

The Autist's Guide to the Galaxy: Navigating the World of Ordinary People

Clara Törnvall

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Clara Törnvall's cheeky, illuminating social manual *The Autist's Guide to the Galaxy* turns the tables on autism conversations by focusing on how to engage with neurotypical people.

Because articles about neurodiversity are often penned by non-autists—sometimes with the implicit directive to “help” those with diagnoses conform themselves more to the rest of the world—Swedish author, producer, and autist Törnvall steps in with lighthearted realism. Here, neurotypicals are explained as the ones who can't help but seem different. Törnvall examines their fashion, how their thoughts and conversations track along other paths (cuing in on tone, subtext, and body language), and their penchant for assuming that others are like them.

Frequent topics surround the discrepancy between what neurotypicals say versus what they intend or hope that others will understand. Whether covering perplexing neurotypical habits of making “small talk” (in which connections are sought, but without too much depth) or of telling white lies and thinking that other people must have hidden agendas, these discussions are candid and eye-opening. Other useful subjects glance at autist dating, education, and self-advocacy. The result is both a humorous semi-anthropological study and a valuable survey that includes quotations from fellow autists about their experiences. Misunderstandings that arise—as when neurotypicals give directions that are then interpreted in literal terms but whose real meaning they thought would be clear enough, or in relationship scenarios, where an autist is expected to “read” what isn't being said—inspire empathy for the autist's plight. Indeed, here, amid the gentle skewering of people's sometimes illogical ways, there are real insights to glean in considering people's inherent differences.

With its tips to help autists thrive, *The Autist's Guide to the Galaxy* is an encouraging, entertaining overview of common social challenges.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2024)

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