

Hitchhiking on Coattails

Search

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One of the most common questions readers ask me is whether I've read *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. They recommend it. They think I'll enjoy it. I should check it out.

Ri-i-i-ight.

Consider this: The reason my writing style sometimes, in some small way, reminds people of this masterwork of comedy and literature (and don't sell the book short by combining the two categories into "comedic literature"—it is a pinnacle of greatness in each category) is because Douglas Adams is my hero, my mentor, and my idol. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is my bible. I've read it dozens of times. I own three copies of it: a paperback copy (all you really need), the version included in the inappropriately named *The More Than Complete Hitchhiker's Guide* (which is missing *Mostly Harmless*), and the coffee-table book *The Illustrated Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Oh, but let's not stop there. I have a copy of *The Original Hitchhiker Radio Scripts*. I have the original radio show on CD. I have VHS copies of the awful British TV show. (OK, some of these were gifts.)

I own, and treasure, an autographed copy of *Mostly Harmless*.

I frequently adopt the name Agrajag online or for computer games.

I believe (and this isn't a big stretch) that the best part of *National Treasure* was learning the release date of the *Hitchhiker's* movie in the brief trailer they showed at the front. The trailer didn't let on what it was for; it was just a pull-back from the earth as Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" played. When I realized, a few seconds before it happened, that the earth was about to blow up, I had to choke back tears of joy. ("What a Wonderful World" plays over the end of the British miniseries.) The movie project's been on and off for decades, and I'm both overjoyed and terrified that it finally got made. They. Better. Do. It. Right. Period.

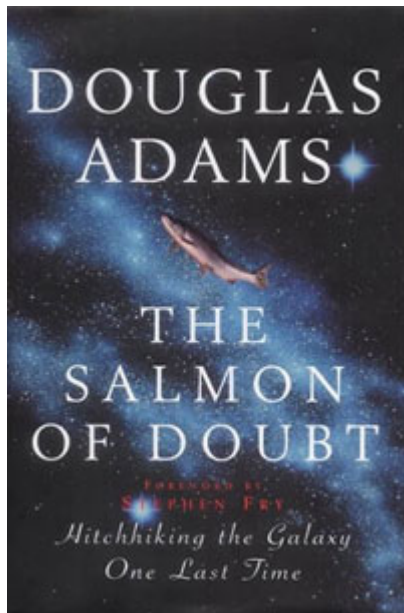
Like many others, I have come to the conclusion that *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* are really *one* book unjustly and arbitrarily split in two (which is why *Hitchhiker's* doesn't really have an ending, but *Restaurant* does). The main character is not Arthur Dent—it's Zaphod Beeblebrox. The primary plotline is not the quest for the Ultimate Answer and/or Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything. It's the quest to find the ruler of the universe.

I've dressed as Arthur Dent for Halloween on multiple occasions. (It's really easy: Wear a bathrobe and carry a towel. It helps if you speak with an English accent. It helps a lot if you mock up a scientific calculator or a PDA as the Guide itself. It's going too far if you put a bone in your beard—that's the line I have yet to cross.)

I believe that *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* actually dwarfs *Hitchhiker's* in terms of mind-boggling brilliance, but I had to read it three times before coming to that conclusion. The first time I read it, my mind was so thoroughly boggled that it made no sense to me and I thought it was



garbage. The second time, the light bulb started to come on. The third time everything clicked... and I'm still in awe when I think of it.



I own a copy of *The Salmon of Doubt*. I have for over a year now. I can't bear to read it. I know it contains the last words I will ever read from the mind of Douglas Adams, and the thought of running out forever... it's too much for me. While that book remains closed, I know he still has more to tell me.

This latest round of "Have you read *Hitchhiker's*?" was brought on by my musings about the meaning of life last week. This inspired a lot of chatter (most erroneous) in email and on the message boards about the meaning of life as expressed in the books. I'm by no means a preeminent Douglas Adams scholar, but I am the preeminent Douglas Adams scholar that's currently typing this, so I'm going to share my knowledge at the end of this column, most of which I learned from other sources. Don't read it if you haven't read the books. Read the books if you haven't read the books. RIGHT NOW.

Whenever I get an email comparing my writing style to that of Douglas Adams, I consider it extraordinary praise. I'm not trying to mimic him; that would do neither of us justice. I have my own style—but Douglas Adams was obviously a huge influence in forging it.

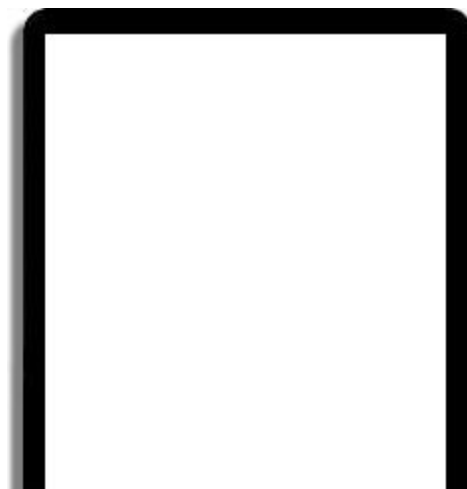
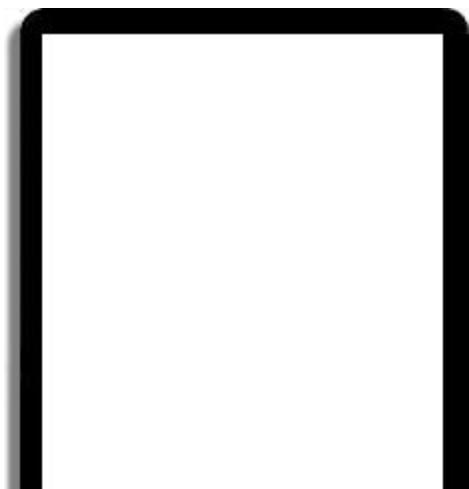
(For the single most influential book in shaping who I am today, you have to go back to *The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin, which I read when I was 11. It tapped into the core of my mind, revealed hidden depths of wonder in the world, and made who I was—a puzzler—start to make sense.)

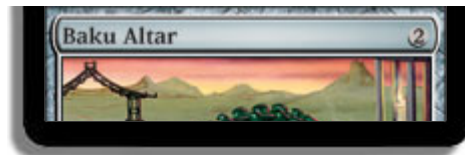
Artifactorial

Scott Johns informs me that it's Artifact Week, which is odd, because it's not that far removed from Artifact Year. So it's my task to present some interesting artifact-based decks that I didn't already talk about during Artifact Creature Week, Machine Week, any of the 52 weeks of *Mirrodin* block, or any other week I've been writing this column.

Ri-i-i-ight.

Oh, but there's always more stuff out there. In fact, there's a nutty little cross-*Kamigawa* artifact interaction that just became possible to play on **Magic Online** now that *Betrayers* is on there: Long-Forgotten Gohei and Baku Altar.







Somehow this combo reminds me of the M.C. Escher work of the two hands drawing each other, although I suppose it's more accurate in this case to have one hand drawing the other one twice. Long-Forgotten Gohei helps out Baku Altar on both ends: It makes Arcane spells cheaper, so it's easier to load up the Altar with counters, and it makes Spirits bigger, so the Altar's output will double in size.

There's another artifact that quite enjoys both Arcane spells and the Gohei: Jade Idol. (Call me crazy, but shouldn't Jade Idol show a picture of a *green* statue?) Load up the deck with cheap Arcane spells, and you're off to the races with—no, wait, it's not artifacty enough. This is Artifact Week! Where's the *Mirrodin* love?

It's right here: Isochron Scepter. The Scepter tells you to *play* a copy of the card imprinted on it, so activating it will trigger both Baku Altar and Jade Idol. You can also splice more spells onto the copy. *Now* we have a deck: It keeps generating creatures without actually playing any creatures thanks to the Altar and Idol, and it keeps generating spells without actually playing any spells thanks to the Scepter and splice.

Spirifact  

Main Deck
60 cards

<p>2 Blinkmoth Nexus</p> <p>8 Island</p> <p>3 Mirrodin's Core</p> <p>8 Mountain</p> <p>3 Tendo Ice Bridge</p> <hr/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>0 creatures</p>	<p>4 Baku Altar</p> <p>4 Consuming Vortex</p> <p>2 Eerie Procession</p> <p>2 First Volley</p> <p>4 Glacial Ray</p> <p>4 Isochron Scepter</p> <p>4 Jade Idol</p> <p>4 Long-Forgotten Gohei</p> <p>4 Peer Through Depths</p> <p>4 Reach Through Mists</p> <hr/> <p>36 other spells</p>
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Artifactotum

The drawback to that last deck is that it might actually be good. Not against anyone running Kiki-Jiki & Viridian Shaman, but for the most part it's an efficient deck with tons of card advantage potential. We can't have that—I have a reputation to uphold here!

That's why I'm going to turn my attention to a rather different *Betrayers of Kamigawa* artifact. One whose very concept (they're giant—uh, magical—hair pins!) absolutely reeks of silliness. Oh yes, it's

Ornate Kanzashi (when Understated Kanzashi just won't do). So here's my game plan: You, my opponent, have a good deck. It's so good that I want to do what you're doing. It's so good that I'm willing to pay 2 more mana than you are for each of your cards that I play. It's so good that I'll leech off of it despite the fact that my mana base isn't built to support it while yours is.

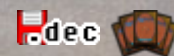
Seems like a great plan, doesn't it?

Ah, but here's where the combo magic happens. Pair Ornate Kanzashi with... Lantern of Insight! Now I can see what's on top of your deck. I know whether I want to activate my Kanzashi and play it (or just remove it from the game so you can't have it), or whether I'm happy leaving that card there for you to draw. Now not only am I playing your spells, I am (to some degree) controlling what you draw.

I can't always control what you draw, though. Let's say I use the Kanzashi on my turn because the top card of your deck is too juicy to resist. The new top card will be what you draw, and my Kanzashi is now tapped—what if the revealed card is a Naturalize? Or let's say that it's the beginning of my turn, and I've got a Kanzashi itch, but the top card of your library is unplayable or, worse, boring. I need to shuffle your library! The Lantern has that built-in, but then the Lantern would be gone. That's why the deck features a variety of shuffle effects of varying quality levels. (I'm going to be playing *your* cards—my own cards can be dreck!) Extract is efficient; it shuffles your library for $\{1\}$. Krosan Reclamation does it twice for $\{1\}$ each time. It's the wrong color, but my mana base is already set up to expect spells of any color—so they might as well be in my own deck. On the high end, Bribery and Acquire continue the theme of playing with your stuff while shuffling that library of yours. The secret weapon here is Tahngarth's Glare. No, really. Really! By arranging the top of your library, I give myself access to the two best among your next three cards while giving you the worst one. I don't care that you do it back to me—my deck's full of crappy cards like Tahngarth's Glare.



Yes You Kanzashi



Main Deck

60 cards

1 Adarkar Wastes		1 Acquire
1 Coastal Tower	0 creatures	4 Annex
4 Grand Coliseum		1 Bribery
10 Island		1 Confiscate
2 Mirrodin's Core		4 Darksteel Ingot
1 Salt Marsh		2 Extract
1 Shivan Reef		3 Fabricate
2 Tendo Ice Bridge		2 Krosan Reclamation
1 Underground River		4 Lantern of Insight
1 Yavimaya Coast		4 Ornate Kanzashi
		4 Tahngarth's Glare
		1 Talisman of Dominance
24 lands		2 Talisman of Impulse

1 Talisman of Progress

2 Threads of Disloyalty

36 other spells

Artifactory-to-Dealer Incentives

If you're anywhere near as insane as I am, there's just one thought running through your mind after reading the Ornate Kanzashi-Tahngarth's Glare deck: *Not wacky enough!* I guess it's time to break out the silver-bordered cards.

Pharmalade, aka Geoffrey Rutherford, poses the riddle "When is a Time Machine not a Time Machine?" The common answer is "When you use it to go back into the past and murder the inventor of the Time Machine before it's been completed, thus creating a paradox that rips apart the fabric of the universe." Geoffrey's answer is "When you have Richard Garfield, Ph.D. in play."

Richard Garfield, Ph.D. is broken. It's ridiculous. Mark Rosewater believes it's far and away the most powerful card in *Unhinged*. How broken is it? It won't just win you the game you're playing (thanks to its ability to transmute each card in your hand into any of dozens of other cards for free)—it'll win you the *next* game, too.

Here's Geoffrey's plan. With Richard on the table, play some sort of insane 5-mana artifact as Time Machine. You know that's kosher because *Unhinged* is obviously one of the allowable sets in the format you're playing. Use the Time Machine ability to blink itself and a 1-mana (or 0-mana) creature out of play. On the first turn of your next game, the small creature will show up from the past... *and so will the pseudo-Time Machine*. It pops back in as well, although now it has no memory that it was a Time Machine in a previous game. No, it's back to being a plain old free first-turn Gilded Lotus. That seems fair, right?



Geoffrey's preferred play is to blink out (and in) a Leveler pretending to be a Time Machine and an Obstinate Familiar pretending to be whatever it wants. That will lead to an exceedingly weird (and short) game 2. It's not foolproof: If your Familiar gets Shocked on turn 1, you have a problem. His backup plan, for those playing it safe, doesn't even involve a creature. Just play a land in your hand as Blinkmoth Nexus or Mishra's Factory, animate it, then work that Time Machine mojo to give yourself a future first-turn Razormane Masticore.

Other 5-mana artifacts that should be pretty devastating include Karn, Silver Golem; Mishra's Helix; Belbe's Portal (switching over to your Dragon deck for the next game); or Mind's Eye. Geoffrey suggests Thought Prison if you'd rather make your opponent squirm than win the game outright.

Of course, there's no particular reason you need your not-Time Machine to pop in on turn 1. Some other ideas from Geoffrey: "If you don't mind waiting until turn four, you could send an Eon Hub and a Delaying Shield (played as Valor or something) through.... Also with Delaying Shield or another upkeep 'I don't lose' card such as Solitary Confinement (played as, perhaps, a Dogged Hunter), you

can use Timesifter and switch to your nothing-but-land deck. The possibilities appear to be endless, so I'm sure I'll have missed a great big something. Of course, any 5-mana artifact is fair game, and you can have two if you Ph.D. the other as a creature! Eon Hub as a Time Machine and Naked Singularity as a Basalt Golem force mana screw from turn 5 onward. Worldslayer as Time Machine and Vulshok Battlemaster will both come in on turn 5. If you just so happened to play Whispersilk Cloak and Shield of Kaldra in the turns before, you're sitting pretty."

I can't compete with that kind of craziness. I will suggest that you use this plan with caution—not every 5-mana artifact will work. (Beware Spinal Parasite!) I don't have a specific decklist for this; there are just way, way too many options here, and what you load your Richard Garfield, Ph.D. deck with is wholly dependent with what sets and what styles you're comfortable playing Mental **Magic** with. The deck essentially has Richard, the 5-mana artifact of choice, some ways to find Richard, and a whole bunch of blanks with mana costs written at the top. Please feel free to post suggestions on the message boards.

Spoil Sport

And, as promised, the Hitchhiker's spoilers. Most of this you can find elsewhere on the Web. I'm putting it here because some people obviously need to be set straight. Like I said, if you have not read *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, stop right now and go read that instead of reading this. It's much, much more enjoyable. If you like this column, you will love the book (despite the total lack of **Magic** decklists).

Until next week, befriend Paranoid Androids, don't panic, and always know where your towel is.
Mark

Hitchhiker's doesn't discuss the meaning of life like I did last week. Not even close. Rather, it discusses the answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything. The answer is 42.

It doesn't say what the question is.

But it does! Many believe that the Ultimate Question is "What do you get if you multiply six by nine?" because that's what Arthur's brain randomly generates from the Scrabble tiles on prehistoric earth. (Hey, you—yes, you, the person reading this spoiler without having read the books—of course this makes no sense. Go read the books like I told you.) That is not the Question. The earth experiment was tainted by the arrival of the Golgafrinchans, so Arthur was not five minutes away from the Question after all.

But someone does know it: Marvin. Marvin, who has a brain the size of a planet, read Arthur's brainwaves and extrapolated the Question, even correcting for the error in the experiment. And he says it, too; he asks the mattress Zem the Question in the book *Life, the Universe, and Everything*. This, then, is the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything:

Think of a number, any number.

Makes perfect sense, doesn't it? (And if you just scoffed, "But that's not a question," you so don't get it. Try reading some Stephen King instead.)

Show some respect when discussing this on the message boards. Keep the spoilers hidden.

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