

Long journey to the big screen

Details swamped author Adams

Film's makers happy with result

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NEW YORK—Left to his own devices, as he was for many moons, Douglas Adams would never have completed the screenplay for *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

The *Hitchhiker's* movie became a case study in cinema stasis, and was included in a book about failed sci-fi films. Adams' unexpected death from a heart attack in 2001 made the *Hitchhiker's* movie a matter for his estate, not his restless muse, and allowed executive producer (and close friend) Robbie Stamp, director Garth Jennings and eventual co-screenwriter Karey Kirkpatrick to finally get on with the job.

Two big problems remained: how do you stay true to Adams' vision, when he wasn't sure of that vision himself? And how do you make a film that will please the vast *Hitchhiker's* cult, without creating a cult movie?

Stamp, Jennings and Kirkpatrick, two Britons and an American, addressed these and other issues in separate interviews at a recent *Hitchhiker's* junket.

Why did Adams find it so hard to finish a Hitchhiker's screenplay?

Stamp: "It sounds very basic and very obvious, but I think in a way Douglas got lost because he was always up for reinventing... He spent a lot of time shuffling blocks of material around without necessarily making big difficult structural decisions."

Jennings: "It was never plot-driven."

Kirkpatrick: "I think more it was just a loss of objectivity."

Is it true that Adams resisted the love-triangle rivalry between Arthur, Zaphod and Trillian?

Jennings: "It was always in the books as far as Arthur meeting Trillian at a party... But the trick was always how to build this relationship up so that it played upon that sort of awkwardness, that triangle with Zaphod... But how to do that in a *Hitchhiker's* way, you know? It would never be, and should never be, where you'd come out and say, 'Well, it's the most amazing love story I've ever seen.'"

Why did you go for the lo-tech look for Hitchhiker's? Why not make full use of modern computer graphics?

Stamp: "I think *Hitchhiker's* would have rattled around inside a full-blown CG treatment. Had it been made to look absolutely like a *Star Wars* I think the humour would just have been crushed."

Jennings: "I love CG effects. I think they're a fantastic tool. But I think (the Jim Henson puppets in the film) had a lovely hand-made quality to them."

Everyone has said that Hitchhiker's couldn't be a big-budget cult film. Why was that taboo?

Stamp: "Douglas... wanted to make a big movie... He wouldn't have wanted it to remain as a cult movie."

Kirkpatrick: "I actually think that throwing a lot of money at a movie is the wrong way to go. If it cost \$120 million (the actual cost was far less than that) to make, you're going to have the studio in your face. You're not going to have a \$100-million art film."

Do you think Adams would have liked the end result?

Jennings: "A lot of people who were working on it were close to Douglas. The other day I showed it to all his family as well as a huge number of dear friends, and at the end I think people found it quite moving. The whole film is supposed to be a celebration of *Hitchhiker's*, first and foremost, a celebration of all this stuff... It's going to have lumps and bumps but my God, it always had that stuff."

Kirkpatrick: "God, I feel so ambiguous about that because there's something — I don't know, there's something so kind of opportunistic about the way that's done... Douglas was a smart guy. I wish I had known him and I have no idea if we would have shared space harmoniously."

Stamp: "I think the key thing that he would generally have loved is the amount of energy and passion that everybody brought to it."

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Director Garth Jennings, right, listens to actor Tim Freeman on the set of *Hitchhiker's Guide*.