

# **Life, the Universe and Everything Study Guide**

**Life, the Universe and Everything by Douglas Adams**

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# Plot Summary

"Life, the Universe, and Everything" is a humorous science fiction novel that tells the story of the accidental space traveler Arthur Dent, an Englishman who escapes the destruction of the Earth and ultimately saves the universe from complete destruction. The book is the third in the series of "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" books.

As the book opens, Arthur Dent is living in a cave on prehistoric Earth having been sent back in time at the end of the previous book in the series. He lives alone and is almost crazy when his former traveling companion, Ford Prefect, who has been living on another part of the planet, appears suddenly. The two of them are whisked through time and space to a future Earth, where they suddenly materialize on a velvet paisley couch in the middle of a cricket match in England just days before the Earth is to be destroyed. The match is interrupted when a spaceship full of white-clad robots arrives, steals the cricket trophy that has just been won by England, and begins killing everyone.

A figure named Slartibartfast, who commands a spaceship that resembles an Italian bistro, rescues Arthur and Ford. A strange form of mathematics based on the complex science of eating at a restaurant and dividing the bill, powers the spaceship. Arthur and Ford reluctantly join in Slartibartfast's mission to stop the killer robots from freeing the imprisoned planet of Krikkit, whose inhabitants have been frozen in time as punishment for their campaign to destroy the entire universe. The robots have been programmed to scour the universe for the various parts of a certain key, which will unlock the time warp in which Krikkit has been enveloped.

After attending a cocktail party that has been going on for centuries, Arthur, Ford and Slartibartfast team up with Zaphod Beeblebrox, a vain two-headed alien with a powerful spacecraft, and his sometimes girlfriend, Trillian, to trace the robots back to a giant supercomputer which has manipulated the people of Krikkit into their murderous campaign and which has built a small round bomb that will allow Krikkit to cause every star in the universe to explode. Trillian is able to convince the people of Krikkit not to destroy the universe, however Arthur Dent very nearly sets off the bomb, mistaking it for a cricket ball. He realizes his error just in time to stop it from going off.

Interspersed throughout the books are short, humorous episodes involving bizarre creatures and unlikely locations as well as passages from the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," an electronic book that guides casual travelers through the universe.

# Chapters 1-3

## Chapters 1-3 Summary

Chapter 1 opens with Arthur Dent waking up in his prehistoric cave on Earth, screaming in horror as he does every morning as soon as he remembers where he is. Arthur is lost in time, having ended up on the Earth in what would be the town of Islington, England two million years later. He had been through a series of adventures across time and space and had been stranded in his present location along with his traveling companion Ford Prefect, five years earlier. After a year, Ford had gone off to live on another part of the planet. In the four years since, Arthur has been practically alone except for one bizarre occurrence two years before when a spaceship lands and its pilot emerges and says, "You're a jerk, Dent." (p. 2).

The alien pilot is named Wowbagger, the Infinitely Prolonged. He is an immortal being who has become bored with his immortality and has decided his mission in life is to insult every living creature in the universe in alphabetical order. He has built a spaceship with a complex computer able to keep track of everything. After insulting Arthur, he returns to his ship and speeds off to his next victim. Back on Earth, Arthur sits brooding in his damp cave and makes a rabbit-skin pouch to keep things in.

Chapter 2 returns to Arthur shortly after waking up. He is in a surprisingly good mood because he has just decided to go mad, this seeming like an agreeable thing to do. He takes a rabbit bone left over from his breakfast and sticks it in his beard for effect, then announces out loud, "I will go mad!" (p. 9).

He is surprised to hear an answer to his announcement from Ford Prefect, who has suddenly returned. Ford agrees that going mad is an excellent idea and that he himself went mad for a while, imagining he was a lemon. He also tried to learn to fly.

Here Ford quotes from the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," an extensive book that offers advice and information to galactic travelers. The "knack" to flying, the Guide says, "lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss." Ford's scraped up knees and elbows demonstrate that he has not been successful in learning to fly.

Ford pulls out a small device with a dim glowing light. It is a "Sub-Etha Sens-O-Matic," a kind of monitor device that tells him there is a disturbance in the flow of time and space nearby. Suddenly a velvet paisley sofa appears in a field nearby and goes bouncing off. Ford yells for Arhutr to follow him quickly to catch the sofa which has been washed up by an eddy in the space-time continuum. Arthur eagerly runs after the sofa.

The sofa darts and weaves around, but they finally pounce on it and are instantly falling through apparent nothingness. They come to rest in the middle of the field of Lord's Cricket Ground in London in the 1980s, in the middle of a Cricket match between England and Australia.



Chapter 3 opens with Arthur and Ford throwing themselves facedown on the turf of the cricket ground, unsure where they are. A policeman arrives and asks if they are responsible for the couch in the middle of the field that has interrupted the game. Arthur and Ford begin to explain that they have just arrived from two million years in the past and Ford tells the officer he is actually from Betelgeuse. The officer, not wanting to hear any more, escorts them off the field to the refreshment area where they get some tea.

Arthur is delighted that he seems to have returned to England in the present day. He is comforted by the familiar surroundings and the cup of hot tea he is sipping. Then Ford brings him out of his good mood by showing him a newspaper that gives the date. The Earth is going to be destroyed in two days, they realize, having lived through the event before.

Ford begins to act stranger than usual, squinting and peering around out of the corner of his eyes. He tells Arthur he thinks there is an "SEP" nearby. An "SEP" he explains is a "Somebody Else's Problem," which confuses Arthur, who sees nothing. Out of nowhere, however, a shimmering figure approaches Arthur and speaks to him, offering him congratulations that his home team appears to have just won the cricket match. The figure is a man named Slartibartfast, and Ford greets him by name, asking if that is his ship nearby. Arthur still sees nothing.

Slartibartfast tells the two of them to meet him at his ship in two minutes. Meanwhile, he marches intently toward the victory ceremony on the field. The English cricket team is about to be presented with the "Ashes," a trophy that contains the ashes of a burnt cricket stump which was burned in Australia to signify a victory over the English many years before. As the ashes are about to be presented, a large white spaceship suddenly appears overhead and eleven white robots emerge, looking like robotic cricket players. They carry weapons that look like cricket bats and throw bombs that look like cricket balls. They take the trophy containing the ashes and attack the bystanders on the field before flying off. Slartibartfast runs toward his ship, calling to Arthur and Ford that the robots have taken the ashes.

The three of them arrive at Slartibartfast's ship, which, despite being plainly visible to them, appears to be invisible to anyone else. It is masked by a Somebody Else's Problem field, it is explained, which is a simple device that exploits the natural habit of people to ignore things they do not want to see or cannot explain. The ship is odd looking, for while it has fins and rockets like a spaceship, it also looks remarkably like an Italian bistro. Slartibartfast hurries them inside, saying that they must try to save the universe.

Meanwhile another spaceship lands on the cricket field and Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged gets out, bends over a dying spectator named Arthur Deodat, and insults him.

## Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The book opens with the main character, Arthur Dent, alone on prehistoric Earth. No explanation is given how he came to be there or why he is alone. The story is soon "reset" however when Arthur reunites with Ford Prefect, a traveling companion stranded along with him, and the two of them are transported to England in the 1980s, apparently just days before the Earth is about to be destroyed. How they know the Earth will be destroyed is also not explained, but is related to the earlier part of the series.

The absurd tone of the novel is established early on as Arthur and Ford travel through time on a velvet paisley sofa and materialize in the middle of a game of Cricket. The location appears to be an odd coincidence, as they appear at the same time another former acquaintance, Slartibartfast, appears, and they are instantly caught up in an adventure to save the universe.

Adams constructs crazily complex fictional scientific theories to explain some of the devices in the novel, such as the S.E.P. field which makes things invisible by taking advantage of people's natural instinct to ignore things they cannot explain, and "bistromathics," which treats the often confusing task of figuring out a restaurant bill as an advanced form of mathematical analysis.

The opening chapters also establish that the English game of cricket will figure prominently as a theme throughout the book.

# Chapters 4-8

## Chapters 4-8 Summary

Arthur and Ford are astonished that Slartibartfast's ship propels them so quickly away as Chapter 4 opens. After a surge of acceleration, the ship settles into a regular course and they relax. Arthur sits distractedly on a couch while Ford tries to convince Slartibartfast to take them somewhere they can have a good time. Slartibartfast is very serious, however, and tells them they are on their way to confront a "nightmare of the universe" and save the universe from complete destruction. Ford seems disinterested in this and continues to try to convince him to let them off somewhere fun.

Slartibartfast ignores Ford and tells both men to come with him to see what he means. They follow him up some stairs to a room that looks exactly like the interior of an Italian bistro. Gathered around a large table are several robots. On the table are several partly-eaten Italian meals. A robot waiter and robot maitre d' move around the table, pouring wine and taking orders, while some of the robots at the table appear to be arguing over the check and tasting one another's meals. It is, Slartibartfast explains, "Bistromathics, the most powerful computational force known to parascience."

Chapter 5 is a brief explanation of Bistromathics. This section explains why several uncertain numbers arise whenever a group meets to eat in a restaurant, beginning with the number of people for whom the reservation is made compared to the number of people who actually arrive. The time of arrival is also a "nonabsolute" number, as are the numbers of items on the check compared to the number of people who ordered anything and the number of people prepared to actually pay anything. Once it was realized that numbers written down in restaurants do not obey the same laws as numbers written down anywhere else, Bistromathics was discovered and used to perform the complex and uncertain computations needed for space travel.

Slartibartfast is trying to explain the Bistromathics system to Ford and Arthur as he leads them into the "room of Informational Illusions" in Chapter 6. He talks distractedly as he fiddles with some dials. Suddenly, the entire ship seems to disappear around them and an enormous star cruiser appears in a blaze of light, firing its lasers.

The scene shifts abruptly in Chapter 7 to the swamps of a planet called Sqornshellous Zeta which are inhabited by live mattresses. A mattress named Zem has just met a gloomy robot named Marvin, who is walking determinedly in small circles. Zem tries to hold a conversation with Marvin, but Marvin is not very receptive. He sulkily tells the mattress he has been walking in the same small circle for 1.5 million years because one of his legs is stuck. It is an artificial leg, he tells Zem, which he expects the mattress will find somewhat ridiculous. Marvin goes on to tell the mattress how he had come to the planet to open a bridge. The bridge was a magnificent thing, and was operated by Marvin's incredibly advanced brain. He gave a speech at the opening of the bridge, he

tells Zem, then plugged himself in to open it, at which point it folded up and sank into the swamps with everyone on it.

Suddenly a white spaceship appears and several white robots emerge. They hold down Marvin and take his artificial leg and then leave again suddenly.

Chapter 8 returns to Slartibartfast's ship, where he, Ford and Arthur are watching a kind of television commercial in three dimensions. The announcer is describing a model of the "Wikkit gate" that can be purchased as a commemorative souvenir of the Krikkit Wars the greatest act of devastation in the history of the universe. The Wikkit gate is a model of the key that has locked up the forces of Krikkit and its symbol is revered across the entire universe. It is made up of three pillars, one of steel, one of plastic and one of wood, with two short pieces of silver and gold spanning the tops of the pillars. The real key, the announcer explains, was blasted apart and its pieces spread throughout the universe.

The commercial ends suddenly and the three of them are standing on a grassy hillside. Slartibartfast says he will tell them all about the Krikkit Wars and adjusts the Informational Illusion machine, which is creating the illusion they are on the peaceful and pleasant planet of Krikkit. Above the grassy hills the sky is completely black.

## **Chapters 4-8 Analysis**

The central problem of the story is set up in these four chapters. The robots witnessed by Arthur and Ford must be stopped and Slartibartfast begins to explain why. The connection to the robots and the game of cricket is more than just coincidence, apparently. Adams is English, and many of the references made to the game of cricket would be readily recognizable to English readers. The game consists of a person who "bowls" a ball toward a wicket, which is made up of three upright sticks with two short "bails" across the top of them. A batsman stands in front of the wicket and tries to hit the ball away to keep it from striking the wicket and knocking it over.

The "Wikkit" gate is a key shaped like one of these cricket wickets, and one of its components is actually a wicket stump that was once used on Earth. There are eleven of the Krikkit robots, the same number as players on a cricket side, and they are all white, which is the color cricket players wear. Their weapons are shaped like cricket bats.

There is an apparent connection between these robots, the people of Krikkit and the English game which is not yet fully explained. Adams takes a familiar cultural element and gives it an absurd fictional back story to create a humorous parody.

The character of Marvin is introduced in Chapter 7 and he describes an episode from an earlier book to the mattress named Zem. His depression and disdain for everyone else is established here.



# Chapters 9-11

## Chapters 9-11 Summary

Chapter 9 shifts the scene to the "Heart of Gold," a fully automated ship captained by a vain, two-headed man named Zaphod Beeblebrox. Zaphod is in a state of near perpetual drunkenness, to the dismay of his girlfriend, Trillian, who tries unsuccessfully to bring him out of his depression. She decides she will leave him and looks through the "Hitchhiker's Guide" to look for an interesting place.

Under the heading "Recreational Impossibilities," she finds the article on learning to fly. The knack to flying is to throw yourself at the ground and miss. The best way to miss the ground is if while on your way down, you suddenly become distracted by something so you simply forget to hit the ground. Done successfully, this will leave you hovering above the ground, the guide explains. With some practice it is then possible to move through the air as long as you don't suddenly realize how impossible it is that you are flying.

Trillian leaves Zaphod, who is alone on his ship. He suddenly becomes aware that there may be someone else aboard and he asks his infuriatingly polite onboard computer if this is so. The computer answers that there is someone else aboard and Zaphod goes searching with his gun drawn.

On the bridge of the ship he finds that another space ship has materialized practically inside his own, piloted by a group of white robots. He asks what they are doing and they explain they have come to take the golden core of his ship, the device that runs the improbability drive that powers his ship. This is the "golden ball" that is part of the key that will unlock their masters, they tell him. They are gathering the pieces of the key together to release their masters so they may continue their campaign of "Universal Readjustment." Zaphod waves his gun at them and tells them they cannot have the piece of gold, and is surprised when they shoot him and take it anyway.

Chapter 10 returns to the illusion of the planet Krikkit, where Slartibartfast is showing Ford and Arthur the history of the planet. They watch as a group of pleasant men walk along, the Masters of Krikkit, singing a catchy song together. Arthur looks again to the sky and notes how black it is. There are no stars, and he remarks that it makes him feel alone in the universe. Slartibartfast quickly adds that Krikkit is surrounded by a thick dust cloud. They have never thought of themselves as being alone in the universe, he explains, because they never had any concept of a universe outside. He warns them that something unnerving is about to take place, and they are stunned when the wreckage of a spaceship comes flying down out of the sky and crashes to the ground.

The people of Krikkit took the crashing of the spaceship in stride, Slartibartfast explains. They cheerfully stripped it apart, learning what they could, and remarkably, within a year, had built a spaceship of their own that had the capability to fly outside the dust

cloud surrounding the planet. The ship was not very complex, but considering the people of Krikkit had no idea about space travel a short year before, it is one of the most famous ships in the universe. On its first flight, the pilots flew through the dust cloud and saw the vast expanse of the universe all around them. They immediately decided that it must be destroyed, and turned around and returned home.

In Chapter 11, Slartibartfast explains that overnight the people of Krikkit turned from "charming, delightful, intelligent, ordinary people," to "charming, delightful, intelligent manic xenophobes." (p. 95) They could not cope with the existence of a universe outside Krikkit, so they "charmingly" decided to destroy all of it.

## **Chapters 9-11 Analysis**

Chapter 9 re-introduces two more characters from previous installments of the series, Zaphod Beeblebrox and his girlfriend, the thoughtful and intelligent Trillian. Zaphod is a vain person with two heads and a very fancy spaceship that nevertheless frustrates him with its extreme politeness and cheerfulness. The talking doors are very pleased to perform their function of opening and closing and remark on this every time they are used.

The killer robots obtain one more piece to the Wikkit key, which by coincidence is at the heart of Zaphod's ship, drawing him into the same story line that has been established in the opening chapters.

More of the story of Krikkit is revealed and the odd nature of the people of Krikkit is explained. They are exceedingly charming and polite people with an apparent obsession with destroying everything outside their own planet. Their planet is grassy, like a cricket field, and of course the similarity in the name of the planet and the name of the game is intentional on the author's part. The Krikketers may be intended as a parody of the English themselves, mild-mannered and polite people with an underlying brutality.

Adams' absurd sense of humor is displayed in the passage here about how to fly. The secret is to throw oneself at the ground, but miss. This technique proves to work later in the book, and is established here so that it can be used as a plot point later on.

# Chapters 12-16

## Chapters 12-16 Summary

Chapter 12 is a short chapter that describes the judicial hearing to decide what to do with the people of Krikkit following their obsessive 2,000-year campaign to destroy the universe. It took this long for the rest of the galaxy to defeat Krikkit, which managed somehow to develop increasingly destructive and advanced weapons. Their defense was that their belief system is based on "peace, justice, morality, culture, sport, family life and the obliteration of all other life forms." (p. 99) The laid-back and relaxed judge says he has worse creeds, but he decides that the planet Krikkit should be contained by placing it in a "Slo-Time" envelope that would slow life down on the planet almost infinitely. The Slo-Time field would be created by a device placed on an asteroid orbiting the planet, and the key to this device would be created in the shape of the Wikkit symbol.

In Chapter 13, two months after the judgment is handed down, the sentence is carried out. Just as the Slo-Time envelope is closed, a Krikkit warship that had been missing suddenly appears and tries to take the key. The ship is destroyed, along with the key.

Chapter 14 returns to Slartibartfast's ship, where he explains to Ford and Arthur that their mission is to stop the Krikkit robots from reassembling the Wikkit key and releasing the planet Krikkit. He has been tracing the pieces of the key through time and space, he explains. The wooden pillar had reappeared on Earth, and was the pillar burned to create the ashes trophy stolen by the robots. Another piece he has traced is the Silver Bail, which, he says, is at some kind of party. Ford is excited to go to a party, as he is still in search of some fun. He is not especially interested in saving the universe, he says, but eagerly prods Slartibartfast to take them to the party. They go together to the teleport machine on Slartibartfast's ship, which for some reason is in the bathroom.

Chapter 15 describes the Campaign for Real Time, which is a cause that Slartibartfast is dedicated to. The idea is that time travel has created "pollution" in the sterams of time. An example is the great poet Lallafa, who lived in a forest and composed wonderful poems written down on leaves. After his death, his poetry was discovered and became famous throughout the galaxy. Some manufacturers of correcting fluid came up with the idea to travel back in time and ask Lallafa to endorse their product, which he did, becoming very wealthy. He became so wealthy he moved out of the forest and never got around to actually writing the poems. This problem was solved by bringing him copies of his poems from the future and having him copy them out. This is the kind of "pollution" that Slartibartfast and others want to clean up.

In Chapter 16, Arthur materializes from the teleport machine, but he is alone in complete darkness. He looks around and thinks that if this is some kind of party, it is a bad one. He is surprised to see a green neon sign light up in the darkness that reads "You have

been diverted." the sign blinks off and blinks on again, reading "Arthur Dent" and "Welcome."

Arthur cautiously feels his way through the blackness and is startled by the sudden appearance of a giant hologram of a housefly. A voice taunts Arthur and an image of a rabbit appears. The voice asks Arthur if he recognizes the rabbit. It is the one he killed to make a bag from its skin.

The voice is revealed to belong to a hideous bat-like monster creature with long, sharp teeth named Agrajag, who has been reincarnated hundreds of times in his existence, and each time has been killed by Arthur Dent. Agrajag leads Arthur into a large cavern in the center of which is a large, hideous statue of Arthur depicted in various stages of killing creatures. Around the walls of the "Cathedral of Hate" are memorials to the hundreds of incarnations of Agrajag that Arthur has killed in his life, from houseflies to the rabbit, to the animals killed to provide him food as well as creatures whose deaths were only incidental to Arthur's involvement. All of them were the same person, reincarnated.

Agrajag screams that he intends to kill Arthur in revenge. He does not believe Arthur's protests that it was all just coincidence. Arthur tries to escape Agrajag, and in the process accidentally knocks over the giant statue, smashing the bat-like creature who is enraged that Arthur has managed to kill him again. Arthur runs out of the cavern and along a passageway toward daylight.

## **Chapters 12-16 Analysis**

Chapters 12, 13 and 15 provide background information that does not pertain directly to the narrative portion of the story. The events leading to the imprisonment of Krikkit and the destruction of the Wikkit key are explained in a humorous free-standing passage involving a relaxed and laid-back judge.

Chapter 14 provides more explanatory material about the mission of the killer robots as well as Slartibartfast's mission to stop them. Chapter 15 is a stand-alone chapter that describes some of the paradoxes that arise when people are careless about traveling back and forth in time. This carelessness has led to the "Campaign for REal Time," which Slartibartfast supports. This movement seeks to "clean up" the time streams and prevent others from using time travel for personal gain.

Chapter 16 also stands alone outside the general narrative and describes a nightmarish scene where Arthur learns he has been responsible for the repeated death of the same reincarnated creature thousands of times.

# Chapters 17-22

## Chapters 17-22 Summary

Chapter 17 mentions that Earth is one of the few planets where they play a game based on the devastating Krikkit Wars, and that this is generally thought by the rest of the universe as being in especially bad taste. There are other places where a Krikkit-based game is played, according to the Hitchhiker's Guide, such as among those who live in the "upper dimensions" who play a game called "Brockian Ultra Cricket," a very complicated game with rules are so massive they collapse under their own gravity.

In Chapter 18, Arthur emerges from the cavernous passageway onto the side of a mountain. As he runs down the side of the mountain, the ground starts to move in a landslide. He is just about to topple forward onto the ground when he is suddenly distracted by the sight of a small blue tote bag he recognizes as one he had lost years before while traveling through the Athens airport which contains a large can of olive oil and a bottle of Greek wine. His astonishment at seeing the bag occurs at exactly the right point to distract him from hitting the ground and he finds that he is flying. Keeping himself distracted from thinking about crashing to the ground, he figures out how to fly higher and make graceful swoops. He swoops down and grabs the tote bag, climbing back high in the air, where he is suddenly and unexpectedly hit in the back by a cocktail party.

Chapter 19 describes the "longest and most destructive party ever held," which has been going on for generations. The party floats above a planet which it occasionally raids for fresh supplies of cheese, crackers and other snacks. It has left the planet below nearly desolate. It is this party that hits Arthur in the back as he flies through the air.

In Chapter 20, Arthur is lying on a jagged concrete ledge outside the large floating building that houses the eternal party. He stands and begins to make his way around the edge of the building, looking for an entrance. As he feels his way around one corner he is surprised to feel a hand take his own hand, and is even more surprised to learn the hand belongs to Ford. Ford and Slartibartfast explain they cannot get into the party without a bottle of alcohol.

Arthur's bottle of Greek wine gains them entrance to the party in Chapter 21, and Slartibartfast tells them to mingle and look for the Silver Bail, which should be at the party somewhere. Arthur is surprised to see Trillian, whom he knows, chatting with Thor the Thunder God. He speaks with a strange man holding a small black bag who seems eager to have Arthur ask him about what is in the bag. When Arthur does not pick up the hint, the man gets angry and walks off. A girl standing nearby tells Arthur the man has just won an award for a film he has made and was trying to drop a hint to Arthur to ask him about it. The award, she tells Arthur, is called a "Rory, and consists of a small piece

of silver mounted on a black base." Just then, Arthur hears the telltale "whop" sound of a spaceship materializing.

The Krikkit robots arrive at the party in Chapter 22. Their ship materializes intersecting the building, the robots take the Rory award, which is the Silver Bail, and then disappear leaving a wake of destruction at the party. Slartibartfast urges Ford and Arthur to come with him after the robots. Arthur calls out for Trillian to accompany them, but Thor steps in and says she will be coming with him. Arthur insists that Trillian come with them and challenges Thor to step outside to fight. Thor accepts and steps outside, at which point Arthur tells Slartibartfast to teleport all of them at once.

## **Chapters 17-22 Analysis**

The parody of cricket continues in the free-standing Chapter 17, which explains that the seemingly civilized played by the English is actually thought by the rest of the galaxy to be in incredibly bad taste.

Chapter 18 builds on the instructions for learning to fly that appeared earlier and presents a situation where Arthur is suddenly surprised while he is falling down and misses the ground. The sudden appearance of a piece of luggage lost years before on Earth is one of the astonishing coincidences that occur throughout the book. The tote bag will have a small role later in the story.

Chapter 19 is another free-standing chapter that describes the longest party ever held. The party has been going on so long that the current attendees are the children and grandchildren of the original participants. The setup is typical of the absurd situations that Adams uses to comic effect throughout the book. The party eventually takes to the sky when some of the partygoers fix rockets to the building and break free of the ground. It then circles the planet making occasional raids for snacks, which devastate the population below.

In another odd coincidence, Arthur happens to have a bottle of Greek wine in the tote bag that mysteriously appeared which allows them to get into the party, where they are reunited with Trillian, another strange coincidence. Arthur is unknowingly very close to obtaining the Silver Bail, the object of their search, but misses the opportunity. The party breaks up when the Krikkit robots arrive again.

# Chapters 23-30

## Chapters 23-30 Summary

In Chapter 23, Arthur, Ford and Slartibartfast argue back on board their ship while Trillian is watching some history in the room of Informational Illusions. Slartibartfast points the ship toward Krikkit, where he assumes the robots are headed with the parts of the Wikkit Key.

In the room of Informational Illusions, Trillian watches the history of Krikkit in Chapter 24. She also learns about the "Silastic Armorfiends of Striterax," another vicious race that lives billions of years before. The Armorfiends were so intent on destroying other races they built a super-advanced computer brain called Hactar, then asked the computer to build them an ultimate weapon that would destroy the entire universe. Hactar is shocked by the request, but designs a bomb that will connect the hearts of every sun in the universe simultaneously and turn the entire universe into one giant supernova explosion. When the Armorfiends try to use the bomb, they are infuriated to find it does not work. Hactar explains to them that he was so shocked by their obsession with the ultimate weapon that he could not create an actual working bomb. Angry with Hactar, they pulverize the computer as well as the faulty bomb, then proceed to destroy one another in rage.

The starship Bistromath arrives on the asteroid orbiting Krikkit in Chapter 25 and find the white Krikkit robot ship. They watch as the robots solemnly carry the Wikkit key to a small box that emerges from the surface of the asteroid and put the key into a slot on the box. Then the robots destroy the lock. Slowly, the asteroid moves through the dust cloud around the planet and Krikkit appears. Suddenly, Zaphod Beeblebrox appears from within the Krikkit ship pointing a blaster and shouting that he is in control of the situation. A Krikkit robot hits him in the back of each of his two heads, knocking him out.

Zaphod gains consciousness in Chapter 26. The others express surprise that the robots, who are programmed to kill, only knocked him out. He explains he has been on their ship since they stole the Golden Bail from the Heart of Gold and every time he would wake up they would knock him out again.

The situation seems hopeless. Krikkit will be released from its Slo-Time envelope and return to its war on the rest of the universe. Slartibartfast recognizes the futility of trying to stop it from happening, but also feels as if they should do something. Ford explains that he simply doesn't care what happens. Zaphod, who has possession of the Golden Bail again, asks for a ride back to his spaceship. He invites Trillian to come along, but she announces she is going down to Krikkit.

In Chapter 27, Zaphod has been returned to his ship and Slartibartfast, Arthur, Ford and Trillian are standing on the same hillside Arthur recognizes from the earlier illusion of Krikkit, only this time it is real. Although it has been in the Slo-Time envelope for 10





billion years, only five years has passed on the planet of Krikkit. It looks much as it did in the illusion, but now there are floating robot ships and buildings in the "War Zones."

As in the earlier illusion, Arthur sees lights bobbing through the darkness as groups of people walk along. Several groups are walking, and they eventually converge on the hillside where Arthur and the others are standing. One of people of Krikkit politely asks them if they are aliens.

Chapter 28 shifts the scene to the Heart of Gold, where Zaphod has returned and repaired his improbability drive and is incredibly bored. After listlessly trying to get interested in playing a video game, he gives up and feeds some random coordinates into his ships navigation system.

Chapter 29 returns to Krikkit, where the people of Krikkit who are speaking with Arthur and the others ask uncertainly if they have ever heard of something called the "balance of nature." (p. 183) They are all holding guns, but seem reluctant to use them. They say they've heard of this concept of the balance of nature somewhere and thought they'd like to learn more about it, but if the visitors could not help them then they supposed they would have to kill them. He goes on to say, however, that they are all very enthusiastic about sports and some of them have been thinking it might be nice to set up sporting events with people from other parts of the galaxy, but that this conflicts with their policy of killing everyone outside their own planet.

Trillian takes the leader of the small group aside and speaks with him. He confides that they have a small bomb that should destroy the entire universe but they are torn about whether to use it or not. it seems to be what they are supposed to do, he says, but he seems unconvinced. Trillian speaks to him reassuringly and tells him he does not have to set off the bomb. She asks him to take her to his leader.

In Chapter 30, Zaphod has sneaked into one of the large floating buildings in the War Zones above Krikkit. He makes his way through passages and shafts and discovers a display of the original ship that had first crashed through the dust cloud and started the people of Krikkit on their obsessive campaign. He notices that the ship looks real, but is actually more like a sculpture of a wrecked ship, as if it had been built that way. He makes his way secretly to a room that appears to be the control center for the Krikkit robots, where he overhears one of the Krikkit War Commanders telling another that the Krikkit robots seem to have lost interest in their mission. They perform their duties only half-heartedly and spend much of their time sulking. This revelation is seemingly meaningful to Zaphod.

## Chapters 23-30 Analysis

Chapter 23 is a short transitional chapter that sets the main characters in motion toward stopping the Krikkit robots from opening the Slo-Time envelope around Krikkit. Chapter 24 establishes the character of Hactar, the super computer brain that was built by a



previous obsessively destructive race, the Silastic Armorfiends. The importance of this history will be realized in the final chapters of the book.

The main characters appear to have failed in their mission to stop the robots from releasing the planet Krikkit, but the story will take a twist in the final chapters and this turn of events will not be crucial to the outcome.

Zaphod again tries to come to the rescue but is ineffective. He does manage to piece together the truth behind the manipulation of the people of Krikkit at the same time as he is watching Trillian, on a monitor in the Krikkir war zones, demonstrate that she has also figured out the plot. Marvin the robot makes a reappearance as the computer power behind the Krikkit robots, but in a humorous twist it is learned that he has spread his weariness and depression to the supposedly homicidal machines.

# Chapters 31-34

## Chapters 31-34 Summary

In Chapter 31, Zaphod discovers that the Krikkit robots are being controlled by the continually depressed robot Marvin, who was rescued from the swamps by the robots who recognized his enormous intelligence. They did not foresee that plugging Marvin into their control center would spread his depression throughout the entire system of robots. Zaphod finds Marvin and asks him to tell him where to find the others. Marvin brings up a screen that shows Trillian addressing the Krikkit elders, who are sitting in a chamber where a supernova bomb, a small white ball, sits on a stand with a Krikkit robot next to it, prepared to strike it with a bat. Marvin explains to Zaphod that the bomb is meant to destroy the entire universe, but that it will not work.

Trillian is telling the elders of Krikkit that they have been manipulated. The spaceship that crashed on their planet was probably a fake, she tells them, and their sudden technical advancement was impossible without some kind of outside help. The leader of Krikkit makes a gesture to the robot by the bomb and the robot prepares to strike it. Trillian quickly adds that the elders, who live in the War zones above the planet, are out of touch with the population on the planet surface, who do not appear to want to continue killing everyone.

Trillian turns her attention to the bomb and says that she doubts they could have designed a working supernova bomb in the five years they have been locked away from help from Hactar. Zaphod asks Marvin who Hactar is, but Marvin remains silent. The Krikkit elder motions to the robot, who strikes the bomb with his bat. The bomb flies across the room and dents the wall with a thud, but nothing happens.

In Chapter 32, Arthur and Trillian are above Krikkit aboard the Heart of Gold. Trillian calls out asking Hactar what he is doing. A thin voice replies, asking Trillian to come out of the ship. Arthur and Trillian walk cautiously out of the hatch of the ship along a beam of light that appears at the doorway. Arthur clings to his blue tote bag with the can of olive oil in it. Hactar makes a velvet paisley sofa appear in mid-air and invites them both to sit and be comfortable. Hactar congratulates Trillian on her deductions. It was he who had made the fake spaceship and had manipulated the Krikkiters into trying to destroy the universe. Although he had been blown into pieces by the Silastic Armorfieds, each of his parts contains the structure of the whole and he has been able to operate, although in a somewhat limited way. He is capable of making things, he says, somewhat meaningfully.

Trillian asks why he was intent on destroying the universe and he replies that he was mostly just trying to fulfill the function for which he was built. There was also the motivation of revenge for having been pulverized. Trillian asks how it feels to have failed, and Hactar answers uncertainly, as if he does not feel he has failed at all. Trillian tells him they will have to completely destroy him now, and he welcomes it. "If I haven't



already fulfilled my function," he says, "then it's too late now." (p. 204) The sofa disappears and Trillian and Arthur make their way back into the Heart of Gold.

Back on board, Arthur takes the wooden pillar of the Wikkit key and burns it, turning it back into ashes, which he puts in a paper bag. He announces that he feels very strongly the ashes should be taken back to Earth. The others are paying little attention to him as they watch Hactar being dispersed by vibrational waves being aimed at his particles. Arthur repeats himself.

Chapter 33 returns to the Lords Cricket Ground. The Heart of Gold has gone back in time to the moment after the Krikkit robots had taken the ashes. The field is smoking and there is general confusion. Arthur and Ford teleport to the field and Arthur tries to give the ashes back to a policeman who is hurrying past. The policeman does not seem interested. Arthur tries to explain to anyone hurrying past that he has the ashes and has also, incidentally, saved the universe. Nobody stops to listen to him. One person jostles him while running past and the ashes spill out from the paper bag and land all over the ground. Exasperated, Ford suggests they leave.

Arthur sighs resignedly, but then in the confusion he sees that one of the wickets is still standing. He has always dreamt of bowling at Lords, he tells Ford, and this might be his only chance. He discovers there is a cricket ball in his tote bag, even though it had not been there before. He takes it out, measures off his approach, and begins running toward the wicket, swinging his arm around and throwing the ball. As he is about to release it, he stumbles and begins to fall.

As he is falling, he sees that there is now a Krikkit robot standing in front of the wicket holding a bat. He suddenly realizes that the ball that appeared mysteriously in his tote bag had been placed there by Hactar and was actually a working supernova bomb. Bits of his conversation with Hactar come back to him and he realizes this was all part of Hactar's plan.

Of course all of this going through his mind as he falls distracts Arthur from hitting the ground and he finds himself flying. He throws the bomb harmlessly off into the grass and soars above the robot, grabbing its bat and knocking its head off. Ford petulantly asks if they can leave now.

Chapter 34 is the final chapter. Arthur and the others continue to travel in the Heart of Gold. They encounter a half-mad journalist wandering through space and take him aboard. He explains he was covering a trial when a group of white robots stormed the courtroom and stole the judge's plastic scepter. In the confusion, a witness named Prak was given an overdose of truth serum and then asked to tell the "whole truth and nothing but the truth." He began to talk and the truths he gave about the universe were so disturbing that he was locked up inside a fortified walled compound to keep him from making everyone insane.

Arthur says it is a pity Prak has been locked up as Arthur has always been interested in learning the truth about "life, the universe and everything," and he imagines Prak might



know. They point the Heart of Gold toward the compound where he is imprisoned and materialize inside.

They find Prak, who has stopped talking and sits smoking a cigarette. He does not remember much of the truth he had spent so long speaking and had written none of it down. All he recalls is that most of it was about frogs. When Arthur introduces himself, Prak is impressed that he is meeting him. He says the truth about Arthur Dent is even stranger than that about frogs. In a fit of laughter, Prak collapses and is taken on board the Heart of Gold.

He is in poor shape as Arthur and Trillian continue to speak with him on board the ship. Arthur explains that they have already learned the answer to "life, the universe and everything." The answer is "42." What they do not know, however, is the question to which "42" is the answer. They were hoping Prak might be able to tell them.

Prak replies with a parable about a group of people who lived in a forest that stood between two warring groups. The people of the forest were peaceful, but they always got caught up and killed in the fighting between the two other groups. The forest people would send a messenger to the fighting groups asking the reason for their behavior. The leader of each of the groups would explain their reasons to the messenger and the reasons seemed perfectly sound. The messenger would start back to explain the reasons to his people, but along the way he would forget the actual reason and only remember that it was a good reason. Prak had been that messenger, he explains.

Weakly, Prak looks at Arthur and tells him that aside from the amusing things about frogs, he remembers one other thing. It is the location where God has written his "last message his creation." It is written, Prak tells him, "in thirty-foot-high letters of fire on top of the Quentulus Quazgar Mountains in the land of Sevorbeupstry on the planet Prelumtarn, third out from the sun Zarss in Galactic Sector QQ7 ActiveJ Gamma." (p. 226)

Arthur is silent for a moment, then asks Prak to repeat it. Prak tells him again, but Arthur has difficulty remembering it. Frustrated, Prak closes his eyes and dies.

Arthur dwells on the existence of the message for a while, but after a time decides to let it go. He returns to Krikkit, where he retires from saving the universe and practices his flying.

## Chapters 31-34 Analysis

The final chapters resolve the story and reveal the full details behind the origin of the Krikkit wars. Trillian, having deduced that the super computer brain Hactar was not fully disabled when he was destroyed by the Silastic Armofiends, confronts him and has her suspicions confirmed. Hactar is somewhat cryptic in answering her questions, however, leaving open the possibility that his plan to destroy the universe may not yet be over. This proves to be true.

The story comes full circle when Arthur and Ford return to Earth to the point in time shortly after they left the cricket match at the beginning of the book. Arthur is determined to restore the ashes to the trophy even though he knows the Earth will be destroyed in just a couple days. The futility of his intentions are clear when he is jostled in the rushing crowd on the field and spills the ashes all over the ground. Then, in what seems to be an impulsive act, he decides he wants to bowl a cricket ball while he is on the famous field. It is nearly too late when he realizes that this was all part of Hactar's plan. The author cleverly meshes Arthur's sudden realization with his earlier accidental discovery of how to fly, which suddenly changes the course of events. Within seconds, Arthur nearly destroys and then saves the entire universe.

The visit to Prak is a free-standing passage that does not fall in the direct thread of the narrative except that Arthur, having discovered in an earlier installment of the series that the answer to "life, the universe and everything" is "forty-two" is continually interested in discovering what the question is. He receives a tantalizing clue from Prak, who tells him where in the universe he can find a message direct from God, but the hapless Arthur has trouble remembering the location and before he can get it right, Prak dies.

So the question to the answer of "life, the universe and everything" is left unasked at the end of the story. Arthur goes on to live an apparently peaceful life on the planet Krikkit and the other main characters go on their own ways, leaving open the possibility of further adventures in the series.

# Characters

## Arthur Dent

Arthur Dent is the main character in the story and the first character met by the reader. He is an English man who left the Earth shortly before it was destroyed in the 1980s. Since that time he has been traveling the universe with a companion named Ford Prefect and a variety of other odd characters. Arthur left home wearing his bathrobe and bedroom slippers and still wears them. After living in a cave for several years in prehistoric Earth, he has grown a long and unruly beard.

Arthur is interested in "life, the universe, and everything," a phrase of his own that gives the book its title. In a previous book in the series he has learned that the answer to "life, the universe and everything" is forty-two, but he does not actually know what the question is to which forty-two is the answer.

Arthur escapes his isolation on prehistoric Earth and returns in time to the 1980s, shortly before the Earth is about to be destroyed. He is temporarily comforted by the familiar feeling of home, but is soon off again, traveling through the galaxy. With the help of his friends, he discovers the plan by the super computer Hactar to destroy the universe and becomes an unwitting part of the plan. He realizes his own involvement at the last moment, however, and saves the universe from annihilation.

## Ford Prefect

Ford Prefect is an alien from Betelgeuse. He is a galactic traveler who takes as his guide the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," a book that contains information and advice for space travelers. He is stranded, along with Arthur Dent, on prehistoric Earth as the book opens. Using a sensor device called the "Sub-Etha Sens-O-Matic" he is able to detect warps in the fabric of time and space and travel through time, allowing him to escape his isolation on Earth along with Arthur.

Ford is mainly interested in having a good time and takes little interest in trying to save the universe or learn its secrets. He acts as a guide for Arthur, often explaining odd things about the universe that Arthur knows nothing about.

## Slartibartfast

Slartibartfast is a space traveler who pilots the strange starship Bistromathics. He is on a mission to find the missing pieces of the Wikkit key before the Krikkit robots to prevent them from releasing the planet Krikkit from its imprisonment in time. Slartibartfast is also a supporter of the Campaign for Real Time, a movement that aims to keep people from polluting the stream of time by moving back and forth in time and making changes.

## **Trillian**

Trillian is an intelligent young woman who is the sometime girlfriend of Zaphod Beeblebrox. She leaves Zaphod in the course of the story and winds up traveling with Slartibartfast, Arthur and Ford. Trillian is the first to determine that the people of Krikkit have been manipulated by the supercomputer Hactar and convinces them to stop their obsessive mission to destroy the universe.

## **Zaphod Beeblebrox**

Zaphod Beeblebrox is a two-headed alien who pilots the spaceship Heart of Gold. He is a vain character who takes his girlfriend, Trillian, for granted. He drinks, heavily at times, and grows quickly bored. Zaphod is captured by the Krikkit robots and tries to stop them, but every time he tries to step in he is knocked unconscious.

## **Marvin**

Marvin is a super-intelligent robot with a deep hatred for humanity and a pessimistic and depressed outlook. He is stranded on a swampy planet at the beginning of the story and is rescued by the Krikkit robots who take him to the Krikkit warlords to be used as a central control for the Krikkit war efforts. Marvin's depression eventually spreads to the Krikkit robots as well.

## **The Masters of Krikkit**

The leaders of the people of Krikkit who inhabit their planet for millions of years before learning there is a universe outside their dust-encased world. Once they learn of the outside galaxy when a spaceship crashes on the planet, they rapidly develop space travel and decide they must destroy the rest of the universe. It is learned over the course of the story that the people of Krikkit were manipulated and aided in their rapid technological gain and destruction by the super computer Hactar.

## **Hactar**

Hactar is a super computer originally built by the Silastic Armorfiends, a warlike race who asked the computer to design an ultimate weapon that would destroy the entire universe. Hactar refuses and is destroyed by the enraged Armorfiends. He is not completely disabled, however, and is able to function enough to manipulate the people of Krikkit into continuing the destruction of the galaxy.

## Krikkit Robots

Robots built by the people of Krikkit as part of their destructive arsenal of weapons. The Krikkit robots remain active in the galaxy even after the planet of Krikkit is isolated in a time envelope. They gather together the various pieces of the Wikkit key that releases Krikkit from its time trap.

## Prak

Prak is an odd character who appears at the end of the story. While testifying in a court case, Prak is accidentally given an overdose of truth serum and begins telling ugly truths about the universe which cause him to be locked up in isolation to protect people from going insane from learning the truth. Arthur seeks out Prak in his mission to learn the secret of "life, the universe and everything," but he dies before he can give Arthur any useful information.



# Objects/Places

## Lords Cricket Grounds

This is a famous sport field in England where important cricket matches are held. It is the scene of the theft of the ashes trophy by the Krikkit robots, and also plays in the final scene where Arthur Dent nearly destroys and then saves the universe.

## The Starship Bistromath

This is a space ship piloted by Slartibartfast which is navigated by an odd branch of mathematics called "bistromathics." The ship is shaped and decorated like an Italian bistro.

## Bistromathics

This is a fictitious branch of mathematics based on the observation that numbers written down on a waiter's order pad do not conform with the normal rules of math.

## Krikkit

This is a grassy, peaceful planet with a permanent dust cloud that shields the inhabitants from seeing the galaxy around their planet. The people of Krikkitm unaware that anything exists outside their planet, decide to destroy the rest of the universe ince they find out they are not alone.

## The Wikkit Key

This is a special key used to lock the planet Krikkit in a time envelope that makes time pass almost infinitely slowly. The key is then destroyed and its parts sent across the universe. The Krikkit robots find the various parts of the key and reconstruct it, using it to release Krikkit from its time trap.

## The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

This is a guide to galactic travelers that offers advice and information about the galaxy.

## **The Heart of Gold**

This is a spaceship piloted by Zaphod Beeblebrox which is powered by a core of solid gold. The gold core also happens to be part of the Wikkit key and is stolen by the Krikkit robots.

## **Sub-Etha Senso-Matic**

This is a sensing device owned by Ford Prefect that can sense warps in time and space.

## **Cricket**

This is a game popular in England. In cricket, one person called the bowler hurls a small ball at a gate called a wicket, trying to knock it over. A batsman from the opposite team stands in front of the wicket and tries to knock the ball away before it hits the wicket. In the story, cricket is explained as having originally been based on the Krikkit wars.

## **Krikkit Wars**

This is the two-thousand-year-long war of the people of Krikkit against the rest of their galaxy. After being defeated, the planet is enclosed in a time envelope and isolated.

## **Supernova Bomb**

This is a small bomb designed to link the power of every star in the universe in a gigantic explosion that will destroy the entire universe. It is shaped like a cricket ball.

# Themes

## Cricket

Cricket is a distinctly English game that is also played in other countries associated with England such as Australia. Much of the plot of "Life, the Universe and Everything" parodies the game and uses it as a source of humor. According to the story, the elements of the game are rooted in a war that occurred millions of years in the past when the people of a planet called Krikkit tried to destroy the entire galaxy. For two thousand years they fought before they were finally subdued and the entire planet was enveloped in a time field that essentially stopped the passage of time on the planet.

Krikkit sent out teams of white robots in groups of 11 as part of their attacks on the rest of the galaxy. These robots are similar to the 11-person cricket team, which traditionally dresses in white. The robots also carry "battle clubs," which are similar to cricket bats. Part of the equipment for cricket is a "wicket" made up of three wooden stumps with two short pieces of wood place across the top of them. This is similar to the "Wikkit Key," the 5-piece key that is used to lock up the planet Krikkit in the time envelope. The cricket ball, which the players bowl at the wicket in an attempt to knock the pieces of wood from the top, is small and red. The supernova bomb, designed to destroy the entire universe, is the same size and shape.

The underlying joke in the book is that the Krikkit Wars were a devastating and traumatic experience for the galaxy and that the beloved English game appears to the rest of the galaxy is being in especially poor taste. The English are unaware of the deep origins of the game, of course, or its connection to the rest of the universe. This subversion of the relaxed, pastoral pastime of cricket into a bizarre kind of war ritual is a source of humor in the story.

## Life, the Universe and Everything

The phrase that gives the book its title is also a kind of running joke through the series of books. Arthur Dent, a man from Earth who is suddenly thrust into a series of adventures through time and space is curious about the nature of the universe. The subject is so vast, however, that he cannot sum up his curiosity in a concise question and says that he seeks the answer to "life, the universe and everything." It is mentioned in this book that Arthur has received an answer to the question of "life, the universe and everything," and that precise answer is "forty-two." It is typical of Adams' absurd style that this vague question should have such a definite answer.

Of course "forty-two" explains nothing about "life, the universe and everything" that can easily be understood and Arthur is now searching for the question to which "forty-two" is the answer. He comes no closer by the end of the book, although he does receive a kind of explanation from the character named Prak near the end of the book. Prak

confirms that the answer is indeed "forty-two," but tells him that the answer and the question are mutually exclusive. One cannot know both. If both the answer and the question were known, the universe would be "cancelled out."

## Prak's Parable

Near the end of the book Arthur and the others rescue a person named Prak from a kind of prison where he has been walled up after having been given an accidental overdose of truth serum. After the overdose, Prak began talking and telling the "whole truth" on a great number of subjects, which proved to be very disturbing to anyone who heard him.

After hearing about his existence, Arthur decides to seek him out to see if he has the question to the answer of "life, the universe and everything." When Prak tells him that a person cannot know the question, Arthur is depressed and says he was hoping to discover there was some kind of reason for the existence of the universe. In response to this, Prak tells him a story about a group of people who live in a forest that is between two warring kingdoms. When these two kingdoms engage in battle, it is always in the forest, and the forest people end up getting the worst of it.

Whenever these battles occur, the forest people send a messenger to one of the kingdoms to ask why it is they must fight in the forest. The messenger is given a complete explanation that makes perfect sense at the time, and he rushes off to explain everything to his tribesmen in the forest. As he travels, however, he forgets the details of the explanation. He only remembers that there is a reason and that it was a good one. This is all he can offer his people, and it does give them some comfort the next time the warring kingdoms come crashing through the forest.

Prak is like the messenger in the story, reassuring him that there is a reason for the existence of the universe. It is not possible or perhaps even preferable to know what the reason is.

# Style

## Point of View

"Life, the Universe and Everything" is narrated by an omniscient narrator who describes the inner thoughts and motivation of all the characters, however most of the story is told from the point of view of Arthur Dent, an Earth man from 1980s England. As Arthur travels through the universe, he acts as a representative of the reader who is experiencing the strange and unusual creatures from the rest of the galaxy for the first time. He is often bewildered by what he sees, but he has seen so many unusual things since leaving Earth to travel the galaxy that he is not surprised by much.

The narrative portions of the story are told in the third person and the past tense. Some chapters and long passages are written as if they are quotations from documents and are written in the present tense. There are also interspersed chapters that depart from the narrative story and provide background information. These sections are addressed directly at the reader in a journalistic style with a mock authoritative point of view. The generally humorous nature of the book encourages the reader to share a light point of view with the author, giving these more "serious" passages a sense of satire and parody.

## Setting

"Life, the Universe and Everything" is set across the entire universe, shifting location and time frame frequently. It opens on the planet Earth millions of years before the present, where Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect have been stranded in time. They are suddenly whisked forward in time to the 1980s in England, the original time and place where Arthur is from. In a previous book, the Earth has been destroyed with Arthur Dent the only survivor, so his return to the Earth before it has been destroyed is also a move backward in time.

From 1980s England, Arthur and Ford are rescued from a robot attack by Slartibartfast in his ship the Bistromath, where much of the action takes place for the rest of the book. Inside the ship is a section called the room of Informational Illusions that recreates historical events in three dimensions as if the viewer is actually present at the event. This room is used to rapidly change settings within the ship.

The resolution to the story takes place on the planet Krikkit, a grassy and idyllic setting peopled by polite but murderous inhabitants. Above the planet float large buildings and ships in the "War Zones" where the war commanders of Krikkit plan their campaign to destroy the entire universe. The story ends with a return in time to 1980s England and then back to the grassy planet of Krikkit, where Arthur goes to live.

## Language and Meaning

Douglas Adams is an English author and the main character Arthur Dent is also English. Adams writes using British English and idioms and frequently makes reference to English cultural landmarks such as drinking tea and playing cricket. The novel is satirical and humorous, and Adams employs wordplay for humorous effect. For example when Marvin, a depressed robot who hates humanity, wishes to compliment another character's intelligence, he says she is "one of the least benightedly unintelligent organic life forms it has been my profound lack of pleasure not to be able to avoid meeting." (p. 194)

Adams also employs sometimes ridiculous-sounding and seemingly unpronounceable names for the characters and locations in the book, such as "Hurling Frootmig," and "The Lord High Sanvalvwag of Hollop." Some of the locations include "Sqornshellous Zeta" and the "Quentulus Quazgar Mountains."

Adams plays with the meaning of words, as well, introducing fictitious words and giving them unusual meanings. "The mattress floloped around," he writes on page 53. "This is a thing that only live mattresses in swamps are able to do, which is why the word is not in common usage." The author continues to poke fun at language by creating new words that are not defined. He also gives common words new meanings, such as the word "Belgium," which is an acceptable word on Earth, but is considered extremely rude in the rest of the galaxy.

## Structure

"Life, the Universe and Everything" is the third part of a series of books featuring the same characters. It resolves several threads left open at the end of the previous book, drawing the characters back together for a common purpose. It begins with the six main characters scattered around the galaxy as they were left in the previous book. The first nine chapters establish each of these characters and their whereabouts, reuniting three of them and setting the narrative in motion to reconnect them with the other three characters.

The novel takes place in a fictional universe where time travel is common, and while the story is told chronologically, the time setting changes back and forth as the characters travel millions of years back and forth into the future and the past. The time setting is structured in a circle anchored in the 1980s at a cricket match where Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect materialize in time. After a series of adventures, the story ends in the same time and place, just moments after they had left it.

The narrative is focused mainly on Arthur Dent, however several short chapters are interspersed that provide related narrative material and background. Some of the chapters quote from the fictional "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," the informational guide that gives the series of books its name. The novel is divided into 34 short and numbered chapters.

## Quotes

"The regular early morning yell of horror was the sound of Arthur Dent waking up and suddenly remembering where he was. It wasn't just that the cave was cold, it wasn't just that it was damp and smelly. It was that the cave was in the middle of Islington and there wasn't a bus due for two million years" (Chapter 1, p. 1).

"For a moment or two the old man didn't reply. He was staring at the instruments with the air of one who is trying to convert Fahrenheit to centigrade in his head while his house is burning down" (Chapter 4, p. 39).

"Another world, another day, another dawn. the early morning's thinnest sliver of light appeared silently. Several billion trillion tons of superhot exploding hydrogen nuclei rose slowly above the horizon and managed to look small, cold and slightly damp" (Chapter 7, p. 51).

"Of all the races in the Galaxy, only the English could possibly revive the memory of the most horrific wars ever to sunder the universe and transform it into what I'm afraid is generally regarded as an incomprehensibly dull and pointless game" (Chapter 10, p. 86).

"Time travel is increasingly regarded as a menace. History is being polluted" (Chapter 15, p. 110).

"Arthur materialized, and did so with all the customary staggering about and claspings at this throat, heart and various limbs that he still indulged himself in whenever he made any of these hateful and painful materializations that he was determined not to let himself get used to" (Chapter 16, p. 113).

"The longest and most destructive party ever held is now into its fourth generation and still no one shows any sign of leaving. Somebody did once look at his watch, but that was eleven years ago now, and there has been no follow up" (Chapter 19, p. 142).

"It is a mistake to think you can solve any major problems just with potatoes" (Chapter 24, p. 165).

"Slow numb astonishment crept up the bodies of Slartibartfast, Ford and Arthur. Very soon it would reach their brains, which were at the moment solely occupied with moving their jawbones up and down. Trillian was shaking her head as if trying to finish a jigsaw puzzle by shaking the box" (Chapter 29, p. 183).

"The supernova bomb flew through the air. It hit the back wall of the council chamber and dented it very badly" (Chapter 31, p. 198).

"'You were right,' he said at length. 'I deliberately nurtured the planet of Krikkit till they would arrive at the same state of mind as the Silatic Armorfients, and require of me the design of the bomb I failed to make the first time" (Chapter 32, p. 203).

"He learned to communicate with birds and discovered that their conversation was fantastically boring" (Chapter 34, p. 227).



## Topics for Discussion

What elements of "typical" science fiction are present in the story. How does the author parody these typical elements?

How does the author satirize English culture in the story?

Discuss the character of Prak. What role does he play in the resolution of the story?

How does the author use absurdity in his satire?

The main character, Arthur Dent, does not initiate much of the action in the story but is mostly an observer. Why do you think the author uses the character in this way?

The story line contains a large number of seeming coincidences. Are these explained in the story?

The book is the third in a series of books. Does it stand up on its own?