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Don't panic -- 'Hitchhiker's' adaptation is not too shabby

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There have been numerous projects associated with Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy saga. These range from comic book adaptations to a BBC radio show to a television mini-series. The latest of these is the new feature-length film.

The movie opens with the ever-calm voice of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Stephen Fry) as narrator, as if the audience is merely consulting the book on the topic of earthman Arthur Dent (Martin Freeman). Arthur is an everyday guy, just minding his own business. However, to make way for a new bypass, his home must be demolished — something he's not going to take lying down ... or is he?

Meanwhile, his friend Ford Prefect (Mos Def) turns out to be an out-of-this-world sort, and while the Earth itself must make way for an inter-galactic bypass, Ford and Arthur hitchhike their way off the planet and into a rather amusing adventure through space.

This adventure takes the pair first to a Vogon ship. The Vogons are not particularly friendly, nor do they appreciate hitchhikers, especially while on-the-job and having just demolished Earth.



Not even Sam Rockwell, Zooey Deschanel or a robot can explain why Mos Def has a towel on his shoulders in Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

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After a rather unfortunate Vogon encounter, they next find themselves existing momentarily as sofas. This improbable condition is quickly fixed, and the rest of the main characters are introduced. First there's Trillian (Zooey Deschanel), who, ironically enough, had once been hit on by Arthur Dent, though she found herself someone far more exciting: the galaxy's current president, Zaphod Beeblebrox (Sam Rockwell). Then there's the paranoid and maniacally depressed robot Marvin (voiced by Alan Rickman).

Having made off with the Heart of Gold, the band must elude those who would have the ship returned, while encountering various and amusing effects each time the "infinite improbability drive" is engaged (for example, it is rather improbable that your ship will turn into a giant rubber duckie or cross vast amounts of space without going through a straight path. Meanwhile, Arthur contends with the difficulties of being thrust into a wholly new existence wherein he is unable to even find a good cup of tea.

As the adventure unfolds, several secrets are revealed, such as the purpose of mice on Earth, and the ultimate answer to life, the universe and everything — though Deep Thought reveals a startling truth about the Earth itself.

This adventure is unfortunately lacking in characterization and detail. Other than surface stuff, there isn't a lot of depth to any of the characters, though there is a bit of implied background given. If one is looking for more entertainment than deep characterization, this will not be a problem. Entries from *The Hitchhiker's Guide* also provide brief narratives to fill the audience in on certain things or to bridge scenes.

The film opens with a musical number featuring the dolphins of Earth in their final performance as they say "So long, and thanks for all the fish!" The various special effects and costumes work well with this film — showcasing the various aliens from all over the galaxy, some particularly ugly and bizarre.

Recognizing prior Hitchhiker projects, there are several notable cameos. In one scene, there is a cameo of the earlier version of Marvin the robot. Another scene has Simon Jones making an appearance. Douglas Adams is even worked in somehow.

As it's been a number of years since this reviewer has read the original novel, the characters all come across well by their respective actors — especially Rockwell as Zaphod. That Ford is black in the film might cause some concern, though that should have no bearing on one's enjoyment of this film.

As a whole, the film seems to carry the overall tone of the book it is based on, though there are a number of noticeable discrepancies. For those looking for an absolutely "faithful" translation, there will be plenty to dislike about the film. Complaints aside, this is a fun couple-hour adventure through space, with a fair amount of humor, interesting aliens, action and of course, highly-entertaining entries from *The Hitchhiker's Guide* itself.

It doesn't seem very likely that this space adventure will hold up to *That Other Space Movie* coming in a few weeks — particularly in popularity and anticipation — but in and of itself, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is worth the price of admission. Aside from the fact of their existence, this reviewer is not familiar with the prior adaptations of the novel — though it is likely that this film will firmly hold its own as one version of the story that will be known as the story.

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