

From the Tree like Whales we Surf the Universe

Book 3: Part 2: Chapter 2: Episode 2

We walked in those halls and twists and turns of architecture for what seemed like a month and three days. Empty halls of banished demons poisoned the air with the stench of brimstone. Argenta and I remained quiet as we walked down the ornate halls of the tree. Paintings and tapestries of Chancellor Rococo met our eyes in every direction, the dark eyes of the art following us. Flames twisted the images of shields and heraldry all glorifying his image glistening in the smoldering ashes. Paint began to melt and stain the walls as the colors ran. Beneath our hooves and amid dunes of soot ran the lavish rug with the colors of the chancellor burning at the border. Chandeliers swayed in the unnatural breeze of the hallway, their diamonds jingling and reflecting our apprehension in them. All the doors were left open, darkness seeping in from their rooms. No sounds from the darkness were heard and any sight was masked in the opaque abyss. In front of us lay thick shadows and behind us grew the same darkness.

Argenta's stoic expression was dimly lit in the small fires scattered across the floor. She carefully stepped over a fallen sword. Around us the explosions of lightning crashed with the screams of battle, all faint and so distant. In her city, outside of her little slice of existence, raged a war. She turned to me.

"You have quite the set of accessories." She commented.

"Excuse me?" I said turning to her.

"Your pendant and ring."

"Oh? Well I suppose I do." I turned back to the endless hallway.

"Oh don't end it there. Talk to me. It will keep us focused."

As a gentlecolt and noble adventurer, I was contractually bound to indulge her request.

"I suppose if one hears bad music, it is one's duty to drown it by one's conversation. What about my pendant and ring?"

"I want to know about your pendant. Where ever did you get it?"

"A friend tasked me to carry it across myself and see it finds the hooves of his mother."

“I see.” She paused for a while, perhaps thinking. “I’d guess this ‘friend’ is a child?”

I turned back to her and knit my brow. “Quite. How uncanny.”

“Did the foal have some sort of dark colors? Maybe black with a dark indigo mane?”

“Dark purple mane.”

“And this foal carried the name ‘Bell’?”

I stopped. Something whirled in my brain. “I hear it in your language and your connotations...you know the boy’s mother!”

She kept on walking. “We won’t get anywhere with you standing there like that. Story time is this way. Believe me, I have much to tell you.”

I galloped back to her and stopped her. I stared her down and steeled my resolve. “With all due respect, I have little inclination to trust you, as you did sell me out for money; your games and selfishness are of your own business, but to me they are an obstruction of justice! I have little time to spare on you, so allow me to breathe new light into your memories.”

Without receiving an answer, a fresh orb shined at the tip of my horn. Quickly it formed and took shape and fell from my horn to Argenta’s. Magic was indeed powerful in the correct hooves and innovation, especially when I invented telepathy. Barely a flicker of the flames could be heard in the emptiness of the halls. The violence outside seemed to have subsided momentarily. The link forged between our two minds, Argenta sighed and remembered.

The primitive age of the spell casted cast difficulty over my vision, though the mist began to clear. Argenta’s thoughts and dreams came into view. Sceneries flashed by in seconds, memories were sorted through and organized. All ages of Argenta, from birth to present could be viewed and examined as Argenta remembered, though she could hide nothing from my eyes. If she would recall it, I would see it for what it was.

Finally the landscapes began to slow and solidify. The geography of the previous Elyograg came into view, a nameless city, though very much restored. Streets were clean, a fountain bubbled in the square, and windows were left unbroken. Beaming pearl colors shined from the homes and their azure tiles smiled back at the world. Shops were organized and orderly, and only ponies ran in the streets. No hellish denizens mixed

with the benign population, a rather utopia of sorts amid fields of surrounding green.

Silence cursed the visions, sights guiding me through the scope. A lamp shined down and illuminated a familiar foal of silver toiling over a workpony's desk, her horn bright with determination. She wiped the sweat from her forehead beneath her crimson mane and worked on. In one hoof she held a slip of paper, eyeing it every few seconds as her horn guided the chisel across a small slab of iron. True craftspony ship masterfully directed the chisel to carve the tiny words into the pendant. Punctuating the job, the foal clapped the locket shut, smiling and reveling in her work as the image began to fade away.

She materialized over a shop counter, the vision's landscape sliding into a new segment. The sun beamed victoriously through the window panes of the beautiful shop. Across the immaculate floors trotted a proud mare approaching her purchase. I could not mistake the three vermillion bells on her flank. Like Argenta mentioned before, her black colors mingled with her indigo mane and flowed peacefully as she trotted. Across her back rested her hood, as natural protection of wings and horns could not be found on the traveler. The foal lowered the locket around the traveler's neck, both marveling at how well it fit. The traveler popped the locket open, a warm smile growing brighter as she read over the inscription.

Darkness breathed across the streets packed with eager ponies all focused on a sight in the distance. A tree began to bud in the cloudy horizon, growing with every passing minute. Upon a platform where all eyes were cast, a prophet was delivering an address to the city. His mustache bounced with vigor after every declaration. Words were silent yet actions were passionate and clear. A savior had arrived, directing the ponies' attention to the mighty oak and calling for support. Silent cheers broke out and ponies leaped in joy. One silver pony, now fully grown, shared their glee and caught the eye of the speaker. They shared a gaze, for perhaps a second or so, before the speaker shot her a pleasant wink.

Clouds raged and tumbled in the skies, though two ponies over a dinner table laughed and talked and smiled together. Both, like the darkness had cursed the land, had already had their cutie marks stolen, but what was the use dwelling on it? The view from their table on that balcony overlooked the city below; signs of degradation began to show, though no such interruptions could stifle the palpable aura of love shielding the couple. The silver pony and the savior talked on and for a while simply looked into each other's eyes. The savior whispered something into the silver pony's ear. She giggled and followed him from the table, both sharing another look over the vista of the city before racing into the tree. The door slammed behind them.

The two had settled in together in their kingdom in the tree. They shared their hopes and dreams and what they would do in the world; how they would escape the darkness and make their own stake in the land. The silver pony grew confident, a new and magical bravery about her. Over dinner once more they shared a kiss, though the silver pony caught the world below in her eyes and gasped. Love in the heavens obscured her attachment to the world, dirt and grime now caking the streets. Strange creatures and dark beasts moved in the streets and ruled as mobsters and sharks. She looked to her lover, the savior, and he pondered why she was so worried. He spoke, though I understood one word he mouthed: "Love."

Lightning cracked in the distance, startling the silver pony. She found comfort in the warmth of her lover, he in turn wanting to preserve the serenity of their unity. Floating in from the room, a small cubical box danced along the breeze guided by magic and presented itself before the silver pony. The box opened, the gem and gold inside sparkling brighter than the hidden sun. He knelt before her and asked her, and all she could do was nod. Tears streamed down her face as she returned to his side, the image of the two slipping away.

Time seemed to pass again. Beasts in the town were the norm now as was the stains across the city and grim look of the town. The fountain's once bountiful gurgling had since ceased, the base dried and full of debris and dust. The silver pony lay alone in their bed, her lover hunched over his desk, examining an orb and writing furiously. Many nights had ended this way. Tonight she would ignite their love again. She called to him, he did not answer. She trotted over to him, peering over his shoulder to examine his work and the artifact. Something revolted the silver pony as she recoiled from what she read. Her lover looked up at her and tried to ease her fearful expression, though she questioned him. They argued, she accused, he denied. She backed away, he drew her closer in. She levitated the papers over and showed their flaws to him, he fighting back against her arguments. Finally, she turned away from her lover and ripped the papers cleanly down the middle. Her lover flew into rage, shoving the silver pony away with a hoof impacting against her face as he tried to piece together his work. Head dug into his papers, he hardly noticed the silver pony walk out and never return to that room.

Returning to her old home, it had fallen into disarray and been the subject of vandalism, yet she felt safer there. Exhausted and on the verge of tears, she pulled up the trapdoor in the floor revealing stairs to her basement. She trotted down them and found her bedroom untouched. Tiles were still sparkling and not a soul had breathed the air. Austerely set, a bed and a simple bookshelf decorated her room. A stark change, though she welcomed it. On her bed, where she had left it, a book was marked and

placed for future reading. Through her drowsiness she skimmed the pages, all heralding a nameless adventurer and his deeds across the universe. He had just found his perfect love, though she believed she knew the ending and burned the book in the fury of her magic and tossed it to the other side of the room. The smell of burning papers filling the room, she paid it no heed as she slipped under her covers and fell asleep amid falling tears.

As days and months and years passed, the clouds never shifted and darkness prevailed. Her shop reopened and she went along with her life. Periodically she'd receive gifts, but they were all disposed of. Whenever she was on the streets and passed by that forsaken tree, she could hear a faint melody from it. Something sad, yet not defeated. Lovesick, but not met in return. It was a somewhat hopeful song, as if it was scheming something. I heard it grow even louder.

The song of piano keys began to rise in the darkness of the hall. In the distance the dignified melody haunted us and beckoned us on. Releasing each other from Argenta's mind, I made no more judgments on her. We shared another stare, though I smiled and nodded to her. We broke into a gallop and followed the faint song. Fires and soot eventually became scarce as the end of the unnecessarily long hallway came into view. Two thick and beautifully carved doors barred our entrance, though no system of portals and jambs could hope to withhold me. A flash of piercing light shattered the wood and we entered.

Upon the piano a pony played a playful melody for the empty room. Silk dressed a bed set for two beyond the piano. An enormous abstract portrayal of what I could assume to be Argenta hung on the wall. The rest of the room was filled and crowded with ornate and expensive items of all varieties. On the opposite side of the room, two doors were left open to a balcony overlooking the clouded night and the smoke rising from the city beneath the view. Some sort of enchantment must have been on the hallway to bring us to the highest room of the fortress. Uncaring of any of it, the chancellor played on, finishing the concerto triumphantly and letting the sound of the keys fade into the air.

"Ah. I knew you'd come back for me. I knew you'd finally see your mistake." Chancellor Fragonard Octavius Rococo excused himself from the piano. There he was, just as I saw him in the visions, though twisted by time: a top hat decorated his head, a monocle over one eye, and a thick blonde mustache accompanying his golden mane. He smelled of smoke and children's crushed dreams extinguished by the stomp of an aloof hoof. Choking clouds of the stench suffocated me as he drew nearer. An ugly and supercilious chuckle poisoned the air with the sound. His light blue frame moved to

confront us.

“You see, Argenta? It’s exactly as you remember it! I do hope you’ll excuse the mess you saw in the halls. It seemed some damned fool incited a rebellion and banished all my guardians back to Hell. Thankfully I had plenty more patrolling the streets and in reserves. But it was meant to happen this way, you know. It’s all happening for a reason.”

I approached him. “What method can there be to this madness you’ve brewed? A cauldron of evil bubbles over with your colors, chancellor!”

Rococo snorted. “But we are all of such temperatures and temperaments, aren’t we Ostentatious? Don’t be alarmed. I don’t know you, but I know *of* you.”

“Cease this idle chatter! You are the villain and I am the hero, and as we are of such roles, I am to overcome you in a duel! En garde!” Argenta remained silent.

Rococo laughed and levitated a cup of tea from his desk to his mouth and sipped it villainously. “These empty gallantries are tiresome. Have you not heard me? You and I are of the same olive branch, my friend, and we are more alike than you’d like to believe.” He took another evil sip of his drink.

He started again. “Do you want to know what I’m doing here? Ruling a city and drinking tea in a tree? It’s relaxing, without a doubt, but I did build this city of Elyograg up from nothing but a nameless shanty town. When the darkness fell over this world and stranded us, I calmed myself and opted to prosper in the wasteland. For the ponies’ devotion, I promised them a taste of my prosperity. I grew this tree with my own energy and it took in the fresh water for miles around and gave life to this city. Deserts surrounded us and an ocean of a reservoir grew in the east, sheltering our paradise from the world. I rose up from nothing and became a god, and for a while I was content with that.”

He took another malicious sip and twirled his thick mustache.

“But then I was delivered something: a gift from an anonymous subject. An orb and a pedestal. It was a novel piece, though the novelty wore off as the aura of the decoration began to speak to me in my sleep. It told me of a prophecy. A glorious and valorous pony would rise up and free us from the clouds and let us see the sun again. It sounded wonderful, but the more I thought about it, the more it made me wonder why I would want that. Of course I assumed the prophecy referred to me, so I simply let it pass and kept my peace peaceful. But when the orb spoke again and told me the name of the prophet, I devised my plan to find him.”

A frenzied look began to form on Rococo. Argenta spoke up. "You turned sinister! Did you ever even figure out who this prophet was?" Her voice quivered. Rococo only laughed.

"Stupid girl, do you really have to ask. If I am not the prophet, who else could rival my brilliance?"

I paused for a moment to think, and then smiled hopefully. Rococo smiled as well. "You see? He's figured it out. Of course *he* figured it out."

"What?!" Argenta gasped. "You mean that...?"

"The prophet's name was 'Ostentatious', the pony to bring about the end of the apocalypse. As I searched my city and systematically weeded out the males of society, I concluded this prophet could not harm me as he was not among me. Who would have known you would have made my search so easy, though. Your friend actually tipped me off. The green haired one. She said your name with such passion."

"I've heard I'm a pretty important pony around these parts, so I'll take this prophecy and add it to my list of things to accomplish." I thought back to my hefty list. "Did any of your beasts of Hell happen to leave a head behind?"

Rococo blinked. "Not a head here, I'm afraid. I'd be more concerned with your own head. These things have a way of losing themselves, you know. I've lost mine." He took another antagonistic sip of his tea.

Rococo stared hungrily at Argenta. His magic possessed her and drew her close to him against her struggling. "My queen has returned for her king! As I am king of this land, I must have an obedient queen. We are in love, after all. We have been since my first day here. She's never left my thoughts, and now we shall unite as royalty. Look out there, my queen! If it is not already, we shall paint the town red!"

She struggled but could not break free. She was in his web once more. Her memories filled my mind again. That flame was now monstrous. They all flashed before my eyes and summoned from me her escape. Teleportation had been added to my repertoire, a spark of my magic taking hold of Argenta and transported her away in thin air. I knew where to send her, and she was safe. Rococo looked desperately at his empty hooves.

"Already taking from me, eh Ostentatious?! I should have known. You cannot let lovers be, can you?" Rococo's tea cup shattered beneath the crushing pressure of his magic gone untamed. Madness was alive in this arena and a combatant partnered with

power. "We shall begin then." A magnificent chord fell from the ceiling and dangled from the boughs above. Rococo eyed the chord with wide eyes.

I cleared my throat and prepared myself for the battle. "I shall begin. What sonnet shall I recite? I've prepared dozens."

Rococo looked dumbfounded at me again. What had I said? "Poetry? In my kingdom? In these trying times I'd rather opt for more ferocious barbarisms. Something concrete and meaningful! I had a failsafe in case we would ever encounter each other like this. With this monster's guidance and power, I saved this town." Rococo yanked the chord with his teeth, the chord snapping and falling to the ground. Something stirred above us.

"We are ponies of greater destinies than we could ever imagine. Or can we imagine them? Is that what makes us so noble?" Rococo posited wistfully.

I threw a hoof down like thunder. "Nobility sees thee smited! What are you proud of with your enslavement of the innocent and abusing a city's good ponies."

That demonic laughter escaped him again. He looked out the window to view the carnage. "Princess Celestia, you know I am a righteous pony." He closed his eyes. "Tell me, princess, why am I given this role? To rise from squalor only to be lit as the villain?"

He would not answer me. He walked away to the balcony, almost singing his words in a mad trance. I followed him, wary of his forces.

"The desire for a name for myself was what turned me to sin. The desire to save these ponies! I intended that! It's not my fault! Whose plan was this? Who made the devil so much stronger than a pony...?" His voice trailed off into the rising ashes.

"She cannot hear you here in this no pony's land. Please talk with me. There is another way!" I pleaded. He whirled around, eyes filled with uncertain rage. He trotted slowly towards me.

"Protect me, Princess. Don't let this prophecy be true. Destroy Ostentatious and let him taste the fires of Hell, or else let me be the prophet my father believed I was!"

The canopy overhead blew open. Debris of leaves and branches exploded in every direction, though I held my ground. A blood curdling screech pierced the air and rolled out from the darkness of the canopy. Stone wings beat and lowered a body to the floor. Hardened claws rested obediently beside Rococo, the beast ready to pounce and strike. A sharpened tail rested behind the beast of stone.

“But why a gargoyle? What prosperity does it bring?”

“It draws the water from around the area, feeding the city and its own power.” Rococo explained.

“It does?”

“Of course!”

“How does water feed a stone gargoyle?” I asked.

“How doesn’t it?”

I could not argue, though that thing from before whirled in my brain again. I could see it! This town and its meaning! His devotion to the monster became apparent.

“Elyograg!” I exclaimed with feeling. “It’s ‘gargoyle’ spelled backwards!” I paused, shuddering from the next equally frightening realization that was very bad for my health.

“And this is their kingdom!” Rococo declared, confirming my realization.

Another screech slashed at my ears as the gargoyle leapt into the air. Its claws unsheathed and ready, it dove for me flailing its daggers wildly. Speeds like lightning blazed across the room and caught me by the throat. Air fled away, though the energy and momentum of all those fighters who believed me in drew from me enough strength to summon another spell. Binds of light spread across the monster like chains and crippled its movement. Free at last, I raised my front legs high and brought down the hammer of justice on the beast’s head, only in the aftermath realizing that now I did not have a head to take home.

The stone body crumbled and erupted across the room and dressed the antiques in debris. Putrid smelling dust twirled in the air and clouded our battlefield. Rococo shrugged it away, breaking out into a smile.

“Who is to say I am any sort of prophet?” I demanded. “This orb and pedestal I have encountered before. Evil bleeds from them and their blood is toxic. They are composed of deceit and you are under their spell!”

Rococo smirked. “Toxic? What does not kill you only makes you stronger! The job is mine to enlighten you!” Rococo spread his legs and dipped his head, drawing in the darkness around him to form a solid shape of energy. Spikes protruded from the growing form, its shape ominous and life threatening. Rococo held aloft his mighty horn

now acting as a sword. It oozed with hellish black force.

Targeting me, he stampeded towards me. If he was to be darkness, I, of course, of such divine notions and entities, would act as light. Quickly I formed a sturdy shield to evade and hold off his frenzied charge. I could see my father in the heavenly shine of it, his smile glistening and fueling my fervent counter. I smiled back.

“And I shall smite the wicked and plunge them into the fiery pit!” Rococo screamed, his battle cry leading into the crushing swing of his sword. Poison and gravity flew in every direction of the hit as shield met sword. Darkness struck then fell away in the presence of my divine shield, yet Rococo continued his hacking stance. His blade’s edge danced with my shield’s body, the two caught poetically in their bitter rivalry. They knew each other and knew each other well, yet they could not bind themselves by each other’s elements and limitations. They were as different as day and night, yet what were those concepts here?

“Rococo stop!” I had not spoken, nor did Rococo. The voice was female, as if Argenta had contacted us. We both stopped, though I took advantage. Holy light blazed from my defenses, blinding the warrior. In his daze and screams of agony, familiar chains of light bound the chancellor. Eyes mad with darkness, he struggled vigorously against my binds, yet he could not break them.

“I suppose this is where you’ll kill me?” Rococo spit, relaxing himself in the wake of his defeat.

From the open window a convenient breeze flowed in and lifted my mane, allowing it to blow victoriously in the wind. I looked at Rococo’s fallen body. “Nay, villain. Hell need not be merciful when I am.”

“Arrogance be thy fall, for too soon do you revel in the breeze!” Barked the chancellor. “Do with me what you will.”

“I merely want answers.” I began. “I wish to inquire about my own father, Ostensible. Does this name recall anything?”

“Why would I tell you anything?” Rococo fired back.

I smirked for my own brilliance. “My chains of light are enchanted with a convenient exposition incantation. At my will and command, you are forced to honestly exposit what I desire to hear!”

He felt the binds on his throat draw from him the words he knew. “Quite clever. I submit. To your misfortune, I know nothing of your father. I was but a vagrant before I

came here. I could have met him, but I don't know him."

"And what of this darkness? What is the source?" I demanded.

Rococo sighed and looked out the window. "That reminds me of my plan. Argenta and I were going to take my boat across the ocean and find the epicenter of the storm. You see the rings in the sky? The originate from a point. That's where the darkness spreads from. It was so many years ago."

I raised a hoof to my chin and pondered his story. "Hardly a veritable litany of exposition. Are you sure you know nothing else? That will only be a few sentences at best. Normally these sorts of accounts take a shape akin to a wall, yet you've supplied me with little to work with."

"Perhaps, but here's a twist to it all! What's got eight letters and can regenerate when destroyed?" Riddled Rococo with a demonic grin.

Rocks and fragments of stone began to gravitate towards the center of the room. A crude shape formed, arms extending along with wings. Hardened by magic, a mouth grew and shrieked violently. I screwed my eyes shut and ducked my head beneath my hooves to escape the sound. The screech pierced my brain and shattered my magical concentration, thus interrupting my spell. Rococo leaped to his hooves and retreated, jumping on the back of his gargoyles.

"I've given my monologue, my false hope of victory coupled with exposition, now all that remains is a climax to this action, don't you agree? Our game of cat and mouse is like a very well written story. If you wish to give me chase, abandon your cause and have at me!" Atop the stony fiend, Rococo laughed manically as the gargoyle shot through the open doors and into the open air of the battlefield.

I galloped to the window on only my passion and prayers. Leaping from the balcony, I conjured as my means of flight the spirit of my emotions. My horn shined with my ring glowing like a beacon as time seemed to slow in my ascent. Coated in the shine of holy magic, scales like diamonds flickered on the mighty dragon beneath me. Furious storms of wind and rage danced from the wing beat of the giant dragon, stifling the gargoyle's flight and threatening to knock Rococo into the war of fire and brimstone below. In the distance he turned to me, laughing proudly.

"You are my rival, to be sure! Such a beast you've made for yourself!"

"Rational thoughts may still lurk within you! It does not have to end this way!" I screamed over the sounds of battle.

“Funny. I never knew you as a pony. Only as a name and something to conquer the day you would inevitably oppose me. I thought the same of the world, but the world is far too massive. These are our inexorable roles to play. Let’s give the universe what it wants!”

Reluctantly, I accepted the terms of war. Upon the declaration, the gargoyle unhinged its jaw and charged a devastating laser. The dragon and I glided beneath the abyssal cannon as it launched, the assault following us as we flew against the body of the tree. My mane had never felt so much wind in it. Invigoration and momentum guided as the dragon ascended and the laser quieted. The dragon’s head collided with the gargoyle, cracking its body and causing the beast to spin out.

Aerial evasiveness corrected the flight of the demon and it returned fire. Hell’s fireballs rained down on us from above, the turret of stone slicing through the air. My spirit dragon’s wing began to blaze and the dragon roared in anguish. The stone fiend flew below us, an easy target for the dragon’s breath. Furious crystal gusts swarmed the air and fell like daggers upon Rococo and his beast. The monster’s own artillery assaulted the raining crystals, smoke and dust erupting from the impact and obscuring my vision. I paused and waited. Silence.

Through the storms of dust shot Rococo’s gargoyle, a mad smile on the rider. Why didn’t I think of that counter attack? His noble top hat had long since fallen from his head, his mane now wild with wind and fire. Rococo’s eyes were as black as night and bursting with dark aura. The head on collision met my spirit dragon’s body devastatingly, more painful roars filling my ears. Transparency threatened my flight of the dragon as the fires below came into view. This was the summit of our duel. Rococo flew below the staggering dragon, taking aim and charging some sort of magic on his horn.

Words were meaningless here. I leapt from my dragon, diving towards Rococo. He challenged my dive and commanded his gargoyle’s flight into me. Darkness would encounter light. In the winds of the world rushing past me and through my mane, I felt a single tear slip away from my eye and into the sky. I was content with the last words I had spoken to my friends. A noble sacrifice to be remembered as the day good triumphed over evil. Those eyes of darkness on Rococo, opaque with Hell possessing them. He was an adventurer who heralded love above all else, yet fell so demented. If I was to escape with my life, never again would evil claim another brave adventurer’s mind and body. Of one I could absolve Rococo.

“Mind Crush!” I held the vowel sound for as long as possible before our collision.

The supernova exploded in every direction, two stars blazing in each other's power. I saw Rococo scream, light shooting from his eyes and mouth as his mind was finally purged. In his final moments, he faded away into the light, his faint smile to meet heaven's gates. Frigid energy engulfed my body. I felt myself falling, my eyes closing.

Two stars I knew brighter than all the lights of the universe burned out in each other's glory. In one direction, an explosion of white blew away the darkness. A pony's body burned and was picked up by the breeze. Ashes rode high on a flight of angels who sang for his rest. What really happened to you? He was not inherently evil. Outside forces made him that way, I suppose as they made me the same. I turned away from the blinding light. I loved him, though I could not cry.

When it ended, all I could see was a single statue falling. The hardened body of a pony fell from the collision and struck the floor of the city. The war had ended. No longer were axes swung or lives risked, but at the cost of the bravest knight. Silence spread across the area, everypony gathering to view the destruction and the fallen. Wounded or not, their city was saved.

A pony stood over the statue, screaming at it and crying. Her celadon hair fell over the statue and caressed it, the young mare unable to accept the events. All ponies were silent in their respect. She cried and called for him. She called his name. No answer. What did she expect to happen? She shook his stone body. No movements.

Her two companions felt the gravity of the loss, the grey mare breaking into similar tears, hiding her face in her dark blue friend. Unknown warriors and soldiers wept as well. Ponies who had no memory of Ostentatious cried. Streams of tears ran from all fighters, their waters pooling around the statue.

I trotted closer to the statue. His face was caught in dignity, eyes shut as he boldly accepting of his fate. Crying would do no good, so I skipped it. I followed what I knew and stood stoic, yet something began to occur. As tears ran from everypony around, they began to sing and grow bright. Waters glistened and surrounded him, forming a shell. Slowly, the statue rose from the dirt and into the sky, everypony still silent in amazement. It was a stunning array of light, the hero's ascension to immortality, as it were. Unfamiliar emotions coursed through my veins and my head began to shiver. I smiled widely, even laughing a bit at what I was witnessing. Succumbing, the dams of expressionless attempts burst and shattered, my eyes welling with joy. Two tears, one from each eye, were all that were needed to complete the mysterious ritual.

The two tears floated to the case around the levitating statue, the water racing

around the body and preparing it. From across the sky, pellets like seeds were summoned and rained across the rising statue. The seeds found salvation in the soil below and bathed in the tears of the city. Bright red stars sprouted petals and stems and created a heavenly garden. A crimson cross rose from the bouquet and forced a break in the clouds above us. Sunlight so beautiful as I had remembered it fell from the sky and blanketed the statue and the water bubbled and foamed with magic. Blinding flares of light erupted once more, the sun escaping again behind the darkness as the statue began its descent. In the sun's place, rain fell upon our city. The water felt pure running through my dirty mane.

Lightning struck the tree, setting a blaze the top of it, though the rain began to fight back and control it. The head of the statue began to move and stir. His eyes blinked and he met the waking world once more.

“And that’s how I came back from the dead.”

Scattershot greeted me ecstatically with a nuzzle under my chin and tears of joy. The crowd of warriors and rebels all cheered for my safety and their freedom.

“Scattershot! You’re safe! What was the tide of battle?” I asked on bated breath.

“Great, Osten! We had no casualties at all. Everyone is safe.” She smiled gently.

“A flawless victory!” I cheered with the crowd.

Bella and Sirocco ran to my side to welcome me back. I returned their own joy with my own for escaping death, though I had a special thanks for one pony. She approached me, a light and confidence in her eyes I had only seen in her memories.

I tried to thank her, yet sleep proved to be a stronger force. I took a step, though fell to gravity’s pull and collapsed from exhaustion and the day’s events. After all, we did topple a tyrant all in one day.

Energy returned to me as my eyelids fluttered. I awoke on a bed in a strange location, yet from Argenta’s memories I recalled it. This was her haven. Her basement. In the corner by the bookshelf, a pony laid curled up with a book beneath a burning candle. The mattress squeaked with my new movements, Argenta now aware I was awake. She was clean, fresh from the shower and an adventure. Smiling and radiant, she shut her book and trotted towards me.

“Good morning, hero.” She greeted with a sense of mockery.

“Good morrow to you to, Argenta. How long have I been asleep for?”

“About a few days.”

“A few days?!” I exclaimed. Time was of the essence in this time stopped land.

“Woah, calm down. I’d say you deserved it after what you went through. You and Rococo.”

I sensed the sadness in her language. I was sorry for her loss, though she assured me she preferred it this way. “What became of Rococo?” She asked.

“He is in a better world, now. He was shot through the heart, as he was to blame for giving love a bad name.” I told her.

“He wasn’t to blame. It was his overwhelming ambitions.” She reasoned. She levitated Slay Bell’s pendant from my neck and popped it open.

“I want to read to you what is inscribed here. Have you ever read it?” Argenta asked.

“I have not. Go ahead.” I said.

“That’s what I thought. That is what has been troubling me.”

She cleared her throat and began. “‘The whole course of history may depend on a change of heart in one solitary and even humble individual – for it is in the solitary mind and soul of the individual that the battle between good and evil is waged and ultimately won or lost.’ The quote never left my mind when Scattershot mentioned it. She told me of Slay Bells. He sounds like a nice kid. If you’re looking for his mother, she’s going to have a locket similar to this with the same quote in it. That’s what she ordered from my family’s store all those years ago.”

“Well, I’m glad we’ve got some sort of lead, I—“ I stopped. The description of the locket we were to find sounded eerie, the thought of what I had imagined sending a chill up my spine. Leaping from the bed, I asked where our bags were. They had been set beside the bed, I rifling through them to find the memento my father had given me before his death. My magic gripped the chain of the pendant.

“What do you make of this?” I asked, fearful of the answer.

“How did you...? Open it!” Argenta said, understanding the disturbing train this discovery might take us on.

“I know what it says. It is how I knew the quote. My father gave me this amulet as a memento to remember him by while he traveled. I cherished it after his death. Is it a match?”

Argenta examined the pendant with wide eyes. Her brow began to knit as she took note of the craftsponyship. Reluctantly, she nodded and confirmed this was the match to Slay Bells’ pendant.

“Looks like you had it all along, Ostentatious, as I feared. I don’t understand why your father would have this. Clear Bell treasured the locket with her life as a constant reminder of her son...” Her voice trailed off into terrible territory.

I was silent, only looking at the locket with millions of questions. “Oh father, where have you been...?”

Argenta and I agreed to leave the mystery be for now and prepare for our departure. She accepted my offer to join my band of adventurers on our grand quest, for the town could repair itself now and restore itself. Continuing our southern bound trek, our group focused on the ocean and its secrets. I took note of the rings of clouds and directed our path to the apparent center. We bid the town goodbye, the townsponies in turn singing of our names and our ushering in of their freedom. These good deeds felt good to complete, even if I had no heads of Hell’s monsters in my possession. Could it be a metaphor? It would be a pretty awkward one if it was, so I kept it literal for the time being.

Argenta directed us to the ship Rococo had hidden away behind a cove. The sails caught miraculous wind and took our band off into the horizons. The sails following the southern current, the town previously known as Elyograg faded into the distance and into my adventurer’s log. We traveled for only a few minutes before a single beam of light shot through the clouds overhead. Something descended from the heavens like a trophy for my bravery. That familiar rectangle of justice glided gently in the sunlight and broke into its own current, flowing on the wind and finding myself on the boat. My four friends gathered around to see the card’s contents. It held a single word.

“Furious.”

My eyes sparked with life and vigor. Whatever beasts lay beyond the dark horizons, confidence promised their speedy defeat and our success. My father was waiting. I took the time to write an entry into my adventurer’s log.

Dear handsome log of adventures,

I pray thee father! Give me clarity and light as we travel on. These orbs of evil are desecrating the name of adventurer's across the land and destroying them. It disgusts me that one fell to them, and I shall never let it end that way again. Though your locket...did it belong to Clear Bell, brave huntress and mother of Slay Bells? You two must have been really good friends, perhaps adventuring partners! She knew you could deliver the pendant home to Slay Bells, so you gave it to me...yeah!

We are on an epic sea voyage to the center of darkness. Surely these clouds must originate from a wicked factory. Where that is, we shall find it and rip open a righteous cut in the sky until the sun can shine through once more and declare her domination.

Love is a complicated emotion. I'll opt out of it until my adventure is over. It leads to ruin and heartbreak eternal in exchange for a meager taste of paradise. Father, was your love as complex for mother? I wonder how she's doing. She probably hasn't even noticed I'm gone. She's probably busy doing girl stuff, like her hair. Love may be something special. Someone to hold and be held in return.

We're running with the shadows of the night, yet whose hoof can I hold to know it will be all right? I'll surrender all my dreams tonight, for they'll come true in the end.

-Sir Ostentatious

--End of Book Three--

Any comments or inquiries can be sent to:

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If I have made any semantic errors or if something doesn't flow well, please alert me in the comment section of this document.