



The Drink Tank

The Drink Tank 450

Douglas Adams

Alissa—Chris—Chuck

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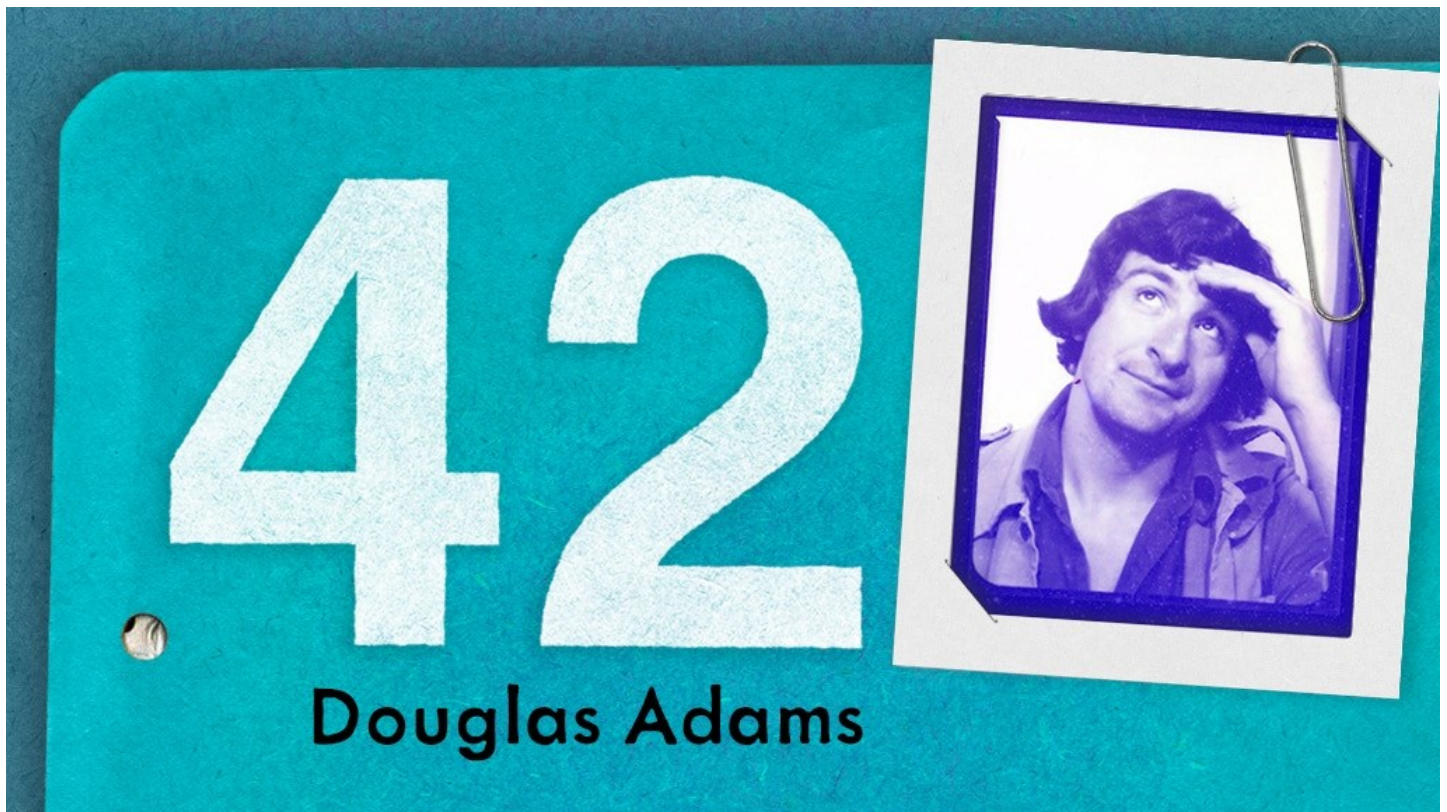
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An Interview with Kevin Jon Davies, Editor of *42: The Wildly Improbable Ideas of Douglas Adams*

By Yvette Keller

Kevin Jon Davies (KJD) is a documentary filmmaker, illustrator, and editor of the upcoming book [42: The Wildly Improbable Ideas of Douglas Adams](#), who had the happy fortune to work on the BBC Television adaptation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* in 1981.

Yvette Keller (YK) is the author of the newly released [Douglas Adams' London](#) map and guide, who knew of KJD from [ZZ9er fandom](#) but didn't have the opportunity to meet him in person until he graciously agreed to whizz her around London for literary tourism location scouting in 2022.

In this interview (edited by Yvette for clarity and length) Kevin and Yvette talk about their love of Adams and how their respective Adamsian projects came about.

How Fans (and Fan-Friends) Are Made

YK:

So, Kevin, for any fans getting this Douglas Adams issue of The Drink Tank who have never met you at a convention or a slouch . . . who the heck are you?

KJD:

Well, for many years I was an animator. An old school, do it by hand-drawn methods, animator. I worked my way through that industry for about 13 years. [Hitchhiker's] was the first TV show that I ever worked on. I was already a massive fan. I'd met Douglas and interviewed him for a fanzine, and I was like a pig in clover!

Then I got lucky with a documentary commission from the BBC for [The Making of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy](#). They let me have the free run of the place. I documented the whole behind-the-scenes story, and that got me various projects over the years.

[The Illustrated Hitchhiker](#) was a book that I was the concept art director on -- I think was my official title. But all the pictures in it were based on my sketches and I directed the pictures almost like what Douglas dubbed "a movie that doesn't move." That was my only previous foray into publishing.

Ever since 1993, I've been a documentary filmmaker. A couple of years ago, I was invited to go do this project and investigate Douglas' archive for the forthcoming book. One of the biggest things I've ever done is [42: The Wildly Improbable Ideas of Douglas Adams](#).

And that's where we met! You were doing your map and I was doing my book research.



YK:

We had so much fun, didn't we! Because we were both just fans, driving around London and seeing Douglas-related places. Were you involved for many years before that with the fan club the [ZZ9ers](#)? Did you go to conventions? What are the other bits and pieces of who you are as a fan?

KJD:

I think I started out as a school kid, in, I guess, your equivalent of high school. I was a big fan of two things. One was [The Goon Show](#), which was already pretty archived in the early seventies. The Goons had been off the radio for a good 15 years plus . . . that was Spike Milligan.

And Peter Sellers, who you may have heard of, and Harry Secombe, they were The Goons: crazy, anarchic wild, weird stories on the radio. BBC Radio was very, very healthy and very imaginative, and I fell in love with that. And the other thing that I've loved since, since childhood was [Doctor Who](#): a big science fiction show.

So those were two flagship items of the BBC's sort of repertoire of both radio and television. And then in 1978, when I was 17, along came [The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy](#). And that was it. I was hooked because it was almost like a synthesis of my two favorite things, the crazy anarchic stuff, the science fiction of [Doctor Who](#) all melded together in this amazing radio show.

And I adored that. I was already a member of the Doctor Who Appreciation Society, and I was at the [world's first Doctor Who convention](#), and most of my friends that are still friends now, I made at that time . . . we were all into Doctor Who. We were all fascinated by this new thing, *Hitch Hikers Guide*, by the guy who wrote [Pirate Planet](#). That's all we knew of him really.

When I first met [Douglas] I interviewed him for a fanzine. I just carried on doing fan-type stuff, until I just happened to land on my feet and got lucky with the TV show. I met the producer by accident, and I introduced him to my boss, who became the animation director for the show.

I consider myself very lucky to walk that line; I'm very happy in the fan world and I'm very happy doing professional stuff. And I mix the two together. I've got to the point now where I'm older and I look back and I reflect...I'm terribly nostalgic. It's still very much a part of who I am, the [ZZ9](#) crowd, the Douglas Adams continuum, and in the past decade or so,



Top: KJD during lunch break in Maida Vale, Photo Credit Yvette Keller

Bottom: Tardis from Kevin's car as we navigated London, Photo Credit Yvette Keller

[Galactic Hitchhikers](#) on Facebook. They're enormous. I dip in and out.

I'm quite happy you know, to go along with any of it. I think some people can get involved in projects, Doctor Who and whatnot, and get a little bit grand and sort of leave the fan thing behind. But I am quite happy to have a leg in both camps if you know what I mean.

YK:

I know exactly what you mean. I pitched my guide to [Herb Lester and Associates](#) to help my fellow fans connect with Douglas Adams and his writing. I wanted the map to get made because I'm a fan, and I wanted it . . . so I thought other fans would want it too.



[Kevin Jon Davies](#) outside one of Adams' previous residences, Photo Credit Yvette Keller

Tell us more about what we can expect on the inside of the book you've edited, which is coming out in August. We know it's all about these wildly improbable ideas and we know that you (lucky dog!) got to delve inside of those boxes inside [St. John's College, Cambridge](#).



St. John's College Cambridge, Photo Credit Yvette Keller

But when you looked through and you had to pull things out and start to put them all together and create that book, what did that end up looking like? What kind of decisions did you make about what was going to go in and how did you make those decisions?

KJD:

Right. Well, it was a very interesting proposal. Obviously, there are others that have done books about Douglas. There are some lovely biographies by several different people, most of whom I know and are friends of mine. We've lost one of them, sadly; [Nick Webb, who did the official biography](#).

So, I wasn't the first to go into the archive. I think [Jem Roberts](#) was the first to be allowed officially to access it, in 2016. Jem Roberts had already been there and found stuff that had become the appendices at the back of his book, [The Frood](#).

I had been ill...I had a heart thing and was recovering when [Dirk Maggs](#), the radio producer who adapted, produced, and directed the later radio shows based upon Douglas' books, asked me to go [to the archives] and take a look. Dirk incorporated previous content and said to me, "Anything else?" So, I poured through what I could and I had about six days in all.

It was a nice job to do when I was just getting back on my feet again. I went up to Cambridge to Douglas' former college, St. John's College. In the 500-year-old library there, the family had lodged 67 boxes of Douglas' personal and professional papers. Various artifacts and bits and bobs and things that, you know, they just didn't

know what to do with.

When they cleared his home, I think they were overwhelmed with it all. [The Family] all knew me and they put me forward for the project. I didn't propose this book. The publishers came to me.

Having already delved into the archive once before for what was known as [The Hexagonal Phase](#), the sixth radio series, mostly based on the book by Eoin Colfer, an official continuation of the five-book series by Douglas, [Dirk Maggs](#) wanted to pepper it a little bit with some pure Douglasisms. He said, "Just find if there's anything of Hitchhiker that hasn't been found."

I just found what I could and it was added to the mill of those six scripts for [The Hexagonal Phase](#). I also looked in the Doctor who file (just in case) and got some material there. But I hadn't really done the whole archive. I'd just concentrated on the wedge (which is considerable) of *Hitchhiker*. So this time, it was a case of looking at Douglas' entire life story...A huge archive to wade through.

Inside The Archives

KJD:

Let me explain the process of what it's like going there. [The first time I visited the archives] I'd drive out for an hour along the motorway. They kept strict office hours and they shut for lunch (which is very British). So, I would travel there, do a day's work, break for lunch in the pub that Douglas used to frequent across the road, and then carry on in the afternoon. They finish their day at 5 or 5:30 and you have to be out and that's it.

Luckily, they allowed me to take snapshots with my iPhone of the pages because I realized I couldn't just sit and read. I'd have to go many, many more times if I did that. So, I snapped away busily and I was up, down, up, down, up, down, taking pictures. I should have really set up with a tripod. I never did for some reason, arrange it more properly, but it was too fiddly.

The way the process works is the librarian would bring you a folder, or later on once they got to know me and they trusted me more, an entire box so I could go through it at leisure.

Otherwise, I kept saying, right, done this bit. Half an hour on that, ten minutes on this, they'd have to then bring me another file. So anyway, in the end, I was going through box by box, and I got through I think about 80%.

Across six months I made 17 trips, and I would take the pictures home and then it was a slow, laborious process of me cataloging the subset of pictures of all the archives so that I could find things again. Because sometimes it's a bit random.

I'm amazed that it's as organized as it is and that is a tribute to the archivists there at the library. The chief librarian, Kathryn, and her assistant Adam have done a fab job of collating what has been donated . . . I don't know what the official word is, because you can't just walk in and look at this stuff. You have to make an appointment and it has to be officially sanctioned by Douglas' representative, the agency who represents the family now. You have to have the nod from them. So, the family still very much owns it.

But it's looked after, and they've got similar arrangements with other famous people, ex staff or students of St. John's. And presumably, all the other colleges within the great Cambridge University town, I presume they've all got situations like this.

Douglas is in good company there. Somebody else was going through Cecil Beaton's material. And, there was one lady I met who was cataloging or re-cataloging all the medieval manuscripts. The building itself, the upstairs bit at the back, is like an old church. It's got stained glass windows and the bookshelves look like the bookshelves at Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films. Big, heavy old bookcases, groaning with big old dusty tomes, you know.

So [Douglas is] in very good company and he's a bit of a Johnny-come-lately compared to the medieval manuscripts. I was shown one that they hadn't opened since the seventies. It was 800 years old. This book. And it was a privilege to look at it because the colors . . . the monks illuminated [the book with] beautiful, rich colors. In some of them, the colors had bled through onto other pages. They were lead-based, and they used to lick the pens. So terrible. The things it must have done to those poor monks. But oh my goodness, the calligraphy is so beautiful.

YK:

I could imagine that as an illustrator yourself, that must have been . . .

KJD:

It was just particularly thrilling. Very special. And it's nice to think, as I said, I'm just dealing with, you know, Douglas, who, by comparison, has been a Johnny-come-lately. I'm not looking back any further than the early fifties.

With His Head in The Clouds, Not His Data

YK:

So, you've got all these boxes of physical detritus left over. Did they take all of the information of what was on, you know, his computers and his hard drives, and did they print all of that out to put into the boxes?

KJD:

No, that's another resource to be looked at another time. I did have access, when I was doing [The Hexagonal Phase](#) for Dirk, he had the file that was on one of [Adams'] later computers, that had the [Dirk Gently](#) stuff on it.

YK:

I know that's mentioned in the biographies and also in [The Salmon of Doubt](#) of course. They pulled a lot of those files out. But I was thinking about it, and I was thinking about my Google Mail. It has, years and years and years' worth of just Google Mail back and forth to people. And so I was very curious how much of the boxes were pre-digital versus post-digital.

KJD:

Well, I would say all of the boxes were pre-digital, really. Which is . . . we're so lucky because it's his handwriting. It's his sometimes terrible typing. With Tippex or liquid paper correction; Lots of strikethroughs and scribbles in the margin and all.

And you get to see all this in the book. A big thick coffee table book, full of facsimiles of his actual papers. Thank goodness he did most of his most famous work when he was still ignorant of most computers and just typing that stuff out, man. He was hammering away at the typewriter. He was scribbling in notebooks.

He had this thing, it's quite funny: He had got many notebooks but nearly all of them have a similar pattern. Douglas was a man of great enthusiasms and also amazing depressions when he got stuck with writer's block. And he would start a fresh notebook with a declaration sometimes in the book saying, "Here we are. I've started a fresh one." It was, "This is the latest thinking, I'm gonna write something every day. Doesn't matter if it's rubbish. I'm just gonna write something and this is it. And I've decided this is what this notebook's about, blah, blah, blah . . ." And then, After sometimes only half a dozen pages, sometimes a bit more, you'd find the rest of the notebook was utterly blank. Because then he'd obviously plunged into some fug of depression or whatever and when he got going again, he'd start a fresh notebook. As if that was gonna be the magic talisman or something that was gonna unleash a fresh burst of creativity.

Also, I did find a note where he said, the thing about a book as opposed to an eBook (which he predicted and always wished that the technology was up to what he was thinking of), he said that he used to sort of think that a paperback book is the best form of a book because you can do anything with it. You can rifle through it, you can stuff it in your back pocket. And you can do things with a paperback book you can't do with an eBook: You can read it in the bath. That seemed to be a big thing for Douglas. We know he liked his baths and yeah, he just liked the whole idea of it; Nothing has beaten an old-fashioned book.

But that meant he also quite liked to print stuff out when he first got his computers. At first, it was IBM PC-type stuff. There are notes in some of his notebooks from that time with him jotting down as a memo to him-

self of which block of memory he was storing certain blocks of type in. So that he could find sections of his own work. And that's fascinating seeing that written by hand in his notebook.

I asked someone who knows about these things (because I was quite late to computers really), and they said, "Oh yeah, that's Word Star." Which was a terrible program, this lady said. So, it was like, okay, we've got a clue then what this stuff is. He kept talking about K-W-ing things. K-W. KW was written everywhere. What's that then? And that was part of storing text in an early word processing software.

And then, of course, he discovered the Mac in 1984. And is famously supposed to be the very first person who bought a Mac in this country and Stephen Fry was the next one. It's debatable whether Douglas bought two and then Stephen Fry bought the third or whether he got the second one. But they used to converse and excitedly compare notes of the latest new thing they'd managed to do with the computer.

And Stephen Fry, I interviewed [him] a couple of times way back, in one of up Dirk's early projects, and he said, "Oh yes," he said, "We used to get thrilled when we could actually talk to each other down the computer line, but when it went wrong, What could we do? Oh, yeah, we, we just picked up the phone."

But they were thrilled with all this new technology, the pair of them. We are lucky that Douglas printed out a lot of stuff. [Douglas] said at the end of the day he liked to print it out and look at his work in the hand. And so of course we've got all those papers. Some of what's in there is from the computer, but mostly it seemed to be that he was either writing by hand—longhand in the early days—or typing. The furious typing that his brother remembers from way, way back.

What's Inside 42: The Wildly Improbable Ideas of Douglas Adams?

KJD:

Thankfully we got all that paperwork. I had loads of work to do, to quickly put it all together.

All the way along I was thinking, oh, that will go there, and this will go there—a loose plan. But I hadn't actually got into the real nitty gritty of what was gonna be on each page.

Luckily, they appointed a technical editor to help me with the whole process of laying out the book. She worked with the designer and there's been lots of discussions.

I think I would've liked it all much messier and scrapbooky. Because I grew up with the [Monty Python books](#), and we had a series here for, for most of the seventies called The Goodies...some of the Python contemporaries had their own sort of more family orientated, surrealistic kids show and I used to like their books as well. Because they had a more scrapbooky sort of notion that you would pour over every page, looking at all the little details, things in the corner.

But this is a modern book. It has a lot of air around it to breathe and it looks nicer on the page. Where the handwriting is indecipherable, transcripts are printed on the opposite page, so you're not left high and dry, wondering what Douglas' writing says. After a time, you can piece it together, but it's written in text so that you can make your way through it more easily.

In the early days, I was writing too much. [The editors] said, "You're not doing another biography. We just need paragraphs to explain what it is we're looking at and give it context." I got the hang of that eventually.

I hadn't done anything like this before, but when I stepped back from it, the overall process of dealing with a big archive, it's very much like what I have to do when I make a documentary.

The Power of Lego: Documentation to Publication

KJD:

There are two massive archives that I've worked with in the past. I did the [30th anniversary of Doctor Who](#). I was having to sum up 26 years of that sci-fi series all in one program, and I did cut that to feature length the following year. That's the one that exists now on DVD. And I did a biography of the father of a friend of mine, who is [Lord](#)

[Montagu of Beaulieu](#). I did his [life story](#) for his 80th birthday. And that was a vast archive that his son, Ralph, had amassed over time with, with footage of him coming home as a newborn baby in arms.

So, I'm used to dealing with a big archive, usually for a documentary, but really it's the same.

YK:

You still apply the same editing... Finding the story, finding the through lines and then having enough information to tell that story, but not so much that it overwhelms the reader, or the viewer and they sort of wander off. Yeah, I can see how those skills would be really similar.

KJD:

It was. It's very similar, and I've kind of half-joked that it's because I was a massive Lego fan when I was a kid. I'd build things out of Lego. And I think it gives you that frame of reference. And my mother was a librarian. I was a librarian when I was at art college—that was my Saturday job. And my father was an engineer, a mechanic. I think that whole thing, a process of putting things together and finding the right slots and making sense of a complicated thing, I think that was ingrained in me from [Legos]. That's what I've brought to this project. My love of Hitchhiker and Douglas.

Douglas' Life, The Universe, and Hitchhiker

KJD:

I left the Hitchhiker chapter [of the book] till last because I thought, well that's the one I can breeze through because I know that one terribly well. [The book has] everything. Doctors and clinics and health reports of Douglas when he was just a tiny toddler.

His mum had him tested because it appeared that he was a little bit slow to start with his development. She was worried—she'd been a nurse—She was worried that his speech particularly was, you know, not good. And to think that he became such a fine wordsmith! That just shows you that, you know, don't underestimate slow beginners because they can outstrip the rest of us.

YK:

Yeah, there's that lovely quotation that I think he gave to Neil Gaiman for *Don't Panic!* about them being worried about him as a child because he was the only person that they'd ever known who could literally walk straight into a light post with his eyes open! There are a few allusions to this idea that they were worried there wasn't anything going on the inside, but luckily they found out that there was too much going on the inside, essentially.

KJD:

Yeah. His, his mind was so unique. I think it's the same thing that I admired about Spike Milligan that I admired about Douglas. Both of those gentlemen. Their minds were wired up differently than the rest of us. You know, they just had a unique take on the world. Milligan's might have been down to his having shell shock during the Second World War, and, you know, the various mental illnesses that he had. Douglas was just innately curious.

He was fascinated as he got older—and in the last decade or so of his life almost exclusively—fascinated by ecology, evolution. All the evolutionary sciences. And that comes across more and more. And he was definitely, I think, working his way up to writing a proper science book. I mean, one of the last things that he did in book form of course was *Last Chance To See*. *Last Chance To See* is his only factual book and it's one of his best. It was his favorite, his personal favorite.

YK:

I love, love, love *Last Chance To See* so much. I'm always so shocked when people don't know about it because I always say it's his tightest and funniest writing at some level. It's so hilarious.

KJD:

Yeah. I recommend anyone who's not looked at it should have a go. It's a great book. It's about his journeys around the world looking at endangered species. And there are boxes of stuff to do with that. I mean, his itinerary for travel and the equipment that he took with him. I've found the original BBC memo [from] when he was first getting the project together and he'd already got the advance from the publishers. It was about making the radio series; they took radio sound recordists with them.

YK:

And that's [available on audio now on Audible](#).

KJD:

Yeah, you can just buy the original BBC recordings, which is pretty great. And some of it is slightly different to the book. They cover different animals and things. The Rodriguez fruit bat—we've got a whole section on that—which the main problem was when [Douglas] went into the caves to look at the fruit bat, he had been so troubled by mosquito bites that he really just didn't give a tinker's cuss about these rotten bats. He didn't wanna know by that point. He said, despite all his ecological awareness, and his love of endangered species, he said, "If I saw one more mosquito, I would cheerfully have machine-gunned the bugger." So, yeah, that's quite a funny section.

I managed to find bits and bobs even from *Last Chance To See* that you can read and that gives you an insight into what it was like on his travels. He met some funny people along the way. I mean, the guy in Australia was hilarious. Warning him about poisonous snakes.

He also talks about a whole section that's not in the book. About these monks that he went to see in a temple. I can't remember where that was now, but anyway, it's in the [new] book. Every time they brought their cameras out, the monk would take his cigarette out of his mouth and dispose of it quickly. And tend to be very serene and monk-like for the photographs. Then as soon as they were done, out with the cigarette again and back to being a modern man. Very funny segment.

There's lots of things . . . sciencey stuff that came in later. And then he formed The Digital Village with Robbie Stamp, and there's a whole section on that. So it covers pretty much his whole life. We got his school reports, photographs of him on stage when he was at school, which I'd never seen. So, it's not all just paperwork. There are photographic illustrations too.

Surprising Life

YK:

What was the thing that you found, and got to include in the book, that most surprised you?

KJD:

Oh, so much. I mean, it was quite moving to pour through the papers. I was very aware that I was in a privileged position. I was also thinking that what a shame Douglas isn't here; but then if he was here, he wouldn't have wanted anybody going through his paperwork.

YK:

Right!

KJD:

Never mind me, he wouldn't want anyone to see some of this stuff. Um, There were love letters from a relationship that he had when he was a student with an older married woman. Rather troubled character as far as we can make out. He was only 21. She was older and there's some stuff to do with that. We couldn't put it all in. Sensitivity to her family and that. There were little snippets.

I found notes jotted in early notebooks, long before *Hitchhiker*. There's one which seems to be the genesis of *Hitchhiker*, which is a note just saying: *A science fiction story. These two guys have known each other for a while. This one of them comes along and says that in actual fact he's an alien, and the earth is in terrible danger and offers to take him off into space.* That's it. And that is at least two years, maybe more before *Hitchhiker*. He hasn't even got names for the characters at that point.

I also found, in amongst the stuff for [The Meaning of Liff](#) that he wrote with [John Lloyd](#), I found a handwritten script between Arthur and Marvin. A whole scene that we've never read before. He was writing it for the 60th anniversary of BBC Radio. And he'd obviously been told, you know, "We've got the dressing gown and we've got the robot, so can you do us something?"

So, it's Arthur and Marvin—it was for a television thing. Ultimately it never got made [for TV] and became a radio project. Which was probably more suited anyway. Somebody else wrote something [for the 60th], and that does exist. But this script was a hint of what might have been. With, you know, Marvin being rather sarcastic about things and Arthur trying to be terribly polite and British about this wonderful institution, the BBC. Marvin kind of, you know, [offering] barbed comments along with it. But it was misfiled, because it just something that he did in the middle of doing [The Meaning of Liff](#). So, it wasn't actually flagged up. Even on the database of the library, it's not flagged up as a piece of *Hitchhiker*. I realized that was golden!

How Douglas Adams Wrote

YK:

So, everything in the archives: I know that there was a student many years ago who went through and did try to make an index of the archives. So, are they cross-referenced? Were you able to get a checklist from the archive and be like, okay, I've looked at this, I've looked at this, I've looked at this?

KJD:

There is an [online archive catalog](#) that you can access, but it really is only bullet points. It doesn't tell you what's on each page. And each sub-category has a one-slash-one-slash-one-slash-one . . . all the way down to 67 or whatever it is.

There are all these different lists in the catalog but they really only cover the overarching umbrella of what's in that particular folder. You have to go through page by page to find the stuff. And it needs someone like me—someone who's kind of knows this stuff—to go, "Oh! I know what this is. Yeah, I know where this goes."

And every now and again, things have been placed slightly out of order. The library, when they accept things from the estate of one of the old boys of the school, they like to keep it in the order in which it was submitted as much as possible.

And what they do is they turn the page over, and sometimes when there's a whole sheaf of loose papers, they'll do Roman numerals in pencil, in the corner, on the back of the page, so you know roughly the order that it was in.

Well, that wasn't necessarily the correct order. Once you start reading it, a few things have been put in reverse order. Or something slightly slipped out. There's a lot of repetition. I found endless reprints and slightly reworded pages from [Dirk Gently](#). Where he was trying the whole, you know, "high on a rocky promontory." You know that bit. We found the original note—the one that his mom liked. The [phrase] the whole book is based on. It began the same—every time: "This time there would be no witnesses."

He's writing it and rewriting it and fussing over it and changing it by small amounts and then printing it out again. Endlessly. I've put some of the samples in there because you can see how he was stuck.

He said he was intimidated by the massive advance—the money that his agent Ed Victor had negotiated to do the two book deal of [Dirk Gently](#). He felt intimidated by the amount of money, and he wanted to make sure every single line, every single word was worth whatever. You know, he worked out that he needed to do "x" tens of thousand words, and how much is that per word when you compare it to the 2 million it was that he was offered. I

think he felt overwhelmed to try and top what he'd done before and make sure that it was valuable.

He wasn't a prolific writer. We know that he got stuck so often. He hated the whole lonely business. He was a frustrated performer. We know he liked to [perform]. I mean there are books that he recorded of him reading his own work. Lots of people love that. And that's their preferred version of *Hitchhiker*. I happened to prefer the radio show because that's the first way that we all encountered it.

[His writing process] is fascinating to see. When I was doing it in 2016, when I was first looking for [Dirk Maggs](#), at the archive, I thought then, "Hey, this should be a book. It should be called, (you know, working title) 'How Douglas Adams Wrote'".

On the page, he's berating himself for not doing well enough. He's arguing with himself. There's one point where he is saying, "I can't stand it anymore...Arthur Dent is a burk. I don't care about him."

And, you know, and then he goes off onto a rant about something else. There's one where it's quite nice and he's reminding himself, "If you sit...if you concentrate, you can do quite well by it." And he certainly did. He was a wealthy man. He did well by his family.

It's poignant to read [those notes to himself]. It's exciting to read it. It's an honor. And I hope that the book—I mean, it's far from being the entire archive—but it's a good representative section for every piece of his archive. With the exception of the later hard drives.

What's Left Behind

KJD:

You know, the technical editor said to me, don't worry, you are the only one who knows what's *not* in there. We're all gonna love it for the things that are in there. Which is the only way to look at it. And I'm a bit of a completist. I wanted to crowbar in as much as possible.

The boss of the publishing company said, "Did you have to leave a lot out?" And I said, "Oh boy did I." So he goes, "Sequel?" and wagged his eyebrows at me. And I went, "I see this as a one-off, but who knows? We'll talk."

YK:

I had the exact same conversation with my editor, even over the map and guide! I submitted almost 90 places in London. We knew we had to get down to 42 because of the minuscule space available on a map. And we had to decide: what are the 42 best places that most fans will want to go to? Also, what places have the tightest relationship to Adams. Our priority was specific and tight, and you can say why it's an important place.

A lot of my favorite places on my quest were a little bit more tenuous. They were fictional and more fun. Because I'm interested in the magic of finding out what was going on in the background at the moment Adams was writing. For me, going to places on the map is time travel: What was going on in the moment he wrote this? What can we understand from reading about a place in a book and the physically looking at. That's the sort of thing that I like to do.

KJD:

Well, it forced you, and as this has forced me, to be more selective. For the good of the project, you know? I do recognize that the sort of strictures they placed upon me made it a better product. Because I was forced to confront the fact that maybe I wanted this thing a bit too much, you know? I mean, there is that saying—I think it is to do with writing and I certainly have applied it to documentary making—there's that phrase, 'kill your babies.' Little bits that you've fallen in love with...sometimes it just doesn't belong. And you painfully have to cut it out and let it go. Filmmakers do it all the time, you know, doesn't serve the story.

YK:

Yeah. And it's like, does this really belong? What use is this scene?

KJD:

Yeah, it's gotta go, you know? And sometimes you need a fresh pair of eyes and that's how Judy, the technical editor on this, she brought that to the project. Being ruthless with me saying, "Yes, I know you like this Kevin, but it doesn't fit and we haven't got room for it." And sometimes it was like, "Well, you can either have this or that, but you can't have both."

YK:

Was she a Douglas fan too?

KJD:

No, not at all. I mean, she had respect for it, for what [Douglas had] done and [said] she'd enjoyed the first book. And I don't know how much else she'd read of it. But no, she came to it as a professional wordsmith editor, you know.

It's what artists have to do every now and again. You have to take that step back from the canvas and look at the bigger picture. I quite often find that when you write something, you go back to it the next day and suddenly you can see a pattern you didn't see the day before. And you can slash it, and suddenly it's a better piece of writing. Well, that applies to filmmaking as well, especially when assembling a documentary . . . what you said earlier, looking for the story.

I've made a career in the last 20 years or so, I've done so many documentaries where I interview actors and production staff from old TV series and ask them to reminisce. And I might know some of the little anecdotes . . . I might have read in the research something about a particular episode or something funny that happened on the set or whatever. But you've gotta get other people to comment on it. And then you've gotta look for now, okay, so what is the story here?

And sometimes the bits that you really love that are hilarious or that are fascinating or whatever, just don't fit the rhythm of the storytelling. You have to rather painfully go, okay, delete that section goes because it is just holding everything up.

So, I've been through that many times in a different medium and the rules are the same. Whatever you are putting together, you have to do that. The artist stepping back. Or another fresh pair of eyes. Leave it alone. Go away. Come back, look at it tomorrow or next week. Take a fresh look at it. When you've slept on it, you can quite often see things you didn't see before. I did it all again on this project.

YK:

In the introduction at the Douglas Adams Memorial Lecture, the publisher said that you had found evidence that Douglas actually worked quite hard when he was reading English at Cambridge. What was he referring to? Did you actually find papers about Douglas' literature degree and what he was working on?

KJD:

Yep. There's a whole section in there that looks at his serious work. Obviously, we couldn't put many essays in because we're trying to present them in full size. The book itself is 320 pages, [size] A4. [We wanted] to have an A4 page of typed script or handwriting that the reader can read it—you know, just like I did—sitting there looking at it, at the desk, at the library. Turning the page and wondering what's next.

And so, we had to select. There were more essays and there was more academic work than Douglas tended to suggest. We know that he used to make up stories and he would spin a yarn...usually because he said he never understood anything until he'd found the joke. So, it would be in the form of an anecdote or an amusing quip, and a throwaway comment that, "I didn't have time to do my academic work. I was too busy appearing on stage in Footlights."

Or in what they called their smokers' concerts. Where they would do standup comedy effectively, they'd do sketch comedy and standup, with his friends. I mean, it was the whole thing. He wanted to go to Cambridge for; He wanted to be [John Cleese](#), you know?

He did get to meet him, and we do have a letter from Cleese in the book which we managed to clear: When they rather cheekily, invited [John Cleese](#) to come and see their show. And he wrote to them, apologized that he hadn't made it.

But then he did invite Douglas to come and interview him. And Douglas was in the middle of rehearsals for an amateur dramatics thing that he was doing. And he had to write to the director of the show saying, "Look, I've only got this one chance to interview [John Cleese](#), and I'm sorry I won't make it to rehearsals tomorrow."

[That director] became quite a well-known writer in Britain, [Sue Limb](#). She does a lot of historical comedy; Takes historical settings and writes a kind of sitcom about it for radio. Anyway, she's been very helpful because she's kept a couple of his letters. I said, "Well, look, there's a couple of your letters in there. You haven't got any replies from him, have you?"

She said, "Oh Yes." She was still very keen and spoke rather wistfully about Douglas and what fun they had as students. So, you know, that's the kind of thing I like finding. And we did it with the fans as well, the fanzines, and the fan letters.

I found letters in the archive from people that I knew from fandom. [Douglas] used to write A-N-S—answered, it meant—or sometimes it said 'answered', but usually it was just shortened to A-N-S in Douglas' scribble on the note, to say that he'd replied. And in the early days, the first two or three years when Hitchhikers came out, he was writing to every fan. But soon he was swamped, he couldn't possibly keep it up.

But we have those letters and in some cases we have carbon copies of his typed replies to them. So I asked a few of the ones whose names I recognized. An art student who wrote to him, she supplied some of her artwork. She'd done a graphic, a poster that she did way back then...and she had some of Douglas's replies!

So, we have a short chapter on fan mail and Douglas' responses. Which is lovely. I particularly like that. It's a nice thing to have and there were many, many more. I mean, there were so many.

You know, you asked me about what's left out. I mean, there were so many professional letters that we couldn't possibly put in the book because of the confidential nature of some of them. There were a couple of awkward legal things that he got tangled up in. I think they're a matter of record. Reading those is kind of heavy going, because you think Douglas at the time had been very friendly with the guys, but they'd taken him for a bit of a ride and hadn't given him his royalties.

I mean, lots and lots of things that aren't that exciting anyway. Book festivals or universities or whatever that have invited Douglas to come and be a speaker. And sometimes he took them up on it and sometimes he didn't.

A String of Excellent Personal Assistants (PAs)

KJD:

But all the letters are [in the archive]. It's extraordinary for a man who was so chaotic, his archives are quite fulsome. But I could only put it down to a string of PAs. I met some of them, the girls that took on this [paperwork] over the years. His last PA, who sadly had to deal with the whole thing of his death, and for about a year afterwards, she was handling his paperwork and everything. She was friendly with Douglas. It was a painful time for her but thank goodness she was there because obviously she and the other PAs across the years kept his paperwork in order. Somebody must have done all that filing! I can't imagine Douglas doing it—not being that careful with it, you know?

And it is amazing what's there. His school reports. I think his mother kept a couple of things. There's some childhood poetry. There's a poem that is written when he was 12. It's in the book and you look at it and think this is way beyond his tender years. The quality of the writing was there from that age.

And then other ones, you know, a bit more of a kind of the lovelorn student writing poems to the woman he's got this up and down relationship with. It's just rich with the man across his whole life. And he died at 49 and know how we all wish that he'd lived longer. Who knows? He would've written about all sorts of things.

When What We Have Underscores What We've Lost

KJD:

[Geoffrey McGivern](#), who played the original Ford on radio, said, that we've been robbed of Douglas, the parent, you know? You think about how Douglas was observing [his daughter Polly] and she was the apple of his eye when she was little. What might he have imparted to us about the business of having, maybe, a truculent teenager?

He didn't live to see it, sadly. And we would've liked to have had his unique take on it. And also his growing reference to science, his reading on the matter, his friendship with all the top tech people and all that . . . that never came out in anything except a few short articles here and there, and his notes for the speeches that he made. He was invited to all sorts of high-tech conferences. To inspire and entertain the people that have had a tough weekend discussing the technicalities.

And Douglas would then come along and walk up and down the stage and entertain them for an hour or so with all his thoughts. And it would give them a kind of a renewed belief in their work and what the future of their industry might be. So he was a very inspirational talker.

In fact, the last time I ever saw him was in 1998. He was giving a version of one of those speeches—and we've got the notes from that speech—a version of it that he did previous. That was an awards ceremony for the public awareness of science. And he was a guest speaker, and he was sort of mobbed when he came off the stage. And I thought, oh, I'll see him at the party upstairs. The cheese and wine party afterward.

I thought, I'll see him there. And then a bit later on, I asked the organizers, "Is Douglas not coming up and joining us?" They said, "Oh no, he's gone home. He ducked out." I mean, I don't know if he saw me, maybe that frightened him off . . . but I was just sad that I didn't know that would be the last time I'd see him.

And then the following year he emigrated to near where you live, as you know. And he lived there for two years until one day he overdid it in the exercise gym. And that was the end of him rather prematurely, rather shockingly, and upsettingly for his family, friends, and his fans.



Highgate Cemetery 2015,
Photo Credit Yvette Keller

So, we cover that, we have to cover that. Obviously we know there's gonna be a sad bit at the end of the book. But there's a nice eulogy that was only printed in a publishing newsletter. So we've got that from his editor who talks about some of the troubles of getting text out of Douglas back in the day. So, yeah, his whole life is told from cradle to grave.

YK:

I love the fact that even for those of us who've read the three biographies and read them over and over and over again (and also read *Don't Panic*), even those of us who've read all of that . . . I believe that your book is going to fill holes. Not specifically questions, or not specifically things that were left out of the other [biographies], but a really textural awareness of what that time, that moment, those parts of his life actually physically looked like. Because it is this presentation of the materials.

And I think it's gonna be fascinating for people who are old enough like us, to have seen and held materials like that in our own lives. But also, I think it's gonna be fascinating for new and younger fans who never have. "Why does this paper have holes down the side like this?"

KJD:

Yeah, there's a few pages of [dot matrix prints] in the book too.

YK:

It's gonna be just as fascinating as a coffee table book that showed those old [Renaissance] manuscripts you were talking about, for the younger fans.

Editor's Favorites

KJD:

One of my favorite [items] that has been printed once before...one of my favorites that I found in 2016, is in an old kind of school exercise book that he was writing some of the earliest *Hitchhiker* passages in for the first radio series, is the bit about the biros and where do all the biros go? And what's so hilarious is, halfway through a paragraph, it changes from a green pen to a red pen (or the other way around) and it's just like, he lost his pen in the middle of writing about it.

And I don't think it was deliberate, it was just symptomatic of the way he wrote rather chaotically. Yeah. But I love that one because it perfectly illustrates the kind of thing he was playing with.

So we are very lucky that he lived at a time and he worked on his most famous stuff at a time before computers. 'Cuz as you say, nowadays, we throw it all out there, don't we, into the ether. It's disappeared unless you're able to save all of your WhatsApps and all of your texts. And maybe technology will fail and you won't have it anymore.

YK:

I don't think there are enough examples of that kind of writing process for writers today. We just don't have editing examples in the same way that we can look at old writers who wrote in journals, who made their edits, who crossed things out. Like, you can see Emily Dickinson's process of writing poems; crossing things out and writing new words, you can see that.

But we are losing that. So, I'm really, really grateful to you, and to Douglas Adams' family and the publishers who manage his estate. I think this book will be cherished for many reasons and for a very, very long time.

Check out [42: The Wildly Improbably Ideas of Douglas Adams](#) available for pre-order from [Unbound](#) and at all retailers September 2023.

NOTE: Some links in this article are affiliate links and the writer may be paid by Amazon if you make a purchase using them.

DOUGLAS ADAMS

***The Hitchhiker's
Guide to the
Galaxy***



a novel

Douglas Adams and Me—Video Games

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Infocom interactive fiction - a science fiction story

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Release 59 / Serial number 851108

You wake up. The room is spinning very gently round your head. Or at least it would be if you could see it which you can't.

It is pitch black.

>say "This isn't the game! It's a screenshot of the game!"
Talking to yourself is a sign of impending mental collapse.

>inventory

You have:

 a splitting headache

 no tea

>

Douglas Adams wrote books. They were very good books, the kind of books that people build specific fandoms around. I had only read three books by Douglas Adams prior to 1999 – *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which I read in high school, *Last Chance to See*, which I read several times in college, and *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, which I read during a four-day trip to a local hotel which was 50 bucks a night and had a hot tub in every room.

I miss those days.

Anyhow, I knew his work and one day, the director of the Computer Museum History Center came to my desk asking if I'd ever heard of Douglas Adams. I blathered about his writing and was told that he'd be coming to the museum in a couple of weeks and would I be able to show him around that evening.

Yes. Yes, I would.

Over the few previous weeks, I'd been emailing a science fiction author named Arthur C. Clarke. Clarke was big into tech, and I was hoping we could get him to do a distance event at the museum, years ahead of its time! I mentioned that Douglas Adams was going to be coming to visit, and he told me, "Give him my best regards."

The day came, and he gave a thirty-minute talk, and then about an hour of Q+A. I didn't get to hear that; I had to go back to the visible storage area and get things ready for his visit. I waited and after a while, folks started to wander over, and at the back of the pack was Douglas Adams. I walked up.

"Mr. Adams, Sir Arthur says hello . . .?"

Now, I'm not able to recreate the combination of questions and greetings that somehow manage to represent.

“Oh, then this is for you!” he said, reaching into a canvas bag he had over his shoulder. He pulled out a box that I instantly recognized: Infocom’s *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*.

Now, this was the game that I had never made it past the opening vignette. Infocom is one of those stories in the history of video games that just shows how sometimes companies miss the point. They made incredible text-based adventure games, dozens of them, but they wanted to be a “serious” software company and developed a TERRIBLE database system called *Cornerstone*.

It was a major flop, and the explosion in the number of game companies and titles, not to mention that graphical games were basically destroying the text-based adventure game, led to its downfall. They were bought I believe by Activision, who at times used to release CD-ROMs of old games like *Planetfall* (the greatest science fiction comedy game when it was released!), another Adams game *Bureaucracy*, and *Trinity* (which I really should have written about for the Manhattan Project issue) and of course, *Zork*.

They were all so great, but there was a special place in my heart for *HHGTTG*, and having the copy from Douglas Adams himself was super-special! For years it was on display at the Museum, but I understand it’s been replaced.

Truly, my mark is no longer upon the place.

A few weeks later, he died. I was bummed. I used to go to the local used bookstore that also had a fairly decent software collection looking for things to add to the collection. I saw that they had a small display of Douglas Adams books with a memorial note and photo. There was a picture, I’m fairly certain taken the same week as his visit to our museum, and about ten books, though really it was just two or three titles, but multiple editions of each, and a software box – *Starship Titanic*.

I knew nothing about that game. Not a thing,

I grabbed it and then returned to the warehouse, knowing that I’d be alone for the next few hours. I grabbed one of the iMacs that we had just decommissioned from regular use (it was, in fact, my old work computer!) and set it up, loading the game.

I was not at all disappointed.

Well, maybe a little.

The *Starship Titanic* crashes through the ceiling and robots ask you to help save them by coming along. There’s a whole bunch of neat things you can do the best of them being the chat feature. You could talk to the characters in the game. This, apparently, led to a delay in developing the game because they had to come up with a text parser. Now, this wasn’t exactly unknown in games of the 1990s, there were several sorts of keyword parsers done for Infocom games in fact, but this was much more robust. There was an in-game email system that was where you’d find pretty much all of the backstory, and you had to go gathering and puzzling and asking and so on.

Was it fun? I thought so!

Was it original? Well, it felt a little like *Hitchhiker’s*, that’s for sure. Even the opening.

Was it pretty to look at? You bet! The ship has this stream-lined Art Deco feel that I was totally into.

Was it good? That’s a tougher call.

There were more exciting games, games that let you do far more in-world, that had better graphics, that required less attention to detail, and ultimately, were funnier. I was big into the *Monkey Island* games at that point, and they were hilarious, though about a decade old by the time I fired up that iMac. Those are, to this day, the funniest games I’ve ever played, and this just didn’t hold up to that level. It was clear that this was a game with a principal designer who happened to be a writer because the storytelling was placed high on the list of attributes. I never quite finished it.



DOCTOR WHO

THE PIRATE PLANET

DOUGLAS ADAMS AND JAMES GOSS



ADSC



***"We Apologise for the Inconvenience Interview"* with Mark Griffiths**

Review, and Author Interviewed, by CJ Hooper

We Apologise for The Inconvenience is "an infinitely improbable play about Douglas Adams," by Mark Griffiths. Douglas is alone, locked in a hotel room having been kidnapped by his publishers after the last "Woosh" of a deadline sailed past. I was fortunate enough to cross paths with its author in cyberspace, as we called it in the 1990s, and interview him. Though not before I had a chance to review the play itself in a previous life . . .

[Review](#)

This was the Fringe before the Pandemic (August 2019), before the Dark Times, when the streets of Edinburgh were thronging with culture vultures, performance artists, and comedy seekers. Being August, the rain came down as though every rain god in existence was in the city and being adored by the clouds.

My attention had been drawn to a “one-man show” entitled *We Apologise for The Inconvenience* and being a Douglas Adams fan was instantly compelled to see it. A show set in the hotel room in which Douglas Adams has been imprisoned by his publishers until he had finished at least a draft of his fourth Hitch-Hiker book, *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish*. Like all good/bad sci-fi / nerdy types I was apprehensive as to how my hero would be interpreted and a “Points of View” style blog post was already forming in my head. There is nothing better in this universe, however, than being pleasantly surprised in the face of unwarranted concern. The show opened with the familiar scene of an impossibly tall man in a dressing gown, next to a bath with a rubber duck. Any concerns vanished faster than a politician’s promise.

The monologue from “Douglas” was pithy, insightful, suitably downbeat in places, and ultimately “Adamsian.” The unexpected appearance of another character was an excellent touch, and, while risking spoilers, the show remained a one “man” show. As for the wise-cracking bath companion providing a vent for Douglas’ anxiety, in another universe, I would have expected to see this role inhabited by Terry Gilliam.

This show is a lovely warm hug from an old, much-missed friend. Its epilogue was “utterly proper.” In this universe of improbability, I would award *We Apologise for The Inconvenience* (WAFTI) with the highest of praises – “More Than 5 Stars.”

We Apologise for The Inconvenience is written by Mark Griffiths.

It is returning to the stage on 25th May 2023 at 7 PM and 8.30 PM, at The Seven Oaks, 5 Nicholas Street, Manchester.

Those with time travel capabilities will thoroughly enjoy the show. Tell them I sent you.

(Anticipated publication of this article being in August 2023.)

Through the joys of unusual social and online connections, I was able to get in touch with the author Mark Griffiths and put a few questions to him about WAFTI:

When did you first discover the works of Douglas Adams? And how?

19:55 on Thursday 4th June 1981. This marked the start of the BBC1 repeat of the TV adaptation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I was ten. And I haven't really been the same since. It was quite Doctor Who-ish, which I liked, but the script was like nothing I'd ever encountered before. Witty, literate and very dark. There's a bleak, Kafkaesque flavour to the humour. It's shot through with references to death. That's a thing people sometimes forget among all the depressed robots and aliens with funny names. That, and its satirical elements, prevent it from lapsing into mere whimsy. I became absolutely obsessed. I bought the books, taped the radio series when it was repeated a couple of years later and searched endlessly for the vinyl versions (something you could do in about 10 seconds online today.) At school, I'd always enjoyed writing bits of comedy and reading Neil Gaiman's biography of Douglas, *Don't Panic*, in 1988 inspired me at the age of 17 to send a page of topical jokes into the show *Week Ending* on Radio 4, a show that Douglas had once produced. To my amazement, they used one of my gags and there was my name in the writer's credits at the end of the programme. What made it even better was that my joke was performed by David Tate, known to Hitchhiker fans as Eddie the Computer. That was the start of my writing career.

Do you have a favourite “Douglas Adams” moment or scene?

The opening minutes of 'Fit the Seventh', the so-called Christmas Special of the radio series of *Hitchhiker*, is a definite favourite. At the time I first listened to it, I hadn't even been sure there were more than six episodes, so to hear the story continue was astonishing. There's a lot of brilliant stuff in the second radio series that hasn't turned up in

other versions: the Arcturan Megafreighter, Hig Hurtenflurst, Marvin's autobiography, the Computeach, etc.

What first prompted you to write a play about Douglas locked in a hotel room?

Nick Webb, in his biography of Douglas, *Wish You Were Here*, describes Douglas being held virtual prisoner in a hotel room by his editor in a desperate attempt to get him to finish *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*, mentioning in a footnote that it might make a good two-hander play. I read that and thought, "I like Douglas Adams! I write plays! If anyone should write this putative two-hander it should be me!" After that, there was nothing for it but to sit down and write the thing. I was terrified that someone would have the same idea and beat me to it but fortunately, no one did. I was convinced I could do a decent job of replicating Douglas's voice and was keen to show off my literary impersonation. The setup is ideal. Having characters trapped together is a good starting point for comedy.

How did you go about selecting your "Douglas?" What qualities did you look for?

We put out a casting call. When Adam Gardiner walked in, he made an immediate impression. Tall, English, strong-featured and with a fantastic ability to get his tongue around the play's many long and difficult speeches. He's absolutely brilliant. We've been so lucky to find him. I also want to add a word of praise for Rob Stuart-Hudson, our duck. He has a wonderful gift for characterization and brought an improviser's top-notch comedy timing to the role.

Every time Douglas Adams retold *Hitchhiker* he made changes. Have you found a similar process with WAFTI?

There's been the odd nip-and-tuck here or extra bit of business there but mostly it's remained unchanged. The major difference since the very earliest performances has been the jettisoning of the bath. When I first wrote it, I thought it would look great to have an actual bath onstage. It did, too. What wasn't great was the hernias I and the producer nearly got every time we had to move the bloody thing from one venue to another. Eventually, enough was enough and the bath was quietly consigned to the nearest black hole.

How many baths were taken in the process of writing WAFTI?

Very, very many, actually! One thing I have in common with Douglas is I spend a very large amount of my time in the bath. I'm a big fan of Radio 4 and audiobooks and for me, the bath is the perfect listening environment.

Do you have any plans for WAFTI?

We're trying to get a tour together for later in the year after our Towel Day performances. We're also planning to return to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2024. Watch this space!

Will there be an audio version of WAFTI available (Could you put in a word with Dirk Maggs)?

I'm happy to inform you that there is an audio version of WAFTI available right now. It can be purchased as a

download from iTunes, Amazon, and other online music retailers. What's more, it's available on CD or as a limited edition gatefold vinyl from the good people at Cutaway Comics at <https://www.cutawaycomics.co.uk/publications/we-apologise-for-the-inconvenience>. We had a lot of fun recording the audio version. We did it in my friend Adam's studio in Manchester. Artist Will Brooks did a terrific job designing the gatefold sleeve. Jon Canter, Douglas's friend, and erstwhile flatmate wrote some sleeve notes for us. It all turned out marvellously.



WE APOLOGISE FOR THE INCONVENIENCE

A PLAY ABOUT DOUGLAS ADAMS
BY MARK GRIFFITHS

Thursday 25th May / 7pm & 8.30pm / Tickets £9
The Seven Oaks / 5 Nicholas Street / Manchester

NATIONAL TOWEL DAY

Mark Griffiths sold his first gag to Radio 4 when he was 17. Since then he's written material for the likes of Mel Smith & Griff Rhys Jones, Roy Hudd and Charlie Brooker, as well as drama for stage and radio, including the acclaimed play about Douglas Adams *We Apologise for the Inconvenience*. He's the author of four children's novels for Simon & Schuster, including *Space Lizards Stole My Brain!* and *The Impossible Boy* and, writing as Mark Powers, the *Spy Toys* series (winner of the Fantastic Book Award and optioned for film adaptation by DreamWorks) and *Space Detectives* series for Bloomsbury. His first *Doctor Who* novel publishes with Penguin/BBC Books, Autumn, 2023.

EASY

M

IONS

PANIC!

WE APOLOGISE FOR THE INCONVENIENCE

An infinitely improbable play about the author
of 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy'
WRITTEN BY MARK GARDNER

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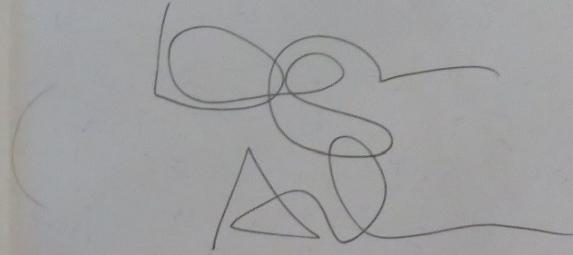
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MOSTLY HARMLESS

It's very easy to get a little disheartened when your planet has been blown up, the woman you love has vanished in a misunderstanding about the nature of space-time, the spaceship you are on crashes in flames on a remote and Bob-fearing planet and all you have to fall back on are a few simple sandwich-making skills. However, instead of being disheartened, Arthur Dent makes the terrible mistake of starting to enjoy life a bit and, immediately, all hell breaks loose.

Hell takes a number of forms: there is the usual Ford Prefect form of hell, fresh hell in the form of an all-new version of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* which behaves in an altogether more mysterious, sinister and airborne manner, and a totally unexpected hell that arrives in the form of a teenage girl who utterly startles Arthur Dent by being his daughter when he didn't even know he had one.

Much as Arthur would love to stay in his



Douglas Adams and Me by Juan Sanmiguel

It all started on the radio. It was 1981, the local NPR station in Miami played *Star Wars* on one day and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* on another. Both shows would be rerun on Saturday afternoons back-to-back. It was fantastic.

Later that year the local PBS station would get the last three seasons of Tom Baker's era on *Doctor Who*. This included the classic stories *The Pirate Planet* and *City of Death* written by Douglas Adams. A year later, for a summer school assignment (I preferred that to my summer camp option) I would write a summary for *The Pirate Planet* for a school assignment. Months after that I did a breakdown of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* for a similar assignment. Soon after came the television adaptation of the radio show. The animated segments that depicted the passages of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* were better than I imagined. My young brain was bothered by the changes in episodes 5 and 6. Changes like this would become a feature of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as it moved from one medium to another.

I got paperback copies of the first three books. At the time the library did not have copies of the books. The first two books were novelizations of the radio and television shows with some new material. The third book came out in the US around 1982 or 1983 (I am not sure since there was a delay in the US edition). All I knew about it was that Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect had to go to a wild party to save the universe.

Life, the Universe, and Everything was all new material. Arthur and Ford escape from the prehistoric Earth and go to a cricket championship two days before the destruction of the Earth as seen in the first book. They meet up with Slartibartfast, a planetary designer they met in the first book, who takes them to the party and explains the main problem of the novel.

The Krikkitmen are the main threat in the book. Eons ago, the solar system of planet Krikkit was isolated by a cosmic dust cloud. A spaceship crashed on Krikkit, and the inhabitants eventually figured out how it worked. The Krikkitmen built their own ship and saw the rest of the universe outside the cloud. The Krikkitmen could not handle the knowledge of an inhabited universe and decided to destroy it. This led to horrible wars and the victors locked Krikkit with a space gate. The key to the gate was made of separate parts and they were scattered all over the universe. Robots are trying to reassemble the key and free the Krikkitmen (this was like the Key to Time season of *Doctor Who* that Adams wrote *The Pirate Planet* for, and the idea of the Krikkitmen was from a proposed *Doctor Who* story).

Arthur deals with some interesting situations. At the beginning of the book, he meets an immortal being who has chosen to use his time to insult the universe alphabetically. Arthur finds his lost bag from a trip to Greece with a bottle of olive oil, and while doing so learns to fly. The Guide says to fly all one has to do is throw oneself at the ground and miss. Arthur meets a being that he has killed repeatedly and who tries to even the score (and explains a scene from the first book).

This novel had big ideas and ran with them. The ending was satisfactory. It did not lead into the next book as the first nor did it end on a cliffhanger as the second did. The conflict was resolved, and the characters moved on.

I played *The Hitchhiker's* Infocom computer game. The text-based game allowed the player to walk in the events covered in the first novel. The game was a challenge, and I eventually broke down and I bought the hint book. It was an engaging experience.

So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish came out a few years later in hardcopy. This was a love story for Arthur. Arthur and Ford find out the Earth is no longer destroyed, and each finds their way back. Arthur resumes his life and finds the extraordinary Fenchurch who was an unnamed character in the first book. Arthur discovers they can both fly and start a relationship. Ford arrives on Earth and takes both to the site of God's last message to creation.

This was a fun romp. We meet a man who is an unhappy rain god and a man with a house that is inside out. There is also the mystery of the disappearance of the dolphins. This would have been a great book to end the series.

Mostly Harmless was good but ended on a downer. As always there were good bits like with Ford trying to sneak into the Guide's publishing offices. I remember Adams reading this part of the book. I am not sure if it was part of a book tour or an appearance at the Miami Book Fair. At one of these events or both, I would get two books signed.

The Hitchhikers Guide to Galaxy film was enjoyable. When I saw it with a friend, I had to resist saying the scenes out loud since I knew them so well. I did wish they could have made more films.

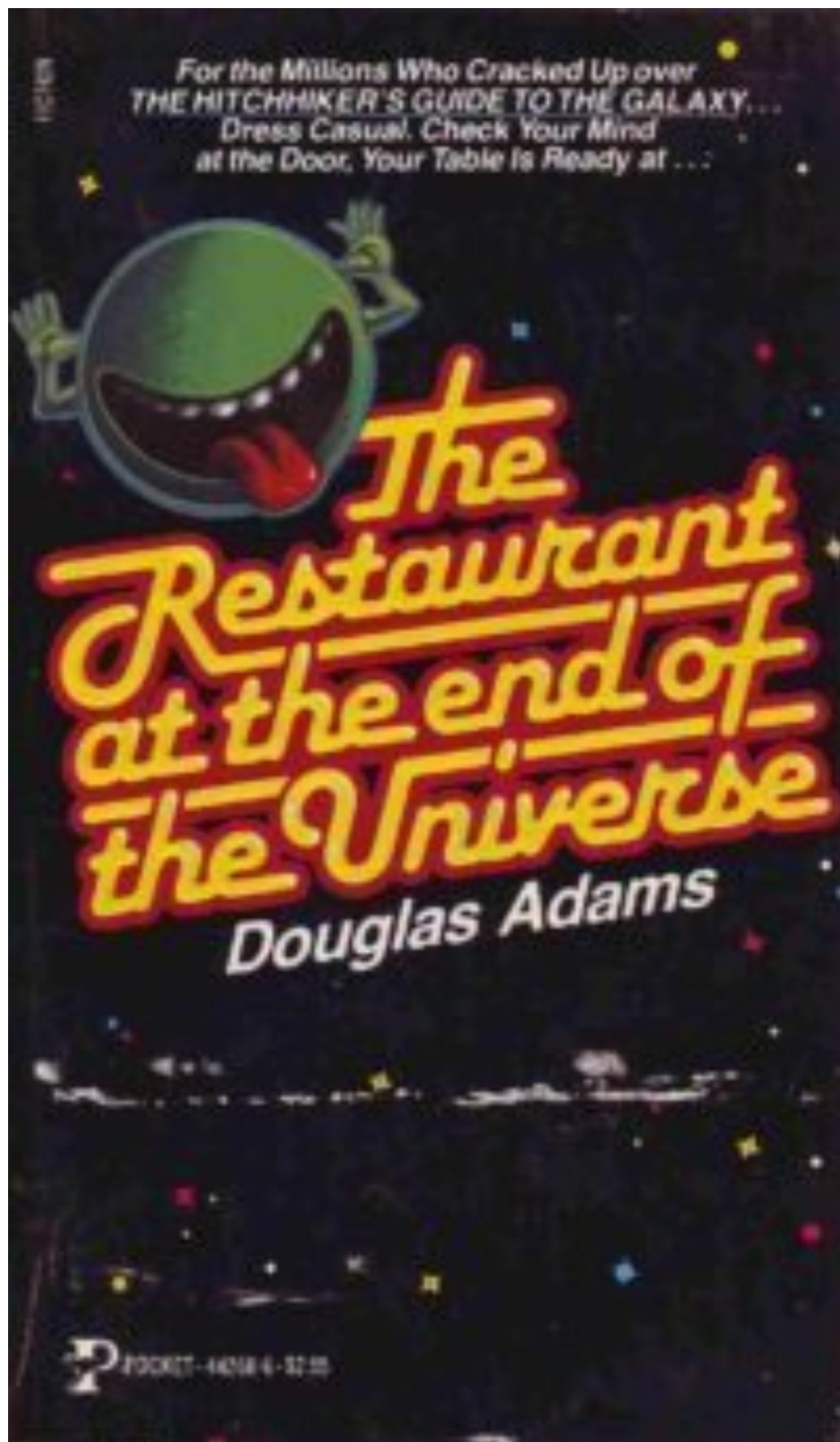
I still have not read the first Dirk Gently novel. The second one was fun. The BBC America television show based on those books with Elijah Wood was beautifully insane.

Douglas Adams was taken away too soon. I wanted another Hitchhiker novel (I will read the Eoin Colfer novel one day). I would have liked to see if the makers of the new *Doctor Who* could get Adams to write a script.

I still celebrate Douglas Adams. I proudly wear a towel every May 25 for Towel Day. If I go to a showing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, I will bring a towel. The Rich Weirdoes, a cast based in Orlando, asks if the au-

dience has seen the show 42 times. When they do, I proudly display my towel, and the cast and audience cheer.

I cannot stop a smile from coming on my face whenever the number 42 comes up. It reminds me of an electronic book, dealing with nonsensical bureaucracies, traveling through the stars, and remember this advice: don't panic.





Questions From *Obrigado Pelos Peixes (So Long, and Thanks for all The Fish)*

Answered by Yvette Keller

When was your first contact with Douglas Adams?

The answer to this question makes me a little sad because I managed to just miss meeting Douglas Adams in person during his lifetime. Even though I loved his books as soon as I read them in the 1980s he coincidentally lived in my hometown for several years, and I have met many people who knew him and were even friends with him during that time . . . I never met him.

Through Jr. High and High School (ages 12 - 18), I read all of his published works and loved them. My favorites were *So Long and Thanks For All The Fish* (because I was a romantic young woman), and the Dirk Gently series, because I love gods, ghosts, and other mysterious supernatural fiction.

The realization that he had been living in my hometown while I was away at college only hit home when word of his death in Santa Barbara reached me 250 miles up the coast of California. I felt like I had been punched in the gut. My first shocking thought was, "My hometown killed Douglas Adams."

If I had known he was not in England, I definitely would have tried harder to meet him or at least attend his lectures at UCSB.

How did that Guide idea start?

The idea for the 2015 trip that became the map & guide, the upcoming book, and the iPhone App (in progress), was from a friend I met during college. She told me that she and her husband planned to travel for 40 days and 40 nights for his 40th birthday. I was about 25 at the time and thought that seemed like a really cool idea. *But what would be even cooler, I thought, would be to travel for 42 days for my 42nd birthday.*

Those thoughts were in my head for over ten years before it got close enough to my 42nd birthday that I

started to think, *Uh Oh. If I'm going to travel, I'd better come up with a plan.* I was probably 38 when I realized “travel” meant you had to pick a place to go and usually, plan on something to see and do. Up until then, I had been on my honeymoon and trips with friends, but I had never traveled solo.

My 42-42-42 trip was kind of a present to myself: I would travel to 42 places from Douglas Adams novels, over 42 days, for my 42nd birthday. For 42 days I would travel to London, to Cornwall, to Manchester, to Cambridge, to Dorset, to Austria, and then back home to Santa Barbara, which counted because it's a setting in Douglas Adams's fourth book and he lived here until he died in 2001. For my Ultimate Answer birthday, I would go on a 42 Places Pilgrimage.



After writing about my experiences and not finding an immediate publisher for the whole book, I researched smaller publishers and pitched to Herb Lester Associates. They were not interested in a whole book, but they were very excited about the map and guide.

I am considering whether to publish the book as a How-To-Guide, A Memoir, or multiple smaller guides for the places I have been to properly share the rest of my research and experiences from the 42-42-42 trip.

From the places that you added in your book, which one is your favorite (fictional and real one)?

I have two favorites. Both are real-world places AND fictionalized locations. I think that's where the magic happens; knowing a place you've visited is both in your reality and somehow in the imagination of millions of other fiction lovers. It gives a place a unique, enticing energy.

Both places are also from *The Long Dark Teatime of The Soul*, which is my favorite work of fiction by Adams. The first is what I call “Kate’s Corner of The Park.” It is the location described several times by Adams in the book, but not so specifically that it can be definitively pinpointed. Finding it required a lot of research and walks around Primrose Hill and Regents Park, which made the finding all the more fun.



The second place is the “Archway of the Winged Dogs.” That one is a favorite because I took a tour of the building, the renovated St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel, which in Adams’ day was the derelict Midland Grand Hotel. Adams’ details are so specific, his description of the winged dogs so direct, that I knew they had to be there...but the tour guide told me I must be mistaken! He said the animals used for decor were wyverns. I was disheartened, but sure enough, after the tour, I found them by following the descriptions in the book! That made me feel like I knew a little secret about the building that even the tour guides didn’t know...and that makes the place extra fun.

We know that Douglas Adams was also a very musical guy, do you have a soundtrack when you are reading/writing a book? Any of Douglas Adams' favorites? (This is a playlist we made with some of his favorites, some that are quoted in his books and artists who made reference: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0z4F2FMv0wBUXBU3eLvjXf?si=uVcr2MEISZ2Q5zY55uMxEQ&nd=1>)

I love your playlist! I am not musical, but I am so auditory that when I am writing, it is more like dictating to myself. I hear the words as I compose them as if I was speaking them. I write them down just like I hear them. Music when I’m writing makes it too loud in my head to “hear” myself talking, and therefore, I can’t type!

I do use some white noise-generating apps to help me focus. Noisli is probably my favorite because it allows me to layer sounds like beach waves, wind, and my favorite: the sound of riding on a train. The sounds are repetitive and comforting and I can stay undistracted by outside sounds that would otherwise interrupt me.

Thinking as a traveler and hitchhiker: which country would like to visit and explore?

I’ve been to New Zealand and would go back in a heartbeat. They serve beetroot with everything! Other places on my list are Australia, Poland, India, and Mauritius. I prefer to travel with native or local guides and stay with friends and family or friends-of-friends when I can. Hotels are nice, but they are so similar everywhere you go that it adds a barrier to getting out and getting to know the country. Even when I visit London, I prefer to have an apartment or flat of my own as a base for exploration.

Which book would you recommend for Douglas Adams' fans?

For fans, I recommend giving another read to whichever book you liked *THE LEAST* and then talking about it with someone else-ideally someone who really liked it. My least favorite book for a long time was *Mostly Harmless* because it opens with the loss of Fenchurch and ends with everyone else dying. I didn’t want all my favorite characters to die, and I definitely didn’t want the Vogons to win!

I went back and read it with our [Works of Douglas Adams Book Club](#) and realized that the rest of the book has a wealth of beautiful language, funny jokes, and some of the most relatable characterization Adams ever wrote. Talking about it with other fans helped me appreciate the book for what it was (instead of just being mad at it).

For Adams newbies, I tend to recommend *Last Chance to See* because the writing is so funny and so accessible. Or *The Long Dark Teatime of The Soul* if they like a little bit of the fantastic because Adams got much better at the craft of writing as he did more of it.

What is one of your favorite things about Douglas Adams' books?

This is pretty nerdy, but I was a literature major in college (just like Douglas Adams) and I feel like his incredible language reflects his own love for classic English novels. His contribution is that it is mega-funny. He spent a lot of time collaborating on sketch writing and his humor and skill at seeing ridiculous situations and writing humor into every scene is the unique thing I think we all love.

Do you have a favorite quote?

So many favorites. I feel like any book of Adams' that I open at random opens to my favorite quote. But if I have to pick one, it would probably be a quote about tea, because I believe Arthur, Adams, and I share a deep love for the beverage and the rituals that go with it:

“He told the Nutri-Matic about India, he told it about China, he told it about Ceylon. He told it about broad leaves drying in the sun. He told it about silver teapots. He told it about Summer afternoons on the lawn. He told it about putting in the milk before the tea so it wouldn't get scalded. He even told it (briefly) about the history of the East India Company.

“So that's it, is it?” said the Nutri-Matic when he had finished.

“Yes,” said Arthur, “that is what I want.”

“You want the taste of dried leaves boiled in water?”

“Er, yes. With milk.”

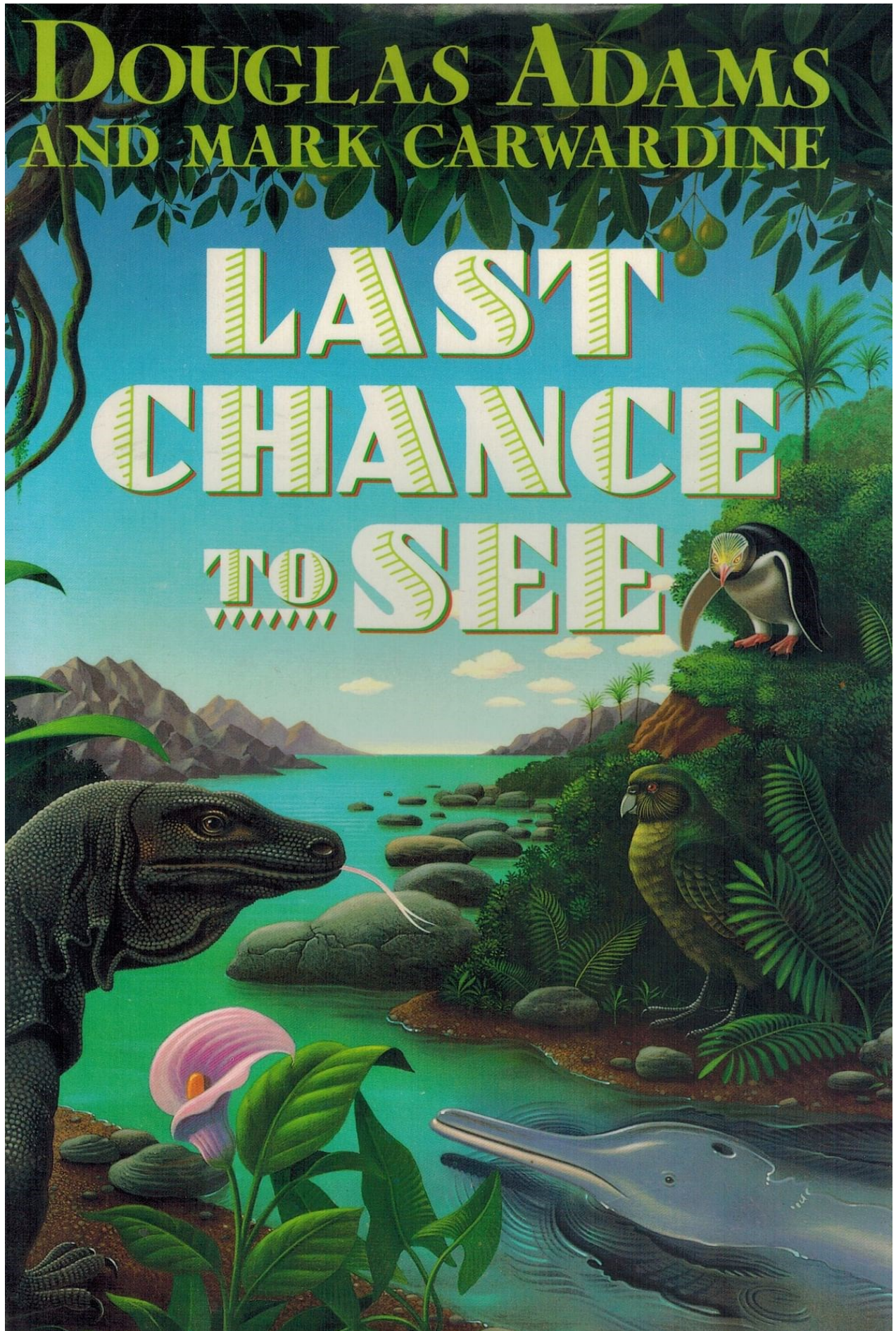
“Squirted out of a cow?”

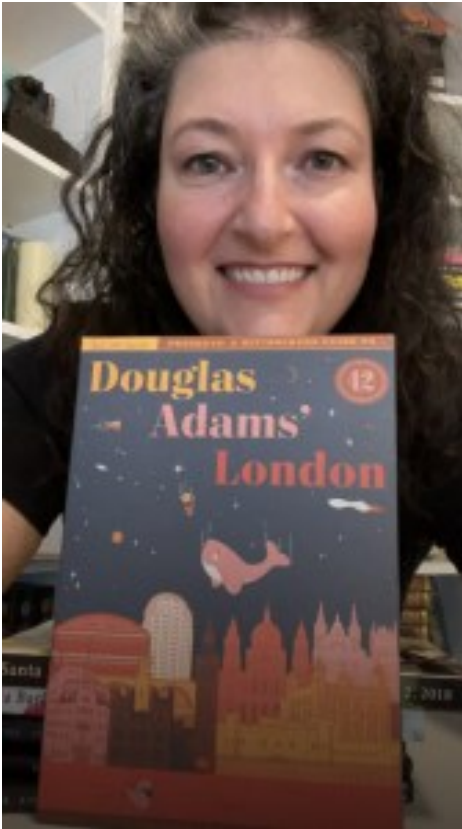
“Well, in a manner of speaking, I suppose . . .”



DOUGLAS ADAMS
AND MARK CARWARDINE

LAST
CHANCE
TO SEE





Reluctant Tourist to Towel Day Ambassador

How a Douglas Adams-Themed Vacation Altered a Life Trajectory

**A Conversation with
Yvette Keller**

by Linda Wenzelburger

Linda Wenzelburger (Linda) loves both maps and having any excuse to travel. She is thrilled to have had a chance to talk with Yvette Keller about her past travels and latest project, which happily plays into both of Linda's weaknesses.

Yvette and Linda met through their shared love of costuming and through the [Greater Bay Area Costumer's Guild](#). Discovering that her "dress-up friend" was also deep in fandom was a welcome surprise, as

was finding out they had a shared love of Douglas Adams and maps.

Linda:

I have always known you were a Douglas Adams fan, but certainly over the years we have known each other I get bigger glimpses into your love of his works. I can certainly say that from knowing you, I have learned and continue to learn more about his work and the fandom surrounding him.

Clearly, your love for DA is deep and meaningful. What was your first exposure to his work? Was it a particular book or show that started this love affair?

Yvette: My love for Adams is as deep and meaningful as Agrajag's cave of vengeance (and also as coincidental). I've always liked Adams, but I read the first three books when I was too young to fully understand the humor. I laughed, but I didn't know why.

The turning point from mere affection to deep adoration was entirely due to being a teenage romantic when the fourth book of the trilogy, *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish*, came out.

Every aspect of that book (except the ending) thrilled me: Arthur's improbable return to the impossible Earth. An unconscious beautiful girl. The phone number was lost because it was on the back of a winning raffle ticket. The biscuit story. The flying. Wonko The Sane. Even though many fans who heard the radio series before the books find SLATFATF to be a mediocre effort, it was the right book at the right moment to make a lasting impression on me.

Linda: For your 42nd birthday, you embarked on an epic journey to trek to places from DA's life and writings. When did the idea for that trip manifest and how long was the planning phase? Was there any one thing that really stands out as an extra special memory from that trip?

Yvette: Extended travel was an idea my friend Serena told me about when I was in my 20s (She and her husband traveled for 40 days and 40 nights for his 40th birthday) and I adapted the idea years later to suit my "Ultimate Answer" 42nd birthday.

I conceived that first pilgrimage narrowly: A trip to visit 42 places *from the novels*. The idea of reading all the books again, making a massive spreadsheet of every real-world place mentioned, and trying to get to at least 42 of them . . . well, it was one of *those* ideas—Once I’d had it, and started talking to people about it, it was hard to let go of something *that awesome*.

That I might be willing to possibly consider starting to begin the planning for such an unlikely trip, came up around my 40th birthday. For two years I was genuinely unsure whether I could make it happen, and if I’m being honest, unsure if I even *wanted* it to happen.

I’d never gone to a foreign country alone; I had never planned for over a month of travel. My father was ill, I was taking care of him, and I had been under-employed for a couple of years, so the money wasn’t really there.

But 42 only comes around once in a lifetime. I felt like I sort of HAD to do it, and my father, Bob, encouraged me to go. He was adamant that travel was an incredibly important thing to do. So, I read the books, made the spreadsheet . . . and then the magic started to happen (which is where the memory comes in).

Three or four months before the trip, I found out [Neil Gaiman](#) (another favorite author) was going to give the [Douglas Adams Memorial Lecture](#) ([There’s a Douglas Adams Memorial Lecture?!](#)).

I bought tickets to hear [Neil Gaiman speak about Douglas Adams](#), and things started to fall into place. The memory that stands out was how I entered a constant state of meta-shock: the uncanny sensation of being aware of somehow foreshadowing my own life. Plans had the synchronicity of a series of miracles. It’s really the sort of thing that can turn people into true believers.

As a child of hippies, the woo-woo Californian in me acknowledged my eerily exciting presentiment. I found out there was a [Douglas Adams Fan Club](#) (A fan club!?!?). I found out fan club members gave tours of London and Cambridge (There were already Google Maps that included places from my giant spreadsheet?!). I wasn’t alone in my quest. This had been done before. Sort of.

The trip started to feel not only possible, not even probable, but utterly inevitable. So many wonderful opportunities opened to me that I couldn’t have stayed home even if I’d wanted to. A spaceship would have parked itself on the street in front of my house, a tall, grey-green skinned alien with a flat head, dressed in extravagantly draped golden robes would have exited to tell me I was being a dim-witted arsehole, and then, once it was clear my mundane life was someone else’s problem, I would have been whisked to Heathrow Terminal Two even if I’d tried to stay home.

That is why I started calling my trip a Pilgrimage. And I’m serious about that capital “P.” It grew with force and significance into something that I was destined to do. Like seeing God’s Final Message to His Creation.

Linda: That research must have been very useful in finalizing the materials for your latest work - [The Douglas Adams' London Map and Guide](#). How did that project come about? Did you approach a publisher with the idea, or did they reach out to you?

Yvette: Processing and writing about the Pilgrimage went on for several years, interrupted by both my parents' passing and a lot of other life. But yes, once I felt my material was strong enough, I researched publishers and then pitched the map and guide directly to [Herb Lester Associates](#). It was an immediate yes, because I had carefully found the publisher who already did exactly what I wanted to do and knew how to make exactly the thing I wanted to see made.

I had about 60k words of a book written, but feedback from three different publishers assured me that in its current form, the book was problematic without permission from the Adams estate. The map was a much smaller risk and an opportunity to learn about my fellow fans and research my audience.

Linda: How closely did you work with the graphic designer and publisher to bring the project to publication?

Yvette: I worked very closely with my editor at Herb Lester (HL) on everything, but not directly with the artist. I knew the angle that HL was interested in. They have a precise aesthetic for all their guides, which are singular and wonderful. They let me know what artist they were approaching so that I could “stalk” the designer's

IG portfolio.

I gave a lot of feedback when we got the initial artwork. It was all taken seriously and implemented. One example of a design choice that changed was the whale. The first whale had a cartoon-terrified look on his face as he fell alongside the bowl of petunias.

But every Adams fan knows that the all-too-few minutes of that whale's life produced the most joyful, innocent, and tragi-comic monologue our galaxy has ever seen. That whale had to look ecstatic about life, not fearful of impending death. Once I explained that to the editor, he relayed it to the artist, and the change was made.

Linda: Were there any challenges with distilling the location information into such a compact format?

Yvette: That was the hardest part. I initially gave my editor almost 60 places to choose from. I knew we wanted exactly 42 places and there would be things that couldn't go in. Never having made a map before, I hadn't anticipated that the main reason to cut things was making them fit geographically. Scale is everything with maps. Figuring out how to have enough detail that the individual dots don't overlap each other while fitting in locations that ranged across many parts of London was a crazy complicated effort.

Linda: I think it is a very user-friendly map and I am looking forward to seeing some, if not all, of the locations when I am next in London. Of course, in my perfect world, you would be there as well to be a tour guide, as I am sure you could embellish beautifully the information provided in the guidebook. Do you have any plans to organize tours yourself?

Yvette: Why Yes! In fact, just before COVID, I had three major tour companies create itineraries and price out 10, 12, and 14-day all-inclusive coach trips around the UK. I was going to take people to the places and worry about writing a travel book about it all later.

But COVID kept us all at home for two years, so I wrote a book. Then the book felt too risky for publishers to get on board, so I pitched a map, and it is such a beautiful thing!

This information about Douglas Adams literary tourism is meant to be out in the world. I want Adams fans to feel as inspired about walking in his footsteps as Jane Austen, Shakespeare, and Conan-Doyle fans. More ways for fans to do this will be out soon, in multiple mediums. The map was the easiest, so it is the first of many (I hope).

Linda: Are there any other resources that we can direct people to that have more travel tips with a DA flair?

Yvette: I encourage every Adams fan to become a member of the Official Fan Club, ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha (they have a letter from Douglas and everything!). Member David Haddock gives tours in Cambridge and London, and the club has regular "slouches" that are chock full of fascinating information. Sometimes the slouches are about Adams, sometimes interesting historical places in general. My [forty-two-places page](#) also has a list of all the Adamsian projects I have cooking.

Linda: You also had the honor of being voted the [Towel Day Ambassador for 2023](#). What has been the highlight of your ambassadorship so far?

Yvette: Hosting a [Towel Day Celebration](#) at [The Book Den](#) in my hometown and having a slightly too-large crowd of people fill the bookstore and participate in the towel contest, the costume contest, and Vogon Poetry Reading was the highlight so far!

I take my mission of spreading the word and wonder of Adams' writing to as many earthlings as possible very seriously. I'm honored to be invited to judge the Towel Contest at [Costume Con 42](#).

Happening in 2024 in Denver, the con has adopted "The Heart of Gold" as one of its themes. Every

TDA appearance comes with the question: Why are you wearing a towel like a beauty pageant sash? I love answering that question!

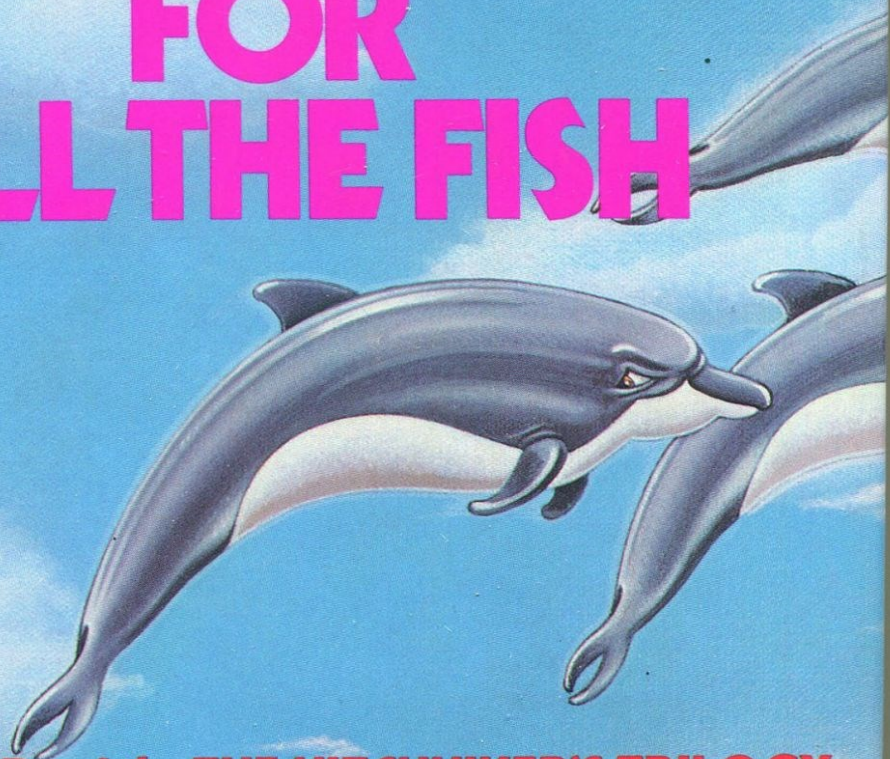
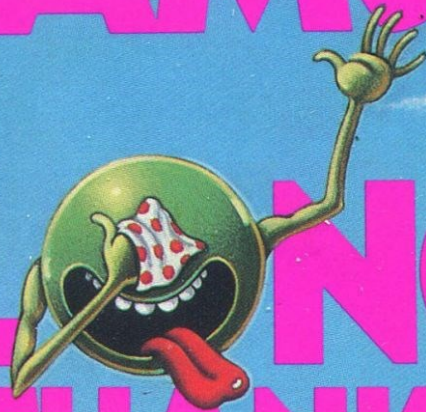
Linda: I will definitely see you at CC42, but hopefully our paths will cross again before that. Thank you so very much for taking the time to chat with me!



Yvette poses during prep for the 2023 Towel Day Celebration. Photo Credit: Leanne Cooper

**DOUGLAS
ADAMS**

**SO LONG,
AND THANKS
FOR
ALL THE FISH**



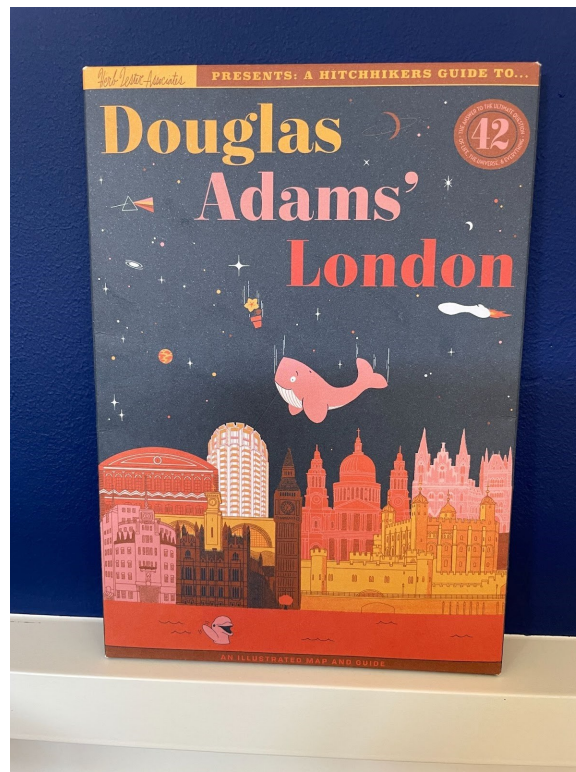
The Fourth Book in **THE HITCHHIKER'S TRILOGY**

Adams Fan By Association

by Leanne Cooper Elliott

A copy of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has been moved from shelf to shelf in our house for nearly 20 years. It came to our marriage with my husband, who has had a copy on his bookshelf for as long as he can remember. He first read the book in grammar school and was an instant fan. When our oldest kid started having an affinity for sci-fi books he lent his copy, and another instant fan was born.

Aside from my family, I'm also near and dear to one fan of all Douglas Adams fans, my friend Yvette Keller. Yvette happens to be two impressive things: the 2023 Towel Day Ambassador, and also the author of *Douglas Adams' London*. I'm not a fan of Adams' written works, but the map is a stand-alone wonder to behold. It's functional, but also a little comical, a dash of whimsical, and beautifully designed and illustrated. Even if one doesn't have plans for London travel anytime soon, this map is a collectible my family wanted to have on our shelf for when earth-side travel strikes.



As for me, I'm an Adams fan by association. Surrounded by super fans who speak what sounds to me like another language when quoting from the book. When I read, I tend to reach for non-fiction books, so the Hitchhiker books have remained on our shelf untouched by me.



But I have wanderlust by nature, so any type of travel -- even interstellar travel -- is always a big heck yes for me. So, when Yvette asked for my help to plan the 2023 Towel Day festivities, it piqued my curiosity about the endurance of Adams' Hitchhiker story. The fans that showed up to the Towel Day party spanned all ages, genders, and degrees of passion for the towels they draped around their necks and showcased in the costume contest, or while reading open mic Vogon poetry.

When I got home, I asked my kid why she thinks the story has endured and why it transcends generations, genres, and the time-space continuum for so long.

"It's such a good story," she commented. "You almost believe that it's possible because the characters are so well-developed, and funny." And then she offered helpfully that she was surprised I didn't die on the spot from exposure to the Vogon poetry reading at the Towel Day festivities.

I asked my husband the same question, and he offered that it was the humor that pulled him into the books, and Adams' writing style that kept him there for all five books in the trilogy.

"The opening paragraph to Hitchhiker's Guide is one of the best, and just funny," he added.

To my ears, what they described sounds like a ridiculous brilliance in storytelling. I am a sucker for good writing, and also anyone who takes you on a wild ride around the universe. So, I guess that's the real story here, how sci-fi works of fiction that are now forty years old are calling from the bookshelf to this true-story maven. So, I hope you'll excuse me, I'm off to grab a towel and become an accidental tourist on the ride with the Douglas Adams fandom.



**THE
MEANING
OF
LIFE**

**THIS BOOK
WILL CHANGE
YOUR LIFE**

**DOUGLAS ADAMS
& JOHN LLOYD**

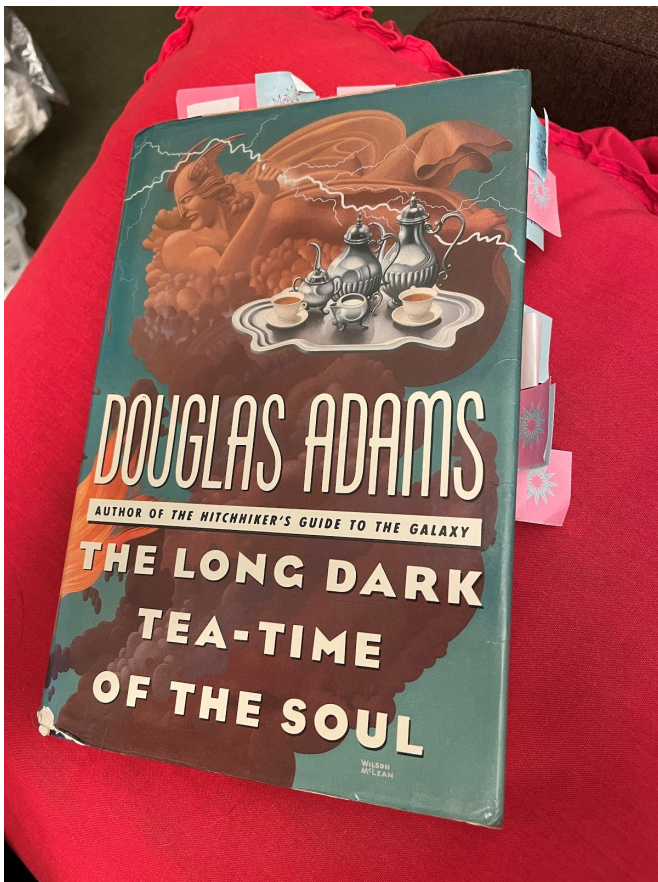
The Works of Douglas Book Club

An Invitation from Yvette Keller

The [Works of Douglas Book Club](#) meets on the last Sunday of every month via Zoom . . . a celebration of having survived the month.

We have read the novels and the non-fiction. We've listened to and discussed all the Fits. Recently, we've moved on to the biographies and we're currently making our way through [The Anthology at the End of the Universe](#), a volume that is slim but weighty with essays about ideas in *Hitchhiker* novels and how they interact with the world outside them.

Next up will be the Dirk Gently comics! We have a private FB group and [you can sign up here to join us](#).

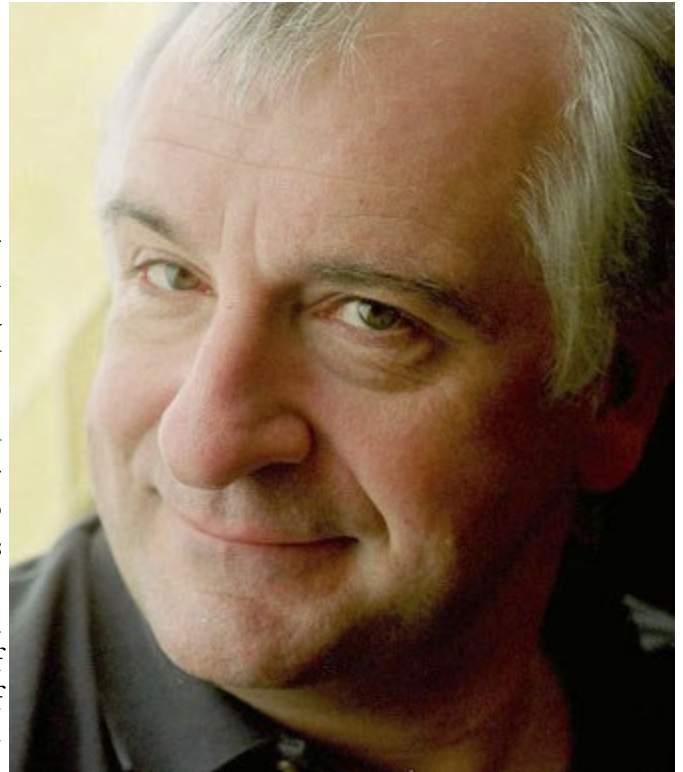


Ready for book club copy of TLDTOTS.

Photo Credit: Yvette Keller

Stalking the Wild Hitch Hiker

Steven H Silver



I was an early acolyte at the Church of the Holy Hitch Hiker, somehow getting my hands on audiotapes of the original BBC airings(1) sometime in the late 1970s and picking up a first US edition of the novel when it first appeared at my local bookstore, the Book Bin(2), in 1980.

Over the years, I've had a variety of interactions with Douglas Adams, ranging from an exchange of letters to hearing him read at Kroch's and Brentano's(3) in Evanston to waking him up to providing him with an idea that found its way into one of his novels.

In the mid-1980s, I was writing for my high school newspaper and Douglas Adams was touring in promotion of the book *The Meaning of Liff*, co-written with John Lloyd. If you aren't familiar with this particular tome (or its subsequent expansion, *The Deeper Meaning of Liff*), the basic idea was that Adams and Lloyd identified place names from around the world and assigned them definitions(4). I decided that I would do the world a service by interviewing Adams and publishing the results in my high school newspaper, where it would be ignored by the majority of the 2,000-person student body.

How to set up an interview? I reached out to Adams' American publisher, Harmony Books, outlining my credentials, such as they were, and requesting an interview when he was in Chicago. To my delight, my letter (because this was well before the days of the Internet) was answered with instructions. I was given the date that Adams would be able to meet with me, but no time or location was set. Instead, I was instructed to call Adams' hotel at a specific time on that date, ask for a name, and I would be told when and where I would be able to interview the author.



(1) - The first series, comprised of six fits, or episodes, originally aired from March 8 through April 12, 1978, and formed the bases of the first two books of the series and the subsequent television show. The second series, which aired from December 24, 1978 through January 25, 1980, introduced many wonderful concepts that were included in subsequent books, as well as other concepts that never resurfaced in any of the later versions of the stories...the shoe event horizon, the Lintillas, and the total perspective vortex.

(2) - The Book Bin first opened by four women in 1971. By the following year, three of them had left the business and the only original owner brought in Janis Irvine to help run it. Janis owned it until 2015, when she sold it to its current owner, who had worked at the store since 1992. The Book Bin is still in business in the same strip mall it first opened in, although in a different location, in Northbrook, Illinois. Throughout the 70s and 80s, they special ordered many books for me that are still in my collection.

(3) - The venerable Kroch's and Brentano's was once the largest bookstore chain in Chicago. It was founded in 1954 when Chicago-based Kroch's (founded by Adolph Kroch in 1907) merged with the Chicago branch of the New York-based Brentano's (opened in Chicago in 1884 and purchased by Kroch in 1933, he ran it separately until 1954 to keep Brentano's from re-entering the Chicago market. At one time, there were 22 Kroch's and Brentano's in Chicago, but the chain filed bankruptcy and closed in 1995. They are still missed. I bought my copy of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* at Kroch's and Brentano's Wabash store in 1980.

(4) - For instance, "Ahenny (adj.) The way people stand when examining other people's bookshelves." or "Goadby Marwood (n.) Someone who stops John Cleese on the street and asks him to do a funny walk." Ahenny is also a village in Tipperary County, Ireland, known for its proximity to the Kilclispeen monastery and the presence of ancient Irish high crosses. Goadby Marwood is also a village in Leicestershire, about ten miles from where I lived when I studied in England. Of these two terms, I find ahenny is a much more useful term. Definitions from *The Meaning of Liff*, Douglas Adams and John Lloyd, Pan Books, 1983, pp. 9 and 61. An expanded volume *The Deeper Meaning of Liff*, was published in 1990.

In preparation for the interview, I relistened to the two series of the radio show, rewatched my video tapes of the BBC television series(5), reread the trilogy(6), and prepared questions.

And then, the Time of Waiting was over!(7)

It was the day of the interview. At the appointed time, I dialed the number, got through to the clerk at the hotel, gave her the name I had been given, and found myself speaking to . . . an exceedingly groggy and irate Douglas Adams, who said, “Do you know what time it is?” before he hung up the phone.

Needless to say, the interview never happened.

The name I had been given was not the publicist I had expected, but rather than nom de voyage, Adams was using to avoid fans who were trying to find him. The publicist who provided me with the name and instructions had failed to provide Adams with the information that would have completed the circuit.

I felt horrible.

When I wrote a fan letter to Adams later that year, I didn’t apologize for waking him up. In fact, I didn’t mention the failed attempt at the interview. I figured if he had been unaware that it was supposed to have happened, it meant that I had been given a chance to start over with him.

And I didn’t hear from him.

For several months.

Until 1984. (8)

Adams opened the letter by apologizing. Not for the missed connection or the phone call. I’m sure he had no idea that the fan who had written to him was the person who had awoken him. He apologized for the delayed response since he had “only recently returned to this country after spending most of last year(9) in the States.”(10)



(5) - First airing in 1981, it reunited most of the main cast from the radio series: Simon Jones as Arthur Dent, Peter Jones (no relation) as The Book, Mark Wing-Davey as Zaphod Beeblebrox, Stephen Moore as Marvin, Richard Vernon as Slartibartfast, and David Tate as Eddie, the Shipboard Computer. Geoffrey McGivern had been replaced by David Dixon as Ford Prefect, and Sandra Dickinson took over the role of Trillian from Susan Sheridan.

(6) - In 1983, it was still a trilogy: *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980), and *Life, the Universe and Everything* (1982). *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* wouldn’t be published until 1985 and *Mostly Harmless* made its belated appearance in 1992.

(7) - Douglas Adams, *The Original Hitchhiker’s Radio Scripts*, fit the fourth, Harmony Books, 1985, p.78.

(8) - For years, I had forgotten about the letter that I received from Adams. In 2015 when I was chairing Windycon 42 with the theme “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Windycon,” I was going through one of my desk drawers and I came across the letter, dated January 17, 1984, a thirty-one year old voice from a favorite author who had been dead for fourteen years.

(9) - The UK.

(10) - 1983



He went on to tell me about the plans for a *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* film(11), but no additional radio shows(12) or television episodes(13), and that he was working on a novel, "very definitely last until I change my mind,"(14) that would be titled *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*, although he noted, "that could change."(15)

Although I tried to connect with Adams when I visited England in the summer of 1984, that attempt was no more successful than the 1983 attempt. Except insofar as it did not involve waking him up or otherwise annoying him, so, overall, a win.

In 1987, however, I was studying in a small village in Lincolnshire(16). I had planned a trip down to London, where I was planning to meet one of my professors at the Royal Academy. As I was walking to make my appointment, I saw a familiar figure walking along the street and recognized Douglas Adams.

I introduced myself to him and, rather than brushing me off, we struck up a conversation. He asked me some questions about being an American studying in the UK and about things that I was surprised to find were different. The night before I had taken the train down to London, we had attempted to order a pizza and had run into a bit of a problem.

I was living in a small village(17), so The Pizza Place(18), the nearest pizza place, was in the next town over (19). We had no way to get to the restaurant at that hour and they did not deliver pizzas. Coming from a land where pizzas were the quintessential delivery food(20), we were flummoxed by this development but were told that the standard way to have pizza delivered from town to the college was to place the order, call Frank's Taxis(21), the local cab service, and arrange to have a driver pick up the pizza for us. Upon delivery, we were to pay the cabbie for the pizza, the round trip, and a tip.(22)



(11) - It would eventually be made and released in 2005, with tributes to the original series of Simon Jones appearing as a ghostly image and the original Marvin costume from the television series making a cameo. The less said about this version, the better.

(12) - Until 2003 when the third through fifth novels were adapted for radio, reversing the original process.

(13) - He got this right.

(14) - He got this wrong.

(15) - It didn't.

(16) - Located about ten miles from Goadby Marwood, see footnote 4.

(17) - Population about 450.

(18) - Not sure when they opened, but they are still in business and now do deliveries through Foodhub.

(19) - Population, much larger.

(20) - I had spent two summers delivering pizzas for Edwardo's, a Chicago style pizza place founded in 1978. At one time, there were 30 Edwardo's in the Chicago area, including one which I took TAFF delegate Steve Green to during his trip, but now they are mostly known for frozen pizzas which are nowhere near as good as their original product. They also apparently still have two locations, a ghost kitchen in a restaurant on Chicago's Near North Side and an actual restaurant in Munster, Indiana. Both deliver.

(21) - Still in business, no longer delivers pizzas.

(22) - I later learned that members of an earlier class went even further to get pizza. Literally. In 1983 two students, Frank Idabell* and John Bruce, ordered 40 pizzas from Original Famous Ray's in New York. They flew back to New York, picked up the par-baked pizzas, and brought the pizzas back to the college. Students paid £3.50 (about \$6.30) for two slices of pizza, according to *The Toronto Star*, March 24, 1983. *Not his real name.

Our discussion didn't last long, perhaps five or six minutes, before I had to thank Adams and say goodbye to make my appointment.

I returned to the United States in December of 1987. Shortly after my return, I was browsing through the Book Corner, one of the bookstores where I attended college.(23) I had previously purchased Douglas Adams' *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*(24) there and now saw that it had a sequel, *The Long Dark Tea-time of the Soul*.(25) As you might imagine, I snatched it up.

Surprise was no longer adequate, and I was forced to resort to astonishment(26) when I read these words in the opening chapter.

"London was the place she liked living in most, apart, of course, from the pizza problem, which drove her crazy. Why would no one deliver pizza? Why did no one understand that it was fundamental to the whole nature of pizza that it arrived at your front door in a hot cardboard box? That you slithered it out of greaseproof paper and ate it folded in slices in front of the TV? What was the fundamental flaw in the stupid, stuck-up, sluggardly English that they couldn't grasp this simple principle? For some odd reason it was the one frustration she could never learn to simply live with and accept., and about once a month or so she would get very depressed, phone a pizza restaurant, order the biggest, most lavish pizza she could describe—pizza with an extra pizza on it(27), essentially—and then, sweetly, ask them to deliver it.

"To what?"

"Delivery. Let me give you the address—"

"I don't understand. Aren't you going to come and pick it up?"

"No. Aren't you going to deliver? My address—"

"Er, we don't do that, miss."

"Don't do what?"

"Er, deliver."

"You *don't deliver*? Am I *hearing* you correctly?"



(23) - The Book Corner was founded in 1964 and is still owned by descendants of the original owners. In addition to buying many books there, it was also an excellent source, in those pre-internet days, for newspapers from around the country. The Book Corner is still in business in its same location in Bloomington, Indiana. Throughout the mid-80s and early-90s, I bought many books there that are still in my collection.

(24) - Published in 1987.

(25) - Published in 1988. Although a Dirk Gently novel, the title comes from a quote in *Life, the Universe and Everything* which described the preternatural boredom of Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged, whose method of dealing with the boredom caused by being an immortal is to insult every single living being in the universe in alphabetical order.

(26) - Douglas Adams, *The Original Hitchhiker's Radio Scripts*, fit the fourth, Harmony Books, 1985, p.73.

(27) - Hmm, potentially a reasonable definition of a Chicago stuffed pizza.

editors's note the only true kinds of pizza are Chicago Stuffed or Chicago Deep-Dish. All other is topped-bread.

“The exchange would quickly degenerate into an ugly slanging match which would leave her feeling drained and shaky, but much, much better the following morning.”(28)

I can't prove that this exchange came out of my conversation with Adams, and it is quite possible that the book was already to the publisher when we spoke, but it is amazingly reminiscent of our conversation, although it is much more humorous the way Adams has depicted the problem.

I only saw Adams once more after that chance meeting on a London street, at a book signing in 1992 when he was touring in promotion of *Mostly Harmless*. Although I was able to have him sign several books, including *Last Chance to See*,(29) which may be my favorite among his books, I was not able to ask him to confirm or deny that our conversation was immortalized in *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*, which he also signed that day.(30)



(28) - Douglas Adams, *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*, Simon & Schuster, 1988, pp.15-16.

(29) - Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine, *Last Chance to See*, Harmony, 1990. Possibly his least-known work, *Last Chance to See* was also turned into an interactive computer program, which I have sitting next to me on CD-ROM. Unfortunately, the discs are not covered by any concept of “backward compatibility” that Microsoft has ever heard of. It was also adapted for television in 2009, with Stephen Fry stepping in for Douglas Adams. The book is an exploration of animals on the verge of extinction.

(30) I did, sort of, have one final encounter with Adams, although it happened after his death. I had received an advance copy of the novel/collection *The Salmon of Doubt: Hitchhiking the Galaxy One Last Time*, which contains several chapters of an unfinished Dirk Gently novel (although at various times, it was also an unfinished Hitch Hiker's novel) as well as essays, sketches, and short stories written by Adams. I duly wrote and published my review, which included the statement, “The final section of the book includes the short story “The Private Life of Genghis Khan,” which looks at the personal life of the conqueror. The reader quickly understands Adams's point, but Adams maintains the joke, apparently unable to find a successful way of ending the story.” Shortly after I published my review, I received an email asking me to confirm that the story was in my copy of the book. Apparently, the story was based on a comedy sketch devised by Graham Chapman and written by Chapman and Adams. My correspondent indicated that the people who compiled the book may not have had the rights to reproduce the story, but he wanted to confirm its presence with me before contacting them. My understanding is that some editions of the book retain the story, but it was excised from other versions of the book for copyright reasons. Adams also worked with Chapman on *A Liar's Autobiography*, Chapman's autobiography, my copy of which is autographed by Douglas Adams, although I've also inserted a piece of paper autographed by Graham Chapman. I didn't purchase a copy of the book. It was a gift from a high school friend, with whom I am still in touch.