

Universal medicine — the rejected appendix

Brian Gosset

Interstellar itinerants (tourists, salesmen, hobos and locums alike) continue to rely on that wholly remarkable travel companion of 5 975 509 digital pages from the Megadodo publishing corporation of Ursa Minor Beta, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.¹ A little-known fact about that electronic resource is that the first edition included an additional 1 205 398 pages of an appendix entitled *A Compendium of Astro-Travel Medicine*, which was intended to assist those who might stray beyond the reach of their insurance plan or HMO-approved health care network.

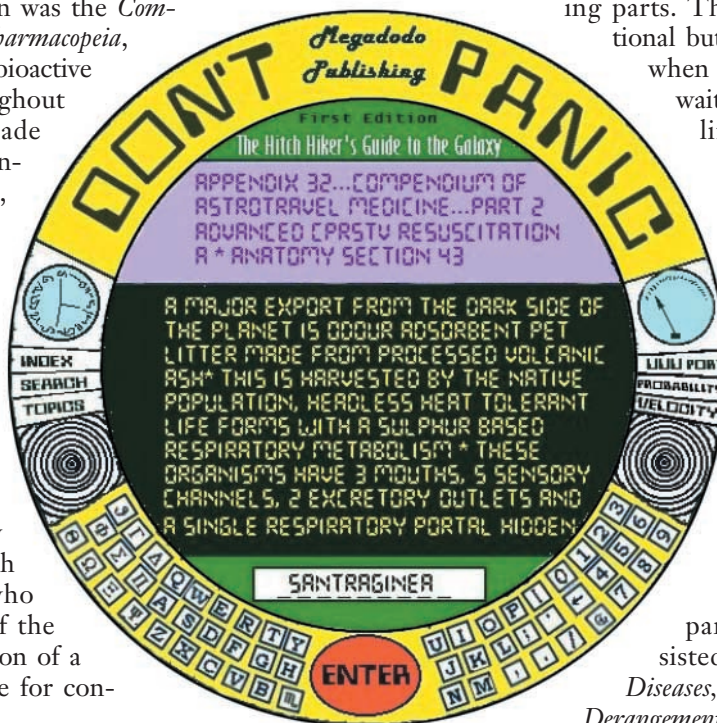
A popular feature among those fortunate enough to own this edition was the *Compendium's Pan-Planetary Pharmacopeia*, a comprehensive listing of bioactive substances available throughout the major intergalactic trade routes. Apart from the standardized therapeutic agents, a considerable portion of the inventory was devoted to those mildly toxic preparations labelled "Natural" or "Organic," which are prepared without analysis from the free-living biomass, pollutants and all. Such products are preferred by followers of the hugely popular Apoplectic Church of the Green Mystery, who believe that knowledge of the precise chemical composition of a substance renders it unsafe for consumption.

A major subdivision of the compendium comprised the *Universal First Aid Manual*, designed to assist in the emergency curbside care of individuals belonging to any one of the 500 million most populous registered intelligent life forms. The ABC of resuscitation in this larger, morphologically diverse community begins with "A" for Anatomy. It is embarrassing to discover too late that one has pumped life-restoring sulfur dioxide into the wrong orifice of an unconscious Headless Santraginean Volcano farmer. Likewise, in order to perform the "B" for Backup

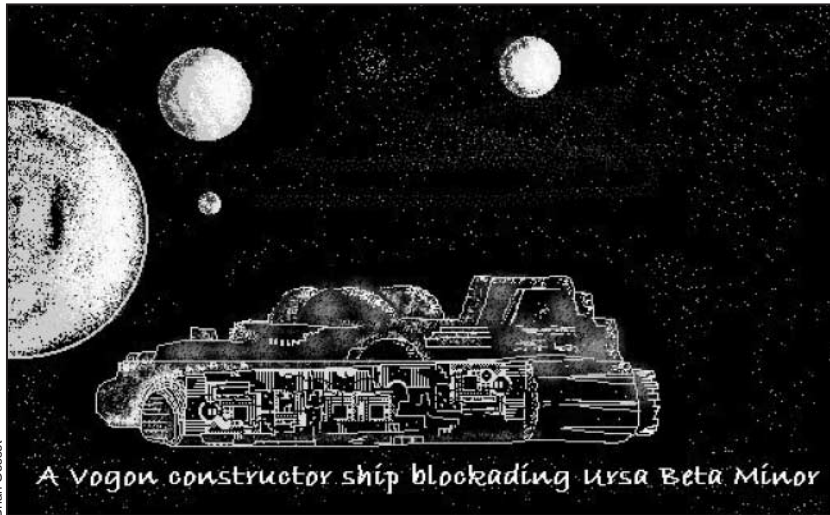
of surviving personality and memory banks, the cognitive organ(s) must be located with precision. The "C" is a reminder to try, where possible, to enlist the Cooperation of the proposed resuscitee, because 98%* of intelligent life forms in extremis will assume that anyone approaching their cognitive organ at such a time while reading a guide must be either incompetent or planning a meal, and they may still be able to offer serious resistance.

An intriguing subsection of the manual, punctuated with numerous disclaimers, offered a DIY primer of *Simple Surgical Repairs Using Common Kitchen Utensils* for primitive life systems such as hominids that lack autoreplicating parts. This was intended for exceptional but not rare situations, such as when the duration of the surgical waiting list exceeds one's natural life expectancy. The *Guide's* advertising campaign emphasized the potential value of this primer during prolonged intergalactic voyages under constrained circumstances; the TV commercial featured a relaxed stowaway casually fixing his acute abdomen, while remaining concealed on a Vogon Constructor ship traversing the 401 star system during rush year.

But the most ambitious part of the *Compendium* consisted of a *Definitive Database of Diseases, Distempers and Disagreeable Derangements*, compiled from a review of the 500 thousand most respected subethereal medical publications on the UUU (Ubiquitous Universal Utility, the cosmic counterpart of the World Wide Web).



*The other 2% encompasses various nonskeletal organisms such as the Jumping Jelly-Beings of the Orbiting Moons of Aldebaran (also known as the OMA) and certain public officials of the City of Tor on the planet To, who are prone to attacks of *cor haemorrhagus liberalis*.



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Unfortunately, due to the relative lack of medical scientific sophistication achieved on planet Earth before its destruction, no terrestrial journals were included (except, for complex reasons, the *Journal of Studies of Longevity in Rodents*). Although none of the illnesses peculiar to *Homo sapiens* were therefore represented in the *Compendium*, human space-tourists are exposed to a variety of acquired conditions affecting other carbon-based life forms and, therefore, could have benefited from familiarity with this database.

For example, all space travellers should be aware of an insidious condition associated with disabling cerebroanergic malaise, but no verifiable pathology, known as “mitochondrial exhaustion.” The cause is obscure, but the prognosis is usually quite favourable *until this diagnosis is suggested*, often by well-meaning friends, after which recovery is rare. Some suspect this condition to be a variant of the “clothed fantasy syndrome” first described in an imperial proband by Andersen,² where the naïve subject’s perceptual distortion was similarly perpetuated by the loyal complicity of those around him.

One of the derangements of potential interest is *acute ichthyobabel horribilingualis*. The Babel fish, which “translates” any language instantly into that of the individual whose ear canal it inhabits, might have seemed to be a natural ally for governments with bilingual aspirations. However, the Babel fish is exquisitely sensitive to emotionally charged thought frequencies directed at the language medium itself. In such an environment, it eventually succumbs to the mental strain of trying to bridge the 2 solitudes and begins to transcribe

incoming signals into nonsense messages coded in the brain’s equivalent of *assembly* language, which is unintelligible to the mind of the host but with startling consequences for involuntary bodily functions.

One might well ask why, given the fascinating and invaluable contents described here, was this medical *Compendium* abandoned in subsequent editions of *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*? Was it the threat of losing advertising revenue from certain giant intergalactic drug manufacturing corporations concerned about generic drug promotion? Did the Interstellar Council of HMOs, fearful of a decline in membership, pull powerful political strings to have it removed? Or did the *Guide*’s editor himself finally capitulate to

the demands of the 3-year-long protest blockade of Ursa Minor Beta by the members of the Professional Union of Vogon Commanders, weary of losing galley cutlery and of endless cleanups after botched operations in the cargo holds of their ships?

In fact, a former employee seeking reinstatement at the Megadodo Central Mainframe location has claimed that this loss was due to an accident that occurred during a routine technical maintenance operation. This worker was then a recent immigrant to Ursa Minor Beta and struggling with assimilation issues; he alleges that an acute attack of *ichthyobabel horribilingualis* sent his peanut butter sandwich along with his dental prosthesis hurtling into the delicate Biomemory Neuralmatrix Suspension over which he was working at the time. Due to an oversight by the manufacturer, the Sirius Cybernetic Corporation, the computer turned out to be allergic to nuts; this segment of the vital cortex unit suffered an anaphylactic meltdown, not only deleting the entire contents of the medical appendix but steadfastly rejecting all later attempts to restore it.

Dr. Gosset is a physician in Toronto who probably needs an interstellar holiday.

Acknowledgement: An apology to readers of Douglas Adams is appropriate.

References

1. Adams D. *The hitch hiker’s guide to the galaxy – a trilogy in five parts*. London: Heinemann; 1995.
2. Andersen HC. The emperor’s new clothes. In: Sideman BB, editor. *The world’s best fairy tales*. Montreal: Reader’s Digest; 1967. p. 401-8.