



The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe: A novel

By Romain Puértolas

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A charmingly exuberant comic debut from an exciting new literary voice, and a “quirky, hilarious, elegantly written farce” (*The Daily Telegraph*), *The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe* is the globetrotting story of a trickster from rural India and his adventure of a lifetime.

When the fakir—a professional con artist—arrives in Paris, he has just one goal: to get to Ikea. Armed with only a counterfeit hundred-euro note in the pocket of his silk trousers, he is confident that he has all he needs to thrive. But his plan goes horribly awry when he hides inside a wardrobe at the iconic Swedish retailer—the first in a series of accidents that will send him on a whirlwind tour across Europe.

Pursued across the continent by a swindled taxi driver dead set on revenge, our fakir soon finds unlikely friends—from movie stars to illegal immigrants—in even unlikelier places. And, much to his own surprise, his heart begins to open to those around him as he comes to understand the universal desire to seek a better life in an often dangerous world.

Channeling the manic energy of the Marx Brothers and the biting social commentary of *Candide*, Romain Puértolas has crafted an unforgettable comic romp around Europe that is propelled by laughter, love, and, ultimately, redemption. (Meatballs not included but highly recommended.)

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Editorial Review

Review

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

Winner of the Grand Prix Jules Verne

Finalist for the Prix Renaudot

“A genuinely funny novel.” —*Vogue* (UK)

“Who would have thought that a comedy that mixes flat-pack furniture with magic could tackle some of the biggest subjects of our time? With a big heart, a brilliant sense of humour and an excellent translator, that’s what French writer Romain Puértolas achieves.” —*The Independent* (London)

“You’ll find yourself giggling.” —*The Sydney Morning Herald*

“The book is as heartfelt as it is original.” —*GQ* (UK)

“If you believe in zen and the art of flat pack furniture, this is the book for you.” —*Sunday Express* (London)

“Very funny.” —*Daily Mail* (London)

“With his first novel, as sprightly as it is funny, Romain Puértolas adds one hell of a cheerful note to this fall season. Total nonsense? Yes, but developed at a brisk pace by Romain Puértolas, who piles up the vivid scenes along with oodles of puns.” —*L’Express* (Paris)

“A laugh out loud funny debut that is as bonkers as the title suggests.” —*Candis Magazine* (UK)

“Puértolas’ debut is a charming, surreal comedy.” —*New Books Magazine* (UK)

“This brilliant first novel . . . delivers a contemporary, off-the-wall version of *Candide*. It’s a fable, a farce, but also and above all, a delicious satire of the modern world, that we’ll have to read while cautiously holding our sides!” —*Figaro Magazine* (Paris)

About the Author

ROMAIN PUÉRTOLAS was born in Montpellier and has lived in France, Spain, and the U.K., where he has been a DJ, singer-songwriter, language teacher, translator-interpreter, and steward. He most recently worked as a police inspector with the French border service, specializing in document fraud. *The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe* was a number-one best seller in France and has been published in thirty-five countries.

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A fakir by trade, Ajatashatru Oghash (pronounced Ajarofratstewohgosh!) had decided to travel incognito for his first trip to Europe. For this occasion, he had swapped his “uniform,” which consisted of a loincloth shaped like an enormous diaper, for a shiny gray suit and a tie rented for peanuts from Dilawar (pronounced

Die, lawyer!), an old man from the village who had, during his youth, been a representative for a famous brand of shampoo, and who still had an impressive head of (graying) hair.

In choosing this disguise, which he was to wear for both days of his trip, the fakir had secretly wished to be taken for a wealthy Indian industrialist—so much so that he had forsaken wearing comfortable clothes (i.e., a tracksuit and sandals) for the three-hour bus journey and a flight lasting eight hours and fifteen minutes. After all, pretending to be something he was not was his job: he was a fakir. He had kept only his turban, for religious reasons. Beneath it, his hair kept growing and growing. It was now, he estimated, about sixteen inches long, with a total population of thirty thousand (mostly germs and fleas).

Getting into the taxi that day, Ajatashatru (pronounced Acatinabatsuit) had immediately noticed that his peculiar get-up had produced the desired effect on the European, in spite of the tie, which neither he nor his cousin knew how to knot correctly, even after the perfectly clear but somewhat shaky explanations of Dilawar, who had Parkinson's. But obviously this was a minor detail, as it had gone unnoticed amid the overwhelming elegance of his attire.

A glance in the rearview mirror not being enough to contemplate such handsomeness, the Frenchman had actually turned around in his seat in order to better admire Ajatashatru, making the bones in his neck crack as he did so, as if he were preparing for an act of contortionism.

"Ikea?"

"Ikeaaa."

"Lequel? Er . . . what Ikea?" the driver had stammered, apparently as comfortable speaking English as a (holy) cow on ice skates. "Just Ikea. Doesn't matter. The one that best suits you. You're the Parisian."

Smiling, the driver had rubbed his hands before starting the engine.

The Frenchman has taken the bait, thought Ajatashatru (pronounced Ajackalthatateyou) with satisfaction. This new look was proving ideal for his mission. With a little luck, and if he didn't have to open his mouth too much, he might even pass for a native.

Ajatashatru was famous throughout Rajasthan for swallowing retractable swords, eating broken glass made from zero-calorie sugar, stabbing his arms with fake needles, and a heap of other conjuring tricks, the secrets of which were known only to him and his cousins, and which he was happy to label magical powers in order to bewitch the masses.

So, when the time came to pay the bill for the taxi ride, which amounted to €98.45, our fakir handed over the only money he had for his entire trip—a counterfeit €100 note printed on just one side—while nonchalantly gesturing to the driver that he could keep the change.

Just as the driver was sliding the note into his wallet, Ajatashatru created a diversion by pointing at the huge yellow letters that proudly spelled out IKEA above the blue building. The gypsy looked up long enough for the fakir to pull nimbly on the invisible elastic that connected his little finger to the €100 note. A tenth of a second later, the money had returned to its original owner.

"Oh, I almost forgot," said the driver, believing the note to be nestled safely within his wallet. "Let me give you my firm's card. In case you need a taxi for the way back. We have vans as well, if you need. Believe me, even in flatpack form, furniture takes up a lot of space."

Gustave never knew if the Indian had understood any of what he had just told him. Rummaging in the glove compartment, he pulled out a laminated business card emblazoned with a flamenco dancer and handed it to him.

“Merci,” said the foreigner.

When the red Mercedes of Gypsy Taxis had disappeared—although the fakir, who was only used to making small-eared Indian elephants disappear, could not claim to be responsible—Ajatashatru slipped the card into his pocket and contemplated the vast commercial warehouse that stretched out in front of him.

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Kent Walker:

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Michael Hollinger:

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