

INTRODUCTION

'HE IS - I DON'T KNOW THE POLITICALLY-CORRECT TERM - A MORON. A COMPLETELY ROUND, EMPTY-HEADED, PART-CHIMP MANC.'

RICKY GERVAIS

'HE'D'VE BEEN HAPPIER IN MEDIEVAL TIMES IN A VILLAGE WHERE YOU DIDN'T TRAVEL BEYOND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.'

STEPHEN MERCHANT

STEPHEN: He's a real, genuine freak that we have often thought we would like to introduce to the world, like to Victorian showmen, like P.T. Barnum and his fat friend who are just saying, 'Look, you must come and observe this wonder of the world!'

RICKY: I mean, he is – I don't know the politically correct term – a moron. A completely round, empty-headed, part-chimp Manc.

STEPHEN: In many regards we've often described him – and it's appropriate – as being like some kind of real-life Homer Simpson.

RICKY: Yes.

STEPHEN: Homer is arrogant and yet an idiot. Small-minded, petty, but at his core a good person.

RICKY: And lovable. Absolutely lovable. He's got child rights because he says the most awful things so naively and sweetly. Things like, 'Chinese people don't age well . . .' I go, 'What?' He goes, 'They don't age well.' He says, 'You'll never see a thirty-five-year-old one.' I go, 'What do you mean?' He went, 'Well, they're good-looking when they're young but then they age overnight. They're like a pear.' I mean, racism, you know . . .

STEPHEN: It's not racist. It's just ignorant.

RICKY: It's just ignorance, he thinks that. I went, 'Well, some of the oldest people in the world are Chinese.' He went, 'Are they though?' He thinks they might be lying. He thinks these

old Chinese boys might be thirty-five by lying about they're age 'cos they don't age well. I mean, he's an idiot. I mean, his theories, his outlook on life. He really would never go away if it wasn't for his girlfriend.

STEPHEN: He'd've been happier in medieval times in a village where you didn't travel beyond the local community. That would've been fine for him.

RICKY: Yeah, making up his own theories about the moon.

STEPHEN: Terrified because he doesn't know where it goes during the day.

RICKY: Yeah, he's quite remarkable. So I think we should broaden his outlook. And they say travel broadens the mind. So I think it'd be amazing to send him round the world . . .

STEPHEN: Well, yeah. I mean, he's travelled, but it's only been to places like Majorca. Somewhere safe. A little two-week package holiday.

RICKY: If it wasn't for his girlfriend, he wouldn't do anything. His job at home is washing-up. He looks forward to that because it's something he's done. Often I call him and he says, 'I'm washing up' like it's a big event. One day he'd started a diary and he did the washing-up and took his girlfriend's shoes to the cobblers. Now I hadn't heard the word 'cobblers' in ages . . .

STEPHEN: I didn't realise cobblers still existed. I thought they were only in fairytales.

RICKY: Yes, exactly. And she makes him go on holiday. When she books a holiday he goes, 'Oh, I gotta go or I'd just stay at home alone', and when he does that he forgets to eat. Once, right, someone at the radio station where he used to work sent us an email that Karl had sent by mistake, right? It was an email from his girlfriend. She was out that night and so, in detail, she was telling him where the quiche was in the fridge, cut up into pieces, and she'd even put 'EAT' on it.

STEPHEN: Didn't he try and put fish fingers in a toaster or something?

RICKY: Yeah, he did that once. No, sausages.

STEPHEN: Sausages.

RICKY: Yeah, she came home, going, 'What are you doing?' He'd forgotten to drink so he had kidney stones. I mean, he is . . .'

STEPHEN: He's a typical little Englander and he doesn't like going out of his comfort zone. That's key. You know, he's got everything around him that he's happy with and he's comfortable with. Even when he goes on holiday, you know, he's the sort of person who packs some teabags. He's not comfortable going beyond things he doesn't understand. And he thinks he's not interested. What excites us in the idea of forcing him to get out there. We'd like to see him go out into the world, experience other cultures, other peoples, and see if, in any way, we can change his outlook on the world.

RICKY: Yeah. Can I just say that I've got to admit that Stephen's motives are a lot purer than mine. He wants Karl to enjoy it . . .

STEPHEN: I've travelled. I've been to many exotic places. I genuinely think travel broadens the mind. I've become a richer person for it . . .

RICKY: I want him to hate it. I want him to hate every minute of it for my own amusement. That's it. I think we've gotta send him economy. I think we've gotta put him up in shacks and awful hotels. I think we've got to expose him to some of the most mind-blowing degradation that we can. And that'll be funny. Nothing is funnier than Karl in a corner being poked by a stick. I am that stick and now I have the might of Sky behind me. This is one of the funniest, most expensive practical jokes I've ever done. And it's gonna be great.

STEPHEN: I'm hoping as well that he'll be poked by some real sticks.

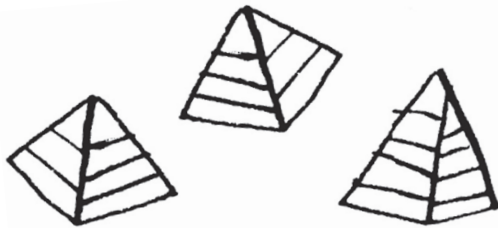
RICKY: I know. What country do they poke you with sticks?

STEPHEN: There's gotta be a country where they poke you with sticks . . .

RICKY: There's bound to be. There's bound to be one of those weird little countries where, if you see a man with a round head, you're allowed to poke him with a stick. One of those unrepealed laws. Just find me that country!

CHAPTER ONE

THE PYRAMIDS



'ASCENDING THE PYRAMID, I COULD NOT BUT THINK OF WATERLOO BRIDGE IN MY DEAR NATIVE LONDON - A BUILDING AS VAST AND AS MAGNIFICENT, AS BEAUTIFUL AS USELESS AND AS LONELY.'

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

'I REALLY CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT A STATE THE PYRAMIDS ARE IN. I THOUGHT THEY HAD FLAT RENDERED SIDES, BUT WHEN YOU GET UP CLOSE, YOU SEE HOW THEY ARE JUST GIANT BOULDERS BALANCED ON TOP OF EACH OTHER LIKE A MASSIVE GAME OF JENGA THAT HAS GOT OUT OF HAND.'

KARL PILKINGTON

EGYPT



GIZA



Pizza Hut

Peace and quiet



Al Hakim Mosque



Taj Al Sultan

Al Azhar Park

Egyptian Museum

Golden Nile Floating Restaurant



Windsor Hotel

desert

FRIDAY 17TH OCTOBER

My Seven Wonders experience started today with a trip to get my injections. I've never had to have an injection to go on holiday before. I don't tend to go to extreme places normally. I like my holidays to be the same as being at home but in a different area. The time we were in the Cotswolds and could only get whole milk instead of semi-skimmed was almost enough to make me turn around and go back home, so this is going to be a challenge for me.

I was booked into a clinic off Tottenham Court Road in London, which seems a bit odd, as this area is mainly known for its electrical shops. It would be like going to Chinatown for a curry. They told me I had to have six injections – Tetanus, Typhoid, Yellow Fever, Rabies, Hepatitis A and B. I asked if I could have the injections in my arse, as I have just moved house and need to be able to use my arms when they deliver my new washing machine. (I'm guessing this isn't a problem Michael Palin has ever had to worry about.) The nurse said she had never been asked to put injections into an arse cheek and said I was worrying too much and that my arm should be fine.

She gave me the jabs and said I was covered for every worst-case scenario, including being bitten by a dirty chimp. I told her this is why we have over-population problems. Why are idiots who annoy dirty chimps being protected?



SATURDAY 18TH OCTOBER

Good job I didn't have the injections in my arse, as I had to sit on it all day waiting for the washer/dryer to be delivered. They

gave me a window of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. That window has a name. It's called Saturday.

I was up at 7.50 a.m. It turned up at 5.40 p.m.

My arm ached after fitting the machine into the kitchen.



MONDAY 23RD NOVEMBER

I did some filming today with Ricky and Steve. They told me the places I would be visiting: Egypt, Brazil, India, Mexico, China, Jordan and Peru. I have to confess, these are all places I've never really fancied visiting. If it wasn't for the Wonders I doubt most people would go to these destinations. Me and Suzanne mainly go to the Cotswolds, Devon, Spain or Italy. I'm not a proper traveller. I don't like to be challenged or have too much of a change and prefer a week away just to relax rather than broaden my mind. I'm not very adventurous. Maybe I'd see the Wonders if time travel was possible but then I also had a really nice time in Majorca back in 2007 in a villa with four bedrooms and its own swimming pool which was only £300 for the week, so I'd probably just end up using the time machine to go back to that holiday as I know I enjoyed it, plus I wouldn't have to pay again as I paid for it back then.

Steve told me that some of the areas we would be visiting are quite dangerous. Krish, the producer, said I shouldn't worry, as we will have a man with a gun protecting us at some of the locations. Being attacked by a dirty chimp with rabies doesn't seem such a worry anymore.

WEDNESDAY 25TH NOVEMBER

I had to go and get my medical done to make sure I was fit enough for the challenge of travelling around the Seven Wonders of the World. It was a really posh clinic on Harley Street. I knew it was a classy place, as the waiting room had all the same style chairs, which is rare. Most doctors I have been to have loads of different styles that have been bought at various times. It always reminds me of Christmases at home when we'd borrow chairs from various neighbours so we could seat everyone for dinner.

They say you can tell the quality of a doctor's by the magazine selection. The place on Harley Street had loads. They had every magazine you could wish for and some that you wouldn't. One of which was *Boyz*, a gay magazine. I was the only one in the waiting room so thought I would have a flick through it to see what gays like to read about. There wasn't much reading to be done, as it was just picture after picture of half-naked men (mainly the lower half) dressed as mechanics, farmers and plumbers with their tackle out. I've never understood what gay blokes get from looking at these pictures, as they have knobs of their own to look at. Other than the pictures there was the odd bit of text that was always a pun on the knob and bollocks. The main one I remember was Suckcocko. The puzzle was exactly the same as a normal Sudoku, just with the knob twist to its name.

I had my medical. The doctor said I was in good shape for my age. It's the first time someone had ever brought my age into my health. It made me feel quite old.



WEDNESDAY 9TH DECEMBER

I was picked up at 4.30 a.m. and taken to the airport for our flight to Cairo. Six hours later we were on the road to our hotel. I hadn't been told anything about who or what I'd be meeting, eating or seeing. Apparently that's the way each trip is going to work, which I know will annoy me, as I don't really like surprises. Not big ones anyway. Just having a pack of Revels holds enough of a surprise for me.

The first thing that hit me about Egypt was the traffic. It was mental. There was a song in the 1980s by a girl group called The Bangles who sang 'Walk like an Egyptian' yet no one seems to be walking anywhere here – everyone is driving. They make every three-lane road into a six-lane road, and cram so many people into their cars it's ridiculous. Passengers are squashed up against the windows like those Garfield cats that people used to stick on their car windows in the 1980s. The horns are in constant use, but this might be because there are so many people crammed into the car someone's arse is accidentally pressing against the horn.

It was a long journey to the hotel. As we drove, all the nice hotels seemed to disappear until we finally pulled up at a place called The Windsor. It is one of the oldest hotels in Cairo and it is situated in one of the roughest areas. It even has a security scanner at the entrance, as if to prove how dodgy the area is. As I walked through, my belt set off the bleeper. It was enough to startle me, but it didn't seem to wake the security man.

As well as being one of the oldest hotels, it had the staff to match. You wouldn't get people of this age working in hotels in England. An old fella brought my case from the coach. We were parked right outside the entrance, but it took the old fella the same amount of time it took me to fill out all the forms and

collect my key. It reminded me of the time I was moving flats and I found a company that did removals and was cheaper than everyone else. They charged £10 an hour. I realised what an error I had made when the man turned up. He must have been close to 70 years old. It took him 30 minutes to climb the stairs to our third-floor flat. He had a sweat on just bringing us the empty boxes. It cost a fortune in the end.

Another man took me to my room. I was on the second floor, just where the cleaners congregated. I couldn't believe it. Not the fact that it's where they congregated, but the fact that the hotel had cleaners. It was also clearly a bit of a storage area, as there was a piano outside my door and five TV sets stacked on top of the wardrobe in my room. I was given the full tour of the room: 'Telephone there. Bathroom here.' He said one or two other things, but I could not hear properly due to the creaking of the floorboards and the noise of the traffic outside. There were two beds separated by a fluorescent tube light on the wall that, once you switched it on, showed up all the damp stains on the walls in their full glory.

I wandered downstairs to meet up with the crew and bumped into the owner outside. I don't know if he was waiting to meet me to check if everything was okay or if he was about to have his piano lessons. He was in his late sixties and looked smart but tired. He was keen to tell me that Michael Palin had stayed here once. If these are the sorts of places Palin stayed in, no wonder he went round the world in 80 days. He was obviously keen to get home as soon as poss.

The owner then introduced me to his dad, who was in his nineties, at least. I wish I hadn't met him, as it would have made asking for a better room a lot easier.

At 4 p.m. we ordered food. Most of us asked for chicken kebabs, apart from Jan, our cameraman, who is more of a

hardened traveller than the rest of us. When we were talking about the worst places we had visited on the coach ride into Cairo and I had said a week in Lanzarote was pretty grim, Jan announced he had done three months in Antarctica. Finally, at 5.30 p.m. our food was brought to the table. It actually left the kitchen at about 5.22, but all the staff were quite old and shuffled slowly from the kitchen to our table.

Went to bed. Nodded off counting the car horns outside.



THURSDAY 10TH DECEMBER

I met Ahmed this morning. He's a local lad who is an expert on the Pyramids and Egyptian history in general. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to understand him, but his English was better than mine. He may as well have talked Egyptian to me, as the English words he used went right over my head. One of the words he used was 'tintinnabulation', which he told me means a ringing or tinkling sound.

He took me to a mosque. Praying and religion are a big deal in Egypt. Ahmed prays five times a day. I would never keep to it if I lived here. I struggle having my five fruits a day. Religion has never been a big part of my life. I wasn't christened. My mam told me not to tell many people about not being christened, as she said I would be a prime target for witches. To this day I don't know what she meant by that.

Ahmed told me about how he believes that after death you go to a place that is perfect in every way. I said I'm quite happy with my life as it is now. In Ahmed's perfect world he listed not having to use the loo. I told him going to the toilet is one of my favourite parts of my day. It's proper 'me time' where

I get to clear my head and think about things with no other disturbances, but after seeing the toilets in Egypt I can understand why he thinks this way. They are just holes in the ground with a hose for cleaning up.

We then went off to old Cairo to see the market.

The markets are made of up tiny, rough roads, crammed with motorbikes and vans. The stalls themselves sell mostly clothing, cotton and wool. 'How can I take your money?' was a popular shout from most of the store owners as I browsed at the wide selection of tat on offer.

I wanted to buy a gown for Ricky, as he likes to slob out when he's at home. Most days he has his pyjamas on by 5 p.m. I found one pretty quickly, but it took 45 minutes to get the price I wanted. I wish they just had price tags on the products to save the hassle of haggling. If you nipped out for bread and milk you could be gone for hours. The only good thing about this way of buying products is that you would never have that awkward situation when you're a penny or two short and have to ask a shopkeeper to let you off.

We passed a man with crates full of living rabbits and pigeons. They were being sold as food. I've never eaten rabbit but I've never had one as a pet either. I like the way you could get one as a pet though and eat it if you found it too much trouble to look after. I think we'd eat guinea pigs too if they weren't so expensive.

The new market was also full of tourist tat. Headscarves, ashtrays, toy camels, plastic pyramids. Even though I had no intention of buying anything when I set out for the market this morning, by the time I left I had purchased a plastic cat and an eagle for me mam. I'm hoping she will find it handy, as she used to have two birds. But one died, so she replaced the dead one with a pebble with one of the dead bird's feathers glued

on it so Kes, the other bird, still feels like he has company. I figured that the eagle from the market would make a good replacement.

I stopped to have a cup of tea, but it wasn't very relaxing, as I was constantly hassled by people trying to sell me wallets, glasses, lighters, fags, necklaces, rings and watches.

I witnessed the call to prayer for the first time today. It's something that can't go unnoticed. It's the only time the car horns are drowned out, by the singing of prayers from different parts of the city.

Everything comes to a halt. The only time I experienced something like this was when I worked at a printer's when I was eighteen. All the printers and packers and guillotine workers all stopped at 11 a.m. to listen to 'Our Tune' with Simon Bates on Radio 1.

During the call to prayer each area of the city tries to be louder than the other. Everyone seems to get involved, and they may as well, as there is no escaping it. It makes you think about religion even though you weren't thinking about it, in the same way I'd suddenly fancy an ice-cream when the ice-cream man's chime would sound. The only time I was aware of religion growing up was when Songs of Praise came on the telly on a Sunday evening. This was always my cue to go and have my bath for the week ahead.



FRIDAY 11TH DECEMBER

Ricky called last night. He was moaning 'cos I hadn't been in touch. He said he had left loads of messages asking me to call him, but I can't access them, as I've been locked out of my

phone after entering the wrong security code more than four times. I told him I could still get texts, but that they cost me around 70p to receive them.

RICKY: What about email? You got email on your phone?

KARL: Yeah, but I don't really wanna answer them 'cos they're like 70 pence at a time or something. I got an email from Oxfam, saying if I wanted to buy some goat again. That's cost me a quid.

RICKY: Even if you don't answer it or retrieve it?

KARL: If it gets to my phone, I'm charged for it. That is it. So don't start sending me pictures of your head and that.

RICKY: You're an idiot then, because now I'm gonna send you a message or an email every couple of minutes. Why do you tell me these things?

KARL: Dunno.

Ahmed took me to the Cairo Museum today. I hated it. It was exactly what I thought it would be like. I've never enjoyed museums. I had also seen a lot of this stuff at the Millennium Dome when there was a King Tut exhibition on. I didn't want to go to that either, but Suzanne, my girlfriend, had arranged for us to see her brother there. It was like the Cairo Museum. Box after box of some old ornament painted gold. Even the corpse of King Tut was in a box. Most people were more impressed by the fact that Jilly Goolden, the wine critic, was having a tour.

Ahmed told me they were expanding the museum so it could fit more tourists inside, but I think this will just encourage the museum people to put even more old boxes on display. It's interesting to see that people had so much clutter even thousands of years ago. The only way to get rid of it all was to bury it, and then some archaeologist went and dug it all up. Humans have always been hoarders of tat. I think that's why lofts were invented; it's somewhere to stick all the crap we collect in our lives rather than bury it.

Ahmed explained how many of these items were made for the kings to take into their next lives. This would annoy me if I lived back then and people kept saying, 'Hey, King Karl, I've got you a lovely gift.'

'Have you? Let's have a look.'

'No, it's for when you're dead.'

'Well, I'd rather see it now, if I'm honest.'

'No, it's all wrapped for when you're dead.'

'Will you stop going on about me being dead!'

Surely I should choose what I'm going to be surrounded with in my next life? At least then I'd have time to have a chariot boot sale to get rid of my least favourite things.

I left the museum, as I couldn't take anymore. It was too busy for me, with people pushing and shoving. There were even some people there with babies in prams screaming their heads off. It's not a great place to take a baby, is it?

I noticed there was a KFC outside, so I had one, as I needed something that reminded me of home. I went to place my order, but the girl behind the counter pointed to a note on the counter. The note informed customers that it was a deaf KFC. I was confused. Did this mean they only served deaf people? The girl behind the counter pointed out the menu. There were instructions on how to place an order, which basically involved

pointing to the items you wanted, which is the way I normally order my food when I'm abroad anyway. It was quick and easy and quite a good idea, as I was worried that no one would speak English and I wouldn't be able to order a Zinger Meal. It turned out that not speaking meant life was a lot easier.

It was nice to be in a fast food restaurant that didn't have dance music blasting out of the speakers and staff yelling at each other like they are working on the floor of the Stock Exchange. Service was fast and friendly, due to the fact the staff weren't stood around gabbing by the milkshake counter as they normally do in most fast food chains. I saw a man using a videophone to chat to someone using sign language. I've never thought about videophones being used for the deaf. We used to watch a lot of TV with subtitles when I was younger, not 'cos anyone in our family was deaf but 'cos my dad worked nights so we all had to be quiet.

Suzanne called today. She was annoyed, as the boiler was playing up at home and she had asked me to sort it before I left. I always have problems with boilers.

Ricky sent me a text that just read: '70p.'



SATURDAY 12TH DECEMBER

I wore the jellabiya that I bought for Ricky last night. I wanted something comfy to relax in so opened it and tried it on. I ended up sleeping in it too. That's the good thing with the local dress – it's so light and comfy. If you lived and worked here you could wear them as pyjamas and then just get up at five to nine, roll out of bed and go to work in them. I think this is the reason you see doctors wearing those light blue pyjamas.