

Pony Fiction Vault

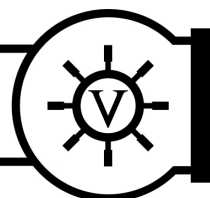
Interview Collection Vol. 1

Compiled by RBDash47

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PONY FICTION VAULT



If you're reading this, presumably you already know of the Pony Fiction Vault and its purpose. If, however, you have somehow stumbled across this document with no foreknowledge of the Vault, or you're a longtime reader but have never gotten around to reading the FAQ or About pages on the site, allow me to explain what follows.

I became involved in the *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* fandom midway through season one's airing, at the beginning of 2011. After burning through the available episodes, I wanted more pony, and went online looking for fan fiction archives. I was startled to find there weren't any. Of course, there was Equestria Daily, with links to stories scattered around the 'net on dA, Google Docs, FanFiction.net... but there weren't any sites dedicated to *Friendship is Magic*.

I founded the Pony Fiction Archive, where anyone could add any story they wrote based on *Friendship is Magic*. Today the Archive hosts over 800 stories by more than 300 authors, totaling almost 8 million words of pony fanfic. That may sound like a lot – mostly because it *is* a lot – but it's only a fraction of what's out there. Equestria Daily has posted just over twice as many stories, and the biggest *FiM* story archive, FIMFiction, just broke the 5,000-story mark, with a total of 64 million words. Add in stories that are only posted to deviantArt, Fanfiction.net, personal blogs, et cetera, and we have a fandom that is almost frighteningly prolific.

I noticed fairly early on there was a subset of pony fan fiction that was truly excellent – some were extremely well-written, some were unique or creative, some inspired other fans to create their own stories or art. I'd been in other fandoms where as the years went on, really good stories were lost in the bottomless ocean that is the Internet, never to be read again. I didn't want that to happen here, so I started a second site – the Pony Fiction Vault. The Vault is intended to serve as a repository for those truly excellent stories, the “best of the best”.

Because I strongly believe that authors deserve to retain control over their work, I set out to contact each author I wanted to include and ask their permission. I realized that context would be interesting and informative – so I also asked each author to participate in a brief interview about themselves and their work, to accompany their stories.

To date, the Vault features twenty-five stories by twenty-five authors, totaling a “mere” half-million words – but these are, in my opinion, some of the absolute best work in the fandom. These twenty-five authors' interviews are collected herein. I hope you have as much fun reading them as I have.

Originally posted on November 7th, 2011.

Shipping • 21,000 words

Twilight ventures out into the mountains to see a once-in-a-lifetime event. Disappointed by her friends not coming with her, she crosses paths with a kindred spirit.

Where do you live?

I live in the province of Ontario, Canada.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I'm currently a funemployed student.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I was introduced to the show in January 2011. At first when I heard of it, I thought that "bronies" was just a bunch of hipsters being "ironic," like the people who watch old children cartoons for fun. Eventually I watched it, and I found that the characters were far departures from what I expected. Most of all, I could relate to Twilight Sparkle's insane "aspie student" ramblings and gestures. I first got into the series around episode 18, and eventually worked my way backwards to the earlier episodes.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Luna Eclipsed*.]

Hmm, difficult question! *Cutie Mark Chronicles* is a good one, as is *Winter Wrap Up*. I think those would be my two favourites.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Even more of a difficult question! All of the mane six, including Luna, appeal to me for different reasons. If I was going to put them in order of priority, it'd be: Luna, Fluttershy, Twilight Sparkle, Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie, Rarity. Not to say Rarity is my *least* favourite or anything. I like them all roughly equally.

My answer might change if it came to fan creations. Butterscotch Sundae and LunaFyre strike me as interesting character designs. There are a host of brilliantly designed OCs. I think it really speaks to the creativeness of the fans.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

It's actually from a piece of unpublished, half-written original fiction. Syrin is the name of a very young (13-14 year old) time traveller in one of my bigger stories, who is trying to survive in a dystopic city after the end of the world. The "kitty" comes from the characters' slightly autistic nature, which makes her identify more heavily with cats than other people. It was a random name to begin with, although I say that like most masks, it grew to fit.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I used to write random anime fanfiction a long, long time ago. It was complete crap, and I'm not even sure I can find copies of that stuff on the internet anymore. I was a bit weird growing up, and every so often I'd go through a Great Purge of some kind and wipe out a bunch of my data for no reason. Don't ask me why. Don't worry, I won't be doing that again. :P

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

These days I'm trying to re-start a lot of my old hobbies, which is part of the reason why my story writing has taken a bit of a back seat. I'm currently getting into amateur electronics and "cyborg art," i.e: wearable, artistic clothing that is controlled by microcontrollers and integrated circuits. I'm currently learning how to use the "Arduino," which is a hobbyist development platform built on an 8-bit processor. I'm also learning how to do good old-fashioned performance art with staff spinning. I hope to be able to spin a staff that is on fire by next year.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

I often mention *The Great Gatsby* as the novel which inspired my current writing style. F. Scott Fitzgerald had a particular way of writing which involved writing in the third person, but having the sequence of events be described as if they were coming from the

main character. Kind of like if a little faerie was sitting on your shoulder just watching everything that happened and reacting the same way you did. It almost has a way of tricking the reader into identifying with the main character's beliefs and world views, while making them think it is an objective summary of events. It taught me an important lesson: everything is skewed by perception, especially stories you hear from other people. Novels are no different: they're just stories being told by other people, after all.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

I mostly write for the INFP-type personalities out there, mainly the introverted hopeless romantic types. I hated most sources of romantic fiction growing up since it treated love as a kind of fire that would destroy a forest given half a chance. Going into writing, I wanted to write a story that showed subtle emotion and feelings that remain hidden until slowly pried out, like a flower beginning to blossom. Thus, my ideal readers are the "idealists," the ones who try to co-exist in a harsh environment that crushes dreams. Sorry if that sounds melodramatic.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

When someone is cutting a statue out of marble or wood, they begin by making the biggest cuts into the substance and giving it a general shape. Afterwards, they begin filling in the general details, like the arms, the legs, and so forth. Then, after that level of complexity is done, they do the fine detail, like hands, noses, fingernails, or the pupils in the eyes.

Think of story-writing like that. Lay out the super-structure of your story: write a paragraph in the beginning, a paragraph in the middle with some big event that you want to transpire, and then roughly how you'll end that story or chapter. After that, just keep feeling in those blank spaces with other events that you want to transpire - even if it's just someone saying a single sentence or two - and build up the fine detail around that. Once you've got all the events all laid out, it's just a case of stringing them all together, and working out the grammatical and continuity quirks and kinks. You may even end up throwing away giant chunks of what you've written if you decide that it doesn't flow properly, but you'll at least have words on the page, and not every chapter will seem like a giant mountain to climb.

It works best if you're the kind of person who thinks non-linearly and visually like I do. I'm no pro by any means, though.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

My typical writing process begins with me writing the first part of the first scene of a new chapter. I'll then jump to some other even in the continuity, like I described above. Once that's roughly in place, I'll keep going from place to place, filling in a random scene here or there, and then working out the dialog, all the while editing and fixing stuff up. Once I've got the basic story down, I'll send it to a friends or people I know, like Drax99, Doctor Dapples, the people over in #Equestria on Caffie, and so on. Once I'm sure there aren't any huge holes, I generally just upload it and wait for the response.

What inspired you to write *Common Sky*?

I had just gotten out of a particularly bad winter season. Nothing seemed to be going my way - I had just failed one of my mandatory course classes, I was increasing physical pain due to the stress and other health problems, I was getting sick pretty much constantly, I had no friends to speak of, and so on. Needless to say, it was pretty rough. Ponies provided a nice escape, and once I saw the fandom's interpretation of Princess Luna, as the shy, demure pony who just wanted a friend, I felt incredibly inspired to write a story in which she finds friendship and happiness. In a way, I was essentially trying to make myself feel better. It was an outlet for the intense sadness and isolation I felt. The response I got from the fandom was more than encouraging.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Common Sky*?

Being my first piece of "serious" fiction in over seven years (i.e: more than 5k words), I felt a bit intimidated by how "big" it was getting. Obviously with fics like *Fallout: Equestria* starting to push the one million word mark it feels a bit silly in hindsight, but I almost felt like not publishing it at first. Once I was assured that it was Very Good(tm) by some acquaintances, I went ahead and submitted it to Equestria Daily. I think it was one of the first "Six Star" stories, which blew me away.

One funny thing that happened is that while writing *Common Sky*, I had planned the "once every one thousands years" meteor shower to originally be "once every one hundred years," with Twilight Sparkle being excited and wanting to take her friends out to go see it. Imagine my surprise when the Owlicious episode aired a week into writing,

with Twilight acting all excited about a “once in a hundred years meteor shower” and wanting to take her friends out to go see it. Needless to say, I had to preemptively ret-con that particular plot point, and check the various pony figurines I had bought for cameras installed by Hasbro.

When you set out to write *Common Sky*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Not really, aside from “Happy Luna,” as I mentioned. I also wanted to write a pony shipping story that was a little more realistic in terms of emotional response. A lot of shipping stories involve the characters saying “I Love You” and kissing at the end. I wanted to write a story in which two characters just begin to fall in love, and don’t even really understand it. “Love at first sight” does happen in real life, after all, but it’s more common for two people who have just met to slowly become closer and then begin a relationship. The progression in *Common Sky*, of course, is relative to how quickly it moves in other shipping fics.

Where can readers drop you a line?

You can always send me a note on syrinkitty.deviantart.com or reach me at SyrinKitty on AIM. I like talking to people and I’m very hard to offend, so please don’t be shy!

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Not much, aside from the fact that bronies are awesome. Be who you are, no matter how ‘normal’ or ‘weird’ that may be!

Originally posted on November 11th, 2011.

Adventure • 3,100 words

Twilight is approached by Applejack with a strange request - to join her that night for a run, but all is not as it seems. Why is Applejack so nervous? What could this be about?

Where do you live?

I live in Finland, near Helsinki.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I work full time in a large technology company as a lab manager and general IT architect.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I forget exactly, but it was probably some reaction images at first. These led me to Know Your Meme which is always a fun site. From there, I saw something so unlike the old MLP that I had to check it out. The first episode was a cliff-hanger, so on I went to episode 2. My Little Sailor Moon made me squee enough to try episode 3, and by the end of episode 4 I was sold.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Luna Eclipsed*.]

I could pussy out and say “all of them” because even my least favourite episodes I eagerly watch again, but since you’re asking, it’s currently a real toss-up between *A Dog and Pony Show*, *Sonic Rainboom* and *Episode Zero*. The first for season 1, let’s say, and the last in the list for season 2. That’s fair.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

My favourite canon character is Rarity (again, I could easily say “all of them” because they’ve all grown on me). Favourite fanon character... I’m going to cheat and say the ship-pair LyraBon and DerpyTop. Huzzah! The fun has been doubled!

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

I came up with my handle after some frantic plugging away at an MLP name generator. I think it eventually came up “Midnight Moon” which sounded far too feminine, and somepony suggested “Shadow” for the second part. I still get called a filly though.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I did, many years ago, write what amounts to a Carebears fanfic. I’m so ashamed. Other than that, I’ve been writing on and off since I was about eight (I still have most of them, they range from ‘atrocious’ to ‘an unholy spawn of evil wrought with the English language, the likes of which must Never See the Light of Day’ and I didn’t get what I would call “almost good enough” until halfway through Elements of Discord.)

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I read, swim, bike and look after my family.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

A favourite single story or novel would be hard to lay down, the closest I can come to is *Blue Moon Rising* on the fantasy front, but really, anything by Iain Banks or Peter Hamilton at the moment in the realm of Science Fiction makes for excellent reading (although Hamilton’s penchant for Deus Ex Machina does tend to let down his endings, Banks is far better at that). My favourite fanfic author? I can hardly decide on one... at the moment I’m enjoying *Nightmares Don’t Last Forever* by BB and Chatoyance’s CB fics. There are really a lot of fics I have enjoyed.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

This is a hard question. I’ve never thought about it beyond writing something that I’m entertained by - an artist is generally far more critical of their own work than others will be, so if I’m happy then I can let others see it... my ideal reader, if I could hazard a guess since I can’t name a specific person, is anybody who can take risqué humour, a

smattering of soap-boxing and is prepared to indulge themselves in flights of fantasy with a smidgeon of an Aesop mixed in whilst I tell them what I hope is an entertaining story.

Do you think that your work as a pre-reader for Equestria Daily has influenced your own writing or your views of writing in any way?

I think that in being asked to be critical of common writing flaws and inspect others' writings and pronounce them "worthy", I have hopefully improved my own work and, in concert with the other pre-readers, have learnt what makes writing better. I'm far more critical now of adhering to the rules which, for better or worse, are accepted as making something fun to read - mostly because whilst they seem arbitrary and in some cases are, they do have import.

My views as to just why you should write, however, have not changed. You should write primarily for yourself. If you set out to write a story just to get it published, then you will not be putting your heart into it. That's why it hurts when an editor or critic has honest and sometimes harsh criticism for a tale that you cannot help but think of as your baby.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

If you want to write better, read more. Read things you normally wouldn't read - *Wuthering Heights*, Shakespeare, Mills and Boon (though not too much of that, it's often rather trashy) and even technical papers on things like orbital dynamics. Learn the difference between dry, technical writing and florid prose, and pour that experience into your own work. Pay attention, when you read, to not only what is said but how it is presented. Most of all, *keep writing*. Be aware that your first stories will suck. Be more aware that the first story you complete will have you bursting at the seams with happiness... and then you'll come back to it and realize how godawfully dreadful it is (seriously, you should read my older stuff... I cringe. The only thing keeping me from burning it in a van is to keep myself humble). Eventually you'll drop something down on a page, show it to somepony and they'll say "Hey, wow, you're going to write more of this, right? When? When can I have it?". That's when you know you're off to a good start, but beware the pitfalls of the non-discerning hugboxing reader - find honest editors/reviewers and let them at it, and listen to what they say or you won't go from good to great. There are no authors anywhere in the world that do not get proof-readers sending their stuff back.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I get the germ of an idea in my brain - sometimes it's something someone says, sometimes it's something I see, other times it's just... an idea that my ever-insistent muse pokes me hard enough with. I let it percolate a while before I attempt to write about it (take note, and this is something I don't do but always wish I did: write down even the briefest of sketches about any ideas you think are really great, otherwise you may not remember them when you do come to write about them - dream journals can work wonders, I'm told). When I'm ready to write, I write until I get to a good place to stop (a big section end or a chapter break). If I've written enough (i.e. it's a long multi-chapter story) then I'll stop writing more and go back and check for first mechanical errors (spelling mistakes, structure, grammar) and then I'll see if any turns of phrase are awkward or sections need re-writing. Once I'm happy enough to send it to an editor, I'll mark it from "WIP" to "First Draft". If I'm lucky with an editor, I'll get a bunch of comments and fixes and observations back - which I'll action upon - and then it's presumably considered "ready to go". At that point I'll send it to the other pre-readers if I'm trying to get it published to EqD, or I'll post it on FIMFiction directly. I try not to publish anything I think needs revising, but the urge has struck a few times (there're always small mistakes you miss, don't sweat those).

What inspired you to write *The Midnight Run*?

The main inspiration which springs to mind is that we easily see how unicorns cast magic and spells, how pegasi fly, but we don't generally see earth-pony magic. What would earth-pony magic be? Well, in the Running of the Leaves we saw that they really control the earth's seasons in a far more fundamental way than the pegasi do - so from there, it was a small step for earth ponies to pull the planet through the seasons, running for the sheer joy of it as they move the world from spring to summer, to autumn and finally to winter. The pegasi control the skies, but the earth ponies control the world. I like that idea.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *The Midnight Run*?

I was really worried that I'd just confuse my readers - and some I did, some readers had no idea what I was trying to do and were actively angry that their intelligent, talking cartoon ponies were being depicted as fierce, wild creatures - the sorts of creatures we all are, underneath. I was also torn with just how far to take the nature theme - wild animals don't see things like life, death and sex the same way as we humans do. I originally had a

more 'adult' scene or two in the story, but I felt it detracted from the message rather than added, so I removed it. I was worried about how to depict, in a coherent fashion, Twilight's journey from sentience to atavism and back - I'm not sure it's perfect, but I'm reasonably happy with it. I think there's one more story to tell at least, so let's see.

When you set out to write *The Midnight Run*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

This was a strong desire to explore, through our favourite colourful pastel ponies, what it means to be alive. That might sound pretentious, but those strange creatures called "humans" are really just big, hairless monkeys (humans are apes, apes are monkeys, yes - really). They've got this thin veneer of intelligence over an old mammalian brain that says "hungry, tired, horny", over an even older lizard brain that says "eat, hump, kill". The ponies in the show are intelligent, loving and caring - but presumably beneath that exterior they're wild animals. Stripping away that civilization speaks to something primal in me, so it was a fun way to not only show that elusive earth-pony magic but to play around with the "returning to nature" trope.

Where can readers drop you a line?

I'm generally available on email at midnightshadowpony@gmail.com, but you can also poke me on askmidnightshadow.tumblr.com, herpdragon.deviantart.com and various IRC chatrooms (leave me a PM, unless my shell goes down, I'll eventually get to it).

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

This is the first fandom I've been really involved in, in this way, and it astounds me how many amazingly creative people we have (both in the industry as well as in the fandom), so keep on being awesome, all of you. I am always grateful for feedback - all artists are - both positive and negative, but as long as it's constructive. If a reader here wants to give back but doesn't know how, then just letting your favourite authors and artists know you appreciate them is a great way to start.

Thanks for giving me this chance to plug my writing and I sincerely hope my readers get at least as much fun out of reading my work as I did writing it. For more of my stuff, you can hit up my author tag on EqD or my FIMFiction profile.

Originally posted on November 14, 2011.

Tragedy • 1,800 words

Scootaloo reflects on her life on the streets of Ponyville, without a home and without a family.

Where do you live?

I usually tell people I live in South Mareolina. The town is Myrtle Beach, which is probably my least favorite of South Carolina's bigger cities.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Right now, I work in a psychiatric hospital as a tech. I want to go into nursing school once I'm able to clear my plate a little bit.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

A /b/tard friend of mine told me about it, and I decided to watch it for shits and giggles. Neither of us were really into it (I only watched a couple of episodes), but we joked about it and changed our facebook pictures to ponies just to weird out our friends. I didn't bother with the rest of the series until near the end of its run, when a really bad day at work made me seek out something to cheer me up. I watched a few more episodes and was hooked.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Luna Eclipsed*.]

Right now, its probably *Lesson Zero*. I relate most closely to Twilight, and I've been very guilty of OCD many a time, to a fault. I even have to make lists of the stuff I do for fun, so that I appropriate the right amount of time to each fun activity.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Pinkie Pie is the one whom entertains me the most, and is the one I'd most like to be like. The fandom has done everything in its power to ruin her for me, but as long as the show's creators continue to market the show towards its original audience, I'll never have to worry about Cupcakes being canon.

As for the fandom, I feel they've helped flesh out Big Macintosh and make him much more than just a background character.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

I always told myself that when I got accepted into medical school, I'd have a blog about my experiences under the handle "Doctor Dafs" (dafs is a shortened version of my handle on XBLA, Twitter, etc). Unfortunately, three years of applications and interviews found me no closer to being accepted, but I still liked the name. When I was looking for a pony-friendly handle on ED, I went to a glossary of horse terms trying to find anything that was reminiscent of "dafs" and found "dapples". Later on, someone pointed out to me that "Doctor Dapples" is a homonym for "Doctored Apples", which I quite like.

As for the ponysona, he was originally written as spotted and brown, but when I requested my first piece of artwork from qwert5 on Ponychan, I forgot to mention this, and the unicorn was gray. I loved the design so much that I haven't looked back.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

First time I ever wrote was back in high school, where I wrote a (seriously) 37K word fanfiction for *The Lion King*. It is too awful to reprint. Once my fervor for *TLK* started to wane, I began writing short stories. I only wrote a small number of stories, most in college, between high school and today. My output in four months of writing for *MLP* greatly exceeds my combined output since then.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I don't read as much as I should. I'm trying to get away from watching so many movies and focus on reading instead. Not a big fan of most television. Give me a cup of nice coffee, preferably with some espresso in it, and a good book, and I'm all set.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Published, I can't recommend anyone higher than Mark Leyner, who pretty much still qualifies as a cult author, and whose *Tetherballs of Bougainville* I would rate among my favorites ever. Hunter S. Thompson is a big one too, and I was absolutely devastated when he took his life (something my idols seem to do). Other great books: Richard Adams' *Watership Down*, John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Bret Easton Ellis' unfairly maligned *American Psycho* and my personal favorite book of all time, Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, which is the single most unnerving book I have ever read.

Fanfiction, I can't begin to list all my favorites, but I have to give a shoutout to Vanner's *Carousel*, EbonMane's *The Cough*, SaddlesoapOpera's *Pony Psychology Series*, and pretty much anything by HiddenBrony, SyrinKitty, Harp-s-ong and NK. I especially want to give props to the two authors whom I consider the best in the fandom: The Descendant and Twilight Snarkle.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Most of the authors whom I closely follow are also followers of mine, but they're hardly sycophants. They give me the feedback I want when I want it, and they let me know if something isn't working. That said, if I had to pick one whose positive reactions really get me happy (at least with regards to pony work) its NetherLips aka Futret, who is an amazing artist in his own right, and hearing him praise my work makes me feel like I'm really doing something.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

It's such a cliché to say to push through the writers' block, but it's still good advice. However, I do think if you're stuck, give yourself some time to clear your head before you tackle the page. Just go outside with a cup of coffee (or whatever) and just breathe. Don't think about the plot or characters. Don't think about anything. Just clear your mind. If you can, try meditation. I've tried it, but my mind moves around too much to do it unguided.

And when you do write, and you accomplish something worth celebrating, allow yourself to celebrate. There's nothing like those little victories.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I hate drafts. Always have. Its only recently that I've considered going back to old stories and improving them, and most of them were written in one sit down. I imagine this drives my editors (usually Snarkle) crazy. This fandom is the first time I've ever used an editor, or at least the first time I've used one and actually listened for advice.

What inspired you to write *La Poulain De Rue*?

It started with Gavalanche. He has a real talent for showing us the sordid underbelly of the Ponyville reality. He's kind of the David Lynch of *Friendship is Magic*, except he often plays it for laughs. I wanted a ride on the Scootabuse train, but I wanted to touch on something real. The combination of having seen absolutely nothing of Scootaloo's family, and some recent stories in the news made me come to child homelessness (which I want to remind our readers is a real, and all too terrible issue).

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *La Poulain De Rue*?

The tone was very different than my previous works. At the time, I was probably best known (and probably still am) for a handful of M/M shipping stories, and an interview I did with Butterscotch Sundae. Aside from a couple of stories that most people still haven't read, it was all related to shipping. I had to sort of shift that narrative voice a bit. I've been told I have a very detached narrative style, and I think that works for that story.

I was also wary about allowing it to turn into misery porn, like so many grimdark stories I've come across. If I had to pick a favorite theme of all time, it would be "hope in the midst of hopelessness", and my headcanon of Scootaloo fits that perfectly.

Also, my title has incorrect French grammar. My bad on that one.

When you set out to write *La Poulain De Rue*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

I'm not sure my goal was necessarily to raise awareness of child homelessness, but if I did, that's fantastic. Mostly I wanted to explore the question of "Who is Scootaloo's family?" in a meaningful way.

I was also very inspired by *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls, whose experiences are very much echoed in the story. Just because a child wasn't beaten with a stick or cursed at, doesn't mean their parents weren't abusing them.

Where can readers drop you a line?

Deviantart is where all the pony stuff goes. If you're interested in getting a little closer to the me outside of the Ponyverse, dafotology.tumblr.com sort of covers everything banging around my head. It's not an ask blog, but it is open to questions.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A big thank you to RBDash47 for setting this all up. The PFA was the first place I really grew attached to the brony community, and where I first started getting people who really paid attention to my work. [Editor's note: Stop it, I'm blushing.]

Originally posted on November 18, 2011.

Adventure, Shipping • 40,200 words

University student Chester Llewellyn tries to survive in the Everfree Forest after being torn from Earth without warning or reason. But Equestria has sent a legendary war hero to personally recover him, for at the tallest point of Equestria, somepony needs Chester, and fast.

Where do you live?

Originally I lived in Abergavenny, a small market town in Wales cradled by seven mountains, not thirty minutes away from the capital, Cardiff. Whilst writing *Arddun* I lived in Treforest attending the University of Glamorgan, a university as famous for being on the side of a bloody great inconvenient mountain as it was abominable as a university. Since then I now live in Penarth, a confusing town five minutes from Cardiff with its own warm microclimate and huge demographic of confused old people who shy away from self-service tills in supermarkets as if they were secretly Decepticons in disguise.

Maybe they are, and they're the smart ones.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Officially my job title is "Software Engineer", but this is fancy talk for "Programmer". I'm a graduate on probation with a small start-up company; I work in a spare room in a dentist's office. Every now and then my dentist comes in and has a go at me for drinking sparkling water. Alternatively he puts monkey toys on the door handle so I get confused when I walk in on a Monday morning.

To go into a bit more detail, I develop and bugfix an application that works sort of like Facebook, but for business. People group together in "chapters" and give referrals to one another for work in a sort of networked way. It's my first job and it gets an absolute ton of business. The web app is Java-based but includes heavy doses of Javascript and SQL. To be absolutely frank I love my job to bits and look forward to Mondays with a bizarre sort of zeal that makes people question my sanity, although this offends me, as it's not even a *question* by this point.

How did you discover My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

Oh, hang on. Let me dig out the conversation I had with the guy who linked it to me.

[12/02/2011 20:37:29] Gelf: PONIES

[12/02/2011 20:37:33] Gelf: THEY'RE IN MY MIND

[12/02/2011 20:39:30] Gelf: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqgsXkmQ6ZI>

[12/02/2011 20:39:35] Gelf: Succumb!

[12/02/2011 21:10:16] Pridethunder: ...

[12/02/2011 21:10:25] Pridethunder: This...

[12/02/2011 21:10:31] Pridethunder: Is enjoyable...

[12/02/2011 21:10:33] Pridethunder: ...

[12/02/2011 21:28:05] Gelf: Yes,

[12/02/2011 21:28:08] Gelf: Yes it is

[12/02/2011 21:28:13] Gelf: I'm on episode 14

[12/02/2011 22:32:16] Gelf: Tell me you're still watching.

[12/02/2011 22:55:11] Pridethunder: You know nothnig

[12/02/2011 22:55:14] Pridethunder: Tell

[12/02/2011 22:55:16] Pridethunder: noone

[13/02/2011 00:02:40] Gelf: Had the episode with the zebra yet?

[13/02/2011 00:22:52] Pridethunder: No, been watching a film with Jera

[13/02/2011 00:22:56] Pridethunder: Still on the first episode tbh

[13/02/2011 00:28:11] Pridethunder: I...

[13/02/2011 00:28:12] Pridethunder: have...

[13/02/2011 00:28:16] Pridethunder: kinsmen...!!!!

[13/02/2011 11:40:07] Pridethunder: GELF

[13/02/2011 11:40:17] Pridethunder: This series is AWESOME

[13/02/2011 11:40:43] Gelf: Yes

[13/02/2011 11:40:46] Gelf: Yes it is

[13/02/2011 11:45:00] Gelf: What episode are you on?

[13/02/2011 11:45:27] Pridethunder: 5? The one with the griffin.

[13/02/2011 11:46:02] Pridethunder: I have to admit I exploded with laughter when Pinkie Pie literally rammed her face on the floor and came back up completely sorted with glasses/headband/twizzler

[13/02/2011 11:46:10] Pridethunder: The accompanying sound effect did little to help as well#

[13/02/2011 11:46:42] Gelf: 9 and 10 are my favourite episodes so far. You'll appreciate them

[13/02/2011 14:12:52] Pridethunder: Did

[13/02/2011 14:12:58] Pridethunder: Did she just make plants SING?

[13/02/2011 14:13:01] Pridethunder: That's fucking amazing

[13/02/2011 14:13:43] Pridethunder: Seriously, imagine if a wizard in some D and D game had the power to make plants or foliage produce a unique melody or tone, totally unique to that plant

[13/02/2011 14:13:53] Pridethunder: It'd be worshipped as one of the most original ideas on the planet

[13/02/2011 14:14:00] Pridethunder: And here it is, in a fucking My Little Pony cartoon.

[13/02/2011 15:48:14] Gelf: So

[13/02/2011 15:48:29] Pridethunder: Episode 8

[13/02/2011 15:49:02] Gelf: Now that you would respond when somebody calls for "everypony" and your mind's voice talks like Apple Jack. What have you got to say for yourself?

[13/02/2011 15:49:16] Pridethunder: I want her to call me Sugar Cube

[13/02/2011 15:49:17] Pridethunder: Just once

[13/02/2011 15:49:21] Pridethunder: Just once

[13/02/2011 15:49:45] Pridethunder: Also

[13/02/2011 15:49:48] Pridethunder: Fucking _hat_!!!!

[13/02/2011 15:50:17] Pridethunder: Also, Fluttershy is the cutest thing on the fucking planet,

[13/02/2011 15:50:31] Pridethunder: And Pinky clearly, CLEARLY, suffers from ADHD

[13/02/2011 15:50:32] Gelf: Had the zebra episode yet?

[13/02/2011 15:50:36] Pridethunder: No.

[13/02/2011 15:50:46] Gelf: You will love it

[13/02/2011 15:51:33] Gelf: Ah, it's episode 9

[13/02/2011 15:51:55] Pridethunder: I love how it frequently lampshades itself too

[13/02/2011 15:52:03] Pridethunder: Some actually good writing in this

[13/02/2011 15:53:51] Gelf: The introduction of Granny Smith made me grin

[13/02/2011 15:54:04] Gelf: And Big Macintosh

[13/02/2011 15:54:12] Gelf: "I SEE WHAT YOU DID THERE"

[13/02/2011 15:57:21] Pridethunder: Wait

[13/02/2011 15:57:22] Pridethunder: What?

[13/02/2011 15:57:24] Pridethunder: I don't get it

[13/02/2011 15:57:44] Gelf: They're of the Apple family

[13/02/2011 15:57:56] Pridethunder: There is no way they're putting that in a kid's show

[13/02/2011 15:58:09] Pridethunder: Seriously? Apple Mac? In a kid's show for little girls?

[13/02/2011 15:58:10] Pridethunder: Really?

[13/02/2011 15:58:15] Gelf: Yep.

[13/02/2011 15:58:19] Gelf: Big Macintosh

[13/02/2011 15:58:24] Pridethunder: Nah

[13/02/2011 15:58:28] Pridethunder: Don't believe it

[13/02/2011 15:59:23] Gelf: Big red one, green apple cutie mark. AppleJack's big brother

[13/02/2011 15:59:36] Pridethunder: Beauty mark, I think

[13/02/2011 16:00:30] Gelf: We're discussing "beauty mark or cutie mark" like it's normal, Pride.

[13/02/2011 16:01:06] Pridethunder: We passed normal a fucking mile ago when we started using names like Fluttershy and Twilight Sparkle, Gelf.

[13/02/2011 16:01:22] Gelf: Pinkie Pie ftw

[13/02/2011 17:09:35] Pridethunder: Oh my fucking god.

[13/02/2011 17:09:39] Pridethunder: She wouldn't speak

[13/02/2011 17:09:40] Pridethunder: And I hoped

[13/02/2011 17:09:49] Pridethunder: I hoped for all the worth of everything, ever

[13/02/2011 17:09:58] Pridethunder: That she would speak with a Barry White baritone

[13/02/2011 17:09:59] Pridethunder: And then

[13/02/2011 17:10:00] Pridethunder: She did

[13/02/2011 17:10:02] Pridethunder: And

[13/02/2011 17:10:27] Pridethunder: <http://img.chan4chan.com/img/2009-04-21/1240266540309.jpg>

[13/02/2011 17:14:40] Gelf: It's gonna get so much fucking better soon

[13/02/2011 17:14:50] Gelf: You'll know when it's there. Let me know once you've seen it

[13/02/2011 17:15:08] Pridethunder: I want her to say

[13/02/2011 17:15:12] Pridethunder: "Damn right"

[13/02/2011 17:15:28] Gelf: Better than even that.

[13/02/2011 17:25:46] Pridethunder: Fuck

[13/02/2011 17:28:42] Gelf: Have you witnessed it?

[13/02/2011 17:28:51] Pridethunder: I have witnessed it

[13/02/2011 17:29:04] Gelf: She's an evil enchantress and she does evil dances..

[13/02/2011 17:29:41] Pridethunder: It's made absolutely phenomenal by the fact that she's just wearing a $\neg_ \neg$ face during the entire thing

[13/02/2011 20:03:11] Pridethunder: You've got a real problem, alright.

[13/02/2011 20:03:17] Pridethunder: And a banjo is THE ONLY ANSWER.

[13/02/2011 20:25:26] Pridethunder: Fucking lol'd so hard

[13/02/2011 20:25:26] Pridethunder:
http://fillydelphia.tumblr.com/photo/1280/2785368584/1/tumblr_levjl66aMh1qfewof

[13/02/2011 20:28:59] Pridethunder: WOW

[13/02/2011 20:29:00] Pridethunder:
http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_levhe1jW6C1qfewofo1_400.gif

[13/02/2011 20:29:20] Gelf: OH GOD WHAT

[13/02/2011 20:34:23] Pridethunder:
http://28.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_le7pqlMs3s1qzcl5o1_500.jpg

[13/02/2011 20:35:03] Pridethunder:
http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_leqj0dIfQb1qajg12o1_500.jpg

[13/02/2011 20:47:56] Gelf:
http://i2.photobucket.com/albums/y36/ShyRangerSMRPG/Confound_these_ponies.png

[13/02/2011 20:48:41] Pridethunder: Bother that nonsense

[13/02/2011 20:48:51] Pridethunder: Drawn by one of the production team on the show!

[13/02/2011 20:48:52] Pridethunder:
http://fillydelphia.tumblr.com/photo/1280/2517184190/1/tumblr_le6ferW0oR1qfewof

[14/02/2011 10:33:06] Pridethunder: I had finished watching the final episode so far. I laughed so hard when Celestia dropped from the sky like an atom bomb and just stood there like, "Hi, what's up".

[14/02/2011 10:33:26] Pridethunder: I knew this was the impasse that I had secretly dreaded, even if I only knew in my soul I dreaded it.

[14/02/2011 10:33:40] Pridethunder: But the decision was made swiftly. I knew I had gone too far down the rabbit hole.

[14/02/2011 10:34:06] Pridethunder: I moved my mouse over to the higher part of the page,

[14/02/2011 10:34:08] Pridethunder: and I clicked

[14/02/2011 10:34:12] Pridethunder: "Subscribe".

I had recently left WoW and sought a community I could be a part of. I found Equestria Daily at one point, and then I found Ponychan, and that was it. Naturally I gravitated towards the /fic/ board; chans were, for me, an intimidating hive of scum and villainy, and I wasn't at all sure how it worked and whatnot, but my first post and action within bronyness and writefriendship was to proofread a guy's story. Ironically, it was a Human in Equestria story. Funny, that.

Shortly afterwards I was buzzing with the idea that eventually turned into *Arddun Lleuad* (called *Corruptor*, back then) and the rest is history.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Luna Eclipsed*.]

Absolutely not; I can't pick out a favourite since they're all so damn good!

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

This is a hard one. I'm tempted to say Luna, because she's such an excellent setup. We could do whatever we liked with the character, since she was so loosely defined; it was like being given clay that you were free to mould into whatever you wanted, with a theme and appearance ready-made. Celestia also fits this bill, being somewhat less fleshed-out; we know that she's capable of battle, can move the Sun, has a joker's side, but what else? It's the *lack* of detail - the *understatement* - that makes a character compelling to me.

But of all the characters that are fleshed-out and defined, Rarity wins my respect for being her own woman, a strong woman in her own regard, while Twilight wins my eternal jealousy for being able to do nothing but further her mind all day long.

My answer wouldn't change if I considered the fandom in its entirety; I can see where the idea of Trollestia comes from, but I don't subscribe to these theories, even if it is just a joke. I have to say, though, that the beautiful, adorable pictures of Celestia and Luna go a long way to altering my look on the characters. "Woonna" is probably going to give me a heart attack at one point. Not that I'd mind.

How did you come up with your handle/penname?

OH BOY. HERE WE GO.

Okay. Originally, I played a very old, very *bad* MMORPG called Nexus: The Kingdom of the Winds. I randomly came up with the name Raisentaku for a character name; this then became Raijingeiki, then Raijinmagus.

Into WoW I went, adopting the name Raijinragus (for playing a warrior); this is the one name I hate the most. I transferred to a roleplaying server at one point, seeking intelligence (as well as being a phenomenally adept roleplayer, if I may say so myself), and I can remember the exact length of time it took me to create, for my tauren warrior, *Pridethunder*.

I wanted two Warriors, one for killing players, since back then you couldn't dual-specialise; hence Felrage was born. A time came when I had to have a handle; and so I concatenated both to create Priderage.

To be honest with you, I don't really like Priderage. I *vastly* prefer just Pride.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I am giving serious consideration to writing as a professional hobby; however, prior to Arddun Lleuad I had only written bits and bobs, including a story for my wife for her birthday. *Arddun Lleuad* was my first foray into proper writing.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Way too much Left 4 Dead (pref. mode Realism Expert) and Team Fortress 2 (favourite classes: Medic, Engineer, Soldier, Sniper, Heavy, Pyro). I'm also very given to walking with my music and reading whilst giving my cat (or the cat that belongs to the house I'm currently living in, at least) a great big adorable fuss, even if she randomly decides to try and kill me halfway through it.

I also spend huge amounts of time with my wife. We play together a hell of a lot; currently we're playing Dead Island, but since we enjoyed Terraria so much together I am *really* looking forward to playing Minecraft with her. She is going to *love* that.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Neil Gaiman. Easily, by far. The man's imagination *scars* me. Sharon Shinn comes in at a very close second. Her writing is incredible; the flow is beyond sublime.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Oh God yes. It was once said by someone that "the reader brings as much to the story as the writer".

The ideal reader is, indeed, the reader I write for. My requirements for my ideal reader are not difficult; they are this. That they take their time to read the story; that they understand that two hearts that seek one another are not bound by physical barriers and that they are of the mindset to be able to enjoy the warmth between these two characters.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Many!

Love what you write. Don't write anything for the sake of popularity, write because you love writing. As soon as you stop loving it, stop writing. If writing is an optimal activity that will bring you joy in the long term, the love will come back. Otherwise, move onto something else that you're destined to find.

Everyone thinks everyone else's story is better than theirs. Fact of life.

Be patient. Sleep on your stories, don't write and publish immediately.

Try and maintain a structured approach to writing, but if you're buzzing with ideas for scenes, write that ASAP and weave it into the story structure later.

And the most important of all. A good writer is a good *reader*. *READ*. Read like buggery. Read everything. Take in what you like, disregard what you don't. Your reading *WILL* influence your writing, it will give you ideas.

Also, find support and friends in the writing trade. Feedback and the few, rare discussions I had with fellow writers was immensely inspirational. Friendship is magic and all that.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

OH GOD.

My writing process is a horrible abomination. *Arddun* took two entire drafts to get to where it is now, and even now I want to rewrite the sixth and eighth chapters. I wrote a track draft, hated it with all my soul, and then went back and re-drafted it. Once I had the outline, I went through and polished it to a final state.

For *Chwe Goleadau*? Ugh. It has been terrible. I have had a solid idea of WHERE the story is going, but HOW to GET THERE has been awful. I've made an outline, written to it, examined the first draft, decided it lacked many important things, redrafted, re-outlined, re-outlined again...

I wager if I had a solid writing approach, CG would have taken half the time. Sadly, I do not. I can only apologise in this regard.

What inspired you to write *Arddun Lleuad*?

I really can't remember. One day I was just *watching* the show and then the next I was planning *Corruptor*. I think what I wanted to do was write a more serious story without a happy ending; of course, as Chester formed in my mind this changed completely.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Arddun Lleuad*?

Firstly, the romance between Luna and Chester needed to be *perfect*. The end result of it was that while the romance was indeed a deep, emotional connection that many readers tell me they found heartwarming, the romance was unfortunately too fast. I think Chester, in my mind, had waited for so long to finally begin his destined relationship with Luna that when it started to happen all of it came out at once. In a future draft of *Arddun* I may or may not get the chance to do, Chester will start as Luna's *companion* first and become her Consort nearer to the end.

Additionally, exams. I was close to finishing *Arddun*, starting on Chapter 8, when my exams came. I wanted *Arddun* out of my mind; I wrote it as fast as possible. God, do I regret this now. Chapter 8 is ungodly; it's full of plot holes.

When you set out to write *Arddun Lleuad*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Believe it or not... no. No themes or messages of any kind, nothing I wanted to get across to the reader. Which strikes even me as a bit strange.

Where can readers drop you a line?

I'm afraid I can't provide such a thing at this point in time, for various reasons.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Yes. Two personal admissions. Private in their nature, but the fandom is of the type that I feel comfortable to speak freely in this manner.

For one, I find it nearly impossible to believe I am actually a good writer. I have extreme paranoia; I believe everyone who says so is lying to me, or doesn't know what they're talking about, which I find uncomfortable in the extreme only for the *insult* it gives to those who speak positively of what I do.

In that same thread, I suffer from jealousy of larger, popular works in the FiM fandom such to the extent that I now avoid Equestria Daily. I feel this is one of my greatest letdowns as a person, and look forward immensely to the day that I am able to do so freely without such strong envy.

Finally I hope *you*, reading this, have a great day. Hell, have a great week, or year, or life.

Originally posted November 21st, 2011.

Tragedy • 8,500 words

An argument between her friends has brought to question Rarity's generosity. Can a unicorn who's had everything and nothing truly be generous?

Where do you live?

Northern Nevada.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Unemployed English Teacher.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

In May 2011, my brother's friends were joking about Bronies. I discovered all the episodes were on YouTube and watched the entire first season in one day.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *The Cutie Pox*.]

Winter Wrap Up.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Twilight Sparkle is best pony. Always. I see a lot of myself in her.

I'll always love what Rarity could have been... but ah well...

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

Life-long chronic depression.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've tried writing novels in the past but gave it up. Fanfic writing has been the first serious writing I've done in a while.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

RP, play *Fallout*, and look for work.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Kkatman. Hands down. She is amazing. Half of the reason I write what I do is for her approval. Ironically she won't read *Project Horizons* 'til she's done with her own fic.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Kkatman. Hinds and Bronode, my editors for *Project Horizons* too.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Editors are gold. Any editor who will spend eight hours per chapter to make it better is wonderful. Take all the feedback you can.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I think of an ending to the story. I then work backwards to figure out how to get there. Per chapter, I try and pick plot points that matter to the narrative. Once the chapter is done, my editors go through and actually make it worth reading.

What inspired you to write *Simply Rarity*?

At the time I hated Rarity's canon. I really did. I didn't see her as generous. I saw her as manipulative, snide, and a bit of a bully. I also didn't understand her character. If she was

an upper class socialite as her manner indicated then why design? If she was a lower class seamstress, why the pretension? So the story was born of trying to resolve this dichotomy.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Simply Rarity*?

Not really. I originally cut a lot out, but folks said they wanted it all so I put it back in.

When you set out to write *Simply Rarity*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

She has everything... she loses everything... and she comes to respect just what it means to be without.

Where can readers drop you a line?

David13ushey@gmail.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I'm still amazed anyone likes my writing... but I'm glad they do.

Originally posted on November 25th, 2011.

Tragedy • 4,700 words

Every night, in a little stable just outside of town, an old mare lays down to sleep. And every night she has the same dream of rainbows and open sky...

Where do you live?

I'm just outside San Antonio, Texas. Or inside of it. I can never tell with suburbs.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

At the moment I'm a full time student at the University of Texas San Antonio, while sometimes also doing freelance editing or writing work when I can find it.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I think I'm one of the five people that actually knew about it before it premiered and was excited about it. *My Little Pony* was a thing that I always wanted to like but never could because aside from *Midnight Castle* there was never anything really worth liking, aside from the occasional guilty pleasure. I always thought that the franchise had the potential to be awesome (as evidenced by *Midnight Castle*) but was never allowed to be awesome. Knowing the good work Lauren Faust does, I was excited to see if *Friendship Is Magic* would finally give me the show I'd been waiting on for almost two decades.

But it didn't. It was even better than I ever could have hoped.

Around the point where I realised just how deep the character writing and worldbuilding was I knew that I was in this thing for a long haul. I think that point in time was *Griffin the Brush Off*. Or when Twilight ate the daisies at the restaurant table and I geeked out because ponies were really doing pony things for the first time in the franchise. These weren't just humans in bright pony outfits, they were actually *ponies* and the world around them reflected that, from the little stomping and snorting and whinny sounds to the fact that their cups have straws since they don't have hands.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *The Cutie Pox*.]

Look Before You Sleep, definitely. I love what they call “bottle episodes” where it’s just a few characters in one space for a long time because they’re slower episodes that get to expand on characters and interaction and all of that awesome stuff. Normally I’m not crazy about odd couple dynamics, but this really made it work. Twilight is so adorkable in her enthusiasm about the whole thing. I loved discovering that Rarity actually isn’t fussy for the sake of being fussy, nor is she just a neat freak - it rather exemplifies her attention to detail and just a pinch of OCD. For the record, I make sandwiches the same way she makes s’mores and gets into bed. And Applejack... okay I didn’t learn too much about Applejack besides that she’s absolutely fun to watch. I don’t know why, but everything she does is just so fun to watch!

Also, every single sleep over I ever had went exactly like this. The only thing different is we weren’t stuck in a storm and a tree never fell through a window.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

So, that run on sentence about Rarity up there? That’s the moment where Rarity became my favorite character. She’d been building up to it with her cute little melodrama moments and my noticing how sincere she is about helping everypony look and feel their best. *Suited for Success* and *Sisterhooves Social* just made her top-tier position stick.

But if I included the fandom’s input... well, the answer would still be Rarity. But Princess Celestia would come in at a close second. While I got tired of Tyrant!Celestia real quick, I still like the multiple interpretations of her character I see in the fandom, (even if I don’t always agree with them). I especially ilove the way she appears in Egophiliac’s fanart. I’d say that my favorite fanon background pony is Caesar, but aside from my own little fanon there’s not actually much material about my favorite monocle pony.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

I actually don’t remember where the Patchwork part came from. “Patch” was attached to some previous handles, but I don’t recall the origin of it. I think it was from the Patchwork Girl of Oz, to imply I’m a bunch of things at once and a giant weirdo-pants. I have a habit of using the same prefix for my internet names, so when I came to a Danny Phantom message board I attaches Poltergeist to the end, and the name eventually stuck.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've been writing - writing for real and not just taking advantage of school assignments - since I was about fourteen. (Ten years! I just realised that. I feel old now...) About half of that writing is fanfiction, though anything written before 2004 I'm not too proud of. I keep it up on my ff.net account because I like remembering how much I've improved. I had a long lull in fanfic for a while until I got into Danny Phantom around 2006 and decided it was my duty to write character studies all over the place. I'm glad I did because it reminded me how to work with established characters, how to pace my writing, and most importantly, how to frame, edit, and end an ongoing piece. I'm barely in that fandom anymore, but what I got from it is invaluable.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I'm starting to think a huge chunk of my time is spent on walks and music. I can't sit still and listen to music for some reason. Besides that, I mostly spend time reading and watching films and the handful of television still worth watching (that's what, six shows?). Oh, and video games. I'm going through the newest Professor Layton at the moment and failing epically at half of the puzzles.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

I don't really think I actually have a favorite author. All the authors with multiple books I like have never written anything I'd put on my top shelf, and the books I do have on my top shelf are the only thing I like by that author. That said, my favorite novels and stories are a lot easier. Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* is easily my all-time favorite book. I think I've read and reread it at least eight times and made me cry for reasons I don't quite understand on at half of those times. Honorable mentions go to *Watership Down*, *The Martian Chronicles*, and *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*.

Meanwhile, on the fanfiction front *The Old Stories* was so good I was actually kind of mad at it for being so freaking amazing. *Paradise* is one of my top favorites as well; I drop whatever I'm doing as soon as I learn there's an update.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

That's a really interesting question. I've never really thought about it. I never have any real scope of what my writing looks like to other people, because everyone reads differently. I guess my ideal reader would be someone that takes their time, can spot subtlety, and is willing to occasionally take a chance. Honestly, my ideal reader is someone that really appreciates what I worked on. I'd like it if they picked up everything I wanted them to and noticed the cute references or whatever, but I actually think that in the end if someone doesn't "get it" then the fault is probably on me and I ought to just do better next time.

The only thing I can ask of a reader is that they give me an honest chance. When fanon, maybe more so than canon, clashes with fanfiction it sometimes turns off readers before the story has a chance to prove itself. The same thing goes for characters that are unpopular for one reason or another - there are several very good stories about Snails that don't get near the attention they deserve, and I'm fairly sure the reason for that was simply because people don't like Snails. I've seen several stories get automatic one-stars for... whatever reason. Trolls? Haters of the genre? Of characters? Who knows, but the thought that a good story was punished by somepony that likely didn't even read halfway through makes my heart frown a little. From experience, I can say a non-reader feels much worse than a "bad" reader, or bad reactions. I know everyone has their biases, but there's always that exceptional ten percent. What I'm basically getting at is don't judge a book by its cover and I'll step off this soapbox now.

Besides that, I'd ideally have a reader that's nice enough to tell me what they thought of my story. I like to know what I'm doing right or how they felt or what I'm doing wrong. Especially what I'm doing wrong.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Read. I know this is the answer everyone gives but that answer is common for a reason. Seriously, read. Read novels from all sorts of genres, try short stories, read stuff in first, second, and third person. Read good books and see what it is that made them good. Read bad books and see where they went wrong. Bad books are fantastic learning tools. *Twilight* may not be very good but it taught me so much about what not to do. (Also gave me a boost of confidence because hey, that got published why not me?)

Aside from that, I often find that if I have real writer's block, reading something else almost always helps my juices flow again. Said Patch who's been blocked on her Silver Spoon story for six months.

I also suggest the use of outlines. It doesn't need to be a four page detailed affair, just a couple of bullet points about where the story's going. If you know where the story is going, even vaguely, it makes everything a lot easier. I also find that in cases where one is struggling to write, see if you can find a different location to write in. Change of scenery can work wonders sometimes.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

Usually I have at least two drafts, one handwritten and a typed final draft. I find it easier to write on paper because that way I can write everywhere and in notebooks I'm not distracted by editing or triple-guessing word choice. Plus, in notebooks I can make sticky notes and additional outlines if I need them. I know I could probably do all that on a laptop, but it's just easier that way. It means that for sure I'll go back and edit when I type it up. I used to do my initial draft typed, and in the process almost always did a really shoddy edit job. Speaking of which, I usually send my WIPs and complete drafts by my friends for some quick editing, since I don't do a very good job by myself. I think I could really use an actual beta reader specifically for Pony fics, though. It's always best to have a neutral editor that's well versed in the fandom you're writing for.

What inspired you to write *Somewhere Only We Know*?

I'm not entirely certain. I think what happened was several stray ideas ended up combining. I know it was sparked by the use of the song for the Winnie the Pooh trailer and thought that it would fit ponies, but how that morphed into the idea of dual realities I'm not sure. I think it might have been from a TV Tropes Wild Mass Guessing theorizing that the series was a dying dream of Rarity in an alternate reality where she was lost in the Diamond Dog mines. I took that and changed it to an alternate grimdark reality where Equestria was industrialised and run by Dogs instead of Ponies and the story was from Rarity's point of view. The visions of Equestria as we knew it were dreams sent to all ponies via Celestia and Luna, trapped in the sun and moon because that was the only comfort they could give.

But then I sat down to write and suddenly Rainbow Dash. I don't know how Dash got there but since it was working so well I kept it. Besides, a Pegasus fit in with the themes of freedom a lot better anyway.

Humans actually came in because I've always found the idea of the contrast between actual ponies and our own candy color ponies fascinating. I also was always interested in the idea of somehow writing a *Black Beauty* crossover, even though I had no idea how to do it. I'm pretty sure that idea subconsciously combined with the Diamond Dog idea and here we are!

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Somewhere Only We Know*?

Fluttershy.

I knew in this alternate universe, Dash had the whole mane cast living in the stables in the past, and Fluttershy was the only one I just couldn't make fit without feeling awkward. I could modify names like Twilight Sparkle and Rainbow Dash, and Applejack and Rarity are feasible pony names already. Pinkie Pie's got the knack for being recognizable just from a vague description but I just couldn't find a place to describe Fluttershy without making it seem forced in.

My editor kept jokingly kept suggesting that maybe Fluttershy went to the knackers. Somehow it became a running gag and now that's solution to every writing problem I have.

"Editor, I don't know if Diamond Tiara is coming in too soon or too late!"

"Send Fluttershy to the knackers!"

"...Editor, I think you are trying to get me stoned to death."

In the end, I decided simply not to mention Fluttershy. After all, the major characters I was concerned with were Applejack and Pinkie Pie so I decided to just cut her out of the story and hope no one noticed. As far as I know, no one did. Except just now because I just told everyone.

When you set out to write *Somewhere Only We Know*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

I mostly wanted to explore the theme of separate realities, and how if one were aware of the other how it plays out. Is Dash reaming of Rainbows or is Rainbow dreaming of Dash? Are they separate functional realities dreaming of each other? Is Equestria actually pony heaven? Maybe. Maybe not. It depends on the reader, really. I wrote it to be openly interpreted.

In the end, what's dreaming of what doesn't really matter. What does is the feelings that comes with it. Even in the grey, Dash can still manage to find happiness, even if it's only when she's sleeping with the knowledge that somewhere things are better. More importantly, it's something that can't ever be taken away from her. It's more a story about joy than about sadness, and I view the ending as a happy one, though a little bittersweet.

(Also, look out for gopher holes when you're running.)

Where can readers drop you a line?

Best bet is to get me on deviant art under the label cunningcoyote. I'm there all the time, and check my messages obsessively. Granted, if someone sent me an email (paradox1313@hotmail.com) or messaged me through fanfiction.net I'd be sure to see it too, but I'm more likely to respond on DA. Be sure, I read every single thing anyone sends to me. I don't always respond, because I don't know what to say but I always read it.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Without a doubt, the response to *Somewhere Only We Know* blows the response to pretty much everything else I've written out of the water. I expected maybe... fifteen total responses with a couple of people who "got" it and a few manly tears. That's more or less what I usually get. Instead I got over a hundred responses, the majority got it right away with lots and lots of manly tears. More than one brony told me that I made them cry themselves to sleep. I've never made anyone cry before. It makes me feel proud of my story, while also feeling kinda bad about feeling happy that I made someone cry. So basically I'm like "Haha I am totally aweso- Oh my god I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to hit you so hard!"

(Not that I have room to talk. When Dash nuzzles Applejack because it's the only thing she's able to do, it almost always makes me cry, myself.)

Anyway, my point is I'm all kinds of amazed and flattered that I managed to affect so many bronies the way I did, and that I'm apparently good enough to be included in the Vault. On that, it's fantastic that the Vault exists in the first place. And the hundreds of Pony fic and art and music. This fandom breeds creativity like mold on exceptionally wet bread. The *good* kind of mold, not the kind you breathe in and die from. Or... something.

The point is, I love you guys! Let's all group hug!

Originally posted on November 28th, 2011.

Adventure, Shipping, Tragedy • 61,800 words

One by one, Twilight and her friends must come to terms with the consequences of being the Elements of Harmony.

Where do you live?

I'm a proud Canadian from Ontario.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I have a job working with language - I work in the journalism industry.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I first heard about the show via the YouTube video mashing up the audio from the Starcraft 2 trailer with MLP footage. Intrigued, I watched a few episodes. By the end of the pilot I knew this was not the cartoon my little sister watched way back when. Four or five episodes in, I was hooked.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Sisterhooves Social*.]

That is definitely a tough question. I think the episode I have re-watched the most so far though is *Green Isn't Your Color*. It has a wonderful blend of humour and emotional tension, and Photo Finish played hilariously off of Fluttershy's meekness. Rarity's jealousy and Twilight's secret-stress were great too.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Another tough one! But as a survivor of a LONG academic career I am very fond of Twilight - I sympathize with her grad-student-style behaviour. Honestly though, ALL of

the primary cast members have their enjoyable aspects - that's one of the show's strong points.

With fanon aspects included, I am also a big fan of Ditzzy Doo / Derpy Hooves / Whoever in her fan interpretation as a hard-working and dedicated single mother to Dinky Doo / Hooves / Whatever. It's just such a touching relationship as it is presented in a wide range of images and fics.

How did you come up with your handle/pen name?

I wanted to have an equine pun as my handle, so I brainstormed for a while and came up with it off the top of my head. Obviously, it plays off the product "Saddle Soap" and the genre "Soap Opera" - which seems fitting, considering the high levels of drama in the fic series for which I am most well-known.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I have been writing stories since grade school. I have never been published, but I have written large amounts of fiction on my own time - a few hundred thousand words' worth, if a quick mental inventory is fairly accurate. I have successfully participated in NaNoWriMo twice, and I enjoy writing as a hobby. *MLP:FIM* was the first fandom for which I wrote fan-fiction, however.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I'm fairly sure this will come as no surprise, but I read voraciously. I also enjoy watching movies and TV, playing video games, and otherwise enjoying the consumption of fictional creations.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Ah. Now THIS is REALLY a tough one. I just don't think I could point out a single story or novel as my favourite, since my tastes in fiction evolve and change with great speed. As for authors, though, I am a big fan of Chuck Palahniuk, Clive Barker, Stephen King, William Gibson and Jon Courtenay Grimwood.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

I do indeed. A dear friend and fellow Brony, she acts as critic and sounding board for my fiction - both Pony and otherwise. She is unafraid to offer both criticism and praise, and our conversations always prove highly inspiring.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

I could probably waffle on for ages on this topic, but I'll see if I can boil things down to a few suggestions that have proven useful for my own writing.

First, when writing dialogue, read it out loud. If you find it awkward or confusing to speak your characters' lines, so would they - rewrite them.

Second, always carry a means to jot down ideas, whether a smartphone, laptop, or (my favourite) a notepad and pens. You never know when inspiration will strike, and you WILL forget an awesome idea if you don't write it down.

Third, read. Read books. Read other fics. Read the newspaper. Read your earlier works. Read, read, read. Reading is exercise for the mental muscles you use when you write. The more you soak yourself in good writing, the more you'll recognize it when you start producing some of your own.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

All of my stories tend to start as small piles of notes jotted down on the aforementioned notepads. Once the basic concept is hashed out, I tend to write a single draft and then tinker with it when writing shorter pieces, and sometimes write a couple of drafts when dealing with longer works. *Ditzy Doo: Muffins*, for example, went through something like SIX drafts before I posted it. That was a bit of an anomaly, though.

If a particular scene stands out especially vividly in my mind, I will sometimes write it down first, and then craft the story around it or insert it in an appropriate spot.

I often end up tweaking my fiction in small ways over and over (sometimes after it is posted!) - I am my own harshest critic sometimes.

What inspired you to write *The Pony Psychology Series*?

The series really began as a standalone, *Fluttershy: Origins*. I was shocked and entertained by the “Flutterrage” moment in *The Best Night Ever*, and after watching that finale I couldn’t help but wonder what sort of life experiences could have led FS to present such a strange blend of caregiver and shrinking violet, with occasional outbursts of pent-up fury.

My musing led to the fic, which led to more musing about the other characters, which led to more fic ideas, and by the end of *Pinkie Pie: Schism* I knew I wanted to shape them into a connected series. But it all started with imagining Fluttershy as carrying a hefty case of Caregiver Burden. As I said above, I had never written fanfic before, but once I started... well, here we are.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *The Pony Psychology Series*?

I have noticed that I tend to rush endings - I suppose it’s like seeing the finish line at the end of a long race; you get a burst of energy and push extra hard. It’s something I watch out for now.

(*Spoilers ahead.*) I would say the hardest chapter to write was *Muffins* - it was essentially a self-contained narrative, and balancing the VAST range of moods in the story was very difficult. Also, while the amnesia concept came to me very early, I went through a TON of different pasts for Ditzzy. In an early draft, she was actually a serial killer who had almost killed Nurse Redheart years back in Manehattan before being “shot” in the head by a unicorn cop’s magic and losing her memories! It was Dinky who put that notion to bed - I couldn’t bring myself to have that little foal’s mother be that evil, even if she was different in the present.

Conversely, the easiest chapter to write was *Alicorns: Blame*. The Royal Sisters’ argument, fight and reconciliation just flowed forth, and I found it extremely satisfying to write.

When you set out to write *The Pony Psychology Series*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Psychology, identity and emotion were obviously central elements from the beginning, but on that note I think what I really wanted to do was dig beneath the surface of the Mane Cast as they are seen in the show, without disturbing said surface. I looked into those huge, shiny eyes and wondered: *what's going on in there?*

With *Pony Psychology*, I wanted to lend some depth to the cast's characterization with the minimum possible disturbance to the canon seen in the episodes. Examining the possible effects of the Elements of Harmony on their bearers provided a chance to do that.

Where can readers drop you a line?

I can be reached via private messages through any of the fiction sites where I maintain a profile (handle Saddlesoap Opera in all cases), or directly at SaddlesoapOpera@gmail.com. I am always interested to hear from readers, and I love discussing the process of fiction writing. Feel free to contact me!

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I'd like to thank everypony who took the time to read my work, all those who gave a "TV show for little girls" a chance to demolish their expectations, and most of all, the creators of said series.

Friendship is Magic makes me smile. Truly, reflexively, widely, *smile*. It wasn't until I felt it happening while watching the show that I thought about just how little in this big bad world does that to me anymore. I laugh all the time, and hoo-boy does the world offer plenty to cry about, but smile? *Sincerely* smile? Smile like a happy child? Rarely. So thank you, Lauren Faust *et al*.

Thank you for making me smile.

Originally posted on December 2nd, 2011.

Adventure, Shipping, Tragedy • 54,300 words

Pinkie Pie's unrequited love for Rainbow Dash reaches a crisis point as she fears the party in her heart has at long last come to an end.

Where do you live?

Sydney, Australia.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I'm an English teacher at a high school.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I saw it on 4chan's comics board /co/. I kept seeing all this fanart of lesbian ponies and I was just taken aback by the sheer cuteness of it all and I had to watch the show that had inspired the images!

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *May The Best Pet Win.*]

Look Before you Sleep - the best character-driven episode in the series so far, in my opinion. Twi became adorkable and not just a grouch, and the Rarity and Applejack ship set sail!

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Pinkie Pie. I don't think the answer would change if I considered the fandom as a whole (the only fandom I care about is the stuff that is true to the canon characters anyway) - although I do love Derpy (our very own wall-eyed angel!)

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

It literally came to me out of the blue. I'd decided I wanted to write some FiM fanfiction, and I thought to myself - what's an adorable name that would be appropriate for the writer of cute and sugary stories starring colourful, magical ponies? "Butterscotch Sundae" was literally the first thing that popped into my head, and I went with it.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've dabbled in writing a few times in my life, some serious stuff and also fanfiction (I used to write Lucky Star fanfiction of all things!), but this is the first time I've had the discipline to actually write something worthy of recognition within a fandom.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Gardening too little. Drinking too much.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

My favourite author for plot and general mind-fuckery is Philip K Dick. For the quality of prose, either Nabakov or Steinbeck. My favourite novel changes all the time, but at the moment it's probably Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

I have a lot of respect for Stephen King - he's the one writer who seems to be able to talk about writing with a complete lack of pretentiousness. An ideal reader? I'd have to say it's a burnt out individual like myself who longs for romance, cuteness and magic in their real life, and for whom the adorable adventures of candy-coloured equines offers them the perfect escape from the "bluh"ness of our own world.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

This is an extremely annoying piece of advice that all aspiring and struggling writers get, and I used to hate getting it, but the truth of it cannot be avoided - WRITE. You must write as much as you can, every day, to get yourself into the discipline of producing

words. Never, ever be one of those individuals who calls themselves a “writer” and who constantly talks about writing but never does any.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I used to write a handwritten copy, but now I type the first draft straight into a digital document. I think the writing you produce is different when you do it this way, but I haven't decided how it's different exactly and whether it produces material that's better or worse than handwriting. All I know is that it saves an awful lot of typing stuff up, which I hate!

What inspired you to write *The Party Hasn't Ended*?

A friend of mine (OK, he's called Auraion on DA and CANDYBAG on 4chan's /co/*shudder*) asked me to write a Pinkie-Dash shipping story.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *The Party Hasn't Ended*?

Party was originally intended to be a one-shot, ending with Pinkie destroying her secret monthly party for Dash and Dash never learning that she was in love with her. But then I decided that I didn't want to end it on such a sad note, and wrote another part - and then another - and another, until ended up as more a novel than a fanfic! So I guess the challenge was actually getting the plot to a place where Dash and Pinkie being together made sense, and for that to happen it turns out a *lot* of drama and adventure had to happen!

When you set out to write *The Party Hasn't Ended*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

There is no place so dark that the power of love cannot illuminate the way out.

Where can readers drop you a line?

You can email me on butterscotchsundae.ponipower@gmail.com, or come and see me at butterscotchsundae.deviantart.com! I actually reply to people's comment or questions (although it can take me a while sometimes, for which I apologise in advance...)

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I hope you enjoy the story!

Originally posted on December 5th, 2012.

Tragedy • 8,400 words

When Fluttershy asks Rarity where she learned to sew, she learns that remembering where you came from isn't always easy.

Where do you live?

Ohio.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

IT and Medical Laboratory.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I'd seen the term "Brony" popping up on the Internet some time in April of 2010, but I couldn't find anything in particular. I saw a post on a forum about MLP asking if adult men really liked this kind of thing. Being a bit of an animation junkie, I tuned in for the first two episodes and found myself hooked.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *The Mysterious Mare-Do-Well*.]

Suited for Success. Rarity is the best pony after all.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Canon only, I'd have to consider my two favorite ponies to be Rarity and Cheerilee. Rarity started off as an annoying drama queen, but quickly grew into someone with serious underlying psychological problems. And that's just what you can gather from the show. Cheerilee is great because she reminds me of a teacher I had when I was in school. She's dedicated to education and willing to make you suffer for acting the fool.

Including general fanon consensus, that expands to Lyra and BonBon. Lyra and BonBon, as depicted in artwork and stories are just such an adorable couple. Their colors compliment each other so well, and there is so much art of them just being together.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

Funny thing that. The Gypsy Vanner is a type of draft horse with beautiful feathering around the hooves, and luxuriously silky mane and tail. They're probably the most beautiful horses in the world. My pen name is a bit of a play on that, as in real life, I have a shaved head, though I'm otherwise fuzzy.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I first started writing my own stories when I was nine. Simple stories to be sure, but I was never a good enough artist to make much of anything by drawing. I've always felt the need to create, and traditional arts likes paints or sculpting never appealed to me. Writing has always been easy and cheap. I've drifted in and out of writing for years at a time, but I keep coming back to it. It just happens to be something that I can share with other people.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I am a gamer, both in the electronic and the tabletop sense. Gaming offers a unique look at how people think and function, no matter the medium. I suppose in that regard, I'm also a hobbyist sociologist.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

My favorite published author is Kurt Vonnegut. His stories border on the absurd and the insane, and frequently cross the line. He presents us with absurd and unreal situations, and they still somehow make sense in the end. My favorite story by him is *Bluebeard*, which discuss the irrelevancy of the artists that the main character was friends with.

My favorite novel is *Watership Down*. On the surface, it's a story about bunnies trying to find their place in the world and making the best of a bad situation. Looking deeper, it's a commentary on governments and their effects on the populace, and how people react to how their government treats them. Or maybe it's just a bunny adventure.

My favorite fanfic author is probably Conner Cogsworth. His stories are consistently clever, and keep to the spirit of the show, even when going completely off the rails.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

The idea of the audience of one is not one that I subscribe to, because I don't think there's anyone out there that I feel like I'm writing to. While I do write for the entertainment of others, there's no one person or ideal audience that I'm trying to reach.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

My advice actually isn't that helpful because the way I write doesn't work for a lot of people. I do very little planning or character analysis before hand, and most of the time I just jump into the story as close to the ending as possible.

What advice I would give is what everyone will tell you: Start as close to the end as possible, and make every sentence count. There are times where you want to write awesome scenes or hilarious jokes, but they have nothing to do with the story you're telling.

I guess that's the other piece of advice I'd offer. It's okay to leave things on the cutting room floor. Say you just spent an hour writing an epic fight, only to realize that your characters could have avoided the whole thing by going up another floor to their goal. Cut it out, and use it for another story. There's very few ideas out there that aren't worth salvaging for another project.

Other than that, get other like-minded authors to read your stories before you send them out into the world. People aren't going to read the same story twice because you changed something. Places like the Pony Fiction Archive or /fic/ are invaluable for new writers because they are full of people willing to listen and help.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

My typical writing process has actually changed in the past few months. First and foremost, I start out with an idea. A basic plot forms, and from there I think of two things: ending and beginning. The ending is way more important than the beginning because you can bring readers in anywhere in the story and still bring about comprehension. The ending is where you leave your readers, and you don't get another chance after that.

From there, I decide what how I want my characters to be. Given that I write a lot of original characters, it's important to make sure that your characters are, if not likable, then at least realistic and interesting to read about.

Next I think of a few scenes that I want to include in the piece and write outlines from that. Usually these are action scenes or moments of choice for the characters, so they're pivotal plot pieces. I fill in the rest with setting and character building.

I pass off my work to prereaders from Ponychan who then tear my piece apart and berate me for doing things that drive them nuts. Then I rewrite, and they complain some more.

I used to just throw things out there willy-nilly. While I'm a strong enough writer to do that, my stories are much better now that I have people who aren't afraid to tell me that I'm writing like a jerk.

What inspired you to write *Carousel*?

I really don't know. I woke up one morning with the idea and it wouldn't stop bugging me until I wrote it down. After a few drafts, I changed several parts of it, and it all just coalesced into the story that I wanted it to be.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Carousel*?

Not really. One of the things I've always prided myself was that I never leave a story hanging. I've had a lot of failed starts over the years, and I have scrapped entire projects, but the pieces have come back stronger in other works than they did in the original.

When you set out to write *Carousel*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Not really. I got lucky with the timing of it, as it came out Father's Day weekend. Since it's a story about a father, it went over really well.

I guess if I had a message, it would be to remember where you came from. Even if the past is painful, you can learn a lot from it, and you can appreciate that you are a product of your experiences.

Where can readers drop you a line?

I can be reached at bronycoon@gmail.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

The fandom has made me glad to pick up the pen again and start writing. The kind words from people who enjoyed my stories have inspired me to help others in their quest for good fiction. I've met some fantastic people, and read some incredible stories. I'm glad a cartoon about ponies could bring me here. I've had a lot of Internet friends over the years, and this is probably the nicest community I've had the pleasure of being part of.

Originally posted on December 9th, 2012.

Slice-of-Life • 9,200 words

There are stories which define us. Stories that inspire us. And there are stories that damn us.

Good afternoon, my name is Thanqol and sometimes I'm a jerk.

Where do you live?

Canberra, Australia. I wouldn't live anywhere else - this is a beautiful town.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I am currently studying a combined Arts/Commerce degree at the Australian National University (the arts is to expand my mind and learn how to write bestselling novels, the commerce is so that I'll have a *real job*). I also run deliveries for Domino's Pizza - it's good work, relaxing, and I never miss a sunset.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

My first exposure to the thing was on 4chan. At this point in my life I was a massive troll. I was on this perpetual creative downswing, convinced in the back of my head that I was "a writer" despite not having the commitment or insight to actually write anything. I was also incredibly angry, all the time. I've got this incredible dark streak, this part of me which just loathes humanity and other people and expects nothing but the worst, all the time. 4chan fed this rage. I was going nowhere, and I kind of knew it.

And then I saw the comic by Jukashi. You know the one; the Celestia/Luna one. And my imagination was captured. I didn't know who these two horses were but they were *interesting*. Was tragedy a thing in My Little Pony now?

A few weeks passed, and when I eventually saw a pony thread on 4chan, I clicked it. And it was... unreal. People were being *polite* to each other. And *kind* to each other. And *supportive* of each other. They were still being complete jerks, but they were *trying*. They were really trying, and that was the most impossible thing.

I lurked pony threads for two or three weeks, just marvelling at this ongoing phenomena of niceness. And then I opened up episode 1. “This is very gay” I said. That sentiment lasted right up until Rainbow Dash appeared on screen. That was the moment I was hooked. I didn’t realise I was hooked as I marathoned the next ten episodes. I didn’t realise until I gave a squeal of delight when they all started singing in *Winter Wrap Up*, and rewatched the song half a dozen times before I could proceed with the episode. And then I downloaded the song and put it on my mp3 player and that was really the end of the debate.

But it was always about the friendship, for me. The ponies opened the door and gave people the chance to be nice to each other. I wouldn’t be where I am if they didn’t take that chance.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *The Mysterious Mare-Do-Well*.]

Fall Weather Friends. I’m not entirely sure why. Maybe because I love autumn, or because I love Rainbow Dash. But I think it’s because of what it means to me in terms of being physical. I’ve always associated being physical with violence and pain, and popular media just seems to back that up. But *Fall Weather Friends* is about a race. I honestly can’t think of another show or event where a race was that important. It showed me that you don’t need violence to tell a physical story.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Rainbow Dash. It’s so one sided it’s not even a question. Rainbow Dash gets even better with the inclusion of fanon. It’s always been a question as to who’s second best pony.

In which case, it’s Rarity. I initially hated Rarity until I realised that most of my favourite episodes were Rarity episodes. I feel like she gets the shaft in the fandom in general, which is a pity. Considering total fandom, I think Celestia is second best pony.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

The first book series I really liked, at the age of 12 or so, was the “Trollslayer” series, in which there is a villainous ratman wizard named Grey Seer Thanquol. Thanquol was the most brilliant villain ever. Whenever things were going well he’d start planning out the

details on the fifty-foot statue of himself that he was going to build the moment he got home, and as soon as things started going badly he'd instantly start blaming everyone and everything, especially his imaginary enemies who sent him defective minions.

When attempting to use GreySeerThanqol as my handle, I found that I had one character too many. So I nixed the 'u' and I've been Thanqol ever since.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've been writing since 2003, when I entered the world of message board play-by-posts. And I've produced a *lot* of content since then and been writing almost non-stop. PBPs are fantastic practise for learning how to write. I have won one or two prizes for creative writing in academic contexts, and I study Creative Writing at university. I've done a handful of full length pieces but nothing I feel particularly happy with.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Self improvement! It's amazing what a determined person can master! I decided randomly one day that I was going to learn how to draw, and decided that I was going to draw a picture every day no matter what. Two hundred days later, the change in skill is astounding and it's one of my favourite past times. Otherwise, I take long walks through the mountains, run play-by-post games and play very small amounts of video games.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

My favourite book is *Heaven's Net is Wide*, by Lian Hearn. My favourite author is Terry Pratchett (can't go wrong with faving Pratchett). Other notable favourite books are *Eisenhorn* and the Trollslayer series, though I do have a big soft spot for Sherlock Holmes. *Fate: Stay Night* is another highlight of mine.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Huh, I've never considered that question before. If I'm being completely honest, with every recent piece of work I've asked myself, "Would PhoeKun like this?" But otherwise, I'm mostly writing for and against myself.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Do I ever! I've worked out this entire elaborate philosophy of writing, and learning to write, and dealing with writer's block. Here's the cliff notes:

To learn to write, or to do anything, *you must write*. This gets said by everyone all the time ever, but when they say "Practise, practise, practise" they're not pulling your leg. And it's easy to say "They're talented and are just being modest". *They are not. They are telling you the truth*. Take a look at my art progress over the last 200 days for the ultimate reality of this assertion. It's possible to get *anywhere* if you put the hours in.

The second point is that *you're always getting better*. If you write something and it's horrible and you hate it you've still learned a lot from the process. Quantity leads inexorably to quality, and you can't let a setback bring you down.

The third point is *learn how to think right*. Learn how to think in thought patterns that are alien to your own. Think about alternate takes on the same characters. How they think; when they don't think. Challenge your basic assumptions and work out what the basic assumptions of others are. For me, writing is all about investigating people's minds. Exploring other ways of looking at the world is what fascinates me.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any pre-readers/editors, etc?)

Wait until I'm tired and then write the entire thing in a single sitting. I'm really good at reflexively responding to things, a habit drilled into me by years of PBPs. Editing is a slower and more languid process, done with the assistance of friends.

What inspired you to write *The Old Stories*?

Exalted, being a huge mythology buff, and being worried that if I didn't do it it wouldn't be done 'right'.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *The Old Stories*?

Submitting it! I wrote the entire thing, and then was all like “Nah, no one will ever read this” and then sat on it for a month or so. The only reason I submitted it at all was because a friend of mine bullied me into it.

I was kind of floored by the reaction.

When you set out to write *The Old Stories*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Oh yes, quite clearly. I love the theme of myth, of seeding (a term I invented; it means where you use certain words or phrases to seed a whole bunch of assumptions in people’s heads which you can then play with), and particularly of six stories which are vaguely unsatisfying until you hear the twist. Something that people could read and enjoy while still sensing that there was something *wrong* somewhere under the surface.

Where can readers drop you a line?

thanqol_@hotmail.com for emails; alternately, thanqol.deviantart.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

School year is over so I promise I’ll start writing again. I’m looking forward to it!

And thank you so much to everyone who takes the time to read, rate or comment on stories. You’re contributing more than you’ll ever know.

Originally posted on December 12th, 2012.

Adventure, Human Crossover • 20,300 words (abandoned)

The ponies and the humans have lived together in harmony for centuries. Equestria is an island inhabited entirely by ponies, and some have branched off to live with humans. However, the humans, seeing their bleak world and accepting that they have made too many mistakes in their world to fix, have decided to open facilities to convert humans into ponies and live in peaceful Equestria.

Where do you live?

I live in New Jersey, in the United States of America. Or, as many in my homeland call it, "MURKA".

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I'm a senior in high school, and I haven't really gotten a steady-paying job yet. I'm pretty lazy.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I discovered it in early February, after having gone on 4chan's /b/ for the first time in a long time. I, like many bronies-to-be, wondered why there were so many damn pony threads sprouting up in /b/ and /co/, so I checked it out for myself. My first episode was the pilot, but I didn't get that far in before getting bored with it, so I watch another episode. *Call of the Cutie* was the first episode I watched in its entirety, and I was hooked. At the time, *Suited for Success* was the newest episode.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *The Mysterious Mare-Do-Well*.]

It's so hard to choose, especially since there's so many now. *Sonic Rainboom* has always been a good one for me, and the season two episodes have all been fantastic. The CMC is growing on me, too.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Fluttershy, hands down. Derpy is a close second, since she's practically canon. I don't keep track of much of the fandom these days, so I don't really have any favorite fandom characters. I try not to get too attached to them.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

It's been my username for pretty much everything since the dawn of time (or, at least, since I started frequenting message boards). It was the name of the very first OC I ever made, in fifth grade. I was a big Dragon Ball fan back then, as many young boys are around that age. I miss Toonami. [Editor's note: me too!]

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I had dabbled a little into Pokémon fan fiction, but I didn't put that much effort into it; it was mainly because I was bored. MLP was the first major project I started really committing into, fanfic-wise.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Draw, play/write music, and watch ponies. I want to get a career started in music, that's my main goal.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Well, I'm afraid to have to go the route everyone else my age goes, by saying "Harry Potter", but I feel like that's the only book series/author I've really been drawn to. I'm tempted to begin reading *Lord of the Rings*, though; see what all the hype is about.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Just the lonely brony who wants to go to Equestria. Not permanently, but just to see what happens. Meet the ponyfolk. Fly like a pegasus, or do magic like a unicorn. Or live the simple life of an earth pony. Dreamers.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Proofread. A lot. I'm not one for advice on writing. *Conversion Bureau* was my second fan fiction, like, ever.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I'd come up with a couple of ideas, write them down for later (since my best ideas come during school hours), and see how I can integrate them into the story. Then I type a bunch (into the one Wordpad file I have everything stored in), and I would sometimes send it to my friend to preread for me. Then, off it goes to Sethisto.

What inspired you to write *The Conversion Bureau*?

During my "extremely obsessed with MLP" phase in the spring of 2011, I felt this desire to want to go to Equestria. I had attempted lucid dreaming, and read a few other fan fictions on the subject of humans-in-Equestria (*Stuck in Equestria* being the main influence here), and tried to write my own. It was really just an experiment; I didn't want it to get as popular as it did, but I took what I got.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *The Conversion Bureau*?

The critique was definitely the hurtful part. The comment section of EqD can be a cruel mistress. I was called misanthropic, and my fic was bashed for my OC use just to fulfill the writer's desires (i.e. what they would do, not what the character would do). I'm most certainly not misanthropic, and whoever accused me of that is not very nice.

When you set out to write *The Conversion Bureau*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

I just wanted to write a little story about people going to Equestria and back; and their connection with humans. It was to show how our world was compared to the heavenly paradise of Equestria; you can see why bronies would want to go there.

***The Conversion Bureau* is currently incomplete - do you ever anticipate revisiting it?**

I don't know, honestly. I had written it on a whim, and most of the time the demand was draining my ideas away. Plus, the spin-offs were clearly better than the original, so I think this premise is better left to the professionals (see below).

What do you think of all the spinoff fanfictions that arose from *The Conversion Bureau*? Have you read any of them, and if so, do you have any favorites?

When I wrote *The Conversion Bureau*, I ran into my one problem when it comes to writing: I have a great concept, but I can never execute it the way I want to. The spin-offs seem to have executed it for me, and I'm personally jealous that these people can write so well, lol. They are all fantastic, and I thank each spin-off author for making this humble brony's idea such an amazing "fan fiction franchise". As I said in the previous question, the spin-offs are the main reason I don't think I'm going to continue the original. The original, in my opinion, was a mediocre, first-try fan fiction, and my premise should be left for the much more professional writers to create amazing stories with. Go get'em, tiger.

Where can readers drop you a line?

They can go to my deviantArt at Blaze12 (I don't do much on there, but there's some pony stuff on it), or, if they REALLY want to stalk me, by going to my Tumblr at brianfancypants (again, not much pony, but I do track the "fluttershy" and "pinkie pie" tags). Yes, my name is Brian. Nice to meet you.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Cupcakes is overrated. Canon Pinkie is best Pinkie.

Originally posted on December 16th, 2011.

Shipping, Tragedy • 11,900 words

Smudge loved well, and loved deeply. Too deeply, perhaps, for the pony left behind.

Where do you live?

I'm currently living just outside 'The Bold New City of the South': Jacksonville, FL.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I do remote systems administration for a region that spans from the East Coast to the Mississippi River, minus New England.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I stumbled across an episode called *Feeling Pinkie Keen*, and it was the best thing I'd seen on TV in some time. I'm a huge fan of the classic Looney Tunes, and this (and later, *Party of One*) had some great Friz Freling / Chuck Jones moments. After that, I found the rest of the episodes online, and set my DVR to record reruns and new episodes.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Secret of My Excess*.]

See above!

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Mm. Twilight Sparkle is my favorite Mane Six, but only by a hair. She's bookish, adorkable, and a generally good person who gets wrapped up in the trivia far too often. The rest of the Mane Six, in order, are Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy, Applejack, Rarity, and Rainbow Dash. Outside the Mane Six, that's a toughie. I'm very fond of Apple Bloom but I think Luna edges her out.

Of course, it's entirely possible that Pinkie Pie would be my best friend were I to suddenly find myself in Ponyville. You just can't say no to that level of pure unquestioning love.

As far as considering 'the fandom in its entirety' - there's no possible way. It's a fool's errand. You'd have to have a Pinkie who is both a serial murderer and dead from diabetes, a Dash who beats on Scootaloo and is also a Wonderbolt and who is also ascended to godhood... eh. Fanon is alternate views, and best kept as exercises in 'what-if'.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

In a forum now long-dead, I lit into a person who may or may not have deserved it. For pages. The mod stepped in and said, "Whoa there! Cool your jets, Twilight Snarkle!" I liked the name so much I kept it.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've been writing since I was a teen living on the Gulf Coast. I used to do video game reviews for the local paper. Since then, I've put out articles here and there, some letters to the editor, some actual items/stories, but never as a direct-hire 'professional', although I have edited professionally.

Fan writing never really appealed to me until MLP, and *Two Ponies* was my first foray into that field.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I like to read, nap, take walks, nap, talk/play with my monsters, nap, and nap.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

My favorite author is Neil Gaiman, to whom I owe a debt for showing me how to present the myriad worlds in my head in a way that others can accept them. My favorite story of his is *American Gods*, although I think I may have a minor crush on Delirium from his Sandman series.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

I don't begin to challenge Stephen King's authority on the nature of authorship, but I find it absurd to write for anyone but myself. Vonnegut says to write for one person. If I don't write for myself, then why write at all? That said, my writing seems to touch on the themes of solitude, belonging, acceptance, loss, and love. If anyone has found a sort of peace from losing a loved one after reading *Two Ponies*, or any of my other stories, then I'm writing for you, too. Copper Key says "Hi."

Do you think that your work as a pre-reader for Equestria Daily has influenced your own writing or your views of writing in any way?

It's made me a lot more critical about writing in general and about my own work—to the point where I'm in a bit of writer's block. I keep second-guessing what used to come naturally. That will fade, I'm sure, and I'll be back to finishing the last part of the *Order from Chaos* trilogy very soon.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Nothing was ever crafted at a forge with a single blow of the hammer. You must continuously shape your work for it to be good and true. Even if you don't feel like picking up the hammer that day, re-read your latest work and see if the alloys or heat or temper need to be changed. Once you've finished your work, don't rest. Pick it up and feel it in your hands. Congratulations: You have yourself another, better hammer.

Now get back to work.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I think in scenes and encounters. I will write out the basic events of a chapter and then stare at them a while, then rearrange/add/delete until I feel the story flows as I wish. Then I'll fill in details and dialogue and color. As for pre-readers and editors, I have had a few lovely people offer from time to time, and they have helped immensely. *Two Ponies* was largely complete when I first put it on Ponychan for review, and the good *Anonymous* (who uses icons from Samurai Jack) was a great help in finalizing the work.

Order from Chaos & Justice were helped by the editorial efforts of *Cloudyskies the Inimitable* and *Filler the Implacable*.

What inspired you to write *Two Ponies*?

There was a young lady I knew, long ago, who passed over a winter. I loved her dearly, and we would have long conversations about nothing at all in the wood behind our homes. Her name was Charlotte. Copper Key is her, in pony form, and the initial story was my way of saying goodbye in a manner I saw fit. It was she who convinced me to 'write more often', when I was very young.

Smudge has a little of me in him, but not much. He's the person who never learned to let go, and never lived as a result. I learned long ago you can't hold on as tightly as he did, and survive.

I guess that goes a little far afield from the question, though.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Two Ponies*?

Oh yes. It's awfully difficult to present a sad protagonist who doesn't ever really clue in on the problem and keep him both believable, and avoid becoming some hyper-emo Sad Sue.

When you set out to write *Two Ponies*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

It wasn't a goal at the initial writing, but as I shaped the story it became important to me to tell the reader that it's okay to be sad and lonely, so long as you don't fool yourself into believing you're actually alone. It's a hard-won lesson, and a valuable one: There's always someone out here who wants to listen.

Where can readers drop you a line?

You're free to hit me up via email (sordideuphemism@gmail.com) or a note on dA (sordideuphemism.deviantart.com), if you like. I also lurk the /fic/ board on ponychan.

However, if you have a question about the stories, please post them in the relevant story threads on dA, or EQD, or PFA. Others may have the same question, comment, or concern and it's great to talk to you all in a public forum.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Yes! Go get yourself a 9x11 glass baking dish, two quarts of vanilla ice cream, a small container of frozen Minute Maid lemonade mix, a few drops of green food coloring, and a standard package of Oreos.

Open the Oreos and remove the cream filling. Crush up the cookies roughly and use half to line the bottom of the baking dish. In a ridiculously large bowl, mix the quarts of ice cream, the lemonade mix, and the green food coloring together until soft and uniform. Pour over the cookie crumbs. Top with the the other half of the cookie crumbs. Wrap in foil, put back in the freezer until solid. Serve in tiny slices to the slaving horde/grateful family.

Once the dessert has been devoured, sit back and wonder where the cream filling went. We never throw it out, and yet, it's never there when we're done making the dessert!

Originally posted on December 19th, 2011.

Shipping, Tragedy • 7,400 words

Lyra receives a mysterious book from an old friend, confessing a depth of feelings she never knew existed.

Where do you live?

I live in Lake Villa (actually closer to Gurnee), a Chicago suburb right on the edge of the Illinois/Wisconsin border.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I'm currently enrolled at Purdue University, without a job. I'm looking to fix the latter part of that relatively soon.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

The Internet. I sadly cannot recall anything more specific than that. I imagine I realized I was a fan about 4-5 episodes into my first *MLP:FiM* marathon, like anypony else.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Secret of My Excess*.]

Just one? Not a fair question. I can't pick just one, but *Sonic Rainboom*, *Sisterhooves Social*, *Dragonshy*, *A Dog and Pony Show*, and *Luna Eclipsed* are among my favorites. Canon Luna blew my expectations away. "Yes, I can tell, by all the adoring shrieks of the children, as they *run away*." And Fluttershy's expression(s) while Luna was hugging her without her consent were priceless.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Rainbow Dash, though Fluttershy and Rarity are close behind. And no, my answer wouldn't change if I considered the fandom because we're so good at coming up with

billions of interpretations of each character, the only one I can really get attached to is the canon one. Trixie is definitely growing on me though.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

"Melionos" (pronounced "meh-lie-on-os") came from a minor obsession with Greek-sounding names when I was younger. My other handle (my username on MMO-Champion), "Bluesparks", is a reference to one of my favorite book series as a child, *Artemis Fowl* by Eoin Colfer. In said series, "blue sparks" is a recurring phrase used to describe the raw, natural state of free-floating magic. (Ironically, red is my favorite color.)

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

Surprisingly, no. I wrote only for schoolwork prior to entering the brony fandom, which happened around April/May 2011.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I can often be caught playing League of Legends or - on rarer occasions - drawing. Though most of the time I'm mentally beating myself for not writing. If anypony wants to add me on League of Legends (I'm on the North American server), my summoner name is "Melionos" (Karma/Fizz main).

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Tough question. I'm not very well read. I'm attached to Eoin Colfer, though if I had to pick one story, it'd probably be *Ender's Game*, by Orson Scott Card.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Funnily enough, I think I've already met my ideal reader, another member of the MMO-Champion brony community known as Kaorin (and Daetrin, to an ever-so-slightly lesser extent). She's intelligent and well-read enough to be highly resistant to diction-based seduction (don't read too far into that; essentially distracting the reader from plot holes

or other no-nos with compelling/engaging words or phrases), while still remaining insightful enough to catch all the subtle things authors (often unconsciously) drop in their stories. And she still somehow manages to enjoy a story for what it's worth.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

If you're just starting out, know that you're not going to be amazing right away. Realize that oftentimes, good critique is going to hurt. Look for people who read your work and say more than "I like it" or "I don't like it". Those are great confidence boosters, but they do nothing to help you improve. Know that what works for one person or one story may not work for another. If you get turned down by, say, the pre-readers of Equestria Daily, don't get discouraged, and don't take it personally. They are there to filter out all but the best of stories. From my experience, crossing that line is a hugely satisfying goal. Ask them what you can do to improve, what you can do to make your story stand out. If you let your reaction be "I'm just not good enough" or "They're all idiots that wouldn't know a good story if it gnawed off their forearm", you've already lost. Always be looking to improve, and don't abuse your finger of blame. Pointing that finger means you get to be lazy and not work to improve; it implies you feel you are entitled to being a good writer. Yes, it won't always be your fault, and yes, sometimes the pre-readers will be wrong. They're human too. If you think they're wrong, talk it over with them in a reasonable manner. Don't rage at them. Or about them, for that matter. It reflects poorly on you.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I usually start off with an idea of what I want to do. When I write, it's as though it were all the final draft. I write a part, tweak it, rewrite it, so on and so forth until I'm satisfied. I do all my work in Google Documents, where a few other fellow writers (willingly) reside as livereaders. I have five livereaders, all from the MMO-Champion bronny community; Daetrin, Mixup, Kaorin, Isrozzis, and Valcron (in no particular order). Daetrin and Mixup have both been published on Equestria Daily. Valcron, if you don't know him already, is a well-known and rather talented artist around the bronnydom. You can find his deviantArt page over here: dreatos.deviantart.com.

What inspired you to write *Black and White*?

In short, bronies. By that point, my heart had been warmed enough by bronies to feel the compulsion to share the only story of my life (so far) worth sharing, one I hadn't told anypony else, not even my parents.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Black and White*?

[*Spoiler alert!*] I had two that stand out. The first was the part where Octavia recalls the quote Lyra told her; I genuinely can't remember that quote, and it was insanely aggravating that I couldn't until I decided to just move on. Lucky for me, it worked without it. The other was figuring out how to end it, likely the most controversial part of the story. It's true that I kept my vow of avoiding contacting Lyra, but nothing ever happened between us past that, besides me writing this story about it. I'm 99.9% sure she hasn't read it, and I really hope she doesn't. She's happier not knowing.

When you set out to write *Black and White*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Besides "tell my story", no, no specific messages or themes in particular. It evolved into what it is - a mishmash of self-absorbed emotional splurging and philosophical waffle - while I was writing it. I'm still a little awed at how well-received it was, since I had basically grabbed Octavia, yelled "MINE" like a *Finding Nemo*-seagull, and proceeded to inject her with my soul.

Where can readers drop you a line?

My deviantArt page, melionos@gmail.com, or a PM on MMO-Champion. I primarily use a different Twitter account than the one I linked at the end of *Black and White*, which, for technical reasons, is virtually dead. I'm considering using my main one for my bronie interactions. (Twitter, I have to ask, why can I use multiple-logins on my iPod touch but not on my PC? I don't have a wireless router around me at all times).

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

To all you fic writers: Use justification alignment, not left-align. Justify spaces words so every line is filled to the margins, left-align doesn't. It's subtle, but it makes your story feel cleaner and more professional to readers, I guarantee it. Also, when writing your description, bear in mind that your description, title, and your coverart (as *Past Sins* so thoughtfully taught us) are what sell a story on Equestria Daily. Only a few authors have the status of "X story is by *him/her*? I **have** to read it now!" - don't count on that. Make

sure your description hooks people in a non-cliche manner (i.e. "protagonist has amnesia"). Tell people enough to get them interested, but don't spoil anything. I try to lay the story's foundation out, but while leaving things maddeningly open to interpretation so people are compelled to read the story. Find something that works for you.

I'd like to give another shoutout to everypony in the MMO-Champion bronny thread, currently on part three after the first two threads broke VBulletin with a combined total of almost 17,000 pages (18,747 pages, at time of writing, if we include part three) at 20 posts per page. A huge thanks to the bronny community for showing me the support my parents have declined to provide me as well as producing massive quantities of enjoyable, high-quality fan creations. A shoutout to Sethisto, Cereal, Phoe, Tek, and all the pre-readers for maintaining such a respectable and handy blog for all us lazy bronies. And last but not least, RBDash47, whom I can thank for the opportunity to be interviewed and being a genuinely sensitive, thoughtful person.

Umm...go buy Bastion and/or Okami. My two favorite games of all time; trust me, you won't regret it. The two-bit, half-baked prophet said so! The world *cannot* have enough people to drool with me about how incredibly awesome they both are.

Keep a weather eye on the horizon, cap'n, for the writing has not ceased!

Originally posted on December 23rd, 2011.

Shipping, Tragedy • 4,500 words

Friendships don't always last, time isn't always well-spent, and not everyone gets a happy ending. Everypony has their regrets, paths not taken, failures and lost loves. Sometimes, it's too late for second chances.

Where do you live?

Mountain View, California.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I work full-time night shift in server and network monitoring and triage. Essentially, I make sure certain web services are working correctly, and ensure they get fixed when something goes wrong. I also take a full load of community college classes, mostly online due to my schedule.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I discovered *MLP:FIM* on 4chan's /b/ back in January of 2011. I was a fan pretty much from the first episode, though I grew into more of one over time.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Sweet and Elite*.]

Party of One. Crazy Pinkie is just awesomedorable.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Twilight Sparkle is my favorite canon pony, because I enjoy her nerdiness and find her social inexperience endearing. Based on the fandom in its entirety, I'd have to say that Luna is my favorite, because of all the things fanfic authors did with her before she had a canon personality; each writer that wrote her into their story sort of made her their own, and it was an interesting thing to see play out.

How did you come up with your handle/penname?

I wrote my first fanfic on a whim for Equestria Daily's Valentines Day Ship-off event back in February, and I knew that I needed a pen name. I knew I wanted something ponyish but masculine, and Ebon Mane was the first thing that came to mind.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I wrote a few extremely short fiction stories in high school, and one creepypasta that never took off a couple of years ago, but I really only got into writing when I got into the pony fandom. *Creatures of the Night* was probably the first fiction piece I wrote that was over 1.5k words.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Video games, forums, tabletop gaming. I don't do those things as often as I wish I could, though.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

I don't really have a favorite author; I like a lot of authors but none really stand out to me as being ahead of the rest of the pack. My favorite novel is *The Door Into Summer*, a little-known science fiction book by Robert Heinlein. I'm not sure why it's my favorite, it's just something that I can read again every couple of years and still love, even if it has a bit of weirdness to it.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

My ideal reader is an intelligent and thoughtful stranger. It's someone that can notice and appreciate subtleties, but not predict the plot based on how well they know me, my mannerisms, and my modes of thought.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Know your ending before you write your first chapter, or you'll regret it later.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I try to outline, starting with the most general events and then filling in the details between them with more and more specificity, until I'm writing chunks of the actual narrative. I usually make several editing passes as I'm writing my story. I've had an editor for most of the chapters of *Merely a Mare*, but don't always get one on other works. That's because I'm more of a perfectionist when it comes to *MaM* than I am with other works. I often will finish a story, wait a week, and then read it again to self-edit. I also edit after I've posted, when I go back and reread earlier parts of a story I'm working on or just reread something I wrote months back to remember my old work. I have a bad habit of only making those kinds of edits to one of the places I posted, so the FIMFiction version is often slightly different from the DA version, and the fanfiction.net versions are usually the original because I honestly just care about fanfiction.net less.

What inspired you to write *Ships and Notes*?

TVTropes did, actually. I was looking at the shipping tropes section, and the name of one of the tropes caught my eye and made me think about where I'd heard the term before, which was actually a couple of songs that were referencing a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow quote:

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing, only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness; So on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another, only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.

That quote's feel inspired my theme of love lost because of opportunities that passed. I continued with *The Three Notes* a bit because I wanted to destroy the reader's hope. I wanted to make clear that Twilight and Big Mac were not going to somehow manage to end up together. I wrote about several kinds of pain in *The Three Notes*, pain that I expected my readers to be able to relate to on one level or another. There's value in writing tragedy; happy endings show people that triumph is possible, but sad endings show people that when they cannot triumph, they are not alone in the pain they feel.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Ships* or *Notes*?

Not when writing *Ships* or *Notes*. It was one of the few works I've written that just seemed to flow out of me, without me needing to push myself to finish it.

When you set out to write *Ships* and *Notes*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Not everyone gets a happy ending.

Where can readers drop you a line?

Send me a note on my dA account or on my FIMFiction account.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

My ongoing fics aren't dead, just hibernating.

Originally posted on December 30th, 2011.

Comedy • 8,500 words

Luna decides to work on her Element of Laughter. The Commander of the Lunar Guard gives chase.

Where do you live?

San Diego, California.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Database administrator, programmer. (I've worked in a number of fields; currently, I'm in education.)

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

A thread on MetaFilter brought the current generation of MLP to my attention. After reading Lauren Faust's comments about her goals for the series (girl-positive, smart-positive), I took a look at an episode or two in YouTube.

I can't stress enough how much Faust's essay on her goals for MLP influenced my decision to watch. I understood her impatience with the lack of girl-positive programming. I had little prior knowledge of the MLP universe, but her essay compelled me to learn more, not just about the current generation of MLP, but of the generations that came before.

I decided I enjoyed this show when, half-way through *The Ticket Master*, I realized I actually wanted to know how Twilight resolved this issue with her friends. From that point, there was no looking back.

Here's how I've described this to others: suppose you suddenly found a cache of classic Warner Bros cartoons. From the "golden age" of Chuck Jones and Mike Maltese. Suppose they offered you a window into their world. Wouldn't you like to come inside, look around and make new friends?

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: as of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Hearth's Warming Eve*.]

Troubling. I point new viewers to *Winter Wrap-Up*, but my favorite is *Suited for Success*. While watching this episode, I finally "got" Rarity and realized that she and I are not so very different. The homage to *Sunday in the Park with George* is just icing on the cupcake.

An embarrassing admission: I did not, initially, like Rarity at all. I assumed that she would be the "mean girl", the oh-don't-hate-me-because-I'm-beautiful character. I am astounded by how wrong I as. After the *Suited for Success* episode, I felt I understood her completely. For all of our differences, she is very much like me.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Ha ha! For the longest time, I couldn't decide on a favorite! Right now, it's Twilight Sparkle, because she is so much like the daughter I wish I had.

(Have you see the PMV "The Stars Will Aid In Her Escape"? Watching this, I understood why I love Twilight: she has courage of the heart. In real life, I would be privileged to be her friend.)

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

It started with Monty Python's "Airline Pilot" sketch. I was trying to come up with the pegasus equivalent of "Bob" and I wondered what some simple pegasus parents would think of. "Let's call her... I dunno, 'Sky'." "It's a boy, dear." "Okay... how about 'Cloud'?"

"Cloud Wander" comes from Wordsworth, obviously: "I wandered lonely as a cloud."

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've written, previously, in RPG journals and drew a humorous comic strip that was well-received by the fan community. That was long ago, however. I have returned to "the herd" but newly.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Reading. A good writer is, first, a good reader.

I can't stress this enough.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Terry Pratchett is who I want to be when I grow up. My favorite story is (long version) "The Lord of the Rings", (short version) "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward".

The thing that both have in common, now that I think of it, is that both are mindful of the point-of-view of the narrator. One of the main weaknesses I see in other's writing is that they are "describing a movie," rather than getting down into the heads of their primary characters.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

I write for my teenage self, the boy I was at 14, who was desperate for escape.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Read. Write. Do the first extensively, and think about the "why" and "what" of the authors you like. For the second, have confidence in yourself and write without fear.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

What works for me is to just sit and write without concern for the outcome. OK, maybe a story will emerge, but, if not, at least some bits and pieces will be produced that might be useful later. Over time, I've learned to have confidence that whatever I write, there will be something there worth reading.

What inspired you to write *Tonight I Shall Be Laughter*?

Equestria Daily's "Happy Luna" competition.

To expand on this a bit: the story was written over two weekends and was constrained by the rules of the challenge ("Happy Luna", "socks", etc.). While this was a challenge, it was also helpful, in that it forced me to restrict my story to what I could accomplish within the time constraints.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Tonight I Shall Be Laughter*?

The biggest problem was structuring the story so that Princess Luna and Captain Bucephalus had "equal" roles. In the end, I think Luna had the strongest story, emotionally, while Bucephalus had the most "action".

When you set out to write *Tonight I Shall Be Laughter*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

When I set out, no. Looking back, I'm struck by how urgent it was that both characters get out of the Tower, the dull, dead-end lives that they had lived until then. This is why I said, above, "have confidence in your writing." You may discover unexpected qualities in what you write. Goodness knows, I have.

Where can readers drop you a line?

km32215@gmail.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

The truest thing I ever wrote:

"Bill, let me tell you something: you, me, Blue, Princess Celestia and Princess Luna, Twilight Sparkle, Spike, Sweetie Belle and all the folk down in Ponyville, all the earth ponies and the pegasus ponies and the unicorn ponies, the kelpies and the cuddlefish, we all began with nothing more than this: once upon a time.

"In a world like this, like Equestria, a story is a very powerful thing. Maybe the most powerful thing there is.

“So if you tell a story out loud, and if you believe in it, well, maybe the world will listen and like your story better than the one it has, and the world will believe you, too. And follow you.

“Bill, if you believe you have a chance to be a unicorn, then I’d be a foal to bet against you.”

This is from "The Shadow Over Ponyville", the second story I submitted to Equestria Daily.

Originally posted on January 2nd, 2012.

Tragedy, Human Crossover • 12,400 words

When your life is as dull a gray as the world that surrounds you, the mundanities can make it all seem meaningless. Sometimes all we need is a little color - or six - to reintroduce us to what truly makes life worth living.

Where do you live?

Just on the outskirts of Durand, Michigan, USA, North America, Earth, Milkyway Galaxy.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I am currently going to school for Automotive technology (basically a mechanic), though I also have a newspaper route that I deliver and I work with my father who is an independent aviation mechanic.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

A good friend of mine by the name of Noogai one day spammed the living *yay* out of several fan arts and comics, then episode twenty-five *Party of One*. It interested me, so I watched another random episode, number five, and decided "What the hell..." and started from the beginning, and by the time I got to the end twenty-six had been shortly released. I believe it was the end of May, and once I had all the episodes watched... I was hooked.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: as of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Hearth's Warming Eve*.]

I have two technically; one for each season. Season one has been since I saw it episode ten, *Swarm of the Century*. My reasoning behind it is simply it shows each of the characters' personalities in excellent ways, it's chaotic, a good moral, and finally the right amount of Pinkie Pie randomness that most of the episodes hold. For Season two, since it is unfinished and we are up to only eleven, I say it is episode five, *Sisterhooves Social*. It was the first real MLP episode of season two in my opinion. The ones previous were full of wacky and zany situations, but didn't have that true feel like most of season one had.

Plus, this episode changed my view of Rarity as a character AND had some great sisterly bonding between Applejack and Apple Bloom, which was something I had wanted since she went all “I’m your big sister, NA NA NA!” in the Poison Joke episode.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

My favorite character based on canon so far has to be Applejack, though I’m stating this right now, SHE NEEDS AN EPISODE GWARGARBLEFLARGLE! *Ahem* Anyway, though over all I must say that Macintosh (Or Big Mac to some of you mares/fillies ;D) is my favorite character due to both the small canon roles and the huge fanon characterization of him. My like of Applejack has had no impact from the fandom, I solely base it on the show itself.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

Ah... my name. Well, it’s actually broken up into three separate parts. First the ROB, which stands for me and my friend’s clan back from our serious gaming days. “the Republic Of Bacon”. Cakeran, the second part, is my usual RPG/table top name that I use as a character. Simply put, I like cake, so I made it up on a whim. Finally the 53. It is the number of my favorite movie character: Herbie from *The Love Bug*.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I actually started writing fan fiction back in February of 2011, beginning with the VG Cats community. It wasn’t that large, but I felt compelled to add my own fic into the mix. I had actually been writing since I was little, though I never officially finished anything nor has anyone but myself ever seen them. Fan fiction was an interesting change of pace for my writing, and I found it to be quite fun. Once I became a Brony, well, I knew how I had to contribute to the community.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I try to play video games on my Xbox 360, though lately I’m finding myself simply browsing “teh interwebz” or hanging out with my friends to play some Magic: The Gathering or Warhammer 40K table top.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

I can't say I have a favorite author, published nor fan fiction, but I do have a favorite story for those categories. For actual, published story it has to be *Cell* by Stephen King. That was one of the few books I own that I have actually bought, besides the Halo series. In fan fiction, my favorite is a interesting one: Pen Stroke's *Creeping Darkness*. I love how he blended Alan Wake and MLP, and how he executed aspects of the fic. Hell, because of this fic I bought the game, and it is now my favorite Xbox 360 game. I highly recommend it to anyone who is a fan of *Past Sins*, simply because this fic is where Nyx originated from before she became an actual character for the separate story.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Me? Hell no. Well, maybe. Does myself count? Ha ha... all my stories that I write come from my own imagination, so when I write them and develop them, it's all stuff that entertains me. I do aim to also please others, but well, it's impossible to please everyone, so I figure that there are others who share my same thoughts and interests in my stories. I don't go looking for them, but eventually they find me.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Yes... Oh yes, I could go on days in this topic, but I won't because it's very early and I'm very tired. The best, and simplest thing I can prescribe is to just write! Write anything. It helps you build up more ideas for other projects, which is why I write multiple fics at once! You may hit a roadblock with one story, so start writing on another one. You will brainstorm other ideas, and if they don't work for that fic, maybe the one you previously were working on. And don't worry about if what you write makes no sense, or relevant to a story. Just the simple act of using your brain like that helps draw out the ideas.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

My typical writing process is to get myself horribly sleep deprived (ranging from 12 to 48 hours), two six-packs of Sunkist, a comfy chair, throw on some of my record albums (mostly my Benny Goodman collection) then go to town. I don't have multiple drafts,

but I always copy/paste segments of my fic that I remove into another doc so if I choose to use them later then I can. Once I have the story done, I have a few pre-readers that I send it to that look it over and such. Then I go through and change more, do my own “editing”, then send it to someone to edit. Once they give me the OK, I post it.

What inspired you to write *My Little Dashie*?

The main inspiration for the fic was a comic a friend linked to me, to which I saw a comment saying “Someone needs to make this into a fic, now!” I took that challenge, built up a quick idea of what I wanted to have happen, then began writing.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *My Little Dashie*?

The biggest problem I had with this story, turned out to be the thing that would have, in my opinion, made it MUCH better. I worried that if I made it too long, then people would turn away from it and it would not be well received. So to keep it short, I left out a lot of ideas and parts I had planned for it. But, some awesome people out there had taken up the challenge of filling in those gaps, and I must say they have done a superb job. I thought about going back and adding the scenes I had imagined, but I think it is way more fun to see what others think up.

When you set out to write *My Little Dashie*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Eeno.

Where can readers drop you a line?

The best way to get me is on Skype under the username/profile/whatever ROBCakeran53. It is of the screaming Macintosh face... hard to miss. Otherwise, you can get me on dA or my email which is robcakeran53@yahoo.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

This answer sheet took me over two hours to fill out because gdocs kept crashing.

>mfw: <http://mylittlefacewhen.com/media/f/img/1316911808540888.jpg>

[Editor's Note: I appreciate your dedication in sticking with the interview through your Google Docs problems, Rob!]

Originally posted on January 6th, 2012.

Slice-of-Life • 20,500 words

Little Rainbow Dash is loyal to one pony and one pony only: herself. It's a simple system, and it gets her through the days. But that all changes one stormy summer afternoon at flight camp, when another pegasus blunders into her life - a pegasus with whom she shares nothing in common.

Where do you live?

For the moment, in the Puget Sound, Washington region.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I'm a college senior working toward his B.A. in English, though I'm also taking biology and chemistry courses for med school. For discretionary income, I work at the campus library, pretending to be useful at the information desk while I look up ponies on the internet. Nifty job.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

Someone I watched on deviantArt suddenly started talking about ponies. A LOT. We'd met at Comic-Con a few years back but didn't really speak. Still, her general enthusiasm started breaking me down, and in May I asked her if it was worth "my complete and utter emasculation".

I think I finished all of Season 1 in four days.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Hearth's Warming Eve*.]

This question is very hard! I think I have to go with *The Stare Master* from Season 1. The Everfree Forest is such a cool place and really helps develop Equestria as a world! I really hope we see more of it in Season 2.

From a fanfiction writer's standpoint, I love that it located Fluttershy's cottage right next to the forest, as well. Maybe a future writer will derp and place her cottage more toward

Sugarcube Corner in a later episode, but for now, *The Stare Master* is my canon. I know, it's a stupid little thing to get excited about.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

It's Fluttershy, definitely. The first three episodes of Season 2 pretty much concentrated her awesome quotient so much that that's the only explanation I can think of for why she hasn't had a S2 episode dedicated to her yet. To be more serious—beneath her self-effacing demeanor lies a very respectable core of iron. She knows what's important to her, accepts her responsibilities, and will stop at nothing to make sure there's a happy outcome involved for everypony. Sometimes she overextends herself, but who doesn't?

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

Last summer was a pretty hectic time for me since my family literally lives scattered across the globe at any one moment. After college got out, I spent the holiday sleeping on various couches—my best friend's, my mom's in Japan, Dad's in California, as well as a short visit to Mexico... When I moved into my own apartment this year, I bought an IKEA sofa bed to sleep on. I'm typing this interview on a couch right now.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I started writing in 1st grade after I watched a segment on the local news that someone my age had published a book! I never stopped writing since, though I never tried to get myself published because I could never finish a story (I did, however, win NaNoWriMo in 2009). Ever since I got into ponies, my writing throughput has expanded dramatically.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I wish I had more time to read the amazing fic that pops up on EqD. Other than that, though, I'm a very boring person IRL! I even have a \$1200 gaming computer I built last year and I don't play games anymore.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

I'm going to throw several at you: China Mieville, Neil Gaiman, and Italo Calvino for "published" authors. *if on a winter's night a traveler* would be assigned reading for every course I teach if I ever became a college professor. These three gentlemen have written some very amazing stories that take place right here on planet Earth, while only changing a few details, and the result is nevertheless stunning. Fan-fiction wise, I don't have a favorite author, though I doubt that that position will remain empty forever.

(Oh! One more addition! How did I forget about Patrick Rothfuss?)

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

I always write for myself. My primary motivation for writing is to make sure I have fun reading my own stuff. That said, however... remember that friend I told you who got me watching ponies? I write for her, too. Find her on dA and Tumblr under RizCifra.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Since everyone else has said "read and write a lot," I'll try to say something different. Consider the following question *seriously*:

"Would I keep writing if I were the last person on Earth?"

Especially for novice authors, writing is primarily a solitary pursuit. Your drive to write must evolve internally - if that drive comes from a hunger for other peoples' love and admiration, Princess Luna will tell you you're in the wrong line of work. It's okay if you cannot answer "yes" to that question right now (I still can't, not completely), but developing that kind of independence goes a long way toward productivity - and happiness.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I have a writing process? Excuse me while I laugh at the notion. I'm the opposite of what you'd want to emulate as a writer, "process-wise". I go on Facebook/pony sites a lot, revise as I write, and generally take every opportunity to belittle my limited understanding of writing well.

If I get over that: I try to sit back and let the characters operate the story. I know I'm onto something good if they take over their own dialogue and go off on their own places - I just run behind them with a figurative notepad, scribbling furiously. I'll also keep a little "buffer" at the bottom of a WIP where I'll list possible narrative destinations (as well as more lambasting/psyching of my writing abilities).

Once I complete a draft of a story or chapter or what have you, I'll print it out and mark it up with a pen. Hard copies reveal wonderful, wonderful blunders I wouldn't catch on the screen otherwise. Then I ask other people I know to be reliable editors to examine my work. Only after they give me the all clear do I publish.

I really can't overemphasize how important it is to have other sets of eyes looking over your work for mistakes you won't catch. At the same time, be fair and reasonable with your expectations. A good friend is not necessarily the same thing as a good editor, and you'll have to judge how useful they are when it comes to polishing the rough spots out of your work.

What inspired you to write *Wingmares*?

My other project, *A Fire on the East*, ground to a halt after Chapter 4. I really wanted Chapter 5 to take place from Rainbow Dash's point of view - and I felt I needed to get a better idea of her history with Fluttershy in order to do that.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Wingmares*?

The entire thing. The specific parts have faded into my mind, but writing the moments leading up to the climactic race in the last chapter was especially tough. Coming up with the layout of Cloudsdale Circuit, and describing it in races without stiffness or a serial listing of its elements, was difficult, too.

When you set out to write *Wingmares*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Nope. I just wanted to expand on Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash's history. Then again - I love writing [Normal] flavored fics. I guess I just really wanted to write one and see if it turned out to be something that could possibly show up as an episode some season.

Where can readers drop you a line?

My Gmail account is thecouchcrusader, but I'm found on dA as commoncouchcrusader. I also have a tumblr under couchcrusader that I never update.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

If you've read my writing before, or read through this entire interview without punching your screen, thank you for your time! Feel free to contact me if you want to know anything else about me or my writing, too, I guess.

Originally posted on January 9th, 2012.

Shipping • 28,800 words

Fluttershy is used to nursing critters of all sorts back to health. When she comes across a broken showmare, however, it will take all her patience and care to help the other pony. Especially when Trixie begrudges her help every step of the way. Can she get through to her? And can Trixie learn that she doesn't need to stand alone to stand strong?

Where do you live?

Judging by the amount of time I spend there, the internet. No seriously, most of the time in Massachusetts.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Oh, I'm a college student. Usually leaves me with time to write. By which I mean I write straight through most of my classes.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I never actually knew it growing up! Well, only in passing. Then my friend linked me episode one of *FiM* in... I want to say May, I don't have the best memory. I was hooked five minutes in.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Hearth's Warming Eve*.]

Season one, episode one, will always be special to me because it proves how much you can do with such a simple premise. Maybe it wasn't the funniest, but it provided so much world-building, and the characters were astounding. The humor still had me giggling nigh-constantly at that.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Purely on canon? I'd have to go with Twilight. She gets decent character development and backstory, and is just so adorably dorkish. Mostly it's the fact she plays the straight man to a lot of the others' antics, almost being "the sarcastic one" and I love that kind of humor. I love Fluttershy as well, but her canon is kind of bad... If we extend it to the fandom interpretation of characters, it's a toss up between Fluttershy and Luna, at least pre-season 2 Luna. Nothing against canon Luna, but she can't really match what the whole community came up with.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

I am A Very Strange person. Also my first name's actually Avery. Yes it's a girl's name too.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've toyed with the idea for years; I have an active imagination I suppose. I was "writing" fanfiction when I was seven just imagining where I'd go if I was a Pokémon trainer. I'd never really written anything substantial, certainly not a full story, until MLP came up.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

To be honest, ideally if I'm not writing or working on schoolwork I'm sleeping. If I can't muster up the energy to write, I do have a few video games, and I enjoy board games when I can get friends together.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Hummm. In terms of fanfiction I'm not saying, I don't really have a single favorite, nor do I read a lot of it. For published novels, I enjoy the works of L. E. Modesitt, I think he influenced my ideas on world-building. Terry Pratchett's a lark, but after you read a few books in a row they start to feel formulaic.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Ideally, no one. I'm writing because it's fun. I often forget that, but I don't think I'm doing any great deeds or even that I'm producing art. I'm having fun, and readers can come and go as they please. I forget this sometimes and worry about *everypony's* opinion and that's when things go wrong. I guess my ideal writer is me. Perhaps that's selfish, but I often seem to be my own worst critic as well, so it works.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Oh boy, do I ever. First off, the same piece of advice any artist will tell you - just start producing something. You really don't have to worry about it being good, because there's nothing worse than nothing at all. The more practice you get putting ideas to paper, the easier it becomes. For this purpose it's really helpful to write what you think, even if your thoughts are disorganized.

Secondly, accept that you're not going to be good at it for a while. Overconfidence is almost as bad as a lack of confidence. If you can't accept criticism, you won't improve, and you'll keep receiving criticism. The best thing to do is head it off at the pass and become your own worst critic. Put down that draft, give it a couple days, and then come back when you're in a fresh mindset and do your best to tear it apart. As long as you're trying and improving your work, you're a better writer than most.

Third and lastly, sometimes ideas just don't work! Don't get discouraged if your drafts keep running dry at chapter 4. I myself have 4 stories out there (not counting a smattering of short pieces) and yet about 30 different drafts on file. Recycle or combine ideas you don't want to let go, but don't sit there at a blank page. Some people benefit from plotting things out, sometimes you might want to try to sum the entire story in a paragraph, sometimes you just need to write and see where it goes. Remember step one - as long as you're writing, you're making progress.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I come up with an idea, sometimes a scene or other times just a single "what if" statement in my head. I can think "where does this go" and "how did we get here" and build a story outwards from there. I don't outline so much as just get a feel for the story. So far I've written shorter works because of this, since it's easier to hold the whole story in my head the smaller it is. The first draft I make is a skeletal one, rushing through the plot to get characters from point A to point B. Then I set it aside for a day or two (this is important!

You need to ‘reset’ before editing) and give it another go, fleshing out scenes, rewriting paragraphs and making sure it flows naturally. Then I give it to editors (one, two sometimes) and get their opinions - I don’t look for grammar and spelling errors so much as just comments on what makes sense as a reader. Did I over-explain? Skim too much? Go too fast? Does this dialogue sound awkward? Et cetera. Then I go over what my editors had to say, typically throwing out a couple paragraphs and expanding others again, and out goes the final draft.

What inspired you to write *Kindness’s Reward*?

I won’t name names, but I was rather unhappy with ‘Twixie’ stories up to that point. More than that, her character felt flatter in fanon than in canon. I wanted to see her shipped with somepony else, and once I thought of Fluttershy my muse went wild. More ideas just kept coming after that, especially as I began chatting to my future editor on the work. It really “wrote itself” to a point.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Kindness’s Reward*?

The scene with the dragon took a lot of redoing, and I’m still not 100% happy with it. Action scenes are a bit difficult for me to pace, and I have to convey a sense of urgency while still making every detail unambiguous. Other than that, Trixie’s character took a little work, because I actually hated the pony before writing this. Believe it or not, I warmed up to her by the end of the story...

When you set out to write *Kindness’s Reward*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Trixie stories are often about redemption, and it was definitely on my mind. I wanted to start with her canon character, and make something off of that. In line with that, I honestly wanted to prove she was a character in her own right. She isn’t treated as such, even by most “good” shipping fics involving her, because even then she’s typically just a partner for Twilight, no real depth given to her. I dare you to find more than a couple shipping stories where her love for Twilight is even explored or given context! She just shows up, usually already inexplicably in love, and that’s the end of it. I wanted to give her more.

Where can readers drop you a line?

averystrange.deviantart.com or if you want averystrange@gmail.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ponies!

Originally posted on January 13th, 2012.

Slice-of-Life • 4,800 words

Luna attempts to distract herself from the frustrations that she once let ruin her life.

Where do you live?

Massachusetts.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Currently, I work retail full time, and also am a substitute teacher.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

Y'know, I can't rightly say exactly how I discovered it. I only know that while browsing Youtube one day in early Spring 2011, I watched a video involving Nightmare Moon, and thought the design was fairly neat. A few Google searches later, I'd learned that this was apparently some growing phenomenon, and, naturally skeptical, I watched the first few episodes. I realized I was a fan by the time I was halfway through Episode 3.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Family Appreciation Day*.]

I couldn't really say what my favorite is, although I have several that I really like above most others. *Lesson Zero*, *The Cutie Mark Chronicles*, *Dragonshy*, *The Best Night Ever*, and *The Return of Harmony* are all really great, but I don't know if I could really pick a favorite of them.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Canon: Twilight Sparkle, without question. I love a lot of the characters, but she's just a terrifically appealing character who has depth of character and whose role and friendship really hold all the great elements of the show together.

Fanon: Twilight Sparkle. Honestly, a lot of the fandom's ideas are too nonsensical or silly (Tyrant Celestia, Vinyl Scratch x Octavia, Trixie being a non-terrible character, etc.) for me to get behind to begin with. The ones that aren't totally out of nowhere or don't outright ignore the show's portrayal of characters aren't strong enough to oust Twilight from top place.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

This one's been mine for ages now, back to the late 90s. I love RPG video games; they're basically my life's passion. I wanted to have a name that played off of my huge interest for the game genre back when I first started writing fanfiction and exploring the internet, and came up with that.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

Definitely. I've written several other fanfics, mostly about RPGs but also about the anime Kannezuki no Miko. They're at Fanfiction.net, although the older ones really show that I've come a long way in writing ability since I started. Here's my page, if anyone is interested: http://www.fanfiction.net/u/78289/The_RPGGenius

Nowadays, my writing mostly takes the form of thrice-monthly rants about RPGs, general and specific, at my blog, Thinking Inside the Box. It's pretty fun, even if I'm mostly just talking to myself. The blog's here, if anyone's interested in RPGs and hearing some opinionated jerk yell about them: www.thinkinginsidethebox.blogspot.com/

As for when I started, I guess my first real foray into writing would be my old Final Fantasy Tactics fanfic, *Trials of the Valiant*, which I started writing some time in 1999, I think.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

RPGs! I do so love me those RPGs. I also like to watch various movies and TV shows (including *MLP:FiM*, of course), and I am fond of reading, as well. I also sometimes am called on to proofread and edit various creative works written by several friends (I actually think I work better as an editor than a writer).

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

An impossible question to answer. I have a lot of favorite published authors, and I couldn't really put any of them over any of the others. I love Isaac Asimov, Agatha Christie, Douglas Adams, Anzia Yezierska, William Shakespeare (playwrights count, right?), and so many more. I suppose I can say that a long-time favorite of mine has always been Lloyd Alexander, an author of children's books that proves, much as *Friendship is Magic* does, that just because something is meant for children, it doesn't mean it isn't amazing, enjoyable, and insightful. I find more truth and worth in Alexander's works than I do in those of many acclaimed authors of books meant for adults.

As for a favorite fanfic author, this is also hard to answer, although not nearly as much. My old friend Myshu, another writer for RPGs, is terrifically skilled and creative. I also have found a recent respect for Varanus, who is currently writing the *MLP:FiM* story *Composure* (which I am lucky enough to be a proofreader for). His writing skill is formidable, he has a terrifically insightful understanding of the characters he writes about, and he's creative and detailed in his creativity, if *Composure* anything to go on (he's written other fanfics, but about things I am currently unfamiliar with).

I really can't even hope to pick a favorite story or novel. Way, way too much to choose from.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Well, not exactly. Mostly I hope that everyone will enjoy what I write. But I do share pretty much everything I write with my sister, who graciously acts as both my sounding board and editor, and if she ever had a negative reaction to my writing, I'd have to either scrap it or seriously revise it. I suppose that could be my "ideal reader"?

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

God no. My writing process is so scrambled and slow-moving that sharing any part of it might pollute someone who might otherwise have written with some form of efficiency. I'll leave the advice to people who know what they're doing. All I'll say is what any grade school teacher will tell you: spell your words correctly, use properly functional grammar,

and take the time to reread what you write to make sure it's all correct. There isn't a story written so amazing that atrocious grammar and spelling can't completely destroy it.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I really just don't have one. I dive in, am incredibly picky about the word choice and structure of every sentence I write, and I take way too long and am easily distracted. Sometimes I'll keep ideas for later in the work down near the bottom, so I don't forget them. Other times I'm just winging it. It's a complete mess of a process. The only organized thing about it is that I always make sure I pass a hopefully finished work off to a few editors and get feedback from them, which is always helpful in ironing out the story's many kinks.

What inspired you to write *Constellations*?

Honestly? Nothing in particular. New to the fandom, I knew I loved the show, and really wanted to write something about it. I looked at the characters, and felt that there was a lot of potential with Luna (as many other authors had noticed, too, apparently). I did set out with the idea of creating a Shipping story about Luna and Twilight Sparkle (this was before I realized how awesome, adorable, and sweet Twilight and Celestia would be as a couple), but that's not how the story worked out to be, and in the end I think it was better for it - the main thing was to tell a story about Luna, and I did that to my satisfaction.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Constellations*?

Not really. It all came surprisingly easily.

When you set out to write *Constellations*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

No, nothing specific. I wanted it to be a happy ending, and to leave people feeling touched in a positive way, but I didn't really have anything to communicate or explore beyond just the character herself.

Where can readers drop you a line?

In general, the_rpgenius@hotmail.com. If anyone actually checks out that RPG rant blog I mentioned above, they can of course just leave comments right on it.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Always remember to leave feedback! Authors, artists, and other creators want nothing more than a couple minutes of your day spent committing your reaction to words. Also, thanks bunches to everyone who has read my story or stories, and I hope you've enjoyed them. Last of all, play Planescape: Torment. It's absolutely amazing.

Originally posted on January 16th, 2012.

Adventure • 34,900 words

When Rainbow Dash's newest trick backfires spectacularly, she and Fluttershy find themselves stranded in the middle of nowhere. Together, they'll have to survive and find their way back to Equestria and Ponyville... no matter how far the journey.

Where do you live?

Shenandoah Valley, VA.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

Currently I work as a patent classifier for the United States Patent and Trade Office, but I'm working on moving into other venues (including writing!).

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I kept hearing it was good, so one day I sat down and watched the first one on YouTube. And then the second one. And the next thing I knew I'd watched for five hours straight. I was pretty much a fan from the moment I saw it. That was shortly after episode 22 had aired, so I consumed the entirety of season one in three days.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Family Appreciation Day*.]

It's really hard to choose between episodes, especially when you have such masterpieces as *Dragonshy*, *Sonic Rainboom*, and *Party of One* to choose between...but outside of those standbys, I have a special place in my heart for *The Cutie Mark Chronicles*. Possibly (probably) due to Filly Twilight.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

It started out Fluttershy, shifted to Twilight Sparkle, but now it's Princess Celestia. She's just such an incredibly tragic figure. An immortal among mortals with the burden of

ruling a kingdom, raising the sun and moon, having to fight with and imprison her own sister, and deal with the fact that everypony is afraid of her. The fanon really makes it even worse, with Molestia/Trollestia/Tyrant Celestia, and then there's all the implications of Discord/Celestia shipping.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

I ran across Michael Whelan's illustration for *The Madness Season* by C.S. Friedman many, many years ago I was struck by the duality of the human and inhuman elements. I stole the name from that illustration.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've mostly only written for fun, with nothing really published or anything. I have been writing for years but without a community to get feedback from (and I mean, *real* feedback, not "this is good" or "this is meh") I was kind of spinning my wheels. I'd never written fanfic before and had never been interested in it, but pony got me writing again and since I had the pony thread on MMO-Champ, I could wrangle up pre-readers for my stuff. Some of them give me really good feedback and discussion, and that combined with the general feedback from EqD really got me settled into a writing style/mindset in a way I hadn't been previously.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I suppose I would consider myself a gamer, but I sadly don't have much time to do anything outside writing and working at the moment. I'm an extraordinarily slow author so it sucks up a lot of my time.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Probably Roger Zelazny. Amazing prose, fantastic integration of themes and elements, and really the author that got me reading. So far as favorite books... well, that's a much more difficult question. I could probably name dozens of *really good books*. I read a *lot*.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Really I try to write for myself. I have a group of people that hang out on my docs on occasion when I'm writing, and shout encouragement from the shore (and sometimes we actually discuss themes and plot and characterization, gasp!), but ultimately my question when I write something is whether I'm happy with it.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Read a lot. Read more. Then keep reading. The more you put into your head, the more you can get out of it.

Also, if you can handle it, browse TVTropes. I'm an engineer by training so I might have a more analytical bent to my approach than many, but being able to dissect my own writing in a coherent way is extraordinarily helpful.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

Usually I have a rough idea of what I want to do, and it gets revised as I go along. Often I'll write a scene, notice something in it that implies something new, and head off in that direction. As I said before, I have people now who hang out in GDocs and that helps a lot, since steering a story can be a pretty subtle thing at times. Since I tend to write from beginning to end, rather than write the outline and flesh out around it, I don't too too much editing, but when I do it's enormous chunks of text.

What inspired you to write *Off the Edge of the Map*?

One of the things was I wanted to write some FlutterDash. I'm mostly discontent with shipping, as most of it starts out with "X loves Y" as a given. My goal was to establish the *basis* of emotions, which meant it ended up as pre-shipping. I didn't want to force the characters in any way, so it was actually lighter in that way than initially intended.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Off the Edge of the Map*?

Yes and no. The entire section in Draconia felt clumsy no matter what I did, and I really phoned in the ending, but I never really had trouble making *progress*. I have a tendency to sit there and plug away at a story for ages and ages no matter what.

When you set out to write *Off the Edge of the Map*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Partly, I wanted to wave a “relationships can be subtle” flag. Partly, I wanted to make the world of Equestria more fantastical and larger than the confines of Ponyville that we see in the show. I also wanted to make a terrible Latin pun. With OTEOTM I had to tread the line between telling a ‘serious’ story, and staying within the bounds of the fundamental MLP world, where optimism and friendship rule the day.

Where can readers drop you a line?

As I noted at the end of Apotheosis, people can email me at daetrin@gmail.com. I’m usually willing to chat and such, especially about writing.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ponies are amazing. Seriously. I’ve always enjoyed writing and wanted to write, but it wasn’t until I started writing ponyfic and got in touch with all the pony people that it really clicked and I started working in earnest.

Originally posted on January 20, 2012.

Tragedy, Slice-of-Life • 17,400 words

Pony Joe awakens before the dawn each morning, readies himself for his day, and then walks through Cantelot's cold and silent streets to his doughnut shop. Life has become pretty mundane for Joe, but as he serves his customers and chats with his regulars he realizes that he has come to rely on that repetition... he relies on it to keep from remembering. As a casual utterance by a new customer sends Joe into a spiral of haunting memories we learn about his life... and what he must give up if he wishes to move beyond his past.

Where do you live?

I live in the north east of the United States of America.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I am gainfully employed. I like my job but it simply doesn't pay enough, so I'm trying to become an author.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I've been a life-long lover of animation. When I was a kid one of my dreams was that someday I'd be writing scripts for Disney. Well, that never happened, but I've stayed interested in animation my whole life. I've kept watch on all of the developments in the industry and the like.

When I saw that that animation was going to be a big part of the lineup of the new Hub network I researched who was doing what. When I saw that Ms. Faust was going to be doing a restart of *My Little Pony* I knew right away that it would be higher quality than the previous generations but it didn't really register with me that it was anything I should actually sit down to watch.

It's for little girls after all. Right?

So, I was home one day from work and I jumped on my elliptical trainer. I usually watch *Fraggle Rock* while I exercise but I must have missed the time or they had just switched up the schedules or something. So, the new version of *My Little Pony* starts and I

grumble to myself but figure it's just background noise while I exercise and I'll be able to see what Ms. Faust and her team did with the show.

The episode was *Dragonshy* and as soon as I was off the trainer I was searching online for more information about the show. Within two weeks I had joined *Equestria Forums* and was in the prewriting for my first two stories, *Heart of the Mountain* and *So Being What We Sow When We Sow*.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Baby Cakes*.]

Hmmm... how about we say it's *The Cutie Mark Chronicles*. I love the back story we saw developed for each of the characters.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Based purely on canon it is Spike. The series does an excellent job of just letting him be a kid, something some series don't do. I've never bought the idea that children are somehow useless to writers. I think that I've done enough with him in my stories to prove that he is capable of many things while still acting as a child acts and having the same fears, hopes, and faults. His relationship with Twilight is the most important in the series to me expressively because it is familial and not romantic. I really hope the series expands on it.

In fanon? Well, I'm not impressed by the way the fandom treats these characters, in all honesty. If we're talking about my personal fanon then it's Celestia.

I've always portrayed her in my stories as a loving mother figure. When we watch her in the series she's always giving out advice and gently chiding Twilight and interacting with her little ponies in a manner that, at least it seems to me, bespeaks of an unspoken fondness and silent love.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

I desperately wanted to be a "The" this time...

By choosing “The Descendant” it allows people to apply whatever meaning works for them. It’s like the raven I’ve been using for my avatar in the fandom. Every culture has some sort of interpretation of what a raven “means”, all of which are right. I wanted my pen name to be like that too.

Oh! There’s one other advantage. Draggle, who is now one of the moderators at *Equestria Forums* asked me who I was descended from. I, of course, replied, “Why, the ancestors!”

She replied, “Well, I’m descended from the ancestors too!”

I said that it was great to run into some lost family, and that I really needed to borrow some money.

Heh...

To my horror it turned out that there was already a “The Descendant” on dA when I joined, so in a fit of worry I simply added “of KehAn” when I registered. I have no idea what it actually means. I then had people writing and commenting who addressed me as Keh’An. That sucked. So, I’ve just been asking everybody to call me T.D., and I hope that explains that mess.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I started writing when I was in junior high school.

I wrote (past-tense) for several fandoms in the past, most of which are now dead or ghostly shells of their former selves. I am also involved in a few others presently, some of which I’ve written stories in for nearly a decade.

Most of my stories in those other fandoms were utterly terrible.

I write Christmas and Easter plays for my church. They’ve always been well received. Then again, what are the parents going to do, “Boo!” their kids?

I’ve submitted all of my plays and three full length books to publishers. They’ve all come back to me. The latest rejection was of a historical fiction novel. That came back in November. Hurts real bad.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I'm very active in my church, several local volunteer organizations, and some civic groups. I want to suggest to everyone who feels disconnected and alone that the best thing you can do is actually put yourself towards working with others to help others and grow something you are interested in. I've met a lot of the great people in my life in such organizations and while volunteering. I can't imagine what my life would look like if I didn't have volunteerism as a part of it.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

My favorite author is probably Douglas Adams. A lot of people say that they see his influence in my stories, especially *Super Amazing Rocket Sled of Awesome* and *Bailout*. He wrote exactly the way it looks inside my brain. Everything is just running around screaming up there and every once in a while different strings of causality wrap around each other and it all coalesces as a single identifiable plot.

My favorite book is *Watership Down*. The reasons why would take up more space than the entirety of the rest of this interview combined.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

My Watchers on dA come pretty damn close! They are the most articulate, thoughtful, and clever readers that I have ever come across! I bet one of them could explain who I am writing for better than I could.

In general, I'm only writing the stories that are running around screaming in my own mind, so I guess that since I like stories that hint at something more without giving too much away (I love Tolkien for doing just that) and inspiring the imagination of the reader someone like that would be a great audience for me.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Plan. Plan, plan, plan. Know who your characters are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it. Know exactly what the plot of the story is, where it is going, and what it's going to do when it gets there.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I prewrite maniacally. Each of my stories begins with a note card that has the working title on one side and the briefest of explanations of the plot. I have fifteen sitting here on my desk right now in a neat little stack.

I also have sheets of prewriting that go with each card. Reams of paper it seems at times. One story that I've been playing with since May has nineteen sheets of notes to go with it. A short one like *Variables* only had one side of a page, but before I begin writing I always know for fact all that is going to transpire with the plot. I might add stuff later, but I always have a firm foundation to begin with.

I continually revise as I am writing. Most of my stories are unidentifiable as their original form by the time I'm done. I am continually stopping when I write to go back and re-read what I've written from the beginning.

When I think I'm done, and I encourage everyone to do this, I not only re-read the story to check for errors but I also go back and read it aloud to myself to make sure it "sounds right". If it doesn't, well, yeah... it doesn't.

What inspired you to write *A Cup of Joe*?

I do a lot of reading about military people, especially soldiers' memoirs. I was struck by the stories of men who'd served and came back to civilian life. It's especially poignant to me in memoirs from before we understood Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the American Civil War most specifically.

I read one about a boy who went off to fight. He fought in some of the most horrific battles of the war. Places like Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, in Devil's Den at Gettysburg, The Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Petersburg.

The day after he got back home, the very next day, he was back out there in his father's field planting seeds. For the rest of his adult life he'd just begin crying at times, unstoppable big rolling tears.

When I read that I wanted to write a story about a soldier who tries to lead a normal quiet life. I chose Joe because I happen to like doughnuts.

I really, really, really appreciate all of the incredible feedback on the story I've gotten from veterans, people who are currently serving in the military, and family of those who are. That really means so much to me. I guess I came pretty close to getting it right, and I'm very grateful that I did.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *A Cup of Joe*?

No, actually. Like its predecessor *Tangled Up in Blues* this story just came spilling out. Like that story this one actually went a lot longer than I had planned it to go. I guess that when a story that is properly planned and inspired begins being written it simply takes on a life of it's own and wants to be made corporeal.

When you set out to write *A Cup of Joe*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

We are the sum of the choices we make. For better or for worse, we are the end result of what we've done. You can't change the past, you can only grow from it. Don't blame yourself, you have to learn to let go. If you don't then the past, which is supposed to be our companion, becomes our curse.

Where can readers drop you a line?

Feel free to leave me comments on my dA page or on my FIMFiction page! I'd love to hear from anybody about almost anything!

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I just want to thank everyone. This fandom has been so good to me. I've been given so many new opportunities and I've met so many wonderful people. I've appreciated all of the praise and honest constructive criticism. You're all awesome!

Originally posted on January 23rd, 2012.

Shipping, Tragedy • 10,600 words

She is as beautiful and graceful as the moon, and just as hard to reach. He is a young artist with much to learn about the world. When he accepts her challenge to create an artistic masterpiece, will he win her heart, or learn a terrible lesson in the nature of beauty and love?

Where do you live?

I currently live in beautiful Ohio.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I'm a mid-grade member of the United States military.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

Wired Magazine did a feature back in June '11 on Bronies and the show, which prompted me to view the series premier on YouTube. Pretty quickly I was watching an episode an evening, and shortly thereafter discovered the much, much larger mass of fan-created content on websites like Equestria Daily (and, of course, the Pony Fiction Archive). More than the episodes, it was the stories created by fans, for fans that drew me into writing.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Baby Cakes*.]

There are quite a few I like, but my favorite is the Season One finale, *The Best Night Ever*.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

Probably Twilight Sparkle. I realize that's a fairly vanilla answer, but she has more depth than any of the other main characters. I like the fact that the show's creators were willing to make an unabashedly intelligent and sarcastic person the star of the show.

I don't think my answer changes if you consider the fandom. Interestingly, the amount of character development and content generated by the fan community vastly outweighs the actual content of the show at this point, but the fan content hasn't greatly changed the characters in my eyes. It has only given them more depth.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

That's a long story I'll be happy to discuss over a beer. :)

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I've written, very minimally, for a few other fandoms. Mostly fantasy RPGs (tabletop, online and MMO). I do a lot of technical writing in my professional capacity, which I think has given me a strong foundation for writing fiction.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

All sorts of things. My job demands that I stay physically fit, so I spend a lot of time running, playing sports, that sort of thing. I'm also an avid reader and occasional gamer, though I try to limit my game time as much as possible. There simply aren't enough hours in the day.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Iain M. Banks, a British sci-fi and fiction writer, is probably my current favorite author. His "Culture" series is an amazing, detailed, *intelligent* look at a speculative far future. Other authors I like are Neal Stephenson and Peter Hamilton, along with classical writers like John Milton, who wrote *Paradise Lost*.

Within the fandom, I'm a huge fan of Kkat and her *Fallout: Equestria*.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Stephen King is a successful writer who can afford to write for just one person :) Alas, I'm not as secure as him in my writing, and I'm always on the lookout for reviews, comments and criticism letting me know I'm on a somewhat right track with my stories.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

Practice. When I look back at the first stories I wrote in high school, I cringe. They were bad, but the experience of writing them is what helped me develop as an author, to the point that people apparently look forward to my stuff.

A second, and related, tip is to always seek feedback. If all you do is write, and show your stuff to people unable or unwilling to criticize it, you'll never grow. Show your work to people unafraid to tell you how terrible it is.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

Usually I write short stories with a firm idea of how I want them to begin and end, but without much detail on the middle. Sometimes this works out and I'm able to find a neat path from the front of the story to the back; other times, it leads to a mess and I have to start over.

The past few months I've had several reviewers go through my stuff before firing it off to EqD, and the difference has been amazing. They don't usually find errors -- I'm a fairly good technical writer -- but they find holes in the narrative, things that don't make sense, unclear transitions, silly phrases that sounded good in my head, etc. Reviewers help keep me grounded.

What inspired you to write *The Glass Blower*?

Most of my stories start with ideas that get stuck in my head. In this case, it was a pair of images: a broken, crazed man stuck on some obsessive task, unable to stop, and a beautiful, magical gift presented to a lady who subsequently destroyed it in a fit of rage.

The first image became the eponymous glass blower, an artist with an incredible gift but blinded by love. The second became Rarity destroying the glass blower's mirror.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *The Glass Blower*?

Writing is easy for me. It's fixing the stuff I write and getting it ready for publication that is hard. In *The Glass Blower's* case, I spent almost twice as long going over the story with my reviewers as I did actually writing it. I went a bit overboard with some of my phrasing, and they had to pull me back.

When you set out to write *The Glass Blower*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Obsession and pride were the two big themes. Throughout the story, the glass blower is obsessed with Rarity, unable to see the plain truth that she will never love him. Rarity's sin is pride -- she strings the glass blower along because she is unwilling to admit that her challenge to him was false, that she could never love him.

A side-theme was the idea of earth pony magic. I always thought it was unfair that unicorns and pegasi got all the neat stuff in the MLP universe. *The Glass Blower*, with its proposal that earth ponies can do magical things, is my counter-argument.

The Glass Blower also includes quite a few rhetorical devices. The lack of a name for the main character is the most obvious, but the writing is dense with similes, metaphors, and other devices. The final paragraph makes heavy use of anaphora, with its repeated use of the phrase "He worked."

Finally, some people have noted that the story reads almost like a fairy tale. That was very much the structure I was going for, and I'm glad to see it worked out.

Where can readers drop you a line?

I can usually be reached at coldingardez@gmail.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Sometimes I'm asked why I write about ponies. The answer is that I don't: I write about people. The people happen to be four-legged and have pastel coats, but they are people nevertheless.

When we write about ponies, we're writing about humans. When we write about vampires or werewolves or ghosts or space aliens, we're really writing about humans. The forms we put our characters in are simply a literary short-hand, a way to give them

attributes we wish we could have in life. All writing is, at its core, about humans. Ponies are simply humans with odd shapes, neat powers, and curious limitations.

The goal of the writer should be to make the reader ask a fundamental question about what it means to be human. To make them think about some essential element of ourselves. Many stories do not attempt this, but are nevertheless extremely popular (you can probably think of several examples).

The real stories, the *best* stories, are the ones that make the reader think, regardless of how popular they are.

Originally posted on January 27th, 2012.

Shipping • 38,900 words

Something is definitely up around here. Applejack and Fluttershy have been spending a lot of time together without the rest of the gang. Well, Rainbow Dash is on to them! In fact, she is sure this is the no-good friend-stealing Applejack's doing, and she will not stand for this - whatever this is. Also, Rainbow Dash wears a corn hat.

Where do you live?

I hail from the frozen land of Norway, way up past the arctic circle! 'Tis a place where light and dark are seasonal things. It's dark now.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I am a perpetual student dabbling in history and linguistics both. I have a part-time IT job to fund my sugar addiction.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I picked up on it via 4chan. I thought the whole thing seemed silly at first, and I was a closet fan for a while before I admitted I liked it even to myself. By April I was reading fics on ponychan and naming video game characters after the mane 6. I think it's safe to say I was a fan at that point, and my first fic followed soon after on a whim and a self-dare.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *The Last Roundup*.]

One? Oh no. I am terminally indecisive and I shy away from anything that smells of calling "best" on anything, but I am very fond of *Dragonshy*, *Luna Eclipsed* and *The Last Roundup*.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

I don't want to name a bestpony, truly. I love everypony just as they are, and prefer canon-close stuff, but I also greatly appreciate most fanon BG pony personalities where they are in tune with the show. Octavia and Bon-Bon are great examples of this.

I am far less enthused about the darker show-contrasting variants such as the psychotic killer Pinkamina. I just never "got" that.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

Oh, that's easy. It sounded nice! When I set out to write, I wasn't quite as open about the "pony stuff" as I am now, and felt I needed a pen name. That, and I like to watch the clouds.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

I had my goth-poetry phase in my early teens like so many others, but I never stopped writing. I am the co-founder of and do scripts for a webcomic (www.4thwallcomic.com/), and I've had two partial attempts at writing novels before. Ponies didn't make me write, but they changed how I write in that I actually complete things now. It's such an immense motivator, I can't begin to describe it.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Honestly, I'm downright uncomfortable when I'm not writing. If I don't feel like I can write on - if I'm writer's blocked - I get depressed. When I'm forced to take time off, such as when my roomie threatens to crush my hands if I don't take a break, I enjoy the regular stuff; walks, games and hanging out with the Wonderbolts.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

China Miéville. His versatility is staggering. He's written weird steampunk/industrial fantasy, modern horror, sci-fi and children's tales - and they're all amazing. His *Perdido Street Station* in particular is amazing. He's delightfully weird and treats both his own weirdness and that of his settings with callous indifference.

That said, I also want to mention Daetrin and his *Off the Edge of the Map*. That piece of fiction had a greater emotional impact on me than most published works, and almost single-hoofedly inspired me to keep writing after my first fic.

Stephen King believes that every author has an “ideal reader” - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

I wonder if this is a trick question where the answer is supposed to be “myself”? Most of the stuff I write aspires to inspire emotions. I try to spice my writing up with clever turns of phrase, but I never considered myself a strong technical writer. I want to make the reader cry and laugh, so I cater to those who aren't cold, dead fishes, I guess.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

I don't know if I am qualified to give tips or advice, but many have said before me that it's about being able to both love and hate what you write. I think there's truth to that, you just need to realize there's a “when” here, too. Love your every work as you write. Convince yourself that this is going to be the best thing ever written. Prepare to hate it only after you submit it or finish it, and seek to learn from critique you get.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

Complete chaos. I am still learning and trying new things, but generally, I write start to finish and let the characters decide what happens. I rarely plan, but rather collect ideas and scenes as they come to me. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes I struggle to write on, but basically I write, then edit, then edit again. The more I try to organize and plan, the worse the result gets.

I do have friends and pre-readers who are invaluable resources in pointing out inconsistencies or things that flat-out don't work. Without them, I would be an unproductive useless bubbling mass of insecurities. Cormacolindor and Kits in particular are my rocks. Thank you!

What inspired you to write *Where Earth Meets Sky*?

Initially, I wanted to raise the issue of homophobia, but I dismissed that quickly when I realized how ill-fitting it was for a tolerant and loving setting like Equestria. It felt like an unnecessary step in the wrong direction.

Instead, it became a bit of a personal challenge, trying to write something different from my other ship fics. Specifically, I wanted to start with a declaration of love, rather than end the fic with one. I also wanted to strip the fic of any “villains”, once I ditched the homophobia angle. It was an attempt at making a harmless story that makes the romance seem believable, rather than forcing the reader to buy into something half-flanked.

Or, in fewer words; I wanted to write something sweet and fluffy while still making it an engaging read.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Where Earth Meets Sky*?

Where Earth Meets Sky involved three times as many people as any of my previous fics, and I spent a lot of time debating possible changes with pre-readers. As a result, this is easily the “slowest” fic I’ve written so far, but I am very thankful for all the help I’ve gotten.

The worst of it was entirely self-inflicted. I spent almost a full week frozen because I couldn’t decide whether or not to re-write certain parts. In the end, I did nothing, and my main annoyance was that it took me that long to decide on it.

When you set out to write *Where Earth Meets Sky*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

I always come back to the same messages in all my fics; love has many shapes, and nopony does well alone. *Where Earth Meets Sky* wanted to show that differences and similarities can both contribute to something wonderful. To me, AppleShy is just so incredibly tranquil and cute, and I wanted so dearly to give the reader a what-if scenario that worked.

I don’t pretend everypony loves shipping, nor am I one of the people who try to interpret canon content with ship goggles. I just saw the potential for something adorable here, and poked at it.

That, and so many writers are mean to Fluttershy, myself included. She deserves a happy ending.

Where can readers drop you a line?

Everypony loves getting mail! I reply to everything I get at cloudyskieswrites@gmail.com, and I also have a deviantArt account at cloudyskieswrites.deviantart.com. I'm nearly always polite, honest.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ponies are pretty swell? No, seriously, thanks for having me! I'm still writing, ever writing, and I hope to have my next story (not even shipping - hell has frozen over) out within a week or so.

Originally posted on February 3rd, 2012.

Adventure, Crossover • 61,300 words

Alan Wake has unintentionally released the Darkness and an old villain upon Equestria.

To fix the mistake, Alan starts a new story with Twilight Sparkle as the protagonist. Can the unicorn find the strength to face the darkness, or is all of Equestria doomed to be the victim in the dreadful horror story?

Where do you live?

PS: I'm currently living in Los Angeles, CA.

BG: At the time of this question, I live in Kentucky. I'd rather not name the city as it's rather small.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

PS: I'm a master's student at USC, but I'm also working for a mobile game start-up called Innovative Leisure.

BG: I have a bachelor's in Business Management with a focus on Human Resources. Due to economic reasons, I'm working at a K-Mart, though I may or may not join the navy very soon.

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

PS: I was first introduced to the show by a few teammates I had on a programming project at the university. That's what got me watching the show, but I really got into the fandom when I re-encountered my writing friend, Batty Gloom. We had collaborated on other writing sites before, and by some strange twist of fate we ran into one another again writing *My Little Pony* fanfiction.

BG: I was first introduced to the show before it actually even was animated. A site mentioned a reboot of *My Little Pony* and I sarcastically sneered that they would remake anything these days (completely unaware that the original movies and TV show of the 80's had three previous sequels). I later saw a promo image (the one that secretly has the

armless and fore-legless Spike and Twilight *shudder*) and the style creeped me out at the time.

I more or less ignored the pony fandom, as I don't use forums on a regular basis like I used to but when I saw CR! of Thatguywiththeglasses.com fame made a "Pinkie Pie in 5 Seconds" video, I just had to see it because CR! is a guy who takes animation very seriously, which is something I respect. So, because I respect his opinion in animation, I took a chance and started up the first episode and went on a marathon viewing on spring break of 2011. I was hooked by the ponies that just so happened to act and respond like believable characters, the high quality of the animation (flash animation especially, good lord, they work so hard on it), the music, the lovely voices and the next thing I knew, I realized with horror that I was assimilated with the herd and I was officially a brony.

And then Batty Gloom was a brony.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *The Last Roundup*.]

PS: Oh, that's a hard question. I really do enjoy all the episodes, so it's hard to pick a favorite. So, I'm not going to. Unless something comes out in the later half of Season 2, I'm going to say all of the episodes are my favorite.

BG: Ugh... I'll admit that I'm a little pickier than Pen Stroke when it comes to enjoying specific episodes (not a big fan of the two Spike-centered episodes, though it's more because of how they were handled; I would love a really good Spike-centered episode) but just like him I really can't choose. Let's just say that I can enjoy all the episodes, even the ones I'm not a personal fan of, for what they each offer.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

PS: Well, that depends. If we focus on main characters, I'd have to choose Applejack. If it was a pick of background/side characters, it would be Zecora. And, currently, I don't think my answer would change if I considered fandom.

BG: Rainbow Dash. Full stop. I love the brash tomboy character and that's to her to a T. And no, I don't think the fandom would change that answer.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

PS: I kind of just came up with it. I wanted a pen-name that fit into the show's character naming scheme and spoke to the fact I was a fanfiction writer, and Pen Stroke is what came out of that.

BG: My answer is very similar to Pen Stroke. I have a preference to the dark and semi-Gothic and I wanted a pen-name that also fitted into the show's character naming scheme as well. I came up with the idea of a very lanky, insane pegasus with bat wings and named him Batty Gloom during season 1, long before season 2 proved canon examples of tall, thin stallions as tall as Princess Luna and the existence of bat-winged pegasi.

It couldn't have worked out better than if I was a member of Studio B.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

PS: I first started major writing back in late middle school, early high school. I've never been professionally published, but I have written a few original stories that were novella and novel length and I did write fanfiction before joining the *My Little Pony* community, though my writing had fallen off until the show gave my inspiration a kick start.

BG: I once wrote a fan fiction long ago that thankfully is no longer available in any form whatsoever; I say thankfully due to the suckage. Most of my writing before writing fan fiction was done with Pen Stroke on a website that encouraged collaborative writing and we became writing partners (and later close friends) because of that. Then FIM came along and I wrote a some-what rough story called "The Truth About Pinkie Pie" and then...

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

PS: I enjoy playing video games, but I also like to keep busy on other projects such as personal coding endeavors and work. That and, of course, watching the latest *My Little Pony*.

BG: I enjoy video games, watching amateur web media, web comics, reading, and animation. So of course, I try to catch the latest FIM as soon as I can.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

PS: For fanfiction, I'm a real big fan of KKat and her story *Fallout: Equestria*. She did an amazing job with that, and her dedication to finishing such a long story is to be admired. As for published works, I probably don't read enough honest, printed stories as I should. Still, I was just at the right age for the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling, and I'm also a fan of Terry Brooks.

BG: For fanfiction, KKat and her story *Fallout: Equestria*. There are certain criteria for me to be able to get behind a grim-dark story and she hit all the right spots. For published works, I'm (to my great surprise) not as big of a reader as I should but so far I've liked all the Neil Gaiman stories I have read so far.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

PS: I don't think my "ideal reader" really has a name, now that I think about it. I general know the kind of stories I like, and with Batty as my writing buddy I also like to make sure he enjoys my stories as well. Still, I don't think I have an ideal reader I can name as a real person.

BG: Ditto.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

PS: I'd say the thing is to get outside opinions, if you can. This is something that's true for both writing stories as it is writing code. Sometimes, if you stare at something too long, you have trouble seeing something that may be wrong, where a fresh pair of eyes may be able to quickly point out what's wrong.

The other thing I say is don't be afraid of re-writing. Sometimes, I find that I've written myself into a corner with a scene, or something just isn't flowing. If I can't figure out what's wrong, I'll gently place that original scene off to one side and then just start fresh. I'll go at the scene again, using the knowledge I gain from trying to write its first pass to better set up what I want to happen or make sure key dialogue comes naturally to the characters.

BG: Know this: just like any serious artist or even wannabe artist has a thousand bad drawings in them, everyone has at least ten bad stories in them. The only way to get better is with lots of practice and even then, sometimes you'll still mess up on something. For example, the reason I enjoy having Pen Stroke as a writing partner is that he often catches OOC moments and lost opportunities when I'm writing. I'm slowly getting better but I have a lot more practice and a couple of creative writing courses to attend before I'm anywhere near his level.

Also, use Speakonia with headphones to read back your lines if you're unable to read your stories out loud. Trust me, your editing skills will increase ten-fold.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

PS: Since Batty and I hate getting into a fanfiction and then finding it's been abandoned, we like to try and write a whole story before posting it anywhere. This has both its advantages and drawbacks, but it also gives us time to make sure the story is coherent. Then, once we've got a story done or close enough to done we know we're going to finish it, we start looking for pre-readers to not only nit-pick grammar but to also give us general input about what they like and dislike about the story. Personally, I like to have at least three other people look over the story in some capacity.

That, and Batty and I have come to love a tool called Speakonia. You know how people say you should read what you write aloud to make sure it makes sense? Well, Speakonia is the ideal tool for that. It has a feature where it will read to you any text you copy to the computer's clipboard, so it becomes easy to have your computer read your own story to you so can listen and hear when things don't sound right.

BG: (Ninja'd on the Speakonia advice! O:) I tend to get ideas from the strangest places, such as a blog post or a random quote. Two stories were inspired by blog quotes, which I give full credit for. I have a word file that I write down a sentence or two to describe my ideas and then pick the one that's the most inspiring to me at the time. If I can't write more than maybe a chapter, then it was probably a weak idea and I promptly discard it. If, on the other hand, I can write at least three chapters on my own before sharing it with Pen Stroke, then I probably have a strong enough story idea, even when I occasionally run into writer's block and need a second pair of hands to help me out.

As for the actual writing process, I write the same way Pen Stroke does: complete a full story and then submit it. Typically I write a full chapter first and then pass it to him, who goes over it. He'll usually trim the fat, point out some OOC behavior or at least set up the situation so it's less OOC, or add in a scene or two that seems obvious but I missed. The less he changes, the more I did right, typically.

What inspired you to write *Creeping Darkness*?

PS: It was a mixture of replaying the Alan Wake games and having pony on the brain at the same time. The two literally began to intermingle in my head, and that's where it all started.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Creeping Darkness*?

PS: I can't really remember at this point any section that gave me a whole lot of trouble, but my memory for details like that tends to be shoddy at best. I can remember a difficult part being keeping the two tones of the source material balanced. That and making sure I wrote the story so that Alan Wake remained a secondary main character to Twilight Sparkle.

When you set out to write *Creeping Darkness*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

PS: To be honest, I usually don't write my stories to explore a theme, but in the end I always end up having one that kind of grew out of the situation. When I started *Creeping Darkness*, it was really just me exploring and enjoying the crossover. Still, in the end I got at least a few themes, the strongest of which was learned by Alan Wake in that he didn't have to do everything himself. Friendship may not be magical in our world, but when you need help, friends are the ones you can turn to.

Where can readers drop you a line?

PS: pen.stroke.pony@gmail.com

BG: batty.gloom.pony@gmail.com

Originally posted on February 10th, 2012.

Adventure • 14,100 words

Rainbow Dash faces off against her hero, Spitfire, in a one-on-one race through a relic of Nightmare Moon's past.

Where do you live?

Currently in Phoenix, AZ.

What kind of work do you do? (i.e. are you a student, do you have a career/day job, etc)

I'm a counselor for At Risk Youth at a group home. A very... interesting job for someone who freely admits to watching *My Little Pony*. You can imagine what kind of hell delinquent teenagers can conjure up for a brony, but I do my best to pass on the lessons from Equestria. Hey, even little wannabe gang-bangers deserve some caring and kindness, no?

How did you discover *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*? When did you realize you were a fan of the show?

I went to school for animation, so I make a point of checking out new cartoon series, but I somehow missed *MLP:FIM*'s debut. Near the end of Season 1 I read an article about the growing popularity of the show and how it was attracting more males 18 - 35 than its intended demographic, and curiosity got the better of me. I remember feeling embarrassed when watching the first episode (I think I actually put my hand over my face when Pinkie Pie started singing, although I now know that song by heart), but felt compelled to watch the next. And then the next. And the next. Five episodes later I was a brony.

Do you have a favorite episode? [Editor's note: at the time of this interview, the most recent aired episode was *Read It and Weep*.]

Tough question. I have several favorites, but *Swarm of the Century* is up there at the top. I love Pinkie Pie's misunderstood randomness in that episode, and her line "You've got a problem all right, and a banjo is the only answer!" is one of my favorites. I made a t-shirt with a banjo and the line 'The Only Answer' underneath it, but eventually lost it on a camping trip. I cried. Hopefully it made some coyote very happy.

Who is your favorite character based purely on the canon of the show itself? Would your answer change if you considered the fandom in its entirety (i.e. art, fanfiction, memes, etc)?

If I had to choose one, I'd say Fluttershy. Her cute moments of vulnerability and self-effacing demeanor offset by surges of a repressed alpha-female ego are awesome. As far as fandom goes, I'd probably say the snarky-little-sister persona that fans bestowed upon Luna before the episode *Luna Eclipsed* aired and she became all royal. And of course... Derpy. You gotta love Derpy.

How did you come up with your handle/pennname?

It's from the logo for my video production company: Saturn's moon Titan rising up from behind its rings. So, no, my pen name is not a statement of ego, more like laziness for not bothering to think up something pony-related.

Have you written in other capacities (other fandoms, professionally, etc)? When did you first start writing?

Eeeyup. I wrote some scripts for indy films when I lived in LA, I've written a couple novels, and am working on a third. Nothing published as of yet, but I'm seeking representation for one of the finished novels... the other has been shelved indefinitely as being a good 'first try' at writing a full-length novel. (In other words, it was 140k words of suckfest. Well, it had its moments, but overall... meh.)

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Ultra Pony Roller Derby! I wish. Umm... besides working, I'm into martial arts (I have black belts in a couple styles), going hiking with my dog, road trips on my motorcycle, I recently went to alligator wrestling school (Seriously. I have pictures.), and now that I'm finally sick of playing Skyrim, I'm going snowboarding next weekend.

Who is your favorite author (published or fanfiction)? Do you have a favorite story or novel?

Webster. His Dictionary and his Thesaurus are both fantastic reads. My favorite fiction authors, however, are probably Neil Gaiman and Kurt Vonnegut. I read *Sirens of Titan*

when I was ten and it totally blew my mind. And I think I just discovered the probable origin of my pen name. Weird.

As for favorite story, at the moment I'd have to say Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. (*The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*.) But ask me again tomorrow and I'll probably say something different. Like Orson Scott Card and *Ender's Game*.

I haven't read enough fanfics to confidently pick out a favorite, but *My Little Dashie* definitely left an impression. *sniffle* And *Wingmares* was great. After rifling through the fics included on this site, I see a few I definitely will be checking out soon.

Stephen King believes that every author has an "ideal reader" - the one person who they write for, the one person whose reactions they care about. Do you have one, and if so, who is it?

Hmm... I personally don't think of one specific individual as much as envision the intended audience as a whole and what someone from that group might think. I try to write something that I think *I* would be entertained by, and then see what reactions I get from my initial readers. So, to answer the question I guess I write for an imaginary friend. *sigh* Forever alone.

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers, or writers who are struggling with their own stories?

First, the obvious: read. And read a lot of books about writing. Not just one, mind you, don't only read Stephen King's *On Writing* and call it a day (nothing against that book, it's great). Get multiple views on the subject so as to help develop your own. *The Writer's Journey* is a great book to help build a basic understanding of modern storytelling in regards to classic mythological story structure, in my opinion, and *The Elements of Style* of course is a must have. There are tons of books on the subject of writing out there written by successful authors, try to read them all.

Get as much feedback as you can and listen to all of it even if you disagree. You don't necessarily have to follow it, but listen. Feedback sucks, I know, but it always... *always* helps. Pure haters on the other hand can go eat a plate of Baked Bads.

And write. A lot. Experience is everything. If you're struggling with a story, put it down and write something else, then come back and pick it up again.

What is your typical writing process? (Do you work through multiple drafts, do you have any prereaders/editors, etc?)

I tend to favor the ‘organic’ writing process, where I start with a pretty good idea of idea of beginning, ending, certain scenes, and overall arc, but I try to let the characters drive the story and not restrict myself too much. I use the first draft to solidify/discover the story, knowing that it’s not the final product. Then I leave it and work on something else, so when I come back to it I can be more objective about the entire piece as a whole and sculpt the structure. And then the rewrites start to streamline plot, character, word choice, etc. Around the second draft or so I will start having people read it to get feedback, and then make the major changes before concentrating on details. As for editing, I’m on my own for that.

Some writers love a rigid structure, and although I’ve tried it, it just doesn’t work for me. I like the feeling of living the story at the same time the characters are, where things can surprise me just as much as it does them.

What inspired you to write *Moonspire Run*?

I was writing a really dark scene in a novel I was working on in which a twelve year old girl has to go through some seriously sinister crap (she ends up fine, I’m not evil), and I felt the need to write something light and happy to cleanse my soul. I was on Equestria Daily and saw a comic that absolutely blew me away and got me thinking about Rainbow Dash’s insecurities. I’ll see if I can find the link. Yeah, that one: <http://www.equestriadaily.com/2011/08/comic-time-off.html>. Beautiful.

At the time, most of the pony-fics being submitted were all dark, gloomy stuff, and I didn’t really see any good ol’ happy straight-forward action/adventure pieces that were for pure entertainment. So I wrote one. I set out intending to write a piece that could pass for a regular episode, but with a strong action pace.

Did you run into any tough spots or challenges when writing *Moonspire Run*?

Probably the biggest was deciding what to cut. I wanted to write a simple, fast-paced story, but realized after my first draft that I had way too much extra stuff, like I went too far into RD’s internal monologue, I had a whole Elements of Harmony sub-plot that was more distracting than entertaining, and there were several scenes with the others back in Ponyville that just killed the pace.

As this is an action-oriented story, whittling down the language and word choice was difficult at times as well. I wanted to stick to a simpler, visual style, and in adherence to that I found myself having to cut a lot of flowery words and worry about syllable count more than usual. I still want to make changes whenever I give it a read-through, but I think I'll just drive myself insane if I start doing that.

Oh yeah, another huge problem was that I'm the only brony I know, so I had nopony to pre-read it. This one was pretty much a solo venture with the one pre-read by two EQD volunteers.

When you set out to write *Moonspire Run*, did you have any specific messages or themes in mind?

Mostly, I just wanted to entertain, but I tried to keep the theme as true as possible to an actual *MLP:FIM* episode.

Where can readers drop you a line?

titanrising01@gmail.com.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Thanks to everyone who took the time to read *Moonspire Run*, and especially thank you to those who took the time to email me or leave comments. The feedback has been enormously helpful, and seeing that I was able to entertain a few people with my ramblings makes it all worthwhile.