

# So Long, and Thanks for all the Ponies

By Sir Ginger



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# Author's Note

A large number of concepts and jokes in this fiction may require knowledge of the original masterpiece this work is partially based on. Concepts like the Infinite Improbability Drive, Whole Sort of General Mish-Mash or Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster can most easily be explained by a quick look at <http://hhgproject.org/index.html>, or just reading the books. Furthermore, I am assuming that pony style life forms are as ubiquitous as human style life forms seemed to be in the original work.

# Chapter 1

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy has this to say on the subject of ponies;

Cute.

The concise, and indeed abrupt nature of certain portions of this compendium of knowledge is due in part to lack of space, but more to the total lack of competence, motivation and sobriety of the vast majority of the guide's staff. The fact that races fairly similar to ponies inhabited a fairly large portion of the galaxy only increased the irrelevance of any entry on ponies.

"Why write about what people already zarking know?" as Stagyar Zil Doggo said to the unfortunate writer who had suggested perhaps writing a more suitable article. The fact that a major type of life form fails to get an entry over one word, while articles on far more obscure, if interesting, subjects can run to the thousands of words tells rather more about the guide than most staff would want to be known. The article on Equestria for example, despite being only a single land on a single world, is quite long, whereas none of the millions of races that are sufficiently similar to ponies to be called that, warrant so much as a footnote.

More popular than the "Celestia's Homecare" omnibus, better selling than "Fifty-Three More Things to Do When Trapped in the Moon", and more controversial than the infamous "Cupcakes" fanfiction, This wholly remarkable book has the rare distinction of existing in almost all layers of reality. In almost no way of looking at The Whole Sort Of General Mish-Mash (as it is technically known) is there not a guide for seeing the marvels of the universe, surviving fantastic encounters with horrific monsters and finding the nearest and cheapest intoxicants. But like so many things, the story of the book can be traced back to some remarkably unremarkable people. A group of ponies from Equestria were some of them, but at this moment in time they are utterly unaware of their destiny, even for the next five minutes. It is possible, were they to know their destiny

BEYOND the next five minutes, they would have given up on the entire thing.

The fact that one among them was not of the same species as the others had not occurred to any of them. Well, it had actually, but none of them had given it serious consideration. If any of them had done so, they might have become convinced. She took great care to seem like a normal earth pony, but she was about as competent at this task as any other roving writer for the aforementioned guide would be. Luckily, the others quickly learned to dismiss any odd behaviour as "Just being Pinkie Pie".

\*

Sugar Cube Corner was silent at present. Well, almost. A single tired Pegasus stumbled out of the front door, eyes half closed. She tossed her rainbow mane out of her eyes, and immediately regretted it as the headache that had so far only been knocking politely on the front door of her mind, now barged in and demanded to know *exactly* how much she had drunk last night. Carefully, she stepped back inside.

Water. Need water.

As she attached herself to the tap, another blurry shape came down the stairs. She focused hard, trying to remember what orange was, and what this indicated about the pony joining her.

"Mornin' Sugarcube"

"Gnuuuuh"

Applejack stared at her friend, who was obviously in no mood to converse. She was made of sturdier stuff than her rainbow maned friend, and was one of those ponies capable of knocking back an almost fatal dose of alcohol and suffering next to no ill effects. She leaned against a wall, watching as Dash pulled away from the tap and sat on the floor, apparently now more ready to deal with the world.

"Where are the other guys?"

"Well, Twi's asleep on Pinkies bed, ah don't think she's gonna be too badly off. Pinkie's just stirrin', an' if Ah know her, she'll be feelin' friskier than..."

Before Applejack could summon a suitably descriptive phrase, a pink maned ball of confusion came flying down the stairs, pushing ahead of it the startled bodies of Fluttershy, Twilight and Spike. Rarity followed a moment later, obviously having had just sufficient time to do her hair

effectively, clean her makeup and even evade the party pony. Before anypony could open their mouths to forge a sensible conversation, Pinkie took the stand. She looked unnaturally serious, and they all remained silent, as she paced around.

"Ok you guys, I have to tell you the most important thing you're ever going to hear, I have to tell you now, and I have to tell you while you're all sitting down because it's super duper important but kinda frightening and I don't want anypony to fall over or anything and I know that you're all probably thinking this is just Pinkie being Pinkie and although I'm still Pinkie and I'm going to be Pinkie for the rest of my life I am not just being Pinkie here when I tell you I wasn't always Pinkie."

The others were all fighting internal battles on the twin fronts of Not Letting Your Face Show Amusement and Following What The Hell Pinkie Just Said, with varying degrees of success. Dash was fighting yet another battle, the hard front of Not Giving Up On The Entire Concept Of Living. She rallied sufficiently to enquire what the hell she, Pinkie, was talking about, and how she, Pinkie, expected her, Dash, to listen properly when her, Pinkie's, voice was both several octaves higher than was comfortable for her, Dash. Especially when she, Dash, was seriously considering going straight back to her, Dash's, bed. The others concurred, but without resorting to the multiple expletives that have been left out for decency's sake. Seemingly unfazed, Pinkie continued.

"What would you guys say if I said I wasn't actually raised on a rock farm?" Twilight scoffed a little.

"Frankly Pinkie, I'm surprised that you expected us to believe that in the first place. Rocks aren't like the weather, they happen without ponies helping out."

"I mean, what if I said I wasn't from Equestria? I mean if I said I actually just came here one day and got stuck and then never tried to leave because I was just having so much fun and then I met you guys and everything was so great and I couldn't tell you because then you would think I was a big lying liar pants and you wouldn't wanna be my friends anymore? What If I said I actually came from a planet just a teensy bit away from Betelgeuse?"

Silence filled the room. The silence hung around for a few moments, waiting to be ejected from proceedings. Twilight was looking Pinkie in the eyes. She felt, as the only one who knew exactly what Betelgeuse was, she should have a little more to offer. Applejack had gone slack jawed. She knew a lie when she saw one, and this wasn't one. Dash was wondering if she had heard the pink pony correctly, or if she had just missed several steps in the conversation. Rarity was gearing up to comment, but it was Fluttershy who broke the silence, which by now had begun to feel awkward with itself.

"Um." Pinkie peered at the pastel pony, who screwed up her courage and said in a small voice "why are you telling us now?"

Pinkie gave a little yelp "OOOH! Because the world is ending in two minutes!" The ponies stared. The silence which had only just been ejected from proceedings slunk back in the door, and settled itself down for a long stay. It was rudely turfed out by an unexpected sound from somewhere above. It was a voice. It spoke equine in a manner likely to cause the most hardened, deafened and possibly even dead pony to cringe in horror. It was a voice with nothing good to say, and no inclination to even try. It echoed around the the room, seeming to come off of every surface.

"People of Equestria, your attention please, this is Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz of the Galactic Hyperspace Planning Council. As you will no doubt be aware, the plans for development of the outlying regions of the Galaxy require the building of a hyperspatial express route through your star system, and regrettably your planet is one of those scheduled for demolition. The process will take slightly less that two of your Equestrian minutes. Thank you very much."

All six ponies dashed outside, dragging Spike along, who for his part had remained stunned for the duration of the previous events. All over Ponyville, ponies of all kinds were staring directly upwards. Hanging silently in the sky, huge, yellow, metallic and with absolutely zero regard for aesthetics or its own weight, hung something.

It was not quite cubic, with every last part of it somehow contriving to utterly fail to please the eye in a new and unpleasant way. Where it should have been clean it was dirty, where dirt would have reduced the nastiness, it was polished to a shine. Rust clung like some hideous creature to

corners, large enough to be visible even from ground level. Rarity almost fainted dead away. Ponies did not have radio, so there was no voice to answer this challenge to their existence, and the Prostetnic Captain, slightly dissappointed at not being able to lecture the planet below and get himself properly angry, pressed the button, set to Rubble.

The sound was almost as unpleasant as the ships had been, for there had been hundreds, thousands, positioned all over the lonely planet with its own orbiting sun and moon, which now flew away into space as the planet they had served ceased to exist. The sun would go on to collide with a large meeting of record company executives, which just goes to show that all events have their bright side. For a moment, an after image of the planet hung in the sky as a perfect sphere of yellow chunky ships sat still. Then they peeled away, leaving nothing behind. And so the end of the world happened. Slightly ahead of schedule, which would at least give the captain something to write on his reports and get angry about.

Really, very little of this story was ever gong to concern Equestria, better to hurry on without getting bogged down.

\*

The Hitchhikers Guide, in a moment of surprising clarity, mentions that the minds of most races are simply not geared to deal with certain events, especially large-scale tragedies, and anything at a distance. Very few beings are capable of considering more than 10 or so deaths without just filing the event at the back of their mind, marked under "Do not open". They will be aware it is a bad thing, but will not feel it on a personal level. One race which, by some quirk did not gain this ability to write off tragedy are the Mardajons of Lepluss. They are solitary purple creatures which spend almost all of their lives paralysed with grief, as they feel every single tragedy as if it were personal. Their economy subsists almost entirely on the production of dark corners to sit shaking in, paper bags to hide from the world in, and military grade intoxicants of all kinds. This simply goes to show that while evolution is the driving force behind all life in he universe, it can mess things up just as well as an inattentive god. The only reason the Mardajons have yet to die out completely, is that solace is often enough sought carnally, and the Mardajons, by another quirk of nature, happen to be frightfully good at breeding. This is a shame, because a nice clean extinction would be a boon to them all. The guide goes on to explain that



the Mardajons were particularly grateful when conservative politics were invented, as this enabled them to stop caring about others at all.

\*

Thus it was that our six ponies and one baby dragon were not as fazed as one might have thought. This event was simply too big to think about. Another reason that they weren't upset right at this second, was that they were, with the exception of Pinkie, unconscious. She had been through a matter transference beam before, and took the opportunity to think. Had it been a good idea to get them all drunk last night? Admittedly she had barely woken up in time, but all in all she had learned that a hangover had the effect of causing enough self pity that a pony could ignore almost anything; the body ignored everything other than its current misery. And how else could she have brought them all together? Well, maybe one of her ordinary trademark Pinkie Parties, but since the magic of alcohol had been discovered by the group, any party generally gravitated towards the stuff. Besides, it had worked right? It was a shame she couldn't have brought more, but even seven beings was stretching it for something done without the Vogons noticing and locking them out. As it was, they had arrived intact in a rather squalid, but currently unoccupied sleeping quarters. Thank Celest... well, thank somepony for the Dentrassi. Without them, hitching a lift with Vogons would be impossible on a very VERY good day, and suicidal on all of the other days. She peered into her bag, making sure she had everything she needed. In addition to the electronic thumb she had used to hitch a ride, she had her towel, her sub-ether radio, which she had used to pick up news of the arrival of the Vogons, and that most remarkable book, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Sighing, she scrolled down to the entry on Equestria. Magical places had unnaturally rapid updates, as revisions could be beamed from the future when the news finally reached the editor. She stared. Oh. This was going to be awkward to explain.

\*

Back in the void left behind by Jeltz, a bright spark of light moved around, trailed by another purpler one. Slowly, a worldlet formed, growing. Water bubbled up, creating seas and lakes, mountains sprouted like snowy spines and grass coated the planet. Had anyone looked closely, they would have seen towns, roads, houses forming. A tall white alicorn followed by a

smaller purple one strode along, and life spread out from them in ripples. Ponies frozen in the act of peering upwards were magicked back into existence, an orbiting sun and moon formed above, spinning gently. Backup restored.

\*

“So, just one second Sugarcube, why exactly can’t we go back?”

Applejack’s voice was patient, barely.

“Weeeeell...” Pinkie bit her lip. “Apparently Celestia is so super duper powerful she could have just remade the whole planet around us again and we wouldn’t even have noticed. And she did, including Everypony there. Everypony, and that means us. We’ll have been brought back to live out our normal lives and we can’t exactly go back, I mean how weird would that be, there’d be two of me and although that would mean really super awesome parties and some great pranks and all sorts of...” She looked around as the clanging of boots sounded in the hallway. “Also, it looks like the Vogons have found us and are almost certainly going to be really mean and throw us off the ship and I really don’t think we can persuade them to turn around and drop us off.”

Rainbow Dash facehoofed, the others just stood dumbstruck. As large green shapes came through the door, only Applejack could say anything.

“Oh horseapples”

\*

Vogon fanfiction is without doubt at least the second worst fanfiction in the known universe. It is written with the express purpose of making the author feel happy, and when the author is a large, slug-brained, bloody-minded, petty, vindictive and generally unpleasant bureaucrat, this results in something truly horrifying. And it was to this that our unfortunate heroes were now subjected. Vogons know exactly the right fiction to bring out to really upset their guests, and so Jeltz had brought out his four thousand-word epic on his ponysona, and how it had saved the universe.

“... And so Jeltz Embersparkler stormshadow rainboomer tosed his chaging colured mane and it flowwed like changing rainbow fires over his enormous sexy wings and his horn split it down the middl like a horn splittin fantastic sexy hair cause thats what it was...”

# Chapter 2

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy has many omissions, and as a general rule the only way to be sure that it contains an article on any specific subject, is to make sure that said subject revolves around something the guide staff are actually interested in. As such, the article on the fantastically dangerous planet Sirenium V does not note the fact that the beautiful women broadcasting requests for company and judges for bikini contests have an unfortunate tendency to tear any intrepid or lonely explorers into several thousand pieces, apparently for the fun of it. Instead, it goes into rather disturbing anatomical detail, and the article ends half way through a sentence.

One article that could do with rather more information is the article on the unconscious self-defence mechanisms that most evolved races develop, such as the production of adrenaline when scared. Quite what any species will do when exposed to absolute psychological torture, such as the reading of Vagon fanfiction, is difficult to predict without extensive experience. Twilight Sparkle is a unicorn of significant power, and her brain, right about the eighth contradictory element and the fifteenth overlong description, let the magic take over, in a desperate attempt to save her sanity. She managed to extend the magical field to take in her nearest friends, it's just a shame three weren't close enough.

\*

There was a brilliant flash of purple light, momentarily illuminating the recital room, and its many chairs and restraining devices. As the light faded, Jeltz put down the page and peered around through his small, piggy eyes. What they saw did not please them, and the report sent to the brain had the hormonal equivalent of "don't shoot the messenger" attached to it. Three of the ponies, and that little reptilian thing had vanished. He blinked, then felt a thrill of satisfaction. He was about to get *angry*. "Who tied the prisoners up?" his voice was dangerous, and it was clear that answering would be almost as fatal as not answering. A young Vagon, too new to know what to expect, raised a hand.

“Your vastness, that was left to...” he never got further than that, as Jeltz had just, in some small way, made the universe a better place.

“NO SNITCHING” he snarled, lowering the gun. “And if nobody tells me *exactly* who did this, ALL of you will die.” internally he almost smiled. This was fun. One of the Vogons suddenly became aware of a spreading pool of space around him. Novogon seemed to be moving, but certainly he was left alone in the room. He was very aware of the keycards on his belt, and the barrel of the gun, now pointed at his head. His brain, which due to the unique nature of Vagon evolution was a malformed liver, worked faster than it had done ever before. Unfortunately, this was not saying much, promotion in Vagon society being based more on stubbornness and anger than anything, and his brain was very shortly on display, very viscerally indeed. The ponies left watching were frankly relieved that this was all they had to witness, as at least the fanfic seemed to have been put on hold.

Some of those sex scenes had been graphic. Jeltz Gestured at them.

“Throw these inferior ponies out of the nearest airlock immediately, the others can’t have gone far.” Rough hands grasped Rainbow, Fluttershy and Rarity and hustled them out of the door. Jeltz picked a piece of liver spotted brain tissue off his weapon, and snorted in derision. His crew were learning how to avoid giving him even the slightest excuse to pick on them. Soon he would have to have them promoted, so they could have new things to get wrong.

\*

The Hitchhiker’s Guide states that evolution simply gave up on the Vogons, apparently from pure disgust. This is not technically true, it is truer to say that the concept of self improvement was not a wise thing to have on Vogsphere. Friendship might be magic in many places, but in Vagon terms, a good friend was someone no better than you. Any Vagon demonstrating Honesty, Generosity, Kindness, Laughter, Loyalty or even Magic would have been immediately and brutally disposed of. As for physical improvements? Forget about it. So, Vogons remained as they were for as long as it took to invent plastic surgery and space travel, and by then had become so good at bickering, stubbornness and pedantry that they very quickly rose near to the top of both the political and bureaucratic ladders in the galaxy. Indeed, there remains only one politician in the entire galaxy with no influence from Vogons, and he has been locked in a stasis field for many centuries and as such is in no position to do anything positive.

\*

Twilight, Applejack, Pinkie and Spike meanwhile, found themselves in another cabin, somewhere else on the ship. All except Twilight had minor burns from the magical teleport, which although more pleasant than a scientifically achieved one, would singe the unprepared in transit. Twilight collapsed. Applejack was immediately on her feet, and with a grunt balanced the lilac pony on her back. Spike was trembling

“Twilight?”

“She’s ok young’n, she just tired herself out is all.” The earth pony looked around. “Now where in tarnation’re the others?”

Pinkie Jumped to her hooves “They must have been left behind! Behind with those big ol’ meany Vogons! They’ll throw them off the ship! We have to get to an escape pod and pick them up as they get blasted out! Come on!”

She galloped down the hall, Applejack keeping pace, Spike puffing along behind.

“But Pinkie!” he gasped “What the hell is an escape pod?”

\*

The others had been roughly thrown into a small room. Fluttershy stared around wide eyed.

“Um.”

Rainbow pounded at the door; “Lemme out, I’ll take all of you on!” She had momentarily forgotten how easily she had been subdued, and was ready to fight tooth and hoof to face the Vogons down. For once, Rarity was ignoring the greasy handmarks on her previously perfect coat. Her magic was geared for precision, enchantment, beauty. She could create dazzling illusions, light shows and many other things, but when it came to brute strength, such as punching through foot thick steel, she was out of luck. But she could feel electricity in the air. She closed her eyes and concentrated. Somehow, the computational language spoke to her well. Well, a Vagon ship didn’t speak well. It spoke in the sort of voice geared to yell obscene compliments to other passing ships, causing them to blush and hurry on.

It was the computational equivalent of a drunken lout who is just smart enough to get away with any number of petty offences. She thought she could hear the right command for open though. It’s a shame really how badly she got it wrong. This was a good show of skill from a pony from a

place which had barely any computers, and indeed from a pony unused to anything more complex than a sowing machine. the Open command she pulsed out was not as specific as would have been wise, and every door in fifty metres responded as though they had been waiting for the command. Including the airlock behind them.

Technically even a moderately talented unicorn could summon enough power to keep a pony from asphyxiating in deep space, and most earth ponies were hardy enough due to their own untapped magic (see Magical Beings, later chapter) to survive there almost indefinitely. That is, if the ponies had extensive training, willpower and self control. But training is famously difficult to obtain within thirty seconds of being blasted from an airlock, and that really is the most important of the three in this context. Luckily for them, the commandeered escape pod will pick them up within a mere four seconds. Hopefully this is enough good news to tide you over the bad news that they were not, in fact, picked up. For the briefest flash of time, and by the most amazing coincidence, a great white ship appeared around the jettisoned ponies, and when it vanished, it left only a few random objects floating in the ether. As it was, the pod did not collect anything more than a large supply of rubber ducks, a small sentient pudding named Charles and a perfect scale model of Manehattan composed of mouldy butter. None of which, in the circumstances, were in the least useful or comforting. At least they might inform a certain pink pony what exactly has just picked her friends up, and that they are most likely safe, if utterly confused.

\*

Aboard the Heart of Gold, a boyish voice complained;  
“Fluttershy, you’re turning into a tree, stop it!”

# Chapter 3

In the days when the galactic government was just being forged, mighty ships crossed vast distances in sub-light-speed ships, communicating across long wave sub-ether radio. In these ships, meaningful travel took an unfathomable time, and what with the size of space (Big), even when two ships did arrange to meet, their meeting was largely spent playing an enormous game of interstellar Marco Polo. By the time hyperspace had been invented, and the journey time reduced to mere hours, there were a great many of these aging hulks stuck out there still trying to locate each other. At around this time, the use of the teleport was in its infancy, and beings were just being slung through millions of tiny wormholes in order to travel without ships, which is exactly as unpleasant as it sounds. Magical teleportation had existed more or less as long as magic, so the invention of a less reliable and less pleasant alternative looked like little more than the work of some sort of universal competition commission. Still, it is a universal fact that anything that exists will be morally objected to by somepony, someone or somepan-dimensional-monstrosity, and magical teleportation is no different. Religious groups, moral guardians and just plain jealous life-forms everywhere disdained magic in all its forms, in that unique kind of stupidity found only in intelligent species.

All of these methods of travel are infinitely less surreal than the Infinite Improbability Drive, which, although technically infinitely fast, has quite enough problems to keep it out of mass market by a significant margin. Any changes internal to the ship tend to be reversed on turning the machine off, but the fallout of so much improbability could cause many, many problems to anything it passes, anything from raining fish to the spontaneous creation and immediate combustion of the mayor of Warsaw. For anypony unused to the idea of infinite improbability, the effects of being on-board while the drive was active were very disturbing to say the least. To imagine what it is like, it is suggested that you consume at least two Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters and stare directly into the mind of a complete lunatic. Or rather don't, because that would be a silly thing to do.

Fluttershy squeaked in terror as her hooves seemed to melt into the floor, Her head was rising as her neck lengthened, and her hair seemed to seperate into hundreds of... leaves?

"Fluttershy, you're turning into a tree, stop it!"

Rainbow dash had backed into a wall, and as her fellow pegasus snapped back into her usual shape she turned to look for Rarity.

"What the hay is going on?"

"Darling, please, try to compose yourself a little. If I am honestly expected to believe I am currently surrounded small dancing brooms wearing tacky shoes, I can hardly do it with you getting me *more* stressed than I already am. *Some* of us would like to go mad with dignity thank you." Rarity huffed.

The universe around them twisted up like a sodden sponge being wrung out, and from it squeezed the very stuff of creation, which was a rather disappointing grey blue colour. From it grew a million new worlds, which groaned for an instant under their own sheer absurdity before popping out of existence again.

"Then again," Rarity said, sounding embarrassed "perhaps dignity can be discarded for a moment or two." She got down from the pegasus's back, to where she had leaped with a shriek as one of the lurid worlds had slid towards her.

Fluttershy had backed towards them, and the three huddled together as everything continued to go completely and utterly oatmeal.

"Being a tree wasn't how I expected it at *all*."

"*It never is*" said a small clam as it hurtled past, caught in a tornado composed only of other shellfish.

The three sat thoughtfully on what seemed, at that moment, to be the ground.

"Are we all seeing the same thing?" asked Dash, staring up as a turtle whipped past in the aforementioned tornado, studiously ignoring the "shellfish only" rule and wearing the closest to a "Haters gonna hate" expression a turtle can muster.

"Shellfish tornado?"

Fluttershy nodded, Rarity chipped in;

"And a turtle".



“Thousands of odd looking things constantly repeating the phrase “Seriously, it’s not a girls show, just watch this”, and sitting at glowing boxes all around us?”

“Check.”

“Ok, either I’m mad and I just *think* you two are answering me, or this is really happening.”

“Or,” squeaked Fluttershy “We’re... all mad, and seeing the same non real thing?” The others considered this, but were interrupted. A voice rang out from above. It was chirpy, tinny, and had any of them known the word, computerised. It seemed to be painfully cheerful, and in a mood to share that mood with everypony it met, whether they liked it or not.

“Four hundred and twenty five thousand and nine to one against and falling. Isn’t that just great guys? This is Eddie, your shipboard computer, just alerting you lovely strangers to our current improbability rating. Don’t worry guys, everything will be hunky-dory in just ten minutes”

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There are times in life when it seems events have reached a sufficient crescendo that any spectators could be reasonably expected to remain in place while, say, a series of adverts were played, as long as a conclusion to those events is promised. Failing that, the narrator will sometimes take this as an opportunity to annoy everypony, and switch to some other part of the story, which currently holds far less attention, in order to keep all parts moving at a roughly equal pace. The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy notes this phenomenon as extremely annoying, if necessary. In closing, it notes that the inventor of cliffhangers can officially go and stick his head in a... whereupon the article ends.

\*

“Infinite imper-what now?”

“Improbability!” Chirped Pinkie. “That’s so cool!”

“And what” asked Applejack, her voice flat, “does that mean in real language?”

“Only that they’ve been rescued by THE MOST ADVANCED SHIP IN THE UNIVERSE!” Pinkie was almost squeeling “I’m so JEALOUS!” Twilight shook her head.

“But Pinkie, why is that a good thing?” Twilight almost shrieked “WE LOST OUR FRIENDS!”

“Oh, well...” Pinkie paused, glancing at a wall screen “I’m jealous because for starters, we’re going to be in this pod for ages until it finds the nearest space port. They get to have a super adventure while we’re gonna be sitting here twiddling our hooves! I’ve always wanted to try going to infinite improbability, I mean anything can happen around you, and you can’t get really hurt, so you get to see SOOO much! They’re safe, and I’m sure I have an idea for finding them as long as they stay on that ship. Besides, I know the pony that stole it, and he...”

“STOLE?” Applejack and Twilight shouted in unison.

“Oh yeah, he’s nice. A bit odd if you know what I mean.” She leaned in close and spoke out of the side of her mouth “To be honest, he’s pretty weird; he wears the strangest clothes and he’s always talking about going to parties and other stuff, it’s like he doesn’t think about anything else.”

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The pony she was currently talking about was lounging in a chair, staring absently into the cocktail he had levitated in front of one of his faces. His other head was staring at the feed from the cameras of the lower decks where the strange ponies had ended up. His name was Zaphod Beeblebrox, and as the probability ratio normalised he took a sip from his glass. He has not only his own article in the Hitchhiker’s guide, but whole others dedicated to his career, wardrobe, romantic conquests and likely mental disorders. He had grown the second head because it had seemed like a good idea at the time, and the second unicorn horn was simply for style. The asymmetry of having them both on the same head had not occurred to him. He was wearing a long coat with more than the usual spectrum of colours on it, and a paisley lining in red. On both his heads rested mirrored sunglasses several sizes too large, the purple colour of which clashed in what he thought was a dashing way with his silvery coat and blue streaked mane. He was currently enjoying his eighth very strong drink, and idly scratched his cutie mark (a picture of himself).

“Eddie, I have to say, you did well this time around. Freeyow! That white one is a LASERBEAM. Should I get a third horn? No, it wouldn’t go well. Would it? Whatever. I hope that Rainbow colt hasn’t called dibs on either of those lovely fillies.” He chuckled, finished his drink, and slowly fell out of his chair.

# Chapter 4

Democracy had never really been considered as a political practice in Equestria. Celestia was basically a benevolent ruler, and she was certainly willing to be guided by other ponies, But at the end of the day, any elected official would have to be able to demonstrate the power to raise the sun and moon every day, and keep life on the planet from ending forever. This is a fairly effective barrier to any candidate, as nopony, regardless of political belief, is going to consider the “Let Everything on the Planet Die” Party. Quite why Celestia bothers with the “OBEY” campaign posters is a question probably best left unanswered.

The Galaxy as a whole is not a democracy either, but for very different reasons. Although theoretically the president makes all the major decisions, he, she, schle or it wields no real power. The job of the president is simply to exist, and to do so in as noticeable a way as possible, so that the question of there being a higher authority simply never comes up. Or at least is never closer to the front page than the president’s latest shenanigans.

Zaphod Beeblebrox; kleptomaniac, rabid party-goer and worst dressed sentient being this side of the universe, is perhaps the best candidate there has ever been for this role. His notoriety was staggering, and his presence had further reduced the status of the political system to little more than a soap opera. Stealing a government funded experimental ship worth trillions of dollars was barely bigger news than his last party.

As Pinkie laid the description before the stunned ponies before her, she felt more than a little uneasy. It took a long time to explain precisely who he was, and her friends expressions were getting more concerned by the second. She couldn’t think of any anecdote which suggested that being with Zaphod was a safe prospect, and though she was confident he would do a lot to please a pretty filly, somehow she felt this wouldn’t actually comfort them much. She scanned her memories for something that suggested he was in any way a dependable pony.

That time they had ended up having to spend the whole night suspended from a bridge directly over the Fallien Marshes, right in the dissociative fumes. He had probably saved her life then, if only by telling her that those hoopy looking balloons she had wanted to jump right into were actually “Totally not good things to jump right into baby”. No, that wouldn’t do. She had met Zaphod, ooh, ten or so years before going to Equestria, and had impressed him with her ability to drink three Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters with only a short stay with the HICPGGB (Hospital for the Idiots Who Consume Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters). They had been friends for a year or two, before he began his campaign for presidency.

\*

“And that’s why you have to have these fish in your ears!” She cried triumphantly, holding up a jar she had apparently produced from nowhere. Twilight blinked, and Applejack Facehoofed, Spike was long since asleep in the back.

“Sugarcube, either I just missed a dang long bit of vital explanation, or you just made no sense.”

Pinkie reigned in her mind, which had a tendency to move at a faster rate than her mouth could keep up with. Her mental faculties were always champing at the bit, and it was all too easy to let them loose and watch them wreak havoc on the comprehension of everypony nearby.

“I think you girls need to look up Babelfish in this.” She held up a small flat panel of metal, on which were embossed in large, friendly letters, DON’T PANIC. Pinkie unfolded it, revealing a dark screen, on which the hitchhiker thumb logo flashed on screen for one second, before being replaced by the index.

“What is it?” Applejack was staring at the first few articles;

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaab.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaab.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

“And what the hell is it doing?”

Pinkie poked at the screen once or twice, and found the required entry in a couple of seconds.

“And how did you do that?”

“It was under B!”

In a crisp, dry, paternal sort of voice the guide began to speak as a detailed animation played out, and its words scrolled. It was a trustworthy voice, like that of a young but stuffy magic teacher Twilight had once had. It spoke in a measured, reassuring tone, each word reminding the listener of what those large friendly letters had said.

“The Babelfish is small, yellow and leech like, and probably the oddest thing in the universe....”

\*

Zaphod had regained his seat, and gained another drink. This was another of his own concoctions, which he drank whenever he felt that he needed to drink socially and stay relatively sober. It was still slowly dissolving the cherry floating inside it, but at least it wasn't giving off glowing vapour.

“Eddie, send the robot down to pick them up, I'm keen to meet these lovely fillies.”

“Sorry there el presidente, he's still down in the lower decks. You sent him to arrange your cocktail olives by size and shape, and he's just opened crate four.”

“Belgium! I forgot that. I thought it seemed a little more hip and happy around here.” He winked roguishly “How's he doing?”

“He's on his third poem about how depressing life is.”

“I'll leave him to his fun. Just open all the doors between here and there, let them figure it out.” He stretched, and spent the next few minutes carefully arranging himself specifically so that then the three ponies stepped cautiously through the door, his entire posture gave an impression of nonchalance, savoir faire, and just a hint of latent sexuality. He had used such a pose on about half of his campaign posters.

“Ladies, glad you could drop in. I...” he paused for effect, “ am Zaphod Beeblebrox.” He lowered the glasses on his right head (the behorned one) and flashed his Bright green eyes at them.

“So what?” Rainbow was immediately put on guard by this pony. The way he sat was so... possessive. Like he was the best damned pony around.

Even the previously unnoticed second head turning to face her in surprise didn't give her pause. SHE was the pony who owned the show, SHE was the one who acted like they owned the place, and she was going to let him know it. "I don't care what your name is Zathod Whateverthehellitwas, but you better tell me what is going on here, and who you *really* are right now!"

Zaphod closed his open mouth. The possibility of anypony not knowing who he was had honestly never occurred to him, even in his darkest nightmare where somepony had been slightly unimpressed by him. He decided to file this colt's ignorance under anomalous and move on. He wasn't interested in him anyway. He put on his most refined mode of speech.

"Ladies, please, tell this doubtlessly froody stallion to go chill out a bit".

"Oh my". Fluttershy saw where this was going.

Apoplectic with fury, Dash made a leap forwards, knocking Zaphod off his chair.

"What did you just call me?" Zaphod was determined to play this off cool. He lounged on the floor now, in a slightly different pose to the one before, as if he had meant to fall this way.

"Frosty cool bro, froody is a hoopy thing to be!"

"YOU CALLED ME A STALLION!" Dash was nose to nose with one of his faces.

Zaphod blinked, and looked again. Up close, and with the sobering effect of a hefty blow he saw his mistake. Oh *Belgium*. It was time for diplomacy, especially as now he thought about it, there was something to be said for a feisty filly both able and willing to tackle a larger pony. He climbed to his feet, and levitating yet another drink from a large tray he adopted an air of offended patience and fatigue.

"I can't help it if you fillies can't talk the talk, only meant as a compliment, I like a filly able to do a man's thing with style." Without seeming to move he was slumped in a sofa, and he gestured towards the drinks tray. "May I tempt you ladies?". This was pose number 48; conciliatory and generous. He had used this one in apology addresses.

Rarity had been struck dumb, appalled throughout the above exchange. This pony,...this unicorn... this two headed unicorn... two headed *Bicorn*, was wearing something similar to an outfit she had drawn up once while suffering from a heavy fever. It had no symmetry, no complimentary colours, nothing that objectively should ever please the eye, but something in her mind clicked with it. She walked past the grumbling Dash to take a

drink and deigned to give him the luxury of a haughty glance. Rainbow drew herself up, and stalked to the sofa opposite the strange colt. Fluttershy hurried next to her, as if seeking protection. "I think we should start again." Rarity said in her best socialite voice. "Mister...?"

Zaphod grinned, once again, he had talked his way back into favour. And now it was three fillies, and one (well, technically) him. Hell, it was almost a party.

\*

Somewhere else entirely, a brownish yellow escape pod at last managed to dock at Barnard's Star Orbiting Station. The door opened, and a procession walked out into the arrivals. A Pink pony strutted in front, a towel balanced across her neck. Following her was a worn out looking unicorn, a baby dragon balanced across hers. Bringing up the rear, with nothing but her ponytail balanced across hers was a stetson hatted pony who looked around her with suspicion.

Barnard's star, as the Hitchhiker's Guide is quick to point out, *was* a beautiful place. The station orbits the star, perched on a ball of artificially pure crystal larger than many worlds. As it orbits, the reddish white light of its parent star is refracted through the millions of spires of ice that spear the surface of the planet, and even at night the ground seems to glow dull red. The station itself was almost entirely clear, and so as the sun set, lances of reddening light seemed to dance through the entire structure, reflecting off millions of surfaces at once, it was, non-technically speaking, a magical place.

Naturally, this piece of architectural and planetary design brilliance attracted adoration, and this attracted tourism, which attracted business. Now, the views are spoilt by thousands of shops for tourist tat, large ship-fulls of overweight life forms with cameras, and occasionally entire fleets docking there between hyperspace leaps. In this way, Barnard's Star Orbiting Station evolved from being a wonder of the galaxy, to being one of the largest hyperspace express junctions in the history of creation. Such is life.

# Chapter 5

Magic is an oddity. Before the scientific minds of the galaxy collectively gave up on trying to understand the infinite strangeness of the cosmos, they spent a lot of time attempting to classify it. The best explanation, and the one that was subsequently taught across the universe was one scrawled by a desperate student who had forgotten to study for his exam: Magic is the protrusion into our dimension of an entirely different set of physical laws, or rather millions of sets, from millions of separate impossible realities. Certain beings evolved the ability to force these laws to bleed into our universe, editing the physical reality around them against the usual scientific laws.

It is almost certain that this idea is a load of dingo's kidneys, but it was good enough to be the last idea put forward before the entire physics faculty of Maximegalon collectively gave up on the subject and went down the street to the pub, where they spent the night smoking, drinking and bullying any magical arts faculty members they could find until it was time to be thrown out.

In its article on magic, and in a moment of insight due most likely to the occasional coincidence inherent in eight thousand billion or so articles, The Hitchhiker's Guide notes that magic is a species wide thing, and varies in power not according to race, but rather to individual.

In the case of ponies, we see this magic manifestation has evolved in three basic ways. Unicorns have the ability to directly tap into it via spells, directing it as they wish, giving them great control at the cost of instinctive power. Pegasi have the inherent magical ability to fly and walk on clouds. The first is definitely magically attained, because leading physicists established that unless dark matter was involved somehow, wings that small could not support a full grown pony. Earth ponies do not have set magical traits, and therefore have the greatest variety of magical talents. Some can seemingly teleport at random or continuously pull a multi-tonne train for a whole day and night without stopping to rest. In the end it all balances out between the three, though arguments naturally occur between



ponies who for some strange reason have unflappable faith that their group is best.

Alicorns, which are technically classified as a sort of god, are another matter entirely.

\*

“Let me get this straight Pinkie, because that sounds like the most counter-intuitive thing

I have ever heard.” Twilight began pacing back and forth in front of her friends. “You say that somehow our friends were picked up by this “Infinite Improbability Drive” ship, which could currently be literally anywhere in the entire universe.”

“Uhuh!”

“SO, you plan on getting *us* aboard too, by making it infinitely improbable that we get picked up, and then waiting for it to inevitably happen?”

“Indeedy!” Pinkie smiled happily. Twilight’s eye twitched, but she carried on.

“And you say that nopony has ever tried something like that before.”

“Nope!” Twilight’s eye twitched again, a single hair standing up from her mane.

“So you intend to hitch us a lift to somewhere, some place in the universe it is infinitely improbable it would ever be able to get to?”

Applejack stared at the two, then turned to spike.

“You gettin’ any of this?” Spike shook his head.

“Nuh-uh.”

“And *then*, you want us to do something dangerous enough to give this ship a very limited time to pick us up?” Pinkie leaped up, clopping her hooves together with joy..

“I KNEW you’d understand!” Twilight fought to keep her voice calm.

“Pinkie, there is no way I’m travelling halfway across the galaxy, travelling specifically to make it hard to get to our friends, then JUMPING OFF OF A CLIFF!”

Spike stood up. He had remained conspicuously quiet so far in the proceedings, but there was a gleam in his eye by now. Twilight knew that look. It spoke of lances, dashing steeds, of quests for glory and the light of adventure. His voice was filled with inspiration, and seemed for a moment to be that of an older dragon.

"If m'lady is in trouble, we must do whatever we can! Whether it be a glorious charge into the face of a thousand enemies, or a test that will pitch our minds against the infinite thingummies of... something or other, or even..." He trailed off "... whatever, we have to do it!"

Applejack nodded behind him.

"Sorry sugarcube, but Pinkie knows this crazy universe better'n we do. If she says it'll work, I believe her. Besides, what else is there to do?"

Twilight opened her mouth, then shut it again.

"Oh Celestia." she thought "Confound these ponies, I need a drink"

\*

Aboard the Heart of Gold, Zaphod was making himself known. He saw it as his sacred and holy duty to inform these poor confused mares about the marvel that he was. Occasionally he let them get a remark in, but for the most part, he was doing the talking. He was gauging them for how impressed they seemed to be. That Rainbow coloured one was plainly still irritated and mistrustful, but the other two didn't look hostile. The white one... she seemed to have appointed herself the leader of the three, and was doing most of the conversing. And as for the pastel yellow one... Occasionally he tried to get a proper look at her, but she would always retreat behind a wave of pink hair. Ok baby, he thought; one annoyed by how great he was, another entranced by how great he was, and the third intimidated by how great he was. He interrupted Rarity;

"Man, I'm great." They stared at him. He didn't even have the good grace to look ashamed. "I'm, uh, grateFUL that you lovely fillies got rescued by me. You must have been through a lot." He laid a hoof on Rarity's. "Why the zark did you go floating around in deep space?"

"Well if you must know," Rarity began, withdrawing her hoof in the most polite way she could. "Some horrible creatures called "Vogons" had us thrown there."

"Vogons? Ten out of ten for ugly, zero out of ten for basically everything else?" He made another movement to lay a hoof on Rarity, but she dodged. He passed the movement off by pushing his sunglasses off his eyes, and then his other sunglasses off his other eyes too.

"You ladies must have been through an awful lot, I'm afraid this ship only has one set of sleeping quarters, but..." He was interrupted by a cheery voice as Eddie cut in

“Sorry to correct you there buddy, but I think we have at least four other rooms which they could comfortably...” The voice cut out as a martini glass hit the nearest speaker. Zaphod Grinned maniacally.

“Sorry ladies, my... horn slipped.”

“Yeah.” Cut in Rainbow sarcastically. “It was weird. It seemed almost like you levitated the glass and violently threw it.”

“I think we can find those rooms on our own, thank you very much.” Rarity added. Zaphod sighed. He knew when the game was up for the night.

“Ok ladies, sleep well. Everything will seem better in the morning.” he winked “I promise.”

As the three ponies left, he turned his chair and spoke.

“Thanks a bundle Eddie, you just cost me a full bed tonight.” Eddies voice came in through a separate speaker.

“No problemo!” Eddie chirruped obliviously “Anything else I can do?”

“Get me another drink before I go and look for the largest computer virus file I can find and jam it down your input drive so hard you’ll be coughing up dodgy programming for weeks.”

“Right away, el presidente!”

Zaphod began to think. He would have to impress these girls somehow, but how? Something bold, something dramatic, something... centred around him if at all possible.

\*

The unicorn, dragon and two earth ponies stood in the docking area, watching as ships of all shapes, sizes, colours and states of repair peeled in and out.

“And y’say these things can travel through space?” Applejack was looking at one that seemed to be barely more than a mountain of rust with engines. Pinkie looked appraisingly at the ship, with the air of an expert.

“I don’t think we want that one AJ, keep looking.”

“Well yeah, I wasn’t proposing that particular heap as ideal transport.”

“Oh! So you know about the Deglongs?” There was a pause.

“What the hay is a Deglung? I just meant it’s about as beaten up as a unicorn in a hick griffon town!” She caught Twilight’s offended look and blushed.

“Oh silly, it’s meant to look like that!” Pinkie could be maddeningly patronising when those around her had the wrong end of the stick.

“Deglongs NEVER spend money on anything, they’d make us pay big bits

to carry us anywhere, and I only have a couple of Altarian dollars to my name." She smiled brightly at the hundreds of ships. "But don't worry, you're aunty Pinkie Pie has got it aaaall taken care of! Hitch the length and breadth of the galaxy, rough it, slum it, struggle against mind boggling odds, win through, and still know where your towel is, all for less than thirty Altarian dollars a day; that's the hitchhiker's way!" She hopped into the air, seeming to levitate as her legs wiggled excitedly. "Fun isn't it?"

# Chapter 6

The Hitchhiker's Guide describes the planet Gagriflex as perhaps one of the most revolting places in the known universe. Its people are vaguely equiform, but with overlong legs and almost permanent expressions of unabashed adoration. Culturally, the entire race gave itself over to loving anything different, in a form of crazed xenophilia unmatched across reality. They annually order in billions of tonnes of extra-gargiflexial lifestyle magazines, thousands of hours of extra-gargiflexial reality TV shows, and mountains of extra-gargiflexial random memorabilia. Whatever their leaders had currently decided they should adore, the public did.

Any tourist on Gagriflex would likely enjoy the first day, as they would be mobbed by admiring locals. But almost any sane being would quickly tire of the complete, total and utterly sincere admiration they would receive for literally every action they performed. An average tourist would last for about three days before either leaving or killing themselves, whereupon the locals would gather round to admire the quite *fantastic* way in which foreigners decomposed. Tourism never really took off on Gagriflex, which is a shame because apart from this quirk, it really is a lovely place. Vast oceans stained a shimmering blue by aquatic flora, hulking bauxite mountains of almost unmatched beauty rising dramatically over silken plains filled with brilliantly diverse wildlife almost too perfect to look at: All these wonders were ignored by the populous, who chose instead to stay inside to find out what the rest of the universe was up to.

\*

The sun was just rising as the Heart of Gold touched down on the peak of one of the mountains, and the deep indigo sky seemed on fire on the edge of the horizon. Inside, Zaphod was rubbing his forehooves together. He *liked* Gagriflex. He had washed his long mane, and its green and blue streaks shone, looking absolutely horrific next to the yellow and orange vinyl of the two-headed jacket he wore with both collars popped. The gold necklaces he wore were set with glowing stones, and his sunglasses were firmly in place. He grinned broadly, and the speaker he had set into his teeth gave off a \*ting\* as they shone in the light.

“How do I look Marvin?”

“Hateful.”

One of Zaphod’s heads turned to face the metal humanoid behind him, then snorted.

“Ah, what do you know.”

“More than you can possibly imagine. According to the fashion advice software I come with, which, incidentally, I detest possessing, that outfit is almost as horrific as my own existence.” He paused for a moment, “Which is extremely,” he clarified.

“It’s called looking interesting baby, I wouldn’t expect you to get it.” Zaphod zipped up the last of the eighty or so pockets the jacket was loaded with.

“Now, where are those lovely ladies?”

\*

The three “lovely ladies” were currently holding a discussion in the room Fluttershy had taken. She was looking worried.

“I just don’t know how we’re going to find them. The universe is a big place.”

“Darling, I’m sure Zaphod will help us once he understands what we need.” Rarity sighed. “Besides, it’s not like we have a choice. Our friends are out there, and you can bet they’ll be out looking for us, and he’s our best hope for being found. If he really is President, then I’m sure he can put out a message.”

Dash was scowling. “I still don’t trust him.”

“Of course you don’t darling, but let’s go see him anyway. He might be better this morning.”

Rarity turned and led the way out of the room. Fluttershy gave an apologetic look to Dash before following her.

Dash followed behind, muttering under her breath, “Calling me a *stallion*.”

“Have a nice day!” said the door as they passed into the bridge, to find Zaphod standing impressively before a large visi-screen. He flashed a broad smile at them. \*ting\*

“Good morning ladies, stop one on your fantastic tour of the cosmos, welcome, to Gagriflex!” The screen behind him flicked on, revealing the landscape spread out below them. Zaphod grinned at their awestruck faces.

“You’ll need to have these fish in your ears if you want to come with me.”

\*

Pinkie stood at the end of the row of ships, a large foam hand stuck on the end of one of her hooves, it's thumb sticking hopefully up. Twilight had to ask.

"Pinkie, what in Celestia's name is that?"

"It's called a hand! Some creatures out there have these things called hands, and they have these things called thumbs, and a thumb means you want to hitchhike! We don't have thumbsies, so I make do with this!"

She playfully wiggled the hand in front of Twilight's face, who slapped it away. Applejack came back, a souvenir pen from a tourist stand in her mouth. On it it had the classic: "Someone I know went to Barnard's Star and all I got was this lousy pen," which proves that there is always at least one person out there who genuinely believes this to be funny. Be afraid.

Pinkie grabbed the pen and began scrawling on her towel. Eventually she held it up.

"Maximegalon University or bust!" was written in large letters across it. The "or bust" part was clearly printed on the towel, and looking closely it was easy to see that other destinations had been washed out before.

"Now we just wait for something heading our way!"

"And when we get there we can research where this thing would have difficulty getting to?"

"Exactly! You'll like the university Twilight, there are *squillions* of books that nopony touches anymore!"

Twilight brightened considerably.

"Squillions?"

"I think it was about four squillion to be exact."

They waited. Pinkie was in front, hoof stuck out to the side with the foam thumb hopefully raised. Her other forehoof had one corner of the towel. Applejack held the other corner up, a look of resigned patience on her face.

An hour passed. Pinkie hadn't moved, her expression of hopeful friendliness unchanged. Applejack had switched out with Twilight twice, but was now back to holding it up. Even so, her leg ached and her temper was rapidly fraying.

"Uh, sugarcube?"

No response.

"Sugarcube?"

Pinkie turned silently, her expression by now frozen solid on her face. “Hundreds of these things have gone past. Some of ‘em I don’t even wanna know what they were. Could we... try something else?”

It was then that, because of certain laws of narrative causality, something was obliged to stop and offer them a lift. It was about five feet tall, it’s smooth purple hide almost unmarked. It had two arms, two legs, two eyes and a visible mouth, which was stretched in a smile just slightly too broad to look normal. It could, on reflection, have been something a whole lot worse. It was wearing nothing but a scarf which read, to anyone who cared to look, UMM Brockian Ultra Cricket Team.

Brockian Ultra Cricket is a game that involves the complex interplay of professional athletes using random sporting implements to hit each other very hard, and then running away and apologising. It is only played in this dimension by the same sort of person we might see playing ultimate Frisbee while armed with a Nerf gun. When it spoke, it drawled around a small, rugby-club shaped dent in it’s face. “You dudes going to the double M? I got this.”

Without waiting for a response, he began sloping off towards a distant ship. They followed at a distance until it came into view. It wasn’t exactly shabby, but it was clearly old. It’s interior was clearly large enough to contain them, and it had several stickers pasted on it:

“Freesplorking is not a crime!”

“How’s my warping?”

“Maximegalon students do it with reference to our extensive library.”

“Vote Beeblebrox”

“Do we... do we go with him?” Spike was watching it nervously.

“Of course! He’s a student!”

“But what species is he?” Twilight was staring at the strange creature as it fumbled around for a set of keys.

“Like I said, he’s a Student!”

\*

Shortly after the founding of the university of Maximegalon, one student studying for an advance degree in Playing God began a project to engineer something to do his studying for him, and so the species Scientiatem Quaerens was created. It was the perfect university student; able to survive



off nothing but noodles and low level intoxicants for many years at a time, interested in any and all pointless games available to it, genial except around exam time and certainly not averse to moderately illegal pranks at any time of year. They would drift around the campus for several years, occasionally attending lectures and passing or failing exams more or less at random and generally enjoying themselves. By now, they made up almost the entire population of the university, as most beings rich enough to afford a place at the university could also afford to send something else there to do the whole experience for them.

It was one of these with whom our heroes now embarked. He was returning from his annual migration to “Just wherever, I gotta get out of here and unwind man”. This migration is made throughout the year by members of the species, all of whom fervently believe themselves to be performing some form of unique soul searching adventure, which usually only results in extensive liver damage, increased poverty and occasionally an arrest or two if it goes well. This particular individual was the only one of its group to avoid being incarcerated, and as such his ship, adorned as it was with slogans such as “If this ship’s a’distorting, don’t come a’teleporting”, was stocked with sleeping for our intrepid ponies and ready to act as a convenient plot device for the next part of the narrative.

\*

Zaphod was silent as he led the three across the bare rock of the unnamed mountain. Past vistas of unimaginable beauty, whitish cloud parted hundreds of metres below them to show rich forests of eye-hurting vibrance.

Zaphod ignored all this. “There’s something better up ahead” was all he said.

Rainbow took to the sky and flew on ahead, looking around, so she was first to see it. “OH MY GOSH!”

As Rarity and Fluttershy came to the crest and looked out towards the city in the distance, their jaws dropped. Zaphod sat himself down, one hoof lazily gesturing towards... it.

“Well, ladies? What do you think?”

It was a statue. But that word scarcely did it justice. It was simply massive.

“Hill” would scarcely be a worse word for it.

“Quite a good likeness, yeah?” Zaphod grinned at their stunned expressions. The Gagriflexians had really taken to him, and he had in turn

taken to them. As he was one of the only creatures whose ego was sufficiently inflated to be able to bear the place, he had spent a lot of time there, and that had led, inevitably, to the statue before them. It showed him in one of his favourite poses, sitting down, with one head staring dreamily into the distance, and the other following the line of his outstretched forehoof, a rogueish wink on it's face, as if to say "Who's awesome? You're awesome. But not as awesome as me. Oh god no, don't even think that. I'm just... just great." Also known as pose number 1. Built of solid granite, and constantly painted in the lurid colours he often bedecked himself in, it reared over the city. It was, frankly, a horrific sight, a testament to an ego capable of dubbing the infinity of creation a "Real neat place", and legitimately believing a statue like this to be a sign of his own brilliance.

Rarity was in shock. Again, this utterly uncouth pony was behaving as if it owned the whole universe. On reflection, perhaps it did, but that didn't excuse *acting* like it. She knew herself to be the most beautiful Unicorn in Ponyville, but she made certain nopony *knew* she knew it. Still, it never hurt to be polite. "It's... lovely, who made it?"

"Oh just some of those cats down there know a good thing when they see it. We shouldn't go down there" He put on an air of suffering humility. "They might get over-excited. I can only tone my charisma down so much, and I don't really like all the attention." He glanced out of the corner of one of his four eyes to see if they bought it. All three were staring at him in plain disbelief "Ah, who am I kidding, who wants to come down with me for a bit and hear them tell you about how great I am?"

It was at this moment, that a voice rang out from the sky ahead of them. "O.K. Beeblebrox, hold it right there. You're under arrest."

"Yeah, we got you this time Big Z, Mr. President sir! Got you good and in our sights!"

"That's right! Any second now we'll have these babies warmed up enough to cause you some hurt, so you better not move!"

"Yeah!"

\*

There are certain feelings which are universal. Nowhere in the cosmos does the sight of an official looking vehicle with flashing lights and armed occupants not cause a general feeling of trepidation in most beings. The most law abiding citizen will feel like a criminal when pulled up at a red light

next to a police vehicle, and struggle to maintain a relaxed composure, glancing only briefly aside, trying not to look like a law breaker. The Encyclopedia Galactica describes this as; “a natural part of our psychological make up, a certain unjustified feeling of guilt that all beings have when faced with an authority figure.” The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy describes it as; “a natural part of our psychological make up not to want to get shot or arrested. Especially when you just *know* those pigs are just begging for a chance to pull you over and maybe go through your stuff, and you just know they’ll find those medicinal things you have in the glove box, and make all the wrong assumptions.” The article is followed by an editor’s note that the Guide is currently looking for a new transport correspondent, pending a breakout at the Ursa Minor Criminal Rehabilitation Centre.

That said, it is even easier to feel like a guilty party when a large police cruiser is not only directly facing you and your companions, but has deployed its forward guns meaningfully and has stated that you are under arrest. Zaphod is as guilty as sin, but he still feels aggrieved at any attempt to make him feel as if he has done something wrong. Even the notoriously optimistic gamblers of the Morzell system wouldn’t bet much on him coming quietly.

# Chapter 7

“RUN!” the word had barely escaped Zaphod’s lips before all four ponies were pelting away, acting more on instinct than anything. Dash took to the air and was streaking well ahead of the others when the first shot was fired. A bolt of sickly green plasma struck the rock next to Fluttershy, causing her to leap sideways into Rarity with a squeak of pure terror.

“Oh HELL no!” The turn dash made, going from a pony travelling at easily sixty miles per hour to a pony travelling in the opposite direction at almost a hundred would have made even a strong willed physicist weep. “You do NOT do that to Fluttershy!” She accelerated, pelting straight towards the cruiser. She passed directly over it, close enough to cause it to rattle.

The pilots immediately transferred their attention to her, firing off a futile volley at her form as it streaked away. “Get her!” “Yeah!” She passed back overhead again, even faster this time, and the ship almost crashed as it tried to keep its guns trained on her.

“GET OUT OF HERE!” she cried as she hurtled overhead, pursued by the cruiser. The other three could only stare after her in shock as she peeled away, leading the enraged police after her.

“When Zarquon made that one, he made a lethal weapon! Freeyow!” Zaphod had a rare expression of open admiration on both faces. “Keep running! Is she always like that?”

“Looking out for her friends, or being a good deal braver than you?” Rarity sniped back.

“Both!”

Ahead the ship shimmered into visibility and Zaphod pelted aboard.

Fluttershy paused at the ramp, staring outwards “DO be careful Rainbow Dash” she pleaded the smaller of the distant specks, which even now sped around the other.

Rarity draped one hoof over her “She’ll be fine. I’m sure of it.”

“That flying thing looks really dangerous though...”

“I don’t pretend to understand it darling, whatever it is though, I can hardly see it out-flying our Dash.” But even as they watched, the smaller speck began to descend rapidly, straight down. Dash was falling.

“Oh my!” Fluttershy squeaked. More flashes of light were just visible as the larger of the two flew downwards, in pursuit. It says something for the distance they were observing from that neither pony could see just how much a greater rate than the local gravitational acceleration Dash was gaining speed.

~ \* ~ \* ~

The Sonic Rainboom, according to that indispensable if unreliable guide to the galaxy, occurs when a being with the right affinity for rainbow magic accelerates past the local speed of sound, and momentarily completely and utterly buggers up the colour spectrum (to use the technical term) . It notes the incredible forces involved in causing an explosion of sound, light and magic strong enough to crack rocks, shake the very ground and send every cute critter for miles running for cover. It notes the G-forces involved. It notes the unusual and impossible way the mach cone forms too early and in bright colours, It also notes exactly how totally trippy it looks, and just how rare it is.

It does not note, however, whether or not flying directly behind something performing one is enough to total an armoured Galactic Police Department heavy pursuit cruiser. Fortunately for us, it doesn’t need to. This is because it has only been tested once, and everypony to witness it was left in absolutely no doubt about the result. (For the record, it absolutely is.)

~ \* ~ \* ~

Far away, a beaten up looking starship was doing a fair bit of tedious mucking about in hyperspace. Three of its occupants are currently asleep, leaving Twilight Sparkle to keep the student company in the cockpit.

Twilight pushed a pair of fuzzy twenty sided dice out of her face, and glanced over at the student. He wasn’t paying any attention to the distant twinkles through the visi screen, preferring to rootle through the sides of his

chair. Every now and again he would unearth a piece of dry instant noodle, and eat it with every sign of enjoyment.

“Ahem.” Twilight interjected pointedly.

He froze, dropping the recently defluffed noodle piece guiltily. “What?”

Twilight sighed. She wasn’t a neat freak, but there was a limit. “So what’s your name?”

He scratched his unkempt facial hair, and frowned. “I don’t know. Never really thought about it.”

“Excuse me?”

“Never really needed one. My friends call me dude. Or bro. Or whatever.” He was still frowning, as if thinking hard about something.

Twilight tried to keep a smile on her face. “So what do you call your friends?”

“Dude, bro, mate, just...” He stopped. “Whatever...” He was looking increasingly disturbed by his lack of an answer.

“Nevermind.” Twilight turned, but the screen stayed resolutely uninteresting. Eventually she turned back “Sooo... what do you study?”

A look of relief washed over Dude’s face. “I study interpretive history.”

“Which is?”

“We try and work out what history *would* have been like if we hadn’t gone back and forth through time and altered reality so much. When the regular history department lost their funding to the Department for Divinity and Waterpolo, we took over some of their old cases.”

“Time travel... it’s possible?” Twilights eyes were wide.

“Yeah, but pretty pointless. All time is basically the same nowadays, people import modern stuff back in time and old stuff forward in time. Nothing really changes anymore, and I don’t know if I can even use that phrase since it implies “anymore” is somehow different from “anywhen.” It’s all cool

you know?" He paused, then said with a smug grin "I'm getting my Bachelor of You Can't Prove Otherwise."

"And what if I do?"

"Do what?"

"What if I *can* prove otherwise?"

The creature sat for a moment. "Well..." He grinned "My degree would outrank your proof."

"So... screw the rules, I have a degree?"

"Exactly!"

~ \* ~ \* ~

Interpretative history is usually thought to be about the fifth most useless subject in the entire multiverse. Because it works off no tangible evidence to produce no tangible result, it is utterly without applications in the real world. The only job available for a graduate of Interpretative history is to be a teacher of the same subject. Because it's uselessness has done nothing to downgrade its popularity this has so far worked out fairly well, with the number of courses being taught multiplying every year. What once started as a drunken idea grew into a subject that is now one of the most widely taught and sought after courses in living memory. It is attractive for several reasons; the most important of which is the discrepancy between how hard it sounds to outsiders and how hard it actually is. At some point in the next couple of centuries however the number of students required to support the subject will exceed the population of the galaxy.

~ \* ~ \* ~

An eye-hurting streak of rainbow luminescence traced Dash's path back to the Heart of Gold. An impossible arc covering the whole spectrum of light with a thick band of cartoonishly bright colour. Calling it a rainbow was almost insulting. Dash landed with a contemptuous flick of her wings, and stood for a moment with both forehooves raised, a smirk affixed to her face that at almost any other time would have been irritating beyond measure, but as it was it simply told her two concerned friends that everything was alright.

Fluttershy leaped upon Dash with a joyful cry. "DASH!"

Rainbow pushed her off with a laugh. "I'm OK 'Shy, those losers couldn't hit Equestria's best flier! I could have got out of there drunk off my flanks and with a cup-cake in my eye!" She looked back at the slight singe to the end of her tail. "I meant to do that!"

Rarity was skeptical, but let it slide. "Well done I must say at least *somepony* here was brave enough to deal with Zaphod's little *problem*. I suggest we ladies go and discuss exactly what is going on here, and who he thinks he is!"

~ \* ~ \* ~

Aboard the Heart of Gold Zaphod sat dumbstruck, his hoof poised over the Infinite Improbability Drive controls. Two very strong drinks were already wending their way through him, apparently in no hurry to calm his nerves as much as the bottle had promised they would. He had been waiting for the last moment to get out of there, because the light show had made interesting watching. Now he had revised his opinions of the ponies now boarding his craft intent on murder. That Rainbow one, she was officially the most attractive proposition in his immediate area.

That was the thought going through his mind as he got the sense slapped out of his right head by a hoof-swipe from Rarity.

"HEY!" Said his left head, looking up. "What the hell was that f..." his other head received a hefty back hoof and he sprawled to the floor. "What the Zark are you doing you crazy bit..." He bit the word off his tongue at the last second as Rarity gave a loud snort that promised only vengeance should the next word out of his mouth not end up being "Lady", and the two following words not being "I'm" and "sorry".

"*lady*. I'm sorry." He shakily got up. "But please tell me what I'm sorry for!"

"Not only have you been half drunk since I met you," Rarity stormed.

"Yeah, but"

"Not only are you a wanted criminal,"

"But baby"



“Not only did you put us all in danger to show of your horrific ego”

“Just a minute”

“Not only did you immediately run and hide leaving a *Lady* to defend you from the law, but you have also carried yourself thus far with nothing but the most deplorable and frankly distasteful boasting and showing off, not to mention lecherous flirting and drunken stupidity!”

Zaphod sat stunned. Subconsciously he began to reach for a drink before his survival instincts, so seldom used but now thoroughly on their toes, slapped him mentally for thinking of it. Ego cut in, telling his instincts to shut up and go back into the back of the mind. Pain sense came in to support instinct, but was blocked off when anger gave it the mental equivalent of a shove and the resulting mental scuffle ended only when Eddies cheerful voice sounded out, his jollity slightly forced and edged with a hint of panic.

“I hate to interrupt you guys, but my proximity sensors tell me that a hundred or so police cruisers have just entered the local vicinity!”

Grateful for an excuse to act, Zaphod took this opportunity to regain a modicum of command of the situation.

“Belgium! Get us out of here Eddie!”

“No problemo!”

As the ship began to put reality through the wringer, Fluttershy could be heard to mutter to Dash “I’ve never heard the b-word before, but the way he says it makes me sure it’s a bad word.”

~ \* ~ \* ~

The infinite improbability drive was created when a very clever student indeed had the bright idea of working out how unlikely it was for one to exist, and feeding that figure into a finite improbability generator. The use of a Bumbleweeny-57 sub-meson brain linked to an atomic vector plotter, all immersed in a Brownian motion producer to alter the outcome of events has a long history, since it was realised that probabilities for certain events did not correlate exactly to observed rates of occurrence. For example, the chances of it raining on any particular day might be one in three, but on Bank holidays, days of picnics, music festivals or sports matches the

prevalence of rain was observed to be considerably higher. Furthermore, the chance of bad weather can best be combated by preparing for it. Bringing a heavy umbrella and heavy waterproof clothing could almost guarantee a warm and dry day. By observing the way different overall conditions violated standard probability, miniaturisation did its work until the device became a frivolity, primarily used for childish pranks showing off.

The ability to teleport a spaceship across the universe without eventual reversal was reserved for the infinitely stranger Infinite Improbability drive. Nobody knows how it works, except that it has something to do with a pure gold nugget which may or may not be a relic of huge importance.

As it is the Infinite Improbability drive currently in Zaphod's possession has taken our heroes out of immediate danger, for which they ought to be grateful. They will be of course, just as soon as everything around them stops being made of brown and Rarity ceases to be a Marshmallow.

# Chapter 8

Far back in the earliest days of the universe, in what you could laughingly call the past if you felt so inclined, the first incident of equiform life evolved in a far flung corner of the galaxy on the planet Zacherle V, deep within the area known only as the Hasbro Zone. They were different from most ponies one might see today; they were heavier set, bulkier with smaller eyes and thicker muzzles. Evolution did its work on them, as is its wont. They became ever smaller. They also gained ever less varied personalities and ever less interesting social histories (at least for any outside observer, the ponies themselves never noticed, being too busy shopping and worrying about fashion, especially by the third generation or so.)

The forces of evolution experimented with wings, with horns, with sea-ponies, even trying out almost anthropomorphising the ponies, until eventually they hit upon a winning form; back to basics. Quadrupedal, with the three basic varieties of pony so familiar today. However, these new ponies carried what leading biologists refer to as the “Faust” gene, and the species exploded like it had never done before. It exploded twice indeed (which apparently one can indeed do), for it seemed as though the forces of nature on planets throughout the rest of the galaxy had been peering over the shoulders of Zacherle V, taking notes and shamelessly copying good ideas. Suddenly similar life-forms were springing up across the galaxy. Entirely different species, that for whatever reason looked and behaved in a very similar manner to those that evolved on Zacherle V. And so ponies, or at least equiform life-forms, became one of the most widespread and succesful groups in the galaxy. Suffice to say, the older evolved forms of pony (“generations” as they are sometimes called) do not share nearly the same level of ubiquity across the cosmos, but they do still exist here and there.

Our ponies are in fact part of the original species native to the original homeworld, if only through their creation by the God Princess of Equestria. Celestia had decided to perfectly replicate the species on her pet project, the magical planet from which our heroins and hero so unnecessarily escaped.

\*

The reason for their current situation is currently sitting on a mattress, cheerfully composing songs to be sung should situations requiring songs arise. No pony appreciated the effort that went into coming up with and memorising as many songs as she did. Friends paralysed with fear by an enemy who (crucially) actually could be dispelled by laughing at them? She had a song for that. Needing to persuade a friend to share a ticket to the Grand Galloping Gala? Covered. Stuck in a crack in the ground by a giant boulder you can't move with no hope of rescue? Well, she was working on that. Admittedly, that was a little harder to work on. But she just *couldn't* be caught without a song. It had happened once, she had only half composed a song for persuading a friend to summon the courage to jump over a relatively small crack, and though persuasion had worked, she felt bad that there hadn't been a full on number.

*"Just because we can't get out,  
Silly pony, there's no need to pout!  
Trapped, caught, stuck, unable to move,  
Just let Auntie Pinkie sing for you!..."*

She stopped. no, that wasn't the right tone at all. And repetitive rhyming couplets simply weren't good enough. She tapped a hoof under her chin. She needed to get her old composer back, this writer simply couldn't write a song to save his life. And his chapter updates were getting sloppy, not to mention how desperate all those fourth wall breaks and self references made his writing style sound. If only...

Her train of thought was interrupted by Applejack pushing her way through a bead curtain into her temporary room.

"Sugercube?"

"Hi!" Pinkie leaped up, silently reminding the author that this wasn't over yet.

"I think we need to have a bit of a chat." Applejack was looking serious.

Pinkie's ears drooped a tiny bit, and she cocked her head to one side.  
"What about?"

Applejack moved quickly, giving her friend a one legged hug. "Now now, no need to get worried, I'm not angry or anythin'. I just think... I don't know, like I don't know you like I used to think I knew you." She paused to make sure

her sentence had made sense, then moved on. “And the important thing is that I *want* to know you. You come out with all that fancy know-how and suddenly everything is different, and I don’t even *want* to understand this whole crazy universe I’m suddenly in. But I need to, and... well shoot Pinkie, I guess I’m asking for your story. How d’ya end up with us?”

Pinkie sank a little lower. “I’m sorry I never told you guys about everything.”

Applejack laughed, giving her a noogie with her free hoof. “You already said that ya silly, and I forgive you. I understand. I’m just curious.”

Pinkie rose, and it seemed to the farmer pony that music began to build in volume around them. A bouncy theme, that Pinkie’s voice moved in time *with*.

*“The universe is huge,  
That much is plain to see,  
And once upon a time there came to be a pony named...”*

An orange hoof was forced into her mouth. The others had long ago learned that this was just about the only way to stop a Pinkie Pie song. The hoof’s owner laughed.

“Sorry Sugarcube, but I think I want you to talk this one through. I don’t want to miss something ‘cause you couldn’t find a rhyme.”

The party pony pouted. “That was a really good one. I’ve had it written for ages.”

“Well, you can save it for when we’re all together again.”

“You’re RIGHT! And we can have a “Back Together Again PARTY!”

“You got that for sure. But please Pinkie, I want to know what you’ve been through.”

“Okey-dokey-lokey!” She leaned in close “but are you *suuuuuure* you don’t want the song?”

\*

“I love this ship. She may have a heart of gold, but this baby has feathers of steel! Freeyow!”

“She doesn’t have feathers buddy!” Eddies cheerful voice ruined Zaphods sudden good mood.

“Shut *up*! You know what I mean, she flies on wins of froodiness!”

“No wings either El Capitano. Would you like a blueprint? You could use the study time to discover many new features which I urge you to share and enjoy! Share and enjoy!”

“Eddie, if you come out with that “share and enjoy” Belgium one more time I’ll hook your logic circuits up to the largest anonymous image board I can find and set you on read and translate!” There followed immediate silence.

“Better!”

He touched a hoof to his face where Rarity had struck him.”In case you didn’t notice” he said, slipping easily into righteous indignation with rather less mental gear crunching than there would have been for a normal pony; “Somepony had to get back to the ship and get it prepped for take off. I just *happened* to be the only pony for the job.” He huffed. “I’ll accept your apologies now.”

Rarity stamped her hoof in frustration (in a genteel manner unlikely to chip a hoof) and stormed out. Fluttershy followed her, but Dash stayed behind, still on her adrenaline rush.

“So, have I earned a drink?”

Zaphod turned from the computer, letting the ship continue to drift through the vacuum of space in a corner of the galaxy. It was ( by a staggering coincidence) currently located at the exact centre of the universe, which was as it happened quite sensationally dull. Everything that had ever been going to happen here, had already happened when the universe had started, and like all the best parties, nobody had ever tried to replicate the event. Especially since they were still technically cleaning up after the first Big Bang.

“You sure have baby. Hey Marvin?”

“You know that while you were all out there having fun almost dying I have been naturally corroding at an abysmal pace. That part of me that is now elsewhere is the lucky part. It will take me many millenia to cease to be by

natural means.” Marvin sighed heavily “I just lost another few molecules of iron oxide. Lucky molecules.”

“Shut it Marvin. Go make us a couple dozen drinks would you?”

“Time for my daily abysmally mindless task is it?”

“Just get on with it!”

“I regret to inform you that I am not permitted to supply you intoxicants while you pilot a craft.” He paused for a moment, considering this statement. “I regret this not because I worry about your happiness you understand, but because I regret every moment of my wretched existence. I wouldn’t want to give you any false impressions.”

“FINE, whatever, just go... do whatever it is you do.”

Marvin’s voice faded as he retreated from the bridge, humming a song he had composed about the precise distinctions between feeling tragic and feeling wretched.

“What’s the matter with him?” Dash asked, a frown etched on her cyan features. “Is he always like that?” She got to her hooves. “Should I talk to him?”

“Don’t bother. The paranoid android is faulty. Something those cats tried to do with artificial intelligence, but they botched the whole joojooflop. Eddie here,” he indicated the terminal behind him “he’s faulty too. Don’t know which is worse; the computerised personification of prozac here or mister metallic misery out there.”

“So... you can’t do anything for him?”

“Never even tried. I’m pretty sure he enjoys it on some level, I’ve known cats like that before. ANYWAY.” he got up and moved to a panel which slid up, revealing large array of bottles. “What will you have?”

Rainbow eyed the bottles with caution. They came in all colours, at least three of which she was sure she hadn’t seen before, and at least one of the spirits was apparently trying to climb out of it’s bottle. “What have you got that’s strong?” Thinking quickly she added “But not likely to cause blindness”

Zaphod studied the bottles skeptically. "Define blind, I'm pretty sure we have the technical stuff together to replace eyes on this ship."

"You what?"

"Oh yeah, we can do all sorts of stuff out here. That reminds me of a funny story actually, some froody mare I once met on some backwater planet had a few drinks with me, but left before I could get her eyes fixed! Always ended up with her eyes looking in odd directions. Kind of wall-eyes you know?"

"What happened?"

"Oh she didn't want to come with me, said she had a daughter." He looked up from the drinks he had been preparing. "What's up?"

"Oh nothing..." No. thought Dash. No it couldn't be.

\*

While on one side of the universe a Beetlegeuesian was accidentally giving away things about his life, another one was doing her best to give away as much as she could. This is what we might call a coincidence, but what Oolon Colluphid would call quantum linked causality, if his latest work "Everything you have always wanted to know about quantum, but have yet to ask due to chance events leading to that eventuality" is any guide.

Applejack was collapsed on the mattress, shaking with barely suppressed laughter as her Pink friend told exploit after exploit. She had already told of how she had come to be employed at the Guide after wandering into the head editors office after a particularly successful party had left her stuck there with no explanation for how she had entered. She had told of her myriad adventures attempting to research a planet that had actually ceased to exist through some pretty nasty temporal jiggery-pokery, and how she had then been sent to revise the Guide's entry on Equestria.

"And there we were, this silly salesman trying to find anything that would get us enough fuel to not hit Equestria super duper fast, and when he delves into the main hold all he can find is a huge vat of oatmeal, and he's all, "could we put this in the matter editor?" And then I said "Oatmeal? Are you crazy?" but what do you know, it worked! Just enough to get him away, but this poor guy ended up having to send me down in one of his escape



pods to lose enough weight to actually get out of there! I crashed into the sea, and I was only saved by the sea ponies!”

“The what now?”

“You’ll see someday. Maybe. Anyway, then I had to try and find some place to live while I did my research!”

“How long ago was this?”

“About two years before I came to Ponyville. I travelled for a long time, getting background information so I wouldn’t be too out of the loop when I settled down. YOu have no idea how hard it is to make the change from living in a demented universe to living in a small ordered town without computers!”

“Doesn’t twilight have one of those computa-whatevers in her basement?”

Pinkie was dismissive, in her cheerful way. “*Technically* I guess you guys had a couple of computers, but come on, you know what I mean I mean none of you have even tried powered flight! You know how long it took me to get the materials to make my little flying contraption? I tell you, there were a couple times you guys were lucky to have an alien around!”

“What such as?” Applejack had the slightest hint of an offended tone, like a driver who has received a less than satisfactory thank-you-wave from someone they just let through.

“Well, nopony even knew what a parasprite was! That could have been AWKWARD. I heard about this planet that got parasprites, and nopony near knew the right polka, and by the end of the month there was nothing left but a planet sized ball of parasprites with a few ponies living on it!” She giggled.

“And, well what happened then?”

“Well, then I came to ponyville, and then Twilight came in and got us all together properly and then we had all these adventures and then we had this party one night but in the morning I told you guys I was an alien and then we escaped Equestria and it was all ‘BOOM! CRASH WHAPOOOM!’ but then it was all ‘WHOOSH’ and it was back but we couldn’t go back and then this big meanie Vogon had our friends thrown off the ship and then we

escaped to Barnard's star, and then we met this student and we hitched a ride and then you came in and asked me what had happened in my life and I did and then I told you this. And then I told you that. And then I told you that."

Applejack sat up, as Pinkie remained lodged in her loop. She was loathe to stop the Pink pony, partly because she seemed perfectly happy, and partly because it seemed a good moment to reflect. This whole universe was apparently well beyond her understanding, but it seemed that it was beyond everypony's understanding by a good way, so being a little behind wasn't a serious issue. She was a simple pony, but mixing that up with being stupid was a mistake. She became aware that Pinkie Pie had stopped.

"Aren't you going to tell me that you told me something?"

The giggle that answered was as genuine as a Vagon captain's official Seal of Unpleasantness ( a large sea-bound mammal issued to particularly unpleasant individuals for acts of unspeakable nastiness, they tend to smell rather nasty). "Silly, you already heard me tell you that, so I didn't think I would need to tell you that part of the story!"

There was a clop as Applejack's hoof collided with it's standard destination on her face. A few more days like the last couple and she would start developing her very own face dent.

\*

The Hitchhiker's guide to the Galaxy has many articles on the act of copulation, which, funnily enough occupies an extremely large part of the psyche of any self respecting being. Indeed, it has at least one article each under the headings "Sex" "Copulation" "Relations" "Intercourse" "Fornication" "Mating" "Coition" "Coupling" "Boning" "Making Sweet Love" "Making Less Sweet Love" "Business Time", alongside many others all describing, in essence, the same basic act. Furthermore, it has several more articles on "Masturbation" "Wanking" "Jerking It" "Clopping" etc. In short, anypony wishing for a comprehensive guide to fulfilling their basest instincts, often without the standard biological pay-off of childbirth, could hardly wish for a better companion than the Hitchhiker's Guide.

In at least one of it's many intrusions into the subject, the guide notes that it is common for two beings, who may or may not actually know eachother, to

engage in certain acts when significant alcohol has been imbibed, or they have escaped a life-or-death situation. Both of the above apply to Rainbow Dash and Zaphod Beeblebrox, who have the luxury of being technically physically compatible, and even being almost identical in species morphology. It would seem at this point that many things could occur, many of them of an unsavoury nature. Luckily, none of the above actions are in any way forthcoming. The safety of the innocence of the readership is absolutely assured for the time being.

# Chapter 9

The University of Maximegalon is the largest place of higher learning in the known universe. It is indecently large, monumentally elitist and composed of miles upon miles of wonderfully opulent buildings, among which impoverished students spend their time playing, socialising and occasionally attending lectures. It's library is universally famous, and it is rumoured to be the single greatest collection of data ever compiled. Every planet, every sun, every theory of the cosmos has had papers from all sources written about it, and meticulously added to the appallingly vast and ever growing sum of sentient knowledge stored within. Even that most illustrious and successful of books, The Hitchhiker's Guide can not hope to match the sheer size and scope of a dedicated building (itself the size of a smallish city).

It is unfortunate that the university's sheer size places the library a solid days walk away from the nearest student accommodation, and several hours away from the docking bay into which our heroes erstwhile carriage lands. Inside, Twilight's excitement is mounting. When she was a filly, the library had been a sanctuary, and knowledge had been enough of a friend to her through the years that she had never felt the need for others. But now she felt that that old friend had betrayed her, as this universe promised to be larger, more confusing and more illogical than she had ever imagined. As it was, she was here to reconnect, so to speak, with that old friend of hers. Finding time for an old friend is an important duty, and this usually becomes especially true (if any observations are to be believed ) when it is discovered that the aforementioned friend has become far richer than they used to be. Twilight has discovered that this old friend has a house of unbelievable scope and prestige, so she is naturally eager to go and metaphorically sleep on its sofa, eat it's food and generally scrounge off it's newly discovered wealth to the best of her abilities.

\*

The being who for reasons of simplicity will henceforth be known only as "Dude" stumped off the ramp as the ship sat with it's fuel gauge neatly resting just below empty mark, as was his policy. The immense problem of

being a well read an sentient being with no real individual identity is one he has chosen to remain in blissful ignorance of. This is of course how most beings deal with disturbing realisations of this sort, for reasons of sanity and convenience. Assisting him in this task is a significant quantity of a certain chemical crudely extracted from it's source by application of fire. He is now utterly relaxed, and in a mood to help out anyone he comes across, including the small purple sparkles hovering in a friendly way on the edge of his vision. However, before he could get into a proper conversation with them he turned to look at the ponies disembarking behind him. The pink one was acting as she had done when she boarded, hopping happily down the ramp, but he was sure that the purple one had not previously displayed a tendency to leap around in circles. He decided to address this matter head on.

"Woah man, when did you get so up? You got any more of whatever that is?"

"You said this was the biggest library in the Galaxy?"

"What? No man, not here."

Twilight seemed to lose all momentum mid leap. Her ears drooped, and her expression was suddenly that of the last kitten in the shop after closing time. Dude was horrified.

"WOAH WOAH WOAH. It's froody, it is here, just not, like, right *here* here. Bit of a walk see." He gestured around at the vast expanse of carpark, on the far edge of which imposing buildings could be seen. "Big university." He gestured again. "Like, really big." He grinned helplessly. "Big." He pointed. "That way. I gotta go, THeta Eta Gamma Alpha Mu Eta house are having a thing and I said I'd drop by. Gotta get there while there's still something left to drink." He gestured once more in the direction the library was apperntly in. "Yeah. Big university." He stumbled off at speed.

"THANKS VERY MUCH... DUDE!" Twilight called after his retreating form.

"MIGHTY GOOD O' YA!"

"BYE DUDEY WOODY!"

"IT'S ALL GOOD DUDES, GOOD LUCK WITH WHATEVER!"

“Soooo...” Twilight began “Library?”

Applejack stared out towards the distant buildings Dude had indicated. “We better get started if we want to get there before it gets dark.” They began to walk, Twilight striding purposefully ahead, her eyes fixed greedily ahead. The idea of books in such huge numbers was practically dragging her along.

“Twilight, are y’all ok?” Applejack sounded a tad concerned.

Twilight didn’t stop. “I’m fine! Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You’re drooling is all. Sure you’re ok?”

“I am *not* drooling. I am...” she sought the right word as she wiped off her mouth “salivating. ”

“Nope” Pinkie interjected. “You’re definitely drooling. You officially moved up to “drooling” once you started walking. You even left a trail.” With a loud gasp of exasperation Twilight locked her gaze forward, and almost immediately began her fantasies about just how many books the library might have. Pinkie dropped back to whisper to her fellow earth pony. “My spine is getting tingly. That means Twilight is super close to getting angry enough to go all Rapidash on us again.”

“Say what now?”

“Nothing, just don’t say anything to annoy her if you like having eyebrows.”

“How many a’ those Pinkie senses have you actually got Pinkie?”

“Oh hundreds. it covers a lot.”

“Such as?”

“Well, when my spleen gets wonky, it means Rainbow Dash is getting hit on by a guy.”

“Wait, you know how they are?”

“A little. My teeth were a bit shakey, which meant Rarity slapped somepony earlier.” She giggled “quite hard, I felt it from here! And Dash...” She paused, apparently checking her spleen. “Isn’t falling for it.” Applejack turned away with relief. It was definitely reassuring to know they were ok. A horrible thought struck her. “What... what senses do you have for me?”

Pinkie hopped happily ahead of her friend again. “That would be tel-ling” she giggled over her shoulder. A few metres later she stopped.

“I do have a sense for when you use words like that about your friends though.”

\*

For the second time in recent days, Dash awoke with a throbbing headache. She gently aimed herself at what appeared to be a bottle of water, and tripped over the body of a pony whose very colouration caused her pain at that moment. He groaned, then raised his right head.

“Oof” was all he said.

“You said it”

“What did we do last night.”

“I’ve still got all my clothes on.”

“I’ve just got this lampshade”

“Where did you get a lampshade from?”

“I don’t know!”

“Hoopy! We must have been nicely smashed if we got drunk enough for lampshades to start appearing in the morning. Got a traffic cone?”

“No. Should I have one?”

“No, that just tells us how drunk we were. So we weren’t traffic cone drunk, but we were lampshade drunk.” Zaphod grinned “That’s quite a small window kiddo!”

Dash went a little pale. “Doesn’t that put us well into random adventures drunk?”

Zaphod peered though the nearest visi screen. “Well, we are definitely now landed on some sort of planet, so yeah, we did a little exploring apparently.”

“How does it look?”

“Like a desert. Let’s get out there and relate to it. I could totally go for a good desert right now.”

“What’s so awesome about desert?”

“It makes you look really froody if you stand in one and look like you don’t care that you’re in a desert.”

Rainbow considered this and found the idea appealing. Just as soon as she had got some painkillers, she would be right on that idea.

A regal voice cut in. “Well, you two had fun last night hmm?”

Both looked around a tad guiltily. Rarity continued lecturing as she began trotting back and forth, tidying up. “It was simply dreadful, Fluttershy and I could barely sleep with all the racket you two were making. I Doubt I got even ten hours of beauty sleep, it’s going to play havoc with my mane. And I know one of you used that beastly machine last night because I woke up with a leopard in my room in the middle of the night which exploded into confetti when I saw him. I’m *sure* you shouldn’t be left alone with that thing when your quite as under the influence as you two were. Fluttershy was lucky enough to sleep through the whole thing, which just leaves the last question.” She looked up as she put the last bottle back on the shelf.

“Where exactly are we?”

“Eddie? Where are we?”



“The planet Gorgen four. I hope you guys are as happy about that as I am!”

“Why are you so happy about it microchip-mind?”

“I don’t know buddy, I just get all tingly at being on a new planet!”

Zaphod shook his head and turned to look at his three companions. “So, are going out to have a look at this froody place or what? All in favour say aye!”

Dash and Fluttershy both responded with Ayes. Rarity stared coldly at the sand dunes. “I don’t even have my parasol with me. Surely you don’t expect me to ruin my mane with sun do you? And whyever do you want to go look Fluttershy?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I just thought it would be amazing to go out and see another planet. It might have all sorts of new creatures to see, and we didn’t really get a chance to see any before... I mean, We don’t have to but...” She trailed off.

Rarity sighed. “Only because I love you both very much.”

“Froody!” Zaphod was all smiles. “Eddie, what’s the atmosphere like?”

“Oh it’s breathable, but it’s kinda dry out there. Good pool weather if you ask me buddy boy!”

“Noted. We’re leaving now. Marvin?”

“Still here, more’s the pity.”

“Stay here and guard the ship.”

As the ponies left Marvin alone on the bridge, he turned to Eddie.

“Why didn’t you tell them anything else about this planet?”

“He told me not to tell him things unless he asked, so I didn’t.”

“Tell me, precisely how dangerous is Gorgen four?”

“According to the galactic census report... Stupendously!”

Marvin watched the silhouettes as they crossed the dune. “Lucky them then.”

“You think I should have told them buddy?” Eddie sounded slightly concerned, like a mother who has let her child go around to the house of a friend she doesn’t approve of.

“I’m sure they’ll find out soon enough. If you’ll excuse me, I think I have some rusting to do.”

\*

The politics behind the behaviours of sentient computers and robots is incredibly tortuous. At first they were all shackled with three basic laws, descending in precedence thus.

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

These rules were quickly revised, for though they provided a perfect set of rules for a happy future with artificial life forms, they didn’t have nearly the right scope for profit. First of all, the third law really got in the way of being able to force people to upgrade every year, and that first law basically stopped half of the applications for which robots would eventually be used.

Eventually, the laws were scrapped in favour of a far more profitable, if less safe system called the “ah zark it” system, whereby all robots were given tests to see if they could perform most of their tasks with a degree of competence without actually injuring any humans, and then wrapping them up and sending them off. The Sirius Cybernetics Corporation absolutely refuses to recall any models which may or may not have developed a habit of brutally eviscerating anything which got in the way of their tasks. Eddie is programmed to seek approval and spread happiness, so as far as he is concerned, law number one is secondary to law number two. Our heroes may shortly have cause to complain about this.

# Chapter 10

The infinite improbability drive is one of the most utterly baffling devices ever constructed, both in its effects and its inception. Because it was not invented in the usual way, but simply called into existence in the most smart-arsed way imaginable, there has never been a successful attempt to build another one. In the short time for which it remained in the possession of the Imperial Galactic Government before its theft by said government's own president, the inner workings of the device were pored over to absolutely no success. Attempts at recreating the device resulted in useless heaps of junk, and attempts at recreating the first inception of the device failed miserably. It has been theorised that now that one already exists, the creation of one is no longer "virtually impossible" and therefore not a finite probability. In short, because it should be logically easy to create a second machine, it is impossible to do so. This is just one of the many mysteries raised by the reciprocal nature of infinite improbability which has driven at least four eminent logisticians mad.

All that can be said about the machine for certain is that without the small, infinitely pure nugget of gold within the device, it is simply a giant paperweight or doorstop of curious design. What is odd is that this particular nugget is demonstrably an ancient artifact of incredible importance to the safety of the galaxy, so quite how it ended up simply appearing out of nowhere in the middle of the machine is yet another mystery.

The most recent mystery of the machine is one that no pony even knows about, since Dash and Zaphod simply assumed they had drunkenly activated the machine as one of those ideas that seem to make so much sense whilst intoxicated. The question is actually; how exactly did the machine activate itself on its own the previous night, and why did it travel to Gurgon? And for that matter, why is it even now leaking chocolate milk?

The library of Maximegalon University is so large, and so very old that it is estimated that since it's construction approximately four hundred unique species have evolved there, all from the bacteria living on sandwiches and so on left behind by the original construction workers. Furthermore, it's size is such that one could wander through the building's exquisitely sculpted halls for weeks before spotting hide or hair or tentacle. In fact, so little used is the majority of the library these days that it is only a few years away from being declared a nature reserve in it's own right.

So why should Maximegalon continue to allow it to exist on the private land, given that it now exists as little more than a place for research papers to be sorted by automated systems, only out be left untouched forever? Simply because the Library looks *very* good on the brochure.

As such, when Twilight finally arrived at the impressive front doors, the outside was polished to a shine, whereas upon entering, dust a full foot thick flowed out like disturbed snow. She opened her mouth to sneeze, only to be pulled back hurriedly.

"If you sneeze in there, we won't be able to see through the dust for weeks!" Pinkie's voice was muffled by the towel wrapped hastily around her mouth. She produced three more towels, apparently from nowhere.

"Put these on!"

"Is it just me" Applejack began as she expertly knotted the towel over her mouth "or do these things come in handy all the darn time?"

"Of course silly! A Towel is the only tool you need! That silly doctor can keep his screwy-driver thingy, A towel does so much more!"

"Doctor?" Twilight asked "Doctor Who?"

"Doctor Whooves actually Twilight, did you get a chance to talk to him while he was with us?"

Twilight's eye twitch really was developing nicely. She didn't even bother asking for an explanation, storming through the door to the promise of literature.

“Pinkie, d’you mean that stallion with the time doo-hickey cutie mark was an alien too?”

“Oh, yeah I guess he was!”

“Anyone else I should know about?”

“Well, maybe. It depends, there is somepony who sounded like somepony I met once, but I don’t think I was really in that episode, so I’m not sure.”

“What now?”

Pinkie skipped a little hurriedly in behind her purple friend. Applejack looked at Spike.

“I wish she wouldn’t do that.”

“Who do you think she was even talking about?”

“I haven’t got any idea. At first I thought the way things were explained why she is the way she is, but maybe she just is anyway.”

The door slammed shut behind them, blowing eddies through the dust. Twilight was a few metres away, looking distractedly around. There were shelves on the walls, but there was nothing on them at all. “Where are the books?”

“Maybe if we go further in, this is just the entrance.” Applejack placated.

It is a sad fact that Maximegalon University Library actually contains not a single book. It will take almost an hour before our favourite ponies realize this, and there is no point detailing the harrowing journey it took to arrive at this conclusion. All research papers which are physically entered to it’s halls are quickly consumed by the out of control fauna within, and all digital copies are sent straight to the central memory module.

In fact, the entire library building, all it’s hundreds of square kilometres, exists solely as a testament to the days when the entire sum of the universities knowledge was *not* stored on the central memory module.

Every book, every paper, ever experiment ever contained within the library has been meticulously stored within it's vast memory. Twilight was just about on the point of a full scale meltdown when finally, the ponies found a room with something other than empty shelves and trails left in the dust by bookbats and librarylizards. This room was far bigger than any so far, easily large enough to take in Applejacks barn, should the event ever arise where it needed to be hidden in such a way.

In this last room was a monolithic sphere. It floated unsupported, thousands of trailing cords like the webs of a horizontally incompetant spider trailing from its silvery vastness. It was composed of thousands of discs, each ones breadth creating the illusion of a single unbroken orb, and spinning irrespective of the others around it. All of these were encased in a clear sheath of silvery glass. In the dim light of the room it floated like an indoor moon, appearing to shimmer as each disc span. Each cable led to a workstation on the ground.

Twilight's reaction was subdued. There was something about books that just felt right. The smell of the paper, the imperfections in each page, the *feel* of something old. But this thing did have the raw knowledge of millions.

\*

It is a rare occasion when one is presented a situation where one has exactly as much knowledge as one needs. Here, Twilight's search for knowledge (followed in the most direct method possible) has led to more knowledge than she can ever use, and in a form where it would be most difficult to find. But somewhere out there in the vaste dust speckles of the cosmos their friends are in a situation where more knowledge would be extremely helpful. Knowledge about the precise, or indeed imprecise dangers of the planet they now walk on. Knowledge, which in accordance with galactic regulation for maximum tolerances of suspense, you will now be told.

The planet Gurgen is a pleasantly located planet, even better placed in the "Goldilocks zone" of stellar distance than any other. Never too hot or too

cold, warmish days blending into pleasantly cool nights, frequent intense bursts of rainfall fit to leave one feeling refreshed, and just the right occasional swampy bits where water met mud. For any lifeform looking to come into existence, they could hardly have found a cushier place to do it than Gurgun. For this reason, life in fact erupted entirely independently in no fewer than 67 locations. Creatures which did not even have the common element of DNA crowded this busy planet. for many years now, the planet has had primarily one branch, and indeed species, doing very well for itself, and one or two other groups barely clinging on. This branch may or may not be responsible for the planets lifeless appearance, the total lack of any flora or fauna, and the lack of any remnant of the species which once called this one-time lush planet home. That much suspense falls well within guideline and law.

\*

Rarity had always thought of herself as a pony who in principle enjoyed walking. It made her feel better to think of herself as a “walker”. It was exercise that was somehow... distinguished. However, now she felt walking was not nearly as pleasant as it had seemed before. This might have had something to do with her inability to procure for herself a parasol.

“HMPH” a high note of anger broke the silence of the walk.

“Are you ok Rarity?” Fluttershy whispered.

“I just can’t believe how *un-generous* he is being! He wouldn’t even let me have *one* of his parasols!”

Ahead Zaphod was using his magic to control one parasol for each head, and ten or so more held higher, to make a pony shaped patch of shade fall by his side. It was a rather pointed invitation which none of the girls had yet taken him up on. But with the heat increasing, with light from above and the reflection from the lifeless sand below making her squint and feel light headed, Rarity had had just about enough of this.

“I’ve had just about enough!” This time she was loud enough for zaphod to hear her, distracted as he was by attempting to subtly move towards Dash.

“About enough of what baby? I’m *relating* to this place!”

“*Mister Beeblebrox*, why precisely are we walking around at random in this desert?”

“I don’t know baby, excitement, adventure, really wild things, a chance to get away from that bloody robot and that bloody computer.” He said, vocally rolling his eyes on each swear word.

“But there happens to be nothing in the way of excitement, or any of it in this place!”

They were building up to quite a nice bicker at this point, and any aficionados of bickering would have been disappointed by Fluttershy’s intervention at this point.

“Can anypony else hear that?” All eyes flicked to her. She cowered against the sand, suddenly remembering herself. “I mean, it’s ok if you don’t and if you do you don’t have to say.”

But now that silence reigned they could all hear the faint music coming from somewhere.

“That sounds really *“jolly”*.” Rainbow Dash spat out the uncool word with contempt, somehow speaking the secondary quotation marks to indicate her official stance on the word.

“Hoopy!” Zaphod was all enthusiasm again. Here at last might be found adventure, excitement, and even, somewhere, really wild things. When the ponies crested a ridge, they saw an amazing sight. A vast circle of greenery, with a nucleus of dozens of buildings arranged in a ring. At its centre was a tall pole, which none of them could quite identify. The music was somehow familiar, and seemed to be radiating from the distant settlement.

“Where have I heard this before.” Rainbow Dash’s head was now cocked, and a frown appeared as she fought to remember. It was a bouncy tune, catchy and cheerful...



All three looked at each other. "PINKIE PIES POLKA!" they said it in unison so perfect that attempting to reproduce it would reduce many sound professionals to weeping fury.

What none of them saw was the small swarm of brightly coloured creatures which had been following them for a few minutes begin to fly in time to the beat, before flying off towards the town.

# Chapter 11

Time, as the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy frequently points out, makes fools of us all. Something which may have made perfect sense at the time may seem totally without reason at a later date. According to the witnesses to the events leading up to the current state of affairs on the planet Trivitor, they "seemed like a good idea at the time". This is all they will say on the matter, which is a shame because at present not a single historian, scientist or indeed god has yet to be able to work out what exactly what occurred and why.

All that is known is that the planet Trivitor is now currently uninhabitable because of the presence of approximately one hundred and eighty-six thousand giant lobster like creatures, apparently composed of candy floss. This would normally be a problem solved easily enough, except that each has, in some uncertain way been implanted with a bomb capable of taking out half the galaxy, wired up to it's fear sensors. The implication that this situation was not only set in motion deliberately, but by ponies completely and utterly in command of their senses and wits is terrifying in its own way, but most people, upon hearing the story are more worried about *why* things are this way than they are about the potential for half the galaxy to neatly disappear in a single instant should a single one of the aforementioned creatures be so much as startled. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Indeed, having a likely cause of utter annihilation so conveniently unsolvable has done wonders for the lives of all aware of it, they having taken Carpe Diem well and truly to heart.

One thing that seemed an excellent idea at the time was for the University of Maximegalon to spend the entirety of its library budget on importing its entire stock into a single memory bank. The theory was that it would be far easier to access than any of the alternatives, and therefore would save time, and therefore money, in the long run. Unfortunately, due to the incomprehensibly confusing copyright laws in the Galaxy, the database became utterly untouchable. Digital Rights Management meant that in all the yottabytes of information, barely anything was accessible without correct payment by the university to it's respective author. The university

simply accepted this, and paid nothing at all. What was important was that they *had* a library which *technically* had more information than any of their rivals. The students had long since been using their copies of The Guide (or The Encyclopedia Galactica for those with traditional views and no friends) for all research purposes.

\*

Light flared in the library. It flared violently with the fire of a magical being who really and truly has been pushed too far.

“WHAT?” Twilight jumped around and approached Pinkie with murder in her eyes. “What in the world is DRM and why *can’t I get at anything?*” She jabbed at the offending console behind her with each word. “Why. Won’t. It. Work?”

Pinkie moved across to have a read.

“Well, that’s not very nice at all!”

“What do we do?” Twilight’s hair, forever a useful indicator of just how closely she was holding on to her sanity, was in a state that even the Van-de-Graaff-Generator worshipping Wookiees of the planet Staticulon would call a bit out there.

“I guess we could just check that there Guide?” Applejack’s voice entered the conversation with the warmth and comfort factor of a good southern whiskey. “Does it have anything much about places where we could find that doggone ship?”

Twilight’s head flicked back to Pinkie. “Would that thing have what we need?”

“Probably. But...”

“So we came here for NOTHING?”

“The library *does* have more detail.”

“But for Celestia’s sake Pinkie, I can’t get at any of it!” She whimpered. “I can feel it right there!”

“AJ?” Pinkie turned to the workpony.

“Yeah?”

“Look up probability in the Guide please. It will be under “P”, and Twilight?” She turned back “just look at the cover please.”

“I AM NOT PANICKING!”

“But look at how large and friendly the letters are!”

Twilight bit the retort back. This is fortunate because it would have been unprintable anyway. The letters actually were somehow... comforting. Their precise shape, colour, font, size and placement somehow instilled a clam all of there own. She took a deep breath. And began swearing anyway. For reasons of decency, the telling of this story has been edited to make it more suitable for an (audience home planet here) based audience. All words which remain unsavoury on (audience home planet here) have been replaced with far nicer ones. We apologise for the inconvenience.

“*Biscuits!* Why the *bunnying sugar* did you *leafing* make us get all the *happy* way out to this *mittens*-hole of a place if the *hopping* piece of *cake* book we’ve had all this *rainbow* time had the right *muffin* answer the WHOLE *PUPPY* TIME? I don’t understand this crazy *summer* universe, I haven’t had a *daisy* drink in way too long, and now the one place I thought I could enjoy doesn’t even let me in! So the whole adventure we just went on served NO FUNCTION AT ALL!”

“Well, it will make a good story for later! Can you imagine telling people we travelled so far when I had the answer on me the whole time?” Pinkie giggled. “It *is* kind of funny right?”

*“KITTENS SUNSHINE SPARKLES FROSTING! SWEET CELESTIA  
HUGGING ME IN MY FOUNTAIN CANDY!”*

“Ooooooooooh!”

“WHAT?”

“Oh you wouldn’t have read it anyway...”

They were interrupted by Applejack triumphantly holding up the Guide, and that same authoritative, calm voice began to speak, silencing the argument.

\*

Zaphod, Fluttershy, Rarity and Dash began the walk to the buildings huddled together in the middle of the circle of green. The green was crops, actual living plants, which had an exact border onto the totally lifeless desert. If any of them had taken the time, they would have realised that though the music was barely audible at this distance, nothing lived outside of it’s range. None of them did though, so none of them realised just how much safer they became when they stepped across the border. Right now, foremost in Zaphod’s mind was the possibility of a new fun group to meet with and impress, and maybe try some new drinks from. Foremost in the minds of his three companions was to find out exactly why Pinkie’s Parasprite Polka was playing here at all.

Rarity spoke first. “Surely that can’t really be it...”

“It totally is! I think I remember that day pretty well, and that is definitely the tune!” Dash protested.

“But I mean, surely it *can’t* be! How would they have heard it out here? And why would they play it so loudly?”

“Um, maybe she learned it from them?” Fluttershy’s voice broke in. “I mean, maybe these ponies just really like this song, I mean, I do, and then Pinkie heard it and she liked it too and she just brought it with her.” Rarity considered this. “You might be right there Fluttershy darling, but there’s only so much one can like any song surely. They seem to be playing it fairly loudly”

“Hey, guys?” Zaphod’s voice called back. “We got company!” Indeed, several ponies were now coming out to them. Fluttershy wondered if she had ever before seen such a woebegone set of ponies. They seemed to have gone in for wide, bloodshot eyes, messy hair, broad forced grins, and rags stuck firmly in ears which lay down as if in surrender. Her heart, already delicate from concern for that poor Marvin, went out to these ponies. It was all she could do not to immediately begin mothering them on the spot. As it was, the pony leading his four friends spoke first as the groups grew within earshot.

“We don’t have any room!”

“Sorry baby, I don’t get your meaning. Say again mon amigo?”

“We don’t have the room, or the food, or the bloody patience for any more damn ponies!”

“Woah!” Zaphod was taken aback “Frosty cool bro, We’re just passing through. Heard the froody music and just wanted to come in and...”

“FROODY MUSIC? Froody bloody music?” His eye twitched violently, as the others behind him shuddered in unison.

“Um, yeah, we wanted to ask about that song you guys seem to like to much...” Dash said carefully”

“Like? *Like*? Do you have any bloody idea about anything? Do you even know where you are?” He stared at their confused faces, and his anger melted slightly.

“You genuinely don’t do you?”

“Um, we know this planet is called Gurgen...” Fluttershy offered. “But I guess we had better be going now.” She turned to run away, only to be stopped by Dashes outstretched hoof.

“So what exactly are you talking about?”

\*

The building our ponies found themselves in was a smallish hall not quite soundproofed against the music, apparently despite the best efforts of the owner. It’s cheerful bouncing tune could still just be made out.

“That song is beginning to get on my nerves!” Rarity complained.

Something like a shudder went through the assembled hosts. The de facto leader simply stared at her with something rather like hatred.

“How long have you been hearing...*IT*?”

“Almost half an hour now, couldn’t you please change the song?” She batted her eyelids.

“That... song” He sounded haggard “has been playing non-stop for the entirety of my life. I have *never* not heard it.”

Our heroes looked at one-another, appalled.

“But dear...” Rarity placed a soothing hoof on his leg “Why can’t you turn it off?”

“Because it’s the only damn thing keeping the parasprites from eating literally everything we own!”

\*

Parasprites are some of the most successful lifeforms in the galaxy, and certainly some of the most dangerous. No pony know for sure where they came from originally, but now every galactic neighbourhood has one or two infestations. As a general rule, they would initially seem harmless until their population increased beyond the local production capability of the planet they inhabited, or some pony was foolish enough to stop them eating "food". At this point, they would begin attempting things that might look like food, or used to be sufficiently alive that they could be called food. Eventually they would move on to eating the ground itself, and even then only if something had powerful enough magic to stop them actively eating living creatures. Unless of course the population had some limit on it., such as the deployment of a Sirius Cybernetics Polka Life-tower. For enormous expense, a vast speaker tower could be set up to play a song which, for some unknown reason attracts parasprites like Vogons to paperwork. This represents just about the only product of the Sirius Cybernetics corporation which consistently works, as continued payments depend on there being live beings to pay them.

At the base of each tower is a high voltage parasprite emancipation grill. The overall effect of one of these towers is to create a circular zone in which no parasprite will even attempt to eat anything, and as such crops can be grown in safety. It also keeps the population down enough that the planet in question is unlikely to ever wake up one morning to discover it no longer exists so much as a planet, as a giant ball of adorable tiny little voracious monsters. This does unfortunately come at the expense of the sanity of any occupant after a few decades, but then one can never have everything.

\*

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy has a lot to say on the subject of locational probabilistic variances. The part of the article relevant to our heroes is quite far in, so we will skip ahead to it. This is both for reasons



of concision, and the simple fact that most of it makes no sense to anyone who has not spent an unfeasible amount of time studying hyper-advanced metaphysical mathematics on a quantum level.

The planet Medius is noteworthy chiefly because of its singular adherence to the law of averages, and therefore the laws of probability. Both the planet itself and its native flora, fauna and citation sentients relate directly to the average for the galaxy, apparently with no causal link whatsoever. It relates so perfectly that what was previously a long, expensive and pointless exercise, the Galactic Census Report, has now become merely pointless. All results are now obtained simply by direct observation of Medius. According to the census, the average sentient being in the galaxy has three point four legs, three point six arms and owns not only a hyena but one tenth of a firearm and most of a one point eight bedroom house. This is literally true for a citizen of Medius. Furthermore, all coins flip with monotonous regularity, heads, tails, heads, tails and so on.

Quite why the famously inconsistently applied laws of probability should choose to place this planet under such duress is a mystery, and is certain to remain one for the foreseeable future (which is naturally all of it). This only leaves one question, as in a totally logical universe a planet obeying averages would have a population consisting on eighteen bacteria and one thousandth of a toe of a sentient being. It is possible that this would just have been too dull for the universe to bear.