

Deus Ex: Equine Revolution

By Melon Hunter

Chapter 3: First Contact

Bon Bon had to admit, being the test subject had none of the allure of being the researcher. While the ponies studying her were safely sequestered behind shatterproof glass, she was strapped to a medical gurney, various pieces of monitoring equipment surrounding her. The room was large and sterile, with blank white walls reflecting painful amounts of light from the fluorescent strips above. In the chamber with Bon Bon was Twilight, who was hovering a holoscroll in front of herself, along with a small gem that pulsed gently with all the colours of the rainbow.

"You're *absolutely* sure about this?" Bon Bon asked nervously. She'd never heard of aug patients having to be restrained while their enchantments were placed on them, or for that matter a non-neuromantic unicorn being able to build the enchantments. "Shouldn't this be done in a MANE clinic? By a neuromancer?"

"No. This is classified research; I can't just entrust this to anypony. Besides, after the incident, I took personal command of the horn aug project. This has to be me. Somepony else might have gotten this wrong," Twilight said. "All the enchantments are held in the soul gem. I only have to apply them."

"If you insist," Bon Bon said hesitantly.

"I'm not the Bearer of the Element of Magic for nothing, Bon Bon," Twilight chided her. "Technically, I *am* a neuromancer; I'm able to cast all the requisite spells. I just don't like to advertise that fact." The rainbow-coloured gem—a soul gem, as it was colloquially known—floated down and touched against Bon Bon's artificial horn. "Ready?" Bon Bon gave a slight nod and closed her eyes.

A moment later, the world exploded. Bon Bon gasped and struggled as a bolt of lightning worked its way through her body, blasting away any other sensation. Augmented limbs strained against the restraints, trying to pull away from the intense waves of magic that washed over her body. Impossible shapes and colours flooded her vision, and an otherworldly roaring built up, overwhelming the unicorn's senses. Bon Bon felt her artificial heart skip and shudder at the strain, and a strangled cry emanated from her lips. Twilight was going to kill her!

Then, as if Celestia had felt her plight, the intensity fell away. Bon Bon could still feel the magic pouring through her, but now it was calm, as though it had changed from a raging torrent to a meandering river. The cream pony revelled in the sensation, taking deep breaths. Her horn, once little more than an inert object, began to pulsate gently with the ebbs and flows of energy. Bon Bon reached out to try and touch it, that alien, yet comforting presence in her mind.

As she did, the magic faded to nothing. Bon Bon opened her eyes to see Twilight on the point of falling unconscious, with beads of sweat lining her brow. The soul gem was nothing more than ash on the floor now. A pair of researchers rushed in, one bearing a glass of water in her telekinesis. The exhausted unicorn took the water and drained it in a single gulp, before wiping her forehead.

"Did it... did it work?" Twilight asked weakly, waving a hoof at the gurney. The other researcher

undid the restraints, allowing Bon Bon to climb down and drop to the floor.

"I don't know..." Bon Bon said, gingerly touching her newly-enchanted horn with her hoof.

"Try it out... Here, try levitating this pencil." Twilight yanked the implement out of the pocket of the pony sitting near the gurney, who was lost in the holoscroll, monitoring the readings from the operation.

Bon Bon stared at the wooden stick, at a loss for what to do. "You remember the simulations, Bon Bon. It's exactly the same process," Twilight said encouragingly. Bon Bon knew that; she'd practised the mental activities countless times in preparation for this day. What stayed the augmented unicorn was the feeling of dozens of expectant eyes on her, willing her to do the impossible.

She took a deep breath, willing her horn—her *magic*—to reach out and levitate the pencil. It stayed resolutely on the ground. *No, come on!* The augmented pony grit her teeth, trying not to fall to the schoolfilly error of using sheer brute force to manipulate objects. Bon Bon was on the verge of giving up. Her eyes rose from the pencil to Twilight, and she opened her mouth to offer her resignation.

And then... then there was the slightest sensation of pressure melting away, not so much a dam bursting as a piece of parchment gently yielding to a hoof press. A collective gasp rang out from the observers. Bon Bon looked up to see the pencil hovering above the ground, enveloped in a gentle blue glow. She marvelled as it spun and moved about as she willed it from within her mind. A beatific smile grew on Bon Bon's face as she floated the pencil in front, gazing at the blue glow—*her* blue glow. She was a unicorn.

"It worked," Twilight whispered. Her gaze rose up to meet Bon Bon's, delight sparkling in her eyes. "It worked!" Bon Bon let her magic fade, the pencil clattering to the floor. "This is more than we ever hoped for."

I sure hope it was. No pony was gonna refund her all the bits they spent on this project.

Bon Bon gave a start at the voice. Apparently, no pony else had heard it. She hadn't finally cracked, had she?

Oh, stop being so melodramatic. Wait... had it just read her own thoughts?

They did tell you everything that came with the aug, right? No? Ugh... Gimme a sec. The voice cut out, and a moment later, a deep blue face poked around the door, grinning at her. "Yeah, you're not going crazy. I can just..." ***...project my voice into your head now,*** it said.

"Colgate?" Bon Bon breathed.

"Yeah. Long time, no see, huh? What is it, two months since I last spoke to you?" Colgate said casually.

"I—" Bon Bon was cut off by Twilight, who shot an annoyed look at Colgate.

"Colgate, we haven't started testing yet," Twilight said reproachfully.

"It seems like you haven't even told her all the features of the horn aug," Colgate retorted. Twilight paused for a moment, then rolled her eyes and waved a hoof in admission. "You've heard of the Hydra aug, right? Telepathic link?" Colgate asked. Bon Bon nodded. "Built right in." The blue unicorn tapped her own horn. "Equestri-net access too! Trust me, you are gonna waste so much time watching... ah..." Colgate appeared to have become acutely aware of Twilight's glare boring into her back. "...I mean, um, let's just say you'll never need a holoscroll again!" she finished, before swiftly retreating.

With a sigh, Twilight turned her gaze back to Bon Bon. "Despite revealing some rather *unsavoury* habits, Colgate is correct. A variation of the Hydra aug was installed for long-range communication. It's silent, as well. Just... in case you ever needed that," she said, with a flicker of her eyes to the other researchers. Evidently Bon Bon's true purpose hadn't been revealed to the company at large.

"I see. Although, uh... how am I supposed to use it? I'm kinda new to this whole unicorn thing," Bon Bon said.

"You need to... focus on the pony you wish to speak to, and think what you want them to hear. Once you've done that, you'll both be able to hear one another's direct thought until you terminate the connection," Twilight said. Looking at the confused expression on Bon Bon's face, she scratched the back of her head. "Sorry. I've never been good at explaining." Bon Bon shook her head. She envisioned Twilight in her mind, squeezing her eyes shut tightly.

Like this? the augmented pony thought hesitantly.

Exactly! Twilight's voice came into her head. Bon Bon opened one eye a crack to see the other unicorn's lips hadn't moved.

I don't really see this catching on, she admitted. *Do I have to concentrate entirely on you?*

It takes some practice. For privacy's sake, you won't project your thoughts into a connected pony's head without consciously willing it. But it should take less effort to send thoughts once the initial link is established.

Bon Bon switched her focus slightly. *So if I think Colgate should have waited before bursting in like she always does...*

"Hey!" Colgate narrowed her eyes at the cream pony. "The first thing you do with one of the most advanced communication aug's on the market is insult me with it?" Bon Bon shrugged. "Heh. Well, if you're able to do that, then it's working as well as it ever will. All up to you now. I'd like to stay and chat, but I guess you've got tests to be sending yourself to sleep with. And I've—"

"Got hackers to stop and flanks to kick?" asked Bon Bon.

After a moment's hesitation, Colgate nodded, a sad smile on her face. "I'll catch up with you later," she said quietly, exiting as abruptly as she'd entered.

"Bon Bon." The cream pony gazed over to Twilight. "Before we start stress testing, could I have a word with you? About what I told you earlier?" Bon Bon nodded, and Twilight led her over to a corner of the lab, away from the researchers. "I'm sorry to have to ask this of you so soon, but I have a task for you.

Tonight.”

“It’s what you’re paying me for, isn’t it?” she deadpanned. Twilight bit her lip.

“I know. It’s just that I need the utmost discretion; not to mention it’s potentially dangerous and I’m not sure if you’ll be ready—”

“Twilight. I can do this. What is it?” Bon Bon reiterated.

Her superior nodded. “OK. Tonight, there’s a scheduled protest outside the MANE clinic. The usual... ‘evils of augmentation’, with a few ‘the Princesses are out to get us’ crazies mixed in. It’s just... they have a somepony giving a speech. Somepony I haven’t seen in a long time: Fluttershy.”

“Fluttershy? I thought she stayed out of this sort of thing. I hadn’t heard about her in years.”

“Neither had I. We’ve met less and less, and resorted to writing letters... I knew she was growing distant, but never to the point of outright opposing me. Whatever it is that’s spurred her on, it’s pushed her to the point of standing up in front of hundreds of ponies, to speak out against augmentation!” Twilight exclaimed.

“So what do you want me to do?” Bon Bon inquired.

“Keep an eye on her. See if you can talk to her, or get in contact,” Twilight said.

“Can’t you just go and talk to her yourself?” Bon Bon asked.

“I think the protest would turn rather ugly if the head of Sparkle Industries just turned up for a chat with her friend, in the middle of a crowd of anti-aug demonstrators.”

“So you want me to spy on her?”

“No. I just want you to try and find out what turned her against us. And... protect her.” Twilight sighed and stared at the ground. “I’ve seen these ‘peaceful’ protests turn into riots one too many times to trust them. If she got caught in the middle of it all... I can’t let that happen. She’s not just my friend; she’s a Bearer of an Element of Harmony! If anything happens to her, the consequences for Equestria could be catastrophic.”

“I understand, Twilight. I can do that. I’ll see if I can talk to her after her speech,” Bon Bon said.

“Thank you. I’ll end the testing at about five o’ clock and let you rest. The protest proper shouldn’t start till later this evening. I’ll see you then.” Twilight smiled and walked out of the lab, Bon Bon following her. As she walked out of the door, she observed the vast array of obstacles and objects scattered around the lab, and felt the attentive gaze of two dozen researchers just *itching* to test the full potential of the horn aug. She rolled her head from one side to the other, working the cricks out of her neck.

“OK, then. Let’s do this.”

Bon Bon sat back and sighed, a steaming cup of coffee held in her paws. Despite an entire day of stress testing, she still didn't quite feel confident enough in her levitation to trust it with a container of scalding hot liquid. It had gone better than expected; her magical strength was on par with a young adult unicorn. Some of the researchers had admitted to expecting little more than the odd spark that a filly could produce, while others had excitedly chattered about programming new spells into the horn, and perhaps experimenting to see if there were any spells inherent to her, corresponding to the three wrapped sweets of her cutie mark.

She had to admit, she found the concept disquieting: the idea that everypony in history had had their own repertoire of magic spells hidden away inside them, and yet only a third had the equipment to ever use them. What purpose did that serve?

Bon Bon realised she was slipping back into her usual deep thought. Not good. She needed to focus; it wasn't long until she had to head down to the MANE clinic and act as Fluttershy's bodyguard... and spy. Her gaze caught the coffee cup. *Maybe...*

She cast a furtive glance around the cafeteria; it was mostly empty, with only a couple of ponies occupying the room with her, scattered amongst the wooden tables. They were occupied with the television on the far wall, or staring out of the windows at the city outside, the spires and towers bathed in the afterglow of dusk. No pony was paying any attention to her.

A faint blue glow ignited around her horn, and enveloped her cup. Bon Bon took a deep breath, and let go of the cup, her talons folding back into familiar hooves. The cup stayed exactly where it was. She began to grin; she could get used to levitating objects at will. A slight change in thought, and the coffee hovered toward her mouth.

Bon Bon? She gave a start as Twilight's voice cut into her mind. Her paws barely caught the coffee as her telekinesis ceased.

"Yes?" she said testily. She waited a moment, before realising she'd said her answer aloud. Bon Bon rolled her eyes and focused on her superior's being. *Yes?*

Bon Bon, I need you to meet me at the skypad. Immediately. Twilight's voice held an anxious edge. Bon Bon rose from her seat, abandoning her drink, and began trotting towards the nearest elevator.

What's the matter? Has something gone wrong? She mentally cursed herself for not paying more attention to the news on the television. No wonder the others in the cafeteria had seemed so interested in it...

The protest... it's turned ugly. This wasn't just a demonstration; it was a cover for an attack on the MANE clinic!

What?! I thought the police had the place locked down? What about all the security measures?

So did I. They've formed a perimeter, but... there are hostages inside. They... they took

Fluttershy.

Oh. Bon Bon pursed her lips, and felt a knot of anxiety form in her stomach. Her job had just become a lot harder.

Just... just meet me on the skypad. I'll talk to you there. Twilight signed off as Bon Bon stepped into the elevator, jabbing her hoof urgently at the button for the top floor. As the doors shut, she sat down, her mind racing. How in Celestia's name had another attack occurred in Canterlot? Had the police learned **nothing** from the deaths of over one hundred Sparkle Industries employees? She let out an exasperated sigh, and moments later, the doors opened out onto the lobby at the top of the building. She paused for a second as memories overwhelmed her—memories of being a normal, unaugmented pony, just going about her life as usual. Bon Bon shuddered, pushing away the thoughts. *Don't think about it, just don't think about it at all...*

She pushed her way past a small crowd of ponies who were gathered around the television in the lobby, all with looks of faint horror on their faces at the scene unfolding in front of them. Armoured police officers and Royal Guards kept a large circular perimeter around the entrance to the MANE clinic, holding back crowds of protesters and bemused onlookers alike. From the expressions of the ponies being held back, it seemed like the police were just as worried about a riot occurring outside the clinic as they were with the situation inside. The main doors of the building had apparently been barricaded from within.

Bon Bon ran up the stairs to the skypad to see Twilight pacing around beside a small sky carriage. Hitched to the front was Flint, dressed in an armoured purple jumpsuit. He nodded to her as she emerged from the portal.

"Bon Bon! You're here!" Twilight exclaimed. "Get in; we haven't a moment to lose." She jumped inside, swiftly followed by Bon Bon. As Flint pumped his wings, pulling the carriage airborne, the two unicorns took their seats opposite one another. Bon Bon noted a couple of discreetly-wrapped parcels on one of the seats.

"What happened?" she asked quietly.

"It's not entirely clear. It must have been an inside job; the cameras inside the clinic have gone dark, and the attackers were able to take control of the building in minutes. They must have been hiding amongst the protesters," Twilight replied.

"And the hostages?" Bon Bon continued.

"Most of the lockdown procedures worked, but about a dozen ponies were captured before they could reach a safe zone. They're still somewhere in the building. The attackers dragged Fluttershy inside when they raided the clinic." Twilight stared at the floor, not making eye contact.

"Twilight, I know you're worried, but CPD have plenty of experience in sieges. Nothing will happen to Fluttershy or the oth—"

Her superior cut her off. "They've threatened to execute the hostages if any move is made on the clinic! She is not just 'going to be alright'," she said. "We're at a stalemate. They can't get out, and if the police try to go in, over a dozen ponies—including a Bearer—lose their lives."

"So what do we do?" Bon Bon said.

Twilight nodded toward the packages on the floor. "If the police try to barge their way in, the hostages die. But nopony said anything about one pony making their way in undetected."

"You want *me* to go in and rescue them?" Bon Bon asked.

"Secure them. Make sure they're safe, then we can call in the cavalry," Twilight said with a nod. "I know you expressed concerns about your combat training... Well, this is exactly what I feared it would need to be used for."

"Simulations can't recreate a real situation perfectly, Twilight. You're absolutely certain about this? About me?" Twilight nodded. "It's the only way to save them, isn't it...? I can do it, as long as I have clearance," Bon Bon said.

"I convinced the officer on the scene that this was the only realistic way to get to the hostages in time," Twilight said primly. "And in light of our conversation earlier, I've picked up some special equipment for you." Her horn glowed softly, opening the package. There were two black ceramic plates inside, designed to fit around the torso. Bon Bon took them, and began to shuck her longcoat off.

"Uh, do you mind? I just..." Twilight averted her eyes, and Bon Bon awkwardly strapped the armour to her chest, the padded plates fitting snugly over her. She put her coat back on, and cleared her throat. Twilight turned back to her, and opened the other package, revealing a small, dark grey item the size of a pistol, with a large, bottle-shaped device attached underneath.

There was a click as Twilight's magic depressed a button on the side of the device. It unfolded, a long barrel extending from one end as a stock unfurled from the other. A handle and trigger pushed their way out of the bottom, and the bottle rotated outwards, causing the entire frame to take on a shape closer to that of a rifle. As a final flourish, a small box with a lens popped out of the top, forming a scope.

"A P-21 'Naptime' tranquiliser dart rifle. Breach loaded, single shot, powered by compressed air, and completely concealable in public," Twilight said. Bon Bon took it in her own magic, admiring the design. "I thought about what you said earlier. And you're right: I shouldn't force you into killing ponies. This will allow you to neutralise any threats, non-lethally." Twilight tossed a box of darts to her as well. Bon Bon opened the box, counting out the dozen projectiles inside. Another flick of magic, and she broke the barrel, slotting one of the darts into the chamber, before closing it and folding it back down into its pistol form.

"Thank you," Bon Bon said as she tucked the rifle and darts away in her coat. "That should be all."

"I have a standard-issue ten millimetre pistol here, too. Just in—"

"That's all," Bon Bon reiterated.

"The occupiers are armed, Bon Bon. I don't want to leave you defenceless if the worst comes to pass," Twilight said reproachfully. "You should have a contingency."

"If I'm going in undetected, I shouldn't need a weapon that's only going to draw attention to myself, should I?"

Twilight opened her mouth to say something, before waving her hoof and nodding slightly. "Just stay safe, Bon Bon," she said quietly.

A few minutes later, the carriage touched down on a building next to the MANE clinic. The air pulsed with noise: anxious and angry shouts from the crowd, whistles and sirens from the police and angry shouts from the Royal Guards. It produced a perverse carnival, great masses of bodies swaying back and forth against the circular barricade outside the clinic. Several fires burned in litter bins, sending thick, black smoke into the air.

Bon Bon disembarked from the carriage, looking out onto the scenes below. As she stepped down onto the white stone of the building's roof, Twilight called out to her.

"Bon Bon!" The cream pony looked over her shoulder at the unicorn. "Good luck... and stay in touch," Twilight said, tapping her horn. Bon Bon nodded her thanks, and Flint pulled the carriage away to a safe distance. She turned towards the MANE clinic, where several armoured pegasi circled overhead, keeping watch over the occupied building. A narrow metal bridge linked the tower she was on to the clinic, which was currently guarded by two police officers, both in heavy, urban camouflaged riot armour. One was a pegasus, hovering agitatedly beside the bridge, the other a stocky earth pony with a saddle-mounted water cannon and tear gas launcher. The earth pony beckoned Bon Bon over.

"Hey! You the 'specialist' from Sparkle Industries?" he called over the ruckus. She nodded primly. "Heh. I've heard some choice phrases about you and yer boss tonight. Think you can... Wait..." He pushed his mirrored visor up with a hoof. "Bon Bon?"

Bon Bon's lenses retracted, and she stared at the dark grey face of the stallion. "Iron Clad?"

"It is you! What happened to you?" the earth pony said, indicating Bon Bon's augmentations. "You were never one to want upgrades, back in the Department."

"I... didn't have a choice," the augmented unicorn said quietly. "What about you? Riot squads now?" she asked, eager to change the subject. Iron Clad didn't seem to notice, grimacing and slapping his breastplate with his hoof.

"Yep. Just promoted to Captain, and I get *this* mess handed to me..." he said.

"And we're up here, guarding a Luna-damned *bridge*," his partner snapped. "Shouldn't we be, I dunno, in there? Securing the hostages those fucking terrorists have held up?"

"Watch yer language, Storm Front! Have some respect," Iron Clad said testily.

Storm Front landed, snapping his deep blue wings shut. "So, first we're caught short-hooved, with riot gear against a paramilitary attack, and now we have one augged up ex-detective doing our job for us? No, I'm not gonna watch my language. I think you've got bigger problems to deal with, *Captain*. Beginning with *her*." He pointed a hoof at Bon Bon.

"We go in there, even with armed squads, those hostages *will* die, Lieutenant," Iron Clad retorted. "I get a request to send in one of the best black-market detectives we ever had, with stealth augs to boot, to go secure them? Damn right, I'm gonna give the order." He turned back to Bon Bon. "You'll have to forgive my colleague's behaviour. We're all a bit edgy after that other attack six months ago."

"Yeah, you and me both," Bon Bon said, wiggling her artificial foreleg slightly. Iron Clad nodded his head in sympathy.

"So you got caught up in that, huh? Damn shame. Still, I gotta say, six months is a helluva short time to come back from the dead. I know I wouldn't be going in there alone if it were me in yer horseshoes."

"Don't worry about me. Twilight had a surprising amount of foresight when it came to my training," Bon Bon reassured him. "What's going on in there?"

Iron Clad looked embarrassed. "We don't really know. Somepony must've hit the security circuits. All the internal cameras are dead, and the lockdown procedures got delayed. We're looking at something like twelve to fifteen hostages, with anything upwards of thirty hostiles inside."

"So they all charged through the front doors?"

"Some of them. But the clinic also has access routes into the sewers and catacombs. Heavily alarmed, and with intruder counter-measures, but what with everything else going down, I think it's fair to say they came through those tunnels, as well. As for the protest... it all happened so fast. One minute you got ponies waving placards. Next, gunshots, chaos, ponies running everywhere. We couldn't clamp them down fast enough," Iron Clad said morosely, shaking his head.

"And the threats towards the hostages?" Bon Bon asked.

"One message, thrown out of a window. They said if anypony gets within twenty metres of the building on the ground, they kill one hostage a minute till they leave. Anything like a full-on assault... they all die. Fortunately, we have snipers keeping 'em off the roof and away from the windows. They won't know till it's too late if we get a single infiltrator in on the roof."

"And did they have any demands? This is just an elaborate form of suicide otherwise," Bon Bon said.

"The usual... abolition of augs, compensation for those who've had to pay for neuromantic treatment," Iron Clad said. "Your usual anti-aug nut, except these ones are armed and dangerous. Even if we wanted to negotiate, it's not like we can give them anything they want."

Bon Bon nodded. "If that's all, then I won't waste any more time." Iron Clad saluted, and pushed his visor back down.

"Hey." Storm Front had landed next to her as she walked onto the bridge. "Remember, you screw this up, the blood's on *your* hooves. There are a lot of innocent ponies in there," he warned her.

"I'll keep that in mind," she said icily. As she made her way swiftly across the bridge, she heard a commotion behind her.

"...You say anything more like that, Lieutenant, and I will bust your ass all the way back to Traffic! Is that clear?" Iron Clad barked.

"Yes, sir..." Storm Front said. Bon Bon rolled her eyes. Pegasi always were the worst in tense situations. She trotted over to the access door, and pushed it open. Unlocked... That didn't bode well. Bon Bon's horn glowed softly, and she pulled out the tranquiliser rifle, unfolding it as she descended the stairs into the clinic.

So, I guess you'll be needing some assistance? Or would you rather charge in there blindly?

Colgate?

Yeah, Twilight's set me on the case. The police were kinda reluctant to give her any information on the attackers, so... I just hacked into their comms. They're... not exactly confident about the situation in there. Particularly not now that the onus is all on you.

I know. Just had a run-in with a jumped-up riot cop myself. Anything else?

I got you some maps of the clinic. At that, a large window appeared in front of her, drowning out the usual biometric readings that hovered at the edge of her vision.

Colgate, I can't see!

Whoops! Sorry. Don't panic. The window shrank down a little, allowing her to see the dark corridor around it.

Better. It contained a wireframe map of the floor she was on. As she willed it, the map moved between floors, covering each storey, all the way down to the basement.

OK, so you've got six stories above ground level, plus two levels of basements. Likeliest place for the hostages is on the second floor, in this staff room. The map moved to the relevant floor, with the room in question marked out in red. ***Easily defensible, no windows, hoof recognition locks on the doors. Question is, how to get to it. Top floor is all offices, but the two floors beneath you are patient rooms and wards. They got locked down in the attack, and it'll be difficult to get through there without being seen. You could try the ventilation system...***

Air ducts as a route into the building?

Hey, if it stops you getting shot up, I'd say it's a viable strategy. But you can always take the stairs like a good little filly if you really want.

OK, fine. I'll see if I can find one.

Sure thing. Stay safe, and holler if you need anything. I'm not just a pretty face, y'know!

Bon Bon swore she felt just the faintest hint of amusement from Colgate as she severed the telepathic link and minimised the map. She took a deep breath, pushing open the door at the bottom of the staircase, the rifle levelled in front of her.

The door opened out into a small T-junction at the end of a longer corridor, the space filled with cabinets, mops, and toolboxes that had been hastily tidied away. The cream pony stepped carefully over the detritus, ensuring she didn't disturb any of the mess. Flattening herself against the wall, she caught the rifle in one unfolded hoof, and sneaked a look around the corner.

The corridor extended towards another white wall in the background, flanked by large panes of frosted glass that were set into the offices' walls. Halfway down the corridor, with her back to Bon Bon, a pink unicorn mare with a ragged white mane poked her nose into a few of the offices. A sawn-off shotgun was nestled in her telekinesis, its handle wrapped in a crimson glow.

Bon Bon quickly pulled her head back behind the wall, lest she be seen. If there was only one pony here, she could probably pick her off with a tranquiliser dart...

"What are you doing?!" The augmented pony gave a start, mind racing. Had she been discovered? Another peek assuaged her worries; the unicorn was now looking into another office, the shotgun hanging loosely at her side, rather than levelled. "Are you two going to spend all night in there?"

"Hey, hey, hey! This office belongs to the head honcho of this place! Who knows what we'll find in here!" came the reply from within.

"What, you think she has a notebook titled 'Evil things I did today'? Stop pretending you can hack that computer and make yourself useful," she sneered. "And Graffiti! Put down that spray paint."

"Just a minute, just a minute." The third voice had an oddly tinny quality to it. The mare snorted and stamped her forehoof.

"Look, just 'cause you're sore you don't get to raid the *really* juicy stuff in here, it doesn't mean you get to order *us* around. If you're gonna be so anal about it, go check the door to the roof or something," the first voice said. Bon Bon's blood went cold. She would be discovered if she stayed here, and she doubted she could take on three armed ponies at once. She quickly dived across the gap to the other side of the T-junction, just before the mare let out a frustrated sigh and stamped her hoof again. She began walking towards Bon Bon's hiding place.

Bon Bon crouched down by the wall and propped the tranq rifle against it. She counted off the hoofsteps as they came closer and closer, the mare grumbling under her breath. She tensed up as a pink foreleg appeared in front of her, the shotgun swinging around as its owner regarded the door.

"Ugh... as if anypony would think to come through here," the mare muttered. This was it. Bon Bon sprang up, forehooves unfolding. A quick chop to the horn sent the shotgun to the floor as the mare's telekinesis winked out. Her shout of surprise died in her mouth as Bon Bon's other foreleg wrapped

around her throat, squeezing tightly. She pulled the pony off of her legs and dragged her back behind the wall.

Pink forehooves scrabbled desperately at the artificial limb, and the mare's azure eyes looked up in horror at Bon Bon's shaded gaze. A last few weak kicks of her hindlegs and she slumped down, the last of her breath choked out of her. Bon Bon released the grip and gently lowered the unicorn to the floor. The cream pony carefully placed an ear to the pink mare's mouth, listening for the weak rasps of breath, and pushed her into the corner. One down.

Taking up the rifle again with her magic, she edged down the corridor to the director's office. The faint sound of a spray paint can being shaken and triggered emanated from the open door.

"I'm done here; I'm gonna see what else there is up here," said the tinny voice. Bon Bon ducked inside the nearest doorway, sighting down the tranq rifle's scope. As she waited, a blue earth pony emerged from the office, a narrow band wrapped around his neck. To her relief, he turned away from her and began walking. *Perfect.*

She took a breath, and sent a dart sailing through the air, straight into the stallion's paint brush cutie mark. He continued walking for a few seconds, oblivious to the projectile lodged in him, until the tranquiliser entered his system. He wobbled on his legs, and fell sideways, hitting the plate glass with a thunk. *Damn.*

"The hell was that? Grafitti?" The final pony came out, a tan pegasus with a saddle-mounted combat rifle, eyes casting about, until he saw the unconscious body of his compatriot. "*Graffiti!*" He ran over to the earth pony, before seeing the dart stuck out of his flank. He looked up, directly at Bon Bon, and his eyes went wide.

Before he had a chance to bite down on the bit and fill her with lead, Bon Bon leapt forward, swinging the stock of the tranq rifle into the side of his head. He staggered back with a muted cry, as she dropped the rifle and tore the bit out of his mouth telekinetically. The pegasus rallied and reared up, wings pumping. He aimed a wild swing at Bon Bon with his forehoof, but only touched her mane as she dodged to the right.

An unfolded paw darted up and grabbed the hapless pegasus' forehoof. The paw extended slightly out of Bon Bon's leg and spun rapidly in a complete revolution, taking his limb with it. A horrific *crack* resonated throughout the corridor as the buck's leg dislocated at the shoulder and the bones snapped under the stress. His eyes went wide, and Bon Bon only just shoved her other forehoof in his mouth in time to muffle his scream.

She twisted to hold the pegasus from behind on two legs, pulling his broken limb with her. Her other forehoof still muffled the sobs emanating from him. His hindlegs scrabbled at the ground for purchase, and his wings batted against her body in a futile effort to escape. Bon Bon tugged harder, and the sobs became high-pitched whimpers until he finally passed out from the pain, wings fluttering slightly as he slumped against her. She let him drop to the floor, and sat down heavily.

The rifle was gathered up in a blue glow, broken open, and reloaded with a new dart. Bon Bon regarded the ruined foreleg of the pegasus, and the tranquilised earth pony beside him. A glance up the corridor confirmed the unicorn mare was still prone. She let out a heavy breath.

One floor down.

Augmentations Activated

Horn: Basic Telekinesis

Allows the user to dexterously manipulate small objects, as well as magically responsive surfaces.

Using experimental compounds and enchantments, a prototype unicorn horn augmentation has been developed by Sparkle Industries. Although the exact capabilities of the aug are unclear, it is able to replicate the most basic of unicorn spells; telekinesis.

Horn: Hydra Mod

Telekinetically connects users, allowing communication through thought, emotion, and even remote optical and aural implant access.

Developed by studies of its namesake's neural processes, the Hydra mod can remotely link ponies in absolute privacy. Different varieties can also connect in more sophisticated ways, even allowing minds to temporarily meld; however, the cost of higher mental integration rises exponentially, placing even the most basic versions of this aug well out of the price range of the public.

[<<Chapter 2](#)
[4>>](#)

[Chapter](#)

Many thanks to RavensDagger and Burraku_Pansa from [SALT](#) and to Darth Rex for pre-reading, and to [KibugamiKenzo](#) for the incredible cover art.

Questions, comments, critiques? Get in touch at melonhunter42@gmail.com

