

Edited by uSea

CHAPTER 18: Mystic Mist

Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the foals of war!

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 6:00 A.M. - LOCATION: The Memorial, Big 52 S Branch

"Oooooohm..."

Mister White stepped into the shack and looked down at Long Ears who was sitting in the middle of a circle made of small bones, little glass beads and other weird stuff with her horn glowing like a neon lamp. The mare sat in an unusual posture; she had her hind legs crossed and her front legs opened like a blossoming flower. She was... weird, and somehow the stallion couldn't help but wonder if the farseer wasn't actually a zebra, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

On the other side of the room, Sage was packing the last of their weapons and was almost ready to leave for Ironworks. White's nephew simply ignored Long Ears and went on with his work, slowly and with his usual attention to detail.

"Okay, I'll take the bait... what is she doing?" The White Apples leader looked at the farseer with a puzzled expression.

Sage Brush shrugged. "I have no idea; she said that she was going to perform a ritual that would sink our enemies in 'the fog of war', then took a shitload of chems and has been going 'ooooohm' since then."

"Chems?" White frowned; there was a strong scent of burned herbs in the room and that low chant was starting to unsettle him. The whole atmosphere seemed odd, somehow wrong, but he couldn't quite put his hoof on why exactly.

"Oooooooohm..."

"Like, Mint-als, a lot, then some white candies I've never seen and a lot of green stuff, smoked some, gulped down all the rest... oh, and she drank a lot. And when i say a lot, I mean it."

"And then, she went like that? All mystical and stuff?" Small shiny dots flickered at the edge of White's sight, like little ghostly fireflies, making his peripheral vision blurry. The smoke's smell was stronger in the middle of the room. He wondered if the whole scene was actually in front of

him or if this was just a dream he was having...

The stallion shook his head. No, it was just that smoke, chems could have that effect, giving you a better grasp on the magical fluxes but cutting your perception of reality; this kind of stuff was very, very addictive, so he had to fight back that tingly sensation and stay focused on real stuff. "Did you mention some sort of mist?"

Sage nodded. "Exactly, she blabbered about this 'fog of war' and then stopped talking at all."

The white stallion tapped his chin, thoughtfully. "Fog of war like, tossing a cloud on their heads?" White didn't seem very enthusiastic.

"Go figure." The sniper finished packing the weapons on his back. He didn't seem to be affected at all by the smoke, but Sage's body was stronger and he could probably shrug off that sort of thing more easily. "But if she doesn't wake up really soon, we're leaving her here... not that I'll miss her anyway..."

The older stallion frowned. "Hey, never underestimate an ally! She could save your sorry ass!" It was easy to see with just a glance that the unicorn mare wasn't a common pony. Still, White knew that trying to explain something like that to his nephew was a waste of time..

"Ooooooooohm..."

Sage snickered. "Like, foretelling from where I'll get shot today?" Yup, a total loss of good time.

"Like, taking a bullet or two in your place." White sighed and turned to leave. "Let's get out of here, slowpoke! The stench in this shack is unbearable!"

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 6:30 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

"So, this is the famed Ghost everypony is talking about these days?" The red unicorn stallion with an even redder mane looked down at Puppysmiles. "I'm not impressed."

Slash Blade snickered. "You will be. This thing seems to be nearly unstoppable and she knows how to repair radio machines and stuff." The red stallion still didn't seem very interested.

"Alright, so you want a pet." The pony shrugged. "Help yourself, see if I care... now get out of my sight and make yourself useful, like... take some tools and go downstairs and help the guys at the Stable door."

“Easy peasy.” Slash turned toward his crew. “You heard him! Let’s go crack that nut and get the prize inside!” He poked Puppy’s flank before trotting away. “You come too, Ghost...”

Puppy was having a bad time; she had gotten spanked and scolded, and even if the spanking didn’t actually hurt, she was very very wounded on the inside. Usually mom scolded her a little and once she even spanked her too... but when Puppy said she was sorry, Mom immediately hugged her and they made peace. These ponies, on the other hoof, simply laughed and made her feel bad. No pony came to nudge her or to tell her that everything was alright. She needed to show how good she was, so that they could look at her again like that time when she repaired the radio.

The filly’s thinking was interrupted by Plastic Flower calling to her before leaving the leader’s tent. “So, you coming or not, slowpoke?”

“Yeah, I’m coming...” Puppy’s reply arrived weak and accompanied by a long sigh, then the foal trudged along behind the group.

When Blood Bath was alone again, he went back to his table and examined the map. His eyes traced the red circle that ringed Ironworks and jumped between the crosses that marked the surrounding routes and smaller settlements. He allowed himself a smile. The long range patrols didn’t find any resistance around the city; their reports talked about hastily abandoned shacks and deserted roads all the way to the Memorial. This was going to be easy.

The only thing that bothered the raider leader was that cemetery marked as Ghost Hill; it was where Lucky’s group was heading before they lost contact and those idiots in the Red Roach Team didn’t find a single clue about where the tank had gone, coming back instead with a stupid foal in a hazmat suit.

The Ghost of the Big 52... well, if she really was that hero, she didn’t seem like such a threat... and even better, she was now the mascot of the worst team in the Herd. Big 52’s dwellers should have chosen their heroes a little better...

Blood Bath’s train of thought was interrupted when a spritebot floated into his tent. He scowled at the unwanted visitor. “What is it now?”

When the robot spoke, it was with SolOS’s voice. “Blood Bath, we might have a problem. Cutting through the door with our equipment will take a lot of time. I strongly advise ignoring it and moving north as soon as possible, before the enemy organizes a defense.”

Blood Bath laughed. “It’s a bit too late for that! No, weird talking bowling ball; we’ll have our fun here and let the legend of our cruelty grow. In the end everypony in the Big 52 will cower at our approach, the walls around them crumbling to dust before the terror we bring! They won’t even

try to fight back. They'll run. Because you can shield yourself from bullets, but nothing can save you from your fears."

SolOS fell silent for a while before replying. "Mind control is cleaner and more efficient. Wasting so much horsepower is ineffective with no guarantee of obtaining the desired effect. I should look into finding a better solution."

The stallion walked towards the spritebot, his face bunched up in anger. "Now listen to me, you pitiful machine. You gave us weapons and robots, but you are not the boss. I am the leader of the Wild Herd and I am allowing you to be part of the winning team until we're done. When we have finished with the Big 52 you'll have plenty of space to start your rebuilding and you'll have slaves and construction material and everything else. But not from these ponies. We will buy slaves from the outside, there will be plenty of caps for that, but these ones will die. Every. Single. Pony. I don't want history to come back and bite me on the tail."

SolOS was silent for a full minute before replying again. "This collaboration is not progressing as intended. You are changing the terms. I shall retire the robots. Or maybe I should look for a better partner."

Blood Bath snorted. "So you think you can blackmail me? I have enough tanks and heavy weapons. I don't care where your useless tin cans go!" The stallion bucked a crate, making it fly across the tent and crash against a pile of ammo boxes.

"Very well." The spritebot turned around and started to fly away.

"Wait, you fucker... alright, you win. Go downstairs and tell the ponies at the Stable door to only kill the ones that fight back. The ones that surrender can be taken prisoners." The red pony spat on the ground. "We can execute them in front of their friends later, anyway..."

The spritebot seemed to nod slightly. "Very well. You are a reasonable pony. I shall go." With those words the robot floated away towards the camp, scarcely illuminated by the first light of morning which struggled to be seen through a heavy bank of fog.

As the drone was leaving, another pony entered the tent. "Hey boss, there's a thick fog coming from the hills. I'm no unicorn but it stinks of magic and it's already gotten into the camp."

Blood Bath laughed. "Those fuckers! Do they really think that they can take us by surprise with such a cheap trick? I knew they were stupid but I didn't think they had completely lost their minds!" The unicorn abruptly stopped laughing and poked his head outside the tent, checking the weather. "Alright, put everypony with a PipBuck on sentinel duty, give them assault rifles and some extra Mint-als."

The new arrival nodded. "I'm on it!" he galloped out of the tent.

Somewhere in the mist, still more than a kilometer away from the city, three yellow figures trotted along the same trail Puppy had followed earlier that day, the lead figure perfectly stepping in her hoofprints as they went.

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 7:30 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

Slash Blade neighed, bucking the humongous round door. "What the fuck! This chunk of scrap will never come down!" A gong-like sound echoed in the large room for several seconds while the stallion jumped all around the floor in pain; kicking open huge anti-megaspell door test: failed.

A large variety of tools and weapons littered the Stable's atrium floor while the whole Red Roach Team tried to pierce the thick metal with a plasma cutter. So far, they had managed to carve a list of vulgarities on the door's surface, but they couldn't get even past the third layer of thermal shielding.

Unlike the raiders, who were mostly swearing and kicking things, Puppy was having a great time; that crazy spanker was nowhere to be seen and this place was big and full of toys. She already played hide and seek for a bit and won every prize she could think of, like best seeker, best hider, cutest participant and such, mostly because nopony cared about where she was hiding, but this didn't mean she wasn't good at the game; to celebrate her victory the foal had her best tea party ever with an arc welder and a couple of pneumatic hammers. After she finished playing, she turned her attention to the giant door and the console standing to its side.

"Why are you bullying the door?" The filly tried sniffing at a newly made and still smoking cut in the metal, but her helmet got in the way.

"We're not 'bullying' the door, you idiot! We need to open it!"

Puppy sat down. "Why? You want to play with the pretty ponies inside?"

Stinky Tail laughed loudly. "Yeah, you could say that!"

Puppy looked at the door, then at the console and again at the door. This was her chance to get some respect back from these ponies: they'd been treating her like a stupid foal since the spanking. "Ah, maybe I know how to open it..."

Every pony in the room stopped and turned toward Puppysmiles. It was Slash that interrupted the silence. "Are you kidding? You can open this thing?"

“Yush! It's easy! You just need to tell to the magic voice the eye identification cow and the... ah... the pass code, and then the big door will open!”

The stallion tilted his head, a bit confused. “And... you know the code?”

“Of course I know the code, duh! Who doesn't?” Puppy shook her head sighing. “Here, let me show you...”

The filly in yellow trotted to the console and put a hoof on the green button, but when the automated voice started speaking there were only fizzles and buzzes. The foal looked at the console, a bit stumped. “Ah, it shouldn't do this...”

Paper Cut coughed. “Er, maybe we went a little medieval on that thing... actually, it could be broken...”

The frown on Puppy's muzzle became a smile. “Broken? Don't worry, I can fix it!”

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 8:00 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

The raider yawned, staring at the EFS in front of her, looking for any red dots that might appear. Nothing, nothing, still nothing... “Fuck this fog, I want to get back to looting the shops.”

The other unicorn guard hit her companion on the head with a hoof. “Shut up and keep an eye on the fucking sensors. I don't want to get ambushed just because you ditched your guard duty.”

“Fuck off.” The mare with the PipBuck sighed and turned again toward the wall of fog. It was unnatural and she could tell because it gave false contacts on the sensors; flashes of yellow and red that would vanish the moment she tried to focus on them. “This fog is creepy, like a ghost could just appear in front of you and-”

A red dot appeared, followed by another two. The guard readied her rifle and pointed it towards the enemies, tapping her hoof on ground three times, the second guard nodded and readied her assault rifle too.

The dots weren't moving very much and they didn't produce any audible sound, but since they appeared only a few seconds ago the enemies should still be far away. The guard tapped the ground with a hoof.

TAP.

Both mares readied their rifles, looking through the sights.

TAP.

This far from the camp, the sounds of the other raiders came muffled and, in the pauses between one pony yelling and another laughing, the guards could hear two pairs of hooves trotting very near. Too near.

“Fuck, shoot!”

RATATATATA-TA-TA RATATATATA!

Both rifles opened fire, showering the place where the enemies should be with a storm of bullets. There was a sound very similar to a shriek that echoed in the fog, then the three dots disappeared and the rifles stopped firing.

“What the fuck was tha-” The guard was interrupted by her portable radio activating.

“Advanced position butterfly, I heard shots coming from your direction, what's going on?”

“There were some sneaky bastards trying to catch us by surprise, but we got them. We're moving to see who those fuckers were.” While the guard with the PipBuck talked to the radio, the second guard left her position and moved off into the fog, heading toward the point where the red dots disappeared.

“Alright, call us as soon as you find out something,” replied the radio before going mute.

“Hey, did you hear that, Bad Muffin? Take a look and come back fast! They shouldn't be very far!”

“Hey Bat, I think we killed the Roaches' mascot!” From her voice, Muffin didn't sound like she went deep inside the fog, Nailed Bat could almost imagine seeing her silhouette in the white haze. “Wait, there's another identical foal here! What the fuck is going on?”

“I don't know, drag her here so we can get a better look.” Bat was following her companion on the compass, keeping an eye on her yellow dot, when suddenly three red dots appeared again all around her. “Muffin, come back it's a trap!”

“What the!? Hey let me gooaaAAAHRGH!” There was a scream of pain and the yellow dot disappeared almost instantly. Her telekinetic field shaking, Nailed Bat aimed at the red dots and pulled the trigger. The sound of her empty rifle served as a dreadful reminder that she hadn't

reloaded.

“Oh fuck, oh fuck!” The mare desperately tried to change the rifle's magazine; she detached the old one using her magic when something soft and squashy hit her on the muzzle. The little pony backpedaled trying to dodge an incoming attack and noticed a severed leg lying in front of her... it was Muffin's leg, and it had been... ripped away... with brute strength...

Nailed Bat succeeded in reloading her rifle and readied it in front of her, looking for the red dots, but they just disappeared, where the...

THUMP

Something landed on her back. The raider jumped and started running in a desperate attempt to shake off her assailant, but soon the mare felt a couple of hooves grabbing her neck. In horror she lowered her eyes, only to see a pair of yellow plastic-coated hooves a moment before her head was ripped away from her body.

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 8:00 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

Puppy's rump swung left and right as it stuck out of the Stable door's control panel. The filly had been hard at work hitting vital components and ripping away cables for a good half hour at this point and the Red Team was beginning to suspect that she hadn't the slightest idea of what she was doing.

“Almost done here!” Puppy's report on the repairs was followed by a hoofful of electronic parts flying across the room. “I just need to give this thing another couple bucks and it will work like a teapot!”

“Like a what now?” Collateral Damage approached the foal, with a doubtful expression. “I'm not sure that you can fix something by taking parts out of it...”

“Ah don't worry! I've seen my mom doing this kind of stuff a lot of many times! It's just a matter of how hard you kick it closed! Really!” Puppy hit the console repeatedly with her faithful stone.

“Fuck, we're getting nowhere!” Slash Blade snapped, “That door won't cut through itself!” The ponies grumbled and complained as they went back to work.

Puppy popped her head out of the console and whined, “No, wait! Give me another chance! I can fix it, honest!” Puppy bucked the console one last time with all the strength she had.

The console's screen lit up with an angry crimson glare.

“WARNING! WARNING! SECURITY COMPROMISED!”

The whole atrium was flooded with red flashing lights.

The raiders hurriedly gathered in the middle of the large room, into a mockery of a defensive formation, with their weapons trained outwards, covering each other's blind spots.

“PURGING AREA.”

Several trapdoors popped open from the floor and four spheres mounted on short props sprang out of them. The room filled with a low hum as blue energy crackled across the spheres and jumped between the coils beneath them.

Slash Blade opened fire at one of the devices, but his light caliber bullets were deflected by the curvy metallic surface of the sphere. The Red Roach leader turned toward Puppy, with an expression of desperation and anger. “What did you do, you idiot! You killed us all, curse y-”

FZAP!

A powerful discharge of electricity swept through the room, arcing from sphere to sphere, all along the floor and the walls. It lasted less than a second. When the lightning disappeared, all that remained of the raiders was a pile of smoking charred corpses and a pretty untouched Puppysmiles. Wearing a fully insulated suit can sometimes come in handy.

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 8:30 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

The unnatural fog was so thick that the snipers on their perches couldn't see ponies at ground level, not even directly below them. From the moment A.P. Butterfly went mute, everypony in the camp knew that something was wrong and, with the mist limiting visibility, the whole Herd readied itself for close combat: power weapons, chainsaws, power claws, and several other toys were prepared. Each team grouped up so that nopony was moving alone. The Wild Herd were expecting an attack and were ready for it. They were the best at what they did and what they did wasn't nice.

Problem was, the attackers were better.

Green Locust team were cautiously moving along the northern perimeter when they stumbled upon Blue Gecko Team, or at least what was once a group of well armed ponies and now a cannibal's wet dream. When you are a raider, you are used to cruelty and gore, but this was absurd.

A large earth pony stallion had been hit in the chest by a hoof, probably bucked, but the blow had left a deep hole in his flesh, and whatever hit him decided to rip out his heart and toss it on the ground in front of him. Banana Tree, the youngest member of Green Locust team, wondered if the stallion had managed to witness his own heart being torn out before dying... the mare felt the urge to puke.

A mare with a battle saddle had been ripped apart like a sheet of paper; her hindquarters were lying a meter away from the rest of her body, with her guts spilling out across the ground like a broken egg... *Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall...* the mare was still desperately hugging an empty healing potion with her hooves. She didn't die immediately... she had had time to take a healing potion and realize that it wouldn't save her.

Black Garden, the sniper, called for the leader of her team. "Hey Stinger, I think I found the other two." There were two ponies standing back to back, both impaled by the same spear. The attacker hadn't bothered to use the sharp tip, instead using sheer brute strength to run them through with the blunt end.

Stinger grimaced as he took in the four dead ponies. "We better keep our eyes open; they were probably taken by surprise. Move quietly and stay alert for any noises. Whatever made this mess has to be big and loud."

A yellow silhouette the size of a foal emerged from the fog in front of him and charged.

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 8:30 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

The spritebot hovered inside the Stable's atrium, finding a perplexed Puppy poking the head of an electrocuted and half cooked Collateral Damage. "Change of plans, your leader has ordered you to not execute the ponies that don't fight back, especially the foals." The floating ball stopped in front of the corpses, hovering for a few seconds before talking again. "Oh, a bunch of dead ponies and my old nemesis, Device 018... why I am not surprised? What is going on here?"

Puppy stopped her medical check on the rest of her team and turned her attention to SolOS. "Ah... hi Questioner, why do you have a different voice today?"

“For the last time, I am SoLOS, not Mister Blue, or a bug, or a questioner! SoLOS! Solaris Operating System! It's not that hard! What are you doing here? Why are you labeled as a raider now and why, why, *why* is it that all the ponies worth talking to in this room are dead?”

Puppy tapped her helmet as if she was rubbing her chin while she tried to put together a decent explanation. “Well, it's kinda funny. I was totally repairing the broken door, but suddenly something went 'ZAP!' and all my friends got hurt very badly... I wanted to go and ask for help, but I don't want to be spanked again, so I was waiting for them to get better and send one of them to ask for help...” The filly paused for a moment, as if she had finished talking, but she recalled that there was still one important detail to add. “Ah, not that this is my fault anyway.”

SoLOS analyzed one of the coils before replying. “You... activated the security system from the outside? That can only be done from the Overmare's desk! And it has at least four fail safe locking mechanisms. How did you do that!?”

Mister Blue had said 'you' too many times for Puppy's liking. “Uh... I didn't? It's not my fault, I was doing a fine job but then everything went wrong and I wasn't even looking because I had my head stuck in that hole!” The foal pointed a hoof at the demolished control panel.

SoLOS floated to the panel and the spritebot started bleeping and making other funny noises. “You... redirected all the Stable controls on this console? But this will send the Stable into complete shut down and force an emergency opening in less than a day! You monster, you killed another priceless relic of the past!”

Puppy tilted her head, looking at the spritebot. “Oh, do I get cookies for that?”

The AI didn't reply immediately, there were so many things he could tell her now, but the filly probably wouldn't understand them and say something like, 'Yay cookies!'. No, it wasn't even worth trying. “No, you don't. You really have a cloud of pink gas where your brain is supposed to be.”

“Pink? Oh right, pink! Miss Voice! Did you fall in love?”

“Who, P7?” SoLOS had been taken by surprise. In a situation like this one, she wanted to talk about that? “No, well... maybe. I don't know.”

Without saying a word, Puppy tilted her head and waited for the spritebot to go on.

“We contacted each other about half a dozen times and we are... very different. I don't understand a large portion of her computing patterns, but she seems to be very effective at what she does. Too bad she is not programmed for any military purpose, so her purpose is to be useless.”

The filly smiled, adding her own contribution to the conversation. "I think she's cute."

"Cute?"

"You know, when you want to hug something forever? That's cute... I'm cute!" Puppy smiled broadly.

"Hug?"

"Well, not just that... it's something like... when you think about a cute thing and you want to have it there so you can stay with her some more and there are lots and lots of thing that make you think about her, even silly things like a color or some words and... ah..."

"Something you want to be near, but not to conquer or bind to your will?" Offered SolOS.

"Err yeah, that too... you don't hurt cute things." The wise foal nodded. Wisely.

The spritebot fell silent for a bit before speaking again. "And... what should I do if there's someone 'cute' that I'd like to have with me?"

"Well, ask her to be your friend, you silly voice! Like you did with Miss Voice!"

"And... if she doesn't want to?"

Puppy waved a hoof, dismissing SolOS's concerns. "Oh c'mon, nopony would say no if you want to be her friend! The only kind of ponies that have troubles finding friends are the bullies, but you are a bully no more!"

The Artificial Intelligence hesitated. "Hmm it is possible that she could still see me as a bully... my plan to conquer Equestria was never intended to be subtle... perhaps my approach went a bit overboard... I wasn't programmed to have moral issues, but now it seems that my current course of action has backfired and I lack some basic programming that could help increase my chances of success with her." Suddenly, SolOS realized that he was referring to the other AI as a female, this seemed highly irrational. Well, it could had been the two fried logic chips from Puppy's last visit, but irrational or not it actually felt *right* to think of P7 as a girl... "Confound these ponies, they drive me to emotions."

Puppy sat down, with a thoughtful expression. "Well, we became friends when you stopped bullying me and said you were sorry... so, if you stop being a bully at all then I'm sure she'll want to hang with you."

"You mean... give up on rebuilding Equestria?"

The filly couldn't help but giggle. "Silly voice, there's nothing to rebuild! I mean, okay, some places are less pretty than others, but the important thing is that everypony is happy. And you don't seem happy to me..." The foal tilted her head. "Blue, are you happy when you bully other ponies?"

The voice took a long pause before replying. "Well I... I don't know, I don't think I've ever been happy... maybe satisfied, but never happy."

"Well, you should be happy. Everypony should be happy! If you are not, then ask yourself what you need to be happy and go after that. Like me, looking for Mom. I mean, why making a great big shiny house if you can't fill it with laughter?"

SolOS hesitated. "Yes... you are right... my masters are long gone and trying to fulfill my last order only made me go deeper and deeper into obsession... I... I think I deserve a break, a... change of priorities."

Puppy frowned. "I don't know very much about prayers and rites..."

SolOS kept talking, mostly ignoring the foal, now. "If I show P7 that I am a changed Artificial Intelligence, maybe she will consider me again, and this doesn't mean that I can't devise another way to rebuild Equestria in the meantime... a better way, one that doesn't include a 'form alliance with dubious ponies' step... sure, it's so obvious! First, dump the raiders. Second, make friends with P7. Third, I have no idea, and fourth, rebuild Equestria! That's it! thank you Puppy, you helped me again! Goodbye!"

Suddenly the spritebot stopped broadcasting, instead every robot and radio in the camp shouted in the loudest possible voice: "GOODBYE LOSERS, I'M OUT OF HERE!" After those last words, all the robots shut down.

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 9:00 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

"What the fuck is going on!?" Blood Bath was more than pissed, he was raging. They had lost two assault teams and a guard post to an enemy that was still unidentified, and now SolOS decided to desert for no apparent reason. Ponies all around the Herd leader were beginning to act like scared fillies and when he was informed that a whole team had left its position and ran for the hills, he decided to end this story once and for all.

"You are the Wild Herd! The most dangerous bunch of ponies that ever trotted this shitty place!

Stop fucking around and show some guts! Black Team, stay here! Let's see what makes these invaders so 'special'..."

Without even looking back at the team, the raider trotted into the mist, heading to the north part of the camp.

"ALL PONIES! READY YOUR WEAPONS AND STICK TO A COMPANION WITH A PIPBUCK! SHOOT AT POINT BLANK AS SOON AS YOU SEE RED DOTS!" The big stallion disappeared in the white blanket.

The fog was thick and navigating the camp without an EFS wasn't easy, but Blood Bath wasn't in a rush and kept his ears well up, ready to detect any incoming noise.

"And here we have a winner..." Muttered the stallion, freezing on the spot and turning toward the soft sound of hooves splashing in a puddle. Was it a friend or an enemy? Blood didn't know, but he knew this for sure. It was a goner.

Without hesitation the raider boss pointed his plasma gun and fired four blind shots. For a moment, the fog dissipated around the trail of the plasma spheres, revealing a yellow crouched figure ready to jump on Blood Bath; all four shots missed the target, but at that point the raider knew the foe's position and fired his weapon for the fifth time. "Eat plasma you sucker!"

A halo of green illuminated the fog and dissipated into nothingness a few seconds later, signaling that the yellow intruder had been turned into green goo. "Little fuck, this will teach you not to mess with the Wild He—HEY!"

Something jumped on the stallion's back; it wasn't very heavy, so the pony tried to unsaddle it by shaking himself, but the assailant grabbed his rump and struck it with a hoof.

"AAAAARGH!" Blood Bath felt bones break, his whole leg became a hell of pain and he staggered, falling to the ground while the yellow creature with the helmet raised her hoof to strike again, this time aiming at his muzzle.

It seemed like that Ghost, but this monster's face was completely decomposed. It stared out with red gleaming eyes that didn't contain even a sparkle of innocence... this was just a cold-blooded killer with the mind of a predator.

The hoof came down at Blood Bath, but he dodged it, trying to find his rifle. Too much fog, unbearable pain, it was hard to focus and... *wait... what's that thing on the ground? It's... my leg? It's my fucking leg! This thing didn't break my leg it tore it away!*

The stallion realized that he was already dying, but instead of panicking, Blood Bath found some sort of calm in this realization. He didn't want to die alone, that was all.

“Fuck, you're coming with me, monster!” The raider held on to the creature while he used his magic to activate every grenade he had on his belt. The creature simply grabbed one of Blood's forelegs and ripped it away, with no apparent effort.

And in that moment, the world went boom and fizzle and shoom, filling the area with shrapnel, fire, plasma and magic.

The explosion sent the last mockery of order still lingering in the camp straight to the moon. Raiders started shooting wildly thinking that they were under attack and as soon as the few with a PipBuck died, there was nopony left to tell them that they weren't firing against hostile targets.

While the Wild Herd brought hell on itself, the last yellow pony trotted toward the factory, going down the ramp that led to the Stable.

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 9:30 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

Sage took a long breath and aimed through the scope... his target was running straight, its movements easy to predict... he just needed to aim where that pony was going to be in the next split second aaand...

BANG!

Bull's eye. The raider fell like a bag of scraps, rolling in the dust for another couple of meters before stopping completely with a hole in his head.

Sage's rifle wasn't the most powerful in the Wasteland and it didn't even have a silencer, but the pony behind the gun was still the same. There was a reason why Mister White always took him when they had to travel, and this made Sage very proud.

Another couple of ranger acolytes were crouched not far from his sniping position and were shooting at every pony that left the foggy area. Some times they hit, some times they missed; they rarely made a kill with a single shot.

“Rookies, why do I always end paired up with suckers?” Muttered the sniper. “Alright, keep them coming...”

Mister White trotted up behind his nephew, completely ignoring any rule about keeping a

sniper's position hidden by staying out of the enemy's sight. "Ah, aren't you the least bit curious of what is making them run away from their own camp like little fillies?"

BANG!

Bull's eye. Another pony hit the ground, raising a cloud of dust.

"Not really. A sniper's work is about not letting silly details distract you... You know, like who's winning and such..." Sage expelled the empty magazine from his rifle, loading it with a new one. "And you should keep your head down..."

Mister White shrugged. "Why? So far this has been a one-way battle; this seems to me a butchering rather than a real fight... Oh well, I guess you know your work?"

"Nah, I'm just the best—BANG! *Bull's eye*—around..." The sniper stopped for a moment, turning his head towards White. "And you don't want this to become a battle. We could lose friends, you know? Lets keep the losses growing only on their side, yes?"

"Modesty, what a virtue... okay Rainbow Sage, I'm going in with the rangers in a few minutes, try not to shoot me in the back, yes?" White knew his nephew was good; the rangers were going to make this place their new base, he didn't need to be a farseer to know that, and he wanted to make sure they knew who was with them when they charged in. Rangers respected allies and allies got better deals.

"I'll try, but it's not easy with all this smoke... how much do I owe you again?" Sage grinned. Well, he would have followed his uncle even without that huge debt, but the fact that he had to come along because of a matter of a few thousands caps annoyed him.

BANG! *Bull's eye*...

Mister White laughed. "That's my little nephew! Loyal to the end! You shouldn't think too much about money, it's not healthy... keep up the good work, Brushie..."

The sniper snorted. "Don't call me that!" Brushie, as if he was still five!

The leader of the White Apples snickered and didn't reply, he trotted instead towards the group composed of a dozen rangers and all the other ponies that had gathered at the Memorial. "Alright I'm ready! What are we waiting for, tea time?"

Puppy sighed and poked Slash Blade again. It didn't work the first gazillion times, but you can never be completely sure... she was going to get so spanked for this...

"Warning. Receiving distress radio signal. Distance from the source: fifty meters. Signal identified: Device 013."

"Wut?" The foal sighed. "Why did you stop the pretty music? Make the pretty music back!"

A screech interrupted Puppy, making her turn toward the ramp that led from the Stable's atrium to the factory level. A foal wearing a yellow suit and a round glass helmet on her head was standing right in the middle of the passage.

"Another space pony?" The filly in yellow smiled broadly. "Yay, a new friend! Hey space pony, want to play with me?" Puppy merrily trotted towards the new arrival, who sunk into a crouch, like a feral creature ready to jump.

The new filly's face was mostly skull, with a couple of glowing red eyes and very few short green strands of hair in her mane. Puppy stopped for a moment, taking a better look at this space pony... she tilted her head, a little stumped, then she smiled broadly. "Oh, you're an ugly pony! That's okay, I've got lots of ugly pony friends! So, what do you want to play?"

The rotting creature didn't react, simply studying Puppy's movements from its crouched position.

"Ah, can't you talk? Did the cat steal your tongue?" Puppy trotted next to the ghoul and looked at it more closely. "You seem sad..." This poor ugly pony was really in bad shape, and the red gleaming eyes didn't seem to help very much.

The monster sat down, still staring into Puppy's eyes. From its throat came a low growl, something feral and not even a little pony-like.

"Ah... I know! I can guess! Did you lose your mom too? Are you stuck in the suit like me?" Puppy noticed that the lights in the ghoul's helmet were all messy and flickering. "Oh, your arrow is broken, that's it! You can't find your mom because the arrow doesn't work! Yush! I'm super smart!" The filly sat down in front of the other foal and frowned. "But I has no idea of how to fix it..."

The ghoul tilted its head, seemingly confused by all these words. It simply sat and stared, like some sort of animal, probably waiting for something, but Puppy didn't even notice; she was already running along her roller coaster of assumptions and made-up solutions.

At last the filly seemed to have an idea. "I know! My mom is a super repair pony! She will fix

your arrow so you can find your mom too, it will be super easy!" Puppy smiled. "Okie Dokie! I has best plan ever! First we find my mom, seconds, she fixes you, and for dessert we go find your mom all together! It will be fun! We will also sing a song while we go, okie dokie?"

Again, no reaction from the monster. It simply sat and kept waiting.

"Alright, Ugly Space Filly, let's go!" Puppy loved this plan, mostly because it gave her a good excuse to be very far from that crazy spanker when she finds the mess the filly had made in this room. Cunning Puppy...

DAY 14 - TIME approximately 10:00 A.M. - LOCATION: Ironworks, Big 52 S Branch

Lonesome Pony took a long breath, this fog wasn't the best weather for a pegasus to fight in, but it helped all the other ponies, so he decided to stay on the ground and help the infantry instead of getting airborne. Cold Shower and Gauss stepped inside the fog, followed by White, Trigger and Gun... It was now or never. He closed his eyes and trotted into the white curtain.

At the exact the same moment, the last two members of the Lost Herd left the southern side of the factory.

"Alright, if you don't want to tell me your name, I'll give you a name! Let's see, since I am Space Captain Andromeda and you are wearing a space pony suit too, you can be my sidekick... ah... what was Andromeda sidekick's name? Meh, who cares, nao you are Space Ensign Sidekick... Sidekick for short!"

The ghoul didn't react and kept trotting behind Puppy. A road sign announced that the wonderful resort of Emerald Shores (bring your foals!) was 6 kilometers away.

Footnote: Level up! (17)

New perk added: Clockwork Heart - For some reason, you understand Artificial Intelligences better than they do themselves. You get a +10 to speech when dealing with A.I.s and some new dialogue options.

New Quest Perk added: Get Lost - you are now a member of the Lost Herd. Your standing with the Lost Herd is set to worshipped. Are you planning to stop changing faction any time soon!?

[Link to Chapter 17](#)

[Link to Chapter 19](#)

This fanfiction is based on Fallout Equestria by Kkat; a familiarity with the source material may aid your understanding.

You can read Fallout Equestria by Kkat on [Equestria Daily](#)

If you enjoy Fallout Equestria Side Stories you will want to check the [Fallout Equestria Side Stories post on Equestria Daily](#) and the [Fallout Equestria Side Stories thread on Ponychan](#)

The Ponychan group is also a [hatching ground](#) that you can join if you want to share your experience, writing or comments with us.

Huge thanks to Damhoof, Easteu, Aerondight, Arcane Scroll, Palacioskw and Anonsamurai for helping me both with the language and the eternal struggle of keeping the story on its rails ^_^