

## *The Legend Of The Mirror Pool*

### A Close Reading

When the 2010 reboot of children's series *My Little Pony* launched, much was made of the series' fluid animation and whimsical art style. Although there are many memorable scenes from the series' eight-year run, one particular sequence of shots that stands out occurs in the third episode of season three, in which one of the main characters clones herself. Starting at about the fifth minute mark, the sequence is a case study in how shape language and colour grading can be used to indicate foreshadowing to the viewer, an example of how to handle a gag character in a foreboding or dangerous environment, and an extremely clever use of reflection and camera movement along a track.

By this point in the series, the character depicted in the sequence, Pinkie Pie, had an established reputation as being happy-go-lucky, gregarious, and carefree, almost to a fault. This is reflected in her appearance – bright pink fur, an outsize magenta mane whose overshoot and recoil animations were frequently over-exaggerated for comedic effect, and a tattoo – or “cutie mark” in the fanciful terminology of the series' universe – of teal and yellow balloons. At the 5:09.18 mark, we see her cheerful appearance juxtaposed with dense, tangled forest undergrowth, drawn with very prominent thorns. The normally-rounded shapes of the forest background art become increasingly mixed with more angular ones forms, hinting at the coming danger. Pinkie becomes annoyed at the increasingly-spiny nature of the brush, but its subtle visual warning is lost upon her. The scene continues with a long pan in which the animators have carefully concealed the ground, setting up a joke; the character has become so perturbed by the spiky undergrowth that she fails to watch her step and, walking along, she stumbles into a previously unseen pit, briefly leaving behind a dust cloud and smear frame – visual cues that indicate how surprised by the pit she was.

This leads to a hard cut to Pinkie Pie tumbling through the cave, accompanied by various stock foley noises. The whimsical sound-effect choices here, serve to underscore personality, and the careful use of smear frames indicate just how far and how rapidly she falls, but there's another important effect in this shot worth noting. Between 05:15.11 and 5:16.20, the background fades from the warmer, redder sunlit hues of the surface, to a colder, almost otherworldly teal, which continues to be used as the predominant hue of the background from 05:16.21 until the end of the clip. Pinkie, the animators seem to be saying, has passed the point of no return, and the situation has just become far more dire.

The cave-tumbling sequence ends at 05:16.21, with the character sliding into a clearing and falling on her face a few frames later at 05:19.08. As she picks herself up and dusts off, we can see she's no worse for wear – again, quite in line with her established personality traits by this point in the series, and to underscore this, the animators forego the common trope of having visible bandages, bruises or abrasions present on her. We can also see that the background has become even more otherworldly - .the ground is now an unsettling shade of teal, bioluminescent plants nearly the height of the character herself sit nearby, and, nestled in the corners of the frame, giant fern fronds in blue-green, purple, and black lurk. Again, the character perceives nothing unusual about the suddenly unfriendly-looking environs; she's focused solely upon reaching the mirror pond and cloning herself. The otherworldliness is further underscored by a fast dolly out at around the 05:22 mark, revealing even more of the cavelike clearing. The dolly out also helps to convey a sense of scale, leaving Pinkie taking up a a very small portion of the frame in relation to the features in the backdrop.

After a brief soliloquy, we see the character steel her courage and step into the pond around 05:44, leading to a dramatic example of the use of a shifted camera angle. The shot follows Pinkie's stride and smoothly rotates along the viewer's Y axis, literally mirroring the world

and turning it upside down as a clone of Pinkie Pie emerges from the pond. The sudden and unusual camera movement appear to have been intended to instill a sense of wonder in the viewer, further underscoring the pond's status as a legendary, magical, and otherworldly place. It's also worth noting that the newly-minted Pinkie Pie clone, drawing herself to full height at 05:45.22, is completely dry, despite emerging from a pond less than a second ago, further indicating the magical nature of the mirror pool.

Finally, 05:46.07, alongside exhibiting rule-of-thirds composition, sets up another interesting piece of narrative with a subtle visual cue: the cloned Pinkie, on the left side of the shot, initially acts as if she's right-handed/hooved, but after a few seconds, switches to her left hoof, signaling to the viewer that she's not just a clone, but rather an autonomous, completely independent being, and foreshadowing events later in the episode where the clone, in a fit of comic mischief, decides to clone herself through several generations of clones recursively.

The combined effect of the techniques the animators chose for this sequence serves to convey both a sense of wonder, as well as foreboding. By looking at the technical and narrative decisions they made, it may be possible to glean some ideas that inform one's own future media projects.

## *References*

Polsky, D. (Writer), Albeghetti, S. (Storyboard artist), Weibe, D. (Storyboard artist). (2012 November 17). Too Many Pinkie Pies (Season 3, Episode 3) [TV series episode]. In L. Faust (Creator), *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic*. DHX Animation; Hasbro, Inc.