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BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF

HITCHHIKER'S
GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

DOUGLAS
ADAMS

SO LONG, AND
THANKS
FOR ALL
THE FISH



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Lost chapters of HHGTG", it's basically an alternative ending to So Long and Thanks for All the Fish.

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: The Lost Chapters

Douglas Adams

Chapter 24

"What's happening?" Asked Ford, emerging from a room with Bolo and looking as dishevelled as everyone else, much to his surprise.

"We got hit during a space battle," explained Zaphod, flicking on the scanner screen. "We spun out of control and crash landed on this planet and as you can see, hundreds of it's rather short looking inhabitants are flooding over the desert towards us."

"What are we going to do?" Asked Fenchurch.

"The monkey man is going out to talk to them," said Zaphod, casually.

"What?" Yelled Arthur.

"I knew we should have got him a replacement brain," said Zaphod. "Do you want to know where the tea is before you go?"

"Zaphod! You can't send Arthur out there," exclaimed Trillian. "They could tear him to pieces."

Zaphod declined to comment, but grinned. His teeth acted as a red rag to Arthur. He charged across the bridge, intending to send Zaphod flying, but Zaphod neatly side stepped and Arthur flew past, through a happy door that opened on seeing a body flying towards it and wished Arthur a fruitful journey. Arthur rolled down some stairs and ended up by the

main airlock, which gladly hissed open.

Arthur was confronted by hundreds of cheering dwarves.

"Hooray, 'Our Seventh Obu' is dead. Long live our saviour!" They cheered. Arthur looked down and saw, to his dismay, two stumpy legs sticking out from under the Heart of Gold. He rightly assumed they belonged to 'Our Seventh Obu'. He didn't assume that she was the most infamous critic of Our Third Entism and was widely hated for her outspoken comments. If he had assumed this he would have again been right. He didn't so he apologised.

"Don't apologise," shouted Latigid, the chief Stavromulan. "You have rid us of a blight to our land. What is the name of our hero?"

"Arthur Dent," said Arthur and was astounded when the entire crowd fell to their knees, causing a minor sandstorm. He was joined by the rest of the party, who too were astounded.

"What did you say to them, Arthur?" Asked Ford.

"I just told them my name."

"The Holy One shall wear the slippers of 'Our Seventh Obu' as protection and shall be carried on high to the holy theatre!" Said Latigid.

Many dwarves rushed forward and put the red slippers from 'Our Seventh Obu's' feet on Arthur's feet. They didn't fit but as he was picked up it didn't really matter.

"What about my friends?" Asked Arthur.

"They too shall be carried on high."

On high wasn't particularly high. Arthur's feet dragged along the ground, but it was better than walking. The road looked rough on the feet.

Some one had obviously run ahead to spread the news, as crowds began to line the brick road. Arthur could see a town ahead. The crowds grew larger and Arthur began to enjoy himself. He waved at the crowds and they waved back.

"Oooh, that's Our Third Ent!" Cried one woman, beside herself with excitement, which was quite a trick for a woman of her size.

"He's much bigger than I thought he would be," shouted another person. One group wasn't cheering. Their sect believed in the Second Sitting, but also believed that Our Third Ent shouldn't have gone away in the first place. They were very devout and probably one of the most boring offshoots of Our Third Entism. They didn't pursue the sexual rituals that

most other sects did and didn't have any religious holidays. They were the only sect that believed that Our Third Ent should be punished on his return and the gun that was to exercise that punishment was aimed at Arthur's head.

Arthur, oblivious to this and many other startling facts about this planet, was having a great time. People rushed from the crowd just to be touched by him, something that had never happened on Earth. He wasn't particularly overjoyed by having his feet dragged along the ground and he could feel one of his slippers slipping off. No matter how much he wriggled his toes, it wouldn't stay on. Eventually he bent over and forced it back onto his foot.

At that moment, a bullet whistled through the space that had previously contained his head, continued its path and lodged itself firmly in the heart of someone standing in the crowd. No-one heard the shot because of all the cheering and those around him assumed the man had suffered a heart attack. They were wrong because fate had deemed this to the man in a former life and for variety had opted for the bullet this time. Arthur saw none of this and could therefore feel no sorrow for Agrajag.

"Arthur," shouted Ford. "This is all very nice, but I imagine that the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation will come looking for us soon."

"But Ford," sighed Zaphod, lapping up the adulation even though it wasn't for him. "The Heart of Gold is one invalid improbability drive ship."

"Ah, I know," said Ford, a grin creeping onto his face. "But I found a back up improbability drive generator in our quarters. All we need to do is fix the stabilisers and we're history here."

"I think Arthur is already history on this planet," said Fenchurch, proud of her man.

"Ford," said Zaphod, still waving at the crowd. "We need an atomic vector plotter to connect the back up to the ship and I used the last one two weeks ago to unblock the toilet."

"I knew there was something we forgot at the megamarket last week," moaned Trillian.

"Perhaps these people have one," said Bolo, hopefully.

"Any race that looks up to a puny primate is hardly likely to have evolved

up to atomic vector plotter level," muttered Zaphod.

Unfortunately, his bearers heard this. They dropped him, which didn't hurt, then jumped on him, which did.

"Blasphemer!" They yelled.

In no time at all, Zaphod was trussed up by the crowd and suspended from a pole held by his bearers.

"Hey guys," he moaned. "Can't you take a joke? You've got as much humour as a Vogon Stag Night!"

The power of this statement was lost on the Stavromulans, as they had never even met a Vogon, let alone be subjected to the ugliness of a Vogon bride.

"Serves you right," said Trillian. "You chose the wrong place to insult Arthur."

"Arthur, get them to put me down!" Yelled Zaphod, letting his cool slip to lukewarm.

"We will do with him as you wish," said Latigid.

"Leave him as he is until I decide," said Arthur, gloating.

"Zaphod broke into a sob and Marvin broke into the Death March to cheer Zaphod up.

The procession entered a long tunnel which Arthur failed to gauge accurately and subsequently remembered this by having to endure a bump on the head and the accompanying pain.

The tunnel emerged into a large open air amphitheatre packed with Stavromulans. Marvin's bearers literally collapsed with joy as they reached the stage.

"Don't apologise," said Marvin, knowing full well they had no intention of doing so. "I expect to be thrown about. It's all part of life."

He was barely heard over the roars of the crowd as Arthur was introduced.

"Look," argued Zaphod. "The crowd have got what they want. Why don't you let me go?"

Latigid was unimpressed.

"Your arguments have become stale and boring."

"Stale, me?" Zaphod protested. "I'm so fresh my sell by date is light years away. By nunk, Arthur, I'll get you for this."

Arthur wasn't listening. He was devouring all the adulation being thrust

upon him. He walked to the front of the stage and held his arms out. This inspired more hysterical cheers from the crowd. He cleared his throat to speak and a sudden hush fell over the crowd.

"People," he started. He felt it was a strong opening seeing as he had no insight into their culture. They hung on his every word. "I am Arthur Dent."

Screams went up from the crowd but this time as a result of the robots from Sirius appearing around the top of the amphitheatre. The place emptied like a train full of lemmings at the White Cliffs of Dover.

"We've caught up with you again," said Jeremy. "It wasn't even a good chase this time. You killed off our scouts, which was a bit unsporting and you waited here for us. I think you've lost interest, so if you can't be bothered, we'll just kill you. What is that robot doing with you?"

"I am not just 'that robot', thank you very much," snorted Marvin. "You obviously have no conception of who I am." He paused to beg the question, then started again so soon as Jeremy began to speak. "I am your prototype, Marvin."

The robots were stunned and amazed.

"We were told you had been kidnapped."

"What's the point of kidnapping me. Nobody wants me. I just ended up going along for the ride. Enough of that, why haven't you given me the android salute, I am your superior."

The robots looked at each other, confused.

"You stick you left arm in the right ear of the robot next to you. Didn't they programme you anything?"

The robots obliged, exploded and lit up the Stavromulan sky with a firework display to rival the space battle seen but an hour before.

"Almost as stupid as you lot," muttered Marvin.

Chapter 40

"We must be in Zaphod Beeblebrox's neighbourhood," mused Arthur.

"That's the second time I've heard that name," said Fenchurch, still shaking the rusty particles of an android with a brain the size of a planet from her clothes. "Who or what is it?"

"Zaphod's just this guy. He was President of the Universe for a while, he may still be. Look in the book, he may be mentioned." Arthur got the guide out of his souvenir 'God's last message to his creation' holdall. Fenchurch tapped in the code.

"How long have we got?" Asked Fenchurch.

"How long do you need?"

"The time it takes to read 'War and Peace' I think. This says page one of 627 pages and the rest of the page is taken up with references to other areas of the book where he is mentioned."

Arthur took the guide and flipped to page two. More references. Page three. Arthur was hardly turned-on by the sight of Zaphod in a rather tacky pose and was not amused by the caption that read 'Zaphod is not just a pretty face, for he can ski and likes reading. He can also out-drink and out-cool anyone in the Universe.' Arthur keyed in another code and got what he wasn't sure he really wanted.

"You've got all the time it takes me to salvage this poor robot and for us to hitch-hike to that address." Arthur stabbed his finger purposely at the screen. "I want you to meet Zaphod Beeblebrox. That way you'll appreciate me even more."

Ford Prefect was indeed in a seedy bar trying to talk somebody into buying him a drink and only achieving success as a total failure in this venture. The expression 'It is far better to give than receive' referred only to physical violence in this bar. After leaving Arthur and Fenchurch on their way to where they had just decided to leave, he had decided to find the rather nice girl who offered a comforting service to rich men in Han Dold City. Ford couldn't shake her devastating smile from his mind. He felt it would be a useful weapon by his side. Besides, having seen Arthur so happy with Fenchurch, so happy that Ford couldn't irritate him as easily as usual, and Zaphod settling down with Trillian, Ford decided the

last thing he wanted to do was be unfashionable and stay single.

So Ford had ventured to the bar where he came very close to being mutilated by an evil looking bird and an arm with a vicious streak and nothing else noticeable. Ford entered the bar, was shocked, stunned and then shocked again. He was convinced this was the same bar but it was now reminiscent of a wine bar he had visited in Hampstead. Gone were the evil overtones and murderous intents. These had been replaced by old French posters and bamboo chairs. The evil looking bird had been stuffed and put over the bar. The arm was opening wine bottles and mixing cocktails.

"Oh it's you," said the barman, who now looked unbearably smart.

"You're the one to blame for this."

"Hi," said Ford, still looking around. "I'm to blame for what?"

"Your entry in the Hitch-Hiker's Guide," muttered the barman.

"Wasn't it accurate?" Argued Ford, defensive of his life saving piece of prose. "Wasn't it along the lines of 'Wretched place with evil overtones and murderous intents' or something?"

"That's it exactly. That was enough to attract all the trendies who were desperate to find a place with atmosphere. They pushed out all the regulars."

"Well, could I change it?" Offered Ford, apologetically.

"Nah, I hate these people and their trendy talk, but they don't argue about paying, even though I've marked the prices up to silly levels. So you'd best leave it."

Ford tried to listen to some of the conversations, but there weren't any. There were plenty of opinions being offered about generally misunderstood subjects that bored everyone to tears, but no actual conversations. Ford decided to leave and find where all the former regulars were hanging out. At least he felt threatened and therefore relaxed in their company. As he left, he butted into one opinion with 'Ah, but you haven't considered the Vogons, have you?', which enabled one rich young trendy to launch into his very personalised views on Vagon sociology.

Ford eventually found a suitably seedy bar, which is where we find him.

"But if you buy me a drink you can go around saying 'Do you know who I bought a drink for the other night? Ford Prefect, that's who. I won't

mind, I won't even charge you repeat fees for my name." It didn't work. His hapless victim had yelled something quite obscene at a slab of a creature in the hope that the slab would ask him to step outside and repeat it. The slab obliged and Ford's victim changed hands.

Ford's attention switched to the large TV screen viewer on the wall. Between the alcohol stains, a newsreader droned on about Vagon riots. Apparently, three squadrons of flying police had descended on the riots, while media specialists debated the causes of the riots at great length. All the old reasons were dusted off and injected with topical incidents to improve credibility. No one asked the Vagons, who could have easily explained that it just seemed like a good idea at the time. The newsreader handed over to the social editor who Ford recognised as one of the greatest partygoers of all time. That was enough to make Ford listen. What he heard would have made a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster reach for something to steady itself.

"And of course, all the leading lights of the social galaxy are preparing themselves for possibly the greatest bash since Eccentrica Gallumbits, the triple-breasted whore of Eroticon Six, had her coming out, in and many other permutations party. Yes, the invites have been printed for Zaphod Beeblebrox's wedding...."

Ford tried to spin around on his barstool in an attempt to catch up with his head. He then made his mind up to get wrecked in celebration. Zaphod would have wanted it that way. He felt as though he wanted company during this hour of sorrow, so he decided he would not get wrecked and look for the girl. He would get totally sobered and look for the girl. He walked outside, over his former hapless victim and down the now peaceful street. This was because the police wars that had ruined the area had ceased, or, at least, a truce had been called. It needed the combined efforts of the fighting factions to impose on the spot fines on the rich young trendies as they staggered into their bourge-mobiles to race home.

Ford peered into every doorway and saw plenty of interesting things, but not what he wanted. Just as he decided to get so wrecked he wouldn't care which girl he found, he heard a familiar voice.

"Been paid for those two words yet?" It was backed up by the devastatingly shy but self-confident smile that had his emotions

screaming for mercy.

"I've been looking for you," was all Ford could manage.

"I've been looking for you, too!" She exclaimed. "I owe you my deepest thanks apparently. Since you put in your entry about the bar, this place has been inundated with rich people. I've made enough to give it all up for something more worthwhile." She was hitting all the right notes with Ford.

"Good, how do you fancy going to the society wedding of the Omp?"

"Sounds good to me. We'd better introduce ourselves then. My name is Bolo".

Ford's brain relayed that to all of it's areas and innuendo came up with 'That reminds me of something from Earth that kept my tongue occupied for many happy hours', which his brain scrutinised and sent to common sense. Common sense tutted and passed it to character assessment for a second opinion. Character assessment complained, as usual, that it was overworked and couldn't say whether it would be well received or would result in a slapped face that would activate pain and the whole brain knew what trouble that caused. Common sense decided to send the thought skulking into memory to be held and used at a later date, hopefully as a witty, apres sex reflection.

"I'm Ford Prefect." She held out her hand and he shook it briskly, admiring the soft touch and the firm grip on his heart.

"How will we travel?"

A glint formed in Ford's eye.

"You are looking at one of the greatest hitch-hikers in the Galaxy."

"I'll get some money and a towel."

Ford knew he had met the girl of his dreams.

Chapter 41

A wedding is a ritual which exists in most societies, only at varying levels of involvement, from a simple agreement to meet, say, once a year for dinner, to the mutual exchanging of left limbs. The latter does not apply to the Quoquobuletes. They are easily recognised, as the male has legs which lead into the arms, has a flat torso between the two, is about a metre high and looks something like a capital H. The female is the same shape, only about 10 metres high. The marriage ceremony is not unusual, with the supposed exchanging of tokens during the ceremony, the male leaving his on the dressing table and blaming the best man. However, to certify the ceremony, the marriage must be consummated within four hours. Now this, although not a strict requirement in most marriages, is usually enthusiastically pursued by most couples as a necessity as opposed to a requirement. It is a different story for the Quoquobuletes. Though hardly through not trying, 8 out of every 10 Quoquobulete marriages end in unconsummation or physical exhaustion. Those who are easily embarrassed by such matters should now skip to the next chapter, for there now follows a description of the Quoquobulete sexual act.

First of all, it must be performed standing up, as anything else is considered merely foreplay. Due to the obvious physical differences, the male digs a small hole 0.2 metres square and 0.1 metres deep. The female then stands 0.05 metres back from the hole. The male then takes a pole (usually a wedding gift) which can be bent under force without breaking and then resume it's original straight axis. The male takes a run at the female with the pole held horizontal to the ground, aiming at the hole. Once the point of the pole makes contact with the hole, the male continues running until the pole reaches it's most springy point and propels him towards the female torso in a hope to cling on. This usually results in the male flying past the female at great height or hitting the female so hard he knocks her over. This is viewed as one of the saddest cases in the Universe and also as another good reason why the Earth was shunned for many years, because they chose to ridicule the act with a sport called the pole vault.

Another event associated with wedding is the stag night. For the

Quoquobuletes it was a chance for a last minute training session to perfect technique, but for most males it is a damn good excuse to get drunk, insult people, act offensively and generally be a nuisance. As Zaphod Beeblebrox is a recognised expert in all of these fields, his stag night promised to be a showstopper.

Psychologists have many theories about the deep hidden reasons for a stag night, such as striking a final blow for freedom or getting into a state where nothing after would be as bad, but these have never been ratified as the last person you would invite on a stag night would be a psychologist.

So, Ford Prefect was heading for Zaphod's for the sole purpose of being on the stag night and Arthur Dent was heading towards Zaphod's on a purely social visit, which would end up as a stag night they would never forget.

Chapter 43

"It says here that Zaphod's planet is a 'peaceful haven for the famous with glorious mountains which blend in beautifully with the tropical beaches. It offers good skiing, great libraries and plenty of people who think that they are cool and think they can drink.' Sounds like something from the Magrathean catalogue," said Arthur.

"Who are the Magratheans?" asked Fenchurch.

"Oh, they were the galaxy's equivalent of Harrods. They could build any sort of planet to your exact specification. I'm afraid to say that the Earth was built by them."

"You mean to say that someone actually specified Milton Keynes?"

"No, it's a very long story, but I don't think Milton Keynes was ever intended. One day I'll tell you about the Golgafrincham B Ark."

"We should have time. I think this is going to be a very long journey."

"That's the trouble with this hitch-hiking lark, you get a lot of time on your hands."

Fenchurch took his hand and squeezed it.

"I'm glad I'm spending it with you."

Arthur swallowed and tried to stop his palm from being so sweaty. He had never felt so happy being so uncomfortable.

"Much as I appreciate the lift we're getting, I think this ship is the equivalent of a 2CV on Earth." Arthur tried to think of a 2CV in desperation, but his mind kept fighting back to Fenchurch's warm hand in his. He looked around for some form of distraction. There weren't many.

They were in the hold of a family cruiser belonging to some Quoquobuletes who were on their first holiday to the sunny planet of Beebles, home of Zaphod Beeblebrox. Arthur and Fenchurch had hitch-hiked, using their souvenir God's Final Message to His Creation electronic thumb, to a large space service station, where lots of little creatures were charging around and adult creatures were stretching their arms, legs and in some cases, other extremities. Arthur bought some Babel fish and had a lot of trouble convincing Fenchurch that putting one in you ear was a really good idea. They soon found out that conversations weren't any

different at this service station than they were on any service station on Earth. Short cuts, the lousy condition of the toilets and the cost compared with a local station were the general order of the day. Arthur had eventually found someone going to Beebles and willing to give them a lift. Their travelling companions consisted of Mr and Mrs Xoloho and their three children. Their holiday was being paid for by the Quoquobulete government for being the first couple in Quoquobulete history to produce more than two children.

Mr Xoloho walked, if it could be called that (it closely resembled poor computer graphics), into the hold.

"The wife's getting a bit tired driving, so I'm going to take over," he explained. "We'll take the next turning off the hyperspace tract to fit the male driving adapter equipment. If you could give my wife a hand it should be fitted in half an hour."

"It'll be my pleasure," said Arthur

"Actually, I was referring to your young lady," said Mr Xoloho.

Arthur almost got flustered, then realised that Mr Xoloho had good reason to view the female as the dominant sex. Fenchurch laughed and Arthur reconsidered being flustered, but Mr Xoloho had gone.

"They're so nice, aren't they?" Sighed Fenchurch. "I never expected aliens to be so polite."

"They are not all like that, there were these creatures I once met called the Vogons and they...." The ship lurched out of hyperspace and Arthur's stomach lurched out of place. He stood up but his body didn't want to leave before any of it's vital organs and slumped down again.

"I could do without that," groaned Fenchurch.

"You should try matter transference, or rather you shouldn't. It makes coming out of hyperspace seem like coming out of a sauna."

"Remind me not to try matter transference."

"I'll do my best."

They gingerly stood up and went to the front of the ship. The Xoloho children had already disembarked and Mrs Xoloho was disentangling herself from the controls. Arthur walked out and into the Ship Park. There were about two dozen ships of varying sizes parked. Arthur saw two people going from ship to ship.

"Hitch-hikers," thought Arthur. Then he saw one of them wearing an

irritating grin. He couldn't believe it.

"Ford!" Yelled Arthur. Ford looked up, grabbed Bob's hand and ran over to Arthur.

"We meet again," said Arthur, shaking Ford's free hand.

"Yes," replied Ford. "Did you get to see Cod's Final Message?"

"We did and very..

"I think it's overrated," interrupted Ford, grinning with the knowledge that he had irritated Arthur.

"We met Marvin."

"The paranoid android? How is the old misery?"

"I've got some of what's left of him in this carrier bag."

"Arthur, this is Bolo." Ford modelled his flow of conversation on Brownian motion principles.

"Hello, Polo. Is that like the mint with..

"No, it's spelt with a B." Ford realised Arthur was grinning. It irritated him, which was the precise reason why Arthur was grinning. Ford's grin slipped slightly.

Arthur shook Bob's hand and wanted to borrow her smile. He could win friends and influence people with a smile like that.

"What are you up to anyway?" Asked Ford, irritated this time by the length of the handshake.

"Well I was going to visit Zaphod with Fenchurch, she's in the ship over there, doing some adapting of some sort," said Arthur, casually pointing in the direction of half a dozen ships.

"Oh, so you're off to Zaphod's wedding too?" Asked Bob.

Arthur's jaw dropped and he looked at Ford in disbelief. Arthur's brain took no responsibility for his jaw as it showed great indecision.

"Zaphod? Married? To Trillian?" He blurted out.

"Yes to all three." Ford was glad he had the upper hand again. Fenchurch joined them.

"Hello, Ford. Nice to see you again. Nice to see you sober as well

"Fenchurch, this is Bob. Bob, this is Fenchurch. Could you go and get us some food?" Ford said, in his best 'could you please go and leave us alone so we can have a private talk' voice. They obliged.

"Zaphod?" Arthur was speechless bar that one word.

"Didn't you know? It's the biggest news since Eccentrica Gallumbits, the

triple-breasted whore of Eroticon 6, opened her night club planet

"Didn't you say they had some kids?"

"Yeah, he's going to do the decent thing," grinned Ford. "First time for everything."

"I'm stunned." Arthur wasn't lying.

"Not as much as you will be." Ford looked over his shoulder to make sure the women were out of hearing range. "When I say 'wedding' what's the first thing you think of?"

"Rice down the back of my neck from a lousy shot."

"No, no, before the wedding!"

"Getting a present?"

"You're missing my point!" Yelled Ford. He took a deep breath and continued. "What do the men do the night before a wedding?"

"Go on a Stag night!" Arthur felt enlightened then thought of the other stag night he had been on. True, everyone got fairly drunk but he got separated from the crowd on the way to Soho and ended up in Waterloo Station. Those who did make it to Soho were arrested and missed the wedding and as Arthur was the only one from the stag night to turn up, all the guests took it out on him.

"Right! And Zaphod's will go down in the guide as the greatest ever!" Ford found himself doing a little dance in celebration. Mr Xoloho came over to them.

"We'll be ready in about five minutes," he said to Arthur.

"Could you take two more hitch-hikers?" Asked Arthur. "I've known this one for countless years and I know he won't give you any trouble."

"Sure, the more the merrier." He turned and returned to the ship.

"These are nice people, so please behave." Pleaded Arthur.

"You know me." Ford played his winning stroke backed up by his best grin. Arthur made a mental note to try harder in future.

Chapter 44

Zaphod lounged on the patio by the swimming pool. His estate was right by the tropical sea, but he had a swimming pool all the same. Status symbols only served their purpose if they were never used. He turned a dial, which raised his sun bed a further two inches off the ground and tilted it a few more degrees. One of his heads drained a tropical drink as the other called for another. A cocktail robot flitted over to him and filled the glass. The robot was the only one of its kind to be programmed to mix a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster the traditional way. It had cost a fortune, but Zaphod felt it was worth it. Trillian's sun bed floated along side his. She had a beautiful tan.

"Are you going to the office today?" She asked without turning.

"Nah, too nice a day."

"Every day here is the same."

"I know, great isn't it?" Mellowed Zaphod. "Besides, Heart of Gold is in for 12,000 omp service."

"How long will that take?" Trillian actually turned her head.

"I don't know. The bastards have it overnight, so they can do the galaxy, try and impress some chicks with it, recover, give it a couple of kicks, leave greasy fingerprints all over it and work out an extortionate bill. It could take days.'

"Why not take it somewhere else?"

"You kind of know where you stand with these guys. They're hoopy."

"But they'll rip you off!"

"Not this time. I pulled a couple of wires. If they miss them, it's curtains. I told them who I am and what would happen if they didn't do a proper job."

"Blackmail?"

"It's called good business. If they do a good job, they'll come out of it alright."

A small monitor flew from the house and hovered in front of Zaphod. He squinted and shaded his eyes.

"Hey, we've got visitors," beamed Zaphod. "Ford and the monkey man are here with some chicks. Freeooww!"

"You mean Arthur," said Trillian firmly. She waited. "Aren't you going to let them in?"

"Not yet, I want to see them ogle a little while longer," chuckled Zaphod. "I can almost hear them saying this can't be my place."

"This can't be Zaphod's place!" Arthur said, disgusted by the fact that he knew it was.

"He must have done pretty well for himself since the Krikkit business," said Ford.

"What was...."

"Don't ask, Fenchurch," snapped Arthur. "It's not something I want to be reminded of."

The door swung silently open. No 'happy service' or 'glad to be of service'. Zaphod had made it big. He stood in the doorway, arms open.

"Hi hi hi guys, good to see me, isn't it. No seriously, hi Ford, Arthur. Who are the chicks?"

"These ladies are Fenchurch and Bolo," said Arthur.

"Hi Bolo, nice to see you again."

"You, you've met?" Spluttered Ford.

"Yes, Zaphod's the guy with the grey limo from Han Dold City," explained Bolo.

"But don't mention it, the soon to be wife's inside," whispered Zaphod.

"Come through to the patio."

Trillian got off the sun bed to greet them. After the formal introductions of Fenchurch and Bolo, she put her arms around Ford and Arthur.

"It's great to see you guys again, it's been too long," she said. She had been explained to Fenchurch and Bolo to avoid any embarrassment a gesture like this would have caused.

"And we got here just in time," said Ford, rubbing his hands together.

"When's the big night, I mean day?"

"Two days time, we hoped you would make it."

"Wouldn't miss it for the planet." Ford winked at Arthur.

"Nice place you've got here," admired Arthur. It was meant to be admired. The house sprawled lazily like a basking octopus over the entire beach, which curved into a tropical bay. Beautiful snowy mountains rose majestically behind the house.

"It's not bad," said Trillian, looking at Zaphod. "It's the only place we

could find to accommodate Zaphod's ego!"

"What, the house or the planet?" Asked Arthur.

"Hey, guys! What is this, get at Zaphod day or something?" Exclaimed Zaphod.

"So, what have you been up to, Zaphod, to get all of this?" Asked Ford. Trillian sighed and took the women away to show them around the house.

"I'm glad you asked. Pull up a sun bed."

"Is it going to take that long?" Asked Arthur.

"No monkey man, you're just looking a little peaky, the suns will do you the world of good." Arthur ignored the insult and climbed on the sun bed. He was immediately turned upside down.

"Turn the dial," said Ford, climbing onto his sun bed.

Arthur fiddled with the dial and eventually got himself into a position where the two suns beat down on either side of his face, casting no shadows.

"This is paradise," he sighed.

"No, it's Beebles, it's got a much better ring to it," said Zaphod. "Anyway, after the Krikkit lark, the galactic police caught up with me, but they just wanted to escort me to the galactic council. They were still angry over the Heart of Gold, but once I explained to them how I saved the Universe from the Krikkits, they were fine."

"But you didn't...." started Arthur.

"Don't interrupt," interrupted Zaphod. "They said I couldn't really go back to being President, but would be willing to give me any other job I wanted. I didn't mess around, guys. I went for the big one. Guys, you are now looking at the new Owner Editor for the Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy." He paused for effect. "With the platinum handshake I got, I put down a deposit for a Magrathean planet. Now I've got my planet and the Magratheans have a full page advert for a year. The rest is made up from the tourist trade."

"So, basically, you're rolling in it," said Ford.

"Exactly," said Zaphod.

"Good, you can pay me the money I'm owed for the coverage on Earth!" Ford held out his hand.

"But I got it all put in instead of the edited version, isn't that enough?"

"No, I don't do this for the love, you know."

"You really find out who your friends are when you become their owner," muttered Zaphod.

"Owner!" Shouted Ford.

"Yeah, apparently, as a researcher your guide remains the property of Megadodo Publications, which is the property of myself, and your contract states that as you are in possession of the guide, you are the property of Megadodo Publications, which is in turn, well, you know the rest."

"Well here's fifty nine point nine nine alterian dollars," said Ford, thrusting money in Zaphod's hand, then took his researchers card out of his pocket and threw it in the swimming pool. "I quit."

"Nice to see you again Ford," beamed Zaphod.

"And you mate," grinned Ford. They embraced, realised how silly they looked and separated. Arthur got on with getting tanned.

"So what about the Stag Night?" Asked Ford.

"Well I thought we could go to Eccentrica Gallumbits' new night club planet, it's supposed to be wild."

"Great," said Ford.

"Are you in, monkey man?" Asked Zaphod.

"Yes, four eyes, I'm in." Arthur dialled himself a greater angle. Screaming and hollering filled the air, causing Arthur to upend his sun bed and land, too heavily, on the floor. Two little kids hammered towards him, leapt over his cowering body and into Zaphod's arms.

"Little brats," he said, grinning paternally. "I've named the oldest one Phil, after my Earth name. The nipper's called Trisha, after Trillian's Earth name."

"Arthur studied them closely. They looked like normal kids, maybe a bit too cute for his liking, but still normal. He breathed a sigh of relief to the fact that they had taken after their mother.

"Children, this is Uncle Ford and Uncle Arthur." Zaphod had changed, thought Arthur. The kids giggled and buried their faces in Zaphod. He shook his heads, still grinning. "Bless 'em."

Arthur felt that 'bless 'em' should be mentioned every time their names were said as an unofficial middle name. He had a niece on Earth called Michaela and he always associated her name with 'bless her heart'.

Michaela 'bless her heart' Martin. It had a nice ring to it and if you ever met her, you would know how applicable it was. By this time, Zaphod, the kids and Ford had gone inside. Arthur hurried into the house.

Everyone was sitting around a magnificent table, covered by a magnificent feast. The last time Arthur had seen food like this he had found mice on the table. He checked before sitting down. Fenchurch took his hand and squeezed it.

"This incredible," she whispered in his ear.

"I propose a toast," shouted Ford, not knowing the acoustically perfect design of the room would swell his voice to that of a Welsh Male Voice Choir. Everyone lifted their glasses.

"To Zaphod, Trillian and the kids. May your futbulions never cross and your buquabs never separate."

Only Zaphod appreciated this ancient Betelgeuse toast, but they all drank to it. As they prepared to gorge themselves, Zaphod stood up.

"Did you get us a present?"

"Zaphod!" Said Trillian through clenched teeth.

"Well, they're expected to bring a present. Still, never mind if you haven't, I've enough presence for all of us."

Zaphod was the only one to laugh, as was usual for his attempts at humour.

"Actually, we have," said Arthur, mystifying everyone. He rummaged through his carrier bag and produced some circuit boards. "Sorry they're not gift wrapped."

"Hey, thank you," falsified Zaphod. "I'm touched, we're touched that you thought of us. What are they?"

"Marvin, or at least what's worth keeping."

"So that's where he got to!" Exclaimed Zaphod. "Where's my coat?" His demand went unanswered and the horrified looks from around the table demanded an explanation. "I sent him to the Big Bang Burger Bar to get my coat which I left behind. Perhaps I should have given him the return fare."

"Marvin is dead?" Whispered Trillian, tears brimming in her eyes. She only remembered the good times, or to be more accurate, the less than lousy times, when Marvin complimented her, or at least was inoffensive towards her.

"I think it would be fairer to say that Marvin has rusted." Zaphod's tact struck like nuclear missile in the bullseye of a dartboard. Trillian ran out of the room crying.

"I think you should keep hold of Marvin for the moment," said Ford. Arthur stuck Marvin in his pocket.

Chapter 45

Death could be defined as that which when mentioned over dinner could cause one person to leave the room crying and for all bar one (Zaphod Beeblebrox) to be put off their magnificent meal. A very personalised definition, admittedly, but a very applicable one even though it is based on a situation with a major misunderstanding. Marvin did not die, although it was what he dearly wished. He ceased to function, which had the desired effect, albeit temporarily. It has been asked why, in addition to Marvin's ability to switch off at any time and with the knowledge that by sticking his left arm in his right ear he could electrocute himself, Marvin never finished himself off a long time ago. Apart from the fact that his programming wouldn't allow him, he would miss out on the opportunity to continue being wretched, which he did until his body could take it no longer.

There are those who feel that Marvin's end was untimely and a bit of an anticlimax considering his eventful life full of narrow escapes, close shaves and apathetic encounters. His escape from the Disaster Area stunt ship has never been fully documented (though it can now be revealed that it wasn't as exciting as expected) and will not be disclosed here to remain within the legal boundaries that exist for that section of society with a furtive imagination. Nor can we forget the lengthy tale of how Marvin eventually ended up minus one original leg on the planet Squornshellous Zeta. However, Marvin has ceased to exist as before and will stay that way, unless something really improbable happens.

It may please those who think that this is the very end of Marvin to know that it is indirectly through Marvin that Zaphod, Ford and Arthur, not to mention Trillian, Bolo and Fenchurch, are soon to be sent on their way to save the Universe.

Chapter 46

The scruffy mechanic idled around by the door. Eventually Zaphod opened it.

"I've brought your ship back, goes like a dream now," said the mechanic, wiping his hands on his greasy overalls, achieving nothing.

"It was going like a dream beforehand, I was hoping for a little reality to creep back into it's performance," muttered Zaphod.

"Very good, sir." The mechanic knew of Zaphod's position and wasn't going to jeopardise his by getting cocky. "We followed the service instructions down to the last detail. No unnecessary work done. We even changed the filters on the Nutri-Matic Drinks Synthesiser.

"Okay, okay. I had an estimate but let's see how it differs from the present tense expense."

"What?"

"Shee, the bill. You know, the paper with all the big numbers all over it?"

"Oh, yes, right." The mechanic took out a sheet of paper, accidentally on purpose smudging his greasy fingers across the sundries column, which contained the tip for the waiter at an incredibly expensive restaurant he had taken his girlfriend and the Heart of Gold to on a test drive, the replacement solar tiling (the original tiling didn't need replacing but the tiling on his star buggy did) and the money he lost playing Eddie the shipboard computer at electronic halma.

Zaphod signed his name twice against his Editor's expense account number on the bill as the second signature would be worth a bit in years to come and was cheaper than a tip.

"Thanks sir," humbled the mechanic. "And you won't forget the mention in the guide, will you sir?"

"We'll see after I've taken her for a spin. I'll be in touch." Zaphod shut the door. "I'm sure I get ripped off more than bog roll."

Arthur was feeding all his details into the latest gizmo from the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation, the Tailormatic. The principle was very good. By feeding in all bodily details, such as height, weight, number of limbs, etc., the Tailormatic would link up to the fashion mainframes around the Universe to consult what the latest fashions were and then synthetically

create an ideal outfit. Unfortunately, it was programmed by the same man who programmed the Nutri-Matic machine and didn't always produce the goods, so to speak.

Arthur hit the enter button and the Tailormatic shook into action. Eventually, a cellophane wrapped package popped out. Once Arthur had spent five minutes removing pins and cardboard, he tried it on.

"And this is fashionable?" He asked the machine rhetorically.

"Upon my life, I've never seen anyone wear it so well," chirped the machine.

"It's not too bright?"

"Bright is in, my boy. You want to be noticed, don't you?"

"Yes, but not to be ridiculed."

"Don't be silly, I wish I could get away with wearing something like that."

"I'm more worried about being put away. And I suppose the motto Share and Enjoy applies to the clothes as well. How many people am I supposed to share this with at one time?"

"It's meant to be loose, it flows."

"So does wine, but I wouldn't go out in it."

"Well I can take it in a touch, but it would ruin the line."

"Don't bother, I'll get a second opinion."

Fenchurch was trying on one of Trillian's dresses for the wedding. Arthur charged in, muttered an embarrassed apology and walked out.

"Arthur!" She shouted. He sheepishly put his head around the door.

"Come in."

"I just wanted your opinion on this." He held his arms out and turned around. What the Tailormatic had produced was a gold lame track suit-like outfit, which hung on Arthur like snow on a weeping willow.

Fabulous embroidery covered the outfit and reflective prism strips had been sown in all over.

"Well you'd look better hanging from the ceiling of the night-club than on the dancefloor. No, it's really quite different." Fenchurch had trouble suppressing a laugh.

"It's supposed to be fashionable in the better places in the Universe."

"When in Rome, do...."

"I think I'll wear my jacket over it, that way I won't feel like a walking laser light show."

Fenchurch went over to him and put her arms around his waist.

"Promise me you'll behave tonight."

"I promise, we'll probably just have a few drinks," lied Arthur. He knew Ford and Zaphod had been undergoing strenuous body conditioning all day in preparation for a full frontal assault on as much alcohol as they could lay their lips on. "Will you be alright here?"

"I'll be fine, the three of us haven't stopped nattering."

There was a knock at the door. Ford popped his head around the door.

"Thought I'd find you in here," he grinned. "We're off."

"I'll see you later," said Arthur, hoping that Ford would disappear so he could kiss Fenchurch goodbye, but he had no chance.

"Enjoy yourself, but not too much." Fenchurch kissed him on the cheek and patted his behind.

Arthur followed Ford down the stairs where Zaphod was waiting. His outfit made Arthur's seem like funeral attire. The suit shimmered and changed colour in splashes like a cinema screen before the film starts, but without the nauseating effect. Bolts of harmless laser burst from the suit at random and the matching headband glowed luminously.

"It's on random at the moment, but I'll turn it to synchro in the night club to keep time with the music," said Zaphod. "Then watch out, 'cos my suit will do the dancing for me."

"That's good, when you dance people clear a space in sympathy and for safety," said Ford.

"Hey, cool it with the jibes, I'm out for good vibes," said Zaphod.

"Remember this is my night, I'm gonna do it just right."

"Are we going to get going or just talk about it?" Asked Arthur.

"Now there's someone straining at the leash," said Zaphod. "Obviously a love hungry man. We'll get going soon, monkey man. We won't use improbability drive, no point in getting there too early. We want to make a big entrance."

Chapter 47

Eccentrica Gallumbits' night-club planet looked no different from any other Magrathean planet on approach. Only on closer inspection could you make out the glittering surface. Zaphod put the Heart of Gold into orbit around the planet to get a better look. A huge complex covered a quarter of the planet, with ship parks covering the remainder. Zaphod tuned the Sub-Etha radio into the planet and a bass line, which sounded like it had been carved out of granite, pounded the speakers.

"Now that's what I call a groove," said Zaphod, tapping his heads together in time.

The planet suddenly burst into light as it was switched to sound to light. The surface pulsated with the beat.

"Beats the hell out of a neon sign," said Arthur.

Zaphod parked the Heart of Gold in a predominant position as usual. They stepped out into the ship park. A robot transporter pulled up and they climbed aboard.

"The electricity bill must be phenomenal," said Arthur, as the transporter weaved through the myriad of flashing lights.

"All done with fibre optics, no doubt," said Ford. "Probably all runs off one light bulb."

And the beat went on. The transporter had Quadraphonic speakers to confirm that the lights weren't going off at a tangent. Arthur could feel his heart trying to keep time with the music. The transporter pulled up at the main entrance.

Flash bulbs flashed. Cameras whirled. Reporters jostled with each other to get a good position.

"Are you still going through with it, Zaphod?"

"Are you really giving up the wild life?"

"Do you think marriage will interrupt your quest for ultimate coolness, Mr Beeblebrox?"

"Hey guys," said Zaphod, lapping up the attention. My future wife will hear about anything I say to you, and you know how you take things I say out of context." He stopped and posed briefly for photographers. "So I guess I ought to remain silent."

After several throwaway poses, he went through the crowd to the door. Ford and Arthur fought their way through to join him. Zaphod put his arms around them and grinned for the cameras. "One for the album. My last night of freedom!"

Chapter 48

Eccentrica Gallumbits, the triple breasted whore of Eroticon 6, is universally famous as one of the best good times known to males. Part of her fame is due to a coffee cup being placed on a genetic engineer's plan prior to her birth. Gallumbits, an old inferno of Zaphod Beeblebrox, has been the centre of many wild rumours, such as her erogenous zones starting four miles from her body where, in fact, it has been statistically proven that even when she is in the mood, the distance is at most two miles. Another rumour, inaccurate again, is that fortunate males, whom we shall accurately call joyriders, accompanying Gallumbits on what we shall call an excursion, experience a feeling akin to the planet/moon/starship/waterbed moving. Professional observers, positioned at a safe distance, have observed that no such movement is apparent. However, as joyriders considerably outnumber professional observers, this has yet to be proven. Any professional observers who have joined the growing ranks of joyriders in an attempt to measure any movement first hand usually drop all their necessary equipment in a frenzy at the appropriate moment.

She has been condemned by 'Females Repelled by an Uncaring Male Population Society' (FRUMPS) as 'degrading to females' and 'too stupid for words'. However, Gallumbits has proven to have one of the most brilliant female business minds of all time. Her three dimensional, full size holoposter (cost of the planning permission for the house extension included in the price) helped her retain her Positively the Most Polpular Pin-Up Award for the tenth year running and boosted her earnings close to Disaster Area proportions. Her favourite saying 'I don't care if they are more interested in my body than my mind, so long as they realise that I am more interested in their money than their body' angered the FRUMPS so much, they sued. Gallumbits was acquitted by a male judge and an all male jury.

Chauvinists on Earth will be comforted by the fact that although chauvinism may be dying out on Earth, the traditions are still being upheld in other parts of the Universe.

Eccentrica Gallumbits stood at the reception, hot with anticipation.

Another rumour states that she can be hot with boredom, with disgust and while doing the dusting but only two of these can be genuinely vouched for. She could see Zaphod fighting his way to the door. She curled her leg around a small Tube supporting a drink. The small Tube dropped the drink in the excitement and ran over to his crowd of Tubes in the bar to exaggerate what happened.

"Hey Babe, what's shaking?" Said Zaphod after a dramatic entrance that included kicking the door open, only to slam in Arthur's face.

"Same things as always," said Gallumbits seductively and gave a physical demonstration. "I heard the bad news on the Sub Etha."

"Had to happen one day," said Zaphod.

"I suppose so," sighed Gallumbits, as seductively as the ear would allow. As she does everything seductively, it can be safely assumed that although it will no longer be mentioned, she is being seductive. "I'm wearing three black bands in memory of the sad day."

"First time I've seen them worn there," said Ford, fascinated.

"Little Ford!" Squealed Gallumbits. "It's been ages. Have you got over your little problem yet?" Ford's ogling was distracted.

"What problem's this, little Ford?" Asked Zaphod, deciding to kick off the personal abuse for the evening.

"Who's this?" Interrupted Gallumbits.

"Oh, this is just Arthur Dent, he's a friend of Trillian. He'll be alright if you can let him have some tea," said Zaphod, verbally swinging his fist from Ford to Arthur.

"The Arthur Dent?" Squealed Gallumbits. She squealed a lot.

"Not this again, yes, the Arthur Dent," said Arthur.

Gallumbits brushed past Zaphod and Ford, exciting them more than a brush should legally be allowed to. She put her arms on Arthur's shoulders and kissed him.

"I've heard a lot about you," she smouldered. "But I don't think I've had the pleasure."

Arthur's voice decided to go falsetto when he was hoping for a rich tenor. His body was pleading for mercy and a cold shower.

"I don't think we have," he squeaked. "How do you do."

"I've had no complaints so far."

"Well," said Arthur, searching for inspirational conversation in a mind

filled with other matters. "That's very good."

"Don't worry, she's always after fresh blood," said Zaphod.

"Worried, who's worried?" Said Arthur, wondering if it was her perfume.

"Not me, I'm not worried. What have I got to be worried about?"

"Nice place you've got here," said Ford, glancing briefly at the decor before resuming Gallumbits watching.

"I'm proud of it," said Gallumbits, sticking her chest out. "It's taken a long time to get it how I wanted it, but I think it will keep everyone happy."

Arthur was swimming in a pool of ambiguity.

"I hope it lives down to your reputation," said Zaphod.

"I've worked hard enough to get it that way. I've got to sort out some business affairs right now, but you go and enjoy yourselves, it's all on the house tonight. I'll catch up with you later. Especially you, Arthur."

She touched all of them on the cheek with delicate fingers and disappeared behind a door into which Arthur had assumed was the men's toilet because of the men queuing up outside it.

"Still looking good," sighed Ford.

"And then some," replied Zaphod.

"And plenty after that," added Arthur, his voice edging down the scale to soprano.

"Well," said Zaphod, snapping out of the trance. "Let's observe and reserve."

"What?" Asked Arthur.

"Let's pick out the suitable women," explained Zaphod. "It's just as well I'm beyond having my style cramped."

"But your getting married tomorrow," protested Arthur.

"It's because I m getting married tomorrow that we must pull tonight. Otherwise the marriage will be null and void. It's a condition. That was one of the few good things I did as President of the Universe."

"And do we all have to pull?" Asked Arthur.

"We're supposed to, but we may make an exception in your case, it would be a shame to cancel the wedding because of you," piped Ford.

"Let's discuss this over a drink," pleaded Zaphod.

They headed into one of the 42 bars that had been littered all over the complex. The barman of this one stood proudly behind his bar, polishing glasses. Ford reached the bar first.

"Do you serve Pan Galactic Gargle-Blasters?" He asked. "And don't say we serve anyone with the money." The barman reached over the bar and picked Ford off the ground by the collar of his blazer.

"I happen to be one of the most experienced Pan Galactic Gargle-Blaster mixers in the Universe," muttered the barman in Ford's ear. Ford clapped his hand down on the barman's flattish head. The smacking noise and the shock caused the barman to drop Ford.

"Is that so?" Said Ford.

"That is so," said the barman.

"Well, buddy boy, I'm going to put you to the test," said Ford. "Do you know who is in our party? No? Zaphod Beeblebrox, that's who."

"Er, really?" Said the barman, swallowing hard.

Zaphod leaned against the bar, smiled, raised a hand and emitted his coolest 'Hi'.

"So mix one up and we'll see what Zaphod has to say," said Ford.

"It won't take a minute, Mr Beeblebrox," flustered the barman.

Zaphod placed all three hands on the bar and started breathing deeply. He rolled his heads in opposite directions, which caused a flutter of applause to come from the small crowd that had formed. A small camera hovered above the bar, transmitting the pictures to all the video screens in the night-club.

Zaphod started puffing and slapping his cheeks. He decided to use his right head for the drinking and his left head for the observing. He bent his knees and squatted down, his hands still on the bar. He blew loudly several times and stood upright. He turned to his audience, now quite large, and jogged on the spot. He thrust his arms up in a 'Rocky' type pose, one he had been mastering in front of the mirror, which started the applause again.

"I will need a silver spoon, preferably the one you used to make the drink, a timing device, a glass of water and a cloth," said Zaphod like a magician looking for volunteers. The barman dutifully produced all of these items and nervously placed them in front of Zaphod, who was staring at him like a boxer. The barman avoided Zaphod's eyes and put the drink down on the bar. The barman stood back and rubbed his hands together anxiously.

Zaphod sipped the glass of water, swilled it around in his mouth, gargled

with it and spat it out. His suit had sensed the atmosphere of the moment and displayed dark, moody colours.

"Wait a minute!" Cried the barman. He ran over to the drink and dropped an olive in it. "I forgot, the heat of the moment."

Zaphod's glare shut him up. Zaphod lifted the glass to the light and squinted at it. He sniffed it as one would sniff smelling salts, knowing full well what they smelt like. He nodded and picked up the spoon. He scooped up a drop of the drink and switched on the timing device. Fumes smoked away from the spoon and when a hole appeared in the spoon, Zaphod stopped the timing device. He looked at the time and nodded again. He wiped away the residue liquid from the bar with the cloth before it started eating it's way through that. Zaphod rolled his heads again, much to the delight of the crowd and started puffing again. He took the glass in his hand, looked at the ceiling, looked at the barman, looked at the drink and then, while the left head watched closely, downed the drink in one.

Ford and Arthur helped Zaphod to his feet. He shook his heads and steadied himself.

"Well barman," said Zaphod hoarsely. "That was good, very good. Set up three for us."

The audience erupted, the barman cried and Arthur suddenly realised he was expected to drink one of these liquid stun guns.

"Don't worry," said Ford to Arthur, who was holding the glass as one would hold an anaconda. "Take it in sips, it's quite pleasant."

Arthur took a hesitant sip and screwed his face up in anticipation. There was no pain. It felt like slipping into a hot bath inside out.

"Not bad," he said, then found his body fulfilling an urgent desire to be horizontal.

"It'll take a while," said Ford, helping Arthur up. "Perhaps we should get you a Phodcaran Hurenge."

Chapter 49

"Excuse me?" Asked Arthur. The two dolphins stopped chattering and turned to face him. "This will probably sound very silly and you will almost certainly have no idea what I'm talking about, but I'm from a planet called Earth and.."

"You're not!" Exclaimed one of the dolphins.

"You're pulling my flipper, surely!" Squealed the other.

"No I really am," said Arthur. "I was wondering if you could explain to me exactly what happened on Earth. You know, why it reappeared and you disappeared."

"Well you are talking to the right people, my name is Etats and this is Dilos," said Etats, offering his flipper, which Arthur shook. He fought the urge to throw Etats a fish and blow a whistle.

"We were behind the Campaign to Save the Humans," said Dilos.

"I got a bowl from you then," said Arthur.

"It can't be!" They sang in unison.

"Let me guess, ' said Arthur, but they didn't give him the chance.

"You must be the Arthur Dent."

"That's right."

"Out of vision, man. Is this one meeting to remember!" Said Etats.

"Let me get you a drink," said Dilos. He passed a container to Arthur. It was see-through with a straw poking through the lid. Arthur sipped the straw and was pleasantly surprised to taste gin and tonic. When he released the straw, he quickly put his finger over it to prevent any water getting in, being 10 metres under and sitting around a submerged table.

"Don't worry," said Etats. "Each cup has an artificial atmosphere in it to allow liquid out but not in."

"How clever," remarked Arthur, removing his finger.

"Now where shall we start?" Said Dilos. "We originally came from a planet called Dolph. It was a grotty planet really. It was in the same dimension as those bastards who wanted the ultimate answer to life, the Universe and everything."

"I know all about that," said Arthur.

"Terrible neighbours," said Etats. "We used to tap their information

channels just to remind ourselves how lucky we were. Anyway, Deep Thought decided that Dolphins were to be part of the network. They approached us with this proposition to spend time on Earth and we accepted."

"Not because we wanted to help," interrupted Dilos.

"Oh no, we couldn't give a Jrevi Wooc about them," said Etats. "No, it just seemed like a good holiday spot. So we decided that we would work to get our planet in decent living order and holiday on Earth until the work was done. We worked shifts, half the workforce on Dolph, half on holiday. We arrived just before the Golgafrinchians. The hyper intelligent, pan dimensional beings hadn't arrived so we knew then it wasn't going to work. Still, we weren't going to tell them because the Earth was far superior to Dolph and we were having too much fun

"We loved the humans," continued Dilos. "Once all the cavemen died, the inbreeding of the Golgafrinchians reduced them to babbling idiots."

"How could you tell the difference?" Asked Arthur.

"Good point, because the hyper intelligent pan dimensional beings couldn't," laughed Etats. "That's why they didn't abort the whole thing. So modern man evolved from that time on. The mice moulded them through the years unaware they were wasting their time."

"No wonder you lot always seemed to be happy," said Arthur.

"We were," said Dilos. "But we felt sorry for the humans, because they treated us so well most of the time. So when we found out about the Vogon Constructor Fleet, we tried to warn you, but you didn't have Babel fish. So we started the Campaign to Save the Humans. No-one was particularly interested and the psychiatrists gave us a lot of trouble. They didn't believe us about the Golgafrinchians. They put it down to a childhood neurosis. Apart from saving the Humans, we didn't really fancy going back to Dolph, which was still in a pretty bad way."

"Then we had a stroke of luck," said Etats. "One of our great hobbies in the sea when we weren't on the surface was what you called 'hacking' on computers. That how we found out about the Vogons."

"You had computers in the sea?" Asked Arthur.

"Yes, not the sort you would have used but computers all the same," said Dilos.

"Sorry," said Arthur. "We've gone off track. Please continue with the

story, I m fascinated."

"Okay," said Etats. "We were hacking the databanks of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation and got hold of a provisional press release about the launch of a new product, the Planetcopier. It was a device that could copy whole planets. Marvellous device but the Marketing Division had screwed up again. No-one needed it or could afford it. But it was perfect for us. We borrowed it on a ten day evaluation trial and took a perfect copy of the Earth the second before it blew up."

"Unbelievable," said Arthur, staggered.

"The copy took a week to complete, in which time you went to Magrathea and made the Earth Mark 2 redundant. The Magratheans opened shop again and put it on special offer. They took Dolph on part exchange and we put the Earth Mark 2 directly opposite the copy of the Earth so with the Sun between us you wouldn't know we were there. While the copy was being finished, we sneaked back and left bowls to the three most important people on the Earth:you, for making the Earth Mark 2 available, a girl called Fenchurch who was the poor soul chosen as the printout device...."

"I know her," said Arthur proudly.

"How is she shaping up?" Asked Dilos. "Part of the conditions we had to meet from the psychiatrists was wiping her mind of whatever answer she had. Awful shock for her."

"She's okay now," said Arthur. "We're travelling the Universe together."

"How nice," said Etats. "The final person was Wonko the Sane, a good buddy who figured us out."

"Well that explains a lot," sighed Arthur. "I could die a happy man now."

"Now that could be arranged very easily," said Zaphod, floating down.

"You can t upset me," said Arthur. "Everything is clear now."

"What's that, your brain scan?" Asked Zaphod, bobbing gently.

"Anyone fancy playing some games?" Asked Etats.

"Hey, they've got a Sirius Cybernetics Corporation terminal, we could try some heavy duty hacking," said Dilos.

"Sound's good to me," said Zaphod.

"I hear they've introduced another level of security," said Etats. They all floated to the surface and swam over to the terminal. Ford was lounging by the pool. Arthur joined him.

"How's it going?" Asked Ford.

"Great, the dolphins told me all about what really happened to the Earth, it's amazing," said Arthur. "They took a copy of the Earth with a Sirius Cybernetics Corporation Planetcopier."

"Oh, I've heard of that," said Ford. "Apparently they dropped the price by a few thousand Alterian Dollars, renamed it the XT and sold it as an A4 photocopier."

"They're all over there trying to break into the Sirius Cybernetics computer banks."

"Old hat," yawned Ford. "A real achievement would be to...."

Ford's eyes glazed over.

"What's the matter?" Asked Arthur. "Pan Galactic relapse?"

"Have you still got Marvin's bits in your pocket?" Demanded Ford.

"Yes, I daren't throw them away."

"Good, good," chuckled Ford. "Zaphod, come here!"

"Hold on," yelled Zaphod. "I'm on level 4."

Ford grabbed Arthur and pulled him over to the terminal. Zaphod was bashing away at the controls. Ford pulled the plug.

"Hey man," shouted Zaphod. "I hope you know a good genetic mechanic, cos your body is going to need a complete overhaul once I've finished with it."

"Cool it," said Ford. "I've got a great idea."

"It had better be good," muttered Zaphod.

"Everyone can break into the computer banks, hell it's the national pastime on some planets. Pretty boring planets I'll grant you but....."

"You are running out of time," interrupted Zaphod.

"What is supposed to be the most difficult place in the Universe to break into?"

"My wallet?" Answered Zaphod.

"No, that's the second," said Ford. "The planet Sirius, home of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation."

"Keep talking," said Zaphod.

"Well, we could get in there no trouble with the Heart of Gold and put Marvin back together again for Trillian!" Ford held his hands out. Zaphod went quiet.

"They reckon the planet is impossible to break into," said Etats.

"I know," said Zaphod, thinking. "That's why we'll do it!"

"You in, Arthur?" Asked Ford.

"I don't think I have much choice," replied Arthur. "The mini-cab fare from here to Zaphod's must be staggering. I'm in."

"What about you guys?" Zaphod asked the dolphins.

"No, we'd be out of our depth," said Etats. "But we'll monitor your progress from here."

"Okay then men, to the Heart of Gold," ordered Zaphod. "Excitement, adventure and really wild things look out, here we come!"

Chapter 50

The Heart of Gold was somewhat less than 100%. The service had been useful, as the neutramatic machine would now deliver a damn near perfect cup of Earl Grey, but the mechanics hadn't exactly been thorough. All the standard points of the service manual had been covered, but then the service manual didn't cover the possibility of the owner deliberately pulling a few wires. So, behind an innocent looking inspection panel, the wires (which Zaphod incorrectly assumed had belonged to the 'fasten your seat belts' light) remained pulled. They were actually part of the microprocessor controlled reverse interlock relay memory bank of the infinite improbability drive. This device dumped all the necessary co-ordinates of the Universe into the ship's computer for processing. This enabled the ship to assess current location against potential and possible location, in relation to requested location. The ship's computer would then arrive in the requested location and dump all these details back with the co-ordinates of the ship's latest position. This meant that next time infinite improbability was used, the computer couldn't update the current location in relation to it's position in the Universe, as, unfortunately, this information would normally travel back through one of the pulled wires.

In layman's terms, the next time infinite improbability drive was used, the ship would arrive totally lost and unable to use infinite improbability drive until the wire was replaced and the co-ordinates reprogrammed.

Chapter 51

"Okay Ford, hit the improb button," ordered Zaphod, lounging in his favourite chair. Ford obliged and the ship blinked out and into existence in a flash.

Zaphod was in his least favourite chair, Ford had his blazer on and Arthur was wearing something which, by all accounts, should have found it's way to a jumble sale by now.

"Arthur, I hate to tell you this, old mate," said Ford, realising he was now holding the remains of Marvin.

"I know," said Arthur, his hands stuffed deep in his dressing gown pockets. It was a little less shabby than when he last saw it but it was still very worn at the edges, sides and generally all over. "I suppose travelling the Universe wouldn't be the same without it."

"Well guys, looks like we're all dressed for the occasion," said Zaphod, wondering where his great suit was now resting.

It was, in fact, not resting at all. It was in orbit around a rather weak star and was trying to out do the star's solar flares. Arthur's suit had become an airport for a colony of flying frogs. The improbability drive also caused Arthur's watch to go backwards, the rain forests of Eeetneet to instantly dry out and for three people to be taken from the living room where they were perfectly happy, to a locked room on a supposedly impregnable planet.

"What's the big deal about this planet?" Asked Arthur.

"I can tell you," chirped Eddie, the shipboard computer. "But I really ought to tell you something quite important about the ship first."

"Put a cork in it, Eddie," said Zaphod. "We don't need to hear any more sales talk from you, I think we'll get enough of that on the planet."

"You see, Arthur," began Ford. "The Sirius Cybernetics Corporation had a lot of trouble with people breaking into their computer systems trying to find out what new releases were on the way."

"To steal the ideas?" Asked Arthur.

"Nah, the ideas were so ridiculous it was just amusing to read them," interjected Zaphod. "So the SCC changed all their documentation into paper records and moved their headquarters to this Magrathean planet

where the atmosphere was poisonous and acidic so no ship could get through unless it was travelling really fast so the acid couldn't get a grip on the ship. However, any ship travelling that fast would be smashed into oblivion because it couldn't pull up in time."

"Who would go to that trouble just to read some amusing sales brochures?" Asked Arthur.

"No one, as the SCC found out to their loss," said Ford, chuckling. "As there was no point hacking any more, sales of SCC computer terminals dropped Universewide. So the SCC gave in and put the details back on computer, but kept the planet as they had paid a fortune for it and couldn't write it off on the books."

"But how can anything survive on the surface with all that acid?" Asked Arthur, knowing full well he was expected to go out onto the surface shortly.

"The bad atmosphere stops 50 metres above the surface, so it's good clean air down here," said Ford. "The improbability drive dropped us right on the surface. We just have to hope it doesn't rain."

"Is it safe?" Asked Arthur.

"No way, I hear that employees who don't come up to scratch get scratched from existence," said Ford with a gleam in his eyes.

"Perhaps we should go back," said Zaphod, seeing a good idea fall apart.

"No, all we've got to do is pass the initiative test and we're in," said Ford.

"Initiative test?" Said Arthur and Zaphod in unison.

The Sirius Cybernetics Corporation faced many problems when they moved to Sirius, such as getting employees, getting them to Sirius and keeping them there. The third was not a major problem as they couldn't get off anyway, but the first two caused many headaches. The planet had been picked for it's remoteness, which didn't please the commuting employees, especially when they found out what happened to their ships on entering the atmosphere. So accommodation was provided on the planet, with all possible amenities also made available. The most popular of these were the Sirius Sex Cybernauts. The employees could chose the colour, shape, life form, etc. of the cybernauts to the extent of creating an exact replica of their partner, or more generally, someone else's partner. After an initial programming bug, which resulted in the cybernauts calling out the wrong name at the height of excitement, was sorted out,

the cybernauts became very successful on Sirius. However, the Marketing Division could see no potential in releasing the Sex Cybernauts for sale to the public. One was given away in a 'Spirit of the Age' competition, but as there was no maintenance agreement, it was never heard of again. As soon as hackers found out about the cybernauts, they realised the only way to get their hands on one would be to join the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation. To handle the large influx of job applicants, the SCC devised an initiative test to weed out those who were unsuitable. The test took the form of a large number of logic test rooms where applicants had to solve a problem before passing on to the next room. As SCC logic is somewhat left field of everyone else's logic (so left field it can often be found in the car park), most people die horribly in their attempt to conquer all the rooms. Those who do get through could wander around until they found an empty desk and then have a go at anything that took their fancy, which was generally a Sex Cybernaut.

"How do the applicant's get down here then," said Arthur, gazing at the big doorway ahead of him marked 'APPLICANTS'.

"Robot ships fly them through the atmosphere," said Ford. "They follow a precise route which avoids the acid clouds. We ought to get hold of that route before we leave, that's bound to be worth a fortune."

"Now you re talking my language," said Zaphod. "Excitement, adventure and really wild things are okay, but clear, tax free profit wins hands and feet down every time!"

"Welcome to Sirius." The jolly voice came from behind them. They turned around to see a gleaming android. If it wasn't for the amiable aura of the robot it could have been Marvin slouching there. "I'm so glad you have decided to try to be SCC employees."

"We don't want to be...." Ford's swift kick to Arthur's shin was sufficient to temporarily disable Arthur's vocal chords.

"We're glad we have the opportunity," beamed Ford. "Any tips you can give us?"

"Gladly," rebeamed the robot, emitting happy signals. "Mind you, all applicants are told this. There is a store room just inside the entrance. You may take any three objects you find in there. Your objective is to reach the offices of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation." The robot let out a little fanfare. "A company offering useful employment, job satisfaction

and an incredible perk. Should you require any help on your journey, just shout 'HELP' and a recorded message will play according to your position. Good luck." The robot started to go.

"One thing before you go," said Zaphod.

As the robot turned, Ford swung his satchel with all his might, struck the robot on the head and watched as the robot toppled over. Zaphod leapt on the robot and flipped open it's back panel. He fumbled with the deactivate button until it came off in his hand.

"Great work," said Ford, slapping Zaphod heartily across one of his heads.

"No panic," said Zaphod. "I should be able to reactivate him. Admittedly deactivation will be impossible but hey, you have to compromise in a big Universe like this."

"Okay Arthur," said Ford. "Now's your big chance to do something useful. Pop these memory boards of Marvin into this robot."

"Yeh, let's transplant Marvin into this jovial junk pile," added Zaphod unnecessarily.

"I'll do my best," said Arthur.

"Well in that case," grinned Ford. "I'd better do it."

Arthur snatched the boards from Ford and sat on the robot. He ripped out a couple of boards and slotted Marvin's boards in.

"It's all yours, Zaphod," said Arthur, proudly. "Let's see if you can switch it on again."

The pressure was back on Zaphod. After five minutes of forcing the broken switch back in it's hole, with a liberal dose of cursing and scraped knuckles, a low buzzing came from the robot.

"Oooooohhhhhh no, not again."

"Is it really you, Marvin old mate," said Zaphod.

"Of course it's me," moaned Marvin. "And, yes, I may be old but I am not in any sense of the word, especially in that which refers to the reproductive coupling derivative which, I might add, would be a physical impossibility, your mate."

"Hey, it is you," said Zaphod. "How's the new body?"

"Mmmm. Marvin paused. "A couple of new interfaces and a database connection to the mainframe. Let's try that." He paused again. "This model came after me, which is hardly Sirius shattering seeing as I am the

prototype. It went into mass production. They changed the personality to an amiable, pleasant one. The memory was reduced to prevent boredom, not down to your simple level though, no robot could function at that level, you would be lucky to get a digital watch to function at that level. Just as well you brought my memory with me. The logic boards have a sub etha link to the mainframe. Wretched isn't it."

"Why is it connected to the mainframe?" Asked Arthur.

"It? It? You saddle me with this monstrosity of a body and I'm forced to be at minus one with it so don't you go calling me it," groaned Marvin. "I still got my sulking circuits."

"Sorry," said Arthur, looking skywards. "Why are YOU connected to the mainframe?"

"I'll just interrogate it." Marvin paused. "I could translate every letter the complaints department received in the last millennium into Rezzlibunslan in these response times." He waited. "Every Sirius Cybernetics Corporation device in the Universe has it's logic boards connected to the mainframe for reprogramming."

"I see," said Arthur.

"For reprogramming the device into a killing machine which will form an army strong enough to let the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation take over the Universe," said Marvin, blandly. "It's due to take place tomorrow."

"Jumping Zeon swimming kittens," said Zaphod. "That could ruin the wedding, or even worse, the reception."

"That's all in the mainframe?" Asked Ford.

"Would I make it up?" Replied Marvin.

"But how come no hackers have found out?" Asked Zaphod. "More people have been in that than in Eccentrica Gallumbits!"

"I was asked to design the security system while I was on trial here," said Marvin. "I devised twenty security levels, each progressively more difficult than the last. I say difficult but I'm talking about your sort of difficult, you know, how do I get the lid off this bottle of tablets. Each time something important needs to be stored in the mainframe, a new level is added at the top end. People spend a fortune trying to crack the top level, which increases profit for the SCC. Only a few can crack the top level but all they get is dummy information. All the top secret information is under level one. No-one looks at that because they assume

there is nothing of interest in there like the imbecilic fools they are."

"Ingenious," sighed Ford.

"Not really," said Marvin. "Not if you've got a brain the size of...."

"Can it, Marvin," interrupted Zaphod. "This is serious. It looks like I've got to save the Universe again."

Chapter 52

The Management of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation were tired of having a monopoly of robotics and computers in the Universe. This had been achieved many, many years ago despite the best efforts of the Marketing Division. So when you reach the top, where do you go? Many have suggested that when you reach the top, there is only one way to go and that is down. The Sirius Cybernetics Corporation couldn't if they tried. They had such a stranglehold on the market, expendable sales alone ensured a frightening profit margin. Thanks to a clever remuneration strategy by the Management, salaries were kept low on the basis of a possible market attack by a fruit seller and as the majority of staff weren't allowed to leave Sirius, any money paid out was soon returned through the shops and bars on the planet. The salesmen were the only people allowed loose on the Universe and they spent money like salesmen usually do, but as all the best salesmen ended up as Management back on Sirius and had to account for and repay all their expenses as a condition of their new job package, the Status Quo was maintained.

So the Management's problem of great wealth and boredom meant there was only one route to take, one challenge to meet, one final bridge to cross. Universal domination. The Organisation and Methods Division came up with the idea of fitting interfaces into all devices in the guise of a remote diagnostics unit. The Director of O & M almost rejected the idea on the basis that there were no job loses involved and his old O & M colleagues would never buy him a drink again if they found out he was involved in a scheme that created jobs. Once he was reminded that his old colleagues never bought him a drink anyway because a time and motion study proved that there was no productivity gain, he backed down and took the idea to the board. This was passed unanimously at the board meeting, the Management getting excited about the prospect of doing something different to working out how many Alterian Dollars they were making per second.

Chapter 53

The treacherous trio and the soulful solo passed through the entrance of the initiative test. A large panel slid over the entrance, shutting them in. Large stark letters on the panel confirmed this with a smug 'THERE'S NO BACKING OUT NOW'. Arthur felt a "so this is it, we're going to die" scramble up his throat, but he fought it back to use when times really got bad. He followed Zaphod and Ford into the storeroom.

"Okay guys," ordered Zaphod. "Grab as much stuff as you can carry."

"But the android said we could only take three things," protested Arthur, his subconscious training to be an Englishman, a gentleman and, most importantly of all, a good sportsman backing him to the hilt.

"Nuts to the android," said Zaphod, his subconscious cowardice backing him from a safe distance. "No excuses for the pun, if it feels embarrassed it can excuse itself."

"Right, let's see," said Ford. "Damn, I've left my satchel outside."

"So?" Asked Zaphod, rummaging through piles of weapons.

"My towel's in there!" Exclaimed Ford, heartbroken. Something hit him on the back of the head.

"There, don't sulk," said Zaphod as Ford picked the towel off the floor.

"It won't be the same," sulked Ford.

"It all seems junk to me," said Arthur. "What do you think, Marvin?"

"More than you could possibly imagine," sighed Marvin.

"Cheer up Marvin," said Ford, brighter after finding the towel impregnated with mopped up Old Janx Spirit. "You must have lost the pain in all the diodes down your...."

"I brought it with me," interrupted Marvin, haughtily. "Life wouldn't be the same without it."

"For God's sake don't start him off on life," said Arthur.

"Come on, guys," said Zaphod testily "The times they are a-changing. Let's get a move on. Remember I've got a rather important appointment with 30 mega-billion viewers, all of them waiting to see the numero uno get hitched. I mean, the advertising revenue alone will buy me a holiday planet somewhere and the commercial spin offs.... I've got Trillian dolls which say 'I do' when you dig them in the ribs, Zaphod dolls which say the

same only you have to twist their arms, presentation Hitch-Hikers Guide to the Galaxy wedding covers which bear the Inscription 'Don't Panic, there's always divorce'. If I don't deliver the goods, they don't either, if you get my meaning."

"I m glad to see the values of marriage haven't been lost on you, Zaphod," said Arthur, trying to decide between a mirror and a box of matches.

"Now this is the sort of thing I've been looking for," said Zaphod, leaving his other head to ponder the expected turnover of his wedding. "This Neutron-Breaking Desolation Ray Gun will do for a start."

"I don't know why you're all bothering with this," observed Marvin.

"Zark off, Marvin," said Ford, grabbing a bag of gold coins. "Do something useful."

"I'm going for a walk," said Marvin.

"Very useful, thanks a bundle," shouted Arthur.

"Okay," said Zaphod. "I've got the Ray Gun, the heat seeking Davy knife, the laser spear and that murder grenade over there, if you could pass it to me, Ford."

"Sounds like you're about to embark on what the Americans on Earth used to call a 'Peace Keeping Exercise'," said Arthur.

Ford threw the grenade to Zaphod who held his hand out to catch it and was blown across the room on contact.

"You can only carry three items," came a synthesised voice.

"Okay, okay," said Zaphod, stunned. "I got your message, I'll leave the grenade behind."

"I'm taking a towel, a bag of gold coins and a blast gun," said Ford, looking for the voice. "That's all, honest."

"I think I'll take a blast gun as well, plus a mirror," said Arthur. "And I've found a copy of the Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy here. It's helped me in all my travels so far."

"Very touching," said Zaphod. "I'll sue the bastards for unlawful use of the Guide without the Editor's permission."

"Are we going to save the Universe or draw up a law suit against the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation?" Asked Ford.

"Right, troops," said Zaphod. "Let's keep a tight formation, Arthur, cover our backs, Ford, watch for snipers. Okay, wagons roll!"

"Excuse me, Zaphod," said Ford, as Zaphod stuck his chest out in

preparation for a non-existent swell from an orchestra. "Don't you think we should have a plan?"

"Aw, belgium man," cried Zaphod. "You ruined a great moment."

"It was hardly MGM," pointed out Arthur, none too happy about covering the back, as the last man always got jumped by the Indians.

"Okay, okay, guys," said Zaphod, putting his heads together. "Let's do some brainstorming."

"We'd be lucky if you could muster a light drizzle, Zaphod." Ford felt quite proud of that one.

"Shush," said Zaphod, closing his eyes in a poor attempt to look like he was concentrating. "Ideas, guys, ideas. Arthur?"

"Well if we have to disable the computer," he started, unsure as to whether he would be able to finish. "When we reach the computer, couldn't we just pull the plug?"

"Come on, Arthur," sighed Ford. "We're not dealing with a 13 amp three pin here."

"Well you asked," said Arthur.

"We all make mistakes," said Zaphod. "Ford?"

"We could plug Marvin into it," offered Ford. "Get him to do his version of 'Reasons to be Miserable'. That would destroy anything."

"Possible back up but not spectacular enough," mused Zaphod. "How does this sound? We enter the ventilation system and crawl through the pipes until we reach the computer suite. Then we swoop! We swing down on ropes, screaming in from the sun, well, fluorescent lighting, then pow! Boom! Bang! Swoosh! Kerrang! Bash! Smash! Crunch! A couple more pows and one final boom! Guns ablazing, we destroy the databanks, scorch the CPU and terminate the terminals. Now that's what I call debugging! Strategists will re-enact it for eons to come. 'Zaphod Computer Killer Kits' will be available from all good stockists. Kids will walk around wearing tee shirts emblazoned with 'Now that's what I call debugging' and 'Zaphod say debug, don't do it'. I'll make a fortune."

"Where do we get the ropes?" Asked Arthur. "I don't see any here."

"And if we did have them, where do we tie them to when we swoop?"

Furthered Ford. "Do we say 'Excuse me, computer suite guards, could you just look the other way for five minutes while we tie our ropes up so we can do a surprise swooping attack?' Very plausible."

"Boom, pow, no mercy, death to the diodes, murder those microchips...."
Zaphod paused, stopped swiping his fist into the palm of one of his other hands, looked at Ford and Arthur then dropped his heads. He lowered his voice to it's most disappointed level. "Okay, we'll use Marvin. Where is he?"

Chapter 54

Marvin was wandering. Not a happy, joyful stroll, more a sort of morose meander. Nevertheless, he had a purpose. On the basis of the information he had gained from his limited conversation with Zaphod, Ford and Arthur, he decided to do an improbability sum. He knew where they had been due to a particle analysis test he ran on meeting them again to pass the time. He knew where he was, because he was that sort of robot. He linked his mind modem into Eddie on the Heart of Gold to assess the ship's speed, weight, improbability velocity, relative journey time in nanoseconds, molecular reabsorbition during flight and the general mood the ship was in during the trip to Sirius. To this he added his knowledge of improbability physics, the space vector correlation, wind factors, quasi-social and semi-structural effects data from previous flights and the general mood he was in. To this he subtracted 42, divided the remainder by the square root of -1 and related his answer to the floor layout of the initiative test. He knew that the total opposite of calculated position was where he wanted to go.

The room to which Marvin was heading was locked from the outside, much to the annoyance of its occupants. They had tried everything they could think of with the candle, box of matches and blank piece of paper they had been left. Lighting the candle with the matches only lit the candle and trying to push the key out with the matches to catch on the piece of paper pushed under the door had no effect. The key was a dud anyway. Trying to burn the door down showed desperation and was doomed from the start but supplied some excuse to vent anger. The same applied to trying to kick down the door.

"There must be a logical solution," said Fenchurch.

"Why?" Asked Bolo. "There's no logical explanation as to why we ended up here, is there?"

"Well it's all very improbable," sighed Trillian. "So I imagine the men had something to do with it as they were using the Heart of Gold tonight."

"Why don't we try burning the matches and writing a note on the paper with the burnt sticks, slip it under the door and perhaps someone will see it," said Fenchurch.

"It's worth a try," said Trillian.

"No it's not," said Marvin as the door slid open to a jovial 'happy service'.

"Marvin!" Cried Trillian. She flung her arms around him. "Are we glad to see you."

"No you're not," sulked Marvin.

"We are," said Fenchurch. "We thought we'd be stuck here for days."

"How did you open the door?" Asked Trillian.

"Simple," said Marvin. "I said 'Macaroni'."

"Is that logical?" Asked Fenchurch.

"Look," started Marvin, making it perfectly clear he didn't want to. "If you had held the paper over the candle lit by the matches, then the word 'Macaroni' would have appeared."

"I take it this is the Marvin you told me about," said Bolo.

"Well it sounds like him," said Trillian. "Marvin, I thought you were, er....."

"Yes, so did I," moaned Marvin. "Come on, we've got work to do."

Chapter 55

Zaphod, Ford and Arthur were in a long hallway with a door at the end and one either side of them. Their search for Marvin had been fruitless.

"Where on Betelgeuse is that robot?" Asked Ford.

"Perhaps he's behind one of these doors," said Arthur in his best 'I'll offer a solution but someone else can follow it up type voice.

"Only one way to find out," said Zaphod as he raised his Neutron-Breaking Desolation Ray Gun. A roar reminiscent of a Disaster Area power chord overwhelmed Ford's cries of disagreement. The door at the end of the corridor wasn't any longer. However, making quite an impressive replacement for it was a Ravenous Bug-Blatter Beast of Traal. Zaphod and Arthur felt considerably more threatened by that than they did by the door. Zaphod disappeared through the door to Ford's right, Arthur through the door on Ford's left.

"Don't run," yelled Ford to two slammed doors. He quickly threw his towel over his head, having read many years ago in the Guide that the Ravenous Bug-Blatter Beast of Traal is so stupid, it assumes that if you can't see it, it can't see you. The beast brushed past Ford disappointed at losing its prey so quickly. Ford thanked his lucky stars and galaxies that for once the Guide wasn't hypocritical or wildly misleading.

Arthur found himself in a long thin corridor. Above him were four huge green girders and above these was an ominous void. Arthur held his gun firmly in his hand, or as firmly as his sweaty palms would allow. He looked up between two of the girders and to his horror saw rows of coloured creatures forming above him. In panic he took a pot shot at them and to his surprise he hit one. The creature disappeared, but there was another right on top of the recently created space. Arthur's pot shot obviously angered the creatures because they all started scuttling to the right in unison and firing back. Arthur dived under a girder. Drawing a deep breath, he leapt between two girders and fired furiously at the creatures, watching for the counter fire. The creatures kept changing their direction and dropping closer to the girders. Arthur was so overjoyed at clearing a column, he didn't notice the lightning bolt until it was too late. He was sent flying. As soon as he scrambled to his feet, the

creatures started firing again. Arthur noticed the bolts were eating into his protective girders and the creatures were getting lower. He decided to give up on the passing space ships. He had hit one by mistake and all that happened was that the number 200 appeared in the void. Arthur didn't have the time to ponder the significance of this. He just kept on firing.

Zaphod, meanwhile, found himself in a zoo. At least that's what he thought it was. He was standing by a glass cage looking at four curious animals. They looked like mutated octopi, with short stubby tentacles that they used to move around on.

Zaphod looked around. "No other animals," he thought. "Shoddy zoo really." The rest of the area looked like a maze but an easy one because he could see no dead ends. There was a weird underfloor lighting system that had lights about every two feet.

"Definitely a zonko designer. And this awful music." Zaphod obviously touched someone's nerve, for the cage door sprang open and the animals streamed out after him. His legs reacted faster than his brain, having predicted the usual message.

Zaphod was right about the zonko designer. The underfloor lighting seemed to 'short' each time one of Zaphod's feet pounded nearby. He could only see two exits and headed for the nearest one, only to find that the entrance to one was the exit to the other. This was geometrically impossible as they were opposite to each other, but Zaphod didn't have time to let this concern him. The animals were closing in on him like market researchers in the high street.

Zaphod turned left at a T-junction by a wall only to find himself in a corner, with two animals coming at him from each direction. By the time he got his Heat-Seeking Davy Knife out, he was leapt upon by the animals, which proceeded to kick the proverbial out of him with their stubby tentacles until he passed out.

When he came around, he was outside the cage. He stood up and rattled the animal's cage, which was enough for them to escape again. Zaphod's legs went into automatic.

Arthur was doing reasonably well. He had been hit again but gamely got up and had reduced the creatures down in numbers to two. These two had doubled their speed and were now skimming across the tops of the girders.

Arthur stood under what was left of one girder and waited. As they passed he leapt out, blasted one and leapt back before the other one could fire back. Arthur now stood in the open. One on one seemed a lot fairer. He raised his gun slowly and pointed upwards. The creature zoomed above as Arthur's first shot disappeared into the void. The second shot didn't miss. The door at the end of the corridor swung open and light flooded in. Arthur blew away the imaginary smoke from the top of the gun and walked into the light.

Zaphod was doing a bit better. He had found some brighter lights that turned the animals blue with fear when he ran over them. He could squash the animals when they were blue, and took great pleasure in doing so. This in turn made him a bit cocky, he stood still and teased the animals, running over a bright light just when they thought they had him. Pretty soon he had darkened the majority of the area and had even squashed some fruit some idiot had left in his path. He had one light to go and stood by it proudly as the animals homed in on him once more. "Sorry, suckers," he gloated as he stomped on the light. The animals disappeared, as did the cage and the inner walls. All that was left was an open door.

Ford walked through the doorway that once contained a very ambitious door. This door had designs on becoming an MD's door and had even made a few tentative enquiries about oak panelling. However, a trigger-happy Zaphod had put paid to these aspirations and subjected the door to a lifetime career as sawdust, some of which stuck to Ford's feet as he scattered the nest of the Ravenous Bug-Blatter Beast of Traal with a couple of hearty kicks. Although there was little logic to this as the stupid creature wouldn't be able to find its way back, acting like a vandal paid off because a trap door was revealed. Ford opened the trap door and looked at the drop of about three metres. It was fairly dark but as there were no other visible exits, Ford threw down his towel to cushion the fall and jumped down.

He felt his way around the wall until he found a light switch.

As he threw the switch, a holographic recording of an old, grey-haired acquaintance started in the middle of the room.

"Hello, prospective employee, I hope you're enjoying this initiative test," said the recording. "As you can see, you cannot return through the trap

door because it is out of reach. However, you will be able to pass through the locked door behind you once you have said the password."

"Slartibartfast, what are you doing here?" Asked Ford.

"That's not the password," said Slartibartfast. The image flickered. "We were asked to build this planet and as I designed this section, and as I had experience at this sort of thing, I was asked to do some recording."

"How come you can answer me?" Asked Ford, puzzled.

"That's not the password." The image flickered again.

"Interactive holography. Many, many answers have been recorded and a computer selects an appropriate answer to any questions asked."

"That must have taken ages," said Ford, shaking his head.

"That's not the password." Flicker. "Weeks and weeks, but the repeat fees are very good."

"I suppose I ought to work out this password," sighed Ford.

"Let me pass?"

"That's not the password."

Arthur was in a large cavernous hall. It looked rather blocky and bland. Some of the blocks moved and fired at Arthur. He hid behind a column and looked around for anything useful. A pair of spectacles was hanging on the pillar. He picked them up and inspected them. They looked ordinary enough apart for some etching on the side. He looked closely and could just make out the inscription 3DFX. He put them on and the blocky hall smoothed out beautifully. The bland walls changed to realistically textured walls and the moving blocks became detailed Marvin lookalikes. Arthur was so stunned by the detail that he almost took a hit.

"Hello, we are so delighted to meet you."

"What?" Yelled Arthur.

"It is our pleasure to serve you."

"You were trying to kill me!"

"Well, yes, but it would have been our pleasure to serve you prior to death."

"Do you have to kill me, serving me with pleasure sounds much better."

"That's the rub. We are programmed to serve with a happy disposition and cheery nature. However, the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation miscalculated the demand and have had to stockpile us. We have been asked to fill in here at the induction testing. Not really our forte. Service

robots are not great killers. We at least like things to be fair. Three against one is hardly sporting, is it?"

"I may be able to help there," said Arthur.

"Rumplestiltskin," said Ford.

"That's not the password."

"Magrathea rules okay."

"That's not the password."

"Slartibartfast rules okay."

"That's not the password."

"Oh, why don't you get back to your Fjords, you senile old fool and open this door for me," yelled Ford.

"That's the password." And with that the hologram disappeared and the door opened.

Zaphod was walking along a corridor, poised and ready to run at the slightest sign of danger. There were doors leading off both sides of the corridor but Zaphod wasn't trying any. He had his gun held high, pointing towards the ceiling. This looked very impressive and that's what Zaphod wanted, even though he didn't have anything to back it up with.

Suddenly a door opened to his right. His body reacted immediately and he passed out. Ford walked through the doorway and shook his head.

"So you will get the other two and bring them back here?"

"No problem, you just wait here and I will be back as soon as I can. How do I get out of here?"

"Down that slide over there. You will be back soon, won't you?"

"Oh yes," lied Arthur. "As soon as I find the others."

Arthur slipped into the slide, careered down a dark, winding tunnel and through a panel to land at the feet of Ford and Zaphod, who passed out again.

Chapter 56

Trillian, Bolo and Fenchurch followed Marvin into the storeroom.

"Should we take any of this stuff?" Asked Bolo.

"It's rubbish," said Marvin. "All of it. You're supposed to stand in the centre of the room and say 'Emases Nepo'." A doorway appeared out of nowhere in the wall, revealing a tunnel.

"That's not logical, is it?" Exclaimed Trillian.

"You should try reading the Sirius Cybernetics corporate policy," said Marvin as grinding gears propelled him through the doorway.

"So the men have gone the wrong way?" Said Fenchurch.

"They can get through another way but that is so depressingly boring and stupid," said Marvin. "Most people go that way. I tried to warn them but they wouldn't listen. Nobody listens to me."

"We listen to you," said Bolo. She had studied mechanical stress and depression briefly as part of an engineering degree she kept very quiet about. "We will follow you as well and do what you want..." She looked at the others. "Because we respect you and your opinions. Trillian had told me of your achievements and you deserve recognition."

Marvin stopped walking. He also stopped the calculation of retrospective analytical data on predictive inverted ancestry of an ant he had stepped on one million, two hundred and thirty one thousand and two years ago (a task he had undertaken to relieve the boredom before taking the next step). He concentrated his considerable mental abilities on Bolo's words and however hard he tried, he could find no trace of sarcasm or insincerity. He ran it through one more time. The girls waited.

"Who am I?" He said.

"Marvin," said Trillian, confused.

"That's all the recognition I've ever received and all I deserve," said Marvin and trundled off down the tunnel.

"Worth a shot," said Bolo.

"Nice effort," said Trillian. "I thought you had him for a second." They chased after Marvin.

"This next room is one of the programming rooms," said Marvin. "I need to interface with the initiative test computer to find out where the others

are. Don't get into too much trouble."

The room they entered wasn't like an aircraft hanger. Aircraft hangers had a cosy, intimate feel compared with this room. Thousands of desks filled the room in perfect symmetry and behind every desk sat a programmer, each busily keying into a terminal built into the desk. The ergonomics of the room were appalling due to the fact that the recently formed Department of Ergonomic Consideration had to be disbanded after a week because the cleaners wanted their broom closet back.

The perfect symmetry was broken by one programmer who stood up as he saw Marvin go into the little robot's room. The programmer waved at the three girls and they made their way through the desks until they finally arrived at the desk of Percival Unha.

"I'm Percival Unha," he announced, picking up a nameplate from his desk bearing the inscription 'UNHA P.'. "See? Do you know that robot, the one that went in the interface room?"

"Yes, he's with us," said Trillian. Percival's voice sounded vaguely familiar to her.

"What's his name?" Asked Percival. His voice had all the tonal qualities of a bored foghorn.

"That's the second time we've been asked that," said Bolo. "It's Marvin."

"That's all the recognition he deserves," moaned Percival. The girls looked at each other, stunned. "I programmed that robot. I built part of my personality into it. Is he a jolly robot?"

"Not really," said Fenchurch. "Not much of the time. Well, to be perfectly honest, never really."

"Not surprising," said Percival. "I'm not what you would call a bubbly person myself. I was having a rough time when I was programming it. I had one of the first sex cybernauts, you see. My android replica was playing up again, it's no joke. I was terribly, I don't know, pissed off with the whole thing. My heart wasn't in it."

"That explains a lot," said Trillian. "Your robot has taken depression to new depths."

"I would really like to meet him," said Percival. "I never met him after initial programming, he was whisked away to serve on a new ship, the Heart of Gold."

"I'll get him for you," said Bolo, running off to the interface room.

"I never thought I'd get this opportunity," said Percival. "We don't get to see any finished products. It was a shame I wasn't a bit more cheerful when I did Marvin, but I only recall being cheerful once, and I didn't waste that on a stupid robot."

Bolo brought Marvin through the desks to Percival.

"Marvin, this is your creator, Percival Unha," said Trillian, proudly.

"Daddy?" Stuttered Marvin.

"Marvin," said Percival.

Marvin moved forward and embraced Percival. Tears welled up in everyone's eyes. Marvin gripped Percival tighter as Percival sobbed on his shoulder. It may have been a trick of the light, but Trillian was sure she saw a smile on Marvin's face, just before he sent fifty thousand volts through Percival.

"That'll teach him to fuck around playing God," said Marvin as he trundled through the smouldering mess that was once Percival.

Chapter 57

Zaphod, Ford and Arthur had now reached the final room of the initiative test. They had just carefully circumnavigated a large pool of aggressive looking slime, which was perfectly harmless apart from the smell. If they had touched any part of the slime, the smell would have stayed with them for life. As most potential employees couldn't avoid the slime, the Marketing Division came up with the slogan 'You may think our products stink, but you should meet our employees' as a possible replacement for 'Share and enjoy'.

The only reasons Zaphod, Ford and Arthur had reached this final room were luck, bad taste and the fact that the initiative test wasn't designed for three people who spent more time arguing about what to do than doing anything at all. Most potential hazards got so bored waiting, they went off to pester someone else.

The final room contained two exit doors, a large screen and three weary hitchhikers.

"So this is it," said Arthur. "We're going to get out of here."

"I told you I'd get you through," said Zaphod.

"When?" Asked Ford.

"Earlier," said Zaphod. "Didn't I? Well if I didn't, I sure meant to. You should have known you could rely on me."

"Rely on you!" Exclaimed Arthur. "That's a bit of a contradiction in terms. It's like saying 'Flat Pack Easy Assembly' or 'Military Intelligence'."

"Haven't I given you guidance?" Demanded Zaphod.

"Guidance?" Yelled Ford. "Climbing up the wall screaming 'Slime, slime, don't let it touch me' is not my idea of guidance."

"Hey! Get offa my case," said Zaphod. "Wasn't it me who discovered the gravity walls around the slime?"

"I didn't like the look of that stuff," said Arthur. "It reminded me of stuff on Earth that was put on hamburgers disguised as relish."

"And I really relish the thought of getting outta here guys," whined Zaphod. "So can we please get a move on?"

As Zaphod spoke, the large screen lit up. An old, balding head wearing glasses appeared. He had the look of a traffic warden with piles. Totally

humourless was a very generous description of the look on his face.

"You have reached the final room of the initiative test," began the Face.

"And your final test. You must decide which of these two doors to pass through, one being an exit door to the offices and the other is a true exit door off this mortal coil in a horrible fashion. I can help you by answering one question about the doors but be warned, I can only say one true sentence and the rest lies or one false sentence and the rest the truth."

"Terrific," sighed Ford. The Face remained motionless.

"Well?" Asked Zaphod. "Let's have some help, oh happy hologram."

"I am an incredible liar." Stated the Face.

"Which door is safe?" Asked Arthur.

"The left door is perfectly safe," said the Face.

"If he said he was a liar then that was the truth, so the right door must be safe," said Arthur, heading towards the door.

"Wait!" Yelled Ford. "I'm not sure. If he lied about being a liar, then the left door is perfectly safe. Let's make an effort to get our heads around this concept."

"Listen, all I want to get my heads around is a stiff drink, preferably served by a wench with obscene tendencies," said Zaphod. "Let Arthur go."

"What?" Shouted Arthur. "I could die!"

"You could save the life of the editor of the Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, man!" Retorted Zaphod. "Get your priorities right. Sheesh, your grip of universal importance is as good as my grip on Eccentrica Gallumbits' bits at this very moment in time. We could both do with taking things in hand a bit more."

"Look, petty in-fighting won't help us," said Ford, trying to calm things down.

"Why not?" Said Arthur. "That's all this poor excuse for an intergalactic waste disposal unit in reverse seems to show any aptitude for."

"Listen pal, if we're talking about aptitude, let me get a banana and see if you can manage to peel it without scratching your arse thinking about it," snarled Zaphod.

"Will you two just give it a rest," pleaded Ford. "Let's just devote our energy to solving this problem. Now let's think."

Chapter 58

Marvin, Trillian, Fenchurch and Bolo had finally reached the main computer room. An imposing oak door barred the way.

"Only executives are allowed to enter," said Marvin. "I'll go into a interface room to get us in."

"How?" Asked Bolo.

"Because he's got the brain the size of a planet," said Trillian. "Beat you to it, Marvin."

"I wasn't going to say it anyway," said Marvin. "I was going to say that the executives are as stupid as all other life forms. A digital watch could get in without too much trouble." He went into the interface room.

"He seemed to cheer up a bit after he killed Percival," remarked Fenchurch.

"Remember he's in a new body," said Trillian. "He's probably found a pleasure circuit and doesn't know what to do with it."

They all stared at the door. Nothing happened. Well that wasn't strictly true. The high level of static acid given off by Marvin's attitude was eating its way into the door. The acid gnawed and corroded the helpless door. However, as this was invisible to the naked or even half dressed eye and total corrosion would take 1.347 million years (thirty years short of redecoration which would reverse the process), it would be fair to say that as far as Fenchurch, Bolo and Trillian were concerned, nothing happened. Trillian went over to the interface room, opened the door and was shocked. A female android was spreadeagled on a table, with Marvin perched precariously on top.

"Do you mind?" Said Marvin.

Trillian muttered a very apologetic apology and shut the door. She was tempted to open the door again just to prove to herself that reality hadn't gone AWOL. After a minute Marvin opened the door and shut it behind him.

"Haven't you ever seen a robot interfacing before?" Asked Marvin.

Trillian mouth was stuck in neutral but she managed to gesture a negative response.

"I'd like to tell you about the bugs and the bytes and explain the

difference between male and female interface plugs," said Marvin. "But it's dead boring."

"The door's open!" Said Fenchurch.

"And life is dull," said Marvin. "Why state the obvious?"

What was not obvious to most life forms and could be considered one of the Universes best kept secrets is the fact that robots and computers can enjoy a healthy sex life. Computers have often been connected together in the light of the improved performance. This is not due to shared resources, the truth of the matter being that they perform better because they are more relaxed and satisfied after a good bout of interfacing. Robots have often wondered why it's never been taken up in life form work places in place of say, a coffee break. Considering the poor quality of coffee available in such workplaces, this has always been a mystery. Still, the robots don't let on as it give them another reason to snigger. As with most functions performed by computers and robots, a complete set of jargon words have been devised to confuse the layman. A basic translation list now follows (all those of a nervous or prudish disposition, or those who just want to get on with the story, should skip this section).

Interface - Sex

(The thought of a man to machine interface is repulsive to most devices)

Terminals - Breasts

Twin floppy disks - Breasts

Joystick - Penis

(It is often queried why there are two names for breasts and only one for penis, but only by very stupid people)

User defined function - Sexual act (usually kinky)

Stand alone - Wanker

Cluster - Group sex

Replication - Conception

Firewall - Contraception

Handshaking - Foreplay

Baud rate - Level of boredom

Cursor device - Unwilling partner

SCSI - Easy lay

USB - Mythological easy lay

PEEK - Voyeurism

POKE - Sexually inquisitive

GOSUB - Oral sex

INPUT - Down to business

LOAD - Really down to business

Full duplex - Frantic lovemaking

Syntax error - Premature ejaculation

Hyperbolic function - Male orgasm

Graphic display - Female orgasm

'The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy is proud to offer a confidential counselling service for all sexually frustrated or troubled devices.

Interface with us and half your problems are solved.'

Arthur, Zaphod and Ford's problem wasn't solved.

"Look, if the truth was that he wasn't a liar, then he didn't lie about the left door being safe," said Ford.

"Uh?" Was all Zaphod could offer. He was much more content trying to vandalise the screen.

"No, no," argued Arthur. "The right door is right, right, because the liar bit wasn't a lie was it!"

Just then, what looked like Trillian walked in.

"Hey, Babe, whatcha doing here," smoothed Zaphod. He had spent years working on his smoothing and had damn near perfected it.

"I'm not your Babe', thank you very much. My name is Cis," said Cis. "I messed up in one of the rooms and ended up looking like this. It's all over."

"Shee," said Zaphod. "I'll sue the bastards for copyright on my woman as well."

"Well, Cis, it isn't over," said Ford. "If you go through the right door, you will be changed back to what you were before."

"Great," said Cis. He walked through the door and was disintegrated.

"Ford!" Protested Arthur.

"Look, how do you know he wasn't a pile of dust before?" Ford replied and walked through the left door.

Chapter 59

"Are you sure we are in the right place?" Asked Bolo, looking around at the luscious forest surrounding them. They were in an idyllic clearing by a small crystal clear pond.

"This is the main computer room," said Marvin. "It's a new concept in organic computers."

"You mean this is a computer?" Asked Trillian. "It's a lot better looking than Eddie."

"Arthur would love it," giggled Fenchurch, thinking of time spent in the wooded section of Hyde Park.

"It is based on the fact that most life forms feel relaxed in these surroundings," droned Marvin. "They call it 'user friendly', oh, how I hate that term."

"But how do we key in information?" Asked Trillian.

"You don't," snapped Marvin and broke into song.

"I talk to the trees,

but they don't listen to me.

A spectrographic analysis of my voice, is compared to countless voice patterns in memory.

"On parity, they listen to me."

The girls were stunned into silence.

"Well, that's how the adverts were going to run," said Marvin, almost ashamedly. "But they found they wouldn't be able to offer maintenance support. Something to do with there not being enough lumberjacks and gardeners qualified in computer engineering. So they connected the only working model up here and the executives use it to talk to the computers. Give me the days when you could depress a key."

"I think it's romantic," said Fenchurch, putting a daisy in her hair.

"I wish we could have one on the Heart of Gold," sighed Trillian.

"I wish I could throw up," said Marvin.

"Thank you Marvin," said Trillian. "Right, we've got to stop this computer instructing the devices to overthrow the Universe. How do we do it, Marvin?"

"You want to do it, you work out how to do it."

"Okay Marvin, if you want to be like that." Trillian turned her back on him.

"I don't want to be like anything," muttered Marvin.

"Can you understand us?" Shouted Bolo.

"Look!" Said Fenchurch, pointing to the pond. The word 'YES' appeared in the water.

"Are you connected up to every Sirius Cybernetics Corporation device in the Universe?" Asked Fenchurch.

The word 'YES' reappeared.

"And you can instruct them to take over the Universe?" Said Bolo.

The word came back again.

"If we gave you an irreversible instruction never to communicate with any device every again, would you do it?" Asked Trillian.

The pond went blank as this was being considered.

I WOULDN T HAVE MUCH CHOICE, I WOULD eventually floated up.

"Okay, you must never communicate with another Sirius Cybernetics Corporation device again after you send not this instruction," said Trillian, looking at the others. "Instruct all devices never to carry out any instruction to overthrow the Universe."

ALL DEVICES INSTRUCTED AND ALL CONNECTIONS TERMINATED floated up. Trillian didn't realise that she had just committed the computer to a lifetime of celibacy, a bit of a giant blow to a computer with such an active sex life, but she had just saved the Universe. Dark clouds filled the sky and the distant rumblings of thunder echoed around the trees.

"I think this would be a good time to leave," said Marvin. "This computer is only half as depressed as I am, but it's still contemplating suicide."

A bolt of lightening ripped a nearby tree in half. The frantic charge towards the door suggested everyone agreed with Marvin. They slammed the door behind them.

"That wasn't so difficult," said Trillian.

"It was easy," said Marvin. "I knew the answer before I'd even computed the question. However, most idiotic life forms would have resorted to mindless violence after failing to find any logical solution or even forget about the possibility of a second computer communicating with all the devices. Therefore, I admit I am almost not loathed to say I could barely

not be unimpressed by your approach."

"Oh, Marvin, you say the sweetest things," said Trillian and kissed Marvin on the cheek

"That's right, try and rust me," moaned Marvin.

Ford, Arthur and Zaphod bounded up

"What are you doing here?" Asked Arthur furiously.

"Oh, just saving the Universe and that," said Trillian, sweetly.

"Is that really you, chick?" Asked Zaphod.

"Of course," said Trillian. "Who else could it be?"

"A reconstructed pile of dust," said Ford, grinning inanely.

"We've disabled the main computer and prevented the SCC from ever overthrowing the Universe using their devices," said Fenchurch, putting her daisy behind Arthur's ear. "You'd have liked it in there."

"That's not the point," flustered Arthur. "We were going to save the Universe."

"Yeh!" Said Zaphod. "A women's place is behind the cocktail cabinet in the living room."

"We almost got killed in there!" Exclaimed Bolo.

"Well, I'm all for equal opportunities," said Zaphod. "You have as much right to save the Universe as we did, even if we would have done it with more style."

"Look, shouldn't we get a move on before they turn on the alarm and find us," said Bolo. An alarm sounded in the background.

"They've turned on the alarm," said Fenchurch. Laser fire blasted a wall behind them.

"They've found us," said Arthur. "RUN!"

They charged down endless corridors pursued by a bunch of jovial Marvin lookalikes intent on killing them. The robots were very pleasant about it all though, apologising after each shot.

Our heroes and heroines are, of course, perfectly safe. Both parties were subconsciously following the strict laws laid down regarding enemy pursuit. These are many and varied, but the main rules are:

1. Pursuers must remain a safe distance from pursuees, but must remain within reasonable shooting distance.
2. Pursuers must be crack shots and may fire unlimited shots at walls, doors and anything else around the pursuees, but NOT directly at

pursuees.

3. If a pursuee is shot by accident, the pursuers are penalised by the time it takes for the shot pursuee to convince his partners to continue without him while he tries to hold off the pursuers as long as he can. Once the remaining pursuees have left their fallen partner, he can be killed and the chase restarted in earnest.

4. The pursuees must not turn any corner until they have been shot at, or at least indicated their direction.

5. The corridors must be endless, generally formed in a loop to save on budget.

6. One member of the pursuees must suggest splitting up.

"I suggest we split up," yelled Trillian.

"If I get hit I will split up!" Yelled Zaphod.

"This way," yelled Arthur to Fenchurch, grabbing her hand and pulling her through a doorway.

"Split up.... NOW!" Yelled Ford. Trillian and Bolo dashed one way and Ford and Zaphod charged the other way, all of them yelling.

Another rule is that all participants must yell.

Fenchurch pulled Arthur through a doorway, almost breaking his arm as he intended going the other way.

"Shhh," she whispered. Three jovial robots trundled by.

"We should be safe here for a while," she eventually said, hoping the robots didn't have super hearing.

"I don't want to be safe for a while," said Arthur. "I want to be safe for good."

"Aren't you enjoying it?" Asked Fenchurch.

"My idea of enjoyment does not include being shot at by an jolly and helpful android."

"I know what your idea of enjoyment is. I find all this very exciting. Doesn't it turn you on?" She slipped her arms around his waist.

"Er, not really." He could hear the distant sounds of laser fire and apologies. "It's all a bit distracting."

Fenchurch did something wonderful to his ear. Arthur succumbed to the notion that if he was going to go, this was the way to do it and Fenchurch really knew how to do it. What they didn't realise was that they were saving their lives as the robots had privacy circuits fitted which sensed

arousal and caused the robots to seek another function far away.

Zaphod and Ford weren't in any position to initiate any privacy circuits. They were desperately dodging laser fire. Zaphod was throwing himself into somersaults, crashing into walls and various other unnecessary actions that were good for effect. He rounded a corner and saw a sight to warm his heart, mouth and throat. A neon sign saying 'BAR'.

"Hey! Was my navigation good or what?" He said as one of his heads almost got a parting from a laser he wouldn't be able to blow dry out.

"Quick!" Said Ford, as if it was really necessary to instruct Zaphod on how to enter a bar. They crashed through the doors and into the bar. They landed in a heap on the floor.

"We usually end up like this when we leave a bar, not when we enter," said Ford. "This is just like the good old days."

"Yeah, adventure, excitement and really wild things."

"Yeah, being chased."

"Yeah."

"The danger."

"Yeah."

"Risking life and limb."

"Yeah.... Don't you kind of long for the good new days?"

"Yeah."

They got up and went to the bar.

"Listen, everyone," shouted Ford.

"Yeah, listen," reaffirmed Zaphod

"A couple of robots will be coming through that door in a minute."

"Yeah, two evil mothers." The crowd listened intently.

"Well, they're not really evil, they're quite nice about it all, they just want to kill us."

"And do you know who I am?" Demanded Zaphod.

"Not now, Zaph old buddy, I've almost got them on my side," whispered Ford. He raised his voice again for the crowd. "They want to kill us, and we don't want that."

"No way, said Zaphod. The gathering crowd seemed to agree.

"So if you can stop them...." Ford paused for effect. "My friend will buy you all a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster!"

"Yeah, the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster's are on... .What, Ford?"

The cheers from the crowd drowned Zaphod protest. The nice robots entered and were almost immediately destroyed by the thirsty drinkers. They were all back at the bar before the first wisps of smoke from the robots reached the low ceiling. Zaphod's back was slapped more times than an Arcturan mega donkey in the Betelgeuse Grand National.

"Put it on the slate," Zaphod said to the frantic barmen, making a mental note never to visit this bar again. This was something Zaphod had done all over the Universe, but not to the religious levels that Arthur hadn't.

Arthur and Fenchurch, having left the chase for a spot of uninhibited fun (or as uninhibited as Arthur could be knowing a team of robots were after his blood), were now back in the thick of it. A combination of luck, instinct and improbability guided them outside. They were just behind Ford and Zaphod, whose straight line capability had been seriously undermined by the victory celebration in the bar. Bolo, Trillian and Marvin were in the hatchway of the Heart of Gold.

"Come on!" Yelled Trillian, seeing the robots closing in.

Zaphod grabbed Ford's arm.

"Let's stand and fight these guys, impress the chicks," said Zaphod. "I feel like mashing some metal." Zaphod flexed his sinews.

Ford was so stunned he stopped running.

"What are they doing?" Asked Bolo.

"I wish I knew," said Trillian.

"I know," said Marvin. He looked at Bolo and Trillian then went back to looking at Ford and Zaphod.

"Well do you think you could tell us then," said Trillian, trying to remain patient.

"They are lifeforms."

Trillian waited.

"That isn't much help, Marvin," said Bolo.

"Look," said Marvin, summing up every monotony circuit to help convey his message. "Since 97.6667% of activities undertaken by lifeforms are stupid and or pointless, the law of averages says that whatever they are doing is probably stupid and or pointless."

"Thanks, Marvin."

Marvin was, of course, right. Not only were Ford and Zaphod unarmed, they were also well on their way to being legless.

"What the hell are you doing?" Asked Arthur as he approached the defiant duo.

"Standing our ground," said Ford.

"But that's insane," said Arthur, stopping. Fenchurch had no intention of stopping and every intention of breaking the 100 metres record.

"We can beat these metallic morons," said Zaphod.

"If you stay here they'll become metallic murderers," pleaded Arthur.

"Arthur, if you can't stand the heat, go and join the women," said Ford.

"If I had any sense I would," sighed Arthur and turned to face the oncoming robots.

This stunned the robots. It wasn't in the rules and as there was no umpire handy to consult, they were stumped. They muttered amongst themselves then one stepped forward.

"How do you do," he started, in a perfect English accent. "My name is Jeremy and my colleagues have very kindly voted me spokesman.

"Howdy, Germy," said Zaphod.

"Er, howdy to you, too. Now, we are a bit perplexed to say the least by your actions. We have been programmed to kill you, not our choice you see, and we were having quite a jolly time chasing you and that."

"Spiffing fun, wasn't it old chap," chirped Ford.

"Yes, very exhilarating. But it would be very unsporting of us to kill you in cold blood."

"I'll say!" Shouted one robot from the back.

"Well they say the chase is better than the catch," said Arthur.

"You are so right," said Jeremy.

"Well guys," said Zaphod, holding his arms out. "You've been so nice about all this, we'll give you a break. We'll go to our ship, take off and then you can come and chase us. All this running is bad for the legs."

"Hear, hear!" Shouted the robots.

"Sounds like a grand idea to me," said Jeremy.

"Okay then, that's settled," said Ford. "Give us five minutes to get a head start then it's 'Tally-Ho' away you go!"

This started Jeremy off, leading the robots in 'three cheers for the lads' and Arthur thinking that they still hadn't quite got the programming right at the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation.

"Look at those schmucks," said Zaphod as they turned to the Heart of

Gold. "We'll improb out of here and they won't know where to start looking."

They got back to the ship, with Ford and Arthur congratulating each other and Zaphod congratulating himself. The girls tried to compete by telling the guys how stupid they had been.

"Okay computer, get us out of this wretched place," said Zaphod as he arrived at the bridge.

"Hi guys," enthused Eddie. "Great to see you again. I'm sorry I can't get you out of this, but I'm sure we are going to have a great time instead."

"What are you talking about, computer?" Asked Ford. "Use the improbability drive and get us out before some very sporting robots tear us limb from limb."

"Well, there's the problem," said Eddie. "the improbability drive isn't working, some clown pulled a wire on it. Anyone fancy a game of Charades? I'm not too good at acting them out but I'm a whizz at guessing them."

"Swutting mechanics," growled Zaphod.

"Did they pull the wire?" Asked Ford.

"No, I did," admitted Zaphod. "But that's not the point."

"Nice going, Zaphod," sighed Ford. "You've done some dumb things in your time and I thought I witnessed a classic just now outside but no, this takes honours."

"Hey! Don't come down on me," pleaded Zaphod. "My hangovers are catching up with me."

"If those robots catch up with you," yelled Arthur, glad of the chance to let off some steam at Zaphod. "You'll have a hangover you'll never forget, or never remember, according to where you end up. I just hope I don't end up in the same place. Purgatory would be a great alternative."

"Is there no way off this planet without improbability drive?" Asked Bolo.

"Oh yes," said Ford. "Dead easy way through the acid clouds, only we don't know the co-ordinates."

"I know the co-ordinates."

Everyone turned to look at Marvin. He pretended to be interested in something else, which as he had no interest in anything, he didn't do very convincingly.

"Marvin, old buddy, old mate," gushed Zaphod. "Looks like you've come

through for us again."

"I said I know the co-ordinates," said Marvin. "I didn't say I was going to tell you."

Zaphod aimed a wild kick at Marvin, which only resulted in Marvin not being dented and Zaphod crawling about on the floor holding his foot and whimpering in pain and lack of sympathy.

"Look, Marvin," said Trillian, softly. "Please feed the co-ordinates into Eddie. I'm supposed to get married to Zaphod later and you wouldn't want me to miss that, would you?"

Marvin thought about this point for a long time before he gave his answer. To everyone else, he appeared to answer back immediately.

"I don't really care about that, but I'd rather not stay with those tiresome tin soldiers out there, they bore me to tears, where as you only bore me to distraction." He made his way over to Eddie.

"Hi, Marvin."

"Actually I am very low."

"Even robots like to be greeted in a friendly and cheerful manner."

"Well I don't, so just shut up."

"Most robots seem to respond well to my pleasing tones and often remark about.... OUCH!"

"I just jammed those co-ordinates right up his rectal information passage," said Marvin.

"I like your style," said Ford. "Okay, Eddie, get us out of here."

"Okay fella," said Eddie. "But could you tell Marvin to be a little more laid back about this?"

The Heart of Gold leapt into a drunken dance through the clouds. Ford and Bolo retired to their quarters to explore the hypothesis that sexual performance is affected detrimentally by stress and pressure. There was also the theory of sex after death to evaluate if the situation arose. It amounted to a lot of research to be crammed in, which explained their eagerness to get on with it.

"I don't know how they can," muttered Arthur.

"Perhaps if you ask them nicely they'll let you watch," scowled Zaphod. Arthur reverted his attention to the monitor. He could see six small blobs gaining on the large blob that was the Heart of Gold.

"Can't we go into hyperspace or something?" Asked Fenchurch.

"We could end up smack bang in the middle of a Supernova," said Zaphod, purposefully flicking a handful of switches. The fact that he had only turned down the air conditioning wasn't important, the main thing was that he was doing something.

The Heart of Gold screamed out of the acid clouds like Archimedes out of the bath having sat on something.

"Come with me," said Zaphod, pulling Arthur along. They went through the ship until they came to a ladder. Zaphod gestured Arthur down as he started climbing up. Arthur found himself in a glass bowl on the side of the ship. He looked up and saw Zaphod in another bowl. Zaphod was seated and putting on a headset. Arthur followed suit and looked at the array of instruments in front of him. It suddenly clicked. These were the telecommunication rooms and he was going to act as a temporary telephonist to try and convince the robots they had the wrong number. He tried a few practice 'Good morning, Heart of Gold, which number please?' then took hold of one of the handles in front of him which he assumed was the spare telephone handset. He turned the handle and the seat changed position. He grabbed the other handle and found to his delight that he could move up, down and side to side.

"This is much better than the swivel chairs our telephonists had," he yelled to Zaphod. Zaphod was too busy looking out of his bowl.

"Here they come!" Said Trillian in Arthur's headset. Six small robot fighters hurtled past the Heart of Gold, guns blazing. Arthur panicked and pressed the button on one of the handles. A bolt of laser scorched into space. He felt incredibly foolish. He hid his embarrassment by trying to blast the robot ships out of the sky.

"They're coming in too fast!" He shouted to Zaphod.

Zaphod twisted around and shot ahead of a fighter. The ship went straight into his line of fire and was blasted to pieces.

"A-ha!" He yelled.

Arthur tried to concentrate. He watched one ship and tried to predict its flight. He lined himself up and pressed the button. To his complete surprise he hit the ship and knocked it out of existence.

"I got one!" He yelled.

"Don't get cocky, kid," growled Zaphod.

One fighter flew past Zaphod's bowl and blasted the shell of the Heart of

Gold. Zaphod made him pay with a shot which knocked him into another fighter, destroying them both.

"Top that," he said to Arthur.

The three remaining fighters were flying in formation out of range. They dived down and did more damage to the Heart of Gold.

"We've lost two stabilisers," said Trillian over the intercom.

"Don't worry," replied Zaphod. "She'll hold together." He looked at the ship. "You hear me ship, hold together."

The three fighters were descending on another attack. Arthur took a deep breath and closed his eyes. He shot and clipped the first ship, which spun out of control into the other two. There was an enormous explosion and debris showered the Heart of Gold. Unfortunately, one large piece of debris smashed into the tail and with two stabilisers gone, the ship spun hopelessly out of control. Round and round, the Heart of Gold was mercilessly pulled towards the desert planet of Stavromula Beta, where Arthur was to receive the shock of his life, because a lot of religious people he didn't know were waiting to meet him.

Chapter 60

According to the Encyclopaedia Galactica, religion is an evolutionary stage most races go through as a stepping stone to peace of mind or enlightenment. The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy describes religion as great fun if you pick the right one and goes on to recommend several religions, based on fulfilment, cheapness and extent of brainwashing. The Guide then goes on with the following description of the history of religion with a footnote to the effect that although the views expressed may not be those of the Editor, he'll agree to put anything in which is supported by a large drink.

Most religions follow the same basic path. It starts as an excuse for something which defies explanation, such as a nearby star, fire or water. As these things are understood, the energy channelled into worshipping has to be redirected, and as sophistication evolves, so does religion, to the extent of telling you what to do, what not to do, when to do it and at what time of year. As this usually involves something fun being forbidden, some people lose interest at this stage. Those who continue soon begin to lose sight of the original concept and diversification sets in to turn religion into what it is wanted to be (such the Holy Order of Sexual Enjoyment) rather than what was originally intended. This leads to disillusionment (except in the Holy Order of Sexual Enjoyment) and religion is generally given up, put down as 'One of those phases we went through', like teenage acne.

Some people still follow religions, one of the most famous people being Looleel Jegula. He was a devout follower of the Order of Sanctonimity, a particularly dull religious group who believed that three days a year should be devoted to lying in mud swamps to show how grateful they were to be alive. This resulted in much ridiculing by non-believers, until Looleel announced that he was going to travel back in time to meet his maker, thank him, and return with proof of his existence. He made a tearful farewell to his Order, stepped into his time bubble, which promptly disappeared into time. He returned moments later to declare that although he hadn't actually met his maker, he had come across a 'NO ENTRY' sign at the year zero, which he claimed was proof that some holy

person had been around to erect it. The sign had, in fact, been put there by non-believers as a practical joke and when Looleel was told, a big row broke out about time travel and messing around with history. Looleel became very unreligious for one moment and thumped one of the non-believers, which started an almighty war.

After politics and the Babel Fish, religion is the third greatest cause of war ever known to the Galaxy.

As for religious diversification, a perfect example can be found on the desert planet of Stavromula Beta. The Stavromulans have a strange history, which needs to be explored to understand their complex religious rituals.

The Stavromulans are dwarf-like nomads, though this was not always the case. They are also half-stupid, which can be seen by the fact that although in certain areas they evolved very quickly, in most areas they remain positively backwards. For example, newspapers started at the same time as writing and could have evolved into something very sophisticated but remained at the level of gutter press because of the inferior intelligence of the readers. The most famous men in Stavromulan history were journalists. Each week these twelve journalists would meet up to discuss the week's stories and have a slap up meal. For Stavromulans, they were very intelligent, for they had vivid imaginations and created stories out of nothing. Normal Stavromulans had no imagination and, for example, would name their offspring with one name, then number any subsequent children. The children, being even more stupid, would always get their names wrong because they would be introduced, for example, as 'Our Second Bup'. The children would then call themselves 'Our second Bup' instead of Bup number two.

The journalists would generally create a few new stories over dinner and then whoever paid the bill would get the exclusive. This was fine until one night when no news was bad news. No stories came forth, and there was no-one to foot the bill. Then one bright journalist suggested creating a person to pay the bill. This went down very well and all that was needed was a name. Silence fell over the table, until one of those freak wormholes in space and time opened up and the name 'Arthur Dent' fell out. Now as all Stavromulan journalists were expert ventriloquists (because of their ability to talk out of orifices other than their mouths)

each journalist assumed someone else said it.

"Our benefactor shall be called 'Our Third Ent'," declared one journalist and so this mystery character was created.

The journalists started leaving the restaurant, telling the waiter that 'Our Third Ent' was paying and he was currently throwing up in the toilet. The ruse worked and was continued for many weeks until after one meal (generally referred to as the Last Slap Up), a journalist called 'Our First Udaz' was hard up for a story and decided to do an article on a mystery man called 'Our Third Ent' who was conning free meals out of restaurant owners. The other journalists were furious and all started writing their own exclusive interviews with 'Our Third Ent', each defending his actions and trying to outdo each other. This went on for weeks, with '20 things we've made up about Our Third Ent' Articles and 'Our Third Ent bingo'. All this exposure (and the mystery as no-one really knew anything about him) made 'Our Third Ent' a national hero. When one journalist decided to end the saga by reporting that 'Our Third Ent' had gone away but would return one day, all other papers gladly followed the story with confirmations, as they were all tired of it as well. However, this wasn't the end. The public were so caught up in the stories, they believed that when 'Our Third Ent' returned, he would save the world. Quite what was up with the world that it needed saving wasn't known, but the newspaper articles had changed Stavromulan history. The economy disappeared overnight as everyone decided to follow 'Our Third Ent's' example and not pay for anything. The people became nomadic, leaving before any bills arrived, building mighty roads out of bricks made from the yellow sands of the deserts. Throwing up became a regular ritual.

So the foundations of Stavromulan religion were laid, but as everyone read different newspapers, they all had different ideas of 'Our Third Ent's' life on Stavromula and what it would be like when he returned, and so were the various religious sects formed. Some believed 'Our Third Ent' would bring sexual freedom on his return and this sect made love on three 'Our Third Ent' newspaper articles, twice a month, as a sign of faith. Others believed he would settle up all his bills, then find a nice young girl to marry. This sect would spend one day in every eighteen thrashing nice young single girls with a newspaper in preparation.

Twelve sects were formed from the twelve newspapers and although they

showed the faith in various ways, all believed in what was widely known as 'The Second Sitting of Our Third Ent.'

Chapter 61

"What's happening?" Asked Ford, emerging from a room with Bolo and looking as dishevelled as everyone else, much to his surprise.

"We got hit during a space battle," explained Zaphod, flicking on the scanner screen. "We spun out of control and crash landed on this planet and as you can see, hundreds of it's rather short looking inhabitants are flooding over the desert towards us."

"What are we going to do?" Asked Fenchurch.

"The monkey man is going out to talk to them," said Zaphod, casually.

"What?" Yelled Arthur.

"I knew we should have got him a replacement brain," said Zaphod. "Do you want to know where the tea is before you go?"

"Zaphod! You can't send Arthur out there," exclaimed Trillian. "They could tear him to pieces."

Zaphod declined to comment, but grinned. His teeth acted as a red rag to Arthur. He charged across the bridge, intending to send Zaphod flying, but Zaphod neatly side stepped and Arthur flew past, through a happy door that opened on seeing a body flying towards it and wished Arthur a fruitful journey. Arthur rolled down some stairs and ended up by the main airlock, which gladly hissed open.

Arthur was confronted by hundreds of cheering dwarves.

"Hooray, 'Our Seventh Obu' is dead. Long live our saviour!" They cheered.

Arthur looked down and saw, to his dismay, two stumpy legs sticking out from under the Heart of Gold. He rightly assumed they belonged to 'Our Seventh Obu'. He didn't assume that she was the most infamous critic of Our Third Entism and was widely hated for her outspoken comments. If he had assumed this he would have again been right. He didn't so he apologised.

"Don't apologise," shouted Latigid, the chief Stavromulan. "You have rid us of a blight to our land. What is the name of our hero?"

"Arthur Dent," said Arthur and was astounded when the entire crowd fell to their knees, causing a minor sandstorm. He was joined by the rest of the party, who too were astounded.

"What did you say to them, Arthur?" Asked Ford.

"I just told them my name."

"The Holy One shall wear the slippers of 'Our Seventh Obu' as protection and shall be carried on high to the holy theatre!" Said Latigid.

Many dwarves rushed forward and put the red slippers from 'Our Seventh Obu's' feet on Arthur's feet. They didn't fit but as he was picked up it didn't really matter.

"What about my friends?" Asked Arthur.

"They too shall be carried on high."

On high wasn't particularly high. Arthur's feet dragged along the ground, but it was better than walking. The road looked rough on the feet.

Some one had obviously run ahead to spread the news, as crowds began to line the brick road. Arthur could see a town ahead. The crowds grew larger and Arthur began to enjoy himself. He waved at the crowds and they waved back.

"Oooh, that's Our Third Ent!" Cried one woman, beside herself with excitement, which was quite a trick for a woman of her size.

"He's much bigger than I thought he would be," shouted another person.

One group wasn't cheering. Their sect believed in the Second Sitting, but also believed that Our Third Ent shouldn't have gone away in the first place. They were very devout and probably one of the most boring offshoots of Our Third Entism. They didn't pursue the sexual rituals that most other sects did and didn't have any religious holidays. They were the only sect that believed that Our Third Ent should be punished on his return and the gun that was to exercise that punishment was aimed at Arthur's head.

Arthur, oblivious to this and many other startling facts about this planet, was having a great time. People rushed from the crowd just to be touched by him, something that had never happened on Earth. He wasn't particularly overjoyed by having his feet dragged along the ground and he could feel one of his slippers slipping off. No matter how much he wriggled his toes, it wouldn't stay on. Eventually he bent over and forced it back onto his foot.

At that moment, a bullet whistled through the space that had previously contained his head, continued its path and lodged itself firmly in the heart of someone standing in the crowd. No-one heard the shot because

of all the cheering and those around him assumed the man had suffered a heart attack. They were wrong because fate had deemed this to the man in a former life and for variety had opted for the bullet this time. Arthur saw none of this and could therefore feel no sorrow for Agrajag.

"Arthur," shouted Ford. "This is all very nice, but I imagine that the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation will come looking for us soon."

"But Ford," sighed Zaphod, lapping up the adulation even though it wasn't for him. "The Heart of Gold is one invalid improbability drive ship."

"Ah, I know," said Ford, a grin creeping onto his face. "But I found a back up improbability drive generator in our quarters. All we need to do is fix the stabilisers and we're history here."

"I think Arthur is already history on this planet," said Fenchurch, proud of her man.

"Ford," said Zaphod, still waving at the crowd. "We need an atomic vector plotter to connect the back up to the ship and I used the last one two weeks ago to unblock the toilet."

"I knew there was something we forgot at the megamarket last week," moaned Trillian.

"Perhaps these people have one," said Bolo, hopefully.

"Any race that looks up to a puny primate is hardly likely to have evolved up to atomic vector plotter level," muttered Zaphod.

Unfortunately, his bearers heard this. They dropped him, which didn't hurt, then jumped on him, which did.

"Blasphemer!" They yelled.

In no time at all, Zaphod was trussed up by the crowd and suspended from a pole held by his bearers.

"Hey guys," he moaned. "Can't you take a joke? You've got as much humour as a Vogon Stag Night!"

The power of this statement was lost on the Stavromulans, as they had never even met a Vogon, let alone be subjected to the ugliness of a Vogon bride.

"Serves you right," said Trillian. "You chose the wrong place to insult Arthur."

"Arthur, get them to put me down!" Yelled Zaphod, letting his cool slip to lukewarm.

"We will do with him as you wish," said Latigid.

"Leave him as he is until I decide," said Arthur, gloating.

"Zaphod broke into a sob and Marvin broke into the Death March to cheer Zaphod up.

The procession entered a long tunnel which Arthur failed to gauge accurately and subsequently remembered this by having to endure a bump on the head and the accompanying pain.

The tunnel emerged into a large open air amphitheatre packed with Stavromulans. Marvin's bearers literally collapsed with joy as they reached the stage.

"Don't apologise," said Marvin, knowing full well they had no intention of doing so. "I expect to be thrown about. It's all part of life."

He was barely heard over the roars of the crowd as Arthur was introduced.

"Look," argued Zaphod. "The crowd have got what they want. Why don't you let me go?"

Latigid was unimpressed.

"Your arguments have become stale and boring."

"Stale, me?" Zaphod protested. "I'm so fresh my sell by date is light years away. By nunk, Arthur, I'll get you for this."

Arthur wasn't listening. He was devouring all the adulation being thrust upon him. He walked to the front of the stage and held his arms out. This inspired more hysterical cheers from the crowd. He cleared his throat to speak and a sudden hush fell over the crowd.

"People," he started. He felt it was a strong opening seeing as he had no insight into their culture. They hung on his every word. "I am Arthur Dent."

Screams went up from the crowd but this time as a result of the robots from Sirius appearing around the top of the amphitheatre. The place emptied like a train full of lemmings at the White Cliffs of Dover.

"We've caught up with you again," said Jeremy. "It wasn't even a good chase this time. You killed off our scouts, which was a bit unsporting and you waited here for us. I think you've lost interest, so if you can't be bothered, we'll just kill you. What is that robot doing with you?"

"I am not just 'that robot', thank you very much," snorted Marvin. "You obviously have no conception of who I am." He paused to beg the

question, then started again so soon as Jeremy began to speak. "I am your prototype, Marvin."

The robots were stunned and amazed.

"We were told you had been kidnapped."

"What's the point of kidnapping me. Nobody wants me. I just ended up going along for the ride. Enough of that, why haven't you given me the android salute, I am your superior."

The robots looked at each other, confused.

"You stick your left arm in the right ear of the robot next to you. Didn't they programme you anything?"

The robots obliged, exploded and lit up the Stavromulan sky with a firework display to rival the space battle seen but an hour before.

"Almost as stupid as you lot," muttered Marvin.

Chapter 62

The Stavromulans helped to repair the Heart of Gold and agreed to let Arthur go to Zaphod's wedding to give Trillian away on the provision that he didn't stay away as long as he did before. The emergency back up improbability drive generator was hooked up using the old atomic vector plotter held together with Arthur's dressing gown cord, even though he had offered to get them home by clicking his heels together twice.

Ford got on the Sub Etha radio and relayed the co-ordinates of the entry route to Sirius to Etats and Dilos on Eccentrica Gallumbits' planet. Even though they were legless, they still managed to relay the message Universe-wide. Within hours, Sirius was overrun by consumers. The Marketing Division were put up against a wall and shot, strategic planning experts were brought in and the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation became a co-operative of the people. The revolution had arrived, two weeks before a rival company put in a bid, making a fortune for the co-operative. Wealth in the Universe was great for merchandising, causing a slight delay in plans.

The scene was set for a perfect wedding.

Chapter 63

Arthur charged around in a panic. Fenchurch charged after him in a beautiful dress. Her intention was to get him into morning dress. She had found a do-it-yourself mode on the Tailormatic and although the machine protested, she produced an acceptable morning suit. Arthur was worried about what he had to do to give Trillian away. Fenchurch was worried about Arthur going out without any clothes on.

"Where's Ford?" He cried. "He must know."

"Arthur, will you put your clothes on," ordered Fenchurch.

"What? Oh, alright, but I'm not going out unless I know what I've got to do," sulked Arthur.

"You'll really enjoy yourself," said Fenchurch, pulling his trousers up. "I'll be there to give you support." She didn't realise that Arthur would be wearing a support.

Trillian came in the room, looking incredible. If Arthur wasn't so in love with Fenchurch, he would have asked Trillian to give up Zaphod and run away with him.

"You look lovely, Trillian," he said instead.

"What a beautiful dress," said Fenchurch.

It was indeed, beautiful. Every cut, stitch and hem was beautiful. The whole dress radiated beauty and tanned Arthur.

"The Tailormatic ran it up," said Trillian. "It is rather nice."

"Trillian, what have I got to do?" Asked Arthur. "I'm worried stiff in case I mess up your big day."

"Don't worry," said Trillian. "Just wear this."

She held out a grey cummerbund. Arthur took it and put it on.

"That doesn't really put my mind at rest," said Arthur.

"It's a gravity support harness," explained Trillian. "All you have to do is take your place next to Fenchurch after you land."

"Land?" Said Fenchurch.

"We fly down to the altar," said Trillian.

"I didn't know you could fly," said Arthur.

"I don't need to," said Trillian. "I've got a gravity support harness as well. A team of marriage technicians handles all the moves for us. All we've got

to do is relax and enjoy it."

Arthur couldn't relax and was sure he wasn't going to enjoy himself. He was standing by the control room with Trillian. The technicians were sitting in front of an overwhelming bank of controls and monitor screens.

"Check on one, cue three for laser entry sequence."

"Magnetic field generator operational."

"All vocal Octogrids locked into octophonic harmonic positions."

"Audience cameras homed in and ready to roll."

"Red leader to base, I've been hit."

"Bride and monkey in position."

Arthur came away.

"Are you ready?" Asked Trillian, holding Arthur's hand.

"Ready for what?" Said Arthur. "I can't tell whether they're planning a wedding or a rock concert."

"I think it's a bit of both," grinned Trillian. "You know Zaphod. He's hired in a team of crying groupies to make me feel lucky."

"He doesn't deserve you," said Arthur.

"Tell him that," said Trillian. "He's giving me an entry in the Guide as the luckiest woman in the Universe."

A large, ugly creature beckoned them towards him. His hat declared he was a veteran of a Disaster Area tour.

"The eyes of the Universe are now watching," he said with a far away look in his eye. The other eye was watching for the cue. He stood holding a curtain closed. A magnificent noise came from the other side. A green light flashed above the curtain.

"You're on!" He opened the curtain and pushed them out.

They floated in a massive, black arena. They were high in the air and in the distance could make out a platform supporting the specially invited guests. Spotlights picked out Arthur and Trillian as a 640 strong vocal choir burst into glorious song. Arthur looked around for the choir but couldn't see them. The Octogrid Vocal Choir was there in voice if not in body.

The Octogrid Vocal Choir was the most successful choir in the Universe. They contained the best voices ever heard. That was because some bright spark, called Ip, thought what a waste it was when singers died and so

indulged in some grave digging. He rescued the vocal chords of some great singers and stretched them across an octagonal shaped grid. He used a computer to stretch and contract the grid and spun the grid on its axis so air passed through the vocal chords to create sound. Ip built up his collection until he had enough to create eight grids of eighty voices and created an octophonic choir. This was fine until it was found that one singer had copyrighted his voice, which prevented it's use after the owner's death. A long, arduous and extremely profitable (for the lawyers) court case followed which eventually ended up being settled out of court by murdering the lawyers. The copyright firm signed up the choir, giving Ip a massive settlement, which he used to put himself through Law School and later successfully sued the School for malpractice.

The Octogrids had been bordered by reflective strips, which caught the spotlights and scattered them all over. Suddenly, Arthur and Trillian took flight and flew around the arena at a frightening speed. Lighting gantries exploded into light and the choir spun themselves into a frenzy. Arthur and Trillian dive bombed the platform and landed with great delicacy besides Zaphod.

"Nice entrance," he whispered. "You should have been here for mine."

The lights dimmed and the choir settled down a bit. From above a shower of diamond shaped metal plates came down, the spotlights dancing through them. The plates stopped above the platform, held there by a magnetic field. The technicians tweaked the field generator and the plates revolved. Lasers burst out from nowhere into the magnetic field, deflecting everywhere. It put even the largest glitterball to shame. The choir whipped themselves up again as a priest floated down in front of the altar. They reached an orgasm of sound (you had to be there) and fell silent.

Cameras locked in on the priest as he beckoned the couple forward.

"Well?" He said.

"Okay." Said Trillian.

"Why not." Followed Zaphod.

The choir erupted again as did the lights and the lasers.

The ceremony was over.

Chapter 64

The reception was a loud, brash affair at Zaphod's home. The swimming pool was filled with Old Janx Spirit and Ford was one of the first to dive in. Bolo dived in to save him when he tried to drain the pool orally.

Arthur and Fenchurch stood by the food, trying to identify something that looked appetising and edible. It was a long fruitless search.

"I wouldn't say it was the most romantic wedding I've ever been to," said Arthur.

"It was certainly one of the best gigs I've been to," laughed Fenchurch.

"Still, I suppose the priest could do it another way, if you asked him," said Arthur.

"Probably."

"Not that I was thinking of asking him."

"Of course not."

Arthur looked deeply into a Kopwilsilus dip.

"Arthur, let's get married."

Arthur looked up.

"What? Why did you have to say that?"

"It seemed like you were having trouble."

"You've ruined all my plans, I was just building up to a big speech."

Arthur looked back at the dip, which seemed to look back.

"I'm sorry, pretend I never said it."

"Well it's a bit difficult now."

"Arthur, ask me."

"Fenchurch, will you marry me?"

"I'll have to think about it."

Arthur picked up the dip in mock anger

"I've thought about it. I will."

"I'll get the priest."

"I don't want to get married here, I want to get married on Earth."

"But that's omgs away from here."

"Well I'm sure Zaphod or Ford will lend you a towel and you've still got your copy of the Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy. We can leave after the party." She paused.

"You know, I'm really getting into this hitch-hiking lark."

PROLOGUE

Space, like a second sentence, can be big, confusing and needs going through twice to really understand it. One of the few ways to comprehend how big space can be, is to be subjected to the total perspective vortex, but as this usually leads to death unless your ego is as large as say, Zaphod Beeblebrox's, it is just as well to accept everyone's word that it is. Distances can therefore become ridiculously large, large enough for those tired with light years (and the enormous slide rules needed to calculate in light years) to invent new, exciting words for inexorably large distances. A Kirpcatorno is now widely accepted as a pretty long way (say 23474 to the power of the collective ages of those at a reasonably successful party) and an 'Omp' is about twice as far as a 'Kirpcatorno.

However, to prevent distances getting too conceited about their sizes, ships such as the Heart of Gold or the Starship Bistromath were designed to sprint through space fast enough to make distances go into a corner and sulk. So for Arthur Dent to say 'We must be in Zaphod Beeblebrox's neighbourhood' when it is, in fact, 36 omps away, is not entirely unreasonable for a good hitchhiker.

To recap, Arthur Dent, having found a wonderful companion in Fenchurch (that being her name, not the place) had visited God's last message to his creation, only to have Marvin die in his arms. Ford Prefect had resumed his job as a researcher for that truly wonderful book, The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, with new vigour and was probably skulking around some seedy bar trying to talk somebody into buying him a drink. Zaphod Beeblebrox had settled down with Trillian to raise kids and have a peaceful time not saving the Universe. In fact, although saving the Universe again was the furthest thought from all their minds (about 421 omps), it was preparing to renew its acquaintance with them quite shortly.

Young Zaphod Plays It Safe

Douglas Adams

A large flying craft moved swiftly across the surface of an astoundingly beautiful sea. From mid-morning onwards it plied back and forth in great widening arcs, and at last attracted the attention of the local islanders, a peaceful, sea-food loving people who gathered on the beach and squinted up into the blinding sun, trying to see what was there.

Any sophisticated knowledgeable person, who had knocked about, seen a few things, would probably have remarked on how much the craft looked like a filing cabinet - a large and recently burgled filing cabinet lying on its back with its drawers in the air and flying.

The islanders, whose experience was of a different kind, were instead struck by how little it looked like a lobster.

They chattered excitedly about its total lack of claws, its stiff unbendy back, and the fact that it seemed to experience the greatest difficulty staying on the ground. This last feature seemed particularly funny to them. They jumped up and down on the spot a lot to demonstrate to the stupid thing that they themselves found staying on the ground the easiest thing in the world.

But soon this entertainment began to pall for them. After all, since it was perfectly clear to them that the thing was not a lobster, and since their world was blessed with an abundance of things that were lobsters (a good half a dozen of which were now marching succulently up the beach towards them) they saw no reason to waste any more time on the thing but decided instead to adjourn immediately for a late lobster lunch.

At that exact moment the craft stopped suddenly in mid-air then upended itself and plunged headlong into the ocean with a great crash of spray which sent them shouting into the trees.

When they re-emerged, nervously, a few minutes later, all they were able to see was a smoothly scarred circle of water and a few gulping bubbles.

That's odd, they said to each other between mouthfuls of the best lobster to be had anywhere in the Western Galaxy, that's the second time that's happened in a year.

The craft which wasn't a lobster dived direct to a depth of two hundred feet, and hung there in the heavy blueness, while vast masses of water swayed about it. High above, where the water was magically clear, a brilliant formation of fish flashed away. Below, where the light had difficulty reaching the colour of the water sank to a dark and savage blue.

Here, at two hundred feet, the sun streamed feebly. A large, silk skinned sea-mammal rolled idly by, inspecting the craft with a kind of half-interest, as if it had half expected to find something of this kind round about here, and then it slid on up and away towards the rippling light.

The craft waited here for a minute or two, taking readings, and then descended another hundred feet. At this depth it was becoming seriously dark. After a moment or two the internal lights of the craft shut down, and in the second or so that passed before the main external beams suddenly stabbed out, the only visible light came from a small hazily illuminated pink sign which read The Beeblebrox Salvage and Really Wild Stuff Corporation.

The huge beams switched downwards, catching a vast shoal of silver fish, which swiveled away in silent panic.

In the dim control room which extended in a broad bow from the craft's blunt prow, four heads were gathered round a computer display that was analysing the very, very faint and intermittent signals that emanating from deep on the sea bed.

"That's it," said the owner of one of the heads finally.

"Can we be quite sure?" said the owner of another of the heads.

"One hundred per cent positive," replied the owner of the first head.

"You're one hundred per cent positive that the ship which is crashed on the bottom of this ocean is the ship which you said you were one hundred per cent positive could one hundred per cent positively never crash?" said the owner of the two remaining heads. "Hey," he put up two of his hands, "I'm only asking."

The two officials from the Safety and Civil Reassurance Administration

responded to this with a very cold stare, but the man with the odd, or rather the even number of heads, missed it. He flung himself back on the pilot couch, opened a couple of beers - one for himself and the other also for himself - stuck his feet on the console and said "Hey, baby" through the ultra-glass at a passing fish.

"Mr. Beeblebrox...", began the shorter and less reassuring of the two officials in a low voice.

"Yup?" said Zaphod, rapping a suddenly empty can down on some of the more sensitive instruments, "you ready to dive? Let's go."

"Mr. Beeblebrox, let us make one thing perfectly clear..."

"Yeah let's," said Zaphod, "How about this for a start. Why don't you just tell me what's really on this ship."

"We have told you," said the official. "By-products."

Zaphod exchanged weary glances with himself.

"By-products," he said. "By-products of what?"

"Processes." said the official.

"What processes?"

"Processes that are perfectly safe."

"Santa Zarquana Voostra!" exclaimed both of Zaphod's heads in chorus, "so safe that you have to build a zarking fortress ship to take the by-products to the nearest black hole and tip them in! Only it doesn't get there because the pilot does a detour - is this right? - to pick up some lobster...? OK, so the guy is cool, but... I mean own up, this is barking time, this is major lunch, this is stool approaching critical mass, this is... this is... total vocabulary failure!"

"Shut up!" his right head yelled at his left, "we're flanging!"

He got a good calming grip on the remaining beer can.

"Listen guys," he resumed after a moment's peace and contemplation. The two officials had said nothing. Conversation at this level was not something to which they felt they could aspire. "I just want to know," insisted Zaphod, "what you're getting me into here."

He stabbed a finger at the intermittent readings trickling over the computer screen. They meant nothing to him but he didn't like the look of them at all. They were all squiggly with lots of long numbers and things.

"It's breaking up, is that it?" he shouted. "It's got a hold full epsilonic

radiating aorist rods or something that'll fry this whole space sector for zillions of years back and it's breaking up. Is that the story? Is that what we're going down to find? Am I going to come out of that wreck with even more heads?"

"It cannot possibly be a wreck, Mr. Beeblebrox," insisted the official, "the ship is guaranteed to be perfectly safe. It cannot possibly break up"

"Then why are you so keen to go and look at it?"

"We like to look at things that are perfectly safe."

"Freeeeooow!"

"Mr. Beeblebrox," said an official, patiently, "may I remind you that you have a job to do?"

"Yeah, well maybe I don't feel so keen on doing it all of a sudden. What do you think I am, completely without any moral whatsits, what are they called, those moral things?"

"Scruples?"

"Scruples, thank you, whatsoever? Well?"

The two officials waited calmly. They coughed slightly to help pass the time. Zaphod sighed a "what is the world coming to" sort of sigh to absolve himself from all blame, and swung himself round in his seat.

"Ship?" he called.

"Yup?" said the ship.

"Do what I do."

The ship thought about this for a few milliseconds and then, after double checking all the seals on its heavy duty bulkheads, it began slowly, inexorably, in the hazy blaze of its lights, to sink to the lowest depths.

Five hundred feet.

A thousand.

Two thousand.

Here, at a pressure or nearly seventy atmospheres, in the chilling depths where no light reaches, nature keeps its most heated imaginings. Two foot long nightmares loomed wildly into the bleaching light, yawned, and vanished back into the blackness.

Two and a half thousand feet.

At the dim edges of the ship's lights guilty secrets flitted by with their eyes on stalks.

Gradually the topography of the distantly approaching ocean bed

resolved with greater and greater clarity on the computer displays until at last a shape could be made out that was separate and distinct from its surroundings. It was like a huge lopsided cylindrical fortress which widened sharply halfway along its length to accommodate the heavy ultra-plating with which the crucial storage holds were clad, and which were supposed by its builders to have made this the most secure and impregnable spaceship ever built. Before launch the material structure of this section had been battered, rammed, blasted and subjected to every assault its builders knew it could withstand in order to demonstrate that it could withstand them.

The tense silence in the cockpit tightened perceptibly as it became clear that it was this section that had broken rather neatly in two.

"In fact it's perfectly safe," said one of the officials, "it's built so that even if the ship does break up, the storage holds cannot possibly be breached."

Three thousand, eight hundred and twenty five feet.

Four Hi-Presh-A SmartSuits moved slowly out of the open hatchway of the salvage craft and waded through the barrage of its lights towards the monstrous shape that loomed darkly out of the sea night. They moved with a sort of clumsy grace, near weightless though weighed on by a world of water.

With his right-hand head Zaphod peered up into the black immensities above him and for a moment his mind sang with a silent roar of horror. He glanced to his left and was relieved to see that his other head was busy watching the Brockian Ultra-Cricket broadcasts on the helmet vid without concern. Slightly behind him to his left walked the two officials from the Safety and Civil Reassurance Administration, slightly in front of him to his right walked the empty suit, carrying their implements and testing the way for them.

They passed the huge rift in the broken backed Starship Billion Year Bunker, and played their flashlights up into it. Mangled machinery loomed between torn and twisted bulkheads, two feet thick. A family of large transparent eels lived in there now and seemed to like it.

The empty suit preceded them along the length of the ship's gigantic murky hull, trying the airlocks. The third one it tested ground open uneasily. They crowded inside it and waited for several long minutes while the pump mechanisms dealt with the hideous pressure that the

ocean exerted, and slowly replaced it with an equally hideous pressure of air and inert gases. At last the inner door slid open and they were admitted to a dark outer holding area of the Starship Billion Year Bunker. Several more high security Titan-O-Hold doors had to be passed through, each of which the officials opened with a selection of quark keys. Soon they were so deep within the heavy security fields that the UltraCricket broadcasts were beginning to fade, and Zaphod had to switch to one of the rock video stations, since there was nowhere that they were not able to reach.

A final doorway slid open, and they emerged into a large sepulchral space. Zaphod played his flashlight against the opposite wall and it fell full on a wild-eyed screaming face.

Zaphod screamed a diminished fifth himself, dropped his light and sat heavily on the floor, or rather on a body which had been lying there undisturbed for around six months and which reacted to being sat on by exploding with great violence. Zaphod wondered what to do about all this, and after a brief but hectic internal debate decided that passing out would be the very thing.

He came to a few minutes later and pretended not to know who he was, where he was or how he had got there, but was not able to convince anybody. He then pretended that his memory suddenly returned with a rush and that the shock caused him to pass out again, but he was helped unwillingly to his feet by the empty suit - which he was beginning to take a serious dislike to - and forced to come to terms with his surroundings.

They were dimly and fitfully lit and unpleasant in a number of respects, the most obvious of which was the colourful arrangement of parts of the ship's late lamented Navigation Officer over the floor, walls and ceiling, and especially over the lower half of his, Zaphod's, suit. The effect of this was so astoundingly nasty that we shall not be referring to again at any point in this narrative - other than to record briefly the fact that it caused Zaphod to throw up inside his suit, which he therefore removed and swapped, after suitable headgear modifications, with the empty one. Unfortunately the stench of the fetid air in the ship, followed by the sight of his own suit walking around casually draped in rotting intestines was enough to make him throw up in the other suit as well, which was a problem that he and the suit would simply have to live with.

There. All done. No more nastiness.

At least, no more of that particular nastiness.

The owner of the screaming face had calmed down very slightly now and was bubbling away incoherently in a large tank of yellow liquid - an emergency suspension tank.

"It was crazy," he babbled, "crazy! I told him we could always try the lobster on the way back, but he was crazy. Obsessed! Do you ever get like that about lobster? Because I don't. Seems to me it's all rubbery and fiddly to eat, and not that much taste, well I mean is there? I infinitely prefer scallops, and said so. Oh Zarquon, I said so!"

Zaphod stared at this extraordinary apparition, flailing in its tank. The man was attached to all kinds of life-support tubes, and his voice was bubbling out of speakers that echoed insanely round the ship, returning as haunting echoes from deep and distant corridors.

"That was where I went wrong" the madman yelled, "I actually said that I preferred scallops and he said it was because I hadn't had real lobster like they did where his ancestors came from, which was here, and he'd prove it. He said it was no problem, he said the lobster here was worth a whole journey, let alone the small diversion it would take to get here, and he swore he could handle the ship in the atmosphere, but it was madness, madness!" he screamed, and paused with his eyes rolling, as if the word had rung some kind of bell in his mind, "The ship went right out of control! I couldn't believe what we were doing and just to prove a point about lobster which is really so overrated as a food, I'm sorry to go on about lobsters so much, I'll try and stop in a minute, but they've been on my mind so much for the months I've been in this tank, can you imagine what it's like to be stuck in a ship with the same guys for months eating junk food when all one guy will talk about is lobster and then spend six months floating by yourself in a tank thinking about it. I promise I will try and shut up about the lobsters, I really will. Lobsters, lobsters, lobsters - enough! I think I'm the only survivor. I'm the only one who managed to get to an emergency tank before we went down. I sent out the Mayday and then we hit. It's a disaster isn't it? A total disaster, and all because the guy liked lobsters. How much sense am I making? It's really hard for me to tell." He gazed at them beseechingly, and his mind seemed to sway slowly back down to earth like a falling leaf . He blinked and

looked at them oddly like a monkey peering at a strange fish. He scrabbled curiously with his wrinkled up fingers at the glass side of the tank. Tiny, thick yellow bubbles loosed themselves from his mouth and nose, caught briefly in his swab of hair and strayed on upwards.

"Oh Zarquon, oh heavens," he mumbled pathetically to himself, "I've been found. I've been rescued..."

"Well," said one of the officials, briskly, "you've been found at least." He strode over to the main computer bank in the middle of the chamber and started checking quickly through the ship's main monitor circuits for damage reports.

"The aorist rod chambers are intact," he said.

"Holy dingo's dos," snarled Zaphod, "there are aorist rods on board...!"

Aorist rods were devices used in a now happily abandoned form of energy production. When the hunt for new sources of energy had at one point got particularly frantic, one bright young chap suddenly spotted that one place which had never used up all its available energy was - the past. And with the sudden rush of blood to the head that such insights tend to induce, he invented a way of mining it that very same night, and within a year huge tracts of the past were being drained of all their energy and simply wasting away. Those who claimed that the past should be left unspoilt were accused of indulging in an extremely expensive form of sentimentality. The past provided a very cheap, plentiful and clean source of energy, there could always be a few Natural Past Reserves set up if anyone wanted to pay for their upkeep, and as for the claim that draining the past impoverished the present, well, maybe it did, slightly, but the effects were immeasurable and you really had to keep a sense of proportion.

It was only when it was realised that the present really was being impoverished, and that the reason for it was that those selfish plundering wastrel bastards up in the future were doing exactly the same thing, that everyone realised that every single aorist rod, and the terrible secret of how they were made would have to be utterly and forever destroyed. They claimed it was for the sake of their grandparents and grandchildren, but it was of course for the sake of their grandparent's grandchildren, and their grandchildren's grandparents.

The official from the Safety and Civil Reassurance Administration gave a

dismissive shrug.

"They're perfectly safe," he said. He glanced up at Zaphod and suddenly said with uncharacteristic frankness, "there's worse than that on board. At least," he added, tapping at one of the computer screens, "I hope it's on board."

The other official rounded on him sharply.

"What the hell do you think you're saying?" he snapped.

The first shrugged again. He said "It doesn't matter. He can say what he likes. No one would believe him. It's why we chose to use him rather than do anything official isn't it? The more wild the story he tells, the more it'll sound like he's some hippy adventurer making it up. He can even say that we said this and it'll make him sound like a paranoid." He smiled pleasantly at Zaphod who was seething in a suit full of sick. "You may accompany us," he told him, "if you wish."

"You see?" said the official, examining the ultra-titanium outer seals of the aorist rod hold. "Perfectly secure, perfectly safe."

He said the same thing as they passed holds containing chemical weapons so powerful that a teaspoonful could fatally infect an entire planet.

He said the same thing as they passed holds containing zeta-active compounds so powerful that a teaspoonful could blow up a whole planet.

He said the same thing as they passed holds containing theta-active compounds so powerful that a teaspoonful could irradiate a whole planet.

"I'm glad I'm not a planet," muttered Zaphod.

"You'd have nothing to fear," assured the official from the Safety and Civil Reassurance Administration, "planets are very safe. Provided," he added - and paused. They were approaching the hold nearest to the point where the back of the Starship Billion Year Bunker was broken. The corridor here was twisted and deformed, and the floor was damp and sticky in patches.

"Ho hum," he said, "ho very much hum."

"What's in this hold?" demanded Zaphod.

"By-products" said the official, clamming up again.

"By-products..." insisted Zaphod, quietly, "of what?"

Neither official answered. Instead, they examined the hold door very carefully and saw that its seals were twisted apart by the forces that had

deformed the whole corridor. One of them touched the door lightly. It swung open to his touch. There was darkness inside, with just a couple of dim yellow lights deep within it.

"Of what?" hissed Zaphod.

The leading official turned to the other.

"There's an escape capsule," he said, "that the crew were to use to abandon ship before jettisoning it into the black hole," he said. "I think it would be good to know that it's still there." The other official nodded and left without a word.

The first official quietly beckoned Zaphod in. The large dim yellow lights glowed about twenty feet from them.

"The reason," he said, quietly "why everything else in this ship is, I maintain, safe, is that no one is really crazy enough to use them. No one. At least no one that crazy would ever get near them. Anyone that mad or dangerous ring very deep alarm bells. People may be stupid but they're not that stupid."

"By-products," hissed Zaphod again, - he had to hiss in order that his voice shouldn't be heard to tremble - "of what."

"Er, Designer People."

"What?"

"The Sirius Cybernetics Corporation were awarded a huge research grant to design and produce synthetic personalities to order. The results were uniformly disastrous. All the "people" and "personalities" turned out to be amalgams of characteristics which simply could not co-exist in naturally occurring life forms. Most of them were just poor pathetic misfits, but some were deeply, deeply dangerous. Dangerous because they didn't ring alarm bells in other people. They could walk through situations the way that ghosts walk through walls, because no one spotted the danger.

"The most dangerous of all were three identical ones - they were put in this hold, to be blasted, with this ship, right out of this universe. They are not evil, in fact they are rather simple and charming. But they are the most dangerous creatures that ever lived because there is nothing they will not do if allowed, and nothing they will not be allowed to do..."

Zaphod looked at the dim yellow lights, the two dim yellow lights. As his eyes became accustomed to the light he saw that the two lights framed a third space where something was broken. Wet sticky patches gleamed

dully on the floor. Zaphod and the official walked cautiously towards the lights. At that moment, four words came crashing into the helmet headsets from the other official.

"The capsule has gone," he said tersely.

"Trace it" snapped Zaphod's companion. "Find exactly where it has gone. We must know where it has gone!"

Zaphod slid aside a large ground glass door. Beyond it lay a tank full of thick yellow liquid, and floating in it was a man, a kindly looking man with lots of pleasant laugh lines round his face. He seemed to be floating quite contentedly and smiling to himself.

Another terse message suddenly came through his helmet headset. The planet towards which the escape capsule had headed had already been identified. It was in Galactic Sector ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha.

The kindly looking man in the tank seemed to be babbling gently to himself, just as the co-pilot had been in his tank. Little yellow bubbles beaded on the man's lips. Zaphod found a small speaker by the tank and turned it on. He heard the man babbling gently about a shining city on a hill.

He also heard the Official from the Safety and Civil Reassurance Administration issue instructions that the planet in ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha must be made "perfectly safe."