

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams

Excerpt 1 (pages 29-30)

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy *has a few things to say on the subject of towels.*

A towel, it says, is about the most massively useful thing an interstellar hitchhiker can have. Partly it has great practical value—you can wrap it around you for warmth as you bound across the cold moons of Jaglan Beta; you can lie on it on the brilliant marble-sanded beaches of Santraginus V, inhaling the heady sea vapors; you can sleep under it beneath the stars which shine so redly on the desert world of Kakrafoon; use it to sail a mini-raft down the slow heavy river Moth; wet it for use in hand-to-hand combat; wrap it round your head to ward off noxious fumes or avoid the gaze of the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal (a mindbogglingly stupid animal, it assumes that if you can't see it, it can't see you—daft as a brush, but very ravenous); you can wave your towel in emergencies as a distress signal; and of course dry yourself off with it if it still seems to be clean enough.

More importantly, a towel has immense psychological value. For some reason, if a strag (strag: non-hitchhiker) discovers that a hitchhiker has his towel with him, he will automatically assume that he is also in possession of a toothbrush, face flannel, soap, tin of biscuits, flask, compass, map, ball of string, gnat spray, wet-weather gear, space suit, etc., etc. Furthermore, the strag will then happily lend the hitchhiker any of these or a dozen other items that the hitchhiker might accidentally have 'lost.' What the strag will think is that any man who can hitch the length and breadth of the galaxy, rough it, slum it, struggle against terrible odds, win through, and still know where his towel is is clearly a man to be reckoned with.

Excerpt 2 (pages 55-56)

[*squalid—dirty, unpleasant]

Ford and Arthur stared around them.

'Well, what do you think?' said Ford

'It's a bit squalid, isn't it?'

Ford frowned at the grubby mattresses, unwashed cups and unidentifiable bits of smelly alien underwear that lay around the cramped cabin.

'Well, this is a working ship, you see,' said Ford. 'These are the Dentrassi sleeping quarters.'

'I thought you said they were called Vogons or something.'

'Yes,' said Ford, 'the Vogons run the ship, the Dentrassis are the cooks, they let us on board.'

'I'm confused,' said Arthur.

'Here, have a look at this,' said Ford. He sat down on one of the mattresses and rummaged about in his satchel. Arthur prodded the mattress nervously and then sat on it himself: in fact he had very little to be nervous about, because all mattresses grown in the swamps of Squornshellous Zeta are very thoroughly killed and dried before being put to service. Very few have ever come to life again.

Ford handed the book to Arthur.

'What is it?' asked Arthur.

'*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It's a sort of electronic book. It tells you everything you need to know about anything. That's its job.'

Arthur turned it over nervously in his hands.

'I like the cover,' he said. '*Don't Panic*. It's the first helpful or intelligible thing anybody's said to me all day.'

'I'll show you how it works,' said Ford. He snatched it from Arthur, who was still holding it as if it was a two-week-dead lark, and pulled it out of its cover.

'You press this button here, you see, and the screen lights up giving you the index.'

A screen, about three inches by four, lit up and characters began to flicker across the surface.

'You want to know about Vogons, so I enter that name so.' His fingers tapped some more keys. 'And there we are.'

The words *Vogon Constructor Fleets* flared in green across the screen.

Ford pressed a large red button at the bottom of the screen and words began to undulate across it. At the same time, the book began to speak the entry as well in a still, quiet measured voice. This is what the book said.

'Vogon Constructor Fleets. Here is what to do if you want to get a lift from a Vogon: forget it. They 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 Vogon 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 allow a Vogon to read poetry at you.'

Excerpt 3 (pages 68-69)

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 members died of internal hemorrhaging, and the President of the Mid-Galactic Arts Nobbling Council survived by gnawing one of his own legs off. Grunthos is 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 Favorite Bathtime Gurgles* when his own major intestine, in a desperate attempt to save life and civilization, leapt straight up through his neck and throttled his brain.

The very worst poetry of all perished along with its creator Paula Nancy Millstone Jennings of Greenbridge, Essex, England in the destruction of the planet Earth.

Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz smiled very slowly. This was done not so much for effect as because he was trying to remember the sequence of muscle movements. He had had a terribly therapeutic yell at his prisoners and was now feeling quite relaxed and ready for a little callousness.

The prisoners sat in Poetry Appreciation chairs—strapped in. Vogons suffered no illusions as to the regard their words were generally held in. Their early attempts at compositions had been part of a bludgeoning [hitting somebody with a short heavy weapon] insistence that they be accepted as a properly evolved and cultured race, but now the only thing that kept them going was their sheer bloodymindedness.

The sweat stood out on Ford Prefect's brow, and slid round the electrodes strapped to his temples. These were attached to a battery of electronic equipment—imagery intensifiers, rhythmic modulators, alliterative residulators and simile dumpers—all designed to heighten the experience of the poem and make sure that not a single nuance [slight difference of meaning] of the poet's thought was lost.

Arthur Dent sat and quivered. He had no idea what he was in for, but he knew that he hadn't liked anything that had happened so far and didn't think things were likely to change.

The Vogon began to read—a fetid [having a rotten or offensive smell] little passage of his own devising.

'*O freddled gruntbuggly . . .*' he began. Spasms racked Ford's body—this was worse than even he'd been prepared for.

Excerpt 4 (page 97)

'Listen,' said Ford, who was still engrossed in the sales brochure, 'they make a big thing of the ship's cybernetics. *A new generation of Sirius Cybernetics Corporation robots and computers, with the new GPP feature.*'

'GPP feature?' said Arthur. 'What's that?'

'Oh, it says *Genuine People Personalities.*'

'Oh,' said Arthur, 'sounds ghastly.'

A voice behind them said, 'It is.' The voice was low and hopeless and accompanied by a slight clanking sound. They spun around and saw an abject [miserable] steel man standing hunched in the doorway.

'What?' they said.

'Ghastly,' continued Marvin, 'it all is. Absolutely ghastly. Just don't even talk about it. Look at this door,' he said stepping through it. The irony circuits cut in to his voice modulator as he mimicked the style of the sales brochure. '*All the doors in this spaceship have a cheerful and sunny disposition. It is their pleasure to open for you, and their satisfaction to close again with the knowledge of a job well done.*'

As the door closed behind them it became apparent that it did indeed have a satisfied sigh-like quality to it . . . Marvin regarded it with cold loathing whilst his logic circuits chattered with disgust and tinkered with the concept of directing physical violence against it. Further circuits cut in saying, 'Why bother? What's the point? Nothing is worth getting involved in.' Further circuits amused themselves by analyzing the molecular components of the door, and of the humanoid's brain cells. For a quick encore they measured the level of hydrogen emissions in the surrounding cubic parsec of space and then shut down again in boredom. A spasm of despair shook the robot's body as he turned.

'Come on,' he droned, 'I've been ordered to take you down to the bridge. Here I am, brain the size of a planet and they ask me to take you down to the bridge. Call that job satisfaction? 'Cos I don't.'

Excerpt 5 (page 139)

'Are we taking this robot with us?' said Ford, looking with distaste at Marvin, who was standing in an awkward hunched posture in the corner under a small palm tree.

Zaphod glanced away from the mirror screens which presented a panoramic view of the blighted [ruined] landscape on which the *Heart of Gold* had now landed.

'Oh, the Paranoid Android,' he said, "Yeah, we'll take him.'

'But what are you supposed to do with a manically depressed robot?'

'You think you've got problems,' said Marvin as if he was addressing a newly occupied coffin, 'what are you supposed to do if you *are* a manically depressed robot? No, don't bother to answer that, I'm fifty thousand times more intelligent than you and even I don't know the answer. It gives me a headache just trying to think down to your level.'

Excerpt 6 (160-161)

It is an important and popular fact that things are not always what they seem. For instance, on the planet Earth, man had always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins because he had achieved so much—the wheel, New York, was, and so on—whilst all the dolphins had ever done was muck about in the water having a good time. But conversely, the dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man—for precisely the same reasons.

Curiously enough, the dolphins had long known of the impending destruction of the planet Earth and had made many attempts to alert mankind to the danger; but most of their communications were misinterpreted as amusing attempts to punch footballs or whistle for tidbits, so they eventually gave up and left the Earth by their own means shortly before the Vogons arrived.

The last ever dolphin message was misinterpreted as a surprisingly sophisticated attempt to do a double-backwards-somersault through a hoop whilst whistling the 'Star-Spangled Banner', but in fact the message was this: *So long, and thanks for all the fish.*

In fact there was only one species on the planet more intelligent than dolphins, and they spent a lot of their time in behavioral-research laboratories running round inside wheels and conducting frighteningly elegant and subtle experiments on man. The fact that once again man completely misinterpreted this relationship was entirely according to these creatures' plans.

This is a Class Set. Write your answers on loose-leaf paper.

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- 1) Excerpt 1 has two main paragraphs that focus on the subject of towels.
 - a. In your own words, what is the main idea of Paragraph 1? (Your answer should be a complete sentence.)
 - b. In your own words, what is the main idea of Paragraph 2? (Your answer should be a complete sentence.)
- 2) List two transitional phrases used in Paragraph 2 of Excerpt 1.
- 3) What is an amusing detail included in Excerpt 1? Why is it funny?
- 4) After reading Excerpt 2, what strikes you as funny? Why?
 - a. Example 1. State the detail that was funny. Then explain what you found humorous about that detail.
 - b. Example 2. State the detail that was funny. Then explain what you found humorous about that detail.
- 5) After reading Excerpt 3, what strikes you as funny? Why?
 - a. Example 1. State the detail that was funny. Then explain what you found humorous about that detail.
 - b. Example 2. State the detail that was funny. Then explain what you found humorous about that detail.
- 6) After reading Excerpt 4, what is ironic about the robot? (Consider what you expect from a robot. Then contrast that with what the robot is actually like.)
- 7) After reading Excerpt 5, select **two** brief phrases that have a funny combination of words.
- 8) Explain the irony in Excerpt 6.