

Chapter XVII

“...So, basically, what you’re saying is that magic is like a battery that powers the whole body, but can also be used to shape the world around us. However, when I *accidentally* used my magic while working, I didn’t leave enough of it inside myself to keep my basic functions going,” I summarized for her.

“I’m unsure what a ‘battery’ is, but that is an apt description of what happened,” Moon said after a moment’s thought.

During our long dream session, I had learned a lot from her, and despite our differences in terminology, I was pretty sure I had gotten the important stuff.

For starters, the abilities I’d seen the ponies perform really were magic, just not the magic I knew from my gaming and roleplaying days. In fact, it wasn’t even like the magic from our ancient mythology. This ‘magic’ really was more of a science, which, to be fair, was what all magic was when you really got down to it: science that wasn’t fully understood.

Here, for some reason, it was understood (at least to a certain degree), but was still called magic. Not really sure *why*, but I’m sure the reason for it has its roots in the society’s history and social background, just like anything back on my world.

Anyway, I learned quite a few things that would have completely rocked the scientific community back home, not to mention shatter everything we ever thought we knew about the universe around us.

The first—and probably most important— thing that I learned was that souls really did exist. They weren’t some abstraction of the conscious mind, or a myth, but an actual part of the living body that could be manipulated and interacted with.

Magic was simply a measure of the amount of change a soul could make on the universe around it.

When I said change, though, I meant *change*. Apparently, if you knew what you were doing, and you had enough power at your disposal, even the laws surrounding the four other forces of the universe could be superseded by the laws that this ‘magic’ worked by. The ponies didn’t *break* the laws of physics per se. Rather, they were able to take advantage of a higher law that overruled the lower laws.

This part of her explanation actually was the easiest for me to believe, surprisingly enough. I mean, for the longest time, humanity had said that flight was impossible, at least until someone had figured out a way to overcome the effects of gravity through the principals of

aerodynamics or, going back even further, the principles of buoyancy. No laws had been broken, but it still appeared as if they had.

I'm not saying that I comprehended the intricacies behind this power—I'm just saying that I now knew *why* it was possible for a four-foot pony to levitate a thousand-pound rock or to control the weather. They weren't breaking the laws of physics. Rather, they were simply superseding them with a higher law.

Now, I know what you might be thinking: Alex, how on Earth could you be so freakishly calm about this? How could you just sit there and accept what she was telling you at face value, without so much as batting an eye?

Well, the simple fact of the matter was that I wasn't *on* Earth anymore. In fact, I was so not on Earth that it was entirely possible that I wasn't even in the same *galaxy* anymore.

Not only that, but I had seen with my own eyes some pretty unbelievable feats, many of which were by my own hand. If this power could actually be explained in a scientific manner that *didn't* involve at least one repetition of the phrase: 'it's magic, that's just how it works,' then not only was I on board with it, but I'd probably support it with everything I had if I ever got home.

That's not to say I wasn't curious as to its inner workings. Of course, I had questions—a *lot* of questions. Still, at least I could let my mind rest for a bit, knowing that the magic I had seen here was actually explainable, and not just some unknowable force.

Most of my questions could wait, but there was one that stood out in my mind that I just *had* to ask. One that completely refuted everything that Moon had told me so far. "So, if every living thing has the ability to use this 'magic,' then why didn't I have any of these powers back home? For that matter, why didn't *any* humans have these powers back home?" I asked her.

She just shrugged at my question, the look on her face genuinely confused. "I do not know. After all, I have never been to your home world. I have some hypotheses, but without more information, it would only be speculation."

"Well, since you know more about this kind of thing than I do, I think I'd like to hear your hypothesis," I said after a bit of thought.

Moon took a deep breath at these words, then looked me in the eye. "All magical abilities and spells require the caster to have three things: a soul, the knowledge required for the ability, and a strong magical field to serve as a power source." Her voice had taken on an authoritative tone as she slipped into a lecture. "If just one of these things is missing, then it is impossible to perform magic."

“So, what are we missing? Knowledge?” I asked her thoughtfully.

“No. Even without the knowledge to perform spells, you would still notice some abilities that would have no logical explanation, simply because you possess the basic knowledge of how to move your bodies. From there you would learn and create more complex and powerful abilities, eventually developing spells.” She shook her head. “This is how all the sapient people of my planet learned magic, and I believe that that is how your people would learn as well.”

“Well, if it’s not that, then what could it be?”

“When we first spoke, you told me an extremely interesting fact about your world: you do not have anything there that remotely resembles magic. Do you remember the question I asked you afterwards?”

I thought back on that for a second, then nodded my head. “Yeah, you asked me how we controlled the weather and the sun. But... why did you ask me how we controlled the sun? I’ve been thinking on that for a while now. You couldn’t *possibly* mean that...” My voice trailed off when I noticed her expression did not change.

“I also asked you how your star worked, and you told me that your planet revolved around the star once every year. At the same time, your planet spins at a rate of one revolution per day. I do not pretend to understand how that is supposed to work, but that is not how *our* star functions.” She raised her eyebrow as she said this.

“But... how does...?” I trailed off again when I noticed that she was shaking her head.

“Because of your background, it would do you no good for me to just tell you, as I am unsure you would even believe me.” I mirrored her action with my eyebrow at that, but did not interrupt her. “I believe a more... practical demonstration would be in order.”

I folded my arms at those words. “Fine, but I expect a full explanation later.”

“I would not expect anything less,” she said with a smile. Her smile morphed into a frown, though, as she came to what she really wanted to talk about. “At any rate, based on all available information, I would guess that the reason you did not have magic is not that you do not possess souls, or that you do not possess the knowledge to enact even very simple magic. Your race probably has already performed some form of magic already, yet never recognized it as such due to the extreme simplicity of the magic you have used.”

I hummed in thought about this. This was probably where all those legends of magical abilities and superhuman feats came from, though from what she was saying, those feats were probably blown way out of proportion. “Well, why wouldn’t we have ‘more advanced’ magic, then?” I murmured, though Moon apparently heard me.

"I believe what your people lack is a sufficiently strong magical field. To be precise, your planet, star, and moon do not generate fields sufficiently strong enough to allow magic's use or development."

I thought about this for a bit, then nodded my head. "Well, that theory makes more sense than anything I was thinking about that could have explained it."

"Anyway, as soon as you wake up, we will—" she started to say, but stopped as she tilted her head, almost as if she were listening to something.

"What is it?" I asked her.

"I have to leave you now. Something has happened, and I need to see what it is. I hope the next time you dream, you will allow me in to help you so that we may talk like this again."

"O-Of course!" I stuttered. "I feel kind of bad now that you had this much trouble to begin with. I wasn't even aware that I was preventing you from getting in!"

"I understand. I would like to talk to you more on that later as well, but for now I must bid you farewell," she said as the dream distorted and broke apart, taking her with it.

"Goodbye," I said as I woke up.

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"How is it doing that?"

"Doing what? It doesn't look any different to—OW!"

"Open your eyes, Tusk Breaker! Not only is your precious automaton actually moving like a real cat for once, but it's also speaking a language!"

"Yes, because of *my* brilliant work. The speaking thing is clearly a glitch though, one that I'll be all too happy to sort out—OW!"

"You're not touching that thing. Not if I have anything to say about it."

"But that is *my* personal property! I can do with it what I want!"

"Yes, but not only are you my subordinate in our joint effort with the Equestrians, but also my subordinate in our clan! You so much as even *touch* that thing and I promise you this: not

only will you never work again, but you'll also find yourself quickly banished from the Isle of Minos."

"You cannot be serious!"

"I am dead serious."

"Thank you, Thunder Hoof," Celestia heard Twilight say through the door.

"What are they talking about, sister? And why did you think it important enough to break me from my Dreamwalk?" Luna asked as she approached. "I finally managed to get through to him, too."

Celestia turned at her sister's voice, a sheepish grin on her face. "I am sorry for that, Lulu. Had I known things had progressed so far, I would have waited on this until later," Celestia said quietly. "While you were in there, were you able to pick up any of ~Alex's~ language?"

"A little. I believe that I may be proficient enough to convey basic meanings, as well as understand basic concepts, but it will take more than two successful Dreamwalks to understand it completely. Also, I believe that there may be sounds necessary for the ~human~ tongue that we cannot make, and vice-versa."

"I see. That may prove troublesome later on, but for now, it should be enough for you to question it, then," Celestia said as she opened the door for them.

"Question what? And why can't we... just use... the..." Luna started to say but stopped herself when she saw what was on the table in the center of the research laboratory.

There, sitting on the table while surrounded by the best golemancers on all of Equis, was a small metallic cat, clearly of minotaur design. However, despite the fact that it wasn't moving much from its position, Luna could easily tell that there was something about it that was very different from the automatons she was used to, due to her years of experience in dealing with golems in the past.

And it was clear to her that this thing was anything but a soulless automaton, simply by the way it flicked its tail back and forth.

"Where did that come from? Also, did you say that this thing was speaking?" Her voice was tinged in disbelief. "What did it say?"

Immediately, all the scientists in the room turned, and fell into bows at the sight of the Royal Sisters. "Your Highnesses!" Twilight shouted as she fell into a bow.

“Please rise.” Celestia waved at the assembled ponies, griffons, and minotaurs.

“Also, please answer my question,” Luna said as she slowly approached the metal cat on the table. “Where did this thing come from?”

At this, a pink hoof near the back of the crowd shot into the air, quickly followed by a bubbly answer. “Oh! I know! I found him behind that desk over there with a bunch of sciency-looking things!” Pinkie Pie wore a manic grin as she bounced around the crowd and into view.

Celestia nodded at this. “And to answer your other question, we have no clue what the strange automaton has said, simply because it seems to only be able to talk in ~Alex’s~ native tongue.”

Luna quickly turned back to the small automaton, her gaze becoming calculating as she studied it. It returned her gaze with an almost indifferent one as it continued to flick its tail back and forth. “Then why have you not used the translation spell?” she asked them.

“We did, Your Highness, but all attempts to use that spell have failed for some reason. We want to run a scan on it, but we’re afraid that that might damage whatever is being used to give the automaton life,” Twilight hurried to explain.

Luna turned towards her sister at those words. “Is this why you woke me from the Dreamwalk then? You were hoping I had gleaned enough from ~Alex~ to be able to question it?”

“My first choice would have been to go to ~Alex~ himself, but due to his low mana, he would have passed out after only a few short minutes,” Celestia answered.

Luna nodded at this, then turned back towards the small cat. “I don’t know how well I’ll do, but I’ll do my best.” she said doubtfully.

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The small metal cat watched impassively as the strange alien creatures continued to argue in their musical tongue, not really caring what they were arguing about. It spent a couple of CPU cycles wondering why that was a bad thing, but just couldn’t figure it out on its own. “There may be something wrong with me. I *definitely* remember being able to feel a lot more than this,” it said thoughtfully.

As it said this, its tail continued to whip around in a distinctly feline fashion: It had found the arcanite cores hidden in the various limbs, and had found the code written on those cores

sorely lacking. It had remembered how cats were supposed to move, and had adjusted the instructions accordingly.

It wasn't really sure *why* it had done this, or how it had done this, for that matter, but it knew that it just felt right to move like this in its current body. "Still, just because I can move properly doesn't mean that I should stay inside this form. It may be restricting my emotional range and even my memories," it said to itself as the argument around it became more heated. It then looked up at the surrounding aliens, its eyes focusing on the purple one that had brought it here. "Look, as interesting as the implications of my existence are, I *really* need to see Alex. He needs to fix me as soon as possible."

The automaton's request fell on deaf ears however, since the surrounding aliens were incapable of understanding the golem's language. Despite this, the small creature just couldn't get itself worked up over it. It felt as if it should worry more about that, but frankly, it found it hard to get worked up over anything.

It knew that something wasn't quite right about that, but at the current time, it really couldn't do anything about it. All it *could* do was wait until the aliens finally took it to its creator. *Well, not really my creator. Just the one who is responsible for my current form*, it thought to itself as the door opened, revealing the royal-looking pegasus/unicorn hybrid from before, as well as the blue one that it had only seen through Alex's eyes.

It watched impassively as the two approached, wondering briefly what they were talking about. *Well, obviously me, but what **about** me?* it thought as the blue one came closer.

She stopped just inches from the table and gave the small automaton an odd, searching look before turning her head back towards the white royal. After a few more words, she turned her head back towards the automaton and cleared her throat.

"...Excusing me?" she asked hesitantly.

"*Finally*, someone who can speak English!" the automaton said as the tension it didn't know it could feel was released. "I apologize for being so forward, but could you take me to see Alex?"

"...Alex? Yes, Alex. Alex sleeping. Need sleep, cannot disturb. Take later, yes?" she asked in incredibly broken English.

The automaton thought about this and found that it had absolutely no opinion over this information. It was sure that it should feel impatient, but for some reason just couldn't get itself worked up. "That is fine. I have waited for a long time. I can wait for a few more hours," it said as it laid itself down.

The blue unicorn/pegasi—Moon, if the automaton remembered correctly—looked at the metallic cat with a steady, searching expression. “Who are you?” she finally asked.

The cat looked down at its paws at this question, seriously considering her question. “I’m not sure that is correct. Instead, ask who I *was*.”

Moon looked unsure about this, then cleared her throat again. “Who *were* you?” she asked nervously.

The cat looked up at her, then back down at its paws. “It’s funny. I know I should feel angry, or at least jealous of my old life, but the most I can feel right now is a small sense of loss. My name is—*was* Robert Cowley, and I was one of the humans taken from their homes by the aliens, just like Alex,” Robert said.

Moon’s eyes widened at this as she took a quick step back. “But, you *dead*,” she said, her voice quaking with a tinge of fear.

Robert wasn’t listening. “That’s right, I was a *he*, not an *it*,” he thought out loud as the memories trickled back. He then looked up as what Moon had said registered in his mind. “And I think you’re right. I think I *did* die...” he murmured as Moon started to talk extremely fast to the other aliens in the room.

Wonder how I forgot about that? he pondered as he slumped down, slightly depressed at the memories that he was remembering. *If I had known that being autonomous again was going to be like this, I probably would have stayed in Alex’s head.*

However, as he watched the ponies gasp and start running in each and every direction, gathering tools and equipment of some kind, he couldn’t help but feel like a leaky memory was the least of his concerns.