

# The Logical Option

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# Chapter 1

The purple unicorn gazed out the window for a brief moment. She noticed birds chirping happily, along with the quiet yet frequent hustle and bustle of Ponyville. It was the afternoon, and the commotion around the town was its normal levels. Though no matter how beautiful the day was, chances were that Twilight would be busy cooped up in the town library studying.

Yet she was not completely dedicated to studying. She always took opportunities to go outside and spend time with friends. 'Friends' was the key word. She would usually be annoyed if somepony other than her friends were to bother her.

The day first took its strange turn when her studying was interrupted by her dragon companion, who had burst through the front door.

"Twilight! \*huff\* \*huff\* liste-" gasped the baby dragon. He obviously had sprinted back to the library. He was still gasping in his attempt to go on, but Twilight interrupted him.

"Spike, what is it this time? I can't keep helping out the ponies of Ponyville when they can't explain it themselves." It had been a recurrence for the past month for the citizens of Ponyville to ask Twilight questions over confusing incidents. Most of their questions were so basic or self-explanatory, that it just ended up wasting Twilight's time.

"But.... Twilight... \*huff\* this is importan-"

"Apples 'mysteriously' dropping, Pinkie Pie's bottomless stomach, all those were emphasized as important Spike, so this better be-" Finally Spike raised his voice a little higher than usual to get his point across.

He managed to say to her, "There's somepony hurt Twilight!"

Twilight raised an eyelash. "That's new? Normally ponies get injured Spike," she said while thinking of her rainbow-maned daredevil friend.

“Can’t the nurse unicorns handle it? They seem to do a good job each time Rainbow Dash crashes into something”.

“That’s the thing, they’re not sure what to do! This is different than the other times. They just said a pony needed help, and to get you A.S.A.P., so you better get to the Medical Center quickly.”

Twilight sighed, she had been interrupted multiple times during her study time this month, and she was getting a little tired of it. Even though some pony was hurt, she was certain that it wasn’t anything too serious for her to handle. She took a glance around at her workspace of the library, which was scattered with books. She then looked to her dragon companion.

“Alright Spike, fine,” she said finally with a tiny smile on her face. “I’ll go check to see what the problem is, and I should be able to handle it. In the mean time...” She glanced at the piles of books around her again. Her assistant let out a groan, knowing full well what she was going to say next. “Sort my books back on the shelf, alphabetically according to topic as always. I shouldn’t be long.”

The young dragon groaned a little louder, but sighed and began to pick up the books that were scattered and piled across the floor. “Thanks Spike. Maybe if you get it done by the time I come back, I can get you some gemstones from Rarity.” Her baby dragon started to work faster upon hearing her mention ‘gemstones’ and ‘Rarity’. Twilight giggled at his boyish nature.

“See you later,” she said as she closed the front door, and began making her way through town to the Medical Center.

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Twilight was in no rush to get to her destination. She was definitely trotting faster than normal. Her mind was more focused on her lost study time than the situation at hand.

*‘And I was just in the middle of the history of the Age of Ancie-’* she thought to herself, before a voice called out to her. It was a nurse pony, who was

outside the Medical Center. At this point, Twilight broke into a run, to make it seem like she got there as fast as she could. She stopped in front of the nurse pony with numerous red crosses as her Cutie Mark.

“Thank goodness you’re here, Miss Sparkle-”

“You can call me Twilight, Nurse Cross.” The nurse paused, but started her story over.

“Thank goodness you’re here, Twilight... One of the ponies sent your dragon companion when he saw him over by the Carousel Boutique...” Twilight giggled in her head at Spike’s completely obvious crush on Rarity. She dismissed the thought when the nurse’s voice became less urgent and more serious.

“There was an expedition team sent out to the Everfree forest today. Only to scout out a tiny part of it for some later expansion... when one of the ponies found something.... strange.” Twilight knew that the Everfree forest and strange went together all the time in the minds of the ponies of Ponyville, yet the way the nurse said it made it seem like it was stranger than normal.

Nurse Cross continued, “They came across a cave... and they weren’t going to bother with mapping it out... until they one of them thought he heard noises coming from it. So they worked up the nerve to go inside...” Twilight grew a little surprised. Ponyville ponies wouldn’t even step in the direction of the forest, yet this group of ponies were daring enough to enter a creepy, suspicious cave within the forest itself?

“You wouldn’t believe what they found... They found a pony! He was just lying there... but he just passed out when they got close. He wasn’t moving... but he was breathing. The explorers thought it would be best to rush him back here. Yet we’re about as clueless as they were!”

Twilight asked, “Couldn’t Nurse Magenta have done something?” Twilight knew Nurse Magenta to be one of the best unicorn doctors in Ponyville. The rest were trainees. Nurse Cross shook her head however.

“No... she’s out visiting family in Fillydelphia... so we thought the next best pony was you...”

Twilight grew somewhat intrigued by the story, and took a few seconds before responding to the nurse. "So this pony... is he who you wanted me to see so urgently? How is he right now?"

The nurse shook her head. "We don't know what's going on. He's freezing cold, yet he isn't shivering. He's breathing very slowly. We agreed he needed heat, so we put him out in the garden for some sunlight and warmth... We figured Celestia might be able to warm him up..." The nurse's face showed signs of worry, which Twilight decided to alleviate.

Twilight assured the nurse, "Don't worry. I'm here now, so I'll see what I can do."

---

She climbed her way up the steps to the rooftop garden of the Medical Center. The Center was actually large enough to be considered a hospital, but it started as the Ponyville Medical Center, so everypony called it that. She made her way up each set of steps, and opened the door to the room labeled "Rooftop Garden". It must have put there for patients who wanted to have a walk around, but were too sick to go outside. Twilight entered and noticed a small to medium amount of greenery, and fountain in the middle. The garden did have a sun-roof though, to prevent sick or injured pegasi from trying to fly out of the Center through the garden. Yet the room itself was as warm as the outside, so there was not much difference in terms of atmosphere.

Twilight took a look around, and noticed immediately the pony she had to see. A hospital bed could be easily fitted into the garden, and it was easy to spot among the greenery. On top of the bed was a green colt. His mane was black, while the rest of his body was covered by a blanket. Twilight had been in Ponyville for months, and she already knew that he wasn't from around Ponyville.

She carefully made her way towards the side of the bed, where she could hear his slow, monotonous breathing. Upon placing her hoof on the side of his head, she felt the "ice-coldness" the nurse had mentioned. Using her

magic, she sensed his temperature. There were only a few parts of his body that were heated, while the remainder were not producing any sort of warmth.

*'Alright, maybe I should try a simple warmth spell first,'* Twilight thought to herself. She closed her eyes and focused her energy on the colt in front of her. It took about 10-20 seconds of casting time, but she stopped to check his temperature. It seemed like his body was definitely warmer than before.

*'It seems like a warmth spell was all they needed... that's pretty basic. I learned that back in Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicor-.'*

Her thoughts were interrupted when suddenly, the green colt's eyes sprang open.

---

Twilight nearly jumped back in surprise. She did not move for many seconds, unsure of what to do. She dared not to make a move and risk startling a pony in bad condition. He gazed at her, almost through her, and started blinking repeatedly. *'He must be adjusting his focus...'* thought Twilight. Finally the pony stopped blinking, took a look around the room, and then focused his eyes back on her. She noticed that he had gold irises. He looked at her strangely, as if she had something on her face. Twilight felt the awkwardness building up, so she decided to speak in the most formal way she could muster.

"Hello sir... my name is Twilight Sparkle... you were out cold (*'literally'*) for quite a while now. I just casted a warmth spell on you is all-" She stopped talking when the colt began to jerk his limbs in an attempt to get up. She went back to him and put her hoof on his side. He slowly stopped moving his legs and stared at her.

"Sir... I wouldn't recommend moving yet... maybe you can just sit up for now?" she asked. The colt still stared at her blankly, but nodded, and began to manipulate his limbs to try and push himself to an upright position. He seemed awkward in his movements, but he managed to roll his body and bring his head up off the pillow. Another awkward silence came up.

Twilight realized she still had her hoof on his side, and blushed slightly while quickly bringing it down.

She was going to say something, but he beat her to it. "...Where am I?" he asked her, before adding "Miss Sparkle". His voice was somewhat relaxed for someone that just got out of his condition. She knew some colts around town to have a gruffness to their voices, yet his had a friendly sort of ring to it. She responded, although he still gave her a weird gaze.

"You're in Ponyville's Hospital, or the Medical Center as everypony likes to call it here."

"Where?"

"In Equestria. We're practically right next to Canterlot."

"Huh?"

Twilight got more confused, like her answers were just bringing more questions instead of solving them.

"Are you feeling okay? Don't you remember where you are?"

He looked down a moment, and gazed at the ground, as if deep in thought. After some time, he brought his head up, and responded. "I can't remember..."

'*Memory Loss?*' she thought. There was a special term for memory loss, and Twilight struggled to remember it. "*oh.... amnesia was it?*" She took a moment to look at the colt again, who was still deep in thought. Even though she just said that he best not move around, he looked healthy enough to move.

"You look like you could use some exercise. Do you think you can walk?" Twilight asked after another silence, thinking that he needed to stretch his legs out. The colt looked up at her again.

"Well... I won't know until I try..." his voice trailed off again, and he looked down.



Twilight felt sorry for the colt. Even though he seemed around her age, she couldn't imagine losing her precious memories. Not to mention his expression made him look so helpless.

He struggled a little out of bed. When he got out of bed and stood, Twilight could notice his legs were wobbling. She successfully suppressed a laugh when he lost his balance and fell over, but he managed to quickly grab hold of the bed to prevent himself from hitting the ground. He got up again, this time looking at Twilight, and stood properly, as if imitating her stance.

*'I guess he really does need to stretch,'* she thought. Before they left the garden, a new thought occurred to Twilight. She turned to the colt again.

"I'm sorry... how impolite of me... I should have asked for your name before... would you like to tell me?" she asked. Once again, he looked down, and Twilight sighed to herself when she remembered that he could be an amnesiac. To her surprise, his eyes grew wide and he brought his head up faster than before. This gave Twilight hope.

"Sigmund... my name is Sigmund, Miss Sparkle."

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When they exited into the Medical Center, Twilight was a little side-tracked. In the beginning, she dismissed this as a normal over-exaggerated injury, and took her time to get to the Center. She was more concerned about her studies and her plan for the day than anything else. The pony though, the one who was "injured", according to Spike, was a mystery. The story she received from the nurse first made her intrigued, and to top it off, the colt, or Sigmund, had memory loss. This only added to the perplexity of the situation. On the way home, she began to plan a trip to the Carousel Boutique to get the gems she promised Spike, since it was obvious that this was going to take far longer than she had originally hoped.

Sigmund had trouble walking through the Center. He would only keep a slow pace, or else he would lose his balance. It didn't help that some of the nurses were following him asking questions pertaining to his health. Some of the nurses questioned Twilight if it were alright for him to walk, but she

assured them it was fine. Sigmund seemed nervous when answering their questions, yet Twilight could understand that though. She herself wasn't particularly fond of having ponies mob around her with daily questions.

When she swerved off her thoughts, she noticed Sigmund staring at the multiple sights of Ponyville, and at other ponies. He seemed to stop giving Twilight the strange look, but was now giving other ponies an inquisitive stare. The other ponies he was staring at did not notice, but probably would have been creeped out if they had. He also had his attention towards the sky, where some of the Pegasi were busy pushing clouds to different parts of the town.

"What are they?" he asked Twilight. If it weren't for the colts memory loss, Twilight probably would have been speechless, but understanding his memory-loss, she decided to politely answer his questions.

"They are ponies like you and me," she said with a smile. "Except they have wings. They are called Pegasi, or a Pegasus, if we're talking about one of them only. They have wings. I guess you're wondering about the horn on my head as well?" He must have not have noticed the horn before, but he nodded his head to answer the question.

"I'm a Unicorn. I can use magic and do many things with it... for example..." She lifted a nearby box about a foot off the ground, and then dropped it. Sigmund's eyes widened in what seemed like amazement and curiosity.

He then looked at his body, and his forehead, and then asked. "So I don't have wings, or a horn... what does that make me?"

"Earth Pony. You can't fly or use magic," she informed. Twilight stopped when she realized that Sigmund looked a little down when she said that. "I mean, Earth Ponies are great at a variety of things. They're strong, fast, and are said to be braver than Unicorns and Pegasi." Her personal experience with her friends like Applejack vouched for that.

Sigmund's face did light up a little at the thought of an Earth Ponies' skills. He gave a quick nod to show his understanding, and they moved on.

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Along the way, Twilight occasionally popped a question or two, just to see how his memory was doing. She didn't really get a response other than "I can't remember...". She recalled cases in newspapers in Canterlot of ponies who lost their memories; some reacquiring them within the day, some taking years. She hoped that Sigmund would be a fast one, but obviously, it didn't seem that way.

He showed a lot of interest in everything in Ponyville. Twilight smiled when he made comments on every little thing. Two hours ago, he just woke up and seemed lost, but now he seemed to be enjoying himself.

"Miss Sparkle, what's that smell?" he asked.

"You can just call me Twilight, Sigmund." She paused to sniff into the air. "... that smells like cupcakes... it's probably coming over from that bakery over there." She then realized that it had been hours since he was found in the morning, and he must have been starving. "Do you want to get something to eat?"

"Uh..." A stomach growl timed itself appropriately, which caused a little giggle from Twilight.

"I'm guessing yes," said Twilight. He blushed in slight embarrassment.

As they walked over to the bakery, Twilight began to make out some features of it. It looked like the roof was covered in frosting, and it had a cupcake on the highest part of the roof. *'This seems familiar... Wait a minute- Oh no... I don't think he's ready yet.'* Sigmund was already at the doorstep, and Twilight attempted to run up to him to catch him, but it was too late. Sigmund already entered through the front door.

"HI TWILIGHT!" said a familiar happy and preppy voice coming behind the counter.

*'Great... this isn't going to be good...'* thought Twilight in her despair. Before them was a pink pony jumping up and down towards them both.

“Twilight! Where were you? I mean you were suppose to be here about 30 minutes ago to help me organize the super-duper-est party ever and I was gonna have streamers candy balloons slathered all over the bakery and-” The pink pony quit bouncing when she noticed the green earth pony standing by the doorway. Twilight already knew without looking at Sigmund that he was probably even more confused than before.

“Ohhhhhhh, who’s this Twilight? Are you new to Ponyville? I mean I would know since I know everypony in Ponyville! Where’d you come from? Are you single? Are you dating Twili-”

“Pinkie!” Twilight said as she shoved her hoof quicky on Pinkie’s mouth. Twilight then got over her anger to blush and take her hoof off of her friend’s mouth.

“Sooooo it’s not like that? Awwwwwww too bad Twilight, he is kind of cute though, I wouldn’t be surprised if-” Pinkie stopped talking again when Twilight gave her an angry glare. Twilight then regained her composure and went about introductions formally.

“\*ahem\* Sigmund, Pinkie Pie. Pinkie Pie, Sigmund.” Pinkie Pie smiled and held out her hoof towards the green colt. Sigmund, although still a little confused, understood the gesture and touched his front hoof with Pinkie’s hoof, where he was promptly jolted by her hidden joy buzzer.

“HAHAHA! Yeah, you’re totally new to Ponyville. Everypony in town knows I’m quite the prankster and that’s the oldest trick in the book!” While she continued laughing, Sigmund gave her a bit of a fearful smile. which she easily noticed. “Something wrong, Sigmund? Normally ponies laugh when I do that. Oh lighten up, you colt...”

Twilight face-hoofed. She quickly dragged Pinkie to the side to explain the events of that day over the course of 20 seconds. Pinkie Pie gasped when she heard the part of ‘memory loss’, and they both went back to Sigmund.

“I’m super-sorry Sigmund, I didn’t know...” Pinkie said in a quiet voice, before gasping from an idea. “Oh oh oh oh oh! I got it! We were gonna throw a party anyway, Twilight! Let’s do it for poor Sigmund here, hopefully fun times will get those memories a comin’! I can invite everypony in Ponyville and he can get some friends and...” She started babbling on

about the details, at almost a fast enough speed that Twilight herself couldn't understand what she was saying. Before Sigmund could say anything in response, Twilight interjected.

"That sounds fine Pinkie, but not tonight, I think he needs to rest more than to be up partying all night."

"Awww booo, that's no fun... but I guess it makes sense!" Pinkie paused. "Oh! Right! I guess you wanted something to eat ay Sigmund?" Sigmund, although a bit frightened, nodded his head.

"Alright, be back in a jiffy!" she said before quickly vanished into the room behind the counter. She emerged with two pastries in ten seconds flat. "Here you go! Two Sugarcube Corner famous pastries on the house!"

Sigmund carefully took the pastry off of the plate with one hoof, nearly dropping it in the process, and took a bite. Pinkie Pie waited for him to swallow the bit of pastry, intent on his response. A real smile appeared on his face after he swallowed it.

"Wow... this is pretty good!" he said. Pinkie Pie jumped with joy, and handed the other pastry to Twilight. Twilight didn't even take a bite of her pastry before Sigmund already finished his. "Thank you Mis-" he paused, guessing that she wasn't one for formality, and said "Thank you Pinkie Pie, that was delicious."

"I'm glad you thought so!" Pinkie paused when she heard voice call her from within the kitchen. "Well looks like I have to go..." her voice trailed off, but picked up again. "Oh Twilight, while you're on your walk, if you run into the others tell them about Sigmund's welcoming party! I'll see you both later! Bye!" And with that, she darted back into the kitchen in a puff of smoke.

He looked towards Twilight. "She seems a little... enthusiastic, but she's definitely nice."

Twilight rolled her eyes a little. "You've barely scratched the surface, Sigmund." She said as they left the bakery.

---

They didn't have to go very far before Twilight heard a voice calling out to her again. This time it was above them. It was a blue pegasus with a rainbow mane. She was lying on an idle cloud above them.

"Hey Twilight? Where are you going? Who's the colt with you?" She rolled off the cloud and performed a swift drop, landing only a couple feet away from where Twilight and Sigmund were standing.

Sigmund looked like he was fascinated by her wings, which were in the air as usual, due to the pony's show-off personality. "Well...?" she said, expecting Sigmund to say something. Sigmund noticed she was looking at him and didn't know what to say.

"Errrrr....."

"Not the talkative type are you?"

Twilight sighed and pulled Rainbow Dash away for a moment to explain to her the course of the day, and who Sigmund was. Rainbow Dash's eyes widened a little at the mention of "memory loss". They went back to Sigmund.

Rainbow Dash leaned in close to Sigmund with stern eyes and examined him. Sigmund looked at her strangely, and a little nervously. "Hmmmmmm" she said. "You know, I use to have amnesia as well."

Twilight's eyes widened. "You did? You never said that before!"

"...I hit my head prettyyy hard back then."

*'Implying that you don't hit your head hard enough now,'* thought Twilight, who rolled her eyes somewhat.

"I couldn't remember a few things, and the doctors said it would come back to me over time. And then, like an hour later, I started flying around and doing stunts and tricks and going fast, and then it just came back in a sudden burst. I remembered everything I forgot. I think that's what he

needs!" Rainbow suddenly wrapped one foreleg around him and looked towards the sky. "All you need is a little adrenaline, and I'm sure it'll come back to you! Let's start now! 200 push-ups are a good place to begin, and-"

"Rainbow Dash," Twilight interrupted, "he just got out of the Medical Center, so he definitely needs a bit of relaxation. Maybe some other time." While saying this, she winked to Sigmund, which gave him a little relief.

"Alright alright, fine, I understand that." She looked back towards Sigmund, and gave him a smirk that caused fear to return to him. "I'll see you around, Sigmund. Don't you think Twilight here can hold me back forever!" she said as she flapped her wings and took off into the air.

Before she shot off into a random direction, she asked, "Oh yeah! One more thing. I'm making a guess Pinkie is already throwing a party right?" Twilight nodded. "Alright, I'll spread the news to AJ and the others." She then flew off.

Finally Sigmund said something to Twilight. "I have a feeling that if I go along with what she has planned, she'll be the death of me."

Twilight laughed a little. "I don't doubt your feeling at all."

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"Oh yes, before we go to my home, I need to make a quick stop to one of my friend's places." She glanced over to a nearby building, titled 'The Carousel Boutique'.

"Are you talking about the hyper pony or the murder-with-exercise pony?"

"No, the nit-picking fashion-designer pony. You haven't met her yet, but she's always delighted to meet newcomers." They approached the door, but Twilight remembered to tell Sigmund one tiny detail to better prepare him. "She'll probably want you to try a hundred different outfits... but just go along with it. She knows what she is doing."

Before Twilight could reach the door, it already flung open. Standing by the doorframe was a white unicorn with a shiny and curly purple mane.

“Oh hello darling,” she said, “I was wondering when you would come by today. Oh yes, and let us not forget about your new friend...” she said with a wink towards to Twilight. “Rainbow Dash already flew by and told me... why, I didn’t know what he looked like, so I got all my gentlecolt apparel out, just in case...”

“Uh... thank you Rarity but...” Twilight paused to shoot Rarity a glare when she understood the meaning of the wink. “We’re just here for-”

Rarity quickly interrupted her and went next to Sigmund. “Oh my, what a handsome gentlecolt. Please! Please! Come in! I simply must know what size you are... Green isn’t a common color among colts, so I may have to improvise...” she said as she pulled Sigmund into the building.

Twilight sighed once again, and followed them into boutique.

---

After an hour, Sigmund had finally gone through all the clothes Rarity had out for him. Twilight had almost fallen asleep during the procedure, since she had seen it happen far too many times before. Sigmund was bored, but a little flustered after the hundreds of positive remarks the white unicorn gave him while trying on new things.

“Ah yes, that vest went so well with your coat Sigmund... what an exquisite name you have by the way... just remember to come back some other time! I will be likely to have something done by then.” She said while smiling at him.

“Uh.... thank you miss Rarity,” he said. H then remembered that Twilight did come here to ask Rarity something, so he lightly tapped her to wake her up fully.

“Huh? what? Oh... right. Rarity, do you have some gemstones? I promised Spike I would get him some.”



“Why sure darling, I still have a couple left over from when Sapphire Shores ordered her outfits. Take as many as you like!” Rarity showed her to the jewel chest, which was about half full. Twilight levitated 7 or 8 of the colorful and assorted ones and put them in her saddlebag.

“These will do nicely, thanks Rarity.”

“Oh no, thank you Twilight Sparkle, for showing me your handsome new friend...” she gazed towards Sigmund again, who heard her comment and blushed while attempting to avert her gaze. She turned back to Twilight and winked at her in the same manner as before. Twilight glared at her again, and left with Sigmund.

---

Twilight had run out of things to talk about, so the walk was suffering from an awkward silence.

“The sun is about to set. Luna’s moon is going to rise soon...” said Twilight, in a poor effort at small-talk.

Sigmund asked in response, “Luna? who is Luna?”.

“Uhhh... I have a bunch of history books and newspapers lying around, I think you should take a look at them when you can...” said Twilight, not willing to answer any more questions about basic pony knowledge for the day.

“Alright. Maybe that will help jog my memory.” Sigmund then looked towards the direction of a large tree.

“I see you’ve noticed Ponyville’s library. That’s where I live. It’s the perfect place for studying.” As they got closer, they began to make out the details of the Library’s exterior. Twilight paused when she remembered something.

“Oh, right. You can stay with me for now while we get this entire memory thing sorted out. I have a spare room, and a spare bed, so you can use those.”

“Sure, that sounds great.” replied Sigmund before adding, “as long as it doesn’t trouble you so much.”

“It doesn’t bother me really. You’re gonna meet Spike now”

“Is he a Unicorn, Pegasus, or Earth Pony?”

“He’s not a pony, he’s a baby dragon. He tends to grumble a whole lot, but he’s definitely a great assistant and friend,” she said as she entered the completely clean and sorted library. She was glad that she told Spike to clean up, for it would have been embarrassing if Sigmund were to believe he would sleep in such a messy place.

Silently, she and Sigmund walked up the steps to her room. She noticed Spike asleep in his basket. “There he is. I wouldn’t wake him now for conversation, or else he’ll be cranky. You can probably talk to him tomorrow. I’m sure he’ll have a lot of questions.”

“Questions that I won’t have the answer for,” he joked. Twilight giggled somewhat. Twilight levitated the gems out of her saddlebag and placed them beside his basket.

“What does he do with the gemstones?”

“He eats them,” Twilight replied simply.

“They’re... edible?” he said with some surprise.

“Yeah, but only dragons have the durable teeth and strong-enough bite required to chew them. Even baby dragons have both.”

They watched him doze in his sleep for some moments, before they left her room and returned to the main reading room. Shortly after being there, Sigmund let out a yawn. Even though it was just after nightfall, he was already sleepy. “Are you tired? You should probably go to sleep now.”

“Yeah... I guess that’s a good idea.” he said while using his foreleg to rub his eyes. “Which room am I staying in exactly?”

“Second room on the right.” She extended her foreleg out in the direction of a hallway.

“Okay.” He made his way towards the door, and awkwardly used his hooves to open the door. “Oh yeah, and mis-,” he stopped himself on the formality, “Twilight?”

“Yes, Sigmund?”

“...Thank you... for what you’ve done for me so far. I appreciate it. I’ll return the favor some time,” he said, and Twilight smiled at him in response. He then closed the door.

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It was no where near Twilight’s normal bed time, so she stayed up. This was something that she was going to have to report, she figured. She took out a quill, and began writing on a scroll to her mentor. Normally she would only write to her mentor when she learned something new about the magic of friendship, but this was something she felt her mentor needs to know about.

*Dearest Princess Celestia*

*This isn’t one of my normal reports, but rather an something I’d like to tell you that happened today. Stranger than the Pinkie Pie bottomless-stomach incident I may have mentioned to you before...*

...

She relayed the story for the third time that day.

...

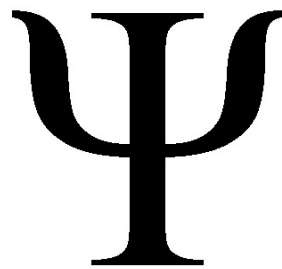
*...I’m not sure what to make of this, and I’m hoping this colt, named Sigmund, has his memories returned. May you respond and give me your take on what is happening?*

*Your faithful student,  
Twilight Sparkle*

Twilight briefly woke Spike up to send the message out, which Spike was use to. He just quickly sent out the message, and passed out in his basket again.

Twilight was getting tired herself, but decided to check up on Sigmund. Sigmund was fast asleep when he pushed the door open gently. It looked like he already made himself comfortable, and was snoring normally, unlike his strange comatose sleep he was in earlier that day. Twilight was about to leave, when at that moment, she saw his cutie mark, exposed from the tossed sheet. It must have been there the entire time, but she must have glanced over it.

It looked sort of like candle holder that held three candles, yet it wasn't. She had seen a few ponies with candles as their cutie marks, but they were usually colorful, or had fire on them. This Cutie Mark was like a black candle holder, without the candles. Something told her it wasn't meant to be a candle holder. Maybe it was a symbol of some kind. The night was getting the better of her though, so she went back to her room to sleep. She would have ask Sigmund about it tomorrow.



# Chapter 2

Sigmund woke up to the surroundings of the guest room. For some reason, being surrounded on all sides by wood and simplistic decorations had its own comfort and appeal. It was only meant to be a guest room, as he remembered how Twilight's room was much more complicated and decorative, yet he liked the simplicity of his temporary lodging. The outside world was blocked by the curtains, but that didn't prevent a few beams of sunlight from penetrating and landing on his face. After a few minutes of waiting for his muscles to become less sluggish, he brought his head up.

Slowly, he tossed the sheet over and moved off of the bed. While getting off, he made sure this time that he was prepared to support his full weight, unlike the day before when he nearly fell over.

He was only doing awkward movements because he wasn't use to the way his limbs bended or his balance. Then again, he couldn't remember much of anything prior to when he woke up in the Medical Center. Perhaps he just lost his coordination as well.

He walked over to the window curtains, and pushed them to the side, where he was immediately greeted by a strong light. When his eyes adjusted, he looked outside the window to see the town bustling with commotion like the day before. He gently unlocked the window's latch with a lift of his head, and pushed the window open, whereupon the frequent and harmonious noises of Ponyville entered the room with speed.

Before leaving the room, he noticed his untidy sheets on his bed. Not wanting to leave the room unorganized, he walked back to the bed and used his mouth to adjust the covers. He doubted that he would have been able to do it with precisely with his hooves. Plus he had noticed ponies doing several things with their mouths, so he assumed it was okay to do so.

When his covers were neatly positioned, he walked towards the door. *'I'd best go find Twilight now,'* he thought, and exited the room.

---

She was in the main reading area. She was looking over a textbook titled *The History of the Ancient Pony Sisters*. She looked up with a friendly face.

“Good Morning. you must have been pretty tired. You’ve been out of it for most of the morning.”

“Morning,” he replied. “Hehe, sorry about that”.

She smiled. “Don’t worry, it’s not noon yet. In fact-” She was cut off by a voice nearby.

“Whoa... it’s you!” The baby dragon jumped down from the nearby ladder and rushed over to get a closer look at Sigmund. He gazed at Sigmund with speculative eyes for a good five seconds before saying anything. “Hmmm... green? Really? You were more blue than anything else when I first saw you.” Spike then had a grin on his face and held out his hand. “I’m Spike, it’s a pleasure to see that you’re doing fine.”

Sigmund carefully looked at the young dragon’s hand to make sure there was no joy buzzer on it, and held out his hoof to meet the hand. “I’m Sigmund. It’s a pleasure to meet you too.” he said. “Well, more of a pleasure when you’re awake that is.”

Spike was still smiling. Until Sigmund heard a grumbling noise from Spike, followed by his cheeks puffing outward. Sigmund looked with curiosity.

**BURRRRRRRRP.** Sigmund jumped back when Spike belched out a greenish gas in front of him, which quickly materialized into a scroll.

“Oh! A letter from the Princess!” said Twilight excitedly, as she caught it in mid-air with her magic and placed it on the table.

“What Princess?” asked Sigmund, recovering from the surprise. He promptly received a stare of disbelief from Spike after asking the question.

“Spike... remember what I told you?” reminded Twilight. Spike broke the stare and looked down to avoid Twilight’s gaze. Twilight turned back to

Sigmund to answer his question. "Princess Celestia is the benevolent ruler of Equestria, or the land of the ponies. She lives up in Canterlot." She gestured out one of the windows, where a castle on a mountainside was evident. "She's also my mentor, and we communicate through scrolls, which Spike here helps me with."

"Oh... I see. So aren't you going to read her message? If it comes from royalty then it must be important."

Twilight looked at the scroll on the tabletop, but shook her head. "I have a feeling it's something private, so I'll read it a little later... besides, two of my other friends are coming here. They wanted to meet you, Sigmund." When she finished saying this, there were a few knocks on the library door. "...And that must be them right now. Impeccable timing on their part. Oh, and don't worry, they aren't as loony as the others." Sigmund breathed a quiet sigh of relief. She opened the door from afar with her magic.

"Howdy Twilight! ah see you must've spruced the place up a bit." The earth pony in the cowboy hat wandered in and looked over to Sigmund. Her accent was quite apparent as she talked. "So this is him ain't it? Hmmmm." She looked at him in the same speculative eyes Spike gave him before. "You said 'memory loss'? My, he don't look any different than the average pony." She then quickly grabbed one of his forelegs and shook it vigorously.

"My name's Applejack. Ah work on the farm just on the outskirts of town. Sweet Apple Acres. The juiciest of apples are grown there," she promoted.

"Uh hello to you too Miss Applejack..." said Sigmund after she stopped shaking his hoof. "I'm Sigmund."

"Now now, ya dun have to call me Miss, Sigmund. Applejack works ay-okay."

"Alright then Applejack," he said with a smile. He looked over to Twilight. "Didn't you say two friends? Where's the other pony?" He then noticed Applejack's tail was trembling.

Applejack groaned. "Aw shucks Fluttershy, now that's no way to greet a new fella'. Be nice and say hi!"

Applejack moved over, revealing a yellow pegasus with a long, pink mane. The pegasus looked up at him from her cowering pose into Sigmund's eyes, but all that came out of her mouth was a "\*squeak\*". Twilight and Applejack both face-hoofed. Sigmund was originally confused, but he could understand that she was merely frightened.

"Hello Miss... Fluttershy. My name is Sigmund, if you didn't catch it before," he said as friendly as he could muster. "There's no need for you to be like that, I'm just like anypony here. I won't hurt you." He put on a friendly smile to go along with the friendly tone. The Yellow pegasus looked up again into his eyes, but this time slowly stood up. Twilight looked at Sigmund with widened eyes, as if he accomplished something rare.

"I-I'm sorry..." she stammered in a soft voice. "I'm just a little afraid of meeting new people... Not to mention that it was a little scary when I heard they found you in the Everfree F-forest." She then looked back into his eyes. "But you seem... nice..."

An silence followed before she spoke again.

"I take care of the tiny creatures around town..." she said, feeling as though she should say more. She had a small smile on her face.

"That sounds like a wonderful way to spend your time," complimented Sigmund. Fluttershy blushed a little at the compliment. He looked at Applejack. "The same goes to you too, Applejack."

He, along with the others, stared out the nearby window when the town bell began ringing. It rang twelve times, signifying noon.

"Oh that reminds me... It's about time for some lunch, so ah brought over a couple apples." She took an apple out of her saddlebag. "Do'ya want one?"

"Sure, sounds good," he said as he grabbed an apple. He was holding it awkwardly, but he soon got the hang of his hoof's ability to slightly bend, which gave him a better hold on objects. He began biting into it. It had an incredibly juicy taste to it, just like Applejack promoted before. Not to mention it was more filling than the pastry from the day before.



“Slow eater, eh?” commented Applejack. “Ah usually just jam one into my mouth and bite down hard, but whatever works ah suppose.”

“Applejack, not everyone is a member of the Apple family,” said Twilight., “Everypony knows only the Apple family has jaw strength like that.”

“Eh, anybody could do it with enough practice, sugarcube,” Applejack replied. “Oh yeah, ah almost forgot. Pinkie wanted us to meet her at Sugarcube Corner, and to bring Sigmund along as well. You know what that means right?”

Everyone else in the room besides Sigmund let out a simultaneous “Party.”

“A’yup,” said Applejack with a smile. “Better hope you have room down there Sigmund... cause you need room for desert... plenty and plenty of desert...”

They all laughed, and Sigmund, although confused, laughed somewhat as well. There was a friendly and welcoming atmosphere to the ponies, which he did enjoyed being in. They soon headed towards Sugarcube Corner.

---

When they got there, Pinkie Pie was still setting the place up with balloons and streamers. Even if the party was apparently thrown for him, he gladly aided the others in setting it up. It was fun, getting to know them all better rather than having them all question him over his amnesia.

The party itself lasted almost all afternoon, and into the night. Sigmund was walking with Twilight back to the Library from Sugarcube Corner. Sigmund was surprised on how many ponies could fit in one building. It was like the entire town was there. They all gave him friendly shoves, hoofshakes, smiles, etc. Like he was one of the family. It did help to feel like he was accepted, even with the strange stories circulating of his arrival.

Pinkie Pie was even more hyper than the day before, something that he found unbelievable. Applejack and Rainbow dash were lost in the crowd, while Rarity seemed to be unintentionally charming some of the nearby

colts. Sigmund didn't want to get caught up in it, so he just sat off to the side and accompanied Twilight and Fluttershy. Even though the party got out of hand in the middle of it, he did enjoy himself.

He felt an ache in his stomach, from the large amount of sweets he ate. All of which were delicious. *'Applejack wasn't lying when she said I needed room,'* he thought to himself and chuckled.

The party ended though after the sugar-high wore off and the other ponies started feeling sick. So mostly everypony left. He stayed with Twilight and her friends to help clean up. He remembered overhearing Pinkie Pie say "Dang, I hope the next one in a few days is just as bouncy!"

*'I can't imagine partying like this so often... ugh... well... everypony looked like they were enjoying themselves.'*

Twilight's friends all parted ways, and made their way back to their homes. All of them said goodbye to him as well, while also saying how they would like to hang out with him again. They must have considered him a friend at this point.

"You know... Sigmund..." said Twilight, interrupting Sigmund's thoughts. He looked towards Twilight, who had a passed-out Spike on her back. "You see that mark on your flank?" Sigmund turned his head over and saw the mark. It looked sort of like a trident. "Do you happen to recognize that mark?"

"No..." He then looked at Twilight's mark. "You have a mark as well... I've noticed them on all ponies now that you mention it. Each is different than the last. What are they exactly?"

"They're called Cutie Marks," she said. "Normally when we're younger we get them, after we discover our special talent that is. They normally relate to what our special skill is." She looked at her Cutie Mark. "Like mine here. I got it when I was back when Princess Celestia took me under her wing as her student. It symbolizes great magical power."

"...And Applejack's apples on her flank show her talent relates to apples? And Fluttershy's show how she is good at taking care of little creatures?"

“Yep. You get it now.” said Twilight. She then looked towards his Cutie Mark before continuing. “Most Cutie Marks are easy to interpret... yet... I don’t understand yours. I was hoping that you would know whatever the symbol meant...”

Sigmund looked down. “I’m sorry Twilight, but I just don’t remember a lot of stuff. I’m sure it’ll come back to me. But if it relates to whatever my special talent was, then it should be important...”

“It’s alright Sigmund. I just wanted to know, because maybe the knowledge of your special talent would help you...”

Her eyes lit up when an idea popped into her head. “You know, there is still plenty of time left in the night. How about we check through some books in the library? Maybe we can find out what that symbol means.”

Sigmund looked to the sky. It was darker than when he went to bed the previous night, but he didn’t feel tired yet. It was understandable, since he only work up a few minutes before noon. He looked back at Twilight. “That sounds like a good idea.”

---

Hours passed in the night. Sigmund flipped through the books of the library. At first he would skim them, looking for pages that had special symbols on them. When they had peculiar symbols or pictures, he’d stop and compare his Cutie Mark to them. Then he would read through some of the books, seeing if the text could spark a memory. Twilight could only help look for a similar image, but she couldn’t help him read, as she could not unlock his memories for him. Twilight looked towards the clock. 11:00 at night. She could not believe time passed by so quickly.

Sigmund however was buried in books. He groaned every time he was finished with a book, and simply grabbed another book off of the stack to skim and read. He was becoming aggravated. It had only been two days, but the only thing he had that could relate to his memories was his Cutie Mark, which was in none of the books.

His aggravation was suddenly paused when he felt a hoof on his shoulder, and he turned around to the smiling but worried face of Twilight. He calmed down slightly, but he realized something at the sight of Twilight and her magical horn.

“Hey Twilight... can’t you just use magic to help my amnesia?” he asked with hopeful eyes. Yet his brightened expression was short-lived when Twilight shook her head in response.

“Sorry Sigmund... but magic is more... related to physical things. We can move and change objects... but as far as all my books tell me, there’s no such thing as a mental spell. Believe me, Sigmund, I would have done a spell like that in the beginning, but there’s simply no such thing.”

“Ah...” his defeated gaze casted downwards.

“Listen... Sigmund... just let it go for now. I’m not expecting your memories to come back to you immediately, and you shouldn’t either... you have plenty of time to get them back,” she said. Sigmund slowly nodded his head in response. “Okay. Nothing good ever comes of too much stress. It’s getting a tad bit late, so I think you better rest up. I can probably help you more tomorrow if you’re still willing to go through the collection.”

Sigmund had a downed look, but he nodded once again. “Thanks Twilight.” He got up and made his way to his room. “Good night,” he said as cheerfully as he could.

“Pleasant dreams,” she said as he shut the door behind him.

---

Twilight yawned. It was about time for her to go to bed as well. Yet as she passed by the table, she realized there was a scroll laying on it. It was still furled and tied, with the royal seal placed on the ribbon. Twilight’s stopped dead in her tracks when she remembered that Princess Celestia sent her a message in the morning. The Princess could have been waiting for a response the entire day, and Twilight may have unintentionally ignored her. Panic nearly overcame her, but she calmed down and opened the scroll.

~~~

*My Prized Pupil Twilight Sparkle,*

*The story of your friend Sigmund is indeed peculiar. However, amnesia is rare, but common for me to hear about. I receive letters more frequently than you may have read about in the newspapers, from ponies of all sorts who have forgotten their past. Normally they solve their problems themselves, when given enough time, but from the story you described to me, I find this case in particular different than usual. I would like to see this new pony for myself.*

*Unfortunately, my advisors have me thoroughly busy over the next few weeks. I am unsure when I will be able to see you in Ponyville. When I get the chance, I will come as soon as possible.*

*In the mean time, I suggest that you yourself continue your normal routine in Ponyville. If you learn a new lesson about the magic of friendship, then you may send me your report. If Sigmund however remembers something that seems important, you should send me another letter, just so that I am well-informed on the situation upon my arrival. I may have a trick or two in my knowledge to awaken his memories, if nothing else works.*

*Your Mentor,  
Princess Celestia*

~~~

Twilight breathed a sigh of relief. Not just because the Princess wasn't expecting a quick response like before. She was glad that if there would be a safety net if nothing else worked. Only a few weeks from now, the Princess herself would be here to help. If there was a pony who knew a spell that Twilight didn't know about, it would be the Princess.

She pondered briefly on why the Princess would take a moment from her busy schedule to help an unknown pony. Maybe it was because it concerned her prized pupil, which sounded like a reasonable enough answer. She rolled the scroll and tied the ribbon on it again. Twilight was comforted, believing that the entire situation would be sorted out without a problem.

# Chapter 3

Sigmund looked up from his reading, and groaned to himself.

It had been about three weeks since Sigmund first jolted awake in the Ponyville Medical Center. Three weeks of bits and pieces of his memories coming back to him. Remembering his past was like trying to solve a puzzle set, when they only gave him one puzzle piece out of thousands a day. When he tried to pair the information, it made no sense whatsoever. The picture of the puzzle couldn't be seen with the few pieces Sigmund had.

Yet all the pieces of information that came back were... unimportant. Nothing pertained to the "cave" he supposedly found in. Nothing related to the strange symbol on his flank either. Normally it had random images that made no sense whatsoever. Sigmund was forced to consider possibilities, rather than actual memory-based facts.

Maybe when Twilight first cast her warmth spell on him three weeks ago, she could have affected his head in a negative way. Maybe he was some sort of intrepid explorer who banged his head against something in the cave. Maybe he was going insane. Once again, he groaned to himself in aggravation.

To pass the time, he normally read books in the library. None of the books could help him jog his memory, but he read them just to gain knowledge. He did, however, learn a lot of Equestrian history. He learned about the Ancient Pony Sisters, The Early Years of Equestria, and read various reports on the current news in Equestria.

Sigmund found the history books and news informative, but enjoyed reading the magic-related books instead. They were actually interesting to read. There were so many uses for magic, and apparently Twilight was the best magic-user in Ponyville according to her friends.

Speaking of Twilight, Sigmund remembered finding something a little awkward that may have belonged to her. While sifting through the library

collection a few days before, he came across a small box placed in the corner of the Library. Upon opening it, he saw that it was filled to the brim with what looked like cheesy romance books. Not wanting to approach Twilight and risk making her feel embarrassed, he placed the box back where he found it and acted like he saw nothing. He could never guess Twilight to be that type of pony. He could only imagine a pony like Rarity to be into stuff like that. It just went to show that there was more to ponies than what appeared.

Sigmund shook himself out of his train of thought, and scanned the Library for another pony. No pony at all. He'd been there in the Library for three weeks, and he would only see Twilight and her friends inside the library. '*I guess reading books isn't an active hobby of ponies,*' he thought.

His thoughts soon drifted back towards Twilight and her friends. Although none of the others seemed to mind, Sigmund felt like he relying on them too much. Twilight gave him a place to sleep. Applejack and Pinkie tended to give him food whenever he saw them, and so did Twilight on some nights. Rarity gave him a nice jacket that 'fashionably went along' with his naturally green coat. Rainbow Dash helped him with some memory jogging techniques, and Fluttershy... well... Fluttershy was generally nice to him.

Three weeks ago, he hadn't known the ponies for a day, and they already aided him in whatever way they could. Perhaps they pitied his situation, or maybe they were naturally compassionate ponies. Either way, Sigmund felt like it wouldn't go on like this forever. If he couldn't make sense of his memories soon, then it seemed possible that they would stop helping him.

It wasn't just that though. Here he was, in an incomprehensible situation, and they were being nice to him. Even if they remained nice to him in the future, Sigmund felt guilty. He didn't want to mooch off of them, because they genuinely were his friends. Why else would they have been so nice? Pity can't be the only thing to drive such selfless action.

One thought was in his head for a few days, and it was showing itself to be a reasonable solution: A Job. To become less dependent on them, he would need money to pay for his own food and things. He might as well get one to show his friends that he didn't require help all the time.

He gazed around the boring library again, sighed, and closed the book in front of him. One by one, he carried his books back to their respective spots on the shelves. While he organized, he heard a voice call him from the steps to Twilight's room.

"Hiya Sigmund," said the baby dragon, "you're done reading?"

"Yeah Spike, I'm done for today."

"I see." Spike looked at Sigmund as he used his hooves to put the books back on the shelves. "Wow. I'm sorry, but after being Twilight's assistant, I can't imagine a pony sorting books without me." Sigmund chuckled, as he understood that the baby dragon was the assistant to Twilight, the pony who pulled hours of studying on a near-daily basis around the library.

"Nah, I'm just not in a hurry is all." When he put the book back on the shelf, he headed towards the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going for a walk." Sigmund noticed that Spike looked a little sad as he said that. "Don't worry Spike, we'll play your dungeons game sometime later."

"It's not 'my dungeons game', it's Dungeons and Drag-" He stopped himself, sighed, and continued. "Ugh... I hate how everypony keeps forgetting the name. Is it really that hard to remember? Fine, I'll catch you later Sigmund."

"Later," said Sigmund with a chuckle as he closed the front door behind him.

---

As Sigmund trotted through Ponyville, he began to contemplate on where to find a job in Ponyville.



*'Pinkie Pie works in the only Bakery in town... but that would mean I'd have to work alongside her during the day... I think I'll pass...'* Not that he disliked Pinkie Pie, but he just couldn't imagine dealing with her hyperactivity and talkative nature for several hours on a daily basis.

*'How about the Carousel Boutique? No... Rarity likes to handle designs on her own... plus I don't have much of a fashion sense...'*

*'Rainbow Dash is a weather pony right? Except I don't have wings... what about Fluttershy? Oh wait, she's naturally good with animals, so there probably isn't much I could help with.'*

*'Hang on... what was that one place that Applejack talked about? Sour Apple Land? Juicy Apple Farm? I know it had 'Apple' in it.'*

Sigmund's question was answered when he passed by the Ponyville market place, where one apple stand had "Sweet Apple Acre's Apples" written on the board above it. It seemed business was slow, so the stand manager was beginning to pack up. His coat was a crimson red, and his Cutie mark looked like a green apple that was cut in half. Sigmund could tell from a distance how large the pony was, which probably made him a worker at the farm. Sigmund went closer to engage him in conversation.

"Hello sir," greeted Sigmund, "You sell apples here?" Sigmund probably would have slapped himself in that moment for pointing out the obvious, but the large stallion turned to him anyway. He observed how he had a large horse collar around his neck, which seemed to have a fair amount of weight. There was a piece of wheat hanging from his mouth, which somehow stayed in place as his mouth opened and closed.

"Eeeeeyup, Ah sell apple an' apple accessories here. Ah was just packin' up fer today, since the lunch rush looks about over," he said slowly, in a deep yet familiar accent. "Do ya want some? Just grab some apples and pay ya bits is all."

*'Bits of what?'* thought Sigmund, but he remembered from the books that "Bits" was Equestrian currency. "Well, no... that's not what I'm here for." The red stallion finished packing his pack of leftover apples, and with a single heave of his neck, swung the large sack of apples onto the cart..

“Then what ar’ ya here fer then?” the stallion said as he began to make his way down the road with the cart of apples in toll. Sigmund followed him down the road.

“Well... perhaps I started this off the wrong way. My name is Sigmund. I’m new to Ponyville, and-”

“Mah name is Big Macintosh, Sigmund. Everypony calls me Big Mac or Mac though, so ah guess ya can do the same. Oh, ah think ah remember ya name now. Mah sister told me about yer predicament a couple weeks ago.”

Sigmund then pieced together the familiar accent to know who he was talking about. “Oh! So Applejack is your sister?”

“Indeed she be. She sometimes shakes off her duties to the farm’ whenever a problem ah rises, but she have a mighty big heart.”

“Yeah, she’s a pretty dedicated pony.”

“She said something of... memory-loss was it? Must be quite the annoyance. Might’ve you remembered anythin’ yet?”

“Just bits and pieces really. And yes, it is quite the annoyance.” Sigmund then changed the subject when he remembered that he was not there for a casual conversation. “Anyway, see, I’ve been in town for a while... and your sister and her friends have been very nice to me. Giving me a place to stay, food, and stuff... and I can’t help but feel like I’m becoming a burden.”

“Aw shucks, ya shouldn’t think that. My sis’ does think ya are a nice colt in this town, an’ from what ah see, ya mean well.”

“Well, I guess, but that could change in a few weeks if I don’t make any progress...”

“Ah see... so Ah’m guessin’ you’re lookin’ fer a job?”

“Yes!... I mean... I am. Do you think you need help on the farm?”

“Well... Sweet Apple Acres is a family thing really...” said Big Mac with a shrug. Sigmund looked down in disappointment, but Big Macintosh kept on talking. “Yet we do let some ponies help us out every now and again. In fact, ah’m gettin’ mighty tired of doing all the work by mahself when AJ ain’t around to help. So ah think we have a slot open fer work. You’d probably want to see AJ before doing anythin’ though.”

“Sure, can we go now?”

Once again, the large stallion replied with a simple “Eeeyup”.

---

“Oh hiya there sugarcube. Whatcha doin’ followin’ Macintosh around?” asked Applejack.

“He’s here fer work sis” Big Mac said, responding for Sigmund.

“Huh? Shouldn’t you be memory-searchin’? I don’t see how labor will help...” she said.

“Well Applejack, it’s just that I feel tha-” said Sigmund, before Big Mac cut him off.

“He just wants some bits to use is all AJ. Plus he already told me that it was takin’ a while.”

Sigmund continued off of Mac. “Uh... yeah. I figured I might as well do something useful in the meantime.”

Applejack put her hoof to her chin in thought, nodded to herself, and responded to Sigmund. “Alrighty then sugarcube, ah understand. Libraries are pretty borin’ anyway. Ah guess my big brother could use a little help,” she said while giving her older brother a light and friendly shove. “Ah reckon’ yall can start today if ya want.”

“How much?”

“Ah suppose 20 bits for 5 hours a day is a fair place to start for now. Maybe if you work hard enough, we’ll bump it up. You can take weekends off if you want,” she said. “Now ah’ve got to get goin’, some of the others are expectin’ me, so ah’ll talk to yall later.” With a wave of her foreleg, she trotted and left through the farm entrance.

“Later sis,” Big Mac called out, and then turned to Sigmund. “Sorry about interruptin’ ya before, but you didn’t need to tell her that you felt that way about her kindness. Mares don’t like bein’ criticized... even a mare as strong-hearted as AJ.”

“Yeah... you have a point I suppose.”

“Indeed ah do. Now, let me show ya how ta work the plow...”

---

Five hours and four aching limbs later, Sigmund made his way back to the Library.

*‘That plow... ugh... that thing weighed a ton. I guess that’s why Mac is so muscular,’* he thought. The road to town seemed even longer than before, with each step of his hooves sending pain across his body.

He felt the jingling of his day-earned Bits in his saddlebag, which didn’t seem like much at the time. They were bound to accumulate if Sigmund kept working. Although Mac had to show him how to plow and buck properly about a dozen times, he didn’t really mind since Sigmund was new to it. Mac was like a new friend, since they had good conversations for most of the workday.

Sigmund entered the Library, where he saw Twilight reading through a scroll in the main room. She looked up and asked, “How was the farmwork?”

“Oh, I guess Applejack already told you huh?” The unicorn nodded. “Ugh... I’m exhausted... maybe I’ll go to bed early tonight..’

“Well Sigmund, that would be a good idea, but you need to stay up for a little while longer.”

“For what?” he asked, while he groaned inside his head. His limbs ached, and he just wanted to lie down at this point. Yet his focus was shifted when there were three knocks on the door behind him.

Twilight opened the door from a distance with her magic, and who was behind it was even taller than Big Macintosh.

She looked like a pony, like Twilight, but of a towering height. She had the picture of a sun on her flank, and was decorated in jewelry: a gold necklace with a purple gem in the front, along with a jeweled crown. She also wore shiny, gold shoes on each of her hooves.

He recognized the figure from his studying over the past couple of weeks, as the ruler of Equestria. Princess Celestia herself.

Knowing the proper formality, Sigmund bowed at the same time Twilight had. The Princess, although taller than him, looked down with kind, benevolent eyes. She was indoors, yet her long, multi-colored mane still flowed at the slightest breeze. She also had both wings, and a horn. A horn that was probably four, maybe five or six times longer than Twilight's.

“Hello my prized pupil.” She greeted Twilight in an ethereal voice, as he knelt down and nuzzled her affectionately. “It's been around a month since I've last seen you. Your smile seems to have improved I must say.” Twilight grinned even more brightly at the comment.

“I'm sorry I could not announce my visit, but this was meant to be private. I would not want to trouble everypony in Ponyville, like that time when the entire town spent days readying for one of my quick visits.”

Sigmund still looked at her in awe. He felt like he was being judged when she turned her head to look towards him.

“I'm guessing you are Sigmund, correct?” asked the Princess. Sigmund was a little lost for words, so he nodded his head. “I've heard quite a lot about your situation from my student here. How are you doing?”

Sigmund finally managed to speak. "F-Fine, your majesty... I only wish you would come at a later time, so that I could take a bath..."

"Don't worry Sigmund, I do not sense any foul smell of any sort. Although I do detect the smell of apples..." Sigmund glanced Twilight who grinned at him. "Now... you've been in Ponyville for about three weeks correct?"

"Correct, your majesty."

"How has your memory been... do you remember anything prior to your arrival at the Medical Center?"

"Only little details your majesty. I wouldn't be able to tell you about them, because they make no sense to me at all."

"I see..." She then brought her gaze towards Twilight. "Twilight, how about we have some tea? Sigmund looks like he needs something to drink." She looked at Sigmund again, who attempted to avert his eyes from her all-knowing gaze. The Princess quietly laughed to herself.

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"Now, Sigmund," she said while they were seated at the table. Princess Celestia and Twilight were sipping their tea using magic, while Sigmund had to use his hooves to carefully drink the tea. "I have received news about memory-loss cases in the past, and normally they sort themselves out... but your memory loss seems oddly peculiar." The Princess sipped her tea while Twilight and Sigmund looked at her. "Does it seem difficult... in your attempts to jog your memory?"

While drinking from his cup, Sigmund briefly attempted to think of a good way to explain his difficulties. He settled what he compared the struggle to earlier that day.

"Princess... my memories are like a thousand-piece puzzle set. I have so few pieces, so I can't make sense of what the big picture is."

“Interesting simile, Sigmund.” said Celestia, while she put down her cup. “I understand what you are saying. Your memories seem complicated. However, I have a trick that I learned many years ago. It should prove useful in reacquiring what you have lost.”

“You can help me remember?” Sigmund’s eyes widened. If what she was saying was true, then he had no need to worry. “All you have to do is cast it on me?”

“Well, it can get your memories back Sigmund. It isn’t something I cast on you though. Nothing like my pupil’s spells.” She looked to Twilight, who looked like she had many questions to ask. “Twilight herself isn’t quite ready to perform it.” She then turned her head back towards Sigmund, and locked eyes with him.

“Are you comfortable with me trying the spell to help you acquire your elusive memories?”

Sigmund looked down, deep in thought. Right in front of him was a free ticket to get the memories that were avoiding him for three weeks. She was being incredibly vague about the spell, but there seemed to be no other way. Besides, she was the beloved Princess Celestia. There was no way she could be lying about anything. He had to trust her. He brought his head up again, and gazed at the royal figure across the table.

“I am comfortable, your majesty.”

“Splendid,” said the princess. “Twilight, may you switch the light off?” Twilight nodded slowly, and flicked the switch with her magic. The only light that remained in the room was the flickering candle in the middle of the table.

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The room remained still. Twilight herself sat on the side of the table, looking between Princess and Sigmund, unsure of what was occurring. Celestia gaze was still locked on Sigmund. There was tension in the air, but Celestia’s eyes made Sigmund calmer in a mysterious way.

The Library's main room became colder, and Sigmund noticed Twilight's repeated looking between him and Celestia was slowing. Pretty soon, it was like the darkness around them enveloped her, and the only thing he could see was himself, Celestia, and the dancing flame in between them. He looked up at Celestia again, her horn was faintly glowing in the darkness.

Sigmund glanced towards the candle again. The flame of the candle lay perfectly still, as if the breeze in the room he felt before was non-existent. He looked at Celestia again, and this time could not move his eyes away from hers.

Finally the darkness around him seemed to envelop the candle's flame. He couldn't think. He couldn't feel the chill that was present in the room before. He couldn't make out details, but all he could focus on was Celestia, now seeming to be the only source of light in the absolute darkness.

Celestia's horn suddenly shown brightly. Sigmund felt her presence overwhelming him. The darkness all around him crept upon his body, but he ignored it. It was not long before a spirit seemed to shift out of her body. It was the only thing he could see. Its invisible aura overcame the darkness, and launched itself towards him. The last thing Sigmund felt before his thoughts went blank, was his consciousness being pierced.

And with that, Princess Celestia entered his mind.



# Chapter 4

Celestia felt as though the pressures of the world were suddenly lifted off of her shoulders. Like gravity had shut off, and now she was simply floating. It was hard to describe the feeling, but it made her she feel safe, pacified, and comfortable. After a few seconds, or maybe minutes, of feeling this sensation, Celestia opened her eyes to find herself floating among a variety of colors around her.

The colors came from all directions. She peered off to the area front of her, and failed see an end to the bending shapes and flashing lights. It all seemed so randomized, but at the same time, the shapes and colors all seemed to work collectively in harmony. They swirled into vortexes, dispersed, went into formations, exploded, and created new shapes and colors. The environment did things that were simply not possible in the outside world, even with magic.

She was suddenly but gently pushed aside by what seemed like letters. They idly passed her by, just going off in different directions. Thoughts, Celestia presumed. They were floating around among the colors. Celestia read the groups of words nearby.

*'Royalty here? I didn't think this could be such a big deal'*

*'Hehe, Mac's a pretty cool stallion. He doesn't seem to be afraid of anything.'*

*'Another party? Don't the ponies ever get tired of partying with Pinkie?'*

*'Rarity really knows how to seduce gentlecolts, I'm making a guess Spike was unintentional.'*

*'Trottingham the Wise? Wizard: +15 intelligence? I don't understand this game, but I'll play along since Spike wants me to so badly.'*

She noticed that with the phrases, the colors tended to morph together to produce images that went along with the thoughts.

The spell had indeed worked. All spells were in the physical range. According to the books, there was no such thing as a mental spell. Yet after years of research and practice, Princess Celestia created a spell that allowed her to enter the mind of another. She would have told other ponies about the spell, but it would have been pointless. The sheer amount of concentration and magic it took to cast the spell would make it useless to even the most skilled unicorn. She, along with her sister, were probably the only ponies in the world with enough magic potential to cast the spell.

It was time to begin searching. With a gentle flap of her wings, she propelled herself into a randomly chosen direction. She was met with more unique colors, and more thoughts. She could make out images of her student and her student's friends, but not Sigmund. She knew she was viewing the images from his perspective.

*'200 push-ups? She doesn't even look like she can do that much.'*

*'I should have asked for 10 of those pastries to go'*

*'My name?... I can't... no... wait... that's right. It's Sigmund.'*

*'...I guess I should do what she says...'*

Celestia was abruptly stopped when she bumped into what seemed like nothing. Upon placing her hooves in front of her, she realized that she had collided with an invisible wall. She could see colors past the invisible wall, but no thoughts or words were floating behind the wall. There was a collection of words heading in the direction of the invisible wall, but they simply bounced off in the opposite direction.

She recalled the thoughts and images she just passed, and realized that they must have been past thoughts. There were no thoughts past the wall, which meant Sigmund really couldn't remember anything before the waking up in the Medical Center.

*'Now where else is there to go?' thought Celestia while backtracking. Along the way, she passed even more thoughts.*

*'That apple sure was juicy. One bite though? I can't even fit the whole thing in my mouth'*

*'How... how can Pinkie Pie eat so much cake? Am I the only one here who's weirded out by it? Or has everypony just stopped caring?'*

*'That symbol... none of these books can tell me what it means. It has to mean something, since it's related to what my special talent is...'*

*'Twilight's right... I should definitely get some rest, maybe I'll find something tomorrow.'*

*'Ugh, I can't believe I dropped something again, now I have to pick it up in the least awkward way possible. Curse my lost coordination...'*

*'I don't want to be a burden to them... they've been so nice to me. I guess a job would work.'*

Celestia found herself lost in an endless storm of colors, thoughts, and images. She doubted that left or right would yield anything different, so she decided to go down. With another directional flap of her wings, she headed downward.

After a few minutes of gliding downward, she was taken aback when the multitude of colors suddenly vanished below her. The feeling of weightlessness changed to the feeling of plummeting. Instinctively, she held directed her legs below her, and braced for an impact.

A few seconds of falling later, Celestia landed on a completely white floor. Her landing did not emit a sound at all, and was virtually painless. She gazed back up. Everything to the left, right, front, and back of her was white. She looked up, staring at what seemed like color changing ceiling.

This part of the consciousness she was unfamiliar to. Celestia never encountered entire blank areas like this when she performed the spell on other ponies.

In the distance, Princess Celestia noticed something black. Like a little dot in the distance. Not knowing where else to go, Princess Celestia began to walk over to it. She knew that she couldn't fly there, and that she had as much time as she needed. Her hoof-steps made no noise against the white surface, no matter how hard they would have clopped.

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The dot became larger. It went from being a little hole in the distance, to what seemed like a massive structure. *'Is that door? That must be it then,'* thought Celestia. The door however, grew in size as Celestia walked towards it. Finally, she was certain it was not a door, but a vault. She saw no wall along the side of the vault door. The vault door was large. The door seemed to be five times her normal towering height, and the length was the same as the height. She took a scan of all directions around her, and saw nothing as noticeable as the vault door. There seemed to be no other place where Sigmund's memories could be locked away.

There was something even more noticeable to her eyes other than the sheer size of the vault door, and the great secrets that probably lay within. She could make out a figure in front of the Vault, sitting on a desk, facing her. As she trotted closer to the vault, she could make out the color, which appeared to be green. It looked like a pony, with a pencil in his mouth, writing down something on the desk. The information she obtained caused her to stop dead in her tracks.

"Sigmund... Is that... you?"

The figure looked up. Celestia was greatly confused. She was not expecting anything like this. In all the cases she had used the spell, none of the ponies ever had a representation of something in them. Entire blank spaces like the one she was standing in were not present in other minds. It was all randomized colors, and thoughts. Yet here was Sigmund.

The pony on the chair sighed, got up, and trotted in the direction the Princess. Unlike the Princess, the clops of the pony's hooves against the floor were audible. As he came closer, the Princess saw that the desk he was working on before vanished.

“So it is you Sigmund...” She rubbed her eyes with her hoof to make sure she wasn’t hallucinating, but she still saw him standing there. He simply kept an emotionless stare at her.

“I am not Sigmund, Princess Celestia,” the green pony finally said. His voice was the same as Sigmund’s, but was less nervous, and seemingly more knowledgeable. “I am only using the image of him right now, both for simplicity’s sake, and because I know it will be easier to confront you this way.”

“If you’re not Sigmund, then who are you?”

“I am a part of Sigmund that he cannot access. A part of his mind that he does not know about, and cannot use. He is not ready for me yet. You may call me whatever you wish, yet I like to think of myself as a Gatekeeper.” He looked up briefly at the colorful ceiling, and back down to the Princess.

Celestia, due to her confusion, remained silent for a few moments. She finally said, “So... Gatekeeper... you are a piece of Sigmund? Are you his lost memories?”

“No, that wouldn’t be me.” He motioned towards vault door with a nudge of his head. “They are all in there. Sigmund cannot access them as well. The door is completely invisible to his thought process.” He gestured to the endless colorful ceiling that seemed miles above them.

“If you’re a part of Sigmund, and you know where his memories are... then why don’t you open the door and return them to him?” she asked. In response, the Gatekeeper shook his head, and looked back up at her.

“He’s not ready. He’s not ready to fully absorb the truth of his past. He will first need his prowess returned to him. Timing is crucial in that aspect.”

Celestia grew confused. “What? So you refuse to let your own memories go... are you insane?”

The Gatekeeper’s voice suddenly grew a tad more serious, and he said, “Sigmund is not insane. Just today even, he considered the possibility that he was insane. I can assure you however, that he is not. To everypony, he

is a normal pony who lost his memories, yet you seem to know that there is much more to him than what appears to be.” The Gatekeeper began to pace while looking directly at Celestia, his voice not faltering for a moment. “There is a good reason why I have been holding his memories back.

“If he acquires his memories in such a way that they are laid out for him already, then he will never re-develop his method. If he acquires the important memories first before acquiring the tiny ‘insignificant’ ones, then his general mindset will not be re-established, and he will use the knowledge haphazardly. If he acquires all his memories in one burst in his current state,” The Gatekeeper paused to gaze up at the colorful ceiling again, “he will be lost, and the information will be too much for him to process for good use.” He continued his slow pacing. “It is for the best that his memories not be released in such ill thought out manners.”

Celestia had trouble understand what the Gatekeeper was saying. “So... you won’t let the memories go? How will he get them back if you won’t let him find them?”

“Sigmund won’t find his memories. I will release them one by one, and then he will obtain them. He will first need to set a basis of his morals and values from his outside interactions in Ponyville. I will control what memories are released into the thought process, and when. The tiny ones will influence his choices, and how he interacts with other ponies. I will only release important ones if I feel that he is mentally prepared to take them and accept them as truth. His past-mentality is something he will have to progressively gain back through his own rational thought.”

“So you’re saying.... to just leave him alone? That I cannot help?”

“Yes, you must not interfere. He needs to re-develop his method. I will aid him by sending his ‘lost’ memories, but other than that, he will be doing most of the work by himself.”

Celestia could not believe what was happening at all. Sigmund was originally eager to gain his memories back, yet in here, he was the opposite. She just about had enough.

*“He will be doing most of the work himself?”* I don’t understand what the problem is. His memories should not pose any threat to him.” Celestia was

showing anger, something that she rarely shown in Equestria. There was something about the all-knowing tone of the Gatekeeper that just got under her coat.

“Although it would not threaten him to release all his memories now... I find it better to... say... sculpt his mind back into its ideal shape.” He made an abrupt stop of his pacing and looked towards Celestia. “You just met Sigmund. How would you understand what could threaten him? You wouldn’t fully understand his mentality, even with your browsing of his past thoughts.”

“You’d be doing him... no... you’d be doing yourself a favor by opening that vault, and letting his memories go. That way he can answer all the questions he’s had since three weeks ago!” she exclaimed. Celestia lost her cool. She was angry at this part of Sigmund for being so seemingly ignorant.

The Gatekeeper sighed and shook his head. “That would be easier, and a lot of less work I would have to do, but you have failed to listen. The desired outcome of his situation will be reached if, and only if, I release his memories gradually and at the right times, as he recreates his original ‘method’. I find it beneficial for his original self to be retained, and then some.”

“Just what is this ‘method’ you keep talking about?”

“You will find out if you are patient,” said the Gatekeeper plainly. Celestia grunted. She just about had enough of this.

“I have been patient with your words long enough. I don’t know what this “desired result” is, but I must know the truth behind Sigmund. I must know his memories to confirm that he is what I believe him to be... and I won’t let you... him... stop me from doing that.”

Celestia suddenly broke out into a sprint towards the Vault door, and passed the Gatekeeper. He wasn’t pursuing her. This was going to be easier than she thought. All she had to do was turn the handle on the door...

The Vault door suddenly shifted backward a couple hundred feet. Celestia, surprised and somewhat disoriented by the sudden shift, halted.

The Gatekeeper appeared in front of the shifted vault. In the blink of an eye, she was no longer standing on solid ground, but on a platform above a black abyss. There were several platforms towards the door, but they were all shifting. Celestia quickly jumped on each platform, carefully timing each jump to avoid falling into the abyss. She and landed on solid ground by the Gatekeeper.

He shook his head, and in the blink of an eye, the set-up of the room changed. There was no longer a bottomless pit behind her, but now there were two walls to her left and to her right. They were moving towards each other. Celestia immediately sprinted toward the Vault door, as the walls on both sides of her closed in. Her room for running was squeezed in, but in a leap of faith, she got out just before the walls smashed together. She looked up, and she was once again in front of the Gatekeeper. In response, he shook his head again.

She attempted to run past him again, but immediately smacked into an invisible wall. Between the Gatekeeper and Celestia was a glass wall that stretched from the top of the white room and to the sides. He had cut her off from the vault door.

Celestia closed her eyes and began to concentrate on her horn. A simple spell could vaporize the wall. Yet despite all her focus, she felt no energy rush to her horn. When she opened her eyes, her horn was not glowing, and on the other side of the wall, the Gatekeeper shook his head.

“You forget, this is not Equestria you are in,” said the Gatekeeper. “In this place, the rules of the outside do not apply. You may be a powerful being *out there*, but that equates to nothing *in here*.” Celestia furiously pounded against the glass in a futile effort.

“Try as you might, Princess Celestia, but this is a ‘battle’ that you cannot, and must not win.” She looked at all directions of her. A Glass wall appeared suddenly on each side of her. She looked around in an effort to find a way out. Celestia grew more annoyed, as she was now in a glass cube. Celestia could still however project her voice to the Gatekeeper.



“Even if I fail to awaken his memories here... I can still tell Sigmund where they are and who is preventing him from finding them,” she threatened.

“Alas,” responded the Gatekeeper without hesitation, “you should know what the cause of that will be. Sigmund will antagonize his mind, and will never be able to trust himself again. Whatever memories I release, he will ignore or view them as false. He will not feel safe with his own personal thoughts, so he’ll refuse to make any form of mental progression.” The green colt then directly gazed into Celestia’s eyes with the same all-knowing stare.

“You have displayed quite the large amount of interest in obtaining his memories. You seem like you have an idea of his past... and you want to confirm it. Which means you won’t do anything harmful to Sigmund outside of here. But in case you consider any sort of harmful action...” The Gatekeeper then went up to the glass cube Celestia was in, and leaned up close to it, to the point where his muzzle was millimeters from touching the glass. This made Celestia feel an emotion that she hadn’t felt in years. Fear.

“If you try and intervene in his time in Ponyville, or Equestria for that matter, whether it would be telling others about what you experienced here, or physically harming him in some way, I will know, and I will keep his memories inside the vault forever.” He backed away again from the cube, where a frozen Celestia stared.

Celestia realized at that moment that the Gatekeeper held all the bargaining chips, and she had no way of fighting back. She, the powerful, benevolent ruler of Equestria, had no power against *part* of this mysterious pony’s mind.

“For the benefit of the doubt though, I will release one memory before you leave the Library. An important one. He seemed mentally ready to handle the information anyway, and you can make a basis for your assumptions when you hear it.”

The Gatekeeper glanced towards the colors above him again, and so did Celestia soon after. The ever-changing shapes and colors were now still, and it looked just like a stationary ceiling.

“Enough of this. You have outstayed your welcome here.” The ceiling turned black, including the areas of the large white room to the left, right, and back of Celestia. The only illuminated area was around the Gatekeeper and the Vault door. The Gatekeeper let out one final call, and raised his hoof out in front of him, just enough to lightly tap the front of the glass cube.

“**BEGONE**” he yelled in a booming voice that echoed from all directions in the Cube. Celestia raised her front hooves to her ears to block out the unbearable sound. Celestia opened her eyes shortly after to find herself being flung away from the Vault, while inside the cube.

The glass cube shattered just as she entered an overwhelming light at the edge of the darkness. Yet before she felt herself being flung out of Sigmund’s mind, she could still make out the Vault door in the distance, with the green figure of unimaginable power in front of it.

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Sigmund slowly opened his eyes. He felt dazed, as if he had been asleep for hours. The room was no longer dark, and the lights were back on. Twilight was still on the side of the table, giving Sigmund a worried look.

He then looked up at the tall Princess, who had just opened her eyes as well. She stared down at Sigmund, with a look that was not the same grandiose stare she had before. It looked like she had fear in her eyes, along with anger. The look only lasted a second before it turned back into a kind, benevolent stare, but it made an impression on Sigmund. He was not sure what was going on.

Twilight was the one to break the silence. “What just happened? Its only been a few seconds... is the spell over?” A few seconds? Really? Even though Sigmund wasn’t sure what was going on, the time during the spell felt like hours of... nothing.

He closed his eyes and searched for anything new... but a new memory did not turn up.

Celestia looked over to her pupil, and then back to Sigmund. "I'm sorry Sigmund, but the spell did not work." Sigmund's and Twilight's jaw dropped upon hearing her.

Twilight gasped out, "Didn't... work?! But Princess... I'm not sure what the details of that spell were, but you seemed to know what you were doing..."

Celestia shook her head. "Forgive me my student, but the spell itself can not work at times. It has happened before when I used it on some willing volunteers, but for some of them, it did not work." Princess Celestia's voice still had its sincerity, but what she said contradicted her initial attitude to the 'trick' she was going to perform on him.

Sigmund was puzzled at her loss of sureness, but he dismissed his doubtful thoughts with '*She must have tried her best I suppose*'. Sigmund gazed down in disappointment, with Twilight soon following.

"You shouldn't give up hope yet Sigmund." Sigmund brought his head up to look at the Princess. "Even though I could not successfully perform the spell on occasion before, the patients I have tried it on did gain their memories back with time. You should just try whatever seems to help. and maybe you'll find answers for yourself." She brought her tea cup off the table again, and took one final gulp of the tea.

Suddenly, Sigmund felt a pain rise up in his head. He was having a splitting headache. There was no build up to it, but just a spontaneous feeling of pain. He quickly clutched his head, much to the surprise of the other two ponies at the table. He felt the urge to yelp, but suppressed it. While the headache continued, images and words seems to flash in his brain. One image in particular that he saw before... one that he saw almost every day...

He then opened his eyes, and received bewildered looks from Princess Celestia and Twilight. Ignoring their somewhat concerned stares, he turned his head around, and looked at one side of his flank.

"I... I think I remember what this symbol means..."

"You mean your Cutie mark?" said Twilight, her eyes lighting up with hope. "That means the Princess' spell worked... right?"

The Princess shook her head. "No, I have a feeling that my spell did not cause this..." Her voice trailed off, as if she were in thought. She then brought her head up again and looked towards Sigmund again.

He turned his head around to face his friend and the Princess. "It was a symbol that I saw and used a lot... before when I woke up in the Medical Center. It had many meanings... but the meaning that it was known for was... the study of the mind."

A silence developed in the room. Twilight stared at him with a raised eyelash, but both Celestia's eyes widened, as if she had just been enlightened.

"So..." said Twilight after some time, "your special talent... is the study of the mind?"

"No... not just the mind... behavior, consciousness... the symbol represented the study of all of it... I think there was a specific term for the study... but I can't remember it..."

Sigmund was interrupted by a noise outside, followed by a few clops against the ground. Celestia looked for a brief moment, but turned back to Sigmund and Twilight.

"It sounds like my royal guards are waiting. I must go back to Canterlot, for I am greatly busy. It's good to see that some of your memories are beginning to make sense to you, Sigmund. As time passes, you should be able to make sense of more. I find your case very interesting at this point, so would like to hear when you obtain more of them." She looked towards Twilight.

"My faithful student, let this be a temporary assignment to you, alongside your main one. If Sigmund remembers anything else, you should write me a letter to let me know. I'd like to hear it."

"I must leave now, but best of luck to you, Sigmund." said Celestia with a nod of her head. She turned to Twilight as well. "Best of luck to both of you."

She opened the door to a carriage led by four white golden pegasus. She mounted the carriage, and then waved goodbye to Twilight and Sigmund as the carriage quietly picked off the ground and quickly flew out of sight.

Both Sigmund and Twilight were waving with their hooves goodbye as well. When Princess Celestia was out of sight, Twilight put her hoof down and turned to Sigmund.

“So... the study of the mind? That was what you were experienced in?” she questioned. Twilight must have found it strange to be a ‘special skill’.

“I guess so. I don’t think my memories lie to me... I just think they’re incredibly vague.” Sigmund said truthfully. Twilight giggled slightly.

“C’mon,” she said, “you must still be tired from your work today.” Sigmund nearly forgot about the pain in his body until Twilight reminded him.

“Yeah. I guess I should rest now.”

He did, but not before taking a bath to wash away the smell of apples.

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The ride from Ponyville to Canterlot was a 10 to 20 minute ride, yet Princess Celestia was already deep in thought.

So the Gatekeeper was not bluffing. He released a memory as he promised. Sigmund and Twilight did not think much of it, but the simple fact that Sigmund’s special skill was understanding the mind cleared up some of her numerous questions during the spell.

Celestia looked down with a guilty expression on her face. She did not want to lie to her star pupil, but she had no other choice. The truth was that in all the previous times she had performed the spell, she successfully explored minds, and awakened memories with all the patients who needed it.

She could not even exchange the details of the spell to either of the ponies, or else Sigmund probably would have thought that something inside his

mind prevented her from performing the spell correctly. If the Gatekeeper had bluffed, he had done an amazing job at it, yet she knew now that he was not bluffing. It would have been all too coincidental. He indeed had full control of the release of Sigmund's memories.

The fact that Sigmund's special skill in the past was "the study of the mind" explained so much. Sigmund must have been mentally adept in the past, to the point where he could safeguard his inner thoughts. Although unlikely, it provided an explanation to the Gatekeeper's presence.

Celestia was more focused on what he said though.

*The desired outcome of his situation will be reached if, and only if, I release his memories gradually and at the right times, as he recreates his original 'method'. I find it beneficial for his original self to be retained, and then some.*

Celestia had trouble understanding the meaning behind the Gatekeeper's words. His main plan seemed to be to change Sigmund back to his past-self. What was so beneficial about it though? What did he mean by 'and then some'?

She then recalled another part of their conversation.

*He's not ready. He's not ready to fully absorb the truth of his past. He will first need his prowess returned to him.*

*'Prowess of the study of the mind...' she thought. 'So he wants Sigmund to reacquire his ability in the study. To be able to perform things such as safeguarding his mind again. To know how minds work, and behave. To use them to his advantage... and then some...'*

Celestia ended her thoughts on the matter there. She already had enough to believe that Sigmund was something great, and could still possibly become something great. He could become a threat to the land she spent so much time and effort perfecting. Yet she needed to confirm her suspicions before taking an action she would regret. She would have to follow the Gatekeeper's plan for now, to be safe.

Princess Celestia made a mental note, and listed Sigmund down as an eventual threat.

# Chapter 5

“Say, Twilight...” have ya noticed Sigmunds been a little... out of it lately?” asked Applejack. Twilight and her friends were walking through Ponyville, while Sigmund was busy working at Sweet Apple Acres. It was not like they always talked about him behind his back, but lately he had been “out of it” as Applejack put it.

“Well...” she said, feeling a little relieved that she was not the only pony who thought this as well, “...I think it’s just that he has an idea of what his talent is is all...”

“What kind of special talent is mind-study anyway?” a rainbow-maned pegasus said while barging into the conversation. “I mean... he was found in the Everfree forest, and he lost his memories. I don’t know about you all, but that just reeked of something awesome. I was expecting like... lasers or tornadoes or somethin’”. She noticed that some of the others were glaring at her. “Well... uh... I was just expecting something 20% cooler... but not cooler than me, or else me and him would have a problem!”

“Cool?” interjected Rarity. “It is certainly not in the category of ‘Cool’ Rainbow Dash. As a fabulous designer, I am an expert on exterior beauty. Yet what is beauty of the body without beauty of the mind...?” She suddenly drifted off into her own fairytale for a moment, but quickly snapped back to reality. “Sigmund understands the mind... so therefore, he is sure to know where true beauty is in some individuals... I’m certain he is aware of which pony is truly beautiful here,” she added while she nonchalantly gestured to herself.

“Aw shush with all ya frou-frou... Ah’ve just noticed that whenever ah see him now, he’s not as say... ‘responsive’ as he was before.”

“I totally agree, ay-jay!” interrupted Pinkie Pie as she bounced up and down energetically. “I mean, I’ve been throwing all these parties and he’s only been to a few of them. *A few!* He should learn some manners and accept every last one of my invitations!”



“Mares, listen, with his current state... I’m sure he’s had a lot of to think about.” She looked at Pinkie Pie. “I’m sure he didn’t go to some of your parties because he’s been busy sorting things out.”

“Aw boo, that’s not a good excuse. He didn’t even want to go along with my idea to throw him a cutecinéra for finding out his special talent!” She sat on the ground and crossed her forelegs together in a grumpy fashion.

“Pinkie Pie darling... a cutecinéra is only meant for children...” said Rarity.

“No one’s too old for anything!” Pinkie said in her usual positive demeanor as she sprang back up.

Twilight sighed. “Anyway,” she said in an attempt to bring the conversation back on track, “I’m sure that Sigmund is just trying to make sense of his memories. Even though they’re coming to him, he has to think deeply into them to get their meaning.”

With that, their conversations drifted off the topic of Sigmund, yet Twilight’s thoughts were still on the subject.

Twilight felt as though she were partially lying to her friends, but she had no way of knowing whether she was or not. Sigmund wasn’t always trying to make sense of his memories. He did have his sudden headaches, but normally he was able to piece them together easily.

She pondered again on his talent. Study of the mind. For the past month, he had been asking her many questions on her morals, or general viewpoints in Equestria. Twilight felt like Sigmund was doing exactly what his special talent was. He was studying minds, including of the ones of ponies around him. Or maybe he was attempting to make sense of his own mind.

Twilight found it understandable for him to be doing such a thing. She remembered the months after she got her Cutie Mark. A hundred percent of her free time was spent trying to better her control over her great magical powers. Even though the Princess told her that it would take years, she still worked extra hard. Once she had an idea of what her talent was, she wanted to do it all the time.

If he was though, he was doing it subtly. He still acted the same for the most part. He was a good worker according to Applejack, and he even became friends with Applejack's non-talkative older brother. He kept Spike company on some days and also tidied up after himself when he had mini-study sessions. There wasn't any real problem.

Although he seemed distant at times, he still remained to be the nice, helpful colt. He was their friend, despite the situation that led them to become friends. Not only did he get involved in whatever crazy things her friends were up to, but he enjoyed whatever they would do together. That's part of what they all liked about him. He would even help her with her study sessions on most nights.

To Twilight, there was some aura about him that intrigued her. Maybe it had to do with his need to help all of them with the tiniest of things. Maybe it had to do with his warm smiles he gave that she couldn't help but return. Maybe there was a deep down complexity that he was unintentionally hiding. Twilight just wanted to know him better, with the chance that he would expose his hidden side. It was like-

"Hey Twilight! Hello? Earth to Twilight! Why are you all dreamy-lookin?" asked Pinkie Pie, bringing Twilight out of her train of thought.

"...Huh? Oh... Uh... I just zoned out was all..." she said in a poor attempt to seem like part of the conversation.

Pinkie Pie raised her hoof to her chin and stared at her for a few seconds, in which a silence developed within the group. She put on a smile.

"Suuuuurreee Twilight..." After winking to her, she quickly turned her head back to the others and resumed their conversation. "So where was I with oatmeal? Oh right!"

'*Typical Pinkie Pie...*' thought Twilight, even though she had thought it several times before.

After looking at her friends, a thought popped into her mind when she realized only four of her friends were with her.

"You know... where's Fluttershy? I know she tends to be a little late sometimes, but this is unusual... has anypony seen her?"

The other ponies stopped their conversation, and Rainbow Dash responded. "She didn't want to come today... one of the animals she was caring for passed away during the night, and I guess she's blaming herself or somethin'. She just needs a little space is all, then she'll be fine."

Twilight grew a little worried. Fluttershy was affected by some of the smallest things. She loved animals. If an animal so much as got hurt on her watch she would be upset. But if an animal died, it seemed possible for her to be completely broken.

"If you say so..."

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"So Mac, do you talk to any of your sister's friends?" Sigmund brought up. He and Big Mac were on their way back to Sweet Apple Acres after he aided Big Mac with selling apples at their vendor. There were still some leftover apples, which they were bringing back to the farm. He had been working for the Apple family for about a month now.

Big Mac shook his head. "Nope, ah've got far too much work ta git involved with their group."

"So you don't want to be friends with any of them?"

Big Mac shook his head again. "Not that they're bad or anythin', but AJ tend ta be distracted 'cause of them, and ah'm stuck with all the work. The farm can't afford to have two workers lolligaggin' about. At least yer here to 'elp me out."

"Yep, aren't you lucky?" They were passing over a bridge built over a river to the farm. The trees disappeared on both sides, so Sigmund's line of sight improved. Sigmund noticed a familiar yellow pegasus by the water. "Speaking of your sister's friends... there's Fluttershy. I would go talk to her... but she's... you know... *shy*."

Big Mac slowed his pace on the Bridge, to the point where he was barely moving. Sigmund slowed his pace as well, but after a while , he turned to question Big Mac.

“Hey Big Mac, why are we going so slow-” He stopped when noticed Big Mac was staring off the bridge, in the direction of Fluttershy, who was still beside the river. “Big Mac? Hello? You there?” Sigmund said while waving his hoof in front of his eyes. He didn’t respond. It didn’t take long for Sigmund to figure out what was going on.

Sigmund grinned. He asked, “So... you like Fluttershy?” That grabbed Big Mac’s attention. Sigmund snickered noticeably.

“No of course not!” He said quickly, different to his usual slow, resonant voice. They crossed the bridge, where the trees once again blocked the view of Fluttershy. Big Mac looked in in front of him, attempting to regain his composure. “Ah just said that ah got my work to focus on...”

“Alright then Mac...” Sigmund turned his head to look behind him. “Oh hi Fluttershy, how are you?” Big Mac suddenly flung around, but saw no pony there except the green colt laughing quite audibly on the ground. Sigmund swore he could he him blushing, even through his thick red coat. The stallion had a murderous glare tracked on Sigmund.

“Ease up Mac, I was just curious was all... I won’t tell Fluttershy or any of her friends... you have my word on that.”

Big Mac contained his anger, and turned around to walk in the direction of the farm. He was moving much faster than normal, so Sigmund had to quickly get up and sprint to catch up to him.

“So why don’t you tell her... or at the very least spend time with her?” asked Sigmund.

“Ah already told ya Sigmund, ah need to work on the farm. Plus whenever ah’m around, she’s normally scared of me... may have to do with mah size ah guess....”

“Nice excuse. Here, follow me.” They took a side road, which followed the riverside. The yellow pegasus by the water came into view again. This time,

they were much closer. "If you want to get close to her, now is the time to do it." They were just out of earshot, so Fluttershy couldn't hear them.

"No, Ah won't. She's probably fine without me anyway."

"Now that wasn't a very good excuse. Look at her." Big Mac took a closer look. "She looks like she's crying." Sigmund looked back to Fluttershy, who was wiping her eyes with a hoof. "Okay, so she has been crying."

"When somepony like Fluttershy is sad or crying, they tend to be more vulnerable. They'd probably open up to whoever feels trustworthy, whoever seems to care about their well-being, or whoever can bring them a sense of protection in their 'vulnerable' state. You happen to be all of those things. If she was scared of you before because of your size, I'm sure that this time, your size will make her feel protected, and your care will make her feel better." Sigmund looked at Fluttershy again. "Trust me, if there's any better time for you to confront her, I would say it's now."

"What if she runs off?"

"Mac, I doubt that she's in any sort of condition to run away from you. Just show her you mean well first, and I'm sure she won't do anything."

"Ah dun know Sigmund. Ah mean, it happened before when ah've asked a filly and she turned out ta be a fooler."

"A... fooler?"

"Fillyfooler"

"Uh... I don't think I'm familiar with the term..."

"Mares who like mares and not stallions."

"Ah..." For some reason, the tomboyish blue pegasus popped into Sigmund's head, but he let the thought pass.

"Don't worry," Sigmund assured him, "I don't think she looks at her friends that way... so I think we can rule out that possibility."

Big Mac looked at Fluttershy, then back to Sigmund. "Ah still dun know about this... what if it ain't like that with her...?"

"I understand her personality, so I'm sure that it is like that with her. Bic Mac, everyone in Ponyville regards you to be the strongest stallion in town. You're a great worker, you're muscular, and you're pretty cool. And you're afraid of messing up? All you have to do is provide a few words of wisdom, and she'll be all over you. Mac, in every situation, there is a chance of something going wrong, but you have to take risks. Playing it safe is likely to make you safe... but I don't think it'll make you happy."

Big Mac sunk in the meaning of Sigmund's words. He knew that his words were true. "What about the cart though?"

"I can handle it. I know where to put it on the farm, plus it isn't that much weight after I've been dragging that dang plow around for a month. I've built up a little muscle Mac, so I should be able to handle a cart of apples myself... Now don't be such a filly. Be a stallion and wise up," Sigmund said with a grin.

Big Mac, for once in his life, felt like he had a friend who had his back. He slowly nodded his head, and removed the rope around his neck tying him to the cart. He began to trot in the direction of Fluttershy, but not before looking back towards Sigmund in indecisiveness. Sigmund sighed and gestured to him with a nudge of his head towards Fluttershy. Big Mac gulped, and resumed trotting over to the pegasus by the water.

The green colt stuck around for a minute or so, just to see how it would play out.

Big Mac approached her, and Fluttershy looked up, but quickly down again. Big Mac sat beside her with his mouth moving, and she began to look up again. Unfortunately, Sigmund was just out of earshot, so he couldn't make out what they were saying. From the looks of it, she wasn't running away or refusing to look at him.

Sigmund thought to himself happily, *'My work here is done.'*

Well, not all his work that is. He made his way back to the farm with the cart in tow, back to Sweet Apple Acres, and left two smiling ponies by the riverside.

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The Gatekeeper sat on his desk in the endless expanse of the white room, with the Vault door safely behind him. He was not bent over writing on the paper in front of him like before, but was instead gazing above him.

The originally randomized colors looked like they had become a river, moving in one direction in the thought process. The colors even seemed to unite at one brief point, and made a bright light.

The flow only lasted so long before becoming randomized again, but the Gatekeeper could still see some general flow among small groups of the colors.

“Your thought process is becoming more coherent, Sigmund. You are moving faster than I had anticipated.”

The Gatekeeper got off his chair, and turned around to the Vault door behind him. He grabbed the small handle on the side of the door with his mouth, and slowly opened the large vault door just a crack. A small collection of words and colors flowed out, and slowly rose up into the colorful ceiling above. The Gatekeeper looked up at the words as they slowly faded into the never-ending storm of colors above him.

He then, with a swift kick of his hind legs, slammed the Vault door shut.

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Halfway back to the farm, Sigmund made an abrupt stop, and quickly clutched the side of his head in pain. Another splitting headache came on. This was his fourth one. The first being when Celestia visited. The second being two weeks afterward. The third being a few days ago. Each

headache would only last a few seconds, and at the same time, he would remember something. He opened his eyes when the pain subsided.

There was no pattern whatsoever to his sudden headaches. The memories that returned to him weren't even related to what he would have been doing at the time, so he ruled out that his mind controlled the triggers for the headaches.

His memory this time was a place of knowledge. A place where he honed his special skill. Sigmund could guess that he use to be a scholar of some sort. He would have to think deeply into it later, as it didn't concern him as much as the way he got his memories back.

A thought occurred to Sigmund, as he continued his walk back to Sweet Apple Acres. It quickly became an idea.

If he could not trigger his memories... and if the Princess could not trigger his memories... then what was triggering them? Nothing in his experiences in Ponyville were influencing his memories... so what were? Was there something he was not getting? Was there something doing it for him?

That last question stuck in his head. Although it seemed unlikely, since Twilight herself said that mental spells were impossible, it did seem possible for a mysterious pony like him. Perhaps there was something grander to him than he knew.

Yet the train of thought ended there. It was becoming an unlikely assumption, which was likely as to why he stopped thinking into it. He was sure other amnesiacs had headaches, so he probably wasn't any special case.

Sigmund did not, however, consider the possibility that a force unknown could have stopped him from delving too deeply into the thought.



# Chapter 6

After living in the library for three months, Sigmund was accustomed to how it functioned. In a place as quiet as the library, the slightest noise could be heard easily. Whether it be a creak of the floorboards, the sounds of hoofsteps in the other room, or the delicate flipping of a page. Sigmund found the Ponyville Library to be the place where he was guaranteed not to be disturbed frequently. Aside from the common noises, Sigmund could research and progress through thoughts without the slightest distraction. However, he was always able to tell when there was an out of place noise.

Today, it was the library door being suddenly flung open. Sigmund looked up from his book, a little annoyed as to what the interruption could have been. His eyes widened when he saw an obviously distressed Fluttershy was panting by the doorframe, looking straight at him with helpless eyes. He was also surprised to see her without Big Macintosh. For almost a month, they have been inseparable.

Sigmund did not even bother to close the book. He immediately rushed over to Fluttershy, who was still panting heavily. Twilight, who was in her room, came out and ran to Fluttershy to see what the commotion was about.

“Fluttershy! What happened?”

“Mac... \*wheeze\*-edge of forest... Manticore!” Twilight’s disposition went from that of concern to that of fear within an instant.

“A Manticore??? Are you sure? What is it doing out of the Everfree forest??” Twilight said in disbelief. Sigmund remembered reading about the Manticores. They were fearsome creatures, and were said to even have a sort of magic-resilience.

Finally Fluttershy regained her breath. “Macintosh tried to fend it off... I don’t know what happened to him... He told me to run and get help!” Since Sigmund understood Fluttershy’s basic personality, he knew that it was not a light matter if the pegasus was raising her voice.

“Alright, listen. Fluttershy, lead the way.” said Sigmund. He turned to Spike. “Spike. Go get the others. We’ll go see what we can do, but we’ll probably need some help.” Spike quickly nodded his head and bolted out the front door. Twilight looked at Sigmund in disbelief.

“Sigmund... there’s no need for you to-”

“Yes there is Twilight. Mac is my friend, and when he needs help, I won’t ignore it. We don’t have time to argue. Just trust me.” Sigmund said in a confident tone. Twilight nodded, and they ran out of the Library to follow Fluttershy.

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The three ponies arrived at the scene, where Macintosh was lying on the ground unmoving, and the Manticore was present.. They were far enough away that the Manticore was not able to sense their presence.

The Manticore was of a sprawling size. One swipe of its massive claws looked like it could take down a pony, even a pony as large as Big Mac.

Sigmund looked to the nearby tree, where Big Mac was on the ground in pain, with several cuts on his body. Mac looked like he was barely conscious. Sigmund was sure that Fluttershy was assuming the worst, as she was frozen in fear and sorrow.

“Fluttershy! Use ‘The Stare’!” Twilight whispered to her loudly. Fluttershy took some time to respond, and shook her head.

“N-No... h-h-he’s too angry... i-i-it didn’t work before...” Fluttershy managed to stammer out. Sigmund swore to Celestia, while Twilight was desperately thinking of options against the beast.

“Alright, here’s the plan, Sigmund...” Sigmund wasn’t paying attention however. He could only see the large Manticore maneuvering towards the wounded stallion on the ground. His friend was in pain. Sigmund felt like he

was in a state of helplessness. He knew that if he were to wait any longer, something terrible was going to happen.

“Twilight! We don’t have time for a plan!” He sprinted ahead, into plain sight of the Manticore. Big Mac was on the other side of the Manticore, and Sigmund knew he had to distract the Manticore in whatever way he could..

“HEY!!! Over here!” Sigmund called out. The Manticore peered towards Sigmund, but grunted and returned his attention to the wounded stallion. Before Sigmund could take proper action, a sudden rainbow streak flashed across the Manticore, and the Manticore recoiled by about a yard.

“Never call an earth pony to do a pegasi’s job!” Rainbow Dash gloated in her normal show-off manner. She pranced a little bit in the air in her moment of triumph, and failed to notice the Manticore recovering from the quick blow.

The Manticore reached up with his paw and grabbed Rainbow’s leg. She let out a quick yelp. She could not fly away, and could not shake herself free of the Manticore’s strong grip. Sigmund watched as the Manticore simply swung his paw downward and flung Rainbow Dash towards a tree like a pebble. She collided against the trunk, and began to sag to the bottom of the tree.

It was a crash that Sigmund would have stayed down from. With Rainbow Dash being of weaker constitution than Sigmund, it was probably far worse for her.

“Ay! Ah think ya’ll best apologize mister!” Sigmund turned to see Applejack, with a lasso attached to her tail. The Manticore responded with an angry roar. “Ahrigh then, so be it.”

With a quick snap of her tail, Applejack flung the loop over the Manticore’s head. She quickly pulled and brought the Manticore down to his paws. Sigmund knew that against such a heavy creature, she would not be able to hold him with just her strength. The Manticore, with a strong push against the ground, heaved upward, pulling the rope. Applejack was yanked off of her feet, where she flew overhead and landed somewhere nearby Rainbow Dash.

The Manticore paused, grunted, and returned his attention to Big Mac, who still seemed alive. The Manticore brought his paw into the air for one final swipe. About to give the finishing blow and claim his kill. Yet a fairly large rock struck him in the back of the head.

Sigmund turned around to see Twilight, who had flung the rock using her magic to grab the Manticore's attention. It had worked. The Manticore slowly but fearsomely made its way in the direction of Twilight. Twilight simply stood her ground, looking like she had a plan. Something told Sigmund that the plan wouldn't completely work out the way she was intending it.

In that split second, Sigmund looked around him. His friends, the ones who unconditionally helped him who cared about him... were in pain from the Manticore. He saw Big Mac laying on the ground bleeding. He saw Fluttershy frozen from fear. He saw Rainbow Dash slumped against the tree. He saw Applejack lying on the ground dazed. He also saw Twilight, about to be hurt by the monster as well. The Manticore was going to kill somepony, and Sigmund couldn't do anything about it.

The idea of being powerless to help those around him struck a chord in Sigmund. As if it brought up a residual feeling. A familiar feeling that he hated so very much. The feeling of helplessness turned into a feeling of anger. Anger towards the thing that harmed the ponies he cared about. In that moment, Sigmund jolted himself to action.

**"HEY,"** yelled Sigmund in a booming voice that grabbed the attention of the Manticore, who turned away from Twilight. "Yeah I'm talking to you, you bastard!" All eyes were upon Sigmund, like he had suddenly become something out of the ordinary. Sigmund felt his hooves trembling. Not from fear, but from pure rage. The other ponies directed their focus on him, even Rainbow Dash and a conscious Big Mac brought their heads up slightly. Rarity and Pinkie Pie had just arrived behind Sigmund, and were looking towards him like the others.

"Do you have any idea what you have done? Do you have... ANY IDEA?" The Manticore stepped back, as if he could feel resonating anger from Sigmund. Sigmund was no longer being rational. He was letting the rage do the work for him.

“I’ll make you regret... I’ll make you regret everything you’ve done here... I’ll make you regret every wrong you’ve ever performed... *I will make you regret... your entire existence!*”

He wasn’t sure what he was saying, but from what he could tell, every word had its own powerful effect against the Manticore. Sigmund paused to take a breath. He was unaware of the frightened faces of his friends at his sudden outburst.

Sigmund felt empowered... not just from his rage... but from a strange feeling. All his thoughts were focused on his hate for this one single monster. Sigmund did not care about the reasons behind the Manticore’s outburst. He only cared about completely destroying the beast for its actions.

Sigmund looked directly into the Manticore’s eyes. Sigmund could only focus on his immense hatred to destroy the beast through whatever means necessary.

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What happened next can only be best described from the perspective of the Manticore.

The Manticore was a fearsome creature. Incredibly strong. Incredibly balanced. Incredibly fast. Incredibly versatile. It was one of the deadliest predators of the Everfree forest.

The Manticore’s current emotional make-up was that of mainly anger and blood-lust. Both strong enough emotions to allow the Manticore to leave the sacred boundaries of the Everfree forest without fear of harm. The only thing that incited such anger in the Manticore were two ponies who got a little too close to his territory during mating season, when tensions for him were already high.

Yet there was a change in his emotional make-up. Not a large shift, but a noticeable one for those who could read emotions. He had fear, caused from the unnatural anger of Sigmund. With this fear, the Manticore’s mind

became vulnerable, allowing for the entry of the foreign-presence. The resonating anger from the green colt in front of him was soon felt in the Manticore's entire mind.

The Manticore was frozen. It could not use its basic mind to think, as if the ability was suddenly taken away from him. The Manticore felt whatever anger that was contained within him being flung out of his body. For a very brief moment, the Manticore felt at peace.

Yet the foreign presence was not finished. It soon started to attack all other emotions of the Manticore. The Manticore could not do a single thing to stop the foreign-presence in its mind. The foreign-mind seemed to eat away at whatever emotions the Manticore was capable of feeling. It gave mental blows which caused an excruciating pain in the Manticore's mind.

The Manticore no longer felt fear, as it was wiped. The Manticore no longer felt happiness, as it was gone. The Manticore forgot what they felt like... and what emotions felt like all together. The foreign-mind destroyed the Manticore's entire emotional make-up.

Yet that was not enough. The foreign-mind was not finished in its vengeance. The intruder moved onto the Manticore's memories. It found whatever memory belonged to the Manticore and wiped it clean. The Manticore forgot its cub days. It forgot its children that it worked so hard to protect. It forgot why it left the forest to begin with. After a few moments, all of the Manticore's basic or treasured memories were destroyed.

That was not enough, nowhere near enough for the presence. The presence darted to the Manticore's thought process. Like an infection, it turned whatever colorful thoughts the Manticore had into pure blackness.

After a few moments, the Manticore's mind was a black abyss. There was no color, no words, no images, nothing. Now completely satisfied, the foreign-presence exited the mind of the Manticore, and back into the body of the green colt.

With no emotion, no memory, and no consciousness altogether, the creature was unable to do a single thing. It could not remember how to see, how to hear, how to move, or how to stand. It had lost most of its basic functionality. The mighty Manticore of the forest, collapsed on the ground.

Over the course of a few seconds, or hours of agony in the mental spectrum, the Manticore went from being a fearsome creature, to becoming a brain-dead vegetable.

---

Sigmund regained control of his thoughts after the Manticore collapsed on the ground. Sigmund's eyes went from that of pure hate, to that of indescribable fear. There on the ground before him, was a beast four times his size. A beast that he had taken down. A beast that he did not have to lay a hoof on.

Slowly, the other ponies, shocked and frightened by what they had just witnessed, moved closer to the Manticore. A pony could assume that the Manticore was asleep or knocked out... until they looked at his face. The face that Sigmund dared not to look away from.

The Manticore had an empty expression on its face. The tongue of the creature was lolled out on the ground. It didn't move. The only thing that could be made out, was faint breathing. Its unmoving eyes were tracked upon the green colt. Its entire disposition... was blank. Sigmund felt a humongous wave of emotions rise up inside of him. The most noticeable of the emotions being guilt, even though Sigmund could not even begin to grasp what had truly happened.

Sigmund broke the thousand-mile stare of the Manticore, to take a brief look around at the ponies who slowly trotted and limped over to the body, and were looking at it as well. Their faces were all horrified at the sight, except for one Rainbow pony, who was in a position where she could not see the face. She had an amazed expression.

One by one, they all gazed towards Sigmund.

It only looked each pony in the eye for a brief moment, but he could tell already see fear in all their eyes. Even Pinkie wasn't giggling at what was scary, she was silent. Fluttershy gave him a frightened look of complete fear. Big Mac noticed this, and limped over to Fluttershy's side to comfort

her, while also giving Sigmund strange looks as well. Sigmund stared down at the Manticore again for a few more seconds, which for him felt like hours. Rainbow Dash suddenly broke the silence.

“WHOA, SIGMUND! DANG. I thought you were bluffing for a moment... but you just amp’ed Fluttershy’s stare by like a hundred fold!” All the other ponies shot Rainbow an angry glare, yet Sigmund did not bother to look up. “Hey? What’s the problem? C’mon... that was totally awesome! You’re cooler than I thought, Sigmund!”

“...Shut up.” Sigmund whispered. Rainbow Dash didn’t hear him.

“You gotta show me whatever you did there Sig-”

**“I SAID SHUT UP”** Sigmund cried out. He looked directly at Rainbow Dash, with the same glare he had on the Manticore before. She jumped back a few feet, stumbling a little from what seemed like a broken leg, and Sigmund could now see she joined the others in giving him the look of terror.

Sigmund took several deep breaths. He gave himself one final look at the vegetable on the ground, and then bolted back into the direction of town, away from his friends.

By destroying the monster, he had become one in the eyes of those around him.

---

Rainbow Dash finally saw the Manticore’s face, and realized why all the other ponies were so silent.

“What in Ponyville is going on here?” asked a voice behind them. Ponyville’s mayor had arrived, along with several other ponies. “What is this I hear about a Manticore outside the forest?” Twilight and her friends were silent however. Spike was at her side. They simply moved to the side, and allowed the mare to see for herself.



Her jaw dropped. She asked, "What... what happened here, Twilight...?" Twilight and her friends briefly looked at each other, and brought their heads down again. She glanced at the others as well. "I said... what happened here?"

"We don't know... we tried to stop the Manticore..." said Twilight plainly. "It just... sorta happened."

The Mayor was unsure what to say, yet she noticed that some of them were wounded. "...you should all seek medical attention... we'll find out what we should do with this trespasser... when he wakes up..."

Twilight felt doubt when the Mayor said that. The Manticore's empty stare just made it seem like there was no recovery.

Twilight truly wanted to explain what happened, but a part of caused her to hesitate. She dared not to even mention Sigmund, or else the Mayor would have suspected him. Some nurses pulled Big Mac to the side to treat his wounds, and slowly tugged Rainbow Dash to fix her broken leg. Normally Rainbow Dash would try and run away when attempting to be treated, but she did exactly what they wanted her to do this time.

Big Mac, not wanting to leave Fluttershy by herself, gestured for her to follow him. Fluttershy had tears running down her cheeks. Rarity and Pinkie Pie, both of whom were silent, turned around and follow the others. Applejack stayed with Twilight, but slowly began to turn to catch up with the others. Twilight knew there was nothing left to do. She left the ponies with the Mayor to deal with the Manticore, and slowly trotted back into town. Her thoughts were focused on Sigmund.

She was a pony of reason... she couldn't believe that Sigmund could have done what happened with the Manticore. But it correlated so perfectly... what he said...

*"No... I will make you regret... your entire existence!"*

And then the Manticore... no... it was all coincidence. Twilight did not want to believe that he could do something so... unbelievable. She suspected that there was more to him than met the eye, but this seemed to be beyond what she was expecting. She wasn't sure what she was going to do.

---

The Gatekeeper sat back on his chair, once again staring up at the ceiling. He was taking heavy breaths, but he still payed attention to the expanse of colors above. The colors were no longer flowing, but were scrambling. Sigmund's emotions were derailing his train of thought.

The Gatekeeper spoke to himself, knowing full well that Sigmund could not hear him.

"I am sorry Sigmund, but there was no other choice. I would have risked your sanity and mentality forever had one of your precious friends been killed. I knew that your anger would mask my control over you, but I did not expect for it to take full control during the Conversion. It does show me though that when your mind is completely focused, it can even override me."

The Gatekeeper had a look of remorse in his eyes for a few seconds, but it turned back into a knowledgeable disposition.

"You must... you *will*... work your own way past this unfortunate event. You will come up with answers for yourself. When you do, you will finally be ready."

He turned to look behind him, at the large vault door.

"You will be finally ready to know the truth, and put it to use."

# Chapter 7

Twilight peeked her head up to the chime of the town bell. There were nine chimes that penetrated the darkness outside. She sighed to herself and began to pay more attention to the doorway. The Library was empty as always, and Spike was already fast asleep in his basket by her bed.

It had been a week since the Manticore incident, and life for her and her friends in Ponyville had gone back to normal. Ponyville pretty much moved past the incident the day after, save for brief comments that Twilight couldn't help but overhear.

It was accepted that the Manticore just... shut down. That the Manticore simply forgot everything, even when moments before it seemed perfectly fine. After a few days, even Twilight and her friends accepted it happened coincidentally. Attempts to treat the Manticore failed, so the nurse ponies gave up. They resolved to just put it back into the forest, and leave it in its own environment. Twilight knew however that it was in no condition at all to go back into the harsh, unforgiving forest, but after what it had done to her friends, she stayed silent when she heard the decision.

Her friends were back to their usual routine. Fluttershy continued to take care of her animals, and spent even more time with Big Mac since his injuries prevented him from working. Applejack had to do most of the work on the farm by herself since Big Mac's injuries prevented him from helping. Rainbow Dash would procrastinate on weather control, and even had a good reason to since she had a broken leg. Rarity had accepted large dress orders, and spent plenty of nights sewing the dress line. Pinkie Pie even stayed up to date on her normal party schedule. Twilight, of course, resumed her 'small' study sessions. The event was practically forgotten. Yet she knew that one pony was still focused on it. That pony was Sigmund.

It had been an awkward week in the Library. Sigmund stopped talking to everypony. He would disappear for entire days. No pony was sure where he would go, and no pony really found a way to ask. Twilight knew though that sometime after nine at night, he would silently walk in through the front

door of the library. Without saying anything, he would head to his room. Twilight would always try and say something to him... but she found herself hesitating when she saw the colt walk in. In those brief moments, she could see his sorrowful face. During those moments when he was in the room, part of her only wished that she could comfort him.

The residents of Ponyville had no clue as to what really happened during the Manticore incident, only she and her friends knew what happened. She was sure that her friends were thinking about it, but they dared not to talk about Sigmund. Applejack and Big Mac didn't complain that he wasn't showing up for work. Rarity stopped asking for him to try gentlecolt apparel. Pinkie Pie even didn't send him invites for her parties.

It wasn't because they were afraid of him. Twilight was certain that the other ponies were beginning to view it as coincidence rather than his fault. She felt that it was because Sigmund ignored everypony, and it just made it awkward to try and talk to him. His secluded state just made it all the more harder. He was acting unlike his personality which made him their friend to begin with. Twilight truly hated seeing him like this.

However, Twilight already decided today that enough was enough. She saw no reason in him beating himself up over what happened. Over the course of the day, she had been building up the courage to talk to him.

And as expected, Twilight heard the creaking of the front door opening. The green colt entered silently. Twilight looked up at him, but he did not return the stare. He didn't even glance at her. Sigmund quietly trotted across the Library floor to the hallway leading to his room.

After a few hoofsteps, Twilight finally decided to say something. "Hey Sigmund..."

He continued to his room. His hooves continued clopping against the library floor.

"Can you come here?" Sigmund continued walking though. Twilight did not bother to get up and stop him as he reached to door of his room. He attempted to push the door open, but found it wouldn't budge. Twilight had magically sealed the door beforehand, expecting that Sigmund would try and ignore her.

“Sigmund. Please come here.” Twilight said louder, almost with a demanding tone. Sigmund, with his eyes down, sighed to himself and slowly trotted to the table where Twilight was.

He avoided making any sort of eye contact, and remained silent, even when he was next to her.

Twilight decided to begin. “Sigmund... it has been a week since what happened. You shouldn’t think that you caused the Manticore to...” She trailed off there, not wanting to say what they both knew already. Sigmund remained silent, still looking down to avoid looking directly at Twilight.

“Can you please talk to me? It’s not good that you’re blaming yourself.”

“Twilight, you saw what I did,” he said finally. His voice had a bit of seriousness in its tone.

“There’s no reason for you to think that you caused that to happen. Everypony believes that it was just coincidence. Why don’t you accept it as so?”

“Because they weren’t in my position. It’s one thing that you all saw it... but I felt it Twilight. I felt it. I felt my anger... I felt my hate... I lost control when I saw everypony hurt... when I saw the Manticore about to hurt you as well...”

“Sigmund... I understand your emotions... but you need to-”

“I felt the Manticore’s thoughts, Twilight. I felt like I was swimming amongst them. His emotions. His memories. I felt like I was there... and... I was angry.” Sigmund’s tone was replaced by that of nervousness.

“What are you saying?”

“I hated the bastard, Twilight... for what he did. I wanted revenge... so I targeted everything around me...” Sigmund kept going. “I still hate the bastard... or what I left of him... which felt like nothing.”

Twilight noticed Sigmund’s legs were trembling. He did not look up however. She got a little closer and put a hoof on him to try and calm him.

“Sigmund...” She wasn’t sure what to say. She didn’t know whether to trust the general understanding, or to trust Sigmund. “Lets say you actually did cause-”

“Which I did.”

“Just because you felt it?”

“Twilight, let’s put two and two together.” He had a hint of anger in his voice now. “My special skill is ‘The study of the mind’ correct? That’s not necessarily it though. It can be anything related to the mind. Like your cutie mark for example. It represents magic. Well what about magic? It can’t just pertain to magic by itself.”

“Where are you going with this?”

“I’m saying that maybe, my special skill is relating to minds. Judging on my experience a week ago, I would say that my real talent... is altering minds.”

“But there’s no magic out there that can alter minds...”

“Twilight... lets think about this. I have already looked it up, and there are ponies out there who have a skill relating to minds. Normally it is easy to infer their study from their Cutie Mark, yet I have a strange symbol for a Cutie Mark that *no other pony with mind-related skill has*. Obviously I’m not some normal pony who is talented in studying minds. No, I’m something more... something different...” As his voice became quieter, Twilight paused a little before speaking again.

“Well... I can imagine that one of us could have died had you not done anything...”

“Twilight... it was one thing to stop him... but I went all out. I went beyond stopping him... and now...”

Twilight could not think of what else to say. Sigmund was still avoiding her gaze. At this point, she realized that Sigmund hadn’t looked at her at all during the conversation. She grew a little annoyed, but remained calm and friendly.

“Sigmund... can you look at me?” Twilight asked quietly. Sigmund shook his head, however.

“The last time I looked at something straight in the eye... was the Manticore. And I know what happened because of it... I’m not going to make that mistake again...” He paused. “You shouldn’t look into the eyes of a monster anyway.”

“Sigmund, I don’t think you’re a monster... none of us do. You did what you could to save us. I’m grateful for that.”

“I will never forgive myself if I hurt you, Twilight... or anything else in the same way...”

“It won’t happen again Sigmund... please... I believe that it won’t happen.” She put on her best smile. Sigmund remained unmoving for many moments. In her mind, Twilight was giving up hope, yet that changed when he slowly but surely looked up. His eyes were not looking directly into Twilight’s, but after a few more seconds, that changed.

A few more seconds passed. She could tell from the look on his face that he was somewhat relieved.. Twilight grinned. “See Sigmund... was that so hard?” Sigmund was quiet, however.

“You’re not a monster...” she said as she reached up and touched a part of his face, “I... we all still care about you... and we don’t like seeing our friend like this...”

She noticed that tears began to stream down his face. Twilight was still smiling though. She gently wrapped her front legs around Sigmund’s neck and hugged him, while he lost his composure and cried silently. Twilight was just glad that he finally opened up to her.

After maybe a minute or two, Sigmund ended his crying. Twilight took that as her cue to end the hug, stepping back while smiling at him. He wiped away his tears with his hoof.

“...Thank you Twilight... I guess I really needed to do that...” Sigmund said quietly, almost with a chuckle. Twilight gave him another grin.

"Friends are always there for each other. I learned that a few months ago." After a few seconds, Twilight looked towards the clock. "I'd best go to bed now. I was up all night last night studying... maybe tomorrow you can talk to the others?"

"Yeah... that would be a good idea..." He smiled. "Good night then."

"Sweet dreams." Twilight paused on the stairway to her room. "Oh and Sigmund?"

"Yes?"

"About what you experienced during that Manticore incident... let's just keep that between us... okay?"

"Yeah... I know already, Twilight. I only told you because I felt that you were the most reasonable friend I have... and that you would trust me on it." said Sigmund.

Twilight slightly blushed at the unintentional compliment. "I see... Well... good night then..." She closed the door behind her, leaving Sigmund in the room by himself. After a minute or so, Sigmund blew out the candle on the table and made his way to his room.

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He shut the door silently. Alone in peace, Sigmund began to reflect, now that his emotions were sorted out.

He had cried for many reasons. Part of it could be attributed to his built up emotions over the past week. Part of it could be that he took a risk and nearly hurt his good friend Twilight. Yet he cried, because he was subtly hurting those around him. He was unintentionally planting concepts into a society. A near-flawless society that does not deserve corruption. He knew for sure at that moment, that he was a threat. Yet he needed his memories first, to confirm his past and his suspicions, yet that would have to wait until he could make amends with all his friends.



Tired, he shut his eyes and and fell into a deep slumber.

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Sigmund opened his eyes shortly after closing them, and found himself on a mountain top. It wasn't chilly, but it wasn't too warm at the same time. He was just above the clouds, but luckily there weren't many clouds that were obstructing his view of the beautiful valley beneath him.

It was truly a peaceful place. This was the place where he could devote all his effort to his thoughts.

Sigmund turned away from the view before him, and immediately noticed another pony.

It seemed like a reflection. The pony was green, and also had the same strange symbol on his flank. Sigmund would have considered that he was looking in a mirror, had the figure not begun moving toward him.

Sigmund stood still while the colt trotted closer to him.

"Hello Sigmund," he said in a voice identical to Sigmund's. Sigmund was surprised that this reflection could talk.

"Hello to you too." Sigmund greeted back. He did not say anything else as the reflection stood beside him.

"I am not a reflection, just to let you know." It could read his thoughts? "Nor am I something you should fear. I only wish to talk to you, and to help you."

"If I say so..." said Sigmund. "So... obviously I haven't imagined you here... so what would that make you then?"

"I am you, Sigmund. A part of your mind."

"...and I never knew you were there? Obviously you've been hiding from me. Why would you want to do that?"

“You could say it concerns your past. I haven’t been able to reveal myself... since I have been focused on another task...” his voice drifted off. Sigmund’s eyes widened. He had good idea of what his other self was talking about. Before he could say anything to respond, the duplicate cut him off.

“I can read your thoughts. I understand it would make more sense to explain myself rather than you piece it together, but I would like to see your advancement in your reasoning.”

Sigmund remained silent, but decided to go along with what the figure was saying. “Alright then, if you say so. What may I call you by the way?”

“You may call me the Gatekeeper.”

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“So then, Gatekeeper. Let us start from the beginning.

“I woke up, and forgot all about my past. According to Twilight, I wasn’t a unique case. It seemed like I was just a normal pony who forgot a lot of things. I knew it would take weeks, perhaps months to reacquire what I lost. It all seemed simple enough... yet it became more complex after the Princess made an unexpected visit.

“She gave me hope that, by using a spell, she could solve the problem that was plaguing me for weeks. She practically guaranteed me that she could solve it. Yet when it was over, I still couldn’t remember. I was pretty disappointed when she told me that it failed, but I trusted her when she said that it did have a chance of failing. Days later though, I realized through experiences with my friends that even the most benevolent ponies would have to lie when put in a difficult situation. I began to think that I was different. That I was not the same as the average pony.

“Yet what could make me a special case? How could the all-powerful Celestia fail in her spell? To answer this, I had to consult a feeling I had before the spell took place. The feeling of my mind being pierced, and the

fact that I was not conscious during the spell. It's not right to use feelings instead of reason or fact, but in this case, I had no choice. I guessed that she didn't cast a spell on me, but rather she used a spell that could allow her to enter my mind, and release my memories on the inside. She even told me it was something she couldn't cast on me, so that sounded like the only other reasonable explanation.

"Even then, she couldn't do it. What could possibly stop her inside my mind? I personally did not experience what she did in my mind. Not to mention I wanted the release of my memories. So even if I was there, I wouldn't have stopped her.

"I started to consider the possibility of an extra presence. An outside, or in this case, an inside force that stopped Princess Celestia. I didn't think much of it, because in the end it was all based off of the assumption that she was lying to me. It's not safe to act on assumption, but now that you have made your presence known, I suppose my assumption is correct.

"I did not let the possibility bother me at first because I thought that there was a good reason for it. That changed in the Manticore incident a week ago. I viewed myself as a monster because of it, and thought nothing good could come from my memories. For the past week I ended up going into the forest and attempting to reason my way to answers. All I have are assumptions, and no facts. My self-hatred cleared up a little bit today when Twilight spoke to me, but not all the way.

"I believe it is your duty now... to clear up the remainder of my confusion. To fill in the blanks in my deduction. If you're showing yourself to me now, it must be for a good reason..."

Sigmund finally stopped. He realized that his voice hadn't faltered for a moment during his deduction. He noticed the Gatekeeper began clapping at a slow rate.

"Bravo Sigmund, bravo." He ended his clapping. "I, of course, knew that you were considering these thoughts, but I viewed them as more of a mental progression rather than a threat to our well-beings. I did have to swerve your thoughts at some points, since I did not want you to start thinking into the idea of a 'force unknown' too early. You went in-depth with

your assumptions, and I can tell that you have developed the beginning stages of your method again.”

The Gatekeeper gazed outward to the imagined valley below him. “You are right. I was the one who prevented Princess Celestia from releasing your memories. I’m not an omnipotent being for doing so, as she was not able to use her abilities in your mind. I attempted to reason with her, but she showed interest in your past, and ignored my words. I was forced to intimidate her through trials and threats, and remove her from your mind.”

“And why did you hold back my memories?”

“It has been a long time, Sigmund. In your past, according to your knowledge of the symbol, you were very proficient in mind-related activity. Whether it be thought, reason, intuition, and logic. You lost most of that ability when you ‘woke up’. If I gave you your memories back instantly, you probably wouldn’t have known what to do with them. I believed it was beneficial for you to recover your prowess first.”

“Beneficial? What was so beneficial about the Manticore incident? I didn’t feel like myself during it... Were you the reason why I...”

“Yes and no. I temporarily took control of you. If one of your friends had died, you probably wouldn’t have recovered easily from such a blow. It would have set you back by several months. Your deep anger towards the Manticore masked my brief control over you. The plan was to shift the emotions of the Manticore so it could lose its blood-lust and return to the forest. However, I did not expect for the anger to amplify the effects during the process, to the point where I could lose control. What happened next... was the result of your anger.”

“...So I guess I can’t blame you for it...”

The Gatekeeper shrugged. “A tragic event I must say. Yet I found that you made quick mental progress. The only true internal problem was your emotions preventing you from putting your progress to use.”

“Are you talking about the ability? But have I always had this power?”

“You will find that out on your own, Sigmund.”

“Well what if I... destroy the mind of somepony or something again?”

“As your mind improves, so will your control over the power. With time and practice, you will be able to wield the power to levels that I cannot even perform now. It is not something I can provide scientific data over. It is a power that I only have an understanding of, and that you will gain an understanding of as well.”

“So... why, of all times, have you revealed your presence to me?”

“You are no longer emotionally compromised, and you have made much mental progression over the course of the week. Isn’t it obvious why I am here?” The Gatekeeper turned away from the landscape view and looked directly at Sigmund. “You are ready.”

The world around them suddenly dissipated. The beautiful valley became nonexistent. The feeling of wind was gone. The dream had become completely white. The only things left, were Sigmund, the Gatekeeper, and a tall vault door.

“I’m ready? For my memories? Have I achieved the ‘desired’ mental status?”

“Not quite. You still have some progress left to make, but you are definitely ready to handle the information.”

The Gatekeeper, without saying a word, trotted towards the door handle. Yet before he grabbed it, he paused to speak to Sigmund.

“Sigmund. When I open this door, you will be on your own. You will no longer have a ‘guardian’, but you will have full access to your mind. Are you prepared?”

Sigmund looked towards the ground to think of a decision, and he brought his head up and said, “I have one more question.” The Gatekeeper did not respond, so Sigmund continued. “What are you getting out of this?”

As Sigmund said this, the Gatekeeper's gaze became intimidating. He turned away from the door handle, and faced Sigmund completely. He slowly walked towards him.

"I'm guessing that you are under the impression that this would somehow benefit me, Sigmund. I will let you know that it isn't about how it will benefit you, or how it will benefit me. It is about the *greater good*. I created this process... so that you would recover your prowess. Why recover your prowess? Because you needed it. You needed it to make the right choice. You needed it to see the logical option in the most conflicting of scenarios. To ask not how a choice benefits you, but how it benefits the world around you. To understand the course of the future with that decision. There will... and I repeat that there *will*, come a time when your decisions will bring either Salvation or Destruction. Because of my efforts, along with your experiences and your ability, you *will* make the right choices." His voice became less intimidating and back to its usual tone.

"Now..." the Gatekeeper said while turning back to the vault, "I repeat. Are you prepared?"

Sigmund was still sinking in the Gatekeeper's words, but still thought into his answer. If the Gatekeeper believed that he was ready... Sigmund had to be ready. There was only one response Sigmund could choose from. After months of playing guessing games, it was only reasonable to choose the logical option.

"Yes. I am." answered Sigmund. Upon hearing this, the Gatekeeper walked back to the vault door.

The Gatekeeper, without hesitation, yanked the door handle with one swing of his head, and the large vault door flung open. Sigmund saw nothing inside, but the Gatekeeper walked in front of the open door. He gazed at Sigmund one final time.

A swarm of colors and words appeared and rocketed out of the vault. Sigmund shifted back in surprise at the sudden torrent that was unleashed into the area around him. In the split second before they condensed and spiraled into his head, Sigmund saw the Gatekeeper had vanished into the torrent of colors.

It was so much. Images and words all flashed before him. Yet Sigmund saw all of it with his mind's eye. He processed every last detail. Every last bit of his past. What he saw would have been unbelievable to some ponies, but Sigmund knew every last bit of it to be true.

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When the dream finally shattered, Sigmund was startled awake. Everything in the guest room remained in its place. He quickly searched his mind, just to check to see if the dream was true. Much to his disdain, the dream was for real.

His eyes darted around the room, feeling like his enemies were everywhere. Now that the Gatekeeper was part of him, he realized now that there was nothing holding Celestia back from coming after Sigmund. He no longer held any bargaining chips against her. It was only a matter of time. He had to act fast.

He would have to lie to his friends, and act as though he did not remember his past, just to buy himself more time. He knew for sure, that he would have to confront them, along with Celestia, very soon. He would have to plan the confrontation in such a way that they would see and believe his side of the story. They needed to know this.

For he knew what he had to do... what he *must* do, for the sake of his past.

# Chapter 8

Once again, time passed in Ponyville. Twilight was glad that Sigmund was talking to his friends again. It was difficult to get Fluttershy to talk to Sigmund normally, yet Big Mac helped to make it easier for her. Pinkie Pie even started sending him invites for the parties again.

It had been three weeks since the Manticore incident, and Big Mac was working on the farm again. Even the rebellious blue pegasus could no longer use her broken leg as an excuse to procrastinate on work. For the most part, everything was officially back to normal.

However, that changed when Sigmund brought something up to Twilight as they were walking through town.

"I think I know how to regain some of my memories," he said simply. The purple unicorn stopped in her task and immediately paid attention to Sigmund.

"Twilight, you said that those ponies found me in a cave, right?" asked Sigmund. Twilight nodded her head. "I'm planning on finding this cave tomorrow."

Twilight's jaw dropped upon hearing that. She closed it to say, "But... Sigmund... that's in the Everfree forest... I don't think that's a safe idea."

"Twilight, after months of being here, I haven't made much progress. I'm thinking that if I find this cave, then maybe I can remember my past."

"The Everfree forest is large, Sigmund... not to mention it isn't quite mapped out yet. You'd be wasting your time searching for it."

"Like I haven't been wasting time here researching. I mean, I enjoy studying with you, Twilight, but let's face it, it's not helping me with my amnesia. Plus I've talked one of the explorers who found me. He gave me a good set of directions on where to find the cave."



“But that doesn’t rule out the fact that the forest is dangerous...”

“I’ll be fine...”

“You’re going into the Everfree forest?” A voice above Sigmund said. It was Rainbow Dash, eavesdropping on the conversation. “It’s been pretty boring around here lately... so I’ll come with!”

“That’s not necessary, Rainbow Dash. I should be fine on my own”

“Naw... I’m up for some adventure. Heck... maybe the others would like to come! I’ll spread the word!” Before Sigmund could say any more, she flew off. Sigmund groaned slightly and Twilight sighed.

“Well... if the others go, I guess it would make sense that I go too.” Twilight said.

Sigmund looked away from the sky and turned to Twilight. “Are you sure Twilight?” He had a concerned look. “As you said, it could be dangerous.”

“I’m the most powerful unicorn in Ponyville remember? I can handle myself. Not to mention I’ve been in the forest a couple times now.”

“Okay then Twilight, I guess that makes sense.”

“If we’re going tomorrow, then I’ll go back to the library and prepare. See you later!”

She ran off down the road, leaving Sigmund in the middle of town.

Sigmund felt the emotion of guilt in him. He didn’t want to lie to them, but he already deemed it necessary. The truth was something that he would have to tell them at the right time. He could only hope that his plan would not backfire and end badly for one of them.

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There was a thick amount of greenery in front of him, which was a sure signal to anypony that they were close to the Everfree forest. Sigmund only saw part of it once, during the Manticore incident. It didn't seem so menacing, but apparently to the other ponies, it was the place that everypony stayed away from. With that knowledge, he wondered why he was not the object of fear to Ponyville.

Sigmund turned to the other ponies. Each of them had saddlebags. He really couldn't believe that all of them were there to aid him, even after what happened weeks ago.

"I guess Spike isn't coming along?" he asked Twilight.

She shook her head. "Nope... he had to go to Canterlot on official business. He didn't give me the details though."

He turned to Applejack, and asked, "What about Big Mac?" Yet before she could open her mouth, Fluttershy answered for her abruptly, in a manner outside of her usual character.

"He's just busy with work... and he said he would run some errands for my cottage while I'm gone..." She put on a small yet noticeable blush.

"Oh Fluttershy! That reminds me! When you two finally get married can I plan the after-party? Huh? Huh?" said Pinkie Pie, while she pushed her head against Fluttershy. The yellow pegasus flushed even harder and knelt down, as if she were in an invisible shell.

"Now darling, it's too early to bring something like that up..." said Rarity. "But since the topic's in the air now... you will be using one of my wedding gowns for it, right?" Fluttershy's coat was practically red as the comments pile up.

"Oh come now girls, leave 'er be." Applejack interrupted. "They're just friends is all." she glanced towards Fluttershy and gave her a wink, which still added to Fluttershy's heavy blush.

"Uh... did you all forget what we're here for?" said Twilight, attempting to get them back on track.

“Yeah, enough with all the lovey-dovey stuff... it’s making boring even more boring... if that’s even possible...” Rainbow Dash added. She turned to Sigmund. “Tell me we’re about to get goin’... right?”

“If everypony is ready, then we’ll go.” They all nodded in response, including the yellow pegasus who was too embarrassed to speak. He chuckled. “Alright then.” He looked in front of him and peered off down the rugged path of the forest.

Taking a brief sigh to himself, he took the first steps into the forest, with the others soon following.

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As they went deeper into the forest, Sigmund could understand why people stayed away from the forest. Besides the rumored creatures that lurked about, the forest as a whole had a creepy aura to it. Birds chimed in a strange, uncoordinated manner, unlike the birds in Ponyville that were harmonious. At times there would be a random fog cloud that descended upon them. He had a feeling he was being watched as well. Apparently most ponies felt the same thing, but they only felt watched by the creatures of the forest. Sigmund knew that he was being watched, and he was sure who was paying attention.

He also noticed the tree branches above them were becoming thicker and more clustered, blocking out most of the sunlight. Which explained why Rainbow Dash was on the ground with them, and not trying to fly ahead to get a bird’s eye view. He turned to see his friends were looking a little edgy. He knew that they had gone into the forest numerous times, but even then, they still feared the place.

Even though he pondered this, he was careful to not let his thoughts phase him out of reality, since he needed to focus on the directions one of the explorer ponies gave him before. There were key features of the forest he needed to look out for, and he would just have to make a few turns when he saw these features to reach the cave.

It had been an hour of walking, some conversation, an excited pink pony bouncing around them, and intense thought, before they decided to rest in a small patch of the forest where light filtered through the leaves.

---

Twilight noticed how throughout the entire walk, Sigmund was mostly quiet. His normal disposition was replaced with that of seriousness. Whenever she or the others involved him in conversation, he would only say a few words, and then turn his head forward.

She was use to him doing that, but it the look in his eyes that was different. She remembered months ago when she first saw him.

He seemed confused, baffled, and helpless back then. Twilight decided to help him out of generosity and because he seemed like a nice colt. As time progressed, he made friends, he began to remember, and he was slowly changing. Now, in only a few months, he had the look of confidence, determination, and knowledge. It was impressive, to say the least. Twilight couldn't help but smile when she saw him like this.

The cave they were trying to find, was definitely of importance to him.

Yet her friends were still treating it as a get-together, judging on their conversations.

"Oh dear! My mane! Ugh... look at all this dirt."

"Rarity... we're in the Everfree forest... whadya' expect? A salon?"

"Well... no... but sounds like a marvelous idea! I can imagine dozens of weary travelers lining up in the only salon for miles..."

"Oh oh oh oh!" Pinkie Pie joined in the conversation. "How about a bakery as well? That way I can throw even creepier Halloween parties!"

"I-I don't think I would go to them... it would too scary..." said Fluttershy quietly.

“Oh don’t worry Fluttershy, I’m sure your big, strong boyfriend would protect you!” Rainbow Dash laughed out, causing Fluttershy to blush in the same manner as before. Twilight and the others couldn’t help but giggle.

They were getting so caught up in conversation, that Twilight almost didn’t notice Sigmund slipping off behind the trees nearby.

Out of curiosity, she got up and followed him. She carefully made sure she wouldn’t stray too far from where she left the others.

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She only had to cross a few trees and bushes to emerge and see Sigmund, with his back turned to her, looking into what seemed like a ditch. She made quiet hoofsteps, just to see what he was up to, but he heard them and glanced at her.

“Twilight, don’t come any closer.”

“Why not?” she asked while doing the opposite of what he asked. She came close enough to the ditch to make out something lying in it.

It was a large creature. Yellow fur, red mane, and a pair of wings. Massive overall. If one were to have but a brief glance before turning and running, they would assume that the creature was sleeping, and would have fled to avoid waking it. Yet she had longer than a brief glance, she recognized the creature. It was the same creature from two weeks ago. The Manticore.

She felt her stomach turn when she saw that it wasn’t sleeping, nor was it breathing.

“Oh dear Celestia...” She managed to say silently, before Sigmund pulled her away. “Was that..?”

“Yes. That was the same Manticore,” he said plainly.

“But... it’s... how...” Twilight was at loss for words.

"Twilight, he's dead. You told me they released him back into the forest, right?"

"Well... yeah... but he wasn't..."

"Three weeks ago, Twilight, he was dead on the inside. Now he's officially dead." Sigmund did not have any sort of remorse in his tone or fear in his eyes. He still had the determined stare. It was as if he had completely moved past what happened, despite the way he acted when she confronted him two weeks before. "I'm guessing he couldn't move and couldn't feed himself, so he just died of starvation or dehydration."

"But..." She looked down, wondering what to think or what to say.

"Twilight, we aren't going this way, so let's not mention it to the others okay? They seem to have forgotten all about what happened, and this would only remind them. I need them to trust me. Now, of all times, I need their trust." He brought one hoof up to her chin, carefully raising her confused head to look directly into his eyes. "Please, don't tell the others."

Even though she was confused, she found some sort of comfort in his eyes. Like the look showed how much he trusted her, and how she couldn't imagine breaking that trust out of confusion.

After a few silent moments of looking into his eyes, she finally said, "...I won't..."

He smiled. "Alright, thanks Twilight. Come on, I think it's about time we continue. According to the directions, it should be close."

He started walking back, but he stopped when he noticed that Twilight wasn't moving. She snapped back to reality and followed him, leaving behind the dead creature in the ditch. Sigmund seemed to move past it, so Twilight did her best to try and not let it concern her as well.

---

It was not much longer before they reached a large rock wall. Presumably, they were at the bottom of a cliff.

“Uh... you sure this is the right way Sigmund? This doesn't seem like something we can climb.”

“No problem! I'll just fly up and take a look!” Before Rainbow Dash could shoot into the air, Sigmund stopped her.

“No need Rainbow Dash. According to my directions, we're already here.”

The others looked around at the sides of the cliff, but saw nothing.

“Sigmund, we're looking for a cave right? I don't see anything.” said Twilight. Sigmund shook his head, however.

“The pony told me that there was a hole that they nearly missed, because it blended in so well.” He gazed carefully around what he could see of the cliff, and soon spotted an opening, that was close to the ground.

“Well, I don't see anything else, so that must be it then.”

As they approached the cave, they realized how large the opening was, even though it seemed to blend in. They could only see into the cave for a few feet, and the rest was pure blackness. Sigmund reached into his saddlebag with his mouth, and pulled out a lantern. He gently tapped the glass with his hoof to awaken the fireflies resting in the lantern. They glowed brightly and illuminated some of the darkness. Yet the light by itself was not strong enough to get a further picture of the cave..

“Twilight. Rarity. I'm guessing you know an illumination spell, correct?”

“Yep, it's pretty simple,” answered Twilight.

“Yet so elegant if used properly...” added Rarity.

“Uh... I don't think we need elegance right now...” He gazed back to the darkness of the cave. “It looks like this part of the cave is large enough for us to walk in a two column formation. I'll take point. Twilight, you should stay in the middle. Rarity should be in the back.” The other ponies looked at

him, finding it strange that he was suddenly giving orders, but they got into his designated formation without a problem.

“Alright then. Let’s go in, shall we?” He raised the lantern up with his mouth, and proceeded to walk in. Twilight and Rarity casted their light spell, causing their horns to glow brightly. They entered the darkness of the cave.

---

There was a soft pitter patter in the cave, but luckily there were no other sort of creepy noises. The cave twisted and turned in different directions, but Twilight could at tell that they were getting farther underground. The passage grew wider, and she could see that her friends were already losing formation because of it. She could tell Sigmund did not mind, probably because he could still see them in the light. The others talked silently, because they did not want to raise their voices and cause an unsettling echo to scatter through the cave. Fluttershy seemed somewhat scared, but the presence of her friends comforted her.

“Oh come on Fluttershy, it’s not that bad. There’s no monster here.” whispered Rainbow Dash to the other pegasus. A growl behind her timed herself appropriately. Rainbow Dash yelped and leapt into the air out of fright. She turned expecting some gruesome monster, but only saw her bright pink friend giggling. The others joined in the giggle, including Fluttershy. “Pinkie Pie!” she angrily said while her face was red from embarrassment.

Sigmund shushed them. “Here... I think this is where they found me. Right by a noticeably protruding rock, he said.” The others quieted down and looked to where Sigmund pointed.

“Okay... so we found the spot... what now?”

“They said I was crawling when they first saw me. I must have been crawling from something.” He gazed ahead of him, casting his lantern out to illuminate three separate paths.



“So uh... do we split up or something?” asked Applejack. Sigmund shook his head.

“That sounds like a bad idea. Plus, I already know where to go.” He gestured to what looked like a line in the dirt of the cave that aimed down one of the pathways. Even after several months, the dirt kept his tracks in place.

“I can’t imagine having crawled for a long distance, so it must be close,” he said while bringing his lantern up in the direction of the passage.

“Pardon me, Sigmund... but what must be close?” Twilight asked. Sigmund did not respond, as he was already trotting down the pathway. She and her friends glanced at each other and some of them shrugged, but they walked after him to avoid getting lost.

Something in the back of Twilight’s head was making her think that there was something Sigmund was not telling her. Perhaps a lot of things. If that were the case, he would have to tell her sooner or later. She knew that.

# Chapter 9

“Uh... sugarcube... if Ah’m not mistaken... this here sure looks like a dead end.”

They followed the passage for only a few minutes, but they already reached the end.

“Maybe we went down the wrong path? How about we go back.” said Twilight.

Sigmund went closer to the end though, and they began to make out details. The “dead end” wasn’t curvy or dark gray like the walls around them in the cave. It had a dull shine to it. It seemed completely flat, despite a few small dents in it. Sigmund reached out with his front hoof, and gently tapped a few times. Instead of the normal noise made by the rest of the rocks, it made a sort of panging noise that echoed across the cave.

“Okay... well that seems out of the ordinary...” said Twilight. “What are you doing Sigmund?” He was touching the wall with his fore hooves, but stopped when his hooves landed on something protruding from the wall. He looked at the protruding object, and then pulled the object down. There was a slight rumbling noise, but they all saw part of the wall moving away. They were quiet for a few moments, until a pink earth pony broke the silence.

“Ooooh! You found a secret part of the dungeon! I call dibs on armor!” Everypony, including Sigmund, shot Pinkie Pie a befuddled look.

“Pinkie Pie... you are just so... random...” said Rainbow Dash after a few moments of silence.

Disregarding the strange comment, Sigmund picked up his lantern, and then went into the entrance. His hoofsteps were now making audible panging noises. Intrigued, the other ponies followed him inside.

The cave was no longer curvy. The walls were perpendicular to the floor and ceiling. Although they could not see the entire cave, it had an unnatural

feel to it. While the other ponies were both confused and intrigued, Twilight saw that Sigmund was not displaying any of those. His eyes were focused ahead of him.

She noticed what looked like scraps of paper on the ground. Along with what looked like overturned tables and chairs.

*‘That’s strange... those don’t seem fitted for a pony...’*

Yet once again, Sigmund wasn’t paying attention to these strange things, while everypony else was. Twilight once again felt the feeling that he was lying to her. Enough was enough. Twilight trotted up closer to Sigmund.

“Sigmund... is there something you’re not telling me...?”

“What makes you say that?”

“It’s just that... you seem like you know what you’re doing. Like you were expecting all of this... Are you sure you told me everything?” Twilight asked. Sigmund didn’t respond. He just continued trotting. “Sigmund...”

After a few more moments, he turned his head to her. “You’ll find out, Twilight,” he said. She would have asked another question, but at this point, they reached another wall, but this time there was an arch on it. Sigmund, once again, pulled a protruding mechanism from the side and the part of the wall under the arch opened. The other ponies were preparing to go in, but Sigmund stopped them.

“Listen... I need to look around for myself... so can you all just stay here for now?”

“Oh c’mon Sigmund, this place seems so spooky, I wanna explore!” said Rainbow Dash.

“You can do that later, Rainbow Dash. I’ll be back, don’t worry.” Rainbow Dash folded her forelegs together in an annoyed fashion. Sigmund chuckled and made his way through the door. He glanced at Twilight for a brief moment, but then turned away and entered the new room.

---

“Oh my... this place is so dusty...” Rarity commented. She looked at Twilight, who was levitating some of the scraps of papers on the ground. “Oh darling... don’t do that, you’re kicking the dust into the air. I’ll have to wash it for hours!”

Twilight ignored her complaining.

“Say Twilight... what’re you doin’?” asked Applejack.

“What does it look like I’m doing?... I’m checking these papers. There’s something Sigmund isn’t telling us...”

“I don’t know Twilight... this place seems creepy enough... I think we should just trust Sigmund, since he knows what he’s doing...”

“Fluttershy,” said Twilight, “that’s the thing. He knows what he’s doing. He didn’t even care about the geography of the room or all this furniture casted everywhere. It’s like he’s been expecting it.”

“Maybe it’s like a surprise party!” Pinkie Pie interrupted. All the other ponies shot her a glare. She immediately covered her mouth.

Twilight threw the scraps on the ground, unable to make the words. She went over to an overturned desk and pulled open the drawers, whereupon a large stack of papers fell out.

She carefully levitated them into the air. The text was still readable. All her friends soon crowded around her in curiosity.

Some of the text was faded, yet she could make out a few words. If only they could made sense.

“Emm Mare rick kah? I’ve never heard of a place like that before...” commented Fluttershy.

“Peh-Fell-Lih-delf-ia? Oh... Fillydelphia! That’s not how you spell it... whoever wrote this needs to work on their spelling and grammar skills!” commented Pinkie Pie as well..

Twilight didn't understand what the words were saying. Everything was in black and white, no colors. She flipped through page after page. Then she picked up a new stack of papers, and immediately one word caught her eye as she skimmed through.

*Sigmund*

She stopped flipping the page, and looked at the text containing the word. Her friends also began to read the large bold text on the side of the page.

*Psychologist Vanishes without a Trace*

Under the large bold text, she and the others began reading.

*After an entire month, police have decided to drop the case of 22 year-old Sigmund G. Harrison. Once a well-known figure in the field of the study of the mind, or Psychology, disappeared from his campus on April 15th, 2016. This was but a week after his controversial presentation to the University's Board of Education. A presentation that caused him to go from the title of a renowned Psychologist, to a 'simple insane doomsday prophet'.*

*Although the field suffered a blow by his disappearance, one anonymous patron in the field admits 'It can't be any worse than when he gave his presentation, and made us all look like fools.'*

*Harrison was believed to have lost the moral and financial backing from the University after the presentation, which was made to display his findings obtained from when he spent a year developing a prediction science. Even with the thriving world economy, and technological revolution, Harrison believed that it would end in disaster in a matter of five years. Numerous financial experts assure us that there is no way the economy could ever falter in such a short time.*

*'The University will have to suffer without Sigmund. Even though he showed quite the potential, it was inexcusable on his part to waste funds on this... fake science' a colleague of Harrison told us.*

*If you have any idea where Harrison could be, you may call our news center number, located on the back page. Your contributions are always appreciated.*

Twilight stopped reading. None of her friends said anything. She wasn't sure what to think. Yet she looked at the picture. It was in black and white, yet she could make out the form of the creature in it.

Under the picture was the caption "*Sigmund G. Harrison, speaking to a group of students at an orientation a year beforehand.*"

The creature was not a pony. It wasn't standing on four legs, but on two. The creature's back was straight, and even though it was only using two legs, it seemed perfectly balanced. While a pony normally had trouble standing on two legs, the creature looked like it was in a comfortable position. It had two eyes, which were small when compared to the size of its head. Its mane seemed like it was only on the top of its head only. It looked like it was gesturing to something, with its arms bending in such a way that a pony couldn't imitate.

The six ponies were too confused to say anything. The words said *Sigmund and the study of the mind*, but they portrayed Sigmund as some bizarre creature, not a pony.

Twilight tried to understand what she was reading. She was far too confused... but she knew now that Sigmund was definitely holding many things back to them, his friends.

Their thoughts were interrupted when almost suddenly, the entire room was illuminated. There were light sources on the ceiling. The entire room was visible, along with all the scattered papers and overturned furniture.

A green colt entered through the same door from where he left. His lantern was turned off. "Sorry about that... I just wanted some real light in here is all." He gave them a smile, but they did not smile back. "Uh... what's the problem? Is there something on my face?" He joked, but they still stared at him.

Twilight, although unmoving, levitated the group of papers over to him, where he read the article. His smile quickly vanished. She could briefly

make out anger, but it was replaced with a calm expression. He didn't have any sort of emotion on his face, but he moved the papers aside and stared at each one of his friends.

Then, with a tiny smirk, he broke the silence.

"So... you all finally know."

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"I believe I already knew the truth Sigmund." The ponies turned their heads towards where they first entered the strange room.

There, majestically and nobly walking in, was Princess Celestia. Although frozen for a moment out of the unannounced surprise, Twilight and her friends bowed before her. Sigmund was still staring at her. He didn't seem to care to bow before her.

She entered with three other figures. Two gold-armored pegasus-knights, and a baby dragon.

Twilight called out. "Spike! Weren't you on official business in Canterlot?" Spike opened his mouth to respond, but Princess Celestia answered for him.

"He was, my prized pupil, and still is on official business. I am on official business as well. I have followed you here, as part of that business." Before Twilight could ask her a question, Sigmund interrupted her.

"Hello there Princess. Let me ask you a quick question... am I Sigmund? Or the Gatekeeper?" Celestia froze at the question. Twilight didn't quite understand what he meant by 'the Gatekeeper'.

"Don't worry," he continued, "there is no Gatekeeper anymore, your majesty... only Sigmund."

Princess Celestia recovered from the statement. "I see you remember your past now, Sigmund. I don't see how else you could know about the Gatekeeper..."

Twilight and her friends' eyes widened and turned towards Sigmund. He ignored their glances, and looked directly at Spike.

"So Spike... you were the one informing her? I guess you didn't know what was going on, but you can't just ignore official orders. I don't blame you in any way."

"Uh... she just wanted to know what was going on in Ponyville... so I just let her know about the Manticore thing and..." Spike had trouble talking, presumably over numerous questions that were going through his head.

"Allow me to answer for you Spike..." The Princess gazed at Twilight again. "I am sorry my faithful student, but I needed to hear more information on this... and I had a feeling you would avoid talking about Sigmund to protect him." Twilight gulped, thinking that she was in trouble. Yet much to her relief, the Princess added, "Protecting your friends is a good lesson for friendship, so I understand your choice."

She turned back to Sigmund. "Spike was under my orders to write to me as well over any strange occurrence that could happen. I did not *just* have Spike though, Sigmund. Some of my loyal followers were directed to keep an eye on you for the past two months. Plus, whenever a creature attacks ponies, it is normal for me to hear about it..."

"I see... Princess. But that is not what you are hear to tell me. Go on, let me hear your assumptions."

The Princess was taken aback by his forwardness, while most ponies would always act formal around her. She showed no signs of it, and continued without hesitating.

"Sigmund, when I first heard the story from Twilight Sparkle, I believed that you were a typical amnesia case. I decided to help since my faithful student seemed concerned. As much of my work passed over the weeks, I reviewed the story she told me in my head, and realized just how peculiar it was. I decided to call one of the ponies who originally found you.



“He told me the story. Of how they found you in the Everfree forest. How they found you in an unheard-of condition. I became more intrigued with each detail, and I found it within the bounds of intrigue to want to know more. So, in a way, I was looking forward to the visit.

“When I visited you and Twilight Sparkle, you were happy to have a way of ending your amnesia. I performed the spell, that let me enter your mind.”

“I found where your memories were being stored, and I would have opened it, had it not been for the Gatekeeper. The sole controller of your memories. A part of you that, at the same time, wasn’t a part of you. He wouldn’t let me release them. He wanted your ‘prowess’ to return first. I didn’t know what he meant by that, until you remembered that your special talent was the study of the mind.

“From then on, I had a feeling. A feeling that you weren’t from Equestria. All evidence would have contradicted me had I believed you were a normal pony of Equestria. I believed from then on, that you were not of this time. That you came from a time before ponies began.

“Yet I couldn’t confirm it. Your mental guardian prevented me. I couldn’t take action against you, or else he would not release what I needed to know. I couldn’t take you away then and there, or else it would have compromised my public image. I had to play the Gatekeeper’s game, or the waiting game.”

Even though Celestia tried her best to explain it, the other ponies, and the baby dragon, were all still somewhat confused. The Royal Guards tried their best to remain noble and not as befuddled as the others.

“When I performed the same mental spell on the beast after the incident a few weeks back, I found nothing left of the Manticore. I know for a fact, that no pony is capable of inducing such a trauma, even a unicorn as gifted as Twilight Sparkle. Magic does not allow for the tampering of thoughts and emotions. The best I can do is view them, and maybe perform a tiny alteration.

“That was when I considered the mysterious pony I met before. The same pony I went into the mind of. The same pony who did the impossible, and

expunged me from the mind. The same pony..." Her eyes narrowed on Sigmund, giving him a look that would spread fear into anypony, yet Sigmund stood his ground. "...whose own special talent relates to minds."

"So... you were the one who killed the Manticore... correct?"

Twilight and her friends were fearful. They already dismissed that what happened was just coincidence, even Twilight didn't completely believe Sigmund when he told her what truly happened. The purple unicorn knew what he was going to say, but she could only hope that he would not say it.

"Kill?" he responded without any sort of pause. "I did not kill him in a physical way. In a mental way... then yes. I killed him." Twilight's friend's jaws dropped and they collectively gasped. "I did it to protect my friends, who definitely would have been seriously hurt had I not done it." He looked at them and gave them a friendly smile once again, but they did not return it. He turned back to the Princess. "Of course, that's not all you're here for, Celestia." He seemed to intentionally avoid the formality.

Celestia only smiled upon his honesty at answering her question. "When I saw the Manticore's condition, I immediately knew you were the cause of it. I couldn't have guessed that you could perform such an act upon a creature. If you could do such a thing to a creature such as a Manticore... what could stop you from doing it to ponies as well? If you wanted to, you could destroy the society that I have watched over for more than a thousand years.

"My assumption of your past was only influenced by history. It was once a fact. Then time passed and it became a rumor. Now it is but a fairy tale. It is of the ones who came before us, or the Ancients. The Ancients were the creatures that controlled the world long before we came into being. It was said that they destroyed themselves in their greed and ignorance. And then we came, and built a grand society on top of the rubble of theirs. And if you are from the past..." She paused, possibly to let the other ponies in the room understand what she was implying before continuing.

"Sigmund... you have become a threat. You may have always been a threat. The very fact that you came from this place... proves my assumption. The assumption that you are one of the Ancients... and I cannot have you in my society. Is what I say true, Sigmund?"

---

All eyes turned from Celestia to Sigmund. He gazed at each pair of eyes in the room. He looked down for a second or two, and closed his eyes. He opened them, and looked towards Celestia.

“You are right, Celestia. I am, or was, what you may call, an ‘Ancient’. Well, technically I’m a pony now, just like every other pony in this room.” Sigmund noticed that his friends were not all slowly maneuvering over to Celestia, possibly out of fear. “I guess after you live thousands years, you pick up on some old rumors. But yes... the ‘Ancients’ were ignorant, greedy, and illogical creatures that controlled the Earth. I can personally vouch for that. For your sakes though, I should tell you my side of the story.”

“For our sakes, Sigmund...” The Princess interrupted, “...it would be better that you do not corrupt the minds of my subjects any longer. I have a feeling you’ve been manipulating them for a while now.”

“You can’t act based off of ‘feelings’, Celestia... you best hear my side of this entire situation. Weren’t you interested in my memories to begin with?”

“Indeed I was. But now, I realize that I have taken enough risk with you.” She gestured to her guards. “Subdue him, then we will decide what to do with him.” Her guards nodded, and made their way towards Sigmund; their hooves clanging heavily in their approach as a form of intimidation.

As the guards approached him, Sigmund gazed around the room. He saw his friends, all looking at him in fear, agreeing with Celestia’s false views. He saw Celestia, about to carry out a huge mistake. He saw the guards, both coming towards him, about to silence the voice of reason. He was being misunderstood. It reminded him of all those years ago, when he was stopped from protecting society. Now he was dropped into that situation again.

This time however, he had the power to let his voice be heard.

He gazed at each of the guards. The guards made an abrupt halt, several feet away from Sigmund. They weren't moving.

"What are you both doing?" Celestia asked. She noticed Sigmund's smirk, and glared at him. "What did you do..."

"You can say..." Sigmund said with a knowledgeable tone, "...that I put them at an imbalance of fear and obedience. Although their obedience is of high resolve... fear is overcoming it." He looked at the guards again. They both were staring at him wide-eyed. Their legs were beginning to tremble noticeably.

"How about I put it this way. You all view me as a pony, correct? They see me to be a frightening demon. They are too scared to attack this demon. Even if they are ordered to do so, they will not risk their lives in such a manner.

"Now Celestia, right now, they can recover from such a thing... but if I let this fear carry on, it could negatively effect their sanity. Is it really worth it? You are the benevolent ruler of Equestria... you can't just let subjects in front of you suffer." He gazed up at Celestia. "Just let me speak my mind... and I'll end their imbalance."

Celestia's face said it all. She was unsure of what to do. She hadn't expected this at all. He looked at his friends. Some of them giving him a look of intrigue, the others giving him a look of fear. "How can I be sure that you will follow through?"

"You can't be sure. You can only trust me."

Celestia was silent as her two personal guards were sweating profusely. "Okay. Just do not hurt them."

Sigmund smiled. As he smiled, the two guards before him collapsed. After they collapsed, the only thing that could be heard was snoring.

"When they wake up, they'll forget the demon they saw, and all about this place." He looked up at Celestia, but this time, Celestia was in a stance. Her horn pointed at Sigmund. It was glowing. Sigmund felt an emotion of

fear within him, but he suppressed it and kept his cool. What Sigmund was not expecting, was for Twilight to jump into Celestia's sight.

"Princess! No!" Twilight pleaded. Celestia stared at her, confused at her sudden action.

"Twilight, you must get out of the way... I need to stop him now, before he manipulates one of us for his benefit."

"But Princess... he's our friend. This entire time... he hasn't manipulated us. He hasn't done anything to benefit himself. That already proves that he's different than what the rumors portray... He just wants his voice to be heard..." Twilight looked back towards Sigmund. She did not have the same fearful gaze. Instead she smiled at him. She gazed back towards Celestia. "Princess... Please."

Twilight's friends... his friends... all slowly gathered in front of the Princess. Even after what they saw and what they heard, they still trusted him. He wasn't sure whether it was out of friendship or confusion, but it already gave him something against Celestia.

"I fail to understand how you can all trust him like this..." said Celestia angrily.

"Celestia," Sigmund called out, "as you know, I can alter thoughts, emotions, and memories. If I really wanted to get away... I would have done so by now. Yet I care about them. Twilight, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie, Applejack, Rarity, Spike... all of them. I never had the mental ability when I first woke up... and they all became my friends. It would make no sense... not to mention wouldn't be morally right... to 'manipulate' them. After all they've done for me... after all that has happened... I think they, of all ponies, deserve a proper explanation."

Celestia glanced at Sigmund, but returned her stare to the six ponies before her. Sigmund could detect the anger subsiding in her mind.

"Fine then Sigmund... you may tell your story... but if I believe that you are lying..."

“Princess,” he said while returning to the formality, “I have already agreed with what you assumed about me. At this point, I have no way to lie, and no reason to. What I have to say... is the truth. And at the end of it, I can only trust you to believe me on it.”

He looked at his friends, who were looking towards him, some of them smiling, and he returned the expression.

“Well then, Sigmund, tell us your story.” said Celestia. With her comment, she put him in the spotlight of the room.

He closed his eyes again, thinking of the best way to tell them the story. This was his only chance to convince them. His only chance to explain his past. His only chance to explain his fate.

# Chapter 10

Sigmund took a deep breath. He knew he would have to remain sensible during this. This was the confrontation he was preparing for. He could not allow any personal feelings to impact the effectiveness of his speech.

He started, "I was born an 'Ancient'. I grew up in the era of the 'Ancients'. We didn't call ourselves the 'Ancients' though. We had a proper term for ourselves: Humanity.

"Humans did not have wings. They did not have horns. There was also no such thing as magic. Only science. Think of it like Equestria, but with just Earth Ponies, and Earth Ponies looked different.

"Yet even with the drawbacks you may think about, Humanity survived for thousands of years. They learned. They discovered. They saw. They felt. The list goes on and on and on. Even though we shared all these similarities, we were nonetheless different.

"Growing up, I asked, why. Why were we so different when we all grew up in the same world? After a while, I realized that I had a lot of interest in thinking about the reasoning behind almost all problems or situations

"Now, as humans, we had no such thing as Cutie Marks. We had no idea what our special talent was, and we never had an indicator to remind us what we were destined to do. But I was sure... I was certain that I was destined to understand the human mindset... and possibly get other people to understand as well. I thought that maybe, we could end all conflict if we could think rationally. It was a childhood drive you could say. I didn't really know in the beginning that it was Psychology, the study of the mind, or Sociology, the study of society."

He then gestured to his Cutie Mark.

"This symbol, was a symbol of Psychology. It was something I was good at. Forgive me Twilight, but I was wrong when I said my Cutie Mark related to by ability to alter minds. My real prowess was in understand reasoning,

mindsets, and the motives of groups of people coherently and without bias. Altering minds was something that came along later.

“After years of analyzing, whether it be on just one person or entire nations, I basically understood the human reactions to certain changes in society. I used this knowledge, to begin constructing a method to predict the future. It wasn’t like casting a spell to view future events. It was really an analysis on chain reactions that could happen.

He could tell some of his friends were losing track of what he was saying, so he simplified it.

“In a nut shell, I could see major events ahead of time by a few years.”

“At the time, the world was doing well. There were no wars going on. The economy was thriving. Industry chugged out new things every single day. I only created the science just to further my career, but when I applied my new science to the situation we were in... I foresaw something impossible.

“A great collapse of the economy, and then a domino effect that would end in the collapse of society as a whole. And when I brought in natural human response to such a collapse... I foresaw destruction. It did not matter what natural disasters or what diseases could have possibly shown up... because I tested all the hypothetical scenarios, and each ended the same way. With our race doomed.

“I knew that people needed to know about this. I thought I built up enough renown to do so. I presented my findings to my superiors, in the most serious manner I could muster. Do you want to know what they did upon hearing my findings?

“They laughed. So did every other member of my species. My research was forcibly ended because they believed it to be a waste...” his voice trailed off, but he put some anger into his voice.

“I tried to convince people, but they saw me as a fool. An ‘insane doomsday prophet’ if you want to quote that paper. The outcome of it was that I lost whatever standing I had among the public.”



He couldn't help himself from chuckling, from which he received a few glances of apprehension from the ponies.

"Hehe... Can you imagine it? I had proof, that everything we knew was wrong, and that we were doomed. You know what they did? They ignored me, and my attempts to save them from their ignorance... which would be their ultimate downfall. If we were going to ignore our eventual demise, that there was no use in me trying.

Sigmund regained control of his anger. The voice of reason in his head was practically shouting at him for getting carried away.

"...Perhaps I went too far when I said those things. Although it was frustrating, it made sense why they ignored me. We had hundreds of times when the 'End of the World' was proclaimed, only for it to not happen. Even though I had 'proof', Humanity learned their lesson from the other times, and did not wish to listen to yet another prediction. They carried on with their choices, which were mainly made for self-benefit. In a way, we brought the disaster upon ourselves... with with our every action. Whether it be voluntary or involuntary.

"I just didn't want to be around for the inevitable collapse. To get away... I took part in an experiment... one that would keep away from the society that expunged me...

He turned and walked towards the nearest wall. He flicked a switch, and a large part of one of the walls opened. It was a window. On the other side was a large capsule, isolated from the room. The capsule was surrounded by complex machinery, which were connected to the capsule by several wires and thick tubes. There was a part of glass that was wide open, revealing the inside of the capsule. Sigmund waited for them to finish looking to the chamber, and back towards him.

"A preservation system... in a sense. It was a new piece of technology; one that would preserve my body and my mind through time. It was said that I would not be able to think during it, so time would not pass for me at all. I chose this method, because I did not want to witness the downfall of society, and did not wish to die at the same time. I "vanished" from society because when I took part in the experiment, I destroyed any evidence to where I could have gone."

Twilight felt motivated to speak after hearing his actions. "You just left your kind behind? What about your family? Your friends? Surely you had some ties left..."

In response to this, Sigmund looked down, his eyes showing signs of sorrow, but he brought his head and looked towards the purple unicorn.

"Twilight... my parents had died years before I took part in the experiment, and I was an only child." As he said this, his friends gave him both glances and stares of pity. "There is no point in giving any details of the accident, and I have grieved enough over the loss. My friends, on the other hand, all left either to go on with their lives, or because they felt that they it was best to not be associated with someone who was 'preaching' a 'false' message to Humanity. I lost my friendships, but only because my friends knew that being friends with me meant their lives would be worse. Because of this, I lost all my ties. If I still had some, I can safely say that I would have hesitated with my decision to partake in the experiment. Yet there was nothing left for me, and now here I am today.

"It did not matter anyway. To be honest, I wasn't planning on going back into the world in ten years. I was certain I would be killed during the preservation. If not, then I would wake up and enter a world in irreparable condition. Whatever the outcome could have been... it seemed better than sticking around for the grand finale that would occur from such a collapse.

"Yet during the preservation, something... unexpected came up. While my body lay unmoving, part of my mind was still alive. My mind had centuries upon centuries... an untold amount of years, to think. This mind... became separated from the rest of my 'asleep' mind. It became a separate entity." He brought his gaze to the towering alicorn in the room. "Princess Celestia... you know 'him' to be the Gatekeeper.

"'He' had hundreds of lifetimes more than the average human to think. 'He' had much more time than the human to develop. Yet while this part of the mind improved... the rest of my mind 'decayed'. The Gatekeeper saw this, and wanted me to remain as I was before. To do so, I would have to figure things out for myself again, not have it all laid out for me. Think of it like learning from your mistakes. There is no lesson to be learned if the meaning is simply told to you.

“To make it harder, he locked away my memories. So when the preservation system finally broke down... I could not remember a single thing. He must have slowly brought me out of this facility... before the rest of my mind woke up enough to unconsciously kick him away from the controls. Right when that happened, I was discovered by the ponies of Ponyville.

“The Gatekeeper worked in the background after I woke up. While he did this... I was able to experience the new world of Equestria... thanks to you all,” he said while glancing at each of his friends. “‘He’ kept track of my progress. As I began to mentally progress, ‘he’ released my memories both for my sake, and to act as a drive for my mental progress. ‘He’ also kept watch of my safety... making sure that his plan would not be interrupted,” Sigmund said while looking towards the Princess, who grunted somewhat.

“Then tell me, Sigmund... was the Gatekeeper only doing this to give you the ability to alter minds? Or were humans naturally gifted with the ability?” Celestia’s tone was not trustworthy, yet Sigmund responded as if he could not detect her obvious resentment of him.

“I can assure you, that if a human were given the ability to alter minds, he/she would have been a grave threat to Humanity as a whole... much like I am now with Equestria.

“The ability was something the Gatekeeper created himself. That was one of the results of his mental development during the preservation. When he gave me all my memories... he gave me his piece of the mind. By giving me his piece, I now have power over his ability. He no longer exists as a separate entity, but as part of my collective thoughts that I am ever-thankful to. All he did was not for himself, but for the good of all... so that I could know the truth... and put it to good use...” His voice became quiet as he said this.

“But Sigmund...” Twilight asked him again, “if you use to be a... human... then why are you a pony now?” Sigmund, for a moment, felt like he was back in the University, occasionally teaching students. He lost the feeling, and answered Twilight’s question.

“I’m no expert on the subject... but my body must have been physically altered through outside forces... or magic. And as for the Cutie Mark... I guess it’s just the law of nature now,” he said with a shrug. “I don’t quite understand the science behind it. I stopped caring about science anyway, because magic has turned whatever Humanity learned about the universe into gibberish.”

He realized that her question caused him to drift off of his story, so he immediately went back into it.

“Now that I have regained my memories, I can safely say that I was correct, and Humanity ceased to exist. My body was left in preservation while the world tore itself apart. The world followed into a natural state of recovery from whatever disaster occurred, and the title of the superior species was given to ponies. I guess I would believe that the superior species would have conflicts just like Humanity did, and would eventually destroy themselves as well, and so on and so forth.

“Yet ponykind does something... right. I can’t quite put my finge-” he cut himself off, and replaced the proper term, “I can’t quite put my *hoof* on it, but Equestrian Society works. Everypony is happy. Everypony accepts each others differences. There are only small, personal conflicts. No sort of large scale war. This is the society... that I wished humankind could have been.

“I am a pony now. Because of this fact, I could easily forget about my species, and just move along with my life. Yet that’s the thing. I am the last living remnant of my species. I see the failure... the ignorance... that could still effect the world. I cannot let the same mistakes happen again.”

“How will it happen again? You have already stated that ponykind is different from Humanity. What could be the problem?”asked Celestia doubtfully. Sigmund shook his head in response.

“Take a look around,” he said while he casted one foreleg out to gesture to the entire room they were in. “This facility, and everything in it, is proof that even after however many years it has been, Humanity has left its marks. Marks that ponies are bound to discover. Those explorers who originally found me could have easily discovered this place as well.

“I can tell that ponies have inherited some technology from humans. It is meaningless to clarify what technology. But if ponykind were to stumble across a far more dangerous remnant... then the world could take a turn for the worst... *again*...

“I cannot take the risk of letting ponykind discover these remnants and making the same mistakes humankind did, and the same mistakes that I made as well. My duty... at this point... is to atone for Humanity’s sins...

“By destroying every last remnant of it. To make sure history never, ever, repeats itself. To let this age of prosperity, friendship, and good will, last for as long as possible. Perhaps even forever. That is my mission, and I am the only man... the only pony... who can accomplish that mission.”

At this point, he was finished. Sigmund gazed at the others. They were all looking at him with wide-eyed expressions. He turned his gaze directly towards Celestia.

“Princess... it is your decision now. You can either let me carry out what I intend... or you can lock me away, believing me to be a threat. Or you can kill me here, and now. You will realize later that you cannot prevent the eventual discord that will follow if your society, or any other, discovers the secrets of humankind. Not without my help, as I have a good idea on where look. I know that there is no other remnant in the charted lands of Equestria, which only leaves the outerland.”

“Now what is your decision... your majesty? There are risks to take both ways... but which sounds like the lesser of two evils?”

All eyes were upon Celestia now. The spotlight had been moved to her.

Celestia remained silent. It took her a few moments to respond, to sink in what he explained. It was not helping that all awake eyes were upon her, waiting for her noble judgement. Sigmund knew that he had placed her in a position where she would have to keep him away from her society, but also let him perform his mission. There was only one logical option for her to choose from, and he had already accepted the course of events from this choice.

“Sigmund,” said Celestia after some time, “put under these circumstances, I am unsure what to think. I do believe that if you remain in Equestria, you will effect Equestria in a slow and subtle way. I also believe your side of the story... since lies cannot be so well thought out.” His friend’s eyes looked hopeful, but Sigmund knew full well what she was going to say next.

“I hereby place you in exile. You will leave Equestria tomorrow. I will have royal guards stationed to make sure of that.” The decision surprised Twilight and her friends, and they glanced towards each other apprehensively, and at Sigmund. He still kept his smile, however.

“Exile is the only way I can follow through with this. Princess... I thank you... for believing me.”

A silence in the room followed.

After several seconds, somepony broke the silence. “So... uh... what now, sugarcube?” asked Applejack.

“Well... now I start my quest by destroying this facility. I have an idea of how to go about doing so...” He turned around pulled some containers into view. He picked one of them up, and with a tilt of his head, began to pour the liquid contents onto the floor, walls, and nearby furniture.

He turned to them again. “I would recommend heading up to the surface. Don’t worry, I’ll join you when I’m finished here.” He continued to pour and scatter the liquid around him.

Although hesitant from his sudden calmness, Princess Celestia was the first to leave. She exited the facility, while at the same time levitating her sleeping guards with her. Twilight’s friends all gazed at Sigmund, then back to each other. Some of them shrugged, and made there way out of the facility. Twilight was still in the room, however. She was still gazing at Sigmund. Sigmund noticed this and put the container back on the floor.

“Twilight... you really should follow them. I’ll be up in ten minutes or so.”

“Sigmund...” she said silently. She wasn’t really sure what to say. An awkward silence was in the air.

“Uh...” he said while using a foreleg to scratch the back of his head, “...about before... after I put those guards to sleep and Celestia was going to attack me... thanks for sticking up for me. I thought you all would be against me after you found out.”

“Well, after all these months, I realized that you have a good reason for everything you do. So I just wanted to hear that reason...”

Another short pause followed.

“Listen... Twilight... I’m sorry for hiding the truth from you. But I needed you all to trust me. If I told you the truth before coming here, it was unlikely that you or the others would have believed me.”

“It’s alright Sigmund... your story was unbelievable, I know... but we’re still your friends. Just remember that.” Upon hearing Twilight say this, Sigmund’s eyes lit up. He looked more hopeful. “I’ll leave you to... whatever you’re doing now.”

She turned to leave the room. As she walked away, Sigmund couldn’t help but smile towards her before she went through the doorway and disappeared into the darkness.

---

Twilight joined the others on the surface. The Princess’ guards had woken up, and like Sigmund said, completely forgot what happened in the cave. Princess Celestia was talking to them, presumably giving them orders.

Her friends were silent. They were worried over what was going to happen next.

They were taken aback by a loud noise coming from the cave, which drew the attention of everypony and dragon to watch the cave entrance. The noise was just a sudden, and almost violent burst, which startled almost everypony who was there. A plume of smoke was coming from the entrance, but filtered through the thick tree branches above them and vanished.

They stood there for minutes, wondering what could have possibly happened. Their expressions grew more worried with each moment. Yet they stopped worrying as they heard some hoofsteps upwards toward the cave.

There emerged Sigmund. His green coat was blackened by soot and smoke. He met each gaze with a grin.

He casually trotted up to his friends, all of them were showing signs of relief. He gazed at Celestia. She still did not have the look of trust in her eyes.

"I have given my guards the order to escort you out of town tomorrow. You will have until 3:00 in the afternoon to leave, or my guards will escort you against your will."

"I understand. That would be all the time I need."

"...I must return to Canterlot. My absence is only tolerated by my advisors for so long. So goodbye my faithful student, and my loyal subjects." The Princess casted her wings. Fully-extended, the wings gave her a majestic and awe-inspiring look.

Yet before she lifted off, Sigmund decided to ask her a question.

"Princess... I know you have trouble trusting me now... but I can only hope that you will in the future."

She stared down at Sigmund. There was no smile on her face. "Time will only tell, Sigmund. Yet hear this. If you ever return, and I have the slightest reason to believe that your intentions are against my interests, then I will take harsher measures against you."

With that, she gave a few magnificent flaps of her wings, and launched into the air. She disappeared quickly among the thick amount of leaves above.

Sigmund smirked. He turned to glance at the ponies around him, and silently began making his way back to Ponyville, with the others following. He had one last day in this perfect society. One last day before his seemingly impossible journey would begin.



# Chapter 11

Twilight once again waited in the library. In a sense, she didn't want to be waiting, but she also didn't want today to come. Today was the day that Sigmund was going to leave Equestria.

The day before, he revealed so much about his past. Most of which sounded unbelievable. She trusted him though, so she did believe him on it.

She wasn't sure what to say to him. None of them were sure what to say. Yet they were all prepared to say one final goodbye. Pinkie Pie even wanted to plan a goodbye-party, but Sigmund told her not to. Presumably so that ponies wouldn't ask where he was going.

The Royal Guards outside her doorstep drew some attention in Ponyville, but all Twilight had to say to the gathering crowd was that the Princess was not there, and they would leave disappointed.

She looked up at the clock again. It read 2:45. She turned her head to the sound of Sigmund's room door creeping open. He exited with a saddlebag filled with contents unknown.

He trotted near to Twilight, and said, "So... I guess you're gonna see me off?"

In response, she put on her friendliest smile. "Of course."

He turned his head towards the dragon at the table. "You too, Spike?" Spike nodded his head in response.

When they exited the library, they met the Royal Guards at the door.

"Are you ready to leave now, Sir?" they asked almost simultaneously. Sigmund turned his head to check his saddlebag. After a few seconds, he turned back to the guards.

“I am,” he said calmly.

They nodded at each other, and held out their hooves with two items on them. “The Princess instructed us to give you this. A Map of Equestria and some of the outer land. Along with this compass.”

Sigmund took the items and placed them in his saddlebag. “Much appreciated. I’ll be needing them where I am going.”

Twilight grew puzzled. “Why would the Princess give you a map and compass?”

“Simply to give me an idea of where Equestria is, so I never set hoof in it again.”

“Ah...” she responded after some time. The thought of never seeing Sigmund again made her feel... bad. Even with his task, part of her admitted that she did not want him to leave.

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The guard ponies in proper formation alongside Sigmund to the edge of the Everfree forest, which was known to be a way to reach Equestria’s border. Twilight asked Sigmund a question.

“What about the others? Don’t you want to say goodbye to them?” she asked.

“Don’t worry, I will,” he said, while gazing towards the forest’s edge. Twilight could make out six ponies waiting by the edge.

“Ugh... jeez Sigmund, we’ve been waiting here for like... ever!” said the rainbow-maned pegasus. He smiled.

“I know you all have. I just needed to do a few things.” The Royal Guards stood to the side as they talked.

“Oh my... you’re going on a perilous journey like that?” asked Rarity.

“I don’t see the problem so-”

“Oh that simply will not do. Here.” she reached into her own saddlebag and grew out two items. A hat and a scarf.

“That’s fine, Rarity. I don’t need it,” he said, knowing full well that the nice-looking items were bound to be ruined on the way.

“Oh no, a colt on a journey must look his best... Not to mention the scarf could warm you and the fedora will keep the sun out of your eyes when you leave the Everfree forest...”

“Well... that makes sense. Thank you Rarity.”

“My pleasure darling.” To please her, he wore the hat and scarf. “Oh you simply look exquisite... certainly like a ‘stallion on a mission’ type.”

“If you say so Rarity...” He chuckled.

Applejack went up to him next. “Ah knew ya liked our apples so much... so I got ya a few. Your bag don’t seem so stuffed’, so Ah’m sure it’ll fit.”

“Well I know there’s some fruits that grow naturally outside Equestria...”

“Excuse me? Yall would rather eat some strange, foreign fruit rather than my tender, juicy apples?” Sigmund shrunk somewhat at her sudden intimidating glare.

“Uh.... no of course not... I love your apples... yessir... I mean ma’am... Sweet Apple Acre’s apples sure are delicious,” he said to try and please her. Her glare shortly turned into a grin upon hearing his words.

“Ah’m glad ya think so,” she said. Sigmund returned the friendly smile after he stood back up properly. He was expecting something random from Pinkie Pie next, so he wasn’t startled by the sudden confetti blast by his ear.

“SURPRISE! Well sorta I mean you said not to throw you a party so I decided to give you just a dose of fun and-” A blue hoof covered Pinkie Pie’s mouth.

“I think he gets the point, Pinkie Pie.” Rainbow Dash said as she shoved her aside. “Well... uh... I don’t have much to give... besides the presence of my awesomeness,” she gloated. The other ponies glared at her. “What?... oh... right...” She gave him a jar filled with multiple colors. “It’s a little bit of rainbow. I thought it would be cool to give. Not sure how useful it’ll be. But when you get back, you gotta tell me what cool stuff you saw out there!”

Sigmund smiled. He was sure she was around when Celestia mentioned his exile, but he went along with it. “Thanks Rainbow Dash, I’m sure it’ll be useful at some point... and I promise I’ll let you know all about my journey.”

“Sweet!” She performed a quick backflip in the air. He chuckled again and turned to Spike.

“Hey Spike, don’t worry about my wizard. You can just ask Twilight to help you with the dungeon. Maybe she’ll enjoy the game.”

“Yeah yeah...” Spike replied. Sigmund raised a hoof to Spike’s head to pet him in a friendly manner. “Hey!”

Sigmund then felt a poke on his side. He turned to see Fluttershy, and Big Mac.

“Oh uh... Sigmund... about the entire Manticore thing... and when you... you know... I’m just glad that you saved Big Mac’s life and...” She shrunk to the floor somewhat, in her usual manner. Sigmund was use to her doing it though. What he wasn’t expecting was for the shy pegasus to lift her head and peck him on the cheek quickly. He blushed from the surprise.

“Thanks... is what I’m trying to say.” Sigmund, slightly confused, looked at Big Mac, but he still had a smile on his face. He figured that Mac would have a jealous expression. “You’re thankful too... Right Macintosh?”

“Eeeeeyup,” he said simply. Sigmund chuckled again. If there was one thing he was going to miss about Big Macintosh, it would be his long, trademarked version of ‘Yep’. He couldn’t help but ‘awww’ to himself when he saw Big Mac nuzzle Fluttershy gently.

“Oh will you both just get a room?” Rainbow Dash commented. Fluttershy and Big Mac blushed while the rest of them giggled.

“Hey Twilight... don’t you have something to say to Sigmund before he heads off into the world on his little virtuous mission? C’mon...” Pinkie Pie tugged at Twilight.

“Sigmund... I...” She hesitated, not knowing what to say. Sigmund smirked and spoke for her.

“That’s okay Twilight. You really didn’t need to get me anything. You really have done enough for me You gave me a place to stay. You let helped me with research. You helped me enjoy my time here. I’m really grateful to you...”

Sigmund could notice that she was tearing up slightly, still attempting to decide what to say. Feeling as though it were proper, Sigmund went up to her and wrapped his forelegs around her, hugging her in a similar fashion as she had with him before. Although she hesitated, he could feel that she wrapped her forelegs around him as well. He did not care that some of the others were trying to hide a giggle at the sight. The hug was interrupted when the Sigmund heard a gruff voice behind him.

“Sir, it is time for you to leave,” the Royal Guards said firmly. In response, he slowly parted from the hug.

Sigmund gazed at each one of his friends. He looked at Twilight for the longest time. He felt he needed to say one last thing.

“When I am gone, I want you all to move on. Do not let my absence impact your lives, or the lives of those around you. Promise me that.”

Unsure, they all glanced at each other. But they looked back towards him and slowly nodded their heads.

“Thank you... all of you... for showing me that good still exists...” He kept his smile, while some of the others had trouble keeping theirs. Twilight felt that it would be the last time she would see his warming smile. She struggled to hide some tears.

"I'm ready," Sigmund said to the guards, somehow maintaining a calm tone.

"We will escort you through the Everfree forest, and a certain distance out of the boundaries of Equestria. From then on, you will be left alone. Her Majesty has put a warning out to the towns on the outskirts of Equestria. They are under orders to report to her immediately if they see a pony with a Cutie Mark such as yours. Do you understand?"

"I fully understand."

"Follow us then, sir." They simultaneously performed a full turn to the entrance of the Everfree Forest. He took one glance at the general direction of his friends, and turned away.

Alongside the guards, Sigmund trotted into the forest, leaving his eight friends behind to watch him as he vanished into the thick foliage and darkness. To keep his emotions at bay, he avoided looking back.

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At this point, Twilight let the tears stream down her face.

Her friends were concerned, but thought it would be best to leave her alone. They stood there for several minutes, even though Sigmund and the guards were out of sight. One by one, they left with their excuses, doing exactly what Sigmund requested of them before he left.

"Well... this is cutting into my training time... so I'm gonna make up for it! See you all later!" Rainbow Dash swiftly launched into the sky, and flew quickly back in the direction of Ponyville.

"Since he didn't want a party, I'll throw a party tonight! It'll be so bouncy that he'll hear it miles away and he'll regret not wanting one!" Pinkie Pie quickly bounced off.

“Hoity Toity ordered quite the number of dresses... so I must continue finishing that order...” Rarity said before she turned away and elegantly walked back to Ponyville.

“I guess I better go home now...” said Fluttershy awkwardly.

“Ya mind if ah walk ya home?” asked Big Mac. Fluttershy blushed upon hearing his slow yet resonant voice.

“That would be wonderful” she smiled. They both walked back towards Ponyville.

Twilight, Applejack, and Spike were the the ones left at the forest’s edge. Spike shuffled his feet in the silence.

“I think I left a mess in your room Twilight... so I’ll just... do my usual thing... you know...” He quickly and awkwardly strolled back to Ponyville.

Twilight still had some tears running down her cheek. Finally, Applejack sighed and placed a hoof on Twilight’s shoulder.

“Why didn’t ya just tell ‘im, Twi’?” she asked kindly.

“Tell him what?” Twilight managed to say.

“Oh come now, Twilight... Yall were the one who stuck up for ‘im in that there cave. Yall were the one who was too upset to speak as he was about to leave... Ah saw it sugarcube. Ya-”

Twilight managed to regain her composure, and interrupted her. “I don’t know what you’re talking about Applejack...” She wiped her eyes with her hoof. “I’ll miss him... yes... but he has a noble task he has to do. I completely understand that, and I’ll let my life go on normally, like he requested.”

Applejack smiled. She wrapped one hoof around Twilight. “Okay then sugarcube... whatever makes ya sleep at night... now how about ya come fer a snack before Pinkie Pie’s shindig? We have quite an amount of Apples left... and we can make the pie you like so darn much!”

“Sure Applejack... that sounds delicious.”

Before she left, she turned to the Everfree forest one more time. At this point, she only wished that the colt could accomplish his mission... so maybe then he could...

Her thoughts trailed off, and she remember his words again. *Move on.*

She quickly trotted up to Applejack. The edge of the forest soon disappeared from her line of sight. However, she didn't notice, for she was not looking back.

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They finally exited the forest. Out into an open field. The sun was still up, but Sigmund knew that in an hour, the first hints of orange were going to appear in the sky. They must have walked through the field for several miles before the guards stopped.

“Sir, this is far as we go,” one of the Royal Guards said, while both of them simultaneously halted.

“Okay then. I know where to go from here.”

“...Sigmund was it?...” said one of the royal guards. His voice was still deep and gruff, but seemed to no longer have the touch of nobility to it. They both looked uneasily at each other, and turned back to Sigmund. “You don't seem like you should be out here. Ponies aren't the most welcome of guests outside of Equestria.”

“I can't imagine why,” Sigmund said with a hint of sarcasm. “Don't worry, I can handle myself.” He knew that they couldn't remember what happened in the cave, so they had no idea of his mental power.

“Your funeral, buddy,” the other guard said doubtfully. They both sprawled their wings out into the air. “Good Luck.”



“Thank you Gentlecolts, but I won’t be needing luck.” They turned to each other again, and shrugged. With one mighty flap of their wings, they lifted themselves into the air, and flew back in the direction of Equestria.

Sigmund waited several seconds to make sure they were out of sight, before turning around, and walking through the field. He didn’t see a need to hide his tears anymore, so he let them gently roll down his face and muzzle.

He used reason to suppress any kind of emotional desire he had to run back. He had to have his mission accomplished first. Going back would be an unlikely option that he would have to think about later.

His thoughts focused on his friends. He was sure that although he told them to move on... they wouldn’t forget about him so quickly. Their personalities remained the same, so he probably did not have that much of an impact on them. Yet he was worried over one factor. The purple unicorn, who was the first to help him.

Before he left, he had a bit of suspicion about the way she was acting towards him. He was not ignorant, so he could make out how sad she was that he was leaving, without using his telepathic powers. Could she have...?

He had the ability to check her thoughts, but Sigmund believed that it would be like invading her privacy. His journey would likely take years, or maybe the rest life. Even if she did... time would pass and she would move on quickly. They were sure to forget about him, as he could not imagine having that much of a profound impact on any of their lives. Perhaps he would forget about them as well. Yet he still had his mind on her.

There was something about her that made her special compared to his other friends. He felt that she was his closest friend... and that he truly cared for her and...

Sigmund quickly suppressed the thought with reason. He knew exactly where it was leading, and he couldn’t have any sort of strong emotional tie, or else it would threaten the effectiveness of his journey.

It was far too late now it anyway. There was only one logical option remaining for him. There had always been only one logical option. He gazed ahead of him, into territories unknown.

He took a brief moment, to consider what he could experience on his journey.

There were an unknown amount of possibilities, but there was a feeling within Sigmund. An indescribable feeling of enlightenment. Although it was not right of a Psychologist to act off of feelings... he had the feeling that he could handle anything thrown at him. He felt... like the feeling was true. That he *knew* that he would be ready for the future.

Wiping away whatever tears were left on his face, he trotted faster. His mind was full of confidence, now that he had fully accepted his directive.

For in that moment, Sigmund realized what he was fighting for. As a pony, he no longer had connections to his ignorant species. He realized his journey was less of the atonement of humanity, and more of the conservation of Equestria and prosperity.

Sigmund Harrison the Psychologist no longer existed. Harrison failed in his attempt to conserve his race, and because of his failure, he perished along with it. Now he was reborn from the ashes, and given a second chance. He would not give up this chance. No matter what could possibly happen, he would *not* fail in his quest.

By taking this quest, he also took a mantle. A mantle that was indisputably bestowed upon him. A mantle that no pony before him could have taken. A role that only he could perform correctly.

The role of a Guardian. A hidden protector of Equestria.

~*End*~