

The *Thessalonica* Legacy

Chapter 2: Comic Books and Aliens

A crisp autumn breeze blew through the boughs of the giant tree. Gold and orange leaves rustled dryly as ancient branches creaked and swayed. One orange leaf lost its grip and tumbled free, dancing in the late afternoon sun. It swooped and dived and eventually came to rest on the page of a book lying open on a balcony built into the side of the tree's fat trunk.

A faint twinkling light appeared around the leaf, quickly growing to a subdued purple aura. The leaf lifted off the page and moved steadily and deliberately—as if it had been plucked by an invisible hand—away from the book. The aura vanished as a gust of wind swept the offending leaf away. The same gust rustled the pages of the book, threatening to send them cascading wildly. A small lavender hoof quickly stamped down on the pages, holding them in place.

Twilight Sparkle was sitting on the floor of the balcony of the town library which doubled as her home. She rested on her belly with her legs demurely tucked beneath her. Well, except for the forelimb she was using to keep the pages of her book from blowing over. She glowered at the uncooperative weather as she waited for the gust to die down, tilting her head so the breeze wouldn't blow her indigo hair into her eyes. Carefully removing her hoof, she turned her attention again to the pages.

The book was lavishly illustrated in that particular Equestrian style. Each page had a pair of rectangular panels, each filled with an elaborate and intricate illustration. The words of the book were not immediately noticeable, being woven like a thread around and through each image. Actually reading a book like this was an art in itself. Not all books were like this, of course. Most had neat, organized text arranged in neat lines and arrayed into paragraphs. This book was of an older, almost forgotten, style where picture and text bled together so the words became the pictures and the pictures became the paragraphs.

Twilight Sparkle was not reading the words. She had read them before, of course. She had read this very book many times over. One could say she knew it by heart. No, what held her attention today were the pictures themselves. She had been making her way through several books of this type of all genres; spell books; books of myths and legends; books of prophesy; books of nursery rhymes; history books; science books; story books; books on animals and books on plants; books on weather and books on agriculture. Books illustrated in the archaic style and ones with just simple pictures. The only consistent variable is that all the books HAD pictures. She had been scrutinizing pictures for days. She had noticed something when perusing an old book of magical theory and now a hypothesis was forming. She was now pouring over every illustration she could get her hooves on looking for evidence.

The illustration that held her attention now was a pastoral scene. A flock of colorful ponies frolicked in a verdant field beneath a bright blue sky. A stylized sun set forth long golden rays piercing wispy curlicue clouds while birds perched in the full, green trees. Twilight's large, purple eyes drank in every detail. She focused particularly where a sizable group of ponies were preparing for a festival. The text weaving throughout indicated the Summer Sun Celebration

marking the longest day of the year. The ponies in the picture were erecting a variety of pavilions, grandstands, and banners. A small town, little more than a cluster of tiny huts and a fenced-off pasture, sat on a low hill by a winding stream behind the celebration preparations. And in the distance, clear in the background, was the unmistakable silhouette of the castle at Canterlot cantilevered out from the side of its mountain. For a moment, Twilight mused if the little town in the picture might depict Ponyville, the very town which had been her home for the past year. The geography seemed to match, at least. But, then, it could have been half a dozen small towns scattered across the valleys between Canterlot and the Everfree Forest—Maresville, Buckingham, Trotsworth... She put the idea out of her mind. Trivialities of geography were not her current objective, though she did make a mental note to investigate the possibility in the future.

The little unicorn furrowed her brow. A purple aura, a match of the one that had surrounded the leaf, engulfed the horn on her head. A second aura sprung up around the book. The pages flipped rapidly before coming to rest at another set of images later in the book. Twilight focused intently on one of the images on this page, but only for a minute. With another glow, she flipped back to her original image of study. With a frown, she sent the pages flipping back the other way, then back, then back again. With an exasperated sigh, she turned to a new page entirely and began pouring over a new image.

She was so engrossed with her survey, she failed to notice when a sky blue form swept down from clouds and alighted on the railing of her balcony. The new arrival swished her rainbow hued tail and dropped what appeared to be a pamphlet from her mouth.

“Hey, Twilight.”

The lavender unicorn did not make any indication she had heard her friend. The blue pegasus cocked her head.

“Hey, Twilight?”

Again, the unicorn did not look up. If anything, she seemed to peer even closer at her book. Her visitor rolled her eyes with a huff. Spreading her wings, she hopped up from the balcony and fluttered over to the oblivious bookworm. Hovering with her face just inches away, she inhaled deeply.

“Twilight!” she yelled, as sharply and suddenly as she could muster. Twilight leapt into the air and tumbled backwards with a startled cry. Seeing her friend in such a state, the little pegasus laughed.

“Rainbow Dash! You startled me!” Twilight stammered, eyes wide. She extricated herself from the rather undignified heap she had landed in and dusted herself off. For her part, Rainbow Dash was still laughing, forelimbs crossed over her belly and tears forming in the corners of her eyes. She hadn’t expected such a strong—and hilarious—reaction from her bookish friend, and she was relishing the moment.

“Yeah, yeah. Ha ha. Very funny.” Twilight screwed up her face.

Seeing her friend’s displeasure, Rainbow Dash regained her composure, wiping a tear from her eye with a hoof. “Heh. Sorry, ‘bout that Twilight. But you were just so wrapped up in that book.”

Twilight’s face softened. “I take it you didn’t stop by just to interrupt my studies and watch me jump out of my skin?”

“Oh, yeah!” With a flap, the pegasus swooped over to where she had dropped her cargo and with a flick kicked it up into the air then caught it, balancing it on her back. “Is Spike around? I wanted to return his comic book.”

“Spike? Yeah, he should be downstairs.” She nodded to the door behind her, “Go on in.”

“Thanks, Twilight,” Rainbow Dash trotted past through the arch that was more window than door and into the library, “Oh, and sorry about scaring ‘ya.”

Twilight smiled and settled back into her previous orientation. Rainbow had left the door to the balcony hanging open. Twilight didn’t mind. It was a lovely autumn day, and maybe the old library could use airing out of some of its stuffiness. She levitated her book back into place and flipped to the proper page.

She was just starting to lose herself in the tangled intricacies of a lovely illustration of a harvest, picking up right where she left off, when her consciousness was suddenly yanked out of its reverie by a bout of laughter from somewhere within the library.

She gave a small smile and went back to her book. Or at least, she tried to. She found her curiosity wandering away from the page and off down to where her friends were. With a huff, she tried to focus on her study, but another bout of laughter wafting up from below preempted her.

Twilight groaned and tried to focus even harder. Now she could hear voices chattering away, too distant to be distinct but unmistakably happy and excited.

She gave up. There was no use in fighting it anymore. Her interest had been completely stolen away. She knew she wasn’t going to be doing any more studying this afternoon. Her horn glowed again as she calmly closed the book and stood up making another mental note of which page she was on. The book floated effortlessly in the air above and in front of her as she entered the tree.

The main portion of the library was downstairs, at the base of the tree. This upstairs portion doubled as additional collections and Twilight’s private quarters. Little more than a sitting area, bookshelves carved into the warm wood of the tree were filled to overflowing with books. Only

a few personal effects indicated this area was more than just another room of the library. Her writing desk stood off to one side beneath a window, buried in scrolls and even more books. The fireplace sat empty awaiting the winter chill. Her bed sat in a small loft above the sitting area accessed by a steep staircase, surrounded by even more overflowing shelves. Spike's bed, little more than a box, sat on the floor by the foot of the bed. Potted flowers and painted organic motifs of stylized leaves, branches, and stars combined with the tree's natural grace to give the room a warm, welcoming look.

Twilight dropped the book on her writing desk and turned to make sure the door to the balcony had latched properly behind her. Satisfied, she trotted down through the round aperture set in the wall and down the stairs to the library proper.

The main library was done up in the same style as Twilight's quarters. The long staircase decorated with small, pink hearts arced around the edge of the large main room, more overstuffed shelves carved into the wood beneath.

Twilight expected to see Rainbow Dash and Spike—and indeed she did. Rainbow hovered in the air by the central reading table with its carved wooden horsehead statue, muscular wings slowly beating. Spike's stout scaly purple and green body sat on a pillow off to the side, comically short legs outstretched. They were conversing animatedly, presumably about the comic book. Who Twilight did not expect to see was the strongly-built pony with the orange coat and unruly blond mane and tail tied back loosely, a trio of apples on her flank, well-worn saddlebags over her back, and a battered old cowboy hat on her head.

"Applejack? I didn't take you for a comic book fan." Twilight greeted the countrified newcomer with a warm smile.

"Howdy, Twi." Applejack trotted over to meet Twilight at the base of the stairs, "Nah, I just walked in on these here two chatterboxes. Actually, I came here lookin' for y'all." She said in her rustic twang.

"Oh?" Twilight raised her brow "What's up?"

"Well, you know the annual Runnin' of the Leaves is comin' up here in a couple of weeks, right?"

"Of course." Twilight had only been in town for one Running of the Leaves event so far. The annual festival and hoof-race was responsible for the dropping of all the leaves from the trees around Ponyville, signaling that the Fall would soon be ending and Winter fast approaching.

"Well, you know how I've been named one of the official organizers this year?" Applejack said with a measure of pride.

"No, I hadn't. Congratulations! That's quite an honor." Twilight paused, "But, isn't that

rather time-consuming?”

Applejack waved a hoof “Nah. Applebuck Season is already done and over with, and most of the other harvests are already in, or will be soon enough.” She reached into her saddlebag and withdrew a rolled poster, which she spread on the floor. “Actually, I wanted to know if it’d be alright to hang one of these here posters outside the library.”

Twilight peered down at the poster. It was a simple affair, a rather attractive stylization of the race with the time and location for the start of the festivities written in formal pictograms. “Of course it is. Here, let me lend you a hoof.”

“Thank ya’ kindly, Twilight.” The orange pony stooped to pluck the poster from the ground and turned toward the front door.

Twilight followed her out, leaving Rainbow and Spike inside still comparing notes. Like on many of the buildings in Ponyville, the red painted door was arched and split in two, top and bottom. A large painted representation of a candlestick, symbolic of the purpose of the building-in-a-tree decorated the top half. Twilight levitated the poster away from Applejack and held it in place next to the door with her magic. Applejack rustled around in her saddlebag and extracted a box of nails. Gingerly holding one in her teeth, she pressed it through the poster and into the bark. She returned to her bag and drew out a hammer, holding the wooden handle sideways with her mouth. Before she could swing to tool, the nail slipped out and tumbled to the ground.

“Aw, shoot.” She dropped the hammer and plucked the nail up in her teeth again. She pressed it back into place and quickly went for the hammer, but the nail fell out before she could even get her mouth around the handle.

“Gosh darn it!” she moved to pick the nail up again.

“Here, let me help,” said Twilight. She pinned the poster in place with a forehoof and concentrated on the nail. It glowed with her characteristic purple light and lifted up to the poster. She held it in place while Applejack swung her neck to drive the head of the hammer onto the nail, sinking it partially into the thick bark. Twilight plucked another nail from the box and held it in place for Applejack and together they finished tacking down the poster.

As she returned the hammer to her bag, Applejack noticed her unicorn friend had barely taken her eyes off of it.

“What’s the matter, Twi? Never seen a hammer before?” the yellow pony smirked.

“What? Oh, no, I was just... thinking about something.” Twilight shook her head “It’s not important.”

They returned to the interior of the library. Spike and Rainbow were digging through a box

of Spike's comic books. Or rather, Spike was digging while Rainbow hovered over his shoulder. The stubby little dragon appeared to be searching for something in particular.

"So, will y'all be runnin' in the race again this year, Twi?" Applejack asked as they entered.

"Oh, I, uh. I hadn't thought about it." Intrigued by the event, Twilight had run in the race the last time it was held, much to the amusement of Applejack and Rainbow Dash, her more athletic friends. After trailing the entire length, she had sprinted ahead at the very end to finish a respectable fifth. Though she had found it enjoyable enough—mostly for the opportunity to enjoy the weather and the fall scenery—she was content to just watch from the sidelines this year.

"Aw, Twilight, ya' gotta race again!" Rainbow floated over to meet them, "A.J. and I still owe you for beatin' us last year."

Twilight felt her cheeks flush. "I'll think about it," she said carefully. "Meanwhile, I hope you two have still learned your lesson from last year?" The only reason she had beaten the two of them last time was thanks to the two hot-headed mares' 'friendly' competition which had devolved into an all-out wrestling match by the time they crawled across the finish line in last place.

The two ponies shared a look.

"I don't think y'all have to worry 'bout that. I learned my lesson," Applejack drawled.

"Yeah. B'sides, this year I'm gonna win outright." Rainbow struck an aggressive pose, rainbow-hued lightning bolt clearly displayed on her flank. Applejack shot her a look, and then shook her head. Rainbow was an incorrigible boaster, and there was no sense in arguing with her.

Over by the stairs, Spike let out a triumphant whoop, "Ah HA! Found it!" He held aloft a tattered comic book and ran over to where the ponies were standing by the door "Here's the one I was telling you about, Dash."

"Oh, Awesome!" Rainbow let out an excited squeal "I can't wait, it sounds so cool!"

"Yeah, it's one of my favorites." The little dragon said "Just... be careful with it, will you? It's... my favorite, and I don't want it..."

"Ah, no sweat, Spike. I'll take good care of it."

"What's got you two so excited?" Twilight's curiosity had gotten the better of her. She trotted over to look at the tattered booklet and read the title "*The Adventures of Orion Nebula, Spacepony Extraordinaire?*" she read.

“Volume 3: Orion versus the Martian Menace!” Spike finished.

“Oh, I remember this. You had me read it to you when you were little, er, littler. Isn’t this the one with the…”

“Don’t spoil it for Rainbow Dash!” Spike interrupted “Besides, I seem to remember you didn’t like it” he scowled.

“I didn’t say I didn’t like it,” Twilight shot back defensively, “I only said the astronomy was very inaccurate.”

Spike began counting off on his fingers “And that the Martians were silly, and that the spaceship was unrealistic, and that the plot was predictable, and that…”

“Ok, ok. You’ve made your point,” Twilight’s head drooped. “I’m sorry, Spike. I didn’t know you took it so seriously.”

“Well…” Spike tapped a clawed finger on his chin mischievously “You *could* make it up to me by taking me out to eat for supper instead of cooking in tonight.”

Twilight looked at him knowingly “Spike, did you not finish your chores?”

Applejack took the opportunity to interject into the conversation “Aw, shucks. I could go for some grub. What say we all go finish hangin’ up these here posters and then go get somethin’ to eat?”

The proposal was agreeable to all.

“Look, all I’m saying is, why do aliens always have to look like ponies?”

“I’m sorry, I still don’t follow.” Now Applejack was totally lost.

The four of them were enjoying the fading evening on the patio of one of the restaurants off the town green. The sun, now a deep blood red, was just beginning to sink behind the low green-clad mountains far to the west, deep within the Everfree Forest. Everything had taken on the golden glow of an autumn twilight as long shadows slowly crept along. Most of Ponyville’s businesses were clustered around the town green which formed a grassy ring around the massive town hall or along one of the couple spoke-like major thoroughfares extending out.

They had quickly finished with hanging the advertisements around the town and had settled on this small bistro more on Applejack’s suggestion that she owed it to the owner. They had ordered from a tall, slender waiter with a slicked-back mane and had dined leisurely. Spike, of course, tried to order gemstones for his meal. He knew perfectly well no restaurant in town

served minerals as food, but he liked to rub it in.

Their conversation had drifted back to Twilight's apparent dislike of Spike's comic book (though she maintained she did not dislike it, per se, just found the inconsistencies jarring). This had led to a discussion of fantasy and fictional literature in general, mostly with Twilight trying to explain what put her off about the genera. "It's not that I don't like them," she explained, "I've read several. I thoroughly enjoy many. I just think it is wise to keep one's hooves on the ground and remember what is real and what's make-believe."

Now, she was trying to explain her problems with space aliens.

She sighed "I mean, look at almost every depiction of a space alien out there. Books, plays, pictures, comics. In almost each and every one of them, the aliens look like ponies. Maybe with bumpy foreheads or strange patterns, but still ponies."

"Ok..." Applejack nodded.

"Now, why would a creature from another planet necessarily look anything like a pony? They would live in different conditions—different gravity, different plants, if there are plants on their planet at all, different atmosphere. There is no reason they should look just like we do." Twilight continued.

"Well, what would you prefer they look like, then?" Rainbow Dash was getting bored with the discussion. She thought she had known better than to get Twilight rolling on anything regarding literature or science. Or magic. Or history. Or a half-dozen other topics. She liked Twilight, but sometimes that pony just took things so literally.

Twilight shrugged "I dunnoh. Something imaginative. A leathery blob with a beak for a mouth and tentacles instead of limbs. Something with a long neck and big head with a heart that you can see glowing in its chest. If aliens exist, they probably would look like nothing we could imagine."

"Oh! How about something like a giant bear, but it walks straight up on two legs and has really long hair!" The exercise in creativity was perking Rainbow up.

Twilight laughed "Yeah, you've got it. Something more creative than a bald pony with little beady eyes."

"What about, like, a giant insect thing with a long head and a big, toothy mouth? And inside that is *another* toothy mouth?" added Spike.

"Eww. Sounds awful" Applejack made a face.

"Sounds *awesome!*" countered Rainbow.

“I’m not sure how that would work, but you see what I mean? It doesn’t have to look anything like a pony,” said Twilight with an air of finality.

The sky darkened to a deep indigo as the sun dipped below the horizon. Twinkling stars began to peak out like tiny, sparkling grains of sand on a velvet cloth. The four friends sat sharing in the silence of the evening.

It was Applejack who finally broke the silence.

“Do y’all think they’re out there? The aliens, I mean?”

They were all silent for a moment more.

“Maybe,” Twilight said finally. “We know there are other planets and moons in the solar system. And if each star is another sun in itself, then it stands to reason they might have planets of their own.”

“The better question is if they’ve ever visited us” Rainbow Dash grinned.

Applejack swallowed nervously, Spike’s toothy monster in her mind’s eye, “Really? Y’all really think there might be aliens *here*?”

“Oh, yeah!” added Spike, “Haven’t you heard the stories? Flying saucers and alien abductions?”

“A-Ab-Abductions?”

Rainbow couldn’t let the opportunity pass “Oh, yeah. Abductions.” She crouched low and stalked around the table, “They say the aliens fly up in their spaceship all quiet-like. Then, you see a bright light... And they lift you up into their spaceship! Then they strap you down and hook you up to all sorts of weird machines...” Applejack’s eyes were wide. She was nearly shaking.

“Oh, now you’re just being silly!” Twilight interjected. “Don’t listen to them, Applejack. There is no evidence that any aliens have ever visited Equestria. Or that they even exist in the first place.”

“That’s just what *they* want you to think!” Spike piped in.

“They?” asked Twilight.

“You know, Them. The aliens.”

Twilight chuckled shook her head, “Oh, Spike.”

Night was coming fast. They all took their leave of each other and went their separate ways. Twilight would stay up a little later, she decided. She still wanted to finish studying that book.

As Applejack made her way back to her family’s apple orchard on the outskirts of town, she couldn’t help but glance around nervously. She didn’t want to admit it, but Spike and Rainbow had gotten to her. Horrible monsters dropping out of the skies and snatching ponies and hooking them up to machines that did who-knows-what? The very idea gave her the willies. Or maybe it was the idea of being stolen away from her home and family she found disagreeable. And now, out here in the gathering darkness, every rustle in the bushes, every creak of a branch, and every shadow of a passing cloud became a lurking terror.

“Ah, horse-apples,” she whispered to herself. “There’s nothin’ out there, Applejack. You’re just bein’ a silly-filly.” She steeled herself and held her head high. She tried to tell herself time and again there was nothing to be frightened of. Still, she had never been so relieved to spy the soft glow from the barn windows.

If she had happened to look up as she trotted through the gate to Sweet Apple Acres, she might have noticed a small flash of light just within the darkened disc of the waxing autumn moon, as if a small star had suddenly burst to life and then just as quickly disappeared. Instead, the curious event went almost completely unnoticed to the residents of the small town.

[<Previous](#) ----- Ch. 2 ----- [Next>](#)

[1](#) | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#) | [5](#) | [6](#) | [7](#) | [8](#) | [9](#) | [10](#) | [11](#) | [12](#) | [13](#) | [14](#) | [15](#) | [16](#) | [17](#)
| [Glossary & Author’s Notes](#) |