

So Long, and Thanks for All the Ponies, part 10

The infinite improbability drive is one of the most utterly baffling devices ever constructed, in both effect and inception. Because it was not invented in the usual way, but simply called into existence in the most smart-arsed way imaginable, and so, there has never been a successful attempt to build another. In the short time for which it remained in the possession of the Imperial Galactic Government before it's 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 nopony 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 it's own the previous night, and why did it travel to Gurgun? And for that matter, why is it even now leaking chocolate milk?

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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 to 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 its 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, every experiment ever contained within the library has been meticulously stored within its 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 incompetent 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.

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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 vast 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 Gurgun 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 life form 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 their basic genetic structure 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.

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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, stretching for kilometres to a nucleus of dozens of buildings arranged in a ring. At it’s centre, just visible, 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.