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The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Review

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The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

Timothy Nunes



To fans of Douglas Adams who've been fighting the urge to panic, just one word of advice: DON'T!

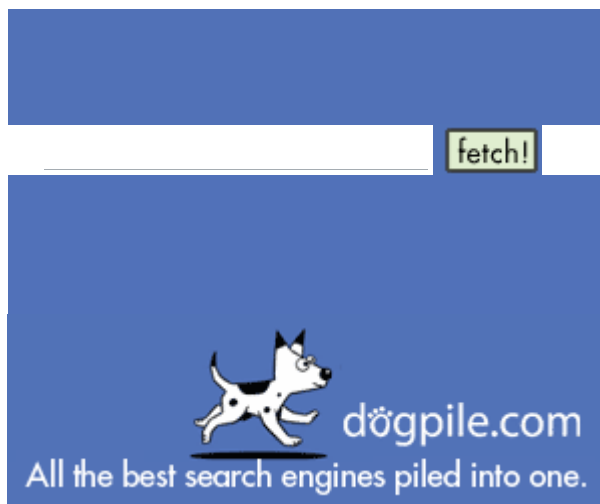
Like the planet Earth, as described within *The Guide* itself (though not referenced in the movie), the big-screen version of Douglas Adams' classic science fiction novel, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy*, is "Mostly Harmless." And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

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The Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy presents a day in the life of Englishman Arthur Dent (Martin Freeman), who awakens one morning to find bulldozers ready to demolish his house to make way for a freeway bypass. Arthur then meets up with a past acquaintance, Ford Prefect (Mos Def), an intergalactic hitchhiker who helps Arthur hitch a ride off the planet moments before it's destroyed to make way for a hyperspace bypass. And the day has only just begun...

This version of Adams' universe, brought to life by director Garth Jennings and Adams himself (he wrote the first revisions of the screenplay before his untimely death at the age of 49), shines in some respects and is a trifle tarnished in others. The gloss and glitter are provided by top-notch CGI special affects, the most breathtaking example being the inside of a planet factory. Surpassing the CGI, however, are Henson animatronic creations, wonderfully brought to life with a realism that allows us to see ourselves in their bureaucratic tendencies—and possibly even their ability to write (and publicly recite) really bad poetry.

Where the film tarnishes a bit is in its attempt to convey the humor of the book to the screen, which may be a commentary on Adams' writing more than any fair criticism of the film itself. Reading *The Hitchhiker's Guide* was like sitting down for a leisurely cup of tea with the writer himself (possibly at a restaurant at the end of the universe), listening to his sardonic voice and cutting wit explain, with just enough detail, exactly how we're supposed to stick a fish in our ear so we might better understand the seemingly endless 'babel' that surrounds us (or at least laugh a little at life's many ironies). In the movie, though the filmmakers make a fine



attempt at compensation through the use of narration and delicious little peeks into *The Guide* itself, much of Adams' intimate narrative is lost, requiring someone like Ford Prefect to come along and brutally shove a fish in our ear for us (which, surprisingly enough, seems to work for the most part).

Sparkle and tarnish aside, however, the cup of tea I was left with after watching *The Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy* was decidedly flavorful, if for only two reasons: utterly superb casting and possibly the best movie song since "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life." Freeman's understated portrayal of everyman Arthur Dent was spot-on, as was Mos Def's perfectly deadpan portrayal of *Guide* writer Prefect. Sam Rockwell was superbly over-the-top as the shallow but handsome two-headed politician Zaphod Beeblebrox. And all I can say about Zooey Deschanel's portrayal of lovely earth girl Trillian is that I haven't been so smitten since Jan Smithers' Bailey on "WKRP in Cincinnati."

As for the wonderfully inspired singing performance of so many talented yet uncredited dolphins, I think I'll just let them speak (or sing) for themselves...

"So long, so long, so long, so long, so long...
So long, so long, so long, so long, so long...
So long, so long, and thanks for all the fish!"

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