

Two severely dressed men sat respectfully before the terminal and waited.

“The time is nearly upon us,” said one, Loonquawl.

“Seventy-five thousand generations ago, our ancestors set this program in motion,” the second man, Phouchg, said, “and in all that time, we will be the first to hear the computer speak.”

“An awesome prospect, Phouchg,” agreed the first man.

“We are the ones who will hear,” said Phouchg, “the answer to great question of Life...!”

“The Universe...!” said Loonquawl.

“And Everything!” said Phouchg.

“Shhh,” said Loonquawl with a slight gesture, “I think Deep Thought is preparing to speak!”

There was a moment’s expectant pause while panels slowly came to life on the front of the console. Lights flashed on and off experimentally and settled down into a businesslike pattern. A soft low hum came from the communication channel.

“Good morning,” said the computer, Deep Thought, at last.

“Er... good morning, O Deep Thought,” said Loonquawl nervously. “Do you have... er, that is...”

“An answer for you?” interrupted Deep Thought majestically. “Yes. I have.”

The two men shivered with expectancy. Their waiting had not been in vain.

“There really is one?” breathed Phouchg.

“There really is one,” confirmed Deep Thought.

“To Everything? To the great Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything?”

“Yes.”

Both of the men had been trained for this moment, their lives had been a preparation for it, they had been selected at birth as those who would witness the answer, but even so they found themselves gasping and squirming like excited children.

“And you’re ready to give it to us?” urged Loonquawl.

“I am.”

“Now?”

“Now,” said Deep Thought.

They both licked their dry lips.

“Though I don’t think,” added Deep Thought, “that you’re going to like it.”

“Doesn’t matter!” said Phouchg. “We much know it! Now!”

“Now?” inquired Deep Thought.

“Yes! Now...”

“All right,” said the computer, and settled into silence again. The two men fidgeted. The tension was unbearable.

“You’re really not going to like it,” observed Deep Thought.

“Tell us!”

“All right,” said Deep Thought. “The Answer to the Great Question...”

“Yes...!”

“Of Life, the Universe, and Everything...” said Deep Thought.

“Yes...!”

“Is...” said Deep Thought, and paused.

“Yes...!”

“Is...”

“Yes...!!!...?”

“Forty-two,” said Deep Thought, with infinite majesty and calm.