

Chapter 1

"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end"

Memory is truly a terrible thing.

Memory is what makes a pony a pony. Memory is what gives said pony its own unique identity, with being able to recall all the past experiences, events, anecdotes, proof-of-self and sense. Memory enshrined a pony's skills, its familiarity and competence in performing such acts, its maturity, the strife that had helped to shape its sense of self and outlook on life. Remove memory, and what is the result? Something flat, something bland, something very, very confused and, if only in my case, very annoyed indeed.

I felt the corner of my mouth pull into a half-smirk as the thought that verbosely bitching in my head would actually do something, apart from giving my mind a break from the monotony of trudging along a broken road accompanied only by the equally monotonous *clip clop* of my hooves on the hard surface and the gentle rhythm of my haversack swaying against my torso. I heaved a sigh, and tried to remember anything I hadn't already remembered from waking up those hours earlier.

Nothing.

My eyes had blearily opened to the depressingly sterile landscape of the Equestrian wasteland and the equally depressing sea of gray that occupied the sky. The very first action I could remember was casting back into the murky depths of my psyche to try and come up with a memory to shed some light upon this situation, a reason that I was out in the Equestrian wasteland, flat on my face, yet all I could remember was waking up those seconds earlier.

And then existentialism kicked in full-force, causing curiosity to turn to depression in the blink of an eye. *Who* was I? *What* was I? The worst part was that I *knew*, but I was physically and mentally incapable of remembering what I should *know*. I *knew* I was a unicorn, I *knew* I was a pony, I *knew* I was in the Equestrian wasteland, I *knew* I was male, and yet I didn't *know*. I didn't *know* who I *was* and I didn't *know* what had happened.

It's a hell of a thing for the first remembered article of speech that I could ever recall to be an inordinate screech of rage and frustration.

Resentment smoldered in my breast at the sheer unreasonable unfairness of my situation as I pulled myself to my hooves to get a good look around at wherever the Equestrian Wasteland I was, and at the same time I viciously ground my teeth in vexation. How could I *know* I was in the Equestrian Wasteland and yet how was it that I *knew* sweet buck all about the place? And how did I *know* how to express myself?

I was a very angry pony.
how did I *know* that the road was a road?), all that littered the drab, inhospitable scene were dead,

And the anger certainly didn't abate after looking around at the benighted landscape. Apart from the cracked, ravaged remains of a road (this provoked an irate exhalation of breath through gritted teeth, gnarled trees and nondescript boulders in an apparent sea of small hills. The term wasteland was indeed apt. And I was right in the middle of nowhere. That particular gem of information earned an angry "Buck it" from me, hissed between tightly-shut jaws.

Suddenly, I felt my ears droop and shoulders sag as the anger was momentarily banished to a dark corner of my mind in a sudden mood swing, only to be replaced with despair. Ungracefully, I collapsed onto my hindquarters as my situation became painfully clear.

"Buck it" I muttered again, only this time through a down-turned, unclenched mouth.

I was all alone, with no recollection of who, what, how, or why. I had no form of protection on me, no viable form of defense save my own unshod hooves and legs. I was cold. Any magical intervention which I might have been capable of, save the basic manipulation of objects via telekinesis, was gone. Then again, I unhappily realized as I instinctively and telekinetically reached out and wrapped a stone with my magic, and with some effort drawing it out of the dead ground, even that didn't feel particularly strong. I sighed, and lowered my head, my gaze slowly dragging across the ground in front of me, going from stone to rock to pebble to a faded green haversack at my hooves.

Wait, what?

The rock I had forgotten I was still holding clattered to the ground as I let it go and instead grasped the godsend that lay in front of me. I frowned, and once again felt anger bubbling through my

Destiny, or fate, or some higher power had apparently decided to intervene in the form of the limp fabric bag. Curiosity fully engaged, I magically lifted the bag up and emptied the contents out a twelve shot clip.

onto the dead ground in front of me. There, glinting dully in the semi gloom of the wasteland, and lying on the grey, stony soil, was a pistol and a plastic bottle of questionable looking water.

veins as somehow I *knew* that this pistol was an N99 series ten-millimeter sidearm with

I shook my head and snorted. This was ridiculous. I had no recollection of my past nor myself and yet a freakish repository of knowledge on a gun? A gun that had been hidden away in a sack and not seen until now, a gun that up until just now I had never laid hoof nor horn upon and yet somehow, almost instinctively, I was able to identify it just by *looking* and the damned thing. I frowned. Something wasn't adding up.

I put that irate thought aside for later consideration as with no real conscious volition of my own, ran my telekinesis over the firearm. It was somewhat disturbing, feeling myself almost professionally examining the thing and yet not really knowing what I was doing, all the while a parade of names I'd never heard before came tumbling through my head as I continued the ingrained inspection. *Breech. Slider. Barrel. Hammer. Stock. Rear sights.*

This was seriously unnerving. The words seemed to come from nowhere whatsoever, and yet were spontaneously appearing in my head. My frown grew larger still.

All of a sudden, I felt a surge of doubt. Providence had, well, *provided* a means of defense, but had it provided provisions?

With that, my telekinesis unthinkingly pressed down on the magazine release nub, and with a muffled *click*, slid the magazine out and pulled out the ten millimeter bullets nestled within out to see how many there were. Eleven. Plus the one already loaded in the chamber, twelve. But that was it. I let my hard-wired instincts slide the bullets back into the magazine before bringing the slider back and ejecting the round already present in the chamber before slotting that one into the magazine, then slapping the magazine into place. I finished off by racking the slide again, producing that distinctive *cha-chink* sound that signals a loaded gun like nothing else. Even through the haze of anger, incomprehension and frustration at my staggeringly unfair and precarious situation that occupied my head, that metallic clicking had produced a small surge of satisfaction and a ghost of a smile.

Have gun, will travel.

The ghost of a smile turned into a bitter smirk at that last thought. Here I was in the tail-end of nowhere, with no recollection of anything bar the last few extremely profoundly dissatisfying minutes of trying to come to terms with my existence, and armed only with a gun of dubious origins and twelve equally dubious bullets and at the whim spawned from listening to pieces of metal slide against each other, ready to gallivant off into the non-existent sunset. Oh, right, and all I had apart from that was a haversack and some dubious water.

That said, the only other alternative was to stand around here until something doubtlessly bad

happened.

"Buck it" I unimaginatively muttered as I made my way over to the cracked, lonesome road that bisected the otherwise empty landscape. I stared at it, my cynical optimism evaporating into cynical pessimism.

Now what, genius?

Both sides of the road stretched off into the grey middle distance, the one to my right leading off into some small foothills, and the one to my left lead towards the dark grey smudge on the horizon that was the ruins of Manechester.

What?

My ears shot up, ramrod straight as my brain reeled and eyes widened. My mouth dropped and my recently-found pistol slipped from my nerveless telekinetic grip and clattered to the ground.

The word Manechester had somehow lodged itself in my conscious the very moment I locked eyes onto its remains in the distance, as if somepony had just whispered it into my ear. I hadn't even known that the ruins were there until I had laid eyes on their silhouette in the far-distance.

What the hay is going on here?

I shook my head, trying to dispel the truly unnerving feeling that had been creeping up on me until then, and trying to make some sense of what was going on and failing miserably. The one thing that was clear was that snippets of information would suddenly and startlingly lodge themselves into my brain, gleefully scaring and freaking the crap out of me as they did so.

As the adrenaline born from the shock of having a new word leap from the ether and into my head subsided and clarity once again asserted itself, one thing was abundantly clear. I needed to get myself to some kind of doctor as fast as equinely possible: memory loss and sudden epiphanies didn't exactly signal good things about the state of my head.

I let out a shuddering breath that I didn't really realize that I was holding, scooped up the fallen pistol in a softly chiming telekinetic glove and levitating it close to my head began to plod down the road in the direction of this Manechester, with my mood wildly swinging back to optimism once again. Civilization, even the ruins of one meant ponies, and that meant settlements with, hopefully, medical help. I almost smiled.

Nope. Nothing else had magically sprung from nowhere to shed more light on my situation. I had been walking for a while now, slowly getting more and more tired and more and more frustrated by the grievances born from my utter inability to remember anything, and further compounded by my apparent hard-wired affinity for guns. While it was pretty neat to have been able to perform that rapid inspection on the pistol, not to mention recognize the damn thing just by wrapping my magic around it, it still had opened the floor to a plethora of questions and speculations as to what I might have been or done before completely losing all memory and winding up way out in the wasteland. And while I could guess to my little pony heart's content, guessing wasn't going to get me anywhere.

Speaking of which, where was I?

I had been so engrossed at the truly taxing and diverting task of bemoaning my fate to myself and putting one hoof in front of another that I hadn't really noticed the change of my surroundings as I slowly but steadily approached Manechester. Instead of grey featurelessness punctuated by boulders, rocky outcrops and hills, there lay on the other side of the road the remains of some sort of building, now reduced to just one standing brick wall, the rest of it now a haphazard pile of rubble, and slightly further away on lay the tattered remnants of a bridge, if it could be called a bridge. It looked more like

chunks of concrete bridged with planks. It spanned a stony and long-dry gully, and more or less failed to inspire confidence concerning its stability and structural soundness. Unluckily, it was the apparently the only way through, as one side of the road there lay a steep drop, and past the ruins on the other side was a tall rock face. The bridge was the only way forward.

I looked up to the grey, cloudy sky and realized that the light was beginning to fade, as the grey aura wrapped round my gun became slightly brighter in the darkening air. I sighed. Eyeballing these ruins was getting me nowhere, and although the ruins were very nice as ruins went, they offered no real shelter from the onset of the cold night in the wasteland. I had to keep pressing on to Manechester. And that meant crossing the bridge.

Cringing as the ancient planks groaned under my weight, I gingerly inched my way across the dilapidated structure and had just made it onto a relatively stable concrete chunk when all of a sudden the peace and quiet that had reigned in my little corner of the wasteland until then was shattered as a loud crack rang out and a bullet buried itself into the concrete between my fore-hooves. I yelped in surprise, caught out completely by the sudden shot and only just managing to keep hold of my ten millimeter pistol out of shock.

A sardonic chuckle filled the air and a verminously-attired unicorn mare stepped out from behind a boulder on the other side of the bridge, in front of me. She smirked as she floated a double-barreled weapon near her head and pointed it in my direction.

"Well, well, well. Wot do we have 'ere, eh?"

Not good.

I started to back-pedal as two similarly clothed earth ponies stepped onto the bridge at the other end, flanking the smirking unicorn. One was another mare, albeit an earth pony, smaller and stockier with a wickedly sharp knife clamped in her teeth, while the other was another earth pony, a hulking stallion that had his jaws wrapped round a rather large and nasty looking rusty sledgehammer. To compound an already bad situation, yet another unicorn, a buck this time, had appeared over the top of a nearby boulder, an abused-looking rifle bracketed at me. I stopped in mid-stride backwards.

Not good at all.

The smug mare who had spoken had started to swagger onto the bridge towards me, affording me a better look of both her and her old and stained barding, though the two sights were the kind of thing I could have cheerfully gone without. Her odd double barreled gun floated next to her, and although it was rusty and the wooden stock was chipping off, it nonetheless extruded a menacing air. Her brows furrowed as she looked me over, then she half-turned her head back to address her companions at the other end of the bridge.

"I said, wot do we have 'ere?" she repeated, sounding more annoyed.

One of her underlings, the earth pony mare, sniggered. "Dunno. Lost caravan guard maybe?"

Seemingly satisfied at having gotten an answer, she turned her head back to face me. "Lost caravan guard eh? Maybe we should add 'im to our caravan, huh?"

The sniggering of the four ambushers snapped me out of the fugue that I had slipped into since their arrival. Shaking my head once again for good measure, I pointed my pistol at the ringleader as I tried to dredge up a way out of this situation. Unfortunately, my brain refused to cooperate.

"I'll, uh, pass, thanks"

Her eyebrows rose in mock surprise. "So you *can* talk then. Good. You're worth that little bit extra." I had once again started to creep backwards as she continued "...and don't move, would you? I'd hate to have to shoot you in the leg."

I froze again as the rifle wielder shifted his rifle closer to his eye, drawing a bead on my slightly trembling legs.

“Who are you ponies?” I asked, vying for more time as I desperately tried to clear my head

A wicked grin formed on the leader’s face. “Slavers, of course. Now git over here, drop your gun and come quiet-like, or we’re gonna have to mess you up a bit.”

That had done something. Far in the back of my mind, something undeniably ugly had reared its head at that proclamation. I could feel my limbs tingle as my mouth suddenly went dry.

Mess...ME...up? Let them try.

Realization dawned as my mind cleared somewhat and I finally realized that I was spoiling for a fight. Out of nowhere, I had gone from surprised to belligerent in the space of a few seconds and now relished the possibility of being able to use the gun that I held still wrapped in my magical grip against these four ponies.

What the hell am I doing?

Even so, a detached part of my mind wondered if I had gone insane. I was outnumbered and they had more guns trained on me than I did on them, with the odds were stacked firmly against me. And yet that only served to put a grim smile on my face as I worked out a possible way of evening the playing field.

“Pack it in, buck. There’s four of us and one of you. And I’d hate to *insist*” the mare hissed venomously at me.

I bristled. No way was I backing down now.

“You’ve nowhere to go, shit-for-brains. Trying to run will get you killed. Give. Up.” she snarled as an idea flared in my head. I was *up* on the bridge where they had the advantage. I needed to get off the bridge. I needed to get *down* off the bridge.

I was going to have to jump off the bridge to the gulley below.

The unicorn had apparently seen something dawn in my eyes. “What the hell do...” she began, but never got a chance to finish. Gritting my teeth and somehow clamping down on the instinct not to leap, I barreled forward into the void in front of me, and managed to squeeze my pistol’s trigger as everything turned into a kaleidoscope of movement and noise. My pistol boomed, the rifle fired with a crack, the mare’s gun roared, the slavers shouted intelligibly, adrenaline surged and I plunged dizzily forward as the ground rushed up to meet me, all at once. I hit the ground hard with all four hooves, grunting as the shock slammed my joints against each other and knocked the breath out of my legs jarred painfully against the ground.

Ouch.

Pushed on by the adrenaline buzzing throughout my veins, I pushed my now-brutalized and sore limbs into a mad dash to reach the safety offered by the boulders, pistol still amazingly gripped and savoring the rapidly-approaching opportunity to use it.

I made it behind one of the massive stones as a voice rang out from above and behind me. It sounded extremely annoyed.

“Luna buck me sideways, what th’hell was that? C’mon, let’s git down there and finish his sorry ass off.” A chorus of affirmations and sniggering followed as I lifted my gun, barrel-up and next to my face.

That's what they think.

I grinned wickedly, and hobbling slightly, I made my way further in to the maze of boulders.

Very quickly, the sound of hoof on stone was heard as the gulley filled with the four now angry slavers, the leader breathlessly issuing orders as they galloped in.

"Split up, holler if you find him and fer Celestia's sake, make him suffer for that stunt. Understood?" Three voices echoed in affirmation, and four hoof beats set off in different directions, growing muffled as they dispersed amongst the rocks.

Slowly, I crept from behind the boulder where I had been hiding, heaving a silent sigh of relief and hefting the N99 as I did so. My spur-of-the-moment crackpot scheme had actually worked; my assailants had followed me down and were spread out. Keeping low and making as little noise as possible, I slunk round the nearest boulder with my heart pounding wildly, intent on sneaking up and catching the slavers unawares.

Needless to say, the wasteland had other ideas.

I rounded the rock to come almost nose-to-nose with the massive earth pony stallion and his rusty sledgehammer. I took in a myriad horde of details in the split-second it took for me to bring the pistol's iron sights to my eyes: his twisted, scarred face, the rusty sledgehammer with dried-on bloodstains and splinters on the haft, his spiky and discolored metal armor and the sudden flare of surprise in his hateful eyes.

My magic curled round the trigger as he tried to swing his sledgehammer at me.

BLAM! BLAM!

Unprepared for the violent recoil and startled by the loud report, my first shot had gone wide as I flinched back from the gun. And yet, in the space between frantic heartbeats, my freakish hard-wired affinity for guns had somehow risen to the fore, pushing the iron sights back onto the slaver stallion and tightening my magical grip on the gun's metal stock.

The second shot had punched clean through a metal plaque on his left shoulder in a shower of blood, but the third shot was, to my eyes, poetry in motion. As the stallion flinched from impact of the ten-millimeter wide piece of lead slamming into his shoulder, he had jerked his head towards the source of pain just enough to put his head in line with the rising barrel of the N99. It was almost too fast to see...

Almost.

BLAM!

The third round tore into his head, and he dropped like a puppet whose strings had been cut. No screaming, no twitching, no nothing. He slammed into the ground with the sound of his metal armor clanging against the rocks.

I shook my head as my ears rang, Now was really not the time, as the other three slavers had beyond a shadow of a doubt heard the gunfire and were most likely heading towards it, revenge on their minds.

I had to make myself scarce, before...

"There you are!"

Fuck.

Reflexes turbocharged by adrenaline and somehow suppressing my instinct set to avoid unnecessary pain, I dove forward onto the stony ground next to the dead stallion without a moment's thought as the unicorn mare fired her double-barreled weapon with both barrels at the space where I had been scant moments before. The gun blew two large divots into the boulder with two blasts with an almighty noise, sending a shower of gravel exploding outwards. Ignoring the pain from where the stones on the ground had dug into my underbelly, I twisted round to face the leader-mare, bought my ten millimeter firearm up and...

Click.

Misfire. The unfairness was staggering and the timing couldn't be worse. The mare was already sliding in another cartridge into the first barrel of her gun, and there was no way in Equestria I could clear the chamber in time to fire before she had finished reloading, even with my abnormal affinity for firearms.

My gun was a no-go.

Why shouldn't hers be?

Dropping my jammed gun with a clatter I pooled my magic, manifesting a glowing feeler emanating from my now brightly glowing horn as fast as I could despite the shooting pains in my battered cranium, and in a frantic heartbeat, reached out and slapped the mare's gun with all the telekinetic force I could summon in that brief instant.

Incredibly, amazingly, it worked. The gun (which, upon touching it had been identified as a sawn-off shotgun by that maddeningly frustrating corner of my psyche) was wrenched out of the slaver mare's magic grasp and sent spinning off into the gloom. She gawked, and then fixed me with what could only be described as a *murderous* stare.

"Yew really are one for doing things the hard way, aintcha? Fine, let's do this the hard way!" and with that, she charged at me.

I tried to scramble to my hooves, but the mare was too close and too fast. Spinning round, she lashed out with both back legs at my head. Reflexes still amped up, I just managed to throw myself out of the way, her hooves missing my head but slamming into my side instead. I hissed as the pain flared in my side. Nothing was broken, but that *hurt*.

Smirking once again, the slaver paused to gloat. "Aaw, what's the matter? Y'hurt? I'm only getting started!"

The pain and the taunt goaded me on. Snarling, I reached out with my magic, snatched up my jammed pistol that I had dropped earlier and bought the N99 upwards in a swinging motion, jerking my head in a similar movement if only to add some imagined force to the swing, and smashed the pistol's stock into the raider's jaw with a sickening crack.

Even through the telekinetic link, I felt her teeth break, provoking a rather sadistic surge of pleasure as she keeled over holding her jaw, spitting muffled curses and blood. Impelled by a sadistic streak I never knew I had, I laboriously hauled myself to my hooves, almost savoring the pain throbbing in my side, knowing that now it would be repaid in full. Reversing the grip on the gun and bringing the barrel back towards my assailant, I pulled back on the slide and the ten millimeter cartridge which had failed to fire was ejected out, and a fresh one slid into place into the firing chamber as she writhed on the ground.

Cha-chink.

She froze in mid-writhe and looked up to the source of the sound, eyes wide with fear
It was my turn to smirk.

“Y’hurt?” I spat in a rough imitation of her voice before pulling the trigger.

BLAM!

I had just managed to get behind a nearby boulder after retrieving the raider’s sawn-off shotgun when once again the sound of approaching hooves were heard. It was a case of two down, two to go, and I grinned manically as I cradled the newly acquired shotgun and my pistol.

Let’s end this.

The hoof beats grew louder then stopped amidst gasps of shock and surprised expletives. They had found the bodies. I coiled my legs and bearing my teeth in a deranged grin prepared to swing round the boulder, all guns blazing.

“Ho-lee shit, would ya look at that!” came a hoarse, albeit young mare’s voice. That was the knife-wielder.

“Both of them? Fuck. When I’m through, that little shit is gonna...”

I never found out what inspired and twisted acts the sniper-stallion had planned for me. I sprung round the boulder, shotgun and pistol both brought up. The two slavers were standing backs to me, looking over their fallen companions. Grinning my deranged, twisted grin, I carefully drew a bead on both of them and then pulled each gun’s trigger once.

Just once, and in the sound of two gunshots, two more dead ponies fell to the ground.

Once again, I was alone with my few confused thoughts as the adrenaline ebbed out of my system and with it the weird frenzy that had accompanied it. I frowned, trying to make sense of what had just happened. In the space of a few instants on the bridge, I had swung from surprised ambushed pony to some kind of crazed pony who had leapt off a bridge and proceeded to kill four other ponies.

Not only kill, but enjoy killing four other ponies.

I shook my head but the thought resolutely remained engrained, and in a sudden moment of revelation, I realized it was true. I *had* enjoyed it. But was that wrong?

I heaved a sigh and rolled my eyes as clarity momentarily asserted itself and restored a semblance of order amidst the bickering inside my head. I didn’t know whether it was normal to have violent mood swings, nor feel good about killing another pony. What I did know was that I was sore, hungry, that it would be a good idea to move on after going through the slavers’ belongings as the night was creeping up fast and the Manechester ruins were no closer.

I reached out with magical tendrils, sending them running over the barding of the sniper-stallion, looking for pockets or compartments to try and find something, anything that might prove useful.

Or better yet, something to eat.

I was in luck. I fished out a half a dozen small-caliber bullets which upon looking at their bases revealed themselves to be .32 caliber, some sort of inhaler and, best of all, a battered cardboard packet that looked distinctly like food. A lumpy and distinctly lumpy, but presumably edible vegetable-like thing was emblazoned on the box, along with the words ‘*Insta-Mash*’.

Greedily shredding the package, I suddenly pulled up short. Inside the box was a crinkly plastic bag, and in the bag was...

"Edible dust?" I said incredulously as I narrowed my eyes at the offending substance. It looked like beige dust, but the smell coming off it was faded but distinctly a food smell. My stomach growled in agreement. I shrugged, and started spooning the '*Insta-Mash*' into my salivating mouth. It was dry, virtually tasteless and stuck tenaciously to the roof of my mouth, but it was food. A tiny voice in the back of my head politely asked if I was going insane, eating in front of four freshly dead and still bleeding bodies that I had killed while only earlier I was feeling slightly remorseful, but was quickly drowned out in a wave of contentedness.

That's better.

Discarding the now empty bag and box, I turned my attention on the other slavers, rummaging through their barding too. My search yielded a small amount of assorted junk, six shotgun shells, a battered yellow-and-pink syringe, a rusty knife, another box of the dubious yet edible *Insta-mash*, a bottle of grimy water and another self-explanatory bottle marked 'vodka'. Everything was promptly added to my haversack, which had somehow not fallen off during the scuffle, except the collection of junk, which I put on the ground to paw through. There were two-dozen bottle caps, an empty glass bottle, a rusty screwdriver, a bent tin can and strangest of all, a bottle of turpentine. I mentally shrugged and added everything into the back except the tin can, leaving that to rust on the ground.

All that remained now was to pack away the guns into the haversack and press on to the Manchester ruins. I put my N99 pistol with its few remaining bullets into the sack with the stock sticking out, stuffed the sawn-off shotgun in too and finally wrapped my telekinesis around the hunting rifle, pulling it towards me and giving it a once-over as I did so.

The rifle wasn't anything fancy, a fairly atypical bolt action hunting rifle with a full five-bullet magazine, but it was pretty beat up; the barrel was coming loose from its wooden stock and was held on by what looked like duct tape and the bolt action was stiff and rusty from use and age. The rifle probably wasn't long for this world, but it was all I had that had a semi-decent range, assuming it still worked. Close range firefights were well and good, but I nonetheless hoped that I wasn't going to have to leap of any more bridges anytime soon. It was going to have to do until I found something better or it gave up the ghost. I slung it onto my back, pushing my horned head through the ratty leather strap that ran from stock to barrel, feeling a wave of gratitude towards it as I did so. Now I didn't have to carry anything via telekinesis, and I could concentrate on keeping a wary eye out for further problems, slavers or otherwise. Not to mention that I was now feeling tired, and the pain in my ribs wasn't going away but getting more and more noticeable with each passing moment, as was the pain issuing from my knee, which had apparently been twisted, battered or otherwise beaten up by my swan dive off the bridge, yet hadn't registered through the haze of adrenaline that had invaded my mind during the fight.

I pressed down gently on the throbbing leg seeing if I could walk on it, only to grunt in pain as the nerve endings trilled with agony at even that gentle pressure. Walking was going to be out of the question unless I consigned myself to limping or found something against the pain.

I opened up the flap of my haversack with my horn and after pausing for just a moment, unconsciously pulled out the battered syringe. Squinting, I brought it up to my eyes to read its faded and torn label.

I could just about make out '*Med-X*', in faded pink writing and on the other side, '*...painkiller*'. Painkiller?

Yes please!

I jammed it into my leg, as close as I dared to my badly-twisted and now swollen ankle and pressed down on the plunger. Almost instantly the throbbing pain subsided into little more than a dull ache as one thought lodged itself balefully and somewhat urgently in my brain.

What the hell had I just done?

I had just injected myself with a painkiller. I had just injected myself with a painkiller which had been found under questionable circumstances at best. I had just injected myself with a painkiller I knew nothing about except the fact that it claimed to be a painkiller. I had just injected myself with something found on a dead slaver of which I knew sweet nothing.

Oh...oops.

Recriminations aside, the *Med-X* appeared to be working. I could at last put weight on the hoof sporting the twisted ankle, and it no longer hurt to breathe, but on the other hoof it *did* feel like my brain had just been replaced with a fluffy cloud and all thought processes had slowed to a crawl. I was going to have to be careful, but in my current state I was royally screwed if *anything* showed up. I had to get somewhere safe, and collapse. That sounded like a good plan. Slowly I toiled out of the bloody gully and back to the road, and laboriously continued along, head down and hoof beats getting progressively slower and slower, until they eventually stopped. Even through the pain-free curtain the *Med-X* had erected around my senses, I could faintly feel the deep-set exhaustion in my legs manifesting itself as weight. My legs were heavy. My head was heavy. My eyelids were heavy. The haversack was heavy. Breathing felt heavy. Every part of me was crying out for a rest. I couldn't go much farther.

With what felt like the few remaining scraps of energy, I slowly and unsteadily raised my head, and stared through weighted lids into the darkness.

Wherever I had dragged myself to, it was more built-up than where I had been. Husks of houses and burnt-out buildings stood in rows on cracked concrete foundations, gaping holes and rubble spewing out everywhere the eye could see. The plateau of urban degeneration was made complete by the presence of a huge concrete wall, fissured and stained except for a door which led into the bowels of the building.

Summoning the last of my flagging endurance, I made my very slow way over to the door in the wall of towering concrete and lent on it. Protesting with faint squeals of metal and the creaking noise of wood, it opened, and I half staggered, half fell through.

Squinting into the surrounding darkness, I could faintly make out doors leading off, and directly in front of me was a desk or table of some description, but I was far too tired to care.

I took seven halting steps towards the opening at the side of the table-thing, then staggered and collapsed behind it, legs finally reaching their biological limit.

"Made it" I muttered into the darkness as my eyelids came crashing down, and moments later some desperately needed sleep.

Footnote: Level Up.

Whoever you once were and whatever you once did is now behind you, lost in the amnesiac mists which cloud your head. You get a new start, and yes, that means its back to square one, sugar cube. And yes, that means you level up like everyone else. Now it doesn't matter what you *did*, but what you *do*. And who knows, maybe *this time* you'll actually hang on to your memories?

New Perk: Gun nut. Though you have no idea as to how, and despite your apparent memory loss, you have a truly freaky affinity and surprising knowledge concerning anything which shoots lead and spews brass. You gain five bonus points to your Guns skill and five bonus points to your Repair skill.