

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

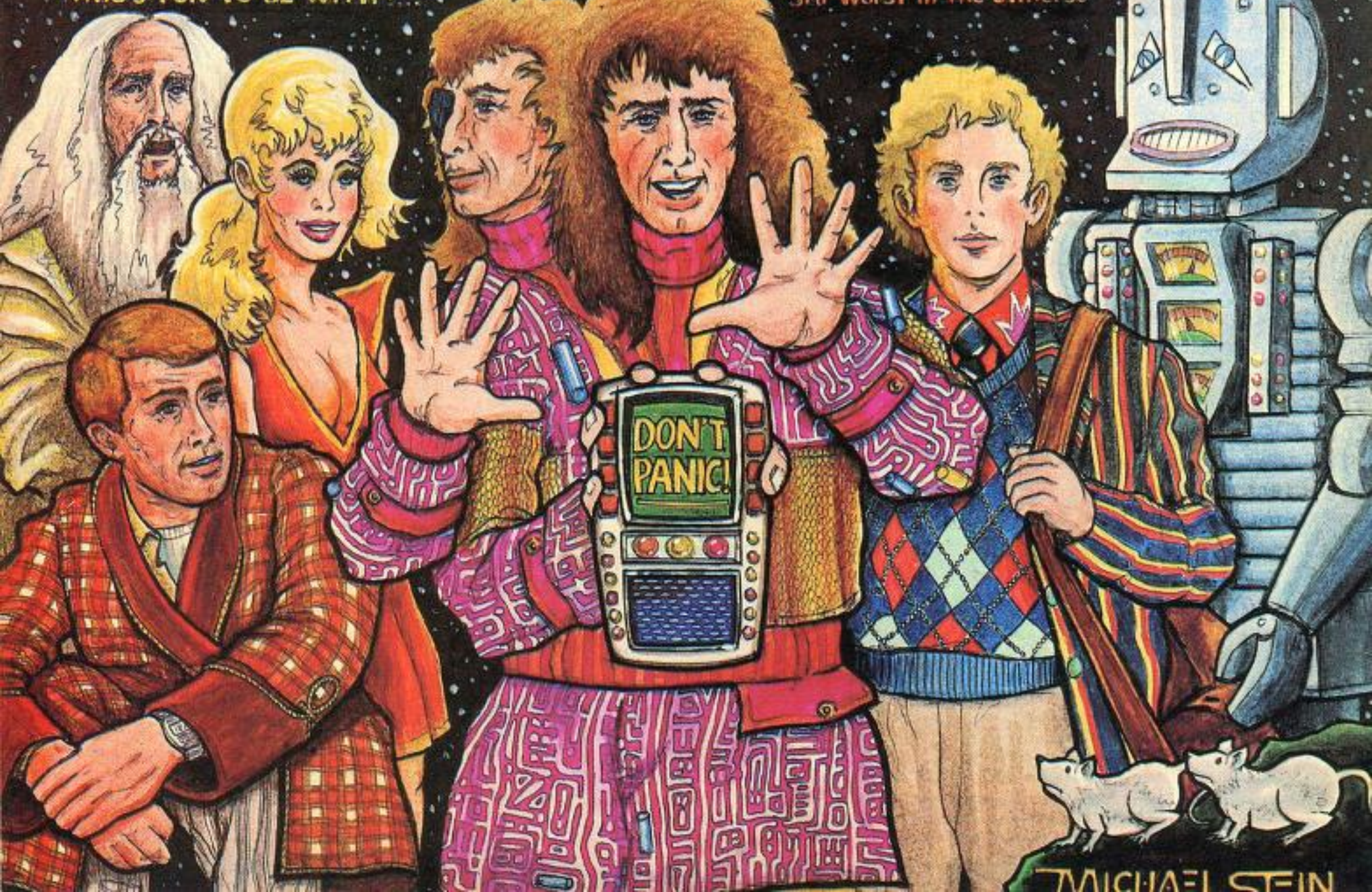
Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster

AMAZING BABEL FISH



YOUR PLASTIC PAL
WHO'S FUN TO BE WITH!

VOGON POETRY
3rd Worst in the Universe



MICHAEL STEIN

Earth. A small, green planet located at the rather unfashionable end of the spiral arm of the galaxy. It's mostly harmless to the universe as a whole, but nonetheless it is about to be destroyed by the unexpected intervention of a Vogon Constructor Fleet (in order to make room for a "hyperspace bypass").

On this small, green planet in a place called Guilford, England, resides a six foot tall bi-ped, ape descendant named Arthur Dent, who is about to be rescued from the Vogon's heartless destruction by his friend, Ford Prefect. But to his amazement, Arthur finds out, just prior to being rescued, that Ford is really not a fellow Englishman at all, but rather an alien (albeit considerably English in appearance) from a small planet outside the star system of Betelgeuse, and not from Guilford after all. Consequently, Arthur would like to have a very stiff drink. Thus begins Douglas Adams' remarkable story about that wholly remarkable book, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

The book itself is as remarkable as Douglas Adams says it is. In the novelization, it is described as a "sort of electronic book." In the radio series, the book narrates a good 80% of the show. The video version was no exception. The book (which looks remarkably like a Milton Bradley Micro-Vision game) explains the odd and sometimes frightening things that Ford Prefect and his Earth companion Arthur Dent encounter. The miniature screen of the book sometimes upstages the narrative with its unique explanation and view of the universe. The animation, which resembles computer line animation, is particularly useful in the video series. Its advice ("How to hitch a lift with a Vogon: FORGET IT.") is often overshadowed by the bizarre graphics accompanying it.



The *Hitch Hiker's Guide* BBC radiocast, from left to right: Douglas Adams (Scriptwriter), Geoffrey Perkins (Producer), David Tate (Man of Many Voices), Geoffery McGivern (Ford Prefect), Mark Wing-Davey (Zaphod Beeblebrox), Simon Jones (Arthur Dent), Alan Ford (Roosta).

"Originally heard over the BBC in England, Hitch-Hiker's Guide has also been translated into a stage play, two books, two record albums, a second BBC radio serial, and a television serial on BBC 2."

As the story continues, the Vogons destroy Earth (and this is only episode one, folks), but not before Ford and Arthur 'hitch a lift' with the Dentrassi, the Vogon's in-flight caterers. Ford and Arthur are found, and, after being tortured by the Vogons (they read their poetry to them) they are thrown out into the vacuum of space.

The Guide says that you can survive thirty seconds in space. And fortunately, twenty-nine and a half seconds later, Ford and Arthur are inadvertently rescued

by Ford's semi-cousin, Zaphod Beeblebrox, who along with his companion Trillian (in reality, Tricia McMillian from Earth), has stolen the first prototype ship equipped with the Infinite Improbability Drive. Zaphod is looking for the lost planet of Magrathea, a planet that used to build custom made planets. It is there that Arthur discovers the Earth was made for some vastly intelligent, pan-dimensional beings who look amazingly similar to white mice.

Meanwhile, the Galactic Police have traced Zaphod and Trillian

to Magrathea, where they corner them in a shoot out. Trapped behind a rapidly over-loading computer bank, Ford and Arthur sing an old Beteleguse death anthem which, loosely translated, means "after this, things can't get much worse."

The computer bank explodes and causes a small gap in time, sending Our Heroes to the Restaurant at the End of the Universe. Once there, they get a phone call from the car park where Marvin, the Paranoid Android and Zaphod's shipboard robot, has been waiting for them for the last few thousand years. In the car park, Zaphod and Ford persuade Marvin to break into a space ship for them, which they promptly steal.

The ship turns out to be a stuntship for Disaster Area, an intergalactic rock group. The highlight of a Disaster Area concert (which reaches new heights on the decibel level) is the collision of a jet-black stuntship into the heart of a sun while on automatic pilot. Needless to say, it is this ship that they have stolen. They discover this as it plunges toward the sun. Our Heroes escape via the teleport facility on board the ship, but Marvin is left to operate the mechanisms.

Ford and Arthur are teleported aboard the B Ark, from the planet Golgafrincham. All of the useless people of the Golgafrincham race (marketing executives, hairdressers, accountants, insurance salesmen, etc.) were put aboard the B Ark and sent to the planet earth on a collision course. It is here that Arthur finds his true ancestors. The B Ark has crashed on Earth in prehistoric times, completely messing up the experiment conducted by the mice.

Originally heard over the BBC in England, *Hitch-Hiker's Guide* has also been translated into a stage play, two books, two record albums, a second BBC radio

Illustration by Michael Stein



Above left, Sandra Dickinson as Trillian and Mark Wing-Davey as Zaphod Beeblebrox. Top center, Zaphod gestures as he converses with his "second head."



Below left, Simon Jones as Arthur Dent and David Dixon as Ford Prefect. Above right, Joe Melia as Mr. Prosser argues with Arthur Dent in front of a bulldozer.

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serial, a television serial on BBC 2 and, most recently, has been recycled into designer firelighters by Beeblebrox Enterprises. The story in all of these incarnations remains more or less constant, and follows the adventures of Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect, usually along with Ford's semi-cousin Zaphod Beeblebrox.

The original series (which has been aired along with the sequel in twelve consecutive half-hour installments on our own National Public Radio throughout this country) was meant to have been one complete story. Originally, the audience was never to see nor hear from Ford and Arthur again after they had been stranded on Earth two million years before her destruction by the Vogons. However, the audience reaction was so tremendous to the first chapters of *Hitch-Hiker's* that the sequel to *The Guide*, often referred to as *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, was subsequently penned by Adams and aired on the BBC a year later. The two books soon followed, and Hitch-Hikermania soon set in. At this time the stage production of *The Guide* also appeared on the British theatrical scene, but was, in Adams' own words, 'a fiasco.' The intricate story of the guide was lost amidst the over-staged scenery, and Adams prefers not to talk about it.

Nor was he especially thrilled with the second radio series, which posed some rather demanding artistic problems for Adams, the foremost of these being: can one man write a new radio series, a book, and script edit the *Doctor Who* television series all at the same time? The answer was yes, but each of those projects suffered somewhat in the long run. The second series had lost the purpose of the first, and seemed to ramble, and that particular season of *Doctor Who* is regarded in some circles as unfortunately one of the worst in the show's 18 year history. The book, however, was a success. *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* was every bit as entertaining as the original, owing mostly to the fact that Adams' rewrite of the whole second series had somehow been sandwiched between the fifth and sixth episodes of series one.

As for the BBC 2 television serial, only four of the original radio cast decided to re-create their roles from the radio drama. The voice of Peter Jones was brought back to bring the book to life with the help of some highly inventive computer graphics. Simon Jones again contributed his understated genius to the terribly British persona of Arthur Dent, the last of two survivors of Earth. Mark Wing-Davey once again became the very hip Zaphod Beeblebrox, ex-numbers runner,

ex-confidence trickster, part-time President of the Galaxy, creator of the Pangalactic Gargleblaster, and the only person in history to survive the TPV. (Total Perspective Vortex. The Vortex shows you in relation to the entire universe, thus making you die of sheer insignificance. Zaphod walked in and walked out about three minutes later. Ergo: Zaphod Beeblebrox has an ego bigger than the universe.) Zaphod is the only person out of the group (excluding Marvin the Paranoid Android) that is pseudo-humanoid: Zaphod's second head and third arm have a tendency to stand out in crowds and very dull parties.

In the video version, Marvin the Paranoid Android's mechanical body was inhabited by David Learner, with the voice being supplied later by Steven Moore. David Learner also played Marvin in the stage version of *Hitch-Hiker*, so he was used to the role. Eddie,

for the stage version: fake it. Or, to put it another way, don't fake it. Another of the major problems encountered by the special effects team throughout the series was trying to make Mark Wing-Davey's second head and third arm look believable. Were there any problems with the Zaphod Beeblebrox costume? "Yes," said Sandra Dickinson. "Most of the problems were from his point of view. It (the mechanical 'puppet head' and 'third arm' apparatus) was very difficult to wear, very heavy, and I think it did trouble his back a bit. It was also difficult to work by remote control, working the face and everything."

More problems revolving around special effects arose when *The Guide* was produced on stage at the Rainbow Theatre, where the largest stage production of *The Guide* was performed. In a space that size, Adams thought, the story would often

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the shipboard computer, was given life by David Tate.

Unfortunately, the actors who played Ford Prefect and his female companion Trillian in the radio series were unavailable for the video version due to prior commitments. Geoffery McGivon and Susan Sarandon were replaced by David Dixon and Sandra Dickinson, respectively. In a recent interview for *Fantastic Films*, Sandra Dickinson had this to say about her role in *The Guide*:

"I hadn't heard all the radio series so it was quite nice to be able to step into the role without any preconceived ideas. And obviously there was no way I could have done it the way it was before, because I'm nothing like that. But I did feel very much a part of the new team. It was good fun."

The video version did suffer from some major problems, however, the biggest of which was encountered when the BBC set designers attempted to visualize the bizarre, strange and often mind-boggling settings in which Our Heroes often found themselves. This problem was solved in much the same way that it was

give way to visuals. His fears were founded as the intricate story was often lost amidst the scenery, making Adams a little wary to try and visually adapt *Hitch-Hiker's* again. But the BBC, realizing the immense popularity of the show thus far, finally coaxed him into it.

The first episode of the television adaptation of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* appeared on BBC 2 last year. The end result was almost as good as the original, with the BBC spending large amounts of money on its production.

The end of the original serial left the viewers to wonder about the fates of Zaphod and Trillian, with Ford and Arthur being left on the planet Earth some two thousand years before the Vagon destruction of the planet. Douglas Adams had also been working on another television serial, but which has, since been unfortunately cancelled by the BBC.

The original book, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, is available in hardcover by Harmony Books in the United States. *The Guide* is due to premier in paperback later this year in the

States. The original paperbacks were printed in England by Pan Books (*Hitch-Hiker's Guide*: 95 pp., *Restaurant at the End of the Universe*: 95 pp.) Douglas Adams is currently working on the third book in the series which should be released sometime near the end of this year. This third book will be completely new and original, which may later be adapted into the second television serial or the third radio series.

There are two albums, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. These two long playing albums contain the original two radio serials. A 45 rpm record was also released with the theme music to the series.

The official *Hitch-Hiker* tee shirts have finally been approved by the BBC and are available in England. The various designs are the "Don't Panic" television logo, the logo from the television series, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* book logo, and the logo of the Intergalactic Plutonium Rock Band, Disaster Area.

Other items have been appearing at conventions of late, including silk-screened towels reading Don't Panic, and *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* Survival Kits, with everything the complete Hitch-Hiker needs (including babel fish). These items are usually not authorized by the BBC, but are fan produced and pretty classy.

The radio series (both of them), have been distributed to the National Public Radio affiliate stations, usually with the *Star Wars* radio series. In some instances, *The Guide* has gotten better ratings than the *Star Wars* radio series.

Currently the plans are for the series to be distributed by either RCT (Rockefeller Center Television) or Lionheart Television Limited, the current distributors of the *Doctor Who* series. Lionheart distributes most of the BBC serials in packages such as *Great Performances*, *Once Upon A Classic* or *Masterpiece Theatre*. Can anyone out there imagine Alastair Cooke introducing the two-headed Zaphod Beeblebrox?

The best thing anyone can do to encourage the distribution of the series is to write to both the BBC and Lionheart. Lionheart's address is: Lionheart Television Ltd., 40 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019. BBC Enterprises, Villers House, The Broadway, London, W5 2PA England. If both companies get enough response in favor of the series, it could be distributed in the United States as early as the end of the year.

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