

## The Tome of Ding

### Terence Dingwall

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*The Tome of Ding is an entertaining account of an interesting life.*

Terence Dingwall's wry memoir *The Tome of Ding* collects amusing tales of globe-hopping and tinkering with vehicles.

Covering Dingwall's father's World War II service and Dingwall's childhood in colonial Kenya, adult life in New Zealand, and years spent traveling with the Royal New Zealand Air Force, the book is an assemblage of anecdotes. Humorous discussions of motorcycles and planes mix with serious stories about colonialism, the rise of a dictatorship in Seychelles, and the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya.

The book is waggish more often than not. Shenanigans like being chased by wild bees, bored cops teaching kids curse words, and a teacher flushing a pet snake down the toilet are recounted from a nostalgic distance. Even its depiction of military life is lighthearted, focused on describing escaping the wrath of general service inspectors and the patriotism of drinking local beer. The text is full of personality in sharing these stories, and many of them are charming, if they stick to the surface.

Descriptive passages capture interactions with a keen eye, and whimsical lines play with language ("perennial plans and plots to purloin the pugnacious porker have persisted in plenitude"). However, the book's characterizations don't often go beyond musing observations, such as that the best bugler in school was also a heavy smoker; most characters pop in and out of the text when they are needed to further stories. Their use is expedient rather than developed; this extends to presentations of Dingwall's parents and other family members.

The book runs in a chronological fashion, but its stories are not connected to one another, and the reading experience is discombobulating. Some are monotonous, as with several chapters dedicated to motorcycle stories. The book's changes in tone are arbitrary, and switches (for example, from sober reflections on PTSD in a jocular poem about a soldier returning home) are confusing, as are philosophical tangents. Unnecessary hyphens, random spaces, and repeated turns of phrase are an additional hindrance.

Cartoons, sketches, and poems appear at random. The poetry—preserved with the note that it was inflicted on "long-suffering followers on Facebook"—is composed of rhyming couplets and sing-song rhythms, and is variously sentimental and droll. The included drawings are also free-spirited and unfiltered.

Funny but scattered, *The Tome of Ding* is an entertaining account of an interesting life.

JOSEPH S. PETE (September 19, 2019)

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