

# DOUGLAS ADAMS



## THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY ORIGINAL RADIO SCRIPTS

Edited and introduced by  
producer Geoffrey Perkins

# THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

The Original Radio Scripts

Douglas Adams

Edited, and with an Introduction by Geoffrey Perkins  
(who produced it)

With another Introduction by Douglas Adams,  
largely contradicting the one by Geoffrey Perkins

25th Anniversary Edition, with new and updated Introduction  
by Geoffrey Perkins, not to mention a 'Lost' *Hitchhiker* Script  
and a *Hitchhiker's Who's Who* by M. J. Simpson

PAN BOOKS

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To the BBC Radio studio managers

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## **Publisher's Note**

*Hitchhiker's* was spelled in almost all possible ways from its creation in 1978: in October 2000 Douglas Adams decided that everyone should spell it the same way from then on. In the *25th Anniversary Edition* we have used his preferred spelling in the new material, and in the original material it is printed as it was in 1985.

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## Introduction to the First Edition

The first time I can remember coming across Douglas Adams he was standing on a rickety chair making a speech, and the thing I remember most about that was that it was really rather a strange thing to do, since he was already some six inches taller than anyone else in the room. He also pressed on with his speech despite being aggressively heckled by members of the cast of the Cambridge Footlights show that he had just directed.

It was plain here was someone prepared to stick his neck out further than most people, someone who would carry on in the face of adversity, and someone who would shortly fall off a chair. I was right on all three counts.

Some years later when I was producing the radio series of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* I was also to learn that he was an amazingly imaginative comic writer whose desire to push back the barriers of radio comedy was only matched by his desire for large meals in restaurants.

I came to work for BBC Radio from a shipping company in Liverpool. I only went there because when I told the University appointment board that I didn't know what I wanted to do they immediately told me to go into shipping. It was only afterwards that I realised they probably recommend everyone who comes in on a Wednesday and doesn't know what they want to do to go into shipping. On Thursdays it's probably accountancy, and so on. I sat around wondering what I was doing there for six months until I was recommended to the BBC as a potential producer by Simon Brett, who also started Douglas off with *Hitch-Hiker's*. We both owe him an enormous debt.

Prior to the shipping company I had been at Oxford and directed the University revue at the Edinburgh Festival for the previous two years. This made me an unlikely person to work with Douglas, he being a Cambridge man, not to mention nearly twice my size. If you saw us together you would immediately think of Simon and Garfunkel. Except that I don't write songs and Douglas doesn't sing. Well, he does, but he shouldn't. He is, however, a very good guitarist (unlike Art Garfunkel) and is very keen on Paul Simon, whom he exactly resembles in no way at all. In fact Paul Simon actively refused to meet Douglas in New York when he heard how tall he was. This may have been because he had heard that Douglas was prone to falling off rickety chairs and to breaking his nose with his own knee and so was liable to step on him accidentally and squash him.

Douglas is also the only person I know who can write backwards. Four days before one of the *Hitch-Hiker's* recordings he had written only eight pages of script. He assured me he could finish it in time. On the day of the recording, after four days of furious writing, the eight pages had shrunk to six. Some

people would think this was a pretty clever trick but I've been with Douglas when he's writing and I know how he does it. When he wants to change anything, a word or a comma, he doesn't just cross it out and carry on; he takes the whole page out of the typewriter and starts all over again from the top. Yes, he is something of a perfectionist but he would also do almost anything to avoid having to write the next bit. His other favourite way of putting off writing the next bit is to have a bath. When a deadline is really pressing he can have as many as five baths a day. Consequently, the later the script the cleaner he gets. You can't fault him for personal hygiene in a crisis.

But of course much of the strength of *Hitch-Hiker's* comes from the fact that Douglas has sweated over every word of it. It's not just funny, it is also very good writing; and one of the few comedy shows where people don't think that the actors have made it all up as they went along. And at least Douglas was never quite as bad at overrunning deadlines as Godfrey Harrison, who wrote the popular 50s radio comedy show *The Life of Bliss*, who often finished the script some hours after the audience had all gone home.

Fortunately we didn't have to worry about the audience leaving. Amazingly there was some debate when the programme started about whether we should have a studio audience, since at that time nearly all radio comedy shows had one. In fact an audience for *Hitch-Hiker's* would have needed about a week of spare time, since that's about how long it took to make each show.

They'd also have been thoroughly confused by the whole thing, since much of the time the show was recorded out of order, rather like a film, and only half the actors in any scene would actually be visible on stage. In fact we evolved a whole new form of radio performance, which Mark Wing-Davey called 'cupboard acting'. All the various robots, computers, Vogons and so on had their voice treatments added after the recordings, so it was necessary to separate them from the other actors, and this we did by putting them in cupboards. During the series several elderly and very distinguished actors were reluctantly shut up in cupboards and only got to talk to the other actors through a set of headphones. Sometimes we would forget all about them and long after their scenes had finished a plaintive voice would be heard in the control box, saying, 'Can I come out now?' The experience was all the odder because we recorded the shows in the Paris, BBC Radio's main audience studio, in London's Lower Regent Street, since at the time it was the only stereo studio with a multi-track tape recorder (albeit only eight tracks). The actors would consequently perform in front of rows and rows of empty seats, and sometimes when three or four aliens were taking part in a scene you could look out of the control box and there would be nobody on the stage at all. They'd all be in various cupboards dotted around the studio. Sometimes the actors played more than one part, sometimes as many as five parts. This of course was so that they could show off their versatility. It was also so that we could manage to bring the show in somewhere in the region of the budget.

The actors were recorded without all the backgrounds and effects, which were put on afterwards. Contrary to many people's beliefs most of the sounds are not pure 'radiophonic sound' but were made up by playing around with some of the thousands of ordinary BBC effects discs. Most of the synthesised effects and music were done on an ARP Odyssey, which sounds impressive unless you happen to know that it is in fact a tacky little machine which can be found irritating people in cocktail bars all over the world. The Radiophonic Workshop itself (housed in a pink painted converted ice rink in Maida Vale) is a marvellous lash up of bits and pieces of gadgetry gradually picked up over the years. When we started the series we spent many hours just finding out what some of the equipment could do (or not do in the case of their vocoder, which must have been one of the first ones around,

took up a whole room and stubbornly refused to do anything other than emit various vaguely unpleasant hums). However, if we had known how all the equipment worked we'd have missed all the fun of playing around with it, and I'd have missed all the fun of finding out what the pubs are like in Maida Vale.

More playing around went on in the Paris Studio, where most of the shows were put together. Many of the backgrounds and incidental noises (like Marvin's walk) were put on loops of tape which went round endlessly. Sometimes we would have three or four of these loops on the go at any one time and the cubicle would look as if it had been strewn with grim black Christmas decorations. But I can't speak too highly of the efforts of the technical team, led by Alick Hale-Munro. I particularly remember one occasion when, after we'd overrun our mixing session for the umpteenth time, I received a stern phone call strictly forbidding me from incurring any more overtime for the studio managers. So at six o' clock sharp, I said, 'Right, that's it,' whereupon they all looked at me rather incredulously and said, 'But we're half way through this scene.' When I explained I wasn't allowed to let them run over they insisted on finishing the scene and said they had no intention of claiming any overtime. That sort of attitude was undoubtedly a great factor in the success of the show.

The first time that we realised the show might not just be different but also successful was probably when a letter managed to find its way to my office addressed simply to Megadodo Publications, Megadodo House, Ursa Minor. Now if the British Post Office knew about the show then we really must have been on to something.

*Hitch-Hiker's* became rather a freak success for a radio show; after all, good as it was, *Under Milk Wood* didn't go on to spawn a spin-off towel. Feeling, however, that radio shows were not big money spinners, BBC Enterprises turned down the suggestion of doing a book or a record of the show and the last I heard they were fiercely trying to win back lost ground by obtaining the soft toy rights. We were soon deluged by letters, some of which are quoted from in the footnotes (and some of which sadly seem to have disappeared somewhere between the BBC and Original Records, with whom we made the two *Hitch-Hiker's* albums).

The show was lavishly praised by all of the radio critics (except one who found it 'noisy and confused') and it went on to win a variety of radio awards (though it failed to win a European award, possibly because of a rather erratic translation into French).

The show was also a big hit when it was transmitted on the BBC World Service, though there were one or two interesting criticisms. One listener in Belgium (excuse my language) asked, 'Why should humour be frantic? Do we have to get it over quick, so that the smile can appear on the face, like when a doctor swiftly jabs a hypodermic into the bottom of a luckless child?' A listener in Sierra Leone thought that 'as a source of information it is misleading' and asked if it could be 'replaced by something more educative, such as a programme on National Anthems of the world', and a listener in India strongly objected to 'Robots taking part in a comedy show'. Who knows, we may start receiving messages from beings who have picked it up on the other side of the galaxy complaining about our inaccurate portrayal of the Vogons and saying how much they prefer their own comedy spectacular, *Eg Twonkwarth El Ploonikon*.

The people who heard the show on the BBC World Service will have heard a slightly different version from the original BBC Radio 4 transmission. Those people who heard the BBC transcription service disc will have heard another version and those who heard the commercial records will have heard



another version again. Those people who saw the television show will have seen another different version, and those people who have read the books will have come across yet another different version. But this book contains the original radio scripts, *Hitch-Hiker's* as it was originally written, and exactly as it appeared for the very first time.

Well, all right, like everything else involving *Hitch-Hiker's* that is not exactly what it seems. These scripts include numerous alterations, amendments and additions, often made during recording, which helped to make a little more sense of the whole thing and gave us something to do while we were waiting for Douglas to come up with the next page. In addition some bits have been restored which were cut from the original transmission. Some of these bits were cut because, although they read well they slowed down the dramatic pace of a scene. Some were cut simply for reasons of time, since each show had to be exactly twenty-eight minutes and thirty seconds and unfortunately twenty-eight minutes and thirty seconds is not a magically perfect length for every single show that is made. The pieces that have been restored are indicated in the script in italics.

The short captions at the start of each episode, or fits as they were called (from Lewis Carroll's *Hunting of the Snark*), are the original billings from the *Radio Times*, and the Announcer lines appeared at the end of the programme credits and were thought up either by me or Douglas.

I have added some footnotes at the end of each episode which are not in any way intended to be comprehensive but simply contain one or two things that might interest people. They may not always be absolutely true or accurate, but where they are inaccurate I hope that (to quote the *Guide*) they are at least 'definitively inaccurate'.

I was aware of the sort of things people might be interested in from some of the letters. About half of them asked what the signature tune was, and since one person said they would 'like to be able to hear the excellent background music without the annoying intrusion of the voices',<sup>1</sup> I have included details of the main pieces of music that we used in the series.

Most of the effects (called EX) directions that Douglas wrote have been retained. One critic wrote that *Hitch-Hiker's* often sounded like somebody thinking out loud, and nowhere does Douglas do that more evidently than in these notes.

My warmest thanks to the cast, who are all named in the footnotes, to Simon Brett, who has helped me to be accurate about the early days, to Paddy Kingsland for great help and moral support at the time and some memory-jogging lunches that helped me with the footnotes, to Alick Hale-Munro for his fantastic hard work on the shows and his magnificent door clunks, to Paul Hawdon, Lisa Braun and Cohn Duff, who helped him, to Dick Mills and Harry Parker at the Radiophonic Workshop, to my then head of department, David Hatch, who helped me make the impossible deadline of the second series, to Richard Wade, who kept repeating the show on Radio 4 at all hours of the day and night, to my ex-secretary Anne Ling, who was superbly unflappable at the time, who typed the script whenever she was given a chance and who has been of great assistance in getting various bits and pieces together for this book, and finally to Douglas for giving me such a tremendous opportunity as a producer. May we share many more large meals.

**Geoffrey Perkins**

*July 1985*

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## Introduction to the 25th Anniversary Edition

Having just re-read my first introduction I was reminded that we did indeed share and enjoy many more large meals but it was poignant to read this introduction again with its constant referrals to Douglas as if he is still with us.

The morning that John Lennon was shot I remember being woken up by Douglas, who just wanted to talk about his shock. In a terrible echo, on 11 May 2001 I was woken up to be told of Douglas's own sudden death and, in turn, I phoned several other people wanting to talk about the shock and to share memories of him.

Huge.

Enthusiastic.

Clumsy.

Often enthusiastic and clumsy at the same time. Things that weren't nailed down were in trouble once Douglas got going.

Tactless. I got quite a few calls over the years about exciting-sounding projects only to find out that I was actually phoning me to see if I had the number of someone else who he would rather like to do it or that a project which sounded fantastic and involved travelling round the world for six months would actually involve me being in London for six months editing random bits of tape that he would send back from exotic places.

Impractical. The Footlights show where I first came across him was pure Douglas. Inspired ideas crashed up against impossible staging. I remember an endless blackout while a huge pillar was manhandled on stage with an actor sitting on top of it. Some twenty years later I was in Douglas's flat with Jimmy Mulville (curiously the same person who had been heckling Douglas as he went through the chair at that Footlights after-show party). We had come to talk to Douglas about working with us at Hat-Trick and for about an hour Douglas, with all the huge enthusiasm he could muster (which was quite a bit), talked about some of his ideas. The main one seemed to involve sending him round the world (there's obviously a theme here) to deliver a lecture. This would be exactly the same lecture in each place, but the big thing was apparently going to be that people would then be able to access any part of this from a whole range of different lecture halls. When Douglas finally paused to take breath and left the room for a second I turned to Jimmy and said, 'Any idea what Douglas has been talking

about for the last hour?’ and Jimmy replied, ‘No. Absolutely none.’

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Generous. He could be enormously kind. At a moment some years ago of personal tragedy he was the person who dropped everything to be with us and was hugely generous in ways which we only found out about quite a bit later.

Brilliant. Like Marvin, he had a brain the size of a planet. And he had a breadth of interests that I hadn’t fully appreciated until someone at his memorial service berated me for a fixation with *Hitchhiker’s* as Douglas’ one big thing, pointing out that his knowledge and enthusiasm for both conservation and computers had had a massive impact on saving wildlife in Africa.

It’s hard to remember now that the radio series of *Hitchhiker’s* was almost Douglas’ last attempt to make it as a comedy writer. He had been struggling to get anything on a variety of topical shows like the long- running Radio 4 series *Week Ending*. But the other side of someone who was a bit of a flop as a topical one-line-joke writer turned out to be someone who was just about the best ever writer of sustained, inventive surreal comic narrative.

At one point Douglas got keen on making another radio series. His plan was to build his own studio so we could experiment with effects and music for as long as we liked. This was in 1985. If it had ever happened I think we would still have been there fifteen years later. But it would have been stimulating. After all, I think I had the best and most creative time of my life stuck in a studio with an enthusiastic comic genius who was in so many ways the size of a planet.

**Geoffrey Perkins**  
*19 December 2002*

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## Foreword by Douglas Adams: ‘Where do you get all your ideas from?’

The story goes that I first had the idea for *The Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* while lying drunk in a field in Innsbruck (or ‘Spain’ as the BBC TV publicity department authoritatively has it, probably because it’s easier to spell).

Apparently I was hitch-hiking around Europe at the time, and had a copy of *The Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to Europe* (by Ken Walsh, also published by Pan Books) with me at the time. I didn’t have *Europe On* (as it was then) *Five Dollars A Day* because I simply wasn’t in that kind of financial league.

My condition was brought on not so much by having had too much drink, so much as having had a bit to drink and nothing to eat for two days. So as I lay there in this field, the stars span lazily around my head, and just before I nodded off, it occurred to me that someone ought to write a *Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* as well.

Now, this may well be true.

It sounds plausible. It certainly has a familiar kind of ring to it. Unfortunately, I’ve only got my own word for it now, because the constant need to repeat the story (‘Tell me, Douglas, how did it all *start* . . .?’) has now completely obliterated my memory of the actual event. All I can remember now is the sequence of words which makes up the story – (‘Well, it’s very interesting you should ask that, Brian. I was lying in this field . . .’), and if I ever forget that, then the whole thing will have vanished from my mind forever.

If I then come across a BBC press release which says that I thought of the idea in Spain, I’ll probably think it must be true. After all, they are the BBC, aren’t they?

However, I wouldn’t like to create the impression that all a writer has to do is sit in a field cramming himself with a couple of Stella Artoises whereupon a passing idea will instantly pounce on him, and then it’s all over bar the typing. An idea is only an idea.

An actual script, on the other hand, is hundreds of ideas bashed around, screwed up, thrown into the bin, fished out of the bin an hour later and folded up into thick wads and put under the leg of a table to stop it wobbling. And then the same again for the next line, and the the next, and so on, until you have a whole page or the table finally keels over.

The problem is that you can't go off and rave it up in a field every time you need an idea, so you just have to sit there and think of the little bastards. And if you can't think of them you just have to sit there. Or think of an excuse for doing something else. That's quite easy. I'm very good at thinking of reasons for suddenly having a quick bath or a Bovril sandwich. Which is why truthful explanations of how writers get ideas tend to be rather dull:

I sat and stared out of the window for a while, trying to think of a good name for a character. I told myself that, as a reward, I would let myself go and make a Bovril sandwich once I'd thought of it.

I stared out of the window some more and thought that probably what I really needed to help get the creative juices going was to have a Bovril sandwich now, which presented me with a problem that I could only successfully resolve by thinking it over in the bath.

An hour, a bath, three Bovril sandwiches, another bath and a cup of coffee later, I realised that I still hadn't thought of a good name for a character, and decided that I would try calling him Zaphod Beeblebrox and see if that worked.

I sat and stared out of the window for a while, trying to think of something for him to say . . .

Zaphod was definitely a three-sandwich idea. Arthur Dent came quite easily after a couple of biscuits and a cup of tea. Vogon poetry I remember was a tough one, and only came after several miles of rampaging round the country lanes of Stalbridge, Dorset, in a track suit trying to work off the effects of thinking up the Babel Fish (six slices of toast and peanut butter, a packet of crisps and a shower). Marvin was . . .

Marvin was different. Marvin was actually based on a real person, but the person concerned tends to get annoyed if I go around telling people it was him. However, he gets even more annoyed if I don't go around telling people it was him because then he has to tell people himself before he can tell them how annoyed he is about it, and I think he finds that particularly irritating.

There is a rumour to the effect that the person I'm referring to here is the comedy writer Andrew Marshall, who co-wrote *The Burkiss Way*, *End of Part One*, and *Whoops, Apocalypse*, but I would like to emphasise that it is only a rumour. I know that for a fact because I started it.

Is there any evidence to support the rumour? Well, it is true that when I used to know Andrew well, he was the sort of person you would feel rather nervous about introducing to people. Suppose you were with a group of people in a pub and he joined you. You would say, 'Andrew, meet . . .' whoever it was, and everyone would say hello to him. There would be a slight pause, and then Andrew would say something so devastatingly rude to them that they would be absolutely stunned rigid. In the silence that followed Andrew would then wander off into a corner and sit hunched over a pint of beer. I would go over and say, 'Andrew, what on earth was the point of saying that?' and Andrew would say, 'What's the point of not saying it? What's the point of being here? What's the point of anything? Including being alive at all? That seems particularly pointless to me.'

However, this is all purely circumstantial evidence, because in fact all comedy writers are like that.

Reading through what I've written so far, I feel I must correct the impression that it's all done with sandwiches, because there's also a lot of playing the guitar very loudly involved as well.

This used only mildly to irritate the neighbours when I just had an acoustic guitar which I would practise intricate fingerpicking styles on when suffering from writer's block. However, since I bought a Fender Stratocaster a couple of years ago even a mild case of searching for *le mot juste* can now

cause pain and anger along most of Upper Street.

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I also suffer from the fallacy of thinking that playing records will help you work. It doesn't. You end up listening to the record and then you have to start work all over again when it's finished. However, this did in the end have a lot to do with how *Hitch-Hiker's* was actually produced.

Though it was now ten years since *Sergeant Pepper* had revolutionised the way that people in the rock world thought about sound production, it seemed to me, listening to radio comedy at the time, that we still hadn't progressed much beyond Door Slam A, Door Slam B, Footsteps On a Gravel Path and the odd Comic Boing. This wasn't so much lack of imagination, as a perfectly reasonable worry that an overindulgence in sound effects easily creates irritating mish mash which detracts from a strong script and fails to disguise a weak one. Also it took time, which, it was felt, could be better used making more programmes.

However, long-standing rules are made to be broken, and I wanted *Hitch-Hiker's* to sound like a rock album. I wanted the voices and the effects and the music to be so seamlessly orchestrated as to create a coherent picture of a whole other world – and I said this and many similar sorts of things and waved my hands around a lot, while people nodded patiently and said, 'Yes, Douglas, but what's it actually about?'

We never did clear that one up, of course, but I think we can fairly claim to have made some good noises. In fact recording these shows was some of the best and most nerve-racking fun I've ever had. Were we doing something extraordinary, or were we simply going mad? It was mostly very hard to tell. Because the BBC Light Entertainment Department had simply never attempted anything like this before, we were largely having to invent the process by which we worked as we went along. Geoffrey Perkins has explained how a lot of the production techniques gradually evolved elsewhere in this book, and I only want to add one thing – which is to say to him and to Simon Brett and Paddy Kingsland and John Lloyd and all the studio managers who worked so incredibly hard and inventively on the show, that the way you really get good ideas is from working with talented people you have fun with.

**Douglas Adams**  
*London July 1985*

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# **THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY**

An epic adventure in time and space including some helpful advice on how to see the Universe for less than thirty Altairian dollars a day.

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# Complete Cast List

**THE BOOK:** Peter Jones  
**ARTHUR DENT:** Simon Jones  
**FORD PREFECT:** Geoffrey McGivern  
**PROSSER AND PROSTETNIC VOGON JELTZ:** Bill Wallis  
**LADY CYNTHIA FITZMLTON:** Jo Kendall  
**THE BARMAN:** David Gooderson  
**EDDIE THE COMPUTER AND THE VOGON GUARD:** David Tate  
**MARVIN, THE PARANOID ANDROID:** Stephen Moore  
**ZAPHOD BEEBLEBROX:** Mark Wing-Davey  
**TRIALLIAN:** Susan Sheridan  
**SLARTIBARTFAST:** Richard Vernon  
**DEEP THOUGHT:** Geoffrey McGivern  
**MAJIKTHISE AND THE CHEERLEADER:** Jonathan Adams  
**FIRST COMPUTER PROGRAMMER AND BANG BANG:** Ray Hassett  
**SECOND COMPUTER PROGRAMMER:** Jeremy Browne  
**VROOMFONDEL AND SHOOTY:** Jim Broadbent  
**FRANKIE MOUSE:** Peter Hawkins  
**BENJY MOUSE:** David Tate  
**GARKBIT THE WAITER AND ZARQUON THE PROPHET:** Anthony Sharp  
**MAX QUORDLEPLEEN:** Roy Hudd  
**'B'-ARK NUMBER TWO, HAGGUNENON UNDERFLEET COMMANDER AND HAIRDRESSER:** Aubrey Woods  
**'B'-ARK NUMBER ONE AND MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT:** Jonathan Cecil  
**CAPTAIN AND THE CAVEMAN:** David Jason  
**MARKETING GIRL:** Beth Porter  
**GAG HALFRUNT:** Stephen Moore  
**ARCTURAN NUMBER ONE:** Bill Paterson  
**ARCTURAN CAPTAIN, RADIO VOICE, RECEPTIONIST AND LIFT:** David Tate  
**FROGSTAR ROBOT AND AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER:** Geoffrey McGivern  
**ROORSTA:** Alan Ford  
**FROGSTAR PRISON RELATION OFFICER:** David Tate  
**GARGRAVARR:** Valentine Dyall  
**THE VENTILATION SYSTEM:** Geoffrey McGivern  
**THE NUTRIMAT MACHINE:** Leueen Willoughby  
**ZAPHOD BEEBLEBROX THE FOURTH:** Richard Goolden  
**BIRD ONE:** Ronald Baddiley



**BIRD TWO AND THE FOOTWARRIOR:** John Baddeley

**THE WISE OLD BIRD:** John Le Mesurier

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**LINTILLA (AND HER CLONES):** Rula Lenska

**THE FILM COMMENTATOR AND THE COMPUTEACH:** David Tate

**THE PUPIL:** Stephen Moore

**HIG HURTENFLURST:** Mark Smith

**VARNTVAR THE PRIEST:** Geoffrey McGivern

**THE ALLITNILS:** David Tate

**POODOO:** Ken Cambell

**AIRLINE STEWARDNESS:** Rula Lenska

**AUTOPILOT AND ZARNIWOOP:** Jonathan Pryce

**THE MAN IN THE SHACK:** Stephen Moore

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# **FIT THE FIRST**

In which the Earth is unexpectedly destroyed and the great Hitch-Hike begins.

NARRATOR: (~~Over music. Matter of fact, characterless voice~~)

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This is the story of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, perhaps the most remarkable, certainly the most successful book ever to come out of the great publishing corporations of Ursa Minor – more popular than the *Celestial Home Care Omnibus*, better selling than *53 More Things To Do In Zero Gravity*, and more controversial than Oolon Coluphid's trilogy of philosophical blockbusters: *Where God Went Wrong*, *Some More of God's Greatest Mistakes* and *Who is This God Person Anyway?*

And in many of the more relaxed civilizations on the outer Eastern rim of the Galaxy, the Hitch-Hiker's Guide has already supplanted the great Encyclopaedia Galactica as the standard repository of all knowledge and wisdom, because although it has many omissions, contains much that is apocryphal or at least wildly inaccurate, it scores over the older, more pedestrian work in two important ways. First, it is slightly cheaper, and second it has the words 'DON'T PANIC' inscribed in large, friendly letters on the cover.

To tell the story of the book, it is best to tell the story of some of the minds behind it. A human from the planet Earth was one of them, though as our story opens he no more knows his destiny than a tea leaf knows the history of the East India Company. His name is Arthur Dent, he is a six foot tall ape descendant, and someone is trying to drive a bypass through his home.

F/X: GENERAL ROAD BUILDING NOISES. BULLDOZERS, PNEUMATIC DRILLS, ETC.

**(The following conversation is carried out over this noise. The man from the Council, Mr Prosser, is being dictatorial through a megaphone, and Arthur is shouting his answers rather faintly in the distance.)**

PROSSER: Come off it Mr Dent, you can't win you know. There's no point in lying down in the path of progress.

ARTHUR: I've gone off the idea of progress. It's overrated.

PROSSER: But you must realize that you can't lie in front of the bulldozers indefinitely.

ARTHUR: I'm game, we'll see who rusts first.

PROSSER: I'm afraid you're going to have to accept it. This bypass has got to be built, and it's going to be built. Nothing you can say or do . . .

ARTHUR: Why's it got to be built?

PROSSER: What do you mean, why's it got to be built? It's a bypass, you've got to build bypasses.

ARTHUR: Didn't anyone consider the alternatives?

PROSSER: There aren't any alternatives. Look, you were quite entitled to make any suggestions or protests at the appropriate time.

ARTHUR: Appropriate time? The first I knew about it was when a workman arrived at the door

yesterday. I asked him if he'd come to clean the windows and he said he'd come to demolish the house. He didn't tell me straight away of course. No, first he wiped a couple of windows and charged me a fiver. Then he told me.

**PROSSER: (Ordinary voice, but he is still clearly audible. In other words, he was standing next to Arthur anyway.)**

But Mr Dent, the plans have been available in the planning office for the last nine months.

**ARTHUR:** Yes. I went round to find them yesterday afternoon. You hadn't exactly gone out of your way to call much attention to them had you? I mean, like actually telling anybody or anything.

**PROSSER:** The plans were on display.

**ARTHUR:** And how many average members of the public are in the habit of casually dropping round at the local planning office of an evening? It's not exactly a noted social venue is it? And even if you had popped in on the off-chance that some raving bureaucrat wanted to knock your house down, the plans weren't immediately obvious to the eye, were they?

**PROSSER:** That depends where you were looking.

**ARTHUR:** I eventually had to go down to the cellar . . .

**PROSSER:** That's the display department.

**ARTHUR:** . . . with a torch.

**PROSSER:** Ah, the lights had probably gone.

**ARTHUR:** So had the stairs.

**PROSSER:** But you found the notice didn't you?

**ARTHUR:** Yes. It was on display in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying 'Beware of the Leopard'. Ever thought of going into advertising?

**PROSSER:** It's not as if it's a particularly nice house anyway.

**ARTHUR:** I happen rather to like it.

**PROSSER:** Mr Dent!

**ARTHUR:** Hello? Yes?

**PROSSER:** Have you any idea how much damage that bulldozer would suffer if I just let it roll straight over you?

**ARTHUR:** How much?

**PROSSER:** None at all.

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## **GRAMS:** NARRATOR BACKGROUND

**NARRATOR:** By a strange coincidence, 'None at all' is exactly how much suspicion the ape descendant Arthur Dent had that one of his closest friends was not descended from an ape, but was in fact from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse. Arthur Dent's failure to suspect this reflects the care with which his friend blended himself into human society after a fairly shaky start. When he first arrived fifteen years ago the minimal research he had done suggested to him that the name Ford Prefect would be nicely inconspicuous. He will enter our story in 35 seconds and say 'Hello Arthur'. The ape descendant will greet him in return, but in deference to a million years of evolution he will not attempt to pick fleas off him. Earthmen are not proud of their ancestors and never invite them round to dinner.

**FORD: (Arriving)** Hello Arthur.

**ARTHUR:** Ford, hi, how are you?

**FORD:** Fine, look, are you busy?

**ARTHUR:** Well, I've just got this bulldozer to lie in front of, otherwise no, not especially.

**FORD:** There's a pub down the road. Let's have a drink and we can talk.

**ARTHUR:** Look, don't you understand?

**PROSSER:** Mr Dent, We're waiting.

**ARTHUR:** Ford, that man wants to knock my house down!

**FORD:** Well, he can do it whilst you're away can't he?

**ARTHUR:** But I don't want him to!

**FORD:** Well just ask him to wait till you get back.

**ARTHUR:** Ford . . .

**FORD:** Arthur! Will you please just listen to me, I'm not fooling. I have got to tell you the most important thing you've ever heard, I've got to tell you now, and I've got to tell you in that pub there.

**ARTHUR:** Why?

**FORD:** Because you're going to need a very stiff drink. Now, just trust me.

**ARTHUR: (Reluctantly)** I'll see what I can do. It'd better be good. **(Calls)** Hello! Mr Prosser!

**PROSSER:** Yes Mr Dent? Have you come to your senses yet?

ARTHUR: Can we just for a moment assume for the moment that I haven't?

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PROSSER: Well?

ARTHUR: And that I'm going to be staying put here till you go away?

PROSSER: So?

ARTHUR: So you're going to be standing around all day doing nothing.

PROSSER: Could be.

ARTHUR: Well, if you're resigned to standing around doing nothing all day you don't actually need me here all the time do you?

PROSSER: Er, no. Not as such.

ARTHUR: So if you can just take it as read that I am actually here, I could just slip off down to the pub for half an hour. How does that sound?

PROSSER: Er . . . that sounds . . . very er, reasonable I think Mr Dent. I'm sure we don't actually need you there for the *whole* time. We can just hold up our end of the confrontation.

ARTHUR: And if you want to pop off for a bit later on I can always cover for you in return.

PROSSER: Oh, thank you. Yes. That'll be fine Mr Dent. Very kind.

ARTHUR: And of course it goes without saying that you don't try and knock my house over whilst I'm away.

PROSSER: What? Good Lord no Mr Dent. *The mere thought hadn't even begun to speculate about the merest possibility of crossing my mind.*

ARTHUR: Do you think we can trust him?

FORD: Myself, I'd trust him to the end of the Earth.

ARTHUR: Yes, but how far's that?

FORD: About twelve minutes away. Come on, I need a drink.

**GRAMS: NARRATOR BACKGROUND**

**NARRATOR:** By drink Ford Prefect meant alcohol. The *Encyclopaedia Galactica* describes alcohol as colourless, volatile liquid formed by the fermentation of sugars, and also notes its intoxicating effect on certain carbon-based life forms. *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* also mentions alcohol. It says that the best drink in existence is the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster, the effect of which is like having your brains smashed out with a slice of lemon wrapped round a large gold brick. The *Guide* also tells you on which planets the best Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters are mixed, how much you can

expect to pay for one, and what voluntary organizations exist to help you rehabilitate.

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*The man who invented this mind-pummelling drink also invented the wisest remark ever made, which was this: 'Never drink more than two Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters unless you are a thirty ton elephant with bronchial pneumonia.' His name is Zaphod Beeblebrox and we shall learn more of his wisdom later.*

**F/X:** PUB INTERIOR. GENERAL CONVERSATION CHATTER, CLINK OF GLASSES, JUKEBOX ETC.

**FORD:** Six pints of bitter. And quickly please, the world's about to end.

**BARMAN:** Oh yes, sir? Nice weather for it. Going to watch the match this afternoon sir?

**FORD:** No. No point.

**BARMAN:** Foregone conclusion that, you reckon sir? Arsenal without a chance?

**FORD:** No, it's just that the world's going to end.

**BARMAN:** Of yes, sir, so you said. Lucky escape for Arsenal if it did.

**FORD:** No, not really.

**BARMAN:** There you are sir, six pints.

**F/X:** DRINKS BEING PUT ON BAR. RUSTLE OF BANK NOTES

**FORD:** Keep the change.

**BARMAN:** What, from a fiver? Thank you, sir.

**FORD:** You've got ten minutes left to spend it.

**ARTHUR:** Ford, would you please tell me what the hell is going on? *I think I'm beginning to lose my grip on the day.*

**FORD:** Drink up, you've got three pints to get through.

**ARTHUR:** Three? At lunchtime?

**FORD:** Time is an illusion. Lunchtime doubly so.

**ARTHUR:** Very deep. You should send that in to the *Reader's Digest*. They've got a page for people like you.

**FORD:** Drink up.

**ARTHUR:** Why three pints?

FORD: Muscle relaxant. You'll need it.

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ARTHUR: Did I do something wrong today, or has the world always been like this and I've been too wrapped up in myself to notice?

FORD: All right. I'll try to explain. How long have we known each other Arthur?

ARTHUR: Er . . . five years, maybe six. Most of it seemed to make some kind of sense at the time.

FORD: All right. How would you react if I said that I'm not from Guildford after all, but from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse?

ARTHUR: **(Really baffled now)** I don't know. Why, do you think it's the sort of thing you feel you're likely to say?

FORD: Drink up, the world's about to end.

ARTHUR: This must be Thursday. I never could get the hang of Thursdays.

F/X: NARRATOR BACKGROUND

NARRATOR: On this particular Thursday, something was moving quietly through the ionosphere miles above the surface of the planet. But few people on the surface of the planet were aware of it. One of the six thousand million people who hadn't glanced into the ionosphere recently was called Lady Cynthia Fitzmelton. She was at that moment standing in front of Arthur Dent's house in Cottington. Many of those listening to her speech would probably have experienced great satisfaction to know that in four minutes time she would evaporate into a whiff of hydrogen, ozone and carbon monoxide. However, when the moment came they would hardly notice because they would be too busy evaporating themselves.

**(Lady Cynthia Fitzmelton is a sort of Margaret Thatcher, Penelope Keith character, who delivers this speech with dignity and utter conviction through a barrage of enraged boos and catcalls.)**

LADY CYNTHIA: I have been asked to come here to say a few words to mark the beginning of work on the very splendid and worthwhile new Bevingford bypass. And I must say immediately what a great honour and a great privilege I think it must be for you, the people of Cottington, to have this gleaming new motorway going through your cruddy little village . . . I'm sorry, your little country village of cruddy Cottington. **(Shouts from annoyed crowd)** I know how proud you must feel at this moment to know that your obscure and unsung hamlet will now arise reborn as the very splendid and worthwhile Cottington Service Station, providing welcome refreshment and sanitary relief for every weary traveller on his way.

VOICE 1: Why don't you push off, you crud-faced old bat?

VOICE 2: What about our bloody homes?

LADY CYNTHIA: And for myself, it gives me great pleasure to take this bottle of very splendid and worthwhile champagne and break it against the noble prow of this very splendid and worthwhile



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