

The Reaper's Game

A MLP / TWEWY Crossover

By SIAanme

DAY 3: 3

A crash of rocks, and the last Noise was erased. Rarity looked over at Fluttershy, exhausted. If her partner was as tired as she was, she was certainly hiding it better. As the battlefield faded away, the unicorn found herself right beside her timid friend again. Rarity couldn't quite understand how that worked, but now was scarcely the time. She looked around the island, seeing scattered pairs fighting the seemingly endless Noise.

"Fluttershy, are you doing alright over there?" Rarity asked. The pegasus nodded her response. "Good to hear. Well, know. You know what I mean. It doesn't seem like we'll be given a break anytime soon though."

Fluttershy shook her head, and pointed at another Noise symbol. It had noticed the pair, and was racing towards them, as if eager for battle. Or maybe it was something else entirely. Who knew how these things thought, or even if they did.

Rarity checked her hoof. They had been fighting off Noise for what had seemed like hours now, but the timer confirmed as only having been ten minutes. The assault had started when they had about 35 minutes left, and the timer read 27:53. Rarity hoped she wouldn't faint before the time was up. Fighting the Noise was more exhausting than even the most complicated magic she'd attempted. Still, this wasn't the time for it. If Fluttershy could stay strong, then so could she.

The Noise reached them, and once more the pair found themselves sealed off from the rest of reality. This time before them stood a new type of Noise. Wolf-like in shape, but with a wooden appearance, with various gnarled branches coming from its joints and head. It was a creature most in Ponyville could name, but few had seen. It - Or more accurately, they - were Timberwolves. The only discrepancy between the creatures before them and the description Rarity had heard from the stories was the head, which instead of the wooden texture consistent with the rest of the creature, was the more ink-like appearance common among Noise.

Rarity didn't have any more time to observe as the first of the pair sprung at her, bearing its teeth. With instinct born from battle, the fashionista conjured an ice pillar under the wolf, throwing it into the air, and more importantly, away from her. Its compatriot took up the assault, this time prowling around the unicorn, not immediately leaping. Rarity tried to toss this one the same way as the other, but the Noise moved to the side at the last second, dodging the column. Sensing its chance, it attacked.

Rarity tried to dodge, but failed to move quickly enough, avoiding a full on collision, but still getting scratched by the wolf's claws. The impact was enough to knock her off her feet, and she fell a short distance away. Capitalising on this moment of weakness, the wolf doubled back for another attack. Disoriented though she was, Rarity managed to use her other pin, causing a shower of rocks. While they failed to make a direct hit, they managed to stop the Noise's advance all the same, forming a small barrier

between them. It lasted long enough for Rarity to regaining her footing.

By this point the first wolf had recovered from its flight, and unleashed another pounce. Rarity managed to successfully dodge this one, and sent it flying again with another ice pillar. She didn't wait for it to land this time, raining rocks upon it even while it was still airborne, causing it to slam into the ground, stunning it. Before she could launch it again, something hit her in the back of the head. Not hard, but hard enough to throw off her concentration for a bit, causing another miss with the ice. Looking at her sash, Rarity confirmed she had used all her charges with the pillars for now, noticeable by the dulled colour of the pin.

There was another whack to her head, and she turned around. A short distance away, moving slowly was the second wolf, what seemed to be a branch in its mouth. With a flick of its head, it sent the branch flying, causing Rarity to step to side quickly, lest it hit her. She then watched as the timberwolf snapped off a branch from its forelegs. The creature was tearing itself apart just to get Rarity. As she readied another rockfall, the Noise tossed the latest branch at her, forcing another dodge.

The wolf's strategy became clear. It was using the sticks to distract Rarity, and to prevent her from being able to attack it, all the while drawing closer to unleash its own attack. Sure enough, as Rarity focused on her attack, the wolf threw another branch. Rarity didn't even try to dodge this time. It hit her square in the head with just enough force to throw off her concentration.

There was a ringing sound, and Rarity glanced down to see her ice pillar pin had recharged. She dodged another branch, and the wolf drew ever closer. The gap between them was closing rapidly now, and Rarity knew she had no chance if the combat became *mêlée* range. She was also acutely aware that the other wolf couldn't stay stunned forever. She had to come up with a plan. She backed away from the advancing Noise, trying to remember what she knew about timberwolves. They were creatures of the Everfree forest, they were made of sapient wood, they didn't like loud noises...

Just like that a plan formed. Instead of dodging the next branch, she conjured an ice pillar, forming a shield. But she wasn't done, and she immediately started dropping rocks on the crystal. The resulting collision created a huge din, one that she would normally object to. But more importantly, it was one the timberwolves would object to. Peering out from behind the column, the unicorn could see that the Noise had indeed stopped its approach, its paws covering its ears as best as it could.

Before it could recover, Rarity summoned another ice pillar, this one directly beneath it, sending the creature skyward. She followed through with her rocks, much as she had done with the other wolf, slamming it to the ground. And then she did it again, launching the Noise and then slamming it. It didn't survive the collision, and it vanished in the now familiar burst of static.

"One down," muttered Rarity. She didn't have long to celebrate though, as she became aware of a growling sound behind her. She spun just in time to see the first timberwolf, recovered, making another leap at her. She concentrated on her rocks, but they didn't come. She had exhausted the charge while dealing with the other wolf, and she didn't have the time to ready her other attack. She closed her eyes, bracing for the hit... which never came. She felt a small gust of wind right in front of her face, and opened her eyes just in time to see the last remnants of the Noise fade. She looked over to the other side of the battlefield to Fluttershy, who was surrounded by her barrier. Rarity realised what had happened as the UG returned.

"Fluttershy, thanks for finishing off the last Noise. I mean, I was in no danger really, but it certainly saved any more damage to my mane."

Fluttershy smiled briefly, before turning her focus once more to the swarms of Noise symbols. Rarity glanced at her hoof again. 20:21. They could do this. They only had to survive another 20 minutes.

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"And that makes twenty five!" Dash cried, crashing through the last of the Noise. "Oh yeah, as if there was any doubt of my awesomeness!"

"It's certainly hard to doubt it when you're yelling it after you do just about anything," muttered Applejack. Dash shot her a look.

"You may have forgotten, but I am at war here!"

"War? Rainbow, it's just a small competition. There's no need to be so... gung ho about it."

"JUST a SMALL competition? There's no such thing as a small competition! You either go home with the glory, or you lose. And I am NOT going to lose to that unicorn."

"Aw come on now. Twi seems like a nice enough pony," Applejack tried to reason. "I don't see why you have to insist on this ridiculous game."

"Well I can't be friends with anyone less cool than myself, can I?" explained Dash. "Besides, she's the one who insisted on this 'ridiculous game', not me." She squinted off into the distance. "Heh, speaking of her, she's right over there. Come on, I've got to go brag to her."

"Can you at least have the restraint to not call it bragging?"

If Rainbow heard Applejack she made no indication of it. The pair made their way to where Twilight and Pinkie were. "Hey Twilight!" Dash shouted as soon as they were close enough. "Just thought I should let you know how much I'm beating you by. I've taken out twenty five Noise! Pretty impressive huh? What's your count? I bet it's only five or so, right?"

"What? Oh, Noise count." Twilight sounded a little distracted, or preoccupied. "Let's see... Thirty-one I think? I may have missed one or two..."

Applejack would have paid a large number of bits to have a picture of Dash's face right then. "Wha... you're *beating* me?"

"Yeah, I guess so. Look Rainbow, I've got a lot on my mind right now, can we talk later?" With no further ceremony, Pinkie and Twilight rushed off into the chaos, leaving AJ and RD on their own again. Dash was still in shock.

"Well, looks like you're not going to win that competition sugarcube," snickered Applejack. "Who knew that little filly had it in her?"

"No! She will not beat me!" Dash cried out, getting a second wind. "We're going to take this to the next level!"

"Easy there... remember what Pinkie said, we should focus on just surviv-"

"Hey! Noise!" Once again Dash demonstrated her ability to not listen. "You think you can take on the Dash? Well come and get some! I'll take you all on with my wings tied to my back!"

"Uh, you don't have wings right now sugarcube..." said Applejack nervously. It seemed to her that the Noise that were previously whizzing above them had slowed, now instead circling them like vultures. "And would you mind dialing it back a bit?"

"Well, I could I guess.... if you're too scared!"

"Now just hang on a sec, I never said I was scared," exclaimed Applejack indignantly, her current accent doing indignant rather well.

"Oh, I know. But it's pretty clear that you're trying to chicken out from this whole thing. It's okay, we can't all be as brave as me.

"That does it! Hey Noise! Come and get it!"

They didn't have to wait any longer as the Noise swarmed down on them, and they were transported to the battleground.

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Dash was frustrated by the number of Noise to battle. "Only two? Errgh, that's not enough! I need like, twenty if I want to catch up with Twilight!"

"Then beat these ones quickly so we can fight more," Applejack shouted from her side of the field. Before Dash could respond, she had leapt into battle, swinging her hat. Dash snapped her attention back to her side of the battlefield. Thankfully she was only up against some frog Noise. They posed no real threat. She prepared her whirlwind attack, taking a deep breath before breathing out. As before, a twister formed, or rather, two twisters, one beneath each of the frogs, lifting them into the sky. Finally, when Dash was out of breath, the twisters slammed the frogs into the ground, erasing them both in a single strike.

"Heh, too easy," smirked Dash, and she waited for the battlefield to dissolve. But this time it didn't. Instead another two Noise symbols appeared, unfolding into frogs. "Oh, so you want a go as well? Okay then!" Once again Dash unleashed a whirlwind, erasing the frogs in a single blow. But it wasn't over yet, as yet another two frogs showed up.

"Hey, what gives? Why do these Noise keep coming?"

"Are you really complaining? It gives you more points, right?"

Before Dash could reply, one of the frogs managed to jump on her, jumping off a moment later

with a powerful kick. "Ow! That's it, you just messed with the wrong pony!" Dash had one twister left to attack with, so she used it, expecting another one hit KO. But this time as the frogs slammed into the ground, they didn't vanish like their compatriots. Instead they spat a swarm of bubbles at Rainbow, who had to dodge.

"Hey, you weren't meant to survive that attack," cried Dash. "None of your buddies did!" To correct this oversight, Dash tackled the frogs, using her other pin. They both vanished this time. Like clockwork, more frogs, numbering three this time, appeared on the battlefield.

"Hey, uh, Applejack? Is it just me, or are these Noise getting tougher the more we fight?"

"I think you're right sugarcube, but it's not like we can't handle them right?" Applejack replied. And once more she was back to fighting, this time shooting her barbed wires across the battlefield, trapping the frogs.

Dash was still out of twisters, so she prepared her charge attack again. She knocked two of the frogs back, and had rounded on the third one when she felt a sudden decrease in speed. Her pin had run out, and a quick glance at her other one confirmed it still needed time to charge. She was out of attacks.

The Noise seized their chance, two of them spitting bubbles at Rainbow while the third made a lunging attack. Dash jumped sideways, dodging the lunge, but landed in the path of one of the swarms of bubbles. She winced at the hits, feeling like each bubble was draining some of her strength. It was at that point that her tackle attack had recharged, so she immediately charged the closest frog with it, knocking it back into one of the others. She aimed herself at the third one and attacked. At the last moment, the frog managed to spit a bubble cloud at the approaching rainbow blur, but Dash didn't even flinch as she ran through them, colliding with the frog.

Ding. Dash smiled, recognising that sound. Her twister badge was ready again. Without hesitation, she activated it, breathing a tornado under each of the frogs, flinging them into the air, and then bringing them crashing down. Three bursts of static, three more Noise erased. Finally, the battlefield faded and the underground reappeared. "And that's thirty-four! Oh yeah, Dash is back in the lead!" From the corner of her eye she spotted Applejack breathing heavily. She turned to face her. "Well come on, we can't stop! Every second we're not fighting is another second that Twilight gets closer to my lead!"

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Thirty-seven... thirty-eight. Dodge. Fire. Dodge. Shoot. *Thirty-nine.* Dodge. Fail to dodge. Stand back up. Fire, shoot. *Forty, forty-one....* Dodge. Wait. Dodge. Dodge. Shoot. *Forty-two.* End battle.

Focusing on her battles in this mechanical way was helpful for Twilight. It meant she could ignore the thoughts at the back of her head, the thoughts about all those ponies who had been erased, all because of Pinkamena's plan....

Twilight banished that thought to the back of her mind with the rest of them. She needed another battle. Thankfully there was no shortage of Noise at this point. Faintly she registered Pinkamena saying something to her, but she ignored it. She couldn't deal with her right now. She wasn't angry. The anger would come later. For now she was just numb.

Pinkamena waved a hoof in front of her face. "Hello, planet Twilight, do you copy? You're starting to freak me out a little."

"Huh?" Twilight snapped back to reality. "Yes, what?"

"I was just saying, I think maybe we should try and hide for a bit, you know, rest. We've been going at full tilt since the fighting started, and well, the mission says to survive. Not to wear ourselves out."

"Yeah, sure." Her voice betrayed no emotion. Pinkamena looked at her worriedly.

"You sure you're okay? You've been acting kinda funny for the past..." Pinkamena consulted her hoof. "...fifteen minutes. And not the good kind of funny either."

"No it's nothing...."

Pinkamena narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "Oki Doki Loki.... I saw a place back there that should work. Come on."

Moving slowly to avoid catching the Noise's attention, the pair made their way closer to the statue itself, finally reaching an alcove out of the Noise's view. They ducked inside.

After a few seconds of silence, Pinkamena tried to strike up some conversation again. "So, spill. What's wrong?"

"I told you," Twilight said, "there's nothing wrong."

"Uh huh. And what about when we're not lying?" Twilight must have looked surprised, for she continued, "My special talent is normally throwing parties. Part of good party throwing technique is knowing when and who to throw a party for, usually for birthdays, but also for when somepony is feeling down or there's something wrong. So I can tell there's something wrong. So don't try and tell me nothing's wrong when something's wrong."

"Okay, maybe there is something wrong," Twilight admitted. "But I don't want to talk about it." *Not with you.*

"Of course you don't *want* to talk about it, that's how you know you *need* to talk about it. So come on, tell me."

"I said I don't want to talk about it," Twilight repeated, clenching her teeth.

"And I'm not going to accept that," replied Pinkamena. "Now tell me what's wrong, or so help me Luna I will-"

"Or you'll what?" snapped Twilight. "You wouldn't dare do anything to me for fear it would end up getting you erased!" The dam of anger Twilight had been holding back finally broke. "You don't even really care what's wrong, you just don't want me to endanger your efforts at life! All those ponies out there, they had just as much right to a second chance as we do, and yet you condemned them without a second thought! No, you went out of your way to make sure they wouldn't survive! You're no better than a reaper!"

Pinkamena just sat there in silence for a few moments. "Wow, that really affected you huh?"

"How am I meant to react at seeing a whole hoofful of ponies dying? Should I bake a cake and celebrate? Cheer as loud as I can to cover the cries of agony?"

"What do you want me to do about it? It was us or them, we're not all going to come back to life. What's wrong with tipping the odds in our favour slightly?"

"Tipping the odds in our-" Twilight was dumbstruck. "What's wrong is that you effectively murdered all those ponies! When is murder ever okay?"

Twilight waited for Pinkamena's next argument. To her surprise, instead the pink pony hung her head in shame. "You're right of course. It was murder. I just got caught up in trying to win, to take back my life and entry fee." She looked up at Twilight. "I can't change what's been done, but maybe I can make it up to you some other way?"

Before Twilight could respond there was a roar from outside. The pair rushed outside to see the ursaform, still causing havoc. It seemed most ponies were trying to avoid it, with varying success. Every now and then it would flicker out of view, but would always reappear only a few seconds later, having made short work of another pair. Twilight turned to Pinkamena.

"Well, I think I've figured out how you can begin to make amends."

"I'm guessing it's not just going to be a hug? No?" She sighed. "Okay, off to fight the scary giant star bear then."

The pair galloped as fast as they could, rapidly closing the distance between them and the Ursa, dodging the other Noise that tried to attack them. As they approached, the Ursa seemed to notice them, a toothy grin appearing on its features. With a swipe of its paw, it knocked back another pair, not erasing them, but certainly leaving them vulnerable to the other Noise swarming around it like vultures.

"Last chance to change your mind!" Pinkamena called to Twilight. She shook her head and continued charging.

The closer they got to the giant Noise, the more warped the landscape seemed to become. From a distance, the area around the Ursa had seemed normal, considering the presence of an enormous bear. But up close, the ground had been torn, there were paw prints where the Ursa had been, and here and there, there was a lot more red than you'd normally find on the ground.

"The Battlefield is warping the space around the Ursa," Pinkamena answered Twilight's unspoken question. "After all, Noise only normally exist as their animal forms on the Battlefield. To be like that in the UG, they have to open a hole between the two, and the Battlefield bleeds into the Underground."

Finally the two stood before the Ursa. The creature let out a roar, and there was a bright flash. They had now been transported to the Battlefield. As with the Dragonfly the day before, there was only the one Ursa, this time on Twilight's side of the field.

The Ursa wasted no time in attacking, swiping at Twilight with one of its massive paws. Twilight jumped backwards, conjuring fire along the path of the paw swipe at the same time. The beast howled in pain, quickly withdrawing the paw. Twilight took advantage of this to pepper it with force rounds, shooting each one at the star in the centre of its forehead, a natural target. This seemed to do little but annoy the beast, and it crouched in preparation for a pounce. Twilight's force rounds ran out, and the Noise leapt, on a collision course straight for her.

Twilight ran towards the lunging Ursa, escaping underneath the beast. As it landed, she managed to skid and turn around, using pyrokinesis once more to bathe the beast in flame. Another roar from the beast rewarded her efforts as it began to turn around, its huge bulk making this a slow job. Twilight used the time to continue her flambé, and when it had recharged, she complimented the attack with a round of energy blasts.

Finally, the Noise finished turning, and Twilight prepared for another swipe or lunge attack. Instead the Ursa let out a might roar, louder and more forceful than the ones it had previously cried. In fact, this one was loud enough that Twilight winced, shutting her eyes and covering her ears with her hooves. The force of the roar was so great that Twilight could feel herself sliding backward on the pavement. When she stopped moving she managed to open her eyes. And promptly jumped several feet to the side. The sight of a giant bear made of stars leaping towards you is not a sight you want to see, less so if it's the first thing you see upon opening your eyes.

The Ursa crashed through the wall dividing Pinkamena's side of the Battlefield from Twilight. Twilight didn't get any chance for a break though, as the second the Ursa was out of her reach, several frog Noise spawned on her side of the battlefield. As one they all blew swarms of bubbles at Twilight, who failed to dodge them this time. One of the frogs used this opportunity to jump on her, delivering a kick powerful enough to send the purple unicorn flying backwards. She landed with a thump, and was briefly winded. Once she regained her footing, she saw the frogs preparing another volley of bubbles.

Not this time, she thought, surrounding each of them with a ring of fire before firing her own volley of force rounds at them. *Forty-three, forty-four, forty-five, forty-six...* They were all erased one at a time. As if on cue the Ursa Minor broke through the dividing wall again, once more on Twilight's side of the field. It swatted at Twilight, this time scoring a glancing blow, enough to knock her off her feet. Woozy, Twilight looked up to see the Ursa bringing down both its paws in a slamming motion, clearly trying to squash her. She rolled out of the way just as the paws hit the ground. Regaining her footing, she scorched the paws, causing the bear to rear in pain. Not wasting the opportunity, she unleashed a flurry of force rounds at the Ursa's exposed underside.

The Ursa let out another roar, and toppled backwards, landing on its back with a tremendous crash, half on Twilight's side, and half on Pinkamena's side. Twilight continued shooting force rounds at it until they ran out, whereupon she switched to pyrokinesis. The Noise struggled to right itself under this onslaught. Finally Twilight's pyrokinesis also ran out, and she was left defenseless.

Seeing an opportunity, the Ursa tried one last time to struggle to its feet. What it didn't see coming however, was Pinkamena's attack. She teleported directly above its head, and crashed down into it. It was the last thing it saw.

Twilight watched as the creature flashed white, fading and shrinking. The battlefield also began to vanish, and as it cleared Twilight spotted Rainbow Dash staring at her.

"That only counts as one!" Dash yelled.

Across the island, there was a flash as the timer on everypony's hoofs ran out. The lingering Noise symbols vanished, leaving only battered and weary ponies in their wake. And just like that, the day was over.

DAY 3

RAISED STAKES

END