

The Book in Practice

By Dante Harker

Hands up who thinks the book works in practice? Soon enough the book was ready.

The king, not a patient man, had not waited for the book to be finished before he'd begun work.

There were things to be done, temples to burn, ceremonies to crash and subsequent parties to plan in their place.

He'd been a busy man.

Tirelessly, too, the three generals and Dent had worked.

Dent had given each a task, by order of the king of course as none of the generals would ever take commands from Dent.

Durian had been tasked with winning over the soldiers.

He had taken them into battle, small battles that it was clear they would win.

And before they'd gone, he'd led them in prayer, something of an oddity at first, but something that quickly caught on amongst the generally poorly-educated men – they were very superstitious and liked anything that would bring them good luck.

After their inevitable victories, Durian had thanked The Good Lord for watching over them, and stated that they couldn't have done it without His help.

He had also spoken about a great place, where any soldiers who had died were lucky to go, as they would rest in beautiful peace for all time.

The men lapped it up.

Prayer groups sprang up throughout the camps, thankful for the victory, but also asking God if he could bless the soldiers' families, or watch over their homes – everyone wanted something.

The more creative men or those who could see a way of making money didn't bother with the prayer groups; they instead started carving images of God's son, who they had

been hearing so much about.

Once carved, the men would sell the images on, targeting specifically, those men who hadn't done so well in battle, or they would hang around the hospital tent, selling their tat to the weak and dying.

The king was happy with Durian's results, so much so that he lavished on the general land and riches, which only served to push the general into even more creative ways to get The Good Lord's message across.

Dent had given Lekk a task that played up to his talents.

Dent knew the general was sly and conniving, two skills that were much needed when it came to fabricating history.

It was clear from the very first meeting that if the king's plan was to work, history would have to be changed.

The history books didn't contain a single reference to The One True God and this wouldn't do.

Lekk, a brilliant strategist, excelled.

He'd been working with the writers and between them they'd come up with a reason The Good Book was only coming out

now.

In the past it had been a collection of stories told from generation to generation, and these were only now being collected together to continue the Lord's work.

Some of these stories had been written down, and had been written down at the time of the Lord's son.

This had meant creating old-looking tablets, before having someone "stumble" across them, and leaving some to be found at a later date.

Without the tablets people might have claimed that the stories had distorted over time and that there was no truth to them and Lekk couldn't have that.

The general had his men plant artefacts and scrolls.

He worked the Lord into every conversation and soon enough everyone in the palace was doing the same.

These were slow and simple times, people were easy to convince and those who weren't were often drawn in by the growing weight of opinion.

Or, they just loved the first party that was thrown in the name of God's son's birthday – an amazing time where the king gave away gifts plus food and drink for the masses.

New songs were written telling the world about God; all of which had almost hypnotically catchy tunes that could soon be heard all over the kingdom.

For the present at least, they'd decided to leave killing the non-believers until after the book launch.

Again the king was ecstatic and generous when he heard about Lekk's successes.

He particularly liked Lekk's idea to have the tongues cut out of all the craftsmen who worked on the project.

The scribes would have suffered the same fate if Lekk hadn't needed them to vocalise their ideas for the book – they, instead, were under pain of death if they spoke to anyone outside the palace about their grand endeavour.

General Score had been ordered to work with the king.

Pagans didn't burn themselves and when local religious festivals were crashed, General Score's men were ready and able to deal with any uprising.

The book was finished and everyone involved was gathered in a stateroom.

There were actually very few people who had been in on the secret.

The king, the three generals, Dent, several scribes and the odd craftsman here and there who had been needed to make tablets or fake scrolls, plus a couple of slaves.

Everyone else had been kept out of the loop.

Outside of the fifteen or so people in the stateroom – those of any importance seated, the others standing around the outside of the room - everyone believed what they were being told was the truth.

The king had also invited the seer, not that he put much stock in her words, but because she was present at the first meeting, and he needed everyone who knew about the plan to attend this gathering.

The holy man at the first meeting had long since died.

King Barkus sat on a mighty jewel-encrusted throne at the end of the stateroom.

The king had scanned the leather-bound black book that he held in his hand.

He'd flicked through the ten main laws – they seemed ok, a little too much protection for neighbours, and he wasn't sure about the honouring your mother and father part (especially given he'd killed his), but it all looked ok.

At least that page and the few others he'd looked at; he hadn't scanned much deeper than that, the text had been small and the book huge.

Plus, he'd ordered the scribes to give a rundown of the book at its launch.

Two scribes stood in front of the king; there were eight in total who had worked on the book, but these two were deemed most articulate and given the honour of doing the presentation.

The other three men were sat on the third row back.

Fifteen chairs had been set out in three rows facing the king and now all eyes were on the scribes.

The scribes began to speak.

They told a story, a before and after story.

They explained that God used to act a lot more.

He used to throw thunderbolts, talk through burning bushes and all kinds of other fun stuff, but that was all before he'd sent his son to earth.

While his son had been around, the son had instructed a bunch of people to spread the Lord's word and it was the stories of these people that had been written down in The Good Book.

(This wasn't going to be the final name of the book, it would need something catchy, something singular – a list had been given to the king, but as yet, he had been too busy terrorising other religions to choose the final name.) 'So, if God acted so much before he sent his son to earth, why doesn't he act after?' asked the king.

He was doing his best to follow what the scribes were saying, but all he really wanted to hear is that this book would make his life easier.

And when he'd agreed to this project he hadn't expected the scribes to write a mighty tome – surely a leaflet summarising the major points would have been quicker? 'Well, my king,

we needed to show that God is indeed powerful.

We had to show him act and show that he will act with vengeance if his words are not followed.' The scribe was old, his voice slow and plodding making each word seem to hang in the air, gasping for breath before slowly dying as another word came to take its place.

'Of course, we also needed the world to know that they must do as the king says, that the king's word is important and that king's act as God's right-hand man.' The king interrupted: 'so, you show the god, sorry, God, killing and maiming before he sends his son, then after his son is no more, you put the choice to kill into the hands of man.

This means my hands, me being king and all.' 'That's right my king, we explained it through a set of stories, told about the God's son dying for man's sins and ...' 'How did you kill God's son in the end?' The king interrupted again, he wasn't really interested in all the details, just the juicy ones, and just how it helped him.

'Crucifixion, after a pretty horrific drag through the streets carrying the cross on his back,' the scribe said, sensing the king's lust for the more gory parts of the new work.

‘Cool!’ the king said, trying his best to focus on the proceedings though the sun was blasting into the room and everything was getting very hot.

It all kind of made sense to the king now.

He liked the idea that he could kill and say he was doing it in the name of God.

He loved that he could quash his enemies and plan huge parties three or four times a year.

Plus, having new holidays did deal with his slaves wanting time off to go and celebrate one deity or another.

They would now have to stick to his God’s holidays.

The scribes continued to expand on their new work.

They gave a list of things that God did not like – a pretty extensive list, the King thought, but then none of the stuff in there actually applied to him.

‘So, in this “before” part of the book, what kind of things does God get up to? You mentioned thunderbolts?’ the king interrupted and then talked over the older of the two scribes, a man who looked like he might have actually died several

years before.

‘Well, my king,’ the old scribe started, his voice slow and ponderous, and much to the king’s annoyance, the scribe didn’t come with a wind up key, ‘we decided that The One True God, would smite regularly throughout the Old Testament “before” section.’ The king already knew this, he wanted to know who God would be smiting, and when had they decided to call it The Old Testament? ‘Get on with it would you, scribe, you might look dead already, but some of us have lives to lead!’ ‘Sorry, my king.’ ‘And why are you calling me “my king”, surely I’m your lord?’ the king snapped, the heat now really getting to him.

He’d expected this whole affair over in twenty minutes.

All he wanted was a quick rundown, and then he could kill everybody and go get some lunch.

‘Well,’ the scribe hesitated, ‘we thought “Lord” could be saved for The One True God’.

The king bit his lip; he knew what was coming, so decided against butchering the scribe.

Instead of reacting, the king simply said, ‘so, who does God throw his thunderbolts at?’ The scribe, amazed that he

wasn't dead, continued 'well, one example is where God decides to destroy an entire city.' 'Cool, why?' asked Barkus.

His words suggested interest, but his tone was clearly screaming 'get on with it!' 'Well, we chose a city where the people were keen on sodomy?' 'Sodomy? What the hell is that?' the king screamed, he was sick of all these new words, pissed that they dare give away his title of Lord, and getting increasingly hungry, which never helped anything.

'Oh sorry, my king, that's the word we've coined for any kind of sex that can't produce babies.

The example we use in The Good Book is "man love" – so when two men have sex with one another that counts as sodomy.' 'Really? You decided to make 'man love' a bad thing? Surely it isn't?' the king sniped, looking at Boy who gave Barkus a warm smile that calmed the king and allowed the scribe to answer and not get his throat cut for deriding one of the king's favourite pastimes.

'Well, it might not be, my king,' (at this last 'my king' Barkus decided that if the scribe said it one more time he was going to hack out his heart and feed it to him or something equally as vile), 'but a lot of our worst enemies indulge in this practice and, if we make it a sin, then we can use these new teachings to wipe them out.' Again, the scribe's words made sense.

The king didn't like the idea that what he did with Boy would be seen as a sin.

But still, he was the king and the rules in The Good Book, didn't apply to him.

And outlawing 'man love' might make the practice just something for the great and the mighty to participate in and not something for the masses.

He let the scribe continue but when he went on to talk about how, when writing the book, they'd been purposely vague, how they'd used lots of stories with hidden meanings and other such crap, he'd pretty much switched off.

The last thing he heard before his thoughts left the room entirely was the notion that by being vague, it left the book open for interpretation.

He thought this was a pretty stupid idea, favouring himself a more clear and direct approach, but given he'd already made up his mind about the book, he didn't bother interrupting.

'So, what do you think? My king, what do you think?' Luckily for the scribe, the king hadn't been paying much attention.

Barkus pulled his thoughts away from how he'd like to be entertained that afternoon and tried to focus on the question.

But as he hadn't been listening for the last twenty minutes, he wasn't sure what he thought.

He looked around the room, trying to catch someone's eye who he could call upon for help.

He looked to the generals, but they all knew better than to hold the king's eye.

Even General Score was looking away, as he had been distracted by a slave who had come to tell him that dinner would be ready in half-an-hour.

At last the king's eyes fell on the seer, she wasn't looking at him either, instead she was batting imaginary flies away her face.

Still, she offered him a way to save face..