



THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

DOUGLAS ADAMS

Douglas Adams was an English author, best known for *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which originated in 1978 as a BBC radio comedy before developing into a "trilogy" of five books that sold more than 15 million copies in his lifetime.

The book follows the adventures of Arthur Dent, a hapless Englishman, and Ford Prefect (who named himself after the Ford Prefect car to blend in with what was assumed to be the dominant life form, automobiles), an alien from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse and a researcher of the Hitchhikers Guide.

One day Earth is demolished to build an express route through its star system. Arthur's adventures in space are full of crazy digressions and anecdotes on the side. For instance, while Arthur is trying to survive, we also get stories about philosophers arguing with computers about the non-existence of God.

Then there's an alcoholic drink that feels like having "your brains smashed out by a slice of lemon wrapped round a large gold brick"; super-intelligent dolphins telling humans "So long and thanks for all the fish" before leaving the Earth; a man who believes all lost ballpoint pens live on a ballpoint planet; and many more.

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

LESSON 4

"If we're lucky the Vogons have come to throw us into space." "And if we're unlucky?" "If we're unlucky," said Ford **grimly**, "the captain might be serious in his threat that he's going to read us some of his poetry first."

Vogon poetry is the third worst in the universe. He was now feeling quite relaxed and ready for a little callousness. Vogons early attempts at **composition** had been part of **bludgeoning** insistence that they be accepted as a properly evolved and cultured race, but now the only thing that kept them going was sheer **bloodymindedness**.

Arthur Dent sat and quivered. He had no idea **what he was in for**, but he knew that he hadn't liked anything that had happened so far and didn't think things were likely to change. The Vogon began to read a **fetid** little passage of his own devising.

"Oh fretted gruntbuggly," he began. **Spasms wracked** Ford's body. This was worse than ever he'd been prepared for. Ford was **wrenching** his head back as lumps of pain thumped through it. He could dimly see beside him Arthur

lolling and rolling in his seat. He clenched his teeth.

"Now Earthlings," whirred the Vogon—he didn't know that Ford Prefect was in fact from a small planet in the vicinity of Betelgeuse, and wouldn't have cared if he had—"I present you with a simple choice. Either die in the vacuum of space, or..." he paused for **melodramatic** effect, "tell me how good you thought my poem was." Ford was rolling his dusty tongue round his **parched** mouth and moaned. Arthur said brightly, "Actually I quite liked it." Ford turned and **gaped**.

The Vogon stood up. "No, well you're completely wrong," he said, "I just write poetry to display my mean, callous and heartless exterior. I'm going to throw you off the ship anyway. Guard! Take the prisoners to number three airlock and throw them out."

"What?" shouted Ford. A huge young Vogon guard stepped forward and **yanked** them out of their straps with his huge **blubbery** arms. "You can't throw us into space," yelled Ford, "we're trying to write a book." "Resistance is useless," shouted the Vogon guard back at him.

"We're trapped now aren't we?" "Yes," said Ford, "we're trapped." "Well didn't you think of anything? I thought you said you were going to think of something. Perhaps you thought of something and didn't notice." "Oh yes, I thought of something," panted Ford. Arthur looked up expectantly.

But unfortunately," continued Ford, "it involved being on the other side of this hatchway." He kicked the hatch they'd just been through. "The hatchway in front of us will open automatically in a few moments and we will shoot out into deep space.

"If you take a **lungful** of air with you you can last for up to thirty seconds," said Ford. He stuck his hands behind his back, raised his eyebrows and started to hum an old Betelgeusian battle hymn.

A little later Ford said, "That was a bright idea of mine to find a passing spaceship and get rescued by it." The real universe arched sickeningly away beneath them. "**Come off it**," said Arthur, "the chances against it were astronomical." "**Don't knock it, it worked**," said Ford.

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

LESSON 3

"What sort of ship are we in?" asked Arthur. "I don't know," said Ford, "I haven't opened my eyes yet." "No, nor have I," said Arthur. Arthur and Ford opened their eyes and looked about in considerable surprise. "Good god," said Arthur, "it looks just like the sea front at **Southend**."

"Arthur," he said, "this is fantastic! We've been picked up by a ship powered by the Infinite Improbability Drive. This is incredible. I heard rumours about it before. They were all officially denied, but they must have done it. They've built the Improbability Drive! Arthur, this is... Arthur? What's happening?"

The Improbability control cabin of the Heart of Gold looked like a perfectly conventional spaceship except that it was perfectly clean because it was so new. Some of the control seats hadn't had the plastic wrapping taken off yet.

The cabin was mostly white, oblong, and about the size of a small restaurant. In fact it wasn't perfectly oblong: the two long walls were **raked** round in a slight parallel curve and all the angles and corners

were **contoured** in excitingly chunky shapes. Zaphod Beeblebrox **paced** nervously up and down the cabin with Trillian sitting beside him. Hey Marvin," she said. In the corner, the robot's head swung up sharply, but then wobbled about. It pulled itself up to its feet and stopped in front of Trillian and seemed to stare through her left shoulder. "I think you ought to know I'm feeling very depressed," it said.

Its voice was low and hopeless. It had claimed to be 50,000 times more intelligent than a human. "Well," said Trillian with compassion, "here's something to occupy you and keep your mind active." "It won't work," **droned** Marvin, "I have an exceptionally large mind."

"Listen," said Ford, who was still **engrossed** in reading the spaceship's sales brochure. "What?" they said. "Ghastly," continued Marvin. "Absolutely ghastly. Just don't even talk about it. Marvin regarded humans with cold **loathing** and disgust. "Why bother? Nothing is worth getting involved in.

"I've been ordered to take you down to the bridge. Here

I am with a brain the size of a planet and they ask me to take you down to the bridge. Call that job satisfaction? Because I don't." He turned and walked back to the door he hated so much.

"Excuse me," said Ford following after him, "which government owns this ship?" Marvin ignored him. "You watch this door," he muttered, "it's about to open again. I can tell by the **intolerable** feeling of smugness it generates."

"I hate that door," continued Marvin. "I'm not **getting you down** at all am I?" "Which government owns this spaceship," Ford asked again. "No government owns it," said the robot, "it's been stolen." "Stolen?" "Who by?" asked Ford. "Zaphod Beeblebrox," he said weakly.

"Sorry, did I say something wrong?" said Marvin "Pardon me for breathing, which I never do anyway. Oh god, I'm feeling so depressed.

The regular early morning scream of horror was the sound of Arthur Dent waking up and suddenly remembering where he was. It wasn't just that the cave was cold or that it was damp and

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

LESSON 3

smelly. It was the fact that the cave was in the middle of **Islington** and there wasn't a bus due for two million years. Time is the worst place to get lost in, as Arthur Dent could **testify**, having been lost in both time and space forever.

At least being lost in space kept you busy. He was stranded in prehistoric Earth as the result of a complex **sequence** of events which had involved him being blown up and **insulted** in more **bizarre** regions of the galaxy than he ever dreamt existed, and though his life had now turned very, very, very quiet, he was still feeling **jumpy**.

He hadn't been blown up now for five years. Since he had hardly seen anyone since he and Ford Prefect had parted company four years previously, he hadn't been insulted in all that time either. Except just once. It had happened one evening about two years previously. He was returning to his cave just a little after dusk when he became aware of lights flashing through the clouds.

He turned and stared, with hope suddenly **clambering** through his heart. He thought

to himself: Rescue. Escape. The **castaway's** impossible dream—a spaceship. And as he watched, as he stared in wonder and excitement, a long silver ship descended through the warm evening air, quietly, without fuss, its long legs unlocking. It **alighted** gently on the ground, and what little hum it had generated died away, as if lulled by the evening calm. A ramp extended itself. Light streamed out.

A tall figure appeared **silhouetted** in the hatchway. It walked down the **ramp** and stood in front of Arthur. "You're a arsehole, Dent," it said simply. It was alien. It had a peculiar alien tallness, a flattened head, **slitty** little alien eyes, extravagantly draped golden ropes with an alien collar design and pale grey-green alien skin which had about it that **lustrous** shine which most grey-green faces can only acquire with plenty of exercise and very expensive soap.

Arthur stared at it. It gazed levelly at him. Arthur's first sensations of hope and **trepidation** had instantly been overwhelmed by **astonishment** and all sorts of thoughts were battling for the

use of his voice at this moment. "Wh...?" he said and finally lapsed into a frantic kind of silence. He was feeling the effects of having not said anything to anybody for as long as he could remember.

The alien creature frowned briefly and consulted what appeared to be some kind of **clipboard** which he was holding in his thin and **spindly** alien hand. "Arthur Dent?" it said. Arthur nodded helplessly. "Arthur Philip Dent?" pursued the alien. "Er...yes," confirmed Arthur. "You're an arsehole," repeated the alien, "a complete and total arsehole."

The creature nodded to itself, made a tick on its clipboard and turned **briskly** back towards the ship. "Er..." said Arthur desperately, "Don't give me that!" snapped the alien. It marched up the ramp, through the hatchway and disappeared into the ship. The ship sealed itself. It started to make a low throbbing hum. "Er, hey!" shouted Arthur, and started to run helplessly towards it. "Wait a minute," he called.

"What is this? What? Wait a minute!" The ship rose, as if shedding its weight like a

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

LESSON 3

cloak to the ground, and hovered briefly. It swept strangely up into the evening sky. It passed up through the clouds, **illuminating** them briefly, and then was gone, leaving Arthur alone in an immensity of his helpless little dance.

"What?" he screamed. "What? What? Hey, what? Come back here and say that!" He jumped and danced until his legs trembled and shouted till his lungs **rasped**. There was no answer from anyone.

There was no one to hear him or speak to him. The alien spaceship was already thundering towards the upper reaches of the atmosphere, on its way out into the appalling void which separates the very few things there are in the universe from each other.

Its occupant, the alien with the expensive complexion, leaned back in its single seat. His name was Wowbagger the **Infinitely Prolonged**. He was a man with a purpose. Not a very good purpose, as he would have been the first to admit, but it was at least a purpose and it did at least keep him on the move, even though he resented it.

Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged was one of the universe's very small number of immortal beings. Those who are born immortal instinctively know how to cope with it, but Wowbagger was not one of them. Indeed he had come to hate them. He had had his immortality **thrust** upon him by an unfortunate accident.

The precise details of the accident are not important because no one has ever managed to duplicate the exact circumstances under which it happened, and many people have ended up looking very silly, or dead, or both, trying.

Wowbagger closed his eyes in a **grim** and weary expression, put some jazz on the ship's stereo and **reflected** that he could have become someone important if it hadn't been for Sunday afternoons.

To begin with it was fun, he **had a ball**, living dangerously, taking risks, cleaning up on high-yield investments and just generally outliving everybody. In the end, it was the Sunday afternoons he couldn't cope with, and that terrible **listlessness** which

starts to set in at about 3pm when you know that you've had all the baths you can usefully have that day, that however hard you stare at the newspaper you will never actually read it and that as you stare at the clock the hands will move relentlessly on to four o'clock.

So things began to fall apart for him. The merry smiles he used to wear at other people's funerals began to fade. He began to **despise** the universe in general, and everyone in it in particular. This was the point at which he conceived his purpose, the thing which would drive him on, and which, as far as he could see, would drive him on forever. It was this: he would insult the universe.

That is, he would insult everybody in it. Individually, personally, one by one, and in alphabetical order. When people **protested** to him, as they sometimes had done, that the plan was not merely misguided but actually impossible because of the number of people being born and dying all the time, he would merely fix them with a steely, sullen look and say, "What? A man can dream can't he?"

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

LESSON 3

And so he started out. He **equipped** a spaceship that was built to last with a computer capable of handling all the data processing involved in keeping track of the entire population of the known universe and working out the complicated routes involved. His ship fled through the inner orbits of the star system, preparing to **slingshot** round the sun and fling itself out into interstellar space.

"Computer," he said. "Here," said the computer. "Where next?" "Computing that." Wowbagger gazed for a moment at the fantastic jewellery of the night, the billions of tiny diamond worlds that dusted the infinite darkness with light.

Every one, every single one, was on his itinerary. Most of them he would be going to millions of times over. He imagined for a moment his itinerary connecting up all the dots in the sky. He hoped that in the universe it might be seen to spell a very, very rude word.

Meanwhile, on Earth, the air was clear and scented, the breeze **flitted** lightly through the tall grass around Arthur's

cave, the birds were **chirping** at each other and the whole of nature seemed to be conspiring to be as pleasant as it possibly could.

It wasn't all the **pastoral** delights that were making Arthur feel so cheery, though. He had just had a wonderful idea about how to **cope with** the terrible lonely isolation, the nightmares, the failure of all his attempts at **horticulture** and the sheer futility of his life on prehistoric Earth, which was that he would go mad.

He **beamed** again and took a bite out of a rabbit leg left over from his supper. He chewed happily for a few moments and then decided to formally announce his decision. He stood up straight and looked at the world of fields and hills. To add weight to his words he stuck the rabbit bone in his hair. He spread his arms out wide. "I will go mad," he announced.

"Good idea," said Ford Prefect, clambering down from the rock on which he had been sitting. Arthur's brain **somersaulted**. "I went mad for a while," said Ford, "did me no end of good." "You see," said Ford..." "Where have you been?"

interrupted Arthur, now that his head had finished **twitching**. "Around," said Ford, "around and about." He grinned in what he accurately judged to be an infuriating manner. "I just took my mind off it all for a while. I reckoned that if the world wanted me badly enough it would call me back. It did."

"At least," he said, "I think it did. This has been playing up a bit." He shook it. "If it was a false alarm I shall go mad," he said. Arthur shook his head and sat down. He looked up. "I thought you must be dead," he said simply. "Can you find us a gin and tonic?" said Ford brightly. "I found a small lake that thought it was a gin and tonic. At least, I think it thought it was a gin and tonic."

"I went to Africa," said Ford. "Really?" "Yes." "What was that like?" "And this is your cave is it?" said Ford. "Er, yes," said Arthur. After nearly four years of total isolation he was so pleased and relieved to see Ford that he could have almost cried. Ford was, on the other hand, an annoying person. "Very nice," said Ford, in reference to Arthur's cave. "You must hate it." Arthur didn't bother to reply.

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

VOCABULARY

Grimly: Discouraging or depressing, sinister.

Composition: Writing prose or poetry.

Bludgeoning: Beat someone repeatedly with a heavy object, to batter.

Bloodymindedness: Unreasonable, stubborn, obstructive.

What he was in for: What was going to happen to him.

Fetid: To smell extremely unpleasantly, stinking, malodorous.

Spasms: Sudden muscular contraction.

Wracked: To cause extreme physical or mental pain, damaged.

Wrenching: To pull or twist something suddenly and violently.

Lolling: Sit, lie or stand in a lazy, relaxed way, recline lazily.

Melodramatic: Exaggerated drama, sensationalised, or overemotional.

Parched: Dried out with heat,

thirsty.

Gaped: Stared with one's mouth open wide, typically in amazement.

Yanked: To be pulled with a jerk.

Blubbery: Abounding in or resembling fat, puffy, swollen.

Lungful: Fill your lungs with air.

Come off it: Said when vigorously expressing disbelief.

Astronomical: Extremely large.

Don't knock it: Don't find fault or criticise something if you haven't experienced it.

Southend: Holiday location in southern England.

Raked: Scrape something with a long sweeping movement.

Contoured: To mould into a specific shape, typically one designed to fit into something else.

Paced: Walked at a steady and consistent speed.

Droned: Speak tediously in a dull monotonous tone.

Engrossed: Having all one's attention or interest absorbed by someone or something.

Loathing: A feeling of intense dislike or disgust, hatred.

Intolerable: Unable to be endured, unbearable, insufferable.

Getting you down: Making you feel depressed.

Islington: Borough in central London.

Testify: Serve as evidence or proof of something's existence, to confirm as truth.

Sequence: a particular order in which related events, movements, or things follow each other.

Insulted: Treated with disrespect.

Bizarre: Strange, unusual.

Jumpy: Nervous, anxious and uneasy.

Clambering: Climbing with difficulty in an awkward and laborious way.

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

VOCABULARY

Castaway's: A person who has been shipwrecked and stranded in an isolated place.	Rasped: Making a harsh, grating noise.	Cope with: Emotionally manage.
Alighted: descend from a form of transportation, to dismount, get out of.	Infinitely Prolonged: To live forever.	Horticulture: The art or practice of garden cultivation and management.
Silhouette: Cast as a dark shape and outline against a lighter background.	Thrust upon: Forced upon by a sudden lunge.	Futility: Pointlessness or uselessness.
Ramp: A slope or inclined plane, a passageway of a ship.	Grim: Dark, without humour.	Beamed: Smiled brightly.
Slitty: Long and arrow opening.	Reflected: Thought deeply or carefully about, considered.	Somersaulted: An acrobatic stunt.
Lustrous: Gleaming, shimmering, polished.	Had a ball: Enjoyed oneself immensely.	Twitching: A short, sudden jerking or convulsive movement.
Trepidation: A feeling of fear or agitation about something that may happen.	Listlessness: Lazy, languid, spiritless, indifferent.	Playing up: Not working properly.
Astonishment: Great surprise.	Despise: Hate, loathe.	
Clipboard: A small board with a spring clip at the top, used for holding papers.	Protested: Expressed an objection, complained.	
Spindly: Long or tall and thin.	Equipped: Supplied with necessary items.	
Brisk: Quick, lively, bracing.	Slingshot: Accelerate through gravity.	
Snapped: Be annoyed with.	Flitted: Moved swiftly and lightly.	
Illuminating: To light up, brighten, shine on.	Chirping: A small bird uttering a short, sharp, high-pitched sound.	
	Pastoral: Especially of land or a farm.	

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Q&A

Question 1: How did Ford and Arthur escape from the Vogon's spacecraft?

Question 5: How did Wowbagger become infinitely prolonged and what did he think about the universe?

Overview: Write in your own words what you thought of the story so far and your interpretation of its meaning.

Question 2: How would you describe Marvin and why was he always depressed?

Question 6: Wowbagger began to despise the universe in general, and everyone in it in particular? Why?

Question 3: How do you think Arthur arrived in Islington when there wasn't a bus for two million years?

Question 7: What was it about Sunday afternoons that disturbed Wowbagger so much?

Question 4: What was the purpose of Wowbagger insulting Arthur?

Question 8: How did Wowbagger intend to insult everyone in the universe?