

# PonyCraft-Pegasi of Liberty

## Chapter 4: The Twilight

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A group of bodies piled into the muddy trench like ragdolls amongst the sounds of gunfire, explosions and screams. The situation was getting worse with each passing moment; the Zerg attack waves were getting out of hand. A battered marine climbed up and yanked a spine from his left fore-hoof with a grunt. Pain seared through his body, and even with the spine removed, it was too painful to put pressure on. Nearby, the ground exploded in fire and the last members of his team flew around lifelessly, their bodies crashing into the walls and splashing into rain puddles.

The marine glanced down the left side of the trench in panic. He saw another squad fighting off a monstrous pony that was an ultralisk in the distance, and a firebat burning some stray fiends nearby. Turning his head down the right side of the trench, he witnessed a bunch of marines give way to a pair of zerglings. The moment they saw the marine, they continued their run. "Wouldn't be so heroic if I died peacefully now, would it?" He muttered himself before he sprinted for a fallen corpse's rifle. Armed with a rifle in his good hoof, the masculine pony got up on his back legs and fired at the advancing foes, sparks dancing around the creatures as they closed in. The armored pony glanced down to his ammunition counter to see it descend from 195 to 000 in a matter of moments. He gritted his teeth and surveyed the nearby scene. To his disappointment, there weren't any rifles near enough to attempt to grab. He glanced back to see death meters away and closing in fast.

Suddenly, a flare of light passed by the marines head, exploding a zergling upon impact. The second zergling, dazed by what had just happened, watched a second flare fly toward it. The marine slowly turned around from the gory fireworks to find the source of the projectiles.

"Learn from the best, colt: 'Don't miss.'" A bulky firecolt said. He turned around and trotted towards another pony who was nervously rocking back and forth while listening to rock music. The marine decided to follow, trying to keep all pressure off his injured hoof. He noticed that there were no longer any marines fighting anywhere; he assumed they were all dead next to the visible lump of ultralisk that lie still in the dark distance.

"Where's the rest of your squad?" The marine yelled, muffled by the dozens of distant cries and explosions.

"You're lookin' at it. I assumed the same goes for you." The firecolt responded. He took a seat in the mud, looked at the smoking weapon he carried, and tossed it away uselessly. His visor lifted to let the rain wash over his scared, dirty face.

The sane marine didn't believe what he was seeing. They were in the middle of a war zone, another wave of Zerg imminent, and these two idiots were just going to wait for them to arrive?

"Where the hays the commander? I was told he'd be here on the front!" He called out in a vein attempt to motivate them.

Neither marine answered. Instead, the rocking marine paused and pointed his hoof back towards the distant Hyperion without even looking. The marine looked over to see the top of the battlecruiser showing above the trench wall. As if he had woken it up, the Hyperion's fog lights flickered on, lighting everything up to the charred forests edge. In the white lights, a silhouette of a dropship slipped by the flocks of Zerg flyers.

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"Aw, Jimmy. You're goin' soft on me. This pretty pony business has gotten the better of ya, hasn't it?"

"What d'ya mean, Tychus." Raynor glared.

The [i]couple[/i] had been loading a dropship with supplies for the past few minutes with help from a selected squad of marines. A trip to visit a so-called "princess" still required some supplies, and with the crates dwindling, they were only waiting on the dubbed "Alfalfa team". The name didn't mix well with Raynor and especially not with Tychus, but, in addition to their lack of creativity, the purple pony with the horn insisted that it was ingenious, "the perfect fit." "You're runnin' from a perfectly good fight to help a couple mares out. Sure, they're gals 'n all, but they just ain't the same." Tychus spat out a dead cigar onto the metal floor, a new one quick to take its place. "They're lil' cute ponies, Raynor. A gals thang." Raynor helped shove the last crate onto his back.

"It ain't up for discussion, Tychus." Raynor quickly retorted. "We've got business with their princess, and you better warm up to the idea."

"It's the blue one, ain't it. She's got some nice-"

"This has nothin' to do with them mares. The sooner we defeat the Zerg, the sooner we get to fixing my ship. We can try and fight on our own, but that'll cost a lot of good stallions. If you don't like the idea, stay behind."

Tychus wasn't about to quit on his ol' buddy, but he was starting to think Raynor was losing his touch. "Rainbows, ponies, princesses and unicorns... This ain't no place for a man. If the Zerg weren't here, I'd prefer my cell."

Raynor had ignored to comment as he went to go search for the missing team. Tychus turned to enter the dropship. As small as it looked, it was huge. The Great War had brought along dropships that were able to carry not one, but two siege tanks if the need be. And that was before the engineer started tinkering with the design. However, the space was used for supplies and for seats, not for tanks.

He grabbed his assigned seat along with the rest of the marine squad. There were a total of 9 of them: a fair sized squad. Raynor had given them places to sit, of all things. He had a massive battlecruiser under his command, and yet he was starting up a daycare. More evidence Raynor was slipping.

The pilot started up the engines, signaling Alfalfa's return. As they gathered inside, Tychus overheard Swann and Raynor talking, "Y'know, hotshot, I don't always like to be left behind only to hear them adventure stories you always have." Swann said.

"Not this time. You and Stetmann are going to be a lot more useful back here than out there."

"Ahh, save it. I hear that a lot these days." Swann muttered.

Apparently, Raynor opted for an unconscious pony over a versatile engineer. Tychus hoped that, with any luck, she would be dumped somewhere.

The dropship began to take off as Raynor walked the ramp and took his seat, given vision of the entire space. Maybe his seating plan was a smarter idea, surrounding the defenseless little ponies with the toughest marines of his crew. As the dropship exited the hanger, Tychus could see the Hyperion's fog lights activate through the closing door.

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Her head hurt, along with the rest of her body. Her mind was fuzzy still, and she questioned whether or not she was really conscious. The question was quickly answered as a high-pitched scream alerted her senses. Applejack was quick to fully awaken, adrenaline coursing through her veins: none of them beasts would catch her nappin'! Her eyes burst open, expecting to already be in trouble. She was half right. A dozen blurry figures were visible in the dim light, they had almost completely surrounded her already! But Applejack was not goin' anywhere without a good tussle!

She rose from her seat and dashed to one of the two open ends in the enemies lines, turning her flank to the wall. She might be able to stand a chance like this. The attackers were already advancing at her, although at a slow pace. They were speaking incomprehensible babble, clearly intended to distract her. Applejack wouldn't fall for such a weak plan! Turning a full 180 degrees in one movement, she bucked one of the beasts that had gotten a little too close. Her hooves slammed into its head. Despite sounding and feeling like metal, the creature didn't stand a chance against such strength and stumbled sideways, dazed none-the-less. Applejack took the opportunity to buck it a second time in the midsection. It crashed to the ground in a heap farther away as a pair of offenders tried to sneak up at her from the rear. They were slightly lighter and weaker than the other one, and a hoof to the side of the head sent one crashing into the other, both slamming into the wall before slumping to the ground.

Time was running out. The others had been able to close in to uncomfortable levels. There was no hope to defeat them all, and escaping was no option... unless-

In a desperate action, she dodged a figure that was about to grab her and headed right to a light source on the other side of the room: the exit to the cave!

"STOP HER!" Applejack deciphered one of the cries, originating from some female source.

She leaped at a beast right in front of her. She hoped to jump off it and shoot herself towards the exit, a sizable gap between her and the oppressing force. Fate had decided otherwise, and the moment she made contact her limbs crumpled and both the creature and herself crashed into the floor, Applejack skidding to a halt just outside the lights reach: So close. She could hear hoofsteps and muffled voices surround her. She vaguely recognized the voices, but it didn't matter, she'd been beat. All Applejack could do was curl up and whimper.

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"Tell me she's down!" Raynor barked through the suit's radio.

"Yes, sir! She must have run out of adrenaline." A marine sounded through the speakers.

The pony laid only meters away from the cockpit door. A group of marines surrounded her ready to catch her if she made a break for it again.

"Could I get some assistance over here?" Tychus groaned as he struggled to his hooves. A fellow marine came over and quickly pulled him up. "Damn pony nearly smashed the visor!" He raged.

"You know it was a mare who did it, right?" Raynor questioned from afar..

"That was some demon that attacked, not some mare! Good thing the devil doesn't want me in hell."

Raynor walked over to the collapsed and whimpering beast of a pony, 3 marines holding rifles to her to ensure she didn't move, 2 others ready to catch her if she did.

The five friends were eager to check on their pal, but a pair of marines held them at bay as well, albeit some difficulty with Rainbow. Tychus never bothered to learn their names, instead, he found fitting names for them himself.

He looked around the less-than-cramped room to the other victims of the rampage. Aside from a few dents and recovering marines, everything was rather unscathed. It didn't last as a barrage of explosions rippled off the dropship's exterior.

"We've got company!" The pilot chimed in, "Hold on!"

The others quickly braced themselves, the marines still watching Little Bucker - as Tychus named her - as Rainbow quickly brought her to safety. Tychus, however, didn't get that chance and wasn't able to grab something; he was too far away from anything. He tumbled all over as the pilot maneuvered around enemy projectiles. Sharp turns, sudden drops and unpredictable decelerations were the tricks Tychus could point out. At some point between Tychus being magically frozen against a pile of crates near Starry Girl and the pilot saying "We're going down!", the Zerg flyers had made a nice collection of skylights and fires.

"I'm going to have to land her, sir. I think there's a clear spot just ahead." The pilot alerted.

"Do it and pop the hatch. It's about time we give this bird some firepower." Raynor responded.

The back door creaked open, licks of flame reaching out as the air was sucked outside. 3 mutalisks were hot on their tail, launching their lethal projectiles at the transport. A few unsecured crates and packages slid out the door, one comically hitting a pursuer. Just about everypony opened fire.

A loud shot rang out among the lesser rifle shots, punching a clean hole in the second mutalisk.

Trying to recover, the creature targeted the now open door despite being overwhelmed by gunfire. Its last act was launching a projectile, which hit the rear wall and bounced, hitting the wall opposite of Tychus and then bounced again in his direction. He was still frozen against the damned crates, he couldn't move no matter how hard he tried! It was like there was a magical force holding his suit in stasis.

He braced for the inevitable impact, the projectile undoubtedly going to hit him. He couldn't even shut his visor, his head enjoying the inability to move as well. FWHOOM! An explosion of olive green gas erupted into the air as the projectile detonated. There was a hole behind Tychus, perfectly lined up with the space between his helmet and shoulder; calling it a close call was an understatement.

"Omygosh! I am so sorry! I has held you down while you were tumbling, but I guess I was too afraid to let go when that thing was bouncing around in here." Starry Girl quickly came over to say.

Tychus only turned his angry eyes at the mare.

"Oh, right." She said as she released whatever gypsy magic she was using, a slight blush of embarrassment showing on her face.

Tychus hit the floor hard on all hooves. Working his stiff muscles he snarled at Starry, "Ya know, I hoped to die fighting for my life, not trapped by a little scared pony." At which point he walked away as the dropship descended; the last Mutalisk killed while he was preoccupied.

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The smoke from the village was difficult to see against the darkened sky, and nighttime was around the corner. The place that Alfalfa team called Ponyville was no match for any size of Zerg Swarm, plus its proximity to the forest, it was inevitable for the attack. Raynor stepped out onto the muddy street; a couple wooden houses had collapsed so that there was only one entrance to their landing zone. It was the optimum place to make a pit stop.

"Contact the Hyperion. Let Matt know our situation." Raynor ordered to whoever was within earshot.

Creep was lightly spread out in large clumps, enough to give the Zerg their home-field advantage. Jim Raynor hadn't had a pleasant stay in Zerg territory to date, and he didn't like the idea of being back. He muddled about with a patch of hay, realizing it was from one of the nearby houses. He was surprised the village lasted this long without any help. A group of marines rushed past, quickly building a barricade to defend the landing zone from the inevitable Zerg.

A few straggling ponies were gathered and put into a house; safe and out of the way. At one point Raynor spotted a grey pegasus chasing after a Zergling that had something like a muffin in it's mouth before she knocked it into a wall, crushed its head with her back hoof, took the muffin with a smile, and flew off into the high clouds oblivious to the danger the village was in. Maybe ponies could put up a fight.

"Oh, but please. You MUST let us find out the poor fate of our beloved home." Rarity begged to Tychus.

"What part of 'N' or 'O' don't ya understand? I ain't playing foalsitter." He barked. "And Raynor ain't gonna let ya run around neither."

"I need you six. No more, no less. That was the deal. Either way, the village is full of Zerg. The longer we stay here, the better the chance we get overrun." He responded.

Rarity was silent, standing on the edge of the rain's reach under the tail wing. Hopefully the others heard the conversation so he didn't have to say it again. He turned his attention to the village and it's situation. He had to give the Zerg credit, it is almost like they had a plan for attacking; half the buildings were still standing, creep littered all but the structure entrances, and the small attack forces that the marines were barring off could have been patrols.

"Hear that?" Tychus said.

"Hear what?" Raynor questioned, a dull roar sounded in the distance.

"Sounds like things 'r gunna get rough, Jimmy." Another roar sounded, but much closer, as if the creature was-

The side wall of a building right beyond the barricade exploded, smoke billowing out the new doorway. A ferocious looking lion walked through the smoke. It sounded a loud, vicious, roar as it rushed forward; nowhere near the speed of the Zerglings that gathered beside it, but still fast. It paused for a moment to open its mouth and vomit a glob of green liquid that began to eat the barrier upon impact. Raynor and Tychus rushed to help hold the barricade.

"What kind of creature is that?" Tychus tossed a grenade into the oncoming Zerglings.

"That's a manticore. Or, at least it used to be one. What happened to it?" Twilight spoke.

"Tychus!" The Zerglings were quickly swarming at the barricades.

He took the hint and grabbed two grenades in his hoof, somehow, and smiled as they flew past the metal walls, over and into the far edges of the swarm. Simultaneously, Raynor, visor now up, fired a penetration round into the manticore creature, punching through with a spray of acid; the Manticore's body burst in small acidic explosion. The Zerglings either burned from the acid, exploded from the Raynor's round, or were peppered by the marine unit's wave of gunfire. The grenades finally detonated, albeit far back. Tychus' smile never faded as he watched the two houses on the side of the entryway collapse, smashing into a debris barrier on top of a second wave that was just rounding the corners. The new barricade wouldn't stop the Zerg, but it would slow down their rapid assaults.

Raynor turned to face the lavender open-jawed unicorn, his visor down. "So what did ya think so important to leave the ship and join me and Tychus up here at the front?"

"B-b-but the... the houses... ponies-" Tychus blew some cigarette smoke into her face as a cruel way of getting her back to normal. After a short coughing fit, she finally responded, "Well, I know you don't want to go out into the Ponyville because it's dangerous and the Zerg are crawling over it. But my library might have some information that can help us."

"Exactly what kind of information?" Raynor asked skeptically.

"Spells. Explosive spells, extinction spells, conjure spells... There's a variety across all forms. I might also have some information that can help wipe out the Zerg."

She was hiding something: surely she didn't expect him to want to go visit a library for books. That or she was crazier than Raynor thought.

"It isn't worth the effort. We need firepower. Tangible guns, soldiers and stuff like that."

A marine came running up to him from by the dropship. "Commander, we have contact with the Hyperion. Captain Horner would like a word. It's urgent."

Raynor nodded and rushed off to the small communications setup. He didn't notice the rounds being fired well overhead originating from a sky-blue and rainbow-colored mound atop the dropship.

"Jim Raynor, the Zerg waves are getting worse. We're losing a lot of men out here." Matt Horner spoke.

"We're holed up in an infested village, Matt. We got our own problems."

"A different attack? The Zerg swarm must be bigger than we thought."

"They also acquired some new assets. They have begun to infest the native species."

"That doesn't sound right for a rampant Zerg swarm. Raynor, I picked up a large power level in your area. I thought it was Zerg, but maybe-"

"Kerrigan?" He paused for a moment, if she had made the trip to Equestria then everypony was doomed. "They're looking for something, Matt. The evidence is clear: they had left the town intact so she could search it."

"But what would she be after?"

"My library!" Twilight burst out; Raynor hadn't even noticed her walk up beside him. "She'll probably be looking for information on Equestria."

"Ms. Sparkle is right. She won't have any knowledge on this planet. She'd go for the closest and easiest source. You'll have to destroy it before she can get to it." Matt informed.

"Got it. What about you colts? Are you goin' to be able to hold the line?"

"We'll do what we can, but if Kerrigan learns any kind of secret, we'll be facing an even worse situation."

Raynor's ears perked up as somepony behind him screamed, "WOLVES!"

"Good luck Matt." He shut the communicator down as he did a full spin to face the barricade.

A dozen mutated and infested wolves had hopped the barriers and were tearing the marines apart. Tychus, who had been beside Raynor, was gunning down as many as he could, but they had an armored shell over their bodies. Raynor quickly switched his commando rifle for a standard gauss rifle lying on a nearby crate.

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"He didn't mean destroy destroy, did he?" Twilight questioned Jim.

"Those books hold information that will aid Kerrigan in taking over the planet." He shot the last of the round into a dying wolf. "We cannot let her find it."

"But-"

"Tychus, we're heading out." He interrupted Twilight.

"We got ten minutes before the dropship is repaired. Assuming the marines can hold the barricade." He explained while having a chaingun mounted onto this armour. "Think we got time?"

"Our time may have already run out as far as I'm concerned." Although Jim Raynor wasn't convinced that the Queen of Blades would act so predictably, he wouldn't take the chance: the library had to be destroyed.

"Seems calm enough to go over the top. Ready for some action?" Tychus wiggled in his armour, making sure the gun didn't fall.

The streets were still mud, the rain, however, slowed to a light drizzle. The alleyways and streets were lit by the fires untouched by rain. Dead bodies of just about anything were spread out.

Although the village had been left intact, that simply meant some buildings were left standing.

The walk through the graveyard-like streets wasn't helped by the pure black of nightfall nor the lengthy walk that felt like hours, despite being a couple minutes. To Raynor's dismay, he couldn't pull anypony from the barricades defense; they were spread thin as it was.

"What a mess. Like walking through a graveyard." Tychus whispered.

"Treat it like one, then. A lot of innocent ponies lay here from the slaughter." Raynor heard something and instantly put a fist up to halt the trio.

There was a growl.

And another. Two more. Four.

A dozen low growls sounded from the black shadows, like a predator stalking its prey. A sudden bark sounded and the streets filled with the wolves, Raynor got to experience their full potential. Tychus spun a 180 and unleashed his chaingun at the pack coming from behind while Raynor peppered the wolves up front. Their armour defended them against Raynor's firepower, but Tychus was keeping his side at bay. A wolf leaped at Raynor's head, jaws wide, teeth sharp and mouth full of saliva. He dropped his rifle and blocked the attacker, having it bite down with incredible force on this front leg; puffs of steam spewed out of the hydraulics of the suit as soon as it bit down. As the momentum of the wolf carried on, Raynor rammed his hoof into the ground, smashing the skull of the beast on a rock in the ground along with the majority of its bones. Quickly glancing back, he noticed another wolf make a vicious leap, except it was met with a fist to the side of the face. Falling to the ground, a short burst of bullets went through its eye. They were weak creatures, their shells being the tough nut to crack. Raynor could no longer hear any growls or chaingun fire. A second look down the street uncovered 4 wolf bodies bashed and bruised with some dug into the sides of buildings. Twilight pushed forward as if nothing happened.

Apparently, the library was a tree just beyond the battlefield Raynor and Tychus pushed through. Twilight tried to rush at it, but Tychus blocked her path.

"Doors open." He whispered to her, "Someponies home."

She wasn't convinced of danger, and still tried to push past, but was still blocked by the unmoving wall that was Tychus. Meanwhile, Raynor had approached the partly opened door, pushed against the wall. Taking a peek, he eyed a source of light inside amongst a pile of books. He jumped off the wall and was about to buck the door down when it flew off and hit him first. He was thrown back a little ways, but quickly recovered to see a familiar figure in front of him. Pony shaped, featuring short, partly developed bone-like wings, a grey coat with dark grey stripes, a bone mane and tail, and a sleek shell that glistened in the light from behind her, she was no doubt the Zerg Queen. She was about the same height as Raynor in his suit, although hovering off the ground in an olive-green glow. Her voice echoed as much as it rhymed.

"Well, well. It seems you have discovered the clue. I knew I should have come to kill you."