

## ***The Thessalonica Legacy***

### **Chapter 8: Neurolinguistic Psychotransmutation**

The two aliens stood up. Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy looked up at them in amazement. They were tall and thin with a long torso perched precariously on a pair of equally long legs. Fluttershy realized she barely even came up to the waist of the one closest to her, the one she had allowed to touch her. It towered over her, peering down with narrow blue eyes.

Now that her initial fear had passed, she could see that her and Rainbow's first impressions of the creatures had been quite wrong. They didn't sprawl on the ground, but stood tall. She wondered how they could balance like that with their bodies so far from the ground. Spike stood much the same way, but he was small and his legs short. The only creatures she had seen which even remotely resembled their gait were the diamond dogs, but even they walked more hunched over. Their forelimbs dangled at their sides, terminating in broad hands with five slender fingers. She noted gratefully that the fingers did not end in claws. A small, round head balanced on their broad shoulders.

What they had taken for green and tan pelts she could see were actually clothes. They were made of multiple pieces and seemed to be covered with straps and pockets and pouches. The clothes covered their entire bodies except their heads and hands. The areas not covered by the fabric appeared to be completely hairless, except the tops of their heads. The skin of the one closest to her was a deep, dark brown, almost black, while the other's was a lighter color more akin to the ruddy shade of a chestnut. They wore broad-brimmed floppy hats, but when one swept theirs off, she could see they had manes. They wore them short, but the chestnut one even had its tied back.

They weren't so bad, she decided. They did have pleasant enough faces, in their own way. Their eyes were expressive and their teeth were not sharp and pointy. The odd protruding noses and round, floppy ears lent them a rather comical appearance, even. They looked a little bit like some sort of giant monkey, and those were generally friendly.

She tried talking to them again. She asked their names and where they were from, but they just stared at her or talked to each other in their odd language. The darker one knelt down and spoke directly to her. It made its noises slowly and deliberately while gesturing with an arm. Fluttershy realized it was trying to talk back to her. It was obviously trying to indicate who or what it was and ask the same of her.

She turned to Rainbow Dash, "Do you have any idea what it's saying?" she asked

Rainbow Dash shook her head. As she did, Fluttershy noticed the kneeling alien had said something to its companion, who responded by shaking its head as well.

"Hmm, hang on," she turned back to the creature. She smiled, and was pleased to see the creature smile back. She focused on its eyes, seeing the corners tug. She furrowed her brow and snorted, stamping a foot. The creature coked its head and raised an eyebrow. Confusion?

Amusement? She ran through several other emotions, watching the face of the creature the whole time. After a while, it seemed to grasp her intent and started playing along.

“What are you doing?” Rainbow interrupted. Fluttershy glanced quickly at the chestnut alien, and was pleased to see the same look of confusion on its face as on her friend’s.

“Oh, well. Their facial expressions are the same as ours! You can read their intents and feelings just like a pony or other animal.”

“No way!” Rainbow turned to the aliens and made a face. The aliens snorted and stifled a laugh “Oh, awesome! Can we talk to them now?”

Fluttershy looked worried, “I, uh. I can try.” She faced the alien and pointed with her hoof to the holly bush. “Bush!” she enunciated, “Bush!” The dark alien looked confused, but then the chestnut one stepped forward, pointed at the bush, and made one of its grunting noises.

Fluttershy looked around for another object. She pointed her hoof to an elm tree not too distant. “Tree!” The alien pointed to the tree and made another, different, but still indecipherable sound. Encouraged, Fluttershy nipped off some blades of grass, then letting them fall from her lips and expressed the word. The dark alien now reached down and plucked some blades with its fingers, grunting out its word for the same.

“Aw, this is gonna take *forever*.” Rainbow Dash sulked. She sat down hard on her haunches and let her wings droop.

“You could start writing down the sounds they make for different words. I think that’s what that one is doing.” Fluttershy nodded towards the darker alien. It has extracted what looked very much to be a pad and pencil, though there didn’t seem to be any paper, and appeared to be writing. The action, seeing that pen pinched between the creature’s fingers, reminded her of Twilight’s rant about how many tools seemed to be made more for use with hands, not mouths. “Rainbow,” she said slowly, “Maybe we should go get Twilight?”

“Hey, yeah! Maybe she knows a translation spell or something!” Rainbow leapt into the air. That wasn’t the logic she had been pursuing, but Fluttershy had to admit her friend’s reasoning was sound. Rainbow suddenly looked very concerned, “But, we can’t leave them here, and there’s no way we could sneak them into town.”

Fluttershy bit her lip. She was timid by nature. Bravery did not come naturally. “Y-you go, Rainbow. I-I’ll s-stay here.”

“Are you sure about that, Fluttershy? I don’t want to leave you in danger. Maybe I should stay and you should go.”

Fluttershy shook her head, “I’ll be fine. I don’t think they’ll hurt me. Besides, you’re much faster than me.”

Rainbow Dash tried to protest, but Fluttershy's mind was made up. With a promise to return with Twilight as fast as she could, she shot off into the deep blue sky.

Ramirez watched the blue race off at an impossible speed. "Now where do you suppose she's going?"

"She?" Liz looked up from the notepaper on which she was recording the sounds the little yellow pegasus was making and annotating equivalent words.

Ramirez shrugged, "I dunnoh. They seem sort of... feminine to me."

"I can see that. Especially this one." Liz indicated the yellow creature with its large, blue-green eyes and long lashes. She turned to look at Ramirez, "Shouldn't we be radioing Command about this?"

"Not quite yet" he replied, "I want to figure out their motivations first. Maybe see if we can find the people."

"I keep telling you, sir. I think these *are* the people."

"Someone built those houses and that castle, Corporal, and I have trouble believing it was a bunch of alien horses."

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Rainbow Dash took the turn in through the library window a *little* too tight, and the landing a *little* too fast. She skidded into the bookshelves with a thud. Books tumbled off the shelves and buried her in an avalanche of paper. She poked her head up out of the pile to see an irate purple scaly face glaring back at her. Spike had just finished organizing the Library following Twilight's research escapades, and he was not thrilled with even part of it being undone so quickly. Behind the irate dragon, Twilight Sparkle and Pinkie Pie looked on in shock.

Normally, Rainbow would have coughed out some sort of apology or excuse, but this time, in her urgency, she elected to forgo her usual habit.

"Twilight!" she panted as she scrambled from the pile, "Come quick! We found..." she tried to catch her breath, "We found... Do you have a... Come on!"

"Dash! Calm down. What's going on? What is it?" Twilight placed a hoof on Rainbow's shoulder, trying to calm her.

"No time. Come on, before they leave!" Rainbow headed for the door.

"Before *who* leaves, Dashie?" Pinkie Pie chirped up.

“The aliens! Now come *on!*” Rainbow veritably shouted, she was starting to get frustrated. There was a moment of silence as the two ponies and the dragon stared at her. Twilight and Spike burst into riotous laughter, but Pinkie remained still and silent.

“Oh, really?” Twilight mocked, “Aliens, huh? Dash, did you really think I’d fall for that?”

“Ha ha! Yeah! You usually put more effort into your pranks, Rainbow. I mean, I know *Orion Nebula* is a great comic book and all, but you usually at least *try* to be original.”

Rainbow stamped her hoof, “It’s *not* a joke! I really found something, and I really need some sort of spell to translate what it’s saying.” She could feel the tears starting to well up.

“Well, *I* want to see.” Pinkie Pie stepped to Rainbow’s side, “I didn’t get to finish telling you about the footprint in Carrot Top’s flowerbed, Twilight. Maybe this will answer *my* mystery.”

Twilight rolled her eyes, “Ok, fine. We’ll go see your ‘alien’. You coming, Spike?”

“Nah, I’ll give this one a pass.” He eyed the newly created mess.

“Don’t forget a translation spell,” called Rainbow, already halfway out the door.

Twilight chuckled, “Oh, yeah. Can’t forget that.” She hadn’t yet dropped the mocking tone, “Spike, could you fetch me...”

“Way ahead of you, Twilight.” He stuffed a book in her saddlebag then lifted it over her back.

“Thank you, number one assistant.” And with that, Twilight trotted out of the library in pursuit of Rainbow and Pinkie. Already they were making best speed down the village street. She found herself having to run very hard to keep pace.

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“Blue one’s back. And looks like she brought a friend.” Ramirez normally would have felt threatened by an increase in number of strange animals, but he found himself unable to feel threatened by such creatures as these.

“Uh huh. Damn these things learn fast.” Liz didn’t even look up from the ground where she and the yellow pegasus, in their ongoing attempts at communication, had moved on from naming random objects to numbers. They had laid out piles of twigs, berries, and leaves and were taking turns demonstrating counting. Already, she had learned the ponies had a concept for zero.

Ramirez saw that following the cyan pegasus was the pink bushy-maned pony from the

previous night. The same one that appeared to be staring right at him in the bushes. “How... How smart do you think they are?” he asked, a little nervous.

Again, Liz didn’t look up, “I’m no expert on these things, but this one? If we could talk the same language, I wouldn’t be surprised if they were just as smart as us.”

Ramirez watched as the pegasus and the pink pony crested the hill, followed a short while later by the lavender unicorn which had been the first of these creatures he had seen. It was sweating and breathing heavily from a hard run. It wasn’t paying attention to anything but its own physical discomfort as it reached the top of the hill. When it looked up and saw the two humans, its jaw dropped.

The blue one fluttered over to the awestruck unicorn and began talking. From the look on its face, the pegasus appeared smug. Ramirez guessed the unicorn either hadn’t been adequately briefed prior to arrival, or had not believed what waited on the hill when told.

The unicorn regained its composure and following a short and heated discussion, turned and addressed him. He smiled in response and somewhat colorfully stated that he had no idea what the little pony was saying. The unicorn tried a couple more times, and then ducked its head into a satchel hanging across its back. Ramirez was surprised when the head retracted with a book held in its teeth. With a short declaration, he managed to pull Liz’s attention away from her linguistic attempts. The unicorn set the book on the ground. A book. They had books. Not only were these ponies smart, they had artifacts and possibly literature.

A pale purple light shone out around the unicorn’s horn. The air around it glowed like fog illuminated by a lightbulb. A similar but fainter light seemed to originate from the book at the unicorn’s feet. With a rustling, the book opened and pages flipped by rapidly. He would have blamed it on the breeze, but no breeze was blowing. The pages stopped turning abruptly, then flipped back the other way for a few pages, and then stopped.

The unicorn read the page intently. He could see its eyes moving back and forth across the page. “Top to bottom, left to right,” Liz whispered next to him, “Interesting.”

The little lavender pony looked up at them and said something incomprehensible. Ramirez felt a knot form in his stomach. Something was about to happen, but he didn’t know what. The pony spread her hooves and took a solid stance. It grunted and its horn began to glow again.

“What is it doing?” Liz whispered in his ear.

The glow grew brighter. She grimaced, whatever she was doing seemed to require a lot of effort. The glow grew in intensity until a bright white flash exploded outward. Ramirez felt a weak shockwave hit his body and his ears were filled with a shrill whine. The noise died away, replaced by a dull ringing.

“There, I think that did it” said a voice. Ramirez shook his head, disoriented. He looked

around for where the voice had come from.

“Hello.” The little lavender unicorn stepped forward. Ramirez and Liz both stared open-mouthed. The unicorn raised its head and puffed out its chest in a very proud manner, “My name is Twilight Sparkle, and these are my friends, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and Pinkie Pie.” She motioned towards each pony in turn. “If I guess correctly, you can understand me now?”

The two humans just nodded. Twilight Sparkle smiled, pleased with herself. Ramirez realized the ponies were all looking at them expectantly. “Uh,” he tried to find his tongue, “Uh. We come in peace?”

“Oh, good *lord*.” Liz huffed.

“Hey, I didn’t hear *you* saying anything, Corporal,” he shot back under his breath. “What, Hey!”

The pink pony had shot forward and grabbed ahold of Ramirez’s foot with its front hooves. It yanked up hard, nearly toppling him over. It stared intently at the sole of his boot then leapt back with a high-pitched whoop “I KNEW it! I KNEW it! I knew I saw you hiding in Carrot Top’s rosebushes! But why were you hiding in the rosebushes? Oh! Were you playing hide-and-seek? I love hide-and-seek! Though it’s certainly more fun if everypony who’s playing knows they’re playing...” she was yanked away by Twilight Sparkle who had grabbed her tail in her mouth.

Rainbow took this as her cue and swooped up close, “Omigosh! Are you really aliens? Like, outer-space aliens? Twilight didn’t believe me, but I...” Twilight yanked her away from the towering creatures by her tail as well.

“Yes, well, I’m sure there’ll be plenty of time for questions, and I’m sure you have plenty of your own. But first things first: who are you... and what are you?” Twilight directed at Ramirez and Liz

Ramirez snapped up straight with a click of his heels, “I am Sargent Brandon Ramirez of the Valexa March Militia, Armed Forces of the Federated Suns. This is my compatriot, Corporal Elizabeth Virat. As for what we are, we are... uh... humans.”

“Sarge-gent Bra—Brah—um? Twilight struggled over the words.

Ramirez smiled, “Sargent is my rank. I usually go by Ramirez.”

Twilight tried to duplicate the pronunciation. He enunciated each syllable for her. She then turned her attention to Liz. At first she called her ‘Eliza-beak,’ matching the name of one of Fluttershy’s chickens.

“You can just call me ‘Liz’,” she grinned.

“Well, Ramirez and Liz, on behalf of myself and my friends, welcome to Equestria. Now, what brings you to our land?”

“I am afraid it was an accident. Our JumpShip suffered a misjump and a busted helium seal. As soon as we can repair, we’ll be on our way,” Ramirez said matter-of-factly.

“Jump ship? What’s that?” Pinkie Pie piped in. She was picturing a sailing ship bouncing across the landscape.

Liz answered for her tongue-tied superior, “A word we use for our space ship.” She was finding she was better at simplifying concepts than the MechWarrior, “We’re... lost.”

“YES! They *are* aliens! I *told* you, Twilight!” Rainbow pumped a hoof in the air.

“Hmph,” Twilight frowned. She wasn’t about to admit they were visitors from outer space. “How do I know you’re not just pulling our legs? What proof do you have you’re from outer space?”

Ramirez just stammered. He was no longer sure just what was going on. Liz, however, was just reaching her stride.

“Would you like to see our ship? It’s in orbit around your moon right now. Do you have a telescope?”

“Yes...” Twilight said slowly.

“Then wait for nightfall and watch the lit face of the moon. You’ll see our ship as a shadow passing across.” She gestured with her finger to illustrate the movement of the *Silvertongue’s* shadow.

Twilight remained silent for a long moment. The other ponies watched her intently. “Alright,” she said icily, “we’ll wait for nightfall and then we’ll see.”

Liz got the distinct impression this little ringleader didn’t quite trust them yet. She couldn’t blame her. She wasn’t certain how much they should divulge to their diminutive hosts, either.

As for Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie, they couldn’t contain themselves any longer. Ramirez and Liz found themselves on the receiving end of a furious fusillade of questions. The humans responded in kind, answering what questions they were comfortable with and firing back with questions of their own.

Finally, Ramirez realized he had not asked one of the most obvious questions. He turned to Twilight Sparkle, “Pardon my asking, but how is it that we are able to understand each other?”

Liz looked at him quizzically, “You know, I was going to ask why you’ve been talking entirely in Cantonese. And why your accent has gotten better.”

Twilight looked at him as if he had just asked a very silly question. “It’s a basic subconscious neurolinguistic psychotransmutation translation spell,” she said dismissively, “As long as you’re in a certain, but fairly wide, radius of me, your linguistic centers will automatically and subconsciously translate any speech into the language you are most comfortable with.” She saw the looks of confusion and disbelief on the humans’ faces and sighed.

Her horn glowed and the book lifted off the ground and floated into her saddlebag. The humans gasped. “How did you DO that?” Ramirez asked frantically.

“Huh? Do what?” the tall creature pointed at her saddlebag with a long finger. “Honestly, haven’t you ever seen magic before?”

The two humans turned to each other. “New hypothesis,” said Ramirez, “We’re dreaming. Or I’m dreaming.”

“Oh! Oh! Maybe I’m dreaming, too! But I’m awake. And you’re awake! At least I think we’re awake. Unless we’re daydreaming. But when I daydream it doesn’t affect everypony around me. *Ooh*, you must be a *really* good dreamer!”

“Yeah, why do you say you’re dreaming?” asked Rainbow Dash

“Because there’s no such thing as magic,” Ramirez said with a dismissive wave of his hand.

Twilight clenched her jaw. “Of course there’s magic!” she yelled angrily. She was about to launch into one of her tirades. Magic and its effects were something that ponies—and especially unicorns—used and relied on every day! How dare this creature just waltz in and casually declare it didn’t exist. That would be like saying that air and water didn’t exist.

Liz saw the anger welling up in Twilight. She also saw Ramirez about to shoot back with what she was sure they would regret later. “He means there’s no magic where we come from,” she quickly interjected.

Twilight couldn’t conceive of such a place. A world without magic? How could anything survive?

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Twilight wanted to keep the two humans close at hand. Despite her misgivings, she was intensely curious. Of course she couldn’t take the two humans to Ponyville. The townspenies initial distrust of Zecora the zebra suggested they would probably react with panic should the



creatures be found in town. However, the thought of somehow restraining or imprisoning the visitors never even crossed her mind. There was also the problem that the male, Ramirez, had indicated there were more of them still in the Everfree Forest. She knew that if one of her friends had been restrained in some way the rest of them would do anything to free them. It had happened before. It had happened just a few months ago with Rarity, in fact. With an unknown number of additional humans out there (he had refused to say exactly how many were in his group, which Twilight found a little suspicious), she didn't want to do anything that could be considered hostile.

In the end she only had their word the two would not leave before she could return with her telescope. She wanted to confirm Liz's claim of a spaceship orbiting the moon. The other ponies had stayed on the hill with the humans while she fetched the instrument. Bursting into the library, she startled Spike, who had been napping. She dropped her saddlebag and ran upstairs to gather her telescope with barely a word.

Spike was waiting for her when she returned downstairs. He was curious about how well Rainbow had pulled off her prank. Twilight replied that she wasn't sure it was a prank.

Spike's eyes grew wide, "What? You mean she really found," he gulped, "a-alien?"

"I'm not convinced they are aliens. I think they're most likely some sort of strange creature from the deep in the Everfree. Even if they do claim they have a spaceship orbiting the moon."

"Shouldn't we warn the Princess?" asked Spike, climbing onto Twilight's back

Twilight considered, "For a couple of strange creatures from the Everfree? I don't think there's anything to warn about."

"But what if they really are..."

"If they really are from outer space, *then* we'll alert the Princess." Twilight pushed open the front door to the library. It was still hours until nightfall, but she wanted to be ready.

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"So, what are you eating?" Rainbow Dash sniffed curiously at the little bag from which Ramirez was spooning some sort of mush, "It smells weird."

Ramirez had sat down to eat while Corporal Virat radioed the DropShip. He had pulled a field ration packet from the backpacks they had retrieved from their temporary campsite and prepared the food with water from his canteen. Ramirez swallowed the lukewarm mixture and looked at the package.

"The label says Sarna-style Vindaloo. I'm pretty sure it's just reconstituted quillar proteins."

“What’s that?”

“It’s a bio-engineered grain crop,” he swallowed another spoonful, “It’s really common where we come from.”

“Can I try it?”

Ramirez pondered carefully. Incompatible biochemistries were a leading cause of extinctions among indigenous life. He didn’t want to accidentally poison their hosts. Still, this food was mostly simple carbohydrates and some denatured proteins, stuff that was really common even in extraterrestrial metabolisms. And with so much Terran life around, it was unlikely these ponies would react poorly to food he himself could digest just fine.

“Yeah, sure.” He held out a spoonful of the lumpy brown mush. Rainbow Dash sniffed at it then took a tiny nibble. Her eyes went wide and she leapt back.

“Ugh! Yech! Blech!” Ramirez chuckled at her comical reaction, “Yuck! How do you eat that stuff?”

Liz came tromping down from the top of the hill where she had been using the radio. “Orders are to stay put, Sarge. Tartaglia and Ling are comin’ out from the *Felicity*, and bringing the doc. The Lieutenant’s ordered the other teams to rendezvous at the DropShip.”

Ramirez nodded, “Alright. You did tell him what to expect, yes?”

“I did, but I’m not sure he believed me. I mean, talking magical ponies? I think he’s bringing the doc out specifically to give us both psych evaluations.” She was only half-joking.

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