

Touch of Chaotic Harmony



Chapter 1: Touched by the Magic

This day was going to be perfect....

Thursday, June 11, 2015. 10:38am

[Ezekiel]

It was Thursday. Thursdays were good. His shift ran from one to eight on a Thursday, giving him enough time to sleep in a bit. It was also a university site day. He got to work with students and catch a glimpse of the projects they had in mind, the ideas they were toying with. He was also covering the Library Science lab. Which was always fun. Not to mention the favour they showed as they raced for the prizes for task completion.

He yawned and stretched, checking Zio (his blackberry Z10)'s screen. 10:30 ish? Meh. He could lounge around a bit more. He would have too if not for the buzz of the doorbell not five minutes later. Muttering unkind things, he rolled off the bed, the impact with the floor helping to get his blood pumping. Bouncing up from totally-not-pain, he tugged a set of sweats over his boxers and snagged a polo and slipped it on before opening the door.

A man in a purolator uniform was waiting there, an odd rectangular shape under his arm, clipboard in hand, his trunk parked out by the curb. "Good morning," he said cheerfully enough. Probably had a mug of coffee on his dash. "I have a parcel for a Mr. Ezekiel Z. Evans?"

"Really? Huh. Wasn't expecting anything," Ezekiel commented. Ezee was the easier nickname. It was sorta of a stealth pun. It was *Easier* to Call **Ezekiel Zachariah Evans** E.Z.E. *Ezee*.

"Funny how that works," the man said. He handed over the clipboard. It had one of those digital signature pads, so he scrawled his name and was presented with the package. Ezee imagined the item get sound from a video game. "Excellent! Have a good day, sir."

"You too," Ezee said, distracted. He could almost hear someone laugh. Weird. Anyway, he closed the door and set about opening his surprise gift. "Maybe there was an explanation inside?"

"No way these are standard shipping material... how did something like this even get through?" Ezee mused to himself as he wandered to his kitchen. He was out of bed anyway. He leaned on the counter as he examined his find. "Okay. Not what I was expecting. At all."

It was a book, about the size of a university text book, a science one. Explained the heft. The book's hardcover was deep purple, with the spine's cover being a lighter purple. The front was decorated with a purple, maybe lavender six pointed starburst, a slightly smaller white one behind it, five small white stars around it; three on the side of the spine, two on the outside. It even had a small lock on it like a diary.

Confused, Ezee scanned it a few times, turning it over and around with a bemused expression. Gold calligraphic looking font decorated the spine and the bottom of the cover, titling the book as *Reference Guide to the Arcane*. The cover had a line of smaller font above it to preface the main title; *Princess Twilight Sparkle's*, and a subtitle from *novice to advanced*.

"Twilight Sparkle? Princess? Some pen name. Maybe it's an RP book or something," Ezee mused as he ran his fingers over the debossed writing. He was on the list at the local game shop, though he never bought anything much from them aside from dice and stop by for the occasional table top game. There was a small jolt of static when his fingers hit the star pattern, small meaning surprisingly shocking and he yelped, dropping the book in shock. The pain was gone the instant it came though, so that was that. Still...

"Bad book! No shocking! How did you do that anyway?" Ezee questioned it. He prodded it with his toe, seeing if it had any more charge left in it. When nothing untoward happened, he picked it up again. After a moment's consideration, he flipped it open to look for the publisher information and ISBN, but didn't find any of that, which was pretty weird. Pretty much every book has that page in it these days. Especially one that big. Instead, all he found was a signed foreword.

*Dear reader,
thank you so much for buying my guide to the wonderful and exciting world of pony magic.
Within these pages I will cover the various nuance of each tribe's innate magical abilities along
with application spells for each. I know most of you might think there are no spells for anypony
outside of unicorns, but that is a sad misnomer I hope to dispel. I know you will enjoy what this
book has to offer and that you learn every step of the way.
- Princess Twilight Sparkle*

"Pony magic? This has got to be a joke. An elaborate one, but a joke," Ezee snickered. He flipped through the pages, seeing the occasional diagram and lots of words, no glossy pages though. He turned the book over, looking for the barcode, only finding a yellow sticker. **Discord Emporium. 238 1/4 bits.**

"Well that don't beat all... Whatever. Could be a fun read. Player manuals normally are. Breakfast first though," Ezee said. He dashed to the bedroom to grab his laptop, put some music on and started putting about the kitchen, putting together a meal.

Hash browns, cornbeef, avocado, half a croissant, an orange, a pear, a glass of milk, cup of water and a boiled egg graced his plate, a humble sacrifice to appease the Hungry God. The sacrifice was fitting and the Hungry God Consumed.

So while he fed the beast in his stomach, he read the book. It was way out there. Pony magic indeed. Unicorns, Pegasi and Earth Ponies, oh my! "This has to be a supplemental," Ezee muttered around a mouthful of avocado and hash, checking the front and back again, looking for some reference to another book. "Still, well thought out and fleshed system, just the pony part..."

Apollo had finally turned up from wherever he had been hiding and had been assaulting Ezee's ankles and shins with fluffy fuzzy cuteness for the past ten minutes or so, appeased on with occasional head scratches and ear ruffled. Such simple needs the feline had. Some of the times.

He carried, lugged the book around, mostly because it was pretty interesting and he's already finished reading the last compendium he brought home from the library. The magic system was balanced strangely. Unicorns could learn the most magic, but had the longest period of study and could literally magic themselves dead. Pegasi had the most noticable passive magic, weather manipulation, personal gravity weakening to let them fly (he had thought those wings looked tiny in the illustrations) and burned mana even faster than unicorns, which both needed some animal protien to replenish for some reason.

Earth Ponies has the most passive magic, which basically amounted to super strength and super fertalizer, with active magic being more along the lines of geomancy. They also had the least reaction to mana drain. Unicorns could die, pegasi would fall from the sky, earth ponies just got tired.

Either way, he had to leave for work before he could finish the first chapter. He grabbed his things, slipped his lunch into his bag, and the book as well. Something to read in the slow periods. "Later Apollo! Later House! I shall return!"

"Avery!" Ezee said as he jogged out to the lot and woke Avery from his night's slumber with the enchanted token that bound his fate to Ezee, AKA the key fob, and popped the doors as his slate grey compact grumbled and rumbled awake.

"Now, now, Avery. You know it's a work day," Ezee said, plugging his MP3 in for some music. "Off to work we go!"
[Progress Point: 2.2hours]

[Mariah]

Mariah's day was normal as well. Her roommate left for the day for work and her class was hideously early. She sighed as she got her meal together and headed for classes. The things she'd do to get Ezekiel to notice her. She decided against it though. She didn't want to come off as being too strong and intimidating for him. She took the bus to get to her classes, as usual reading along the way. As it was, she had a nice sundress on which showed off her curves.

Class as usual was somewhat dull, but with her computer to take notes, and the day not being all that long to begin with, it went y quick enough. After lunch, she usually passed the time in the library stidying while occasionally sneaking glances at Ezekiel.

Here's the where the weird part of her day came in. She found something new in her school bag. A gift bag hidden away at the very bottom of her bag, under the rest of her belongings. Yellow and peach striped with a little card on the straps.

Mariah looked at the package and turned it around, trying to find who it was from.

The card only read '*Enjoy! It will come in useful in more ways than one~*'

Mariah shrugged. maybe her roommate packed it. She carefully unwrapped it as she usually did with her gifts, wondering what this was.

It was jsut a matter of breaking the tape holding the bag shut and slipping the book out. It was... interesting to say the least. Thick and stocky, like one of those alternate structure textbooks that went for hieght instead of taking up all your space on your desk while you were using it.

The cover are was... interesting. A blue horse like creature with large eyes and a yellow mane staring at the three tails, blonde, pale pink and deep purple and that emerged from the bottom of the picture, the flanks they were attacked to, orange, yellow and white, just visible before they got cut off. Form the look of the tails, well styled, it was likely they were female flanks.

The title reinforced it. '*The Stallion's Guide to All Things Mare*', by *Tail Chaser*.

"What in the...?" Mariah asked and blushed brightly. "Dammit, Rachel..." She muttered. Ever since she found some suspect files on her computer, she hadn't let Mariah live it down. She stuffed it into her bag quickly, hoping no one saw it.

Ezee was humming to himself when he got into work, bobbing to a beat that most certainly wasn't the one that was coming from his headphones. Funny how that worked. There was probably research on that phenomena somewhere. Perhaps in one of the psychology books?

"Anyway; the Z-man was in the Book House!" he chortled in the staff lounge.

"Evening, Zeke," one of his coworkers greeted. Joyce Rose was one of the older staff members, actually at the retirement point. Nice lady (though Ezee was of the opinion that she needed to retire already. Workers like her were why it was hard to get a job in the field. Bit down on the post and refused to let go so the younger generation could get in. He only got this one because he 1) had volunteer hours there before, 2) had a masters, 3) did his practical there and 4) impressed on management the need for a dedicated staff worker to handled the more computer based side of the system.) "Having a good day, huh?"

"That I am," Ezee said, twirling on his toes for a moment, making her laugh. "That I am. How's the crowd been?"

"Pretty slow," she replied as he put his beverage in the fridge. Weird... his back was aching a slight bit. Must have wrenched it. Note to self; less pirouetting at work. Joyce continued. "It's summer, so most of the students are glad to have an excuse not to be here. Those that are still around are either redoing a course because they were too lax to come in the first place so aren't here anyway, are very studious and quietly sitting, or just around."

"It's too early in the semester for projects and papers too. Ah well," Ezee shrugged. "I'll be out and around the floor checking if anyone needs a hand then getting ready for the class." He paused at the door. "I shall return, Lady Rose; once my crusade to supplant knowledge has ended. Au Revoir!"

Joyce chuckled and went back to her lunch as the somewhat quirky, but also appreciated librarian (who wasn't hard on the eyes) left. If she were even twenty years younger...

Mariah said hello to Ezekiel as she found her usual spot to read her textbooks... although curiosity was eating at her to read the new book she had found, she would do that in private in case it was more than a little steamy.

[time check: 0.3 hours]

"Hey Mariah," Ezee called when he spotted her. She came into the libraries often. He wasn't really complaining, though.

"Eep!" Mariah said and nearly shut the book on her thumb sharply. She hadn't seen him creep up. "Hey Ezekiel!" She replied waving to him. "How's your day so far?"

"Absolutely flawless," Ezee said, and did a little shuffle. He grabbed a free chair and sat, because talking loudly and library and all. "Anything new with you? And anyone try to drag you to the party that's supposedly going on tonight?"

"Oh yeah, I heard about it. But I don't have anyone to go with. You?"

"I'm working till eight," Ezee shrugged. "Besides, someone sent me a supplementary for a game. I think that's what it is anyway. Looks like an independent publisher," Ezee replied. "I might just head home and work on through it."

"Someone?" Mariah asked. "No name or anything?"

"Place called 'Discord Emporium'," Ezee responded. Come to think of it, he never googled the name. He shifted slightly tried to relieve some of the ache in his back. Maybe he slept bad.

"Well, I got a laptop in here." Mariah offered, pulling it out, making sure to keep the porn book safely hidden from view.

"It's not really a big deal. It's just a free book. Fun read so far. Even if it's about ponies," Ezee chuckled.

She left her laptop where it was and blushed. "Ponies you say?"

"I know, right? Sounds stupid. But it looks sorta cool. Mixed general magic users with the magician, rogue and knight archetypes and some other flair to make the three tribes, each one have a variable and open ended sort of spell list," Ezee explained, painting a picture in the air with his hands. "I haven't finished with the first chapter yet, but that's what I've gotten from it so far. It's like a lore supplement so far."

"I've been trying to get into tabletop games," Mariah admitted. "Just haven't found the time. Between practice, karate class, and school... yeah. Busy, busy me."

"As busy as a bee?" Ezee quipped before wincing. "Sorry. Bad joke."

Mariah chuckled a little. "Almost, yeah. Still, least there's some time to myself." *Come on, Mariah thought. Ask me out on a date already ya dope!* Mariah smiled reassuringly, hoping that would help.

Ezee bit on his lip a little. He wasn't really a party person, and he really wanted to read that book...

Mariah waited patiently, hoping he would say yes. Or at least offer to take her to a movie. Any movie. Her expression was carefully neutral as she waited.

Ezee reviewed his options. Maybe he could photograph the book on his phone? The pages. then he could... no, no, that wouldn't work. Maybe scan it to a PDF? But that would take forever... Actually... what was he going on about? "So... following the stories on the meteor?"

"Can't say I have, no." Mariah said, honestly having no idea what he was talking about. "There's a shower coming soon?"

Knowledge: Current events **Yellow 13** rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 1

Ezee mentally facepalmed. He has long since been weaned off physically doing so when encountering someone who didn't know about some event or another. He was once like that, back in the days when he loathe the news and reports. Then he took SOCI 311 to the knee. Seriously. He tripped going up the stairs. Had to wear a brace for two weeks.

"I suppose I should have had said asteroid. The big one scientists can't seem to agree about whether it will hit the planet or not? The one right out of Armageddon? Or Stargate? That was a good episode," Ezee mused. His expression shifted to one of contemplation as he tapped his chin and he tried to ease the pain in his lower back. "Considering it's approach is atypical and outside the general plane of the solar system, part of the reason they are having so much trouble tracking it, actually."

"Seriously?" Mariah asked, eyes widening. "I suppose to keep a panic from spreading, that's why I haven't heard about it..."

"It's been on ever news station," Ezee smirked. "Most all bets are on it being a near miss at most, anyway. Still, I've been stocking my family's cottage with emergency supplies and food and such. Astrophysics has such a margin for error."

Mariah nodded, knowing she'd have to read up on this when she was at home. *So... In the face of this possible apocalypse and doesn't ask for a date...? Does he even like me then...?* Mariah thought frowning a little. Not to mention from the other thoughts going through her head. She tried to put on a brave face though. "So... In case anything does happen, not that it will of course, but if it does... Do you have anything you'd regret?"

"Plenty," Ezee admitted. So much stuff. Maybe he should make a bucket list. He knew what he'd put near the top too. He glanced at the time and swore to himself and quickly got up. "Sorry, but I have to get to my class. I've got ten minutes to set up."

His thoughts quickly started shifting from casual to work mode as he pulled up the lesson plans and objectives. He did hesitate for a moment. "So... if I do swing by the party after work, would you be there?"

"Probbaly, yeah." Mariah said smiling. It wasn't officially a date, but it was closer then he ever got before. Seeing that he'd be leaving for the next while, Mariah dug out her headphones, laptop and began searching for not only Discord Emporium but also about the meteorite coming, where it would land, estimated strength, and everything she could find out about it.

Yellow 13 rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: $7 + 2 = 9$

[For some reason, her choice of search terms and phrasing netted her old news not connected to the current events, but the false information might have distracted her. Nothing on the Dicord Emporium but a link to someone reviewing the comic book Discord]

Mariah sighed and shook her head. Vacating her usual spot, Mariah found a more hidden place and opened her new book, reading it, though kept her laptop up as a sheild in case anyone found her.

To you who have purchased this book; be warned that the journey we are about too share is perilous and daunting, not for the weak of heart and faint of spirit. But opening these pages it the first step! Now, prepare yourself, for it is time for use to enter the mind of a mare...

"Considering I'm a girl already, that shouldn't be to hard..." Mariah muttered. It was strange though. there weren't acknowledgements, the usual copyright information or anything like that. Even the usual "if a copy is bought without its covers, it's reported as unsold and destroyed, please return it." thing. Anyways, All she had to do was think "i'm myself, but with hooves and a penchant for dried grass."

[let's move down below a bit...]

[James]

James started the day like normal, walking to his kitchen and prepared some breakfast, then grabbed a silvery coloured tail and walked down to the lake.

He got into his tail and swam around talking to some of the locals and just generally relaxing in the lake, nothing out of the ordinary though a bit nervous of the big concert tonight. He prepared the playlist the night before and didn't have to worry about the visuals as the electronic team have it covered so he just swam around.

[time; around 9pm]

After swimming for over 10 hours straight he felt hungry and he had to prepare for the incoming party but something about the package intrigued him, so once he got back to his apartment and dried off he opened the box.

[Current Status: Worn out after spending the whole day swimming. -2 dex and str. Probably the good kind of exhausted though, from doing things you like]

[Roll a fort check, by the way. Wait, no; roll ten swim checks. With mastery+endurance, you can pass the first... two with taking ten, but the DC climbs each hour.]

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 19+8 Pass (Swim)

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 4+8 Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 3+8 Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 5+8 Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 16 + Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 6+8 Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 3 +0 Fatigue

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 10 +0 Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 19 +8 Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 20 +8 Pass

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 3+0 Fatigued

His phone (he has a cell phone, right?) was blinking, probably from having notifications.

James picks up his phone, yawns and checks his messages

The first few were texts, all from Justin, the guy that headed up the tech side of his gigs.

'Hey James, where are? We need to set up.' - 3:08PM

'James, man, where are you?' - 3:23PM

'James, get back to me.' - 3:47PM

eight missed calls between previous and next message

'Dude, this isn't funny, it's seriously getting late. We need to hook up your system.' - 4:24

five missed calls between previous and next message

'Party starts in 5. WHERE ARE YOU?' - 4:53

'We had to call in the back up. You're in hot water with the manager. You'd better have a kickass reason for missing this one.' - 6:13

And one from the club that was hosting/arranging the party.

'James, I'd like to see you at the office tomorrow at 1:30. And it would be in your best interest if you turn up for this one.' - Mr. Hanner. 8:37

James read to first message and facepalmed, he forgot entirely about the party "*shit, im so guna be fired*" he thought to himself, he put a pizza in the oven and started to cook it.

aquaica wolfern (pc) rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 5

His tired state made judging time hard and the pizza burned so he settled for a bowl of cereal instead he sat down with the contents of his bag spilled on the table and stuffed a spoon of corn flakestm into his mouth.

Afterwards he made his way to bed and slept the night away, the dread of tomorrow looming over him.

[Yan]

One thing that people hate at the times they don't really need to do something urgent and that they could just sleep off are the alarm clocks. Yan had his go off at 6 and one at 7, just for good measure. Worked wonders, when he needed them to do wonders, but he didn't, and thus he was lying in the bed, sleepy enough to be grumpy at alarm clocks, but not sleepy enough to be actually sleeping afterwards.

So at first he was like that thing in these westerns, tumbling all around his bed, muttering. Then he pretended to sleep and hoped his body and mind would take the bait, but the body and mind weren't intending to be in the sleeping state for a while. So, in the end, he gave up, got out, got himself some tea and checked the stuff on the net he needed to check, and went about on the ghostly businesses, prepping up for some of his workstation stuff for his routine and not so routine tasks. Like that one "freebie" he got at some club... It is easy money, right? He needed money, mainly because he hit the one boring strike with his projects that do not make people interested for now. Mainly because it's all coding and not a single flashy pretty thing.

So... He glanced at the time. 10:28 according to his clock on the wall, 10:45 according to the one that was looking cool, that is on the table... His computer states 10:38, however. AM, but he was kinda used to the simple 24 hour format, so this clarification was redundant. So... This little work is still far away from him, huh. He could totally finish at least that stupid recognition module for one of his Arduino works. Maybe. Or watch youtube. He decided to be productive at first, so with the coding software up, and preparation to check the time every 10-20 minutes, he started working on his thing.

At around eleven when his phone buzzed as someone rang his unit from the apartment's entrance.

"Oh great... Uh..." he muttered to himself and got over to the phone, answering the call with simple, "Yes?"

"Is this apartment 7-o-4? I have a package for a... Yan Dansin," a male voice responded. "I'm with the Canada post."

Did they mix his patriarchal name with family name again? These naming ways... Oh well, it would make 100% sense in Russia, so he didn't question it much. "Yeah, that's your client," he

replied and did the button finger-boop. Package? He'd better find some rubber gloves and a mask. Doesn't want to have that good-ol anthrax in his body.

"Do you mind buzzing me in so I can bring it up, or would you rather come down and get it. I need a signature for receipt."

"Hang in there for a moment, I'll get down there myself," Yan replied, waiting for a while to hear if he'd get a reply; and if he didn't, he'd have gone for his T-shirt, put on his boots and go for the streets, probably with a pen, to get that signature written down.

"No problem sir," the replay came.

And so Yan hanged the phone and dressed himself up in the way that needed to be dressed, and left his appartments to get to that delivery person. And he did take the pen, just in case.

He was waiting in the front area, behind the glass door that needed a key to get through, the general security for the building. A man in a canada post uniform, a small white box with green polkadots in one hand, a clipboard in the other.

Yan walked over to the man, clearly puzzled. Quite an informal thing... "Hello," Yan said, "You are the delivery man, am I right?"

"That I am," the man said. He held the clipboard out for Yan, a pen attached to it with a length of cord. "I just need your signature on this form, if you will."

"Sure. By the way..." Yan said, using the man's pen to sign, "Who is the sender?"

He checked the form after he exchanged the clipboard for the box. "A company called Discord Emporium."

"Never heard of it..." New way of advertising? Postal mix up? Fake company? Love bombing? Who knows... "Sure the data is alright?" Sure asking that after signing is alright, Yan?

"It wouldn't have made it this far if it wasn't," the mail carrier said, nodding as he turned to leave. "Half a good one."

"Goodbye..." Yan said, staring at the box. Long story short, he got back to his place, found the expendable rubber gloves and mask, put them on and carefully opened the package.

Inside was a book. Seemed simple enough. About the size of a paperback, if slightly larger, maybe twenty by fifteen centimeters. There was a glyph of some sort on the front; a third of a circle set off-kilter, about 60 % of the arc to the right, an inverted 'T' like a stand. A smaller arc curved from just past the left edge of the large curve, up and back down to meet it again about two thirds of the way to the right end, two slashes, one vertical and almost like a continuation of the lower stroke, save for the gap, the other set about 45 degrees to it.

There was strange script on the cover, cursive like but with strange characters not fully resembling anything he could identify from the top of his head.

Yan figured that it was definitely something out of his league. Arabic? Chinese? Japanese? Doesn't look like anything, but at least these looked like letters. Maybe it was a prop from some TV show? That would explain stuff somewhat, but won't explain the reason for why did he get it (aside from someone trying to poison him or a postal mix up, and he won't be giving up on either any soon, apparently)

Oddly enough, there wasn't anything legible in the book. All the pages' script looked foreign. Not latin or Cyrillic, that was for sure. It looked like it could be cursive. Maybe. There were numerous images of odd symbols and glyphs and the like. If he flipped towards the back he would notice that it became full page spreads of circles, patterns and structures.

The quality of graphs was at least quite cool; probably a fancy algorithm, but that makes the version of a show prop unlikely. Maybe it's a very fancy gift item? For sci-fi fans, or maybe a scam to get the money out of people think they have "magical" powers, such as reading future and spirit communications? All can be, all can be.

Since there was no text to look up from the book itself, he decided to go with different way - he took his phone (after taking off his gloves and mask) and made a photo of the book's cover, and pushed it over to Google Image search to handle. Along with that, on another tab, he went on to search for this mysterious "Discord Emporium" that was mentioned, hoping something would come along; the prop book, if it was one, looked well made, so there should be a trace of it in the net.

Google did its magic on the image, and returned a grand total of... nothing. There wasn't anything conclusive that Google could liken it to. The things it brought up were mostly based on the colours than anything else.

The search on Discord Emporium was more successful. It linked him to a game shop called Game Master's Emporium and its review of the comic book 'Discord'. Something about a superhero frankensteined with parts for the dead members of his superhero team after a crash.

Yan checked the time again, figuring that if he has enough time, he could continue the Google binge. And he did, since there was enough time till he'd leave. His next search was on Discord, Discord props and Discord runes, because he couldn't really call it otherwise. Oh wait, glyphs. Yeah, these too.

Irbynx rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 8+8 Research

There was nothing. He couldn't find anything about whatever company 'Discord Emporium' was. It was as if it didn't exist, online at least. There were still those really weird companies that didn't have an online presence. It didn't help that the package didn't have a return address, just a PO box at the Toronto Head Office for Canada Post. After the second hour of research, when it was pushing time for him to leave, finally something. Not a great thing, but something; a thread on a forum. *"Anyone heard of Discord Emporium?"*

Yan glanced at the time. Damnit, he really should be getting to go. Wanted to come earlier, and now he'd be definitely the last one to arrive. Damnit. He sent the link off to his phone so he could read it up later, during the downtimes, for example, packed up his stuff and swiftly dressed up, switched his computer off and headed away to the today's job.

[Timecheck: 1:33. Get going!]

One bus ride later, Yan was on the night life side of town, making his way down to the address they have given him. He managed to get there with no issues, a decently sized club. Not yet open, he only found about eight or nine people there. Most he would know from working with before.

[Roll navigate. See if you make it on time or late. **Irbynx** rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 17]

[Timeline Checks: 3:00 pm, June 8, 2015]

Status:

Ezee: 5 hours in. *Symptoms*: back pain from bone shifting eased, tail developing, constricted by clothing

Mariah: 1.5 hours in. *Symptoms*: Irritation around the temples, ears and scalp. Ears shifted slightly, trace more pointed. Not very noticeable until the 2.5 to 3 hour mark when the fur starts developing

James: Not afflicted

Yan: incompatible

Locations:

Ezee: In the library, one of the lecture/computer rooms

Mariah: in the library, one of the study rooms

James: somewhere on the lake

Yan: Grizzly Nightclub and Bar

[/Timeline Checks]

[Yan]

Justin Mercer wasn't the most tech savvy guy around, but he was good at public relations and almost had a sixth sense about how to please a crowd. He was one of the better event planners in the town and had contracts, ranging from tenuous verbal promises, to actual signed and sealed legal documents with a couple of bars, halls and sites in and around the town. He also had several people he could draw into a contract to set up a site, prepare an event, actually participate and host, depending on what it was. Yan was one of them.

At the moment though, Justin looked rather flustered. "Yan-my-man! Glad you got here on time."

"Was kinda scared I wouldn't, actually," Yan replied with a smirk, "So, we need to be setting up the whole party hard-n-soft wares now, yep? Or there's something else up I should know?"

"Glad to see you eager," Justin nodded. "Only issue is that the DJ for the night hasn't shown up yet. We can't set everything up fully until he gets in with his stuff."

Yan shrugged, "Eh, whatever. I think he's needed just for music and stuff? He did tell techies what are his preferences for the mixing rig and software to install, if any? Right?"

"He's got a custom set up for his act. The guy that does the mermaid thing," Justin said, his phone to his ear as he called again. "Waterproofing, setting up the framework for his tank, that he should have had here five minutes ago."

"Oh, that kind of stuff... Eh, I suppose I could get to setting up the other systems in the meantime. I'm not late for that part, am I right?" Yan asked.

"You should be fine setting up the speakers and other peripherals," Justin said, his phone to his ear as he tried to reach James. "The only issue is setting up his props takes time, and we can't do a full sound check till he gets here."

"And I can say something cynical on that, and you can guess what," Yan replied. *None of my business*, he thought up the follow up that he kept to himself and looked around, "So, where's the stuff that needs to be set up?"

They pointed them out and the crew got to work. They toiled for an hour or two to get everything in place, making sure the room was properly wired and set up for when the DJ finally did show, that nothing was a hazard, that connections were sure, etc, etc. The actual club staff showed up as well and started prepping the bar and dance area and such.

[Mariah]

Judging by the table of contents and what she found in the first one; each chapter was in two or four parts. One or two short stories about some situation in the love life of a stallion and his herdmates, followed by a commentary attempting to be humorous explaining what the stallion did wrong from the mares' point of view and how he might avoid or solve with or without losing too many testosterone points.

The more Mariah read, the more she was blushing. It was very strange, but also steamy like she had predicted. The only thing that stopped her from fully enjoying it was a migraine she was starting to get. Mariah couldn't help but giggle at the sheer ridiculousness of the book. Still, the headache was getting to her... Finishing the chapter, she put it away and started to make for home. She had to get ready for the party. Maybe some little knockout number for Ezekiel to surprise him. Did she even have something like that...? She'd find out when she got home.

Packing up all her stuff, she went home to the residence. Hopefully Rachel wouldn't be around to tease her about her sexual preferences.

Rachel was home when she came in, hard at work writing some paper or another, two books open before her.

"Heya, Rachel," Mariah said to her roommate.

Rachel looked up and gave Mariah a weary smile. "Hey, Mariah. How was your day?"

"Pretty good. Woke up early, got told the planet might get hit by a big fuck-off asteroid, tried to get Ezekiel to go on a date with me while making it seem like it was his idea all along. Going out in a few hours. The usual. Yours?"

"Finally asked your lover boy out, did you?"

"Not really. I was hoping he'd ask me since guys are the ones to do that. He said he'd hopefully be at the party. Party, concert, either or." Mariah said. "By the way, thanks for that book. Real mature."

"What book?"

"The Stalliion's guide to all things mare?" Mariah clarified. "Where did you even get that thing anyways? I couldn't find it online."

"What?"

Mariah took the book in question out of her bookbag and returned it. "Don't tell me you've never seen this before." Carefully, so as not to hit her roommate in the head with it, she tossed the book over.

Rachel didn't manage to catch the book, but picked it up from where it landed on the desk. Her eyebrows raising as she looked at the cover. "Tail Chaser..? Is this something about cartoon horses?"

"You tell me. Didn't you get it for me? With what you know about my... tastes." Mariah said. "I still can't believe you searched through my bookmarks."

"You left them up when I asked to borrow your laptop. Anyway, I didn't get you this book. Where did you find it anyway?"

"In my backpack just after I arrived at school." Mariah replied. "Must have been tucked away at the bottom or something. Anyways, you're sure you've never seen this before?"

"Maybe your folks sent it?" Rachel offered, flipping through it and scanning a random page. "Ponies and pegususes? Maybe your parents didn't send this... I thought the cover was a joke." She flipped it back to look at it. "I guess this could be called a pony..."
Sense Motive: **Yellow 13** rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 13

"Hmm... Well... Oh well. So long as it wasn't you..." Mariah said and took the book back. "Well, I gotta go meet my date. Don't have long and I don't want to be late." She smiled and headed into her room to search for something nice to wear.

Finding the dress that showed off her body the best, she got herself ready. As she was doing her makeup, she noticed her ears. "What the...?" She touched them to see if the fur there was real.

She gasped softly and bit the inside of her lip. The time was ticking down and she didn't want to go to her first date looking like she had just shaved around her face. That was for guys no less. Instead, she let her hair down to cover her ears, like she sometimes did. That done, she got dressed and headed out to the party.

"See ya later Rachel! If I'm not back, avenge my horrible death!" Mariah called as she left.

[Ezekiel]

This was getting ridiculous. What the hell did he do to cause that sort of back pain? Some sort of weird disease? It was all so very distracting as he tried to find a comfortable spot in the chair to teach and supervise from. The students weren't the only one watching the clock.

"Alright everyone!" Ezekiel said when they had ten minutes to go. It was getting unbearable, worsening instead of getting better. "We'll call it a day here." The room immediately filled with the shuffling of people putting belongings away. "I want to see your reference lists for the six books in both MLA and APA on the desk first thing next class. Have a good one, everyone."

Ten more painful minutes as he answered questions, keeping a smile on despite the discomfort.

"Are you feeling okay Mr. E?" Cassandra, one of the better more consistent workers in the group. He wasn't sure why she *was* in the workshop, to be honest. She already had the skills. He was sure it was just a case of either lazy student who did enough but not spectacular, or with friends. Maybe both.

"Actually... no, I'm not," Ezeel admitted. "And I was feeling fine when my shift started too..."

"Then you should call it a day, Mr. E," Annette, Cassandra's friend commented. "You don't want to over work yourself."

"Is something wrong?" someone else asked. Yaul, this time.

"Mr. E's under the weather," Jason, who was also eavesdropping, responded. Now Ezeel was surrounded by about ten of his students, all of whom insisting he take the rest of the day off.

"You looked weird in class and didn't walk around like you normally would," one said.

"We though you were constipated," his friend and regular neighbour added with a grin, only to get a light shove.

"We weren't going to tell him that!"

Okay, so Ezee was the cool teacher (Teacher's Aide, if you wanted to be technical. It was just the lab aspect of another class/workshop). Fine. Still. "Look, I can't just leave middle of my shift!"

"If you're sick there's no helping it," Mrs. Rose said, coming from who knows where. Yeesh, she was better at the sneaking around thing than I was. You'd think those heels would click more.

"But Joyce..."

"Ah-tata!" she chided. "The students coming in for your class was about all the activity the library's seen today. I can do without your help. Go rest up."

"But I'm..."

"Don't you have that date this evening too?"

"I don't have a... wait... how do... what?" Ezee stammered.

"You have a date Mr. E? It's about time!" one of his students said.

"You go, Mr. E!" another said. "Go rest up for your date."

It was certainly... and interesting experience for Ezee. Almost a third of his class cheering him on, and even his senior giving him the evening off. Back in the staff lounge, Ezee confronted her. "Okay, why are you giving me time off?"

"Zeke, you might be good with people, but you are a dreadfully shy boy. You've been carrying that torch for about as long as I knew you, and I knew you since you were in high school. You would carry the torch you have for that girl with you to the grave at the rate you are going."

Ezee spluttered as Joyce smiled. As if the back pain wasn't enough!

"Your class was about all you really needed to do today. You would have just been hanging around otherwise. Take the evening off, rest up and take some pain killers and do enjoy yourself. You really do look stiff."

Ezee sighed and gave up and headed for the rest room to see if he had a rash or something. "Fine, fine... I'll see you tomorrow."

"Make sure you show her a good time!" Joyce called after him.

"I'll try..." Ezee said weakly, still confused.

"And use protection if you go all the way." He crashed into the door. Joyce laughed before heading back out. "Still so innocent!"

Man, he know Joyce was... frisky and pretty rad for her age (the only thing that kept her refusal to retired from chaffing too much), but yeesh... In the privacy of the restroom, he undid his belt so he could check out his back in the- HOLY ALL THINGS HOLY WHAT WAS THAT?

Creeping up his dark sexy backside was a thick mess of hair. Dark greyish black hair. Inching up his back. And the pain was.... um... he dropped his pants and it finally eased, replaced with the soreness of a limb no longer... confined...

Ezee stared blankly at the tail that slowly relaxed behind him; pale grey with bluish grey streaks. He carefully tugged it between his legs, up and over to lay relatively comfortably beside other dangler and slipped his underwear and pants back on numbly left the building, nodding greetings and such and jumping into Avery to drive home.

Ezee focused on the road and not on the thing resting between his legs, uncomfortable again after it's brief stint of freedom. *Just keep on driving Z-man. Keep on driving. Watch out for that red car, and mind that ford... keep driving...* Still, home was only so far away, and his mind was busy in the background battling itself and still coming up with conclusions.

The premire of which ended up with him quickly jogging into his house, pulling the magic book (which he was suspecting was real magic, not just a story book) into the sofa. "THIS IS YOUR FAULT!"

That led to a couple minutes of Ezee yelling and cursing the book and calling it smug and other assorted things (which scared Apollo under the side chair), pointing out that with an asteroid coming some weird 'magic is real' nonsense was the last thing he need on his plate, not when he finally had an 'not quite a date' date with Mari to go to that night and now he had a weird pony tail (which he had freed from it's captivity).

"That's right book, I'm on to you! It was that shock back in the kitchen, wasn't it? You sneaky conniving bundle of pressed tree fibres... this was your plan all along. Hook me with your siren lure and do all sorts of weird things to me... well, I'm not falling for it! I'll read you, book. And I'll learn all your secrets! They will be mine! All MINE! And then we'll see who's laughing! MwuhAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Ezee's evil laugh died off and he slumped down on the sofa beside the book that riled him up, only to hop ba "Yes, I know you're likely an inanimate object but lord knows I needed that... Ship. Carp. Ditch. Other such words that are close to actual culturally accepted profanities. I mean..." He exhaled heavily and picked up the book and flipped through the pages.

"Let's see if there's a pony tail removal spell or something... oh you cacadoode doing... sorry.... gasalsalsa on rye bread with... peach and cheddar cheese! Hell!" Every page past the first chapter was unreadable. The words and symbols skittered across the page instead of behaving like nice and proper inanimate printed words. He flipped to the back. The index was fine, so was the...

huh... a picture of ponies... One of them even had wings and a horn... she must be one of those alicorn things men... ah. Princess Twilight by the blurb...

"Wonder what the deal is with tattooing herself with that seal..." He flipped back to the end of chapter one.

As some of you may know about me, I love to learn. With that in mind, I hope by fully reading the previous chapter that you do too. Now I know this is a reference guide, but I couldn't resist putting in a review for each chapter; mostly to make sure none of you hurt yourselves in taking on magic too dangerous for your skill level. To that end I placed each subsequent chapter under progressively more difficult illusion spells.

"Oh, so it's the princess I should be mad at. Darn book loving.... bah... can't get mad at her. I hate people who skip to the end too..."

Some of you more advanced magic users will have already picked up on the one for chapter one. Each chapter will be harder to unlock, but the solution will always be within the skill range set by the previous text. This review will be a gimme though as chapter one was only about the basics of the three tribes' magical talents. The only thing you have to do to be able to read the next chapter is to touch the next page with the foci of your magic, based on tribe of course. Don't worry about damaging them or the book as a whole, I made sure every copy of the guide is quite resilient. I hope to see you again in the next chapter.

"Well ain't that just dandy..." Ezee muttered. Let's see... wings, horns and hooves. He had... a tail. Waitwaitwaitwait a tick... did that mean he was turning into a pony? He grabbed the book and raced to the bathroom and striped. The tail looked a slight bit longer. Not much, just a bit. The... hair looked fuller. He didn't think the fur had moved much further though... "LOVELY. Absolutely lovely. I'm turning into a pony the night if the first date I've ever gotten..."

"You know what? Too bad book! Your evil plans to keep me a single guy will fail! Tail or no tail, I'm going to that party!"

He fumbled with the book. Right... a lock... and the key was... in the spine. Perfect! "Time to lock your evil away! Mwuahahah-FRIG! The hell?" The key vanished as soon as he locked it. He pulled his hand back, and was shocked to see a key shape on his palm.

Ezee blinked blankly at it. "Holy hannah... how am I supposed to unlock you now?" He thought about it. Magic book turning him into a pony? He placed hand over the lock. "Unlock." It clicked. "Lock." It clicked again. "Fine. You win this round..." he had a party to get to. **ἁπάθεια** rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 12+5

[At the Party]

Forty eight minutes later, a freshly showered and dressed Ezee was at the party location, about ten minutes before it was supposed to start. He decided to take refuge in audacity. It was a party, right? And the DJ was that weird guy who did his stuff in a pool with mermaid tail on. (If you asked him, it was like russian roulette. Operating complex electronics from inside a big bowl of water? Sounded like some serious risk taking if you asked him. But then, you didn't. He was digressing.) Anyway, it sounded like one of those parties were people in costumes and weird stuff wouldn't be all that out there he'd heard and read of. Mostly read. Anyway, tail out and not confined. He tried putting it down a pant leg and it drove him to distraction.

Speaking of... he needed to by shampoo... darn tail used about a third of a bottle. Now, really back on topic, he was a bit out of his element. What didst one do at such a venue? Flounder about aimlessly and hopelessly? He parked Avery about a block away and made his way to the party at a brisk trot. Black slacks, a slightly shimmery green long sleeved shirt that he almost never worn but sorta matched the tail and black shoes. Why mention the shoes? The sentence sounds incomplected without it.

"Anywho; behold! In his sight; the one known as Yan the Undefeated!" Ezee said in self-narration as he found something he could relate to.

Yan looked up from his phone at Ezee and waved over, seeing the familiar face. "Hey there! Never thought you were a party person," he replied, putting the phone in his pocket.

"No, most definately not," Ezee shrugged. "Honestly, I'd rather be home reading a book, listening to music, eating some chicken maybe, but... you remember Mariah, right?"

Yan smirked, figuring out something. "Why yes I do. I think I can even guess what would you be going for on this rave," he replied, chuckling, and then looking back, the smile turning into a small frown, "If only it'd start, dammit. Our extravagant DJ is still not here..."

"Wait, he's not?" Ezee said, panicking a little. 'Egads and Zounds! a mere five minutes into the grand scheme and already cruel fate has struck! The lichpin upon which my feeble scheme was constructed has been removed! How long until it all comes crashing down around me?' His innner melodramatic had a better connection with his tail and it flared and flicked behind him. "Alas, I am undone..."

"And you told me I'm a pessimist," Yan replied, shaking his head, "Fancy tail, by the way. Made in Jap? Anyway... Why won't you just go on through a more direct route if the party is not coming up soon? It's not like your paths are completely blocked off forever and ever. You'd even have a common topic guaranteed! 'Oh how do I hate the late/non-coming DJs' or something like that."

"Yeah. Got it on sale," Ezee said, just rolling with Yan's assumption. When in doubt; made in japan or china. "And yeah, unrelated though. You still planning on coming up to the cottage this weekend?"

"Yeah, of course," Yan replied, "Unless something unforeseen happens... Like today, dangit..."

"I plan to carry up another load of emergency supplies too," Ezee said.

"Such as?" Yan asked, tilting his head to side in a manner of questioning feline.

"Canned food, nonperishables, batteries, some more gas for the generator, a couple more stuff like that," Ezee grinned. "Plan to spend the three days of and around the asteroid's passing. Grania. Don't remember the alphanumeric though."

"You know, if I didn't know you before, I'd thought you were stocking up for the whole apocalypse in case this asteroid's gonna crash into the Earth," Yan replied, chuckling.

"Of course I am!" Ezee said. He looked around and found a lack of anything to place a leg on for proper dramatic pose, so settled for a dashing one. "Scientists have been wrong before! Should the end come, I will be prepared!"

"Honestly though, I'm just having fun," Ezee grinned. "Even if it does fall in that 13% margin of error and hits instead of missing, it won't be large enough to end life or anything. Just..." he got sombre. "The think it would facing the atlantic when it hits. They are thinking tidal waves."

"Owch," Yan said, "How big are they going to be?"

"That's way I'm doing it. They don't want to say really. They just say 'potentially damaging' waves. I mean, we are well inland here, but... besides. Cottage," Ezee grinned.

Yan nodded, "Either way, if it hits, it'd be a boon to scientists and a severe headache to usual people."

"Yeah... just so you know, I want it to miss," Ezee said. "But it's sorta cool to prepare for an apocalypse. In the... actually..." his tail flickered thoughtfully. "You think I should invite Mariah? We could call up a few friends and spend a night or two. We don't have any renters for all of this month."

If he had been thinking properly, he would have remembered the little issue about turning into a pony before issuing that sort of invitation... Really, you'd think it would be on the forefront of his thoughts. In his defence, the entire idea was ridiculous, so it was understandable that he didn't keep it priority.

Ezee eventually ditched Yan when he spotted Mariah, but while it may be Bros before Hoes, Mariah wasn't a ho. See? Loophole! "Later, bro!" And he was gone.

And with Ezee gone, Yan was left alone, with the whole "party gone wrong" vibe again. Woo. He pulled out his phone and got to reading up the thread he found on Discord Emporium. This was all very weird and he had nothing to do now anyway.

Forum Post:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10TscAK1Ee09AhoOfnMu1j1XdLZ9H3Zi6gKNhx3BLPU4/edit?usp=sharing>

[Mariah]

Mariah arrived much later thanks to the bus schedules, but when she did, she immediately began searching to find Ezekiel. While she didn't have his number, he had hers and her cell phone was with her. A rarity for her. While she didn't see him, she decided to mingle as best as she could while trying to find him.

Notice: **Yellow 13** rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: $6 + 2 = 8$

Ezee eventually found Mariah. He realized that next time, though would need to put together an actual plan to meet or something. Anyway; he found her. His tail even wagged a little. He didn't notice though.

"Hey Ezee!" Mariah said. "There you are."

"Uh, hi Mariah," Ezee said a tad nervously. The replacement DJ hadn't arrived yet so only regular music was being played while the crews waited for the replacement. He was pretty nervous, and his tail was twitching restlessly. What did you do at a party? Or on a 'Sorta might be kinda a' date? "So.... I got the evening off."

"I noticed." Mariah chuckled. "What with you being right here and all." Looking at his expression, she grinned. Seemed like she'd have to do all the work here. "So, how was your day?"

"Well..." the scale of the bizzareness and total... ridiculousness of the situation came crashing down on Ezee again and his words died in his throat. "I got into an argument with a book," he said truthfully.

"Did said argument involve a paper shredder?" Mariah asked. "Otherwise, I hate to see what would happen if you lost."

Ezee opened his mouth, then closed it thoughtfully. "Um... give me a moment," he said as he let his thoughts wander. He could easily lie and cover stuff up, but, lets be honest, what has sitcoms and movies and cartoons taught us? Trying to cover up this sort of stuff with friends was a bad thing. At best they had the solution all along and you wasted all that time stressing and worrying for nothing, at worse they helped support your stories and dug holes for the bodies with you.

Not that there were going to be bodies... Seriously... he was just turning into a colourful magic intelligent pony. How would bodies come from that? God he really hoped not bodies came from this. Ezee swallowed nervously. "Okay..." the place was noisy enough. He pointed to a free table and motioned to it. "Let's get a table first..."

ἀπάθεια rolled a die. The die showed: 4+8 Table ho!

Mariah tilted her head a little but shrugged, sitting down. "Something's wrong, isn't it?" She asked, concerned. She paused. "It's me isn't it? Am I comming on too strongly?"

Sense Motive: Yellow 13 rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 19
[He's worried, confused, a tad nervous.]

"No! It's not that!" Ezee said quickly. Easy now Ezee... take it... easy? By... puns. Okay. Just tell her. "Remember I was telling you about that magic book I got in the mail?"

Mariah nodded. "the D&D gamebook thing?"

"Well... turns out it's a real book of magic spells and I'm apparently turning into a magic pony..." Ezee said quickly and in an every lessening tone.

//I'll set it so it's in the shrinking font size when archiving.

Yellow 13 rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 14 +2=16 [you're in a club with music pumping. You don't hear squat past 'I'm appa-']

"Sorry?" Mariah asked leaning in, being careful to sheild her furry ear.

Ezee sighed and turned and held up the pale green and faint grey green stripped tail. It was long enough to reach past his knees now. "I grew a tail. Stupid book is a real magic book written by magic ponies and apparently only usable by magic ponies. I'm turning into a magic pony. Shikes, that sounds ridiculous," he added with a mutter.

Mariah just stared, eyes wide. It was a costume. It had to be. "Uhhh..." She blinked and made sure no one was looking. "Well... Something weird is happening to me too..." She pushed her hair back from her ears. "I felt fur there... And I found a book too. A stallion's guide to all things mare..."

"Um... what?" Ezee blinked. "What... what kind of book is it?"

"It's some kind of guide on how a stallion would pick up mares. And it has ponies on the cover. At least three of them." She went to discribe the three mares she remembered. "It's... ridiculous, I don't even know why I bothered reading it. Well... Part of it." She blushed, remembering how it went.

"So... did it shock you when you touched it?" Ezee asked.

"Not that I noticed," Mariah admitted. "Did yours?"

"Damn... stupid spell is infectious," Ezee swore. "Damn damn damn..."

"Who else have you been around? Because... Oh no." Mariah's eyes widened and looked around. "We have to get out of here. Now." She was already getting up, taking a firm hold on Ezekiel's

hand. "Follow my lead." She whispered into his ear. "Uhhh..." Mariah said, pretending to be woozy. "I need air... Booze isn't agree--Ugh!" She put a hand to her mouth and bolted for the nearest exit, her free hand tugging on Ezekiel's.

Ezee sighed. It was hardly six. It was still bright out. Would be for another three hours. Well, he couldn't fault her enthusiasm. "You know we could have just... left, right?" he asked when they were outside.

"Look, let's just... I dunno, get to your cabin or something while we sort this out. We gotta know if this is it or what... How close is your cabin from here? We'll take your car and hide while we wait this out."

"Aren't you... moving a bit... fast?" Ezee asked, pulling out his cellphone.

"How do you mean?" Mariah asked, stopping.

"I mean... It's... yeah, I suppose we don't know how bad this is..." Ezee finished typing up a text and sent it to Yan.

'Yo. I mentioned feeling sick to you, right? Anyway, turns out it was worse than I thought. Gonna be taking a breather for a while.'

"So, yeah. Your cabin?" Mariah offered. "Because I don't want Rachel or anyone else to be any more infected if I can help it."

"Um, cottage," Ezee said, composing a message to his sister. He decided to go with the truth for her. 1) He needed her connections, 2) she was a nurse (in training). Saying 'I'm sick' was short hand for 'come care for me while laughing at my infirmities my dearest sister!'

'Hey Naomi, I'm gonna be out of touch for a while. I'll let you know what's going on later. Gonna be crashing at the cottage. Also; I'm calling in that favour. Need a doctor's note incase work asks for one. Yes, I'm sick. No, it's not a normal sickness. Long story short: grew a tail. Literally. Because magic. Seriously.'

"Is there a difference?" Mariah asked when Ezee was done and began typing out a message to Rachel on her own phone. "And if there is, what is it?"

Hey Rachel. Nothing happened, no need to avenge death. Going to be away though for a while. Don't wait up.

Okay, Ezee didn't often like to play up how well off he and his family were. Despite being private sector, his job was high paying, especially since it came with that 'post graduate studies' requirement. And his parents were as well. Mom upper management in a company with offices all across North America, his father both a professor and author. Not upper class, but upper middle class.

"Cabin implies a room or two. Cottage is more... general," Ezee said shiftily, his tail flicking.

"And the difference between a cottage and a house?" Mariah asked. "Cause that sounds more like a house."

"Now you're getting it," Ezee said with a nervous smile. "It's actually bigger than my place. By... a lot."

"So why not just call it a house?"

"Because it's a cottage," Ezee said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Mariah rolled her eyes. "Let's just get going before you poof and turn into a magic pony or something. Think we should swing by my place and get my book or jsut go?"

Ezee still felt like they were rushing headlong into things without any idea of what was going on. "Fine... but you'll need more than just that book of yours."

"All my clothes and everything?" Mariah offered, not liking the idea of multiple trips. It jsut meant more chances to spread the infection. If that's what this was. "Or what would you reccomend?"

"... Just... pack for a trip," Ezee said. Okay, how did this happen? This morning he was worried about... well, just getting to work and teaching his lesson. Now he had... a partial date, was apparently hit was a real live magic curse, and was talking about going up to the cottage with the girl he had a crush on for years. Alone.

"Right," Mariah said and searched for Ezee's car. "So... Car to get there? I don't want to risk the bus."

"It's an hour away in cottage country. Buses don't run there. We don't even have neighbours," Ezee said. "Not for a few miles in any direction."

"And the car itself?" Mariah asked.

"Hmm?" he asked, checking the response he got from Yan. Naomi was on the clock, she wouldn't respond for a while. And she didnt have a car, so they were safe from her.
[Yan text: *What did you get sick with? Would cottage plans remain?*]

"Ah, nuts and bolts... Yan wants to know what's up"

"Well we can't exactly say to him 'we're turning into magical ponies, be back in a bit.'" Mariah chimed in. "Best bet is to pretend you didn't see the text."

"And why can't I tell him? I told you," Ezee pointed out as he typed.

"Because we are on a date, I'm going through something more or less the same and..." Mariah paused and finally said it. "I have a crush on you. There. I said it." She blushed and, finally irritated with her hair being over her ears, pushed it back.

[text to Yan]

I got a magic book in the mail and I'm pretty sure it's turning me into a magic pony and M-'
Mariah had horrible timing, choosing then to drop a comment like that, and Ezee accidentally sent the message to Yan incomplete. "I.. ah... uh?"

Mariah looked to Ezekiel. "I said I have a crush on you. For a long time now, in fact. Why do you think I lurked in the library all that time, sneaking glances at you?" Mariah made a face. "That... sounded better in my head."

"I..." the whole cause of this issue was that Ezee hadn't had the guts to say anything to her all this time. He'd all but been chased here by friends. "I've... I've liked you since we first met. Well, maybe not right away... about... five months after? Joyce, (you know, from the library?) insisted I come tonight otherwise I might not have made "

ἄρχή rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 20+4 Stability

Beep beep boop shall go the phone, as it was called on by Yan. Yeah, he's calling! Something's definitely, totally important.

Ezee looked at his phone. Seriously. It was the same at work. The moment you tried to get one important thing done, a dozen more popped up. He answered it. "Hey Yan..."

"What is the company behind the book?" Yan asked, a tone of excitement mixed with anxiety in his voice, "Discord Emporium?"

"Yeah. No publisher info, no ISBN, none of the standard information on the title page either," Ezee said, shrugging at Mariah. Then he froze. "Hold up, how do you know that?"

"Ever read Conan Doyle? Yeah, did the trick his most famous character did," Yan replied, going from the long route, "I got the book from same publisher. Weird as hell. No data in net, aside from confused forum posts. Also was pony heavy, according to poster."

He went silent for a while, then went on, "I got a weird one, apparently, cause it holds no connection to the equines or other things whatsoever, because it is pure rubbish, so I didn't really connect it, but now, come to think of it, you have said the book is magic, right? My book looked like it's full of some sort of mystical glyphs. Anyway, what the hell is this stuff about turning into pony? Is this tail not from Japan, but from Canada?" He sounded like he was trying to 7-zip his words, some of them were said quite fast, and his Russian accent slipped a couple of times, even.

"It's been growing for a few hours now, I guess," Ezee said, exhaling, motioning for Mariah to follow as he headed off to where he parked. "All I know is that I'm growing a tail and fur, Mariah's growing ears, and I've got a book of magic spells and I can only read the intro chapter

because I don't have the proper foci to unlock the other chapters. And I'm going to assuming that it's a 'yet' issue." Also; Mariah confessed to me, but that would have to wait till she wasn't hanging around. Bro talk and all.

"I can't even read the title..." Yan said, "Ah well. Wait, Mariah's turning into a pony too? Sure it's not something else? Also, how much time passed between the moment of you getting the book and starting to turn? Because I have nothing of it. Seriously. Just a goddamn heart attack, at worst."

"I got mine at 10:42 ish," Ezee said. "I had to sign for it so I remember. Mariah..." Ezee moved the phone slight. "Around the time we talked at the library, right?" He turned back to the call. "Around 2 or 2:30 for her."

"Weird... Got mine around 10:30 too..." Yan replied, "Oddly enough, no symphoms though. Maybe it wasn't loaded with the same stuff? Or maybe it's a virus, and because I've used protection while reading it (don't ask, I am paranoid) it didn't come over to me?"

Ezee snickered at the use of the word 'protection' but didn't question it. "My book shocked me. And it's a book about magic. Mariah's didn't and it's a book about dating."

"...dating book? So content shouldn't be magical? Weird. My book is full of random runes, as I've said before, I got literally nothing out of it. Didn't even "shock" me, but I suppose rubber gloves got me some insulation there." Yan replied.

"Wait... you don't think it's the books, do you?" Ezee said, his walk slowing. **ἄρχή** rolled a die with 20 sides. The die showed: 11+5 Insight

"What else then?" Yan replied.

"Well... I thought it was just my book," Ezee said. Okay, tad egotistical. "And that it was infectious..."

"Honestly, I have no idea. I think that whatever causes it, be it all the books, or one, it is all very weird and we should really not ignore that sort of stuff. Really. I am going to keep mine away till I'd know more about this whole stuff. If random people were given this stuff, then internet would explode with data within next few days, I bet."

"Give it to us then," Ezee said after a moments consideration.

Mariah was left pacing as Ezekiel outlined everything that happened, trying to puzzle out what had happened. His book... She thought back to her own and bit the inside of her lip. It was a bit of a stretch, but maybe it wasn't infectious. Or as infectious as he thought it was if she had one and it started on her.

"Zeke!" She said suddenly. "How much of your book did you read? It's a bit of a leap, but maybe the changes are linked to how much we read."

"The book's enchanted. The princess put an illusion lock on every chapter," Ezee said, putting the phone on speaker. "I can't access anything but the first chapter, the table of contents, some of the index and concordance, the foreword and end notes.

"She wants the pony learning to progress in a linear fashion, so each chapter has a review test you have to pass, and I'm pretty sure the book adapts to the user..." Ezee snapped his free hand and switched the phone to his right and held out his left hand to Mariah so she could see the symbol of a key that marked his palm. "The book's key sorta... magiced itself into my hand. The first test is to touch the page with your tribe's foci. Hoof, wing or horn."

"It's a bit of a leap, but if we stop reading, and don't even touch the book, look at it or anything, it might reverse itself. I don't know. The other option is destroying the book." Mariah said. "I'm just throwing out ideas here."

"Give you the book?" Yan asked, for clarity

"My... tail grew after I stopped reading, not while," Ezee responded. "And if you don't want the book, I can hold on to it."

"I'd bring it to cottage meeting, if you still hold it up," Yan said, "Maybe it has this same kinda spell that locks you out of the further steps, and since I've managed to dodge the whole transformation thing, I can't read it due to magicks?"

"I dunno... my book specifically mentioned it was illusion locked. The words were literally dancing across the page like a screensaver on crack. Any illusion on yours, Mariah?" Ezee asked, rubbing the back of his neck. He froze when he felt the fur that was there.

"Not that I saw," Mariah said. "I started reading and it seemed normal... It..." She blushed brightly. "It was... Ummm... I'll let you read it. If you think it's safe. It didn't seem magical or anything. Seemed to be written by a horn dog. The guy's name was even Tail Chaser."

"First Twilight Sparkle, now Tail Chaser... these authors have weird names," Ezee said. His voice sounded a little shakey. "Sorry, but I don't think this transformation thing is stopping. I've got fur up to my neck. I think we should get going sooner rather than later."

"Wait, dancing letters? Mine just completely made no sense," Yan replied.

"Huh... maybe you just got one from another part of ponyland," Ezee said, looking at Mariah and shrugging. "Mariah, is it cool if I drop you at your place to pack some things while I swing by mine then come back for you?"

"No idea," Yan said, "Sure there are just ponies there though?"

"Another book? and... I suppose, sure. Just hurry." Mariah said. "I don't want to contaminate Rachel. Just in case. I noticed my shifting while I was doing my makeup."

"He's had his since around the same time I had mine. It's apparently a dub," Ezee said carefully. He wasn't taking chances, but he's already made his conclusions about the whole situation. He didn't like where they were going. If it wasn't for the fact that he still wasn't convinced, 100%, that the effect wasn't contagious, he would have begged Yan to come too. Ponies didn't have hands. He was thinking ahead. Maybe grab the electric can-opener for his counter...

"And what do you mean 'just ponies'?" Ezee asked. "What else do you expect? They've already got unicorn ponies and pegasus ponies and earth ponies. I mentioned that, right?"

"Shit, shit shit..." Mariah swore, pacing some more. "And no you didn't."

"But yeah, the princess mentions them in the book. I'm surprised your's didn't," Ezee said contemplatively.

"I didn't really read too deeply into it." Mariah replied.

"I think you didn't... But now that you did, this is still weird. Really dang weird and this knowledge really gives nothing to me. Which sucks," Yan replied.

"Ah, damn... hands..." Ezee said suddenly. "Maybe he should come..."

"...are you going to exploit me for manual labor now? I should be totally making jokes on that and races there..." Yan replied.

"One black man to another? And the fur I have is black too," Ezee said, relaxing into familiar banter. "This is just a brother exploiting a brother."

"Meanwhile I'm turning marshmallow white..." Mariah muttered and rubbed her back and neck. "Damn... Why are you hurting, neck? I didn't even do anything!"

"And that's progress!" Ezee said, flicking a finger at Mariah. "I'm pulling out, Yan. Got some stuff to collect and shopping to do."

Mariah blinked with his words, but let it go, just deciding to follow Zeke for the time being. She knew she'd have to stay up for as long as it took. Besides, she wasn't even sure if she could get some sleep.

"Pulling out from Mar-- Oh." Yan replied.

"If you still come up, you'll have to find your own ride," Ezee continued, either ignoring or not getting the innuendo. "No idea if I'll be drive capable any time soon..." He closed his eyes and pinched and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. "The things I'm talking about should be enough to freak anyone out. I'm discussing slowly dep... the fleeting nature of my, fleeting and transient state of my humanity like it's bad weather..."

"If you'd start freaking out, you won't be able to do anything about your fleeting humanity, however," Yan warned.

Mariah kept pacing. "Speaking of fleeting humanity, shouldn't we get going? The last thing I'm sure either of us want is for you to grow hooves while driving."

"Fine fine," Ezee said. He was glad he wasn't freaking out, but the fact that he wasn't also somewhat freakout worthy. If only those self feeding self sustaining cycles could be tapped for perpetual energy... "I'll try to keep in touch, Yan."