

So Long, and Thanks for All the Ponies, part 4

Democracy had never really been considered as a political practice in Equestria. Celestia was essentially an ideal benevolent dictator, and she was certainly willing to be guided by other ponies. Furthermore, 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 no pony, regardless of political persuasion, is going to vote for the Let Everything on the Planet Die Party, regardless of policy, personality or propaganda. 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 elected president makes all the major decisions, he, she, 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, lecher 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 top secret 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 while to explain precisely who he was, and her friends' expressions were getting more concerned by the second. 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, a safe pair of hooves in a large and dangerous galaxy.

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, she reflected, 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 right now baby". Had she done so, she would have found herself spending the next three days slowly digesting in the centre of a fungal growth the size of a whale. Admittedly it had been his idea to hang under those bridges in the first place, in one of those ideas that seems frightfully good to the sort of person they both were...

No, that wouldn't do. She had met Zaphod, ooh, ten or so years before going to Equestria, and had impressed him by drinking three Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters in succession with only a

short stay with the HICPGGB (Hospital for the Idiots Who Consume Pan Galactic Gargle Blasters). The two had at least vaguely known each other for a year or two, and had infrequently met up to drink a lot, share stories and drink a little more. Many of those stories had ended up in The Hitchhiker's Guide, though Pinkie was careful enough to ensure that only the more positive side of the president ever made it to the public through her. It was the least she could do. Whether she could then be said to be in part responsible for his election is a matter for debate.

For now, she unconsciously resorted to a standard enough Pinkie Pie practice: non-sequiter.

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"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. At least this time it had served to change the subject.

"I think you girls need to look up Babelfish in this." She held up a small flat panel of metal and plastic, 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;

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaab.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaab.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac.....

"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 words scrolled. It was a pleasing, trustworthy voice, like that of a young but prematurely old magic teacher Twilight had once had, and indeed had a crush on. It spoke in a measured, reassuring tone, each word reminding the listener of what those large friendly letters had said:

Don't Panic.

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

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

"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 with one head "How's he doing?"

"He's on his third poem about how depressing life is. You'd be amazed how many metaphors you can find using olives."

"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 when 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.

In the lead was that slightly built blue pegasus, followed by that particularly attractive white unicorn, in turn followed by the pale yellow pegasus.

"Ladies, hi there, glad you could drop in. I..." he paused for effect, gesturing with a lazy hoof to himself "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 as unimportant 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?” She snarled.

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 willing and physically able 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 knew that, I can’t help it if you fillies can’t talk the talk. I 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. It was... interesting. 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.

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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 hall. 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 the suspicion of a country dweller in a big city.

Barnard’s Star Space Station, 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 almost perfectly transparent planet into millions of spires of ice that spear the surface of the planet.

Even at night the ground seemed to glow dull red, and light flashed as the rough sphere turned on its axis. The station building 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 spoiled by thousands of shops for tourists, large ships full of overweight life forms with cameras, and occasionally entire fleets docking there between hyperspace leaps. In this way, Barnard's Star Orbiting Station gradually evolved from being a wonder of the galaxy, to being one of the largest hyperspace express junctions in the history of creation, and a great deal of eyesore on what was once a sight for sore eyes. Such is commerce.