

Empty Skies

Chapter 2: Through the Sky

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When Twilight Sparkle came to, the first thing she noticed was pain. She felt as though an enormous hoof had kicked her into the air, after which she had landed on the first set of a dozen flights of stairs and had forcibly tumbled head-over-hooves all the way down. Her muscles ached, her joints creaked, her head throbbed. Twice she tried to open her eyes before her eyelids finally uncovered the white orbs beneath.

Ponyville was gone. In its place was an enormous crater, a perfectly circular dish carved into the earth, its surface impossibly glassy and smooth, reflecting a flawless image of the monstrosity hovering above it as stars continued to fall overhead.

The memories came rushing back. The Celebration, the meteor shower, the noise, the light. Twilight Sparkle remembered being blasted off her hooves and thrown into the air while her other senses were overwhelmed by the sheer force of sensation: the tremendous roar and colossal whiteness of devastation emanating from the thing that had descended from the heavens.

The thing was still there, rotating peacefully above where once had been a thriving town, as though blaspheming with its tranquility against the idyllic lifestyle it had just ended, an affront to the very devastation it had wrought.

Slowly Twilight Sparkle struggled to stand. Her mind was unable to comprehend what had just happened, incapable of taking it all in. In an effort to find something that she could understand she turned her gaze and scanned the surrounding field.

She was alone, as far as she could tell. Dust and smoke were still settling, and her vision was blurry so she couldn't see for sure, but there were no other ponies nearby. The once-pristine field was strewn with boulders and rocks and seemed to be obscured in a dark fog. Twilight couldn't find the hill that had been prepared for the Summer Sun Celebration; she had no idea where she exactly she was.

Twilight put one hoof in front of the other and slowly stumbled forward. "Spike? Applejack?" she called weakly. "Pinkie Pie? Rarity? Rainbow Da- Applejack!"

A familiar orange blur was lying on the ground through the dust and mist. Energy surged into Twilight's legs, letting her rush forward to her friend's side. "Applejack! Applejack!" Yes, it was the orange cowpony, her trademark hat lying upside-down a dozen feet away. Twilight bent down and nudged the mare with her muzzle.

Applejack turned and groaned, and Twilight felt as though a huge weight had been lifted from her shoulders. Applejack's eyes fluttered open into a narrow squint. "Twi? Is that you?"

"Yes! Oh Applejack, I'm so glad you're ok!" Twilight answered as she helped her friend up onto her hooves.

Applejack rubbed her forehead with one hoof. "Ugh, mah achin' head." The thing from the sky caught her attention and her expression turned from confusion to horror. "Twilight? Wha... what is that thing? What just happened? Wh- where is everypony?"

"I don't know!" Twilight cried. "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know! That thing- you remember, don't you? It came from the sky, and the noise and the light and- and Ponyville's gone, Applejack!"

Applejack stared at her friend's distressed face. "Gone? Whaddya mean it's-" Her gaze fell upon the mirror-like crater. "Oh Celestia."

Twilight stared at her hooves. "I... I... we need to look for other ponies," she said. "We can't- there's no way it's just the two of us."

Applejack nodded slowly, unable to take her eyes off of what used to be her home. Then Twilight's words registered, and she asked the unicorn in a panic, "Have ya seen Applebloom? Or Big Macintosh? Granny Smith?"

Twilight shook her head. "No, I haven't. You're the only pony I've found." She scanned the surroundings. "Can you see anypony?"

"I-" Applejack turned around and peered through the haze. "Can't see nothin' in this," she muttered, but then spotted her hat and trotted over to pick it up. As she did so a quiet moan made her ears prick up. "Twi! There's somepony over there!"

The two rushed over to where Applejack had heard the moan and came to a lightly-colored mare with one leg trapped underneath a boulder. "Bon Bon!" Twilight cried. "Are you ok?"

Bon Bon's face was twisted in pain; all her willpower seemed to be concentrated into not screaming. The answer to Twilight's question was self-evident. Applejack bucked at the boulder, but the rock merely rolled in place, causing Bon Bon to cry out. Twilight channeled magic into

her horn. "Hang in there, Bon Bon!" Magical power gathered around the rock like a sheathe, lifting the rock into the air and tossing it aside.

"Oh mah," Applejack quietly said, raising a hoof to her mouth upon seeing Bon Bon's mangled leg. The limb, although somehow having avoided being crushed completely under the rock, was in no condition to be moved at all.

Twilight stared at the mutilated limb, despair creeping in her heart, but then summoned forth a surge of determination to wipe it out. After Rainbow Dash had broken a wing in the pet competition Twilight had took it upon herself to learn healing magic. She had yet to put theory into practice, for there weren't that many injuries in Ponyville that couldn't be cured with a simple trip to the nurse's station. Here was her first chance. She gulped.

Again channeling power into her horn, she reached out with her senses and probed the damaged leg. The bone was severely fractured and partially crushed, the tendons were completely torn, and the muscle had been compressed beyond its ability to spring back to its original shape. As she searched deeper, into the cellular level, she found that bruising was already beginning to take place. More worrying was that many blood vessels had completely collapsed, and if nothing was done soon the tissues on the end of the leg would soon die from lack of oxygen.

So Twilight began weaving the healing spell. It first took the form of a coat of magical energy that enveloped the damaged leg. The energy slowly diffused through the skin, bringing damaged cells back to life and weaving them back together into a healthy covering. As the magic descended further, ethereal strings reached into the depths of the leg, wrapping their way around the broken bones and battered muscles, forming a tapestry-like web that wove together parts separated by injury. Twilight pulled on the master strings of this web, and the entire tapestry compressed, like pulling the two ends of a complicated knot, bringing the damaged tissues together. It was difficult; Twilight had to guide each string to its proper location and stop the tangles that kept trying to form. It was this process that led Bon Bon to scream, her cry resonating freely in the empty air. But the pain was unavoidable. When Twilight was done, the leg, at least superficially, looked normal again. But to fix the deeper damage required a combination of a time and life manipulation magic, a mixture Twilight had never attempted in such a complex form. Taking deep breaths, she fed magic into the cells of Bon Bon's leg, supercharging them with energy and setting them to the work of healing the damage. By itself this application of magic would have taken far too long to get any results, so Twilight also reached out and touched the strings of time that connected each cell to the vast river of past, present, and future, and drew them towards their destiny.

And then it was done. Twilight panted and sank down on her knees, exhausted. Bon Bon, tears in her eyes, could only gaze upon her newly-healed leg with awe. Then she remembered politeness. "Oh, thank you!" she cried, jumping up onto all four hooves and grasping Twilight's hoof with her forelegs. "Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank

you!”

Twilight gave a tired smile. “It was nothing, really.” She sucked in air, filling her lungs to the fullest, then got back up onto her hooves.

“No, really, I can’t thank you enough for-” A massive burst of light on the horizon interrupted Bon Bon’s overjoyed gratitude, and for the first time, the thought entered Twilight’s mind that the destruction of Ponyville had not been a singular event.

She turned around and looked back towards Ponyville, but this time her gaze looked beyond the glassy crater, out towards the distant mountains past where the town had used to be. She couldn’t recognize the horizon. And then she realized why. Canterlot wasn’t just gone; the entire mountain range it was built on had been wiped from existence. The purple-blue mountains that had been a permanent backdrop to their daily lives in Ponyville had been obliterated by swarms of the gigantic orange things that had come from the sky.

“Uh, Twilight?” Applejack asked. “That was some mighty fine magic you did there, but I think we need to skedaddle.”

Twilight glanced at Applejack and followed her frightened gaze to the orange thing that had destroyed Ponyville. And she realized why her friend was scared. The thing, which had been peacefully rotating above the center of the crater it had created, was no longer stationary. Ever so slowly it was now moving across the sky, and it was moving straight towards... *them!*

“Run!” she shouted, and turned around. But where to? What place could possibly be safe from these monsters? As her eyes scanned the distance, she spotted the one place where they might be able to hide. “To the Everfree Forest!” she cried, and broke out at a full gallop.

Another star streaked through the sky, but unlike the others it did not stop to hover in the air. This one, decidedly smaller than the light that had brought the great destroyer, smashed straight into the ground next to the Ponyville crater, sending tremors through the ground and kicking up huge clouds of dust. Twilight cast a furtive glance over her shoulder at the thing and caught a glimpse of a dark shadow rising from within the dust. A circle of light thudded on and rotated towards them, like a dread eye searching for prey.

Twilight could stand no more. She turned her gaze back towards the forest and concentrated all her energy in running. But all that time spent shut in the library had consequences for her body, and for the first time Twilight realized just how nonathletic she actually was as Applejack and Bon Bon raced ahead.

She was but a few seconds away from reaching the forest when another star fell from the sky and crashed into the earth not a dozen feet away from Twilight, blasting her off her hooves. Her world was suddenly filled with dust; she couldn’t see a thing. As she coughed and

wheezed, she could hear Applejack's panicked screams from beyond the trees: "TWILIGHT! TWILIGHT!"

"I'm ok!" Twilight called back, unsure if her voice had reached her friend. Then a great rumbling behind her made her realize that her response may have been premature. She slowly turned her head to see that which had landed beside her, then wished she hadn't.

The clouds of dust still obscured it, but she could make out a surface that was not a surface; it was like the thing that had destroyed Ponyville, made of incomprehensible geometries that receded into infinity, but blue, and glossy, and it was a single, flowing shape, not blocky and rectangular like the orange destroyer. The silhouette rose into the air, humming menacingly as it did. A white circle of light thudded on, like a roving, lidless eye. The thing rotated through the air, and the eye fell upon her. Twilight Sparkle closed her eyes, awaiting the end.

It never came. The humming grew louder, and then faded away. Twilight opened her eyes and stared as the thing turned around and hovered away towards Ponyville. She had just enough time to think that it hadn't noticed her when a massive tentacle snuck around her waist and pulled her into the sky.

"TWILIGHT!" Applejack screamed, but she could do nothing. The giant tentacle, as thick as a pony's body, flung Twilight through the air as though she were but a doll. It was *fast*, moving almost quicker than the eye could see, nothing but a bluish-black blur as it had whipped through the air to kidnap its helpless target.

Twilight flailed and fought but she could not dislodge the tentacle wrapped around her body an inch. Her world spun, the ground and sky constantly switching places, never staying still for so much as an instant as she was whisked through the air. The contents of her stomach rose in her throat and spewed out into the sky. The tendril was drawing back towards its origin on the underside of the flying monster. But beneath the panicking mare's exterior was a core of calm intellect, undisturbed by these wild happenings. *What do I need to do to get out of this?*

The answer, of course, was magic. Twilight closed her eyes. Magic rose into her horn and emerged into the air, but this time it spread downwards, across her own body. She built up power and concentrated it at a single point, the tip of a mighty arrow that she let loose at the fabric of space-time, punching a hole clean through to another place.

The monster's eye spun around, gazing at its empty tendril. It did not see the tiny flash of purple light at the edge of the forest.

"Twilight!" Applejack called her friend's name yet again, but this time the name carried a rush of relief. She reared up onto her hind legs and kicked the air. "Nice thinkin'!"

Twilight let out the breath she had been holding. She cast a quick glance behind her. "Thanks, but we need to move," she said, and rushed into the darkness of the Everfree.

In the depths of the Everfree forest, Fluttershy huddled in a bush with two small fillies. Her wings were slightly charred, her coat was singed and matted, she ached all over and above all else, she was more scared than she had ever been in her life. But as she felt Applebloom and Sweetie Belle shivering against her body, she knew that she had to find her courage.

"Fluttershy... are we going to be ok?" This was at least the twelfth time Sweetie Belle had asked this question.

"We'll be fine," Fluttershy murmured softly, her voice lacking the conviction necessary to convince even herself.

Fluttershy had no idea what was going on. The two fillies had woken her up not too far from the Everfree Forest. How she had got there she did not know; she understood even less the gigantic orange thing that had appeared in the sky, or why it had reduced Ponyville into a glassy crater. But when the blue things started falling from the sky, she had taken the fillies into the Everfree Forest. The forest was dangerous, certainly, but it could not possibly be worse than what was out there.

Where had all the other ponies gone? Of all of Fluttershy's concerns, her missing friends were her greatest. Whatever had happened had separated her from her friends, and that was what scared her the most. With them Fluttershy would have felt safe despite the strange lights and the terrifying monsters, for as long as they were together there was nothing that could beat them. Or so she told herself; deep down inside Fluttershy was no longer certain about anything.

"M- maybe we can f- find Zecora," Applebloom suggested after a long silence, her voice small and shaky.

Fluttershy blinked. Of course! They were in the Everfree, after all. Maybe Zecora would know what was going on. And even if she didn't, at the very least having another friendly face around would make her feel much safer. "Alright," she whispered. Fluttershy looked down at the terrified little fillies and forced a smile onto her face. It didn't matter how scared she was, or how worried about her friends and her animals she was; comforting these two children had to be her number one priority. "Applebloom, why don't you lead the way?"

"M- me?"

"That's right," Fluttershy said soothingly. "You've been to Zecora's hut much more often than I have, haven't you? You know the way better than Sweetie Belle or I do."

Slowly, Applebloom stood up. "Al- alright." She gulped and looked at Sweetie Belle, who nodded her head encouragingly. An expression of determination rose on her face. "Alright!" she declared firmly, and trudged out deeper into the Everfree.

Fluttershy was reminded of the time that the Cutie Mark Crusaders had marched into the Everfree to catch her lost chicken. The forest was exactly the same as it had been back then: dark, scary, teeming with dangerous monsters. But there was still a sense of reassuring familiarity about it against the otherworldly things that had fallen from the sky and so, despite the fact that she knew that they weren't safe, Fluttershy was beginning to feel a sense of optimism. She didn't know what the future had in store, but if they could find Zecora, then they might be able to find her friends. And if they could find her friends...

"Careful here," Applebloom called ahead. "I tripped on this 'ere ledge and broke a tooth, once." She adeptly hopped down the ledge in question and looked back. Sweetie Belle followed suit, but Fluttershy was busy gazing at the treetops.

The topmost branches of the trees were broken, creating a distinct semicircular outline in the canopy, as though a giant blade had sheared through it. Something had passed through here, that much was certain. A dark dread was rising in Fluttershy's chest.

"Fluttershy?" Applebloom asked. "Somethin' the matter?"

The filly's voice brought Fluttershy back down to earth. "Um, no, nothing's wrong," she replied, and quickly descended the ledge. Applebloom trotted on forwards.

"It should be right past these 'ere bushes," Applebloom said, and brushed the foliage aside with a hoof, revealing a scene of devastation.

It looked like a huge storm had just passed through. Tree branches littered the ground in every direction and one tree had completely fallen over. Zecora's hut was splintered and broken, looking ready to collapse with the slightest tap, and in the roof was a huge, gaping hole that opened up to the stars.

"Zecora?" Applebloom cried. "Zecora!" she rushed towards the hut.

"Applebloom, wait!" Fluttershy called, flying after the yellow filly.

"Zecora! Zecora!" The hut's door fell down immediately at Applebloom's touch, and she rushed into the building. The interior looked like a tornado had been spawned in the center; books were strewn haphazardly across the room, containers were smashed and had spilled their contents all over the floor, cauldrons had fallen, flipped, and fractured everywhere. And nowhere was the owner of it all to be found. "Zecora!"

The other two ponies caught up to Applebloom. Fluttershy let out a gasp at the destruction. *No, it's not possible!* Seeing the destruction was like a dream, somehow even less real than the already dream-like that had happened that night. As she looked around the devastated room, she half-expected to hear the zebra's rhyming voice call out from behind a door, asking them what they had done to her home.

"She's gone!" Applebloom wailed. "They took her! The- they- they-"

"No!" Fluttershy cried. "We don't- there's no- Zecora's too smart for that!" she blurted out. "She must have escaped! No, she was never here in the first place! She's out there, in the forest, safe and sound, right now!" Fluttershy descended upon Applebloom, scooping her up in her hooves and giving the filly a tight hug.

"Y- ya really think so?" Applebloom asked, her voice a soft squeal, eyes blinking back tears.

"I know so," Fluttershy comforted, rocking the filly back and forth.

Applebloom gulped. "I- I'm s- sorry, Fluttershy."

"It's ok." Fluttershy put her back down, and glanced over to Sweetie Belle. The unicorn filly looked up at her desperately. Fluttershy flew back over to her and gave her a hug as well.

An explosion boomed in the sky, interrupting the tender moment. As Fluttershy peered up through the hole in Zecora's roof, she saw a familiar spray of colors across the heavens.

It was a Sonic Rainboom.

"Hang in there, pipsqueak!" Rainbow Dash shouted as she cut through the air. Ahead, Scootaloo's panicked screams slowly grew closer as Rainbow Dash closed in. As she blasted through a large, dark cloud, she caught a glimpse of the filly struggling uselessly against the invisible grip of a small disc-shaped orange flier.

She couldn't quite remember how they had gotten here. Her first memory after having her world consumed by unending white light was waking up on top of a hill, feeling like she had flown face-first into a cliff. Her first thought had been to fly around and try to find her friends, but it wasn't long before those giant blue things started falling from the sky. Rainbow Dash had taken temporary refuge on a cloud and had seen that the blue things were snatching up ponies on the ground. But the skies weren't safe either. Swarms of pony-sized, orange flying things had come out of nowhere and were snatching up any ponies that escaped the blue things.

One of those things had taken Scootaloo. Rainbow Dash wasn't overly fond of the filly; the incessant worshipping was nice and all, but it became annoying after a while. Still, she wasn't about to let the kid get taken away by some weird flying contraption.

As Rainbow Dash blasted through a large, dark cloud, she caught a glimpse of the disc carrying Scootaloo before it rounded another cloud. The disc was like a baby version of the giant orange things, with a big fat hexagonal disc comprising most of its size, ringed by stubby little arms. Its surface shimmered and glowed in an unearthly manner as it dragged its captive behind it with a magical aura. Rainbow Dash neither knew nor cared about what these things were or where they had come from; her only concern was saving Scootaloo.

Two white beams lanced out from behind Rainbow Dash, who turned her head to glance back at their sources. "Drat!" she said, realizing that two of the orange discs were now chasing *her*. She dodged and weaved through their attacks, not wanting to find out what would happen if one of those beams struck her. But as she kept an eye on the disc kidnapping Scootaloo below, she realized that the other two discs were driving her away from the orange filly.

"Oh no you don't," she muttered under her breath. She needed to lose these two if she wanted to get to Scootaloo. Furiously she beat her wings against the air, initiating a series of twists and turns through the clouds that would have impressed even a Wonderbolt. But the two discs doggedly trailed behind her the entire way, the near misses of their beams illuminating the clouds like flashes of lightning in a storm. "Alright, so I guess it won't be *that* easy." The discs were indeed worthy foes, and it was a struggle to evade their attacks as their aim steadily got better and better and the beams grazed closer and closer. Desperately she searched the ground, looking for something to change up the game.

There! By some miracle of fate or chance Rainbow Dash had ended up flying right over Ghastly Gorge. Feeling a confident smile sneaking onto her face, she drew her wings close to her body and dove into the entrance of the canyon, leaving a rainbow trail through the sky as she streaked through the air.

First up, the windy cave. Rainbow Dash blasted straight through effortlessly using the speed from her dive. The discs were also unperturbed by the cave, but Rainbow Dash hadn't expected any less of them. Next, the bramble bushes. Deftly she weaved through the thorny branches, occasionally swinging off one with a hoof to smoothly redirect momentum before leaving the thicket entirely. The discs didn't bother maneuvering at all, opting to simply blast through the bushes with whatever magic they were using as weapons. After that came the eel nests; Dash zig-zagged between the holes in the cliff face with an efficiency that could only be granted by experience, taking care not to set any of the eels off. When it was the discs' turn they tried to simply charge through, only to be met with giant clamping jaws. "Hah!" Rainbow Dash laughed. Her mirth was short-lived, however; two eel heads suddenly exploded, showering the gorge with burnt flesh. Dash winced. At least now she knew what those beams of theirs would

do to her if she wasn't careful.

She was almost through the canyon, and the gorge had little else to threaten them with. But Rainbow Dash had one last trick up her sleeve. With a mischievous grin, she flew right into the face of the cliff at maximum velocity, all four hooves compressing under the impact like springs as she smashed into it. There was a deep rumbling from above, and Dash saw to her satisfaction that giant rocks were now raining down from the sky.

She blasted back off the face of the cliff, out of the avalanche and into the heavens. The discs, unable to arrest their momentum, flew right into the rock-slide and were crushed underneath the giant boulders. "Oh yeah, who's awesome?" Rainbow Dash congratulated herself as she streaked up. The disc holding the struggling Scootaloo was hovering high in the sky right above her. Dash grinned, pouring on speed like no other pony could, an unstoppable force that would smash its target to smithereens.

And then a dozen more discs rose from the clouds right into the middle of her path.

"Oh, BUCK!" Dash cursed as she swerved to the right, g-forces making blood rush to her head. As she looked around at her predicament, she suddenly realized why Scootaloo had been so obviously located: it was a trap, and now Rainbow Dash was surrounded.

A disc was streaking at her from the right. A disc was streaking at her from the left. Dash saw both began to glow, readying that telekinetic magic they used to capture pegasi. It was a silly, arrogant thought, but in that instant Rainbow Dash suddenly felt proud—she had proven herself too awesome, too worthy, for the discs to simply kill! More discs came from behind and in front, surrounding her on all sides.

Fortunately, space was three-dimensional. She went up. The discs, unsurprised by such an obvious maneuver, snapped into almost right-angle turns and followed suit. *Ok*, she thought, streaking through the sky. *They probably aren't going to fall for the gorge trick again, and I can't shake them off by turning really hard.* Dash gritted her teeth. *Then let's see how fast they can go!*

She poured on speed, her wings burning through as much energy as she could deliver. The wind rushed at her face, causing her cheeks to flap, and her eyes streamed tears from the intense gusts. As Rainbow Dash flew faster and faster, her hooves seemed to meet a physical barrier, resisting her efforts to increase speed. A white cone of compressed air formed around her. Dash clenched her jaw as hard as she could.

All at once the resistance gave way, and the cone exploded into a circular rainbow, booming across the night sky, illuminating the darkness with an ethereal burst of beauty. Dash laughed, and glanced back at the discs; they had fallen far behind, unable to keep up with this bullet of a mare.

She banked left, making a long loop around without losing any velocity, and streaked towards the disc holding Scootaloo. "C'mere, you!" she shouted. But the disc would not be defeated so easily; adeptly it dodged to the side, letting Rainbow Dash blast past. As she did so Dash felt the disc's telekinetic pull on her body, shifting her off course slightly as she swung around the thing. It was a strange feeling, like the disc had suddenly turned into the ground and Rainbow Dash had momentarily started falling towards it. But the experience was temporary, and Dash streaked off into the sky, trying to think of a way to hit the annoying thing.

Maybe a mile off, another one of the gigantic orange fliers had arrived, hovering menacingly over a small town. Dash realized that she must have flown pretty far from Ponyville in her efforts to save Scootaloo. But as she watched the gargantuan star-shaped monster charge up its mighty weapon, an idea grew in her mind.

It was a crazy, deranged, utterly insane idea, something that made all of the magnificent tricks she had ever thought of to impress the Wonderbolts look like child's play. If she had had the chance to tell any of her friends about it beforehand, they'd call her crazier than Pinkie Pie. No other pony in their right mind would have dared to attempt it.

But she was Rainbow Dash, and she didn't care about any of that.

Dash flared her wings, letting air resistance slow her back down to subsonic speeds before diving down into the town below the orange monster. Behind her, the discs, suddenly realizing their target was now moving at a catchable velocity again, streaked after her. But Rainbow Dash had a pretty good head start, and she weaved through the air over the town, carefully watching the giant glowing eye of the city-destroyer above her as it sent down spiraling rays of light. If she mistimed this by even a second there wouldn't even be a body to bury.

She only had the now-distant memories of the destruction of Ponyville to work with, but Rainbow Dash had a pretty good memory and an even better internal clock. When she felt the time was right, she turned around and once again poured on speed, rushing straight at the ghostly column of light at the center of the spirals that descended from the orange monster.

The discs stopped at the edge of the town. For several seconds they dawdled there, as though uncertain of what to do about this apparently-suicidal pegasus. Then they retreated back towards the disc carrying Scootaloo, arranging themselves into a spherical formation around it.

Rainbow Dash burned through the air. Light permeated every point of her world. She felt the familiar resistance build up against her body as she flew faster and faster, but this time there was no screaming of the wind in her ears. All was silent, an unearthly force having sucked the sound from the sky, a perfect repeat of what had happened in Ponyville. White lightning surged through the center of the ethereal column.

There was a tremendous roar. Light consumed reality. A wave of heat and radiation burned at Rainbow Dash's back. A gargantuan shock wave raced out from the epicenter of the explosion, laying waste to anything that withstood the heat and light.

And then there was a second explosion. A circular rainbow burst into existence behind Rainbow Dash. The shock wave it created propagated through the air and met the shock wave of the city-killer. The two crashed into each other, momentarily mingled, then the latter overpowered the other.

But that was exactly what Rainbow Dash wanted. Even though her grasp of physics and magic was rudimentary at best, she knew, somehow, instinctively, that this would work. It was just a matter of timing, speed, and power. The comparatively tiny explosion of her Sonic Rainboom had generated a disturbance within the greater wall of compressed air, creating a soft, diffuse bubble in which it would be possible for a pegasus to survive.

The shock wave grew closer and closer. Rainbow Dash gritted her teeth. Now was the moment of truth. She angled her body and her wings in the way she thought best, and prayed.

The wave smashed into her like a freight train, knocking the wind from her lungs and causing a spray of black dots to appear in her vision. Rainbow Dash felt like she was being crushed underneath a giant hoof, and for a moment, she was sure she was going to die. But the pressure passed, and Dash felt an enormous amount of energy pushing her entire body outwards at an incredible speed. She smiled, and let her wings angle themselves instinctively to catch the tremendous energy, riding a wave more powerful than anything else she had ever before seen.

"YAAAAAAAAHOOOOOOO!" How fast was she going now? Dash had no idea, but her internal speedometer told her it was far, far faster than she had ever flown before; possibly faster than *any* pony had ever flown before. The air against her body was heating up from the sheer speed of the pegasus. Surfing on a tide of pure destruction, Rainbow Dash felt an exhilaration surpassing anything she had previously experienced. The power of the blast propelled her faster than she could ever have hoped to fly before. This wasn't just a once-in-a-lifetime event. This wasn't even a once-in-a-century event. Quite possibly, Rainbow Dash was the first, and would be the last, pony to surf on an explosion, ever.

As the light began to fade from behind her and the shock wave dissipated, Rainbow Dash caught the flying discs in her eye. At first they were floating in the air, unmoving, perhaps too dazzled by the overwhelming light or too astounded by the amazing sight of the surfing pegasus to react. But as Rainbow Dash approached they sprung into action, the escorting discs spreading out into a wide net that would catch their prey. Dash grinned—everything was going according to plan, and though the shock wave was now gone she was still riding on the surge of adrenaline it had brought forth in her—and tipped her wings as to shoot up at the topmost disc. Maybe the thing was surprised at her action; if so, it didn't show it. The glow of its central eye

grew brighter as it prepared to summon as much magical power it possibly could.

Dash blasted through the air above the disc and felt an intense pull towards it. She did not understand the physics of gravity, but if she had she would have recognized the sensation to have been just that, only orders of magnitude more powerful than the planet could ever generate naturally. The incredible force swung her around the disc in a tight arc, the intense G-forces threatening to snap her bones and cause her to black out. But the disc was not strong enough to maintain its hold; Dash blew past it and rocketed straight down.

It was here, in this act, where the true brilliance of Rainbow Dash's plan lay. She knew that, no matter how fast she flew, she could never hope to strike a target as agile and aware as one of the discs. The only way she could possibly hit it was with surprise. And so she had surprised it. Riding a shock wave that enabled her to reach incredible speeds far too fast for a single disc to arrest her motion, she had used that very attempt to stop her to make an impossibly tight turn that her target could never have hoped to anticipate.

The disc seemed to register the incoming pegasus projectile, and began to swerve to avoid it. But it was far too late. It only took a tiny course correction for Rainbow Dash to smash her hooves into the thing dead-on, sending all three of them—two ponies and one extraterrestrial invader—screaming towards the ground.

Equestria came up to meet Rainbow Dash, and the two met in an embrace that sent a technicolor mushroom cloud rising high into the sky.

Author's Note: This chapter was already written prior to being submitted to the EQD, so Rainbow Dash's scene is in no way inspired by the numerous "Rainbow Dash = Will Smith" comments on EQD.

But I guess she is this story's Will Smith, because that's just how Rainbow Dash is. There won't be any "flying into the alien mothership to blow it up" though.

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