

*The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, by Douglas Adams. Starring Peter Jones as THE BOOK, with Simon Jones and Geoffrey McGivern

<intro music>

*This is the story of the Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy— perhaps the most remarkable, certainly the most successful book, ever to come out of the great publishing corporations of Ursa Minor. More popular than the Celestial Homecare Omnibus, better selling than Fifty-three More Things To Do In Zero Gravity, and more controversial than Oolon Colluphid's trilogy of philosophical blockbusters: Where God Went Wrong, Some More Of God's Greatest Mistakes, and Who Is This God Person Anyway?. And in many of the more relaxed civilizations on the Outer Eastern Rim of the Galaxy, the Hitch Hiker's Guide has already supplanted the great Encyclopedia Galactica as the standard repository of all knowledge and wisdom. Because although it has many omissions, contains much that is apocryphal—or at least wildly inaccurate—it scores over the older, more pedestrian work in two important ways: first, it is slightly cheaper, and second, it has the words “DON'T PANIC” inscribed in large, friendly letters on the cover.*

*To tell the story of the book, it's best to tell the story of some of the minds behind it. A human, from the planet Earth, was one of them—though as our story opens, he no more knows his destiny than a tealeaf knows the history of the East India Company. His name is Arthur Dent, he is a six-foot tall ape descendant, and someone is trying to drive a bypass through his home.*

Mr. Prosser: Come off it Mr. Dent you can't win you know! Look, there's no point in lying down in the path of progress!

Arthur: I've gone off the idea of progress it's overrated.!

Mr. Prosser: But you must realize that you can't lie in front of the bulldozers indefinitely!

Arthur: I'm game—we'll see who rusts first.

Mr. Prosser: I'm afraid you're going have to accept it! *This* bypass has **got** to be built and it is **going** to be built—nothing you can say or do—

Arthur: Why has it got to be built!!!?

Mr. Prosser: Wa-what do you mean, “why has it got to be built?” **It is a bypass! You've got to build bypasses!**

Arthur: Didn't anyone consider the alternatives?

Mr. Prosser: There aren't any alternatives.!--but you are quite entitled to make any suggestions or protests at the appropriate time.!

Arthur: *Appropriate time!!!?*

Mr. Prosser: Yes.

Arthur: The first I knew about it was when a workmen arrived at the door yesterday.

Mr. Prosser: *t-oh!!*

Arthur: I asked him if he'd come to clean the windows and he said he'd come to demolish the house! He didn't tell me straight away of course—huh, *No*. First he wiped a couple of windows and charged me a fiver—**then** he told me

Mr. Prosser: But Mr. Dent the plans have been available in the planning office for the last 9 months.!

Arthur: Yes!—I went round to find them yesterday afternoon.! You'd hadn't exactly gone out of your way to pull much attention to them have you!?!—I mean like actually *telling* anybody or anything.

Mr. Prosser: The plans were on display.!

Arthur: Ah!—and how many members of the public are in the habit of casually dropping around the local planning office of an evening?

Mr. Prosser: *dwu-ah!*

Arthur: *It's not exactly a noted social venue is it!!!?* And even if you had popped in on the off chance that some **raving** bureaucrat wanted to knock your house down, the plans weren't immediately obvious to the eye were they!!?

Mr. Prosser: That depends where you were looking.

Arthur: I eventually had to go down to the cellar.!

Mr. Prosser: That's the display department.

Arthur: With a torch!

Mr. Prosser: The lights, had... probably gone.

Arthur: So had the stairs.!

Mr. Prosser: Well you found the notice didn't you?

Arthur: Yes it was on display in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet, stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying, "Beware of the Leopard." Ever thought of going into advertising?

Mr. Prosser: It's not as if it is a particularly nice house anyway.

Arthur: I happen rather to like it!

Mr. Prosser: Mr. Dent!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Arthur: Yes. Hello.

Mr. Prosser: Have you any idea how much damage that Bulldozer would suffer if I just let it roll straight over you?!!

Arthur: How much?

Mr. Prosser: None at all.!

*By a strange coincidence “None at all” is exactly how much suspicion the ape descendant Arthur Dent had that one of his closest friends was not descended from an ape, but was, in fact, from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse. Arthur Dent’s failure to suspect this reflects the care with which his friend blended himself into human society—after a fairly shaky start.*

*When he first arrived fifteen years ago, the minimal research he had done had suggested to him that the name “Ford Prefect” would be nicely inconspicuous. He will enter our story in thirty-five seconds and say “Hello, Arthur.” The ape-descendant will greet him in return, but in deference to a million years of evolution, he will not attempt to pick fleas off him—Earthmen are not proud of their ancestors and never invite them round to dinner.*

Ford Prefect: Hello Arthur.

Arthur: Ford, hi, how are you?

Ford Prefect: Fine. Look are you busy?

Arthur: Well I’ve just got this bulldozer to lie in front of, otherwise...no not especially.

Ford Prefect: There’s a pub down the road—let’s have a drink and we can talk.

Arthur: Heh, Don’t you understand!?

Mr. Prosser: Mr. Dent we’re waiting!!

Arthur: Ford that man wants to knock my house down.!

Ford Prefect: Well he can do it whilst you’re anyway can’t he?

Arthur: But I don’t want him to!

Ford Prefect: Well just ask him to wait til you get back.

Arthur: Ford!

Ford Prefect: Arthur!—Will you please just listen to me? I’m not foolin’. I’ve got to tell you the most important thing you’ve ever heard, I’ve got to tell you *now*, and I’ve got to tell you in *that pub there*.

Arthur: Why?

Ford Prefect: Because you are going to need a very stiff drink. Now just trust me.!

Arthur: I’ll see what I can do. It had better be good.!

Arthur: Hello Mr. Prosser?!!

Mr. Prosser: Yes Mr. Dent have you come to your senses yet?

Arthur: Um, well, can we just assume for a moment that I haven’t?

Mr. Prosser: Well?

Arthur: And that I'm going to be staying put here til you go away?

Mr. Prosser: So?

Arthur: So you're going to be standing around all day doing nothing.

Mr. Prosser: Could be...

Arthur: Well if you're resigned to standing around doing nothing all day, you don't actually need me here all the time do you?

Mr. Prosser: Uh...no...uh, not, as, such.

Arthur: So if you could just take it as read that I'm actually here, I could just slip off to the pub for half an hour. How does that sound?

Mr. Prosser: Uh, that sounds uh—well, very reasonable I think Mr. Dent. I'm sure we don't actually need you there for the, whole time. We can just—um—hold up our end of the confrontation.

Arthur: And if you want to pop off for a bit later on I can always cover for you in return.

Mr. Prosser: Oh! – oh thank you! Yes, yes well that'd be fine yes very kind of you sir, very kind.

Arthur: And of course it goes without saying that you, uh, don't try and knock my house over while I'm away.

Mr. Prosser: Oh, what?!! Good lord no Mr. Dent!!

Arthur: Do you think we can trust him?

Ford Prefect: Myself I'd trust him to the end of the earth.

Arthur: Yes but how far is that?

Ford Prefect: About 12 minutes away. Come on I need a drink

*By drink Ford Prefect meant alcohol.*

*The Encyclopedia Galactica describes alcohol as a colourless, volatile liquid formed by the fermentation of sugars and also notes its intoxicating effect on certain carbon-based life forms.*

*The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy also mentions alcohol. It says that the best drink in existence is the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster. The effect of which is like—"having your brain smashed out by a slice of lemon wrapped round a large gold brick."*

*The Guide also tells you on which planets the best Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters are mixed, how much you can expect to pay for one, and what voluntary organizations exist to help you rehabilitate.*

Ford Prefect: Six pints of bitter and quickly please: the world's about to end.

Barman: Oh yes sir nice weather for it. Going to watch the match this afternoon?

Ford Prefect: No, no point.

Barman: Foregone conclusion you reckon sir. Arsenal without a chance?

Ford Prefect: No it's just that the world's going to end.

Barman: Ah yes you said. Lucky escape for Arsenal if it did.

Ford Prefect: No not really

Barman: There you are sir, six pints

Ford Prefect: Keep the change

Barman: What from a fiver? Thank you sir.!

Ford Prefect: You've got 10 minutes left to spend it.

Arthur: Ford would you please tell me what the hell is going on?

Ford Prefect: Drink up you've got three pints to get through.

Arthur: Three? At lunchtime?

Ford Prefect: Time is an illusion, lunchtime doubly so.

Arthur: Very deep. You should send that into the *Reader's Digest*. They've got a page for people like you.

Ford Prefect: Drink up.

Arthur: Why three pints?!!

Ford Prefect: Muscle relaxants—you'll need it.

Arthur: Did I do something wrong today or has the world always been like this and I've been too wrapped up in myself to notice?

Ford Prefect: All right, I'll try to explain. How long have we known each other Arthur?

Arthur: Five years maybe six. Most of it seemed to make some kind of sense at the time.

Ford Prefect: All right how would you react if I said that I'm not from Gilford after all but from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse?

Arthur: I don't know. Why do you think it's the sort of thing you are likely to say?

Ford Prefect: Drink up the world's about to end.

Arthur: Ohhh. This must be Thursday I never could get the hang of Thursday

*On this particular Thursday something was moving through the ionosphere miles above the surface of the planet, but few people on the surface of the planet were aware of it.*

*One of the six thousand million people who hadn't glanced into the ionosphere recently was called Lady Cynthia Fitzmilton. She was, at that moment, standing in front of Arthur Dent's house in Cottington. Many of those listening to her speech would probably have experienced great satisfaction to know that in four minutes time she would evaporate into a whiff of hydrogen, ozone, and carbon monoxide. However, when the moment came they would hardly notice, because they would be too busy evaporating themselves.*

Lady Cynthia Fitzmilton: I have been asked to come here to say a few words to mark the beginning of work on the very splendid and worthwhile New Beddingford bypass

Crowd: Ah get off stage!

Lady Cynthia Fitzmilton: And I must say immediately what a great honor and a great privilege I think it must be, for you, the people of Cottington, to have this gleaming new motorway going through your cruddy little village. I'm Sorry, sorry, your little country village of cruddy Cottington. I know how proud you must feel at this moment to know that your obscure and unsung hamlet will now arise reborn as the very splendid and worthwhile Cottington service station. Providing welcome refreshment and sanitary relief for every weary traveler on his way.

Crowd: Why don't you push off you curt face old bag! What about our bloody homes????

Lady Cynthia Fitzmilton: And for myself it gives me great pleasure to take this bottle of very splendid and worthwhile champagne and break it against the noble prow of this very splendid and worthwhile yellow bulldozer

Crowd: Get off! Get off!

<Vrrrrrrrrroooooooooooooooooommmmmmmmmmm (bulldozer pushes forward and sound fades)>

<Pa-cghcl (destruction noise)>

Arthur: What's that?!!

Ford Prefect: Don't worry they haven't started yet.

Arthur: Oh good.!

Ford Prefect: It's probably just your house being knocked down.

Arthur: What???????

Ford Prefect: It hardly makes any difference at this stage.

Arthur: My GOD It is!!!!!! What the hell are they doing??!! We had an agreement!

Ford Prefect: Let 'em have their fun.

Arthur: Damn you and your Fairy stories they're smashing up my home!!! (running out to his house) Stop you vandals! You home wreckers! You half-crazed Visigoths! Stop!!

Ford Prefect: Arthur! *Come back*: it's pointless! Hell, I better go after him. Barman quickly, can you just give me four packets of peanuts?

Barman: Certainly sir. There you are, 28 pence.

Ford Prefect: Keep the change.

Barman: Are you serious sir? I mean, do you really think the world's going to end this afternoon?

Ford Prefect: Yes in just over 1 minute and 35 seconds.

Barman: Well isn't there anything we can do?

Ford Prefect: No nothing.

Barman: Well I always thought we were meant to lie down and put a paper bag over our head or something.

Ford Prefect: If you'd like, yes.

Barman: Well will that help?

Ford Prefect: No. Excuse me I've got to find my friend.

Barman: Very well then. Last orders please.!

<at Arthur's house (being destroyed)>

Arthur: You Pinstripe barbarians, I'll sue the council for every penny it's got!! I'll have you hung and drawn and quartered...! a-and whipped and boiled...! and then I'll chop you up to little bits! Until.. until... until you've had enough!!

Ford Prefect: Arthur don't bother there isn't time get over here there's only 10 seconds left!

Arthur: And Then I'll do it some more. AND when I've finished I'll take all the little bits and I'll... I'll-I'll *jump* on them!! And I'll carry on jumping on them until I get blisters!!... or I can think of something even more unpleasant to do and then I'll – WHAT THE HELL'S THAT???

Ford Prefect: Arthur quick over HERE!

Arthur: But what the hell is it??

Ford Prefect: It's A fleet of flying saucers what do you think it is! Quick you've got to get hold of this rock.!

Arthur: What do you mean flying saucers?

Ford Prefect: Just that. It's a Vogon constructor fleet.

Arthur: A what?

Ford Prefect: A Vogon constructor fleet. I picked up news of their arrival a few hours ago on my sub ether radio.

Arthur: Ford I don't think I can cope with anymore of this. I think I'll just go and have a little lie down somewhere...

Ford Prefect: No just stay here, keep calm, and just take hold of this—

Vogon Captain: People of Earth your attention please. This is Prostectic Vogon Jeltz of the Galactic Hyperspace Planet Council. As you no doubt will be aware, the plans for the development of the outlying regions of the western spiral arm of the galaxy require the building of a hyperspace express route through your star system and, regrettably, your planet is one of those scheduled for demolition. The process will take slightly less than two of your Earth minutes thank you very much.

Crowd roars

Vogon captain: There's no point in acting all surprised about it. All the planning charts and demolition orders have been on display at your local planning department in Alpha Centauri for 50 of your Earth years so you've had plenty of time to lodge any formal complaints and its far too late to start making a fuss about it now.

Crowd roars louder.

Vogon captain: *What do you mean you've never been to Alpha Centauri?* Oh for heaven sake mankind its only 4 *light* years away you know.! I'm sorry but if you can't be bothered to take an interest in local affairs that's your own regard. Energize the demolition beams! God I don't know...apathetic bloody planet, I've no sympathy at all...

<Earth is destroyed>

Ford: I bought some peanuts.

Arthur: *What??!?!?*

Ford: If you've never been through a matter transference beam before, you've probably lost some salt and protein. The beer you had should've cushioned your system a bit. How are you feeling?

Arthur: Like a military academy— bits of me keep on passing out. If I asked you where the hell we were, would I regret it?

Ford: We're safe.

Arthur: Oh good...

Ford: We're in a small galley cabin in one of the spaceships of the Vogon constructor fleet.

Arthur: Ah this is obviously some strange usage of the word safe that I wasn't previously aware of.

Ford: I'll have a look for the light.

Arthur: All right. .... How did we get here?

Ford: We hitched a lift.

Arthur: *Excuse me?* Are you trying to tell me that we just stuck out our thumbs and some bug-eyed monster stuck his head out and said, "Hi fellows, hop right in, I can take you as far as the Basingstoke roundabout."?



Ford: Well; the thumb's an electronic sub-ether device, the roundabout's at Barnard's star, six light years away, but otherwise, that's more or less right.

Arthur: And the bug-eyed monster?

Ford: Is green, yes.

Arthur: Fine. When can I go home?

Ford: You can't. Ah!—I've found the light.

<do-do-do-do-bleeeeeezwzww (light comes on)>

Arthur: Good grief! Is this really the interior of a flying saucer?

Ford: It certainly is. What do you think?

...

Arthur: well it's a bit squalled isn't it?

Ford: What did you expect?

Arthur: Well, I don't know—gleaming control panels... flashing lights, computer screens—not old mattresses.

Ford: These are the Dentrassi sleeping quarters.

Arthur: I thought you said they were called **Vogons** or something...

Ford: The Vogons run the ship, the Dentrassi are the cooks—they let us on board.

Arthur: I'm confused.

Ford: Here, have a look at this.

Arthur: What is it?

Ford: The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy. It's a sort of electronic book—it'll tell you everything you want to know—that's its job.

Arthur: I like the cover, "*DOEN'T PANIC*"—It's the first helpful or intelligible thing anybody's said to me all day.!

Ford: That's why it sells so well. Here, press this button and the screen will give you the index. You've got several million entries so fast wind through the index to "v." ... There you are—Vogon Constructor Fleets. Enter that code on the tabulator and read what it says.

<tick tick tick tick, tick tick tick tick, tick tick tick tick —binggg!!>

### Vogon Constructor Fleets

Here is what to do if you want to get a lift from a Vogon: Forget it! They're one of the most unpleasant races in the galaxy—not actually evil but bad tempered, bureaucratic,

officious and callous. They wouldn't even lift a finger to save their own grandmothers from the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal—without orders signed in triplicate, sent in, sent back, queried, lost, found, subjected to public inquiry, lost again, and finally buried in soft peat for three months and recycled as firelighters.

The best way to get a drink out of a Vogon is stick your finger down his throat, and the best way to irritate him is to feed his grandmother to the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal.

Arthur: What a strange book. How did we get a lift then?!

Ford: Well, that's the point, it's out of date now.! I'm doing the field research for the new revised edition of the Guide. So, for instance, I will have to include a revision pointing out that since the Vogons have made so much money being professionally unpleasant, they can now afford to employ Dentrassi cooks—which gives us a rather useful little loophole.

Arthur: Who are the Dentrassi?

Ford: *The* best cooks and *the* best drink mixers and they don't give a wet slap about anything else. And they will always help hitchhikers on board, partly because they like the company, but **mostly** because it annoys the Vogons. Which is exactly the sort of thing you need to know if you're an impoverished hitchhiker trying to see the marvels of the Galaxy for less than thirty Altairian dollars a day. And that's my job—fun isn't it?

Arthur: It's amazing.

Ford: Unfortunately I got stuck on the Earth for rather longer than I intended. I came for a week and was stranded for fifteen years.

Arthur: But how did you get there in the first place?!

Ford: Oh easy.! I got a lift with a teaser. ... you don't know what a teaser is, I—I'll tell you. Teasers are usually rich kids with nothing to do. They cruise around looking for planets which haven't made interstellar contact yet and buzz them.

Arthur: Ah. Buzz them?

Ford: Yeah. They find some isolated spot with very few people around, then land right by some poor unsuspecting soul, who no one's ever going to believe, and then strut up and down in front of 'im wearing silly antennae on their head and making "beep, beep" noises—hunh, rather childish really.

Arthur: eh-heh-heh. Ford I don't know if this sounds like a silly question—but what am I doing here?

Ford: Well you know that.! I rescued you from the Earth.

Arthur: And what has happened to the Earth??!

Ford: It's been... disintegrated.

Arthur: *Has it?*

Ford: Yes. It just... boiled away into space.

Arthur: Look, I'm a bit upset about that.

Ford: Yes, I can understand.

Arthur: So—what do I do?

Ford: You come along with me and enjoy yourself. You'll need to have this fish in your ear.

Arthur: I beg your pardon!

Vogon Captain: Wa-wa-wa-Weeta elken...

Vogon Captain: ...ghfsk caf figgn in...

Arthur: What the devil's that!?!

Vogon Captain: ...wiza horten ow...

Ford: Listen.! It might be important.

Vogon Captain: ...ow...

Arthur: What?

Vogon Captain: ...ze yaben nect zya tow...

Ford: It's the Vogon Captain making an announcement on the PA.

Vogon Captain: ...wa-wa-wa-wa-zeob...

Arthur: But I can't speak Vogon!

Vogon Captain: ...yo oben nicha ywa-ywa-ywa-ywa...

Ford: You don't need to! Just put the fish in your ear—c'mon, it's only a little one.

Vogon Captain: ... ywa-yi-yi-yi ...

<Khheeta (fish slides into Arthur's ear)>

Arthur: Euuuuggh!

Vogon Captain: ...yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi should have a good time. Message repeat. This is your Captain speaking so **STOP WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING AND PAY ATTENTION!!!!** First of all, I see from our instruments that we have a couple of hitchhiker's aboard our ship. Hello wherever you are! I just want to make it totally clear that you are **not at all welcome!** *I worked hard to get where I am today, and I didn't become captain of a Vogon Constructor ship simply so that I could turn it into a taxi service for degenerate freeloaders!* I have sent out a search party. As soon as they find you I will put you off the ship—if you're very lucky, I might read you some of my poetry first. Secondly, we are about to jump into hyperspace for the journey to Barnard Star. On arrival we will stay in dock for a seventy-two hour refit and *no one's to leave the ship during that time!* I repeat, **all planet leave is cancelled!** I've just had an unhappy love affair. So I don't see why anyone else should have a good time. Message Ends.

Arthur: *charming*, these Vogons. I wish I had a daughter so I could forbid her to marry one.

Ford: You wouldn't need to—they've got as much sex appeal as a road accident. And you better be prepared for the jump into hyperspace; it's unpleasantly like being drunk.

Arthur: Well, what's so unpleasant about being drunk?

Ford: You ask a glass of water.!

Arthur: Ford.

Ford: Yes?

Arthur: What's this fish doing in my ear?!

Ford: Translating for you. Look under Babel Fish in the book.

<wahhhnnhnnhnnhnnhnn...>

Arthur: What's happening?

<...ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhsshhh...>

Ford: We're going into hyperspace.

<...szszszszszszzszszszszzzsssssssszzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz...>

Arthur: Eeeuuuhhh! I... I'll never be cruel to a gin and tonic again.

<...zzoooooweeta>

<tick tick tick —bing>

*The Babel fish is small, yellow, leech-like, and probably the oddest thing in the Universe. It feeds on brainwave energy absorbing all unconscious frequencies and then excreting, telepathically, a matrix formed from the conscious frequencies and nerve signals picked up from the speech centres of the brain. The practical upshot of which is, that if you stick one in your ear you can instantly understand anything said to you in any form of language. The speech you hear decodes the brainwave matrix.*

*Now it is such a bizarrely improbable coincidence that anything so mind-bogglingly useful could evolve purely by chance that some thinkers have chosen to see it as the final clinching proof of the non-existence of God.*

*The argument goes something like this:*

*"I refuse to prove that I exist," says God, "for proof denies faith, and without faith I am nothing."*

*"But!," said Man, "the Babel fish is a dead giveaway, isn't it? It proves you exist and so therefore you don't. QED."*

*"Oh dear," says God, "I hadn't thought of that!" and promptly vanished in a puff of logic.*

*"Oh, that was easy," says Man, and for an encore he proves that black is white and gets killed on the next zebra crossing.*

*Most leading theologians claim that this argument is a load of dingo's kidneys, but that didn't stop Oolon Colluphid making a small fortune when he used it as the central theme*

*of his best selling book Well That About Wraps It Up For God.*

*Meanwhile, the poor Babel fish, by effectively removing all barriers to communication between different cultures and races, has caused more and bloodier wars than anything else in the history of creation.*

Arthur: What an extraordinary book.

Ford: Help me write the new edition.

Arthur: No. I want to go back to Earth again I'm afraid—or its nearest equivalent.

Ford: You're turning down a hundred billion new worlds to explore.

Arthur: Did you get much useful material on Earth?

Ford: I was able to extend the entry, yes.

Arthur: Well let's see what it says in this edition then.

Ford: Okay.

Arthur: Let's see...E...Earth. Tap out the code.

<tick tick tick tick, ent, tick tick tick tick, ent, tick tick tick tick tick, pbha, pbha, pbhink —binggg!!>

Arthur: There's the page... weh, it doesn't seem to have an entry.

Ford: Yes it does, see, right at the bottom of the screen—just under Eccentrica Gallumbits, the triple-breasted whore of Eroticon Six.

Arthur: What there? ...oh yes.

Harmless.

Arthur: Harmless?? Is that all it's got to say??!! One word!! **Harmless!!?** *What the hell's that supposed to mean???*

Ford: Well there are a hundred billion stars in the Galaxy and a limited amount of space in the book. And no one knew much about the Earth of course.

Arthur: Well I hope you've managed to rectify that a little.

Ford: Yes.! I transmitted a new entry off to the editor... He had to trim it a bit, but it's still an improvement.!

Arthur: What does it say now?

Ford: Mostly Harmless.

Arthur: **MOSTLY HARMLESS!?!?!?!?**

Ford: Well that's the way it is.!! We're on a different scale now.

Arthur: Okay Ford, I'm with you. I'm bloody well coming with you. Where are we now?

Ford: Not far from Barnard Star—it's a beautiful place, and a sort of hyperspace juncture. You can get virtually anywhere from there.

<kclk-gla-gla, kclk-gla-gla,...>

<...KCLK-GLA-GLA, KCLK-GLA-GLA, KCLK-GLA-gla, KCLK-GLA-gla,... >

Ford: That is... assuming that we actually *get* there.

<...KCLK-GLA-GLA!!, KCLK-GLA-GLA!!!!!!>

<chingk, chingk, chingk>

Arthur: What's that!??

Ford: Well...if we're lucky it's just the Vogons come to throw us into space.

Arthur: And if we're unlucky...?

Ford: If we're unlucky the Captain might want to read us some of his poetry first.

*Vogon poetry is, of course, the third worst in the Universe. The second worst is that of the Azgoths of Kria. During a recitation by their poet-master, Grunthos the Flatulent, of his poem, Ode To A Small Lump Of Green Putty I Found In My Armpit One Midsummer Morning, four of his audience died of internal hemorrhaging, and the president of the Mid-Galactic Arts Nobbling Council survived by gnawing one of his own legs off. Grunthos was reported to have been "disappointed" by the poem's reception, and was about to embark on a reading of his twelve-book epic entitled, My Favourite Bathtime Gurgles, when his own major intestine, in a desperate attempt to save humanity, leapt straight up through his neck, and throttled his brain.*

*The very worst poetry of all perished along with its creator, Paul Neil Mill Johnston, of Redbridge, in the destruction of the planet Earth. Vogon Poetry is mild by comparison, and when the Vogon Captain began to read, it provoked this reaction from Ford Prefect:*

Ford: Nyyyyyyyaaaghaghaghanyghaenygha!

*And this from Arthur Dent:*

Arthur: Nyyyah, AHHHHeeuuuuuuaahhhg!mp!

Vogon Captain: Oh freddled gruntbuggly...

Arthur: euhinewyahhhh

Arthur: Nyyyaaaghh

Ford: Nyaaagghha

Vogon Captain: ...thy micturations are to me— As purdled gabbleblotchitson lurgid bee.

Arthur: Nyyahhh. Ahhhheughhhhhh

Ford: Euh-ahhhhhhhhhhhh Arrggggggghhh

Vogon Captain: Groop I implore thee, my foonting turlingdromes.  
Arthur: Ewwahhhhhhh. Ehhhhhg. Errrrggggggh  
Ford: Nuurrrrrrgggggggg. Uggghhhhhh. Eggghhhhh

Vogon Captain: And hooptiously drangle me with crinkly bindlewurdles, for I will rend thee in the gobberwarts with my blurglecruncheon, see if I don't!  
Arthur: Awwwggggghhhh. Erggghhhh. Ughhhhhh. Nyawhhhhhhh. Ygggawhhhhhhh  
Ford: Nyyyyahhhhhhhh. Gggggghhhh. Ahhhhhh. WAGHHhhhhhhh. Mmmmgggggghhhhhh

Arthur: Aghhh. Ahhhhh  
Ford: Ahhhh. Aghhhh.

Vogon Captain: So—Earthlings, I present you with a simple choice. I was going to throw you straight out into the empty blackness of space to die horribly and slowly, but there is one way—one **simple** way, in which you may save yourselves. Now think very carefully...for you hold your very lives in your hands! Now choose!: **Either die in the Vacuum of Space, or—**

<stunningly overdramatic and extendedly held chord>

<less stunning, yet overly dramatic chords that soften as it is realized they shouldn't be played>  
Vogon Captain: Tell me how good you thought my poem was.

*Will our heroes survive this terrible ordeal? Can they win through with their integrity unscathed? Can they escape without completely compromising their honor and artistic judgment? Tune in next week for the next exciting installment of The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy.*

*In that episode of The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Peter Jones starred as THE BOOK, Simon Jones as Arthur Dent, and Geoffrey McGivern, Ford Prefect. Bill Wallis was Prosser and the Vogon Captain; with Jill Kendal as Lady Cynthia Fitzmilton and David Goodeson as the Barman. The program was written by Douglas Adams and produced by Simon Brett with the assistance of Paddy Kingsland at the Radio-Phonic Workshop, and a small, furry creature from the Crab Nebula.*

Arthur: I quite liked it really. The imagery was really particularly affective and the metaphysical prop...