

# In Character

By Grayshift

*Ponies belong to Hasbro,  
but stupid ideas are for everyone.*

In the basement recesses of the Canterlot Royal Archives, an epic and familiar war was being fought.

“Back, ye devil bunnies!” bellowed Lorem Ipsum, Master Archivist. His battleground for the day was the Sixth Unnecessary<sup>1</sup> Wing, and he had the upper hoof.

His tireless broom and remorseless dustpan decimated the encroaching forces of decay, his sinister featherduster and cruel polish a scourge upon their flank. He sang as he worked, the ancient pegasi war hymns and the oral poems of Equestrian history, to keep them fresh in his mind.

The light cavalry of his brush encountered heavy resistance as he pursued a retreating battalion of grime under a shelf. “Oh ho! A secret encampment of ye blaggards, I’ll get a promotion for th-- good grief!” No enemy was this, but a prisoner of war, an ancient and tattered book that had long been forgotten or presumed missing in action. The conflict forgotten, Lorem blew on the cover to learn the poor soldier’s name.

“Prophecies of Importance, by Neighstradamus. Hoofwritten in an ancient Equestrian dialect!” he mused with rising excitement, and carried the mildewed tome to a reading table. With the gentlest touch, he pried the cover open and began to translate the crabbed and faded script.

An hour later and with all the speed his old bones could muster, he was frantically boarding the first vehicle anywhere to Ponyville.

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“Awl right Twilight, we’re all here, you wanna tell us what this is about?” drawled Applejack with clear impatience. Pinkie Pie had finally arrived after leaving work early, bringing the total number of ponies in the library to seven – the six friends and an old, parchment-yellow unicorn with a book for a cutie mark. The old stallion had yet to introduce himself, feverishly absorbed in a dilapidated volume, and Twilight had refused to answer questions until everypony had arrived.

“Mr. Ipsum,” prompted Twilight, tapping Lorem’s shoulder gently. “Tell the others what you told me.”

“Oh! Oh, yes, yes... of course.” The shaky stallion wiped his brow, forcing an uneasy smile. “It’s bad news, I’m sorry to say. Just today I discovered this book you see here: ‘Prophecies of Importance,’ by Neighstradamus. One passage concerns the bearers of the Elements of Harmony.” He cleared his throat as if reciting.

“Three days before the thousand and third Summer Sun Celebration, the bearers of the Elements of Harmony shall fall or be corrupted by ancient spirits of evil. In time, they shall be redeemed.”

He looked over the stunned faces. “Well, it’s not all bad news. Apparently you get better!”

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<sup>1</sup> Because there were more than two.

Rainbow Dash was the first to recover, her ire rising along with her body as she drifted toward the ceiling. "That's it?! Nothing about how to prevent it? That's a load of bunk! There's no way *any* of us would go evil!"

"It does seem a drastically unlikely proposition, Mr. Ipsum," chimed in Rarity. "Perhaps it's a joke in bad taste?"

"You mean like putting hot sauce on ice cream? Because I tried that once and it actually wasn't that bad but I got realllllly sick later but that was okay because it meant I could eat more!" babbled Pinkie, earning a few stares.

Twilight tried to reorient the conversation. "I wouldn't discount Neighstradamus, Rarity. According to 'Prophets Through the Ages,' he's the only known case of anypony predicting what their cutie mark would be before they got one. Granted that he got his cutie mark in prognostication seconds later, but he's a verified source. Remember that it was a prophecy of Nightmare Moon's return that brought me to Ponyville in the first place."

Somber silence filled the library for a few moments. A bashful voice asked the inevitable: "What do we do? The one thousand and third Summer Sun Celebration is being held in Las Pegas this year, and that's in five days." Fluttershy trembled gently as she spoke.

Twilight's answer was grim and resolute, "We'll have to warn the town."

"About us."

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The next day, Twilight stepped down from the podium and away from the crowd's anxious faces, resuming her position by Lorem Ipsum's side on the backstage. Mayor Mare broke from a concerned reverie and retook the platform.

Lorem leaned down to comment in her ear, "They're taking the news rather better than I expected."

The mayor spoke to the crowd. "While this is shocking and grave news for our community, I hope we will all band together and show our support for our town's great pride, the bearers of harmony!" Hushed chatter broke out among the assembled population of Ponyville. There were a few scattered hoofclops against the ground that quickly died out.

"This sort of thing happens all the time in this town for some reason, I'm positive that everypony has complete confidence in us and that this won't get too out of hoof," whispered Twilight back with brittle brightness. She and Lorem made their way off stage as the mayor continued.

("And once they turn evil we can best show our support by opposing them to our dying breaths! In related news, the Ponyville Insurance Company has asked me to share that they are currently all out of town and are not accepting new clients at this time.")

"Let's go back to the library. Maybe the book has some clue about what we're about to be

fighting.” Lorem scrunched up his wrinkled muzzle in frustration at the thought of trawling through the Prophecies again, but had no counterargument.

(“As a final reminder, for anypony who wishes to have a living will notarized, my office will be open during regular hours tomorrow.”)

“Complete confidence.”

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The day of the prophecy had come, and a plague of cabin fever had beset the library. Twilight had erected every barrier, protective incantation and ward against evil she knew in preparation. The entire tree fairly glowed in the dusk light. Inside, ponies were bouncing off the walls.

Pinkie had defaulted to her own natural defense as well. Glossy black streamers had been hung in the library, and a hastily constructed banner read “Happy Going Evil Day!!!!!!” She was having no luck in interesting Applejack in various balloon animal minions.

For everypony else not absorbed in a manic cycle, the day had been nerve-wracking. Rainbow Dash ached to fly in the open air and spun lazy laps near the ceiling. Confronting fell terrors from beyond sounded exciting, but being late was utterly uncool. The other pegasus had taken refuge in a blanket under the ravaged party buffet table, engaged in a fitful rest.

Rarity lounged on the stairs, a forlorn and empty sketchpad by her side. She remained skeptical of the doom that had been pronounced upon their heads, but Lorem and Twilight were clearly getting on each others’ nerves enough without adding her own comments to the mix. The stress of withholding her doubtful concerns had banished any chance of inspiration striking in the oppressive, magically charged air.

The two unicorn scholars had poured over the tome all day at the buffet table, their low conversation frequently peaking with jabbed hooves and sour admissions. Their academic instincts dominated as they shot each others’ theories down like skeet, trying to draw even the most tenuous connections to the other prophecies contained in the book. So far, they had clearly had no luck.

Rarity had finally had enough. Interceding regally into the crossfire of another hot moment between Lorem and Twilight, she hovered a hoof over the dingy and speckled page holding the slim paragraph that spelled out their future.

“This is the one, is it?” Twilight and Lorem nodded in unison, releasing held breaths. “What’s this at the edge of the page?”

Lorem only glanced at the book before returning to his staring contest with Twilight. “It says ‘I wouldn’t mind some muffins about now.’ He wrote notes to himself in the margins.”

“If *Mr. Ipsum* is to be believed,” intoned Twilight icily, “The entire book is about as helpful. The prophecy above ours is about laundry. The prediction below it is how many coins will be tossed into the Canterlot fountains! Who writes stuff like that?!”

“Did somebody say muffins!” The library door opened to no great trepidation to the occupants. No horror from the stars had ever announced itself with muffins. In walked a gray pegasus, grinning happily around the handle of a hefty basket, packed with treats.

“Sugar,” admonished Applejack even as her nose and eyes drifted to the basket, “We warned the whole town to stay away tonight. It ain’t safe right now.”

“Oh, I won’t stay long! I just thought maybe muffins would help!” The bubble-marked mare smiled back at the looks she was getting. “What? Stranger things have happened,” she added defensively. She thumped the basket down on the table.

Several things happened in quick succession.

Under the table, Fluttershy jerked out of sleep with a shriek and shot straight up, only mildly inconvenienced by the heavy oak table above her. Plastered to the ceiling, she began breathlessly swearing, pleading to the air in a tiny voice that she wasn’t evil yet, didn’t want to be evil!

The book and basket of bakery went ballistic, leaving trails of dust and crumbs. The rising edge of the table caught Twilight under the chin and sent her sprawling backward, temporarily rendered as wall-eyed as their guest. Lorem missed getting cracked by the table by inches but fell back all the same.

“The book!” he hollered!

“The muffins!” wailed the mailmare!

“The **knives!**” screamed Applejack as the cutlery and plates began to crash and embed themselves in the wood around her.

Rainbow Dash sighed. Well, it wasn’t a horrible demon to defeat but it would have to do. With a burst of her wings she rocketed into the parabolic mess.

Five seconds later Pinkie Pie re-entered the room from the kitchen. Rarity was tending to Twilight’s bloody nose. Rainbow Dash was standing cocksure in the center of the room, a pristine basket of muffins in one hoof and a tawdry book in the other. Attached to her leg was a worshipful gray pegasus. Fluttershy was still on the ceiling, babbling silently and staring at nothing. The table had crash-landed upside down next to Applejack, who was trying to pry out the fork that had pinned her hat to the wall.

“If you guys are gonna take the party to the next level at least wait for everypony to be there!” huffed Pinkie as she spun and marched back into the kitchen.

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A short clean-up later, Twilight’s library looked semi-respectable once again. They had seen the bearer of muffins off with quiet sighs of relief. And they had to admit, they were really good

muffins.

Lorem chewed thoughtfully, flipping back and forth through the book once more.

He stopped.

He stared.

He started to laugh so hard he nearly choked on his muffin. Aware of the stares he was getting but helpless to stop, he held up a hoof to stop Applejack from patting his back anymore before she killed him.

Wheezing gently, he spun the book around so that the mares could see what was so funny. The dense, twisting script looked exactly the same to them, but Twilight wore a puzzled frown. Tears shone in his eyes as he explained, "You have more to thank your friend with the delightful eyes for than muffins. The prophecy -- it's a mistranslation! That little incident must have shaken some dirt off; this dialect is extremely finicky. Let me tell you what it *really* says." He cleared his throat.

"Three days before the thousand and third Summer Sun Celebration, the bearers of the Elements of Harmony will enjoy muffins. They will wash it down with milk."

Everypony's eyes swiveled to the half-full basket that stood as a silent accusation. Lorem slammed the book shut triumphantly, hoof scraping against the cover and revealing a word hidden by a smudge.

"Neighstradamus's 'Prophecies of **Little** Importance,'" he sighed. "I suppose that's why nopony has ever heard of it before now."

Fluttershy asked tremulously, "So we're not going evil?"

Rainbow Dash glowered at the chortling scholar. "I dunno, I think I feel a little evil coming on right about now..."

"Oh no!" gasped Fluttershy, gripping the hovering Dash's hind hooves. "Stay good, Rainbow, stay good!"

"I'm... I'm joking, Flutters. You can let go."

Lorem continued smiling brightly, both in relief and in chagrin at his own foolishness. "I'm so, so sorry to have misled you fine young mares. Can you forgive me? I should have done some proper restoration work on the book before rushing here, but with the prophecy deadline so close..."

"Ah shoot, you were jus' trying to help us, Mr. Ipsum. I do thank ya for wanting to stay with us even when we were s'posed to be turned evil tonight." Applejack offered her hoof to Lorem, accepting his apology.

“Applejack is right, it was an honest mistake. I’m just glad it’s over!” said Twilight.

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As Lorem Ipsum boarded the late night train back to Canterlot, Prophecies of Little Importance stowed safely away in a saddlebag, he couldn’t help but laugh. The dust had scored a decisive victory, but he would yet win the war!

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It wasn’t over.

It was the afternoon of the Summer Sun Celebration. The past three days since the false prophecy had been a merry hell for the six friends. By unspoken agreement they now gathered on a hilltop far from Ponyville’s own modest festivities, and the pleasant air and blue skies were not soothing any tempers.

“It ain’t right!” hawed Applejack. “Past two days I woke up and found Applebloom watchin’ me while I slept with a baseball bat! I asked her what she was doin’ and she said Granny gave it to her.”

“I know what you mean, dearie. The spa has barred their doors against me and the Boutique is deserted! This simply cannot go on!”

“We did tell everypony that the prophecy was just a mistranslation, I’m sure they’ll come around in time,” Twilight said doubtfully. The image of a certain zebra paraded through her memory.

“Oh, so you’ve had visitors to the library since then?” jabbed Rarity.

“Well..... no,” admitted Twilight.

Of the six, Pinkie Pie had been hit hardest. Accustomed to spreading cheer or at least puzzlement through the population, finding mistrust and suspicion on every face but her closest friends had devastated her. Party-withdrawal syndrome was not pretty to watch. Fluttershy, too, found the stares hard to take. Her animal friends had stuck by her side but in dealing with ponies she had regressed to levels Twilight hadn’t seen since shortly after she’d met the yellow pegasus.

Rainbow Dash was having other problems. “They’re letting me win! Every time I set up a race they just let me win!”

Fluttershy gave up trying to tempt Angel Bunny with a carrot. “Um... don’t you always win anyway?”

“Well, yeah, but that’s because I’m the fastest and not because once I have a decent lead they turn around and fly the other way! And they’ve taken me off the weather team for ‘scheduling reasons,’” she scornfully punctuated with wing quotes. “I don’t even have a schedule!”

Applejack snorted derisively. "Seems t'me that we'd've been better off if that prophecy *had* been true and got it over an' done with. Mah own brother won't even talk t'me no more, just says 'eeeyup' and 'eenope!'"

Twilight looked up from a daydream of crafting a proper schedule for Dash. "That may not be such a bad idea. What if we *could* make the prophecy come true?"

Dash scratched behind an ear. "We already ate the muffins, Twilight. There are no more muffins. I don't think all of us drank milk but does it really matter?"

"No, I mean the original prophecy! What if we were to *pretend* to have gone evil, and then get redeemed? Then the townsfolk wouldn't be suspicious of us anymore!"

Doubtful looks were passed around. Twilight pressed her point, "Or do you want to go back and just wait for things to blow over?"

Everypony had to confess that they did not. And very shortly thereafter, they had A Plan.

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*Just think of it as a... a fashion show, Rarity!* she thought to herself. But tonight's show might well turn out to be the strangest of a career that had already included several interesting nights.

She was tired, very tired, but didn't feel it. When inspiration struck it could not be stopped, and all night she had been a whirlwind of needles, scissors and cloth. Then there had been the makeovers in the morning. So much of this plan depended on her skill at making this look real, and she had done her best in designing outfits and personas for her friends. Anyway, the bags under her eyes probably enhanced her costume. She picked up the microphone; it was time to start.

For the fourth time in a week the population of Ponyville had gathered. Content with a Summer Sun Celebration that had gone off without a hitch despite the dire rumors circulating about the local celebrities, they now gathered around the stage once more.

"Gracious mares and gentlecolts of Ponyville!" came the amplified voice of Rarity over the PA system. "Allow me to introduce..."

"Your new **overlords!**"

Twilight hit the spotlights, searing a path for the first revelation of the evening.

"You once knew her as Ponyville's premiere party pony, but is she still so sweet? You'd have to be as crazy as she is to want to find out! Introducing the Pink Witch, Discord's own disciple, Chaos Incarnate Pin-- oh sweet sunlight, *what is she wear--*" Backstage, Twilight disabled the sound system while Rarity composed herself.

Pinkie leapt into the spotlight, grinning before the astonished stares. Rarity's subtle arts had given Pinkie's boundless smile a terrifying aspect. An application of caramel dye had stained her



teeth to a jaundiced yellow, an effect further enhanced by a lightly traced network of fine fracture lines in her eyeteeth. A single colored contact lens had turned a bright blue eye as dangerously yellow as her teeth. Pinkie's untamed hair was streaked with deeper crimson swirls and semi-contained within a quilted shawl, clasped in front with a wooden carving of Discord's own head. Pinkie's dress was as chaotic and piecemeal as the shawl, stitched together from a scrap of everything that had been available in Rarity's workshop. The riot of colors, fabrics and shapes was hemmed by a mismatched collection of tassels and bells that added jarring noise to her every movement.

What had sent Rarity into conniptions was an unplanned addition of Pinkie's own devising. Framing the stained and fractured grin was a fuzzy pink goatee. "Who's ready to party with Pinkie?" she cajoled to the crowd. No matter how cheerful and genuine her tone, that wide and leering smile bespoke of deep seated madness. The front line of the crowd tried to back away as she swept it over them, stroking the goatee mischievously.

The spotlight over Pinkie dimmed mercifully, though her toothsome grin continued to radiate unease through the gloom. Another light sparked to life, stabbing upward into the sky. Rarity's voice thrummed from the speakers once more.

"Pegasi of Ponyville, hold your breath for the air you breathe is no longer your own! Her whims are weather, and whether you weather her whims will depend on whether you work your withers to weariness for Stormlord Rainbow Dash!" Rarity gasped for a breath of her own after the mammoth string of 'W's.

The cone of light cast an exaggerated silhouette of the hovering figure against the low hanging sky. Harsh illumination cast sharp contrast on the folds of the white toga ensemble and the displeased furrow of her brow, but most astonishing was her billowing cloak of swirling black cloud. It rippled with a life of its own as she descended. A corona of St. Elmer's fire<sup>2</sup> backlit her chromatic mane in a glorious halo, crackling along the repurposed laurel from her Grand Galloping Gala dress. Alighting on the stage, she stamped a forehoof down with a peal of thunder.

Head raised imperiously, she challenged the crowd. "You want some of this, huh?!" She stretched back into the recesses of her cloak and thrust forward, a bolt of lightning streaking over the heads of the crowd from her outstretched hoof, impacting against the side of a house. The scorch marks hissed. This cloak Twilight had created was *so cool*, she was having the hardest time keeping up her ferocious scowl.

The second spotlight faded into blackness, though the storming cape continued to outline the cyan pegasus's form on stage with silver light. Rarity gave herself one last check in the mirror before lifting the microphone and sauntering out onto the darkened stage, voice low and throaty. "Mares and... gentlecolts," she purred, savoring the words. Soft underlighting welled up. "Welcome to a whole new world of fashion, for I am vampire mistress Rarity."

All black silk, white flesh, glinting fangs and hungry gaze, Rarity strode to the very forefront of the stage, the artfully torn and ragged train of her simple and slinky black dress drifting behind

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<sup>2</sup> Because it sticks to things.

her. Not something she would have ever considered wearing in public before now, but these were not usual circumstances. Her lips quirked into the barest hint of a come-hither smile, highlighting the gleaming fangs further still. She turned back to take her spot in the lineup with a pause to glance back, licking her deep crimson lips. A graceful kick flashed a moonlight-pale hind leg and reoriented her dress's train, sending a wave of cloying perfume over the audience. She noted with some satisfaction that more than a few colts were picking up their jaws.

The microphone hovered where she had left it.