

Chapter 1

Awakening

I awoke inside a tube of pale blue sludge, my mouth and nose covered and violated by a mask of some sort. Outside of the tube I could see a brightly lit room, white light pouring in through the glass that separated me. It took moments for me to come to terms with what I saw, what I heard, what I felt. It didn't seem right.

Then I started thrashing, my hooves hitting the glass with all the strength I could muster. Desperately I tried to free my face from the horrid thing that covered it, with its tubes going *down* my throat. I felt violated by it, constrained. It felt like hours, but must have been shorter than that, maybe minutes at the most. When it opened, it simply let me flow out with the blue tinged sludge.

Bringing my hooves to my face, I used all my might to tear the thing from my head, its horrible tubes being pulled from my throat in the worst experience of my all too brief consciousness. Coughing and spluttering, I raised myself to a sitting position and took note of my surroundings. I was in a room, far longer than it was wide. On either side of me were tubes similar to my own, each containing what had once been a living creature. I saw Pony, Griffin and Dragon alike, each with similar but different mask things covering part of their face. What I now realised was that they were all connected to their tanks, just like mine had been. I also noted that each one of those tanks contained a dead creature. On the wall opposite of the tanks was a computer terminal, one for each. They all shared a flickering blue screen with numbers and letters constantly marching across. The others said deceased and then a string of numbers and finally a code. Mine read Error, a fact I took as being good considering.

Under the harsh lights, I gathered my disparate thoughts, and worked on raising myself from the floor. It was not as easy as I'd have wanted, my body felt heavier than it should, stranger than it should. It was like I was in a familiar but different body, both feeling right and wrong at the same time. How long it took to get up and stumble towards the door I do not know, my mind at the time wasn't capable of truly functioning, as was the strangeness of me.

Outside of the room the lights were dimmer, with some even flickering erratically, and out here my mind finally bucked into gear and let me start noticing the small things, things I hadn't seen before. There were strange lights dancing across my vision, words and numbers pertaining to thing I didn't understand. There was no sign of anypony nearby, a slight layer of dust beneath my hooves, untouched until I blundered through. Speakers in the corridor gently hissed, like they were playing a song composed solely of static, setting my nerve on edge.

I slowly made my way forward, absentmindedly stretching the various part of my body, the vague click and whir sounding oh so right to my soul, the faint feel of air across my feathers. It felt so right. Up some stairs I went, up towards an unknown room filled with softly beeping computers and the whir of air filters. It was odd how stairs from a corridor linked to a room, seemingly against common sense, and the room its self was odd. In the middle were perfectly stacked piles of books and ingredients to some sort of meal or potion. The walls had more terminals, and a single door was directly opposite me.

"This is weird, it's not right." I said, my voice sounding ever so slightly off, more commanding than

what I could remember. Once more I continued forward, absentmindedly picking up one of the books with my magic. "A detailed guide to Pony Augmentation as written by the illustrious Doctor Iron Hide." I read out loud, the book looked amateurish and the insides were filled with annotation by various different ponies. "Must have been a draft." I said as I dropped the book carelessly to the ground.

So it was that I continued through the strange place, with its oddly designed rooms and nonsensical layout. Occasionally I'd find talismans etched into the metal surface, some on the floor and ceiling with most on the walls. Sometimes I'd find myself walking down passageways that ran parallel to one I'd walked previously, but never once meeting. More and more a sense of wrongness began to fill me, my feathers had at points itched uncomfortably, my magic flared to crazy proportions or my body had just felt *wrong*.

It was sometime, lost as I was in the maze that the wrongness reached a new level. Across my vision, a series of graphs and letters filled my vision, rendering me blind for a moment, and then most faded until all that was left was a simple message:

Welcome to the Stable Tech Augmented Interface Version 0.687b

We thank you for choosing this superior product, and will now begin our get ready tutorial. First, please think of "STATUS". Please hold this thought as this is vital to proper calibration.

After a moment an image of a pony appeared in my vision, other things as well like overall health of my extremities, my current level of hydration, and my current magical radiation total. Also on the screen were various other items, like my healing and repair talisman status. All of it looked right in my mind, and the system seemed to read my mind as it once again went blank.

Please now think of 'Item', this will calibrate the arcane sorting spell.

Once more I was greeted by another menu, and once more all seemed right.

Please now think 'Maps' to begin calibration of automap features.

It was only now I truly realised how strange this place was. The corridors crisscrossed at odd angles, rooms shaped like hexes directly connected to circular rooms. Vast areas filled with empty space, massive rooms that weren't connected to anything. In short the layout was beyond inefficient and bordered on lunacy. I set my markers, it was second nature to me like using a limb I'd had all my life.

Now think 'Data' to setup terminal interaction and download functionality.

I did so and various notes filled my vision, handy because I could just download them straight to my pipbuck and view them through my eyes. I was honestly impressed by the new model I wore, so much functionality and with a hoof free operation system even an Earth Pony like me could use it in the heat of battle. I looked down to where it was, wanting to give it a pat for being so good. It wasn't there; there wasn't a pipbuck on my leg, there wasn't a Celestia damned pipbuck on either of my legs. My magic again flared, uncontrollably ripping a pipe from the wall, it wasn't right, I was

supposed to wearing a pipbuck. I began to stomp my hooves, my wings flared, the floor began to dent as my augmented hooves struck it.

“Why do I not have a pipbuck?” I roared as I continued savaging the ruined floor. It wasn’t right, I should have a pipbuck. But it felt right not to have one, it wasn’t there because I didn’t need one, but I knew that I should have one but it also felt *right* that I didn’t have one. “What the fuck’s wrong with me?” I sobbed, tears clouding my vision.

I collapsed, this wasn’t right. Using my magic I slowly flipped a shiny bit of metal from the floor so I could see my own reflection. “There, that’s better. See, I’ve got a horn and pair of wings just like I’m meant to, a perfect specimen of an Earth Pony.” I smiled at myself, yes that was right, Earth Ponies had no need to be fancy like unicorns and their magic, or Pegasi and their flight. I continued looking at myself, my mind clicking parts into place, horror building up. I felt *RIGHT*, I looked *RIGHT*, and yet I knew I was *WRONG*. “What the fuck is wrong with me. I’m not meant to have wings, I’m not meant to have a horn. But I feel right, I am perfectly normal. Right?”

I don’t know where I went after that, I know I wandered around, I know I found bits and pieces with which I clothed myself with. I know I did things, found some saddle bags. I know I did this, I just can’t remember. I was both right and wrong at the same time, right and wrong, oh so right, with my repair and healing talismans keeping me upright and stable, my augmented legs and lungs driving me forward, my wings feeling oh so good, my magic reaching out and doing things that seemed so natural to me. It was all wrong though. I was an Earth Pony, I was not a Pegasus, nor was I a Unicorn.

I had come to a door, and through this door I found a place that finally conformed to sense. It was a normal room, with normal desks and working tables. There were clipboards and computers shoved down where convenient, not placed in odd formations that made no sense. It was here I settled down for the second time in this strange day. In front of me was a computer, a simple terminal, not like the one in my head, or body, or mind or wherever the fuck it was.

As I looked through it I found a file title with my name, Unity. Inside were a series of reports, observations and personal remarks. I selected the personal remarks and began to read, hoping to understand what happened.

Entry 1: Doc. Iron Hide on the subject of ‘Unity’.

Unity is shaping up to be perfect candidate for the advanced cyber augmentation systems developed by Goldenblood’s Steel Pony program. Although crude by my standards, their simplicity and reliability more than adequately make up for any deficiencies. Add to the fact that subject ‘Unity’ is barely held together on both at the cellular level AND at the level of his ‘Soul’ as much as we can see. I asked our lead Arcane Researcher to gently prod M.A.S. for further information on the subject.

Although it is promising, what we plan to do falls so far outside our regular scope of

augmentations that it boggles even my mind. Of course we have made sure that no one knows about this experiment, but internal security is so strict that we can't even talk to each department without one of them hovering nearby. Not that I mind, this is too big to risk.

Entry 2: Arcane Researcher Life Reader on the subject of 'Unity'.

When the good doctor said this pony was perfect beyond our wildest dreams, I thought he was exaggerating, that he was trying to play me. But by Celestia, by Luna, that pony is beyond what we'd ever hoped. At cellular level he is breaking apart in a controlled series of events. Normally I would call this a momentous find but that fails to explain what's happening to his Soul! It is becoming less distinct with every passing day, at a rate that mirrors his cellular decay.

I have set the initial soul anchors, and I have assured the Doctor that he is good to install his implants at any time after that. I hope he does not muck this up, just as he would wish the same of me. If this works we will have done what was thought impossible.

Entry 3: Arcane Researcher Life Reader

This goes against everything I have ever learnt, but what I have seen today will make everything we know obsolete. Long have we theorised that the soul is capable of being modified, that it can be destroyed and ripped apart. But never did we think it could be healed, merely sustained. 'Unity' is beyond amazing, his soul and body have adapted to the implants and arcane manipulation, repairing his self before our eyes. I think me and the doctor embraced each other in the heat of the moment, something which when we started would never have happened. Tomorrow we begin prepping U1 and P1 for soul and body recalibration. With what 'Unity' has shown us, we have improved our estimates to roughly five percent.

Entry 4: Doc. Iron Hide

I want to say I'm not shocked, that everything was absolutely expected, it's not true. I can't say that because what has happened was unthinkable. Today we placed subjects U1 and P1 near 'Unity' and proceeded to monitor the results from a series of arcane and mechanical sensors located around and in the subjects. U1 and P1 both experienced major fluctuations in their biochemistry and arcane fields. We recorded unprecedented magical spikes from U1, and reactivation of formerly DEAD brain matter, the same holds true for P1. This goes so far beyond the scope of our wildest dreams. 'Unity' is currently at stage 3 of the implant and soul anchor process, at stage 4 we were planning on introducing implants for both wings and horn functionality. But I think we can do it NOW, his soul is currently so malleable that it literally seeks out other damaged souls to repair its own.

I think I and Life Reader need to have a chat; we need to get ready for stage 4 and 5 immediately. Hopefully she sees it my way, maybe over a four course candle lit dinner at the Prancing Pony in Orange Town nearby.

Entry 5: Doc. Iron Hide

Success with 'Unity' stage 5 implants, we carved away excess flesh and bone from both P1 and U1

and successfully installed additional implants upon both components. 'Unity' was then modified along already installed implants and soul anchors to accept them. Currently the wings are unusable and the horn has only limited functionality, but with stage 6 I shall be given complete control on all aspects. First up is nerve and neuron connections, then we go for the full installation of Steel Pony Mk 5e systems supported by my own 'Unity' Mk 6 implants. This is a delicate period for the subject thus all soul work shall be held off till stage 7 as me and Life Reader have agreed previously.

After this I shall only participate in the stage 8 tuning process. I hope that Life Reader has this right, I hope I have this right. We cannot allow this to fail here.

Entry 6: Arcane Researcher Life Reader

I thought I had seen miracles before, I now know I've seen mere party tricks. 'Unity' has managed complete integration with elements of subjects P1 and U1, as well as that, the soul has perfectly formed around my team's soul anchors and the doctor's implants. Stage 7 is in its final days, and I look forward to the good Doctors help in the final tuning. We have made history here, we have done the impossible.

Entry 7: Head of project 'Unity' Supervisor Perfect Schedule

Wow, I know I have a talent for organisation, I know I'm really really good at it. But this is the first time I've been two years ahead of schedule. My team has preformed beyond all measure of excellence, our findings are beyond what we had predicted. Tomorrow I plan on having a celebration, no expenses spared for our team. We will begin production reports by the next week, feasibility studies by the next month. I plan on seeing Horse personally tomorrow with some of these findings.

Perhaps with Goldenblood removed and in Canterlot, we can proceed forward towards full production of the 'Unity' type Cyber Alicorn.

I sat there, unable to move, unable to think. I wanted to scream, I wanted to rage. I wanted to kill the ponies responsible. I wailed with all my being, I screamed and raged and wrecking all that I saw. By the time I felt spent, the room was a ruin. Computers had been bucked across the room, tables upended, half the lights were dead. I felt dead, unable to call upon rage nor sadness, nor regret. I felt hollow, I felt violated, and I felt *RIGHT!* That was the worst part, I felt right.

I had looked through the rest of those files, finding references to other projects carried out within this facility. All of those were related back to Unity, back to me. I was their end goal, I was their sole creation. I wanted to remove this place from the earth. All I had found was one last package that contained a single recording and a data file. I hit play hoping for some penance, some shred of decency.

"If any pony finds this message, I have prepared all data for immediate transfer to the nearest pip buck or other suitable device. Get it to Hoofington, Tenpony, any where they can make use of our findings."

There was a wet fit of coughing.

“I’m dying; the Zebra’s balefire bombs caught me in their fallout. No one else made it here before I had to close this facility down. The brilliant minds we lost here today shall not have been sacrificed in vain though, through our research we shall live on, we shall make ourselves stronger by climbing atop our dead and dying and push forward the Pony way. WE SHALL WIN!”

I saw a pop up on my eye HUD. I saw the data file there. I deleted it without any hesitation. Then, with all that I had left, I made my way to the exit, promising that one day I would return and make this place disappear. No matter who occupied it, no matter how well fortified, I would make this place no more.

Outside, under the cloudy sky I stood alone. Marking the place I had left behind on my map, and setting an objective, a simple one. Locate a Balefire Bomb.

Footnote: Level Up.

New Perk: Cyber Alicorn – You are the most advanced creation of the wastes, a truly superior being. You may take perks regardless of Racial requirements. You are also equipped with state of the art Repair and Healing talismans, although your susceptibility to Pulse Weapons is increased tenfold.