



The Stench of Honolulu: A Tropical Adventure

Jack Handey

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The legendary *Deep Thoughts* and *New Yorker* humorist Jack Handey is back with his very first novel-a hilarious, absurd, far-flung adventure tale.

THE STENCH OF HONOLOLU

Are you a fan of books in which famous tourist destinations are repurposed as unlivable hellholes for no particular reason? Read on!

Jack Handey's exotic tale is full of laugh-out-loud twists and unforgettable characters whose names escape me right now. A reliably unreliable narrator and his friend, who is some other guy, need to get out of town. They have a taste for adventure, so they pay a visit to a relic of bygone days-a travel agent-and discover an old treasure map. She might have been a witch, by the way. Our heroes soon embark on a quest for the Golden Monkey, which takes them into the mysterious and stinky foreign land of Honolulu. There, they meet untold dangers, confront strange natives, kill and eat Turtle People, kill some other things and people, eat another thing, and discover the ruins of ancient civilizations.

As our narrator says, "The ruins were impressive. But like so many civilizations, they forgot the rule that might have saved them: Don't let vines grow all over you."

The Stench of Honolulu: A Tropical Adventure Details

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From Reader Review The Stench of Honolulu: A Tropical Adventure for online ebook

Steve says

The great thing about *The Stench of Honolulu* is that it reads just like "Deep Thoughts by Jack Handey". The disappointing thing about *The Stench of Honolulu* is that reads just like "Deep Thoughts by Jack Handey".

I'd always loved the absurdist humor of the old "Deep Thoughts" bits on Saturday Night Live, so when I saw the recent New York Times profile of Handey (in which I learned - how did I miss that for 20 years? - that Handey wasn't a character but an actual writer) and mention of his new novel, I decided to take a chance on this.

On the plus side, there's plenty of Handey's dark, ironic humor on display. There are ample vignettes and one-liners that had me bursting into laughter, and plenty of passages that are straight out of the "Deep Thoughts" style, such as:

The best thing about going to outer space is being able to go to a party and say, "I've been to outer space - where've you been?"

and

I gritted my teeth and said okay. "What?" he said. I ungritted my teeth and said okay.

(There were many moments like this that would have been right at home in a Zucker Brothers comedy; I could almost picture Leslie Nielsen saying these lines.)

But, like many, many SNL sketches that overstay their welcome and keep plodding along long after the joke's been played out, *The Stench of Honolulu* quickly becomes tedious. The nameless narrator isn't set up to be a remotely sympathetic character, but he quickly becomes loathsome in his venality and obliviousness, to the point you're cheering for bad things to happen to him (in part because that's where some of the best humor comes out). The story itself isn't so much a story as it is the cart at a dim-sum restaurant: a simple vehicle whose only purpose is to deliver the small bites of comedy. Not that I was expecting great literature or even riveting storytelling, but it would have been nice if the skeleton had had a little meat on it.

Handey's humor is really best-suited for small doses, and even though this is an exceptionally quick read - I got through it in a little over two hours - *The Stench of Honolulu* sags under the weight of being too long for the material. Nevertheless, there are enough laughs here - and the humor is indeed excellent when it hits its marks - to make it a worthwhile read.

Lena says

When humor columnist Dave Barry wrote his first novel, he was caught whining, "You mean you have to have characters AND a plot?" Complain though he did, Mr. Barry actually managed to fulfill this challenge

and write a pretty decent funny novel.

Jack Handey, on the other hand, didn't appear to be in the mood to work quite that hard. I suppose this book has the scaffolding of a plot, and it is upon this scaffolding that Mr. Handey hangs his relentless 1-3 line jokes.

I could forgive this lack of literary structure if Mr. Handey's jokes were actually funny. But in the dozen or so pages I read, I didn't find anything that made me crack a smile, let alone laugh. While the material may very well be original, it felt incredibly tired - cliched, trite, and just overall highly unpleasant. Though the book is so slight I could have finished it in under an hour, I couldn't bear to subject myself to it so I gave up early on.

My husband tells me that Handey's Deep Thoughts is quite brilliant, so I may still seek that out at some point. But I can't recommend this one at all.

Sonny says

I didn't like Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves. It's neat, but it worked too hard to be neat, you know? House of Leaves is like those kids in high school who clomp around with black lipstick or capes or tails sewn into their pants. "Deal with my weirdness," they scream with their outfits, made up of pieces hijacked from one trip to an anime convention or a Google image search of "David Bowie hot." These kids (and House of Leaves) desperately want to be appreciated for their uniqueness; they're terrified that just being themselves won't get them the attention they deserve. So they pretend to be vampires or grow a huge mohawk or, in Danielewski's case, add a bunch of mumbo jumbo footnotes and--get this--print some of the words all topsy turvy, the literary equivalent of "Dad, watch me dive! Dad! Dad! Watch me dive! Dad! Everybody, love me!"

Which brings me to Jack Handey, who is actually, truly, not-trying-hard-at-all weird, and The Stench of Honolulu might be the most bizarre book I've ever read. But it's not a wad of nontraditional literary devices or head-scratching gimmicks; it's weird because Jack Handey is weird, and this is the funny weird stuff that comes out of him.

The book's super short. Don't be fooled by the page count; the extremely heavy font and very short chapters stretch a 100-page novella into a respectably sized book that you could feel good about loaning to your grandma whose eyes aren't so good anymore.

It's also really really funny. I won't spoil the jokes, but the oblivious/terrible/cowardly narrator lets Handey stop along the way to deliver some Deep Thoughts-esque ruminations. That isn't to say those breaks in the action are the only points I was laughing--the plot is equally ridiculous, and Handey turns Hawaii into a goofy nightmare land, like something out of a racist black and white cartoon.

Even knowing it was Jack Handey and what his whole deal is, I still marvel at how odd this book is. As a high school teacher, I can't wait to toss it into the hands of some teenagers, and watch their cute little heads explode.

Leslie Langtry says

A word of warning – do not read this book while wearing a clay facial mask. You'll just crack it up, rendering it useless and you'll have no one to blame but yourself.

That said, DO read this book (preferably without any substance of any sort on your face of course). If you are like me – you loved Jack Handey's 'DEEP THOUGHTS' on Saturday Night Live – sometime in the past (if you are like me, you don't remember much before yesterday – in which case that is sad and you should probably see a doctor or eat omega fatty foods or something).

This is Jack's first novel. And he had me in the first few pages with the words; MUSCULAR ANGRY CLOWN.

This book is classic Handey – and it makes no sense whatsoever. Seriously – it is quite senseless and you find yourself wondering if it takes place in an alternate universe (I hope it does or I'm never going to Honolulu) or if you are just completely insane (something that's always possible I guess.).

I laughed so hard and constantly throughout this book, that I actually lost three pounds. I'm pretty sure I'm not kidding here. The book is filled with Handey's classic 'thoughts' and a plot that will make you wonder how much acid you just took.

I do feel the need to add another disclaimer here. This book is expensive. Probably the most expensive I've reviewed. For an ebook to be more than \$11 is a bit of a travesty in my mind (I blame the publisher – not Handey). Make sure you read the sample and like it before you download. Or use your local library. I like libraries.

I know, I've never given such a warning before. But I feel I owe it to you, my minions, to be open about this kind of thingy.

Still – it's a HILARIOUS book. And I do think, if you're a Handey fan, you should read it.

Leslie Langtry

Aaron says

One of the silliest, most joyfully goofy books I've ever read. I laughed out loud several times reading this (not on EVERY PAGE, as the lunatic Ian Frazier says in his pull quote on the front cover. You ok, Ian?), and was pleasantly surprised at how much enjoyed a book that only has the merest semblance of a plot.

I love the dry, bold idiot of a main character Handey has created here (known only to us as "Wrong Way Slurps," a name he made up for himself) and the completely brash way he treats his well-meaning companion Don. I loved how each section basically served as a kind of episode or sketch or something, as Slurps & Don barrel their way through a Honolulu that couldn't be further from the true one. There is very little realism here, and who cares. Realism is bullshit anyway.

If you're a fan of Douglas Adams or Terry Pratchett, you're gonna like this. It falls in the same category of "bumbling doof stumbles from scenario to scenario, inexplicably avoiding death," making just about every single joke that could be made in the process. The whole ordeal here is ultimately kind of pointless, which in and of itself makes a joke about narrative structure that I thought was smarter than it appears to be.

All that said, the lack of structure can get a little out of control at times, with Handey just kind of spinning off into whatever direction he feels like. I guess some deep part of me does cling to structure, because I am human and need to be told what to think and feel. That little bit of missing constraint may have brought this into being one of my favorite books of all time, but as is, it's just very good. I certainly hope Handey finds the time for more of these.

Nate says

Not much here in terms of plot, character development, or anything else you probably ought to look for in a good story. But if a book makes me laugh this much out loud I just can't help but give it 5 stars. Such a fun read. I was embarrassed to read it in public, because I didn't want to look like a nut constantly laughing at the adventures of Wrong Way Slurps.

In the jungle you come to realize that death is a part of life. The bat eats the moth. Then the giant moth sucks the life out of the bat. Then the monkey eats the giant moth, pulling the wings off first, because he doesn't like that part. Then the monkey gets a parasite from the moth that slowly eats his brain. It's all part of the beautiful circle of life.

Megalion says

One of the best things about Saturday Night Live in the late 80s was the Deep Thoughts by Jack Handey in between skits.

I never realized that Jack Handey was an actual person!

I also didn't realize that he'd written a couple of novels. I forget how I stumbled across this one but was tickled pink to see how his wit would translate into a novel.

The answer: In many ways, many of his "deep thoughts" strung together into a full story. Having a story context allowed for more "thoughts" that wouldn't otherwise stand alone.

I'll cite some of my favorite ones but first, I have to admit, the story was interesting but the character's narcissism and rather moronic thinking got tired at times.

"I was on a crashing airplane. The old man next to me was praying. Down and down we went. I started hitting the old man with a rolled-up magazine, yelling, "Pray harder, old man!"

"There's no denying reality. I did once, and I wound up running across a field with my pants on fire, with an old man with a shotgun chasing me."

"I became a mummy, driving a car. And I thought, Why am I driving a car? Then I understood: I was plowing down pedestrians."

A giggle fest indeed.

Recommended for any fans of Jack Handey. If you've not read any of his thoughts before, this is for you if you like the zany and downright absurd.

John says

this book was funny at least 10 times on every page.

i will put this book on my shelf right next to "The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy"

Jack Handy is a Genius

Jason Edwards says

When you are reading a book by Jack Handey, and you come across a sentence such as: "The sun was like a blazing ball of fire in the sky," you know you are witnessing genius.

Because yes, the sun literally is a blazing ball of fire in the sky, so structuring the sentence as a metaphor is ironic. But the word "fire" has connotations of heat, and with "blazing" it's an unbearable, oppressive heat. So. Despite the irony, the description is perfect. This is also ironic. And achievable only in the context of this being a Jack Handey novel.

Art is all about consistency. Yes, *The Stench of Honolulu* is silly, but's consistently silly. It's unwavering, uncompromising. Anyone can make these jokes, but every paragraph, every sentence, for 165 pages? Only Jack Handey. I am not exaggerating: pure genius.

Right now, I'm only on page 64, but this is rapidly becoming of my all-time favorite books. Reviews continues when I finish.

[A few hours later] Okay all done. I was right—easily one of my all-time favorite books. I read it on my e-reader, but I tempted to go get the hard-back edition and keep it with me and read it over and over and over. I spoke about Art before. Let me bring it up once more: you know how people will see some piece of modern art, and say "I could have done that?"

The usual reply is "but you didn't." Well, let me be clear. I dare you to read *The Stench of Honolulu* and then say "I could have written that." I guarantee you couldn't.

K R N says

I've decided to read only funny books on planes.

This is what you'd expect from Jack Handey. I laughed outloud a lot. It somehow manages to be slapstick in writing, but at the same time it's slightly dark.

I expected it to actually be set in Hawaii though, but the Honolulu in this book is fictional - it's a foreign country with a different currency and everything. The main character's internal monologue is basically ongoing deep thoughts-esque comments with their weird totally out-of-the-blue punchlines, which are pretty entertaining, and it kind of builds on itself as it goes along.

Kind of like Hana in the English Patient, you can basically start and stop reading from anywhere and it's still funny without needing to know what's going on, so it's nice for reading aloud. Partially read it aloud with a

friend who was in the hospital and we laughed a lot.

Michael Ferro says

Downright hilarious, delightfully absurd, and pleasingly nonsensical, THE STENCH OF HONOLULU is Jack Handey at his finest.

It's so good, it made me do my funny cowboy dance, and I wouldn't say that in public if it weren't absolutely true.

Buy this book. Support Handey's drinking habit. Have some laughs.

Don Gorman says

(1 1/2) Maybe I was in a grumpy mood, maybe I was just not into abjectly silly material, I certainly know I will never trust Judd Apatow's recommendations for the funniest books on the planet ever again. I smiled once or twice at a few references in this very short read, but laugh out loud? Not even close. Ridiculous the whole way through (absolutely on purpose). I am glad that Handey was so entertaining on SNL but this is a farce. Luckily it only wasted an hour or so of my time. On to better things.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

Oh my. I can't remember reading a book like this in a long, long time. Completely and totally silly book for grownups. Not that the plot is important in this silly book, but I suppose I must at least tell you a little. Let's see. Our main character and his friend need to get out of town, visit a travel agent, and learn of a mysterious treasure map. Soon they are off in search of the Golden Monkey.

It's quite silly, more silly than I can really say, and that's the charm of it. Don't go looking for Deep Thoughts or Wisdom of Life or even a plot in this book. Delight in its silliness or leave it on the shelf.

Kelly says

Jack Handey helped shape my sense of humor as a young teenager- he has a way of distilling the absurd and grotesque in the world into brilliant little comic nuggets and hypothetical situations. In The Stench of Honolulu, he demonstrates the entertainment value of a protagonist who is high on self-importance and low on self-awareness (or any sort of reasonable perspective, really). The story is loose, but that's kind of the point. It's a forum for one liners and ridiculous set-ups starring the insufferable jerk Handey created to narrate his "Deep Thoughts" sketches and musings. It's funny. It is very very funny.

Nate Q says

Dry. Incoherent. Hilarious. It's basically Deep Thoughts crammed into a flimsy plot. I love his stuff, but I could only take so much at a time due to dryness desensitization. Then I'd come back to it and it was hilarious again. So a 3.5 * rounded up. His tone is hysterical, and I could definitely see re-listening to this in the future.
