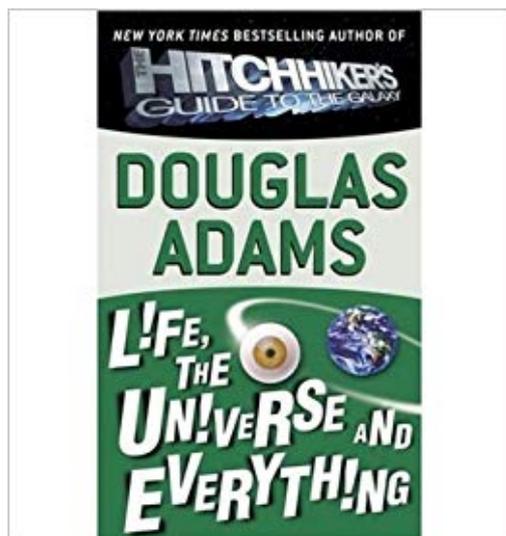


Life, the Universe and Everything *by* Douglas Adams



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Bestselling Author: Douglas Adams. The first three classic novels in the increasingly inaccurately named Hitchhiker's Trilogy .



Reviews of the *Life, the Universe and Everything* *by* Douglas Adams

Siatanni

On the plus side, it's all five books in one volume. However, in "Life, the Universe, and Everything" and "So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish," the text has been edited to be more "American," and a number of the jokes are gone altogether (e.g. The Rory award is no longer for the gratuitous use of the word "Belgium" in a screenplay; it's for the gratuitous use of the word "f***" in a screenplay). Won't be noticed by anyone who has never read the series, but I hate the editing changes as I know what used to be there!

Siratus

Packing more punch than a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster this is the original BBC Radio production with the original cast. Just a bit of music editing to avoid copyright issues. Not noticeable.

I absolutely love hearing this again. A couple of decades back I first heard this on some radio station in California. I think it was on NPR Playhouse. They broadcast only the first two series. I had seen the books in stores and I thought the radio production was adapted from the books. I later learned the actual history. I learned who Douglas Adams was and how he was a natural to write something that would tingle my funny bone and spark my imagination.

Now I find that all of the radio productions are available as audio books. I am savoring each episode. From Vogon poetry to the musings of Slartibartfast you will not be disappointed. I love hearing Slartibartfast again. I wish Stephen Hawking had spent some time trying to work out what the bowl of petunias meant by thinking, "Oh no, not again."

Don't Panic. Don't put a paper bag over your head. Now you can enjoy the entire hilarious adventure.

(Interesting that my Microsoft Word recognizes Slartibartfast but not Vogon)

Anayaron

If you are going to read the complete "Hitchhiker" series then I recommend buying "The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" as it contains all five of the books in the series. Having them in one volume encourages you to read them soon after each other, and I think that enhances the experience.

The collection also contains the horrid story "Young Zaphod Plays It Safe" and it is a waste of space in the text. But, that is a small quibble, and the story is short.

I enjoyed the series, mostly, and I would recommend it to certain readers. For more specifics see below where you will find my review for all five of the novels in chronological order.

1. "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" is short and never gives much development (character or plot) but it seems appropriate for this tale. The novel reminds me a lot of Vonnegut in its style and presentation. Short chapters and biting satire mixed with fantastical plot devices. And it all works! The introduction and first chapter of this novel are funny and pull you into the book. There are moments that are so clever and witty that you will find yourself re-reading certain lines for no reason other than to enjoy them once again. Chapter 23 of the text (perhaps the book's most famous) is brilliant and to the point. It is very short, funny, and kind of wise. Its opening line, "It is an important and popular fact that things are not often what they seem" could be a thematic statement for the book. One of the novel's key devices is the idea that Earth is an experiment, and without revealing too much, I will say that it gives the novel its focus.

Also enjoyable are the characters of Marvin the paranoid android and Eddie, the shipboard computer on "The Heart of Gold" (a spaceship that serves as the novel's main setting). Some of the text's best moments and lines belong to them, and I was more endeared to them than I was to the novel's two human characters.

"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" is a delightful and quick read and I will be continuing my trip through the galaxy with its sequel, "The Restaurant at the End of the Universe."

2. "The Restaurant at the End of the Universe" reads like a typical adventure tale, and it is more in this genre than its predecessor "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy". The restaurant of the title is

a place where the characters go and can literally watch the end of the Universe during dinner. Trust me, the way Mr. Adams explains it, it makes sense!

The plot of the novel begins right where its predecessor left off, and the set up is that space psychiatrists plot to kill Arthur Dent and Trillian because they are the last survivors from Earth, which we found out in "Hitchhiker" was an experiment designed to answer the purpose of "Life, the universe, and everything." The psychiatrists do not want that question answered because they would be out of business. And with this clever premise it is off to the races.

In this delightful and quick romp of a novel we get to meet space psychiatrists, rock stars, and the ruler of the universe. And it goes without saying that none of it is as expected. The satire of the rock stars and bands is wonderful, as is the clever jab at rock stars that use to flee tax jurisdictions to record albums. In the book one mega space rock star even goes into "suspended death" for two years for the tax deductions.

The last 20 pages of the book contain some pretty rough satire of modern professions and social dynamics. And then the text ends abruptly, like Mr. Adams was leading you into the next novel. It worked, because I will be continuing my journey with these hitchhikers. You should too!

3. Of the three novels that I have read so far out of the five that compose the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" series, "Life, the Universe and Everything" is the weakest, but it is still incredibly good. The whole book feels like a Monty Python sketch, but the first few chapters especially feel that way. It works, but it does get a little tiresome after a while.

The humor in this text is mostly through wordplay. It serves the book well and is a strength of this novel because in terms of plot "Life, the Universe and Everything" is all over the place. The unity of the wordplay and humor serves to coalesce (as much as it can) a very scattered text. Especially enjoyable is a clever discourse on swear words, their usage and how they evolve and change. In the world of this novel the word "Belgium" is their equivalent of the F-word. This part of the novel is a witty piece of satirical writing, and is very enjoyable.

There are two interesting bits in this novel I would like to share in this review. The first is one of my favorite cameo appearances in this entire series thus far, the character of Wowbagger, the Infinitely Prolonged. He is an alien who through an accident has immortality and is bored to tears. So he makes it a mission to insult everyone in the Universe. His occasional appearances in this story are a joy. Another aspect of the text that I enjoyed is that the ultimate question and answer to everything remains unexplained. There is also a thinly veiled satire aimed at religious symbols where it seems Adams is mocking finding value in such things. It is an engaging section of the text.

I will be moving on to the fourth book in this series soon. I have enjoyed this ride so far!

4. This fourth novel in the series begins exactly as the first one, word for word, with one small twist. You can decide for yourself what you think of that twist. I did not care for it, as it shifts the focus in this text from the ones that preceded it. "So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish" begins with Arthur Dent back on earth, which is no longer destroyed (it was blown up in the first book of the series) but the explanation for how this is so is best glossed over if one wants to fully enter the world of the text. This novel does not feature the other characters from the previous three, so fans of Zaphod Beeblebrox and Trillian will be disappointed. Other series staples such as Ford Prefect and Marvin the Android make cameos in the novel's final pages, but they seemed forced and not all that interesting in the context Mr. Adams uses here.

This are some shining moments in this book, among them chapter 25 in which the author's persona intrudes into the text to answer the question "Does Arthur Dent f-word?" We also get to see "God's final message to His creation", and it is actually not a letdown.

At one point in the novel Arthur tells someone "See first, think later, then test" as the best way to approach something one does not fully comprehend. If you don't take the last two parts of his advice while you are reading "So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish" you can enjoy the text.

I am anxious to see how the series concludes in installment 5, and I will be traveling that way soon.

5. "Mostly Harmless" is a great example of a writer extending a series by one book too many. Of the five books in the "Hitchhiker" series numbers four and five don't add much to it, and take a lot from it. "Mostly Harmless" just feels out of sync with the books that preceded it. Stylistically it is also very different, the chapters are much longer, the humor is much rarer, etc. It is not a good change.

A big flaw of the text is that our hero Arthur Dent does not even show up until chapter seven, and even when he does there is no transition from how we left him in book four, "So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish." From chapter seven to almost the final 40 pages the chapters alternate point of view between Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect. I found Prefect's story boring until his storyline merges with Dent's about 3/4s of the way through the novel.

The book does have some good moments, particularly chapter nine in which it finally feels like the other novels in the series. Arthur Dent goes to the planet Hawalius to seek the advice of the oracles that inhabit it. In this chapter we see sparks of the Douglas Adams from the previous texts and it is a joy to read. There is also a witty cameo appearance by Elvis, which is cleverly woven into the plotline.

As has been stated in previous reviews "Mostly Harmless" is a dark text, almost nihilistic in its themes. The series ends in a uncharacteristic manner. Although as a reader I did not like the ending per se, I do feel it was kind of appropriate. It feels jarring and out of place at the same time. I can't say much more without spoiling it. Regardless it does give the series a sense of definite completion, and I think that is a good thing.

Keramar

This was one of those books that I find a lot of people have heard of but not a lot of people have read - if you're one of those people and you like dry, satire-style humor and imaginative science fiction, certainly give this book a try. This book is super easy to read and is a humorous take on space and time travel. It follows a 'normal' man who unknowingly befriends an alien hitchhiker and is taken along on some entertaining journeys through space. They go to other universes, meet interesting characters, discover futuristic technology (including a melodramatic, depressed robot), and discover the ACTUAL answer to the universe! The only question left now is... what exactly was the question? Sounds ridiculous, I know, but you really get sucked in!

Ckelond

Douglas Adams was my first introduction to British humor. As a kid that grew up in rural MO during the pre-internet era, this book was one of the first indications I had that the world outside my little cow-filled bubble was a much bigger place than the simple folk around me were letting on. I came back to Hitchhiker's Guide when I was a homesick 20-something in Denmark, acclimating to an entirely new environment, new language, and new life. Most recently, I picked up this copy prior to my 42nd birthday. There are lots of changes happening now and things really seem to be coming together. I can't help but wonder at the timing. You sass? Clever, insightful, and maybe even revelatory in the most absurd way, The Guide is a timeless space adventure that has helped me find my own place in the universe.

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