



# 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.

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## LESSON 1

Far out in the **uncharted backwaters** of the unfashionable end of the western **spiral** arm of the galaxy lies a small, unregarded yellow sun.

**Orbiting** this at a distance of roughly ninety-two million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think the iPhone 6 is a cool idea.

This planet had a problem, which was this: most of the people on it were unhappy for much of the time. Many solutions were suggested for this problem, but most of these were largely concerned with the movements of **small green pieces of paper**, which is odd because on the whole it wasn't the small green pieces of paper that were unhappy.

And so the problem remained: lots of the people were **mean**, and most of them were miserable, even the ones with the latest iPhone. Many were increasingly of the opinion that they'd all made a big mistake by coming down from the trees in the first place. And some said that even the trees had been a bad move, and that no one

should ever have left the oceans.

One Thursday, nearly two thousand years after **a man had been nailed to a tree** for saying how great it would be to be nice to people for a change, a girl sitting on her own in a small café in Rickmansworth suddenly realised what it was that had been going wrong all this time, and she finally knew how the world could be made a good and happy place. From then on, no one would have to get nailed to anything.

Sadly, however, before she could get to a phone to tell anyone about it, a terribly stupid catastrophe occurred. There was a house on the edge of a village that looked over **West Country** farmland. Not a remarkable house by any means: it was about thirty years old, square and made of brick. The only person for whom the house was in any way special was Arthur Dent, and that was only because he happened to be the one living in it.

He had lived in it for about three years, ever since he had moved out of London because it made him nervous

and **irritable**. He was about thirty as well, dark haired and **never quite at ease** with himself.

To make matters worse, the **council** wanted to knock down his house and build a **bypass** instead. At eight o'clock on Thursday morning Arthur didn't feel very well. He woke up **blearily**, got up, wandered around his room, opened a window, saw a **bulldozer**, found his slippers, and **stomped** off to the bathroom to wash.

Arthur went outside and a cloud passed overhead. It cast a shadow over Arthur and his house as he lay propped up on his elbow in the cold mud. "Shut up and go away, and take your bloody bypass with you," Arthur said to the bulldozer driver. "Mr Dent?" he replied. "Hello, yes?" replied Arthur. "I have some factual information for you. Have you any idea how much damage you would suffer if I just let this bulldozer roll straight over you?"

By a curious coincidence, one of his closest friends who was not descended from an ape but was in fact from a small planet in the vicinity of

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Betelgeuse appeared. Arthur Dent had never **suspected** this. This friend of his had first arrived on the planet some fifteen Earth years previously and he had worked hard to blend himself into Earth society with, it must be said, some degree of success.

He had spent those fifteen years pretending to be an out of work actor, which was **plausible** but had made one careless **blunder** though, because he had skimped a bit on his research. The information he had gathered had led him to choose the name "Ford Prefect" as being nicely inconspicuous but was, in fact, a make of car.

Ford would **get out of his skull** on whisky, **huddle** into a corner with some girl and explain to her in **slurred** phrases that the colour of flying saucers really didn't matter that much. Thereafter, **staggering semi-paralytic** down the night streets he would ask passing policemen if they knew the way to Betelgeuse. But really, Ford Prefect's job was a roving researcher for The Hitchhiker's Guide.

The Earth moved slowly along its course and the sun was

beginning to dry out the mud Arthur was lying in. A shadow moved across him. "Hello Arthur," said the shadow. Arthur looked up and, squinting into the sun, was startled to see Ford Prefect standing above him. "Ford, hello, how are you?" "Fine," said Ford. "Look, are you busy?" "Am I busy?" exclaimed Arthur. "I need to lie in front of this bulldozer because they want to knock my house down."

They don't have sarcasm on Betelgeuse and Ford Prefect often failed to notice it unless he was concentrating. He said, "Good, is there anywhere we can talk?" "What?" said Arthur. Then suddenly he **squatted** down beside Arthur. "We've got to talk," he said urgently. "Fine," said Arthur, "talk." "And drink," said Ford. "It's vitally important that we talk and drink. Now. We'll go to the pub in the village."

"Look, don't you understand," shouted Arthur. He pointed at the driver of the bulldozer. "That man wants to knock my house down!" Ford glanced at him, puzzled. "Well he can do it while you're away, can't he?" he asked. "But I don't want him to."

"Ah." Listen to me, I've 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 the saloon bar of the Horse and Groom." "But why?" "Because you are going to need a very stiff drink."

Ford stared at Arthur, who began to think that perhaps he didn't want to go to the Horse and Groom after all. "But what about my house?" he asked **plaintively**. Ford said to the driver of the bulldozer, "If you pretended to think he was actually here, then he and I could slip off down to the pub for half an hour. How does that sound?" "Does that sounds perfectly reasonable?" he said.

The barman of the Horse and Groom pushed his glasses up his nose and blinked at Ford Prefect after he had ordered six pints. Ford ignored him and stared out of the window. The barman said, "Nice weather for it," and started pulling pints. "Are you going to watch the match this afternoon?"

Ford glanced round at him. "No, no point," he said, and looked back out of the window.

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"By the way, what's the foregone conclusion you were talking about?" asked the barman. "It's just that the world's about to end." "Yes sir," said the barman, looking over his glasses. Ford slapped a five-pound note on the bar. He said, "Keep the change. You've got ten minutes left to spend it."

Something was moving quietly through the **ionosphere** many miles above the surface of the planet. Several dozen huge yellow slablike somethings, huge as office buildings, silent as birds, soared with ease, biding their time, grouping, preparing. The planet beneath them was perfectly **oblivious** of their presence.

"Have you got a towel with you?" Ford suddenly said to Arthur. Arthur, struggling through his third pint, looked round at him. "Why? What, no, should I have?" He had given up being surprised, there didn't seem to be any point any longer. Ford clicked his tongue in irritation. "Drink up," he urged.

At that moment the dull sound of a **rumbling** crash from outside filtered through the low **murmur** of the pub,

through the sound of the jukebox, through the sound of the man next to Ford hiccupping over the whisky Ford had bought for him. Arthur choked on his beer and leapt to his feet.

"What's that?" he **yelped**. "Don't worry," said Ford, "they haven't started yet." "Thank God for that," said Arthur and relaxed. "It's probably just your house being knocked down," said Ford, finishing his last pint. "What?" shouted Arthur, looking wildly around him and then ran to the window. "My God they are! They're knocking my house down. What the hell am I doing in a pub, Ford?" "It hardly makes any difference," said Ford, "let them have their fun."

As they left the pub, Arthur tripped and fell headlong, rolled and landed flat on his back. At last he noticed that something was going on. His finger shot upwards. "What the hell's that?" he shrieked.

Whatever it was that raced across the sky in its **monstrous** yellowness, tore it apart with its mind-shattering noise and leapt off into the distance leaving the gaping air to shut behind it with a bang that

almost drove Arthur's ears into his skull, was truly **ominous**.

Another one followed and did the same thing only louder. It's difficult to say exactly what the people on the surface of the planet were doing now, because they didn't really know what they were witnessing themselves. None of it made sense—running into houses and howling at the noise.

As the **Vogon craft** screamed through the air high above him, a sudden silence hit the Earth. If anything it was worse than the noise. For a while nothing happened. Then every hi-fi in the world, every radio, television and cassette recorder, every **woofer**, **tweeter** and mid-range driver in the world quietly turned itself on.

"People of Earth, your attention please," a voice said in wonderful perfect quadraphonic [four speakers instead of two] sound. "This is Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz of the Galactic Hyperspace Planning Council," the voice continued. "As you will no doubt be aware, the plans for development of the outlying regions of the galaxy require

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.the building of a hyperspatial express route through your star system, and regrettably your planet is one of those scheduled for demolition. The process will take slightly less than two of your Earth minutes. Thank you."

Uncomprehending terror settled on the watching people of Earth. The terror moved slowly through the gathered crowds as if they were iron fillings on a sheet of board and a magnet was moving beneath them. Panic **sprouted** again, desperate fleeing panic, but there was nowhere to flee to.

Observing this, the Vogons turned on their **PA** again. He said, "There's no point in acting all surprised about it. All the planning charts and demolition orders have been on display in your local planning department on **Alpha Centauri** for fifty of your Earth years, so you've had plenty of time to lodge any formal complaint. It's far too late to start making a fuss about it now."

"Energise the demolition beams." Light poured out into the **hatchways**. "I don't know," said the voice on the PA, "**apathetic** bloody planet, I've

no sympathy for you at all." It cut off. Then there was a terrible, **ghastly** silence.

Far away on the opposite side of the galaxy, five hundred thousand **light years** away, Zaphod Beeblebrox, President of the Imperial Galactic Government, sped across the seas of Damogran. It would be some time before it reached its destination because Damogran is such an inconveniently arranged planet. It consists of large desert islands separated by very pretty but annoyingly wide stretches of ocean. Damogran was the secret home of the Heart of Gold.

This is why the Imperial Galactic Government chose Damogran for its Heart of Gold project, because it was so **deserted** and the project was so secret. Today was the **culmination** of the project, the great day of **unveiling**, the day that the Heart of Gold was finally to be introduced to a marvelling galaxy. It was also a great day for Zaphod Beeblebrox.

It was this day that he had first decided to run for the presidency. Zaphod Beeblebrox, adventurer, ex-hippy, crook, manic **self-**

**publicist** and terribly bad at personal relationships, was often thought to be completely **out to lunch**, but president?

On top of the cliffs stood a reception committee. It consisted in large part of the engineers and researchers who had built the Heart of Gold—mostly human, but here and there were a few reptiles. They were all **resplendent** in their multi-coloured ceremonial **lab** coats.

Everyone **beamed** at him, or, at least, nearly everyone. He singled out Trillian from the crowd. Trillian was a girl that Zaphod had picked up recently whilst visiting a planet, just for fun. She was slim, darkish, human-like, with long waves of black hair, a full mouth, an odd little nose and brown eyes.

With her long-flowing silky brown dress she looked vaguely Arabic—not that anyone there had ever heard of an Arab of course. The Arabs had very recently ceased to exist, and even when they had existed they were five hundred thousand light years from Damogran. However, nearby there lay a huge starship.

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## VOCABULARY

<b>Uncharted:</b> Unexplored, unknown.	<b>Blearily:</b> Blurred vision when waking up from sleep.	<b>Squatted:</b> To sit in a crouching position.
<b>Backwaters:</b> Isolated, backward.	<b>Bulldozer:</b> A powerful tractor for moving earth, rocks, houses, etc.	<b>Very stiff drink:</b> Very strong alcoholic drink.
<b>Spiral:</b> Curve around a fixed point.	<b>Stomped:</b> Stamping of feet.	<b>Plaintively:</b> In a pleading, sorrowful, desperate tone.
<b>Orbiting:</b> Moving around it.	<b>Propped up:</b> Supported by.	<b>The match:</b> Game of football.
<b>Primitive:</b> Early state of development.	<b>Suspected:</b> Had an idea or impression of the existence of something without certain proof.	<b>Ionosphere:</b> Region of the Earth's atmosphere.
<b>Small green pieces of paper:</b> Dollar bills.	<b>Plausible:</b> Believable.	<b>Slablike:</b> Like a flat, thick piece of stone.
<b>Mean:</b> To treat others in a spiteful manner.	<b>Blunder:</b> Careless mistake	<b>Soared:</b> To fly upward at a great height.
<b>A man had been nailed to a tree:</b> Reference to Jesus Christ.	<b>Skimped:</b> Not thorough.	<b>Oblivious:</b> Totally unaware.
<b>West Country:</b> Southwest England.	<b>Get out of his skull:</b> To get very drunk.	<b>Rumbling:</b> Muffled sound like thunder.
<b>Remarkable:</b> Unusual.	<b>Huddle:</b> Gather in a crowd.	<b>Murmur:</b> The hum of voices.
<b>Irritable:</b> Easily annoyed.	<b>Slurred:</b> To pronounce indistinctly when drunk.	<b>Yelped:</b> Shrill cry, like a dog.
<b>Never quite at ease:</b> Uncomfortable.	<b>Staggering:</b> Tottering unsteadily.	<b>Headlong:</b> Head first.
<b>Council:</b> Local government responsible for housing, etc.	<b>Semi-paralytic:</b> Nearly blind drunk.	<b>Monstrous:</b> Ugly or hideous.
<b>Bypass:</b> Road enabling motorists to avoid small towns.	<b>Squinting:</b> Eyes partly closed.	<b>Ominous:</b> Threatening, inauspicious.
	<b>Startled:</b> Surprised.	<b>Vogon craft:</b> Alien spaceship.
		<b>Woofers and tweeters:</b> Bass and treble speaker.

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## VOCABULARY

**Sprouted:** Start to grow, spring up.

richly colourful or sumptuous, gleaming.

**PA:** Public address system.

**Lab:** short for laboratory.

**Alpha Centauri:** The third brightest star in the night sky.

**Beam:** To smile radiantly.

**Hatchways:** Opening of a spaceship's doors.

**Picked up:** Met for a date.

**Apathetic:** Unconcerned, indifferent.

**Ceased to exist:** Died when they demolished the Earth.

**Ghastly:** Causing great horror or fear.

**Light years:** The distance light travels in a year.

**Deserted:** Abandoned, forsaken.

**Culmination:** The highest point of something, climax.

**Unveiling:** Uncover for display as part of a public ceremony.

**Marvelling:** Causing wonder, admiration.

**Self-publicist:** Press agent for yourself.

**Out to lunch:** Slang for crazy.

**Resplendent:** Attractive and impressive through being

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## Q&A

**Question 1:** Why do you think the author regard Earth as utterly insignificant and its ape-descended humans so primitive?

**Question 5:** Why had the Vogons scheduled the demolition of Earth and what did people know about it?

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

**Question 2:** What made human beings so miserable and mean to one another?

**Question 6:** What was Zaphod Beeblebrox doing on Damogran and why did he think he would make a good president?

**Question 3:** Why did Ford insist that Arthur Dent go to the pub with him?

**Question 7:** Why did the government chose Damogran for its Heart of Gold project?

**Question 4:** What raced across the sky and tore it apart with its hideous noise that almost drove Arthur's ears into his skull

**Question 8:** What do you imagine Zaphod Beeblebrox to be really like?