

My Name is Nihilus



The deep thumping of Ponyville's only dance club filled Rainbow Dash's ears as she threw herself onto the ground in front of their table. Colorful lights flashed on and off above them, each outlining the silhouettes of dancing ponies for an instant before vanishing. Applejack took a seat beside Dash, and Fluttershy and Rarity sat delicately on the floor across from them. Pinkie Pie remained standing, bouncing in place as she addressed her friends.

"Now!" The party pony spoke loudly to be heard over the pumping music of the dance club. "Everypony know tonight's objective?"

The friends seated at the table exchanged confused glances, struggling to figure out what the pink-haired pony expected in answer. Pinkie was unpredictable, but tended to follow a single constant: "To party?" Rainbow Dash hazarded a guess.

"No, silly filly!" Pinkie pie exclaimed. "To have *fun*!" With that, she stood on her back legs, throwing a shower of confetti into the air. "Just because Twilight is off having some midnight picnic with the princesses in Canterlot doesn't mean the five of us can't have a perfectly good time here in Ponyville the way we usually do! I mean, five out of six ponies is still, like, five halves the fun that four out of twelve ponies is, right?" She frowned, considering her last sentence for a moment, then shook her head. "In any case, drinks on me!" Before any of the friends at the table could express their appreciation, the pink pony had cartwheeled off toward the dance floor.

None of the group sitting at the table gave her outburst more than a raised eyebrow. For Pinkie Pie, it had been almost mild.

"What do you think they talk about up at the palace, anyway?" Rainbow Dash wondered aloud. "Doesn't Twilight write to Celestia, like, every day?"

"*Princess* Celestia, Rainbow Dash," Rarity corrected her. "The title is important. And being arguably the three most magical beings in all of Equestria I would think that magic comprises a great deal of their conversation, wouldn't you? Or perhaps they will discuss the accident that happened last week."

"Er..." Applejack started, obviously confused, "what accident?"

“Oh *Applejack*,” Rarity gasped dramatically, “hadn’t you *heard*?” The earthpony gave Rarity a blank stare. “Honestly, anypony who is *anypony* knows by now. Though I suppose *you* wouldn’t be as ‘In the know’ as a pony such as myself. I do have a number of -shall we say- *connections*-”

“Just tell us what happened, Rarity,” Rainbow Dash interrupted her, obviously as confused as Applejack.

“Well if you’re going to be so *rude* about it, I don’t see why I should tell you two anything.” The unicorn turned up her snout and sniffed.

“See if I care.” Rainbow Dash turned to Applejack, completely ignoring Rarity. “So today I was breaking a cloud, right, and this other pegasus struts up like she thinks she can-”

“Alright, fine!” Rarity’s shrill voice cut Dash off. “Somepony went crazy and attacked the princess! There!”

Rainbow Dash and Applejack both turned back to the unicorn. Dash was, if anything, even more confused. “So you’re saying that somepony was actually dumb enough to try and *kill* Princess Luna? I mean I know there was the whole Nightmare Moon thing, but-”

“-Not Princess Luna, Princess *Celestia*,” Rarity corrected, leaning in and whispering in a conspiratorial tone, her grudge seemingly forgotten. “In the middle of her throne room, *while* she was holding court. They failed, obviously. In any case, her assailant wore a grey cloak, and wearing the color has become a major *faux pas*. The entire aristocracy has to reorder their summer wardrobe.”

“Celestia had the entire thing under control in moments, of course,” Rarity continued, “Though I *have* heard rumors- and these are totally unvalidated, mind you- that in order to catch all the culprits she used mind magic on her assailant.”

“Alicorns can read minds?” Dash said, “You mean now I have to watch what I think around the princesses?”

“Thinkin’ something you shouldn’t be, sugarcube?”

“No!” Dash said defensively. “It’s just nopony’s business what I’m thinking, is all!”

Rarity scoffed. “It’s unicorn magic, actually, though totally forbidden. And there are spells that do far worse than simply *read* a mind. Don’t worry though,” she added quickly upon seeing Dash’s expression, “I imagine Celestia and Luna are the only two people who how to perform any.”

Rarity went on in her silvery voice. "I hear the princess was absolutely *furios*. She actually cast her *blade*." The unicorn looked around at three ponies sitting at the table, obviously expecting some kind of reaction. No pony gave one.

"Oh, come now! at least one of you must know what I'm talking about! Fluttershy?" She turned to the pink haired pegasus and was rewarded with an apologetic shrug. Rarity groaned and began to talk as though she was teaching schoolfillies how to add two and two. "Unicorn warriors throughout the ages have been known for spells that summon elegant and terrifying weapons based on their one special talent. Princess Celestia's is a shaft of sunlight so hot it can burn through anything and so bright it would blind you to look at it. I'm sure Twilight has pictures she can show you in one of those books of hers."

"Swords!?" Rainbow Dash exclaimed, eyes wide. "That sounds so *cool*! Can you do it?"

She gave a high pitched laugh. "Of course not, darling, I'm a fashion designer! I said *warrior* ponies. Ponies like Sir Enamorous, the dragon slayer, or Sir Radiant Shimmer, the undefeatable joustler!"

Rarity's eyes stared off into the distance and she smiled dreamily. "Or Sir Fernando," she said, clearly lost in thought. "The extremely attractive..."

Applejack and Rainbow Dash snickered. "Sounds like a real fine stallion there, Rarity."

Rarity saw the looks the three ponies at the table were giving her and regained her composure. She cleared her throat. "But that's enough courtly gossip for one night, don't you think? Let's dance, Fluttershy." She stood up and turned to face the pegasus.

Fluttershy looked down and sank a little in her seat. "Oh I don't know, Rarity. With all these ponies here, watching. Maybe you could just-"

"You don't want to dance with me?" Rarity's lower lip quivered as her eyes went wide.

"Uh... no! that's not what I meant at all! I mean, um, of course I'll dance with you... yeah... yeah I'll dance." Rarity led Fluttershy away with a hoof on her shoulder.

"Ya ever think that Rarity isn't being a very... *good* pony when she pulls Fluttershy around like that?" Applejack asked after they had left.

Since Rarity wasn't around to complain, Rainbow Dash propped her back legs up on the table. "That girl should learn to at least stand up to her friends."

As they spoke, shock of bright pink hair appeared in the top of Rainbow's field of vision.

She looked up, and found Pinkie Pie leaning out of the booth one over from theirs, her face just several inches from Dash's. She had been dancing, and her face was covered in sweat.

"Dashie!" she shouted, causing Rainbow Dash to recoil and hit her head off of the floor.

"AUGH! You could just, you know, *sit down* if you wanted to talk to us."

"Sitting is for chumps! You guys gonna come dance? Look how much fun they're having!"

Dash looked towards the dance floor and easily spotted Fluttershy and Rarity. They were both engaged in some kind of complex dance that complimented their natural grace. Fluttershy had her wings folded despite the heat. Rarity's horn was glowing, the unicorn using magic to make their manes sway and billow with the beat.

"You know what seeing them two dancing like that makes me wonder?" Applejack asked.

It was Pinkie who answered. "What?"

"How much Rarity has to practice to use magic like that and dance at the same time. Makes me glad my magic is innate."

"Me too." Rainbow Dash agreed. "But you know what I wonder?"

"What?" Pinkie again. The music suddenly died as the DJ switched over to another track.

"Isn't Fluttershy hot dancing with her wings folded?" Dash said loudly to complete silence.

Everybody in the club looked over at her. Fluttershy's face burned furiously. The only thing that broke the silence was Pinkie Pie's loud guffaw.

"Oh, *hay*," Dash cursed under her breath. She spoke louder, scratching the back of her head. "I meant, like, *warm*, you know, dancing, in the heat, like—"

Applejack sighed and upended her drink with her mouth, downing it in one gulp. Everyone turned back to their conversations as the music picked up again. "Come on sugar-cube, let's just go dance."



It was several hours before the group of friends all exited the club into the warm summer night air. Rarity and Fluttershy were chatting about feathered hats, and Dash and Pinkie were talking about seeing a movie.

“I’m not put off by gore or anything, I can handle all of that easily,” Dash lied, “I just think it looks like a stupid movie, is all.”

“Okey-Dokey-Lokey!” Pinkie chirped. “We don’t have to see that one if you don’t want. We’ll just see something else! How about that one where the unicorn messes up a teleportation spell and all his friends end up in-” She stopped suddenly.

The world had changed.

All the hairs on Rainbow Dash’s neck stood up immediately, and she got the overwhelming feeling that she was being watched. She felt as though a siren had gone off inside her head, warning her that everypony was suddenly in danger. Adrenaline coursed through her bloodstream, and with a single beat of her wings, she threw herself a dozen feet into the air. She spun around, searching for whatever it was that had set her off.

The street was quiet and empty except for them. Nothing was any different.

But it was. Rarity spun in place, eyes alert, and Applejack was looking around with one hoof on her hat. Fluttershy had leapt into a nearby bush, her eyes blinking out the world fearfully. Pinkie Pie had stopped talking mid sentence, which was a strange enough reaction for Pinkie Pie. They had all felt it too.

“What in the hay...” Applejack muttered after a moment.

Suddenly there was a flash in the sky, followed shortly by a deep rumbling.

“I love lightning!” Pinkie Pie cheered. “Did you know you can figure out how far away it is by counting the seconds between the flash and the noise?”

The sky flashed again.

“Ooooooone... twoooooooo...”

"It's coming from Canterlot," Rarity said quietly

Dash looked, and sure enough she saw the flash originate somewhere near the palace. The boom sounded again. It was a long, deep, and loud sound, never cracking or changing in pitch.

"And it isn't lightning," Rainbow Dash added, "the sound is slightly off."

"Must be princess Luna or princess Celestia," Rarity said the words with a hint of unease "Some kind of... late night fireworks, perhaps?"

The sky flashed again. And again, and again. All Rainbow Dash could do, all any of them could do, was stand there feeling uneasy. *Twilight is with both the alicorns*, Rainbow thought, *they can protect her from anything. Besides, it's probably nothing dangerous anyway.*

Almost a whole minute passed before the strange flashes stopped. Applejack spoke first.

"Ah don't like this one bit. Maybe we should have Rainbow fly over there in the mornin', just to see if they're alright."

"Um, you guys..." Fluttershy had come out of her bush.

"I agree completely, Applejack," Rarity answered, "Something here just doesn't quite add up."

"I think you should all take a look at this..."

Dash landed and crossed her arms. "Why are you all acting so worried? Twilight is more than capable of defending herself, remember how she smoked that Ursa Minor?!"

"Because, you see, the thing is-"

"-And that's if she *didn't* have both of the alicorns with her, which she totally *does*."

"The moon is red," Fluttershy finished quietly.

Every one of them turned to Fluttershy, then looked up at the tiny sliver of moon in the sky. The pegasus had not exaggerated; it had somehow turned a deep crimson.

"Well that's odd," Rarity said after a while.

"Yeah! Usually the moon is white!"

“No, Pinkie,” Rarity answered, her voice taking on a strange tone. It almost sounded as though she was sad. “I meant it’s odd that the princess would do that. It’s a sign, you see- one that’s almost been forgotten because it’s never had to have been used. It’s as old as Equestria.” She resumed looking up at the moon.

“Well?” Dash eventually asked, impatient, “what does it mean?”

The unicorn drew a long breath. “It means,” she said, closing her eyes, “Equestria is now at war.”



It was a short while later that Rainbow Dash arrived at home. It was late enough that she should be in bed. The events of the night however, nagged at her.

At war, she thought, is it even possible? Equestria has no enemies. Equestria doesn't even have equals. Was Rarity wrong? She does tend to be a little over-dramatic about, well, everything. And knowing something that old and obscure is Twilight's thing.

Twilight. Somewhere in Canterlot, Twilight was with the princesses who had quite possibly just declared war on some unknown enemy. And the others expected Rainbow Dash to just *wait* until tomorrow to check in. It wasn't *right* for them to just sit around while their friend could be in danger.

This was a time for action, she decided.

A midnight flight to Canterlot and back was well within her capabilities, even if she was tired and a little tipsy from alcohol. She hastily packed a saddlebag, passing herself in the mirror she kept in her room.

Lookin' good, she thought with a nod. I wonder how I'd look with goggles... I should ask Rarity about getting a pair. At the very least, I'd look more like a Wonderbolt. She shook her head and brought herself to focus on the task at hand. *The sooner I get this over with, the sooner I get some well-deserved sleep.* She glided down the stairs and went to open her front door.

“Going somewhere in a hurry?” said a familiar voice.

In an instant, Dash's fatigue was dispelled as she felt adrenaline course through her

veins. She turned, the hairs on the back of her neck standing up once more, to face-

“Twilight? How did you get up here?” she asked.

The unicorn sat at Dash’s kitchen table. “*Magic*,” she answered with a wink. “How else?”

“You have no idea how relieved I am to see you,” Dash leaned against the door and let herself sag down to the floor. “We saw flashes of something that wasn’t lightning over Canterlot, and then the moon turned red, which Rarity said meant that Equestria was at *war*. And we started to worry about whether or not you were alright, and everyone wanted to just send me to check up in the morning, but I decided I’d go check things out now instead. But, I guess now that you’re back, I don’t need to, right?”

“Wait, why are you back?” Rainbow Dash was speaking the words as she thought them. “You aren’t supposed to come home until tomorrow morning. *Did* something bad happen? Is Celestia alright? Why did Luna turn the moon red?”

Twilight was silent, so Rainbow Dash continued.

“What were those flashes over Canterlot? And why are you in my house so late? It’s polite to knock, you know!”

Twilight raised a hoof to silence her, and began to speak. “Your instincts are right, as usual, Rainbow Dash, something is wrong, and I... I...” She seemed to have trouble with the words. “I need your help,” she said finally.

“Hey Twilight, you know you can count on me. I’m the most dependable pony around!”

“I know, Rainbow Dash, which is why I came to you. You see, I’m going to give you something, something magical, and it’s going to try to hurt you. You need to accept it for me. It won’t *really* hurt you, of course, I would never do that. But it’s going to *feel* really unpleasant at first.”

“Accept it? what do you mean, *accept it*? Twi-”

“I can explain everything once it’s done, Dash, it’ll only take a couple of seconds, and then we can go get everypony else.” She got up from the table and moved towards Dash, who stood up and eyed her suspiciously. “Now are you with me, or not, Dash?”

“I...” her voice was filled with hesitation. The night was getting stranger and stranger, but Dash knew that she could count on Twilight to make sense of everything. Plus, if she backed down she’d seem like a sissy. Rainbow Dash was not a sissy. “Alright,” she said. “Do it.”

Twilight leaned forward and closed her eyes, focusing. After a short time, her horn began to emit a glow and a dark blob began to appear at its tip. She placed her horn just in front of Dash's chest.

"Alright," she said, sounding slightly excited, "are you ready?"

"I guess so. Just, do whatever it is you're going to do quickly, okay?"

"Oh don't worry, this will be over in seconds." She moved her horn forward so that it touched Dash's chest.

Immediately, the formless darkness began to take shape, sprouting writhing tendrils that crept over the surface of Rainbow Dash's coat. A tendril sunk through the fur and she felt it touch her skin. It felt... *wrong*. It was cold and nauseating and somehow felt purely malicious. Dash pulled away, and the tendrils withdrew to the orb of blackness on Twilight's horn.

"I can't!" she said quickly, "I'm sorry Twilight, but it's just so *wrong*. Can't you *feel* it?"

Twilight looked down, "I know it feels bad at first, Dash, but you have to trust me. I came to you because you're the Element of Loyalty, Dash, and the toughest person I know. I know it isn't fair for me to ask you to do this for me when you don't even know what you're doing. I'm sorry I asked you, though. I'm sorry for wasting your time." She moved to leave.

Rainbow Dash felt ashamed. "Twilight, I..." The unicorn looked up. "I'll do it," Dash finished.

Twilight perked up. "You have no idea how much this means to me, Rainbow Dash. I know it feels bad, but just, maybe try thinking about something else." She placed her horn against Rainbow Dash's chest again.

The tendrils once again began to crawl across her chest, spreading over her coat and then plunging through it and into her skin. The horrible feeling returned, and Rainbow Dash thought of the happiest feeling she knew: flying. *Air under my wings*, she thought, *wind whipping through hair*.

More and more tendrils found their way under and through skin, and the feeling of wrongness intensified. It was like the spell wanted to *hurt* her. It made her stomach turn.

Breaking through a cloud and getting showered with misty rainwater, doing a back flip and watching the whole world turn upside down. Passing another flyer to win a race.

The tendrils had now reached her neck and flank, and were creeping around to her back. They felt *cold* almost, and slimy, like worms trying to burrow under her skin. All the while

she could feel the spell's *presence*, wanting to hurt her, to *kill* her. She couldn't stand it any longer. She pulled away.

This time, the spell did not withdraw.

"Twilight!" Dash called frantically, clawing at the darkness that had spread all over her chest. "Stop it!" She manage to pull some of the spell away from herself . Where it had touched, her fur had turned black. "Twilight!" she cried. The tendrils that had come off were now spreading across her hooves. "Help me!"

The unicorn smiled. "Twilight?" She said, her voice becoming sinuous and low. "The neurotic little student girl who spends her time learning about *friendship* despite the fact that she's one of the most powerful beings in Equestria?"

Realization dawned too late. "You aren't her," she said, terrified.

The unicorn positively grinned.

Dash propelled herself forward, straight into the unicorn's chest. She slammed the unicorn backwards, onto the kitchen table, and wrapped her forelegs around her neck. "Where is she?!" she screamed. The darkness had worked it's way up to her forelegs and was almost at her jaw.

In a very Twilightsque facial expression, the unicorn raised an eyebrow.

The air sizzled and flashed, and suddenly Rainbow Dash was pinned the surface of the table by an unseen force. The mare-who-was-not-Twilight sat atop her, straddling her belly. She leaned down, placing her head beside Dash's and whispered in her ear.

"I was counting on you to be too stupid to realize that little fact before it was too late, and *lo and behold*, you did not fail to disappoint." She slowly drew her horn down along Dash's neck and brought the point to rest directly against the center of her chest. "*No*, you imbecilic little fool." Her voice had become a hiss.

"I am not Twilight Sparkle."

Rainbow Dash tried to move her arms, her legs, her wings, but they were all held back by the unicorn's incredibly strong magic. The tiny magical strands of darkness had converged, covering her entire body up to her neck. The nausea was overwhelming. She whimpered.

There was an earsplitting crack from the unicorn's horn, and Rainbow Dash was thrown to the ground as the table exploded beneath her. The darkness was forcing its way into her mouth, and was still rendered helpless by the not-Twilight's magic. She couldn't help herself:

she threw up, soaking the floor beside her with vomit.

“Oh, Twilight is in here,” somehow the unicorn was now standing over Rainbow Dash despite having just been on the table. “She’s screaming and sobbing to get out, to *help* you, as she watches through her own eyes while we suffer upon you a fate worse than death. I don’t even think she made this much noise when we murdered her beloved mentor. Why don’t you say hello, Rainbow Dash?”

The spell was worming its way into Rainbow Dash’s ears now, and covering her eyes with darkness. She tried to scream but the sound that came out was muffled and weak. There was only blackness...



Dash awoke on her kitchen floor surrounded by splinters, her head resting in a cold pool of her own vomit. A low buzzing noise seemed to come from inside her head, and her skin felt itchy. She noticed immediately that her coat had turned black, and her mane a dark grey. It must have been the spell.

The spell! she sat up suddenly. The unicorn was sitting close by on her kitchen floor.

“You blacked out for a bit there,” she said, examining a hoof.

Dash considered attacking the unicorn again, but thought against it. She felt so *weak*, and not-Twilight had crushed her before. Not to mention that if the unicorn was to be believed, Twilight was still in there somewhere.

“We’re going to try this again, Dash,” the unicorn said. “*Say hello to Twilight.*” The last sentence was spoken as a command.

Immediately the slight buzzing noise grew louder, and she found herself unable to think straight. It was as though a thousand parasprites were swarming around inside her head. It felt as though insects were crawling under her skin. She tried to remember what she had been doing, where she was, but her vision blurred and swam. *Say hello*, the buzzing noise wanted her to just say it. *Hello, Twilight*, it grew louder, more insistent.

Her back arched as the crawling sensation grew unbearable. Rainbow Dash tried to remember who Twilight was, but couldn't. She could hardly even remember her own name, let alone some stranger. Her entire mind clung to one thought, one purpose:

“Hello, Twilight,” she managed weakly.

Instantly the room snapped into focus around her, and the noise vanished.

I did it. Dash thought, I gave in. “Your spell,” she said quietly, “It makes me do what you want?”

Not-Twilight stood and circled Dash, then leaned in to whisper in her ear. “You fail to appreciate the true genius of it, Rainbow Dash.” Dash felt magic grip her shoulder. “You see, every second you disobey one of my instructions, my spell is going to take a small piece of your sanity.” Another bit of magic gripped Dash’s mane and turned her to face the unicorn. “And *eat it.*”

Her face was only inches away from Rainbow Dash’s. The pegasus wondered how she could have ever mistaken this unicorn for Twilight. She had her face, and her voice, but her eyes were filled with hatred and insanity. The unicorn spoke again, her voice sharp and biting, “Eventually it will *force* you to obey, and when that happens, you will become perfectly sane again.”

She jerked Rainbow Dash by her mane. “Do you not see the beauty of it, my pet? You will stumble along through insanity, lost and confused. And you will only truly be Rainbow Dash after you have surrendered your free will and done my bidding. You will experience moments of clarity *only* after you have succumbed and committed the most horrible atrocities, and you will spend those moments grieving for the innocent lives I will have you destroy. Your only escape will be to become a monster of your own volition.”

“Listen closely, pet.” the unicorn stood over her now. “You will cease to think of yourself as Rainbow Dash, and will no longer answer to that name. You will not take your own life.”

No. You can’t take my name. Rainbow Dash thought. The buzzing noise grew louder.

“You will not think of harming or hindering me in any way. You will do everything in your power to advance my goals as you see them. You will not try to circumvent any of my orders.”

No! Her skin began to itch.

“You will be cruel to others. You will show no compassion, and a day from now you will beat Pinkamena Diane Pie to within an inch of her life.”

A tear made its way down Rainbow Dash’s face. “Twilight...” she whispered.

“You will not call me Twilight. My name is Nihilus.”

“I wasn’t talking to *you*.”

Nihilus turned and regarded the pegasus with a look of amusement. The buzzing grew even louder, and she struggled to hold on.

“I’m sorry, Twilight...” she whimpered. “Sorry I wasn’t there... sorry... that I couldn’t save you.”

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[Chapter 3: A Beautiful Morning](#)

[A thanks goes out to The Prereaders](#)