, Richard comes across Dirk's address seemingly by random accident. Richard is musing about using a private detective to find someone, which randomly leads him to find the person he's seeking for. His method of locating Dirk resonates with Dirk's self-proclaimed method of finding lost cats using the interconnectedness of all things to lead him.

Though Dirk seems clearly to be running a scam on old ladies and taking advantage of their desires to find their respective cats, Dirk's fast-talk turns out to have more truth than fiction. Dirk has billed one of his clients for a trip to Bermuda, and later the audience will learn that Dirk has actually located the site of the beginning of life on Earth. Dirk continues to bill his client for a cat that's been missing for many years, but by the end of the book, Dirk will have through random and seemingly unconnected events, caused the cat never to have gone missing in the first place.

Dirk uses the conversation about Schrödinger's Cat to determine that Richard seems normal and in his right mind. In turn, Dirk recognizes that something is truly wrong. Richard's actions of the previous night were completely inexplicable through rational means.



Chapters 18-20

Chapters 18-20 Summary

After Dirk repeats the details of Gordon's death, Richard calls Susan. Susan confirms that Gordon is dead, and Dirk hangs up the phone. He tells Richard that he can't go to the police, who want him for murder. Dirk's plan is to hypnotize Richard so Dirk can learn the facts. Richard rejects the idea and heads home, but when he sees police around his apartment, he gets cold feet and goes back to Dirk's office. He finds Dirk's secretary, Janice, back in the front office, to make sure Dirk knows she's gone. Dirk is prepared to hypnotize him.

Meanwhile, Detective Inspector Mason arrives at Richard's apartment. He orders the police officers to get the sofa out of the way. He's with Sergeant Gilks, the man who found Richard on the road the previous night. The sergeant's police car is freezing cold, and the radio turns itself on and off.

Michael Wenton-Weakes wakes in a strange mood, having dreamed of mud, loneliness, and strange crawling creatures. He thinks about the events of the previous evening, and his thoughts hint that something happened that the reader doesn't know about. Michael looks ahead at the day, with nothing to do. He goes upstairs and listens to music, finding himself truly listening for the first time. Still, he finds the music oddly unfulfilling.

Michael digs in his wastebasket and retrieves the article by Richard from the last issue of *Fathom*. He reads the theory of making music from natural rhythms, like birds' flight and the formation of mountains, with a new appreciation. Something in the article makes Michael think of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Michael takes out "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The words of the poem unlock someone else's memories in Michael's mind, and he feels an enormous sense of desolation.

Richard comes out of his hypnotism in Dirk's office. Dirk wants to discuss with Richard what he learned during the hypnosis, including two impossible events of the previous night, and he takes Richard walking by the canal. Dirk first questions Richard about the magic trick that Reg played with the little girl's vase. Dirk exhibits his own ability at sleight of hand and shows Richard that under hypnosis, Dirk has drawn out details even Richard doesn't remember. Dirk is convinced that the trick, as described, is impossible.

The second impossible event is Richard's sofa being stuck at an impossible angle. Richard thinks Dirk is focusing on the wrong things, but Dirk insists that two impossible, and a series of very strange, events all happening to one person must be related. Dirk also points out that Richard's break-in at Susan's apartment was odd behavior. Richard insists that it was perfectly logical.

Suddenly, Richard jumps into the canal, and Dirk pulls him out. Richard explains away his behavior, but Dirk counters by telling Richard that he gave him the order to jump in



the canal during hypnosis. Richard's rationalization was unconvincing, just as his rationalization for breaking in to Susan's apartment was unconvincing. Richard remembers that a message from Gordon was on the tape in Susan's apartment, and he's frightened.

Chapters 18-20 Analysis

Thematically, Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency addresses the idea of retaining control of one's own mind. When Dirk Gently puts Richard under hypnosis, he draws out information that Richard doesn't consciously know he has, and he also takes away some of Richard's ability to control his own actions by implanting the suggestion to jump into the canal. The hypnosis reveals how little human beings know and control, even in their own minds. Possession by the ghost is analogous to hypnosis, but software like Reason is also analogous to hypnosis. Reason gives people rationalizations for their desired actions, while obscuring the true reasons for what they want. Dirk's hypnosis does the same thing, causing Richard to rationalize his actions and obscure even from himself his true motivations. A lack of reason is a lack of control of one's own mind.

Michael Wenton-Weakes hints at something that he's done the previous evening, which the reader will later learn is the murder of A. K. Ross. As Michael is joined with the ghost, Coleridge's poems play an important role. Particularly the fictional second part of "Kubla Khan" opens up in Michael's mind the memories of the disembodied ghost from billions of years ago. This is an important detail, since it will provide the key to how Dirk, Richard, and Reg will later stop the ghost from destroying life on Earth.



Chapters 21-24

Chapters 21-24 Summary

Dirk goes to Richard's flat and fast-talks his way in past the police. One of the policemen is about to saw up the sofa which is stuck on the stairs so the police can get by, and Dirk, pretending to be a higher-up, orders him to guard the sofa instead. Then, Dirk asks if a wastebasket has been searched. He makes sure one of the policemen is kept busy searching and re-searching the trash. Then, Dirk heads upstairs, leaving the police in disarray and confused.

Dirk sees the answering machine tape, and he is about to grab it when he is distracted by Richard's computers. He sees Richard's sofa revolving on one monitor, and he finds the switch to send a note from one of Richard's computers to a keyboard. Dirk is still distracted when Sergeant Gilks comes in. He questions Dirk, and when he looks away, Dirk hurriedly picks up the tape. Gilks, however, notices that the tape is gone. He gets it from Dirk and plays it. On it, they hear Gordon's message, and Gilks stops the tape when he hears the shots. He's fixed the time of death, and heads out of the room.

Dirk continues listening to the tape and then realizes he doesn't know what he's looking for. He commands the ghost to stop controlling him. Then, he hears Gordon's ghost on the answering machine tape. Apologizing, Dirk erases it, not wanting to ruin Richard's alibi with a ghost's voice on the tape. The ghost indicates that he wants Richard's answering machine on, and Dirk turns it on. Then, the ghost starts trying to dial Richard's phone. Gilks returns to see the phone moving itself, but he chooses to ignore it. The tape has established Richard's alibi and cleared him, but the police still want to talk to him.

Meanwhile, Michael Wenton-Weakes has just finished reading "Kubla Khan," and now his two minds are one. As he looks on the human race with disgust and anger, he knows what he must do, starting with some shopping. Back at Dirk's office, Richard calls Susan. She tells him that he's not wanted for murder, just for questioning. Then, she asks him to come see her before he talks to the police.

When Dirk returns, he gives Janice a salary check so she'll stay. He's bought an easy-to-use phone for the ghost, which Janice considers a ridiculous extravagance. Dirk tries to solve the problem of the impossible magic trick by writing scribbles on a paper and pretending that all he needs to do is translate it. Then, when Janice says it's childish, Dirk realizes that he should ask a child.

Richard goes to Susan's flat, where she is practicing her cello. It sounds like Mozart. Susan is a professional cellist and will be substituting for one of friends, who has a cold, at a concert. Richard doesn't want to interrupt her and listens to her play. He knows that she will put her sorrow and grief into her playing. Susan finishes playing and comes out to greet Richard. Richard goes to get them lunch, and the phone rings. He answers it,



but there's only what sounds like wind on the line. Susan says she's had several such calls. Richard tries to explain everything that has happened, but his explanations of Dirk all seem to sound shady. Then, Dirk himself arrives.

Meanwhile, the Electric Monk has been exploring the world and believing people. Often, this leads to discussions of money, and the Monk needs some. The Monk finds himself at the gas station where he jumped into Gordon Way's trunk. Sergeant Gilks is there, questioning the owner. The Monk believes he should worship the uniformed man and gets arrested for his trouble. Back at Susan's apartment, Dirk says he's figured out the mystery and somehow knows that something is terribly wrong. He takes Dirk off with him to see Reg.

Chapters 21-24 Analysis

Dirk comes head to head with a ghost mentally as he finds himself listening to the tape of Gordon's message not knowing what he's looking for. He consciously recognizes that he's not in control of his own mind, and by an exercise of will, he is able to separate himself from Gordon's ghost. Though Richard doesn't realize that he's battling a ghost, Richard also frees himself with an effort of will when the ancient alien ghost tries to get him to remove the tape from Susan's apartment. Will and self-awareness are ways to retain control of one's own mind.

Dirk's attempts to solve the problem seem random and haphazard, but just as his random and haphazard preparation to psychically predict the exam questions in college leads to unlikely success, Dirk is led to success again. He begins by scribbling randomly on a sheet of paper and calling it the answer to the problem. By naming the paper, he creates a meaning for it, showing the power of language. Still, the power of language is limited, since in fact the paper cannot be translated. On another level, however, the paper is the key to the problem, because it leads Janice to suggest that Dirk is childish, which leads Dirk to the correct conclusion that he must ask a child for his solution.

The Electric Monk reveals the weaknesses in human society. Just as the aliens who created the Monk want something to believe thoughtlessly, human beings flock to a believer. Belief, though, is tantamount to gullibility, and the Monk soon learns that people want him not only to believe but to give money. In the world, there are plenty of people who want to be blindly believed, but as a group they are not to be trusted.



Chapters 25-27

Chapters 25-27 Summary

Dirk and Richard go to Reg's apartment at Cambridge. Dirk and Reg have a sympathetic connection, and Reg has avoided him because it's difficult to keep a secret from someone who shares such a connection. Dirk insists that Reg has the biggest secret on Earth and tells Reg that he's guessed what the secret is. Dirk prompts Richard to ask about the conjuring trick, and Reg confusedly explains the slight of hand.

Richard presses Reg as to how the salt cellar got into the two-hundred-year-old pot, and Reg explains that he got the man who made the pot to put it in. Richard is confused. Reg says he thought Dirk knew the secret. Dirk says that he does, but that Richard does not. Dirk notes that Reg needed the note Richard found to remind himself of the last thing he said, and that George the Third asked Reg a third question, or rather a first question, whether it was possible to travel in time. Then Dirk asks where the time machine is, and Reg says they are standing in it.

A party of revelers from a wedding are on a train, and three drunk men sit down by Michael Wenton-Weakes. As two of them head to the bar, Michael stops the third and begins telling him a story of the shipwreck he was on. They came to Earth to build a paradise.

Reg, meanwhile, is explaining about himself. He's so old that he doesn't remember who he is. He's been at Cambridge for two hundred years, since his retirement from something he doesn't recall. Dirk admits that to solve the puzzle and realize Reg had a time machine, he had to ask a child, but Reg still congratulates him on his perception. The abacus, Reg explains, runs the time machine. The time machine is so advanced that it will correctly interpret any control put on the table. Richard, for example, might set his computer there and find software controls ready to go.

Reg explains that he mainly uses the time machine to watch television shows he's missed. It messes up the telephones. Plus, he's trying to avoid being tempted to change the past, since it's dangerous and can have unforeseen consequences. Richard realizes that Reg's reasons for changing the past to perform the magic trick are highly suspect, like his own reasons for breaking in to Susan's apartment. Dirk says Reg is exhibiting signs of possession.

The train comes in at Cambridge, and Michael Wenton-Weakes gets off. The man he told his story to is practically hypnotized with the story of the shipwreck. Michael confessed to having caused an explosion after the accidental wreck and killed everyone. Since then, he's been wandering alone. The drunk's companions laugh that Michael is loony, but the drunk sees something sinister in Michael.



Chapters 25-27 Analysis

The threads of the storyline begin coming together as Dirk reveals his deduction that Reg has a time machine, the biggest secret on Earth. He details the clues that led him to his conclusion in classical mystery-detective fashion. King George the Third in fact spoke to Reg directly and asked first if it was possible to travel in time. Reg knew the answer to be yes. This makes the answer to the second question, whether there's a reason one thing happens after another, humorously no, and the answer to whether there's a way to stop it humorously maybe.

As Dirk and Richard are learning about Reg's time machine, the audience is held in suspense as Michael, inhabited by the ghost, moves ever closer toward Cambridge. The ghost's revelations about his story are eerie and sinister. His references to all of humanity and life on earth as "slimy things with legs" shows his contempt for all the life that has risen up on the planet.



Chapters 28-30

Chapters 28-30 Summary

Reg explains that lately he's had the feeling that something has been pushing him to use the time machine, and Reg has been resisting. His resistance caused poltergeist activity, knocking around Reg's things. When he heard the horse upstairs, he was afraid of the ghost. Reg explains that the horse must have come in on the planet where he got his face powder to hide his suntan while doing the magic trick.

Dirk calls Reg on again having an insufficient reason for visiting another planet, just to get face powder. The ghost must have tricked Reg into going there. After the incident with the horse, the ghost seemed to be gone. Reg agrees to show Richard and Dirk what he's been fighting against doing. Meanwhile, Michael Wenton-Weakes, fully possessed by the ghost because he's in tune with its desire, arrives at Cambridge. He sees all humanity as crawling bugs emerging from eons of mud. The ghost has gone mad in his millennia on Earth.

Reg, Richard, and Dirk arrive in a tropical rainforest. The door of Reg's room merely appears in the forest. They are on Mauritius in 1676, and Reg has brought them there to see the soon-to-be-extinct dodo bird. Reg inadvertently caused it to go extinct when he tried to save another species from extinction. The time machine heads back to Cambridge as the ghost approaches. He looks to the sky, but he cannot see the satellite up there. He had brought the Monk to Earth to try to use it as a vessel, but the Monk was erratic because of its defect. Now, though, he's found the perfect vessel, who will not resist what the ghost wants to do.

Dirk is waiting for the ghost to arrive, but Richard is still struggling with the idea of a ghost. Dirk believes that ghosts have unfinished business, which would make a time machine very desirable. The ghost tried to make both Reg and Richard change something in the past. It tried to make Reg save the dodos and Richard undo his answering machine message. Both rebelled, and so the ghost couldn't take complete control. Richard realizes that the ghost left him when Michael Wenton-Weakes left. A knock comes on the door. It's Michael Wenton-Weakes with a bag of scuba equipment.

Susan is talking on the phone to a friend about the fingering for the piece she's trying to learn on the cello. After she hangs up, the phone rings, but no one is there. She realizes that Richard might call, so instead of taking the phone off the hook, Susan turns on the answering machine with the volume down. In Dirk's office, Gordon again hangs up the phone in frustration. He has been unable to get through to Susan. He is wandering the streets, wondering what to do, when a woman runs out of a building, screaming.



Chapters 28-30 Analysis

Like Richard, Reg has been out of control of his own mind. He fights to resist the temptation to go back and change the past, but he is caught off guard when he is tempted to orchestrate a complex magic trick to cheer up a little girl. Reg's weakness is feeling sorry for people and generally trying to be a nice person. He gets himself into trouble because he feels sorry for Sarah, and the result is that the Electric Monk comes to Earth and kills Gordon Way. He feels sorry for the ancient ghost, and he nearly causes the extinction of mankind in trying to help. He tries to save one extinct species and leads to the extinction of another. Reg's good intentions lead him down the wrong path.

Richard is skeptical and unwilling to let go of his stolid rationalism, even after he is taken for a ride in a time machine. Ironically, even though Richard is a rationalist, he falls victim to irrational rationalizations easily, whether under the influence of a ghost or under the influence of hypnosis. Skepticism is not a cure for irrational thinking. The only cure seems to be conscious vigilance of one's own mind and thoughts.

While Richard, Reg, and Dirk are finally coming together with Michael Wenton-Weakes and the ancient alien ghost, moving toward the plot's climax, Gordon Way's ghost is still trying to complete his final phone call. The story of Gordon Way seems unrelated to the story of the alien ghost, but in Douglas Adams' novel, no plot elements are unrelated. Everything is interconnected. Gordon Way will become instrumental in the resolution of the plot, and the cliffhanger ending of chapter thirty, when Gordon witnesses a woman running out of a building in terror, marks the beginning of his plot joining in with the main storyline.



Chapters 31-33

Chapters 31-33 Summary

The ghost finishes explaining his story to Reg, Richard, and Dirk. The ghost has told them that his spaceship landed on Earth for supplies, not that the goal was to build the alien utopia on Earth. He asks for Reg, Richard, and Dirk to help him by bringing him back in the time machine so that he can stop himself from accidentally blowing up the ship. Dirk wants to know why the ghost picked Michael Wenton-Weakes as the body he would inhabit. The ghost says that Michael was willing to help and will not be hurt. Dirk calls up Michael's spirit to take over, and Michael's voice confirms that he has agreed to help the ghost.

Richard realizes that the ghost's story sounds like Coleridge's poems, like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and the ghost confirms that he tried to tell Coleridge his story. He could only communicate with the poet when he was on laudanum, though, so the poet couldn't help him. The poems turned out very distorted. The ghost explains that his strength rises and falls over time, and Richard compares it to waves interacting and creating peaks and valleys that rise and fall rhythmically.

The ghost summarizes his story. He says that he and his friends started out from Salaxala, their planet, to build a utopia. They landed on Earth to get supplies. However, their engines were damaged on landing, and the ghost sent out an Electric Monk to check to see if they were properly repaired. The Electric Monk, however, is designed to tell people what they want to hear. The ghost wanted reassurance instead of facts. He didn't want to know that the engines were not ready.

Gordon Way's ghost returns to Dirk's office, horrified at what he's seen. He dials the phone and finally gets Susan's answering machine. Meanwhile, the ghost explains that the Electric Monk told him what he wanted to hear, not what was true. The engine exploded, killing everyone. The ghost has been wandering the Earth ever since. Finally, civilization arose, and he learned of the time machine. Since all the Salaxalans were killed, the main ship is still orbiting Earth. The ghost begs again for their help, but Dirk wants to see the main Salaxalan ship first. Back at Dirk's office, Gordon finally finishes his phone call, hangs up, and vanishes.

The aliens' four-billion-year-old ship has been orbiting the Earth undetected and devoid of life. It has gathered data from everything that's happened on Earth as life arose. A door appears in a wall of the ship, and the ship records its data. Reg, Michael, Richard, and Dirk emerge. Richard is struck with awe at the ship's music. It has taken all the ebb and flow of life and converted it to music, much as Richard has imagined. Richard detects a single theme flowing through the volume of sound. He faints. He awakes to the phone ringing. It's Susan. She asks where he is, and he goes out to check. He's amazed at what he finds.



Chapters 31-33 Analysis

The ghost tells his story, but he keeps back one crucial aspect, that helping him will lead to the destruction of the human race. The ghost is willing to sacrifice all life on Earth for his own redemption. He is, like Dirk, a manipulator, only his manipulation is much more sinister. As a ghost, he tries to control people's thoughts and actions, stealing their control of their minds. In the body of Michael Wenton-Weakes, he does much the same thing. The ghost tries to control the minds and actions of Reg, Richard, and Dirk through giving them faulty and incomplete information. It is another form of hypnotism, this time through misinformation.

Dirk's instincts tell him not to trust the ghost, and Dirk's instincts are always right. However, Dirk can't put his finger on what's wrong. Without knowing why he shouldn't trust the ghost, he seems helpless to argue against helping the ghost. He shows his discomfort in ill-tempered outbursts of dislike. Richard also instinctively dislikes both the ghost and Michael Wenton-Weakes, and his instinct will prove to be as accurate as Dirk's.

The ghost reveals that, instead of going to check the engines himself, he sent an Electric Monk to check for him. The Monk's function is not truth or reason, though. It's belief. Belief flies in the face of reason and facts, and that makes it extremely dangerous. The ghost doesn't want to face up to reality (either when he sends the Electric Monk to check the engines or afterward, when he can't accept the reality of his own culpability). The ghost wants reassurance and reinforcement of what he already believes. By rejecting reason in favor of belief, the ghost dooms himself and all his colleagues. Ultimately, this is the danger of the program Reason, bought by the US Pentagon, as well.



Chapters 34-36

Chapters 34-36 Summary

The scene is the same as the beginning of the novel. A tower, the alien spacecraft, leans in the primordial mud of Earth. A dim light is visible within, the light of the Electric Monk presumably going down to check on the repairs to the engine. This time, someone is watching. Reg's time machine has also appeared in the mud, and Richard sees the scene through the doorway. Dirk warns him not to go out. The air is not breathable, which is why Michael brought the scuba gear. Dirk explains that they are actually in Bermuda, and Richard heads back to the telephone.

Dirk finishes putting on Michael's scuba gear and sends him off. He doesn't like the situation, but he can't put his finger on what's wrong. The ghost says an eerie goodbye and heads out into the poisonous atmosphere. Richard comes running in to tell them what Susan's explained on the phone. Michael murdered A. K. Ross, the editor who took over his magazine, Fathom. That's what Michael did that allowed the ghost to take control. Dirk realizes that the ghost needed someone willing to kill. The ghost wants to stop life from starting on Earth, so the aliens can make their utopia here. They have about two minutes to stop him.

Moments later, Richard and Reg are hiding behind a hedge near Coleridge's house. Dirk is going to stop Coleridge from writing the strange second part of "Kubla Khan," which contains the information that showed Michael consciously the ghost's memories and therefore settled the ghost into Michael's body. Dirk is posing as a small-town journalist trying to interview Coleridge, but his real task is to make him forget what he's writing. Dirk has been an hour in Coleridge's house, and Richard wonders what he's doing.

As Reg and Richard wait, Richard expounds on the beauty of the music made by the spaceship. Reg excuses himself and disappears behind a tree for a moment, while Richard goes up toward the house. Then, Dirk comes out of Coleridge's house. Coleridge had started writing, but Dirk is sure the poet's forgotten the story. Dirk says he could use a pizza, but Richard is staring at Reg. While briefly behind the tree, Reg has grown quite a beard. Reg looks up to the sky as the alien spaceship explodes, just a flicker of light.

Richard asks Reg to bring him directly to his apartment, and Reg's door quietly appears in the wall on Richard's stairwell. Then, Richard realizes he can go back in time three weeks to make reservations at L'Esprit d'Escalier. While he is making the call, the movers use the time machine's door to maneuver the couch around a corner.

Richard goes to Susan's apartment and is amazed to hear her playing the music from the spaceship on her cello. He's never heard of the composer before, Johannes Sebastian Bach. Susan has piles of his music. After the weekend, Richard calls Reg



and finds his phone working. The phone company has fixed it, but now the time machine is permanently broken. Still, Reg was able to return the Electric Monk to his home before losing the time machine. Reg admits to having salvaged a small bit of music from the spaceship and released it under the identity of Bach. The rest is gone, now. Back at Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency, Dirk receives an angry call from his client again, but she doesn't even know she's his client. Her cat was never gone. He must revise his bill to no charge for saving the human race.

Chapters 34-36 Analysis

The story, as it reaches its climax, comes full circle to the mysterious Bermuda beach where the aliens crashed billions of years ago and where life on Earth began. All the elements come together. Gordon Way's ghost (and the quirk of the time machine that its phone connections only work while it's not in Cambridge) finally provide the clue that Dirk needs to recognize that the ghost is trying to destroy all life on Earth. Gordon witnesses the discovery of A. K. Ross's body. He completes his final phone call to Susan, passing on the information. Susan calls Richard, who she reaches through the fluke of British Telecom that allows calls to go to Reg's house while the time machine is in another place and time. Richard passes the information to Dirk, and Dirk makes a wild, intuitive leap to the truth.

Once the truth is revealed, the characters are faced with a new problem. Michael Wenton-Weakes is out of their grasp in the poisonous atmosphere of a newly formed Earth. They must decide how to stop him, and that brings in another thread that has been intertwined with the plot line, that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The ghost told Coleridge his story, and through the poet's retelling of that story in "Kubla Khan," Michael Wenton-Weakes is able to become consciously aware of the ghost's memories and join with him fully. They travel back in time to stop Coleridge from finishing the poem.

Ironically, Reg, Richard, and Dirk do exactly what the ghost is trying to do. They manipulate time and events to correct a mistake that they regret, letting the ghost go back and change the past. They even sacrifice something for their own benefit by robbing the world of the second part of Coleridge's poem, and they destroy most of the music created by the alien spaceship. Perhaps the aliens would have established a true utopia and a much better world than the world that has grown up haphazard on Earth.



Characters

Dirk Gently, a.k.a. Svlad Cjelli

Dirk Gently is a bizarre character. He is a scheming con artist who, during college, tricked people into believing he was psychic while maintaining plausible deniability by couching his claims as denials. Unfortunately for Dirk, the psychically predicted exam questions, which he believed would be only as correct as the average intelligent student's guesses turned out to be word for word, period for period exact reproductions of the actual tests. Dirk was kicked out of school and arrested for what he can only describe as a bizarre coincidence.

Dirk continues trying to make his living by scheming and scamming, with a fly-by-night detective agency that specializes in finding old ladies' cats through quantum mechanical theories of interconnectedness. Dirk reassures Richard that he's scamming no one, since no one ever pays Dirk's bills.

However, Dirk proves himself to be an apt investigator with an intuitive brilliance. He guesses at the existence of a dangerous pattern going on that no one's aware of. He deduces the existence of Reg's time machine. He also deduces the existence of the ghost, and he persists in believing that the ghost is up to something malicious. Finally, he realizes the ghost's true intentions and devises a way of stopping him. Dirk does not get rewarded for his effort. Only a few people on Earth know what has happened and how narrowly they avoided oblivion, and Dirk even loses his oldest client, whose cat, through Dirk's time manipulations, has now never gone missing in the first place.

Richard MacDuff

Richard MacDuff is a computer programmer who works for Gordon Way's WayForward Technologies. Richard is tall, lanky, and easily distracted. He is interested in numbers and in music. Although he loves his girlfriend Susan, he can't seem to focus his attention on her continuously. Richard is drawn into the saga of Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency when his old college tutor, Reg, invites him to dinner. Richard is followed from Reg's apartment by an ancient alien ghost who tries to take over Richard's mind, planting the idea that Richard should erase the message he left on Susan's answering machine, a message that will surely get him into trouble.

Richard is essentially a well-meaning person, willing to face up to his mistakes and deal with them. Although, at the ghost's urging, Richard makes a harrowing climb up the side of Susan's apartment building, at the last minute, Richard rebels against changing the past for his own personal gain. Richard is a thoughtful, rational person, and that is not the kind of person the ghost needs for his own ends.

Richard, however, finds himself rationalizing his own actions. He is skeptical and unwilling to see the bizarre things that are happening in front of him, including a time



machine and ghosts. He prefers a calm, cool, rational world. Unfortunately, the world around him is bizarre and unpredictable. Richard experiences the sublime when he visits the alien spacecraft orbiting Earth which has translated all of Earth's rhythms into music. The aesthetically beautiful, organized music of life is something that Richard has always intuited but is unable to recreate.

Professor Urban

Reg is a professor at Cambridge's St. Cedd's College. He avoids teaching by assigning his students impossible-to-find books which he has removed from the library. Actually, Reg is an impossibly old time traveler who has forgotten his own origins. His rooms on the Cambridge campus are a time machine, which he now mainly uses to travel back in time to watch television shows he's missed. When Dirk was in college, Reg felt an immediate sympathy with Dirk. Reg carefully avoided Dirk because he felt that, with the natural sympathy between them, Dirk would easily uncover Reg's secret. Ultimately, Dirk does guess at Reg's secret, even though he has not seen Reg for years.

Reg is a soft-hearted character. He feels sorry for Sarah, who is stuck at a dinner with sour old professors, and he uses his time machine to orchestrate a magic trick for her. Reg also feels sorry for the ghost and agrees to go back in time to help him, although it's against all of Dirk's better instincts. Reg also uses his time machine to try to save extinct species, but he realizes that it's unwise when he sees that his meddling makes other species extinct. Reg's sympathy for others seems to always get him into trouble.

Gordon Way

Gordon Way is Richard MacDuff's boss and the owner of WayForward Technologies. Gordon is a wealthy businessman who thinks out loud. He will talk incessantly to strangers about his ideas for his company, and he will call his friends' and coworkers' answering machines just to ramble at them. His secretary types up the one-sided conversations on Gordon's acquaintances' answering machines each day.

Gordon is killed by the Electric Monk, who misunderstands a command to "shoot off." Gordon's ghost then lingers on Earth because he has left his call to his sister Susan's answering machine unfinished. Gordon has limited capabilities as a ghost and cannot complete his call until Dirk buys a ghost-friendly phone for him. Gordon's final call turns out to be integral to saving life on Earth, since Gordon gives Susan the news that A. K. Ross has been killed, presumably by Michael Wenton-Weakes. This coincidence is part of the interconnectedness of all things notable in the book's plotting.

Susan Way

Susan Way is Richard's girlfriend and Gordon Way's sister. She is also a professional cellist who finds comfort in her music. She is fed up with Richard forgetting about her and with her brother pressuring her to make Richard do work.



The Electric Monk

The Electric Monk is a device invented by the Salaxalans to believe all the ridiculous things that people are meant to believe. The ghost's failure is in using an Electric Monk to check his spaceship's engines. The Electric Monk tells the Salaxalan what he wants to believe instead of what is true. The Electric Monk who comes to Earth in Reg's time travel machine is broken, and believes things at random, getting into much trouble, including shooting Gordon Way.

The Horse

The Electric Monk's horse is cynical about the Electric Monk's ideas. Douglas Adams posits that someone can sit on another creature all day, every day without giving that creature a thought, but a creature cannot be sat upon all day, every day without thinking about the creature sitting on it.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is a poet who, in the novel, attended St. Cedd's College, Cambridge. The ghost told his story to Coleridge while the poet was under the influence of laudanum, and Coleridge told a garbled version of that story in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan." Dirk, Richard, and Reg go back in time to stop Coleridge from finishing "Kubla Khan" so that Michael Wenton-Weakes can never complete his integration with the spirit of the ghost.

Michael Wenton-Weakes

Michael Wenton-Weakes has lost the only thing he loved, his magazine Fathom. He blames the loss of the magazine on its new editor, A. K. Ross. Michael is willing to kill A. K. Ross in revenge for the loss of the magazine, proving himself a willing victim for possession by the ghost.

The Ghost

The ghost of a Salaxalan alien, come to Earth to colonize it and create a paradise, has been wandering Earth for billions of years, wallowing in his regret for blowing up his spaceship and destroying his friends. The ghost wants to go back in time and stop the ship from exploding, which will stop the development of life on Earth. He takes over Michael Wenton-Weakes' body to accomplish his goal.



Sarah

Sarah is the little girl at the Coleridge dinner at St. Cedd's College for whom Reg performs his magic trick with the salt cellar and the two-hundred-year-old pot. After learning of this trick, Dirk figures out that Reg must have a time machine.

Lord and Lady Magna

Lord and Lady Magna are Michael Wenton-Weakes' parents. Lord Magna spoiled Michael, believing without question Michael's false financial numbers from his magazine Fathom. When Lord Magna died from electrical shock, his wife took over the publishing empire. Believing her son needed to learn responsibility, she sold Fathom to Gordon Way, on the condition Michael be left as editor for three issues. After three issues, Gordon immediately fired Michael.

Al K. Ross

A. K. Ross is the new editor of Fathom, Michael Wenton-Weakes' magazine. After the ghost takes over Michael, Michael kills A. K. Ross, showing his willingness to sacrifice something to change the past.

Kate Anselm

Kate is one of Gordon Way's programmers, who is working on an artificial intelligence project.

Janice Pearce

Janice is Dirk's volatile secretary, who quits when she is not paid and rebels at Dirk's purchases of a shiny brass door sign and an easy-to-use phone for Gordon Way's ghost.

Detective Inspector Mason

Detective Inspector Mason is the detective in charge of investigating the murder of Gordon Way.

Sergeant Gilks

Sergeant Gilks is the sergeant who met Richard on the road the night that Gordon Way died. He distrusts Dirk, who he knew when Dirk was accused of cheating at Cambridge.

Mrs. Sauskind

Mrs. Sauskind is Dirk Gently's oldest client, who hired him to find her cat, which must now in all likelihood have died of old age. Through meddling with time, Dirk inadvertently assures that Mrs. Sauskind's cat never disappeared in the first place.



Objects/Places

St. Cedd's College, Cambridge

St. Cedd's College is a fictional college at Cambridge, the alma mater of Coleridge and Sir Isaac Newton. Reg is a professor at St. Cedd's College, and Richard and Dirk both attended St. Cedd's.

The Time Machine

Reg's rooms at Cambridge are actually a time machine.

The Orbiting Alien Ship

The Salaxalans who died on their landing ship left a main ship floating in Earth's atmosphere. The Salaxalan ship records all the ebb and flow of developing life on Earth and translates it into music, some of which Reg eventually saves and releases as Johannes Sebastian Bach.

The Crashed Alien Ship

The Salaxalans landed a ship on Earth billions of years ago, and one of the engines was damaged. The repair was faulty, and on take off the ship exploded, creating the first life in Earth's primordial mud.

A Beach on Bermuda, the Site of the Beginning of Life on Ear

Dirk Gently traces the interconnectedness of all things to a beach on Bermuda, which happens to be the site where billions of years ago the ghost crash landed on Earth, and which is the site of the beginning of life on Earth.

The Abacus

Reg uses an abacus perched on his coffee table to control his time machine.



WayForward Technologies and WayForward Technologies II

WayForward Technologies is Gordon Way's company. The first WayForward Technologies was a computer hardware company that went broke. Gordon Way made back his fortune in computer software with Anthem and Reason, two programs developed by WayForward Technologies II.

Kubla Khan

In the novel, two of Coleridge's most famous poems are explained as garbled retellings of the ghost's story. At the beginning of the novel, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" is described as having a fictional, stranger second part that inferentially contains a more detailed telling of the ghost's situation and desires. Dirk, Richard, and Reg prevent Coleridge from writing the fictional second part of "Kubla Khan" in order to prevent the ghost from connecting with Michael Wenton-Weakes and being able to travel back in time to try to stop the accident.

Anthem

Anthem is the financial spreadsheet software that Richard wrote for Gordon Way. The software takes a firm's financial numbers and makes them into music or into dancing animation, as well as performing traditional financial functions.

Fathom Magazine

Fathom Magazine was Michael Wenton-Weakes' pet magazine. He was fired after his mother sold the magazine to Gordon Way, who replaced Michael with A. K. Ross. Michael blames Ross for the loss of his magazine and kills Ross after being possessed by the ghost.

L'Esprit d'Escalier

L'Esprit d'Escalier is a restaurant that only takes reservations three weeks in advance. Near the end of the novel, Richard asks Reg to take him back in time three weeks to make a reservation. While Richard is making the reservation, the sofa movers use the time machine's door to get Richard's sofa irrevocably stuck on his stairwell.

Salaxala

Salaxala is the planet that the ghost and the Electric Monk both originally come from.

Reason

Reason is a second profitable piece of software developed by WayForward Technologies II, but it was never released. The software takes conclusions that the user desires and comes up with plausible rationales for them based on data. The US Pentagon bought out the whole project.



Themes

Belief and Reason

Belief and reason play an important role in Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency. The guilty accident that causes the ghost's dilemma and sets in motion the development of life on Earth is founded in the fundamental problem of facing what's true versus believing what you want to believe. The ghost wants to believe that the engines are fixed, and so he sends an Electric Monk to tell him what he wants to believe. The Electric Monk is essentially a yes-man, a self-affirmation instead of a check of objective facts. The result is a disaster.

The WayForward Technologies program Reason is another example of the conflict between belief and reason. Instead of basing belief on facts and reasoning, the ironically named Reason program does the opposite. It manufactures facts and reasoning to fit a desired conclusion. The potential outcome, as the Electric Monk shows, is disastrous, and it's sinister that the US Pentagon has absorbed and is using this program.

False reasoning created to support an existing belief is the same as rationalization. Richard rationalizes his actions when he is possessed by the ghost. In reality, Richard doesn't know why he is doing the things he does. This implies that many people do things without understanding their own reasons. Perhaps they are not possessed by ghosts or hypnotized by shady private detectives, but they are influenced by culture, emotion, prejudice, and other irrational factors. Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency reminds the reader that a person whose mind is not controlled by reason does not truly control his or her own mind.

Regret and Revenge

Ghosts, in Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency, exist because of regret. They have something unfinished or undone in their past. As the ghost searches for a suitable host, the reader is able to see the regrets of many of the characters. Reg regrets his actions in trying to save one extinct species, because they led to the extinction of the dodo bird. He has the ability to go back and change events, but he realizes that the cost of trying to re-do the past is too high.

Richard regrets that he left the message on Susan's answering machine. He breaks into her apartment to erase the tape, but then he realizes that a message from Gordon is on the tape. He balks at erasing it. Ultimately, he chooses to not go back and change his actions but instead deal with their consequences. Michael Wenton-Weakes, however, does the opposite.

Michael will not deal with the consequences of his own actions. He does not take on himself the responsibility of his guilt. Reg realizes that the dodo bird's extinction is his



own responsibility; Richard realizes that the phone message is his own responsibility. Michael deflects the responsibility for being fired from Fathom onto its new editor, A. K. Ross. In actuality, Michael is responsible for his own failure, but he turns his regret into revenge. He blames another instead of taking responsibility upon himself. The ghost does the same thing. He cannot accept the responsibility for his actions and live with his regret. Instead, he blames the human race for taking over Earth. Both Michael and the ghost are trapped by revenge, and in both cases, they are willing to murder in order to avoid their own responsibility.

Interconnectedness

Dirk Gently bases his detective agency on the "interconnectedness of all things." At first, this seems a silly suggestion. However, in the novel, even small, seemingly random things are interconnected. Dirk Gently talks to his long-time client Mrs. Sauskind about her bill for a cat missing for years, and he tells her that he had to go to Bermuda because he's traced interconnectedness to there. This sounds like a con artist's line of ridiculous reasoning.

However, Dirk's explanation is perhaps better explained as an impossible intuitive leap, since the novel reveals that the origin of life on Earth and the location of the ghost's shipwreck is Bermuda, likely the exact beach Dirk "calculated." Even more unlikely, Dirk's method of "search" for Mrs. Sauskind's cat turns out to work, as once the timeline is changed by Dirk's meddling, Mrs. Sauskind has never lost her cat and never hired Dirk. Ultimately, even the most minor things are interconnected. The intricacy of the novel's plot reflects the interconnectedness that Dirk believes in. Richard's stuck sofa, Reg's magic trick, and numerous other irrelevancies are all coherently tied together.

When Richard listens to Gordon's message on Susan's answering machine, he hears small snippets of Gordon's thought process which make no sense, because they're removed from the whole. The patterns of life seem to mirror the answering machine message. Because people seldom see more than the snippets they are directly involved with, they do not see the whole pattern, and things seem random. Richard's vision of a music of life reflects this interconnectedness. He envisions all of the smallest and largest movements of Earth translated into a music that connects with itself and replays themes. The music brings together all things into one overwhelming tune, something to be appreciated aesthetically and that binds all creatures in the universe.



Style

Point of View

Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency is told from a third-person omniscient point of view. The narrator does selectively give information, keeping from the audience important information such as Dirk Gently's conclusion that Reg's secret is a time machine. This keeps the reader guessing as the plot moves along. The reader experiences most of the story from the point of view of Richard MacDuff, an outsider who is drawn into a bizarre thriller. The reader uncovers the truth as MacDuff learns more and more.

Still, the story jumps around to many characters' perspectives as the complex plot unfolds. The reader experiences Gordon Way's shock and horror at finding himself a ghost, with no comforting explanations in the afterlife. The reader experiences the bizarre and random beliefs of the Electric Monk, and even the thoughts of his horse. The reader sees events from Michael Wenton-Weakes' perspective, the ghost's perspective, and Susan Way's perspective. Jumping from mind to mind allows the reader to see (and laugh at) the disparity of these diverse points of view.

In many ways, Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency is about the process of thought and control of one's own mind. Richard's thoughts are eerily not his own while he is possessed by the ghost, and he creates a rationale to explain his actions to himself, unaware that his rationale is actually irrational. The real meaning behind his actions is buried deeper than his conscious thought. Gordon's thought process is driven by incessant talking, and when he finds his consciousness disassociated from his body, he is disoriented, unable to rest in peace. The omniscient narrative voice, allowing the reader access to many varied characters' minds, allows Douglas Adams to explore these issues of thought, mind, and body.

Setting

The novel's settings are diverse, including a space ship orbiting above the Earth, an alien planet, the fictional St. Cedd's College in Cambridge, billions of years ago in what is now Bermuda, and modern-day London. These settings are far-flung from each other, in time as well as in space. However, the story ties all these wide-ranging settings together into a single storyline revolving around the moment when the novel begins, the moment when life begins on Earth.

The diversity of locations in time and space underscores Dirk's long-blathered-about interconnectedness of all things in the universe. Richard MacDuff is not only tied to his former college teacher and other close acquaintances. Through them, he is related to a millennia-old ghost, the origin of life on Earth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and an Electric



Monk from an alien world. The diversity of the setting illustrates the vastness of the universe but also its reflection in each small detail.

Even the alien locations are eerily, or comfortingly, Earth-like. Though the aliens on the Electric Monk's planet are many-legged with purple, ruttled skin, they behave and think very much like humans. They have horses and gave paintings, and their Electric Monks look, coincidentally, exactly like humans. They strive for beauty and utopias, and they love music. Though the alien ghost is trying to destroy Earth, his plight, motivations, and desires are believable and relatable—so much so that Michael Wenton-Weakes can form a deep bond with the ghost. This familiarity across time, space, and culture contributes to the impression of a tight-knit, while vast, universe.

Language and Meaning

Words are important in Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency. When the Electric Monk first comes to Earth and learns English, a porter at Cambridge University tells him to "shoot off." The casual slang, interpreted literally, leads the Monk to shoot Gordon Way, ending his life. This illustrates the importance of language and the dangers of how language can be interpreted and misinterpreted.

Dirk Gently uses language carefully to try to fool his classmates out of their money, spreading rumors about himself not by claiming to be psychic, but by adamantly denying that he's psychic. He suggests bizarre abilities without taking responsibility for claiming them, giving him plausible deniability. Language is linked to logic, so Reason, the ironically named computer software that twists facts into desired conclusions, is also a manipulator of language. Dirk uses language to hypnotize Richard and also tries to put the problem in an unknown language of his own devising, to make the problem a "simple linguistic puzzle." The problem hasn't changed. Only the language used to describe it has changed. The power of language is clear.

Douglas Adams also uses language carefully, and of course humorously. In the beginning of the novel, he describes the atmosphere on Earth after the explosion of the landing ship as "altogether livelier," and the attentive reader will understand that Adams is implying the literal meaning as well as the figurative one. The Earth is livelier because the space ship created life. Language is also often linked to perception and therefore perspective, as when Richard muses that he must finish Anthem 2.0 in "the next year, or 'month' as Gordon called it."

Structure

The novel's plot follows a number of story strands, stretching across space and time. Because of this, the story jumps from place to place and time to time, often in short bursts, as it unfolds. The novel begins millions of years in the past, on a dead Earth, at the moment when life first forms within the primordial mud. It moves forward in time, immediately introducing an alien planet, computer science, and the poet Samuel Taylor



Coleridge, among other elements. The diversity of elements introduced at the beginning of the novel will all coalesce into a single plot as the novel progresses.

Each detail in the novel is important as the story unfolds. Reg's magic trick for Sarah will turn out to be an important plot element when it is revealed that the ghost is taking advantage of the opportunity to get Reg to use the time machine. Richard's attempt to steal Susan's answering machine tape, the horse in Reg's bathroom, and Gordon Way's death all tie together in an intricately planned plot.

At the climax of the novel, it takes on a circularity of structure as it returns to its beginning, the moment of the beginning of life on Earth. This circularity is thematically important because the novel is about regret and wishing to change the past. By going back to its beginnings, the novel emphasizes the desires of the characters to change their mistakes. Though ultimately the novel concludes that an obsession with changing the past is dangerous, the characters ironically do just that, changing the past to correct their mistake in allowing the ghost to try to change its own past.

Quotes

"He instituted this, er, Chair of Chronology to see if there was any particular reason why one thing happened after another and if there was any way of stopping it. Since the answers to the three questions were, I knew immediately, yes, no, and maybe, I realized I could then take the rest of my career off." Chap. 4, p. 18

"Although the major part of his mind was firm in its eternal and unshakable Belief that there would be a Door behind the outcrop, and that The Door would be The Way, yet the tiny part of his brain that understood about the water bottle could not help but recall past disappointments and sounded a very tiny but jarring note of caution." Chap. 5, p. 42

"Gordon Way's astonishment at being suddenly shot dead was nothing to his astonishment at what happened next." Chap. 7, p. 63

"Except, of course, that he didn't have a weekend available to do it in because he had somehow to get Version 2 of Anthem out of the door sometime during the course of the next year, or 'month' as Gordon called it." Chap. 12, p. 104

"She took a sip of her coffee. 'But I'm sure,' she added, 'that there's some kind of gray area between being pressurized and being completely forgotten about that I'd quite like to explore. Give me a hug.'" Chap. 14, p. 122

"Of course I will explain to you again why the trip to the Bahamas was so vitally necessary,' said Dirk Gently soothingly. 'Nothing could give me greater pleasure. I believe, as you know, Mrs. Sauskind, in the fundamental interconnectedness of all things. Furthermore I have plotted and triangulated the vectors of the interconnectedness of all things and traced them to a beach in Bermuda which it is therefore necessary for me to visit from time to time in the course of my investigations.'" -Chap. 16, p. 149

"He had been quite clearly instructed to 'shoot off' and had felt strangely compelled to obey, but perhaps he had made a mistake in acting so precipitately on an instruction given in a language he had learned only two minutes before. Certainly the reaction of the person he had shot off at seemed a little extreme." Chap. 17, p. 162

"Dirk bridled at this. 'I believe that all things are fundamentally interconnected, as anyone who follows the principles of quantum mechanics to their logical extremes cannot, if they are honest, fail to accept. But I also believe that some things are a great deal more interconnected than others. And when two apparently impossible events and a sequence of highly peculiar ones all occur to the same person, and when that person suddenly becomes the suspect of a highly peculiar murder, then it seems to me that we should look for the solution in the connection between these events. You are the connection, and you yourself have been behaving in a highly peculiar and eccentric way.'" Chap. 20, p. 193



"There was a rumble of thunder, and the onset of that interminable light drizzle from the northeast by which so many of the world's most momentous events seem to be accompanied." Chap. 25, p. 231

"Deep in a dark and silent part of himself he knew that he was now mad, had been driven mad almost immediately after the accident by the knowledge of what he had done and of the existence he faced, by the memories of his fellows who had died and who for a while had haunted him even as he had haunted the Earth. He knew that what he now had been driven to would have revolted the self he only infinitesimally remembered, but that it was the only way for him to end the ceaseless nightmare in which each second of billions of years had been worse than the previous one." Chap. 28, pp. 259-260

"And that was why I made my fatal mistake. When I wanted to know whether or not it was safe to take off, I didn't want to know that it might not be safe. I just wanted to be reassured that it was. So instead of checking it myself, you see, I sent out one of the Electric Monks." Chap. 31, p. 280

"'Damn and blast British Telecom,' shouted Dirk, the words coming easily from force of habit. He ran to the door and peered again at the dim shadowy figure trudging through the mud toward the Salaxalan ship, completely beyond their reach." Chap. 34, p. 296



Topics for Discussion

How does belief work against reason in the novel?

What is the purpose of an Electric Monk?

In what ways is possession by the ghost similar to hypnosis?

Give examples of how characters in the novel rationalize their behavior. Does Dirk Gently ever rationalize?

In addition to its humor value, why does Douglas Adams give the reader the Monk's horse's perspective?

How does Dirk Gently manipulate people?

Why does Gordon Way feel the need to talk incessantly?

In what ways is the ghost good and evil? In what ways is the ghost human?