The world's greatest index

All the world's a globe, or from lemur to cosmonaut: Desmond Olivier Dingle's concise history of the human race by Patrick Barlow (Methuen, 1987) is a consummate parody of a scholarly volume throughout. The jacket blurb boasts, 'Once every few centuries, a truly major literary work is born. IT IS OUR BELIEF THAT THE BOOK NOW IN YOUR HANDS IS SUCH A WORK.'

The list of OTHER WORKS BY DESMOND OLIVIER DINGLE is footnoted, 'All the above soon to be published'.

The foreword is a letter from Omar Sharif, concluding, 'I will certainly do my best to read it before Christmas, but of course I cannot promise anything. ... P.S. Please get off my back'.

Three prefaces are followed by 172 pages of the most delightful misinformation. For example, from page 124, under 'The British Commonwealth':

'There were, of course, many people at this time who were true despots and tyrants such as Louis XIV, Ivan the Terrible, Frederick the Great of Russia, Madame Pompidou and Mrs Beaton. These rulers obviously did certain things to benefit their people like introducing bye-laws regarding dogs and putting up fountains in parks and so forth, but they were really only interested in one thing. Going to the hairdresser and masked balls.

'For this reason, there was numerous civil wars and French revolutions, in particular the French Revolution.'

The whole concludes with a most suitable single-page index, which we reproduce in its entirety and original layout. Sic, honestly.

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