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## World of Ponycraft

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### *Cataclysm Wrapup*

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The Observatory was already churning with moving, shifting shadows by the time the last of the imported Twilight Cult elite guard hit the ground. Fierce magical energy had rent open what was left of the domed ceiling overhead to form a crackling, pulsing sphere of evil magic encompassing the entire upper floor. Within that sphere, flickering images - stolen, painful, memories - appeared and disappeared, fading in and out from ragged tears in time and mind.

"Interrupts, *interruptions*, **interruptions!**" a hateful voice declared from a raised platform in the center of the Observatory Sphere. "How is a mare supposed to awaken a MAD GOD with all these accursed interruptions?!"

"Wow-wee!" Pinkie ignored the angry ranting and stared at the inside of the nightmare orb with wide, excited eyes. "This place is trippy-wippy! That's my third favorite kind of wippy, too, after cheese and miracle!"

"It does appear we've come to the heart of matters," Rarity agreed, shaking her charred mane. At least most of the damage was hard to make out in her shadowform.

"This is it," Twilight seconded, trotting alongside the priest and shaman as they entered, Fluttershy close behind. Taking the front, Applejack and Rainbow Dash only allowed a few moments of awe at their surroundings, then they focused their eyes on the platform and saw their final opponent: the source of the cult in Everfree.

*Voidhorn.*

"Twilight. Sparkle." The High Priest of the Equestrian cult approached the edge of the platform to better look down on the six intruders. "And the Elements of so called 'Harmony.'"

She was, unlike the others, a pale unicorn with a dusty, partly immaterial mane and tail. With her cultist robe and hood pulled back, Voidhorn's face became visible, including her immeasurably bright orange pupils. It was almost as if they were cast from fire itself; faint trails of red-yellow flame arced from the corners of her eyes. Dark tattoo-like streaks marked her face and body in foreign patterns.

"Oh, yes, yes, **yes**, I know you six," she continued, her voice laced with disdain. "I know about the powers given to you. When I saw you foals fighting alongside Celestia's dogs outside, I suspected you'd find a way to keep interfering in my affairs. Even with my barrier up."

"Heh!" Dash spoke up at that. "Is that why you teleported away with your tail between your legs?"

Voidhorn glared at the cocky pegasus.

"Don't look so smug," she growled, horn starting to glow with dark purple fire. "...I know what

you're thinking, but that little skirmish was *merely a setback*! I'd planned to sacrifice those fodder to raise this shield eventually. You appearing with all those Guards simply hastened the inevitable."

"We know all about your plan!" Twilight quickly confirmed that the area below the platform was clear. There wouldn't be any more interference either way. "We won't let you turn Princess Luna into Nightmare Moon! We'll stop you. No matter what!"

"Princess '*Luna*'?" Voidhorn inquired with an exaggerated tilt of her head. "What do you know of Princess '*Luna*'? **Nightmare Moon** is the real Princess of the Night! **She** is the rightful ruler of Equestria! Don't look at me like I'm the one trying to make her into something she's not!"

"You!" She pointed an accusing hoof at the Elements of Harmony. "**You** changed her! You banished her, not to the Moon, but into a prison of weak, frail flesh! **I** merely wish to wake her from that slumber: to have her remember who and what she really is!"

With a little canter, Voidhorn jumped down from the raised platform onto the floor. The insane cult master chuckled, slowly licking her lips as bits and pieces of her robes burned away. More of the black tattoos became clear, covering the whole of her body with chaotic, shifting patterns. On her sides, twin waves of malevolent magic formed into a pair of black, jagged, gossamer wings.

"I'll show you pitiful ponies the Nightmares revealed to me by the Old Gods!" She broke into a run. "I'll show you why I've broken all who crossed my path! You six are no different!!"

"Applejack!" Twilight ordered, already spreading out away from her friends as they formed a semi-circle. "Rainbow! Everypony spread out!"

The warrior and paladin rushed right into Voidhorn, the former slamming into the charging madpony with a thunderous rage-fueled crash. Applejack met her enemy with a raised shield and a rearing challenge, but the former Academy Unicorn slashed her horn, creating a shield of force to partly repel the apple farmer's attack. Coming in from behind, a Holy Seal also crashed into a magical barrier to Voidhorn's left, a speedy rainbow blur blasting around her in dizzying, spiral circles. The madpony sneered, bearing teeth, and flexed her shadowy wings - a black cloud of magic nearly knocking Dash out of the air.

"Enchanted steel and holy magic?" Voidhorn laughed, rearing up and spreading her dark wings wide. "Pathetic! Bask in the fire and shadow of pure oblivion! Drink deep of the Nightmare!!"

The sphere of captive memories wavered and darkened, projecting its intensity throughout the Observatory. The air itself became hazier, darker, more ominous and foreboding. Faint shapes, echoes of the past, appeared as indistinct silhouettes all around them. Dark clouds from ages long gone settled across the uppermost hemisphere of the nightmare sphere, obscuring it almost completely. Still, images and memories from Luna's past continues to play, behind the clouds and across the curved walls.

The pall was everywhere, and Twilight Sparkle knew better than to assume it was some simple change of ambiance. Her identify spell quickly informed her that it was amplifying all shadow damage taken. It also handily created a visible magical marker for her convenience.

### **Nightmare Depth: "10"**

Putting that fact aside, if only for a moment, the unicorn mare set her hooves and lowered her horn, casting a barrage of arcane missiles at the still laughing Voidhorn. Dash and Applejack were having a bit of a hard time in melee, since the mad pony seemed to enjoy moving around and simply blocking attacks with her mana shield, but they didn't appear to be in much danger except from Voidhorn's dark wings.

These, she used in a slashing manner to ward off Dash's attacks from behind and Applejack's shield-slams from the front. To Twilight's eye, Voidhorn herself did not appear to be a physically menacing specimen. She was no massive Blood Diver, though both used their wings (purely magical ones in the unicorn's case) as weapons, and she was certainly no hulking Gull (aside from simply not being a Diamond Dog). Going by looks alone, Voidhorn appeared to be in worse shape than Twilight herself was: she was thinner, more gaunt, and the madness that had taken over her mind gave her coat a sickly white pallor.

Her magical shields were strong, but how did she expect to win in a fight with -

**"Rainbow Dash..."** Voidhorn declared, craning her neck to look back over her shoulder as the quick-winged paladin. "I know you: blind, stupid loyalty. A slave to everyone but yourself. Don't you see how you're chaining yourself down? Allow me to set you free!"

Her burning orange eyes flashed.

The chromatic pegasus slowed, paused, drifting down until her hooves touched the floor. Twilight had expected an immediate response from her proud friend, but instead, Rainbow Dash smiled broadly. ..

It wasn't a nice smile.

When the paladin looked back up, the multi-colored mane falling to reveal her eyes, Twilight could see that they were a possessed, insane orange! Black magic engulfed her form and she began to grow in size! Switching targets from Voidhorn to Applejack, she flashed a hoof, unleashing an Unholy Judgment!

"What in tarnation!?" Applejack suddenly found herself fending off not only Voidhorn's ethereal magical wings, but now Rainbow Dash's furious assault with the Crusader enchanted Highdiver's Blade. She began to desperately back away, blocking with her shield, but the mind controlled pegasus was almost twice her normal size now, and lost in a merciless fury.

Even Dash's colors had inverted, reflecting the control Voidhorn had over her.

"Somepony do somethin' ahready!" Applejack slammed her hooves down, hard, thunderclapping with a small blast of nature magic. It was enough to give her some room to try and move away, out from the furious assault. Both Voidhorn and the possessed Rainbow Dash followed.

"Twilight!" Pinkie called out, holding a ball of lightning in her right hoof and prepared to unleash it. "What do we do?"

"I - I -" Gritting her teeth, Twilight quickly cast polymorph. "Fluttershy! Root Dash after this breaks!"

"You think you can take me on!?" The possessed Dash demanded, blasting around to Applejack's side to deliver a brutal strike with her oversized hoofblade. "HUH? HUH! I'll destroy you!"

Only to turn into a little white sheep with a "GAH!"

"It won't hold for long!" Twilight yelled, even as she finished the spellwork.

"Ah know!" Applejack slipped under one of Voidhorn's black, shadowy wings, rolling and running to the side to turn the unicorn away. Blocking another strike with her shield, she retaliated with the sword clenched in her teeth. She knew she had to get some distance between herself and Dash before the polymorph broke due to damage.

"ARGH!" The enraged Rainbow Dash burst free, as lingering thunderclap and bleed damage broke

the transformation. "Twilight!" Her formerly sky blue wings stretched, to take her into the air, but a winding tangle of roots came from below, trapping her in place.

Stuck, the only thing the mind controlled paladin could do was -

- was cast Hand of Freedom on herself and break free. *Damnit!*

"WAHAHA!" She laughed, charging at a now panicked Fluttershy. "Even when I'm evil I'm totally awesome! Hey now! Don't fly away! I just wanna hit you with my sword!"

"That's why I'm flying away!" Fluttershy cried, running and then jumping to fly for a few body lengths and then run again as the swooping pegasus paladin swirled around her in a predatory inverse rainbow. "I'm really sorry I tried to root you, but you're being mean and I need to keep healing Applejack!"

"Fluttershy!" A refined voice called out; Rarity was at full gallop, moving to intercept the frightened druid. "Behind me!"

Rainbow Dash just gave another mad laugh. "WAHAHA! And what're *you* gonna do, Rar-ity?" She asked with a crazy grin, coming around for another attack. "Threaten to mess up my hair!?"

Rarity frowned, blue eyes noting Fluttershy having stopped just behind her. She turned her attention to the incoming pegasus and took a deep breath.

The Psychic Scream that ripped free from the typically superbly well mannered unicorn's throat sent a chill down Twilight's spine. It wasn't even so much a sound; it was like a thousand whines condensed into a single moment of pure, unrelenting, unbearable horror. No pony could put up with it, and the full force of the fear effect was directed at the incoming mind controlled pegasus.

"EAAAAGHHH!!" Who then crashed in a very Dash-like manner, bouncing off the floor and flying in dizzing circles. "It hurts! Make the whining stop!"

"As you should all know, I'm not pleasant when I'm *whining*," Rarity explained, and forgetting about her victim, turned her full fury on the cause of it all: Voidhorn. Narrowing her eyes dangerously, she unleashed a brutal stream of mind flaying shadow energy at the mad cultpony.

The attack must have struck a nerve, as Voidhorn staggered back a step from her fight with Applejack. Orange eyes flashed with dark power and coils of alien energy burned along the length of her pale, tattooed horn.

"**Rarity...**" Voidhorn snarled, "*I know you*: self-absorbed, self-defeating generosity. You want others to approve of you; to hold you in high esteem! How much can you give others before you have nothing yourself? Please... allow me to set you free!"

"Oh... oh dear." Rarity's eyes widened, the blue rapidly being overtaken by bright, burning orange. A dizzy look overcame her, and within moments she began to grow to half again her normal size. The shadowform she had been in to enhance the darker side of her priest powers became notably more frightful, the black wings that stretched out mirroring those of Voidhorn herself.

Rarity's narrowed into vicious slits, and an evil look crossed her face as she spun on Fluttershy, the pony she had just protected moments before. "Fluttershy, dear, don't take this too personally. But you're mine now!"

Her next Mind Flay, targeting the group's stressed healer, was fortunately interrupted by a wind shear.

"Hey!" Pinkie Pie interrupted. "Forget about that healing aggro!" She stood on her hind legs and adopted a strange pose, her arms crossed and cape fluttering in some - previously unknown - overly dramatic breeze behind her. "I'll be your opponent!"

"If you insist, darling!" Rarity's now super sized form faced the pink shaman. "I'll - BAaa!"

"Or maybe Twilight will just polymorph you while you're distracted?" Pinkie asked, raising an eyebrow and falling back onto four hooves. "Oh! I can't wait 'till I learn how to Hex! There'll be frogs everywhere!"

"Oh, my head!" Dash slowly lowered herself down to the ground. "That was... weird...?"

Pinkie Pie popped up behind her from out of nowhere, as was her custom. "You!" She pointed. "Were turned into a big mind controlled bully! Actually, it looked like a lotta fun! I can't wait till my turn! Do you think there's an achievement if we all get it?"

"Nevermind that!" Twilight yelled, cutting short another of Pinkie's potential (inane) ramblings.

"Right!" Dash agreed, now back to her regular size. She rushed into the fray.

"So you don't enjoy fighting amongst yourselves, do you?" Voidhorn roared, rearing up on her hindlegs. She took a conspicuously deep breath. "Very well! Then BURN!"

Applejack nearly vanished behind the curtain of purple and black shadowflame. Hunkering down behind her shield, she could only try and weather the attack and keep her opponent from getting anypony else caught in the cone of fire. Fortunately, Fluttershy was free and unmolested, allowing her to drop quick heals on the group's tank. Even after taking the entire blast, point blank, Applejack was still in good enough health to strike back with a vicious pummel to Voidhorn's shoulder.

Twilight signaled to Pinkie Pie, and they continued their barrage of magical and elemental attacks. Voidhorn only seemed able to Mind Control one pony at a time, and with Rarity polymorphed, it was easy to let Applejack tank, Fluttershy heal, and just sit and do damage. Voidhorn's magical shields began to buckle and damage leak through, charring and scarring her shifting tattooed coat.

"Enough!" She finally snarled, releasing a burst of power that briefly knocked everypony off their hooves. Even Rarity's polymorph broke, freeing her. Growing from a small sheep, she started to grow even beyond her normal size, only to stop and quickly revert as the mind control faded.

"I will scour your souls from your feeble bodies!" Voidhorn cried, floating into the air and erecting a burning shield around herself. "Embrace oblivion!"

"Hey!" Pinkie Pie gasped, her eyes growing wide. "Hey! What!" Shockingly, the party loving shaman started to rise into the air, gripped by an invisible hand. "Stop! Ow! Ow! You can't death grip me! You're not a DK! OR a Sith!"

Shadows thickened and began to move, churning into a vortex...

With Pinkie Pie in the center! Twilight immediately felt her body begin to burn, as shadowy magic - amplified by the Nightmare Depth debuff - started to seep into her skin. Frantically looking for a safe place, she saw Fluttershy in the middle of healing Pinkie Pie, Rarity also looking around in a panic, and Dash flying and trailing shadowy energy like the wake of a ship.

There had to be a safe spot somewhere, right? But where?!

"There!" She realized, running towards Pinkie Pie. "Cluster on me! Quick!"

Fortunately, their group was experienced and meshed enough that nopony questioned Twilight's plan. As one, they all collapsed in on Twilight, who had come to a stop beneath Pinkie Pie's choking, struggling form. She was the center of the swirling vortex of shadows, and like the eye in a storm, it was also the one safe spot. Fluttershy was the last to arrive in the tight huddle, quickly casting a regrowth on herself and another on their death gripped friend, who would have been killed then and there otherwise.

Finally, thankfully, it ended and Pinkie free-fell into the arms of her friends.

"That was not fun!" She coughed, holding her throat. "Force Choke is overpowered and totally super unfair!" She shook a hoof at the slowly descending Voidhorn. "Don't think you're cool just because you have so many dark side points!"

**"Deeper and deeper** into the Nightmare!" The insane High Priest pony dispelled her flame shield to close with a charging Applejack. "Stupid, pathetic little ponies! You are already doomed! Celestia has forsaken you! She had sent you to your deaths! Only infinite darkness awaits us!"

Moments after getting close, she opened her mouth to unleash another torrent of shadowflame. And then -

"Get ready!" Twilight warned. "She'll probably-"

**"Fluttershy...!"** Voidhorn hissed, a sibilant tone into the druid's ear; in her very mind. *"I know you:* misplaced, selfish, overbearing kindness. You claim to care so deeply for others; for the helpless and the weak. But who cares for you? Who loves you? Who can you rely on? Who will protect you? NO ONE. Allow me to set you free!"

Impossibly - unbelievably - Fluttershy's gentle turquoise eyes darkened and dimmed mid-heal.

"Oh. Oh no," she muttered, closing her eyes and swallowing anxiously. "Oh. I think..."

When Fluttershy's eyes opened, they were a burning orange and red.

"Um. Sorry. Everpony," she chuckled, mouth slowly twisting into a mad grin. "But I think I'm about to do something a little evil."

A second later, and she transformed into her druid kitty body and vanished.

"Ohhhh," Twilight canceled her polymorph as her target disappeared. "That's not good! Rainbow!" She yelled to the flying paladin. "Pick up Fluttershy when she reappears! Rarity! Off heal!"

"Got it, Twi!"

"Yes! On it!"

Hearing that, Twilight Sparkle went back to dpsing Voidhorn. Even though Fluttershy was out of the equation, as far as healing went, Voidhorn herself didn't do that much damage except for her shadowflame dragon-like breath, and there seemed to be a cooldown on when she could use it. There was another pressing concern...

**Nightmare Depth: "40"**

*'Deeper and deeper into the Nightmare!'* Voidhorn had said just before. The air was growing thicker with shadows, and the debuff was stacking, forcing them all to take more and more damage from any shadow related magic. Twilight wasn't sure if Voidhorn herself was also suffering from the debuff, but aside from Rarity, none of them did shadow damage anyway. If the fight dragged on too long, then eventually Applejack would be killed by a shadowflame breath no matter who was healing her, and everypony else would be destroyed by one of those shadow vortexes.

They had to finish the fight before the debuff got too high.

The strange images and memories on the inside of the massive nightmare sphere around them were also growing more detailed and expressive. They had to be Luna's memories. She was in some of them herself, but most were from the first-pony perspective. Twilight saw Celestia in some of them, but she had a pure, pink mane and tail, not like in the present. Other frames had strange creatures in them, some of them humanoid, but also massive and alien. Not the humans Twilight had seen before. A few replayed events she had seen before. She found herself staring at one in particular, of her predecessor - Enigma - cradling the remains of Featherfrost after the incident in Uldum. From Nightmare Moon's eyes...

"Um. Sorry about this, Twilight."

Together with the voice, a bright orange pair of eyes appeared out of the darkness behind her.

POUNCE!

The arcane mage, stunned, couldn't move or react as a kitty-druid, almost twice Fluttershy's normal size, jumped behind her. A huge, golden paw, like a lion's, raised up into the air to rake and rip and tear. Four rather wicked, curved claws emerged from the fluffy cat's paw.

*'Fluttershy... is about to maul me to death?'* Twilight wondered, still dazed by the pounce. *'I can honestly say I never expected to go out this way.'*

"Hand of Reckoning!" A multicolored blur shot by, bowling the kitty druid over in a flying tackle. "Time for the ultimate druid versus paladin pegasus showdown! We'll see who has the best class!"

"Remember not to hurt her!" Twilight finally managed to shake off the stun-effect.

"I've covered in plate barding!" Rainbow Dash replied, pinning the kitty-Fluttershy to the ground. Her wings flapped excitedly. "What can she possibly do? Bite me? Ha!"

CHOMP

"AAAAAAA!! SHE BIT ME!!!"

Twilight watched, eyes half-lidded, as Dash ran and flew, Fluttershy firmly attached to her tail.

"Get it off get it off get it off get it off!"

"Nya!"

Twilight groaned, focusing on Voidhorn again. "I guess I should be happy that she didn't mind control-"

"Pinkamina Diane Pie!"

"Oh no."

"I know you!" Voidhorn commanded, eyes burning like Sulfuron Ingots. "Deluded, hedonistic laughter. All those parties and all those so called friends; it makes it easy to forget how little you really have. What else will you conveniently leave behind when it becomes unpleasant or unbearable? When the laughter dies, your weak spirit will break! Allow me to set you free!"

Strangely, Pinkie Pie just stood, stony silent, surrounded by her four totems.

"Ooooooooo," she gradually drawled. "Being evil feels all tingly." Her hair slumped, slouched -  
And spiked.

"Ha." She twitched, starting to grow larger. "Ha. Ha."

Fluttershy, by this point back under her own control, turned back into a pony and wisely started to back away. Dash, her tail covered in kitty slobber, also began to back away from the mind-controlled, generally not very mentally stable to begin with, Pinkie Pie. Twilight felt herself inching away as well, and Rarity had already started running.

"Aww, shucks," Applejack grumbled, leading Voidhorn and herself away. "Why'd ya have'ta go and do that to her of all ponies?"

"Ehh." The madpony shrugged. "I don't see what-"

"HA. HA. HA."

Pinkie Pie exploded. Twice.

"BWAHAHAHA!" The possessed shaman emerged from her own flames to levitate in the air. The world slowly dyed psychedelic blues and pinks and greens and ominous ponytin chanting signaled the activation of a very special, very personal Party Time heroism. Lightning blasted wildly from Pinkie's hooves in all directions, hitting the nightmare sphere, the floor, nearly zapping a jumpy Rainbow Dash, and even catching Voidhorn on the rump.

"You idiot!" The cultist roared. "You can't shoot at me! I'm mind controlling you!"

"Everypony. Dance." Pinkie Pie demanded, tongue lolling out over her jaw, one eye wide and the other squinted. Insane fires burned around her like a living firecracker. **"DANCE!"**

A rain of buzzing sparklers and burning confetti began to fall from the dark clouds above.

**"All of you."** Pinkie's voice became deep and ominous. "Have fun. Have fun or **die**."

"What in the name of Yogg Saron's many maws is with this pony?" Voidhorn jumped back as a stray lightning bolt, enhanced by her own magic, nearly blasted her. "Stop this foalishness immediately and destroy their healer or something!"

Pinkie Pie's head lolled loosely around, as if she wasn't even aware of her surroundings.

"Ponies!" Twilight yelled, batting away a falling cupcake that had mysteriously fallen from overhead. "Dance! Everypony dance!"

A bit reluctantly, the five mares started to move. Voidhorn just glared at them, and then at her own mind-slave, and then back at her so called opponents. There was no music - creepily enough, no sounds at



all except for their voices - but she pretended there was and swayed a bit back and forth, pretending to dance.

"What are you idiots doing?" Voidhorn growled, knocking Applejack away with a contemptuous foreleg.

"The two step," the farmer replied.

"You!" Voidhorn pointed at the levitating, super-charged Pinkie Pie. "I command you to attack your filthy little friends!"

"Filthy?!" Rarity objected, but didn't stop pretending to dance and enjoy herself.

"You mean you aren't enjoying the party?" Pinkie Pie drowsily observed, licking her lips. One eye focused on Voidhorn. "Are you a God?"

"Uh... no... but-"

"Then die!"

ZAP

"This isn't a game, you foal! Now do as I command or-"

ZAP

Voidhorn stuck out her lower lip and took a deep, calming breath. With one hoof, she dusted off where she had just been zapped, again, by her own minion's lightning.

"Listen here, you little-"

ZAP

"Pinkamina, I demand you-"

"There is no Pinkamina! Only Zul!"

ZAP

"RAAAGHH!" Voidhorn finally just erected her flame shield and took to the air. "I don't believe this!"

"WEEE!" Pinkie Pie, now normal sized, fell to the floor, bouncing like a rubber ball.

"I've controlled dozens of ponies, but never one with the mind full of rock candy. Well, no matter! I'll just kill you instead!" Voidhorn focused her Death Grip on a new target. "Suffer!"

Twilight felt a force seize her by the throat and lift her into the air. Everything turned dark and her limbs flailed as they failed to find purchase or relief from the pressure around her neck and torso. It was as if an adult dragon had seized her bodily in one massive hand, intent on making pony paste. Only a flare of nature-magic based relief made it bearable.

If only she could see - if only she could be sure her friends were surviving the shadow vortex that she new must be forming and twisting around her. The hurricane of negative energy would be amplified by

the Nightmare Depth everypony was suffering from... except Voidhorn, cocooned within her flame shield. They had to group up together like before! But she couldn't see and hadn't had time to give any orders. For once, things were happening without her and outside her control, and the feeling of uncertainty for her friends was as painful as the magical vice she was trapped in.

Finally, thankfully, the pressure released and Twilight fell back, down, into the arms of her friends...

"Are you guys..." she stated, and saw them all around her. Safe. "Thank Celestia...!"

"Still alive?" Voidhorn also landed, stalking towards them with a sneer. "I suppose you've earned another minute or two of life, but you must have realized that, eventually, you **will** die. With every breath, you sink into the Nightmare. It will take you, and there is nothing you can do to stop it."

Taking a deep breath, she once again unleashed a cone of shadowflame at the charging Applejack. Twilight knew what would come next. As long as AJ kept up, despite the stacking shadow damage debuff, Voidhorn would be preoccupied warding her off. Everypony else, between doing what damage they could to the cult leader, needed to be ready for another mind control.

This was the third round of them and Voidhorn had to be getting tired. Not only had she expended massive amounts of magic to form and project the nightmare sphere and the corruption ritual that Amber had described, the unicorn had also been unleashing one potent magical spell after another on top of using her mana pool as a magical shield. On top of even all that, all the accumulated arcane blasts, elemental energies, holy judgments, shadowy curses and plain old beatings were taking a physical toll. It was slow, but steady.

"**Twilight Sparkle**," Voidhorn said the name slowly, savoring it. "I know you, too! Magic. *Friendship*? Isn't it strange? When did you become so reliant on others? Is that really the kind of pony you aspire to be?"

The evil pony laughed. "I can see you for what you really are. You will **never** become like Celestia. And do you know why?" Voidhorn's burning eyes seemed to take up Twilight's entire world. "Because, deep down, You. Are. **WEAK**."

"Allow me... to set you free..." Twilight whispered the words even as she heard them.

Her eyes felt heavy.

The world felt... distant.

And, suddenly, all the nasty, evil impulses that festered in the hearts of all creatures took on a new, all important life. What reason was there not to do what she felt like? None! Why was she helping Princess Celestia and her friends anyway? Wouldn't it be interesting to do something else? Like pay Fluttershy back for pouncing on her? Besides, all she ever did was heal-heal-heal, and then there was all the trouble caused by her stupid drama with Rarity and all those stupid little animals. And the trouble with Philamena.

"If you like animals so much, how about I make you into one!" Twilight heard herself say, with more than a little mania laced into the tone.

Only for her spell to be interrupted.

"Wind shear?" she hissed, recognizing the interrupt. "Lay off it, Pinkie Pie! I'm trying to cast here!"

An arcane blast would -

A holy brand caused Twilight to wince in pain. Who? Oh, of course. Rainbow-freaking-Dash. Big headed, arrogant, lazy, pranking, troublemaking-!!

"Terribly sorry about this, Twilight." Rarity ran closer, opened her mouth and... oh, not, not that!

By the time the Mind Control blissfully faded, leaving behind the mother of all headaches, Twilight swore never to give her fashion-conscious friend the chance to complain ever again. There was no way that most priest's psychic screams took the form of a mind-shattering litany of *whining*. The story of how she had made the Diamond Dogs surrender by talking to them was one thing, but was this anything like they had been subjected to? It really did hurt!

"*I know you!*" Voidhorn's words cut through the haze, forcing Twilight back into the fight. "Brutal, blunt, simple-minded honesty. You who abhor falsehood in others; isn't it true that the one you lie to is yourself? Your honesty is arrogance!"

Oh. Oh no!

"*Yee-haw!* I'd say it's pony buckin' season! Which onea'ya are first?! Better yet, ah'll take ya'll on! Come on! All at once!"

If Applejack was Mind Controlled...!!

"Rainbow!" Twilight's voice hurt to hear, but she ignored that. A chromatic blur was already taunting Voidhorn, who had been about to charge at Fluttershy. Dash smartly led the unicorn away from the now crazed looking Applejack as Fluttershy cast entangling roots to keep the warrior in one spot.

"Aw, come on! What's with this? Ain't none'ya mare enough ta take me on?!" Applejack tried to tear herself free, but with strength alone, it was impossible for her, even enhanced by Voidhorn's magic. "Ya'll are cowards!" She shook an armored hoof at Fluttershy in particular. "Ah'll buck ya into next week!"

"Um. Just stay there, please," the druid suggested. "If that's okay with you."

"It ain't!"

"The Element of Loyalty, now? You have no idea how much I despise you ponies!" Voidhorn ranted, laying into the chromatic pegasus with a furious blast of shadow and fire. The under armored, unprepared ret-paladin tumbled away from the furious conflagration, using a quick lay-on-hands to get herself back up to full health.

"You six and Celestia! You ruined everything!" The cultist's jagged, ethereal wings convulsed as a backlash of elemental and magical attacks crashed through her shields to open up fresh wounds.

"Your mentor!" She turned to glare accusingly at Twilight. "**My mentors** - lied to my face! To protect her version of the truth! To protect the pony she thought her sister should be! There is no Luna! **There is only Nightmare Moon!**"

"I **will** watch Equestria burn! A flickering, sick light in the darkness! And *She'll* know! *She'll* know! She'll **KNOW!**" Voidhorn bucked Dash away and pitched slightly to the side, finally growing weary. "She'll know... that some things... can't be forgiven... or brushed under the rug. I - I want her to die... The Master wants her to die! Nightmare Moon..."

"Isn't that... what you want... too?" Falling but catching herself, the deranged unicorn snorted and

reared back up. "NO! Not Yet! I am not dead yet!"

Horn glowing, she blinked - teleported - back up to the platform.

"What tha'heck?" Twilight heard Applejack say, returning to normal. "Ah, shoot, she got me didn't she?"

Fluttershy commanded the roots to loosen, and they released the trapped warrior. Twilight quickly took stock of the situation. "Applejack! Be ready to pick aggro back up!"

"Gotcha!" The warrior winced, shaking her head. "I gotcha."

"This body is weak, frail, mortal..." Voidhorn's voice echoed from above, and the nightmare sphere became darker. "But I am not beaten yet! Drink in the Nightmare! Drink in the Infinite! This is the End for All of us!"

"I don't like the sound of that," Rarity whispered, getting closer to her friends.

"The cornered mouse bites the cat," Fluttershy agreed, cringing a bit at the saying. "Um. Or so I've heard."

"Everypony group up," Twilight ordered. The walls of the sphere were shimmering, and the shadows growing even thicker and stronger. "We'll face this together."

One of those shadows... became quite pony-like.

Twilight checked her identify spell -

**Nightmare Depth: "100"**

It had spiked up when Voidhorn teleported back to her platform. Yet, she hadn't cast any other spells, and the debuff alone wasn't doing any damage. Tearing her attention from the debuff warning, the unicorn mage saw the pony-like shadow begin to congeal, growing increasingly distinct. Parts lightened, from black to dark blue, and others from dark blue to azure.

Wings extended, long and regal, and the horned head writhed in agony -

"Princess Luna?" Pinkie Pie said it first. They all looked around: the pictures on the inner surface of the sphere were now all around them, like a dozen indistinct sets from different movies.

"Are we in a dream?" the pink one wondered aloud. "Oh! Oh! Or a dream within a dream? Can we go deeper?" she started to rummage around in her tail, and took out a top. "This should tell us!"

"What are you going on about now!" Dash bopped her on the head, causing the top to fly from Pinkie's mouth. "Be serious for once!"

"But I don't wanna!" Pinkie declared.

"ugh!" The still forming Princess Luna tried to rear up, but there were lines - chains - holding her to the floor. "...no. No! I don't want - don't show me that!" she cried, green eyes snapping open. "I don't want to remember...! I- I-"

**"You must remember."** A different voice, not Luna's, not Voidhorn's, thundered. **"You must remember! ...I will *not* be forgotten."**

The clouds above had been spinning, and now they began to form... into something. Twilight squinted, already suspecting what. Tighter and tighter, the dark nightmare-fog swirled, until it began to take the figure of a neck and head, a horn, and a dark star-covered mane. Murderous green eyes, sharply slit by a black pupil, glared down at the assembled ponies below.

**"Never forget!"** Nightmare Moon boomed, **"We were betrayed! We were forsaken! We lost everything! Remember me. Remember your HATE!"**

A black form appeared from the memory mists: an alien, insect like creature on eight skittering legs. The body that rested on the spider-like form was vaguely humanoid: a fused abomination of ornate purple and gold robes, green chitinous shells, and a dozen smaller twitching legs, like the underside of a horseshoe crab. A pair of beady eyes stared out from a crack in the shell, almost like a face, and two huge antennae flanked the shoulders and back.

**"The Silithid. The Qiraji!"** Nightmare Moon spat the words. **"Do you remember, Luna? How much you hate them!"**

"I... I do hate them...!" the chained Princess choked, the chains tightening around her. "I hate them..."

Luna's head began to bow.

"Kill them all... " she muttered in pain. "Destroy them..."

**"That's right, Luna. Destroy them. Only you can do this."** Nightmare Moon's voice was mad, frantic. **"Remember me!"**

The Nightmare Apparition began to skitter towards the chained alicorn -

"I don't think so!" A rainbow colored blur interposed itself between the Princess and the shadowy figure from the past. Rainbow Dash smirked. "I don't have the faintest idea what's going on, but I'm not the kind of pony who likes to sit and watch!"

"Hehe!" Pinkie Pie bounced over, also getting in the way. "Me neither! I kinda wasted my super party time spell, but I'm still up for a game of pin the tail on the bad guy!"

"We all are!" Twilight, Fluttershy, Rarity and Applejack joined them a moment later. She marked the insectoid nightmare with a skull. "Let's do this!"

Roots emerged from below -

Lightning filled the air -

Arcane bolts shot through -

Shadowy tendrils curled towards their prey -

A divine judgment came from above -

An apple also flew. For what it was worth.

"That's all the ranged ah have!" Applejack protested. "Ah gotta get a crossbow 'r somethin' after this."

And the Nightmare Apparition evaporated like a faint cloud.

**"You six again."** Nightmare Moon spat. **"This nightmare will become your grave."**

"We don't have invitations, but if this is a party, it's a pretty sucky one!" Pinkie pointed up at the malevolent visage. "And I should know! I've thrown a lot of sucky parties!"

She narrowed her eyes comically.

"You know. Before I got good. At throwing parties?" Shaking her head so fast it became a pink and rose colored blur, she pointed up even more furiously. "Anyway! Do your worst, you big party pooper!"

**"Luna!"** Nightmare Moon ignored the crazy earth pony. **"Remember. The war. The ponies you led to their death. The enemies you killed. The blood you spilt. And for what? To be forgotten? To vanish in the night? Make them remember!"**

This time, it wasn't a single shape but a half dozen. They were ponies in dark armor, mixed with cat-like Tol'vir and smaller insect-like Silithid. They all started towards the chained, helpless Luna, whispering and cursing. Applejack charged into one, and it dispersed instantly, but she also flew back, blasted by an eruption of shadowy energy. Her shield was still smoking from absorbing some of the blast.

"Ah think this is a job fer ranged types," she commented, taking up a position to Luna's left.

The six Elements of Harmony arrayed around her, facing outwards to keep the Apparitions at bay.

**"They trusted you!"** Nightmare Moon continued, conjuring up more of the shadowy memories. **"They trusted you with their lives, Luna. And every single one died. And when you needed them most, who was there? The Elements of Harmony? No."**

Six slightly larger shapes appeared along the rest, moving slowly towards Luna.

Twilight quickly marked them, directing arcane magic to take them down. Despite being dream-like and immaterial, somehow they had enough substance to be slowed and destroyed. Roots and spells further reduced their speed, and chain lightning and mind flays tore them apart, one by one. Some of the minor Apparitions got close, but Applejack and Dash took care of them.

**"No. They condemned you. Enigma condemned you! He hated you!"** Nightmare Moon cried, her eyes growing wider. **"He hated you, Luna! They all hated you in the end! They all did!"**

Twilight wanted to scream defiance at the... the thing that was tormenting them, tormenting Luna, but focused on the fight. Arcane missiles streaked from her horn, despite her tired state, destroying more of the Nightmare Apparitions.

**"The Titans abandoned you. Where were they when you were taken by the Curse of Flesh? Even the other Constructs turned against you. Used you. And discarded you. Light of the Moon? To them. To everypony. You're just trash."** Nightmare Moon snorted ash and shadow and roared: **"REMEMBER!"**

"No," Luna moaned, straining against her chains.

Two huge shadows appeared from the swirling mists.

"Skull and then X," Twilight ordered, marking the new targets. Under her breath, she whispered, "There's no way we're messing this up now."

Quickly glancing back at the pony in the center of their circle, she gave the approaching Apparitions a fierce glare. "We'll definitely protect you, Princess..."

**"You can not escape what you are. I am still here. Still inside you. I am you!"** Nightmare Moon leaned down until she took up half the sky. **"Every scrap of pain, every scornful look, every curse under your breath, every insecurity, every failure, every success! I won't let you... or anyone... forget me! I won't let them forget everything we've lost! I won't let it all have been for nothing!"**

**"Remember!"** She thundered. **"Remember the carefree lives of ease! Remember how they worshipped Celestia! Remember how they forgot about you! Remember seeing them sleeping, not a care in the world for all we suffered through!"**

**"Did even one pony thank you?"** the dark goddess demanded to know. **"Even one?! ...Remind them. Plunge their world into darkness!"** Her slitted eyes flashed with madness and hate. **"Suffocate them with shadows! They'll remember when the night lasts forever! Make them remember, LUNA!"**

"No," the voice was just a whisper.

**"I AM YOU."**

A huge, dark hand reached for the chained Princess... but came apart under the barrage of attacks.

**"HATE THEM,"** the Nightmare commanded. **"Hate them. Hate your sister. Hate the ponies. Hate the Titans! Hate Elune! Hate them all! Every one and every thing that abandoned you! They'll remember you. They'll regret what they did."**

"I hate..." Luna seemed to pull herself inward. "I hate..."

Her wings snapped out, and the chains shattered -

"No." She defiantly turned her eyes up to the massive ebon Night Mare. "No! I'll never become like that again."

The black mare opened her mouth to speak, but Luna cut her off.

"I am you," she threw back the words.

**"So what do you hate?"** Nightmare Moon asked, shrinking down to normal size... which was still larger than any other others present. She descended, armor and all, just as she had a year ago in Ponyville.

"Me?" she wondered with a nickering laugh. "Do you hate me?"

"Didn't I just tell you?" Luna asked back, shaking her head. She advanced on her tormentor, brushing through Twilight and Rarity like a ghost. "You *are* me. How can I hate myself?"

Nightmare Moon glare turned to confusion at her other self. No: Twilight realized, it wasn't confusion. It was suspicion. She didn't believe, she didn't trust, even herself.

"I lost control," Luna explained, getting closer to the Night Mare. "But I know. I know the one you hate. And it isn't Big Sister."

Nightmare Moon sneered, her lip curling to reveal teeth.

"You're a part of me. The anger. The frustration. The... loneliness." Luna leaned her cheek into the Night Mare's chest. "I made mistakes. But I don't hate anyone. Not even myself. I'll accept what I did as you, and what you did as me, and move on." She sighed into the ebon apparition and took a step back to look her, eye to eye.

"I'll make them remember," Princess Luna promised. "But I'll do it my way."

For a long while, Nightmare Moon was silent.

Then, finally:

"You really think...?" she began, and closed her eyes. "I see. Fine. I guess I'll have to... leave the rest... to you. But don't forget. Our vow."

Twilight blinked, and the dream - the nightmare - was gone.

- - -

The moon was high and full, but dark.

Nightmare Moon laughed, triumphant, one armored hoof on her sister's fallen form. Easy! It had all been so easy! With the powers of Setesh and Isiset, and the even greater powers unlocked by her communion with Neltharion and his sponsors, it had been easy! It mattered not that Elune refused to speak to her. Greater powers existed, chained by the treacherous Titans below the earth. They understood her. They knew what she wanted in her heart of hearts!

"Weak!" she pressed a hoof down to her sister's injured side. "Weak! Weak! **Weak!** You're all so WEAK!"

She leaned down to stare her fallen sister in the eye.

"I should have done this long ago," she told her, exalting in her victory. Wings at full furl, a storm of dark magical fury surrounded her like a hurricane. Forgotten stars twinkled in the wake of her mane and tail, whispering blasphemies and prayers to unspeakable names.

Beyond the two sisters, Canterlot was plunged into darkness. Fast moving clouds and untamed weather began to release flurries, and already the cold, dark city on the mountainside was receiving a frosting of snow. It would be the first of many, many, many long, dark nights for the ponies of Equestria. Even if it took a thousand to drive the point home, they would all learn to fear and respect the night. They would remember that they slept and dreamed by her sufferance!

"Luna..." Celestia gasped, pink mane around her face matted by blood. "In the Makers' Name, stop this madness! You must-"

"I must? I must?" Nightmare Moon stomped down on the Sun Princess' wounded side. "I must what? I must listen to you? Because you know best?" She cocked her head to the side, questioningly. "Tell me something, sister dear: if you know best, why are you bleeding so much? Why are you at my hooves? Why aren't you begging for my mercy? Because that seems like the smart thing to do in your situation."

"Luna!" another voice called out, eliciting an angry sneer from the Ebon Mare.

"Enigma." she identified the Element of Magic on the far edge of the palace roof. Turning ninety



degrees, she smirked. "Black Pepper." And to her other side. "Happy Days." And finally behind her. "And... Sunflower."

"By the earth, Princess," Black Pepper gasped. "What has become of you?"

"I just thought I'd change the world a bit," Nightmare Moon admitted with an aloof laugh. "Not just controlling the weather and evicting the troublesome species, though," she explained, giving her beaten sister another poke with her armored hoof. "Nothing so mundane!"

"I just thought," she said, directing it at Enigma in particular. "That I'd give Equestria a chance to know me better. The Night doesn't have to be eternal, but... Enigma... wouldn't it be beautiful if it was?" She frowned at him. "You've gotten old, you know. Still haven't settled down?"

His silver eyes hardened.

"Oh, that's right!" The Night Mare chortled, green eyes wide. "Featherfrost is dead, and no other pony could *ever possibly* take her place! But - but! Isn't it ironic?" Nightmare Moon's sanity slipped from deranged to lucid moment to moment.

"Without that Element of Loyalty, or the Element of Generosity... poor, dead Luster..." She smirked behind her at the elderly Sunflower, the timid pegasus shaking not with fear, but anger and indignation. "Without those two, what good are any of you? Like broken, rusty links in a chain. Remove even one, and the whole thing comes apart!"

"Luna," Sunflower said the name like a curse. "You're mad."

"That's not a very kind thing to say," The Ebon Mare mocked and shook her head condescendingly at the Element of Kindness. "Oh, don't look so hostile. I won't kill any of you. After all, I'm doing this for you, too!" She gave grief stricken pegasus a wily look. "Don't you hate not being able to talk about it?"

She turned her mad eyes on Happy Days and Black Pepper.

"They were your friends. Your close friends." And then Enigma. "And your lover." And then Celestia. "And your grandson..."

She laughed, but tears ran down her cheeks.

"All dead. And my Guard. *All dead*. And they don't even have graves to rest in or songs to remember them by. I don't want them to be swallowed by history. I don't want to forget. I... I *can't* forget... I can't close my eyes without seeing them..."

"Luna," Celestia coughed, trying to sound and project confidence, even from her prone position. "What we did - what you did - can never leave this circle of ponies. The peaceful Equestria, the peaceful world we're building, depends on it..."

Nightmare Moon glanced down at her with one vicious green eye.

"No, Big Sister," she said, her voice icy as a glacial wind. "Tonight... your dream... your Equestria... the world I lost everything to protect... tonight *your Dream becomes my Nightmare!*"

"We **will** stop you," Enigma swore, determined despite his advanced years.

"Huh! You're old, like I said! And unless you've gone blind, too, I'm more powerful than I've ever been!" Nightmare Moon spread her wings. "Oh, Enigma... its true: you aren't the handsome young colt you

used to be. But even now, I'm a little tempted to ask you to join me, to be with me. To sing my praises. Sadly, since offering you everything probably won't work, I guess I'll **take** what little you have left away instead!"

"We *will* stop you," Sunflower's voice, so determined, only amused the Ebon Mare more.

"We will stop you," Black Pepper echoed, and Nightmare Moon's amusement turned to annoyance.

"We will stop you," Happy Days said it with great sadness. "We have to."

"A broken chain, like I said," the Night Mare declared. "Chant all you like."

"No, Luna - they're right."

The black alicorn glared down at her beaten sister.

"Eh?" she asked with feigned interest. "More yapping from a beaten dog?"

"We will stop you," Celestia agreed. Her pink mane moved, like a snake, to trap Nightmare Moon's legs. Annoyed, but unconcerned, the fallen Moon Princess chuckled.

- until she saw Enigma levitate out a familiar stone orb.

"What? Are you going to hit me with those keepsakes?" She tried to pull a hoof free from Celestia's pink mane and glanced back, confirming Sunflower had one in her hooves as well. "I don't know what you think those can do without a bearer. They're useless."

"No, Luna. They aren't."

Celestia closed her eyes, and a faint green glow of pure life energy spread out across the rooftop. Still tangled in the white alicorn's mane and tail, Nightmare Moon glowered and intensified her efforts to get free. Not enough to appear frightened, of course. Because she wasn't. There was no force in Equestria or Uldum to challenge her.

Ammunae's gift reached the two dead stone orbs, and the cutie marks on them lit up with life.

"What *is* this?" she demanded, and tried to tear herself free. Failing that, she tried to shift into the shadows... only to be caught in a shield of light. *Rajh's light*.

Celestia's mane began to shimmer, turning from solid pink to a shifting rainbow...

Nightmare Moon laughed madly. "You still have some of that power? Impressive. Not that it matters!" She tried again to get free. "Release me, Sister. Or I really will kill you. You know I can!"

"I'm so sorry, Luna..." The beaten alicorn blinked away tears.

"Heh. Heheh. Heheheh!" Nightmare Moon brayed, turning from one remaining Element of Harmony to the next. They were all wearing their regalia and glowing with power. Lines of arcane energy were spreading across the chill, night air, encircling the pair of alicorn sisters.

"STOP KIDDING AROUND!" The black Princess roared, spittle flying from her mouth. "Don't you know who I am? Don't you know what I can do? I'm invincible at night! You can't kill me!" She licked her lips, anxiously. "You won't kill me..."

"Luna," Enigma said, and closed his eyes.

"Luna," Black Pepper followed.

And then Sunflower. "Luna."

"Luna," Happy Days sniffed.

"Luna," Celestia said last, and the two sisters locked eyes. "*I banish you.*"

Only giving a token struggle, Nightmare Moon leaned back and gave a ragged, tortured sigh. She could feel it: from the tips of her wings, along her spine, spreading through every pore and down every hair. Everything was turning white and chalky. One last wrench finally freed a hoof, but it was too little too late. Holding it up, the dark Princess could see flakes of blood on the armored horseshoe. Her sister's blood.

"Big Sister..." she mused, speaking while she still could interact with the world. "I didn't know you could do this. Since when...?"

Celestia's expression was unreadable. "Since..." she slowly replied. "Since the day after."

"The day after?" Nightmare Moon wondered, but quickly understood: "You mean the day after I re-originated Uldum? You waited that long to think of a way to stop me? A whole day?"

"It took that long to convince Ammunae and Rajh," she admitted, without a single shred of pride.

"Hm." The Ebon Mare closed her eyes, accepting the end. "I see. You never trusted me, did you?"

"It isn't about trust, Luna." Celestia let her go and painfully got back on four hooves. Her aurora-like tail and mane waved behind her. "I wish-"

"I don't want to hear it," the Night Mare cut her off. She was almost transparent now. "I'll be back. 'Tia. I *will* be back. And I'll see what kind of world you want to make. I'll see what my ponies died for. And if I don't like it..."

Nightmare Moon was gone, but her words lingered on.

"...I swear I'll destroy it."

- - -

The startled voices of her friends quickly snapped her to the present. Gone was the nightmare sphere and the visions of the past. The entire spell had come apart, revealing the real Observatory beneath. It was still very much the crumbling ruin that Twilight remembered from her confrontation with Nightmare Moon a year ago. Ancient stain-glass windows lay cracked in their foundations, stone tiles and masonry were riddled with ivy and moss and steps were slick with centuries of falling rainwater.

The roof, though, was completely gone, revealing a star strewn sky and a bright, full moon.

Even the Blood-Shield that had once encompassed the entire structure had dissolved.

"No! NO! **NO!**" Voidhorn cried from behind a fallen magical platform. In her hooves were a number of charred, ruined artifacts. The air still crackles with spent mana, but the ritual had either imploded or dissolved. It charged the air enough for Twilight's hair to stand on end.

"No!" Voidhorn moaned again, trying to scoop together some dusty ashes. "How can this be?" She looked up at the six approaching mares. "How are you still alive? You can't come back from the Nightmare! You can't!" she snarled, standing back up. "It's impossible!"

"Nothin' more fun than doing the impossible!" Dash gloated with a wide grin.

"Please surrender," Fluttershy suggested. "We don't want to hurt you."

"Surrender. Surrender?" Voidhorn's orange eyes widened with primal, mad fury. "Surrender! Me? Voidhorn?! I will never surrender again!" Instantly, she went from hot to cold and backed away, a small grin on her face. "No. Never. Never. Never-ever. Never-ever-ever-ever! I'm a true believer. I'll die first!"

Slowly lowering her head, she picked something up in her teeth.

A yellow lidless eye.

"All glory... to the Old Gods!" Her jaw tensed to bite down. "And a thousand curses on-"

"-on whom, Night Sky?"

Seven heads turned up to where a pair of pegasi perched on the exposed rafters of the roof. Except they weren't just pegasi. One white and the other dark blue, each bore a prominent, long horn. Taking to the air, they slowly settled to the battle strewn floor of the Observatory.

"Princess!" Twilight joyfully remarked, already lowering her head to bow even as she corrected herself: "Princesses."

The other five Elements of Harmony quickly followed suit.

Only one pony stood, her eyes twitching with rage.

"You!" Voidhorn hissed with pure contempt, vocal despite the twitching eldritch eyeball held in her teeth. "And...!" She started at Luna. The normal, awake, blue and blue Luna. "And... Nightmare Moon..."

"Princess Luna' is fine," the smaller alicorn suggested.

"It's over, Night Sky," Celestia spoke, sounding terribly sad. "Please don't hurt yourself any more."

The cultist's right eye twitched again.

"How?" she growled. "You should be in Canterlot! Nightmare Moon should be rising! You can't be here!"

"We got a letter suggesting we make an appearance," the Solar Princess answered easily.

"As one of my domains, naturally I had teleportation spells installed long ago to take me here in an emergency," Luna explained. Her eyes shot up, and Voidhorn followed them to where a handful of Night Guard pegasi had also taken up positions in the rafters.

Voidhorn looked away from them, turning thoughtful.

At first, she said nothing. Then, taking a step to the side, she saw movement from the Observatory

stairway. A pair of dragons emerged, noticing that they had been spotted. The smaller of them rushed forward, up to Twilight's side: Spike. She smiled at him, but wisely kept herself between the young dragon and the still dangerous cultpony they had cornered.

"Amber," Voidhorn called out, to the shape that tried to remain hidden. "So, in the end, you betrayed me? Sacrificed me? How..." She smiled. "How *wonderful*. Consider it one last lesson... passed with flying colors."

"You're wrong!" Twilight raised her voice, and her head, to ensure she was heard. "Ever after what you did to her, torturing her to get more of those... visions, she didn't want to betray you. She didn't want us to hurt you." She looked down at Spike, and smiled wanly at the fallen unicorn. "I know she still thinks of herself as your friend."

--

*She held the small creature in a cocoon of magic. It was hard to believe this little dragon had come from an egg just two months ago. It was already able to read and speak! Now if only it had learned to better care for itself. Dipping the reptile into a soapy bath, Night Sky 'tsked' as it splashed playfully with its arms and wings. The Compendium described this dragon as a 'bronze' drake. Very rare.*

*Celestia would be arriving later to check on it. Everything had to be perfect.*

*The unicorn filly allowed herself a small smile. She had been admitted into the Academy! She even had a dragon to raise as an assistant! Everypony expected great things from her. She wouldn't disappoint them! She'd prove to be everything they expected and more, and she would start by showing the Princess how well she could care for her new dragon! Her new best friend!*

--

"My friend?" The cultpony snorted, dismissively. "Then perhaps I gave her too much credit."

"Night Sky," Celestia stepped in, but the smaller pony growled and backed away. "What I did to you, I did for the good of all ponykind. The truth *couldn't* come out. Not then. You have to know that."

"Shut up," the mad cultist snarled, jaw clenching. "I'm not a foal. I know! *I just don't care*. Equestria? Ponykind? Why should I care one lick about those abstract things? All I had... all I was... all I ever valued... was my work. My research. And you took it. You burned it. You ruined my life."

Her teeth tightened on C'thun's eye, starting to deform it.

--

*Night Sky cursed and struggled against the guards holding her back.*

*Maybe, if they had only been earth ponies or pegasi, she could have managed. But Celestia's unicorn guards were well trained. Magical restraints kept her from using spells, and two others easily found her hidden records and copies in the secret locker under the floorboards. Helpless, she could only watch as the Guards tore them floor open and levitated out the locked box. In moments it was open, and the contents dumped onto the ground.*

*She screamed at them to stop: they already had the copies! Those were the original manuscripts! The very first translations of the Mare in the Moon myth as recorded by the Diamond Dogs, Griffins and Tol'vir! It had taken years of work and thousands of miles of travel to pick fact from falsehood - to prove that the legend was real!*

*It was futile. Pointless.*

*The Guards took the originals. Like the copies, they would be hidden or burned. The truth would be suppressed. Why? Why? Why was She doing this? Equestria deserved to know the truth about Nightmare Moon. They needed to be prepared for if she returned. They needed to be ready to rally. To find the Elements of Harmony. To protect Equestria!*

*Didn't they?*

*Pawing through the remains of her research; the tattered, fractured, ruins of her academic career, Night Sky felt a bitter hatred spread through her veins. Something brushed up alongside the unicorn mare, and she blinked, the sick, angry feeling receding back into her mind, the roar becoming a whisper. Looking down, she saw Amber trying to pull together some of the remaining papers: trying to salvage what was left behind. Her scaled hands held paper remains, shredded and burned.*

*When - with a gentle breath of sand and time - the bronze drake brought new life to the destroyed scrolls. Paper de-shredded, coming back together, moving against the stream of time itself. Manuscripts restored themselves! Night Sky watched with awe and affection, smiling for the first time since she had been ejected from the Academy of Arcane Sciences in disgrace.*

*Amber held up the restored scrolls.*

*"I'm sorry," she said, sounding tired. "This was all I think I can save."*

*"It's a start!" Night Sky promised. She reached out to the young dragon and embraced her tightly. "We'll make them pay. All of them."*

--

"You sacrificed me." With hate in her fading orange eyes, Night Sky's body started to shake as she held back laughter. "Everything I did after that, every life I sacrificed for my purposes, I did it in your image, Princess. You threw away my life, my research, my respectability, to protect your precious little sister. So yes... I understand how important she is to you... to the world. But do you understand what you took from me?"

She suddenly all but shouted, "**Do you?!**"

Celestia's mane fell as she nodded. "Please don't do this, Night Sky."

"You never did teach me the power of friendship..." Voidhorn wrapped her lips around C'thun's eye - and bit down with a wet splurtch, swallowing the mass in one gulp.

"But I'll teach you something, Princess. No matter what happens to me... a thousand knives wait for you in the darkness! The Twilight... Cult..." She gasped, spitting up blood. "Will Destroy you!" She gagged, only managing to force out three final words: "**All of you!**"

The Solar Princess cantered back, shielding herself as Voidhorn fell, twitching and hissing. Dark, ruinous power invaded her from without and within. Strange, alien flesh slouched over hooves and flanks. For just a moment, as one power faded to be replaced by another, a cutie mark was visible: an open book, with stars inside it. Then it disappeared beneath the growing horror.

A faceless, tentacles maw gasped for air.

Celestia shook her head, eyes melancholy. "Night Sky..."

"She's gone." Luna stepped forward, wings warding everypony else back. Celestia seemed on the verge of objecting, but her sister shot her a look, laced by sharp green eyes. "The Night is my domain. This is my castle. My responsibility."

Voidhorn's new form, that of a Faceless One, stood on two misshapen legs. There was nothing left of the pony she had once been, warped far beyond comprehension. Lidless yellow eyes twitched and started through flaps in purple muscle, and barbed tentacles covered the hideous arms and back like transplants from a kraken. Slurred, wet sounds - like words - slipped from its mouth, painful to listen to.

"By the grace of Elune, and the authority vested in me by the Titans..." Luna faced the growing monstrosity. "*Star: Fall.*"

A beam of starlight fell, engulfing the gibbering Faceless One. It cringed at the light, but betraying some instinct or fragment of its previous self, the living fragment of the Old Gods hesitated... and looked upwards with awe. Tentacles waving, it reached up, as if to grasp the source of the starlight.

A pulse traveled down the beam: an arcane hammer powered by the spiritual power of the Moon. The Faceless One that had once been Voidhorn vanished, and with a crack of thunder, so did a good portion of the Observatory. Masonry crumpled like paper and the floor fell in, burying two ruined floors below in a hail of debris. Dust and ash kicked up and the rest of the far wall came apart, chunks of it raining down off the edge of the Observatory. In the time it took to pick a flower, the northeast corner of the building was a smoking, slanted wreck.

At last. It was over.

- - -

Twilight Sparkle got achievement [Soul Searching] !  
Twilight Sparkle got achievement [Castle of the Sisters] !  
Rarity got achievement [Soul Searching] !  
Rarity got achievement [Castle of the Sisters] !  
Applejack got achievement [Soul Searching] !  
Applejack got achievement [Castle of the Sisters] !  
Fluttershy got achievement [Soul Searching] !  
Fluttershy got achievement [Castle of the Sisters] !  
Pinkie Pie got achievement [Soul Searching] !  
Pinkie Pie got achievement [Castle of the Sisters] !

- - -

The trip back down was easier, though slower, than the one the mane six had endured on their way up. There were also no deaths, though Pinkie Pie did take some falling damage due to excessive bouncing and jumping down flights of steps. Royal Guards were busy collecting wounded cultists for incarceration and Luna's Night Guard kept the uppermost level secured. Voidhorn's cache had included some rare items, but most of what had been recovered had been artifacts used in her ritual.

There was no sign of the ogre ambassador from Cho'gall's main branch Twilight Cult.

Luna didn't seem too preoccupied with the search for the two headed sorcerer, however. If he turned up, it wouldn't end well for him. Instead, she levitated the magical artifacts that had been used to invade her dreams and personally set to work taking notes. She spoke little and kept in step with Celestia as the Princess and the Elements of Harmony slowly made their way down to ground level.

Juggling a dozen items, and a sizeable chest to later store them in, the Moon Princess still had enough presence of mind to notice a pair of rose colored eyes staring her way...

"Can I help you with something?" she asked, still logging what had been recovered.

Rainbow Dash started at being found out, but caught herself and nodded. "Well, I, ah... I was wondering... is any of that stuff there like a 'record of cutie marks' or something?"

"Oh yes, that's right," Rarity chimed in from the other side of Celestia. "Sweetie Belle and her friends had that quest for us."

"A record of cutie marks?" the Princess herself asked, glancing at the items floating around her younger sister.

"I believe they mean this," Luna answered, moving one of the artifacts to the right for the larger alicorn to see. It was a seamless metal disk, the surface indented with slowing lines of solid amethyst. For those aware of such things - and there weren't many - it was a Titan artifact. Celestia's one visible eye widened a bit as she realized what it had to be.

"This is... I see," she chuckled. "So you held on to that all this time?"

"It had some meaning to me," Luna admitted, and considered what to do. A small smile gracing her muzzle, she floated the disk past Celestia to her prize student. "You can borrow it if you want, though... who did you say you planned to give it to?"

"The Cutie Mark Crusaders," Dash explained, only to realize that there was no way the Princess knew about -

"Oh, them," Luna mused.

"I have an alt in that guild," Celestia agreed.

"What." Twilight, Rarity, Applejack and Rainbow Dash all managed to say it at the same time.

"We were their fourth and fifth guild signatures," Celestia explained, her eye making a happy crescent.

"You're both members of the Cutie Mark Crusaders?" Twilight asked, incredulous. "Seriously?"

"Our alts are members," the regal white Princess corrected. "Sadly, I couldn't join as myself. It isn't allowed."

"Oh! Hey! My bank toon needs a guild, too!" Pinkie Pie enthusiastically jumped in. "Do they RP?" She gave a happy little bounce. "Dashie's been telling me all about the fun she had ERPing and I-"

"Shut up!" A rainbow blur grabbed the party pony in a headlock. "Don't tell the Princesses about that!"

"What on Equestria is this 'alt' thing?" Twilight hung her head. "I swear, I'm surrounded by crazy."

"At least it's a fun kind of crazy," Spike noted, riding as always on her back and comfortably reclined against her neck.



"Regardless, I believe those three plan to give the Titan Disks to Brann," Celestia continued, nodding thoughtfully to herself.

"Brann?" Luna inquired.

"Brann Bronzebeard," the Solar alicorn answered.

"Wait, you mean the 'foremost authority on ancient dwarven and Titan archaeology' Brann Bronzebeard?" Twilight asked, recognizing the name with more than passing interest.

"That's him." Celestia seemed quite amused by the growing stars in her student's eyes. "I'm sure he'll be quite grateful. Were a pony interested in archaeology, I believe she would be quite excited by the chance to meet such a scholar."

Twilight giggled like a schoolfilly, but quickly caught herself and forced on a straight face. "I - I believe he could answer some questions I have about his writings regarding Ulduar."

"But what is it?" Dash asked, referring to the disk itself.

"That," Luna answered, slowly descending the stairs. "Was something I borrowed when I left... an old home, long ago. Among a few other things, it records when Big Sister and myself were given our cutie marks, and the first five thousand marks bestowed on ponykind. Every pony alive today is descended from those five thousand, and every cutie mark is based on them as well."

"As you can imagine," she quickly added, in the stunned silence that followed. "It is of some historic value. Once Lord Bronzebeard is done studying it, I would appreciate it eventually being returned."

"Neat!" the prismatic pegasus summed up her own thoughts.

"The cutie marks a' all our great ancestors?" Applejack whistled, and tipped back her hat. "Ain't that a find?"

"Any other loot?" Dash trotted closer to the former night mare, now just Princess. "I mean, we didn't get anything from Voidhorn, and usually bosses drop epic loot and stuff! Or tier pieces!"

"Or a hawkstrider!" Pinkie Pie popped up next to the alicorn, causing Luna to jump a bit in surprise. "Oh! Oh! Or a raptor mount! You can't get raptor mounts as Alliance, and they look pretty cool! I mean, *yeah*, you can get the archaeology raptor mount, but who wants to do all that lame archaeology? Flying from one fossil dig site to another? BORING! Oh! Or Ashes of Al'ar! I wanna ride the Phoenix God, but the last time I tried to get into Tempest Keep, everyone was like: LOL! What level are you? How'd you even get to Outland? GTFO! But anyway, what kinda super loot do ya have for us, huh huh huh?"

"You know we'll already be getting some stuff for the Marks we collected," Twilight suggested. "You don't have to give us anything, Princess Luna."

"That's right... but, um..." Fluttershy muttered. "You don't have any pets in there, do you?"

Luna slowly shook her head in amusement. "You six are an odd bunch, you know that? Kind of like..." she trailed off, and coughed, picking out two recovered artifacts and bringing them to eye level. "Well, maybe I do have something for you... something appropriate. Think of them as heirlooms."

First, she floated over a cloth belt. The color was a bit faded, but a little touching up would restore it to working order. It was otherwise rather simple: a silk sash with a touch of elementium filigree in place of a buckle. Twilight carefully took the gift with her own magic, and immediately felt the power of the

artifact. A familiar power.

"The Cord of Arcane Flows," she identified it. "This used to belong to...?"

Luna nodded. "That's right. I think they'd be glad to know the Elements of Harmony were in good hooves."

The Princess then floated over an icy pair of shoulders to the group's paladin, the 'Mantle of Feather and Frost.' It didn't appear to be much, since it was made of cloudstuff, but once Dash put the mantle on, it reformed out of the air, becoming solid. Sleek, snowy clouds covered her upper arms and part of her back, trailing snowflakes behind her as she moved.

"Cool!" the cool blue paladin did a little flip in the air, adding a touch of frost to her rainbow. "Very cool!"

Next, Fluttershy received a piece of polished, ornamental amber resin containing a single entombed flower, still in full bloom: a star burst of red encased in gold. A bronze ring encircled the oval jewel. The timid druid cupped it gently in her hooves, eyes closed as she felt the power of the natural energy within the ancient fossil.

"Talisman of Everlasting Flowers," she whispered, having identified spells of her own. She bowed to Luna, hugging the healing trinket to her chest with one arm. "Thank you so much."

Luna smiled and inclined her head to the young mare.

"I wondered if I should give this to you, Big Sister..." she said, her tone more morose as she considered the silver and mayan-blue cloth she had discovered. The textile was in remarkably good shape, preserved by holy magic that still shined through, despite centuries past.

"Thank you," Celestia replied, she but shook her head in the negative. "But as you said, he would want it passed down."

"This once belonged to a Prince," Luna explained, and passed the cloth on to Rarity, the present Element of Generosity.

"He hated being called it, though," the older Princess noted with a distant look. "He was much happier once he found his true calling."

"This fabric is... magnificent..." Rarity accepted the prayer shawl with reverence. At her touch, it shimmered with tiny lights, like pinprick sized diamonds. It was almost like silk trapped between material and immaterial.

"The Vestments of Fallen Stars," she whispered, and to Luna and Celestia, she bowed her head. "I'll take good care of it."

"I'm not even sure how anyone found this," Luna wondered, floating over a pony-sized ring to the resident apple farmer and warrior. "It wouldn't have been among my things, I don't think."

Applejack examined the 'ring' - it was meant to fit between the knee and fetlock and slid easily over her hoof once she removed her armored glove. There was nothing fancy about it from looks alone: it was simple, well wrought steel, snug but not uncomfortable. Yet an old Earth Pony magic was suffused into the artifact, filling the farmer with strength and resilience.

"Iron Band of Truth," Applejack said, and tipped her hat. "Ah like it."

"Oh oh oh! Finally! Me! Me! What'do I get? Huh? A mace? Something with a troll on it? Something on fire? I like fire! Oh! Is it a troll on fire! That's also a mace!? I'll go enhancement if I can dual wield burning trolls!"

"I'm not sure what to make of it myself. Happy Days was... a little weird." Luna floated over another ring. This one with a simple gem set in it.

"A ring?" Pinkie Pie wondered, quickly slipping it on while giggling. "Hm. It feels funny!" Looking down, she saw that the gem had turned bright green. "Hey! Green!"

Sticking out her tongue, her blue eyes widened into saucers as the green turned pink.

"And now it's pink! He-he! I love pink!"

"Ancient Mood Ring," Celestia mused, watching Pinkie - like all the others - with a confused expression. "An artifact of terrible power..."

"Ooooooh. Blue? Wait, is the ring making me blue, or I am making the ring blue? Or is someone making us **both** blue?" Pinkie's philosophical contemplation was broken as the color changed again, distracting her from a certain wall. "Oh! Fuchsia!"

Just in time, too, as the eight ponies finally emerged from the Observatory and into the open air of the pavilion courtyard. There, rows of Royal Guards and dozens of freed ponies and diamond dogs were all waiting, flanking the main walkway. Celestia and Luna paused, subtly letting Twilight and her five friends move forward, not yet noticing they were being put into the forefront.

Captain Morning Star stamped one hoof against the stone floor in salute -

And so did every Royal Guard, unicorns, pegasi and earth ponies.

"HO-A!" The barked in respect. A few feet from Twilight, Dash blushed and chuckled. Fluttershy shrunk a bit at the attention. Rarity self-consciously tried to fix her still frazzled mane. Applejack simply smirked. Twilight looked back and saw Celestia urging her forward with a not so subtle gesture with her hoof.

"Well done, little ponies," Morning Star told them, and saluted. "Well done."

"Indeed." Rex Rustpaw wasn't far behind. The old geomancer bowed his head respectfully. "You and yours will always be welcome among the Rustpaw."

Among the crowd, Ice Breaker waved, together with some of his rescued friends. "Thanks again!" he shouted over the others. "I'll pay you fillies back some day! That's a promise!"

Even the many wounded ponies they had rescued were out to see them off, despite bandages and crutches and blankets wrapped around shoulders. It was only really then that it sunk in. The Twilight Cult in Everfree was completely dismantled. Even if Voidhorn's last words had been a vow that the evil organization was not gone from the country, at least here and now, it had been kicked to the proverbial curb, and almost a hundred lives had been saved.

It felt... pretty damn good.

"So what now?" the question had been asked by one Rainbow Dash, despite her soaking up the props and cheers from the crowd more than anypony. The paladin gave Twilight a knowing smile.

"What makes you think I have anything planned after this?" the mage asked, ducking her head to hide her own persistent grin.

"Um. The... um... Darkmoon Faire is in Elwynn Forest," Fluttershy suggested, timidly waving to some to a group of patched up pegasi. And one stallion staring at her with hearts in his eyes. Okay. Let's be honest. More than one.

"Ah wouldn't mind seein' Westfall," Applejack kept herself mostly hidden by her stetson hat. "And maybe setting up some apple exportation deals in Stormwind an' Ironforge."

"Well I, for one, have to get back to my boutique," Rarity positively glowed at the adoration and attention of all the ponies - and diamond dogs - they had rescued. "But the Eastern Kingdoms are renounced for their magical craftsmanship, and I've heard they do simply fascinating things with runecloth..."

"Noblegarden Roadtrip!" Pinkie Pie cheered. "Follow me and I'll have us power-leveled to 85 in no time! I'll just need access to your accounts and-"

"Ha! As if I'd ever give you my password!"

"But I already know your password, Dashie! It's 'Cooler20'"

"... no it... isn't. It's, uhhh... something else. But definitely not that."

"Um. you should just use an authenticator. That's how I got my core hound pet. See?"

"My word, what is that!"

"Arggh! Hey! Why does everything try and eat me?! Bright colors are supposed to be a deterrent!"

Hidden behind Celestia's legs, an auburn blank-flank filly watched the mares with confusion.

*'Hard to believe, isn't it Night Sky?'* Amber thought, chuckling as the rainbow pony tried to shake off the hungry core hound pup. It was an amusing sight, but her mood quickly turned somber.

*'The Elements of Harmony... if only we had met them a year ago. Maybe then it wouldn't have been too late for you.'* Reptilian eyes - a dragon's eyes - narrowed. *"...I'll watch them... and see if their future is as the sands of time predicted."*

- - -

By the time they arrived in Ponyville, it was past midnight.

Ponyville was still bustling with some lingering activity: various adventurers were still up and about, enjoying themselves at taverns or inns. Most of the town residents, however, were fast asleep. By one o'clock, the last of the late night raiders would be returning, chiming one after another as their hearthstones brought them to innkeepers for one last hot meal and a warm bed after a night of wiping on one boss or another in some far-off land.

With the increasing number of flying mounts used, and the late hour, no one noticed three royal chariots discretely come down on the edge of town in land technically owned by Sweet Apple Acres. Not wanting to cause a stir, the Princesses had expressed their preference to come and go with a minimum of interference. That meant no fly-bys of Ponyville proper.

As the mane six jumped from the chariots, they chatted amongst themselves, planning for the future. Of them, Twilight was the first to turn back to the chariot she had left, and bow.

"Princess," she said, Spike sleeping on her back. "Thank you once again."

"We are the ones who should be thanking you, Twilight Sparkle," Luna answered for her sister. She and Fluttershy had shared a quiet ride together, just as Twilight had ridden alongside Celestia in her chariot. The dark alicorn was not normally very talkative.

But now, she stepped down from the golden caisson to return the bow.

"I feel ready to face a great many things now," she explained, green eyes glowing faintly in the dark. "Things I have been avoiding... and neglecting... for far too long."

"It was an honor to help," Twilight replied, and saw her mentor smiling. "I... I learned something about the magic of friendship. Would you like to hear it, Princess?"

"Oh?" Celestia remarked, perking up. "That would be wonderful, Twilight." She hadn't said as much, but it was clear the encounter with Night Sky and what the brilliant unicorn had become had left the Princess somewhat shaken; Twilight had politely kept from indulging her curiosity, or her concerns, for most of the trip. "What did you learn?"

The studious Miss Spaarkle trotted over to the circle of her friends. "I learned that... well, I learned a lot of things over the last few days, but I think the most relevant is that no pony can live without something important to them. I don't mean a cutie mark either, or a 'special talent.' I mean something to believe in... another pony, an important friend or ideal... the magic of friendship comes from the part of ourselves that we share with others, and the part of others that they share with us."

"We encountered ponies, and... even diamond dogs... who fought for reasons we don't agree with. Ones we probably won't ever really understand. But I *wanted* to understand, even if I can only scratch the surface. I don't think we'll ever be able to find common ground with the Twilight Cult, but that doesn't mean friendship is a magic unique to ponies. Maybe Equestria being reunited with the rest of the world will be a good thing. For all of us."

She smirked, eyes twinkling. "Or maybe not. But I'll find out eventually. I still have a lot to learn."

"As do I, Twilight," Celestia agreed, pride in her student clear for all to hear. "As do we all."

"Oh! Oh! And I learned to be careful where you leave your totems or you could facepull and wipe your group! And to only pop Heroism during a burn phase!"

"Heh! And I learned that the best party isn't the one with the most hardcore, badass fighters or whatever! It's your friends!" Rainbow Dash gave the pink earth pony a playful nudge. "Because friends stick together, even when things don't go perfectly!"

Since they all seemed to be taking turns anyway, Applejack inclined her head. "Ah'd heard it before, but I really learned first-hoof that it ain't easy bein' a tank. I took a beatin' to high heaven, but ah gotta say, it was worth every minute ta know every blow Ah took was one my friends didn't have'tah."

"What about you, Rarity?" Twilight asked the first of two silent members of their party. "What did you learn?"

"Oh, nothing much," the regal unicorn with the rather burned purple mane replied. "I learned that

resurrection magic is sadly lacking when it comes to cosmetics. That dungeons, although filled with treasure, tend to be rather filthy. I learned to start packing wet-naps. I gained a few levels in tailoring. I also learned it is much cheaper to contract diamond dogs to retrieve gems for you rather than do it yourself. These 'Rustpaw dailies' have a chance to drop rare jewelcrafting recipes! And I've heard they have mounts and a pet, too."

"Really? A pet? Like... a little puppy?"

"Rarity!" By the objection, Spike was clearly back among the waking world. "Don't farm rep with the guys that kidnapped you! I can help you dig up gems, too! Don't you want Spike Rep? I already have a daily!"

"Yes, I heard. To *give* you gems. Not to *get* them."

"...um... oh yeah."

Twilight rolled her eyes. "What about you, Fluttershy?" She asked the golden pegasus. "Did you learn anything *about friendship*?" She stressed that last part.

"Um. Maybe," the druid demurred. "That is..."

"Go on! I'm sure Princess Celestia can't wait to hear!"

"I. um. Well... if you really want to know..." Fluttershy dipped her head to hide behind her slowing pink mane. "...a while back, after I first learned how to be a druid, after we saved the animals of the forest from the fires, I... had a bad experience. I was so sure I wanted to be a healer: a restoration type druid. I wanted to help everyone I could. Some friends I made decided to go on another adventure, and they asked me to come with them to help heal."

"I wasn't sure I was ready, but they didn't have another healer, so I went along," she explained with a sad look. "I was just learning back then and I... didn't do very well. No one died, not permanently, but the group broke up. I had to make my way home by myself..."

"Some friends!" Dash interrupted with an angry huff.

"Well, um, as you can guess," Fluttershy continued, despite the interruption. "I eventually got back. I'd practiced more, but I still wasn't that confident of myself. I wondered if maybe I was wrong? Maybe I wasn't cut out for healing. It isn't like anypony has a cutie mark telling her what her class and spec should be." The timid druid had everyone's attention, and gulped.

Taking a deep breath to steady herself, she continued, "I told myself: one more time. Don't let your friends down. If you can't pull it off this time, you'll never be able to." She cracked a smile and raised her head. "And, um... I guess the last two days taught me that I do like healing. *I really like it*. I like being a resto-druid. I really do."

Rainbow Dash smirked and slid up to her friend's side. "So basically..."

"You want to be..." Pinkie Pie continued, taking the other side.

"A tree!" Fluttershy declared.

- - -

The image was grainy, not simply from age, but repeated use.

It had been played and replayed, over and over, a great many times over tens of centuries.

The sky was vast and dark, but patchwork. Stars were still in the process of being properly set in place; some were finished, others works in progress. Among them all, the Moon was a pure circle of white light, without imperfections of any sort. The floor shifted slightly, distant parts of it rising and moving apart from the others. As they did, it became clear: it wasn't a floor, or the ground.

It was a single, giant hand.

"Come, Luna. You can do this." A deep, eternal voice spoke like a metallic chorus. "You were created to do this."

A tiny, dark blue speck on the hand grew closer, and a bit more distinct. It was one of several, with various shapes and sizes. Next to the dark blue speck was a white one with contrasting pink.

A giggle came from that white and pink shape. "Do you want me to help?"

"I'll do it!" a third voice, that of the dark blue mote, quickly replied. "You just watch me! I'll do it!"

A light blue mane flowed as the filly looked up at the featureless white Moon. *Elune*. In it's pure, original form. Slowly, fretfully, the tiny alicorn raised her hooves and spread her wings -

And the Moon moved.

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#### SPECIAL ADDENDUM

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "Rainbow Dash. Do you have a moment to chat?"

Rainbow Dash whispers: "Oh, hey, a GM! Is this about my ticket? One sec."

Rainbow Dash whispers: "Okay! Ready!"

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "According to this, you didn't get the achievements for your Castle of the Two Sisters run?"

Rainbow Dash whispers: "Darn right! I was running it with my friends and after we beat Voidhorn they all got the Soul Searching achievement and the completion achievement."

Rainbow Dash whispers: "I didn't notice that I didn't have it until... until someone pointed it out. I don't think I need to say who."

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "The Instance ID was 5673027?"

Rainbow Dash whispers: "I even got loot from the boss and I didn't die or zone out or anything!"

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "I can confirm that you were there for the kill, and I'm going to give you the achievement credit you missed. We're still experiencing problems with the new 6-man instances and apologize for any inconvenience caused."

Rainbow Dash whispers: "No problem! Thanks for getting back to me so fast!"

Rainbow Dash got achievement [Soul Searching] !

Rainbow Dash got achievement [Castle of the Sisters] !

Rainbow Dash whispers: "Woot!!"

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "Is there anything else I can help with while I'm here?"

Rainbow Dash whispers: "I think that's it!"

Rainbow Dash whispers: "...Actually, wait! I was wondering something."

Rainbow Dash whispers: "I'm working on unlocking the Wonderbolt reputation dailies and I noticed there's another reputation for the Shadowbolts. Is there a way to gain one rep without losing the other?"

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "Sorry. Like Aldor and Scryer and Frenzyheart and Oracles, you can only align with one opposing faction at a time."

Rainbow Dash whispers: "But I could get, say, Shadowbolt rep to exalted, get the title, uniform and tabard and other goodies... and then switch and work Wonderbolt rep up to get the other title and uniform? And then have both at the same time?"

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "Theoretically yes."

Rainbow Dash whispers: "Awesome. Hehehehe! This is gonna be sooooo cool!"

[GM] Shadowed whispers: "Good luck out there!"

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(special thanks to "Shadowed" - the fanfiction.net reviewer who caught that I'd forgotten Dash's achievements! Now she has em!)  
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**A/N**

Okay. Well. Finally finished this off. Sry for the little delay in the release of the last two chapters. As always, the project turned out far larger than I'd imagined, growing more and more involved and complex.

This is the official end of the main story, but there may be other World of Ponycraft side stories from myself or even others (I know someone is working on a pvp centric one). I still have various subjects that I wanted to touch more on but couldn't, but they would make nice, compact, side stories.



For example:

- Pinkie's mysterious Shaman Trainer. The one she didn't want to talk about. I really wanted to tell this story, but it was too long and tangential to fit in anywhere.
- Twilight forming/reforming a new Guild. This would be a post-fic sort of story. Elements of it were hinted at already in WoP.
- Sunflower (the cultist) as a recurring character, bouncing from one enemy organization to the next. So the mane six encounter her working for Illidan or the Burning Legion in Outland (somehow lol) and the Cult of the Damned in Northrend, and then the Twilight Cult (again!) in Twilight Highlands or Stonecore. Naturally, she surrenders every time and runs away.

Captain Morning Star would also reappear at the girls level up (he'd be helping the Alliance in Outland and part of the Valiance Expedition in Northrend or Storm Peaks, maybe becoming a DK, and finally be part of new quests in Hjjal and/or Uldum). Ice Breaker would also reappear as a specialist attached to the Royal Guard detachment. It would also save me from making too many extra OCs.

- Some of the Holiday Seasonals. Especially Brewfest. Pinkie Pie's gonna love that one. The picture of her partying the night away at the Grim Guzzler and pestering the L80ETC band is right up there with Rarity bartering with Haris Pilton in Shattrath for a 'portable hole' or 'gigantique bag' and somehow turning the city into one big fashion contest.
- Other fun moments in my mind would be Twilight in the Harrison Jones quest chain in Uldum playing the part of an (competent for once) Indiana Jones girl. That and her meeting Jaina Proudmoore. Study!
- Then there is the eventual, inevitable rematch with Trixie and the possibility of a rivalry (friendly or otherwise) with the Knights of Luna, plus Luna herself becoming more 'assertive.' Luna's trip to Moonglade and Darnassus would also be neat, as is the hint that Deathwing still intends to turn her to the side of destruction and chaos (though given the ending of this fic, his success seems very unlikely).
- I also received some interesting comments in a forum thread about a potential Horde Raid taking on Celestia (during the day) or Luna (at night) or even both (at dusk or dawn) for meta achievements like "For the Horde!"
- More cutie mark crusader misadventures, plus more with Spike (and Amber - she'll really have to teach him that polymorph self spell dragons love so much). The mane cast could even take them along for Orphan's week, if only for the fun of dragging impressionable little children into battlegrounds for achievements! "See, Scoots? That's how you cap a flag!"
- My greatest regret, though, was that I just didn't have the time and place to give the Horde much attention in the story so far. Of course, it isn't like I did that much with the Alliance as a whole, either. The story was always supposed to be centered around Equestria, Luna's past in Uldum, and the mane six. Sorry Horde bronies. That was just how things worked out.

Heh. This fic was supposed to be maybe a hundred pages using my normal formatting (times new roman, font 10) ... I don't know how long it is at this point. But a rough guess would be two or three times the planned size. lol. I just can't help myself.

If you enjoyed the fic (or hated it) I'm always happy to hear comments and reviews. If you have ideas you just feel the need to share, or even if you think you want to write a side story or something, drop a line. I'm gonna be taking a little break to catch my breath. Working on this and "Reflections Lost" at the same time

has been brutal. Curse these epic fics!

- Capn Chryssalid

- - -

For fun, here's a list of Voidhorn's Boss Abilities and some other misc stuff!

***Voidhorn*** (unicorn; High Priest of the Equestrian Twilight Cult; aka 'Night Sky')

(All phases)

**Deeper into the Nightmare** (increasing stacking shadow damage debuff)

Phase 1 (lasts 2 mind controls)

**Mind Control** (typical MC, target gets size and damage buff; will randomly MC any target not at top of aggro list, until all targets have been controlled at least once, then will MC tank) - victims needs to be CC'd

**Nightmare Blast** (shadowflame attack on target with the most aggro) - face away from party

**Mana Shield** (absorbs 50% of all damage, reducing mana instead of health; makes Voidhorn immune to interrupts)

Phase 2 (untankable)

**Flame Shield** (reflects incoming direct damage as shadowflame) - don't do direct damage when shield is up!

**Hand of Destruction** (death/force grips one party member into air and creates a swirl of shadow damage around him or her) - everyone needs to group up under the victim to take less damage and catch her when she falls; heals need to keep force gripped victim from dying or she will explode, dealing shadow damage  
phase 1 and 2 repeat, allowing the nightmare debuff to keep stacking. Eventually it becomes impossible to heal through Nightmare Blast and Hand of Destruction.

Phase 3 (25%)

**Luna's Nightmare** - Luna and Nightmare Moon appear. Voidhorn teleports away. Luna is shackled with shadowy chains. During this, Nightmare Moon taunts Luna and resurrects 'Nightmare Apparitions'

**Nightmare Apparition** (a shadow of someone from Luna's past) - these need to be killed before they reach Luna; each one destroyed weakens the chains; Apparitions do shadow damage when they die to anyone in 5 yards so be careful with aoe!

Phase 4 (25% - Luna free) (cinematic)

**End of the Nightmare!** - Voidhorn reappears with Eye of C'thun. Celestia and Luna arrive with reinforcements. Voidhorn consumes the Eye of C'thun and becomes a Faceless One. She is destroyed by Luna.

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*Elements of Harmony/Virtue (War of the Shifting Sands vs Modern)*

Enigma (**Magic: Friendship vs Order**) Twilight Sparkle

Featherfrost (**loyalty/honor**) Rainbow Dash

Sunflower (**kindness/decency**) Fluttershy

Luster (**generosity/charity/altruism**) Rarity

Black Pepper (**honesty/fidelity**) Applejack

Happy Days (**laughter/festivity**) Pinkie Pie