

THE CULTURAL (R)EVOLUTION OF DOUGLAS ADAMS'S
THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

by

Victoria Warenik

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. David Lavery, Director

Dr. Martha Hixon, Second Reader

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to Mr. Brendon Flynn, my ninth grade English teacher, without whom I might never have picked up *Hitchhiker's*.

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ABSTRACT

In 1978, British-born Douglas Adams (1952-2001) wrote what would become six episodes of the celebrated *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* radio show for BBC's Radio 4. Adams's career was marked by his constant return to his original work, reworking and adding on to what most critics deem his best idea into a bestselling book, a miniseries, comic books, sequels, radio adaptations of later *Hitchhiker's* novels, and finally a feature film. Over the course of thirty-five years, fans have been listening, reading, and watching *The Hitchhiker's Guide* and its four subsequent sequels. As this thesis ascertains, Adams's works need further investigation because of their prominence in contemporary culture and their relevance as subjects for such multiple academic spheres as literature, media, and fan studies.

To develop this argument, this thesis focuses on the evolution of Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide* over the years and its remarkable author. The first chapter concentrates on Adams's contribution to the popular culture canon and the need to legitimize the study of popular culture. Douglas Adams, the man, and his particular genius--the constant revision of *The Hitchhiker's Guide*, its unceasing popularity with fans, and its many paratexts—is the subject of Chapter Two. Finally, Chapter Three takes as its subject Adams's authorial intent and the posthumously produced and cast Hollywood feature film, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

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INTRODUCTION:

Douglas Adams and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: an Introduction

“There is no logical progression to be had here: no episode guide, no filmography, not even a clearly defined chronological progression. What there is instead is a genuine multimedia phenomenon—a global success without precedent or parallel” (Simpson 17)

“Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the galaxy lies a small unregarded sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-eight million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea” (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* 1). Here on this insignificant little blue-green planet, Earth, Douglas Adams made his home. The story of how he came up with such an unlikely idea as *The Hitchhiker's Guide* became something of a joke to Adams; in 1971, Adams, an exceptionally tall English fellow, was lying drunk in a field in Innsbrook, Austria, before going up to university. The tale from here has become a part of the mythos of *Hitchhiker's*, and Adams himself doesn't even really know the true story, saying in the forward to his *Original Hitchhiker Radio Scripts*:

Apparently, I was hitch-hiking around Europe at the time and had a copy of *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to Europe* (by Ken Walsh . . .) with me at the time . . . So as I lay there in this field, the stars span lazily around my head, and just before I nodded off, it occurred to me that someone ought to write a *Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as well. Now, this may well be true. It sounds plausible. It certainly has a familiar kind of ring to it. (12)

A few years later, in a production meeting with Simon Brett, then a producer with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Adams's drunken thought floated back to him and he pitched a science fiction comedy radio show about a man's house being demolished and then the Earth being demolished for much the same reason; though science fiction comedies rarely worked, especially in radio, and Adams was a virtual unknown,¹ Brett loved the idea and stuck his neck out for Adams, sending him home to write up six episodes for a science fiction comedy radio show for the BBC. Nearly a year later, Nick Webb would offer Adams the opportunity to move into transforming his radio hit into a book. Since its nascent grassroots success, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has, without finding critical acclaim, continued to entertain its fans throughout the years.² Though it has fallen into some obscurity and out of the mainstream media spotlight since 1984, there have been and always will be Hitchhikers, fans of Douglas Adams, and of his work. *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has done many things for media and science fiction, among them reinvigorating the genre of comedy science fiction and proving that something considered

¹ Adams had recently graduated from St. Johns College at Cambridge University where he was in Cambridge's Footlights Dramatic Club, a veritable breeding ground for Britain's greatest comedians, writers, and actors; alums include Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie, Emma Thompson, Salman Rushdie, John Cleese, Eric Idle.

² Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (London: Pan Books, 1979). To date, through my research, there have been no discrepancies between the original 1979 Pan Books mass-market paperback printing and all subsequent printings, through all of its different copyright and publishing house changes.

obscure and particular could interest millions. To date, the books alone have sold over fifteen million copies, which when put into perspective with the literary giants J.K. Rowling, Stephen King or J.R.R. Tolkien is miniscule, but one should remember that *Hitchhiker's* was doing something different from all the science fiction before it; *Hitchhiker's* was presenting itself in many different forms, to reach wider and broader audiences in a genre that was unpopular in its original radio broadcast format, as well as its later book format. This project seeks to continue an ongoing conversation about the societal impact of media in popular culture and literature, infusing the conversation with Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* which has been a radio series, a book, a stage show, a comic, a video game, more books, more radio series, and finally a feature film, all over the course of thirty-three years. Even with the untimely death of Adams in 2001, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* world continued to turn with the publishing of a sixth *Hitchhiker's* book by Eoin Colfer and radio presentations of Adams's later *Hitchhiker's* novels. Additionally, the disseminations of form and its relation to cult fame will be explored through some of the forms mentioned above, specifically its original radio broadcast, the 1981 BBC4 television series, the books, and a 2005 Hollywood film. *Hitchhiker's* is an ideal subject to study because of its latitude across the broad spectrum of media. Two questions that will remain tangential throughout is whether or not Adams was ahead of his time in terms of his writing and whether his ability to imagine his work past radio, and even past a book, was the reason *Hitchhiker's* was never as popular as it could have been.

In 1977, radio shows in Britain were becoming increasingly scarce and television was where the big money was.³ While it is important to note the radio broadcast of *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*⁴ differed in some ways from the subsequent novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the main plot stayed the same through both the radio series and the book. The same can be said for the subsequent radio series' and their paired books.⁵ Arthur Dent is our hero. Arthur is an average Earthman from the United Kingdom who is saved by his friend, Ford Prefect, a field researcher for the aptly named *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*; Ford is an alien from the small planet Betelgeuse Seven. The novel follows Arthur's travels through time and space after his planet has been obliterated to make way for a hyperspace bypass. Zaphod Beeblebrox is the galactic president, and his only role is to be a figurehead. Trillian MacMillan is an Earth woman picked up by Zaphod at a party six months before Earth is demolished. Marvin is an android on the ship *Starship Heart of Gold* and he has been given a Genuine People

³ Interestingly, there has been a renaissance in Britain concerning radio shows. Though BBC radio has always been popular, there are now multiple shows which only air on the radio whose fans tune in for only thirty minutes, much as they would for a TV show.

⁴ When the radio show was first broadcast, a hyphen appeared in the title: *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. When the book was printed, the hyphen disappeared and when asked, Adams just said to bugger it and leave off the hyphen in future to create a sense of continuity.

⁵ For instance, the second radio series preceded the publication of the second book but the third, fourth and fifth books preceded their subsequent radio adaptations.

Personality; he is presented as chronically depressed. Zaphod is looking for the fabled planet Magrathea, which creates other planets, such as Earth. Interestingly, Earth is a giant computer made by a race of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings that have evolved into mice. By the end of the first novel, readers have traveled the length and breadth of outer space with Arthur Dent and his friends, and are invited to dine at the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, the next book in the series. Though *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is the name of the complete series (of both the books and the radio series), the focus of this project will be the first two radio series' as they are the source material of the later adaptations. Adams's had a penchant for both dipping back into the well to re-adapt *Hitchhiker's* and changing whole plot points, in addition to adding characters because he wanted to change up the original.

Douglas Noël Adams was born March 11, 1952 to Jan and Christopher Adams. His claim to fame is that he was DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) a full nine months before Crick and Watson made their discovery at Cambridge. His parents got divorced when he was just five years old, and when his mother remarried, he became a boarding student at The Brentwood School in Essex (Gaiman 1). Adams was a gawky child, whom at eleven years old towered over his peers and professors. One memorable anecdote Adams recounted in the posthumously published *The Salmon of Doubt* is the story of the boys of Brentwood going on school expeditions: the form-master wouldn't say "'meet under the clock tower' or 'Meet under the War Memorial,' but 'Meet under Adams.' I was at least as visible as anything else on the horizon, and could be repositioned at will" (7). At Brentwood, prizes were awarded at Prep, Junior, and Senior Speech Days every July and in his second year Douglas distinguished himself by winning the Junior Prize for

Reading. The next year he met Form Master Frank Halford who would have a profound influence on him. In 1962, Douglas Adams became the first and only boy ever to receive a ten out of ten from Frank Halford for writing an adventure story about hidden treasure that was “technically and creatively perfect—remarkable piece of work for a boy that age” (Simpson 10). Adams noted at many times during his career, “when I have a dark night of the soul as a writer and think that I can’t do this any more, the thing that I reach for is not the fact that I have had bestsellers or huge advances. It is the fact that Frank Halford once gave me ten out of ten and at some fundamental level I must be able to do it” (Simpson 10).

In the fall of 1971, a few short months after his drunken night in Innsbruck, Adams went up to Cambridge, where he met some of the people he would collaborate with throughout his career, developing his humor writing for Footlights, the Cambridge University Comedy Revue. It was during his Cambridge years that he met John Lloyd, who he lived and wrote with while working on *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* Radio series; eventually Adams removed all of Lloyd’s portions of the show for the novel and all other subsequent adaptations.⁶ Though Lloyd had a hand in some plot development in the fourth, fifth, and sixth episodes, Adams has always been known as the author of the idea of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, especially once he wrote

⁶ Adams would later reconcile with Lloyd and co-author *The Meaning of Liff* and *The Deeper Meaning of Liff*, fabricated dictionaries of definitions that existed with no words for them; for example: “Dalmilling: (Dal-MILL-ing) *ptcpl. vb.* Continually making small talk to someone who is trying to read a book” (*The Deeper Meaning of Liff* 27).

the book and left out all the work Lloyd wrote. After *Hitchhiker's* gained its cult following, Adams kept returning to his idea to turn it into more and more forms such as the stage play, the comic book, the 1981 television series, and the additional novels in the series.⁷ The reason Adams's radio series was even published as a book was because, as Adams says, "A publisher came and asked me to write a book, which was a very good way of breaking into publishing" (Simpson 130). Adams had a penchant for answering interview questions flippantly, and though he meant his answer, Adams continued to write for reasons other than just convenience. Nick Webb, commissioning editor of Pan Books in 1978, heard *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* on the radio and immediately fell in love with it.⁸ He went straight to Adams's agent and sought the publishing rights.⁹

After *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* gained more popularity and had seen many adaptations, Adams grew tired of the series and ended up working on other projects, among them *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* and its sequel *The Long*

⁷ *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe; Life, the Universe and Everything; So Long, and Thanks For All the Fish; and Mostly Harmless.*

⁸ He would later write the authorized biography of Douglas Adams, *Wish You Were Here*.

⁹ Many people do not realize that the first edition, first printing of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* novel was actually published in a mass-market paperback form, just as other popular science fiction pulps. If you are in the market for a copy of the first printing, the first hardcover edition published by Arthur Baker Publishing of London in 1979, mere months after the Pan Books original, is what most sellers put on the market.

Dark Tea-Time of the Soul, a series about a detective who specializes in missing cats and messy divorces. He pulled the bulk of material for *Dirk Gently* from his own scripts he wrote for *Doctor Who*, the long running BBC science fiction hit (1963-1989, 2005-), including those from “City of Death” and “Shada”.¹⁰ In addition to his two non-Hitchhiker books, Adams co-wrote two farcical dictionaries with his former flatmate John Lloyd, and another non-fiction novel with Mark Carwardine.¹¹ Almost ten years passed between the publishing of Book Four of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* series, *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* (1984), and Book Five, *Mostly Harmless* (1992). Amidst all of the different adaptations of *Hitchhiker’s*, Adams tried as early as 1982 to get the rights optioned off to be a movie. It was not until after his death that this goal would be a reality; Adams earned posthumous screenwriting credit.

Over the course of the latter part of the twentieth century, and in to the twenty-first, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* has become a part of the global culture. The books have been published in over thirty-five languages including Croatian, Czech, Danish, Swedish, and Ukrainian. The original radio broadcast has been translated and adapted for non-English speaking countries and has been re-aired multiple times. Big Read, a survey put out by the BBC in 2003, received over three quarters of a million votes from the British public to determine which book was the most loved of all time. The list was 200 books long. J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was first on

¹⁰ Two of the most celebrated and discussed *Doctor Who* stories.

¹¹ *The Meaning of Liff* and *The Deeper Meaning of Liff*, and *Last Chance to See*, respectively.

the list. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was second and Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy was third. Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was fourth. In the summer of 2011, National Public Radio (NPR) polled over 60,000 people in the US to determine the top 100 science fiction/fantasy novels (Weldon). NPR tabulated the suggestions and with the help of an expert panel, narrowed the list to determine who would win. The expert panel was made up of three of the most renowned science fiction fantasy scholars, John Clute, Farah Mendlesohn, and Gary K. Wolfe. As with the previous poll, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* took the first spot with over 29,700 votes. Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide* received more than 20,000 votes, earning it the second position. Yet, while the panelists admitted *The Hitchhiker's Guide's* popularity, they mentioned being surprised it took one of the top spots (Weldon). Yet, Adams has always been a popular author for readers of all ages. The two things that made Adams a relatable author were his absurdist humor and his ability to create a world from things that are familiar.¹²

Adams himself has answered the question of his own fame. In an interview conducted by James Naughtie of BBC 4 in 2000, more than twenty years after the original airing of the radio series on the same channel, Naughtie asks Adams, "What's the essence of *Hitchhiker's* success?" (qtd. in Simpson 43). Adams answers:

Of course, it's an unanswerable question. If one knew the answer, one could bottle it. The only thing I can say with any degree of certainty is that, however extraordinary its success may have turned out to be, there's

¹² Arthur Dent the Englishman in space represents a clear example of this dichotomy.

a little bit of me that's isn't surprised because I actually know how much I put into it. I do find writing terribly, terribly difficult, and I think it's because there's a little bit of me that cannot expect that anything I've written is going to be any good. So you work at it a bit more and a bit more and you are so determined to pack everything in, so it doesn't surprise me that people have got a lot out of it in the end. (43)

Adams's answer is gracious, if perhaps a bit flippant. He answers unambitiously and claims only a small amount of self-importance. This quote typifies why much of Adams's fandom likes all of the adaptations of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. That is: many fans cannot articulate exactly why they like the series because it is so difficult to pin down. Its absurdism and smart jokes help to both marginalize its readership from other science fiction and fantasy readers because of its exclusive nature, yet both of these traits bring in readers who never would have picked up the book because of the inherent inclusivity. One of the aspects many readers of *The Hitchhiker's Guide* enjoy is the fact that they are in on all the jokes. What fans of Adams and *Hitchhiker's* enjoy in addition to their reading is the inability of many potential readers to understand what the draw of Adams is. As Adams says of the success of his most well known work, "it's unanswerable," so to his fans say of their enjoyment of the book and its sequels (43).

Though one cannot ever truly understand the reason for Adams's continued regard in popular culture, he was able to break down the barriers of media, disseminating an idea across the radio, a live stage, print publication, the Internet, a video game, a feature film, more books and more radio broadcasts (tertiary thru quandary phases) to present his work to the world. Adams reached millions of people through his ever-

forward-thinking stance on technology and its impact on culture today. If Adams were still around today, I'm sure he would be active on Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook, popular social media sites through which he could share his brightest ideas because of his innate love of and for technology. After all, there have already been pages created for Adams himself, Arthur Dent, Zaphod Beeblebrox, Marvin the Paranoid Android, and other characters from Adams's work on all of these platforms. We know Adams is popular; perhaps the crux of the matter is that some still refuse to acknowledge his many accomplishments in multiple realms. In 1999, Douglas Adams wrote "How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Internet" for *The Sunday Times* in the UK, which highlights the differences in generational use and acceptance of the Internet and also parallels the reception of his own work in society. Adams says. "The biggest problem is that we are still the first generation of users, and for all that we may have invented the net, we still don't really get it . . ." ("How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Internet"). In the end, our collective culture, including academia, is finally catching up to Adams, his fans, and science fiction culture at large; thirty-four years later, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has finally found its place amongst popular culture *and* literary theory.

Chapter One, "Positive Brainwashing: the Legacy of Popular Culture, the BBC, and Douglas Adams," explores the evolution of the text itself, from a radio series to a Hollywood film and everything in between. Additionally, the chapter investigates where *Hitchhiker's* got its start and how its original platform of radio helped launch its later fame. In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of the text, I explore the representation of mass culture by Theodore Adorno, one of the staunchest

critics of popular culture, and its effect on society as a whole. Further, I frame my argument by using Steven Johnson's "Sleeper Curve Theory" (2005), to support the claim that *The Hitchhiker's Guide* is positive brainwashing. Positive brainwashing is a qualifier, yet it occupies a role other terms cannot incorporate; a further definition is expressed through the text. Additionally, in this chapter, I make the assertion that *Hitchhiker's* was well ahead of its time and will continue to be read and studied because of its immersion in popular culture. Though many academics claim popular culture is not valuable and enduring because of its transitory nature, this chapter helps to break down barriers between popular culture scholars and the more traditional avenues of scholarship in academia. After introducing Adorno's and Johnson's theories, the chapter ends with a discussion of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and its evolutionary journey from radio series, to mainstream book with millions of copies sold, to Hollywood film, proving the capacity of popular culture to make a positive impact on mass society.

Chapter Two, "The Genius of Douglas Adams," closely follows the pattern of Chapter One, continuing the conversation regarding the cultural impact of *The Hitchhiker's Guide*, talking specifically about its cult fame and fandom. Further, the chapter explores the impact Adams himself had on *Hitchhiker's* and why the work became such a cult phenomenon. To clearly establish *The Hitchhiker's Guide* as a culturally famous work, I use media scholars Henry Jenkins and Jonathan Gray's work on fandom theory and fan studies to scaffold my over-arching argument that *Hitchhiker's* exists as an anomalous evolutionary work in the canon of science fiction and fantasy deserving of more scholarly attention from literary and media scholars alike. Adams was well ahead of his time, setting a bar he consistently raised with each additional evolution

of his work. Starting with a glance at the development of fan studies, I move to talking about the growth of *Hitchhiker's* fandom from its infancy as fan call-ins and fledgling fan societies, to its subsequent maturing toward involvement in social media, inter-textual popular culture references, and internationally recognized websites and fan societies. Contextualizing the references that have come into our own popular consumption aids in supporting the argument that fan studies is not only a legitimate field of study, but also that fandoms aid in supporting the understanding we have of the popularity of an author or a work, which allows scholars a deeper, more complete, collaborative look at that an author or work. In the end, this chapter highlights the potential of fan studies in regard to where scholars in the fan studies field are and where they can go in the future.

Chapter Three, "Authorial Intent, Narratology, Hollywood's Happy Ending, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*," is both a continuation from Chapters One and Two and a move toward beginning a conversation about Adams's impact on popular culture through the lenses of narratology and authorial intent. Throughout the chapter I discuss the transformation of the book, arguably the most popular version of *Hitchhiker's*, to the 2005 feature length film produced by Touchstone Pictures. The ensuing chapter argues that while many would claim the film barely broke even and the fandom suffered as a result, the film actually brought new life to a fandom that has seen four decades of new editions and platforms from the original radio programme. First, the chapter considers Adams's authorial intent regarding his seminal work, *The Hitchhiker's Guide*, and investigates whether or not he actually was on board with all of its changes over the years and through its various different formats, given that the changes to the original text are for fans the most problematic. The underlying question tackled is

whether or not authorial intent should actually affect change how fans perceive their favorite works. Should we accept the film version of *Hitchhiker's* because Adams himself scripted the changes he wrote? Or should we be allowed to think individually, without the author's own stance coming to bear as a point of contention when discussing the work? These questions are both deliberated and answered. Further, I make a clear distinction between science fiction and science fantasy, in addition to offering a brief introduction to narratology and its usefulness in studying popular culture texts, specifically Adams's own *Hitchhiker's*. I have no doubt that this project is just the beginning of a long scholarly discussion on Douglas Adams, his works, and his impact on both popular culture and media and fandom studies. I look forward to discovering more studies on this topic, as well as topics of a similar nature. Though I find myself firmly enmeshed in a world of scholarly colleagues set in their canonical ways, I happily present an interdisciplinary study of a literary, technological, and media figure in Douglas Adams.

CHAPTER ONE:

Positive Brainwashing: The Legacy of Popular Culture, the BBC, and Douglas Adams

“The promise of the work of art to create truth by impressing its unique contours on the socially transmitted forms is as necessary as it is hypocritical” –from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

“Having been an English literary graduate, I’ve been trying to avoid the idea of doing art ever since. I think the idea of art kills creativity. I think media are at their most interesting before anybody’s thought of calling them art, when people still think they’re just a load of junk” –from Douglas Adams’s *Salmon of Doubt*

Crossing in and out of the world of print, visual, and audio publications, gathering a slew of honors over the course of his life for his work in technology and with endangered animals, Douglas Adams never won any radio, literary, or film awards for his best-selling work *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, other than from his own publishers after selling more than one million copies. (However, Adams was nominated for a Hugo award in 1979,¹ losing in the end to *Superman*.) Adams wrote one of the most beloved series in the United Kingdom. Though his work was loved by both entertainment critics and fans, there is a disconnect between the life of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the*

¹ Largely recognized as the most prestigious award offered for a work of science fiction, the original radio series of *Hitchhiker’s* was the first of its kind to be nominated for the honor.

Galaxy and its relationship to the academic community. This disconnect can be pinpointed through the work's solid place in popular culture. For a variety of reasons, popular culture occupies a less explored field of study in academia for many academic researchers. However, in recent years, more and more academics have stuck their toes in the waters of popular culture, finding rich wells for their various studies. Cultural theory and fandom studies have sprung up among all of the already existing theoretical approaches being applied to popular culture (e.g. feminism, textual criticism, reader-response, deconstruction, etc.). Adams and his famous works have had multiple articles and essays penned in regard to their contents. In the last ten years alone, *Philosophy and the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *The Anthology at the End of the Universe*, and *The Science of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* have been published; Adams himself wrote the prefatory material for *Digging Holes in Popular Culture: Archaeology and Science Fiction* (2002), edited by Miles Russell, senior lecturer in prehistoric and Roman archaeology. However, *The Anthology at the End of the Universe* printed by publisher-cum-fan Glenn Yeffeth of BenBella Books, exemplifies a move away from academia and toward fan effusions. While the anthology does insert some academic resources, the majority of the essays included are anecdotal fan essays regarding Adams and his work and the impact on their lives; those that are academic appear out of place. For example: having Bruce Bethke's fascinating research into computer science in "The Secret Symbiosis: The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy and Its Impact on Real Computer Science" along side Amy Berner's largely personal account of her experience with *Hitchhiker's* in "Words to Live By." Instances of these less-than-academic conversations being published lend credence to the question: why should people value the study of

popular culture? Though a loaded question, this chapter will attempt to answer it by looking at popular culture's most ardent critic, Theodor W. Adorno, and his theory of mass culture; Steven Johnson's book *Everything Bad is Good for You*, which defends the positive brainwashing² of popular culture; and Douglas Adams' own *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* whose pages, be they radio scripts or books, beg to be combed for the same markers accepted by academic purists.

Adorno's theories are notoriously difficult to parse, even for the seasoned academic. Thus, Robert Witkin's *Adorno on Popular Culture* (2003) will serve as a guide, in addition to looking at Adorno's own essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." As early as 1942—during the throes of Germany's war with the rest of the world—when Adorno and Max Horkheimer first began their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno, a self-admitted Marxist, was not pleased with what he was seeing happen throughout the world—even among his inner circle of friends (some of whom would go on to support the war that beggared Germany)—to the representation and implementation of culture. Adorno and Horkheimer write in their prefatory material from 1944, "What we had set out to do was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism" (xiv). They go on to explore the self-destruction of Enlightenment

² Positive brainwashing is changing a person's very impulses and value system in a constructive way; instead of harming someone, positive brainwashing helps people better themselves. For example, turning someone away from believing that popular culture is bad for you (Johnson xv).

throughout the remaining pages, noting that “The Culture Industry” section as showing the “regression of enlightenment to ideology which is graphically expressed in film and radio . . . still, more than others, the section on the culture industry is fragmentary” (xviii and xiv). Though the authors freely admit to their work being incomplete, they stood by their complete dismantling of popular culture. While Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate an appreciation for this high art, radio, television, and film do not fall among them leading them to say, “Culture is a paradoxical commodity. It is so completely subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly equated with use that it can no longer be used” (131). The argument against cultural exchange and use is especially prescient.

Billions of dollars’ worth of advertisements suffuse our culture; according to Hank Green of YouTube fame, the average American watches four hours of television a day with 1.4 hours of advertisements in a day, which breaks down to 511 hours of advertisements over the course of a year. In addition to television, Adorno and Horkheimer reference film and radio in their indictment of popular culture. While advertisements are certainly inescapable in contemporary society, when Adorno and Horkheimer were writing their philosophical fragments, advertisements had yet to truly grip our world culture in radio and film, and television was just beginning to exploit the interests of their viewers. Of radio and film Adorno and Horkheimer note, “[they] no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 95). While there are those filmmakers, such as Michael Bay, who are known for their pandering to advertisers, many fledgling producers, writers, and actors

work in their chosen field in order to perfect their craft; money as a potential is even better. Adorno and Horkheimer are commenting on the business side of the industry while actually bashing the artists themselves. Further, there are many examples of popular culture which have no advertisements; namely, shows produced by the BBC.

To lump works such as Steven Spielberg's *Shindler's List*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or even Adams' *Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* radio series into this artless category is a stretch.³ The final products of *Shindler's List*, *Slaughterhouse-House*, and *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* have become substantial parts of not only popular culture, but in American high school and college film and literature classes as well. Since the film, book, and radio series have been published, they have touched millions of people in some way. Adorno and Horkheimer themselves constantly reference popular music, novels, and film to aid in supporting their theses. For instance, they cite the industry's bowing to Tolstoy for film adaptations, Mickey Rooney replacing a tragic Greta Garbo, or Donald Duck in place of Betty Boop as examples (106). Adorno and Horkheimer do not draw a clear line demarcating their examples of "good" popular culture versus those that are "unacceptable"; thus, their argument against popular culture becomes a subjective qualification of what Adorno and Horkheimer enjoy. As Witkin elaborates:

³ Of course, they have not actually cited these examples, given they were made after Adorno and Horkheimer published. Yet, because they did not retract any of their theses in reprints, it is understood that they probably would find all three of these examples lacking culturally.

The cultural commodities of modern times, be they films, radio or television programmes or pop songs, are governed by a model of formation that is the antithesis of Adorno's ideal of dialectical structuration . . . All of them were instances of the draining of dialectical relations from cultural forms. They corresponded to the draining of dialectical relations in the increasingly mechanized work process and in the totally administered society generally. (12)

That being said, Adorno's dialectical structuring needs to be reworked, because while there are "good" examples of popular culture or "high art" offered, the thesis is meant to be all encompassing. Adorno and Horkheimer, though well respected, cannot make undisputed claims to the validity of popular culture or "high art." The original radio broadcast of Adams's *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was favorably reviewed, not because its author was a big name or because *Hitchhiker's* was supposed to be the best new thing to come out of Ursa Minor. *Hitchhiker's* presented a fresh way of broadcasting a radio programme, from the sound quality to the story itself. So while Adorno and Horkheimer continue to be well studied and well respected in literary studies and philosophy, they miss the point of most popular culture from the beginning of literary history to 2013. That being said, this does not make the two philosophers wrong. What does is their narrow critical lens. Adorno and Horkheimer neglect to offer a comprehensive formula for their argument against popular culture. Indeed, popular culture does not generally attempt to make a statement, one of Adorno and Horkheimer's criticisms, it tries to infuse into culture ideas and forms people will be unapologetically enthusiastic about. Though Adorno and Horkheimer will always have their place in the

academy, there are those academics whose voices are being heard more and more; among the most vocal are Henry Jenkins, Jonathan Gray, Gérard Genette, and Steven Johnson. All these men have written extensively on fandom theory, paratexts, narratology, and popular culture, attempting to disprove or rectify Adorno and Horkheimer's theses. Of all these academics, Steven Johnson has the strongest answer to the arguments laid down in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and thus provides the most assistance in any attempt to appreciate *The Hitchhiker's Guide*.

In 2005—incidentally the same year *The Hitchhiker's Guide* film was released—Johnson published *Everything Bad is Good For You*, in which he introduces his own “Sleeper Curve Theory” of popular culture, arguing that the popular culture we soak in daily has been growing more sophisticated with each passing year, and, far from rotting our brains, as Adorno and Horkheimer would attest to, actually poses new cognitive challenges, making our minds measurably sharper. Broken into two parts, the book introduces Johnson's theory, which introduces the idea that mass media—video games, television shows, and comics—can be cognitively nutritional. Johnson uses examples from television over the years to bolster his theory, including *Starsky and Hutch*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *The Sopranos* to illustrate the change in difficulty of plot lines to keep viewership. While he makes this claim relatively early on in the front matter, Johnson finally comes to the meat of his argument toward the closing pages, saying:

What I *am* arguing for is a change in the criteria we use to determine what really is cognitive junk food, and what is genuinely nourishing. Instead of worrying about a show's violent or tawdry content, instead of agitating

over wardrobe malfunctions or the f-word, the true test should be whether a given show engages or sedates the mind. (193)

These lines speak directly to the issue with Adams and his work. If popular culture has become more and more complicated, have not Adams, and science fiction and fantasy in general, had some impact on the change? Johnson's thesis states that popular culture has gotten more intellectually demanding over the years, not less so. *Hitchhiker's* typifies this turn to a more intellectually demanding culture product through Adams's use of sarcasm, choppy dialogue listeners have to pay attention to, and the various topics criticized, including the science of inter-dimensional travel, veganism, and the existence of God. While the *Hitchhiker's* radio show spends much of its time distracting its listeners with sound effects and pithy one-liners, the heart of the radio series, and all of the subsequent adaptations, lies in its clever writing; whether listening to or reading the series, skipping lines or partial attention is inadvisable because of the fast movement of the plot and character arch's. *The Hitchhiker's Guide* represents an early example of Johnson's Sleeper Curve, effectively highlighting a missing topic in Johnson's book: that science fiction and fantasy fans have long sought intellectually demanding forms of media that would both keep their attention and be smart. As soon as the first radio episode aired, Adams knew before anyone else the hit he had on his hands because of the amount of work he put into this smart, new science fiction comedy.

When "Fit the First"⁴ of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* aired on BBC radio, advertised solely by word of mouth, people loved it because of its parodic elements

⁴ A reference to Lewis Carroll's "Hunting of the Snark," which comes in eight fits.

as well as the fun it poked at the average Englishman Arthur Dent and his loss. In twelve short minutes, his domicile, which was being threatened with demolition, and his home planet, which was also being threatened with demolition, both cease to exist. Layered in-jokes which help viewers or listeners enjoy a show more if they are “capable of remembering a throwaway line from an episode that aired three years before . . .” are one of the examples that Johnson mentions of intellectually provocative popular culture techniques (*Everything Bad* 88). Johnson cites *Seinfeld* and *The Simpsons* as his go-to examples for using layered in-jokes, but Adams’s *Hitchhiker’s* could very easily be added to the list. Not only was there no way to listen again to the original radio broadcast (until it re-aired or resold on tape, or one was lucky enough to record it as it aired), the amount of in-jokes became legendary. Many of the jokes only understood by fans who listened to the series have taken on lives of their own outside of the realm of Hitchhikerania.⁵ For instance, the number 42, a common in-joke referencing the ultimate answer to life, the universe, and everything, is now common knowledge; when someone Googles “the answer to life, the universe, and everything,” the number 42 appears on a calculator as the first result. The titles of Adams’s subsequent books represent another instance of Johnson’s layered-in jokes at work. Each title references something in the first radio series; the second book, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* references the restaurant mentioned in the closing minutes of the first radio series; the third book, *Life, the Universe, and Everything* references the “ultimate question”; the fourth book, *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* references the message the dolphins left humans when

⁵ The accepted term for the complete fandom. “Hitchhikers” are fans.

they evacuated Earth before the Vogons blow it up; finally, the fifth book *Mostly Harmless* references the revised Hitchhiker's Guide entry Ford Prefect came up with after fifteen years studying Earth. Countless in jokes exist in the *Hitchhiker's* fandom, helping solidify its presence in contemporary culture because people continue making the jokes.

Though unreferenced in Johnson's study of popular culture, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* exists in multiple media platforms, breeding complex interpretations—especially since Adams was known to contradict the version of *Hitchhiker's* which came before the one currently being adapted. For instance, he would blow up Earth, only to bring it back in the second book because he had written himself into a corner. Further, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* represents a stratum of popular culture that was previously ignored: science fiction comedy. Before *Hitchhiker's* there were science fiction shows, there were comedy shows, and there were even humorous science fiction shows, but there were never any shows that were science fiction comedies—that poked fun at technology, science, and human conceptions of outer space.⁶ Though the cards were stacked against Adams and his science fiction comedy because none had been done before and the British Broadcasting Company⁷ was not known for going against the established order, the BBC took a chance on him, asking him to write a pilot episode because the BBC executives were unsure of the reception of such

⁶ In the following years, Adams' famous parody of space would become another joke when he became a champion of technology and was one of the first British citizens to own an Apple Macintosh.

⁷ Henceforth noted as BBC.

a show. Once Geoffrey Perkins, producer at BBC, told the executives it was funny, they ordered five more episodes (*Hitchhiker* 94).

Before it would offer Adams the chance to write a show, the BBC had long been on the air and had an established lineup of solid shows. On New Year's Day of 1927, the British Broadcasting Company began airing across the United Kingdom as a product of its establishment by royal charter (Bould 209). The BBC aired current news programs as well as music, and drama and comedy radio shows, in addition to television programs. Of course, by the fifties, millions⁸ of households had television sets from which they could watch their favorite shows. Radio shows became popular in the early days of the BBC, and are still enjoyed throughout the United Kingdom, and now the world, because of programs such as *Any Questions?*, a topical debate series that has been running uninterrupted since 1948; *The Archers*, a rural soap opera that has been running since 1950 and has the honor of being the most listened to program on Radio 4;⁹ and *Journey into Space* (1953-1958), the last radio program in the UK to garner a higher audience than television programs. It would be a gross understatement to say BBC radio is currently popular. Weekly, more than 35 million people tune into any one of the BBC's stations; and, with the advent of digital broadcasting, one can listen to the BBC from

⁸ 9 million households by 1958 (Bould 210).

⁹ Radio 4 was originally the BBC Home Service channel, which started in 1939; the current channel now airs news, current affairs, arts, history, original drama, original in-house first-run comedy (*The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*), books (forthcoming: Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, which was originally a miniseries), and religion.

anywhere in the world with a high speed internet connection (“About Radio Broadcasting”). Whereas the BBC is known for its plethora of long running, well-received radio and television programs, US programming suffers due to its driving need to meet numbers and engage with its audience, sometimes at the expense of the quality of the show. For instance, British broadcasting airs a drama for an average of three or four seasons and then it goes off the air; additionally, its episodes are fewer, regardless of its fan engagement, usually between three and six. Conversely, the US squeezes every ounce out of their shows, even when the shows suffer for it, running for eight or nine seasons with an average of twenty-two episodes a season. The BBC not understanding what they had in a writer like Douglas Adams, with its rich, long, history of broadcasting, made airing *Hitchhiker’s* all the more shocking because of its many unknown elements. Adams was in the right place at the right time.

While Adams’s radio series was a hit in the UK, many differences exist between the UK and the US regarding their specific ways of disseminating media to their audiences. Today in the United States, radio refers almost exclusively to chart-topping shows that play music while offering the commentary of hosts such as Ryan Seacrest of *On Air with Ryan Seacrest*. The closest one can come to listening to a long-standing radio program, with limited music interruptions, is through NPR (National Public Radio) and *The Diane Rehm Show* (1984) or *Fresh Air* with Terri Gross (1975), among many. Interestingly, while NPR has over 25 million listeners tune in each week from around the world, the demographics prove its listeners are more often than not more educated and affluent than listeners of other radio broadcasts, unlike the BBC, whose listeners are more widely varied. For instance, when *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* radio show was

first broadcast, there was no advertising of the show, so by the second episode when people were tuning in to hear this new British hit, they had missed out on the first episode.¹⁰ By the sixth episode, a vast number of people were tuning in—a great number more than were listening to episode one; because of this huge disparity in audience numbers, there was an uprising from those who wanted to hear the show broadcast again or listen to the episodes they missed. The show was so popular that within the first six months of its airing, it had been re-broadcast three times—unprecedented in BBC radio. Conversely, while the show aired in the US in 1979 (and it was popular enough to be re-aired multiple times), *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* had to fight against the significantly smaller subset of American listeners. The demographics of NPR's listeners are essential to understanding its comparability to the BBC in terms of audience reached. For instance, compared to the average American, NPR listeners are “87% more likely to have a bachelor's degree . . . 156% more likely to have written something that has been published . . . 326% more likely to have read *The New Yorker* in the past 6 months,” despite its similar broadcasting schedule in terms of news, comedy, and drama offered

¹⁰ Additionally, because the BBC is funded by taxes, there are none of the ads and commercials that US watchers are so used to. In fact, when BBC shows air in the US (on *BBC America* or *PBS*) whole sections of shows can be lost due to the US's advertising schedule.

(“How Do NPR Listeners Compare to the Average American?”).¹¹ While one can listen to the BBC from the comfort of home or Internet hotspot, in the US, no radio program offers quite what those produced by the BBC do; Garrison Keillor’s variety show, *A Prairie Home Companion* (1974-), along with NPR’s long-running shows, come closest.

Clearly, many differences exist between the UK and the US in terms of radio listeners and our differing cultures.¹² Yet, when Douglas Adams’ radio programme *The Hitch-hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* was originally broadcast in the UK in 1978 on the BBC, and in the US in 1979 on NPR, it aired to almost immediate critical and societal acclaim. Marcus O’Dair, citing an interview between Adams and M.J. Simpson from 1998, writes in *The Rough Guide to The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (Simpson 115):

According to *Hitchhiker’s* mythology, [the first] episode, on 8 March 1978, attracted an audience so small that it didn’t even register on the BBC’s monitoring service, giving an official audience of precisely zero. Yet soon up to thirty fan letters were arriving at the BBC every day, and, unusually for a new radio show, there were (positive) reviews in two UK

¹¹ For the full demographic information, you can visit 91.9 FM WUOT online at www.wuot.org/h/underwriting/demographics.html; NPR Audience and Corporate Research published the findings in 2002.

¹² Something as simple as the distinction between an American ‘show’ and a British ‘programme’ highlights this separation. Additionally, the United Kingdom’s full, rich history throws the separation in to starker contrast.

Sunday newspapers. By the time the final episode of the first series was broadcast in mid-April, word of mouth has made the show a bona fide success. (142)

As previously mentioned, though radio has always been a vibrant media platform in the UK, radio has not been a priority in the US since the rise of the television. Despite this, the attention the radio series received in the US allowed for multiple re-airings on NPR and for the national publication in 1980 of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which became a bestseller in both countries.¹³

What set the radio series apart, in addition to being a science fiction comedy, was Douglas Adams himself. Usually, once a work is written and the rights are sold to a production company, the writer disappears into the background. Adams was more involved than most, leading O'Dair to claim, "in the nicest way possible, he seems to have made himself a bit of a nuisance" (146). Adams was in the recording studio every day, putting finishing touches on his scripts and mixing sound at the end of a long day, getting in the way of the actors and producers. Another issue arose when Adams's penchant for never finishing on time constantly held up production, to the point that during series two of the radio show, which would become the book, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Adams was hurriedly scribbling lines of dialogue for the episode recording that day in the corner of the studio, while the actors were on the other side of the room recording what he had just handed them (O'Dair 152). While Adams was used

¹³ It would go on to be translated in more than 35 different languages.

to turning in everything he did literally at the last minute, his peers were not which often led to confrontations and Adams continuing to turn in work late.

Adams was a nuisance in multiple ways on set—but a loveable one; he never met a deadline, he was present at every recording and many post-recording sessions, and he was insistent that his show be different from all the radio shows that came before it. A lifelong lover of music, especially of the Beatles and Pink Floyd, Adams was insistent that his work be recorded with state of the art technology, allowing the radio broadcast to share the same quality of the aforementioned bands popular conceptual albums. It was because of this that *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was the first radio show in the world to be recorded in stereo. After it aired, Adams was said to have quipped that before *Hitchhiker's*, stereo was deemed impossible for radio comedy and after it was made compulsory, adding “I wanted the voices and the effects and the music to be so seamlessly orchestrated as to create a coherent picture of a whole other world” (*The Original Radio Scripts* 14). The series, and subsequent adaptations, earned nods from the industry in regard to ahead of its time sound effects and sound quality in an era when door slams, footsteps on a gravel path, and comic boings were normal sound track noises. *Hitchhiker's* earned the place of first CD released by the BBC radio collection in 1988, and before CDs was released on tape. Additionally, the series was the first comedy, and still one of the few, to record with no live audience; because the episodes were being recorded out of order and took a great portion of each recording day, the studio took a chance on Adams and his producer Geoffrey Perkins and did not make them use an audience.

The BBC was making all the right decisions when it came to Douglas and his brainchild, giving him and the other producers freedom to mix the sound the way they wanted to and signing on for six episodes. Still, they underestimated the impact of this science fiction comedy. The morning after the first episode aired, Adams went to the production offices, running into Geoffrey Perkins asking him whether or not any numbers had come back for the show. Perkins was taken aback, saying, “Oh Douglas, come on. This is a radio programme. You know how much coverage radio gets. Maybe at the end of the series there’ll be a round-up in one of the papers . . . But he was absolutely right” (*Hitchhiker* 130). Admittedly, a terrible line up of other shows on competing programmes from 10:30-11:00 PM helped the series pick up some listeners, especially with almost no advertising.

Adorno’s thesis of the enlightenment of mass deception does not hold true for the BBC of the late 1970s. The only advertising the BBC had for *Hitchhiker’s*, at least the first series, was word of mouth. In part of his argument, Adorno claims that art is no longer art, that it only exists to make people money and no thought goes into it. Adams, and every other creator, would strongly disagree. While it was never easy for Adams to come up with an idea (he has said that his ideas correlate with food; for example, Marvin the Paranoid Android was a three-sandwich idea), he was never flippant or dilatory when it came to his writing; Adams missed deadlines because he was mentally exhausted, not because he was lazy.

As a result of the widespread success of the radio series, Adams approached the BBC to see whether or not they’d like to buy the book rights before selling the rights to Nick Webb and his Pan Books. In a now infamous memo, the answer that came back to

Adams was, “Thank you very much for asking us. Unfortunately we can’t do this. In our experience, books and records of radio shows don’t sell” (*Hitchhiker* 130). The BBC’s refusal cleared the way for Nick Webb, managing editor of Pan Books, who snapped up the publishing rights and had the novelized *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* on bookshelves in October of 1979. What made this so interesting was that the BBC was right. There was no precedent set for a radio show becoming popular enough to warrant a book (or books, or an entire industry). Nevertheless, though it only had a first print run in paperback with 60,000 copies, *Hitchhiker’s* sold out so quickly that Pan Books had to rush to do multiple printings.¹⁴ *Hitchhiker’s* contained something unexplainable, an x-factor that few authors and producers have been able to replicate, though all attempt to attain. Despite the series’ famous idiosyncratic quality, there are those who just do not understand the appeal,¹⁵ especially its non-British listeners and readers. Delving into the possible reasons for this lack of appeal of *Hitchhiker’s* is important to discuss because the overall effect Adams’s seminal work had on his world audience was positive; most got past the quintessentially British Arthur Dent, embracing the dry wit.

Concerning its cultural impact outside of Britain, J.P.C. Brown acknowledges why British works such as *The Hitchhiker’s Guide* have had some problems in the past: Britishness. Brown, in his essay entitled “Doctor Who: A Very British Alien” about the

¹⁴ Adams signed a thousand at his first book signing in London.

¹⁵ My own mother being among them.

long-running British television show,¹⁶ spends the majority of his essay dismantling the history of the Doctors. This exercise hits upon a problem of the show, and in all of British programming: its unique culture. Brown describes the problem saying, “It is a problem partly for the reason any national identity is a problem: it involves asserting homogeneity in the face of diversity and particularity” (Brown 162). Brown goes on to end his essay by claiming *Doctor Who* no longer suffers from Britishness in its modern incarnations. Adams was writing at the height of this ‘problem’ with Britishness. Many comments have been made over the years that British humor has a certain dryness, which Adams’s own writing exemplifies. With lines such as “the ships hung in the sky in much the same way that bricks don’t,” (33) “The very worst poetry of all perished along with its creator, Paula Nancy Millstone Jennings of Greenbridge, Essex, England, in the destruction of the planet Earth,” (64) and “There are of course many problems connected with life . . . ” (166), the British dryness is indisputable, not to mention all the references to a good

¹⁶ Adams wrote four stories, three or four episodes each, during the same time *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* was being produced for BBC 4; those he wrote became some of the most famous *Doctor Who* stories in the series’ history (“City of Death,” “Shada,” and “The Pirate Planet”) In England, programming is different from the U.S. in that their programs are not generally an average of twenty episodes but their dramas can range from 3-6 episodes a season and their comedies 6-12. They also have multiple story arcs in each season and these are called “stories.”

cuppa.¹⁷ Many scholars of Adams's work have cited the parts about food in his works as especially British: when Ford takes Arthur to the pub for "six pints of bitter"¹⁸ (*Hitchhiker's* 21); when Arthur makes a cup of tea because the on-board computer Eddie does not know how to make one to his particular British standards. It probably does not help the overly British image that Ford Prefect was named after the car of the same name, which was only manufactured in the UK. Brown seems to be saying, the more modern the adaptation, the less the Britishness affects the viewers.

Interestingly, this does not seem to be the case for *Hitchhiker's*. If anything, the very British quirkiness of the story throws viewers off and either endears them to the story, or keeps them away from the nonsensical British; of course, understanding the humor of the British is not only limited to *The Hitchhiker's Guide*, nor to an American understanding the British. However, more recently, the US and the UK have been exchanging their television shows, broadcasting them mere months after they originally air, due to broadcasting rights (*Downton Abbey*, *Merlin*, and *Sherlock*. Interestingly, *Doctor Who* is one of the few shows aired the same day in the US as it is in the UK). Additionally, its continuous production since 1978 makes *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* idiosyncratic.

¹⁷ Cup of tea. Douglas Adams and Simon Jones (original voice of Arthur Dent) go on at length in separate interviews about how to make a true cup of tea; it includes bringing the kettle to a boil and warming the cup before you pour the boiling water in, among other, very specific, instructions.

¹⁸ Beer; the English term for Pale Ale.

While over the course of the intervening years between each new edition and version Adams would make changes, the vast majority of the story stayed the same. This is the case for most films, books, and radio shows—the original becomes what academics study years after the original is published or broadcast. However, *the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is slightly different in that so many versions exist. Of all the versions available,¹⁹ the vast majority of fans will cite either the original radio series or the book as the repository of all *Hitchhiker's*' knowledge.

Though listening to the radio show, with its perfunctory lines of dialogue eliciting authentic guffaws of laughter and its sound quality reminiscent of a rock band's recording, is timeless, the book too has its place.²⁰ M.J. Simpson, acknowledged Adams expert,²¹ has cited the book as the definitive version of *Hitchhiker's*, despite the radio series coming first, saying, “with the novel Douglas Adams was able to eliminate some of the less satisfactory parts of the story, and tidy up those which almost, but not quite, worked” (*The Pocket Essential Hitchhiker's Guide* 60). When Nick Webb picked up the rights to publishing *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, he thought he had a hit on his hands; he was already a fan and knew the numbers for the radio broadcasts did not lie. Published in the UK in March of 1979, the first printing, first edition sold out almost

¹⁹ Radio series, Book, Video Game, Comic Books, Stage Productions, BBC Mini-series, and 2005 film.

²⁰ It was the book that was first suggested to me and got me interested in Douglas Adams and Hitchhikerania.

²¹ Adams went on record as saying that Simpson knew him better than he knew himself.

immediately and by the time it was published in the US in 1980,²² the book had gone into multiple printings in the UK. Interestingly, the book was the first version of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* the US was exposed to. When the book was first published in the US, few people bought it, despite the radio show being aired on NPR almost concurrently; of course, this is more understandable now knowing the demographics of NPR's audience. To boost the sales in the US, Adams's American publishers Pocket Books put an advertisement in *Rolling Stone* which offered free copies of *Hitchhiker's* to the first 3,000 readers to write in; by the time Adams's second book *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* was published in the US, Adams made the bestsellers list. *Hitchhiker's* success was such that by 1984 it sold over one million copies, and Adams earned himself a Golden Pan award from his UK publisher. Despite its undeniable popularity, with over fifteen million books being sold since 1979, and millions of Hitchhikers still hitching the universe of Adams's creations, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy in five parts is still underappreciated because of its relatively obscure genre. While there are millions of fans of *Hitchhiker's*, even fan studies scholars do not use it as an example.

Though the question of the value of popular culture in our contemporary society remains to be answered, Johnson's thesis regarding the Sleeper Curve Theory to answer Theodor Adorno's scathing argument against popular culture makes great strides in being

²² There are different versions of first printings and first editions, but there is only one first edition, first printing; in *Hitchhiker's* case, Pan Books published originally in softcover.

able to break down Adorno's claims regarding high art and popular culture—Johnson's Sleeper Curve Theory makes great strides in supporting popular culture's cognitive benefits. Adams's own original work *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* helps aid Johnson's claim that popular culture makes more people more intelligent, though it is worth noting that *Hitchhiker's* was ahead of its time—as are most science fiction and fantasy works—so the curve may have skewed. Still, many academics still argue about when a work or an author should start being studied. For most authors and works, the rule chosen is based solely on individual choice; however, Douglas Adams' work will never stop being new, being constantly revisited. Though he died in 2001, *The Salmon of Doubt*, his posthumously published fragments, was available in 2002; books three, four, and five of the *Hitchhiker's* trilogy were adapted for BBC radio 4 in 2004 and 2005; Disney Studios produced a Hollywood version of his groundbreaking work in 2005, as well; Eoin Colfer, famous young adult author, was tapped to write a sixth *Hitchhiker's* book in 2008, and in the summer of 2012 there was a stage revival of the series throughout the UK. Though Adams was most well known for *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, one cannot forget to mention Adams's website h2g2.com, which was created by him in 1999, maintained today by contributors and fans alike. Adaptability and quirky intelligence emphasize the beauty of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. A positive brainwashing if there ever was one, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy's* ever-evolving forms is something Adams would be quite proud of.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Genius of Douglas Adams:

The Fandom and Paratexts of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

Who isn't a fan? What doesn't constitute fan culture? -Henry Jenkins, "Afterword" of *Fandom*

Generally, old media don't die. They just have to grow old gracefully. Guess what, we still have stonemasons. They haven't been the primary purveyors of the written word for a while now of course, but they still have a role because you wouldn't want a TV screen on your headstone. -Douglas Adams

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* became synonymous with cult fame, science fiction, Britishness, and ironic humor. When asked in interviews about the essence of the success of his seminal work, Adams invariably quipped, "If one knew the answer, one could bottle it" (Simpson 43).¹ This pithy answer to an interview question creators perpetually face parallels popular opinion regarding the pervasiveness of fandoms and paratexts in popular cultural universes, usually originating in television

¹ I'm always reminded of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and Professor Severus Snape's introduction to Potions: "I can teach you how to brew fame, bottle glory, even stopper death . . ."

programs;² not even media scholars can explain why fandoms are so prevalent and essential to a fan's enjoyment of any given popular culture icon, wherein the popular culture platform becomes a advantageous side effect to the primary text. With the aid of the technology boom, fandoms and paratexts are changing our perception of the shelf life of a television show, a book, a film, etc. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* occupies a rare role, as its fandom and paratexts help attest, because the original idea which started as a radio show constantly shifts forms, moving from radio to book to video game to stage production to mini series to more books and more radio, a feature-length film, and now even more radio shows (only this time produced live!). Even fans of the series may not know all of its incarnations over the years; the search does take some digging to complete. As Bruce Bethke discloses in his essay in *The Anthology at the End of the Universe*, "Linear narrative is irrelevant" (41); *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy's* narrative life is still a work in progress. The book form had even more success than its predecessor, and originator, the radio show. Through the book's ease of access, the radio show has become a paratext, even though the radio show came first; its global popularity does not lie. *Hitchhiker's* has sold well over 10 million copies. The publishing industry had so much faith in a well-sold Adams book that despite his inability to meet a deadline, his last advance, in 2000, was \$2 million.

The *Hitchhiker's* franchise was built almost squarely on the shoulders of one man: Douglas Adams. Millions of fans read the later books published between 1981 and 1992;

² For example: the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010), ABC's *Lost* (2004), and the WB's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), among others.

listened to the tertiary, quandary, and quintessential phases of the radio series aired in 2003 and 2004; and watched the 2005 film because of this man and the impact his idea had on their lives.³ This chapter will look at what makes up the fandom in regard to the multiple versions of the original work by Adams (and later Eoin Colfer, and others), as well as its fan-made and fan-kept aspects because of the previously unanswered questions fans of Adams take for granted; to understand the fans, one needs to develop an understanding of the representation of the fandom. Scholars such as Jenkins, Gray, and Genette have written extensively on fan studies, paratextuality, intertextuality and transmedia storytelling. This chapter will continue to attempt to answer some of the pressing questions regarding transmedia storytelling and fan studies that Jenkins, Gray and Genette tackle, relating the discoveries to Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide* and its attendant fandom and paratexts. To clearly present as cohesive a picture as possible, *Hitchhiker's* fandom will be discussed in conjunction with its paratexts; of course, it is inevitable to miss some paratexts, as they are not always traceable. In any event, it is lucky that the thriving *Hitchhiker's* fandom offers many paratexts from which to choose.

In terms of literary history, fan studies is still in its infancy. Born in the late 1980s, fan studies has evolved over the last two decades from first wave fan studies scholars such as Camille Bacon-Smith, John Tulloch, and Henry Jenkins trying to normalize fans and their attendant obsessions, to second wave scholars such as Mark McKinnon and Pierre Bourdieu who do their work on fan audiences focusing on their

³ Of course, the same can be said for the fervor of say Tolkien or Joss Whedon fans who will go to great lengths to consume their entire oeuvres.

consumption and compulsions, to third wave scholars such as Henry Jenkins, Matt Hills, Cornel Sandvoss, C. Lee Harrington and Jonathan Gray, who build on the first two waves while moving their work from conceptual to empirical (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 3-10). This chapter focuses on second wave fan studies in regard to consumption of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. As early as September of 1980, *Hitchhiker's* fans began arranging Hitchercon 1, a convention dedicated to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, where Adams was the guest of honor. In the same year, Adams and his fans attended the 37th Annual World Science Fiction Convention in Brighton, UK (Seacon '79), where *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* radio show was nominated for a Hugo award as Best Dramatic Presentation (and lost to *Superman*). When Christopher Reeve went on stage to accept the Hugo on behalf of the *Superman* team, more than a few of the 3,000 fans who felt Adams deserved the win hissed Reeve. In his acceptance speech, Reeves joked, "I'd just like to say to the producers of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*—it was fixed." (Simpson 154). As with most popular or cult products, the fans can get quite attached to their fandoms.

Over the years, many a producer and actor has had to appear apologetic for winning a category the fans did not want them to win. Media scholars mark a clear distinction between fans and consumers in a variety of ways. C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby note this difference in "Global Fandom/ Global Fan Studies" by saying, "fans [are] distinguished primarily by their degree of emotional, psychological, and/or behavioral *investment* in media texts and/or their 'active' *engagement* with media texts" (186). (This distinction between fan and consumer rings true, especially for this author's own membership in multiple fandoms.) In our mediated world, a person without a

fandom would be seen as the Other, though Gray and Jenkins acknowledge that the media still marginalize fans such as “Trekkies,” deriding them for their passion but accepting and welcoming fans who are staunch supporters of sports such as professional Football team The Steelers or professional Baseball player Kevin Youkilis of the New York Yankees (6). Being Other generally carries negative connotations, the person or people exist outside his or her social group mentally and emotionally, if not physically. Fan scholars study people who are fully entrenched in a given fan world; however, this does not necessarily mean all fans are entrenched. The assertion is that regardless of the involvement, the fan is involved in some aspect of the fandom. Thus, the instances of this being a falsehood are few, if any at all exist. Fan studies by media scholars generally concentrated on films or TV; books and radio seem to be left out in the cold a bit, though the term “media” does include them. Gray briefly mentions books and radio in his thesis regarding fan studies and the study of paratexts, but just to say that they are included; few literary theorists have written on fan studies, relegating the study to their colleagues in media studies; in this way, Adorno and Horkheimer can be regarded as pioneers. That books and radio are missing is a slight to a large community of work that deserves more attention by media and fan scholars.

While scholars almost always offer a disclaimer, saying something along the lines of “there’s so much more to study,” the absence of scholarship on Adams in the United States and across the pond in Great Britain is surprising because of both his transcontinental fame and the accessibility of his works, in all of their forms.

Before fan studies became a field of scholarship, Adams’s fans were already expanding across the globe. A relatively small group of followers formed around 1980 at

a celebration of the works of Adams called ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha.⁴ This group was originally *The Hitchhiker's Guide* own official appreciation society which, after a letter of appeal from the then President of the organization, was officially recognized by Adams in 1992. The appreciation society began and still continues to be the hub of scholarship on Adams and Adams-themed works. In 1980, ZZ9 published its first copy of *Mostly Harmless*; Issue #100 was reached in April 2006. Issues #51-#58 were edited by M.J. Simpson, who went on to write a biography of Douglas Adams. Giving a new meaning to the term “fan-scholar,” “it was generally remarked, even by his subject, that Simpson knew more about Adams than Adams himself”⁵ (Jones 16). The following are more scholarly-centered sources for Douglas Adams: The Douglas Adams Society, “or DougSoc for short, is the name given to the student society formed at various British universities to honour the spirit engendered in Douglas Adams’s works,” (“Douglas Adams Society”); the society hosts towel parties⁶ and Adams readings, in addition to other activities. Though it is largely a fan club for Adams, it began to discuss the works of Adams in an academic setting.

⁴ A reference from the books that places Earth at the galactic sector ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha.

⁵ Simpson would publish many articles as well as compile *The Pocket Essential Hitchhiker's Guide*, *Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams*, and edit and add additional information to Neil Gaiman's 1988 *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams and the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, among other things.

⁶ Parties in which fans get together with their towels, and drinks, to celebrate their enjoyment of the text.

While the fan clubs and ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha's magazine *Mostly Harmless* still thrive in some circles, Adams and his creation have a much farther reach in other ways. For instance, the name of the series alone—*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*—is almost always recognizable. Even if a person has not read the series or heard the radio show, he or she knows of the book, the movie, or the television show. Its cultural impact is felt in many ways and even more so now because of the 2005 film produced by Touchstone pictures and Disney Studios; though more often than not people who saw the movie were already fans of the book and radio series, the movie was designed to capture new fans, those who did not know the universe of Adams previously. People know why they should carry a towel;⁷ they know what the Guide says in bold, clear letters on its cover;⁸ and what the answer to life, the universe, and everything is.⁹ Still, comparatively, there are more fans of Adams in the UK than there are in the US. As of March 2011, there are approximately 63 million people who live in the UK ("2011 UK Censuses"); as of March 2013, the US has over 315 million people living within its borders ("U.S. POPClock Projection"). This large disparity in numbers takes up some of the large gap in fans between the two countries, percentage-wise; however, an overwhelming reason for the disparate interest in Adams in the US can also be linked to its deep roots to British culture and humor. In the UK, Adams and his *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is

⁷ Because every Hoopy Froot ("A really amazing together guy") knows where their towel is.

⁸ Don't Panic!

⁹ 42, incidentally.

still consistently read and listened to, whereas in the US there is less interest because of ease of access (the books are always in print but the radio series comes in and out of publication), as well as the lack of engagement with British culture. In the last twenty years, however, there has been a move culturally of more and more British cultural icons coming across the pond (for example: boy band One Direction, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, etc.).

That being said, the *Hitchhiker's* fandom has expanded exponentially since it first came on the scene in 1978. As a result of reaching millions more than it originally had, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has become a cash cow. The introduction to *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* notes that “fandom has emerged as an ever more integral aspect of life worlds in global capitalism, and an important interface between the dominant micro and macro forces of our time” (9). Through the wonderful world of advertising, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has made quite a bit of money. The books alone have sold more than 16 million copies—not to mention the towels, Beeblebears, DVD and VHS sales. *Hitchhiker's* has engendered itself to advertising media, broadcast media, digital media, electronic media, and print media which lend more credence to the assertion that studying Adams is a worthy pursuit.

Jonathan Gray, in his *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, calls information about a new product “hype” (3). He goes on to note, “rarely if ever can a film or program serve as the only source of information about the text” (3). Many times hype is what interests readers and viewers and gets them to engage in the TV show or film. For *Hitchhiker's*, hype has become more and more prevalent over the years and has become its driving force for sales. The hype that the 1978 radio broadcast

received, largely from word of mouth, earned the show thousands of listeners after the first episode was aired and garnered multiple episodes, a book option, later books and more radio shows into the 2000s. For the movie, it was the hype and subsequent success that was created from earlier television shows and films such as *Red Dwarf* and *Men in Black*¹⁰ that allowed the screenplay to be green lit. The original radio broadcast enabled Adams to make his name in radio, television and literature.

Since its popular culture debut, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has filtered through multiple forms of media to reflect its own cult fame, earning millions of dollars for the producers and its creator; though the movie was not seen as a commercial success, its worldwide gross doubled its production costs, earning a lifetime total of \$104.4 million. Its opening weekend in the US saw it earning a full fifth of its overall take (\$21.1 million) (*Box Office Mojo*). *Hitchhiker's* consistently sees more and more fans flocking to its many different forms. Each time *Hitchhiker's* was modified and re-packaged for a different platform, the critics tended to fall off the Adams bandwagon and more fans would join, which could potentially answer the question as to why Adams has been neglected in academic studies previously.¹¹ In a review of Glenn Yeffeth's *The Anthology at the End of the Universe*, a collection of fan and scholar written essays, reviewer Steven

¹⁰ Adams took umbrage with this because he felt as though some of the scenes had been exactly lifted from his book, which is ironic, given that many of his ideas came from his collaborator John Lloyd.

¹¹ One particularly scathing review "Absurdist Sci-Fi Comedy Strictly for Literary Series' Fans," was written by Scott Holleran on Box Office Mojo.

Silver notes, “the essay in . . . which I felt worked best was Susan Sizemore's examination of why she no longer enjoys *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.” Despite this relatively harsh review of a product Silver used to enjoy, fans continue to enjoy the fandom of work, regardless of its long shelf life or multiple versions. In fact, the wonderful thing about *Hitchhiker's* is that one can come to the fandom through the 2005 film or the books or the radio series and still have a wealth of primary texts to work their way through.

Back when the radio show was first airing, most of the critics who commented on the show would say they loved its zaniness but in the next breath would describe it as entertaining but not critically important. For instance, Barbara Bannon reviews *Hitchhiker's* in 1980 saying, “One gets the feeling the material worked better in its original form as a BBC radio show . . . the series was a cult hit in Britain and the same could happen here” (48); John Clute says, “There is enough joy throughout, enough tooth to the zaniness, and enough rude knowingness about media-hype versions of science fiction to make *Hitchhiker* one of the genre's rare genuinely funny books” (34-35). Interestingly enough, some of Adams's biggest fans and greatest friends are some of our culture's most important voices: Actor Stephen Fry, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, and writer Neil Gaiman, among others, have championed *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* for years. Fry lent his voice to being The Guide in the 2005 film; Dawkins wrote multiple articles on Adams and his work; and Gaiman was such a fan that he wrote the first unauthorized book on Adams and his famous series, *Don't Panic*, in 1988. The popularity of *Hitchhiker's* continues to this day. In 2009, Marcus O'Dair of *The Guardian* wrote, “though the subsequent period of Hitchhiker-mania—by 1984

encompassing two radio series, four novels, a TV series, computer game and three major stage productions – may be over, the phenomenon has proved as indestructible as its constantly reincarnated bit-part character, Agrajag” (“The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, 30 Years On”). With a singularly creative plot line and characters, Adams was able to create something many people can enjoy regardless of whether or not one is a fan.

Adams’s *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* has disseminated across our society to infiltrate and capture the minds and hearts of millions. Over the span of thirty-five years, multiple homages to Adams and *Hitchhiker’s* have sprung up signifying even more involvement in its fandom. One such example is the company Alta Vista’s online translator, babel fish, named after Adams’s own creation; the babel fish has been given a new life while accomplishing its original goal of easily translating information. In Adams’s work, the babel fish is a device that not only proves the non-existence of God, it also translates any language in the galaxy to the native tongue of the host’s ear. The guide has this to say about the babel fish, “The babel fish is small, yellow, and leechlike, and probably the oddest thing in the Universe . . . if you stick a babel fish in your ear you can instantly understand anything said to you in any form of language” (Adams 58-59). Though no outright mention of Adams or *Hitchhiker’s* is on the site, babel fish obviously has its roots in the book. Starting in 1995, the site translates phrases from one language to another for no fee; it may very well be one of the first online translators. Another example of intertextuality and combining is already a popular culture icon: *Doctor Who*. A television show produced by the BBC on and off for fifty years, *Doctor Who*

deliberately references *Hitchhiker's* on multiple occasions.¹² One such instance is in “The Christmas Invasion” when David Tennant, the Tenth Doctor, regenerates “comparing himself to Arthur Dent after saving the Earth from invasion in a dressing gown (Dent's trademark dress), and after being awoken from his post-regenerative coma by tea, the character's favorite drink” (*Tardis Data Core*); Tennant’s exact line is, “Not bad for a man in his Jimjams, very Arthur Dent” (“The Christmas Invasion”). Outside of entertainment, one of the popular culture references, of which there are many and can not all be touched upon, one of the most impressive is this: a few days before Adams’s death, The Minor Planet Centre of the International Astronomical Union named asteroid 18610, “ArthurDent.” Most currently, Google’s popular Google Doodles honored Adams’s 61st birthday and *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* on March 11, 2013.¹³

Perhaps most famous of all fandom references is the pervasiveness of the number 42: the answer to Life, the Universe, and Everything. For example, Chris Martin of the band Coldplay notes that the song “42” off the album *Viva La Vida* “is and isn’t” in reference to *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (“Coldplay: Viva La Vida”); Martin is known for being mysterious and having multiple layers to his songs. In the popular television show *LOST*, airing from 2004-2010, one of the running easter eggs fans tried to understand was the repetition of specific numbers; when asked, writer David Fury responded, “I had thought to make [the last number] ‘42’. When Damon [Lindelof] had

¹² Appropriate given Adams’s own history writing for *Doctor Who* during the time he was writing *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*; there are even those who believe the *Hitchhiker’s* and *Doctor Who* Universes are the same.

¹³ To see the Doodle go to: <http://www.google.com/doodles/douglas-adams-61st-birthday>

the same idea, that clinched it. It was my idea to have the numbers engraved on the hatch at the end of the episode” (“The Lostpedia Interview: David Fury”). In science, Jill Tarter, research director for the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute, had 42 antennas set up for the telescopes; “the number was chosen as a salute to Douglas Adams’s satirical science fiction novel . . .” (Hayes). 42, of course, is the answer to life, the universe, and everything. What consistently amazes about the *Hitchhiker’s* fandom is its wide reach. Adams’s fans include scores of people in the entertainment industry, actors, and executives as well as experts and enthusiasts from techies to scientists.

It was because of Adams’s own pursuits that he had fans flock to his works. Although he made fun of space and technology in *Hitchhiker’s*, he became attached to the future of the Internet and bought every personal computer he possibly could. In his later works, it is evident that he made more of a move toward incorporating his newfound passions. Adams’s works have that special something authors and creators work for years to find: a work that settles into the cultural consciousness through its use of pithy one-liners, many inside jokes, and memorably characters. Despite its less than ideal numbers from the box office, fans of the movie of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide* keep it alive in other ways: celebrating every year on May 25th since Adams’s untimely death in 2001, Towel Day; sponsoring a memorial lecture in Adams’s honor every year on March 11th (the day of his birth); and immortalizing his head as a planet in progress on the planet-making planet Magrathea in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* film. Though at times he became tired of talking about *Hitchhiker’s*, Adams was its biggest champion, and thus, while some creators are forgotten, Adams is inextricably linked to his work; for example, he worked tirelessly for twenty years to get the movie up and running. The BBC, where

Adams got his start, has whole pages on their multiple sites dedicated to Douglas Adams and his influence.

Of course, the fandom of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* thrives in part due to the pervasive nature of the Internet. As Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington note of the Internet in their introduction to *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*: “[it] has been joined by a host of other technologies that extend both fandom and the prospects for engaging in fan activities into multiple pockets of everyday life . . . these changing communication technologies and media texts contribute to and reflect the increasing entrenchment of fan consumption in the structure of our everyday life” (8).

Toward the end of his life, instead of being asked to sign books, Adams was brought on school campuses and invited to TED Talks, discussing the future of technology. He wrote the first *Hitchhiker's* book following the radio series in 1980, but what he really wanted to do was adapt his project for the future of the personal computer (Simpson 185). He created a video game, *Starship Titanic*, in 1984 that sold relatively well, and would have generated a second game if not for the lack of story line, coder, and financial backing from the company, Infocom. In fact, the BBC re-invented the original video game for a twentieth anniversary edition and made it possible to play it online on their website.¹⁴

Of course, when one talks of all aspects of a fandom, paratexts bear mentioning. Already this chapter has discussed fan-made and maintained sites, as well as conventions

¹⁴ BBC's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* video game can be found here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hitchhikers/game.shtml>

and references from the series, all paratexts. (This very chapter is a paratext to *The Hitchhiker's Guide*). In his *The History of Science Fiction*, Adam Roberts mentions Adams's seminal work in his section on audio science fiction observing its success was grounded in "Adams's intimate knowledge of the tropes of SF and his ingenious comic imagination which interacted wonderfully, with the result that the show worked as SF, albeit an absurdist idiom, as well as comedy" (336). *The Hitchhiker's Guide* worked for a variety of other reasons as well, not the least of which was the many paratexts telling its transmedia story. As a function of their form, paratexts serve as advertising materials in addition to stand-alone works in their own right.

Henry Jenkins coined "transmedia storytelling" around the same time that paratexts and fan studies were starting to gain a foothold in academic scholarship. "Transmedia storytelling," according to Jenkins, "is the art of world making" and "refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence—one that places new demands on the consumer and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities" (21). Douglas Adams's work is an early and exemplary example of transmedia storytelling. The entire premise of the story is that unless the reader, listener, or watcher is along for the ride with Arthur Dent, he or she will be left behind on the Earth that blows up. Each time the story was revisited, Adams did the adaptation and purposefully changing parts of the plot or characters so that each version became itself a slightly different text from that which came before it (*Don't Crash: Making of Hitchhiker's Movie Parts 1 thru 12*). Below, Henry Jenkins uses the prolific Umberto Eco, speaking on cult artifacts to clarify his own view, which in turn is characteristic of Adams's own work:

Umberto Eco asks what, beyond being loved, transforms a film . . . into a cult artifact. First, he argues, the work must come to us as a “completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the private sectarian world. Second, the work must be encyclopedic, containing a rich array of information that can be drilled, practiced, and mastered by devoted consumers.” (Jenkins 97)

Seemingly, the same is true for film, radio, and print as well. For *The Hitchhiker’s Guide* it certainly is the case. Not only do fans know the big references such as “42,” or that human beings are the third most intelligent beings (after the dolphins and mice), fans can quote whole tracts of the show from memory because it has been taken in so many times. *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* has become a cult artifact for many. As Eco goes on to note, the work must be encyclopedic and for *Hitchhiker’s*, there may not be a better synonym; *Hitchhiker’s* itself is an encyclopedia, offering multiple definitions to aid the reader in understanding certain oddities such as the Vogons and their hatred of hitchhikers, the significance of Towels, and the babel fish. Adams wrote in a genre begging to be tapped: science fiction comedy. Additionally, because Adams was so involved in the early technology boom, most of his ideas, essays, interviews, and articles are all online, ready for the willing reader. While Eco obviously means the work itself when speaking of it being encyclopedic, it only makes sense for its paratexts to be included as well; for without the paratexts, can a fan truly master that which they enjoy? Gray answers this question *Show Sold Separately* by noting, “Taking the eye off the paratexts impoverishes our understanding of production and regulation cultures, and hence our ability to intervene meaningfully in those cultures” (Gray 16). While here Gray

references media scholars and their scholarship, it is just as important for fans to appreciate the paratexts to gain a deeper understanding of the product they enjoy, especially, as Gray goes on to say, “A ‘paratext’ is both ‘distinct from’ and alike—or . . . intrinsically part of—the text” (6). Gray goes on to argue that Paratexts create texts, managing and filling them with the many meanings we associate with them (6). One of the most popular carriers of paratexts is, of course, social media. For instance, on Twitter, a site that has grown in popularity since its creation in March of 2006, many third party fans have created Twitter personalities that occupy spaces in Adams’s *Hitchhiker’s* fandom; there are fan-made pages dedicated to Marvin the Paranoid Android, Galactic President Zaphod Beeblebrox, and Arthur Dent, among others; even Douglas Adams has his own fan-run Twitter account. All of these fan pages are considered paratexts because they are adjacent to the actual texts (or author) and are all imbued with the accepted personalities of the characters in the *Hitchhiker’s* fandom. Paratexts are integral to the life of a fandom because paratexts keep people interested in the universe of their fandom. Additionally, paratexts aid in proving the viability of a given text or character; in short, they keep the primary text alive in this technological age of fast-moving, short-term cognitive recognition in the general populace. It is remarkable that a cult show which first aired to a 0.0 rating in the UK in 1978 could go on to affect millions of people who know the universe of its creation and its attendant paratexts as a result.

Going even one layer deeper, Polly Jane Rocket Adams, Adams’s daughter, has her own twitter account with such followers as Stephen Fry and Neil Gaiman, close

family friends.¹⁵ Polly Adams consistently posts tweets regarding her father's most popular work; since his death, she has taken over as one of the perpetrators of the fandom, creating another paratext, keeping the message about Adams and his work ongoing. On Towel Day 2012 (May 25th), Polly was on Twitter, re-tweeting people's tweets regarding Adams and *The Hitchhiker's Guide*; she even posted a picture of herself holding one of the towels that was sold when the first book came out, weaving intertextuality and paratextuality, which has the following quote on it from The Guide:

A towel, it says, is about the most useful thing an interstellar hitch-hiker can have. Partly it has great practical value—you can wrap it around you for warmth as you bound across the cold moons of Jaglan Beta, use it to sail a mini raft, wet it for use in hand to hand combat, use it to ward off noxious fumes, wave it in emergencies, and of course, dry yourself with it.

Most importantly a towel has immense psychological value . . . (Adams)

In January of 2012, *The Huffington Post* published an article entitled “Bloomsday, Quidditch And Other Cult Literary Traditions.” Of the eleven cult traditions highlighted, the *Hitchhiker's* fandom's Towel Day was listed as number six (Temple). The cult literary tradition is easily completed: just carry a towel around all day because, as a Hoopy Froot, one should always know where their towel is.

The Hitchhiker's fandom has a wealth of paratexts from which it enriches itself. As Gray notes of Gérard Genette's understanding of paratexts, “Far from being

¹⁵ I was fortunate enough to correspond with her to find out where Adams's archives were being kept; currently, they are in her broom cupboard.

tangentially related to the text, paratexts provide ‘an airlock that helps the reader pass without too much difficulty from one world to the other, a sometimes delicate operation, especially when the second world is a fictional one’” (25). More than ever before, paratextuality is becoming the most important aspect to a fandom universe. With the Internet’s growing capabilities, it grows easier and easier every day to connect with fellow fans, to know that one is not alone in their interest. To be a part of the fandom means that one enjoys some aspect of the text. Social media sites make it worlds easier to connect with fans who feel the same way about a certain aspect of the fandom; for example, two fans can bond over the fact that they are not fans of the 2005 film but love the radio series.

Of all the social media sites that have popped up in the last ten years, Tumblr has had the greatest impact on fans and fandoms; countless blog pages exist solely as *Hitchhiker’s* appreciation pages; interestingly, the actors who appeared in the variety of versions of *Hitchhiker’s* gain new appreciation from their other projects. Just one example of this occurring is with Martin Freeman, who plays Arthur Dent in the 2005 Touchstone Pictures film. Since he has gained popularity as an actor having played John Watson in the BBC’s *Sherlock* and a young Bilbo Baggins in Peter Jackson’s *The Hobbit*, his star rises even further from literary and fantasy enthusiasts, and the *Hitchhiker’s* film introduces an even broader audience for the franchise who see GIFs and pictures of Martin Freeman as Arthur Dent on the site. Fans want to know everything about their interest, whether that is a single person, a film franchise, or a book.

With the introduction of social media sites and the Internet, it is easier than ever to connect and, through that connection, begin a new chapter in understanding fan studies

and paratexts. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* can be reborn and rediscovered by an entirely new fan base through their favorite actors, the re-airing of the radio series, the book being on NPR's list of Top 100 Young Adult books, the live radio show that tours each summer, the series being promoted by a favorite author, etc. *The Hitchhiker's Guide* will always be a polarizing force in our popular culture; people either get it or they don't. With the rise of social media and of people enthusiastically supporting their favorite fandoms through the creation of paratexts, *Hitchhiker's* will continue to be a popular outlet for fans. As Douglas Adams himself said in 2000, on his collaborative website h2g2 shortly before his death, "We're gradually beginning to get some tiny, tiny inkling of how powerful a networked community sharing information really could become" ("My Vision for H2G2"); we're all still catching up, trying to understand the capabilities at our fingertips, to recognize the might of paratexts and fandoms. With *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, we can begin to realize their potential, and their impact.

CHAPTER THREE:

“It’s completely self-contradictory”:¹ Authorial Intent, Narratology, Hollywood’s Happy Ending and *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*

“Locked within any simple declaration that the book or the movie “was better” is an emergent perspective, a nascent and potentially collective self-story . . . adaptations, like other recollections, are ultimately just overtures, tentative gestures at connecting now with then.”—Suzanne Diamond, “Whose Life *Is* It, Anyway?” (108)

“All these different versions [of *Hitchhiker’s*] tell roughly the same story, but not necessarily in the same way. And on numerous occasions they flatly contradict each other.”—M.J. Simpson, *The Pocket Essential Hitchhiker’s Guide* (17)

Normally, stories do not begin with the destruction of planet Earth; but then, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* never professed to follow what came before it. Douglas Adams would go on to destroy the Earth in parallel dimensions and alternate universes, but first he would recreate its most famous destruction time and time again on the radio, in the pages of his book, on television, and finally, on film.² Though *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* gained notoriety as the first of its kind, creating the new genre of science fiction comedy, the series became even more famous because of its multiple

¹ Adams to David Letterman on *Late Night with David Letterman* in 1985 while he was promoting his fourth book *So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish*.

² Though Adams himself was deceased by the time the movie was released, he was still credited as producer and screenwriter.

transformations over the years; *Hitchhiker's* has been one of the few true multi-media successes in terms of its fans and monetary returns. However, literary adaptations tend to force fans to choose sides; they never please everyone, regardless of the book being adapted for the silver screen. *The Hitchhiker's Guide's* transformation has been contentious for a variety of reasons, most of all because the movie does not stay true to the novel's plot, but, in the end, the film adaptation suited the life of the text. While some fans and critics may not appreciate it, the movie expanded the fandom of *Hitchhiker's*, integrating both old and new fans, bringing new life to the franchise. Many authors neglect to express the reasoning behind their adaptations because most authors lose the right to their work once the rights have been sold. Luckily, for Adams this was not the case. Though Adams would die before he could see his dream of a movie based on his book come to fruition, he would have been happy with the final project, which was directed by Garth Jennings and produced by Touchstone Pictures, because they tried their best to follow Adams's screenplay and stay true to the spirit of his text. Of course, this notion of the author's happiness speaks to one aspect of narratology: that the author is focused on the intended audience (who they write the text for), not the viewing audience as a whole (who actually ends up taking in the text). This chapter will follow the life of *The Hitchhiker's Guide*, presenting a compelling case for Carl Malmgren's assertion that there is a narratological difference between science fiction and science fantasy as well as Kamilla Elliot's narratological contention that literary adaptations need not subscribe to the age-old form/content dilemma. Explicating the history of how the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* book became a film, followed by a close look at Hollywood's adaptation of

the novel, highlighting changes in character development and plot, will aid in this analysis.

Though he conducted countless interviews, both in print and in person, Douglas Adams never really answered the question of why he wrote his radio series and turned it into different media. *The Hitchhiker's Guide* was Adams's brainchild. From the first drunken idea he had in a field in Innsbruck, Austria, he was committed to his work, regardless of whether or not he could ever finish it on time. In a video recording of interviews with Adams, Simon Jones (the actor who played Arthur Dent in the radio series, miniseries, and the 2012 stage revival of *Hitchhiker's*), and producer Geoffrey Perkins, they discuss the origins of the radio series and how difficult it was to get the radio series off the ground, let alone adapting it into a book. Adams and Perkins admit that throughout the entire process of recording the radio series everyone was learning as they went along ("Radio Origins"). According to Perkins, "No one knew what they were doing and I think that's wonderful. You don't want to know what you're doing. The most extraordinary things happen when you don't know what you're doing" ("Radio Origins"). Adams intention for the radio series came down to experimentation and hope that it would work out; his objectives for the variety of forms his original work would take followed this logic. These interviews are some of the few from the early days of Douglas Adams's career. He was still idealistic, a chain smoker, and just wanted people to find his work funny and irreverent. Adams was not trying to make a statement about the state of science fiction or comedy; he was just trying to get a laugh (Shircore). Adams was just in the right place at the right time, though he does not discount his many hours tirelessly working on *Hitchhiker's*.

Adams mentions many things about his own career trajectory and his intentions for *Hitchhiker's* in the future, identifying science fiction, a major factor in his works' popularity, as "just about people wandering around in space ships shooting each other with ray guns" as "very dull. I like it when it enables you to do fairly radical reinterpretations of human experience, just to show all the different interpretations that can be put on apparently fairly simple and commonplace events. That I find fun" (The First and Lost Tapes"). This interview (conducted by Ian Shircore, published in 2007 for *Dark Matter*, though conducted in 1979 as a ruse for *Penthouse* magazine) highlights Adams's own interest in not only the comedic aspects of his work but also changing the face of science fiction. Adams helped to shift the focus of the entertainment industry to science fiction comedy, and in doing so, aided in popularizing a new genre by being innovative and committed to his craft; after *Hitchhiker's* gained success, and other successes such as George Lucas's *Star Wars*, studios were more likely to green light a science fiction comedy.

What made *Hitchhiker's* so accessible was its science fiction slapstick scenes that invited laughter; Adams was mocking some of science fiction's most constant tropes and themes such as space travel and discovering the unknown. Adam Roberts, one of science fiction's leading theorists, presents science fiction as "a genre or division of literature distinguish[ing] its fictional worlds to one degree or another from the world in which we actually live: a fiction of the imagination rather than observed reality, a fantastic literature"; Roberts also says that science fiction resists easy definition (*Science Fiction* 1). Interestingly, he goes on to claim that the alterity of the production of science fiction has led to its enormous growth as a genre, going so far as to say that *Star Wars*, the 1977

film, was the catalyst for the cinematic climate shift in Hollywood; it was as a direct result of *Star Wars* that film studios were willing to even look at *Hitchhiker's* as a potential project (*Science Fiction* 84). Unfortunately, *Hitchhiker's* would get stuck in limbo for decades before a studio would take a chance on it. Though it was optioned early in the 1980s, it was not until the late 1990s that any real headway was made on getting the movie made because Adams had to buy back the rights at the hefty fee of “£200,000 (plus ten years interest if the film went into production)” and resell them to a more responsive studio (Simpson 310). Though science fiction has always had a wide cult following of readers, listeners, and watchers, derived from the radio, television, and film of the 1950s, it is much more accepted in our contemporary culture. More than twenty of the top-grossing films of all time are in the science fiction genre (including James Cameron's *Avatar* at #1). More and more, science fiction is recognized for its contributions to popular culture as well as its value past its entertainment.

If narratology is the “theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story’,” as intimated by narratologist Mieke Bal, then science fantasy adds on to this definition by explaining “science fantasy is rooted in a discourse which takes for granted the validity of the scientific episteme, and which therefore provides a quasi-scientific rationale for its reversals of natural law” (Bal 3; Malmgren 141). Carl Malmgren, author of *Worlds Apart: Narratology of Science Fiction*, would agree that Adams was actually producing and fostering the genre of science fantasy. Though scholars have defended Adams's use of science in his later books, when it was clear that his interest in science was being incorporated into his narrative, what made the first work stand out was its singular disregard for the genre's conventions. One

of the genres conventions was exploration in space, but in *Hitchhiker's*, Earth as we know it cannot be returned to because it no longer exists so exploration is compulsory. By bringing back Earth in later novels, through the use of parallel dimensions and Magrathea's planet-making skills, Adams defies the genre convention by subverting it.

As noted, in later books, the main character *does* return to Earth, but it is not the Earth he left—in one book he returns to the dawn of man; in another, he returns to an Earth in a parallel universe. To aid in understanding the theory of science fantasy, characterized by Hitchhiker's, Malmgren goes on to further unpack science fantasy by quoting L. David Allen saying, "The 'science' in science fantasy represents, 'an attempt to legitimize situations that depend on fantastic assertions'" (141). A revelatory example of this in *Hitchhiker's* is the afore-mentioned babel fish. Adams always wondered how in science fiction humans were able to communicate freely with aliens, or rather, how the aliens came equipped with knowledge of almost perfect English. His answer is the babel fish, a small, yellow, leech-like being which, when inserted in the ear, perfectly translates everything the bearer hears into their known language. Another such example is Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect surviving out in the vacuum of space for thirty seconds, only to be picked up by the Starship Heart of Gold due to its Infinite Improbability Drive. Adams explains this scientific improbability by saying:

[The Guide] says that if you hold a lungful of air you can survive in the total vacuum of space for about thirty seconds. However, it does go on to say that what with space being the mind-boggling size it is the chances of getting picked up by another ship within those thirty seconds are two to

the power of two hundred and seventy-six thousand, seven hundred and nine to one against. (Adams 77)

What follows is yet another scientific improbability, but Adams makes it work. Part of the charm of the series is its sincere lack of adherence to science fiction conventions. Yet, Adams himself referred to his work as science fiction. This could be due in part to the fact that he writes of the future, space travel, aliens, technology, and parallel universes in *Hitchhiker's*, staples in the genre.

Though it would be more appropriate to label *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as science fantasy comedy because of its insistent lack of science fiction conventions, Adams was intent on producing a science fiction comedy because science fantasy had yet to be coined. Science fiction comedy was a genre that had not worked in the entertainment industry before, and as a result of its early failure to be green lit, Adams had more creative control over the adaptations of his text; in fact, he was present during nearly every aspect of the production of his works. Where a majority of authors are hands-off once the rights to their work has been purchased, Adams was at every read-through and rehearsal for the radio show throughout 1978 and 1979 (writing some of the episodes as they were being recorded), and he was there during the entire production of the BBC series, going so far as to make a cameo appearance, naked on a beach in Brighton, England. Adams's need to control his product had two conclusions: first, that he proved his investment in his work and second, it signified that without Adams's creative input, the final result of his early adaptive works might have suffered.

Adams had clear consultation rights over all of his writing and characters and was always conferred with when changes were considered (Shirley 177). One such case arose

for the BBC series when Alan J.W. Bell, the director, wanted to bring in an all-new cast, one that had little to no familiarity with the work. Instead, Douglas came in and said that he would rather keep as much of the cast as he possibly could. The two came to a compromise and decided to have auditions. The cast members auditioned and a few of them wowed Bell enough to get the job, including front man Simon Jones who was the original voice of Arthur Dent (O'Dair 188).³ Much like the film that would follow it in twenty-four years, the BBC series, produced in 1981, was based on the novelized form of the wildly successful *The Hitchhiker's Guide* radio series, aired in 1978 and published in 1979. The novelized *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* became an instant hit in the UK in 1979, selling all 60,000 units of its initial print run almost immediately. Yet, the book differed from the radio series. The radio series was six episodes, or "fits," and the final two were co-written with Adams's friend John Lloyd. As a result of this collaboration, Adams had to cut episodes five and six from his novelization completely,⁴ thus ending the tale quite abruptly with the characters going off to the Restaurant at the

³ He would go on to reprise his role as Arthur Dent in the complete Radio Series (1979, 2004-2005), the BBC mini-series, and on stage in the live radio show performances (2012); in the 2005 film, he would cameo as the computer automated voice for the planet Magrathea.

⁴ Lloyd was hurt and angry when he received a letter from Adams saying that he wanted to 'have a go' at writing the book himself; eventually they settled their differences by splitting the writing bonus and the two men would go on to write two books together: *The Meaning of Liff* and *The Deeper Meaning of Liff*.

End of the Universe (which would become the title of the second novel). In addition to this large change, Adams made many small changes; the most significant of the tweaks was an exchange of dialogue that was originally between Arthur and the head of the demolition crew, which became Ford Prefect and the head of the demolition crew. However controversial the book was to the fans, it still sold over one million copies within the first three years it was published, earning itself a Golden Pan award from the publishers and the distinction that many claim the book as the definitive text of *Hitchhiker's*. The book reads quite like the radio script, though it does have more exposition. Adams adapted the radio series as fast as possible so that the book could be on the shelves; he didn't run into any problems with deadlines because the bulk of the work had already been done.

As early as 1982, Adams was in production meetings regarding the adaptation of his book into a movie, telling reporters in interviews, "I think there is now quite a good chance that there is soon going to be a film" (Simpson 122). Columbia Pictures picked up the rights to the book, and Adams came along with them, attached as screenplay writer and associate producer. Ivan Reitman (of *Ghostbusters* fame) was on the project as producer. Unfortunately, Adams and Reitman did not get along; Adams was dropped as writer after turning in his third draft, which was said to combine elements from the first three novels; Hollywood scriptwriter Abbie Bernstein wrote seven more drafts but Reitman had moved on to other projects. Though the studio promoted that the movie would be premiering in 1985, by 1987 the project had stalled, stuck in production limbo. In 1992, Adams bought back the rights of his own book from Columbia Pictures, and it was not until 1998 that Hollywood Pictures (under the Disney umbrella) bought the rights

from Adams. Though Jay Roach (*Austin Powers, Meet the Parents*) was initially attached as director, Adams had retained much of the creative control over the project as a result of his sour experience in the decade before, and so *Hitchhiker's* was shopped around different studios for three years to no avail. Robbie Stamp, one of Adams's great friends, interviewed for the making of the movie in 2005 said, "Douglas wanted it to be a Hollywood movie. He unequivocally wanted it to be a movie . . . there was no doubt in his mind about that" (*Don't Crash: Making of Hitchhiker's Movie*). For the twenty years Adams was in production hell, this notion is quite obvious; for purists, fans of the original radio show, they would never be happy with any product except their beloved radio series. By all accounts, it would appear that Douglas Adams was a difficult man to work with when it came to adapting his work for film. However, as Robbie Stamp noted in an interview, "In a way, [Adams] was quite willing to shuffle [the sketches] around in any order. Actually, narratively, the order in which these things happened didn't matter very much. But you can't do that in a movie" (*Don't Crash: Making of Hitchhiker's Movie; Part 9/12*). It appears the problem was actually that Adams was willing to bend the laws of filmmaking to make the movie he wanted, and the studio and his production team were unwilling.

By May of 2001, Roach was about to drop out of the project, but that loss would become insignificant when Adams himself died of a heart attack on the steps of his gym in California on May 11, 2001 (*Hitchhiker* 333). Though it was a sad loss to lose such a man so young (he was only forty-nine), the control of the project was shifted to Adams's estate, which "was more amenable to studio suggestions" (Simpson 123). Screenwriter Karey Kirkpatrick was assigned to work on the remainder of the script, and it was finally

green lit by Touchstone Pictures late in 2002, with the untried directing/producing team Hammer and Tongs (Garth Jennings and Nick Goldstein) out of London attached to produce the film (Simpson 123). Though everyone attached to the project wanted to remember Adams's own contributions and keep the integrity of the text, as Adams's unofficial biographer M.J. Simpson said:

There was never going to be any serious possibility of the movie faithfully recreating the book, for two reasons. First, because the book is a picaresque adaptation of two-thirds of a six-part radio serial written week by week and as such is completely missing any sort of basic three-act structure. The second reason is that to do so would be completely untrue to the spirit of *Hitchhiker's Guide*. (Simpson 124)

Simpson goes on to note that *Hitchhiker's* distinctive feature was that each subsequent version was different from the one that came before it. Though many fans were lost when the film finally came out in 2005 because of its many plot differences from the book and radio series, it stayed true to its roots. Joel Collins, the production designer on the film, noted, "Never once did we feel arrogant enough to just ignore something from the book. We would try everything; if there was anything specific in the book, we would try, we really tried" (*Don't Crash: Making of Hitchhiker's Movie*).

Though there are many differences, those that were the most contentious dealt with the addition of characters and significant plot twists, including the addition of John Malkovich as Humma Kavula, a religious cult leader whose followers worship a handkerchief and thus say "Bless You" instead of "Amen" when their prayers are complete. Another difference is the "point-of-view" gun, which Humma wants in return

for the coordinates to the fabled Magrathea. The point-of-view gun is ingenious in that when pointed at someone and “fired” the person shot sees everything from the shooter’s point-of-view. Created for the 2005 film, the super computer Deep Thought which gives the answer to life, the universe, and everything, also comes up with the POV gun commissioned by “the Intergalactic Consortium of Angry Housewives, who were tired of ending every argument with their husbands with the phrase: ‘You just don’t get it, do you?’” (*The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* film). Another new addition to the film is the slapstick scene on Vlogsphere, the Vogon planet. When the heroes land they are trying to find and save Trillian from certain death. On this land, when anyone has an idea, they are slapped in the face by flat iron pans, which, over the millennia, have beaten out any original idea a Vogon has had and flattened their noses. Though many fans were in an uproar, particularly about three relatively large plot changes (the addition of Humma Kavula, Vice President Questular Rontok, and the romantic connection between Arthur and Trillian), these additions were both created and written by Adams himself before he died. Many of Adams’s fans never understood the reasoning behind his need to change the status quo; it was not enough to present his idea from 1978 in the same way for a theatrical release. Not only did Adams change every adaptation in some small significant way, he also knew that a film was a wholly different platform from a radio series, a book, a stage production, or even a miniseries. There was no way to present every bit of information from *Hitchhiker’s* in roughly two hours. In an interview for *Don’t Crash: Making of Hitchhiker’s Movie*, one of Adams’s programming friends notes, “He’d just done this draft on the plane and wanted to know what we thought . . . I can absolutely guarantee that that this is genuine Douglas made up material. Nobody has been tampering

with your precious memories!” (MicaFeresz). While Adams’s friends can guarantee his work was his own, Adams himself was answerable for the casting of the film, yet another point of contention because of his clearly Anglo-centric tale (despite the aliens).

Though the movie was shot in the United Kingdom during 2004, the American production company Touchstone Pictures, an imprint of Walt Disney Pictures, funded it. As a result, casting of the actors extended to the United States. While most of the secondary characters are British, including such popular actors as Stephen Fry, Helen Mirren, Alan Rickman, Bill Bailey, Mark Gatiss, and Bill Nighy, who all had either speaking parts or minor character roles in the film, the lead roles went mainly to Americans. Of the four lead roles—Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect, Trillian Macmillan, and Zaphod Beeblebrox—only the character of Arthur Dent, quintessential British man, was played by a Brit, Martin Freeman (*The Hobbit*, *Love Actually*, BBC’s *Sherlock*, and *The Office*). Freeman ended up being the best man for the role of Arthur Dent because he represents the quintessential British man Adams had written of years before: “he was about thirty, tall, dark-haired and never quite at ease with himself” (*The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy 2*). Freeman was chosen, in part, because the only request Adams made in regard to casting was that Arthur be British, saying, “When it comes down to it, my principle is this—Arthur should be British. The rest of the cast should be decided purely on merit and not on nationality” (“The Movie”). Over the years *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* delivered a more global, mainstream product and as a result, the series has found a new audience as well as maintaining the majority of its original fan base.

Though it does have its detractors, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is generally enjoyed in all of its forms. Many of those included on the film recounted their fond memories of listening to the original radio series or reading the book. It was because *Hitchhiker's* was so enjoyed that most of the people who attached themselves to the film did so. Yet, one of the main reasons Garth Jennings sighted for his initial reluctance to taking on the project of *Hitchhiker's* was his and Nick's childhood love of the series and the books. Despite their initial reluctance, Jennings and Goldstein decided they could do justice to the spirit of Adams and his beloved work. It was only when both finally read the script and realized how true it was to the original spirit that they agreed to take it on (*Don't Crash: Making of Hitchhiker's Movie*). Jennings had this to say about his intentions for the feature film: "What we've tried to do is make something true to the spirit of the original material but is still really really funny" (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). He goes on to say that this version is different from all of the versions that come before it, "One of the great things about the material is that it's very different from everything else. It's totally unique" (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). Jennings hits on exactly what Adams seemed to want for his own work: for it to be different each time it was recreated. In interviews with the cast, most had read and enjoyed *Hitchhiker's* when they were growing up. In one such anecdote, Bill Nighy, who plays Slartibartfast, recalled that he read and enjoyed the books so much that when his daughter was thirteen or fourteen, he bought her the books. One day he went into his kitchen and his daughter had fallen off of her chair, from laughing so hard at *Hitchhiker's* (*Don't Crash: Making of Hitchhiker's Movie*).

Hitchhiker's has been an evolutionary idea that makes fans laugh as if they are in on the joke. I have written before that some people just do not understand the appeal of the series, and this lack of cognizance extends to the movie. There were critics who lambasted the film for pandering to its fans and leaving new viewers behind, but this could not be less true. Adams was constantly conscious of his fans and the need to include more people in on the joke; however, he was not going to hand feed the jokes to his audience. Adams believed in the ability of society to get the comedy. In Ian Shircore's *Lost Tapes*, Adams is noted as saying, "I like to believe the audience is actually intelligent, because it's made up of other people like yourself" (Loc 125). Of course, it is easy to say this as a fan who understands the jokes written; or rather, that the material was meant with levity, not gravity. One has to be open to reading the sort of thing *Hitchhiker's* is to understand it. If one watches a film or reads a book with expectations of grandeur, disappointment is assured; if fans go into a viewing of a film adaptation of a book with expectations that it will look exactly like said book, they will be let down.⁵ But if a person screens a movie with only one expectation: to enjoy oneself, they will have found a film for them. For *Hitchhiker's*, humor and adaptation are its two staples.

⁵ Examples of this kind of disappointment in the past decade have been the film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Star Trek*, among others. Of interest, all of these movies/franchises were box office smashes and all occupy spaces in the canons of fantasy or science fiction.

In Nick Goldstein notes in *Don't Crash* that he could not read reviews of the movie, good or bad, because neither were helping his nerves, and he could not change what had already happened; he and Garth tried to the best of their abilities to stay true to Adams's story while still imbuing the project with their own particular brand. The last thing Goldstein and Jennings wanted to do was change the spirit of the book—they had been fans for years, just as the legions who came out for the premiere, making *Hitchhiker's* the top grossing film for its opening weekend at \$22.2 million.

In regard to the changes directors, writers, and producers make from a book to a film, Kamilla Elliot presents different forms of adaptation, including the Psychic Concept of Adaptation, which has the adapter looking to balance between preserving the spirit of the original work and creating a new form, within her overall argument (Elliot 222). Elliot goes on to say of adaptations, “The form can change; the spirit remains constant. The spirit of the text thus maintains a life beyond form that is not constrained by or dependent on form” (223). The film adaptation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* maintains the quirky, humorous spirit of the book on which it is based. *Hitchhiker's* itself will never be universally loved, so it would be ludicrous to think about the film adaptation being universally enjoyed. That said, the spirit of the book was captured by screenwriters Douglas Adams and Karey Kirkpatrick, by director Garth Jennings, by producer Nick Goldstein, and by its various actors. Interestingly, one of the caveats Elliot inserts into her own argument is supported by the *Hitchhiker's* film; Elliot notes, “the spirit of a text, however, is most frequently equated with the spirit of the author rather than of the reader” (223). More than once, friends and collaborators and adaptors have noted that they wanted to do Adams's work justice—the work to them does not stand on

its own; it belongs to its author. This is just as true for most adaptations of classic literature with titles such as *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*, and *Herman Melville's Moby Dick*; the authors become a part of the title of the work themselves. While the *Hitchhiker's* film did not call itself "*Douglas Adams's The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*," the production's obsession with staying true to his memory lingered throughout the construction of the film. Interestingly, under actor Martin Freeman, the International Movie Database (IMDB) lists him as having played Arthur Dent in *Douglas Adams's The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* ("Martin Freeman"). At one point, Robbie Stamp said, "[Douglas] just would have said, 'I told you so, I told you it would make a great movie!'" (*Don't Crash: Making of the Hitchhiker's Movie*). While this may in fact be true, his inability to answer leaves us with only conjecture. The best we can do is to begin reclaiming film adaptation for the viewers. Though the author is the original progenitor of the idea and text, the viewers must be able to make their own decisions about subsequent adaptations without wondering what the author thought, especially of an author who cannot take a stance.

Instead of just ending the first series as four pals on their way to the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, the film has a more connective narrative arch wherein Arthur Dent, our protagonist, gets a love interest in Trillian Macmillan. While Trillian is also the love interest in the book, she exists mainly as a plot device and a distraction to Arthur; also, they are the last two of their species existent in the cosmos. In the book, the relationship between Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect receives the most attention, though Trillian does pop up every once and a while to say something witty and have our narrator comment on her brilliance (she is, of course, an astrophysicist). In the movie, the plot

between Arthur and Ford is mostly dropped for the relationship between Arthur and Trillian. Though Trillian and Arthur have already met at a fancy dress party.⁶ they meet again on the *Starship Heart of Gold* where the Infinite Improbability Drive has just picked Arthur and Ford up out of the absolute vacuum of space. When the movie begins, Trillian is with Zaphod, Galactic President. Over the course of the movie, Trillian realizes she does not want to be with Zaphod because the only person he cares about is himself; in the end, it is through Zaphod being zapped with the point-of-view gun that we understand how Trillian feels—she wants to be with Arthur. One of the last shots is of Trillian and Arthur kissing in a construction cart; along with Zaphod and Questular Rontok⁷ who have come together without acknowledging they are together; and Ford and Slartibartfast, who linger in the back of the cart looking slightly dazed. Interestingly, the union of Arthur and Trillian in the movie fits into the remainder of the series in that at one point in time the pair have a daughter, Random, together; however, Adams does not spend any time in his books writing love scenes, nor does he seem comfortable bringing a relationship into a work that began as a buddy comedy. Yet, Douglas Adams himself wrote all the changes that occurred in the film for the screenplay. Narratology and media studies are not exact sciences and they are both constantly evolving.

⁶ A costume party; Arthur goes as Livingston and Trillian goes as Charles Darwin (an obvious nod to Adams's belief in Evolution and his role as, in his own words, a radical Atheist).

⁷ Played by Anna Chancellor, Vice President and new character to the *Hitchhiker's* canon.

The narrative arc of the *Hitchhiker's* film is stronger than that of the book, which in turn is stronger than that of the radio show. Without the radio show, there never would have been a book, which never would have been optioned to be a film to continue the arc of the original tale, challenging itself to evolve and engage more viewers. The narrative of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as a work is fitting of its own narrative story: never linear and never complete, much like our own conception of space. Over the years, *Hitchhiker's* has come to occupy many aspects of the entertainment industry and the 2005 film is not the last adaptation we will see of the work.⁸ In short, Adams *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* occupies a space that narratologists seek to explain; Kamilla Elliot's stance is relevant here: "The spirit of the text thus maintains a life beyond form that is not constrained by or dependent on form" (223). With each change, the life of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is infused with the spirit of each preceding adaptation. Though Adams is no longer around to consult on changes, the work stands on its own, a Chimera in an industry full of straightforward three-act pieces. Adams was known for his short, witty dialogue—just as he was known for creating a work that did not follow a linear path. As Douglas Adams once said, "There is an art, or, rather, a knack to flying. The knack lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss" (*Life, the Universe, and Everything* 11). As with Adams's entire oeuvre, improbable, but logical.

⁸ For instance, there has already been a sixth book published and a live radio show produced.

CONCLUSION: Final Thoughts

Ever since it was written, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has been fascinating its fans, making us laugh. Society has shifted to reflect the move to technologically dependent times in the last 35 years. As I write this, I type on my MacBook Pro with the latest and greatest Android phone next to me and the television on to some particularly horrible daytime soap opera (they haven't changed much, I'm told). From my location in Tennessee, I can call my mom in Florida, talk to my friends overseas on Facebook, and have all the answers to my merest quandary at my fingertips through Google and Wikipedia—with these two search engines and the advent of modern technology, I can take over the world.¹

Thirty-five years ago, Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* predicted our technological future in the form of a guidebook called the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy that had an innocuous "Don't Panic" in large letters across its cover. It was a small device, filled with seemingly countless entries on anything the reader was looking for. Though personal computers started becoming more popular,² no one knew the extent to what this new technology could offer. Admittedly, Adams didn't know either, but he had imagination, like any good author.

Over four decades ago, what began as a drunken night in Austria of one young man who was preparing to go up to university became a cultural phenomenon, which

¹ Not that I would.

² Adams, the super fan of computer technology, had multiple.

would affect millions of people. Though *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has always had cult fame, among those who love it, there are those who have their own power and fame in society, both public and private figures, who have been so moved to incorporate their enjoyment of the text into their own work, or tell their fans of their involvement or appreciation of the work (Neil Gaiman, Stephen Fry, Coldplay, Trillian messaging service, Babel Fish translator, etc.).

In my own study, I try to make this message clear: that Douglas Adams isn't going away and, in fact, he should be studied more as an early example supporting media and fandom studies as well as the necessity to incorporate authorial intent into scholarly investigations. Additionally, one should consider Adams in light of more interdisciplinary pursuits. Though Adams does occupy a corner of the science fiction/fantasy community, he has the curious ability to reach broader, cult audiences in a variety of different disciplines such as: computer technology, science, literary studies, fan studies, media studies, gender studies, philosophy, etc. When I began this study, I sought to accomplish one simple thing: to give recognition where it was due. Over the course of my research, my stance deepened and I found areas of scholarship that Adams deserves to be mentioned in, including fan studies and media studies. Douglas Adams spent most of his career being underappreciated by those around him. His critics would ask, 'what's the big deal; so you wrote a thing that you keep redoing—what's the point?' The point was that Adams was trying to make moves with his work. He was constantly ahead of the curve when it came to adaptive technology.

Adams used his seminal work to adapt to multiple platforms because the plot was such that reworking proved appropriate. Adapting from radio show to book to stage to

mini series to comic to computer game to Hollywood movie was as fitting as it was extraordinary. While it must be said that Adams appreciated the finer things in life (nice homes, fast cars, left-handed guitars) which sometimes led to him becoming side-tracked in the South of France or in an exotic location, he sought to constantly evolve himself and his franchise through his other interest: technology.

If given the time, and access to Adams's papers (currently in a broom cupboard in his daughter's house),³ I would have liked to further explore what Adams wanted from his lifelong project. Specifically, I would like to spend more time discussing various side projects that Adams either abandoned or left undone, such as *The Salmon of Doubt*. Additionally, in the future I'd like to return to his works, both *Hitchhiker's* and *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, to engage them in close readings, focusing on a seldom-mentioned assertion, that Adams's own life affected his characters and plot development. M.J. Simpson, Adams's proclaimed historian and biographer, mentions this connection in his biography *Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams*, a new historian's goldmine. Further, I'd like to do a feminist reading of, arguably, the only two meaningful female characters in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Trillian and her daughter with Arthur Dent, Random. Adams's lack of strong female characters, especially when seen in light of the women in his own life (his wife Jane Belson, his daughter Polly Jane, his editor Sue Freestone, his mother, etc.) begs to be explored.

³ Information gleaned via a twitter conversation with daughter to Douglas Adams, Polly Jane Rocket Adams.

Overall, much has yet to be said of Douglas Adams and his works. Serious consideration needs to be given to Adams for his contributions to literature, science fantasy, computer technology, science, and philosophy, among many. Douglas Adams once said in an interview when *Hitchhiker's* was first taking off, "Occasionally, I get a glimpse and think 'this can go on forever—it'll be terrific.'" (Shircore Loc 181). Indeed, *Hitchhiker's* has already proven it has the staying power to see Adams's dream come to fruition; I look forward to the day this notion is just as reflective in scholarly pursuits of Adams and his works.

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