

In Memoriam - Douglas Adams 1952-2001
Remembering Adams' Radio Days, and What Followed
By Eli Eshed

Douglas Adams is the only science fiction writer and in fact the only writer of any kind who produced an excellent literary work whose source is a non-literary communication medium - the radio. It's difficult to find someone who created a work so loved on several different media. He is the man who proved that radio - that almost forgotten and unimportant medium compared to television - can still create works that enthuse a large audience no less than any visual television program, and become a "cultural phenomenon".

The first radio series

At first Adams suggested a series of separate stories, each of which would present a different way in which the world would be destroyed. But then he changed his mind and decided that a continuing comic series would be preferable. His suggestion was accepted, and it began to be broadcast in 1978 as a six-part series.

The series indeed started with the destruction of the earth, which was eliminated to make way for a new galactic highway. It continued with a description of the travels of the (almost) last survivor from the earth, in the company of a set of nutty alien and robot companions, in a even nuttier universe, as they follow the not-very-useful advice of a guide book, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

That was the first comic science fiction series on radio, and it parodied almost every topic in science fiction. In particular, it contained private jokes that only dedicated radio listeners could understand, jokes based on the classic sf radio series from the 50s. The 50s were the Golden Age of British sf radio, including series such as "Dan Dare", "Journey into Space", and "The Lost Planet".

The only things that interested the antiheroes of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* were their towels. This has to be understood as a wild parody of the heroes of radio serials of the 50s who were busy constantly saving the world and even the whole solar system from new dangers. Here were heroes of a new kind, and listeners loved it.

Adams started out as an unsuccessful writer of skits for the famous British television comics, *Monty Python*, but television showed little interest in his special brand of humor, nor in his suggestions to create a comic science fiction series. Disappointed, he turned to British radio. There he found more openness to radical new ideas, if only because it could be done with far less money.

In addition to the unusual heroes, Adams wanted to create new sounds and effects in the series such as had never before been heard in radio skits. He didn't want *The Guide* to sound like the old and customary series, but instead like an album of a rock group. Adams wanted the "alien" sounds of other worlds to be heard in every minute of the series' episodes. He wanted the voices of the actors, the effects, and the music to merge together so as to create in the imagination of the listeners a picture of "another world", funny, but still completely realistic. It can't be said that the series completely achieved this goal, but it tried and certainly succeeded in this more than any preceding radio series.

Adams wrote the last two episodes in *The Guide* series after having suddenly become extremely busy. He became the script editor of the famous sf TV series *Dr Who* (1978-1980), together with his friend, radio director John Lloyd, based on ideas from an sf book that Lloyd had written (but which was never published). They finished off *The Guide* series in as final a manner as possible, by abandoning their heroes on earth millions of years in the past, long before earth's destruction. No one expected that the series would ever have a continuation.

But... Within a short time *The Guide* series had an audience far beyond the usual for radio series. It became a cult. The BBC broadcast it all over the world, and it received an

avalanche of enthusiastic letters. Of course there were some exceptional listeners that were not pleased by the strange comedy. A listener from Sierra Leone complained that as a source of information the series could disorient and confuse the listeners, and suggesting replacing it with something more educational, such as a program on the national anthems of various nations. A listener from India complained about robots taking part in a comedy series. (Did he want robots only to take part in dramas and tragedies?) But these complaints were a drop in the bucket compared to the sea of praise.

As the great unexpected success became clear (who expected that a series on an old-fashioned medium like radio would become a cult?), Adams and Lloyd discussed collaborating on an sf book

The second radio series

Two years later, in 1980, a continuation series, again of six episodes, was broadcast, and was even more successful. This time Adams concluded it at the height of tension, leaving a clear expectation of a third series. The series served as the basis for the book *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980, translated to Hebrew by Mati Vagenrik and Dana Lederer, Keter Publishing, 1986).

What followed

Adams became a famous writer, he wrote additional books in *The Guide* series, none of which, in my opinion, are nearly as good as the two based on the radio series.

The third book in the series, *Life, the Universe and Everything* (1982, translated to Hebrew by Mati Vagenrik and Dana Lederer, Keter Publishing, 1986), is still very funny. This book is based on a script that Adams wrote for a *Dr Who* movie that was never produced. Adams, who didn't want to waste good material, rewrote it as a book in *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series. Here he had problems with the American publisher because Adams scattered the word "FUCK" around in this book, which distressed the publisher who was afraid of corrupting child readers. Adams solved the problem by adding a section that introduced the word "Belgium" as a dirty word, a section taken from the radio series. In the British version this section does not appear at all; the tougher British publishers simply left the original word as it was. With respect to the two next and last books in the series, it is enough to say that they are not on the literary level of their predecessors, nor are they as funny.

Adams later wrote two very charming books in the *Dirk Gently* series, and one or two more, and then stopped writing. The last sf book which appeared under his name, *Spaceship Titanic*, was based on a computer game Adams created, but was

based on the series. In the end Adams changed his mind and preferred to write the book by himself. His book, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979, translated to Hebrew by Mati Vagenrik and Dana Lederer, Keter Publishing, 1985), became a bestseller far beyond the usual in sf books. Thus was born one of the most successful literary careers of the 20th century.

Lloyd was forced to "make do" by producing one of the most successful British comedy series, *Spitting Image* (the spiritual mother of the Israeli "HaHartzufim"), and *The Adventures of the Black Adder* which some (and I among them) think is the best comedy series of all time. Lloyd is considered the most important producer of comedy series today.

But this time, sadly, the second radio series was also the last radio series. Adams had become too successful to continue to give his energy to radio. He earned an income far beyond anything he dreamt of when he was a radio skit writer. Anyone who wanted to know what would happen next to the adventurers of *The Guide* had to turn to books.

written by the talented Terry Jones, from the original *Monty Python* group. Ironically, Terry Jones had once been one of Adams employers, and here he became Adams' employee as the wheel turned....

One can argue that most of what Adams had to say he said in his first two radio series, and the rest was just expanding on it, and not for the better. There's no doubt that the first two books are the funniest.

Since then *The Guide* has become an entire industry in addition to a five book series. The BBC rushed to remake the radio series in a slightly different form as a record, but with the same actors. The skits appeared as a special book, a rare event today for a radio series.

In 1981 a television version was made with most of the original actors from the radiophonic version. Up until then the listeners had to imagine what the characters looked like. The TV version is nowhere as good as the radio version. There are things which cannot be displayed on the screen in a convincing way. The greatness of Adams and producer Lloyd was that they knew how to suggest things to the listeners via suitable vocal effects and to let the listeners' imagination run free. It's hard to do the same thing on TV.

Several plays were performed based on

the series, and several computer games appeared.

There are numerous plans which were never carried out to make a film from the series. Adams wasted years of his life writing scripts which were never used, and I doubt if they ever will be used.

Even if a film is made based on *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, with a budget of billions, it is doubtful if it could approach the effect of the original radio programs which had a budget of a few hundred pounds sterling. Radio was and

remains the most effective medium for *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, more than the TV series, more even than the books. It must be noted that *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* remains a unique example of an sf radio series which became a cult, and a real cultural phenomenon in recent years. Such an event has not occurred a second time, but there is no reason why it could not occur in the future.

I recommend to anyone interested in getting acquainted with Adams and *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and the sf skits at their best to get hold of the recordings of the radio programs.

For more about Adams see:

<http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~nhughes/dna/faqs/dnafaq.html>

<http://www.panix.com/userdirs/wlinden/adams.html>

<http://www.floor42.com/>

Douglas Adams forum in Hebrew:

<http://www.diburim.co.il/cgi-bin/forums/intraforum.cgi?forum=5554>

About sf on British radio see the article "Radio Days":

<http://sf-f.org.il/story.php3?id=105>

About the British radio series *The Lost Planet* for which *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was a parody:

<http://sf-f.org.il/story.php3?id=94>

In Memoriam - Gordon R. Dickson (1923-2001)

By Aharon Sheer

Sf author Gordon R. Dickson (1923-2001) died February 1st. Dickson was probably most famous for the best-selling *Dorsai* series (also known as the *Childe Cycle*), but to me that was more sf-fantasy than sf proper. In earlier years I reviewed some of his sf books that I liked very much. He wrote a number of books which dealt with the reactions of humans and aliens to the meeting between them:

In *The Alien Way* (1965), the hero entered the mind of a member of a more technologically advanced alien species that potentially posed a great threat to earth. By comparing the alien way of behavior with that of bears on earth he was able to understand them and find a way to meet them in peace (not so easily done with BEARS).

In *Earth Lords* (1989), a highly intelligent dwarf-like species had landed by accident on earth hundreds of years ago. They had been kept as court pets by ruthless rulers (there are a number of famous paintings from the Baroque period that show these dwarfs, for example, by Velazquez). Then the aliens succeeded in founding a secret refuge under the ground in

Canada. The hero had to deal with them as one of their slaves, and find a way to thwart their desire to revenge themselves on earth's people.

In *Way of the Pilgrim* (1987), the whole earth has been enslaved by a race so technologically superior that one of them, alone, can stand off an army of millions of humans equipped with the most powerful nuclear weapons. The hero, exceptionally gifted in languages, has become a servant and translator for these honest, hardworking and intelligent beings, who demand absolute obedience and right behavior not only from themselves but also from those who work for them. The aliens expect to tame human beings and make them love them, as a dog loves its master, and work for them, as cattle work for their masters. The aliens have done this on numerous other planets. And the problem which the hero solves is how to cozen them into thinking that humans cannot be tamed, and more, that humans are not worth even TRYING to tame, so that the aliens will voluntarily leave, without wiping out all of mankind, as they could easily do.

Dickson's humorous fantasy *The Dragon and the George* (1976) provided the basic story and much of the dialogue for the excellent animated fantasy film *Flight of Dragons*. Raz Greenberg, reviewing both the book and the film in *CyberCozen*, April 2000, said that "here is a rare case in which 'The film is better than the book'."

Dickson was a quirky writer, and his works provoked mixed feelings among readers. Nevertheless he won a Hugo award for a short work in 1964, a Nebula award for Best Novellette in 1966, and two Hugos in 1981 for short fiction.

TV Review: "Buffy The Vampire Slayer" and "Angel"

By Raz Greenberg

Every once in a while there's this movie or TV show that makes you glad you're doing movie or TV reviews. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* is this kind of show. The show debuted as a mid-season replacement in 1997, during the height of all the X-Files wannabes, based on a 1992 critical and financial flop movie of the same name. Fortunately, it did much better than its source material. The show became an almost instant hit, with a fan base that rivals the *Star Trek* fans (evident, I think, by the many people who attended the screening held in the last Fantasy.Con convention held by the society – and came out of it crying from excitement). If you're not watching it – you're truly missing on one of the best things the Science Fiction/Fantasy TV genre has to offer.

The show's protagonist is Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar), a teenager with a destiny. She is "The Slayer" – the one chosen to protect humanity against vampires and demons. After destroying her old school in Los Angeles during a fight with vampires, Buffy moves with her mother to the small town of Sunnydale, where she hopes she can start a normal life. Oops. It turns out that not only does Sunnydale sit on the Hellmouth that spawns and spits out all sorts of demonic creatures, but that it's also a real magnet for such creatures from all over the world. Under the guidance of her watcher Giles (a mentor for slayers) (Anthony Stewart Head), and with help from her friends – loser boy Xander (Nicholas Brendon) and geek girl Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan) she goes fighting those supernatural threats. She also gets help from Angel (David Boreanaz) – a vampire cursed with a soul and conscience, with whom she has an on again/off again affair.

This was the original premise of the show when it debuted five years ago, and it went through several changes since then, with some characters added (my favorites being Anya, a demon trapped in a human girl's body, and Spike, a really nasty British vampire who will go through an extreme change in the current and following season). The show's ability to combine and switch gears between many genres – Fantasy, Horror, action and Teen Drama – is amazingly smooth. The scripts ooze with quality –

in terms of both structure and dialogue. They are cleverly and on occasion even brilliantly written – fast-paced, suspenseful, touching and funny (the show is headed by Joss Whedon, a screenwriter with varied credits that include *Rosamund Pike*, *Toy Story* and *Alien Resurrection*). The direction and stunts / special effects handling of the episodes (by many *X-Files*, *Millennium* and *Space: Above and Beyond* alumni) is also excellent – pay close attention to the martial arts choreography, it will keep you raising an eyebrow ever higher at each new treat.

In order to make the show accessible for new viewers, the team behind it decided not to give it the long-arc format of *Babylon 5* or the occasional arc-episodes of *The X-Files* and instead chose to break the show into "mini-arcs" – each season confronts the heroes with a new major villain.

The fourth season, in which Buffy and her friends start college, is currently broadcast on *Star World* (Thursdays, 15:00). This is probably the show's weakest season, but it still demonstrates its strong points – take a look at the mostly silent Emmy-nominated episode "Hush". The show returned to its better form in its fifth season, which is reaching its closing episodes as I write this.

The show has also given birth to a spin-off show – *Angel*, which is also broadcast on *Star World* immediately following *Buffy*. *Angel* follows the adventures of the cursed vampire who moved to Los Angeles in order to be as far away as possible from his loved one. He takes a job there as a private detective fighting the supernatural. While *Angel* keeps the high production values of its parent-show (and has a wonderful opening theme), the end result is pale in comparison – things tend to fail to come together from the script perspective, and the directing of the action sequences often feels tired and clumsy. Still, *Angel* is worth a look – the two shows have some excellent crossovers between them.

While prior knowledge of past seasons is recommended, it is by no means necessary,

and you can feel free to start watching *Buffy* right now. Like I said, if you're not doing that – you're truly missing something special.

A Highly recommended Israeli website devoted to the show can be found at:
http://www.geocities.com/brb14_buffy/

Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

The New Hugo Winners 1983, 1984, 1985 (1989), 288 pages. Translated by Emanuel Lottem as **מבחר סיפורי המדע הבדיוני הזוכים בפרס הוגו**

I usually don't read short stories and novelettes. By the time you get the idea, get into the world of the story, it's over. So I prefer reading novels. But I was talking with Nir Goldfinger, and somehow the idea came up that there are only a limited number of musical notes and therefore only a limited number of possible melodies. Someday every possible melody will have been written, and nobody will be able to write anything new. Nir noted that sf author Spider Robinson had written a story about that. I asked to see the story, and he brought me this book. "Do you recommend this book?" I asked him. "No," he said, "but here is the story we talked about."

Well, I read the whole book and I see why Nir didn't recommend it. Depressing! Almost every story is depressing. Was there something wrong with the world in 1983-1985?

There are two excellent stories by **Octavia Butler** (1947-). She is a big black woman, said to be an excellent speaker, and her stories and books have won prizes. Yet I never before read anything by her.

One story by Butler, "Speech Sounds", tells of a near future in which a terrible worldwide virus attack has damaged the brains of almost all the survivors. Most people have lost the ability to speak or to understand speech. A few have lost the ability to read, but can still speak. But what good does speech do if almost no one can understand you? The heroine was a university lecturer who had written numerous article and books. She still has a house full of books, but cannot read a word. Still, she doesn't have the heart to burn them to heat her house in winter, as most people have done. The description of human relations in this new world is heart wrenching. The story is beautifully written, with a small ray of hope at the end, but – depressing.

The second story by Butler, "Blood Child", describes humans who have settled on an alien planet and been turned into slaves by the original population – giant three-meter long caterpillar-like multi-legged beings. Humans who cooperate live three times longer than humans normally live, but not everyone cooperates. This sounds like it could be the basis for a novel, but was never expanded into one. Humans living in enforced symbiosis with giant alien monsters. Another well-written, depressing story.

There's a silly story, "The Crystal Tears", by **David Brin**. The idea is that a protective invisible "crystal" sphere surrounds every solar system in the universe. When humans finally go space travelling they discover that they cannot enter any of the many solar systems that have planets suitable for human life. Simply, an invisible sphere keeps us out. Attempts to live on non-water planets, which abound in the universe, fail. Humans living in a non-earth-like environment simply stop breeding after a couple of generations. So the human race is doomed to live on earth in isolation, a fact that for some reason is supposed to cause mankind deep depression. I can't quite figure out why, since we've been doing it for thousands of years.

The final story I will mention is "Blood Music" by **Greg Bear**. In a few dozen pages Bear beautifully summarizes his successful book of the same name. Of course, the story is not a really a summary, the book is the story greatly padded. Don't read the book. Just read this.

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 עיצוב לוגו: **מרים בן-לולו**.

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