

Author's Note: I finally saw Se7en. Pretty good movie. And no, this fic is still not based on it. The similarities that occurred were a hilarious coincidence. The murders in this story are not based entirely on the Seven Deadly sins, just sins and shortcomings in general, and Gluttony just happened to be first (just like in Se7en, yes I know). I always figured Pinkie would be the first to die in a murder mystery. It was only coincidence that I decided to make her Gluttony. Well... that, and the fact that she eats whole cakes like it's nothing.

-mbulsht

CHAPTER FOUR

Investigation, Day One (cont.)

Contrary to common belief, the mind of a psychopath is not a fascinating thing. It is actually very ordinary. Yes, it has often been romanticized in those two-bit crime novels they sell in street stands on the corner with newspapers and tabloid bullshit, but fiction hardly ever parallels reality. And the reality of it all, the gritty unbearable truth, is that a killer has a mind that is very normal. And as such, they appear to be very normal. They are just like you or me. They do not live in dark dank hideaways, they do not lurk in the sewers and ventilation shafts, and they most certainly do not draw attention to themselves like their fictional counterparts. I recall reading one of those horrible crime dramas late one night about a deranged pony who gallivanted about wearing the skin of his victims. I got about a third of the way in before I had to put the book down. It was absolute crap. The psychotic pony ran around town wearing a cape of skin; it was completely absurd. I then attempted to wash my brain of that rubbish with an equally trashy romance novel. I enjoyed the occasional romantic drama, I admit. Those, at least, rarely endeavor to take themselves seriously.

It's not just the unrealistic nature of those crime novels that bothers me. It's our nation's infatuation with the fictional psychopath. Ponies just eat those damn little books up. They love it. The strange and weird killers, the ones who kill for sex and money, it sickens me. I hate it because they don't realize just how dangerous a killer really is. How a killer really thinks, how they act, and how they look. They don't understand that real murderers, the really sick ones, are right in front of them, walking down the street, smiling and saying hi. They are somepony you know. They could be your neighbor, your friend, or even a family member. They could be anyone. Why? Because at the very core of their being, they are exactly like me and you. They are adept at putting up masks, lying to others, and pretending to be somepony they're not.

They're devious.

But their minds have one fundamental difference from ours. A single little thing that sets them apart from the rest of us. They have become desensitized to the pain of others, and in many cases, it arouses them. Piques their interest. But they all started out normal. Serial killers are not born, they are made. Something in their past, perhaps a death in the family or childhood abuse, causes their minds to twist and bend. Yet twisted as they may be, they can be

understood. Through proper study and scrutiny, the minds of murderers and serial killers can be understood completely.

And that's what the Profile is. It's what I studied for so long back at Canterlot University. What I've devoted so much of my life to. It's what earns me my bread and butter. The Profile tells us how the killer thinks. And when you know how a killer thinks, then you know who he is.

I took a deep breath and let it out, clearing my mind. Once again I had the pictures of the five victims spread out before me, this time with accompanying files about each pony, as well as coroner reports. Looking over them, I realized the coroner reports were almost completely useless. The times and causes of death were clear cut, but any other clues that could be gleaned from the bodies was...well, there were no clues. Absolutely no evidence left behind by the killer. But this was okay; that in itself was a clue.

"Quill? The Profile?"

Blaise snapped me out of my reverie, and I looked up from the files at him. The light from the flickering magic lamp danced across his face and cast shadows upon the walls of my carriage. I couldn't have been sure, but I thought I saw a flash of fear across his face. Or maybe it was disgust. It was understandable, of course. This particular case was far more frightening than anything we had worked before. I briefly reflected on my partner. Perhaps it was just a kneejerk reaction, but I had always thought he was too young for this job. It was silly; he was at least a year older than me. But dragons age slower, and reach maturity slower than ponies. In relation to others of his kind, he was just a baby. And the Agency was no place for children. I pushed these thoughts away as I saw that he was looking at me expectantly.

Right.

"Let's start with the victimology, then," I began. The profile always began with the victims. By studying the kinds of victims the killer chose, and the way in which he killed them, we could gain insight into his mind.

"With the exception of the dragon, each victim is a fairly young mare," said Blaise.

"Let's forget the dragon for a moment. I have my own theories about him. Because the MO for that murder is different, we should first profile the others."

Blaise nodded. "Each murder was also very brutal. From these coroner reports I can tell that each victim underwent at least a few minutes of painful torture before dying."

"So our killer is into young mares and torture," I said, tapping my chin. "Evidence of torture indicates a sadist. Statistically, sadists are male, ages between 20-35. Let's move on to

the crime scenes. Any evidence of sexual abuse?"

Looking over the files, Blaise shook his head. "Coroner says they were clean aside from their own injuries and blood."

Not a sexual sadist, then. Lack of sexual activity could point to many things. I set that aside in my mind to think about later. Instead I focused on another part of each crime scene. "The presence of these...messages are also an indicator."

Blaise looked over the pictures. "Gluttony...Vanity...Pride...Lust...what do these mean?"

"They're for us. It's the killer explaining why he's doing this. Think of it as a kind of, well, excuse. He's trying to justify the murders to us." I tapped the Pinkie Pie picture. "This young earth mare was a worker at a local bakery. In the police interviews, her friends stated she enjoyed eating sweets to an excess. The probably killer saw this as a shortcoming, or a sin. So he killed her, and justified it as 'killing a glutton.'"

"Looks like he's in to irony too," he added. "He killed her by force-feeding her."

I indicated the other pictures with a nod. "And Rarity, the 'Vain' one, was killed by having clothes stitched into her. He's into poetic justice, that's for sure."

"So he kills because he hates what they do?"

"He kills because he hates them. The supposed sins are just what triggers him. The hate is very apparent, from the torture."

Blaise nodded and looked down at the files. "He must be strong, too. The police report here says that there's no evidence of any kind of struggle. He gets to them quickly and without a fight." He thought for a moment. "I guess it could also mean that the victims knew him. If that were true, then the reason for them not putting up a fight is because they were friends or acquaintances or something."

We didn't have much evidence to go on for that theory, so I changed the subject.

"I don't think there is much else that can be gleaned from these photos. Let's move on to the killer." I waited for him to look up before I continued. "As I said, sadists are usually male, 20-35 years old. Lack of sexual abuse points to him being an aggression killer. The kill is empowering to him, and he enjoys exercising that pleasure. The torture is just used to prolong their death, thereby prolonging the overall experience. Because he does not sexually abuse them, I would guess that he no longer needs them when they're dead."

"What, does that mean he doesn't care about them once their dead?"

What Blaise said stopped me in my thoughts. He was wrong; that was not what I had meant at all. I had meant that killing was his only source of pleasure, and not sex. But it was the way Blaise had worded it struck me. Care about them, I thought. Does he care about them? It was a silly question. Of course he didn't care about them, he killed them. But the thought nagged at me from the back of my head. I ignored Blaise as he asked the question again, instead holding up a hoof to silence him so I could concentrate on the crime scene pictures.

I gazed once more upon each of the photos. We had covered everything: cause of death, victimology, timespread, and even had part of a preliminary profile. But what was I missing? Perhaps I was going crazy, I thought absently. I was just about to give up and answer Blaise's question when I saw it; what I had been looking for.

"Remorse," I said.

"What?" Blaise raised an eyebrow. "What does that have to do with this?"

I turned the photos around to him and tapped each of them. "Every single one of these bodies has been tampered with after death. And most certainly not sexually. Look here, Pinkie Pie has been laid down in a sleeping position. And a towel has been placed over her face. Here, in this picture, Rarity has been put in a similar position. And lastly, look at Rainbow Dash. She has been positioned on her back with her wings under her forehooves. Almost...angelic, wouldn't you say?"

Blaise stared at them and then smiled, understanding. "They've been posed to look more peaceful."

"It's a sign of remorse," I said, leaning back into my bench. "Part of him regrets each kill."

"But that doesn't make sense. How can you hate somepony so much that you want torture and kill them, but then feel regret?"

I smiled. The last piece of the profile had finally slipped into place. Building a profile was like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. You were given many tiny little pieces that you had to turn this way and that until they fit together with each other. Then you could step back and look at the whole picture. And what a beautifully done picture it often was. Such detail, such order!

"It's simple," I said. "He knows them."

For a pony of my background, the Profile is paramount. The Profile tells us how a killer thinks, who he kills, what his past is like, and most importantly, who he is. But to build and use a Profile takes the educational background that I possess. To any street officer, the evidence is most important. I mulled this over in my mind as I felt our carriage descending lower and lower,

and as the wheels lightly touched down to the ground I had already planned out the first bit of my stay in Ponyville. Reaching up, I slid open the small window and called out to Jiffy.

"Ponyville PD if you would, please. And take your time. I'm sure the flight over here was tiring."

"Of course, sir," my chauffeur spoke back amiably.

I felt the carriage drawn away to the side as I sat back down, closing the window. I felt a crunch beneath my hooves and I looked down to see that I had trampled some ashes from the scroll I had burned earlier. Once again I resolved to clean the mess later. Though I would probably forget; Blaise often cleaned out the carriage midst his other duties alongside me. Duties... there was another thing I had to think about. Absently I stared down at him from across the table in my carriage and once more found myself reflecting on my partner. Something I had begun to do more and more, it seemed, as my decision to fill this little book with classified information. I suppose at this point it is well enough to talk about him. Even as I sit here in this loft of hay, surrounded by the chirping of crickets, I can gaze down at his sleeping form. It is not terribly late, and he is still fast asleep. I have some time, I think. A horn is a wonderful thing for writing fast as well, though forgive me, dear reader, if occasionally it becomes rather messy in this book. You understand, yes?

My relationship with my partner is, to say the least, a difficult one. We are friendly, no doubt there. But as I've said before, I have this nagging suspicion (one that is not unfounded, of course) that he is an agent to my agent, if you will. I know he reports to Luna directly, and I'm quite sure he evaluates me on a regular basis. Half of my job, after all, is to show him the ropes. He was assigned to me as both an assistant and messenger, as dragon magic is invaluable in the transportation of secure documents. But when I was paired up with him, the Princess gave me another tenet: to essentially train Blaise, as it were. He's an up and coming Patcher, apparently.

Now as I stated earlier, I have reservations about this particular endeavour. He is young and impressionable, and a part of me is repulsed by the idea of taking him from crime scene to crime scene, giving him insight to the mind of a killer, and exposing him to the nature of our job. When I can, I do try to shield him from these things. Some silly voice in the back of my head wants him to grow up in a different situation than the one I now find myself in. Yet there is another part to this; I don't want to give the knowledge that could be used against me. Teaching him tells, signs of lies and deceit, how to profile a pony, all of these things could be turned right back 'round at me. Call me paranoid, but I'm sure he studies me under the same eye I've taught him to view suspects and witnesses. Paranoid or not, it would definitely fall under the sorts of things Central Command would pull with its agents. I'm sure you, dear reader, have oft heard the joke that psychologists or the ones who most need psychological help. One of my friends back in Canterlot U used to say it a different way:

"A psychologist spends their life so devoted to studying the way others interact that sometimes they fail to properly interact with others"

I believe it was something like that.

And as you saw, I slipped up in front of him once today. He's catching on to learning when ponies hide things, which is precisely why I fear having to hide things from him.

[editor's note: at this point in the diary, the writing slides quickly off to the right as though the quill were scratched violently off in surprise]

Gah, damn! Sorry about that ugly scratching mark there, dear reader. I just heard Blaise shift in his sleep and it scared me half to death. I very nearly slammed this closed and shoved it under my pillow in fear, though I noticed quickly that Blaise was still sleeping. My nerves are getting the best of me, I think. I should finish this quickly. It has grown late, I need to sleep, and there is still much to be written. I shall come back to this subject later, time permitting. And do forgive me if it appears this next bit is written rather hastily. That's probably because it will be.

It was Blaise once again who snapped me from my reverie back in the carriage.

"Quill?"

I paired my gaze with his, inwardly cursing myself. What did he think of my lingering gazes towards him? Was he suspicious of my thoughts? What did he conclude about my current mood?

"Yes, Blaise?" I leaned back attempting to appear as though I wasn't thinking about anything in particular.

"Why the police department first? Shouldn't we be visiting the crime scenes?"

Ah, his thoughts were elsewhere as well. That was fine. "No," I answered. This actually tied back into what I had been considering earlier about Profiles and evidence. "This is a cover job. In jobs like this, what is our primary objective?"

"To ensure the patch and secure any and all information," he repeated from memory, nodding.

"Exactly." I tapped the table in front of me. "The actual case itself is a secondary priority. We must catch the killer, yes, but the first piece of business will be securing all the evidence the police have in lockup. They won't be needing it anymore, anyway."

Blaise "Ah"d and sat back in his seat. We passed the rest of the ride in silence.

Presently, we came to a stop and a knock on the side of the carriage from Jiffy's hoof alerted me to the fact that we had arrived at our destination. Nodding to Blaise, I opened the door and stepped out in to the cool early evening air. My hooves touched down in the soft dirt and I looked around, taking in the scene around me. We were in a central square of the town, just in front of the Police Station, which was marked with a helpful hoof-made sign. Upon closer observation, I noted that the entire square was marked by a distinctly earthy feel. In contrast to the towering stone geometries of Canterlot, each building here was constructed mostly from wood, and some of the roofs showed signs of recent repair. It sure had the proper atmosphere of a town founded by earth ponies. I believe some of my friends from the University may have used the term "quaint." Personally, I rather enjoyed the place.

Blaise hopped out of the carriage himself, stretching his limbs. I looked down at him, smiling. "Ready?" With a light flick of my horn, I levitated a pair of sunglasses from my saddlebags and put them on, despite the fact that the sun was just beginning to set in the distance behind a lovely pair of hills.

"Ready," he replied, whipping a pair of his own. "This is going to be interesting."
I laughed softly. "Let me do the talking, and just chime in when you think you need to."

There is something to be said about the way ponies greet you. First impressions are important, and the way a pony meets you for the first time will invariably lead you to determine certain nuances of their character. As a Profiler, this is always important. As an agent of the CIA, doubly so. Being aware of your surroundings and aware of the way others think of you is part of my job.

And this part of my job began the instant I stepped into the Ponyville Police Department. Dealing with local police is always difficult, even when your mission isn't a cover-up. There's a kind of tone they always have in dealing with outside help and often it comes across more aggravated towards agents from the CIA. Locals have this attachment to their cases and often dislike outside help. Understandable, of course. They live in the towns themselves, see the ponies every day, and it is hard for them to accept the fact that crimes happen in their midst all the time with the ones they live with. It is even more true in a place like Ponyville, a small town where everypony knows everypony else. Accepting the fact that somepony they know is a murderer is hard, and it's even more difficult to turn over a case to somepony from the outside. Not that my job is any easier. Being an "outsider" is taxing, to say the least.

So I trotted in with this mindset, knowing I might meet resistance, and steeling myself for what might potentially become an argument.

Opening the double doors, I stepped inside to find myself in a small standard police department. The lobby was lined with chairs on either side that drew the eye towards the center,

at which stood a small desk. Behind the desk lay row upon row of other desks, where officers sat lounging, or pouring over notes. Without a backward glance I strode forward to the main lobby desk, behind which sat a rather calm looking earth pony.

Immediately, as the doors closed behind me, all eyes were up on me and Blaise.

Remember what I said about first impressions? I got a small taste of what the Ponyville police were like right then and there. Think about how a pony looks at you when you first meet. All ponies have defining features that draw the eye. For a female, it can be a striking mane style or an accessory worn on the face or head. For a male, you note a jaw line or the style of their shortened mane. How, then, does one look at a Patcher? Of course, the most obvious thing is the shaved mane. It always draws the eye first, simply because of the bareness of one's neck. But, as I noted the looks of those around me in the PD, their gazes snapped not to my strange mane style, but to my rump where my Mark sat.

Inwardly, I mused about this. This was a clear sign of the character of the station. They were not interested in my look, or my style. They were not immediately drawn to the fact that I was wearing sunglasses indoors. No, they went straight to my Mark. They wanted to know who I was and what I was about. Of course, with the patch sitting over it, I'm sure they figured it out very quickly. As I walked forward, I noted the looks of each pony and the general atmosphere. The station had been relatively quiet when I entered, but now it was dead silent. Each pony wore a blank stare that was punctuated only by light curiosity. None smiled or frowned, however. They wanted to know who I was. But the silence...

It was not an awkward silence...

No, it was tense. These were ponies on edge. Five murders in ten days will do that.

"You're the ones from Central, huh?" The pony behind the front desk asked.

I looked him over once very quickly. He couldn't follow my gaze from the other side of my sunglasses anyway. He wore a calm demeanor, but he was sitting up very straight. His mane, cut short but just long enough to style, hung down straight to one side and his forelock was neatly combed. Here was a pony of business. He wore a face that was welcoming, but every facet of his style denoted a meticulous personality hiding behind that. That was fine; I could deal with that.

I flashed my badge briefly to him. "Agent Six, CIA. This," I added indicating Blaise with a nod, "is my partner, Agent Blaise. We've been sent to investigate a series of murders that has happened here in the past week. I've come to request access to your evidence locker for investigation purposes."

A very businesslike greeting. I'm sure he appreciated that.

"Why don't you just lead them in? Ain't no pony comin' round tonight anyway, it seems," A pony to my left told the pony sitting at the desk.

He nodded and stood, motioning for me to follow. Wordlessly, he led us towards the back of the station, weaving in and out of the rows of desks. As I passed them, I felt their stares burning into the patch on my rump. It made it itch, much to my chagrin. It wasn't that I was self-conscious about it; I had sorted those feelings out very quickly early on. But that didn't mean that I wasn't annoyed. We stopped at one of the back doors, which was aptly labelled "Evidence."

The pony opened it up for us and led us in to a small room lined on either side with rows of shelves, each holding up numerous cardboard boxes. Walking down towards the end, he stopped us at one section and indicated two boxes, one large, one small.

"This is all we've got in lockup here, the coroner at the hospital has the bodies if you need to look at those."

I nodded and hefted the largest box onto my back, balancing it there between my side-saddle bags. I motioned for Blaise to take the smaller, and he grasped it with his claws.

"Your help is appreciated," I told the pony. "We shall review this evidence tonight and tomorrow morning. Time permitting, I may be able to brief the entire station tomorrow."

"Woah, woah, brief? And where do you think you're taking that? There's place here where you can look at everything we have."

I sighed. "Brief every officer here on our Profile of the killer in order to help you find him. And we will be taking this to our own private area."

"Nuh uh." The pony moved between us and the door. "You may be government types, but we have laws here about what can and cannot leave our lockup."

Here it was, I thought. He was going to argue back. Luckily, I noted, we were in a relatively private location, and he could be swayed easily.

"Look officer, you have your protocol to follow. I get it. But I have mine as well. I am just following orders here. And since my orders come from a place a tad higher on the chain of command than you, I know who I have to follow and when."

That should have done it, I thought. "Chain of command," I had said. Such a nice little phrase. It made everything sound so formal and militaristic. I'm sure he appreciated that. He was a strict meticulous pony, after all. I could almost see the wheels turning in his head as he

thought this over. Of course, it was complete and utter nonsense; I had my orders, but they came from a part of my organization that supposedly didn't exist. And the protocol for joint operations between government and local law enforcement are shady at best; something I had on many occasions told my superiors to review. The pony struggled for a split second internally, but it was Blaise who broke the silence.

"Look, mister," he said, "Our job here is to help you. We have our orders, but they're something along the lines of "catch this killer," get it? We want things done just as much as you do. So the faster both our teams start cooperating, the faster you can have this town back on its feet, and the faster you can have this station calm again."

I chuckled inwardly at this. So he'd noticed, then, the atmosphere of the station. Excellent work, Blaise! And appealing to the stallion's emotions, that was good too. It was the proverbial straw that broke his back, and the pony stepped aside with a nod, letting us pass. The two of us exited, but not before I caught Blaise looking up at me. I smiled down at him. Progress was being made, however slow it seemed.

After leaving the police station, I noted that it had gotten rather late. At that point, it would have been useless to visit any of the crime scenes, let alone interview any possible witnesses, so I had Jiffy set off for Sweet Apple Acres, a large farm at the edge of Ponyville where the princess had apparently set up lodgings for us. The two of us passed the time in silence, each lost in our own thoughts. Mine strayed to the case, reviewing the evidence in my mind, ensuring we had gotten the Profile right. The Profile would be finished when I had seen the crime scenes myself; photos rarely gave a proper view. When at last we came to a stop, the two of us stepped once more out into the cool night air.

Sweet Apple Acres was quite the sight. Huge fields surrounded by rolling hills washed the landscape, and the whole area was a lovely shade of bright green, apparent even in the dim evening light. Many of the trees were dotted with delicious apples of varying colors from tree to tree, and I could also see areas of field that grew other crops. Jiffy had brought us to a stop near the main house, behind which I could see a large red barn. It was a classic farm; beautiful foliage topped with a small house and classically styled barn. The fields were well-kept as well. I could tell whoever ran this farm ran it well.

I closed the door of the carriage behind me, leaving both sets of evidence behind. Turning to Jiffy, I gave him my final orders for the night.

"This will be our lodging area for the remainder of our stay. As such, I will not be needing a transport. In the carriage is two sets of evidence that are to be taken straight to Central Command. They'll know what to do with it. Tell them it's from Agent Six."

"Of course, sir. Will that be all?"

I nodded. "Just be ready to come when we're finished. Blaise will drop you a note. Other than that, you're off duty."

I tossed him a bag of coins which he caught deftly twixt his teeth and tucked away. He nodded to me and, with a short thanks, flew off.

Blaise and I walked up to the main house and I lightly knocked on the door. There was a short scuffle from the inside, followed by a distinct clang! and an uttered curse. Seconds later, the door opened, and I was greeted by an orange earth pony mare.

"Hello?" She shook her blond mane out of her eyes.

I flashed my badge quickly, and nodded to Blaise. "I'm Agent Six from the CIA, and this is my partner, Blaise. We're here because you volunteered a small set of lodgings for us?"

"Oh, right! Now I remember! Come on in, why don't you?" she said, motioning us in. She had a lovely voice, heavily laced with an accent hailing from the deep south.

The two of us stepped in and I closed the door behind me. Quickly, the mare bustled about, picking up a small mess she had just made. "I'm Applejack, and I run this here farm. When I heard the government over at Canterlot needed a place to stay, why, I jus' volunteered right away! We got a big barn out back, and it's right comfortable enough."

"Your help is extremely appreciated, ma'am." I stayed by the door, not wanting to intrude too far into her comfy home.

"Oh, psh... ma'am, heh..." she chuckled. "Applejack's fine."

"Of course, miss Applejack."

She rolled her eyes, but said nothing more. I liked to maintain a constant modus of respect when dealing with others. It tended to get them to trust and like you more.

"Can I get y'all somethin' to drink?" She had finished cleaning up her mess and was leaning against a wall, one foreleg crossed over the other.

"Actually," I said, looking down and noticing that Blaise was stifling a yawn. "I think it may simply be best if you show us to our quarters, miss Applejack. My partner has grown rather tired." He was a baby dragon, after all.

"Aw, sure! It's right this way, now. I fixed up the barn just this mornin.'"

She led us out the back of the small home, and into the barn behind it. The inside of the

barn was massive, though mostly empty. Large haystacks dotted the floor and above lay a loft on either side of the barn. The barn itself had been clearly recently cleaned, and there were a couple beds laid out.

"It may not look like much, but I promise it'll do. Close up these doors, and it stays plenty warm enough in here." Applejack tapped one of the large doors with a forehoof. "Built it mahself."

I smiled warmly at her. "I'm sure it will do fine, miss Applejack."

She turned and left, and we were alone. Blaise had already made himself quite comfortable in one of the beds. I took a blanket from one, and climbed up to the loft, so that I could write while keeping an eye on him.

And that was where I began this rather long entry here. I will stop for the night, as there is little left to be said that cannot be said later, and for the fact that my eyes have grown rather heavy. I shall close this up then, hide it away, and continue sometime tomorrow.

I hope the investigation goes well. As you know, I want out.

Goodnight for now, diary. And goodnight to you, dear reader.

[Go back to previous entry](#)

[Go forward to next entry](#)

***Author's note: Guess who's baaaaack! Yep, that's right. After a few months of sifting through jobs, heavy school stuff, and assorted personal problems, the one and only ME is back! I'm really sorry about the delay for the three of you who were following this fic. But well... here I am ^_^
-mbulsht***