

Hollywood THE REPORTER

'Hitchhiker's Guide to Galaxy'

Arthur Dent fans need not panic.

After succeeding splendidly first as a BBC Radio series, then as a five-book "trilogy" and a subsequent TV series, Douglas Adams' beloved "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" has taken that tricky leap to the cinema, with largely pleasing results.

While the long-awaited movie version has some trouble sustaining the blissfully ironic, witty irreverence that was the Adams sensibility, the fact that it hits the nail on the head to the extent it does should come as great relief to the legions of fans who had reason to be dubious following the author's death in 2001.

That Monty Python-esque target demographic, the one also responsible for making "Spamalot" a big, fat Broadway hit, should reward the Touchstone Pictures release with stellar, though less-than-astronomical boxoffice, followed by some very smart DVD business.

Using Adams' own second draft as a blueprint, screenwriter Karey Kirkpatrick ("Chicken Run") and innovative music video director Garth Jennings remain true to the

highly distinct brand of sci-fi satire that would go on to influence the likes of "Men in Black" and "Ghostbusters."

For those unfamiliar with the Babel Fish, Vogons and Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters that occupy the "Hitchhiker"

galaxy, the movie actually begins back on Earth, where Everyman Arthur Dent (perfectly cast everyman Martin Freeman, late of "The Office") is fighting a losing war with a bulldozer that's about to raze his home.

Coincidentally, planet Earth also happens to be minutes away from total annihilation in order to make way for a hyperspace free-

way, and Dent, still wearing his pajamas, is rescued in the nick of time by his best friend, Ford Prefect (Mos Def), who's really an

See "HITCHHIKER" on page 17 alien who has just been posing as an out-of-work actor.

The two briefly stow away on a spacecraft belonging to the highly bureaucratic, bad-poetry-reading Vogons, before ending up on the Heart of Gold spaceship, which was stolen by the energetic but rather dim President of the Galaxy, Zaphod Beeblebrox (Sam Rockwell channeling George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and assorted rock stars).

Much to Dent's surprise, Beeblebrox is accompanied by comely astrophysicist Trillian (Zoey Deschanel), who went by the name of Trish McMillan back when he met her at a costume party.

And that's just for starters. Also along for the metaphysical mash-up is Marvin, a chronically depressed robot (ideally voiced by Alan Rickman), rather crazed

intergalactic missionary Humma

Kavula (John Malkovich) and Magrathean planetary construction engineer Slartibartfast (Bill Nighy), who has overseen the building of a back-up planet Earth.

Jennings, creatively blending bits of CGI with old school FX and Jim Henson's Creature Shop, gets the tone down cold, but like a number of other novice feature directors who cut their teeth on videos, the inspired sequences don't always effectively link together to form a cohesive, involving whole.

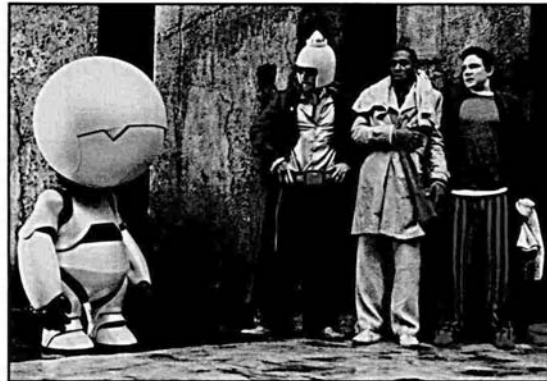
Still, there is much to appreciate here, from the terrific casting (heard but not seen are Helen Mirren as the voice of the Deep Thought computer and Stephen Fry providing the amiably glib narration) to production designer Joel Collins' fanciful sets and especially the rousing musical number, "So Long & Thanks For All the Fish," performed by some very wise dolphins who manage to get out while the going's good. ■



BY MICHAEL RECHTSCHAFFEN

opens Friday, April 29

the bottom line Douglas Adams' inspired "Guide" hits the screen with its disarmingly droll spirit quite intact.



From left: Warwick Davis, Sam Rockwell, Mos Def and Martin Freeman

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Buena Vista

Touchstone Pictures and Spyglass Entertainment present a Barber/Birnbaum production/a Hammer and Tongs production/ an Everyman Pictures production

Credits: Director: Garth Jennings; Screenwriters: Douglas Adams and Karey Kirkpatrick; Based on the book by: Douglas Adams; Producers: Gary Barber, Roger Birnbaum, Nick Goldsmith, Jay Roach, Jonathan Glickman; Executive producers: Douglas Adams, Robbie Stamp, Derek Evans; Director of photography: Igor Jadue-Lillo; Production designer: Joel Collins; Editor: Niven Howie; Costume designer: Sammy Sheldon; Music: Joby Talbot. **Cast:** Zaphod Beeblebrox: Sam Rockwell; Ford Prefect: Mos Def; Trish McMillan/Trillian: Zoey Deschanel; Arthur Dent: Martin Freeman; Slartibartfast: Bill Nighy; Marvin: Warwick Davis; Questular: Anna Chancellor; Voice of Marvin: Alan Rickman; Voice of Deep Thought: Helen Mirren; Narrator: Stephen Fry; Humma Kavula: John Malkovich.

MPAA rating PG, running time 108 minutes.