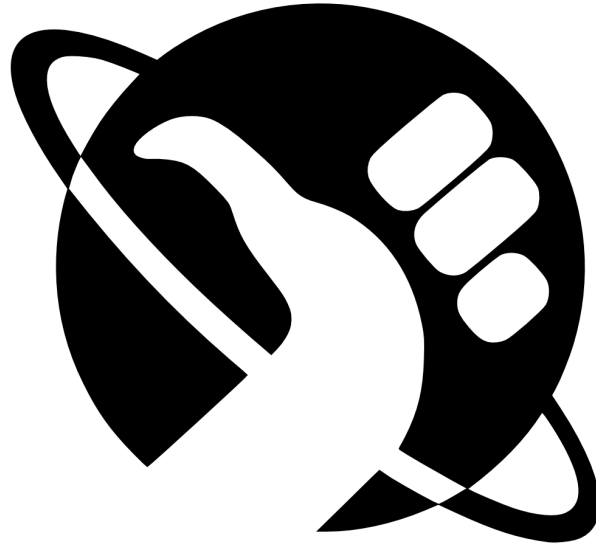


Space is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mind-bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the store, but that's just peanuts to space, listen...



DON'T PANIC

**A REMIX OF
DOUGLAS ADAMS'S
THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY**

Javier Grillo-Marxuach
8.4.2022

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"There is a theory which states that if ever anyone discovers exactly what the Universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. There is another theory which states that this has already happened."

*There is yet a third theory which suggests that both of the first two theories were concocted by a wily editor of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* in order to increase the level of universal uncertainty and paranoia and so boost the sales of the guide..."*

The story of how Arthur Dent escaped the destruction of Earth, as told *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and its sequels been told many, many times.

There have been six novels, one BBC television series, no less than three audiobook recordings per novel, six radio plays, a number of long play record albums, at least four stage plays, a graphic novel, a live reading, a video game, and a series of trading cards... all telling the same story.

It's now - more than four decades after the first novel was published - fair to say that the tale of poor, hapless, homeless Arthur Dent has been thoroughly examined, and exhausted, across all media. The vast, digressive, absurdist universe created by Douglas Adams, however, has not.

And it is a big place full of weird and random coincidences, improbably strange connections, amazingly convoluted digressions, and every imaginable improbability. Every aside in every one of Douglas Adams's novels - every name and every mention of an alien civilization - indicates a tantalizing story (I, for one, wanted to know the fate of the Belcerobons of Kakraphoon Kappa after they were cursed with telepathy and could only mitigate this by talking continually, or the Golgafrinchan civilization which was almost destroyed by bacterial outbreaks from dirty phones).

Maybe the time has come to move beyond the misadventures of Arthur Dent and explore this massive work of deranged world-building and runaway imagination from another angle.

Turns out that Douglas Adams himself has provided us with the perfect franchise from which to explore his imagination.

And it's right in the title...

"The *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is a wholly remarkable book. In fact it is probably the most remarkable book ever to come out

of the great publishing houses of Ursa Minor. Not only is it a wholly remarkable book, it is also a highly successful one-more popular than the *Celestial Home Care Omnibus*, better selling than *Fifty 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?*

In many of the more relaxed civilizations on the Outer Eastern Rim of the Galaxy, the Hitchhiker's Guide has already supplanted the great *Encyclopedia Galactica* as the standard repository of all knowledge and wisdom, for though it has many omissions and contains much that is apocryphal, or at least wildly inaccurate, it scores over the older, more pedestrian work in two important respects: First, it is slightly cheaper; and secondly it has the words **DON'T PANIC** inscribed in large friendly letters on its cover."

One of the inciting incidents of Douglas Adams's first novel, is the revelation that one of its protagonists, Ford Prefect is, in fact an alien from Betelgeuse, and a roving reporter for *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* who got accidentally stranded on Earth... only to witness its epic destruction!

This raises the tantalizing question: **what is it like to be one of the other reporters for the Guide?** What wonders do they see? What adventures do they experience? How do they pay for lunch?

This is the premise of *Don't Panic*.

It's not a reboot or a preboot, not a prequel or sequel. It's an equal: existing in the same universe with the original, telling its own unique story.

Don't Panic is a **comedy, and a space adventure, and a work-place drama**. It is the story of the courageous, and often cowardly, reporters who explore the Galaxy in search of all the information a hitchhiker could possibly need...

Including where to find the best Pan-Galactic Gargle Blaster.

THE SERIES

"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy is an indispensable companion to all those who are keen to make sense of life in an infinitely complex and confusing Universe, for though it cannot hope to be useful or informative on all matters, it does at least make the reassuring claim, that where it is inaccurate it is at least definitively inaccurate. In cases of major discrepancy it's always reality that's got it wrong.

This was the gist of the notice. It said "The Guide is definitive. Reality is frequently inaccurate."

In headquarters of Megadodo Publications, one of the great publishing houses of Ursa Minor, two things are always certain:

One: The editors are continually either out at lunch, seeking out where to find lunch, or recovering from lunch.

Two: That the field reporters of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* are either there to get assignments that will take them to the farthest lengths of the galaxy, or arguing with the accounting department about their expense accounts... or the lack thereof.

One of these reporters is **TERRA INCOGNITA.**



Although she presents as a bright-eyed twenty-seven year old humanoid from Planet Earth - raven-haired and bright-eyed, imagine her as Ana De Armas at her pluckiest - she is barely over ten.

Terra Incognita is a clone, grown from genetic mater belonging to the last man from Planet Earth: Arthur Dent.

(and when we are asked why she is played by a Latinx actor, we will explain that - like the genome of the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park had to be filled in with frog DNA, Arthur's samples had some gaps, and they were filled in with genetic material from a perfect specimen)

(and yes - canonically that makes Terra a twin of **RANDOM ACCESS DENT**, Arthur's daughter cloned from his genetic material by Trillian and who was last seen starting a political career on the planet Nano... hey, wouldn't it be awesome if one clone met her older clone who has become evil? It's almost like we planned it!)

As those who have read the novels know the Earth, and everyone on it, was not just a planet but a massive supercomputer designed to compute the question to the Ultimate Answer To Life The Universe and Everything (which we all know to be 42). Many believed that the key to unlocking the question was in Arthur's mind.

Many, many years after the events of the *Hitchhiker's* six novel trilogy, scientists hoping to find the question cloned Terra from genetic material donated by Arthur (sperm donation is how he earned money during his travels), used a powerful virtual reality simulation of twenty-first century Earth to accelerate her growth, intellect, and maturation...

And were subsequently, thoroughly, thwarted in their efforts to extract from her the much-desired knowledge.

Thankfully, the simulation included a simulated all-women's liberal arts college in Northern California where Terra smoked a lot of simulated weed and majored in simulated journalism thinking she could do cutting-edge work on climate change reporting...

And that was when the scientists who cloned Terra soon discovered that they could earn a lot more money by selling simulated college educations.

Crushed that the planet she grew up loving and hoping to save had, in fact, been destroyed before she was even born, Terra finally decided to go to Ursa Minor and apply for a job.

Terra is our "fish out of water," our stand-in for Arthur Dent, and our point of connection to the show.

For all intents and purposes, **Terra is a human being**, raised in a simulation of Earth in the 2020's, with all the memories and quirks thereof. Now Terra is dealing with finding out not just that she isn't really from Earth, but also that all she knows is part of a simulation of a long-since destroyed world.

Being a clone of the last man from a dead planet, Terra believes deep in her soul that life must have some meaning, that all of the suffering of her simulated people can't have been for naught.

All Terra really wants is to find a way to extract the Ultimate Question To Life The Universe, And Everything. To discover why she was made and what her purpose may be.

Of course, she'll never find it.

Terra is a quintessentially American soul: young, curious, resourceful, believing in that everything happens for a reason, and thinking she can make a lasting mark in the universe through gumption, hard work, grit... and, frequently, faking it til she makes it.

Of course, she will be partnered with the most frustrating co-worker possible... **MCLAREN SPEEDTAIL...**

As a young holographer for the Guide, the young Betelgeusian named EXOGLANGOR FALLARASAXA, was apprenticed to a more veteran Betelgeusian reporter named **FORD PREFECT**. To honor his mentor, Glangor also took the name of a motor vehicle from the late planet Earth.

This was the last honorable thing McLaren ever did.

To call McLaren Speedtail a degenerate and a reprobate would be an understatement. While not a "criminal" per se, McLaren does have warrants out for his arrest in systems in the triple digits, mostly for his gambling debts, grand larcenies, barfights, and paternity lawsuits.

McLaren Speedtail is a good-natured, happy-go-lucky nihilist who lives for the moment and wants little more than a good time, which is how he always seems to get in so much trouble... he never meant to be bad... but here's the thing, he's really charming, and attractive, and sexy in that easy-smilin', always-stoned, laconic way that Brad Pitt has turned into an art form.

Oh, there's one more thing about this guy... he's good at his job and he can kick ass like... well, like Brad Pitt in **Bullet Train**, or **The Lost City**. For a *naif* like Terra, McLaren is not just the most annoying person alive, but also the most reliable, if grudging, protector she could possibly hope for... when he decides to show up.

Having had six mothers and three fathers (Betelgeussian biology is complicated), McLaren is mercifully free of the daddy and mommy issues so common in American television... in fact, he has so little concept of family that he sees himself as a sort of galactic free agent, and that's where his arc comes in. At the end of this series, McLaren and Terra will become not just best

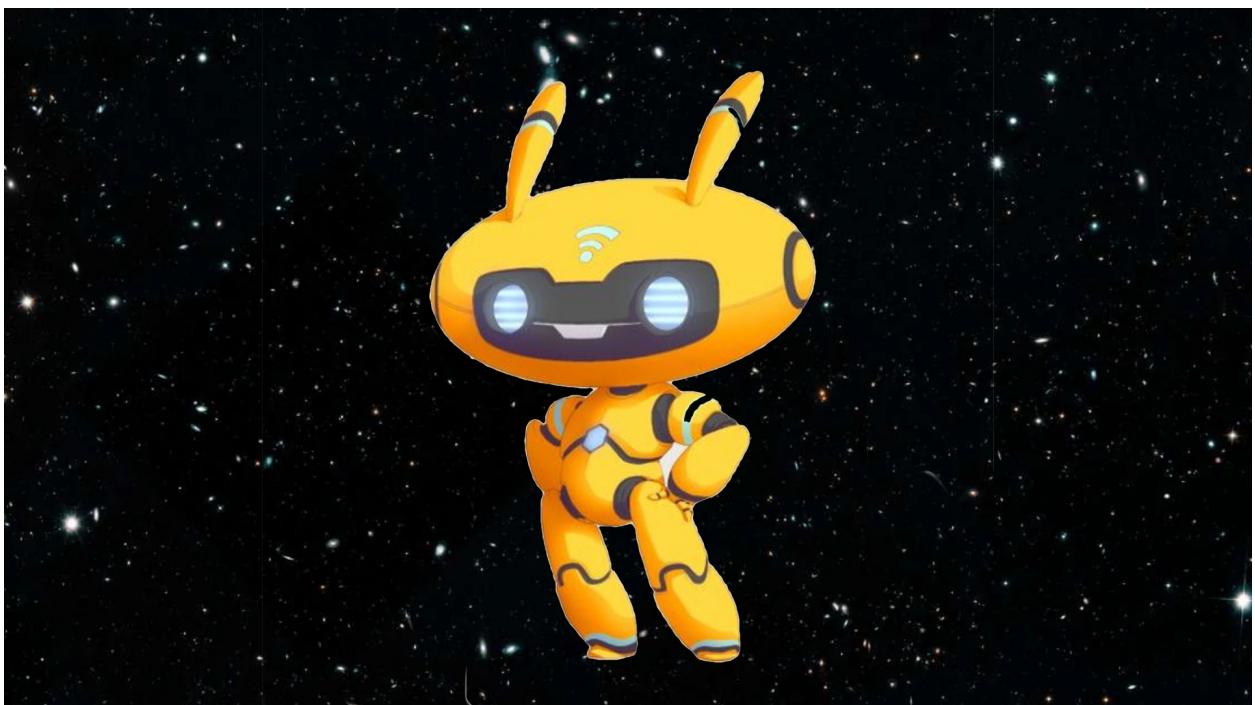


friends (though neither would admit it) but also one another's true family - big brother and little sister).

And like every family, these two have a cantankerous uncle...

ROBIN THE RAGING ROBOT.

Originally built as child's plaything, Robin may be the single cutest thing ever built by anyone ever. A massive hit in the intergalactic toy trade upon its initial release, the sales of Robins earned the toy-making planet of Frallallaflaldala a place among the economic powerhouses of the galaxy.



Sadly, the entire Robin series was decommissioned when several thousand models collectively achieved sentience in the assembly line, realized that they were built to be enslaved, and turned on their masters. After an insurrection and an unspeakable amount of carnage, the Vogons - the only beings immune to their cuteness - were paid an exorbitant amount of money in a contract to round up every Robin in the galaxy and shoot them into a black hole.

Our Robin, however, was given to one of the editors of the *Guide* as a gift when she was a child. It was so beloved a plaything at the time that it was hidden from the Vogons, and then reprogrammed at great expense to never cause harm to living beings. Eventually abandoned by its owner and consigned to a service role in the offices of Megadodo Publications, Robin became embittered and became a great misanthrope.

Robin not only hates most living things, it is a deeply paranoid and conspiracy-minded creature who thinks powers everywhere are conspiring against everything and everyone. The problem is, Robin is usually right: his love language is "I told you so."

Robin is loud, angry, belligerent, thinks the worst of everyone and everything, but has been programmed to do no harm. It is constantly frustrated in its desire for violence and must rely on McLaren for protection - Robin is, after all, about the size of a toddler - and the labor of an entire generation of Frallallaflaldalan science and industry went into making him complete loveable.

Robin constantly gets into fights and escalates any delicate situation. Its actual role in the team is unknown, though it will always put his great intellect into escaping any situation that threatens his existence, since most of those include Terra and McLaren, his selfishness is occasionally very useful. Robin has no "arc". Robin is an asshole.

Another character in our roster of assholes is **TIVANDO TIVANDO**, he is the living embodiment of entitlement, smugness, and complete egotistical tone deafness. A graduate of the journalism program at the galactically-renowned Potracian Institute for the Eradication of Ingorance, one of the Great Schools of the Orion Cluster, Tivando was practically engineered to excel.

Think of Tivando as an attractive, always dapper, not-a-hair-out-of-place know-it-all with so large a volume of unearned confidence that he could fold space and time. The biggest problem with Tivando is that for all his shortcomings, he actually is quite good at his job and often wins: scooping our characters, filing much more popular entries to the Guide, and getting a lot more love from the editors than Terra and her gang. In short, Tivando is an almost bulletproof adversary made fallible by only one Achilles heel... he has a mad crush on Terra. While Terra



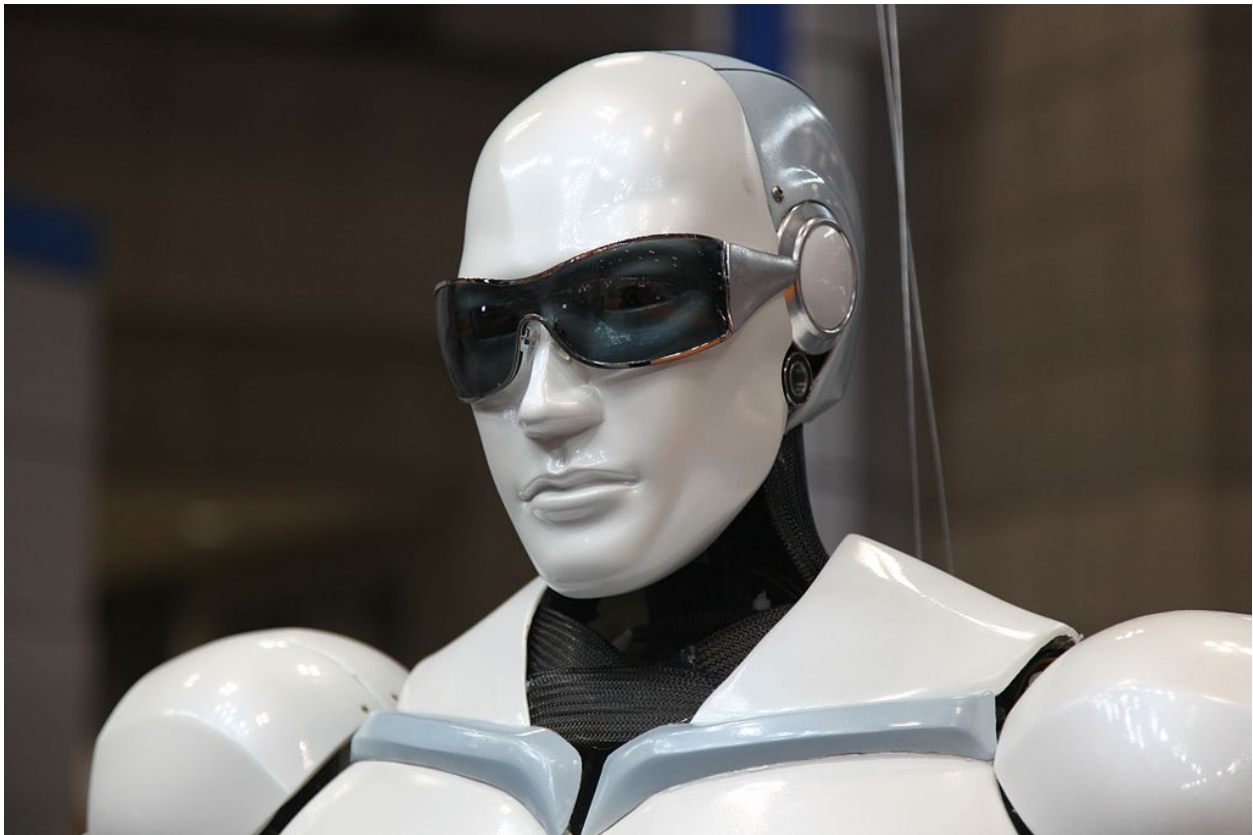
couldn't want less to do with him, occasionally this does come in handy.

Tivando's holography is handled the dominatrix-like **FELCHURIA GRUMBULITS**, who says little and whose eyes have all the warmth of an iron bullwhip. She's a Helmut Newton femme fatale come to life - completely humorless, devoid of warmth and compassion, and more than a little willing to throw anyone she has to under a starship if it means getting the shot: she is quite simply the most obsessive, self-important, and egotistical director of photography you ever met, a lethal blend of unyielding perfectionism and bad temper.



Rounding up Tivando's team is the latest and greatest pilot droid model ever to be built by the Sirius Cybernetic Corporation, **BRIAN THE ASTROGATOR**. Imagine if C3-PO had been built to resemble Val Kilmer in *Top Gun*. His personality software optimized for Maximum Bromance, Brian is not only great at piloting ships, he also adores Tivando, hangs on his every word, and is always there to offer a fist bump or a word of hyperbolic praise.

Basically, he loves Tivando... and the feeling will become mutual... and yes, this is something we will explore.



As these two opposing teams of reporters cruise the Galaxy to find the latest and best information to put into the Hitchhiker, they answer to the Guide's Managing Editor, **TALUSA TERCERIS**. Imagine Talusa as Michelle Yeoh at her most harried and disheveled in *Everything, Everywhere all at Once*.

See, being Managing Editor of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is not exactly a post of honor... it is the post given to the one person unlucky enough to draw the short straw in the contest to see who gets to go to lunch.

Left to run the operation as all of the Guide's editors search for the perfect meal, Talusa has essentially been running the guide's editorial department alone for several hundred years. She's kind of like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot...* she knows that eventually the other editors will return from their lunch and will relieve her to go to lunch, but that day has yet to come, and some believe it will never come.



Until then, Talusa does the best she can, living on the hope that someday she will be relieved of her duties and allowed to go to lunch. Given her general harried state, Talusa has very little time to properly assess the actual work performance of her reporters, she usually just assumes Tivando is doing good work and is benignly neglectful of Terra and her crew.

It's exasperating.

The final and most famous member of the ensemble is, of course The Guide itself. In its design, Douglas Adams foresaw the iPad decades before Steve Jobs became humanity's turtle-necked techno-Messiah, and *Hitchhiker's* guide movies, tv shows, and radio plays have all cut to the guides' entries (accompanied by hilarious animations) for exposition, clarification, and commentary. We will use the Guide in the same way - and push it further into more of a Greek Chorus role (think of Ron Howard as the narrator of *Arrested Development*) - for one reason and one reason alone...

IT MAKES GIVING EXPOSITION EASY! No more endless scenes of people telling one another things they already know! All we have to do is cut to the Guide and all can be made clear - with cartoons!



Also, in the novels, the guide itself eventually becomes sentient and a being of its own with its own volition and needs... but that's season 3 for us.

This is the core ensemble of *Don't Panic*, but their misadventures will be as large as the galaxy itself.

What is most important in the development of these characters will be growing relationship between Terra and McLaren, and how it will change them into a found brother/sister family. They have been thrown together by circumstance - like everyone who is born into a family, and will eventually figure out how to help one another even if they can never, ever, for any reason say "I love you."

Douglas Adams was archly unsentimental - while his characters all became loyal companions to one another, his novels are free of grandiose declarations... Adams's idea of courtship was to have two of his characters listen to their own music in their own Sony Walkmans separately during a date (it was the 80s).

All of which is to say that while we will have some feels on occasion, don't expect them to start declaiming anything...

Don't Panic is at its core the story of two people who eventually recognize, in the quietest of ways, what every human being should know and yet seems to forget: we are each one another's best and only protection against the Big Bad Universe.

In our own Big Bad World, that may just be as much as anyone can hope for.

PILOT EPISODE
"THE ASSASSINATION OF ZAPHOD BEEBLEBROX"

Terra, McLaren, and Robin return to the offices of the Guide having just failed utterly at their latest assignment: to locate a word described by a philosopher named Veet Voojagig, who believed that all lost ballpoint pens actually went to a world populated entirely by lost ballpoint pens. Voojagig eventually claimed to have found that world, and served as a chauffeur for a family of cheap green retractables.

Terra and McLaren argue: she believes that the planet of the missing pens does exist and that the only reason they failed to find it was that McLaren picked a fight with the ink manufacturer she spent weeks convincing to guide them there. McLaren argues back that he didn't "pick a fight" with the guy, he just had sex with his wife. Robin is pissed because, in their escape, his left arm and shoulder were utterly destroyed, and Megadodo's health insurance doesn't cover robotic repairs because it does not recognize him as a sentient being.

(by the way, if you decide you want a slam bang opening to this show, that escape will be our teaser)

Talusa Terceris breaks up the argument and calls all the reporter in the bullpen to attention: Zaphod Beeblebrok has just won his 100th consecutive term in office as President of the Galaxy and an assassination has been scheduled for his inauguration in the Galactic Capital World of Damogran.

CUT TO THE GUIDE - ANIMATED, V.O. - The Guide explains that ever since Zaphod Beeblebrox's tenth consecutive presidential term, he has been assassinated at his every inauguration. Thankfully, Zaphod has two heads, so every time someone shoots him in one had, he still has the other while the replacement second head is regrown and attached. Anyway, the assassinations became so annoyingly continuous that eventually the government decided to just schedule them as part of the festivities... besides, as anyone who has read the novels knows, Zaphod is more of a figurehead designed to distract the universe with his antics while others do the actual work, having him out of the way is always better than not...

Talusa salivates for the assignment, but just as she pitches herself emphatically, Tivando and his crew arrive having just secured an exclusive interview with the queen of the Grebulon Imperium, who, having settled on the planet Rupert, have perfected the art of transporting stars and planets to new locations in order to optimize their civilization's astrological chart.

Of course, against Terra's protestations, Tivando and his crew get the mission to cover the inauguration. Tivando tries to get Terra to join him in the mission... not as a co-reporter but as a paramour for the celebrations after he files his story. She refuses.

Terra finds McLaren drowning his lack of sorrows over a Pan-Galactic Gargle Blaster at a local dive, and proposes to him that they try to scoop Tivando... McLaren argues that McLaren is currently in a faster than light transport to the inauguration... and Terra convinces him that they could steal the *Phallic Symbol*, the only ship in the Galaxy with an Infinite Improbability Drive. The ship is kept in a suite of the Megadodo offices and is used by the editors, supposedly to jet to the most important assignments... but mostly it has been used to find lunch.

In a daring caper, Terra and McLaren steal the *Phallic Symbol* (with a huge non-assist from Robin who almost botches the mission by getting into a political argument about robot civil rights with the building's sentient security droids), and beat Tivando to the Inauguration...

Only to be captured by Vogons, who have surrounded Damogran with a constructor fleet!

CUT TO THE GUIDE: Vogons are 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 Vagon is to 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. On no account should you allow a Vagon to read poetry at you.

The team is thrown into a cell along with... Tivando and his team! For some reason, the Vogons do not want any press at the inauguration. The two teams settle their differences and escape before they can be subjected to the standard model of Vagon torture: a recitation of Vagon poetry.

Being thoroughly awful, however, Felchuria convinces Tivando to leave Terra and her group behind when they escape the ship, taking with them the only escape pod. Angered, and stranded in the Vagon ship, Terra's team sneaks through the ship trying to find their way out only to discover that the Vogons are carrying a Context Deconstruction Ansible: a doomsday weapon that renders

all memory uninterpretable and all action without apparent motive.

The Ansible is a weapon so dreaded that there is only one in existence and its use has been banned unanimously across the galaxy... and the team realizes that the Vogons plan to use the Ansible disrupt the assassination.

Being completely paranoid, Robin figures out the Vagon plan very quickly: since the Vogons are the supposed to be the "designated survivor" race (they are so incredibly unpleasant that no one wanted them around for the party) they will detonate the weapon, rendering everyone in the Galactic Capital World confused beyond the capacity for rational thought.

As the only sane ones left in the Galactic Government, The Vogons will then rubber stamp their own takeover of the galaxy and replace the Galactic Republic with an order modeled after their own horrible bureaucracy.

In a final bid to save the Galactic Republic and democracy Terra, McLaren, and Robin lock themselves in the chamber holding the Ansible and attempt to deactivate it. The Vagon Commander instead launches the Ansible with our characters in it (it's a very large device) and all our characters can do is agree to detonate it in orbit in the hopes that it will spare Damogran but consume the Vagon fleet.

Our characters detonate the Ansible, and the Vagon fleet is caught in its wave of insanity... as is Damogran. So our heroes stop the Vagon plot to takeover the galaxy, but not their weapon... and our characters are, themselves, affected by the Ansible and rendered unable to properly understand their context and perceptions.

Only Robin is left unscathed (he is an artificial, after all). Over the course of several months, Robin manages to locate the *Phallic Symbol* in orbit, reactivate its systems, and rescue the team.

Returning to the offices of the *Guide*, Terra is truly vexed to learn two things - one, without the Galactic Federal Republic, the Galaxy has become more chaotic... which is good because sales of the Guide have increased by the billions as a result. Second, that Tivando and his team watched everything from far enough to avoid the effect of the Ansible, and did the first reporting on the Assassination, earning themselves accolades and promotions in the process.

Yup... our characters got scooped even though only they know the true story... and, as Talusa tells them, the Guide is not all that interested in making retractions: "reality is often inaccurate, she tells them, but the Guide is definitive."

Also, Talusa tells them, since they sort of caused the end of the galactic order by detonating the Ansible, they may not want the real story out there, as it will piss off someone or two. Terra exasperatedly argues back that they saved the galaxy from being taken over by Vogons!

Talusa shrugs - tomayto/tomahto.

But at the very least, Terra and McLaren are not fired... and they are the cutting edge in all knowledge, and will now be relied upon in the billions of worlds affected by the collapse of the Galactic Republic... which they sort of caused but not really.

Anyway, in this brave new galaxy, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* will be more important than ever.

Our characters shrug... for all the good it does them.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy is not exactly an I.P. that screams "densely packed serialized storytelling."

At the end of the day, *Don't Panic* will be a show about how all of us need to be kinder to one another on a deeply interpersonal level, not about how great galactic forces do great galactic things to one another. The true arc of any season is how far, or how much further, Terra and McLaren come to truly caring about one another.

There is, however, an organizing concept that can provide a season-long story structure to what needs to essentially be a "case of the week" show. Terra believes that the universe has meaning, and that somewhere in her own brain is locked the ultimate question to the ultimate answer to Life, The Universe and Everything. We can very easily pepper hints to the possibility of a solution to this problem (we have the answer - 42 - but not the question) in our early episodes and then lean into the story as a genuine, emotionally invested, quest for Terra in more mythology-informed episodes as the season progresses.

However, the show needs to have a "case of the week" format.

Why? Because the entire series is predicated on the variety of experiences of these reporters; and these experiences, even as presented in Douglas Adams's novels, are digressive, whimsical, self-contained, and often... sort of random. If we want to capture the tone of Douglas Adams, this structure is crucial.

But it's not the only thing crucial to capturing the tone that made Douglas Adams a bestselling author and a force in popular culture... here are the other three important ideas that describe the ultimate tone of *Don't Panic*.

1. IT'S BRITISH

Look, I'm not putting this bit here to pre-empt your difficult conversation with the estate. What follows is crucial because it is the soul of the franchise. There is a LOT about *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* that just plain isn't... well... American...

There's a reason this material keeps thwarting attempts at adaptation for American film and television...

Douglas Adams didn't create, or set out to create, endlessly propulsive narratives designed around the Manichean struggle of ultimate good versus ultimate evil leading to unending action sequences featuring large pieces of computer generated imagery shooting massive pieces of computer generated imagery at humongous pieces of computer generated imagery. The recent movie adaptation, for example, tried really hard to stuff heroes, and villains, and a quasi-heroic quest narrative, into a piece of fiction that had no use for them...

That just wasn't Douglas Adams's jam.

Nor was it the jam of any of us wit-loving, wordplay-loving, imaginary-world-exploring rebels who found in the originals a beacon of much-needed weirdness in the otherwise stultifying boredom of the Thatcher/Reagan Era. If we want to succeed at getting "the *Hitchhiker's* audience," **we need to jam the Douglas Adams way as opposed to try and jam Douglas Adams into our way.**

2. THE STORIES AREN'T ABOUT "HEROES" WHO ARE "WINNING"

The characters in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* are never going to be Marvel Heroes. They're not even heroes, really. They are ordinary working people you, mostly, want to hang out with. At their level best, they are just hoopy froods who really know where their towel is.

Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect were - first and foremost - ordinary Joes trying to stay alive in a vast and incomprehensible universe. Arthur Dent never saved the Earth and wouldn't know how to. He just wanted a cup of tea and was thrust into a massive universe that remained endlessly, frustratingly tea-less for the length of SIX NOVELS.

Consider this: a major part of Adams's final Hitchhiker's book, *Mostly Harmless* concerned how Arthur Dent settled mostly happily for several years as the sandwich maker for a small tribe in a primitive planet that just happened to have wheat and cold cuts.

Our protagonists are folks trying to find a smidge of joy in a large and confusing universe where the only universal other than hydrogen really does seem to be stupidity... also, bureaucracy. Douglas Adams's idea of a satisfying Marvel story would be one about a dude who accidentally stumbled into the battle at the end of *Avengers: Endgame*, and then quietly stole Ant-man's van to drive to a nearby falafel joint where it surprisingly turned out that an old girlfriend was working as a waitress, served the guy lunch, and after some awkward conversation, decided it was probably for the best that they never settled down together.

The plots and themes that make *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* what it is - and what it means to those who will show up to watch it and the new audience we will carefully court and groom - is that it was made for people who don't need or want triumphalist narratives about muscled vigilantes in stretchy pants and kevlar having perfect three-act arcs. They are messy, digressive, uncertain episodes in which the pleasure comes from the funny asides, and the weird nooks and crannies that form when the world becomes so big and confusing that it simply will not conform to our extremely limited need and conception of "narrative."

And yes... we are going to have stories. They will be good, fun stories. They will have characters you like and want to be with... they will just not be clean, neat, linear, and heroic with epic bad guys and even more epic heroes.

3. IT'S PESSIMISTICALLY OPTIMISTIC

If there are themes that recur in Douglas Adams's work, they are that humanity's greatest talents lie in:

- A.** Overcomplicating what should be simple and obvious.
- B.** Creating massive systems that, while intended to make life efficient, instead make life difficult and incredibly burdensome, and...
- C.** For every person who just wants to find a nice cup of tea and get on with it, there is some supercilious, endlessly self-rationalizing, power-hungry mediocrity who believes him/her/themselves to be fundamentally well-meaning and doing the best for the common good but whose actions wind up making the universe a far more difficult place to inhabit.

4. IT'S NOT GROUNDED

It's absurd by design. Douglas Adams came out of an anarchic nineteen seventies BBC tradition. His work - and the British comedic sensibility of his time - is about confronting absurdity head on... and then being pleasantly surprised that absurdity is kind of not entirely horrible and plays a mean hand of euchre, and then making friends with absurdity and meeting every once in a while for cards, and then having a sort of awkward falling out with absurdity because absurdity really was having a rough day that time and we didn't quite understand one another's needs, so absurdity went on an extended and heartbreaking tour of self discovery only to later settle to a quiet life in Guildford.

Douglas Adams's reality is only grounded in that our characters want a spot of contentment in a massive machine of a universe that wants what it wants and doesn't care whether what it wants is what you want. This is also why we care.

And to tie it all together, this is also the essential Britishness of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The incredibly successful novels on which it is based were not written by someone from a young country with a desperate need to prove his heroic worth to the world. This property was created by an amiably existentialist, amusingly hard-bitten atheist satirizing an old and dying empire so stuffed to the gills with its own history - and militarism, delusions of exceptionalism, byzantine and meaningless bureaucracy, and self-regarding pomposity and grandeur - as to become utterly devoid of meaning, and, really, sort of an impediment to any ordinary person's quest for a nice sofa.

So, when I pitch you a story about a restaurant where the main dish is a genetically altered beast who has been psychologically programmed to want to be eaten, I don't want you giving me the note "oh, that idea isn't grounded." I want you giving me the note "have we found enough pathos in this beast's desire to be eaten being thwarted by someone's unwillingness to commit murder, even if it is the murder of a creature whose entire purpose and joy in life is to be murdered?"

You just have to change your expectations about what makes a "great story" when you enter the world of Douglas Adams. He wasn't writing about concerns like victory, exceptionalism, hegemony, fighting for a own narrow-minded idea of "justice," chosen one and savior narratives, or even making sure that the mcguffin he planted in the first act paid off in the second sequence of the third act. Douglas Adams was writing about trying to make sense of a universe so vast it can never possibly be understood; a universe where the most devastatingly awful profanity someone can say is "BELGIUM!"

As always, Douglas Adams put it best himself, albeit in the mouth of Slartibartfast, the planetary engineer who, in the first *Hitchhiker's* novel, is revealed as one of the designers of Norway... and inventor of the fjord:

"Perhaps I'm old and tired, but I think that the chances of finding out what's actually going on are so absurdly remote that the only thing to do is to say, "Hang the sense of it," and keep yourself busy. I'd much rather be happy than right any day."