

Pony Age: Origins

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Chapter 1 - The Harrowing

*“And thus the light of Celestia has darkened,
With each trot you take in My hall,
Marvel at perfection, for it is fleeting,
You have brought Sin to Canterlot
And Doom upon all the world.”*
-Canticle of Coltenides, 8:13

The Chantry teaches us that it is the hubris of ponies that brought the Ponyspawn into our world. The Unicorns of the ancient Imperium had sought to usurp the seat of Celestia, Canterlot, but instead they destroyed it with their greed and hatred. They were cast from Canterlot, blackened by their own dark desires, just as they blackened the golden city itself into the hellish Black Canter. The unicorns of the Imperium returned as monsters, the first of the Ponyspawn, and quickly became an unstoppable scourge across the land.

The Donkey Kingdoms were the first to fall, and from the Dark Tunnels the Ponyspawn waged bloody war against the ponies again and again, until we were near obliteration.

Until the Grey Wardens came. Mares and Stallions from the earth pony, pegasi, unicorns and donkey kingdoms banded together formed the Grey Wardens, sacrificed everything to hold back the evil tide... and prevailed against the darkness. For four Blights, did the Grey Wardens wage war against the ponyspawn, and for many years after those invasions did we stand ever vigilant against the rising tide of darkness.

It has been four hundred years since we have claimed victory, and kept sentry against the Ponyspawn. We have waited for the return of the evil tide, but those who celebrated our names have forgotten the sacrifice of the Wardens. We are few now, and our dire warnings to armies, peoples and kings have gone unheeded. The ponyspawn are returning under the shadow of despair.

For it is too late. I have seen the darkness in the skies. May Celestia's light protect us all.

On the cliff overlooking Lake Darkwater stands the Unicorn Tower, the first and greatest defense against untrained magic. This is the only place in Equestria where the unicorns may study and practice their craft in safety from themselves and those who would persecute them. The Tower is a jail as much as it is a refuge, as the unicorns are always under the careful watch of their guardians and judicators, the earth pony Templar Order.

This is the only home Twilight Sparkle has ever known. Found to be sensitive and powerful to magic as a young filly, she has lived in the Tower as an apprentice all her life. Yet her apprenticeship nears its end, with her final challenge: The Harrowing.

Inside the Harrowing Chamber, the templar commander, Hornsheild, looked on as Twilight Sparkle was brought before him and First Enchanter Wise Eyes. Alongside Twilight was her young ward and infant dragon Spike, the result of a magical test of her abilities on a dragon egg. The violet pony appeared strong before the templars and her master of magic, dressed in her finest mage robes all clean and proper, but beneath her strong expression her nerves were wracked as she looked around the assembled unicorns and templars.

All her life she had studied magic and to be a safe and responsible unicorn, but all that could come crashing down if she failed the Harrowing. Success in this test was the only option, as no one failed the Harrowing and returned to tell the tale. Just as Twilight had studied extensively on the arcane, so too did the templar overseers constantly remind her of the dangers of magic, how it acted like a beacon to the denizens of the Fade.

The Fade. The very source of magic and dreams. Once thought to be the home of Celestia and Luna themselves and their benevolent spirits who watched over all pony kind, it was now well known to be the hunting ground of terrible demons as well as horrifying nightmares. All unicorns ventured into the Fade when they slept, regardless of magical ability, and while Twilight's experience in the realm of dreams was brief, knowing that she was going into the Fade in a much more direct manner did not help her nerves settle.

“I don’t know if I’m ready Spike,” Twilight said softly to the baby dragon, “All my studies on the Fade, on demons, I don’t know if I’m going to make it through this.”

“Well it’s not like those templar bullies are going to let you back down now,” Spike said, “Just remember not to let those demons get under your skin. Literally, if all those dusty books you read are right.”

Twilight swallowed before stepping forward as the grey and grizzled stallions eyed her cautiously. The templar commander was a stern yet fair pony, simply doing his duty to protect the unicorns from themselves as well as the rest of Equestria. Wise Eyes kept true to his name, teaching the young unicorns how to practice their magic in useful and safe ways. Hornshield’s cutie mark, a templar shield with an of the sun, and Wise Eyes’, an eye in the centre of a book, shined in the torchlight as they watched the apprentice unicorn.

Hornshield nodded to Wise Eyes before beginning. “Magic exists to serve ponies and never to rule over them. Thus spoke the sister of Celestia, Luna, as she struck down the Magister Lords of the Unicorn Imperium’. Twilight Sparkle, your ability with magic is a grand gift, to be celebrated by those in Unicorn Tower. It is also a heavy burden, to be kept under the watchful eye of the templar. This is necessary as demons from the realm of dreams, the Fade, will attempt to claim your body and mind to enter our world.”

“This is the purpose of the Harrowing,” First Enchanter Wise Eyes continued, his long grey mane slightly swaying against his robes, “To determine if you have the will to resist the demons of the Fade. All unicorns are susceptible to the monstrosities beyond the Veil of our world and the dream world, and the Harrowing is to challenge your magical aptitude and personal courage in the face of terror. You will surely encounter such a beast in the Harrowing, but I am certain that you succeed, Twilight Sparkle. I have my utmost faith in you.”

“Of course!” Spike piped in, “She is the most gifted and talented Unicorn in the Tower. She’ll get through this Harrowing no sweat! What could possibly go wrong?”

“Much, young dragon,” Hornshield said, “Are you prepared to undergo the Harrowing, Twilight Sparkle? Know that if you fail, the templars... I will perform my duty, as we swore to the Chantry. You will die.”

Twilight swallowed again, but saw a sad yet iron gaze in Hornshield’s eyes. He had seen many failures, no doubt, and prayed to Celestia that Twilight would not join them. “I’m ready,” she answered, looking towards the centre of the chamber, “Let’s go.”

Spike was told to stay back by the other templars as Twilight, Wise Eyes and the templar commander moved toward the centre of the room. “This is lyrium,” Hornsheild explained, “The very essence of magic. Once you have touched the lyrium with your horn, you will be in the Fade and the Harrowing will begin.”

Twilight was very familiar with lyrium and most of what the strange substance was capable of. There were still many mysteries surrounding the essence of magic, such as how it came to be and why it had to be mined by donkeys in the Dark Tunnels, but its uses were well into the hundreds. Unicorns used lyrium as it gave them a "boost" to the potency of their magic, and it was the necessary component for enchanting magical spells to items and weapons. It was a rare substance and heavily controlled by the Chantry. Twilight could still remember the dirty looks templars would give any unicorn that passed by the storage rooms where the Tower's lyrium reserves were held.

“Keep your wit sharp inside the Fade, young filly,” Wise Eyes said, “Every unicorn must undergo this test. Remember your studies, that the Fade is a dream world. What you see may frighten you, but the strength of your mind and soul will protect you.”

Twilight Sparkle nodded. “I will not fail you, First Enchanter, Templar Commander.” She gave one last look to Spike for support before continuing to the lyrium. Spike gave Twilight a thumbs-up, showing the unicorn one last measure of reassurance.

Looking down at the blue shining fluid that swirled in the cup, Twilight called on her magic to lift a stream towards her horn. As the lyrium touched her horn, she felt a surge of energy enter her body as tremendous power surged from her horn into her very bloodstream. Her horn and eyes glowed for a moment, her mouth wide open in a silent scream before all was engulfed in light.

* * *

Twilight awoke to find herself in a dreamscape like no other. Everything around her was a twisted mockery of the real world, just as the books in the Tower's library had said it would be. Like all unicorns, she experienced the strange nature of the Fade in her sleep, but this was the first time she had ever seen the dream world with such clarity and detail. It was bizarre and everything like what she had read in her books and tomes, yet she was still unprepared to actually face the reality of it all. Twilight [laughed despite herself. *Reality* was subjective here, of all places. She would have to make her trek through this world carefully.

The land itself seemed to shift and change shape on a whim, and various objects such as closets

and trees and pots floated harmlessly in the sky, only to disappear in a blink. Nothing was real, and everything was permitted in the Fade, whether simply a facsimile by a dreamer in their bed, or a deadly illusion crafted by a ravenous demon. They were likely watching Twilight now, licking their lips and waiting for the moment to strike.

“No use standing around here,” Twilight muttered to herself, “If only I knew where here was.”

“A lot of hopefuls wonder that whenever they come here,” said a voice from nearby, “And so quickly do they get lost and stuck here, just as I did. It's really quite the pity.”

Twilight let a squeak escape her as she heard the voice, looking around for somepony, anypony. She was supposed to be alone in the Fade, as much as it came to other unicorns. As she looked around, then up, then finally down, all that stood before her was a small flower. She lowered her muzzle towards the flower, only to be knocked back by a flash of light emanating from the plant. The flower glowed bright until it transformed into the image of a green and white-maned unicorn filly, perhaps barely younger than Twilight.

“I hope you finished all your affairs back in the real world,” she said, looking Twilight over and clearly unimpressed by what she saw as she raised an unimpressed eyebrow, “Because you are not getting out of here. The templars and the Chantry have doomed you, just like they did to me when it was my turn in the Harrowing. It's not fair! We study and train all our lives, only to put ourselves in danger to the Fade by the templars and the Chantry!”

Twilight looked on at the lost filly with pity. “I'm so sorry,” she said sincerely, “Is there anything I can do to help you?”

She shook her head, eyes focused on the ground. “There is nopony to help. My body is likely long gone from the land of the living. I have nowhere to return. You may call me... Flower, if you wish. I have been in that form for so long, it seems fitting. I don't even remember my real name.”

That sent chills into Twilight's spine. To be trapped in the Fade for such a long time would have been maddening. How long had it been since Flower had failed the Harrowing? How had she coped with living in the dreamlands of ponies and the nightmares created by the demonic denizens? Was this to be Twilight's fate as well if she could not find a way to escape in time? *No*, Twilight told herself, *I won't fail like she did. I will get out of the Fade.*

“You said you were here for a long time,” Twilight asked, hoping for an answer to the one question that burned within her, “Do you know what I have to do escape the Fade?”

Flower looked at Twilight and narrowed her eyes. There was jealousy in those eyes, Twilight could see that with the way Flower was sizing her up. Yet there was something more, something she could not quite put her hoof on. She would have to be cautious around the trapped unicorn. Perhaps it truly was madness after being stuck in the Fade for Celestia knew how long. “You have to find the demon lord in this realm. Confront the demon and defeat it. I was beaten yet I escaped, but as you can see, that sealed my fate as much as if the demon took over my body. You can seek out other spirits in the Fade, and they might be able to help you. Perhaps you will find success where I did not.”

Twilight looked around the Fade, trying to find a path or a doorway or anything that could lead her out of this small island in the middle of chaos. She spotted a door standing alone near a ridge and approached it with caution. Odd enough for a door to stand by itself with no walls or means of bracing, stranger still that as Twilight looked behind it, there was nothing there to show that the door would lead anywhere. As she held up a hoof to open the door, she could hear Flower’s voice behind her. “Remember that the Fade is a dream world. Your thoughts make things real. But if you are not careful, not prepared, the demons will make the world real for you.”

Taking in a deep breath, Twilight stepped through the door. When she looked again, she found herself now somewhere completely different. Instead of a simple floating island with a crazed pony-flower, she was now in a grand cathedral dedicated to the Alicorn Sisters. Twilight marvelled at the workings around her. Intricate statues of Celestia and Luna adorned the great hall, while beautiful stained glass windows allowed the full spectrum of colour to bathe the area in breathtaking light.

Standing before her was an altar to Luna and Celestia made from the purest alabaster and obsidian. Both goddesses appeared majestic and regal, standing tall and proud as they watched over their altar. On the altar was a ring that resonated with magical energy the likes Twilight had felt from simply being near Wise Eyes' arcane staff. It was made of gold, the light reflecting off the metal like sunlight while a brilliant star ruby sat in the middle, pulsing with power. Twilight had never seen a piece of jewelry as fine as this one, enchanted or not. If she could wear that ring around her horn, Twilight was certain her own abilities would be strengthened tenfold.

She trotted up to the altar and gazed at the beautiful ring with longing. It was so beautiful, so powerful, all Twilight wanted was to place the ring around her horn. As she looked, a feminine voice sang to her from the statues of the goddesses, lyrical and welcoming. “Take the ring, young filly. It will help you escape the Fade much faster; it will help you become a brilliant unicorn. When you escape, the magic of the ring will remain within you, allowing you to have anything you desire.”

“Anything I desire,” the violet unicorn echoed as she looked on at the ring. Her horn began to glow, lifting the ring on high to place it around her horn. With the power of the ring, she could lay claim to all those books locked away in the depths of the tower and guarded by the strongest of the templars. All those rare books would be hers and hers alone!

She shook her head, letting the magic cease and the ring fall back onto the altar. “No,” Twilight said out loud, to tell off the voice in her head and to reaffirm her own position, “All I want is to complete this test. This ring is a shortcut, and I didn’t study all my life just to accept a shortcut here. Thanks but no thanks. I’m just going to continue on my own.”

Silence was Twilight's answer until the voice spoke again, each word spoken with venom and contempt. “Desire does not rule you,” it said, and the altar disappeared in a flash, being replaced by a door similar to the one Twilight used to enter this region of the Fade. The cathedral vanished as well, leaving Twilight alone with a door amidst the dreamscape. With a smile, Twilight walked through the open door towards the next challenge.

Again Twilight found she was in a new area of the Fade, but this place was darkly lit with faint candle lights and a haze in the air that made it difficult to see. She was in a massive bedchamber, the likes Twilight had only heard about from the templars. There was a gigantic ornate bed in the middle of the chamber, made from expertly sculpted mahogany and fitted with the most plush pillows and warm blankets. It made her little bed in the Tower's dormitory look like a joke. On the other side of the room, well past the bed was another door the same as the ones Twilight had passed through to navigate the Fade.

With her goal in sight, Twilight made her way towards the door, though she found each step to be agonizingly slow as fatigue set into her body. As she walked, Twilight’s eyes became heavy and she let out a tired yawn. “Something in the air must be making me... sleepy...” Her hoofsteps grew slower as she continued, but the sight of the door on the other side helped keep her awake. This was likely another test by a demon, one that was increasingly difficult to resist the more steps she took.

“Your body is so weak, young filly,” spoke a new voice, one that sounded as sleepy as Twilight felt, “Do you not want to stop and rest for a moment? Take a load off your hooves and treat yourself to a nice nap. Look, there is even a wonderful bed to rest on, with fluffy pillows and soft blankets. Much better than those hard uncomfortable bunks in the Tower, are they not?”

Twilight looked at the large bed with longing. It did look wonderful to sleep on, and she was very tired. The door was too close to ignore though, and all she had to do was trot a few more

steps. As soon as she got near the door moved away, the walls stretching farther and farther into the distance until the door appeared to be leagues away from her. The bed was still uncomfortably close.

“Come now,” the voice said again, “Go and sleep. You need plenty of rest to make it through the Fade. Just a short nap.”

“No!” Twilight shouted, hoping a surge of energy would be enough to keep her hooves moving, “I did not come here for a nap! I’m going to make it through that door, and your comfy beds won’t stop me.” Despite her fatigue, Twilight urged herself into a gallop, charging towards the door.

The voice spoke again as the door opened, annoyance clear in its tone. “You are not hindered by sloth.” With her head low, Twilight rushed into the door, galloping at full tilt until she saw she was going to crash into a massive table leg. She skidded to a stop, narrowly missing the leg of an enormous table as bright lights illuminated the new room she had entered. Tables filled the bright room, and the aroma of delicious food encompassed her.

Twilight looked around, noticing that the sleepy feeling from the previous room was gone, this time replaced by a resounding hunger. As she got to her hooves, Twilight looked on as she saw that the tables were adorned in mountains of food of all varying types. Fresh fruit and baked sweets as far her eyes could see, the smell of the bounty wafting towards her. She absentmindedly wiped some drool from her lip as her stomach growled in hunger.

“Travelling the Fade must be making you very hungry, young filly,” said a new voice, boisterous and jovial, “Come and sit at the table and feast! Cakes, pies, apples and oranges, all you can ever hope to consume!”

The food did look delicious, and Twilight had never seen such a plentiful bounty even during the feasts for Celestia and Luna. Yet as she looked on at the stockpiles of food stacked high beyond, all imagining, she stopped for a moment. Hunger was never a problem in the Tower, and while the food lacked taste, there was always plenty of it. Something as simple as hunger could be ignored in the Fade, where the food had no tangibility.

“Thank you for your offer,” she said, bowing her head, “But I am not hungry. I still have to make my way through the Fade, but I’ll be fine for a little while longer.”

“Muffins and cupcakes, savoury juices and nectars! Eat my friend, eat and be merry! The Fade is not going anywhere! Just one bite, I beseech you!”

Twilight kept her head low, eyes closed as she ignored the hunger pangs in her stomach. *This is just like what you read about the Fade*, she told herself, *Flower was wrong. I didn't have to face one demon, but three: Desire, Sloth, and now Hunger. The books spoke of two more, Rage and Pride. I just have to resist a little while longer.*

Demons of the Fade had their own hierarchy, with a strange dichotomy of how they could enter the real world. Rage and Hunger demons were the weakest, yet the demons that had the easiest time breaching the Veil and crossing over. Sloth and Desire demons had a more difficult time manifesting, and needed strong unicorns to possess. Pride Demons were the strongest of them all, and needed only the mightiest mages to become real.

The demons of all kinds were the predators of the Fade, and the chief reason all unicorns were taught combative magic such as arcane blasts and powerful shields. While Twilight was always a capable student, combat magic always left a bad taste in her mouth. It was lethal magic, the kind the Chantry and her instructors always warned her about. Yet as she stood in the Fade and confronted by demons and their trickery, she was beginning to realize more and more why she needed to know a grand assortment of techniques of dealing with demons. For now, as long as no demon materialized, she did not need to engage in battle.

The food and the tables vanished as the demon snarled in the back of her mind. "You are not driven by hunger," said the demon. When Twilight opened her eyes, she expected another door to appear and take her to the next test. She let out a sharp gasp as instead of a door like before, the entire area was filled with fire. Twilight moved away from the flames only to be blasted by the heat. Flames roared all around her, and escape was impossible. Horn glowing with magic, Twilight raised a shield to protect herself.

Twilight turned to look for a way out of the flames, stepping away from the fires as they burned closer to her. The heat was beginning to make her sweat until her attention was pulled away by a piercing cry. "Help!" shouted a familiar voice, "Twilight! Help me, please!"

"Spike!" Twilight looked around for a path to follow Spike's voice past the relentless fire, fuelled seemingly from the Fade itself. *That's it!* She remembered the words of Wise Eyes, that everything in the Fade is based on thought, on dreams. She just needed to keep calm and twist the Fade into her own image, against the will of demons. *I just need to think and...*

Twilight concentrated her thoughts on quenching the fire, to push the fire back and give her a path towards Spike. The flames relented revealing a path through the Fade. She galloped hard through the burning landscape until she came upon Spike who was burnt, battered, and barely

breathing. Standing over him was what could only be described as fire given true shape, a large blob of molten liquid with hateful eyes and long arms. The rage demon stared at Twilight a moment before hissing and roaring, flaring for a moment in a hope to intimidate her.

“Leave Spike alone!” shouted Twilight as she lowered onto her front hooves, horn raised and surging with power. The demon laughed as it slammed one burning hand onto the baby dragon.

“Your friend will die here, young filly!” the demon roared, “Unless you plan to stop me! Come at me with all your anger, or watch as I reduce this infant to cinders!”

Spike screamed as the demon continued to pound him with his burning hands. “Please Twilight, help me!”

Twilight moved to attack, but the flames around the demon surged forward to block her. “You foal!” the demon laughed, “You will not save your friend from my fire, and soon I will come for you! Attack me with all your hatred, all your fury! Give in to frenzy, or I will kill him! Slowly! Painfully!”

Spike’s screams echoed in her skull as she watched. She wanted to get near, to simply bash her way to the rage demon until it was nothing. Frustration built up in Twilight as she paced the outside of the fiery barrier. Spike was a little brother to her, thanks to her magic playing the key role in hatching him from the egg that not even the First Enchanter's spells could coax open. If that demon hurt a single scale...

It was then that Twilight realized that for the Harrowing test, Spike would not be allowed to go near the lyrium in the chamber. The test was supposed to be taken by the unicorn alone, and as headstrong as the dragon was, he would not do anything to endanger his friend especially during this final test.

“That is not Spike,” Twilight said, pointing a hoof at the rage demon, “He couldn’t come here into the Fade. He would never have been able to touch the lyrium! Nice try. You demons think you so diabolically devious, but you’re nothing but devilish dunces!”

The being sharing Spike’s appearance began to melt away into a pool of lava, until much to Twilight’s surprise formed another rage demon. The two roared in unison as they surged towards her with destructive intent. She balked at the prospect of actually fighting these demons, yet they were leaving little choice in the matter. They would kill her if she was not quick with a powerful attack of her own.

With a spell in her mind and magic twisting in her horn, she called on the very energies of the Fade to fuel her casting. She recalled a spell of magical cold in the violent torrents of a blizzard, useful for freezing enemies such as the demons she was encountering. Soon the mystical ice hailed down on the demons from out of thin air, their cries reverberating in the burning hall, their bodies froze solid. Twilight looked over the frozen demons, noticing steam rising as the rage demons seethed in their icy tombs.

With swift kicks from her hind hooves, Twilight shattered both rage demons. Once they had been splintered, Twilight took a moment to look around as the fires around her finally died. Her magic had been the cause of the demons' defeat, yet despite her victory she did not feel well. She was still trapped in the Fade. The familiar door she searched for in the other areas of the Fade appeared, and with a sigh she trotted through.

Twilight blinked as she stepped through the door and into familiar territory. She was somehow back in the Harrowing chamber. Hornshield and Wise Eyes were beaming at her, with Spike in his corner leaping and cheering her name. "Is it over?" she asked, surprised that the Harrowing was now complete.

"It is, dear student," Wise Eyes answered, "You have completed the Harrowing, the fastest of any unicorn I might add."

"Such a prodigy amongst ponies," Hornsheild chimed in, still smiling, "Never have I seen such skill in magic! Such bravery in a young filly!"

"You saved me from the Fade!" sang a familiar voice. Flower cantered about, looking amazed at Twilight. "I even have my body back and everything!"

Twilight felt herself blush with all the praise. "It really wasn't anything special. Just the Harrowing, like all unicorns have to go through." Something did not feel right. All the accolades from the templar commander and the First Enchanter felt wrong. Almost forced. Also seeing Hornshield smile... Twilight had never seen that before. Hornsheild was always so dour, the fact that he was smiling was unnerving. Flower had said that her body was gone, long since died since how long ago she was trapped in the Fade, yet she was now whole. No magic could bring a pony back from the dead, no matter how powerful the spell or the unicorn behind it.

"This is just another illusion," Twilight said softly, looking around at all the faces, "I'm still in the Fade."

"Nonsense, dear student," said the image of Wise Eyes, "You have left the Fade. Do you not

want to relish in your victory? Do you not take pride at how powerful you have become, so quickly?"

"Of course I am proud of my accomplishments," Twilight retorted, "But I also know that I did not make it here on my own. My teachers, Spike, even the templar showed me the wonders and dangers magic has in this world."

In a moment faster than the blink of an eye, the Harrowing chamber was replaced by the first dreamscape that Twilight had entered in the Fade. Standing before her was Flower, but with a stern expression on her face. Twilight stood her ground as Flower appeared ready to confront Twilight, only to watch as Flower scoffed at her.

"It seems not desire, sloth, hunger, rage or... pride, can subsume your spirit," The voice was cold and callous, not at all like that of the pony Twilight had met, "You will be an interesting prize for a demon one day, though regretfully that day is not today. Know this..."

With those words 'Flower's' body began to grow and shift, turning into a pony demon of unspeakable horror. Twisted and reptilian, the pride demon looked down on Twilight as the Fade began to shimmer all around her. "Know that you will be watched from the Fade from this day onwards. And one day, you will be claimed. Go, young mare. Go into your world, into your 'freedom'."

The demon laughed as a blinding light from the demon's corrupted horn engulfed Twilight. With a groan, she opened her eyes to find that she was back in the Harrowing chamber with Wise Eyes and Hornshield standing over her, both with looks of concern. Wise Eyes' horn glowed bright, connecting his magic with Twilight's, checking for any signs of demonic corruption. It hurt just to move as Twilight felt her entire body scream in pain.

"Is she possessed, First Enchanter?" Hornsheild asked. He and the other templars were looking down on Twilight, a few already reaching for their swords. Wise Eyes shook his head,

"No, Hornsheild, she is fine. Thank Celestia, child, you gave us such a fright." As Twilight got back up to her hooves, she felt cold and shivered. "Worry not, Twilight Sparkle," the First Enchanter said in a comforting tone, "Such an experience in the Fade will have lingering effects for a while, but you have done well. The Harrowing is over, and now you can go out into the world. For now, we'll bring you back to the dormitories for a well-deserved rest."

Twilight groaned as she was guided out of the chamber, with Spike holding on to her foreleg to lend support. Everything was swirling and blurry around her, and she was feeling very dizzy as

her head thudded with a painful migraine. Every muscle ached as she was guided out of the Harrowing chamber and down the stairs into one of the common rooms that acted as both instruction hall and meeting room. The happy looks on her fellow unicorns' faces were lost on Twilight as all she could see was blurring and feeling nothing but pain. Still, it was a good pain as it was a reminder that she was still alive, still whole, and not possessed by a demon. All good points by her standards.

As they made their way through the common area, Twilight heard a familiar voice arguing with somepony not so familiar. Guests were exceedingly rare in the Tower due to the paranoia of the Templar and many of the unicorns, as well as keeping the image of the Tower as a safe haven against and for unicorns could be jeopardized by a wayward guest. Yet as he spoke, the guest sounded wise and confident, two qualities always needed when dealing with the unknown of magic and the Fade.

“I don’t see why you would want any of the younger unicorns, when you can have the Great and Powerful Trixie.” Twilight grimaced whenever she heard Trixie speak about herself, and the dizzy spell was doing nothing to endear the braggart’s voice. "Who better to join your order than a magician who has proven herself worthy time and time again? Shall I tell you of the time I faced a manticore, timberwolves, and a cockatrice all in the same day?"

Despite the pain she was under, Twilight could still manage to roll her eyes at another of Trixie's embellishments. Trixie was a few years Twilight's elder, but Trixie always acted superior to Twilight in any way she could. Though she knew her skill and talent was impressive, Trixie did not have the raw power Twilight had, and this caused a one way rivalry between the two unicorns. Twilight could have cared less, only wanting to study in peace.

“I have my reasons, Trixie,” said the guest, with a calm voice that was much older than Trixie, yet Twilight could hear the wisdom of a long life in that voice alone, “The young make for capable Grey Wardens. I am sure you are skilled, but I do not think you are of the material needed for the Wardens.”

Grey Wardens? Twilight tried to recall who they were, for she was sure she read about them before. Right now, though, all she wanted was her hard uncomfortable bunk to sleep in.

“Are you implying that the Great and Powerful Trixie is old?!” The blue unicorn shot back, indignant. Spike laughed behind his talons, not being the best of terms with each other. Whenever the two met in the halls, nary a word was said that wasn't a direct insult.

Wise Eyes stepped forward to stand between Trixie and the guest. “Now now, Trixie. Duncan is

a good stallion who is simply looking for recruits for his order. Once we get Twilight Sparkle back into her room for rest, you, Duncan and I will talk about the events pertaining to this visit, yes?”

Trixie huffed off, annoyance on her face that she was being brushed off by the First Enchanter while Duncan merely inclined his head in a short bow. Vision still blurred, she could only see that Duncan was a grey earth pony with a dark mane, and what appeared to be a grey shield for a cutie mark. “Pleasure to meet you sir,” she said with a slur.

“Ah, this must be the newest unicorn to pass the Harrowing,” Duncan said, looking Twilight over, “Get some rest. After such an ordeal, you deserve it.”

“Your right she does,” Spike said following close behind, “Come on Twilight, let’s get you into bed.” With Spike’s help, Twilight collapsed onto her bed exhausted from the Harrowing. The Fade did not come that night, nor did the demons. Just a simple night with her mind in utter, blissful darkness.