

The Psycho Ponies

Chapter 2 - It's morph-equine!

By Baron Von Zakary

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"Oh Rainbow Dash, you honestly expect me to believe that?" Rarity asked with a laugh

"I'm telling you, it's all over the town. Fluttershy looted SugarCube Corner yesterday!"

"And I supposed that Twilight turned herself into a newt as well?"

"Whatever Rarity, we'll see when we get to..."

Rainbow Dash trailed off at the sight before her. Applejack was limping towards the library, Twilight under one arm, an unconscious Pinkie Pie under the other. All three looked like they'd been through the mill. After a moments stunned pause, Rarity and Dash ran over to help her.

"Applejack? What the hay happened to you guys?"

"Save it till we get inside Dashie, it's quite a story, and I'd hate ta collapse before y'all hear it."

"You mean to say that there's a Fluttershy copy out there, who wants to destroy all of you?" Rarity had a look of horror on her face, even Dash was too appalled for words.

Having left Pinkie and Twilight to slump in their chairs, Applejack had run back to get Fluttershy. Flutter-statue might have been the better name right now. Ever since the battle with Soaringfury, she'd seized up like a rock. Unsure what quite to do, Applejack left her standing to the side of the room whilst she told their tale.

"It's worse than that. I recon I saw another two of em before getting the seven bells knocked outta me again."

"Man, if only I was there, we could have kicked some serious flank!" Rainbow spoke with her usual bravado, punching the air. Applejack shook her head solemnly.

"Nah, if you'd been there Dash, y'all would have been scuffed up like us. Them ponies just ain't natural. Look what they did ta Fluttershy if you don't believe me."

She was still standing where Applejack had left her, a look of horror frozen on her face. Twilight sat in the chair next to her, various spell books open in front of her. Every couple of minutes, her horn would glow dimly, before she flicked on a few a pages.

"Nothing works, this is beyond normal healing magic." She said sadly, closing the dusty tomes and replacing them on the shelves. Rainbow poked Fluttershy while Spike handed out mugs of hot chocolate. She swayed for a moment and then stabilized, unchanged.

"We need Princess Celestia, she'll know what to do." Twilight continued, "Spike, take a letter, tell her that we need urgent..."

"Rainbow Dash!" Rarity cried scoldingly.

"What I do?" She protested, looking round. With a small jump as she noticed, Dash removed the mug from Fluttershy's head and moved it to the table. Eyes downcast, she quietly muttered "Sorry".

"Urgent assistance." Twilight finished. "Put "Code: Lunar" under the seal Spike, that should ensure a swift response."

"Don't think we'll need that Twilight," Spike called over. He'd been looking for more books on curse breaking, and had paused when he'd passed the window. "She's coming up the drive now."

"What?" Twilight cried, jumping to her hooves. Sure enough Celestia was just outside the door, two royal guards trotting behind her. Years of protocol kicked in automatically. Ignoring her injuries, Twilight bolted for the door and opened it just as the first knock came.

"Your Highness, what an unexpect..."

She was cut off mid sentence by the Sun Goddess pulling her into a hug. Twilight winced slightly as she grazed against her mentor, but said nothing. Celestia always had a calming warmth about her, and in her arms now, Twilight felt completely at peace.

"My dear Twilight Sparkle, I'm so glad to see you're alright."

Breaking apart, it was a shock to all present that a tear was running down Celestia's face, even

the guards seemed concerned. Letting off a doubtful cough, she wiped her face, everypony else suddenly finding something interesting on the walls to look at.

As the moment passed, Twilight looked back. Celestia was still a little dewy eyed, but otherwise back to normal. A great many questions flickered through the young unicorn's mind. Finally she settled on

"How did you know to come?"

Celestia smiled gently. "I know your magic, and when I sensed a burst like that, I knew something was wrong. It was the second magic I felt that told me I had to come at once."

"Please, wait outside gentlecolts," She spoke to the guards, they silently stepped back as she shut the door. "There are important things to discuss, and we need to keep it between ourselves. But first,"

Her horn glowed a pure white for a second, the same light appeared around Twilight, Applejack and Pinkie Pie. Looking at herself, Twilight saw that all her cuts and scrapes were healed, she felt revitalised. With a soft ping, Pinkie's hair poofed out again, tripling in volume as her eyes snapped open.

"Where am I? I don't remember getting here. Did we beat that Soaringfury meanie and party till I passed out?" Evidently her energy had returned too, if her speech speed was anything to go by. Pinkie looked round. "Oh, Hiya Celly! Did you come to celebrate as well?"

Applejack cut her off abruptly via a hoof in the mouth. "Ah think what she means to say is, thank you, your majesty."

A smile slid over Celestia's face. "That's quite alright Miss Applejack. She's, how do you put it in your letters Twilight? Just being Pinkie Pie."

Walking over, she knelt by Fluttershy. Placing her hoofs on Fluttershy's temples, the white glow returned, and she started to mutter quietly. Slowly, Celestia started to subtly twist her hoofs, it was like she trying to crack a safe.

"Yes, this is evil magic indeed. A different caster, but the same result. All this time, and still no new tricks, that will be the undoing."

With a gasp, Fluttershy reanimated. She wobbled on her hoofs, taking in the kindly face before her. She tried to speak, but only let out a hoarse speak before falling down. Celestia lifted her with ease and placed her onto the sofa. Fluttershy slowly opened an eye, the effort clearly draining her. She mouthed something and passed out.

"Rest now, you've done so much already." Celestia whispered soothingly, running a hoof through her mane. As she comforted the filly, tiny spheres of magic fell from the tips of her hoofs onto Fluttershy's head.

"She'll be fine, just needs to get her strength back. Please, sit down."

Celestia waited as Twilight and Applejack parked themselves.

"As some of you already know, all magic has a signature. An imprint left on it by the caster. If you know the unicorn, you can lock onto this imprint and sense their magic whenever they use it.

That's how I knew that Twilight was in trouble, it was like a distress flare to my senses. That's also how I knew where the other party got their power from. Tending to Fluttershy confirmed my fears. Nightmare Moon has returned."

If there had been "silence" when Pinkie Pie had accused Fluttershy mere hours ago, that was a full scale riot accompanied by Vinyl Scratch playing her favourite Alice Hoofer remixes, compared to this silence.

Finally Rainbow Dash broke it.

"But we destroyed Nightmare Moon years ago, we gave her twenty thousand volts of harmony remember?"

"Yes, and no. Our problem isn't Nightmare Moon we know, for she was just one of a line of pawns. This is the work of the original nightmare."

Everyone in the room looked thoroughly confused, Celestia took a second to draw a deep breath before continuing.

"Luna and myself have been the guardians of Equestria over a millennia now, carrying on the ancient tradition of the our family. The royal bloodline has watched over all pony kind since we first harnessed our magical abilities many eons ago.

But as long as that bloodline is, there are forces in this world that pre-date even our noble ancestors. Texts in my personal library speak of a pair of elemental forces that have existed since the dawn of time itself.

In the simplest terms, these forces are good and evil, although such words will never do truly them justice. Scholars across the ages have written theories on them, it is widely believed that they were a kind of magical field, covering the entire world. Omnipresent, and almost sentient in their actions, these fields shaped the earliest destinies of our people."

She paused, taking a sip of the coco Spike had thoughtfully provided. Thoughtfully provided here being code for, being nudged an inch at a time towards the kitchen by Twilight until he got the hint.

"The good magic entered the hearts of the those fledgling ponies and guided them into the light. As they began to prosper and thrive, the evil tried to undo what would become the first pony empire.

But for a twist of fate, we might have been undone that day. It seems that whilst the evil could easily make the mountain winds bitter or the forest sprout in darkness, it could not simply enter the souls of steeds. It had to be invited in, through their thoughts and actions.

So the darkness claimed the lay of the land, and the good claimed the life upon it. Those with a touch of the virtuous became the first artists, poets and speakers. They spread a message of peace and tolerance across the land.

In return, the darkness wrecked ruin upon the world. Foul weather plagued the harvest seasons and the ground became hard as the hydra's hide. Despite these hardships, few succumbed. Instead pegasus took to the skies and shaped their own patterns, while the earth ponies dug in their hooves and endured.

Those who gave in became avatars of destruction, seeking only to bring new miseries and pains. Thankfully their magically abilities were servilely limited, powerful compared to the unicorns, but little more than tribal shaman compared to what we can do now. Between this and extremely low numbers, they were hunted down to a foal. Some repented and drove the evil from their hearts, the rest were imprisoned for life. As each year passed, fewer ponies would fall, until finally it seemed that the threat was gone."

Celestia paused again, allowing the tale to sink in. All of them looked at her in wonderment, Twilight was sat on the edge of her seat, eyes like saucers. It wasn't surprising, few outside of the royal family knew the story any more. She wondered briefly why she hadn't told Twilight it sooner. The thought had occurred to her during their many sessions together, but a sense of forbidding had always stilled her tongue.

This time when she spoke, her tone was somber. The invisible breeze that fluttered her mane seemed to die down a little.

"After countless years of peace, a new avatar was created in Luna. Born from her false belief that she was under appreciated, Nightmare Moon was the single greatest threat Equestria had ever seen. With the limitless powers of an alicorn, an endless age of darkness loomed. I knew what would happen if unopposed, and with the greatest regret, took action.

Now we leave the facts of history and enter into speculation. I sealed Luna in the moon she

loved so much, and sealed the evil away with her. I believe that during that time, something changed. Never before had the darkness been trapped in one form for so long. It learnt how to maintain it and be able to interact directly with our world. When Nightmare was released, I'm sure her original plan was to continue with a reign of terror, but after you defeated her, she went into exile.

It seems that she wasn't idle over the last three years. Nightmare may have masked her own magic to hide from me, but she trained a protégée who isn't so cautious. The rest of the story, you already know."

Snow was falling over the mountains. Had somepony been passing with a sharp eye, they might have been puzzled by the fresh pair of hoof prints and half a dozen dog ends outside a small cave mouth. But no one ever went walking in those mountains, the fierce weather and rumours in the local villages of a vengeful spirit that cursed the peaks were enough to turn anyone away.

Deep inside the cave, Danios shook the ice from his coat and punched a sequence into a panel on the wall. With a hiss, the door slid open and he trotted back into the lab. Soaringfury sat on a chair, her chest wrapped in gauze. Meanwhile a cream unicorn hunched over a chess board, clearly plotting her next move and a cyan pegasus snored gently as she slept on a mattress under one of the work benches.

"Feeling any better Fury?" He asked, walking over to her.

"Much." She replied flatly. "Given that five of my ribs were broken and my lung punctured."

"Well be grateful that I gave you all accelerated healing. That sort of injury would take a normal pony months to treat, you'll be fine again by morning."

Unravelling the gauze, Danios took a look at her chest, gently prodding at the ribs.

"Mind you, it'll probably knock a few years off your life expectancy. It's too early to tell how tuning your metabolism that much will effect you in the long term." He speculated idly.

"I'll bear that in mind when asking Nightmare about my pension plan."

Looking up in surprise, Danios paused in his examination for a moment. "Do my ears deceive me, or was that a joke Fury?"

Fury gave a small smile. "Don't look so surprised doctor, we're not total robots. You should know, you created our learning program afte, DAMMIT!" She jerked back in her chair and nursed her chest.

Danios withdrew his hoof and handed the gauze roll back. "The third one is still healing, same for the fourth. Take it easy tonight, and I'll check again in the morning. Get some sleep in the meantime."

"How can I sleep, knowing that she's still alive?"

"Well Sprint manages ok," He nodded towards the snoring pegasus. "I doubt if she'll just drop dead overnight, you'll get another go. If you really have trouble, then take one of these."

He slid a bottle of pills over to her. Fury caught the bottle and trotted off to one of the back rooms. Danios turned back in time to see the unicorn levitate a piece across the board before kicking the mattress.

"Check, your move."

With yawn, the pegasus rose and stared blankly at the board. "Why do you make me play this game, we've only been active a day and already you've beaten me twice."

"Because it trains the mind, even one as flabby as yours." A cold voice rang out.

With a click of hoofs, the three of them stood to attention as Nightmare walked in. The sight of her wasn't much better than her voice. Her current body had once been a copy of a young mare from Canterlot with a delightful sunset yellow coat. Then Nightmare had spent a month in it. Most of her was black and withered, in places it had worn through to the bone. The flesh over her face had vitrified, the skull leering at them behind sunken eyes.

"When we've defeated the element bearers, Celestia and the other traitors will fall soon after. Then we will take our campaign to the four corners of the world. Danios will create the army, and you six will lead them. To do that, you will need an IQ greater than your hoof size.

Danios, have you collected all relevant fighting data from Soaringfury?"

"I have my lord." He mumbled, eyes fixed firmly on the floor.

"Then see to it that the others know. The more information we have on them, the quicker you can destroy them. Awaken the rest as well, tomorrow you will all go to Ponyville and finish what Soaringfury started. If she put up a fair fight against four of them, then the six of you should take them out with ease. And start making another body Danios, this one is nearly finished."

"It will be as you command."

Without a backwards glance, she went back into her quarters. Danios walked over to one of the

benches and started mixing chemicals together as the others turned back their game.

A different sort of silence had settled over the library now, no one knew quite what to say after Celestia had finished her incredible story. So they sat round and slurped their coco.

"So, if these ponies get their magics from Nightmare, ah recon that we can beat 'em with the Elements of Harmony. If we drive that evil out, they'd just be normal folk again, wouldn't they?" Applejack finally mused aloud.

"A logical deduction Miss Applejack, but incorrect I fear. The elements removed the shadow of Nightmare because Luna was truly sorry, she didn't want that power any more. She rejected it. These ponies are infused with her magic. It might not even be possible to separate them."

"Then what do we do, they could be back at any moment." Twilight said, a twinge of fear in her voice.

"Twilight, there's no easy way to say this. You will have to fight back, you may even have to destroy them. Otherwise, they will destroy you." Celestia said sadly.

"No, there has to be another way!" Twilight cried, almost pleading. "There has to be a peaceful solution."

"No, there isn't." A quiet voice made everypony look round. Fluttershy was awake again. Sitting up, she looked at them with watery eyes.

"Soaringfury, I saw into her mind, I've seen what they come from. They can't be reasoned with, they were created to destroy us. It's all that drives them. It's all they know. We have to fight, it's the only way to help them."

"Fluttershy dear, can they really be that bad?" Rarity asked, astounded that she would say such a thing.

"Yes they are. I only got a tiny glimpse into her life, but I saw enough. Believe me Rarity, being destroyed is far better than going back to what they came from."

"I more than anypony wish we had another choice, but you are all going to have to fight if we hope to save Equestria. That's why I brought this." Celestia focused for a moment, her horn shining. An ornate wooden box appearing in front of her, the lid bearing the royal seal.

Opening it, there was a collective "oh" round around the room. Inside were seven, things. Made from thin strands of silver, they twisted together to form an elegant cage. Set into each cage was a brilliant gem, and as Celestia lifted one out, they could see a leather clasp on the back. It

was clearly meant to be strapped onto the leg.

"Fabulous as they look, how are these supposed to help us win fights?" Rarity voiced what everypony was thinking.

"These Miss Rarity, are relics from old Equestria. In the beginning of my rule, we were at war with a nearby kingdom. They were grim times indeed. We were almost equal in troop numbers, technology, magic and it soon turned into a war of attrition. It seemed that the only end was when both sides were dead, or we surrendered into slavery.

I wept for my kingdom, and in my grief I wandered into the wilderness. I can't say what made me do it, just that it felt right. After walking as far as a pony can walk in a day, I came to a cave. I was amazed, inside I found seven statues. They had obviously been formed by the rock eroding, yet each was clearly a pony in armour. In front of each statue, as if discarded by fate, was a gem stone.

I gathered these stones and ran back to the palace. There I summoned my generals and had them each set a gem into their armour. The following day they lead the armies of Equestria into battle and stormed across the fields of war. It was incredible, the gem bearing unicorns unleashed magic attacks of untold might, pegasus flew at incredible speeds and earth ponies split battle plate with the mildest blows. After a single day, we broke their line and morale. The following morning saw a messenger bringing a letter of surrender to my door.

For many a year now, both I and the University of Canterlot have studied these gems. It's clear that they contain deep magic, magic that we don't yet fully understand. What we have learnt from them, we combined with other sciences to create these. These are the latest word in portable armour and equipment. Twilight, please choose one."

Looking over the strange devices, Twilight picked out one set with an amethyst stone and strapped it to her left front hoof.

"Now place your other hoof on it and will it to activate."

Twilight looked perplexed, but did as the princess instructed. Placing her other hoof onto the cage, she gazed at it.

Erm, activate, please?

Brilliant streams of light shot out of the gem, obscuring Twilight for a second. The light faded, and a second round of "oh" s sounded.

She was completely enveloped in a suit of armour. A helmet covered her head and horn, with battle plate covering her shoulders, back and torso. A boot adorned each hoof. The metal was a

rich, velvety purple, while a lighter purple fabric sealed the gaps in-between the parts. The chest plate bore the gemstone in the centre, intricate gold symbols inlaid all around it. A five point star made from what looked like polarised glass formed the helmet's visor.

A light shone from behind the visor for an instant, and a mirror appeared in front of Twilight. She gave a little twirl, checking out the armour in all its glory.

"What's it like Twilight?" Rainbow Dash asked with barely controlled awe.

"Unbelievable." She said simply. "I feel, so focused. It's like I can do anything."

As she looked round, a display flared into life on the inside of the visor. It picked out items of interest, labelling her friends and other little pieces of information. Looking at Applejack, it read.

Applejack - Earth Pony

Origin - Equestrian, Ponyville

Power - 7000

Abilities - Superior Physical Strength, Element of Honesty

Notes - Powerful Buck Attack

With a thought, she shut the display down. "How do I get out of this?"

"Just will it to power down."

With another flash of light, Twilight stood before them again. She looked at the innocuous piece of jewellery strapped to her hoof. "This has to be the most incredible thing I've ever seen."

"I wanna go!" Pinkie Pie wailed. "Can I have one, can I, pleeease!"

"Of course, I want each of you to chose one" Celestia said, with a small chuckle at her eagerness.

The others gathered round the chest, each taking their own. Only Spike remained seated, watching intently. Having strapped them on, the room filled with light as five ponies transformed at once.

Everyponies armour was a little different to their friends. For starters they were all different colours, and the visors were different shapes. They all also had their own unique features.

Applejack's was a sunburst orange, with an oval visor and notably more armour round the hind legs and flanks. Pinkie's was, not surprisingly, pink. A light matt pink, her visor was a pair of rectangles, one on top of the other. The sheets of her armour looked thinner, like it was made for a pony who moved around a lot.

Similarly, Rainbow Dash's sky blue armour was made for greater manoeuvrable, her wings encased in aerofoil, complete with what looked like thrusters at the end. Her helmet sporting a lightning bolt shaped visor. Rarity arguably had the best looking set. Armour of purest white, with the gold inlay spreading all over like veins. Her helmet had a triangular visor, with various types of lenses built in.

Finally Fluttershy looked over her lemon yellow suit. Unlike Dash, her wings got only a basic fabric covering. Instead, her helmet was nearly all visor, the entire front half made of the polarised material.

As her friends fawned over each other, Twilight turned to Celestia.

"What's that one for?" She asked quietly, nodding to the seventh device. It didn't have a stone, instead a smooth, pebble shaped piece of metal floated in the centre of the cage.

"One of my generals fell in battle that day, in honour of his sacrifice, he was laid to rest in the cave where I found the gems. When the university wanted to use the stones as part of their experimental armour units, we used what we'd learnt to forge one of our own rather than disturb him or risk losing a real one. But ever since that day, we've never had seven heroes rise again. Lots of threes and the odd five, so we just used it as an experimental model."

"I can't wait to test these bad boys out!" Rainbow Dash's voice cut across the room. "I bet that I could Sonic Rainboom in my sleep with these!"

"Now Miss Dash, these aren't toys. They're made for combat, and I dare say that the research department would like to get them back in one piece as well,"

She stopped mid flow as there came a knocking on the door. It opened a crack, and one of the guards poked his head round.

"Terribly sorry to interrupt your highness, but time is pressing on. You have lunch with the Mayoress, then an afternoon with the foreign delegates followed by,"

"Yes, thank you. I'll be out in a moment."

The guard bowed himself out, Celestia sighed and composed herself.

"Duty calls. I will do as much as I can to help you from my end, but keep your wits about you. I fear this will get worse before it gets better." She looked over at Fluttershy. "Don't worry about the townsfolk. I will speak with the Mayoress, you won't be hearing anymore about what happened at Sugarcube Corner."

Twilight ran over and held open the door as the princess made to leave. Celestia pulled her into another brief hug, and then was gone, the door shutting behind her.

Twilight, can y'all hear me?

She looked around, startled. Applejack hadn't spoken, she heard that in her head.

"How are you doing that?"

"Ah've been workin this display thingy. I found a communicator option, seems like we can all talk to each other via these gizmos. Y'all just imagine who you want to talk to, and then think the message."

"That is useful. Ok everyone, how about we go about business as usual and if anyone sees, or thinks they've found those... them, then use your unit to contact us."

There was a mumour of agreement, the room flashing again as they decloaked. Excitedly talking about their new found powers, and what they might be able to do with them, the five slowly made their way out. Twilight pulled Fluttershy aside for a moment.

"Fluttershy, are you alright?"

She seemed to retreat behind her mane a little, but less than normal. "We have to be cruel sometimes, to be kind Twilight." With those short words, she left as well.

Despite Twilight's fears of imminent attack, the rest of the day went peacefully as any other in Ponyville. Pinkie Pie seemed especially happy at her new found ability to talk to them regardless of location, to the point that Rainbow Dash had threatened to return her unit to Celestia personally.

With the sun setting, the young unicorn settled down to salad for dinner as Spike nibbled on an emerald. She was surprised, the dragon had been amazed as the rest of them earlier on, but since then had been unusually quiet.

"Spike, do you want to talk about anything?" She asked cautiously.

"No, not really. Well," He gave her a look that said everything. "Promise me that you'll be ok Twilight. Can you do that?"

She ran over, and held him in that way that only mothers can hold people. "I promise everything thing will be alright." She held the embrace, gently rocking them back and forth.

After a few minutes, Spike piped up "Twilight, you can let go now."

Wriggling out of her arms, he sniffed loudly. "I wasn't worried or anything, I know you can handle anything, you're Twilight Sparkle after all." She might have believed him, if he'd said it as gruffly as he intended.

"That right, I am. Now you'd better get to bed, it's been a long day."

He nodded in agreement, finishing his emerald in a single gulp. As he ran upstairs, Twilight thought about going up to tuck him in, but instead made a mental note to do something nice when all this was over. Perhaps she could convince Rarity to spend a day with him.

Polishing off the last piece of lettuce, she looked over the shelves. Sadly the library was lacking in books on what to do when homicidal ponies came after your blood. There was one, but after a week of being unable to sleep, Twilight had wiped her own memory, leaving only a reminder never to pick it up again. Levitating her things out into the kitchen, she stifled a yawn. Quickly coming to the conclusion that the washing up could wait until tomorrow, she ascended and jumped into bed. No snide voices plagued her tonight, just blessed sleep falling like a curtain.

That morning as the sun rose, it shone down on a light mist rolling out of the Everfree Forest. With a small crack and a flash of blue, six silhouettes appeared in the gloom. They looked out over the fields surrounding Ponyville.

"So this is where they live? What a waste of good space, I could have contained a population like this in a single hab block." One voice said.

"We're not here to admire the scenery Star, we've got work to do. How do we lure them out?"

"Calm down Fury, you'll get your fight." Another voice smirked. "This should bring them running."

A light appeared in the fog, a sphere of pink floating over somepony's hoof. With a flick of the wrist, it flew off into a nearby field. It burrowed into the ground for a second, and then exploded, throwing up a great cloud of dirt.

"Wake up everyone, some things going down in North Ponyville."

Rainbow's voice smashed through Twilight's dream like a jack hammer. Rubbing her eyes, she looked out the window. In the distance, she could see a plume of something rising out one of the far fields.

"I see it too Rainbow Dash, listen up everypony, lets meet up in the town centre and go investigate."

"Okey Dokey Lokey!"

A few minutes later, they'd all arrived and started to walk out into the fields. The conversation was limited, most of them were sleep lagged. Normally only Dash was awake at this hour to get a start on the weather, and Pinkie because, well she had no reason to be up. Twilight sometimes theorised that she didn't actually need sleep and was in fact fuelled by some cosmic event beyond all known understanding. Clearly none of the other pegasus were up yet, the fog was rolling in thicker and thicker.

"Hey, I found something."

Dash had flown on ahead a little. As the others gathered round, they could see a large hole in soil, like a bomb had gone off. Half formed vegetables laid scattered the crater.

"What in tarnation did this?" Applejack voiced, her inner farmer clearly annoyed at the loss of stock, but grateful they were at least three fields from the nearest apple trees.

"We did." An all too familiar voice came out the gloom.

A shape materialized in the fog, Soaringfury casually walked towards them.

"So you're the fake pony that's been causing all the trouble round here." Dash shouted menacingly.

"Fake?" A cool voice replied as a second shape appeared in the mist. "Oh we're very real Rainbow Dash, but you'll learn that soon enough."

It was with a considerable amount of self control that Dash's jaw didn't hit the dirt as the second pony emerged. She had known that Soaringfury would look like Fluttershy, but she wasn't ready to see herself coming through the fog.

"Enough with the games. Come out where we can see you." Applejack said impatiently.

"As you wish." A new voice came from somewhere in the murk. A breeze suddenly sprang to life, the fog rolling off to the side. Four more outlines faded in, and then became solid. There was a quiet gasp from everyone as they came into focus.

It was like looking in a mirror Twilight thought. Except, there was something wrong, the longer she looked, and it felt like an eternity, the more it became like a spot the difference contest. Just as their armour sets were slightly different, each of their counterparts had some defect that set

them apart from the original.

"And who are you supposed to be?" Rarity asked with an air of disgust, eyeing her copy much the same way she would eye a pair of flared trousers.

"We're the Psycho Ponies." Soaringfury said proudly. "We're smarter than you, stronger than you."

"But we're evil." Fake Twilight butted in. "I'm Mourning Star."

"Chromatic Sprint!"

"Curio!"

"Fuchsia Fritter!"

"Peardrop!"

"Well charming as this is," The one called Curio spoke, her voice a mockery of Rarity's high class accent. "We all know why we're here, shall we get down to it?"

"Yes, I think we've talked long enough." Mourning Star said to no pony in particular. From her tone, she might have been talking about the weather.

As they started to walk across the field, Dash, Rarity and Fluttershy huddled closer to the others.

"Well, time to find out if these really work." Dash said shakily, more fear in her voice than she'd ever admit to.

With a blaze of light, the six of them activated their units, the armour appearing as before. The Psychos paused, clearly this was something they hadn't expected.

"You never mentioned those things in your report." Curio shouted angrily at Soaringfury.

"They didn't use them last time," She shouted back. "What difference does some fancy metal make? We'll still destroy them with ease, charge!"

The Psychos broke into a run, glee etched onto each of their faces. The speed was amazing, and yet it seemed to residents of Ponyville that they were running in slow motion. Whether the visors were displaying them like that, or if her senses had been radically enhanced Twilight couldn't tell.

She watched with a mixture of wonder, fear and a tweak of, excitement? Looking closer, she saw the fine haze of an aura round her opponent. She was channelling magic to increase her psychical strength, it was incredible. Undoubtable had they meet under different circumstances, they would have had a great deal to talk about, theories and ideas to exchange.

The lines clashed, everypony pairing off against their opposite. Mourning Star reared up onto her hind legs, swinging round a hoof. The move was impressive, the charge momentum transferring into the punch with minimum loss, and perfectly balanced. But today, it looked weak and predictable. Twilight saw it coming with what seemed like minutes to spare. Turning to face Star side on, she brought up her own hoof to block it.

They collided, a shower of sparks flying out from where Mourning touched her armour. Twilight had enough time to note a look of anger cross her face before the blow slid off and another came fast on its trail. With her next block, Twilight flicked out her leg, catching her prey off guard.

As Star stumbled for a second, Twilight tried a punch of her own. Moving faster than she would have believed herself capable of, she struck just below the neck, feeling solid resistance against her hoof. Star fell back a pace, but seemed unconcerned. Twilight knew just from that fleeting contact, that even without her magic Mourning Star would have been strong enough to give Big Macintosh a fair fight. This was going to take more than a lucky blow.

A routine began to establish itself, Mourning would unleash a torrent of blows, Twilight would block most of them and then land a few of her own. Whenever she did get hit, Twilight barely felt it. It was more than just metal surrounding her, some kind of magic shield was dampening the strikes to little more than gentle shoves. This was hardly the time for metaphors, but at a push, Twilight would have said it was like being on the receiving end of one of Fluttershy's angry kicks.

Around her, her friends were locked in similar patterns. Applejack was going hammer and tongs at Peardrop, more than holding her own. Jumping backwards, she swung round in mid-air, landing on her front legs and kicking out with her hind legs. Peardrop barely had time to jerk out the way, a thin scratch appearing across her side as the very tip of a hoof grazed her.

Above them, Dash and Sprint fought on the thermals. Almost as if scared of what might happen if they strayed too far, the pair of them floated round, keeping to the barrier formed by the fog. Without gravity to bother them, they fought with all four limbs. Punches mixed with kicks and dives as each sought out any weakness in the other. Of all the Psychos, Chromatic was the most obvious forgery.

Where Rainbow's mane and tail was bright and colourful, Chromatic's was a purple. Seven stripes on her mane, fading from palest violet, to an inky plum so dark it was nearly black. It swayed in the breeze as they traded attacks.

Back on the ground, Rarity and Curio circled each other, waiting. Like master swordsmen, they slowly paced, and then struck without warning or mercy before circling again. As such, less than a dozen blows had taken place. In Curio's case, she was enjoying the fight against a skilled challenger, and Rarity was scared that she might break a nail if she struck too hard.

Meanwhile a pair of pink blurs was all anyone could see of Pinkie and Fuchsia, even with their new-found abilities. Clearly whatever allowed Pinkie to bend the universe had been passed onto Fritter. In the rare moments that they slowed down enough to be seen, it was clear that Pinkie was having the time of her life, overjoyed that she'd found someone that could keep up with her. Normally Rainbow Dash filled this void, but she had her limits. If anything, Fuchsia looked a little out of breath, it didn't seem like she'd landed a single punch.

Soaringfury and Fluttershy were having a strange kind of fight. Fury was still filled with rage from her defeat and turned that into flurries of punches, but she seemed very unwilling to expose her chest and turned down some riskier moves that she'd normally do. Fluttershy on the other hoof was trying to keep to her word and help Fury in anyway possible. Looking her in the eyes again, it was much harder to keep up, and she'd mainly stuck to defending herself.

The sun rose higher, wearing down the fog banks and illuminating the fight. Wild as it appeared, Twilight knew that they weren't fighting at full strength yet. She was beginning to wonder when the Psychos would step it up a gear when Mourning Star jumped back out of range and shouted to the others.

"Play time's over, Psycho Barrage. Now!"

The rest of the crew jumped back to gathered round her. As one, their eyes glowed and the air rippled for a split second. Then a wave of lightning shot forth from them, smashing into their targets before they could react.

As it hit home, Twilight recognised the huge power behind the attack before she was thrown through the air, explosions appearing all over her armour where ever the lightning struck. Hitting the ground hard, she felt pain for the first time that day, the wind knocked out of her. Wheezing, she got back to her feet, only to be struck down again by a second wave. Pinned under a storm of magical energies, she could see that the others were being mowed down as well.

"You entertained us Twilight and friends," Mourning called to them over the thunder cracks. "We will honour you with the most painful deaths."

Suddenly as it started, the storm ended. Looking up, they saw the Psychos glowing a light blue.

"No, it's too soon!" Mourning manage to shout, before with a bang, they vanished.

To be continued