

Fallout Equestria: Misfits

By DancingOnTheAshes

Chapter 9: Last Respects.

What am I? Why did Trixie want me? What, in the end, happened in Stable 10?

A couple of hours ago I ate a big piece of turquoise. My mane and tail briefly metamorphosed into living flames and balefire flowed out of my throat. What in the great name of the moon will come next?

At this point the hows about my abduction started to wane. How or when I was taken from Trader's Caravan wasn't as important as the need to know what happened in Stable 10, and what, in the end, I ultimately was.

Of course, I wasn't stupid. There is only one type of creature in the wasteland that eat gemstones and belch balefire... and what was one of them doing in a stable?

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"Snakebite Tourniquet..." Wild was rolling the name around in her mouth, then she gave me a hurt expression. "Why didn't you just tell me?"

I sighed at myself. Well, eventually you have to pay the piper. "Because I felt ashamed, I still do. I'm unsure about myself and what I am, and I didn't want the complication of somepony I knew finding out... then you figured out that I used to be male, and it kinda fell apart. Yet I still kept my name secret, I'm not sure why, but I do know that there really weren't any good moments to bring it up."

I mutely shook my head. "I'm sorry."

"Its okay." She said in that special tone that translated to; 'Things are not okay, I feel hurt and this is going to come back and bite you in the rump later.' I knew the tone, my sister used it on me often enough. Hell, I've used it.

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He slammed his hoof on the big table. "I am telling you, we need to send a message telling Stern and Red Eye we give our support!"

Cinnamon roared back. "Not going to happen!" She was almost standing on the table and Midnight Rose was barely holding her back.

It was bedlam. It was a taste of what was surely about to come. Ponies were yelling to make themselves heard and we were barely two steps away from throwing things at each other.

One of the doctors raised his voice. "But what about refugees? Surely ponies will try and get themselves away from any fighting?"

A buck who's voice was much like a bleat answered. "Well, that wont matter if we close the gates tomorrow evening."

"Wont ponies be left to the dangers of the wasteland if that happens?" Midnight said as she was trying to keep Cinnamon from gutting the slaver supporter.

"Well, yes." He answered. "That's the whole point. And it prevents infiltrators once the real fighting starts."

"Well, we don't know that." The other doctor said uncertainly. "This might just blow over."

"Hah, that'll be likely." A blue earth pony buck with a face like a sack full of hammers and a supernova red mane barked. "Tain't gonna blow over, this will go the distance and end in misery, I can promise you that. But let them try and take us, I'll give 'em a face full of dandruff if'n they try."

I had been sitting silently, just observing since I came back. Now I raised my voice above them all, they didn't stand a chance against me, I could muster more volume than them all combined and still keep a normal tone. "Battering Ram is correct." All heads turned towards me. Okay, I took the plunge, lets see how deep the waters were.

I turned to the doctor that had hoped it would blow over. "Red Eye and The Enclave are butting heads, this will end in a full on war between almost every conceivable faction in the wasteland." I started to count them out while tapping my hoof on the table.

"Red Eye and Stern's slavers, The Enclave, Twilight Society up in Tenpony, both the Steel Rangers and Applejack's Rangers, the Talons, and that's just here. What will happen in Hoofington? The Collegiate and Society? The Reapers and the dozen or so little raider tribes? Anarchy wont even be the half of it." Then there was Stalliongrad, Trottingham, a dozen more places just waiting for the power structure in Equestria to flicker. Ceaser's Legion for example.

Not to mention back home. The Royal Flush Gang up in the Casino. The dozen or so airship captains and the few pirates. Goddesses help us, I hope this will not wake up Machine Mountain. That' s the absolutely last thing anypony needs.

The doctor pointed an accusing hoof at me. "And what about your kind then? Hmm? Aren't you lot working with Red Eye?" Ahh, I had expected that sooner.

"The wasteland alicorns you mean?" I shrugged. "I have no idea what the rest of them are doing, some will no doubt turn back to work for him and some might even be helpful and friendly." I remembered the old green one. "And some will be hostile, mad beyond belief once Unity isn't keeping them sane, but I think most will just be bewildered and confused."

I myself had been scared out of my mind. I still was, now I just had a better grip on my situation.

Cinnamon gave a cough, and we all turned to her and settled down. "Right, lets get back on track.

Syringe and Splint." The two doctor ponies sat up straight. "I want you and Curatie to do a full inventory and get a firm idea of what medical supplies are available, this includes everything the merchants are willing to sell to the town clinic." Splint raised a hoof. "Yes?"

"Are we really going to work with thi... her?" He asked uncertainly. Right, he was not making friends with me at the moment.

"Yes." Cinnamon said coldly. "And if I was you I'd start immediately. Curatie is a respectable healer, I saw her in action yesterday, and will do a good job." I admit to straightening just a little out of pride.

The three of us left while the others continued to talk about the walls, and where to strengthen them most effectively.

"Right," I said as we walked down the hall. "I'll have to make up a list of herbs and ingredients for healing potions that could be useful." I already had a list of prioritised potions and poultices ready in my mind.

Syringe looked up at me over his steel rimmed glasses. "Herbs? Like a zebra potion?"

I nodded. I could see the disdain on his face and sighed. "I was trained to it, okay. It gets the job done, and more than that."

Splint, the more jittery of the two piped up. "But the war? The bombs?"

Before he could get further I spun on him, making him back into a wall and nearly fall over. "What of it?! Do you know why they did it? Do you know the circumstances?" I advanced, prodding him in the chest with a wing. "Do anypony have any idea of their history? Or care?" I stomped away. "Lets get this shit done, I have a funeral to attend tomorrow."

I sighed inwards, of course they don't know. It wasn't talked about and I only had a muddy picture at most of what had happened in the past, and I only had that because I had lived with a zebra for almost a decade.

I felt something look over my shoulder. "*Hi Shade.*"

~~*Hello.*~~ Shade sounded meek. Like a cat that knows it will get a boot thrown at it as soon as it sticks its head in the door.

"*You okay?*" I asked as I walked down the stairs that led to the street.

~~*I will be... it wasn't easy, keeping together... the raw emotion hurt.*~~ And Shade sounded genuinely hurt, or sick. It was hard to tell.

"*Go to sleep, you sound like you need it.*" Shade didn't object and settled down and went to sleep. Good, because I had a lot of screaming at it waiting, and I wanted it to be awake and alert. I didn't want to unleash seven kinds of hell on Shade while it was weak and sickly.

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I walked down the street and was interrupted by a question from the open door to a garage, it looked like it had been rebuilt into an armorers shop. Disassembled and modified weapons and armor of all makes and models hung behind sturdy mesh to show off the armorers skill, but dissuade thieves. A scarred and old gray griffin female sat turned to the street behind a grinding wheel, a strange blade in her claws.

While not taking her eyes from her work she asked me. "Looks like you could use some armor? Heard you got shot down yesterday." She tsked while checking the edge of the blade, it was long and segmented and looked hollowed out on the back. She glanced up at me. "Not good, you could use some padding under that duster of yours... Undertaker."

I looked at her for a minute while she just grinned back at me. Then I relented, the doctors walked past me and continued, clearly trying to ignore me as much as possible. "So," I asked the griffin. "you aren't a Talon?"

She shook her head, making her blue tipped black crest sway. "Haven't been in nearly twenty years."

"I didn't know you could quit." I mused. "Anyways, what armor do you have that would even fit me?" Proper protection was welcome, but my unusual body type made getting fabricated armor difficult. And relying on my shield spells all the time was... unpredictable at best.

She measured me up and put the blade aside. "Well, I don't have anything in stock." She rested her head in her claws. "Your legs are too long to fit normal pony's armor for a start, but maybe I could modify some metal armor, that only requires that the underbarding is changed." She stood on all four. "First though."

She took the weird blade in a claw and walked tree legged towards me. "Don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you, you big cub." She said irritably when I started to back away. "Right, stretch out your right wing."

I did so and she studied it critically with practiced eyes. Then sat and took it in her claw, turned it, and measured the thickness and size with a professionals eye. I felt a little uncomfortable with the examination. "Looks to be in roughly the same size as ours, not like those itty bitty pegasi wings." She muttered under her breath. Then she placed the blade on my wing, edge out.

"Flex." She commanded. And I did so. Then I did a number of different moves with my wing under her orders. Turned, folded and unfolded while she used a tool to adjust the length between the segments. When I've had enough and was about to ask her what she was doing she did something to the blade and it clamped down.

"Ouch, its pinching." I tried to back away but she held me fast.

"Stop fidgeting you overgrown chicken. I'm just checking the fit." She was clearly used to this and soon the blade stopped pinching and sat comfortably on my wing edge. "Now, try it out on that dummy." She motioned towards a training dummy made out of logs.

I raised an eyebrow but did as she asked. Then promptly decapitated the dummy with a well placed swing... or that was what I had in mind. The blade stuck and I looked ridiculous as I tried to pull myself loose, until I simply used magic to pry the blade from the thick wood.

"That... was pathetic." The griffin armorer commented dryly.

Right, that did it. Without a word I pulled my plasma revolver out in one flying magical arc and liquefied the training dummy with one shot. "Okay. Now, why did you put this ridiculous thing on me if you aren't even going to bother asking if I can use it?"

She didn't say anything for a minute, then answered calmly. "Because my son wants to get on your good side after shooting you." And at my suspicious stare added. "He's out back practicing, let me get the other one on you, and get your measurements for some metal armor. It won't be free but my boy has fixed a discount if you are willing. Then go out back and ask him for some help on how to use the blades."

After some posing to get the proper measurements I walked through the workshop and out the back. The yard behind was surrounded by run down buildings and had several steel cables strung in a criss crossing pattern. Several training dummies of pegasi and griffins hung in the air and were beset by a young lad with a pair of swords in his fore claws.

He saw me, goggled at me for a second, then flew into a wire and got tangled. The swords fell and got stuck in the ground. I looked on for a while until he asked in a high voice, still not entirely out of puberty. "Uhm, can you give me a hoof?"

I studied the tangle of wires, then located the right one and pulled it with my magic. The griffin youth thumped down on the ground and rolled on his back. I walked calmly up to the groaning lad and placed a hoof on his chest, then lowered my face to meet his.

"Listen closely, kid. Next time, make sure you kill whoever you are shooting at, because they might not be as forgiving as I am." I had no intention of hurting him, there had been far too much of that today.

He gave me a sickly grin for a few moments. "Eh-heh, mom told you, didn't s-she?" I nodded, not reacting to the sound of a hammer being pulled on a gun behind me beyond stiffening a little. Then I took my hoof from his chest and stepped back.

"You can take your claw off the trigger ma'am, I'm just giving him some sound advice." I looked back to the shop and saw the armorer holster a very large revolver. Then she nodded to me and walked back in.

"Eh-heh," The lad had a very nervous laugh that he seemed to precede most sentences with. "S-so, what happened? Didn't s-see that bandage on you yesterday." He said as he picked himself up. A slight stutter too I noticed.

"Got cut up by a zebra today." I said dryly. I was studying the yard, it was a decent place to train close combat. I wasn't in the mood for small talk so I got straight to the point. "Look, kid. Granting a discount is very generous, but I have a lot to do right now. So I'll spar with you for an hour then I'll get back to doing what Cinnamon asked me to, I might come back tomorrow."

"Eh-heh, r-right lets do that." He looked a little dejected.

I sighed and rubbed my forehead where the slash itched. "What's your name, kid?"

"Hervar S-silverfeather." He bowed to me. "My mothers name is S-sorva S-silverfeather. Eh-heh, s-she must have told you s-she isn't a Talon anymore. I am though, I work for the leader of R-red Light, no matter who that is... personally I think mom s-shafted me on that contract to make s-sure I s-stay here." He gave a nervous grin.

And that was the general impression of the lad, nervous, a little jittery... and this was apparently the same griffin that had shot me in the back with no warning. I had to be careful so that I didn't start to underestimate him.

"R-right, you ever used those things?" Hervar asked, then went on as he went to a hooflocker and picked out a pair of wing blades of his own, stuffing his two swords away. "Nah, probably not. They aren't used much by anyone aside from griffins, the enclave pegasi have their own type of blades, but they are smaller." He fastened the two blades to his own wings. And I noticed another thing, when he went on a lecture his little stutter completely vanished.

"Now, normally griffins either use swords or wing blades, wing blades are preferred because you can hold a rifle or guns at the same time. I like swords though, they have a reassuring feel in my claws." He chuckled. "Haven't tried to use both at the same time, it gets a bit confusing, heard of one guy who apparently managed to decapitate himself, I never found out how he did it."

He walked over to, and around me, appraising me. "Well, you aren't a brawler, I can see that. Maybe you have the makings of a swords pony. You certainly have the grace for it." I hadn't thought of that, sure my body felt more agile and sure hoofed then it had before, but I hadn't thought much about it to be honest.

Hervar placed a claw on my side and gave me a push. I steadied myself reflexively and glared at him. "Hey, no ill meant, I'm just getting to know your type of movement. Go for a run around the yard." I sighed and rolled my eyes. Fine.

After cantering around a few laps he stopped me and then explained a bit about the blades uses. They were useful to griffins for the extra weapons they added to a fight and the ability to swiftly switch between a ranged fight to close up combat. And they were much better for blocking incoming blows than risking damage to a firearm.

Then we sparred for a while, at first I wondered why we didn't just use the training dummies, but Hervar explained that it was always advantageous to fight a live opponent when possible. A dummy was fine when you had no other option, but a real live opponent moved about, fought back, could pressure you and force you to learn. Sparkle and the red outline I got from my EFS was very helpful.

And I had to admit, using the blades felt much better than just pummeling at somepony like a brute. There was some finesse to it even if using wing blades wasn't much farther from just striking somepony with the bare edges of my wings.

And most importantly, as I slashed and trusted, never once getting a clean hit but constantly being pressured by Hervar, I could forget a little. There was nothing but the two of us as we danced and spun, our blades clanging and striking sparks as we traded blow after blow. I could forget the horrible feeling that I had failed the trusting little filly, I forgot the blinding red mist that had made me blind to everything but killing five zebras in an unstoppable rage. My mind went white, blessedly so, and I didn't hesitate to

follow up into the air when the young griffin jumped up in the air to fly the complex aerial training course.

We swirled and dodged the faux pegasi and griffins, flying with the blades attached to my wings was a little tricky, but I managed. It was just a question of adjusting to the circumstances, like when I had flown several days with Runs Wild on my back. She had gone back to taking care of the rodents in the sewers, that was necessary anyway since it was going to be sealed up from the outside and needed to be empty of vermin for the workers.

I didn't know where Geri was, he wandered off this morning and had probably found something to occupy his time with.

I flew, I twirled, losing myself in the joy of flight. Once or twice Hervar made a pass to test me, forcing me to twist to block his strikes. A few times I nudged the wires, resulting in the large dummies to shift their positions, often into my path. I laughed, for the first time that day a sound like crystal bells escaped my mouth. By the goddesses I loved flying.

Suddenly, the alarm I had set on my pipbuck went off, aborting my joy into the cold hard floor of reality. I had to go and help the two doctors inventory Red Light's available medical supplies. And tomorrow...

I landed, panting and sweating, but with endorphins flowing in my blood like a tide. I gave the griffin lad a smile that he returned. "That was pretty fun." I said, a little out of breath.

"Eh-heh. You know, you're quite nice, no matter what r-rumors s-say about alicorns." Then the young griffin did something that made my brain short out. He twisted his head to the side, reached up, and kissed me before I could react. It was weird, oddly hard, and the tip of his beak scratched my cheek. He pulled away, uncertainty in his eyes.

He kissed me. Kissed me. Male, and he kissed me. He was male. Kiss. Me.

Well, I was female... on the outside. Couldn't really blame the guy, young, endorphins in his blood, a lot of hormones. It wasn't like it was a taboo, not as such.

I don't know where they came from, I didn't think I had any left. Tears fell from my eyes down my cheeks as I stared blankly ahead of me. I couldn't think, my brain felt like it was filled with treacle.

"Oh, by The Egg! I'm s-sorry, I don't know what came over me... a-are you okay?" He floundered.

"I... I got to go." I said in a disjointed voice. I needed to leave, to get out of here, be anywhere else but here. I started to scrabble with my magic at the blades attached to my wings, I needed to get them off. Hadn't payed for them yet, couldn't just take them.

"Oh, I'll help you with those." Hervar walked forward, reaching out with a claw towards my right wing.

"Don't touch me!" I shrieked on auto pilot as I raised the other wing to strike. Making him back away. "Please, don't touch me." I pleaded, my voice was low again, broken.

"Hervar!" Sorva commanded from the doorway to the workshop. "Go and see if your boss needs any help up in the mansion."

"But he gave me th..." Hervar started.

"You do as I tell you right now, boy or I'll have you haul scrap for a week, no matter what your wing commander says!" Sorva roared at the youth and he scrambled to obey her, rushing to a brush gun standing against a wall and taking off into the air like his tail was on fire.

Sorva walked up to me while I tried to get the blades off my wings. "I swear, sometimes that boy doesn't have the brains of a beetle. Here, let me help you." I gave up on my attempts and let the old griffin female take the blades off. It was okay, she was safe. She wasn't male.

When she was finished she took my head in her fore claws and looked me in my streaming eyes. "Ahh," She said understandingly. "lets get you inside, it's past sun down anyway and you could use a shot of brandy." She shooed me inside. I was too scrambled in the head to object.

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"Right," She said once we sat in what had been the break room and office, and now was the living quarters of Sorva. She had placed two mugs on a counter and held a big earthenware jug of brandy. "I do appreciate you giving my lad a tip or two, and I thank you for not ripping him to shreds over a kiss." She topped both mugs up all the way to the brim. "But you really mustn't blame him, he takes after his sire. He was an impulsive oaf," She gave what was almost a girly giggle. "but very good in the sack."

I stared at the mug, not doing anything. She sighed. "He's a good lad with edged weapons and a good shot, but he has no real experience with females."

I prodded the mug then took a half hearted sip from it. It was smooth and smokey, it helped grease the cogs of my brain a little. "Not angry." I mumbled.

Sorva laid her head in a claw. Studying me from the top of her mug. "I've heard of a few things that happened up in that dungeon The Don had. So I wont ask." She reached out with her mug and I tapped mine to hers half heartedly. "Cheer up, you're a big healthy girl, and not sore on the eyes neither." She chuckled. "As far as ponies go anyway."

That helped a little, while at the same time being completely unhelpful. I sagged down and put my chin on the counter. "Very helpful." I muttered to nobody in particular. Then I downed the mugs contents, relishing the smooth burn flowing down to my stomach.

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I awoke, the taste in my mouth filling my world. It tasted like something foul had died and rotted on my tongue. I lifted my head from the surface it had rested on, and felt the gentle rip as the fur on my cheek parted company with the sticky surface. I tried opening my eyes but to no avail. They were glued shut by something filthy. What in the seven hells happened last night? I remembered the kiss Hervar gave me and shuddered at the memory. It wasn't that I had been kissed by a male, that had happened before when I had been drunk enough or once when I had lost a bet, it was the fact that I had been kissed by a

male that assumed I was female that had upset me.

I brought up a hoof to clear my eyes, blinking stupidly at my surroundings. I was in the same room, but now it was the obvious ground zero to a drunken girls night out. Several mares lay sleeping around the place and Sorva lay in her bunk, hugging a road sign. What had I been drinking? My liver and metabolism was strong enough to process rocket fuel for Celestia's sake. I looked around the former office, bottles lay everywhere and several decks of cards were spread on the table, along with a lot of bottle caps and other currencies, a few gemstones too I noticed.

I looked down at a big jug standing on the table next to me, then peered at the label. 'Balefire absinthe' was scrawled on it. "Oh goddesses." I groaned, that stuff was made from scorpion venom, spark battery acid, and an apple. Usually a thimble-full of the stuff was enough to knock you on your rump, it could be used to dissolve metal. I guess it was one of the few things strong enough to really affect me.

I asked Sparkle for the time, and got a little clock in my vision. Eight in the morning. Well, that wasn't too bad. Then my memory center started to play the first reel of 'Horrible Recollection' and I nearly screamed.

Oh goddesses, going invisible to pull the barding off of bar bouncers? Singing 'The Drunken Raider' at full volume? And me at full volume shatters windows. And... I looked down at my side, Midnight Rose had cuddled up beside me, snoring adorably with her mouth open. I remembered her arriving and wondering indignantly why I wasn't with Splint and Syringe doing an inventory, and... and I had swept her up on the bar top with me and stuck my tongue down her throat. Oh sweet Luna, I had been dancing on the bar top... again.

I rubbed my temple with a hoof, trying to think past my hangover, dislodging the bandage around my head in the process. I winced when the cool air hit the open cut, it wasn't bleeding but it still stung like a bastard. While I retied my head with fresh healing bandages Rose woke up. She blearily looked around the dingy room, spotting the mares around us and the old griffin armorer on her cot.

Then she looked up at me with a sour expression. "I'm going to be in such trouble with Cinnamon over this, and I swear; I'll drag you down with me." She snuggled closer and I laid a wing over her. "I had fun though."

"That's good at least." Now I just have to find Runs Wild and see what she is up to and... oh crap. I scrambled to my legs, causing Rose to fall to the floor with an 'oof'. I briefly considered covering my mouth with a wing but then decided against it, I didn't want sick all over my feathers. Damn, why was all buildings so damned small.

I finally got inside the bathroom just in the nick of time. Putting my head over the toilet, which is no errand for the faint of heart, and letting go of the contents of my stomach. I hated puking.

~~I go to sleep and you end up getting hammered... brilliant.~~ Shade commented wryly as I heaved.

"Fuck you, Shade. I'm still angry with you." I shot back. Shade sounded fine so I wasn't going to hold back anymore.

Shade became confused. *~~What? Why are you angry at me?~~* Oh please, like it couldn't put it

together. I pulled myself up, magically flushing the toilet.

"When were you going to tell me that I can eat gemstones and breathe fire?" I asked Shade coldly as I tried to wash my face somewhat.

~~When we had a gemstone to eat.~~ Was Shades equally arctic reply. I halted in my train of thought, it had a point. What good would that information have done me when there were no gemstones to eat? I couldn't work up a proper response, my hangover was way to vicious for a competitive argument.

I sighed. *"Sorry."* I whispered meekly in my own head.

~~Hrmph.~~

Okay, don't think about this now, you're not in any condition to handle this at the moment. Lets see, what needs doing today? There was the funeral of Trinity Creme, and I was going to help inventory Red Light's medical supplies. And get some doctoring done, hopefully without any interruptions like yesterday. I walked back into the main room.

Into a sea of general smirking, most of the nearly half dozen or so mares and Sorva had woken up and they were looking at me with knowing grins. "Goddesses, what did I do last night?" I asked weakly as heart-stopping scenes played across my imagination. I hoped to hell that I hadn't announced to the world about my predicament.

"Do you want any specifics?" Asked one of a pair of twins.

"Or just the general picture?" Asked her sister.

"The embarrassing parts, to get the pain over with." I sighed as I sat on my haunches next to Rose. She sat up and snuggled close.

The twins grinned evilly and gave each other a confirming glance then nodded to each other. "Well,-" Started the light blue one with a yellow mane.

"-when Rose here joined us you pulled her up on the counter and made out for like, five minutes in front of the whole bar." Continued the other twin, she was yellow with a light blue mane and tail. Five minutes? Luna help me, if that was just the start then the rest was going to be painful.

Blue picked up the thread with hardly a beat. "Then came the body shots." I groaned. Yep, definitely painful.

"Eventually you dragged Rose into a broom closet and pronounced your intentions to-" Yellow started and then tagged her blue sister.

"-eat her out in a most vigorous manner." It was starting to become confusing as they juggled the conversation back and forth. Rose was blushing furiously and I could practically feel the heat from her cheeks. I think I was blushing too, but I was too occupied with screaming internally to take notice.

"After closing the door you made what sounded like a love making session of epic proportions." Yellow

was grinning like a foal and seemed beside herself with schadenfreude. Then both twins piped up together in a clear imitation of Rose.

"Oh sweet Luna! Yes! Yes! Yeeess! Oh, right there Curatie. Oh, please don't stop, don't stop!" They chorused in a sing song voice, they were both too into it to stop for anything short of a hellhound attack. And I... yes, I think I could actually remember that. Rose had gotten a waxy look and her grimace of fascinated horror was a sight to behold.

"You should have seen it," A green mare laying under a desk said. "the entire bar was totally quiet, you could hear a pin drop." I put my face in my hooves. Oh, how I wished that something just ran in and killed everyone, starting with me.

"Mind you," Murmured a timid unicorn from a moth eaten couch, she was tapping her hooves together shyly. "it sounded like you two were having a really good time."

"Cinnamon is going to kill me..." Rose said in a faraway voice.

I tried to order my thoughts. Okay, names, names are good. The earth pony twins were Topsy and Turvy, the timid unicorn was named Satin. I wasn't sure about the mare under the desk, but I think her name was Hydroponic.

"~Curatie and Midnight sitting in a tree; kay eye ess ess eye en gee!~" Sang Topsy and Turvy in unison.

Then Sorva spoke up for the first time that morning. "That's enough you two, leave them be." She ordered the twins to my never ending gratitude. "Lets get this place cleaned up." And we got to work.

It took maybe half an hour to get the place into some kind of order and I found out to my happy surprise that I had gone at least two hundred bottle caps plus on the card game, including a small pouch of gemstones. Those could be useful.

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"So, do you still want the blades and armor?" Sorva asked me when there was only me and Midnight left. The other girls had left for various degrees of work.

I thought about it. The wing blades were definitely an option, I enjoyed the feeling of grace they provided, it was infinitely better than pummeling ponies like an ogre. I had to see what type of armor she had in mind for me though before I made a decision on that. I said as much and Sorva showed me into an inner workshop.

"I thought about it and decided that this might be best for you." She gestured with a claw to a suit of armor, mid assemble, laying on a big worktable. "At first I thought about a full suit of metal armor, but that would be counter productive; the weight would slow you down too much." She waved a wing. "For us flyers that is always a problem."

I looked at the armor laying on the slab. It was mainly a very dense, black, bulletproof vest with wing holes in the process of being cut out, probably with a cold blowtorch. Laying under it was the pattern of a

thick suit of under barding made of faded blue denim. A set of four, long, leg guards made from light weight ceramic steel was laid out on their respective limbs. I peered at the collar of the vest, on it was stamped; 'Staff Sgt. Candlewick' in white and worn letters. I was extremely impressed, and felt like a little colt in a candy shop.

"The vest is from an old suit of Canterlot combat armor, I have no idea who Sergeant Candlewick was. Candlewick probably died in the war, but he or she was almost exactly the same size as you around the chest. I take care in my work and it should fit you like a sock when I'm finished with it." Sorva sounded proud of the armor and I didn't blame her.

We started to haggle, this went on for a minute or two and ended in quite a steep price before Sorva slapped on the discount. The set of armor and the blades would be expensive but in as good a condition as she could make them. Me and Rose left after saying our goodbyes and thanking her for being a good host. It was only good manners.

*** **

As we walked I took in the feel of the settlement, there was an air of activity. Ponies ran back and forth with building materials, everything from bundles of planks to re-bars and steel sheets, others had tools and one ran by with a H&H Tools nail gun, a nasty thing when aimed at another pony and unmatched when nailing planks together. One earth pony buck trotted past with a wagon filled with wonder-glue, scrap metal, duct tape, railway spikes, and a couple of sledgehammers. In the distance I could hear what sounded like the collapse of a building, from the muffled cheers I assumed that it had been pulled down for building materials.

Rose seemed to have something on her mind as we walked towards the mansion, and only when we were a block away did she speak. "Curatie," She asked in a careful tone. "do you like me?" Warning bells immediately went off in my head. My first thought was; When the hell did this happen? We have only just met. My second was; Oh shit.

"Yes," I said guardedly. "I do like you." Perfect truth all the way; she was attractive, we got along well, she was intelligent, and there was the cord of mutual attraction tying us together. But, and this was a big but, I wasn't sure I liked her in the way she probably meant, and if something more starts to form between us, where did that put me? Because I would probably have to tell her sooner or later.

Rose started to walk closer, and leaned her head up against me, while walking she couldn't reach very high, but it was the thought that counted.

I caught the glimpse of the flying bottle just in time. I shielded us with a wing and the bottle bounced away against the big flexible feathers and shattered against the street, thankfully not showering anypony with shards.

"Freak!" An auburn buck yelled at me before he scurried away into an alley. I was tempted to follow but decided against it. It wasn't worth it.

"Brute." Rose hissed. "I'll have the guards hunt him down and..." I put a hoof on her shoulder.

"Don't, just leave it be, no real harm done." I scooped up the shards magically and deposited them in a trash bin standing against a nearby wall.

"But he threw a bottle." She sounded offended. No wonder.

I sighed, then spread my wings, displaying myself. "Is it any wonder? Look at me, I am an alicorn, we do not have a good reputation." I refolded my wings. "It's not worth going after just one buck throwing a bottle."

"But... I..." Rose just looked a little sad. Then I got it. Stupid stupid.

I bent down, giving Rose a soft kiss. "I have some stuff to do today, I guess you do too. Tell Cinnamon that I didn't mean any disrespect, I just had an upsetting day yesterday, and tell her I apologise for dragging you into it." Rose was blushing a little, I was too. I added. "I'm going to go and attend a funeral, then I'll catch up on the inventory based on how far Splint and Syringe has gotten. I'll see you tonight."

"Yeah, see you." Midnight Rose said before hurrying up the stairs to the mansion. I watched her until she went inside, then I left.

*** **

The Matron was waiting for me when I arrived at the little plot of land that served as impromptu graveyard, due to space concerns it was located outside the walls, between Red Light and a cliff. It wasn't much, mostly a lot of engraved pipes or re-bars with little name plates on them, ponies were too busy with surviving to do much more than the bare minimum for the dead.

There was a small crowd of the orphans old enough to be allowed outside and the oldest had simple revolvers and cheap battle saddles in case of critters. They surrounded a two hoof square hole dug in a free spot.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting too long." I apologised. I regretted boozing last night but couldn't do anything about it now. Besides, tell me a better time to drink your worries away, than after a day like yesterday.

"Don't worry about it, we just arrived ourselves." The matron assured me. I didn't quite believe her, but didn't try to make excuses.

Then we got underway, the hymn started slowly, hesitantly. A lot of the younger foals didn't know the words and hummed along at first.

~Sweet Celestia, full of grace. Help us find our rightful place.
Help us grow up big and strong. Laughing and singing all day long.
Show us how we should be kind. Teach us beauty and peace of mind.
Sweet Celestia, full of grace. Show us your gentle, shining face.~

The Matron showed a young unicorn lad to the hole, he had just one saddle bag on his back. I didn't

have to guess what was in it. We started on the second verse when he gently levitated the much too small urn out of his pack and into the embrace of the earth.

"~Dearest Luna, soft and strong. Keep us safe all night long.
Under your soft and watchful eye. Let your stars fill up the sky.
Know our hearts are always thine. Protect us with strength sublime.
Dearest Luna, soft and strong. Let us honor you in song.~"

A real undertaker, wearing a dirty and stained greatcoat walked up to the grave and started to respectfully fill the hole using a shovel clenched in his teeth. The still smoking dog-end he had been holding in his mouth now sat behind his ear, surrounding his head in a small cloud. The unicorn lad picked up a grave marker from his back and stuck it at the head of the little grave, just before he went to join the crowd, he gave me a baleful look.

"~Sweet Celestia, we sing to thee. That our worries be set free.
Dearest Luna, we praise your skies. Delight us with night's surprise.
Know you're in our fondest prayer. Mighty Princesses sweet and fair.
Sweet Celestia, full of grace. Dearest Luna, our song embrace.~"

The last verse finished and the song died away, little by little. "May Luna and Celestia wrap you in their manes and rock you to sleep child." I added softly to the little marker that simply said; 'Trinity Creme'.

I was still crying when I re-entered Red Light.

*** **

It bloody figured, of course they left it to me... twits. Then again, I spent the night boozing so I don't have much to complain about when I'm given the grunt work.

"For the last time, sir." I said in a kind voice and floated up the clipboard, trying to ignore the bladder emptying terror on the wandering merchants face. "We are just trying to keep a general idea of the healing items that are available in case the situation turns sour, I'm not going to force you to do anything."

Slowly I managed to tease the details out of the terrified merchant, and hopefully, for his sake, he would stay in Red Light until this blew over.

I spent most of the day and afternoon wandering the merchants quarter of Red Light, taking inventory, and trying to not seem intimidating. Around noon my hangover broke and I felt a little better. Even though I hated it, my body had its good points.

Much of the construction was centered around the four gates, reinforcing them and building proper machine gun nests. I also saw Meshing Gears and Geri setting up the turrets from the mansion on top of the gates, they had dug up two more from somewhere to cover all four of the entrances to Red Light.

By now most of the inhabitants of Red Light had gotten used to my presence, except for the newly arrived. I had some problems with these, but not a lot.

By the time the clock was five in the afternoon the gates were about to be closed. I stood there atop the south gate as five earth ponies chained to each massive door were dragging it closed.

"Please! Wait!"

I turned my head to the wasteland, and squinted. A group of worn down wastelanders dressed in rags were running as fast as they could to get in, one was dragging a run down apple cart. I set my jaw when I saw the young in the cart.

"Hold the gate open a few minutes more." I shouted back to the ponies below me.

"We have our orders." One of the draggers said stolidly. None of the ponies below me was going to stop their sealing of the gates.

I made a decision, then flared my wings. I jumped into the air, flying towards them. They faltered a bit but ran on. I lowered down, flying alongside them.

"Just get to the walls and I'll levitate you inside." I shouted down.

"There is something after us." A mare panted as she ran. "Please, just make sure the kids get inside." Her eyes were pleading, the others just focused on running.

I looked back. Something was indeed running after them, three somethings. I did a loop and settled down on the ground, between the fleeing wastelanders and their hunters. I carefully unslung the beam rifle I bought from a caravan owner earlier today. Healing services were at a premium and he had only been only too happy for me to help patch up his crew in exchange for it.

I inserted a spark cell and aligned the sights. I really needed a pair of binoculars or a sight.

The three dots were closing the distance. They were low to the ground and burly. I squinted again in the waning light. No... they couldn't be...

Timberwolves. They were pursued by three damned timberwolves. The burly elemental creatures were howling and snarling, their glowing eyes incredibly creepy in the low light, and their wooden bodies seeming to strain in their effort to get to their prey. A shiver crept along my back, the shiver of prey sensing death on four paws approaching.

I looked down the holographic sights, tracking the first wolf slowly. Come on. I slowly squeezed the trigger with my magic, sending a pink beam like the finger of death rushing towards the leading wolf.

With a yelp of pain the timberwolf fell and tumbled forward, one of its legs burned off. Its siblings ran around it. I took two more shots at one, missing twice before they were close enough to jump. I dodged to the side and sent a cloud of ravens to meet one of the jumping wolves.

The other thumped down beside me and tried to go for my wings, I instinctively pulled it close and shoved my rifle down into its throat, then pulled the trigger as many times as I could. The wolf disintegrated into fine pink ash, but not before making bite marks in the body of the rifle. Its teeth were wood, how the hell could they be so hard?

I saw a collar thump into the ash just as I turned my attention to the one I had veiled in ravens. These were owned by somepony, and presumably trained by them too. That can't be a good sign.

The second wolf snarled, bit and swiped at the ravens flying around it, I saw that it too had a collar around its neck. The claws and teeth looked sharp indeed. I lifted the rifle, sighted and let it rip. The brilliant rays of killing light speared forth, punching holes in the wolf and sending it yelping and whining to the ground. I advanced, these creatures were tough and I had to shoot it at least a dozen times before it gave up and disintegrated.

I ejected the spent spark cell and sighed in relief, only to freeze when I heard a low growl behind me. Bugger.

I screamed in pain when the heavy weight thumped down on my back, the claws dug into my back and it bit down on my neck. I howled and started to buck and kick out in an attempt to get the heavy wolf off my back. "Get off, get off, get off!"

Finally I got the timberwolf to let go and thump onto the ground. How the hell did it get on its paws again. I glanced down at it, it was by far the biggest of the tree and no doubt the pack leader... and its leg was regrowing in front of my eyes. I stared. Vines were growing and twisting into a new leg as I watched in stunned wonder.

It scrambled to its paws and took a flying leap at me, I put my rifle in between us. It made a crunching sound as I drove the butt of the rifle deep into the wooden throat. Paws scrabbled for my face and I simply changed my magical grip and hurled the creature away from me. It immediately got onto its large paws again and went for my throat. I got my shield up and the wolf slammed into it with a force that almost sent me backwards.

I was starting to feel a little woozy from the bleeding sores on my neck. I had a bottle of water saturated with healing powder on me but not much more than that, it would do the job but leave me tired. Not an option just yet.

I looked down at my new rifle, it was fizzing and the 'Ready' lamp was dead. I had just gotten this rifle too. I glared in anger at the wolf. It was circling me and growling deep in its throat. Fine. Just beating it to death was not an option, it seemed that it would sooner or later regrow unless I burned or disintegrated enough of it into ash.

I lifted the pouch of gemstones up from my pack, and selected a fat ruby. It looked big enough. It made a splintering sound as I chewed, it tasted spicy.

"Right, let's try this again." I said as my mane and tail once again flowed like bound fire in my braids.

The wolf must have understood some of what I had said and lowered itself, its glowing eyes fixed on my mane as its growl got lower in pitch. Good, it knew enough to be scared.

The second my shield dropped the big wolf flew like had been a coiled up spring. I reared up to meet its teeth with hard hooves, I managed to beat it back with the crunch of splintering wood. Then I released the fires from my stoked inner furnace.

The wolf howled but only seemed to get angrier, I took the flying fireball head on and tried to beat it back with my forehooves, afraid to use my wings with their flammable feathers. Flames flowed from my mouth and seared and burned the wooden creature as it swiped at me, leaving scorched gashes in my flesh.

I swore and finally took to the air, where the wolf flew like a comet at me before I could get away. We landed in the hard dirt and rolled around, it snapped at me and I gave it a lung full of fire straight into its face. My braid had long ago loosened in the face of the wolf's frenzy. I drove a hoof into the side of the beast's head as it scrabbled at my belly with its hindlegs, trying to disembowel me.

The body finally keeled over and I got to my hooves, the caved in skull was slowly reforming and burned limbs were shedding large patches of coal like dead flesh. I walked up and stood over it as it twitched. Then I opened my mouth and let my flame slowly burn it to a crisp.

It took all the flame I had and soon I simply stood over ashes. I pulled out my bottle of healing water and gulped it down in one long drag, sighing in tired relief as the biggest gashes in my belly and neck slowly stitched themselves together, aided by my own rapid metabolism.

I was about to go pick up my damaged rifle and return to Red Light when I saw something in the black ashes, slowly revealing itself as the ashes were blown away in the wind. I bent down and peered at the round object.

It was a seed... it was gray, about half the size of a sprite bot, and reminded me of an acorn.

I stared on wonder for a minute, I knew that seeds were notoriously tough and resilient to fires, but I was still awestruck. I levitated it up for a closer look. Close up it also had faint veins of green that pulsed regularly like blood vessels.

It must be some type of seedling, maybe... I looked down on the ashes being blown across the ground, and sighed. I gave the seed a kiss and placed it in my saddlebag.

"I'll take care of your cub." I somberly told the pile of ashes. Then I walked back to Red Light, my damaged rifle in tow, and my head full of questions.

I swiftly helped the group of refugees and their cart over the wall. Then I walked slowly back to the mansion. I needed to sleep. Maybe a lifetime would be enough, but I doubted it.

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"I wonder if it will hatch?" Runs Wild said in wonder as she held the little seed in her hooves and studied it. It seemed to pulse a little stronger in her hooves, probably because she was an earth pony.

"I don't know." I answered around a cup of black coyote coffee. We were in the kitchen around one of the tables and eating a slow dinner. "I think it will, but I don't know if it needs to be planted or not."

"I don't think so." Runs Wild said slowly. Her stare was focused, and she seemed to almost be trying to will it into hatching.

I shrugged to myself, why not. "You can keep it if you want to, I just hope you will be careful."

The look on her face was like a little ray of sunshine in the drab kitchen. "Sure." Wild said, then gave the seed/egg a hug before carefully placing it in one of her bags.

I spent the rest of the evening with a beam weapon repair kit, finally getting my rifle working again after much swearing.

oooOOOooo

The sun.

It needed the sun.

The land was howling for it, every wizened blade of grass, every gnarly tree, every flower and plant and the dirt itself was shouting in an earsplitting cacophony for the warmth of the sun.

I stood in the center of a great battlefield, the dead were everywhere, and so were the ravens. They congregated and fought each other for the choice bits, the eyeballs and the soft tissues. Cawing and shouting at each other as buzzards flew lazily above, content in waiting until the bodies had rotted to their satisfaction.

I turned my head, in every direction was endless fields of the dead... and him.

He moved slowly from pony to pony. His black cloak and hood covering his bony frame. After a while of me studying him he turned his head in my direction. Two blue lights sat deep in empty sockets. He let his scythe do a last lazy swing and cut a blue thread before he walked slowly up to me. Sheathing his tool by his side.

YOU ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE. His voice was like the slamming of coffin lids and the echoes in crypts, yet as soft as the sigh of a dying pony. It didn't arrive in my brain through my ears but I still remembered him speaking.

"Where is here?" I asked in bewilderment. I didn't feel dead.

Death looked around. Then back at me, for a long uncomfortable moment. He was a large pony, taller than me when up close like this. His eyes, or what passed for them, flared for a second and he tilted his skeletal head.

OH, JUST A DREAMER. I SHOULD HAVE FIGURED. He turned away, walking off to another patch of dead.

"Wait," I shouted after him, then followed. "wait, where is this?" I didn't understand, this skeletal pony was obviously Death, and this felt like a dream, but more than that, part of it was real.

Death unsheathed his scythe, the blade folding out by itself. THIS? IT ISN'T REALLY A PLACE, MORE LIKE A MOMENT IN TIME. YOU ARE JUST RECEPTIVE TO IT.

A moment? "Then... when is this?" I asked hesitantly, dreading the reply.

Death raised a bony hoof, and pointed at the sky. I looked up.

The sky was clear of clouds. A brilliant clear blue.

I had never thought much about it, I almost never looked up because there was never anything to see aside from the ever present cloud cover. Unless you were looking for flying enemies, and even then you didn't look at the clouds.

Now I was looking, I was staring, there weren't any words. "Is this real... will it be real?" I asked in a weak voice to nopony in particular.

WHY DON'T YOU FIND OUT. Death said, then he gave me a push. I staggered away, not able to take my eyes from that amazing blue.

Then I heard something, a note that was rising and falling. Rising and falling.

I woke up.

oooOOOooo

"The sirens!" I heard Rose exclaim as she woke up beside me on the normal sized bed in the ordinary mansion room we had chosen for my stay instead of that gigantic suite.

"What?" I asked blearily, I was still halfway in the dream, not really awake. What had it meant, the sky? Something about the sky. The dream was rapidly turning into gibberish.

"Its the town siren, we are under attack."

Footnote: Level Up

New Perk: Living Anatomy - You have an eye for measuring the health of your enemies, and an eye for knowing where to strike for the best result. You automatically know how healthy any enemy is, and you do five percent more damage with all attacks against people and non-feral ghouls.

Proof-Readers:

NeverKnown AKA ThatGuyWithTheMustache "Put together the Fan art page"

Shadowstep AKA The Grammar Nazi

'Sweet Celestia, full of grace.' Belongs to Somber, writer of Project Horizon.

[Ask Snakebite.](#)

[Fan-art page.](#)