

Chapter 5

The assembled ponies grew silent once more as Scully resumed reading from the old volume.

In order for you to more clearly understand what I did, I should start at the beginning. I don't doubt you have heard tell of the mythical Mare in the Moon. There is more truth to this legend than most would believe. What you should know is that nearly a thousand years ago, I harnessed the power of the Elements of Harmony and sealed my sister away inside the moon. It is prophesized that within the next few decades, the magic keeping her there will fail and I will be tasked with finding a new way of dealing with Nightmare Moon.

While the prophecy may yet come to pass, I feared that my sister would seek another avenue of escape, one that had perhaps eluded my notice. Two hundred years into her imprisonment, I was given news that struck fear into my heart, for it described a possible path for my sister to flee her prison.

There have always been magical enigmas within Equestria, so it makes some odd amount of sense they would gather to each other. There is a pony within Equestria who is a magical oddity. He is now nearly eight hundred years old, yet he retains his youth and his wits. His cutie mark was a special case. His mark failed to appear all throughout what he affectionately calls his "first life". As he lay on his deathbed, a strange magical reaction was triggered. This pony became young once again, though his appearance and his features had changed slightly. It was then that an hourglass appeared on his flank, fitting given the nature of his existence and his ability to, in a sense, turn back time.

It was this pony that approached me startling news. He had been out deep in the Everfree Forest and had stumbled across the crumbling ruin of my old castle. He had approached the ruin, but as he drew near, a strange thing happened. Reality had begun to bend and shift, and for a few moments he caught a glimpse of a strange world. It was a strange city, one with many more buildings than one usually sees in Equestria. He described it as populated by a multitude of odd creatures.

They walked upright, on two legs instead of four. Their bodies had no real natural coats to speak of, and they all were dressed in clothing covering the majority of their bodies. The informant's words frightened me. Tales of an earlier rift in the worlds have been all but lost, but my dim recollection of a story I had been told once stirred a quiet fear within me. If my sister discovered that the world walls were weakening, perhaps she could take advantage of it. Nightmare Moon was not a thing I wished upon any world. My sister was my responsibility, and I could not simply stand by if she decided to slip into another world and wreak mayhem there.

I spent the next hundred years observing the new world through careful application of my magic (While more suited for raising the sun, it extends to more figurative definitions of

illumination as well). I learned a great deal about the creatures inhabiting it. They were called Men, and their reach spanned the entire planet. Mankind was even more diverse than the ponies of Equestria, though their physical differences were subtle. It was in their culture that their diversity was truly visible.

I also discovered that the walls between our worlds had been weak for some time. Human mythology and folklore included several creatures that existed in Equestria, but no trace of which could be found in the world of Men. It may have been that humans caught glimpses of the creatures in windows such as the one that appeared in my old castle. This troubled me greatly. If both sides were glimpsing each other, the walls were weaker than I initially imagined. I pored over as many texts as I could to find mention of ways to pass through the world walls. My search was fruitless; all the spells mentioned were purely theoretical, and highly flawed at that. It fell to me to create my own through careful calculation.

The process was grueling, and I knew that if my sister had been actively planning escape she would have had a great head start on concocting a spell. I knew that a mistake in my work would be unforgivable. The slightest mishap regarding the borders of our two worlds could result in the destruction of both. I will not outline the process or the spell itself. Suffice to say that it did not function as I had planned it to.

After I believe my spell to be ready, I set out for the Everfree Forest to the ruins of my castle. I found a clearing a fair distance from the castle proper and began my work. Initially, the spell seemed to be working completely as intended, which worried me immensely. The window I was looking through opened up onto an immense body of water. I saw some sort of craft floating upon the water, battered by intense winds. The edges of the window gradually became clearer. Then something happened I could never have anticipated.

I felt the magic slip away from me. The spell I had woven had become so intricate, so complex, and so involved that it had gained a sentience of a rudimentary form. The living spell gave a slight tremor, and the window to the other world became clearer still, the sound passing through it increasing in volume. A trickle of water began to pour from the bottom of the window. Thinking that perhaps I could undo the spell, I hurled myself at the window. For my efforts, I was rewarded with a sharp pain as I collided with what might as well have been a brick wall. Thankfully, even though the spell I had woven should have acted as a two-way gateway, passage from Equestria to the world of men seemed impossible. My relief was short-lived, though. A brilliant light poured forth from the spell, and it was all I could do to throw myself away from the ensuing burst of magical energy.

A searing white light filled my sights, and when I blinked it away I saw the results of my magic. The vessel I had seen in the window lay in a shattered heap in front of me. In the window, I had seen three Men standing on the thing, but they were nowhere to be seen until I turned my eyes skywards. Three globes of light hovered motionless for a moment before shooting off in different directions.

To this day, I have no idea what happened to the three Men who had crewed that ship. I dearly hope that they adapted to their new lives. You see, when Men cross the border between worlds to Equestria through the rifts, they become ponies. But for now, let us return to the clearing near my old castle.

I saw the spell churning in the air before me like some horrible creature. It was a great white fog, the window into the world of Men had vanished. It roiled for a moment before splitting itself into three smaller sections. Each of these slowly drifted to the ground. I stepped back warily as the shreds of fog began to glow softly. As they neared the earth, they coalesced into three pointed stones, pure white as the fog from which they had been formed. They stuck to the earth in a triangular formation, and refused to move from there. I returned to Canterlot shaken, but after a few weeks I ventured back to the clearing where I cast the spell. No matter what I tried, the stones would not budge. They were curious things, each engraved with a different writing from the world of Men.

I was given a brief peace, and for the next thirty years or so I put the spell out of my mind. The wreckage of the vessel had been cleared away by then, I saw to it a contingent of my guard removed it with no questions asked. It was broken down and used as building materials. It is odd to think that some of the buildings in Ponyville had their start in another world. But as peace from war in the world of Men is short-lived, so too was my peace of mind. I had tasked the pony that first informed me of the windows with the overseeing of the stones. Once a month, he was to venture to the clearing and make sure everything was the same. This time he returned with news that one of the stones had begun glowing softly. I went with him the following day to see for myself. It was the northern stone, and the writing on it was a strange harsh lettering, runes of some sort. The stone glowed with the white light it had once possessed, but the writing shone blue.

Anticipating an event similar to the one that had occurred thirty years ago, I gathered members of my guard and waited. After several nights of watching the stone's gentle glow, our patience was rewarded. The light grew stronger again and the window to the world of Men slowly appeared before our eyes. This time we saw one Man in a small ship, and he wasn't exactly far out to sea. He was on a narrow stretch of water, surrounded by tall jagged cliffs on either side of his vessel. Again, the vision became clearer and the sounds louder, and water again trickled from the bottom of the window. There was a flash of blue light, then silence. The window was gone, and the small vessel we had seen was sitting intact before us. I looked up to catch a glimpse of a single sphere of light shooting off into the distance. I immediately sent two of my guards to track it down, then set about the task of dismantling the ship with the others.

The two guards returned several hours later with an unconscious bruised and battered grey pony. He awoke the following day, but despite our efforts to calm him, he panicked and escaped deep into the Forest. I went after him with several guards and we eventually ran him down. I took the liberty of explaining to him where he was and that he had brought here by

magic. All told, he seemed to take the news well, even offering his services to me. I set him to work explaining to the builders in Canterlot about the ship he had been travelling on. Thirty years passed, and again the magical event occurred, this time with the southernmost stone. From then on, every thirty years the cycle would repeat. One of the stones would light up, we would catch a glimpse of a vessel through the rift, and then the vessel and its crew would be pulled through to Equestria. I set myself to conducting research again, and through the help of the same pony who had prophesized Nightmare Moon's return I was able to learn a little more about the stones and the rifts.

Each of the three stones corresponded to figures in the mythologies of three different cultures, thereby determining which vessels would be taken. The northern stone covered in runes corresponded to a mythical eight-legged horse called Sleipnir, the chosen mount of a human god called Odin. The southern stone's writing was a strange flowing script, and corresponded to a deity named Epona, worshipped by tribes in the center of one of the human continents. The eastern stone was decorated by strange figures, almost like those that adorn the pottery of the culture it corresponded to. This final stone represented a deity named Poseidon.

The rift continued to spit forth Men, each stone lighting up in turn every thirty-three years. The Men we retrieved had all turned into ponies when they crossed over. Some took to it better than others, but they all eventually adjusted to their new lives. Some even offered to help acclimatize those who would arrive thirty years after. Perhaps our greatest boon was a group of several ponies that appeared along with a gargantuan iron craft with several wheels. They helped us to build what is now the railway into Buffalo territory, and gave us the schematics for the "train" that they arrived with. Many of the recent developments in Equestrian transports can be attributed at least in part to the study of the vessels that the rift has pulled in.

The pattern of the abductions seems to almost have run its course, but I cannot be sure. Vessels are abducted for their names, the first letter of each craft's name eventually spelling out the name of the deity their stone is associated with. The stone of Epona has been dark for several hundred years, and the stone of Sleipnir has darkened as well. There is one more vessel that will be brought in by the stone of Poseidon, but what will happen after that, I know not. Will the cycle start anew? Will Men be continuously pulled into Equestria until the end of all things? But this is not what worries me most.

I fear the boundaries of our two worlds have been weakened substantially by the near-constant activity of the rifts. Slight magical residue has been building in the clearing for around three hundred years now. Energy is building, and its possible purpose frightens me. If a massive outpouring of magical energy were to occur in Equestria, our world would be all but doomed. The barrier between our world and the world of Men is in essence a steep slope. Things tumble down it and into Equestria through the rift, but we find ourselves stuck at the bottom of this valley of the worlds. It is near impossible for us to scramble back up and escape into another world. I hesitate to say with certainty that it cannot be done, but all the evidence

points to this being the case.

However, my priority is finding a way to seal the rift permanently. If that is not done with the utmost haste, the two worlds may be lost forever.

The ponies startled slightly as Scully slammed the book shut with her magic. Her expression was grim as she turned to Mulder. She spoke in a strained voice.

"I refuse to believe it's impossible. There has to be way back to our world." Mulder seemed dejected.

"But you said it yourself earlier, Scully. Magic has its limits. Not everything is—"

"There has to be a way! Damn it, Mulder, you of all people should be supporting me on this. You're always the one with the crazy theories, the one-shot plans that shouldn't work but usually do. You of all people shouldn't be giving up on this!"

"I'm not giving up, I'm facing the facts, Scully! The author of this account is the ruler of Equestria, and I for one would trust her authority on magic over somebody who hasn't even been a unicorn for forty-eight hours! What would you know about it?!" His words dripped venom. Scully gave him a stunned look. Mulder's eyes widened as he realized what he had just said. He opened his mouth to apologize, but Scully was already halfway up the staircase to the upper floor, sidestepping the slumbering Spike and disappearing upstairs. Pinkie Pie trotted over to Mulder, a concerned look on her face.

"Everything okay, Muldy? She seemed kinda mad." Mulder arched a brow at his new name and shook his head.

"No, everything is not okay, Pinkie." Twilight walked over to him.

"You...you're from another world? Both of you?" Mulder nodded glumly.

"That explains your odd mannerisms." She turned to Pinkie. "You go home and get some sleep, okay Pinkie? Our guests have had a long day." Pinkie nodded, smiling again. The argument she had overheard seconds earlier seemed completely gone from her mind as she bounced her way out the door.

"See ya tomorrow, Twilight!" The purple unicorn closed the library door and turned to Mulder.

"I'm not sure I completely understand the predicament you two are in, but the preface on that book was pretty specific. I'm actually a student of the Princess. We can get a chariot to Canterlot as early as tomorrow. I'm sure you'll both want to talk to her about what you've read."

Mulder nodded, then made his way up the staircase to see Scully.

The peach unicorn was staring intently at the bookshelves, pointedly not even glancing in Mulder's direction as he neared her.

"Scully, I'm sorry. That wasn't fair of me." She nodded silently, and Mulder continued. "Twilight Sparkle is going to be taking us to Canterlot tomorrow. We can speak directly to Princess Celestia about the rift." Scully nodded and looked at Mulder. A sad smile played across her face.

"You know what I find funny, Mulder? You completely missed the other two disappearance patterns." She let out a short, bitter laugh. Mulder smirked.

"Goes to show how narrow our vision of the truth can sometimes be. It's rare that we ever get to see the big picture, have it exposed in the manner that book did. It came as a shock to me too, if that's any consolation." Scully nodded, and the two of them returned downstairs to work out the details of the next day's trip with Twilight. Afterwards, Twilight set out two bedrolls on the library's lower level for them. Scully and Mulder lay awake all through the night, desperately hoping that the Princess might be wrong, but plagued constantly with the thought that she might be completely correct. It might be that they could never return home at all.