

# Books

Douglas Adams hitchhikes across deep space for the fourth time in 'So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish'; the collected plays of Sam Shepard; earth in the 35th century; Mario Puzo continues the 'Godfather' saga; cop stalks killer, and vice versa, in 'Glitz'; a grand inquisitor of the literati; big noise from a quiet author.

## Galactic Gag Man

**D**ouglas Adams travels the universe almost as much as the characters in his "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" books. Take, for example, his schedule for just two weeks last month. He leaves Los Angeles after working for a week on a film treatment of "Hitchhiker." For two days he's in Maryland, giving readings at Montgomery College in Rockville and the University of Maryland. On to New York for two days of brainstorming with Henson Associates (the Muppet people) for a hush-hush TV project. Then Oberlin College in Ohio for a reading. Two days later, it's a press conference in New York for the new "Hitchhiker" home-computer game, followed by game promotion the next day in Las Vegas and in San Francisco two days after that. Finally, back to his native England for three weeks of promoting his new book, "So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish." No wonder he can only squeeze in an interview while he's having breakfast at 8 a.m. When does he sleep? "That's the problem," says a barely awake Adams. "I don't have time to sleep."

Adams's talent for warp-speed outer-space wit has spawned an enormously profitable "Hitchhiker" industry. First done as a BBC radio series in 1978, "Hitchhiker" has become a recording, a TV series, a number of theatrical productions and a movie to be directed by Ivan ("Ghostbusters") Reitman. The "Hitchhiker" game, just out, is a text-based adventure in which the object of the game, says Adams, 32, "is to find out the object of the game." The first three "Hitchhiker" books—"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," "The Restaurant at the End of the Universe" and "Life, the Universe and Everything"—have all been best sellers, with a total of over 7 million copies in print. "So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish," which comes out next month, seems certain to do as well. In a typical bit of Adams tongue-in-cheek, the dust jacket for "Fish" describes it as the "fourth book in the 'Hitchhiker's Trilogy'."

From the beginning, the "Hitchhiker" books have delivered headlong action on a cosmic scale. In the first, the Earth gets



Adams: Back to earth after conquering the universe with warp-speed science fiction

blown up after less than 35 pages, and Arthur Dent, a real schlemiel of a hero, escapes the destruction and begins to carom about the universe from one tight scrape to another.

Adams's relentless sense of humor often springs from setting earthly foibles in an extraterrestrial context. In "Restaurant," he describes the hangover Dent gets after traveling via a matter-transference beam: "Any form of transport which involved tearing you apart atom by atom, flinging those atoms through the sub-ether, and then jamming them back together again just when they were getting their first taste of freedom for years had to be bad news."

In the new book, Arthur Dent returns to an Earth that looks remarkably the same way it did before it was blown up, except for the mysterious absence of dolphins. (The title is a goodbye message from the long departed aquatic mammals.) Dent works diligently to find out what happened to his native planet, with the help of a like-minded Earthwoman. Only at the novel's end do they blast off together in search of "God's Final Message to His Creation." Like the previous three books, Adams saturates the story with bizarre characters and absurd situations. Rob McKenna, for example, is a lorry driver who becomes famous as the "Rain God" because it has rained every place he has been for the past 15 years. Unlike the previous "Hitch-