

**I wish I could say Canterlot, or Equestria for that matter, was a safe place to live.**

**It isn't.**

**NEW GAME**

**>CONTINUE**

**OPTIONS**

"Spike wake up!" Twilight yelled for the fifth time that morning. The baby dragon continued to lull in bed, oblivious to the angry unicorn above him. With ever snore, he released a puff of smoke that would float by Twilight's face, irking her and causing her to gag. She stared down at the devilishly innocent-looking face. *Perhaps a good water spell might wake him up?* She thought to herself.

"Problem?" Applejack entered the room, already fully clothed for the day ahead of her. She took a quick look at the sleeping reptile and Twilight's flustered expressions and stifled a chuckle. "Heavy sleeper?"

"Like a lead weight," Twilight groaned. "It's like this every morning."

Applejack made her way to the window and unlatched it, allowing a breeze to filter through the room. "You know," she started, "here on the farm, we've perfected all kinds of ways for dealin' with heavy sleepers." Spike continued to snore throughout Applejack's speech. "Now for this kind of sleepin' we have a very special technique..."

"That technique is?" Twilight asked curiously.

"Revolution Apple Buck!"

Spike was sent hurdling out the barn window by Applejack's powerful kick. He soared through the air, past an entire orchard of apple trees, over a broken down truck, and finally landing in the ice-cold bathtub with a loud splash. His tiny body buoyed to the top of the tub, eyes still closed, and not a single scratch on him as he continued to snore.

Twilight gaped in horror at the sight. She herself had never handled Spike like that before. "Are you... did you... that was..."

"Huh, never met a sleeper that heavy," Applejack commented as she ignored Twilight babbling "How does he sleep through all that?"

"You kicked him out the window!"

"And?" Applejack replied with a genuinely straight face.

Twilight had a hard time closing her mouth. *Country ponies are something else*, she

decided. "The dragon scales keep him from feeling most forms of pain," Twilight sighed.

"Then no harm no fowl." Applejack dismissed Twilight's worries with a wave of her hoof.

"You still can't just go around kicking him! That's... extreme!"

"Extreme?" Applejack shot Twilight an offended look. "Listen, around here it's either work from sun up to sun down or go hungry 'cause our harvest wasn't big enough. We can't afford laziness from anypony or lizard!" Applejack punctuated by stomping her hoof.

Twilight was taken aback by Applejack's sudden shift in demeanor. "I didn't know things around here were so..." she trailed off, mumbling to herself.

Applejack turned away from Twilight. "No, you didn't, and I can't blame you for that, so sorry if I snapped a little," she apologized. "Listen, my brother made some breakfast, so go get some before Apple Bloom eats everything all right?" With a tiny smile, Applejack left Twilight alone in the room, still down from talking about the depression going on in Apple Acres.

Twilight sighed. "I don't get her," she commented to no pony.

"Get who?" no pony asked back, causing Twilight to jump and hit the roof. She crashed down on the floor and looked up to find Spike looking down at her from the windowsill. "You okay, Twilight?" he asked, drenched, but wide-awake.

"Spike? When did you wake up?" Twilight asked as she collected herself off the floor, body sore and mane a mess.

"A few minutes ago," he answered. "You know, it's pretty refreshing to wake up in a tub!"

"Really..." Twilight groaned as she rubbed her sore face, hoping to soothe some of the pain away. "Well, star collecting your things. We're leaving soon."

"Aw, no breakfast?" Spike complained.

"Actually, Applejack said her brother cooked some breakfast. Get dressed first and then you can go ahead while I pack up."

"All right, 'mom'." Spike grabbed his jacket and threw it over himself before flashily sheathing his daggers.

"And that was?" Twilight asked, amused by his sudden energy.

"I'm working on my victory pose. What do you think? I'm thinking I toss my daggers into the air and then catch them just before I sheath them." Spike drew his weapons and decided he would demo the pose for it for Twilight. He tossed the two daggers into the air.

"Spike, that's dangerous!" Twilight warned him.

"It is not," Spike replied as a dagger slipped from his claw and planted itself in his foot. "Okay, maybe it needs a little practice."

"Are you okay?" Twilight stared at the wound with concern for her dragon assistant, hard scaled as he was.

"Its fine," Spike replied, casually pulling out the dagger. "It didn't go very deep anyway."

"All right then." Twilight turned back to her dirt-stained cloak and disorganized backpack. "Just go have breakfast while I finish up here," she groaned.

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The air in the dining room and den smelled of fresh-baked apple goods. Applejack's elder brother, Big Macintosh, emerged from the kitchen wearing a pink frilly apron and carrying a plate of fresh pancakes in his mouth. He placed the plate on the kitchen table and admired his work.

"Wow, smells good!" Spike emerged from under the other side of the dining table and stared greedily at the delicious pancakes, mouth salivating and fangs exposed. "Do all apple-family ponies cook this good?"

"Family tradition," replied Big Macintosh, "give us an apple and we'll make breakfast, lunch, and dinner with it," he stated before turning back to the baby dragon, "and last time I checked, you got more than your fair share of fill last night during dinner."

"Yeah, it was great by the way!" Spike ignored Big Macintosh's disapproving glare.

"Don't touch anything," he ordered, "and when is your owner-"

"Twilight is not my owner," Spike interrupted him.

"Fine, just when is Miss Twilight going to come down?" Big Macintosh asked.

"Soon, she's just prepping up for the trip back to Canterlot." Spike turned to Big Macintosh. "So, can I have some pancakes?" he finally asked, almost drooling over the still fresh and steaming confections.

"One," he answered. "Apple Bloom! Granny Smith! Breakfast is ready!" he called out to his younger sister and grandmother.

"Comin'!" The little filly ran straight across the room, sliding to a stop just past the table and jumping onto it. "Smells great, Big Macintosh! I want five!"

"You'll have one," Big Macintosh reprimanded her. "If you get a tummy ache you can't do your chores."

"Oh phooey!" Apple Bloom cursed.

"Why are you all yelling so early!?" Granny Smith shouted from across the hall. "Old mare can't get any sleep these days." She limped into the room and sat herself in an old wooden chair. She centered her tired eyes on Spike. "Lizard, where's your keeper?"

"Twilight is not my keeper," Spike almost roared, "and I'm a dragon!"

"Somepony call me?" Twilight asked as she trotted into the dining room, adorned in her magically cleaned cloak and weighted down by a saddlebag full of books.

"Sleep well?" Granny Smith asked with a mischievous smile.

"Oh. Yes. Thank you for the room," Twilight replied as thoughtfully as she could to the crusty old mare. She still felt cheated out of her bits.

"I'm happy to know you were comfortable. You come back to town now. Break some more stuff and you can take more baths with Big Macintosh here." Granny Smith winked back to Twilight, who felt a shiver run down her spine and the blood rush to her face.

"What- I- That was an accident!" Twilight stumbled over her words as she turned away from Granny Smith and the rest of the apple family, mostly from Big Macintosh.

"Granny, that was an accident," Big Macintosh repeated.

"Accident? Get in a bath tub with a cute mare, even if she could stand to lose an inch around the croup, and you want to call that an accident?" she babbled.

"Granny..."

"Your gran-pappy caught me in the tub once and that's how your mama was born. No accidents about that."

"Granny!" Big Macintosh shouted as he covered Apple Bloom's ears.

"What was that?" Apple Bloom asked.

Big Macintosh tried to give Granny Smith a scolding look, who returned the favor tenfold, decimating most of his free will. Giving up, he turned back to Twilight. "Miss Twilight, I apologize for any of my granny's outbursts," Granny Smith gave Big Macintosh a sour-apple face, "but, I was wondering if you could accompany my sister and me to Canterlot; seeing as you're headin' there today as well. Safety in numbers and all," he asked, never taking his warm eyes off Twilight.

"I-I would love to," Twilight answered, unable to turn her gaze away.

"Keep sweet talking the mare and we'll be fine for another generation of apple-family

ponies," Granny Smith smugly commented to herself.

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Big Macintosh lead Twilight and Spike through the town of Apple Acres, heading for the town entrance that would lead to the official road to Canterlot. By policy, the road that leads between Apple Acres and Canterlot was to be protected from the creatures of the Everfree Forest by a militia set up by Canterlot. It was the safest way to Canterlot, even if a goblin or two would slip by every now and then.

At the town entrance, Applejack greeted the two ponies and Spike.

"Cart loaded?" Big Macintosh asked Applejack.

"Eeyup. The orchard's been picked clean and everything's been stuffed in the cart. Not a single apple is left in the orchard now," Applejack confirmed, "so we've got to make it to Canterlot and sell them." Applejack turned to Twilight, who began to feel uneasy, and then back to Big Macintosh. "So I take it she'll be traveling with us, Big Macintosh?" she asked her brother.

"Eeyup..." he replied.

"Hm? Was this planned?" Twilight inferred.

"Why yes it was, Miss Twilight," Applejack answered back, "so I do thank you for your voluntary help in pulling the apple cart and all." Applejack gave Twilight her warmest, most genuine grin to hide the side of her that was pleased by her little scheme's success. "I'm mighty grateful."

"I-I never agreed to this!" Twilight turned to Big Macintosh, hoping for some kind of explanation.

"I'm sorry, Miss Twilight," Big Macintosh replied.

"It's all give and take," Applejack interjected, "you help us pull the cart, and if anything shows up on the road we can protect you. This big lug is pretty strong after all. Them muscles ain't just for looking pretty."

"Lug? Pretty?" Big Macintosh wasn't fond of those adjectives.

Twilight wanted to say no, but Applejack was right, there is safety in numbers. "Fine, I'll help you pull your cart," Twilight spat back.

"Great!" Applejack grabbed a harness and started to hook it up to Twilight.

"Hauling apples to Canterlot," Spike piped up from behind, "isn't that going to take all day?"

"It might, but with some extra work I'm sure we can cut down on some time." Applejack turned to Twilight. "Big Macintosh and I will be pullin' the thing to. We aren't leavin' the whole thing on you."

"Still," Twilight groaned, "ever since I got here it's been one scam after another."

"You really are new to Apple Acres."

SKIT: City Life?

Big Macintosh: Say, Miss Twilight.

Twilight: Yes?

Big Macintosh: What's city life like?

Twilight: Oh! It's great! All the museums, the breadth of the books available at the public library, the educational facilities-

Big Macintosh: Not what I was expectin'...

Spike: You're asking the wrong pony. Twilight spends all her time studying.

Twilight: I'm a student. It's what students do!

Spike: Even during summer break?

Twilight: Yes!

Big Macintosh: Hm...

Twilight: You've never been to Canterlot?

Big Macintosh: I've been there, but every time it's just to sell apples. I never get to spend much time admirin' the city since I need to hurry back to the farm when sellin' is done.

Twilight: Oh, I had no idea...

Big Macintosh: If more ponies would just buy more apples I might be able to spend a day in the city for once, but until then I need to work for the farm.

Twilight: Uh... when you do get that chance to see the city let me accompany you. I can still show you around to the more interesting places.

Big Macintosh: Why thanks.

Applejack: Somepony looks happy...

Spike: Tell me about it...

SKIT: End

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The sun hung high in the sky as it beat down on Twilight. Hauling an apple cart, even with the sturdier apple-siblings next to her doing most of the work, was tiring her out. Around them, trees become more and more scarce as they got farther from the Everfree Forest, giving way to lots of hills, but with so few trees for landmarks it became difficult to discern how much farther Canterlot was. "Do you know how far we are from Canterlot?" she asked Applejack.

"We still have a ways to go," she commented back, "but if we keep up this pace we might be able to make it before evening sets in."

"Great," Twilight grunted.

"We're still that far!?" Spike complained from the top of the apple cart, adding to the haul load.

"Yes, we're still that far, and your complainin' ain't gonna speed up the process." Applejack looked back at the lazy dragon, her eyes narrowing on where it might be most painful to buck him even with the dragon scales. "Twilight, tell that iguana of yours to pull his weight before I send him flying all the way to Trottingham."

"Spike, just be quiet," Twilight groaned and turned back to Applejack. "Sorry, but he's like this a lot. He means well though, most of the time."

"The least he can do is shut his trap," Applejack muttered to herself as she continued to pull the cart.

Big Macintosh wasn't paying much attention to the bickering going on around him. He had gotten too used to it back home, where bickering was a daily regimen, exercise, and past time. He kept his eyes and ears open to the world around him, alert for any disturbance or change. He was always on edge for danger, and the faint sound of footsteps made him stop dead in his tracks. "Applejack," he whispered.

"What?"

A loud roar erupted from the hills behind them. Twilight turned back to see a monster emerge from the horizon: a large black-furred beast with claws sharp as daggers and an elongated, scaly head like a snake. It stood higher than four ponies standing on each other. [It was a chimera.](#)

"What the hay is a chimera doing so close to the road!?" Applejack flared up in anger. "No, this ain't right!"

"Forget the cart!" Big Macintosh shouted. "We have to escape."

"We can't..." Applejack quivered at the sight of the monster. "We can't leave the cart!"

"We don't have much choice, Applejack," Big Macintosh tried to calm his sister, "that thing is too big to fight off."

"Like hay it is!" Applejack undid the harness binding her to the cart and charged at the chimera, eyes narrow on where to buck it as hard as she could.

"Applejack!" Big Macintosh yelled out. "More bull than pony, dang it." Big Macintosh undid his own harness and chased after his sister.

"This is bad." Twilight stared in horror as the apple sibling ran towards the monster. "What do we do?"

"We gotta help!" Spike drew his daggers and slammed them together to form his bow. He withdrew an arrow from his quiver and took aim.

"If we aggravate it, things can get worse," Twilight warned.

"Things are already worse!" Spike yelled as he released an icy arrow. "Sapphire Fang!"

The cold arrow soared past Applejack and buried itself in the monster's leg, coating the fresh wound with ice. "Go away!" Applejack yelled as she rammed herself into the frozen leg of the chimera, shattering the flesh around the leg. The monster let loose an angry hiss as it fell onto the injured leg. It raised a claw over Applejack, ready to crush her in a single swipe.

"Applejack!" Big Macintosh yelled out as he tackled his sister, carrying her out of the way of the monster's claw. The chimera crushed the ground where Applejack once stood, reducing rock into dust. "Are you stupid? That thing almost killed you."

"I ain't dead yet." Applejack pushed her big brother off of her and got back on her hooves. "If we lose this cart we won't have enough bits to last us the month!" she yelled back at him. "You want to watch your family starve to death!?"

"We'll make it by like we always do, but not if you're dead." Big Macintosh gritted his teeth, aware of Applejack's next course of action already.

"Well I ain't dying!" Applejack turned back to the chimera and charged at it. She used all her strength to pick up momentum before planting her fore-hooves into the ground, turning her body. "Revolution Apple Buck!" She turned and kicked the chimera as hard as she could, driving all the energy she built up into it.

The chimera hissed angrily at Applejack. It raised both of its claws, angry at the pony that would try and buck it.

"Gale Salvo!" Three arrows carried by wind barely pierced the monster's hide. The chimera turned, giving its attention to the latest attacker. "Hey! Snakes for brains! Check this out!" Spike yelled back at the chimera as he nocked another arrow. "Crimson Lotus!" he yelled



as he let loose the flaming arrow. The arrow exploded with energy, rocketing through the air and burying itself in the chimera's neck before exploding again.

"Now that's what I'm talking about. Way to go, iguana!" Applejack yelled back before facing the chimera. "Big Macintosh! Go from the other side!"

"Dang it, Applejack!" Big Macintosh cursed back at her as he placed himself on the other side of the chimera. "I'm ready!"

Applejack jumped and rammed herself into chimera's stomach. "Beast!" she cried out, letting loose a lion's roar of azure energy.

The chimera struggled to keep its balance as Applejack's primal force shook the monster to the bone. Big Macintosh took his chance and jumped at it from behind. He slammed his fore-hooves into the creature, conjuring and forcing a piercing white light into its body. The chimera howled in pain as Big Macintosh continued the unrelenting attack, driving the chimera off its last good leg. Big Macintosh threw himself off the monster and ran back to Applejack's side as the chimera landed on the ground, shaking the earth around it.

"You see that!" Applejack panted. "We saved the cart."

"It's not done." Big Macintosh steeled himself as the chimera began to move again.

"Wha-"

The chimera slithered its way behind the siblings, keen on using the other half of its warped biology to swallow them live. Seeing Applejack as the smaller of the two, it unhinged its jaw, ready to snap up and devour Applejack, whole.

"Watch out!" Twilight cried out as she cast her spell.

Before the chimera could prey on Applejack, a stalagmite fired upwards from under its body, fully piercing the hide and inflicting a serious wound. The chimera's mind was incapable of understanding the phenomenon and thrashed about on the floor as another stalagmite erupted upwards, burying itself in the monster's shoulder.

"One more time, Twilight!" Spike yelled out.

"Stalagmite!" Twilight, lost in a moment of panic, cried out.

One last spike of earth erupted upwards and placed itself into the monster's jaw. The monster hissed into the air, extending its neck as far as it could, crying out in pain. Seeing the band of ponies as too much of a threat to its life, the chimera slithered away.

Applejack fell onto her hindquarters, desperate for breath. "I don't need to do that again anytime soon," she gasped.

"Then don't do it in the first place," Big Macintosh berated her as he breathed precious air. "You could have gotten yourself killed. The farm will be fine if we lose a cart of apples but we can't lose you."

"It doesn't matter now. That thing is gone," Applejack retorted, still gasping for air.

"Only because Miss Twilight was here to save us with her magic."

"What? M-me?" Twilight stuttered. "It's nothing, really. I guess chimeras just didn't know about unicorn magic."

"That unicorn magic saved us anyway, Miss Twilight." Big Macintosh beamed at her, grateful to make it out of this ordeal alive and whole.

"Fine, so I may have run into it without thinking things through," Applejack cut through them, "but why the hay was a chimera so close to the road!?" Applejack turned to Twilight, directing her anger at her. "I thought that Canterlot set up a militia of some kind to monitor the Everfree Forest. Something that big should have been spotted right away and dealt with before it got all the way out here!"

"I-I don't know!" Twilight retorted, angry about being yelled at. "Canterlot doesn't have bits flowing through it, you know that! Maybe they don't have enough to keep the militia all the way out here, I don't know!"

"Isn't your dad an elected official, Twilight?" Spike asked. "I bet he'll know."

"Night Light? Yeah, he's on the council," Twilight confirmed.

"What? You're the daughter of nobility?" Applejack asked.

"No, my dad was just voted into the Canterlot Council a few years back. We're hardly nobility and barely have enough bits ourselves."

"We eat cabbage almost every night," Spike sighed. "What I would give for a ruby."

"Well tell your pappy that a chimera got lose and is probably still free somewhere. Last thing we need is to be attacked again by the same dang chimera. Especially one that big."

"Fine, I will," Twilight sighed, finally able to catch her breath now that the worst of the encounter was over.

"Well," Big Macintosh butted into the conversation, "if we're done here we need to get back on the road. The skirmish took too much time from us if we want to make it to Canterlot before nightfall."

"Right," Applejack sighed.

SKIT: Getting old...

Spike: Heh heh

Twilight: And what are you laughing about?

Spike: You called out your spell.

Twilight: This again? It's getting old now.

Big Macintosh: Actually, what was that about anyway? Calling all those fancy names. Even Applejack did it.

Applejack: Er... well...

Spike: Simple, you just name the attack you're doing, and call it out.

Big Macintosh: Why?

Spike: It's awesome!

Twilight: It's silly.

Big Macintosh: Hmm... how does Heavy Bomber sound?

Spike: Hey, that's pretty good.

Twilight: Not you too...

Big Macintosh: It does seem like a simple sort of fun.

Twilight: This is... disappointing...

SKIT: End

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Night had fallen over Equestria, but the gates to Canterlot finally came into view. The rest of the journey had mostly been quiet so that the four of them could keep their eyes and ears open in case of another chimera attack and the rusty gates of Canterlot was a more than welcome sight. A couple of armored guards called out to the apple caravan. "Halt! Who goes there?"

"It's me, Twilight Sparkle," Twilight answered.

"And we're the apple traders from Apple Acres here on business," Applejack added.

"Sparkle!?" One of the guards, a pale blue unicorn with a white mane, jumped down from his post. "Your father has been pestering me all day!"

"Sorry, Pokey," Twilight apologized, "he just worries a lot."

"I don't need you to tell me that," he complained. "Well, go greet him before he pesters me again and I lock him outside the city."

"Really?" Twilight chuckled. "I think he could use a vacation."

"Oh hah hah," Pokey groaned.

"If you two are done," Applejack got the two unicorn's attention, "I would really like to set up shop, in town."

"Right." Pokey returned to the gate, levitating a key out from within his armor. "Good luck selling, you'll need it," he informed Applejack.

"In that case buy something," Applejack spat back at Pokey while undoing Twilight's harness. "It's been... interesting. Farewell, Miss Twi'," Applejack said to her as she took the harness.

"Farewell, Miss Twilight," Big Macintosh added.

"Yeah, farewell," Twilight replied back to them.

"We'll visit Apple Acres again real soon." Spike jumped on Twilight so he could get one last look at the apple siblings.

"I'm holding you to it, iguana," Applejack replied, "Granny Smith needs a new door for her saloon."

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The upper district of Canterlot could be described as a monument to its culture. Ivory towers lined the streets and were used as homes as carefully maintained flowers bloomed across the street. In the center of Canterlot's upper district, a performance was taking place for any noble idle enough to stop and pay attention. On a makeshift wooden stage, the same blue mare from Apple Acres and her assistant, the same muddy yellow colt, preformed an impromptu magic act for nearly all of the Canterlot nobles. Most of these nobles were convinced it was a comedy routine.

"For my next trick," Trixie proclaimed, tied up and suspended from the ceiling of the makeshift stage, dangling over a pool of water filled with sharks, "The Great and Powerful Trixie will escape from the pool of demise! Assistant Snails!"

"On your command, Miss Trixie!" Snails answered back, pulling a few levers rigged to the rope binding Trixie. Trixie began to descend at an astonishingly fast rate.

"Too fast!" Trixie yelled.

Within the audience of nobles, the same blue red-maned colt from before maneuvered his way through the forest of legs and hooves, snipping away at any stray purses that were weighted down with bits. After the disaster in Apple Acres, Canterlot was a gold mine. His quest for bits, however, deposited him in front of the eyes of a dark-blue unicorn stallion with an even darker mane. The stallion looked down at him, right in the eye.

"You know, stealing is illegal," he informed Snips.

"Eh, yeah, w-well," Snips stuttered. He was about to gallop off as fast as he could, but the sudden shifting of the crowd knocked him over. The crowd had just seen Trixie miraculously break out of her bindings before becoming shark feed. His cover wasn't blown yet, at least.

"I take it you're with the show-mare?" the stallion asked.

"Y-yeah?" Snips answered, unsure of what to do. "Are you going to oust me?"

"No," the stallion answered, "just be sure to go on a shopping spree here when you're done. Some of the shops here could go for a little influx of bits."

"Y-yeah. No problem there," Snips answered back before waddling his way back into the crowd.

"I finally found you, Night Light," a voice called to the dark blue stallion.

Night Light turned in the direction to the voice. "Sparkle!" he cried out.

"Pokey Pierce tells me you've been bugging him about me," Twilight groaned. "I'm a fully grown mare, you know. I can take care of myself."

"I still worry about you. What if you were raided by kobolds or, even worse, attacked by a chimera?"

"Actually, both those things happened to me," Twilight told him with a slight grin.

"What!?"

"Is this... a magic show?" Twilight turned to the stage, ignoring Night Light's overreaction. "Is that... Trixie?" She couldn't believe that the utterly insane unicorn she had dueled not only made it out of the Everfree Forest alive, but had also made it to Canterlot where she was probably continuing her scamming scheme. "We need to warn the crowd for-"

"A little purse-pinching colt?" Night light finished for her. "I already met him. Seems like a nice little guy."

"So you're just going to let them steal hard earned bits?" Twilight questioned.

Night Light couldn't help but laugh at his daughter. "I'm sure their bits left them just as

easily as they earned them." Night Light knew his daughter didn't understand what he meant and decided to change the subject. "So, where is Spike?"

"We separated a little ways back. He said he was going to grab some donuts at Pony Joe's. By the way he's using your tab to bring back a box."

"Clever little guy," Night Light laughed.

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[The lower district of Canterlot portrayed a grey world.](#) Many of the buildings were damaged and pot-holes littered the streets for ponies to trip on. "Candy! Candy for sale-" a pony cried out before tripping over a pot-hole. She picked herself up and continued her trek. "Bon-bons! One bit for one piece!" Her coat was cream-colored and she wore a magenta dress with a basket of candy hanging from her neck. Her pink and blue curly mane bobbed up and down as she moved through the busy streets. "Bon-bons! One bit!"

"Hey, Bon-Bon!" Spike called to the pony. "I'll take a couple."

"Oh, Spike," Bon-Bon replied back, "I didn't know you returned from Oatland so soon." Bon-Bon set down the basket and offered some of its contents to Spike. "I'll give you an extra one, free of charge."

"Whoa, really cool of you." Spike greedily took the candy and stowed them away in the pockets of his scales.

"How does that... even work?" Bon-Bon asked, incapable of comprehending dragon biology.

"How does what work?" Spike asked, unsure of what she meant.

"Well... never mind. Just enjoy the candy. I do like to keep my repeat customers happy." Bon-Bon beamed down at Spike with a warm smile.

"Well I'm definitely happy," Spike replied back.

"What's this? Candy?" An armored pegasus stallion shoved Spike out of his way as he walked up to Bon-Bon. The gold colored armor he wore denoted him as a member of the Cloud Kingdom's military, and the gray drape within the armor was indicative of his low rank. "Hey, Honeysuckle, check this out: Canterlot candy."

"What was that, Tornado?" Another armored pegasus appeared out of the sky, this one a mare. "Wow, is everyone in Canterlot a beggar or something?"

"Beggar!" Bon-Bon took offence to the title. "I am a chocolatier. Not a beggar. Now if you want one, it will be one bit," she scoffed at the pegasi.

"One bit for a piece of candy?" Tornado laughed. "Sure, I'll take a whole box full!" The pegasus threw a hoofful of bits at Bon-Bon, most of it landing on the floor. "Is this enough, I bet it is," he laughed at her.

"Quite throwing your bits away on trash," Honeysuckle groaned, growing bored with the display, "we have a job to do here for the Summer Sun Event, remember?"

"Hey," Spike piped up, "Bon-Bon's bon-bons are not trash!"

"I'm sure, gecko." Honeysuckle brushed off Spike with just a bat of a wing, throwing him to the ground.

"Why you," Spike hissed as he got back on his feet, withdrawing a dagger. "I'm not a gecko!" he yelled back.

"Just one more moment, I think this one's about to cry!" Tornado chastised Bon-Bon, taunting her as she looked at him with death in her eyes.

"Did Steel Wing send you to pick fights with street vendors!?" Bon-Bon yelled at the pegasus.

"What was that? You saying something bad about the king?" the pegasus guard spat back at her, raising a hoof.

"He's no king of mine," Bon-Bon voice drew venom. "A bit of a far cry from razing borders, though. Has our king gotten bored sitting on his tail all the time, now?"

Tornado's face burned red. He raised a hoof. "That's it you-"

"Pesante!" a sea-green pony called out as she swung what could possibly be described as a giant lyre at Tornado.

Tornado found himself flying into a wall, crashing against it and dropping to the floor, his jaw, possibly a little more loose, hung open and his legs pointing off in odd directions. He tried to pick himself up, but the pain in his face was overtaking most of his thoughts. He looked at his assailant and found himself staring at a sea-green unicorn mare. She wore armor, but not of any uniform he recognized, and the center of her cuirass bared a lyre emblem. However, her most curious feature was her posture. She stood only on her back-hooves, extending the rest of her body upwards and freeing her fore-hooves. Next to her floated a broad-bladed lyre, the weapon enveloped by her golden unicorn magic.



"Y-you!" Tornado grumbled as he shook the dizziness out of his head. "What they hail are you!?"

["Lyra, behind you!"](#) Spike called to the sea-green mare.

"Take this you coward!" Honeysuckle roared as she dive-bombed on the sea-green mare.

"Bravura!" The sea-green mare raised her broad-edged lyre at the pegasus and swung it just seconds before the pegasus would crash into her, calling forth a stream of water from the instrument. The two forces bounced off each other, knocking the pegasus out of the air.

Honeysuckle cursed to herself as she repositioned herself for another attack. "So we're



playing with blades now, huh," Honeysuckle scoffed as she withdrew a double-bladed sword with her teeth.

The sea-green mare turned to the pegasus, her weapon floating in front of her. "Bring it!" she yelled at her.

"Hold it!" a new voice broke through the crowd, and instantly grabbed Honeysuckle's attention.

"C-Commander Spitfire!?" Honeysuckle turned to the new pegasus mare and dropped her weapon with her gaping mouth. The new pegasus wore armor like Honeysuckle and Tornado, but with a sky blue drape rather than the grey of the other two pegasi. Her coat was a soft yellow, but her mane a fiery red.

"Honeysuckle, Tornado, I demand an explanation, now!" she ordered at the two, eyes flaring and ears sharp enough to pierce rock.

"I... It's all Tornado's fault!" Honeysuckle turned on her partner frantically. "He wanted to mess with one of the street ponies and then he gets his muzzle broken by that pony over there!" she ranted, pointing at the sea-green mare who had become confused by the turn of events.

"Let me get this straight, Tornado decides to pick on civvies, and you get in a fight with one!" Spitfire roared. "Soldiers, I demand to know where you left your pride as proud soldiers of the Cloud Kingdom! This is an outrage and an insult to our nation!" Spitfire continued to rap on the two soldiers who were feeling smaller and smaller in front of their superior. "You two are to retire to the hotel room the city of Canterlot has graciously paid for us in our time here, and stay there for the rest of the day, that's an order!" Spitfire yelled at the two.

"Ma'am, yes ma'am!" Honeysuckle saluted to her captain before grabbing Tornado and dragging him off as fast as she could.

Spitfire let out a sigh of relief. "I swear, we need an etiquette class if our soldiers are acting like this."

"And you are," the sea-green mare finally said.

"I am Captain Spitfire," she answered, "a captain in King Steel Wing's army, and you are?"

"I'm Lyra," the sea-green pony answered. "I'm a musician here in Canterlot."

"A musician? Canterlot sure has all types if it even has warrior musicians," Spitfire chuckled, but her expression soon turned hard. "Regardless, are you insane? My soldiers were out of line for what they did, but if this fight of yours got out of hoof it could have turned into a cross-national incident. I don't even want to think of some of the headlines the tabloids will pop up with just for this little skirmish."

"Your soldiers attacked first!" Lyra yelled. "I was defending Bon-Bon... I mean, the citizens!"

"If you really want to protect others, you're going about it all wrong," Spitfire lectured. "I suggest you think a little more over your actions rather than jumping in head... lyre first. I can tell you this; if you were one of my soldiers, I wouldn't just be just talking to you right now."

"Well it's a good thing I'm not!" Lyra yelled back.

"Yeah, it is." Spitfire turned away from Lyra and flared her wings for take off.

"Wait," Bon-Bon cried out. She ran up to Spitfire, a bag of Tornado's collected bits between her teeth. "These belong to the stallion."

Spitfire gladly took the bag. "I doubt this is going to make up for the cut coming out of his paycheck, and I thank you, miss, for being rather cool throughout all this. I can assure you that those two will get reprimanded for acting so foolish." Spitfire noticed the basket of candy behind Bon-Bon. "I take it you're a candy vendor?"

"Yes," Bon-Bon replied.

"I'll take four then. How much?" Spitfire asked.

"Oh, it's four bits."

"All right." Spitfire retrieved the bits from her own purse and finished the trade. "Thank you," she said with a wink as she flew off into the sky.

"What a nice mare," Bon-Bon commented.

Lyra's pupils had shrunken and her mouth nearly fell off its hinges. She finally clenched her teeth and stared at where Spitfire had disappeared off to. "What does she know," she huffed.

"Tough break, sister," Spike replied as he tossed the one dagger into the air. He failed to catch it as it came down, almost skewering his hand.

"That's dangerous," Lyra muttered as she levitated the broad-bladed lyre to her back.

"Hardly," Spike replied as he pulled out the blade claw, not wincing once. "Oh shoot, the donuts!"

---

Twilight trotted down the streets of Canterlot. She had decided to leave Night Light to watch the rest of Trixie's show and return home where she could finally collapse into her bed. She was dead tired and the day had given way to nightfall long ago. Worse yet, she knew she

wasn't going to get any sleep yet.

Twilight turned a corner, passing by most of the shopping district where most of the vendors had set up. "I wonder how many apples they sold," she asked herself absentmindedly.

"Excuse me, pardon me, coming through!"

Twilight was knocked off balance. She managed to catch herself before hitting the floor and turned to the offender, a bright pink pony wearing a black coat with a large burlap sack on her back. The same bright pink pony that was with Trixie. "You!"

"Huh, it's you too!" The pink pony jumped back on her feet the moment she looked up at Twilight. "Say, how have you been since you made it out of the forest cause the whole time through Trixie was all mad and Snips and Snails were all giggly and I was all-"

"Stop! Thief!" a pegasus mare cried out.

["Oh! That's our cue!"](#) The pink mare turned back to Twilight.

"Our cue?" Twilight repeated in confusion. "What does that even-"

The pink pony grabbed Twilight's tail and ran off, dragging Twilight with her.

"What the! Hey! Stop! Ow! Help! I'm being ponynapped! Help!" Twilight howled as she was dragged off by the pink pony who giggled madly the whole time through. The pink pony found a dark alley she could hide in. She threw Twilight into the slimy alley and then dove in behind her, landing right on top of Twilight. The pegasus that was chasing them flew right by, completely missing her mark.

"Wow-wee that was fun!" The pink pony got off of Twilight and took a moment to inspect the haul she had managed to get her hooves on. Two sets of pegasus armor, both with gray drapes. "I bet I'll get a truck load of bits for this stuff!"

"W-what?" Twilight blinked the spots out of her eyes. "W-where did you get that?"

"Oh, I'm borrowing them from a couple of pegasus guards I ran into. One of them looked like he was beaten over the head with a giant lyre I mean who knew those things were so dangerous? So I walked up to them and asked if I could borrow their armor, and they said yes and then we played tag and I ran into you and the end!" the pink pony said in one breath, an innocently wide smile plastered on her face.

Twilight stared at her. *How did she manage to say all that? How did she manage to make it out of the Everfree Forest for that matter? How did anything in that explanation make sense?* She could only manage a few words. "You're insane!"

"Well, that's just one pony's opinion, or two... maybe three? No, I'm definitely sure it's higher than four," she replied. "Anyway, I'm glad I ran into you again!"

"I'm not," Twilight barked as she got back up. "The last thing I need is to be associated with a crazy pony that went and stole armor from a couple of pegasi." Twilight ran away from the pink pony, galloping off as fast as she could.

"W-what? You're leaving!?" The pink pony dropped the pilfered armor and turned back to Twilight. "W-wait! Please! Don't go!" she cried out.

---

"Dust everywhere. I swear no one in this family knows how to clean up after themselves," Spike complained as he started on the chores that had been ingrained in him since the day he could first pick up a duster.

The sudden slamming of the front door caused Spike to lose balance. "Spike! Spike, are you home?" Twilight ran into the living room. "Oh, good, you're here." Twilight finally paused to gasp for air.

"You okay?" Spike asked.

"No," she answered, "I was almost ponynapped by that pink pony that travels with Trixie."

"You ran into her?"

"Yes," Twilight gasped. "She stole some armor from a couple of pegasi and then tried to make me an accomplice or something! Can this day get any worse?"

A knock came from the front door. "Seriously?" Twilight asked herself. "Is the entire world out to get me?"

"I got it," Spike replied as he answered the door.

"Wait, no!"

Spike opened the door. "Special delivery," a gray pegasus with a blond mane answered.

"Oh, it's just Ditsy." Twilight allowed herself to breathe again.

"Got a package for Twilight Sparkle," the grey delivery pony replied as one of her eyes began to look off in another direction. "Signature please." She reached into her bag and brought out a clipboard with a quill tied to it clenched between her teeth.

"Of course." Twilight used her magic to take the clipboard and quill and sign her name on the dotted line.

"Thank you." Ditsy took back the board and stowed it away. From within the bag she withdrew a small package wrapped in paper and held it out to Twilight. It was shaped like a

book.

"I don't remember ordering anything, though," Twilight responded as she took the package from Ditsy. No return address was on the package. "Suspicious."

"Thank you," Ditsy replied as she flew off.

"Not much for talk, is she?" Spike remarked.

"She doesn't really have the time. Canterlot is pretty big and she's one of the few pegasi that actually lives here, and she's the only one in the postal service so she gets saddled with a lot of the work," Twilight explained. Ditsy was such a curiosity in the town that most knew her by name, which was quite a feat in itself.

Twilight turned her attention back to the package and unwrapped it. The contents of which were, indeed, a book, Predictions and Prophecies. Odd book, Twilight thought to herself.

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"Sparkle! I'm home!" Night Light called out as he entered the house.

"Hey, Night Light," Spike greeted him, "if you're looking for Twilight she's on the roof already."

"Thanks, Spike." Night Light sniffed the air. "Cabbage stew?"

"Yep." Spike smirked as he stirred the pot. "Twilight's least favorite."

"My favorite, though! I missed your cooking," Night Light complimented Spike, purposely inflating his ego.

"Well it's not like anypony else here can cook as good as me."

"Sad but true." Night Light made his way up the stairs of the small and old house. He found the latch to the roof was already open, and [Twilight already gazing out over the deck](#), her eyes analyzing the stars. Night Light stepped into the breezy night air and took in the view before him. Their house was built against the cliff Canterlot was situated on and this allowed the top of the house to overlook the forest behind the city. "You know, from the top, the Everfree Forest just looks magical."

"It's the inside that's the problem," Twilight solemnly commented. "I was in there the other day. Scary place."

"What!?" Night Light gasped. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm fine," Twilight told him. "It's a long story."

"We have time," Night Light told her as he adjusted the telescope to point at the moon,

"so tell me about it."

"You know that show-mare that was performing today?" Twilight started. "Well..." Twilight told Night Light all about her day in Apple Acres: Being scammed by Granny Smith, dragged out into the Everfree Forest by Applejack, the encounter with Fluttershy, being attacked by goblins, and the fight with Trixie. "All that for some rusty farmer's tool."

"Sounds to me like you made some good friends," Night Light responded, smiling.

"Friends?" Twilight mulled over the word before banishing it from her mind. She turned back to her father who was busily adjusting the telescope. "Still looking for your moon mare?"

"Every night," Night Light responded. "I know she's somewhere up there."

"Trying to replace mom..." Twilight trailed off.

"Perish the thought," Night Light responded, growing somber. "I still believe your mother is out there, somewhere."

"She went into the Everfree Forest and never returned," Twilight responded. "She was probably killed by a chimera."

"Your mother is a talented mage."

"Today, a chimera showed up on the main road to Canterlot. The chimera I mentioned earlier," Twilight told him, the words heavy. "I was with an apple caravan and we all managed to fight it off, but it's still free somewhere. What happened to the militia, Night Light?"

Night Light let out a heavy sigh. "We don't have the bits to keep the militia so far out." Night Light stepped away from the telescope. "We don't have enough bits for anything! I swear those nobles are going to bleed Canterlot dry and then probably move to Caballus! Leaving the rest of us to be eaten live by chimeras!" Night Light grew angry, his hatred of the privileged becoming more apparent.

"Can't you do anything?" Twilight asked.

"Not really. They've lined the pockets of most of the other council members. Perhaps the only representatives left that aren't under some hoof are Gilded Scroll and I," he lamented. "Any policy we bring up is instantly voted down, and, if this continues, things are just going to get worse."

"I guess Canterlot has seen better days."

"Yeah, and if the nobles don't pony up we won't be able to afford some weather, which is going to hurt Apple Acres. They won't be able to grow food without the rain, and then more of us in Canterlot get to starve," Night Light spat as he turned back to the telescope and began adjusting it again. "Worst case scenario we get absorbed into the Cloud Kingdom and lose our

republic in favor of King Steel Wing's rule, but hey, territories of the Cloud Kingdom get free rain. We wouldn't have to worry about food then, just presumptuous pegasi."

"Let's change the subject," Twilight said to her father, "I don't think talking about this is going to get you in a better mood."

"It never does," Night Light replied as he began scanning the moon with his telescope.

"How long have you been searching the moon now?" Twilight asked.

"Hmmm..." Night Light thought, "Maybe thirty years now?" Night Light wore a nostalgic smile as he gazed upwards. His mind went back to his foalhood. He remembered the day his parents gave him his first telescope, the same one in front of him now, and he looked through it and gazed at the moon. That day he got his cutie mark, a pair of crescent moons, and he found the legendary mare on the moon. "She was beautiful."

"You must have had quite the precocious crush."

"Perhaps," Night light laughed, "I only ever saw her the once on that day."

Twilight turned back to the opening of the roof. "I'm going to turn in. Don't stay up too late."

"You know, she's Princess Luna, in your mother's story. The mare in the moon."

Twilight paused. "Wouldn't that be Nightmare Moon now, Night Light?" Twilight responded, not wanting to talk about such a subject with him.

"Nightmare Moon is Luna."

"And she wants to bring about nighttime eternal, last time I checked."

"Perhaps..." Night Light looked back to his daughter, but she was already gone. He turned back to the moon above him. "Twilight Velvet, my love, where are you? Do you know, moon princess?" he asked.

---

"Food's ready, Twilight!" Spike yelled from the kitchen. "You done star gazing?"

"I'm done, but I'm not that hungry tonight, Spike." Twilight responded as she made her way down the stairs, towards her room.

"Not hungry!? Didn't you fight a chimera today? And you haven't eaten anything since then!" Spike replied worryingly. "Are you okay, Twilight?"

"I'm fine," she groaned. "I'm just going to bed early, all right."

"Back to our old schedules, I guess" Spike sighed.

---

Twilight closed the door behind her as she walked into her room. It wasn't very big. It was rather small in fact. In one corner stood a table with a stack of organized papers and essays displayed neatly on top along with a single book, the one just delivered to her. Twilight dragged herself over to her bed and collapsed, too tired to bother with blankets. "I guess there's only one thing left to do," she muttered to herself. Using her magic, Twilight grabbed the book from her table. "Predictions and Prophecies," she read the title out loud.

Twilight opened the book. Within its pages, various excerpts from legends that some might say are just an old-ponies' tale. One of these tales, however, caught her eye. "The return of Nightmare Moon?" Twilight read aloud, gaze curiously into the pages. "The mare from my mother's story." Twilight began to read the excerpt. "The Mare in the Moon: myth from olden pony times. A powerful pony who wanted to rule Equestria, defeated by Celestia harnessing the Elements of Harmony and imprisoned in the moon. Legend has it that on the longest day of the thousandth year, the stars will aid in her escape and she will bring about nighttime eternal." Twilight turned to her calendar. "The Summer Sun festival is in a few days. That would make it the longest day, is this the thousandth year?" she asked herself. *Is Nightmare Moon really going to show up and bring with her eternal night?* Twilight looked down at the book. Another entry caught her eye. "The elements of harmony," she read aloud. "The reason mom left, saying it was her duty... duty..."

---

The morning sun rose into the sky and its warm rays beat down on a sleeping baby dragon. "Spike, wake up." Twilight ordered as she raided the kitchen for any dried foods. "Spike? Oh here we go again," she groaned. "Don't make me punt you out the window."

Spike did not wake up. He didn't even move.

"Spike!" Twilight yelled at the top of her lungs.

"Two more minutes..." he yawned.

"Fine, just get ready to go."

"Where are we going?" Spike asked, a little more interested now.

"We're going to find the elements of harmony!" Twilight told him as she searched through the hallway closet. Twilight found what she was looking for; a gilded spear.