

League of Discord
Chapter 6: Ambition Renewed

He felt refreshed. Better than he had in so long. He wasn't ready yet, though. The new arrivals had brought something so new, so strong that even in his Canterlot prison, he was able to feel their arrival, and to feed off of their natures. No pony of Equestria had possessed this much delicious chaos in its nature for ages untold, not since those wonderful years when the leadership of Equestria was less...balanced. Yes, every second that these newcomers were here was a delightful convalescence for this seemingly innocuous statue.

It was so easy, so natural to savor this bouquet, with its pungent flavors permeating his essence. All of the familiar components were there. Fear, anxiety, ambition, hate, confusion; all of these were comforting companions that he had learned to draw power from so long ago, and at one point had even seized the throne with. There was something new here, though, something that he had experienced so little he could barely recognize it. He contemplated it, trying to remember what could cause this particular sensation within his soul.

Discord, Spirit of Chaos and former ruler of Equestria, allowed himself a moment of sadistic glee as he remembered what could be in an entity's heart to cause him such acute delight. Images of red, demonic eyes gazing at a field of broken bodies of some species he didn't recognize flashed through his mind, the last of the survivors of some battle writhing in agony as a purple mist flowed over them before the stillness of death overtook them. Discord had all the information he needed from the distant peek he got into the hearts of the newcomers. Scattered thoughts coalesced into a rare, solid form in his consciousness. He would not miss this opportunity.

After all, it had been so long since anypony in Equestria had violence in their hearts.

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Rainbow Dash gazed thoughtfully at the party going on around her. Normally she'd be in the middle of it, enjoying herself and playing around with everyone else, but Riven's words troubled her. Rainbow Dash was still a bit shaken from Riven's admission that she had taken life before, but her heart seemed good. Maybe if she'd been born in Equestria instead, things would be different. Rainbow Dash didn't know how anyone could survive in the environment Riven had described, but if it was really as bad as she described, maybe being able to take life was necessary. At the very least, she still regarded every life lost as a regrettable result of a cruel world. Rainbow Dash wondered if her two companions were also hiding similar trauma.

The party was in full swing now, and like many of Pinkie Pie's larger parties, a good portion of the town had shown up. The mayor of the town had authorized the use of the town square for the party. Pinkie truly did have a talent for parties, and having something to bring the community together helped keep things cohesive, so once in a while, Pinkie would 'convince' the mayor to allow the use of public property for large events such as this. Throughout the square, ponies of all shapes and color configurations enjoyed the opportunity to revel, only vaguely aware of the reason that Pinkie was throwing a party this time. Even the three champions had, relatively speaking, relaxed and were enjoying the festivities. Riven was locked in a wrestling match with Applejack, surrounded by a crowd

of cheering onlookers as the soldier and the farmer tested the other's strength. Swain was likewise surrounded, playing down his crippled leg just enough to make everypony even more sympathetic while he subtly fished for information about Equestrian politics and government.

Elsewhere, Singed was at a table with a purple coated mare with a mane of a darker purple, each of them taking turns slugging a distinctively apple-flavored alcohol favored by the few ponies of Ponyville who did drink. Unfortunately for Berry Punch, the aforementioned purple mare who emphatically denied she had an alcohol addiction, Singed was a master at the art of drinking, his body being practically immune to inebriation from all but the strongest brews of Runeterra. One defeated sigh later, a bag of the currency referred to as bits was slammed onto the table right before Singed's opponent toppled over. Singed chuckled as he secured the bag to the strap that held his bottle in place. The poor mare never knew she was against the second-hardest drinker in Runeterra. The money would come in handy, though. He would have need of certain ingredients, just in case. Singed got on his hooves, and began to search for the bookish mare, the one called Twilight, who had housed him previously. He hoped that she would know where he could purchase his desired herbs and chemicals.

Twilight Sparkle saw the chemist approaching, and waved a hoof at him. "Hi Singed! I hope you're enjoying the party." She gestured to a cream-colored, pink-maned pegasus mare and a small, purple-scaled creature beside her. "This is my friend Fluttershy, and my assistant Spike. They were away helping another town's veterinary clinic when you first arrived. Luckily, they were kind enough to get her a sky-carriage back after she was done. Fluttershy, Spike, this is Singed. He's one of the ponies I was telling you about earlier."

Spike's greeting was short and distant, and Singed noted that he seemed unduly distracted by Rarity. After a few moments, he decided to not follow that train of thought to its logical conclusion. Fluttershy, however, seemed to have vanished, at least until he heard a squeak vaguely resembling a greeting escape from behind Twilight. Singed frowned. His appearance had caused the all-too-common response of fear from those who met him in person, even in his normal form. It had made socializing difficult at times. People and ponies alike seemed to equate glowing eyes with danger. Of course, Singed knew he was plenty dangerous, but his appearance had nothing to do with that. They never seemed to realize that it was his mind that was such a potent weapon, and without his genius, he wouldn't be the juggernaut he was known for being on the Fields of Justice. Brushing off Twilight's profuse apologies at Fluttershy's timidity, he turned to the topic he had approached her for. "So, Twilight, I was wondering if you could assist me. I've recently acquired some bits from a friendly wager with a pony called Berry Punch. I was wondering if you could help me acquire some supplies before I leave."

"I'd be glad to help. What do you need?" Twilight sent Spike to fetch a quill and parchment.

Shortly afterward, the dragon returned and Singed began to rattle off a list of various chemicals and herbal ingredients. Most of the chemicals went over Fluttershy's head, but her already considerable fear of this intimidating earth pony was augmented as she recognized many of the plants she had treated animals for ingesting. Judging by the way this pony was speaking, he was familiar with them too. Thinking back to Rainbow Dash's often-given advice to her about being assertive, she gathered her courage, and spoke. "Um...Mr. Singed, um, you know that most of the herbs you ask for are toxic, right?" She flinched, as if expecting reprisal for her statement.

Singed laughed heartily. “Of course, my dear. I'm a chemist by profession, after all. Part of my job is to take things that would normally be dangerous and find a way to make them useful, and these ingredients are all vital parts of my greatest creation. Once I go to work on them, they won't be poisonous to me anymore, but instead, will combine to form a concoction that will be capable of boosting nearly every aspect of my body's functions. The effects are so profound that most thought that I was crazy when I first described it to them, which is why I've affectionately named it the Insanity Potion. Unfortunately, I haven't quite refined it to the point at which others can use it, but I possess a resistance to certain chemicals brought on by years of experience, so it's perfectly safe, although there can be some minor side effects, but that's neither here nor there. Anyway, worry not your pink-crowned head. I've been a chemist since I was quite young, and I've learned under some of the finest minds Runeterra has to offer.”

'Not exactly what I was worried about...I probably shouldn't judge someone based on looks though. Zecora turned out okay, after all.' Fluttershy barely managed a somewhat artificial smile. “That's...very reassuring. I was just a little concerned after seeing the effects of such plants on so many unfortunate animals.”

“I take it you're quite the animal lover, then? I've not had the best experiences with animals, but my friend Swain has a bird that he's unusually fond of, and I've not known the man-err, stallion to be very sentimental. Personally, I find the creature to be rather unsettling, but each to his own.”

Fluttershy glanced over to the bird perched atop Swain's back. It looked back at her, its six eyes as luminescent and cold as ever, and gave a disapproving caw. Fluttershy decided she could live with herself if this particular animal decided not to love her. Her next conclusion was that a conversation with Singed was more preferable than a staring contest with the creature. “Well, I've always had a special connection with animals. I'm the closest thing that Ponyville has to a veterinarian, though I'm not officially qualified yet. I'm taking these neat courses in Manehattan next summer though, when I have enough bits saved up from my work here, so I'll at least have that much formal education. I'm hoping to open my own clinic for sick and injured animals one day.” Fluttershy couldn't help but smile at the thought of being able to do more to help her precious animal friends.

The party continued for a few more hours, and as the crowd began to slowly disperse, Riven found herself smiling contentedly as she sat and watched the remaining ponies around her. Her companions had excused themselves a little earlier, saying that Singed had to concoct a remedy to help relieve pain in Swain's crippled foreleg. Riven didn't really believe them, but she didn't press the issue. Rainbow Dash had been right. Taking some time to cut loose had been a refreshing experience, and although she still felt the weight of both her past and her convictions, she felt a little stronger to bear them. Riven stifled a laugh as Rainbow Dash managed to get tangled in a party banner as she tried to catch Pinkie Pie, who had somehow managed to find her way onto a nearby roof. Fortunately, the banner Rainbow Dash had plowed into served as an effective method of controlling Pinkie's descent, and she bounced gleefully into a nearby pile of banner, feathers, and rainbow. Riven decided that she'd have to find some time for revelry when she returned to Noxus. Riven gave up on stifling her laughter at the chaos that seemed to follow the pink pony as she attempted to unravel her friend's bindings, and moved to help free the pair.

The first thing Nasus noticed was the sunrise. The Equestrian sun was making its way back onto its azure throne, regal purples and reds filling the sky to announce its presence. Nasus was more interested in what he saw after that though. As Nasus looked at the distant town, he could already perceive what seemed like a rainbow-hued tapestry of colors to his mind's eye. It was like the distinctive flavor of each settlement he had been to, for his glowing red spheres could detect far more than visual signals; magic-users who had perfected the same ability called it aura viewing, the ability to see the nature of one's soul via a colored haze that emanated from them. For the beings known as soul eaters, though, it was innate, and from a distance, the colors dispersed and blended into a beautiful, swirling vortex. *'And yet it is only to mark food sources. Ironic, that such a lovely display is wasted on those whose very nature demands they destroy it. Even more ironic that those who produce such beauty are usually doomed to be ignorant of it.'* Nasus smiled to himself and waited for his two companions to catch up, admiring the complexities of this particular town's aura. Unlike the two former humans behind him, Nasus did not have to deal with sleep, or food aside from his ethereal nourishment, though he was able to partake in food and gain an infinitesimal amount of sustenance through it.

After a few moments, Ezreal staggered into view, bleary-eyed and blank faced, followed by Ryze, equally bleary-eyed but slightly more coordinated. Ezreal muttered something about civilization, and slumped against a nearby tree. Ryze looked to Nasus tiredly. "Hate to say it, but I'm in the same boat as the idiot. I need sleep. I'll set up a few magical traps, so you can be free to scout the town ahead of us."

"Very well. Rest well. Come to the town when you awaken. I shall know when you are near and meet you on the outskirts." Nasus nodded at Ezreal, who was already far along in his journey to a restful oblivion, and began walking.

It was about an hour later that he came across a cottage standing alone outside of town. It was a somewhat whimsical looking structure surrounded by a variety of birdhouses, with a smaller dog-house like structure labeled 'Angel Bunny', and Nasus was inclined to wonder how the roof, made entirely of some sort of foliage, appeared to still be alive and green. After crossing a bridge over a creek that bisected the path to the building, Nasus walked to the door and knocked firmly with his hoof.

Nasus could vaguely hear the sounds of various animals from inside the cottage, and he thought he could make out a faint voice trying desperately to calm the racket that his loud knocking had caused. When the door opened, and Nasus found himself face to face with a certain pink-maned pegasus, he tried to assume an even mixture of formality and friendliness. "Greetings. My name is Nasus, and I was wondering if you could help me, for I am part of a small group that seems to have found its way into a land we do not know. If you are unable to help, I apologize for wasting your time and disturbing your animals."

Upon seeing Nasus, Fluttershy's first reaction was to slam the door and cower in fear, but she managed to overcome her paranoia long enough to hear the stranger ask for help. *'Gee, I wonder why there are so many huge, scary-looking earth ponies with glowing eyes around. Maybe he's from the same place those others are.'* After debating with herself a few moments, kindness won over fear and she invited Nasus in for tea while they discussed his group's situation. It didn't take long for the subject of Swain, Singed, and Riven to come up, and Fluttershy agreed to lead him to Twilight Sparkle so that he could reunite with his fellow champions.

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“You just missed them. The Royal Guard showed up about an hour ago and picked them up in a sky-carriage. Don't worry, I'll have my assistant send for another. You'll be reunited with your friends in no time.” Twilight Sparkle's reassurances elicited a raised eyebrow from Nasus, who was slightly amused at her assumption that the two groups were on friendly terms.

“Thank you, Twilight Sparkle.” Nasus paused, examining his surroundings. “This is more books than the average inhabitant of Runeterra possesses. Are books more valued here, or are you a librarian?”

The purple mare giggled. “Oh, neither. Well, I suppose technically I am Ponyville's librarian, since I run the place, but I'm actually a full-time student of Canterlot University. Graduated top of my class from Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns just recently. Princess Celestia sent me here on a special assignment, and I took a liking to Ponyville, so she let me stay. She's the best mentor anypony could ask for!” The admiration flowed from Twilight's voice like a waterfall the moment the name Celestia was spoken. “What about you? I mean, Swain and the others mentioned that you all are part of some organization that runs things by settling disputes via some sort of contest, but I get the feeling he was intentionally vague when describing it. I won't pry though. Anyway, besides that, do you have any hobbies or occupations?”

“That sounds like Swain.” Nasus paused thoughtfully. “Since I came to Runeterra, I spend most of my free time exploring a place known as the Shurima Desert. I am more comfortable among the sands than anywhere else, and it is a good place to learn about Runeterran history. Before I came to Runeterra though, I worked with my brother, Renekton. I was the overseer of our kind's greatest achievement: the Great Library, and he was the head gatekeeper, responsible for keeping those not ready for the Library's secrets out. I have never seen anything that can compare to it in my time away from my home. The structure itself is the size of this town, and every room is filled with books dedicated to a subject. At least, I hope it still is. Things were not going so well when I was summoned to Runeterra.”

Twilight looked as if she might explode when Nasus spoke of the Great Library's size. “That sounds like possibly the most wonderful building I have ever heard of. If such a thing existed here, nobody would ever see me again. But how would I choose what to read? Nopony can read that many books even in their entire life...or can they? How much of the knowledge would be retained though?”

Nasus laughed, finding the bookworm's quandary to be somewhat endearing to the scholarly being. “My species is naturally long-lived. I was actually present at the opening of the Library, and before I became overseer I managed to read a relatively large portion of the Library's contents. Those were the most enjoyable centuries of my life.”

“...centuries? That's...wow...I thought only the Princesses could live that long. If I could live that long, I'd have time to read all of the books in Equestria!” Twilight looked extremely pleased at this notion.”

Fluttershy had been standing silently off to the side since she had brought the large earth pony to the Ponyville Library. With a barely audible farewell, she started moving toward the door. Twilight,

engrossed in her fantasies of eternal learning, didn't notice until Nasus spoke his farewell in return. "Oh, uh, sorry. Bye Fluttershy! Take care!" Twilight paused, looking awkward for a moment after her friend had departed. "Um, sorry, I can get a bit enthusiastic when it comes to knowledge. Anyway, I should probably offer to show you around town, shouldn't I?"

"Few things are better than a love of learning, and fewer things are as rare. I would be honored to learn more of your home. It will be several hours until my companions make their way here. Our journey through the nearby forest was somewhat tiring."

"You had to go through the Everfree? Eek, that must have been scary. All sorts of dangerous creatures inhabit it." Nasus smiled at Twilight's concern, and the two continued to speak as Twilight began leading him around town.

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If he hadn't been encased in stone, Discord would have been jumping for joy. Every second brought the newcomers closer to him, and every second he felt stronger for it. This was going to be fun.