"Deep Thought" from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams

There are of course many problems connected with life, of which some of the most popular are Why are people born? Why do they die? Why do they want to spend so much of the intervening time wearing digital watches?

Finally, a race of hyperintelligent pan-dimensional beings (whose physical manifestation in their own pan-dimensional universe is not dissimilar to our own) got so fed up with the constant bickering about the meaning of life which used to interrupt their favorite pastime of Brockian Ultra Cricket (a curious game which involved suddenly hitting people for no readily apparent reason and then running away) that they decided to sit down and solve their problems once and for all.

And to this end they built themselves a stupendous super computer which was so amazingly intelligent that even before the data banks had been connected up it had started from "I think therefore I am" and got as far as the existence of rice pudding and income tax before anyone managed to turn it off.

It was the size of a small city.

Its main console was installed in a specially designed executive office, mounted on an enormous executive desk of finest ultra-mahagony topped with rich ultra-red leather. The dark carpeting was discreetly sumptuous, exotic potted plants and tastefully engraved prints of the principal computer programmers and their families were deployed liberally about the room, and stately windows looked out upon a tree-lined public square.

On the day of the Great On-Turning, two soberly dressed programmers with brief cases arrived and were shown discreetly into the office. They were aware that this day they would represent their entire race in its greatest moment, but they conducted themselves calmly and quietly as they seated themselves deferentially before the desk, opened their brief cases and took out their leather-bound notebooks.

Their names were Lunkwill and Fook.

For a few moments they sat in respectful silence, then, after exchanging a quiet glance with Fook, Lunkwill leaned forward and touched a small black panel. The subtlest of hums indicated that the massive computer was now in total active mode. After a pause it spoke to them in a voice rich, resonant, and deep. It said: "What is this great task for which I, Deep Thought, the greatest computer in the Universe of Time and Space have been called into existence?"

"O Deep Thought Computer," Fook said, "the task we have designed you to perform is this. We want you to tell us…the Answer!"

"The answer?" said Deep Thought. "The answer to what?"

"Life!" urged Fook.

"The Universe!" said Lunkwill.

"Everything!" they said in chorus.

Deep Thought paused for a moment's reflection.

"Tricky," he said finally.

"But can you do it?"

Again, a significant pause.

"Yes," said Deep Thought, "I can do it."

"There is an answer?" said Fook with breathless excitement.

"A simple answer?" added Lunkwill.

"Yes," said Deep Thought. "Life, the Universe, and Everything. There is an answer. But I'll have to think about it."….

The hum level in the room suddenly increased as several ancillary bass driver units, mounted in sedately carved and varnished cabinet speakers around the room, cut in to give Deep Thought's voice a little more power.

"My circuits are now irrevocably committed to calculating the answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything…but the program will take me a little while to run."

Fook glanced impatiently at his watch.

"How long?" he said.

"Seven and a half million years," said Deep Thought.

Lunkwill and Fook blinked at each other.

"Seven and a half million years...!" they cried in chorus.

"Yes," declaimed Deep Thought, "I said I'd have to think about it, didn't I?"

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A man standing on a brightly dressed dais before the building which clearly dominated the square was addressing the crowd over a loudspeaker.

"O people waiting in the Shadow of Deep Thought!" he cried out. "Honored Descendants of Lunkwill and Fook! The Time of Waiting is over!"

Wild cheers broke out amongst the crowd. Flags, streamers and wolf whistles sailed through the air. The narrower streets looked rather like centipedes rolled over on their backs and frantically waving their legs in the air.

"Seven and a half million years our race has waited for this Great and Hopefully Enlightening Day!" cried the cheer leader. "The Day of the Answer!"

Hurrahs burst from the ecstatic crowd.

"Never again," cried the man, "never again will we wake up in the morning and think Who am I? What is my purpose in life? Does it really, cosmically speaking, matter if I don't get up and go to work? For today we will finally learn once and for all the plain and simple answer to all these nagging little problems of Life, the Universe and Everything!"

On the first floor of the building behind the dais from which the speaker was addressing the crowd was the room that housed Deep Thought. In seven and a half million years it had been well looked after and cleaned regularly every century or so. The ultramahagony desk was worn at the edges, the carpet a little faded now, but the large computer terminal sat in sparkling glory on the desk's leather top, as bright as if it had been constructed yesterday.

Two severely dressed men sat respectfully before the terminal and waited. They were named Loonquawl and Phouchg.

"The time is nearly upon us," said one.

"Seventy-five thousand generations ago, our ancestors set this program in motion," the second man 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 the great question of Life...!"

"The Universe...!" said Loonquawl.

"And Everything...!"

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

There was a moment's expectant pause whilst 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 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 must know it! Now!"

"Now?" inquired Deep Thought.

"Yes! Now..."

"Alright," 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!"

"Alright," 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.