Maledictum Insania 3: Rebellion Years

By Nero Darkard (aka. NeroTheDarklord)

Chapter 13: The Underworld League

For the rebellion, it was a common thing to see circle members depart and arrive again. But when group after group after group of clones arrived, huge confusion spread through the whole Crystal Empire. At first, it was considered a trick. An attack by skin-walker demons. Luckily, the situation could be explained before any blood needed to be shed.

The stream of tiny groups of clones arriving at the empire went on for days. Babs Seed soon realized that, if this kept going, the food supplies would get stretched thin. Although the productivity of the Crystal Empire had increased enormously to supply all the rebels, it was going to reach its limit soon. It was clear that they would not be able to make enough food for any more large waves of supporters on their own. So she immediately began arranging troops of gatherers. There was no option left but trying to scavenge supplies from Equestria. This surely would bring more unwanted attention to the rebellion.

After more than two weeks, the frequency of clones arriving finally reduced. Ultimately, the originals who set this stream in motion arrived back home, being immediately welcomed by Celestia, Luna, Cadence and Shining Armor with grim expressions.

“We’re back, everypony!” Twilight announced happily.

“We can see that,” Luna replied.

“I guess we have a bit of explaining to do,” Rarity commented.

“That you do,” Shining Armor started, then focused his sister. “Twily, what were you thinking?”

“That’s just what Applejack and Rarity had been asking me before I could convince them to do this. Shining Armor, Cadence, Celestia, Luna: If we want to stand any chance against Blueblood and his millions of demons and cultists, we need more rebels. So many kingdoms and empires are still too afraid to help us or haven’t even heard of us yet. Time is running and we can’t just sit here, twiddling our hooves and hoping others will respond in time,” the purple mare explained.

“This was still very short-sighted of you, my faithful student,” Celestia started. “If even a single scout figured out what you did, the Mirror Pool might already be in the hooves of the cult by now. We may have gained a few hundred rebels, but can you even imagine how many more cultists will arise from this?”

“Ya needn’t worry about that. Twilight and her clones took care about the hidin’ and travelin’. They all came here in pairs of three different ones and made sure they won’t cross paths and depart with delays. We also insisted on them leavin’ large gaps to the next group goin’. Even if a few got seen and caught, all that would cause is for the cult to think it’s a trick so we can get back safely. The worst that’s happenin’ right now is that the cultists and demons search all around Equestria for somethin’ that isn’t there anymore!” Applejack explained.

“And when it comes to the pool: Twilight cast a spell on the exit to make the clones walking out forget about the pool and where it can be found. We made sure we were the last leaving and collapsed the way behind us. Even the demons wouldn’t be able to find and reach the pool now. It is sealed away for good,” Rarity finished.

“Clever, but that was still a really questionable decision,” Cadence commented.

“Questionable or not, it was necessary. Even if we got another troop of griffons and arabian ponies, we still would barely be able to survive a large attack. We should consider ourselves lucky the BloodClaw Cult didn’t come up with the idea to spontaneously give us a visit so far, but it can’t go on like this. If we can’t even defend ourselves, how are we supposed to strike back at some point?” Twilight questioned.

“I don’t completely agree with this course of action, but I have faith in your decision making, Twilight,” Celestia commented. “You got us this far, so I hope you know what you do.”

The purple mare smiled, but deep inside of her, she still asked herself the same question. Twilight was well aware of the responsibility she was carrying. Their rebellion had to succeed, or else Blueblood would gain power and control beyond imagination. But there was no time to drown into thoughts of if’s and why’s.

“Alright. I guess we will have another meetings this evening. If you need me sooner, I’m back in the library, as usual,” she announced and started walking.

“Yeah, I gotta get some rest and see what the other reapers are doing. Seeya!” Derpy stated and flew away.

As the group split up again, Applejack also went on her way back home. She actually was looking forward to working on the farm again tomorrow. It was also high time she met up with Babs Seed again. After all, it had nearly been a month since the last time the orange mare could meet her last living family member.

While on her way back home, Applejack started thinking back. It was strange, really. She never was all that close with Babs Seed in the years before. The teenage filly used to be much closer

with Applebloom than her. But as everything withered away, these two instinctively sought each others company and bonded much tighter. Although still just a little cousin, Babs had become as dear to her as a sister. Especially since the day they moved to the Crystal Empire, they spent as much time as possible together. Applejack wondered if she should bake something for her as a surprise.

After just a few minutes more, she finally arrived. As the door opened, she saw that her cousin had a visitor. It was Caramel, sitting on the floor and playing with Winona.

“Cuz! Welcome home!” Babs shouted.

The teenager got up from her chair immediately, ran over to Applejack and embraced her. She surely had missed her, too.

“Hey, Babs! How ya doin’?” Applejack wondered.

“All is fine! Caramel and Ah were just talking about you, right?” Babs asked, turning her head around to her guest for a response.

In contrast to the other two, Caramel had a very grim expression on his face. Even Winona got the hint and immediately stopped playing with him, just sitting down next to the fridge.

“Babs… Could you leave us alone for a moment, please?” he requested.

The teenager had been scolded enough times in the past to know what was gonna happen next. Without saying much, she just went upstairs to her’s and Applejack’s bedroom. Caramel stood up and took position in the middle of the room, waiting for the orange mare to fully come into the small house and close the door behind her.

“Caramel, Ah-” she wanted to start.

“Me first!” the stallion insisted and took a deep breath before he continued. “Applejack… *What* in the name of Celestia were you *thinking*? Going on such a dangerous adventure? In *your* condition?”

“*Ah* needed to help mah friend is what Ah’d been thinkin’!” Applejack replied, getting upset now herself because he dared to scold her for that.

“Without telling anypony first? Just up and leaving overnight? I had to ask Babs to find out you just left! You didn’t say a word to me!” Caramel kept going.

“Well, there wasn’t much time! Ah’m sorry ‘bout that, okay? Ah didn’t have the time to tell everypony first! Ah’m a member of the leadership circle after all! Sometimes, these things happen! If ya had to make up for me at the farm, then-” the orange mare tried to explain.

“This isn’t about the farm, for Pete’s sake! Sorry for being so selfish, but this is about *me*!” Caramel interrupted. “I was worried about you, okay? I know what you have been through and I know you aren’t what you used to be anymore! The whole time you were gone, I couldn’t sleep at night! I was so worried you would get ambushed and killed and I would never find out about it!”

Suddenly, Applejack became quiet. This was a lot more personal to him than she anticipated. The light brown stallion actually had tears in his eyes, but wiped them away before they could start flowing.

“Caramel… Ah-” Applejack started again.

“You are not the only one who lost a lot, AJ,” Caramel started again. “I left everything behind just to get here. I didn’t just lose things, but also friends, family and even my beloved one. I lost so many things in my life already…”

The light brown stallion paused. He took a few steps forward and wrapped his front legs around Applejack, holding her tight.

“But by the stars, the moon and the sun, I will be damned if I lose you now as well, Applejack!” he finished.

Applejack rested her head on his shoulder and stared to the floor in guilt. It seemed like Babs wasn’t the only pony for whom she had become a lot more important. The orange mare closed her eyes, ignoring the hat sliding off from her head and falling to the ground.

“Ah’m sorry, Caramel. Ah’m sorry,” she spoke quietly, causing the stallion to hold her even tighter.

As the months went by, the rebellion slowly began to get used to seeing dozens of copies of Applejack, Twilight Sparkle and Rarity around. Several of the clones began to alter their looks and identity to become more unique. A few even chose to have a fully body dying job to become as unique as possible, although the typical issues of the originals still remained. The Rarity clones seemed to be upset about their health issues and the fact that their necks were scarred and their noses deformed, some even going for semi-drastic measures in attempt to correct this. The Applejack clones had trouble figuring out how to handle things with only three legs, while

the Twilight clones caused an increased demand on medication to keep themselves from bleeding to death internally.

As for the original Twilight, the nightmares she kept on experiencing started to shift. It were no longer the deaths of cultists that haunted her, but the deaths of Moondancer and Spike which kept on repeating in her head every so often and waking her up in the middle of the night with tears streaming down from her face. Moondancer's death was her original sin and Spike's was her punishment. They both died because of her. A fact that she would remind herself of for the rest of her life. And still, these random dreams about them felt like they were more than just that. Was it her own mind trying to torture her with the events of the past? Or was something else sending her these nightly visions?

Pondering remained inconclusive every time. Twilight tried her best to push the things she couldn't change anymore out of her mind by filling it with new things. This spell Djin taught her turned out even much more useful than she believed. Within seconds, she could now absorb what would usually take her weeks. Yet sometimes, she was too fast for her own good. Due to the spell bypassing her normal learning process, she sometimes caused herself to get a bad headache, to the point where she actually forgot the content of previous books. Still, if she kept going with her pace, Twilight would know every single book in the Crystal Empire library by the end of the year.

The last few weeks had been rather eventless. Twilight was starting to get dissatisfied with the progress of the rebellion again. She wished things would finally pick up and she could start to actually fight Blueblood. But just days after she began feeling that way, Luna had interesting news to present during a meeting.

"Our griffon friends have been busy using their connections lately and I am happy to say that things came to a pleasing result! They always were in good terms with the minotaurs and thanks to them, we can now officially count them as part of the rebellion!" she announced.

"Those are excellent news!" Shining Armor spoke in excitement. "The minotaurs are known for being some of the best ground fighters in the whole world! They are not only physically very strong, but also have an enormous willpower! With them on our side, we gained a huge advantage!"

"Good. Very good," was all Twilight said, constantly staring at the table.

"Is something wrong? You seem distracted," Fluttershy wondered.

"Hm? Oh. No, I'm fine. I am just way ahead of myself again in planning," the purple mare explained.

"Ya want to go on another trip, don't cha?" Applejack figured.

“I am that easy to read, huh?” Twilight wondered with an awkward smile.

“Knowing you, you probably just came up with the idea as you heard about the minotaurs,” Rarity commented, followed by blowing her nose into a handkerchief.

“You guys just know me too well,” the purple mare stated, sighing. “Well, yes. If the minotaurs would be guarding the empire, we could take the risk on going for much bigger journeys now. I was thinking of the Zebra Tribal Lands as our next goal to look for allies and for a cure for you, Rarity.”

“Not that much of a bigger journey, though. The tribal lands are not a lot further away from us than Saddle Arabia,” Celestia commented.

“I already searched for possible routes. It would be about the same length to journey there and back, plus a few weeks maybe to get through the jungle,” Twilight replied.

“Well then. The empire’s organization is back in order, so I guess we can all go. It definitely would make a better impression if we all presented ourselves to the zebras,” Cadence suggested.

“Sorry, but ya have to count me out. Caramel’s still kinda upset about me just leavin’ the last time and the berry farm really needs mah help,” Applejack stated.

“That’s okay. But I really hope you come along, Rarity,” Twilight spoke.

“Well if half of the reason we even take that trip is for me, of course I have to come along. I have to say, I am kind of excited about visiting the tribal lands. Zecora told me so much about their exotic culture that she really got me curious,” the white mare agreed.

“Oh, you are not the only one who wants to hang out with zebras really badly! Let the Wonderbolts take over my chores for a while! I am *so* in!” Derpy stated in excitement.

“It’s good to know that I can count on you all,” Twilight spoke with a smile. “So, when do you think we should-”

Before she could finish the sentence, they heard knocking at the door to their meeting room, immediately followed by it swinging open and a reaper running in.

“Apologies for disturbing your meeting, but we have a case of emergency! Demons are gathering up at the borders of the empire!” she announced.

“Demons?!” Luna shouted and jumped up on her legs in surprise.

“How many?” Celestia asked, placing her front legs on the table and pushing herself upright.

“Just a small group, my mistress. Four in total. But they are known unique ones: Slendermane, Toxica, Succubus and Despair,” the reaper replied.

“Her again… What are they doing?” Twilight wanted to know.

“Nothing so far. They just stand and observe the empire. They also brought a large metal box with them. It seems like they are waiting for something,” the reaper mare explained.

“Those four are dangerous, but if they wanted to attack the empire, they would have done so by now. I guess they are waiting for us,” Shining Armor figured.

“Like always, we need to be careful. This might very well be a trap of sorts. But we shouldn’t keep them waiting or they might start doing something much more drastic to get our attention,” Twilight stated.

“Let’s go then,” Applejack concluded and started walking, followed by the others.

The four demons kept a respectful distance to the empire and aside of Toxica, they were all standing perfectly still. Succubus did not even bring any of her servants. This gave the impression that they were only here as messengers. But if so, what purpose did the metal container have? These and more were thoughts rushing through Twilight’s mind as she approached the small group of Nightmare Moon’s children. Immediately as they got in their line of sight, Despair gained her typical sinister grin. None of the demons moved even a step closer or spoke a word. They all just waited until the whole circle arrived.

“There they are, Despy! There they are!” Toxica shouted in excitement while flapping her tiny wings frantically.

The Guillotine of Hope did not respond. She still remained perfectly silent and motionless. She seemed to be waiting for Twilight to start the conversation. A hint the purple mare got quickly.

“What do you want?” she asked.

The grin on Despair’s face grew even wider. If arrogance was liquid, it would be dripping off from her body right now. Whatever she had planned, it must be something she had been very looking forward to.

“1006 years ago, Queen Nightmare Moon was banished and Princess Celestia stole the moon from darkness itself. Thus, Maledictum Insania was cast upon Equestria,” the demoness started speaking.

“We don’t need a lesson in history! We are well aware of what happened!” Luna growled.

“Are you now? My queen claims that you were on the verge of non-existence during that time. It would surprise her if you had any memories of your banishment at all,” Despair commented.

“Are you just here to mock us, or do you actually have something to say?” Shining Armor asked with a grim expression.

“Oh! He is fierce and handsome! I will have to try my talents on you at some point, Sugar,” Succubus commented, scrutinizing the prince while placing her right front hoof on her lower lip.

“Keep your hooves to yourself, you foul beast!” Cadence replied angrily.

Whatever was happening right now, the four demons seemed to relish this moment. Even Toxica just hovered in the air, covering her mouth with her left front hoof while giggling.

“All in good time, Succubus. I think we have demanded their attention for long enough,” Despair started again. “You left something behind the last time we met, didn’t you?”

“What are you talking about?” Celestia wanted to know.

“A friend, for what I understand. Isn’t friendship fascinating? You all just keep running and left her behind to be torn apart by us. You prefered to save your own hide over turning around and trying to save her. Oh yes, friendship is truly magical,” Despair kept mocking.

Despite the harsh words, the angry expressions got blown out of the ponies’ faces. Especially Fluttershy seemed highly alerted and stared at the chained up metal container.

“Well, it seems I make a much better friend than you ponies do. While you abandoned her and left her to die, I actually went through the trouble of catching her before she could freeze herself solid. But us demons have no use for traitors like the reapers. So I thought I might as well return her to you,” the demoness explained.

A swift glance over to Slendermane followed. He nodded in response and began to break apart the chains around the container. As the last chain fell, the box opened. It was brimmed with blood, causing a large flood washing towards the group who backed away in horror. But as most was spilled out moments later, a red mass became visible. It immediately fell over and landed in the blood.

Seconds went by without neither the demons nor the ponies or reapers moving. They just stared at this lump in pony-shape. It did not take long for it to start gagging and trying to get up. Despair spoke the truth. It really was Crystal Blossom.

“Mentor!” Fluttershy called and broke out of the group.

The others called her back, but their words fell on deaf ears. Fluttershy just ignored the blood and tried her best to help the soaked mare to get back on her legs. Crystal was panting and gagging as if she hadn’t been able to breather for days. She focused Fluttershy, not saying a word.

Twilight remained highly alarmed, her eyes jumping all over the place to keep track of the situation. The demons still just stood there and grinned. They had absolutely no motivation to do anything at all. It seemed like they only wanted to observe the shocked and puzzled expressions of the group.

It took about three minutes, but Crystal Blossom was finally getting a hold of herself. She kept on staring at Fluttershy the whole time with no expression as it was expected of her.

“Mentor, are you alright?” Fluttershy wondered.

The elder reaper mare did not reply and just kept staring. Nothing about this situation felt right. Something twisted was about to happen, Twilight was sure of it.

The muscles in Crystal’s cheeks began to twitch lightly. Soon, her mouth began to slowly form a smile. The light blue mare’s eyes opened further and further. Even Fluttershy now realized that she needed to back away.

The smile quickly grew into a grin, growing larger and larger. Crystal’s eyes went as wide open as they could. A low chuckle escaped through her jagged fang and her whole body began to tremble.

“She was pretty resistant. Completely refused to eat or drink. We tried to force-feed her, but she just struggled too much. In the end, we decided it would be easiest to just lock her into a container full of elder reaper blood and let her drown in it over and over again. What you see before yourself is the result of whole months spent in that metal cage,” Despair commented, highly satisfied.

The whole group took a few steps backwards and came closer together. All got ready for battle. Crystal’s breath became continuously deeper and faster. Her blood started pumping and her heart began to race. Adrenalin filled her being and only one instinct still remained in her malfunctional mind: kill.

All the sudden, the battle began. Crystal unleashed a fearsome ice storm and teleported herself right behind the group. She lifted her scythe, aiming for Celestia. Yet, her strike was blocked by her own apprentice. But where the scythe failed, the blast of air continued, launching a solid frozen rock at the former princess of the sun and lifting her into the hostile air.

Although they all were still blinded from the snow, Luna reacted immediately. She teleported her sister back to the ground before the frozen shards could impale her and began to cast dark spears on the insane mare herself. But as they hit Crystal Blossom, her body shattered into icy shards, launching right back at her. In the confusion over what just happened, she was able to block off the attack, but could not react fast enough to avoid their former friend to appear behind her and place the blade of her scythe against Luna's neck.

Twilight saw this in time and used her magic in attempt to take over the scythe, causing a short power struggle that left Luna enough time to escape her death. While still maintaining her magical grip on the scythe, the purple mare took over some of the flying ice shards and let them fly towards Crystal. She, though, placed her hoof in the blood, quickly lifted it up and thus created a red, frozen shield to block them off. Before Twilight could cast another spell, Crystal disappeared into the blizzard.

Moments later, Applejack could be heard screaming in pain. Blood was running down from her back as frozen claws were pinning her down. An ice golem had appeared out of nowhere. Shining Armor was the closest to her and cast a spell to destroy the golem, guarding Applejack immediately after.

But with one down, another followed up instantly. Before Rarity knew what was going on, she found herself encased in ice and lifted into the air by a frozen bird. But fortunately, she was careful enough to bring a jewel necklace to battle, allowing herself to cast a powerful blast of fire at the bird and melting it away.

As Rarity landed in the soft snow unharmed, more and more golems appeared. Razor sharp darts of ice were hailing down from above and spikes of ice were rapidly growing beneath them. They had seen what Crystal was capable off during the Manehattan incident, but having all this power aimed at them left them completely overwhelmed.

Twilight saw no option anymore. Her eyes turned white and she unleashed a massive purple explosion of arcane magic, tearing the whole blizzard apart. For a moment, the battlefield was clear again. The demons still stood motionlessly and kept on observing. The rest of the Crystal Empire seemed to try to reach them, but something prevented them from coming closer. Could Despair have raised a force field around them?

Crystal stood nearby, frozen over in a protective icy armor and presenting her sharp teeth. She took a step towards the group and created a snowy tornado that moments later formed into an

avalanche. Twilight launched an arcane beam right into it, hoping to blast it apart. But as she did so, the explosion turned the snow into countless frozen needles now storming towards them.

The three fallen demi-goddesses combined their magic and created a sphere around the whole group to protect them from the attack. Just as everything seemed to have stopped moving, the ice shards clustered together and formed a massive insect-like golem, grabbing the sphere with a pair of nippers and tossing it into the air.

The ponies screamed as they were flying. There was just too much snow and ice around. Twilight remembered an old trick and inverted the temperature of the battlefield, causing the golem to turn into burning crystalline fragments. It collapsed moments later because the insane mare lost her concentration due to her frozen armor now having become a burning prison she needed to get out of. Seeing their opportunity, the mares began to counter attack while Shining Armor took over the sphere and made sure they all would land safely. Rarity used another ruby to launch a fireball straight at Crystal Blossom. Celestia used chains of light to tie the insane mare down. Luna created dark bindings to pin her scythe to the ground, out of reach. Cadence constantly kept casting counterspells to prevent her from teleporting away.

Crystal Blossom might be a powerful elder reaper and she might be even more devastating when she had fallen under Maledictum Insania, but she still was no match for a group as mighty as the rebellion leaders. The battle was over and now they had a moment to react.

The reapers knew what needed to be done, but Fluttershy hesitated. Seeing this, Derpy quickly stepped in. She approached, readying her scythe and-

Cadence let out a short scream of pain.

The whole group turned around. In one short moment where they had forgotten about the demons, Despair had stepped in and rammed a spear-like limb into the fallen alicorn's side.

"Cadence!" Shining Armor shouted and started running to her.

Despair withdrew and just grinned at him, then her eyes jumped back to Crystal Blossom. Needless to say, the attack broke Cadence's concentration, allowing the insane mare to teleport out of the chains.

Shining Armor quickly embraced his wife and began to cast healing spells on her. Twilight joined in straight away. It were Celestia and Luna now trying to find the red reaper and deal with her.

As the moment of shock settled, they realized that Crystal was standing not far from them. The battle clearly left its marks on her, too. She was bleeding, scorched and out of breath. She just used up her energy too quickly. But judging from the grin, she still had one more trick up her sleeve.

The air rapidly began to cool down again. Crystal's mane and tail began to flow in a magical breeze. Ice began to swirl around her and above Crystal's head, a portal opened. Twilight knew what would happen now and created a shield to block off the blast. The fraction of a second later, they were all encased in thick ice while a Windigo stared down on them in wrath.

Crystal saw herself victorious and began walking towards the group to claim their lives. But walking was difficult for her, too. Her steps became slower and slower, yet her desire to kill remained unbroken. She pushed herself forward as hard as she possibly could, even using magic to go where her body couldn't on its own. Bones began to snap and fur started to rip off. Blood stained more and more of the ice, as it immediately froze the open wounds, causing them to be torn even more as Crystal pushed on. Eventually, the wounds got so fatal that they revealed her bones.

"Where the willpower exceeds the physical limits, nothing is impossible. A shattered mind, to some, can be a womb for others. A womb for something much bigger, much stronger, much more dreadful," Despair started commenting.

The exposed bones underneath Crystal's freezing and tearing flesh were not white. As more and more of the black inside the breaking body exposed itself, the ice became tinted with a strong red aura. Even the Windigo seemed to be terrified of what was breaking free below it, causing it to quickly vanish again.

The black bones grew, breaking apart the ice around them and inside of them. A long skeletal tail appeared out of the shattering flesh. Large spiked bone wings tore out of the back. The reaper cloak changed in shape, adapting to the creature breaking free and the scythe as well became red and demonic.

"So far, we had been lacking a proper leader. I was never meant to lead and I gladly give the leadership of the demons to much, much more capable claws. He as well had been waiting to take over command for a very long time," Despair kept going.

The black skeleton began to lift itself upright. It towered over the ponies larger than an alicorn, an aura of pure red darkness flowing around it. As the group tried its best to melt the ice, they did not know why they shook more. From the cold or from the fear. The demon turned its focus to the others, who bowed down before him.

"Malice, The Right Hand of Nightmare Moon. We are glad to finally have you back, demon commander," Despair spoke.

"The queen is pleased with you, Despair," was all Malice spoke in response.

He completely ignored the ponies now and joined up with the other demons. Everyone was still too numb from the cold and fear to react much. This was a disaster. An utter, incomparable disaster.

“At last, the Underworld League is complete. Beware, ponies. The end time draws near,” Despair finished.

After saying that, the demons just started walking away, leaving everything behind. The shivering group, the bloody metal container, the terrified witnesses in the empire. Everything. They already got what they wanted.