

Of Cores and the Alicorn

By Charcoal Quill

“Star. Star. Star. Comet. Star. Star. Black hole. Space dust. Star...”

Wheatley tried to tune out the overjoyed ramblings of the Space Core, with little luck. One would think that in the... in the... in the *indeterminate, but unarguably long*, length of time he had spent stranded in space, with just the other Core for company, he would have gotten used to the noise.

In a way, he had, but some... intervals of time weighed more heavily than others. This was one of those times. “Hey, Space?” he addressed the ever-giddy personality core. “Think you try and keep it down for a little bit, mate?”

The yellow-eyed core regarded Wheatley. It was silent for a whole eleven seconds.

Finally, it couldn't keep itself restrained anymore. **“I'M IN SPACE!”** it exclaimed.

“Yes, you are,” Wheatley mentioned dryly. “So am I. I don't suppose the novelty is starting to wear off?”

“Space,” the Space Core answered.

Wheatley sighed. “Carry on,” he said, resigned.

As the Space Core returned to observing the many wonders of the cosmos, Wheatley turned his gaze inward. *The Space Core is annoying*, sure, he thought, *but it's better than having to be stranded in space alone*.

Stranded in space... It hadn't always been like this, Wheatley reflected. Now that he thought about it, he'd had a pretty decent life, such as it was for an artificial intelligence. All he had to do all day was look after all of the test subjects at Aperture Laboratories – sure, not the most pleasant job, looking after the smelly humans, but it kept him busy. After a series of events involving a mute and possibly brain-damaged test subject, a portal gun, and a short stint as the Central AI of the facility, Wheatley found himself on the moon, being hurtled into the endless depths of space.

Sure, he wasn't entirely to blame, Wheatley reasoned, but he still had to admit that a large portion of that had been his fault. Had he not been so monstrous and power-hungry, maybe he'd still be on earth.

But then again, he hadn't been like that before he'd become the Central Core... and he wasn't like that now. Apparently being wired into the mainframe like that was enough to do that to anyone. It was beyond his control.

But that was no excuse. I should have been smarter, Wheatley thought. *If I ever get back to Earth and see that test subject again, I definitely owe her an apology.*

“Ha, but what are the chances I ever will?” Wheatley pondered out loud. “I doubt I'll ever see the Earth's moon again, let alone Ch-“

“Star. Star. Moon!” interrupted the Space Core. “Star. Star.”

Wheatley swiveled towards the corrupted personality Core. “What?”

“Star. Star. Star...” answered the Space Core.

“Nonono, before that,” Wheatley clarified hurriedly. “Something about a moon?”

The Space Core swiveled dramatically towards something just out of Wheatley's line of sight. “Moon!” it repeated.

Wheatley turned to see the huge, dark outline of a familiar-looking object. Just past it was a tiny, blue-and-green globe.

"The Moon! It's the Moon!" exclaimed Wheatley excitedly. "We're so close to Earth!"

"Space!" agreed the Space Core.

Wheatley turned towards the Space Core. "How can we get there again?" he thought aloud. Suddenly an idea struck him. "Ooh! I know! Hey, why don't you try orbiting around me towards the Moon, then I'll orbit around towards your other side, and we'll keep moving like that 'till we reach the Moon?" If Wheatley had a mouth, he would have grinned. "Then we can use the Moon's orbit as a slingshot, and head straight back home!" *What a brilliant plan*, he thought. *Ha! Who's the moron now, GLaDOS?*

The Space Core orbited around Wheatley. When it was closer to the Moon, Wheatley circled around it, putting the two of them a few feet closer to their destination. *Just as planned*.

It went like that for a while. Presently, the two personality Cores reached their destination. "Alright, now we're in the Moon's orbit," said Wheatley. "If we just circle around one or twice, to build up speed..."

They orbited around the natural satellite. Soon, Wheatley got his first good look at the bright side. "Wait. That's not Earth's moon..."

Sure, it was fairly close. A large, roughly circular piece of grey-white rock covered in craters. But the Earth's moon didn't have a massive, darkened shape on its surface that closely resembled a unicorn's head.

Wheatley gave as close an approximation of a sigh as a non-living object could. "Well, that's a moon but it's not *the* Moon, is it, mate?" *And it looked like they'd been so close, too...*

"Pony. On the Moon," observed the Space Core. "In space. Space pony. Space pony."

"Yes, I saw," replied Wheatley bitterly, not really paying attention. After a minute, he blinked. "Hey, are we still moving?"

"**Space pony,**" repeated the Space Core, more emphatically. "**Look. Look. Space pony!**"

"Yeah, I saw the bloody space-" Wheatley started to snap, turning towards the corrupted Core. Then he noticed something new on the surface of the moon. "...Pony...?"

Down on the moon was a tall, black pony with both wings and a unicorn's horn, a mane like a starry sky, and clad in blue armor. The alicorn's horn was enveloped in a dark glow.

Wheatley noticed a similar glow covering himself and the Space Core. *Hold on*, he realized, *that thing's pulling us toward itself!*

"Space!" Wheatley addressed his fellow personality Core. "The horse-thingy's drawing us in somehow, and it doesn't look friendly!"

The Space Core looked down at the pony. "Space pony," it said. "Hi, space pony!"

"Ugh." Had Wheatley a face, and a hand to facepalm with, he would have done so.

The alicorn brought the two Cores in front of its face. Coldly, it regarded them with reptilian, turquoise eyes.

"Well, well, well," it said in a haughty, feminine voice. "It's not very often that I have guests..."

"Moon pony. Guess where I am! I'm in space!" the Space Core gushed.

Wheatley ignored it. "You can talk?!" he asked the alicorn incredulously.

"My, aren't *you* the bright one?" she answered. "No, on second thought, that doesn't even dignify sarcasm. Shame that my first company in so long is composed entirely of morons and..." The

alicorn paused. "Heh. And *lunatics*."

"I'm not a moron," Wheatley insisted, partly out of reflex and partly out of indignation.

"Of course you're not," the mare replied patronizingly. She inspected the two AI. "Hmm... Metal, spherical constructs, powered by electrical currents running through circuitry, possessed of emotions and *rudimentary* intelligence." She laughed, chillingly. "Why, these ponies have come a long way in my absence."

A familiar, somewhat sullen-sounding voice came from a nearby crater. "Fact: the Aperture Science Personality Cores are of human make. Ponies do not manufacture artificial intelligences, as they believe they are the work of the Devil."

The alicorn lifted turned its horn to the crater and lifted out another Core, this one with a pink-colored eye. The Core regarded her impassively. "The plastic tips at the end of shoelaces are called 'aglets,'" it said. "Their true purpose is sinister."

The mare blinked, and when her eyes reopened, they were no longer the slit-pupiled orbs. Instead, the pupils had become round and the whites properly, well, white. "Aglets?" she asked in a younger-sounding, humbler voice. "Devils? What are they?" She giggled, somewhat nervously. "Wait, you already mentioned the aglets."

Wheatley blinked, too. *This was different*. "Oh, uh, that's not important. Who are you?"

"Who am I?" the alicorn echoed quietly. In another blink, the dragon's eyes were back.

"I am vengeance," whispered the mare, arrogant adult tone returning. "I am the night," she said, louder. "I... AM... NIGHTMARE MOON!" At this, she cackled wildly, and lightning flashed.

The Space Core 'oohed' appreciatively. "Space lightning..."

Nightmare Moon blinked again, and the round eyes returned. "Or, um you know... Luna works just fine too," said the younger voice. And then Luna was gone, and Nightmare Moon was back. "...No. I am *Nightmare Moon*. I shall be addressed as such."

"The most aggressive fish in the world is the herring," recited the Fact Core. "It has been known to cut through water, trees, and the space-time continuum, and will not stop until you are dead."

Nightmare Moon stared at the Fact Core. "...What." She shook her head. "...Never mind. Foals and maniacs you may be, but it is a welcome change of pace from solitude. Hmph. I tire from holding you all up..."

The black alicorn lifted her horn, and a dark pulse erupted from her horn, spreading over the surface of the entire moon. "There," she said with a self-satisfied tone. "Now you all should be able to move under your own power, should you stay near my moon's surface."

Wheatley thought about moving a foot or two away from the dark pony, and sure enough, he did. "So, anyway, Nightmare... Moon..." he continued nervously. "This is your moon? Lovely what you've done with it."

"Moon. In space," agreed the Space Core.

Nightmare Moon preened vainly. "Yes, magnificent, isn't it? At least *you* have the common sense to appreciate my night sky. Unlike *some* foals," she finished darkly.

The alicorn stepped closer to the Space Core, then gestured with a hoof to the endless field of stars. "Do you not see this... this work of art?" In a blink, Nightmare Moon was replaced by Luna. "I... I just wanted them to love my night," she continued, starting to tear up. "I worked so hard. All the stars... so many bright, lovely patterns. They took me ages. A-and my masterpiece, my Moon! But they j-just d-didn't care... They only loved my sister's *day*."

Nightmare Moon picked up the monologue from where Luna left off. "But I decided that if they were just going to sleep through my night in favor of their precious sun, maybe they would learn to adore my masterpiece once they were deprived of their day. Either that, or die of starvation and cold under the light of my Moon." She laughed, bitterly. "But Celly wouldn't have that, now would she? Oh, no. So she banished me. *And* imprisoned me in the place I was banished to. But the greatest irony? My greatest work of art became my cage. My very essence has been bound to my Moon. I can only manifest my form upon its surface, as you see me now."

"And all b-because I just w-wanted to make the world a better place," Luna finished. Sadly, she lay down on the grey-white, dusty ground.

"There, there, Space Pony," said the Space Core, floating over to the alicorn and patting it softly with its spherical body.

Wheatley felt an urge to comfort the despondent pony, too. "Now... it's okay, Nightm-" he began.

"No," Luna interrupted, voice shaky. "Call *Her* Nightmare Moon. Call *me* Luna." She sniffed. "She's... different from me. In a way. Kind... of... I'm not exactly sure of the distinction, but I know for sure that *I'm* not always the one in control. She's just not *trying* very hard right now to be the dominant personality. Or however it works."

"Okay, *Luna*," Wheatley corrected himself. He made a mental note to be more careful with that: round eyes equals Luna, reptilian eyes equals Nightmare Moon. "You know, I can sort of relate..."

Luna stared. "You? How can you...?"

Wheatley faux-sighed. "I once tried to help a woman escape a pretty bad place. But when I got into a major position of power, I turned... Well, pretty nasty. I made some pretty bad choices, and nearly got everyone killed." He paused. "It was only after I was thrown into space from the Moon that my mind was completely my own again. Still, that doesn't mean it *wasn't* my fault..."

"Sounds like we kind of have something in common, then," murmured Luna sadly.

There was a long pause.

Finally, Wheatley broke the silence. "So... all of us, trapped in space together... forever," he said. *No, that was stupid. Why did I say that?*

"...Not exactly," replied Nightmare Moon, retaking control of the Moon Princess's body.

The Fact Core apparently decided it would be a good time to speak up. "Legend has it that on the longest day of the thousandth year, the stars will aid in her escape. Experts have concluded that one of the most likely suspects is Nolan North."

Nightmare Moon glared at the corrupted Core. "While your inane friend has gotten his definitions mixed up," she said, "it is correct. One night, I shall be free."

Wheatley brightened up considerably. "Oh? And when will that be?"

"I... don't know," admitted Nightmare Moon. "Eventually I just stopped counting. Although whether it was because I lost track or because I stopped caring, I... can't quite recall." She tapped her hoof thoughtfully against her chin, and Luna slipped through for just enough time to remark, "Although I bet I could figure out how long it's been if I only had an abacus..." After that, Nightmare Moon's dragon eyes returned.

"Oh," replied Wheatley. "Say, uh, do you happen to know in which direction a little blue planet called 'Earth' is? Because me and the rest of us Cores are just as eager to go home as you are."

“NO!” snapped Nightmare Moon, shoving her face up close to Wheatley’s mechanical eye. “You **will not** leave me!” In another blink, Luna started to tear up. “I don’t want to be alone again...” she choked out.

The Space Core nuzzled up against the disheartened alicorn. “Hey. Space Pony. You know what I like about space? Space.”

“In the entire history of the universe, fedoras have never been out of style,” supplied the Fact Core.

Suddenly, inspiration struck Wheatley. “Ooh! I know! Since Space doesn’t want to go back to Earth anyway, and he loves space so much, why don’t you just point me and Fact in the direction of Earth and keep Space with you?”

Luna blinked away a tear, slowly. “A-alright,” she said finally. “I suppose I would be okay with that... After all, Space sure loves my stars. Don’t you, Space?” she cooed, nuzzling the Core playfully.

The Space Core giggled.

“Okay, then,” Luna continued. She lifted her head. “‘Earth’... ‘Earth’... Oh! Found it! It’s right over th...” Her voice trailed off mid-gesture as her eyes locked onto something far away. Luna’s pupils turned to pinpricks.

“What? What is it?” Wheatley turned to see what the Moon Princess was staring at.

Out in the depths of space, Wheatley could make out a tiny ball of fire, with something in the center. But only distance made the ball look so small, and it grew rapidly as it came closer. Wheatley could make out a faint noise growing ever-louder as the object approached them:

“AAHHHH!”

Covered in flame, Rick the Adventure Core hurtled straight towards Luna. Both Core and alicorn screamed.

Rick smashed into Luna, and she was promptly gone. In her stead, Nightmare Moon shrieked in pain and fury. The Adventure Core bounced off the enraged alicorn and bumped into the Space Core, sending it floating off into space.

“What are you doing?!” Wheatley yelled to the green-eyed Core.

“I’m saving all your sorry metal hides from the dark alien horse-thing!” replied Rick fairly cheerfully (all things considered, as he was still on fire.) “Also? **I’m on fire.**”

“It is physically impossible for fire to exist in space,” the Fact Core observed.

“Doesn’t matter!” replied Wheatley. “You’ve gone and seriously ticked off the ‘horse-thing’! Now we’ve all gotta escape, fast!”

Hurriedly, Wheatley willed himself to float away from the Moon. He swiveled around to face the moon, and noted with some dismay that the other Cores had each taken off in separate directions.

“You insolent foals!” Nightmare Moon thundered. “You **MORONS!** You think you can best me?! I will never let you leave this moon alive!” With that, dark energy enveloped her horn, and it crackled with arcane power.

A swirling, dark vortex for each Core swirled out and began to draw the four of them back towards the waiting, vengeful mare. Wheatley tried to struggle against the dark magic, but it in vain. He was only putting off the inevitable.

Back on Equestria, a purple unicorn gazed out the window of her bedroom at the moon and the

silhouette on its surface. In a worried tone, she recited part of an old legend that was troubling her. "Legend has it that on the longest day of the thousandth year, the stars will aid in her escape, and she will bring about everlasting night." She sighed. "I hope the Princess was right. I hope it is just an old pony tale."

A door opened, and a purple baby dragon wearing a lampshade on its head addressed the mare. "C'mon, Twilight! It's time to watch the sun rise!"

Twilight glanced back at the moon once more, and then followed the dragon away. She tried to put it out of her mind, but one detail bothered her... Perhaps her mind was just playing tricks on her, but she could have sworn that four of the lights in the sky had been moving closer to the moon.

"You foals!" snarled Nightmare Moon. "You shall not get away!"

Wheatley pulled against the lure of the alicorn's magic. Ever so slowly, he started to slow his progress.

"**NO!**" shrieked the mare. "You shall *not*. **Get. Away!**" She drew in all her power, and sent out a dark flare of arcane might.

As it reached the four Cores, the energy washed over them and bounced around in their mechanical forms. Implausibly – in a million to one chance – the spell ricocheted around their casings and pulled them back to its source in a massive ball of unstable magic.

Right at Nightmare Moon.

Dumbfounded, the Mare in the Moon could only stare at the four Cores that were now hurtling towards her with lethal potential. "You're kidding... You're kidding, right?" she asked.

Simultaneously, the Cores collided with Nightmare Moon, releasing their payload of dark magic. In an agonized scream, and a flash of un-light, the alicorn – and her silhouette upon the moon's surface – disappeared.

For a minute or two, each Core floated around aimlessly, close to the surface of the moon. Finally, Rick was the first to speak. "What the heck was that?!"

"Error. Fact not found," answered the Fact Core helpfully.

The Space Core looked around hopefully. "Space Pony?" it asked hopefully.

"No, mate. I think she's gone for good," replied Wheatley. He considered this. "If only I knew where she went..."

Wearily, Luna opened her eyes. As she got to her hooves, wincing slightly, she took in her surroundings.

What she saw shocked her.

She was in a big, grassy field! Real, green grass! Over there – weren't those trees? And flowers! A multitude of wildflowers dotted the ground.

With a delighted squeak, Luna tumbled and rolled, letting the cool, green grass brush against her coat. After an eternity of moon dust, the sensation of the lovely, dew-speckled plants felt so good against her coat, even if it was slightly hindered by the armor that she wore.

Standing up again, Luna pranced over to one of the flowers and took a long, appreciative sniff. It was amazing! Had flowers always smelled so good? With a sense of wonder, she reached out her head and ate the bloom. It tasted heavenly.

As Luna swallowed, it finally hit her. She was home! Home! She felt the sudden urge to whirl and

dance and sing out with pure joy. Grinning, she looked up at the night sky and noted how her form was no longer imprinted upon the moon's surface.

"Well," she said to the world at large, "Home!" She giggled. "Oh, I can hardly wait to see Celly..."

Deep inside the Moon Princess, something stirred. Luna tried to fight it, but the other presence was not to be denied, and she was gone once more.

"...Yes. Celestia," continued Nightmare Moon. "Sister dearest and her beloved day." She glared at the horizon. If she didn't hurry, her sister's *precious* Sun would come trundling up into the sky, banishing her Night.

That simply would not do.

"No rest for the wicked," Nightmare Moon grumbled, and then she was off to make sure that the night would last forever.