

A Dodgy Dog's Tail

By Nick Arnold

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My name is Watson and I'm a dog. Hey, I know what you're thinking – dogs don't write stories but I'm kinda smarter than the average hound. Well, I say so but my owner M.I Gutzache, he reckons I'm the dumbest dog in the universe just because I like chewing wads of cash.



I mean, like big deal – who doesn't like to dine out on a few dollars? It's not like the greenbacks get wasted and they taste better than that cheap dog food Gutzache feeds me on.

Anyhow I'm not here to talk about my table manners I gotta let you into a secret. I know the truth behind the Mississippi Mud Pie Murder mystery! If you've read *The Terrible Truth about Time* you'll know Gutzache never cracked the case, but hey, that's 'cos he never asks me and why? Because he thinks I'm a mindless mutt – that's why!

It all started when Gutzache's phone rang. Gutzache's a private eye here in New York but his phone don't ring too often because it's mostly disconnected because he don't pay his bills. So when it rings Gutzache is on it faster than a fly on a mouldy frankfurter.

It was Fingers Garibaldi, a small-time neighbourhood hoodlum. Now I'm not saying that Fingers is stupid but I've seen smarter stick insects. Why Fingers is so dumb he can't even count his fingers even though he's got less than most humans. Anyhow the guy was real cut up. I heard him sobbing down the phone:

"Boo Hoo! You gotta help me Gutzache - Tony "Big Cheese" Mozzarella and all his boys got poisoned last night. They was having a big blow out at Peter Pepperoni's Pizzeria on 123rd and this morning they ain't too clever!"

That's even less clever than Fingers who thinks a jumbo jet is some kind of power shower for elephants.

Fingers didn't go to the meal on account of being in the slammer so he hires Gutzache and that's when the trouble really starts. Gutzache goes to the hospital and talks to the doctors and finds out that Tony and the boys had eaten all kinds of poison in their Mississippi mud pies. It



sounds like they got their just desserts. So he decides to go undercover.

I decide to go undercover too so I wriggle under the tablecloth and kinda accidentally knock Gutzache's hotdog onto the floor where it accidentally ends up in my mouth. I like to help out when I can. When Gutzache had finished shouting we went to check out Peter Pepperoni's kitchen. Things looked bad - it looked like a dog's dinner and I should know. The windows were wide open and there was food on the floor - it seemed a shame to waste it so I didn't but luckily it wasn't poisoned.

Gutzache took one look at the greasy gunk on the cooker and the salami on the floor and the bin overflowing with mouldy fish heads and he figured he'd cracked the case.

"It's food poisoning!" He announces with a triumphant grin, but I wasn't so sure.

Then I heard tapping from the meat store so I pulled down the lever with my paw and there was something hanging there which wasn't a juicy steak. It was the Peter Pepperoni himself with a length of tape over his mouth.

Gutzache untied the chef and pulled off his tape.

"Ow, that hurts!" says Pepperoni rubbing what's left of his moustache.

"You're in big trouble," says Gutzache. "You poisoned those guys and tied yourself up to make it look like an outside job!"

"Yeah so I locked myself in my meat cupboard from the outside after I knocked myself out with a frozen salami," said Pepperoni rubbing a bump on the back of his head.

Even I could see that the chef guy had a point, well, more a bump so

Gutzache asked if he saw anything.

"Well, stars mostly. I don't remember much just some guy in a monocle."

"A monocle?"

"Yeah, a monocle and old-fashioned clothes and a dodgy Italian accent."

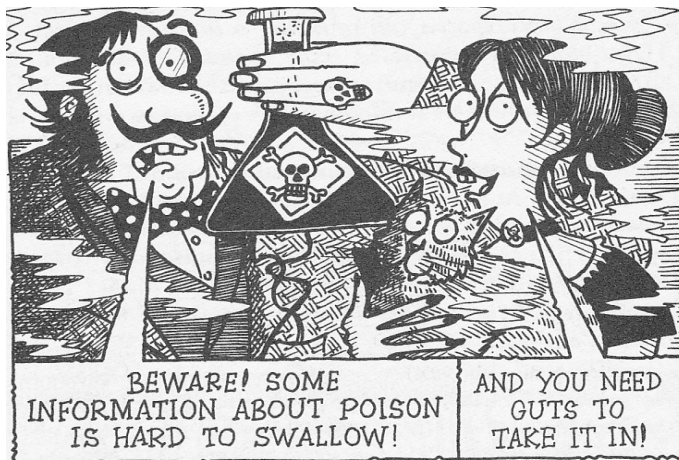
Gutzache's face lit up like a Christmas tree.

"I know that guy!" he says. "That's Count Orlando Vomito. That guy's got a real unsavoury reputation and that's just his cooking!"

That very afternoon we go to Count Vomito's palace. The Count ain't short of a few bucks, besides the palace he's got his own lab and a zoo full of dangerous animals. The Count greets us real friendly like and offers us all kinds of food and drink. Gutzache knows the Count because he's worked for him in the past and he's not gonna eat nothing.



“There’s something kinda wrong with the Count’s cooking,” says Gutzache on the way to the Palace. “I mean who wants to eat belladonna salad, toadstool pizza and cyanide cocktail anyhow?” I had to agree, it didn’t sound too appetising – not a doggie biscuit in sight.



“So you don’t want to try my homemade Brussels sprout and rhubarb leaf health drink,” said the Count in a disappointed voice, “and you don’t want the apple and arsenic pie made by my lovely assistant Donna Venoma. We served it at my latest dinner party

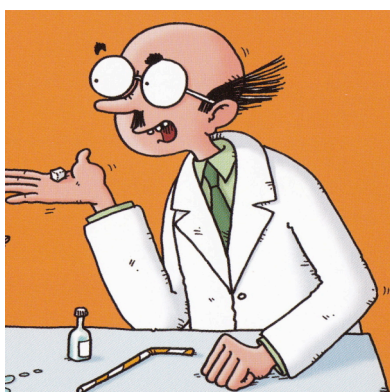
and not one of the guests complained! So what can I do for you guys maybe a little ‘Death by Chocolate’ it’s got extra death in it.”

“Er, we ain’t too hungry, Count,” said Gutzache. “Right now we gotta mystery to solve.”

Well, the Count was helpful, I’ll say that for him, but he and Donna Venoma were out of the frame. Seems they were hanging out with Baron Frankenstein and his Monster Boy at the Poisoner’s Ball last night, and their alibi was stronger than the smell from Gutzache’s socks. But if the Count and Donna were off the hook, something smelled bad and it wasn’t the socks.

“I don’t trust that guy,” whispers Gutzache. “We’re gonna do a surveillance operation. I gotta talk to my pal the Prof.”

And he was thinking so hard that he walks into a packing case in the Count’s hall.



The Prof is Professor N. Large. Gutzache and the Prof aren’t always pals and then there’s the Prof’s cat. Gutzache doesn’t like cats, which just goes to prove he ain’t wrong all the time. But Gutzache has done all kinds of jobs for the Prof and they usually involve testing the Prof’s shrinking machine and the jobs usually go wrong. I’ll never forget that time when Gutzache got lost in the Prof’s digestive system and you really don’t wanna

know where he ended up. Anyhow Gutzache figures the Prof owes him a favour. But the Prof greets us with a face like he’s lost a million dollars.

“Gutzache,” he cries, “I’ve been trying to call you for the past two days but your phone’s out of order ...”

“It’s called disconnected.”

“Someone’s stolen my time machine and you’ve got to help me get it back. In the wrong hands this machine could endanger the whole world!”

“Yeah, yeah, but I’m on a case,” says Gutzache. “Have you still got your shrinking machine?”

Gutzache had a plan. It was for him to shrink down to the size of a jellybean and sneak into the Count’s Palace by hanging onto my collar. Gutzache would be too small to spot and hopefully no-one would notice me because I’m a dog. But what if they did? Would I end up getting fed poisoned doggy sweets?

I wasn’t too sure about this plan but it worked and soon we were hiding in the Count’s kitchen. I came over all hungry so I started helping myself from the cat’s bowl – I figured it wasn’t poisoned as even the Count ain’t cruel enough to poison his own puss. Then I heard tiny screams and I remembered that Gutzache was on my collar and every time I stuck my head down he got shoved in the cat food. Still a dog’s gotta eat. Suddenly I heard a van pull up outside so I got up at the window and saw two guys getting out. One of them was looked like an evil Professor and the other was an evil-looking dame with a voice like a foghorn and real bad teeth. And then there was a dog who looked like me.

Whilst the humans got chatting to the Count and Donna Venoma I got talking with the dog in the kitchen. “Hi, I’m Watson” I said wagging my tail and giving his backside a friendly sniff.

“I’m hungry,” he said.

“That’s a weird name,” I said.

“No, I’m hungry but my name is Badog.”

“That’s still a weird name,” I said.

“Well, my master says I’m a bad dog. Say aren’t those mouldy chicken nuggets in the trash can?”

“Nothing but the best round here,” I agreed.

So we carry on talking and eating and that’s when Badog tells me his master is Professor Z and the assistant is Nora Nasty and they’re trying to take over the world.

“They’ve come to collect that time machine Big Tony’s boys lifted a couple of night’s ago,” said Badog with a mouth full of chicken.



Well, my ears pricked up and I wondered where Gutzache was but he had gone to clean off the cat food and check out the Palace. Just then Professor Z and Nora Nasty went past the window carrying that packing case Gutzache had bumped into last time.

‘That’s a lot of dog food,’ I thought. ‘So maybe Badog’s a big eater?’ He was still guzzling the chicken. I lay low for a while until I heard the humans go inside. Then I decided to sneak out of the kitchen and look for Gutzache but just then he dashes in squeaking at the top of his voice. (That’s not too loud because he’s only the size of a jelly bean, remember?)

“SNAKE!” he squeaks.

“Steak? Yes, please!” I say.

Then I look behind him and there’s a slithering snake baring its fangs and hissing like a tyre with a hole in it. I guess it must have escaped from the Count’s Zoo.

Gutzache squeaks and leaps onto me and holds me tight. And I squeak and leap onto Badog and hold him tight.

“Stay cool,” says Badog, “it’s a krait. It’s only sixteen times more deadly than a cobra but they only attack when scared.”

“But I am scared!” I say.

“And I don’t feel too krait,” squeaks Gutzache who’s trying to hide under my collar.

“So what’s the plan?” I ask Badog.

“Relax, buddy. We’ll try Plan B.”

“So what’s Plan B?” I ask.

“Same as usual - escape by moon rocket. That’s what my master always does when his evil plans get foiled.”

“Brilliant!” I barked, “but for one detail. We don’t have a moon rocket.”

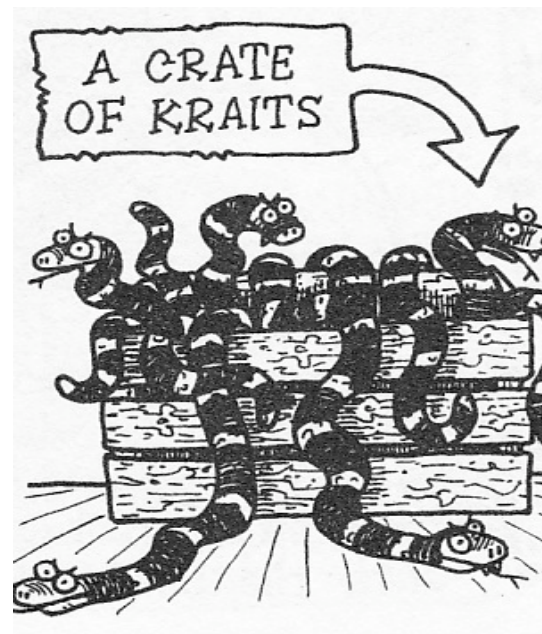
“Ah,” said Badog. “That’s where my plan falls down.”

Well, to be honest it didn’t get off the ground.

“Will you dogs shut up!” said Gutzache. If you knock that jacket off the table it will fall on the snake and we can escape!”

So that’s what I did and that’s how I saved us all. We were just running out the back door when we heard a crash. Not a big crash but the sort of crash you don’t want to hear if you own a brand-new van. Professor Z and Nora Nasty and Count Vomito and Donna Venoma dash out whilst I hide round the corner.

“WHAT THE ...?” yells Professor Z.

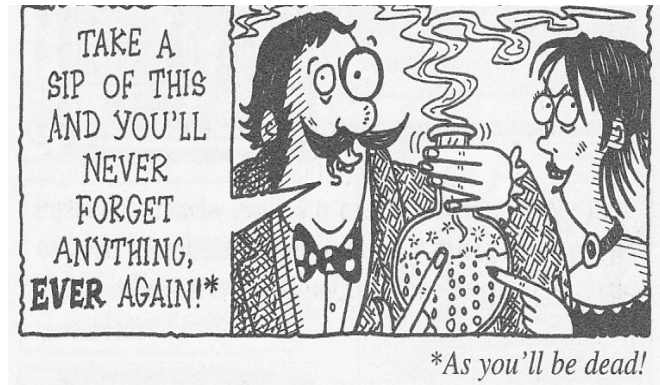


Nora Nasty's ugly mug drops open like a trapdoor filled with shark's teeth. The Count's monocle falls from his eyeball and Donna Venoma nearly faints. The Professor's van is peeled open like a big banana and there's a nasty smell of singed plastic. The packing case has gone. "SOMEONE'S STOLEN IT!" Professor Z roars.

The Count shrugs.

"It's nothing to do with me, so how about a nice glass of battery acid fizz with a long wiggly straw?"

The Count and Donna and the Professor and Nora and Badog all go back inside the Palace to work out what to do and there's the sound of raised voices and furniture being smashed as they work out what to do. Meanwhile



Gutzache and I make our escape. Later Gutzache tells the Prof the bad news.

"What I can't figure out," he says, "is what happened to the time machine. I mean like one moment it was there and one moment it wasn't. Hey you don't think like someone from the future took it away?"

"Hmm," says the Prof rubbing his chin and drawing mathematical diagrams on the blackboard. "The chronological disruption theory is an interesting concept."

"Yeah well, I only asked," says Gutzache taking a headache pill.

And that's when I told them what really happened. First I told them about the little spotted creature I saw running away from the Count's Palace. He had some kind of ray gun and he was muttering something like "Me Oddblob stop brainless humanoids from mis-using time travel technology!"

Then I tried to tell them who really did the poisoning. It WAS Count Vomito but he hadn't done it when he was at the ball. The Prof's machine got stolen the night before the poisoning. Professor Z had hidden it at the Count's Palace and the Count used it that night to time travel forward 24 hours to lock Peter Pepperoni in his own meat cupboard and poison the mob's mud pies. And why? Well, I guess it was the best way to stop Big Tony's mob from spilling the beans about the time machine.

It all made sense, but sadly I didn't. I said I told the humans but all they heard was "Grrr-ruff, whine, whimper, Ruff-grrrr, bow-wow-RUFFFFF!" (Anyhow you get the picture?)

"So what's up you daft mutt?" says Gutzache.

“Maybe he just wants to go walkies?” the Prof suggests.
Well, I tried my best, but you know what? I really did want to go walkies so I decided to quit whilst I wasn’t ahead. After all, every dog has his day – but today just wasn’t mine.



Dear Reader

Want to know what happens next? Fingers Garibaldi takes a basic maths course and becomes a maths teacher. Gutzache keeps doing jobs for the Professor and regretting it. The Prof shares his shrinking machine idea with other Horrible Scientists such as Professor Buzzoff and the Shrinking Scientists and they all have lots of interesting accidents. Count Vomito and Donna Venoma carry on with their nasty experiments. Professor Z keeps trying to

take over the world. He never does although he does get to rule the Moon. Now I bet you're wondering about the spotted alien guy - well, he's Oddblob the Blurb and he's back in The Terrible Truth about Time and in Space, Stars and Slimy Aliens when he gets to save the Earth even though he doesn't want to. And who knows where he'll turn up next?

Happy Reading!

The Author