

Irreplaceable
Chapter 19: Combat

The forest shook, powerful vibrations shaking the treetops, as the guttural sounds of a dragon's song permeated the air. The singer, a colossal, dancing figure, bounced his way through the forest with a grace that belies his great size. The song itself, a somber tune, almost a dirge, was sung with all the glee and good humour that would come from a foal and its mother singing a nursery rhyme together.

***Fear the dragon of the white wastes!
He'll burn your village and laugh as your life is erased
He'll eat your hatchling and stomp on the old
He'll leave you dyeing in pain and the cold***

***He is no dragon but a demon from some far land
Before him, even the mightiest of us cannot stand
Do not wish this monster upon another living thing
For you know too well the horrors this creature will bring***

***Fear the dragon of the white wastes!
He'll burn your village and laugh as your life is erased
He'll eat your hatchling and stomp on the old
He'll leave you dying in pain and the cold***

***Pray to the lights that watch from the sky
Pray that this monster someday will die
Pray that this monster someday will die.***

Arriving at his destination, the dragon finished his song, composing himself as he stood before his salvation: the colossal portal. As he stared into its rippling, white depths, the great beast found himself laughing. Throwing back his massive head, he all but cackled with sheer joy, a low belly laugh rising to a giddy giggle of glee. He had done it. He'd finally done it. After over a thousand years, centuries of planning, toil and waiting, the solution to all his problems had literally dropped itself into his hoard. Finally, he composed himself and approached the swirling gateway. As he stretched a claw to the portal, he paused, looking back over his shoulder, the direction his young friend had taken wing. In a rare moment of introspection, he realized he'd grown quite fond of his madling companion. He was, he realized, honestly sad to see the young lad go.

"Still..." He giggled a bit as his fond smile twisted into an unnatural, insane grin. "I do wish I could see how Celestia handles this... having to kill her pupil's dearest friend..." Another gleeful cackle escaped his scaly jaws. "Alas, I've far more pressing concerns than her sorrow." Turning his back to the portal, he drew himself up to his full height, before bending almost double in an elaborate, exaggerated bow. "Farewell, Equestria! I do thank you for playing host to me for so

long... and do remember.... You are truly fortunate. You've no... *problems* that require my services." With that, the great dragon turned and, with no further ceremony, stepped through.

The party ran through the woods, dipping and dodging around low branches, tree trunks and rocks. This was it. Now was the time. *C'est l'heure*. One had to feel sorry for anything unwise enough to stand in their way. After the fifth time Twilight nearly stumbled on a rock in her path, the mare simply elected to use her magic as a bulldozer; the path behind her was littered with the shattered and splintered remains of trees and boulders. Single-minded determination entirely overtook the lavender mare; gradually increasing her speed, she began to break away from the group. She passed Pinkie, passed Fluttershy, passed Applejack, even passing both Celestia and Luna. So great was her drive, none could match her pace. Horn aglow with arcane power, she was a beacon of light and power, shining through the trees. As she sped up, pulling farther and farther away from her companions, all but the faint glow was lost to sight. They were running as fast as they could manage, straining themselves to move faster than most of them had ever run before. As fast as they were running, however, not a mare among them didn't speed up as they watched the giant, dark shape plummet from the sky, the faint glow ahead winking out.

Bursting from the forest into the newly created clearing, the group skidded to a halt in front of the one they'd come to save. As he switched his attention from the limp form of Twilight he held clutched in one massive claw, all present felt a shiver run down their spines at the expression of raw insanity etched upon his face. Casting Twilight aside, he spread his wings, hurling himself towards the assembled ponies, toothy maw spread wide in a deafening roar. Instantly, the alicorn princesses had positioned themselves between the dragon and its prey, horns aglow and wings spread as their bodies pulsed with magical energies. As they prepared to take flight, launching themselves at the crashing behemoth charging towards them, all three were taken off guard as a boulder collided with the side of Spike's head, knocking him into a spin as he crashed through the trees. Flailing limbs and thrashing tail cut a swathe through the forest as he rolled, splintering and crushed wood scattering, before he finally came to a stop. For some time, he was entirely still. Massive legs quivered as it tried to raise itself once more, but he didn't rise from the inevitable collapse. It didn't move again. A glow attracting their attention, the group turned just in time to watch a large tree disintegrate into nothingness, the raw power of Twilight's fury immolating it in a heartbeat as the mare made her way towards the fallen dragon.

Surrounded by a scorchingly powerful aura, Twilight's face resembled her fallen friend's in all but species. The initial shock of her return quickly wearing off, her friends moved to rush to her aid, but were stopped by two pairs of wings unfurling before them. "No! We can't approach her now. Their emotions are one. She shares his rage, and he hers. Confronting her would be a death sentence."

"Well, what the hay are we supposed to do?! We can't just... well, we can't just do nothing!"

“We need to think, miss Pie. We need to calm them. Both of them. Unless we manage that, there’s nothing we can do, short of...” Celestia’s voice trailed off, her meaning very clear. The smaller ponies hesitated, pawing the earth in frustration; however, they nodded as one, and tried to think. *How...? How could they help their friends?*

Twilight stood before the fallen beast, raw fury coursing through her veins. There was nothing anymore. No princesses, no forest, no friends. There was only the dragon. Tendrils of energy surged from her horn, enveloping Spike, and lifting him from the ground. In an instant, green eyes flicked open, meeting her own, and a torrent of emerald flame turned the ground to crackling glass in the spot where she’d stood moments before. Winking back into space, Twilight’s teleport deposited herself several hundred meters directly above her one time friend. Layers upon layers of magic wrapped themselves around her, shielding herself as strongly as she could, before plummeting towards the beast. The glowing purple streak that was Twilight plowed into Spike at devastating velocity, and a sickening crack echoed through the forest. The limp form of Twilight, struck by a spasming tail, was sent hurtling through the air, a second crack ringing out as she struck a rather large tree.

Casting aside Luna’s restraining hoof, Celestia was at Twilight’s side in an instant, heedless of the warning her sister tried to give, . Gently lifting Twilight’s unmoving body, she cradled her precious little pony like a mother with her newborn foal, rocking her gently. Her horn lit up, a soft glow permeating both ponies as Twilight’s injuries began to heal, disappearing like sand washed from a smooth stone by the tide.

As the glow faded, Twilight’s panicked friends surrounded the two, concern evident on their faces. Breathing a sigh of relief, Celestia gave them a tired smile. “She’s fine, now.... just fine... Hopefully, they’ve both-” She froze, as did the rest, as a massive shadow fell across them. Slowly raising their eyes, the group met those of Spike, concern momentarily replacing rage, but gone in an instant, blind fury retaking his face as a glowing aura once more blossomed around Twilight, the two combatants’ eyes locking once more. Twilight was awake, and she was ready for more.

“YOU. WILL. NOT. TOUCH THEM!” With a flash, Twilight was gone again. As Celestia fired a blast of magic at Spike, a second blast caught her full in the side, sending her sprawling. “STAY OUT OF THIS!” Twilight shrieked in rage, firing another blast of raw power at her mentor, throwing her aside like a rag doll, turning her attention to the dragon just in time to set a shield between her and the gout of green flame he’d let loose. The shield around her momentarily contracting, Twilight sent it rocketing outwards, striking Spike bodily and causing him to stumble. Wasting no time, Twilight stomped her hooves, gesturing with her head and sending three pillars of stone rocketing from the forest floor, pummeling the dragon. As she prepared to strike again, she was forced to dive aside as the dragon’s massive tail struck the stone spires, shattering them like glass and showering the ponies with chunks of rock larger than they.

Reflexively, Luna conjured a shield around herself and her subjects, the rocks bouncing harmlessly off and thudding to the ground. Turning to her sister, the goddess of the moon bore a grave expression, choosing her words carefully.

“Celestia.... The stakes are becoming far too high. Now, not only is Twilight’s life at stake, her very sanity could be forfeit if we don’t end this soon... As well, the longer we delay, the greater the chance that Delicraw will escape.... we simply can’t take that chance. If we’re unable to calm them...” The pregnant pause left no doubt as to her train of thought. Her sister’s face fell as she realized the implications of the statement, as well as the only course of action left to her. With a heavy heart, Celestia rose to her hooves, horn aglow once more with ethereal fire, the energies flowing from the tip and pooling before her, mixing with those of her sister as the swirling energies crackled, mixing and pulsing, coalescing into a shimmering sphere of raw magical power.

As the collected ponies watched, it was Pinkie Pie who finally broached the question. “...Princess.... what... what are you doing?”

“We are preparing ourselves... Together, even in our weakened states, we... we are able to collect enough energy to... end this. Decisively.” Not one of them felt even slightly assured by her tone.

“Pray tell, what, exactly, do you mean by ‘end this’?” Rarity spoke nervously, voice wavering slightly as she glanced between the alicorn sisters. Luna sighed heavily, taking it upon herself to answer the question.

“...We have to kill Spike.”

Jade flame cascaded through the clearing, reducing all it touched to ash as its grasping tendrils reached for the lavender unicorn who always seemed to be just centimeters from its grasp. Arcane fire coursing through her veins, enhancing her strength, speed and reaction time a hundred fold, Twilight ducked, dodged and weaved in and around the blows sent her way, slipping past the furious dragon’s attacks to deliver magical strikes of her own. Preferring to pace herself as to avoid getting tired too soon, Twilight chose to avoid rather than deflect, only shielding herself or teleporting when she was faced with no alternative.

Without a working knowledge of combat magic, Celestia’s apprentice was forced to utilize the skills she already had, twisting benign spells into destruction incarnate. Levitation magic hurled debris and knocked her opponent off balance whilst her basic knowledge of weather manipulation tore thunderbolts from the sky, scorching the air itself as they homed in on their target. Her manipulation of water and earth came into full use, striking from below with pillars of rock, lashing out with vines and creepers from the forest around them or spraying water into his eyes.

Twilight Sparkle, the introverted bookworm who spent more hours in a day reading than she did asleep, studying magic for the betterment of ponykind, was now using every trick she knew to try her damndest to kill one of the most important creatures in her life. Quick movement, even quicker reflexes and a dragon's trademark scales were the only things that had prevented her from triumphing long ago.

Yet again slipping around a swing, Twilight leapt back, and the two found themselves face to face once more. A memory of a fight gone by echoing in the back of her head, Twilight lowered her head, charging towards Spike, horn pulsing menacingly as she angled her horn wickedly. Lunging, jaws wide, at the pony before him, Spike snapped, but a magically enhanced boost of speed kept Twilight just ahead of him fanged maw, and he found himself with a mouthful of dirt. Slipping under him, Twilight flicked her head, preparing to create additional pylons of stone to strike at his less protected underbelly. However, before she could complete the spell, her foe's legs suddenly went slack, dropping his entire weight directly upon her.

For a brief moment, everything stopped. There was dead silence in the clearing. Had he done it? Had Spike managed to kill the pony who could only be described as his big sister? Not one being present moved as much as an inch, waiting with baited breath, no pony daring to so much as move. Had he done it? It seemed as though even their hearts had stopped, the crash of the dragon's weight echoing their final beats.

snap

There was a collective gasp as all looked to the source of the sound, only to see a purple blur and a streak of violet magic strike the dragon. Spike roared, clutching at the spot where he'd been hit. The first true injury of the fight had been dealt. With another flash, Twilight appeared a short distance away. Nothing could be read on her face, aside from raw, primal rage. Her magic boiled around her, drawing magic from Equestria itself as waves of power writhed chaotically around her. The battle was far from over, and once again, each engaged the other with barely a thought.

It took all the courage she could muster, but Applejack planted herself squarely between the goddesses and their target. "Now you just wait a goldarn minute! Spike here's our friend, through thick and thin. He's always stuck with us, an' now when he needs our help, yer first thought's ta kill him?! He may be a bit touched in the head righ' now, but that ain't gonna stop us! We're gonna get bim back, ya hear? We can, an' we will, y'all hear me!?"

Celesita sighed, shaking her head as best she could without disrupting her spell. "Applejack, please... Don't make this any harder than it already is. I assure you, I do NOT want to do this... I helped Twilight to care for him as he grew, helped her to raise him. He's as much

family to me as he is to you, but you must understand. *There is no cure for his affliction.* If we're unable to calm him... Think of how dangerous he is now. He has a focus, a target. What will happen once Delicraw escapes? That voice in the back of his head, that little whisper keeping him in line will be entirely extinguished. We're going to have a rogue dragon on our hooves, attacking anything and everything he finds. There'll be no rhyme or reason, nopony pulling the strings from the shadows. Not only will he become a threat to Ponyville, but his very existence will threaten all of Equestria. We have no choice. No matter how we do it, we must stop him, here and now."

Applejack's jaw went slack, her mouth agape as she processed this new information. She tried to think of something, anything to say, anything that could save the dragon who had become as a little brother not only to her, but to each and every one of them. She tried to think of something, anything to say, anything that could save him.

There was nothing. The princesses were right. She hung her head in despair, tears of hopeless frustration squeezing out from the corners of her eyes. A gentle hoof on her shoulder caused her to raise her head, only to be met with a gentle smile. "Don't worry." Fluttershy hugged her distraught friend, giving her a reassuring squeeze. "They're not ready yet. It'll take time. We can still find a way."

A slow smile spread across the farmer's face, quickly replaced by a scowl of determination.

"Yer right, 'Shy. We still got time, an' we can't waste any of it sittin' here moping! Come on, y'all! We may not be brainy as Twilight, but there ain't no way we can't figure this out!" Newly inspired, the Elements of Harmony, whittled down from six to four, put their heads together. Not a power in the 'verse could stop them from saving their friends.

While Laughter, Honesty, Kindness and Generosity planned, not a hundred meters away, Magic continued her fight in earnest, giving her all as she attempted to kill her closest friend. Both dragon and pony fought with all their ability, pitting bestial fury against cunning intellect. Spike fought with tooth and claw, fire and instinct, forged into the perfect killing machine through millions of years of evolution, the savage blood of the ultimate predators flowing through his veins. Twilight, not to be outdone, fought with her magic and her mind. Powerful magic, honed through years of study and fuelled by near limitless potential exploded through the night, countering brute force with cunning intellect and clever creativity. Fire met magic as a shield would blossom, deflecting the torrents of wrath. Raw blasts of ethereal energy seared through the air, the great yet nimble beast dodging at the last second.

As the battle raged on, seconds seemed to stretch to minutes, and minutes to hours. As they fought, the former friends became more and more in tune with their opponent; the first clumsy attacks, raw blasts of uncontrolled power and vicious, unfocused lunges and snaps falling away, calculation and cunning taking the place of blind rage as the two became more and more in tune with one another. Desperate, rabid conflict gave way to a certain amount of

elegance and grace, the combatants entering into a deadly ballet of sorts. A mighty tail would lash out, streaking towards its target with devastating speed, only to smash harmlessly to the ground as the unicorn disappeared with a metallic *sheen*, only to reappear a safe distance away, a powerful magical attack prepared to counter. Deflecting the blast with its diamond-hard scales, the dragon lashed out with razor sharp claws.

Twilight leapt back, countering with a magically thrown tree, which Spike batted aside without a second thought. Smashed and spinning, the once mighty oak tumbled end over end as it spiralled through the air, directly towards the assembled Elements of Harmony. Calling a warning, Applejack dove for cover, as did Rarity and Pinkie Pie... leaving a shellshocked Fluttershy directly in its path. Wings locked and knees quaking, Fluttershy stared, wide eyed and helpless, as the thousand pound tree bore down on her with a thunderous crash.

~TO BE CONTINUED~

A/N: Hey, all!

First off, I have an announcement to make.

I'm an absolute cunt.

Take that however you will. I hope you take it as an apology, because that's what it's intended as. Due to a number of different things, I've been without a computer for about five months now. Add that to the fact that I've been an incredibly lazy sack of shit and several knife wounds and my new 12 hour a day work schedule, and that adds up to no new chapter of Irreplaceable for an inexcusably long time.

First, I'd like to apologize. That giant mess I like to call a paragraph above this line sorta does that, so I'll let that be that for now.

Second, I'd like to make it up to you. I've had an iPod Touch, which has been my only way to access the internet. Using that, I've written a couple shitty chapters of new fanfics I'm planning on working on after Irreplaceable (My real focus, Pinkie Pie swear) is finished. Anyone who wants a sneak peek of any of my next fics, just send me a message and ask. In addition to that, I WILL be releasing, as per many requests I've had, MULTIPLE ENDINGS, which will cover the entire spectrum, going from Oh for Celestia's sake I just got diabeetus to so ridiculously grimdark it'd make Pinkie Pie turn emo and start cutting herself.

Third, I would like to announce that I WILL release another chapter of Irreplaceable soon. I've already started it, and I just didn't want any of you to wait any longer for this one.

Thank you all so much for sticking with me, and I hope I live up to your expectations. If you've lost interest and think I should go die in a car fire, that's okay too. I both welcome and deserve your hate for how long I've made you all wait.

Thank you all so much for sticking with me through all this.

La Barata