

Fallout Equestria: Starlight

Chapter 2: With Friends Like These

"If I can't find a friendship problem, I'll make a friendship problem!"

Friendship. It seems like a relatively simple concept. You extend your hoof to somepony, hoping to be their friend. You share life, happiness, joy, sorrow, and much more with each other. You lift each other up in bad times and praise each other in good times.

The harsh reality of it is that friendship is a lot harder than it looks. It's easier to kill each other than it is to love and tolerate. The ponies of the past abandoned their virtues of friendship for hatred, deceit, and cruelty. Even to this day, even after all the Destroyer did to save us, there are still ponies that still adhere to these tenets. In the Wasteland, friendship is fleeting, and yet it's still necessary. Friends make the very difference between life in the Wasteland... or slow and painful death.

Will we ever return to the golden age of Harmony where friendship made up the essential core of our existence?

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Our reception back in the town of Mall was exuberant after our exhausting trip into the depths of the mall complex. Not long after we emerged, the town organized efforts to begin salvaging more wares from the mall itself as well as cleaning up and moving homes and shops into the mall proper. There was even talk about opening up the mall for other towns and cities in the area and expanding their trade operation now that more stock was available. Steeljack returned to the town security force and provided his resignation in order to come along with us to Tenpony Tower. He also made sure to regale the townsfolk about the tale of the Mighty Alicorn and how she single-hoofedly defeated waves of robots to save her two friends. I blushed furiously at these proclamations. I wasn't the type to boast about myself, and I didn't really want the attention. The townsfolk relented however, and insisted that we spend another night in their fair town, opting to treat us to a feast in our honor for furthering the sake of commerce. I was reluctant, but was convinced by Steeljack and Violet that it would do us some good to relax a little after the harrowing experience of the mall.

So it was that I found myself in the town square that evening seated around several of the townsfolk, laughing and enjoying the food they provided. Steeljack and Violet flanked my sides, heartily enjoying their share as well. I couldn't help but notice that Violet had been right. The townsfolk no longer stared at me with fear and distrust, but with awe and admiration. I was elated to have done some good for these ponies after all. It helped me keep my head on straight for a little bit, to keep my thoughts from falling back towards a certain purple unicorn.

Just where did she come from? Why was she in my head? I didn't have answers to these questions yet, but they stuck in my head like some sort of horrible sticky thing. The immediate plan was

still Tenpony Tower. The Twilight Society was my chance at getting answers to these questions.

The next morning, I was again prodded awake by both Steeljack and Violet. I groaned and got up, grumbling about my lack of five more minutes. Violet chuckled and tossed me a bottle of Sparkle Cola she bought with some of our caps the previous day. Steeljack and she had spent most of yesterday dealing with various vendors, building up our travelling supplies and our ammunition. I gleefully chugged the cola and sighed.

“We ready to go?” I asked impatiently.

Violet just scowled at me. “You’re the one who wanted to sleep in, and you’re being impatient?” she said with ice in her voice.

I blushed furiously, trying to think of something to respond to that with. Steeljack appropriately chose that moment to trot up with our bags.

“Everything is packed, and ready to go,” he said, setting my bags at my feet.

I nodded in thanks and placed them on my back with a simple glow of my horn. Stargazer followed shortly after, the incredibly beautiful gun having spent all night at the foot of my bed. It was an incredible piece of art in gun form, and I wasn’t about to let anypony take it from me.

After Violet shook me out of my gun-lusting reverie, we made our way out to the front gate, where we once again met up with Cross Tire, whom Steeljack had given his title of ‘acting security chief’ to when he resigned. He gave us an enthusiastic wave, and sent us on our way.

Two days later, we continued along the road, feeling very exhausted but at the same time feeling refreshed. It felt a hell of a lot better than being in that dark and dreary mall. Being the consummate slacker I was, I clicked the radio on my PipBuck on, hoping for either some news or some good music. Turns out, it was the smooth voice of DJ-PON3 who filled our ears as we walked along the road.

Hello kiddies out there in the Wasteland! This is your host DJ-PON3, giving you the latest news in the Wasteland. What a lovely sunny day this is, don’t you think?

I’ve got some crazy news for you kids out there. It seems that somepony saw fit to help the town of Mall out with their little robot problem, allowing them to finally clean that place up and start trading with surrounding towns. And that somepony was an alicorn with the Followers of the Apocalypse! Now I hear ya saying: DJ, but aren’t the Followers supposed to be helping ponies out? And of course I’d say you’re right on that my friend, but here’s the rub. This wasn’t just any alicorn, this gal is the spitting image of one Twilight Sparkle! That’s right kiddos, a bona fide Ministry Mare in our midst.

So if you see a big purple alicorn dressed up like Twilight, show the girl some love will ya? She’s doing some good for the ponies of the Wasteland! This is DJ-PON3, signing out for now, bringing you all

the latest news and tunes the Wasteland has to offer. Have a little Sweetie Belle while I'm out...

The voice of the DJ faded out and was replaced with the beginnings of a slow Sweetie Belle tune. I groaned as I began blushing furiously.

“Looks like somepony’s got herself a fan club,” he said playfully. He gave a hearty chuckle at me.

“I don’t want a fan club. I just want to be me again!” I exclaimed, throwing a hoof up in the air.

“Well, whether you like it or not you’ve got it, Star,” Steeljack replied. “Some ponies like to have heroes is all. Look at the Stable Dweller, what she did was legendary.”

“But I’m not the Stable Dweller. I’m just... me. I want to get this thing out of my head, and go back to a normal life!” I cried out.

“This is the Wasteland. Define ‘normal’?” Steeljack quipped.

I sighed. I had to admit, he had me there. At the end of the day, normal for me was being a large magical winged creature who was mostly shunned by what was left of pony society as a whole.

“... fine. I suppose you’ve got a point there,” I said quietly.

We continued on in silence as the voice of Velvet Remedy soothed us with a Sweetie Belle classic. The Savior had a lovely voice I must admit. I had never met the mare herself, only heard rumors of the things she did within the Followers. I found my mind wandering to what it would be like to be in her presence. I was broken out of my daydream by Violet nudging me.

“Hey you alright in there?” she asked.

“Yeah I’m okay, just a little lost in my thoughts is all,” I said with a nod, beaming back at her. “What’s up? I guess I haven’t been really paying attention to what’s going on.”

“We’re just past New Appleoosa. Steeljack wants to stop at Shattered Hoof. Says he can get us a better shortcut to Tenpony Tower there. Probably some deal with the griffons,” she replied. Steeljack had also come up next to us while we talked.

“I’ve got a few friends in the Talons, having done business with them in the past. We should make it to Shattered Hoof tonight, and if we’re lucky we can be in Manehattan by tomorrow evening,” he said.

Thank the Goddesses!

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We arrived that evening close to the Shattered Hoof Re-Educational Facility, an old political prison during the war. According to Steeljack, it was now home of the Talons, a mercenary force that helped ponies in need.

“The Talons? I’ve heard of them, I think,” I said as we walked along.

“I used to work with them pretty closely,” Steeljack replied with a nod. “Their leader, Gawd, is an honorable griffon.”

“Gawd? What a name,” Violet snorted.

“Yes, well... Gawd is a hardass,” Steeljack said. “She’s true to her contract, though. Thankfully, we’re not here to see her.”

“Who are we here to see, then?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Old friend of mine, name of Brisk. He’s a commander with the Talons,” Steeljack said. “He used to be my commander, actually.”

We walked several minutes longer, finally coming to the ridge overlooking the entrance to the Talon’s headquarters. Steeljack stopped just before the top of the ridge, motioning with a hoof.

“The entrance is down there. I... I can’t be seen by the gate guards,” he said. “My retirement from the Talons wasn’t exactly... amicable. You’ll need to go down there and ask for Brisk. Just ask him to come out here to see me. If you can’t get the guards to cooperate, bribe them. Griffons love gold.”

“Are you sure they’ll get him for us?” I asked. Steeljack nodded in response. I shrugged. “Alright then. Violet, shall we?”

The green unicorn trotted ahead of me down the ridge. I gave Steeljack a stiff nod before following after her. We made our way to the gate, where two griffons sat waiting. They were most definitely guards, each one holding a battle rifle at the ready. One stalked forward, while the other eyed us warily.

“Identify yourselves and state your purpose,” the guard said.

Violet stepped forward. “I am Violet Iris, with the Followers of the Apocalypse. This is my companion Radiant Star. We are seeking the services of Commander Brisk of the Talons,” she said.

“Commander Brisk is busy at the moment, is there something we may help you with?” the guard asked.

“We really would prefer to deal with Commander Brisk. I tell you what, how does fifty caps sound to go and get him for us?” I said, pulling the required amount of my saddlebags.

“Fine, I tell you what, let me just take those off your hooves, and I’ll see if his schedule has suddenly freed up,” the guard grinned, his eyes glowing with greed. He happily took the caps and placed them in his side pack. He nodded at the other guard, who disappeared into the facility. “Just wait outside for a moment for him.”

I nodded. Several minutes later, a large armored griffon appeared from the gate. He grunted at the sight of us.

“What do you want? I already listened to your Follower spiel last week, and I’m not exactly buying it,” he said.

“A friend of ours wishes to speak with you, and we require some assistance,” I said, waving for Brisk to follow us.

We made our way up the ridge where Steeljack waited. Brisk’s eyes widened as his gaze fell onto the stallion, and his talons went for the pistol at his side belt. Steeljack moved in unison as the griffon and earth pony took aim at each other.

“You son of a bitch,” Brisk snarled.

I moved to step in between the two. I wasn’t sure what was going on here. I was under the impression that Brisk and Steeljack were friends. My E.F.S. wasn’t even registering Brisk as hostile for Celestia’s sake!

“Don’t,” Steeljack growled at me. I stepped back, flabbergasted. “This is between us. Isn’t that right, Brisk old buddy?”

Brisk nodded, his pistol still trained on the grey earth pony. He grinned for a second, and lowered his pistol. Steeljack lowered his bit for his rifle.

“Damn right you are,” the griffon said. “What do you want this time ‘Jack? Last I heard you got yourself some swanky job as a security officer.”

“That’s right, I did,” Steeljack replied. “And someday maybe if I live long enough, I might go back. Something else came up though.”

I looked back and forth between the two. “Someone want to clue me in on what’s going on here?” I said, interrupting the griffon and the earth pony’s banter.

“We have a bit of an odd friendship,” Steeljack replied. “Been several times now that Brisk and I have actually tried to take each other’s heads off. How many times is that now, old friend?”

“Seven, I believe,” Brisk replied. “You still haven’t answered my question. What do you want? And what’s with the fillies?” He motioned to Violet and me.

“We need transportation. Miss Star here has a date at Tenpony Tower in Manehattan. I’m helping her and her friend get there,” Steeljack replied.

“Well, I can’t rightly provide any griffon transport at the moment,” Brisk responded gruffly. “Even though the Enclave itself is toast, there are still remnants of those pegasi bastards out there, and I need every available Talon to assist with those efforts.”

“Isn’t there anything you can do?” I asked the griffon. “We’ve got money, if that’s a problem.”

Brisk waved me off. “I’ve got a spare skywagon you can borrow if you’d like. It’s not in great condition, but it’ll get you to Manehattan for sure,” he responded.

“Skywagon?” I asked, confused.

“You’ve got wings don’t you?” the griffon said, chuckling.

I looked down just to make sure. Yep, my wings were both present and accounted for, but what did that have to do with a skywagon? I nodded anyways to answer his question.

“Well, you can hook yourself up to this thing and fly yourself and your friends right on down to Manehattan.”

Oh well that doesn’t sound too bad, I thought.

“I guess that will be fine,” I said.

Brisk nodded, and motioned for us to follow him into the stockyard off the side of the facility. The skywagon lay in the center of the stockyard. I walked up to the harness and used my magic to begin attaching it to my body. Violet began loading our supplies onto the skywagon, while Brisk hung back and began speaking quietly with Steeljack. Being an alicorn, our ears were much more sensitive than other pony races. I could hear every word clearly, even though I didn’t really want to.

“Thanks Brisk, I appreciate you doing this,” Steeljack said quietly, lowering his head. “I owe you one.”

“We’re even ‘Jack. After what you did the last time, I can’t rightly have you owing me,” Brisk said. Steeljack nodded as Brisk continued. “For the record, that last time... it wasn’t your fault.”

“I could have done more,” Steeljack responded. “I could have saved her.”

“No one could have done that ‘Jack, not even you. You made a judgement call,” Brisk said.

Steeljack shook his head. “It was stupid,” he replied. “I needed to do better.”

“So do better. Help these fillies find what they’re looking for,” Brisk responded.

I averted my eyes so the two couldn’t see that I had been eavesdropping. I made a mental note to ask Steeljack about ‘her’ at some point. Brisk strode up to us as Steeljack began loading his gear onto the skywagon.

“If you’re going to Tenpony Tower you’re going to want to stop in Manehattan proper and walk there first. Even these days, flying around Tenpony is dangerous. The Twilight Society doesn’t look kindly on guests who just drop in,” Brisk stated.

I groaned loudly at this. More delays! I just wanted to get this over with and get home!

“Anything we should look out for?” Violet asked the griffon.

“Well, Manehattan’s been cleaned up quite a bit but there are still some manticores in the area and possibly some feral ghouls,” Brisk responded. “You might also run into some bloodwings. Those things are still around too.”

“Bloodwings?” I asked, confused.

“Giant mutated bats,” Brisk said. “They hunt at night, and in swarms. Nasty fuckers. They kill quickly too.”

I turned to Steeljack and Violet, resting comfortably now in the skywagon. “You guys ready to go?” I asked.

Violet and Steeljack nodded in unison. Brisk chuckled.

“You better get going then. May the winds carry you to good fortune,” Brisk said. “And take care of ‘Jack here. I’d hate to have to do something nasty to you for getting one of my old friends killed.”

I nodded and met the griffon’s level gaze. He was deadly serious about this. I nodded as confidently as I could manage, and tossed my head. I couldn’t help but grin as I stretched my wings into a powerful downstroke, even with Brisk glaring at me.

“Alright, ready for takeoff!”

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The Wasteland is a very different sight from the air as opposed to the ground. In a sense I suppose it's almost beautiful. It stretches on forever, ever silent and ever still. It's almost unrealistic that such a place could exist. Then reality sets in, and you realize this really is the world you live in. You live in the Wasteland, and it never lets you go.

More thoughts about Twilight were ringing around in my head while we were flying towards Manehattan. For some reason I could not get the purple mare off of my mind. Was she starting to take over more of my body? I couldn't tell for sure. I wish I knew more.

Around mid-afternoon, the great city of Manehattan came into view. I was awestruck by the city's beauty, as ruined as it was. Spires of destroyed skyscrapers still reached towards the sky, a testament to the dedication and skill of the builders. The majority of those buildings were completely ruined to the point where living conditions were unsafe, yet ponies still lived there, scavenging a living out of the ancient city's treasures.

I set down the skywagon on the edge of the city, and began to unhitch myself from the harness. Steeljack and Violet emptied the cart of our supplies and we set up camp. I had been flying for a good several hours and needed rest. We found an abandoned building nearby that appeared to once be an office building of some sorts. Inside we found the expected skeletons scattered amidst the ruins of several printing presses, posters and books. A poster at the head of the printing room discretely stated that this used to be a printing office for the Ministry of Image. Emblazoned on the poster was the image of the Ministry's head mare, the gorgeous Rarity. Two hundred years hadn't been enough to mute her sex appeal. I held my gaze on the poster for a short time, before continuing my search for someplace to lie down and be lazy for a little while at least. I quickly located an office in the back of the building that appeared to belong to the manager of this particular operation. An intact terminal sat on the small desk inside the room, its cursor blinking on the screen.

I sat down and connected my PipBuck to the terminal, hoping there wouldn't be some sort of difficult password or something that I would have to call Violet in for. She and Steeljack were busy enough clearing things out to make a suitable camp for us. The PipBuck pulled up a diagnostics screen that scrolled through a bunch of letters and numbers, before entering in the password of '123456.' Really? That almost sounds like a combination someone would have on their luggage for Celestia's sake! Apparently even in the Ministries there were ponies who weren't so smart when it came to their passwords. The terminal opened up to several log files. Relaxing into a comfortable position, I clicked on the first log file and began to read.

Log File 06789 : Ministry of Image Manehattan Branch 01

Log Entry Recorded by: Comet Tail

Tomorrow is a very big day for us! We've got a lot of work to do before then, but tomorrow we're being visited by not one, but two Mares of the Ministries! Indeed, both Twilight Sparkle and our very own Rarity will be joining us as we dedicate a new wing of the Manehattan Public Library. Both will be on hoof to provide support for the Ministry of Image as we spread proper knowledge to everypony. I'm so excited!

After the ceremony, Twilight has requested us to provide a list of the books we've selected for the wing, and Lady Rarity wishes to speak with me personally!

I flipped to the next entry, dated a day after the dedication of the new library wing.

Log File 06791 : Ministry of Image Manehattan Branch 01

Log Entry Recorded by: Comet Tail

The dedication of the new library wing went splendidly. Everypony enjoyed the work and effort that went into making the new wing possible. Well, everypony except two certain Ministry Mares.

After the ceremony ended, I accompanied Lady Rarity and Minister Sparkle back to the Ministry of Image office from which I now write to you. Suffice to say, I could tell that things were tense between the two friends. There were several books on the list that Twilight disagreed with Rarity on, leading to a rather heated discussion about proper dissemination of information to the public, all right in front of me. I'm not ashamed to admit I spent most of the argument cowering under my desk. Lady Rarity is fierce when she so desires, and she pulled no punches with Twilight, who was getting angrier by the minute. Then, out of nowhere, the whole thing diffused and the two were hugging and apologizing for each other's behavior. It was a very odd thing to be witness to. One could say you had a sense that these were two very old friends who could have the most serious argument ever but still be friendly with each other.

In the end Rarity relented and allowed Twilight to personally review the book titles that she had not approved. Twilight ecstatically thanked Rarity and left as if nothing had even happened between the two. I pulled myself out from under my desk only to be helped up by Rarity herself, who smiled gently at me.

"There we are darling, I'm so sorry you had to see that. Twilight and I sometimes don't exactly see eye to eye on everything, and we get a little... overzealous I think is the word I'm looking for," she said. I nodded blankly at this, not wanting to incite the wrath of the white unicorn.

As for our own discussion, Lady Rarity wanted to personally thank me for my work on the new library wing and to offer me a promotion to the Ministry of Image hub on Ministry Row in Canterlot. Canterlot! Can you believe it! Suffice to say, I said yes. This will be my last official entry as Manager of this office. The employees are holding a going away party for me this Friday to send me off.

I smiled as I finished reading the log entry. Twilight herself had been in this very room! A

distant memory fluttered into my mind as I began to recall that day and the fight with Rarity. Instead of a narrative like the logfile, I got flashes of impressions, of emotions and context. I remembered how angry I was at Rarity, not because of some silly books, but because I missed her. I was angry that the war was tearing apart one of my closest friendships. I remembered something else too about that night. After I left, Rarity sought me out that night at the Hoofton Hotel I was staying at. She was crying and wanted nothing more than to apologize for being so distant. Her work had been very stressful lately apparently and she felt the same way I did about keeping our friendship alive and as strong as we could.

I found myself quite disturbed by these facts. Not only was I feeling these emotions associated with the Ministry Mare, but I was seeing her memories as well. I sighed as I thought about Tenpony Tower, and what if anything the Twilight Society could do for me. I felt myself slip into blissful sleep as my thoughts slipped back to Twilight and Rarity and that evening.

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A knock at the door woke me from my slumber. I pulled myself out of the lush bed and strode to the door of my hotel suite. I quickly realized that I was reliving this memory, and that I was dreaming. The feeling was almost like that of a memory orb. I was clearly aware that I was still Radiant Star, but at the same time I was Twilight Sparkle. I paused for a moment at the door, before the knock came again. A flash of lightning appeared outside of the window of the suite, followed by a rumble of thunder and spattering of rain. A big contrast to the warmth and safety of the hotel room.

“Who is it?” Twilight called out. I could hear a light sniffing on the other side of the door.

“Twilight? It’s me, Rarity. Can I come in please?” the demure voice, tinted with sadness, asked.

My host unlocked the door and threw it open in an effortless surge of magic. Before me stood not the perfect vision of beauty I had seen in pictures and posters of the Ministry Mares, but a slightly disheveled and dirty white unicorn. Her hair was tousled and erratic, and her eyes were baggy and puffy as if she had been crying for hours. Her coat was messy, as if she’d run all the way here in the rain without stopping.

“Rarity? What are you...?” Twilight started to say before the white unicorn pounced upon her in a crushing hug. Twilight put a hoof on her back and patted. “What’s wrong?”

“E-e-everything Twilight. Oh Celestia, I’m so sorry,” she said, beginning to cry once more. “I’ve been such a terrible friend. I cannot believe how I behaved earlier towards you.”

I felt my host’s lips curl back in a warm smile as Twilight gently pushed out of Rarity’s embrace. Her eyes were glittering with tears as she sniffled loudly. The emotional memory surged forward, and I could feel Twilight’s sadness.

“Rarity, I’m not angry with you. I’m as much to blame for earlier as anypony is,” Twilight said, smiling before turning her head down to the floor of the suite. “I’m sorry too. I’ve been so mad lately that we haven’t seen each other. And it’s not just you but Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and... Pinkie Pie...” She trailed off as Rarity and her sat down on the velvet couch in the living quarters of my room. Pinkie Pie. Another name that rang red alerts into my mind. Something had happened between Twilight and her, I just didn’t know what.

“Twilight?” Rarity finally asked. My host looked up at her expectantly. “I don’t want us to drift apart. Oh how I wish this dreadful war had never happened.”

Twilight pulled her over into another hug and held the disheveled mare there for a minute or two.

“I don’t want us to drift apart either,” Twilight said after a minute of absolute silence amidst the pitter-patter of rain drops against my balcony door. “Can I get you anything? You um... sort of smell kind of terrible.”

Rarity laughed lightly, pulling out of my hug and falling back on the couch.

“I ran all the way here, and then stood outside the hotel for an hour trying to work up what I was going to say to you,” she said, sighing. “I suppose I do look pretty bad don’t I? Not surprising that I smell the part as well.”

“How about you take a shower, while I make us some tea?” Twilight offered. “It’ll be just like old times. It’s not like I was sleeping that well anyways.” My host smiled, an honest and warm smile.

“That would be lovely dear. Anything to get away from the pressure of the Ministries for one night,” Rarity responded as she stood up from the couch and headed to the bathroom to take her shower. My host got up as well and went into the kitchen, grabbing the tea pot and tea bags from the cabinets. She began making our tea as the memory faded to black and I returned to the world of the living.

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I awoke in the darkness of the office next to the glowing terminal. It was a strange feeling, experiencing another pony’s memories, especially somepony as important as Twilight Sparkle. There was a mixture of pain and regret deep inside my chest as I recalled the experience again. I remembered that Twilight felt sad for her friends, and wished that there was more she could do to bring them all together again. I wondered briefly if that was the moment that Obsession crept into her life, forcing Twilight’s hoof along the path that led to the creation of my race... and to Twilight’s dissolution into the Goddess.

At that brief moment, I realized that it was quiet all around me. A little too quiet for comfort, now that I thought about it. I stood up and turned on my PipBuck’s flashlight and moved into the hallway outside the office. It was bare and there was no sign of anypony. The soft glow of the PipBuck illuminated the hall as I moved through the building.

I didn't oversleep again did I? I thought as I made my way through the winding hall into the printing area. It too, was dark, and there was no indication of anypony or any... thing in the large room. A quick glance at my E.F.S. revealed only my own little blue blip in the immediate area. A shuffling noise behind me however, indicated that I wasn't alone by any means. A groan emitted from the hallway, as I turned around and brought Stargazer to bear.

The creature shuffling its way into the printing room was a pony, unicorn by the looks of it. Its flesh looked dry and parts of it were rotted away, revealing muscle, sinew, and in some cases bone beneath the leathery skin. I immediately recognized the beast as a ghoul, and a feral one from the looks of it. While I had met ghouls before, most of them had been fully lucid and intelligent. I had not encountered many feral ghouls. The beast groaned and leaped forward at me to try and bite me.

As I brought Stargazer to bear I realized I hadn't actually fired my wonderful new gun, so what happened when I pulled the trigger was a surprise. The gun hummed happily as the barrels spun, then it poured forth a stream of bullets, glowing as they shot into the room. Bullet after bullet sank into the creature's chest and face, tearing pieces of flesh from its body and rending its legs inoperable as gunfire struck it. I gave no quarter to the beast as I continued firing. When I finally finished the thing was a bloody mess. Its head was missing completely and pieces of its body were strewn around the bleeding mess on the floor. I loved this gun, it was so awesome! I silently cheered as two blue blips came into view on my E.F.S. I heard gunfire up ahead as the blips headed towards me.

I looked up to see Violet and Steeljack enter the printing room, guns out and blazing behind them as more feral ghouls shuffled out of the hallway. Violet growled and looked up at me.

"Where did they come from?" I asked her as she unloaded her pistol into a ghoul who got a little too close for comfort. I grinned. Clearly Steeljack had been giving her some pointers on the flight to Manehattan.

"We think they crawled up in from the basement. Probably some hole in the sewer line. We've been searching through this damn place trying to find you, where'd you run off to?" she told me.

I pointed back the way I came. "I was in the back office... I thought you saw me go back there," I said, confused.

She shook her head. Steeljack let loose another ***crack*** of his rifle, hitting one of the ghouls in the head and taking it to the ground.

"One second you were here, and then you were gone. We got worried when you didn't show up for a while. Then these things appeared out of nowhere and we thought maybe one of them got you," she said, a fearful look showing in her eyes. I smiled softly, before glaring behind Violet.

"Get down!" I snarled, bringing Stargazer to bear as Violet ducked.

One of the ghouls had taken the opportunity to sneak up behind us. Stargazer tore the thing to pieces. I leaped over Violet and brought Stargazer up on the group of ferals. A message suddenly appeared on my E.F.S.

ENTER E.S.A.T.S? (Y/N) ...

Huh? I hadn't ever seen that before on my E.F.S. Mentally I flipped the prompt to Yes. More messages began to scroll up.

ENTERING ENHANCED STARGAZER ASSISTED TARGET SYSTEM...

PIPBUCK OS UPGRADE REQUIRED... UPLOADING ENHANCED PIPBUCK OS...

1%..... 50%..... 100% COMPLETE

***ENHANCED STARGAZER ASSISTED TARGET SYSTEM ONLINE.
MULTI-DIRECTIONAL TARGETING ONLINE.***

Time slowed to a crawl as I saw my targets line up in front of my very eyes. This weapon was freaking amazing! I knew there was a reason I loved this thing! I queued up shot after shot into the entire group of ghouls, the flexibility of the shot mechanism surprising me at every selection, and let myself fall out of E.S.A.T.S. Stargazer was practically howling gleefully as its barrels spun faster than before. Then it fired, unleashing round after round of pure night at the mob. Its bullets ferociously tore into flesh, ripping apart zombie after zombie. By the time the weapon was spent the majority of the mob had been reduced to pieces on the ground.

"Yeah!" I shouted in delight. The whole thing took a hooffull of seconds, the weapon easily demolishing the crowd of ferals. A new thought crossed my mind as I the weapon spun down. I hadn't realized it before, but there was no bullet clip or anything attached to Stargazer. How was it that it was loaded then? I didn't have much time to think about this more before another small group of ghouls poured into the room over the bloody mess that was the previous group. Steeljack and I shredded them to pieces.

"We need to get out of here and back to the skywagon!" Steeljack growled, unleashing ***crack*** after ***crack*** of his rifle into the horde of undead monstrosities.

I nodded, and began to focus. My horn began glowing as Violet quickly realized what I was doing.

"Oh shi-" she began to say as the magic released with a faint ***pop***. A second later we were standing outside of the Ministry of Image office, right in front of the skywagon.

“-it,” Violet finished saying, before glaring at me. “Warn me next time when you do that.”

I grinned sheepishly, before a groaning noise behind us snapped me to attention.

“No time for that, we need to get back into the air,” I said, using my telekinesis to quickly attach the skywagon’s harness to my body.

Violet and Steeljack hopped in the wagon, and I began to beat my wings heavily to get us off the ground. As I was doing this, the front door the Ministry of Image office burst open and more ghouls emerged. I lifted Stargazer and fired several bursts at the mob as we lifted into the air. A few moments later we were back above Manehattan, away from the accursed building.

“Are you two alright back there?!” I called out behind me. I tried to fly as slow as possible so the wind wouldn’t drown us out without losing altitude.

“We’re fine!” Violet called back, through the wind. “Heading straight for Tenpony?”

“No, I have someplace important I need to go!” I yelled. “I’ll explain when we get there!”

I nodded and looked across the skyline for my intended destination. Spotting it at last, I turned the skywagon towards it, and began flying as fast as I possibly could.

The Hoofton Hotel.

* * *

Located in the heart of Manehattan, the Hoofton Hotel was once the highest-class hotel a pony could stay in, short of the fancy hotels in Canterlot. It was regularly used for foreign dignitaries and government officials. Its convention center was the site of several attempted talks of peace with the zebras near the beginning of the war. Twilight Sparkle had stayed there on numerous occasions, owing to her work at the Ministry of Arcane Science hub located in the city, the building now known in the Wasteland as “Tenpony Tower.” It was also often rumored that Princess Luna had stayed at the illustrious hotel once or twice, but those rumors were never substantiated.

The memory dream I had about Rarity was still fresh in my mind throughout the entire escape from the ghouls. There was something nudging me, something pushing me towards the Hoofton Hotel. I felt like I needed to be there, as if there was some answer or closure locked in the musty old rooms. So it came to pass that we set down in front of the exquisite Hoofton Hotel. Well, somewhat exquisite. Okay, okay... it was a dump.

The front entrance of the hotel was in immense disarray. The main doors into the hotel’s lobby had fallen from their hinges and rubble lay all over the hotel’s main courtyard. Decayed remains of centuries old ponies hung from broken windows. The hotel itself loomed above us, dark and dreary. It

looked as if no one had even bothered to come here since the end of the world. Cautiously we approached the doors to the lobby. A single brush of a hoof caused the door to collapse inward and fall to the floor in a cloud of ancient dust. If the outside of the hotel looked like a war zone, the inside of the hotel looked far worse in comparison. The large glass chandelier in the center of the massive lobby had fallen to the ground below, resulting in shattered glass around the lobby.

There was a large hole in the ceiling from which the chandelier had fallen, revealing frayed cabling and electrical wiring. At the far end of the lobby was the grand staircase that led up to the hotel suites above. One of the arms of the massive structure had crumbled completely. On each side of the main staircase were two hallways that led to elevators. Entrances that connected to the main lobby were shadowed by various signs, revealing the bar/restaurant that the hotel housed, the gift shop, and the workout area/pool. At one end of the lobby lay the main service desk where ponies would check in and check out for their stay at the glorious Hoofton. It lay broken in pieces, skeletons of the hotel staff lying over the desk like sick puppets. Skeletons and decayed remains of patrons and other staff lay about the ruined hotel lobby.

I racked my brain, trying to think hard of where Twilight Sparkle had stayed that fateful evening she had spent with Rarity. For all that I could feel of the emotional impact of the encounter, I couldn't remember what room number Twilight had stayed in. I pointed to the service desk and motioned for Steeljack and Violet to follow me.

"Okay, what gives Star? What are we doing here?" Violet asked as we gingerly stepped towards the service desk, avoiding the glass piles as best as we could.

"While I was in the back office at the Image building, I found a few log entries pertaining to Twilight Sparkle and Rarity. I also had another dream... but this one was more realistic. It was about Twilight and Rarity, and they were here. They just had this big fight earlier in the day, and Rarity came to Twilight to apologize," I explained as best as I could. "I felt like... I needed to come here. I needed to see it for myself. I need to find anything that could suggest what room Twilight was in that evening. If you'd like, look around and see if you can find anything, but don't go too far."

Violet and Steeljack nodded, and headed in the direction of the gift shop and restaurant.

I stepped up to the service desk to hopefully locate any records I could that would indicate where Twilight stayed when she came to the Hoofton. A voice stirred me from my search.

"Welcome, Madam Sparkle, and how are you this fine evening?" the voice said.

I looked up to see an ethereally pale unicorn stallion with a bell for a cutie mark. He was standing at the service desk. I blinked my eyes a few times. Was this real? I turned around to see an equally ethereal Twilight Sparkle walking up to the desk, which now appeared to be in one piece and brand new.

"I'm well, Mr. Hoofton. Just in town for a few days. Is my normal room ready?" the ethereal Twilight asked the pale unicorn stallion. Mr. Hoofton? As in Harry Hoofton, the proprietor of Hoofton Hotel? Twilight sure knew all the right ponies.

Hoofton nodded.

"Indeed, Madam Sparkle. Room 610. Penthouse suite just like you requested. Will you be requiring any room service or anything else?" the unicorn asked.

Twilight smiled and shook her head. "No, thank you. And drop the whole 'Madam' bit please. Just call me Twilight," she said.

"Indeed. Terribly sorry, Twilight. We do so enjoy your visits. Shall I hold any calls for you until tomorrow?" the ethereal buck said as his form turned to a hazy mist and finally dissipated.

I looked back to see Twilight disappear as well. By that time, Violet and Steeljack had arrived back by my side. I blinked several times before realizing they were present.

"Find anything?" I asked.

Steeljack shrugged. "There's a lot of old stuff here for sure, but I'm not sure how much of it is useful or even remotely going to help us find out where to go next," he said. "What about you?"

"I... may have found what I'm looking for. One of the rooms that Twilight used on a regular basis was Room 610, which was one of the penthouse suites," I said. I didn't want to reveal yet how I came about this information. "We need a map or something. Did either of you two see one of those around?"

Violet pointed back at the gift shop. "We saw something that could have been a map in there through the window. We didn't go in there without you though. I'm not one for being separated again, not after what happened the last time," she replied.

I followed her and Steeljack to the ruined gift shop. The entrance was blocked by cardboard boxes and shelving that had fallen over. I pushed with my telekinesis and knocked down the rubble, making at the very least a passable entrance. The gift shop itself was in utter ruin. Shelves had fallen over and various knick-knacks were spread across the flooring. The lights were barely functioning here, which was the first time since we entered that I had seen a light working. The lights flickered off and on at random intervals, suggesting that the wiring had been damaged somehow. To the immediate left of the entrance was a kiosk terminal next to a large map of the hotel.

The map was in terrible condition, but readable enough to show that the penthouse suites were at the very top of the hotel, on the sixth floor. I groaned audibly.

“Of course, they would have to be up on the top floor, they’re penthouse suites!” I groaned again. I really was pretty sure we were going to be hoofing this one, since the elevators wouldn’t possibly be functioning. Then again, if the lights in here were working, would the elevators work too? It was worth a shot to check out.

“Let’s go check the elevators. Worst case scenario we have to take the stairs,” I said flatly.

We made our way over to one of the small hallways to check over the elevators. All of the elevators were unusable, either with cars crashed at the bottom of the shaft or cold and unresponsive. Plastered on the walls around the elevator doors were various propaganda posters. One in particular caught my eye. The poster was of a pink mare who was smiling as if she could see into your very soul. The text ***PINKIE PIE IS WATCHING YOU... FOREVER!*** appeared beneath her smiling face. Another voice resonated behind me.

“Thank you again, Mr. Hoofton for your hospitality. You always know how to raise my spirits when I’m here,” Twilight Sparkle, the ethereal and not so sure if real or if ghost version said as the form walked to the very elevators we stood in front of. I couldn’t tell if Violet or Steeljack could see this or not. They did not appear to be able to because neither of them screamed “GHOST!” and ran off.

“A pleasure as always, Twilight Sparkle. Enjoy your stay at the Hoofton,” the pale form of Harry Hoofton said as he escorted Twilight to the elevator. For a moment, Twilight stopped and stared at the poster of Pinkie Pie. Mr. Hoofton must have noticed this, because it was he who spoke next.

“Is everything alright, Twilight?” he asked, unsure of what reaction the purple mare might have.

Twilight shook her head for a moment and looked back at Hoofton.

“Yeah... I’m fine, sorry. I’ll be up in my room now. No interruptions please,” she said, getting onto the elevator. Okay, so now I was sure I was crazy. Seeing ghostly images of long dead ponies in a creepy old hotel? Yep, bona fide crazy!

“Star...” a familiar voice broke my focus on the poster. I looked down to see Violet staring at me.

“Umm... yeah?” I said with a blank stare on my face.

“You alright there? You kind of spaced out for a bit,” she said.

“Yeah, I’m fine, sorry. Still kind of tired,” I said, nodding.

Violet chuckled. “You’re always tired,” she said as we rejoined Steeljack out near the staircase.

“Up we go,” I said to the two as we began to climb the stairs.

* * *

I remember that I once said that robots suck. I think I might have been wrong. Stairs suck just as much, if not more.

After the second flight of stairs (these were really tall stairways!) we all began to feel a little tired and winded. After the fourth flight of stairs we were literally dragging ourselves up each step individually. Seriously, whoever invented these things, I would love to go back in a time machine and shoot them. Repeatedly. In the face. And then for good measure, I'd go back and do it again.

Around the fifth flight of stairs, I began to realize that the stairs didn't seem to be ending at the sixth floor. They continued onward and upward, for seemingly forever.

"What the fuck?" I said, pointing out this fact to the others. "Is it just me or do these things keep on going?"

We stopped at the landing for the sixth floor and approached the door back into the hotel proper. Locked. Of course! I flared my horn angrily, tearing the door off its hinges and setting it aside. I stepped into the dark hallway, trying to get some bearing of where we were at in the hotel. The words *Second Floor* appeared on the side wall just inside the hallway. I groaned.

"Second Floor? What is going on here?" I yelled angrily. I stomped my hoof in anger, before a yelp behind me got my attention. I turned to see... nothing. Violet and Steeljack had disappeared behind me.

"Steeljack? Violet?" I called out. "Where are you guys? Is this some sort of prank? Come on out guys!" I walked back into the stairwell. No pony was in sight in the vicinity. What in the world was going on? Did we step into some sort of alternate dimension or something?

Maybe they continued up the stairs and I just need to catch up. I have been zoning out a lot since we got here, I thought. I started back up the stairway, trying to process everything that was happening. I arrived at the next landing, and pushed open the door. The sign inside the hallway said *Fifth Floor*. Okay, now I was really confused. Was this some sort of prewar magic trick or something? A voice down the hallway made me take notice.

"Sir, I'm trying to figure out what the problem is, it's just taking too long," the voice of an ethereal unicorn walking down the hallway towards me was saying. The unicorn had a wrench and wand for his cutie mark. Great, now I'm back to seeing ghosts again! The ethereal image of Mr. Hoofton appeared in the stairway behind me.

"Well get it fixed, we have important clients staying here. We need to ensure that everything in the hotel is in tip top shape, and that includes the stair extending enchantments!" Hoofton responded. The other unicorn nodded.

“Yes sir, until we get it fixed there is a workaround stairway on this floor. We’ll route any guests through there,” the ethereal stallion said as his form dissipated into nothingness.

Another stairway? I looked back up at the never-ending staircase above me and back into the hallway. Deciding to take a chance on this other stairway, I stepped into the hallway and started down it, igniting my horn for a little light. The walls of the hotel hallway were dirty and stained; the wallpaper peeling back in various places. Many of the doors for the rooms themselves were hanging off of their hinges, darkness pervading the areas they had been protecting. A few decayed remains lay at the foot of several doors. With only the light of my horn to see where I was going, I was beginning to get uneasy. Why was coming here such a good idea again? I pushed any thoughts of unease into the back of my mind as I came into the middle of the floor’s long hallway. Another hallway that bisected this one ran perpendicular from the front and rear of the hotel, revealing more rooms and more rubble.

I was beginning to get worried about where Steeljack and Violet had ran off to. I knew deep down neither of them would just leave me, even if I was a little bonkers in the head. I turned down to the right to head to the rear of the hotel, hoping that the third staircase would be there. A screech behind me interrupted my train of thought, followed by the flapping of leathery wings.

“Oh shit,” was all I managed to say before turning around to see hundreds of beady red eyes staring right at me from the darkness at the other end of the hallway. Within moments, those eyes were coming closer as the bloodwing swarm began migrating in my general direction. It was do or die time, and I did what any natural born Wasteland survivor would do at that moment in time.

I ran for my fucking life.

Immediately I turned tail and began hoofing it down the hallway, trying to keep ahead of the swarm. In the darkness I could make out a door just ahead of me. I burst through the door ferociously and into a stairwell. Unfortunately, I managed to break the door off of its hinges at the same time, which didn’t really help me get away from the bloodwings. I turned back in time to see the first of the large bat creatures reaching out with a claw to scrape at me. Stargazer came up and spat hot lead into the thing, ripping its wings into shreds and forcing it back into the swarm. I growled, and picked up the door with my telekinesis, vainly trying to put it back into place. It was not working well at all. I had managed to completely bust the hinges, meaning the door wouldn’t stay for very long. I opted to try my luck and began running up the stairs, holding the door in place with my magic as long as possible. Finally I let go and opened the door to the sixth floor, without breaking this one and closed it behind me. Several thumps and scratches at the door seconds later indicated the swarm was trying to claw their way in. Several seconds later, the noises stopped completely. I peeked out the window in the door to see that the bloodwings hadn’t left, they were merely waiting for me to try and come back out. Hundreds of red eyes filled every bit of space in the small stairwell.

I turned back to the hallway in front of me. This hallway was much larger than the others, and branched off into several rooms. A skylight was situated above the center of the floor, the night sky

filtering in and casting an eerie glow on everything. Rubble was everywhere, and at the other end of the hallway a section of the wall had fallen out, revealing the city landscape beyond. I made my way into the center of the floor, looking for the room I was here for. I turned down a side hall and spotted it. The gold letters **610** appeared on the front of the room's door, which was conspicuously still attached to the door frame. I gulped with fear. I couldn't back down now. There just had to be answers for me here.

I pushed open the door and walked into the penthouse suite. It looked much the same as I remembered it from my dream. The couch that Rarity and Twilight had embraced each other and apologized on was turned over and the balcony door was completely missing, letting in a slight breeze from the cool night air. I pulled the couch up and set it down with my magic so that it was right side up before moving to it and laying down on it, tears beginning to form in my eyes. There was nothing here. I came into a crazy creepy hotel, possibly lost my two best friends, and almost got myself eaten by giant mutated bats... and for what? A room with a couch? I really was beginning to doubt my sanity at this point.

At some point in my mental self-abuse, I drifted off to sleep with tears in my eyes and a heavy heart.

ooooOOOOooooOOOOoooo

I awoke to find myself on the same couch, but a little different. The couch wasn't ruined, and laying at the other end next me was a lovely white unicorn with a purple mane. I realized after a moment that this was another memory of Twilight's I was witnessing. After several moments, Rarity stirred in her sleep and dreamily opened her eyes, noticing that my host was staring at her.

"Twilight, darling?" she said, groggily. "Are you alright?"

My host looked at her for a moment, and nodded. "I'm fine, just had a bad dream is all. I thought I'd gone to my bedroom though," she said.

Rarity let out a slight giggle. It was... cute.

"I'm afraid that's my fault darling. I kept you up all night and you fell asleep on the couch. I didn't have the heart to leave you there," she mused, smiling at my host. Say what you will about anypony, but Rarity had an incredible smile. Twilight's body felt warm inside just being on the receiving end of it.

"Thank you. What time is it? I feel like I've been out for days," My host said, yawning profusely. A quick glance at the clock revealed it was still roughly four in the morning. Twilight groaned. "I gotta get more sleep. I can't keep waking up like this. It's going to kill me."

Rarity shifted so that she was right up next to me. I could feel her coat brush up against my host's, a gentle caress passed across the centuries.

“Uhh... Rarity? What are you doing?” my host said, my eyes widening.

Rarity smiled at Twilight again warmly. “My dear, tell me what your dreams are about. You need someone to talk to, and I am here for you,” she replied.

My host laid her head on her hooves and began to speak.

“I keep dreaming about Pinkie. I miss her. I mean the real her. Not this addicted crazy version of herself that she puts on for her Ministry,” Twilight said. “Every time it’s the same. I keep running down this hallway, chasing after her, but I never catch her. It’s terrifying. I feel like I’ve lost her for good.

My host started to sob, as Rarity placed her forelegs around her neck, holding Twilight tightly. She began to coo softly.

“Shh, my dear. It’s alright. I know how you feel darling. We all want the best for Pinkie Pie. But a wise pony once taught me that through all things, a pony must always continue to be a good friend and all things are possible,” she said softly.

My host cleared her eyes. “Who told you that?” she asked weakly.

“You did my dear,” the white unicorn replied.

This of course, made Twi cry more. Rarity smiled again and brushed my host’s mane out of her eyes, staring at her with her ice blue eyes. Once again, my host’s eyes cleared up a bit to look at her as Rarity began to speak.

“You are the best friend anypony could ever hope to have, Twilight Sparkle. The things you have done for us... for me... and for Equestria are not unnoticed,” she said confidently. “I can only hope to give back even half of what you have given to us.”

“I suppose you’re right. I just wish there was something we could do for her,” Twilight said, before chuckling a bit. “Look at us, sitting here hugging and crying like a couple of silly fillies.”

Rarity continued to smile brightly.

“It’s alright my dear. It’s in these times that friendships are tested, and I would betray myself as Generosity if I didn’t give myself freely to be here for you,” the beautiful mare replied. Her eyes dazzled brightly with tinges of tears as well.

My host smiled, weakly at first, but then wider as she pulled Rarity closer into another hug.

“Thank you,” Twilight choked out through the tears. “For everything.”

They held each other for what felt like an eternity, the fire in my host’s stomach continuing to burn. Finally, Twilight pulled away and stared into the white mare’s brilliant eyes. They were eyes that could shatter a colt’s heart in mere seconds, as blue as the endless sea of eternity. Instinctively I realized in the back of my mind what was happening next. A few moments later, I felt my host’s lips lock with hers, the connection filling the purple mare with warmth. Seconds later, the connection broke as they pulled back from each other.

“Ohmygosh I’m so sorry Rarity!” My host cried out in shock at the kiss.

Rarity simply smiled again warmly. “It’s quite alright darling. I understand. I don’t hold it against you. It was a very passionate moment I will admit,” she said, laughing softly.

My host’s eyes widened further. “You mean you’re not mad at me?” Twilight asked.

Rarity shook her head vehemently.

“Oh no no no, my dear. You’re my very best friend, aren’t you? I could never truly be mad at you,” she replied.

My host sighed weakly as she fell back onto the couch and out of her embrace. Her eyes widened.

“I just kissed you,” Twilight said blankly as the truth of the matter set in.

“Indeed my dear you just did,” Rarity said, with a hint of mirth in her voice. “Listen, it’s almost four thirty, you should probably get some rest. You’ve had a long night, and if I’m not found near my own hotel room, well... you know just how our employees get when they can’t find us.”

“Yeah... I know. They keep threatening to stick an enchanted necklace on me so they can keep track of where I go,” Twilight said, chuckling.

The lavender mare got up to walk Rarity to the door. Twilight opened it for her and the other mare stepped out into the hallway.

“Good day my dear Twilight. We must get together again sometime soon. Perhaps a spa day is in order,” the white Ministry Mare said, as she waved her hoof.

My host waved back and closed the door. She walked to the bedroom, looking out at the Manhattan cityscape as she did. The memory drifted into nothingness as Twilight drifted into sleep on the bed.

ooooOOOOooooOOOOoooo

I came to again in the same couch, but back in my own body. The whole experience of seeing Twilight's memories was mentally tiring. I arose from the couch to a presence in the room. A ghostly figure began to coalesce in front of me.

"Took you long enough to wake up," the figure said as it stepped from the mist. It was Twilight again, but she looked... different. Her mane was ragged and her eyes seethed with rage. "I was beginning to think you were going to just sleep the entire day."

"Who are you?" I asked the figure, trying to figure out what was going on. I was still reeling from the memory I had witnessed.

"Me? I'm nopony, just like you. That's right, you're a little nopony," the Twilight-shaped figure responded, a snarl in her voice. "Poor little Star. Nopony loves her, that's why even her own friends left her!"

"That's not true," I snarled back at the figure, who laughed. "I repeat, who are you? You're not Twilight."

"Oh but I am Twilight, but for the time being, you can call me Anger. The others, they've been trying to keep me from you for a while now, but the first memory released me. You saw didn't you? The anger in Twilight's heart over being separated from her friends? I must admit, Loneliness had a play in that one as well, albeit a rather small one," the being responded.

"How are you here in the real world? I thought you were inside my head," I said flatly. Anger chuckled.

"You're still dreaming of course. This is all still just a figment of your imagination," the wicked mare replied. "Not that it really matters. You're alone, and you are lost inside a place where nopony else is going to find you. Nopony else cares about you."

Her words cut me deeply. Violet and Steeljack didn't really leave me did they? They wouldn't, I knew they wouldn't. Violet wouldn't leave me... right?

"You're wrong. My friends will find me. They care about me," I said, stomping the floor angrily.

Anger burst into full-on laughter. "That's funny! You really think they care about you. They hate you," she said, grinning widely.

"Stop it."

"They want to be rid of you."

“Stop it!”

“They want you dead.”

“**STOP IT!**” I shouted, in a loud commanding voice. “**LEAVE ME ALONE! I DON'T WANT YOU INSIDE MY HEAD! MY FRIENDS CARE ABOUT ME!**” I shook from shouting so loud as Anger merely grinned and chuckled.

“If you really believed that, then why are you defending it so? You must know in your heart deep down that I am right,” she snarled again. “After all, I should know. I’m the embodiment of Anger. And you’re giving me a little thrill, showing it off like this.”

I fell to my haunches in front of the ghostly mare, tears welling up in my eyes.

“Just leave... leave me alone,” I said, crying my eyes out. “I’m tired of this... all these emotions in my head. I’m tired of you!”

“Too bad sister. We’re not done yet –“ the evil mare began to say, interrupted by a trembling noise in the room around us. The mare’s eyes widened.

“No! Not yet! She can’t wake up yet! She can’t –“ Anger shouted, as the trembling grew louder and the world went white.

* * *

“Star! Wake up!” a voice above me called out. I was being pushed on and shaken back and forth. My eyes opened slowly to the morning sun just outside the room. I looked up to see Steeljack and Violet Iris standing above me, the latter holding both hooves out and pushing on me furiously.

“Violet...? What happened? Where did you...?” I choked out as Violet hugged me.

Steeljack tipped an invisible hat my way, and nodded.

“We’ve been looking all over this place for you! This place is really cracked up!” Violet exclaimed, releasing me from her hug.

I groaned. “I know, I ran into a swarm of bloodwings just getting up here,” I said, standing up to stretch my legs. I felt like I had been asleep for days. I lowered my head to my friends. “I thought... I thought that you both left me here, alone...”

“Why would you ever think that?” Steeljack responded.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

“I thought you wouldn’t want to be my friend anymore. I know this was a crazy idea coming here in the first place,” I humbled myself before them. “I thought you hated me.”

“You really thought we’d leave you and not want to be your friend?” Violet responded. I nodded in affirmation. Violet playfully punched me on the shoulder. “Silly. Why would you think that? You ran off down a hallway after something and we lost track of you. We decided that if you were going to come here anyways, we’d try and get here too. We definitely don’t hate you.”

“Violet’s right. I don’t hate you either. We did manage to find the controls for the staircases on the way up here. Apparently they had staircase-enhancing enchantments on them to make it seem like the hotel was bigger than it really was. I swear, those pre-war ponies were fucked up,” Steeljack grumbled. “I shut them off so we should be able to get back down that way.”

I smiled warmly at the two. “Thank you... for trying to find me. This was a fool’s errand, though. There never were any answers here for me. Just more bad memories,” I said, as I caught a glimmer of white in the corner of my eye.

What was that? I thought as I turned away from Violet and Steeljack. I made my way across the penthouse to a cabinet hanging on the wall near the bedroom. A faint sliver of white could be seen within.

“What’s wrong Star?” Violet asked as she trotted up next to me.

“There’s something in there,” I said, as I opened the cabinet. What lay before me was one of the most beautiful sights I had witnessed ever. Resting on the main shelf of the cabinet, was a small figurine of a white unicorn with a purple mane. The immaculate Rarity was as beautiful as she always was. She was striking a magnificent pose. Every part of the statue immortalized Twilight’s best friend.

At the bottom of the statue was a plaque where the following words were engraved.

Be Unwavering.

Author’s Notes: Whoo. That’s a lot of chapter to get through. Major points to begin with here had to be Twilight’s memories of Rarity, leading up to Star finding Rarity’s statuette. However, this led to an untimely confrontation with Anger. As you can probably tell, the major theme of this chapter was Friendship, and the strengthening of that bond between Star, Violet, and Steeljack.

If you are enjoying this sofar, please check many of the other great FoE sidefics in the FoE Sidefic group. They're all fantastic reads.

Update:

Version 2.0 of Starlight is all sorts of going forward! If you're reading this on gdocs, I've been trimming the fat, so to speak, killing the stuff that was mindless infodump. As always, I appreciate the read, and a major thanks to Wirepony for his work on editing this older stuff.

Also, if you'd like to donate to the cause, you can hit me up at volrathxp AT gmail.com, if you decide to, thanks much!