



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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The starship was one hundred and fifty metres long, shaped like a **sleek** running shoe, perfectly white and beautiful. At the heart of it, unseen, lay a small gold box which had within it the cleverest device ever **conceived**, one that made this starship unique in the history of the galaxy: The Heart of Gold.

Meanwhile, Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz was not a pleasant sight, even for other Vogons. His highly **domed** nose rose high above a small piggy forehead. His dark green rubbery skin was thick and waterproof enough for him to survive indefinitely at sea depths of up to a thousand feet.

Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz was a fairly typical Vogon in that he was thoroughly **vile**. Also, he did not like hitchhikers. But somewhere in a small dark cabin buried deep in the **intestines** of his flagship, a small match **flared** nervously. The owner of the match was not a Vogon, but he knew all about them and was right to be nervous. His name was Ford Prefect.

He heard a slight groan. By the light of the match he saw a heavy shape moving slightly

on the floor. Quickly he shook the match out, reached in his pocket, found what he was looking for and took it out. He crouched on the floor. The shape moved again. Ford Prefect said, "I bought some peanuts." Arthur Dent moved, and groaned again, muttering **incoherently**.

"Here, have some," urged Ford, shaking the packet again, "if you've never been through a matter **transference beam** before you've probably lost some salt and protein. The beer you had should have **cushioned** your system a bit." "Whhhrrrr..." said Arthur Dent. He opened his eyes. "It's dark," he said. "Yes," said Ford Prefect, "it's dark." "No light," said Arthur Dent. "Dark, no light."

One of the things Ford Prefect had always found the hardest thing to understand about human beings was their habit of continually stating and repeating the obvious, as in "It's a nice day", "Haven't you grown" to children and "Oh dear, you seem to have fallen down a thirty-foot hole in the ground, are you alright?" At first Ford had formed a **theory** to account for this strange behaviour but even that had caused him problems.

If human beings don't keep exercising their lips, he thought, their mouths probably **seize up**. After a few months' consideration and observation he **abandoned** this theory in favour of a new one. If they don't keep on exercising their lips, he thought, their brains start working.

"How do you feel?" he asked Arthur. "Like a military academy," said Arthur, "**bits of me keep on passing out**." Ford stared at him blankly in the darkness. "If I asked you where the hell we were," said Arthur weakly, "would I regret it?"

Ford stood up. "We're safe," he said. "Oh good," replied Arthur. "We're in a small galley cabin," said Ford, "in one of the spaceships of the Vogon Constructor Fleet." "Ah," said Arthur. Ford struck another match to help him search for a light switch. Monstrous shadows leaped about.

Arthur struggled to his feet and hugged himself **apprehensively**. Hideous alien shapes seemed to be all about about him, the air was thick with **musty** smells which **sidled** into his lungs.

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"How did we get here?" he asked, shivering slightly. "We **hitched a lift**," said Ford. "Excuse me?" said Arthur. "Are you trying to tell me that we just stuck out our thumbs and some green bug-eyed monster stuck his head out and said, Hi fellas, hop right in. I can take you as far as the Basingstoke **roundabout**?" "Well," said Ford, "the thumb's an electronic signalling device, the roundabout's at Barnard's Star six light years away, but otherwise, you're right."

Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz **heaved** his unpleasant green body round the **control bridge**. He always felt vaguely irritable after demolishing populated planets. He wished that someone would come and tell him that it was wrong so that he could shout at them and feel better. He **flopped** down onto his control seat in the hope that it would break and give him something to be genuinely angry about, but it only gave a complaining sort of creak.

"Go away!" he shouted at a young Vogon guard who entered the bridge. The guard **vanished** immediately, feeling relieved. He was glad it wouldn't now be him who

delivered the report they'd just received. The report said that a wonderful new type of spaceship was at this moment being unveiled at a government research base on Damogran which would from then on make all hyperspatial express routes unnecessary.

Ford and Arthur stared about them. "Well, what do you think?" said Ford. "It's a bit **squalid**, isn't it?" Ford frowned at the grubby mattress, unwashed cups and **unidentifiable** pieces of smelly alien underwear that lay around the cabin.

"Well, this is a working ship, you see," said Ford. "These are the Dentrassi sleeping quarters." "I thought you said they were called Vogons or something," said Arthur. "Yes," said Ford, "the Vogons run the ship, the Dentrassis are the cooks, they let us on board." "I'm confused," said Arthur.

Ford handed a book to Arthur. "What is it?" asked Arthur. "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. It's an electronic book. It tells you everything you need to know about anything. That's its job." Arthur turned it over nervously in his hands. "I like the cover," he said. "It says

'Don't Panic', the first helpful or intelligible thing anybody's said to me all day."

"I'll show you how it works," said Ford. "You press this button and you see the screen lights up." A screen, about three inches by four, lit up and characters began to flicker across the surface. "You want to know about Vogons, so I enter that name." His fingers tapped some more keys. "And there we are."

"Here is what to do if you want to get a lift from a Vogon: forget it. They are one of the most unpleasant races in the galaxy—not actually evil, but bad tempered, **bureaucratic** and **callous**. They wouldn't even **lift a finger** to save their own grandmothers without orders sent in, sent back, queried, lost, found, subjected to public enquiry, lost again, and finally buried in soft **peat**."

"The best way to get a drink out of a Vogon is to stick your finger down his throat. On no account allow a Vogon to read poetry at you." Arthur blinked at it. "What a strange book. How did we get a lift then?" "That's the point, it's out of date now," said Ford, sliding the book into its cover.

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"I'm doing the research for the new revised edition and one of the things I'll have to include is the Dentrassi cooks." A pained expression crossed Arthur's face. "But who are the Dentrassi?" he said. "Great guys," said Ford.

"They're the best cooks and drink mixers; they **don't give a monkey's** about anything else. And they'll always help hitchhikers aboard, partly because they like the company, but mostly because it annoys the Vogons, which is exactly the sort of thing you need to know if you're an **impoverished** hitchhiker trying to see the marvels of the universe for less than thirty galactic dollars a day. It's my job and it's fun.

Arthur looked confused. "It's amazing," Ford said and frowned at one of the mattresses. "Unfortunately I got stuck on the Earth for rather longer than I intended. I came for a week and stayed for fifteen years."

"But how did you get there in the first place then?", asked Arthur. "Easy, I got a lift with a teaser." "A teaser?" "Yeah." "Er, what is..." "A teaser? Teasers are usually rich kids with nothing to do. They **cruise**

around looking for planets which haven't made contact yet."

Arthur began to feel that Ford was enjoying making life difficult for him. "Yeah," said Ford, "and they buzz them. They find some isolated spot with very few people around, then land right by someone no one's ever going to believe and then **strut** up and down in front of him wearing **antennae** on their heads making silly noises. Rather childish really."

Ford leant back on the mattress with his hands behind his head and looked infuriatingly **pleased with himself**. "Ford," insisted Arthur, "I don't know if this sounds like a silly question, but what am I doing here?" "Well you know that," said Ford. "I rescued you from the Earth."

"And what's happened to the Earth?" "Ah, it's been demolished." "Has it?" said Arthur. "Yes, it just boiled away into space." "Look," said Arthur, "I'm a bit upset about that." "Yes, I understand," Ford said at last. "Understand that!" shouted Arthur. "Understand that!" he repeated. "Keep reading the book." said Ford.

When Arthur finds out the Earth has been demolished he panicked. "I'm not panicking," Arthur said to Ford. "Yes you are," replied Ford. "Alright, so I'm panicking, what else is there to do?" "You just come along with me and have a good time. The galaxy's a fun place. You'll need to have this fish in your ear." "I beg your pardon?" asked Arthur, rather surprised. Ford was holding up a small glass jar which quite clearly had a small yellow fish **wriggling** around in it.

Arthur blinked. He wished there was something simple and recognisable he could grasp hold of. Suddenly a violent noise leapt at them from a source he could not identify. He gasped in terror at what sounded like a man trying to **gargle** whilst fighting off a pack of wolves.

"Shush!" said Ford. "Listen, it might be important." "Important?" "It's the Vagon captain making an announcement on the tannoy." "You mean that's how the Vogons talk?" "Listen!" "But I can't speak Vagon." "You don't need to. Just put that fish in your ear." Ford, with a lightning movement.

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He clapped his hand to Arthur's ear, and he had the sickening sensation of the fish slithering deep inside. "This is your captain speaking, so stop whatever you're doing and pay attention. First of all I see from our instruments that we have a couple of hitchhikers aboard.

"I just want to make it totally clear that you are not at all welcome. I worked hard to get where I am today and I didn't become captain of a Vogon ship simply so I could turn it into a taxi service for a load of **degenerate freeloaders**.

"I have sent out a search party, and as soon that they find you I will put you off the ship. If you're very lucky I might read you some of my poetry first. Secondly, we are about to journey to Barnard's Star. On arrival we will stay in **dock** for a seventy-two hour refit and no one's to leave the ship during that time. I repeat, all planetary leave is cancelled.

"They've got as much sex appeal as a road accident," said Ford. "What's this fish doing in my ear?" asked Arthur. "It's translating for you. It's a Babel fish. Look it up in

the book if you like." He **tossed** over The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy and then curled himself up into a **foetal** ball to prepare himself.

The Babel fish was such a bizarrely improbable coincidence that anything so useful could have evolved purely by chance that some thinkers chose to see it as the final and clinching proof of the non-existence of God. Arthur let out a low groan.

He was now six light years from the place that the Earth would have been if it had still existed. From now on England only existed in his mind. A wave of **claustrophobia** closed in on him. McDonalds, he thought, there is no longer any such thing as a McDonald's cheeseburger.

"If you're a researcher on this book and you were on Earth for fifteen years, you must have been gathering material on it." "Well, I was able to **extend** the original entry a bit, yes." "Let me see what it says in this edition then, I've got to see it." "Okay."

Arthur pressed the entry for the relevant page and stared at it. "It doesn't have an

entry!" he burst out. Ford looked over his shoulder. "Yes it does," he said, "down there, see at the bottom of the screen. "What? Harmless? Is that all it's got to say? Harmless? Just one word?" Ford shrugged.

"Well, there are a hundred billion stars in the galaxy, only a limited amount of space in the book's microprocessors and no one knew much about the Earth." "Well I hope you managed to rectify that a bit." "Oh yes, well I managed to transmit a new entry off to the editor. He had to **trim** it a bit, but it's still an improvement." "And what does it say now?" asked Arthur. "Mostly harmless," admitted Ford with a slightly embarrassed cough. "Mostly harmless!" shouted Arthur.

"What was that noise?" **hissed** Ford. "It was me shouting," shouted Arthur. "No, shut up!" said Ford. I think we're in trouble." Outside the door were the sounds of marching feet. "The Dentrassi?" whispered Arthur. "No, those are steel-tipped boots," said Ford. There was a sharp rap on the door. "Then who is it?" said Arthur. "Well," said Ford, "if we're lucky it's just the Vogons.

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VOCABULARY

Sleek: Smooth and glossy.	Seize up: Come to a halt, stop working.	Unidentifiable: That which cannot be recognised.
Conceived: a plan or idea, imagined.	Abandoned: Having been deserted or cast off, gave up on.	Bureaucratic: Carrying out detailed and complicated rules, overly concerned with procedure at the expense of efficiency or common sense.
Domed: Rounded in formation.	Apprehensively: Uneasy or fearful about something that might happen.	Callous: Having an insensitive and cruel disregard for others, heartless.
Indefinitely, For an unlimited or unspecified period of time, forever.	Musty: Having a stale, mouldy, or damp smell, airless.	Lift a finger: Idiom for not making any effort to help someone.
Vile: Extremely unpleasant, disgusting.	Sidled: Walked in a furtive, unobtrusive, or timid manner, moved sideways.	Peat: Decayed vegetable matter cut and dried for fuel.
Intestines: from the end of the stomach to the anus, insides of.	Hitched a lift: Got a free ride in someone else's vehicle.	Don't give a monkey's: Don't care.
Flagship: Lead spaceship.	Roundabout: A circular part of a road.	Impoverished: Make a person or area poor.
Flared: Burned with a sudden intensity, flashed.	Heaved: Lifted or hauled with great effort.	Cruise: Travel casually and smoothly at a moderate speed.
Incoherently: Lacking normal clarity or intelligibility in speech or thought, unconnected.	Control bridge: Where a ship is commanded.	Strut: Walk with a stiff, erect and arrogant gait, swagger.
Transference beam: Transfer of a human body through light to somewhere else.	Flopped: Hang in a loose and ungainly way, sat down heavily.	Antennae: A device used to transmit or receive television or other signals.
Cushioned: Soften the effect of an impact on, mitigated, protected.	Vanished: disappeared suddenly and completely.	Pleased with himself: Self-satisfied, smug.
Theory: A supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something.	Squalid: Extremely dirty and unpleasant, filthy and wretched.	

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Wriggling: Twisting and turning with quick, writhing movements.

Gargle: To rinse the throat with liquid in the throat.

Tannoy: Public address system.

Slithering: Move smoothly over a surface, slide down.

Degenerate: Having lost physical, mental or moral qualities.

Freeloaders: People who takes advantage of others' generosity without giving anything in return.

Dock: To park a spaceship.

Tossed: Throw something lightly, easily or casually.

Foetal: Unborn child.

Clinch: Confirm or settle.

Claustrophobia: Fear of confined spaces.

Extend: Cover a larger area, stretch out.

Trim: To edit with less words.

Hissed: To make a sound as a sign of disapproval or derision, sound like a snake.

Rap: Strike, light blow.

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Q&A

Question 1: How did Ford and Arthur arrive on the alien spaceship from Earth?

Question 5: How did the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy describe Earth?

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

Question 2: What happened to the Earth and why?

Question 6: What was the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy description revised to.

Question 3: What did the huge starship look like and what would device inside the gold box do?

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

Question 4: How would you describe a typical Vogon's personality?

Question 8: What do you imagine will happen when the Vogons come to Ford and Arthur's door?