

This is dedicated to ktooosiek, without whose feedback and friendship, I never would have finished this.

EPILOGUE: WHY WE FOUGHT

“When all the world is a hopeless jumble, and the raindrops tumble all around...”

Princess Mi'Amore Cadenza had never heard the lyrics to the song she now sung until the Combine invasion necessitated her forced relocation to a heavily-fortified Royal Equestrian Army Air Corp base deep within the Everfree Forest.

“Heaven opens a magic light...”

The dark concrete hallway lit up with a hot pink glow as yet another love charm crackled from the tip of her horn.

“When all the clouds darken up the skyway, there’s a rainbow highway to be found...”

If she hadn't moved to New Cloudsdale, then known as the Buttercup Bloomflower Black Forest Facility, she never would have met a Cerberus named Sasha.

“... leading from your window pane...”

If she'd never met Sasha, she never would have heard her singing this song one gloomy day, using a garden tool to scrape dried, muddy hoofprints off of the cement leading to the facility's entrance.

“... to a place behind the sun...”

Cadance had asked her where she heard that song, and she told her it was from a very, very, old film about a young girl who is sucked up by a tornado and deposited in a strange land located south of *No Land* and either west or east of *Lo Land*, somewhere in the middle of the *Great, Deadly, Shifting* and *Impassable* deserts.

“... just a step beyond the raaaiiiinnnnn...”

She told Cadance she believed this was that land.

“Somewhere over the rainbow... way up high...”

The little heart-shaped love charm hovering in the dank, stuffy air popped and fizzled like every other before it, taking with it what little comfort it gave her. Cadance plopped her head back down on the chilly concrete and sobbed. She felt like a horrible pony for thinking not of Shining Armor, nor any of the other scores of ponies who were dead, but of Sasha and that stupid song.

Her whole body jumped when an obnoxiously loud, metallic *bang* shot past her ears and continued reverberating down the hallway.

“PRINCESS CADANCE!” a stallion shrieked.

Her body jumped again. With Twilight and Shining Armor dead, and Rainbow Dash missing and presumed dead, she was in charge of the whole Resistance – and, just like when she was the Duchess of the Crystal Empire, that meant she had to swallow her personal emotions, no matter how profound, long enough to carry out the duties of her office.

“Yes, I’m here!” she hollered, getting to her hooves.

“Princess... Princess Cadance...” the stallion wheezed, sounding like he was having some difficulty breathing.

“Yes, yes, what is it?!”

She clopped to a halt at the swaying side-door next to the much larger, much more broken door that marked the BBBFF’s main entrance. A uniformed REA soldier stood there, giving no reaction whatsoever to the metal door repeatedly hitting him in the flank as it slowly returned to rest.

“What is it, soldier?!” she demanded to his face, to which she got the insubordinate response of absolutely nothing. The pony simply continued staring straight ahead at a wholly unremarkable point on the opposite wall, moving only to satisfy the occasional pesky urge to breathe.

“Oh, for the Goddesses’ sake,” Cadance grumbled, abstaining from taking the name of Peter in vain.

“Yes.”

That was the only response she ever got from that stallion.

Thankfully, the great commotion that drifted through the open set of doors gave the princess a clue as to what this soldier doubtlessly would have called her attention to, had he still possessed a vocabulary greater than two, or possibly three or four, words.

Timidly entering the narrow passageway, Princess Cadance stepped outside into the strange twilight of that day and into the presence of the Goddesses Triumphant.

“... FOR WE SENSED THE DEATH OF THIS BREEN THE MOMENT IT OCCURRED,” the Princess of the Night proclaimed in the traditional Royal Canterlot Voice, **“AND NOW, NOW IS THE TIME TO STRIKE, FOR OUR ENEMY HAS NEVER BEEN WEAKER AND WE HAVE NEVER BEEN STRONGER!”**

The Two Sisters hovered in place above a weary but awestruck crowd of hundreds of soldiers and civilians, their great, glorious wings beating to keep them effortlessly aloft. The trademark aura of magnificence they radiated somehow made the surrounding devastation of the base – which resembled the site of some combination of a hurricane and a carpet-bombing – seem as dignified and proper by its mere association as the gilded halls of the Royal Palace, the fallen branches and muddy grass littered with leaves and broken glass, the manicured lawns of Canterlot Gardens.

Princess Celestia addressed the crowd in a much more modern voice than her sister.

“The end of the Combine and the birth of new freedom is just over the horizon, and we have grown *far* too tired of hiding in peace and comfort while our subjects fight and kill and die.”

“AND THOUGH WE MAY BE DESTROYED IN THE COMING BATTLE,” Princess Luna, it could be argued, *spoke*, **“WE WILL NOT GO QUIETLY!”**

Cadance giggled.

“PRINCESS CADANCE!”

The pink princess turned a different color when Luna spotted her.

“WHAT IN GEHENNA DID YOU DO TO MY SISTER AND I'S PALACE?!” she demanded,

pointing at the kilometers-high mushroom cloud where Canterlot was supposed to be.

“-And the rest of the city!” added Celestia.

It occurred to Cadance that perhaps it was so easy to envision her surroundings as a sort of ‘replacement’ for the Royal Palace because of her subconscious awareness that the old one was now millions of tons of elemental gasses and ultra-fine particles that, after mixing with the air’s latent water moisture along with dozens of cubic kilometers of flash-vaporized snow, had begun to condense and fall from the sky, showering its rightful owners in a charcoal-black ashen rain.

“PRINCESS CADANCE? PRINCESS CADANCE!”

And as she felt the ruins of the Shady City wash over her, running down her cheeks and dripping off her chin in gentle streams that were warm as a summer’s rain, Princess Cadance dared not blink away the stinging water, for before her very eyes, the bitter rain transformed the scenes of death and devastation around her into visages of beauty, life, prosperity and hope. She saw a *new* Everfree Forest – no longer dark and foreboding, but a bright and beautiful place where foals played and lovers laughed – and she saw a *new* Canterlot – its towering golden spires no longer in the shadow of the mountain, but bathed in Celestia’s sunshine from sunup to sundown.

It was not a dream or a fantasy or a delusion. She wasn’t remembering the past.

She was seeing the future.

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I have destroyed so much. What is it that I have created?

I have created a new world for Alyx and her friends; the old, imperfect one that the Combine replaced with something new and worse. Have I started an intergalactic war with an advanced civilization that our race will surely not survive? It doesn’t matter. Why? Because it is better to die fighting for what is right than it is to live in complacency with what is wrong. Did I make that choice for all of Equestria? Again, it doesn’t matter. How could it, when we are all viewed as the same by those who seek our annihilation?

Alyx. I’ll never see her again, will I?

Stopped.

It seemed the whole world and everything in it simply exploded, wrapping me in excited spirits of flame shaded ten thousand hues of orange, yellow and red.

And then it just... stopped.

What happened?

It was all I could think - my overtaxed mind was numb, uncomprehending, stunned, simultaneously tired as the light from a star on the other side of the universe, yet still coursing with adrenaline.

I looked closer, and saw that the flames were seeping through the cracks between the door and the frame. Had the Combine refrained from the use of explosives out of an abundance of caution, only resorting to their use after all other practical options had been exhausted?

Also, far more importantly, why did the flames appear to be frozen in place?

Curious.

Yet they were still emitting electromagnetic radiation. They still felt *hot*. Good Goddesses, that was a strange sight.

What... what happened to... time...?

"Time, Doctor Freeman?"

Good hell, there it is again. I was hoping that perhaps I had misheard his voice the first time, but there was no longer any question, any room for other possibilities.

"It's that Time again, isn't it?"

I could still move, at least a little bit, and swung my head around to see if I could get a look at the bastard. I saw Spike with the needle in Breen's head, with Alyx still staring at the pair with her pistol lowered. Turning my head around the other way, I saw Barney, his teeth clenched in a grimace and his eyes squeezed shut.

Ooh, he is in a really bad place right now.

If Time ever got going again, I was certain he'd either be killed or severely injured. I concentrated, trying to shove him away from the door. Nothing happened.

"Damnit, G-pony, you've got to get Barnes out of the way of that door!"

I looked at the door, and my position relative to it.

"... as well as me, I guess! Please? Hello?"

My legs were frozen. Not literally, but they may as well have been solid hunks of lead. It felt like one of those dreams where you try to run, but your body knows that it's lying down, so when you will your legs to move, they just feel like they're made of marshmallows. It was strange because, mentally, I actually felt refreshed, wide awake and alert.

"I wouldn't say 'but you've only just arrived'. It actually feels like you've been here a rather long... time..."

I whipped my head back around to the center of the room, and there he was.

That bastard. Though I'm normally quite blunt and unafraid to spout whatever idiotic thought happens to be zipping through my mind at the moment, somehow, I didn't think it wise to insult this... creature, this *pony*, if he even *is* a pony, to his face. Especially not when he seemed to be in a rather good mood.

He stood in his pleated blue business suit, his briefcase set on the ground nearby, admiring the statue of Spike holding the body of Administrator Breen.

"Not that I wish to imply you have... 'overstayed your welcommme'..."

"That was what I was supposed to do, right?" I asked the G-pony. "Kill Doctor Breen?"

He turned around and slowly trotted toward me, his green eyes seeming to glow like those of a

cat.

“Oh, yes, yes, that was obvious wasn’t it?” he replied dismissively. *“Breen was dead the moment those two were in the same room together, however, never in a million years would he have gotten here without you.”*

Glancing backward, he remarked, *“Spike is a magnificent creature, yes, but...”*

He stared hard at me. *“... you ... are far more dangerous.”*

He gestured toward the dirty, unmoving clouds outside the window.

“Quite a nasty piece of work you pulled off there in Canterlot – even I didn’t see that coming.”

I held my tongue. I didn’t feel at all good about that.

“Now, you have two options: You can either continue employment with uhh... me... or... I could leave you here... and hopefully, possibly... maybe...”

He prodded the massive wall of steel centimeters away that I had concluded was accelerating, albeit very, very slowly, toward my head.

“Well, I’m sure you’ll think of something.”

“Oh, Celestiadamnit,” I grumbled.

I jabbed my head at my friend, who was also very close to death.

“What about Barney?!”

“That is none of either of our concern,” he answered.

“BULLSHIT IT’S NOT!”

“Time to choose.”

“Damnit!”

I wracked my brains trying to think of something, *anything* I could do if I refused and the G-pony restarted the normal passage of time.

Spike is pretty much invincible... what if I pulled him over here, and...

"It's time to choose."

*No, no, there's not enough time... explosives? Even if I had any, my helmet is down, I'd still die and so would Barney and **everypony else**.*

"THIS ISN'T FAIR!"

"That is hardly a new objection."

"YOU'RE HOLDING A FUCKING GUN TO MY HEAD!"

"My, where did you learn that word?"

*"I don't want my friends to die!" I pleaded, almost crying (I said *almost*).*

"And I want a pony," he responded with a disgusting grin on his face.

"FINE!" I yelled, making far from my last stupid decision. *"Fine!"*

"Excellent choice, Doctor! I will see you on the other side."

And the world flashed a bright and blinding green while I yelled, *"I love you, Alyx!"*

She probably never heard me.

SUBJECT: GORDON FREEMANE

STATUS: CONTRACT COMPLETE,
AWAITING REASSIGNMENT