

What I've Become

Written by [Knight Breeze](#)

- My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic
- Princess Celestia
- Princess Luna
- Original Character
- Carrot Top
- Main 6
- Adventure
- Human
- Science Fiction
- Alternate Universe

Description

This is the first book of *The Humanity Within* Trilogy. Its sequel is [What I've Done](#).

I wasn't always like this, a monster, running through the woods on an alien planet. I was once a man. I had dreams, a girlfriend, and a great job.

Then They came. In the middle of the night, They scooped me from my home, and... changed me.

Now I'm a beast, a demon the like of which the world I've become stranded on has never seen before, scraping by on the fringes of society, hiding from the natives, and doing my best to avoid notice.

After all, who could ever be friends with a monster?

Cover Image done by the very talented PaintSpotch! You can find his [FimFic account here](#).
[And here is his DeviantArt Account!](#)

Now 100% approved by Twilight's Library!

Mad props to my prereaders:

[ThatPonyWithASword](#).

[Admiral Applejack](#).

[JXWheeler](#)

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Chapter I

Chapter I

I charged headlong through the bushes, my breath sounding harsh in my ears. Up ahead, I could hear my quarry as it bounded through the underbrush, its frightened squealing causing an uproar through the forest ahead of it. Honestly, I couldn't blame the poor animal for wanting to put as much distance as possible between the two of us, but I had needs too.

A guy's gotta eat, after all.

I burst out of the underbrush into a clearing, blood pumping in my ears, the beast screaming in my brain. All that existed right at that moment was me and the two hundred pound sow making a break for the other side of the clearing. It was fast. Real fast.

Luckily for me, I was much, *much*, faster.

With one mighty leap, I landed on the poor animal, spearing it with my long, sharp talons. Unfortunately, I had missed its heart, so the poor thing was still struggling underneath my powerful, gruesome frame.

I'm no sadist, so I ended its suffering with one swift stroke of my claw to its neck, killing it instantly.

With a simple muscle twitch, I sheathed my foot long claws back into my fingers. I shivered a bit as the blades moved up my hands and into my forearms, the feeling still unpleasant, even after all this time. *How long has it been? Months? Years?* I thought morosely to myself.

My dark thoughts were interrupted as my sharp ears picked up the sound of a snapping twig. My head quickly turned at the sound, allowing me to see something that made my blood run cold.

Standing just at the tree line of the clearing was one of the natives of this planet. She was a beige, pony-like creature with a bright orange mane and tail. On each of her flanks was a tattoo of a bushel of carrots, and on her face was an expression of abject terror.

Oh crapbaskets, I thought to myself, as the orange pony turned and started to run.

* * *

Carrot Top was fuming. *That stallion is so infuriating!* she thought as she stomped her way through White Tail Woods. *I can't believe that he would go and forget our anniversary like that!* She kicked some of the autumn leaves out of her way, her rage building as she thought of her stallion. He had just up and gone to work, not a word, not a kiss, nothing! *Did I do something wrong? Or-*

Her musings were interrupted by a loud crashing sound echoing through the woods. It sounded like some sort of wild pig, yet there was too much sound for it to be just that. There also seemed to be some kind of skittering sound, probably from whatever predator was chasing the poor thing. Not wanting to be anywhere near predators on the hunt, Carrot Top started to turn to leave, but froze as two things burst out of the cover of the forest.

The first wasn't all that surprising, considering all the noise she had heard earlier. It was a rather large sow, probably weighing somewhere around two hundred pounds, and running as if all of Tartarus were on her heels.

The second thing was a nightmare.

It was *huge*, standing probably five to six feet tall. It had a faintly gorilla like look to it, except it was bald, gaunt, and sickly looking. Its pallid flesh had a slimy sheen to it, and it was so thin that she could see its ribcage stand out on its barrel. Blade-like spikes burst from its back along its spine, giving it a faintly dragon-like appearance. Each of its long, spindly limbs ended in a five-toed claw, with its fore claws being much longer and sharper-looking.

Before she could comprehend what was happening, the monster reached the poor sow in a single bound, impaling the animal on its foot long talons. The pig valiantly continued its struggle, trying desperately to get away from the nightmare that had just killed it. The creature was having none of that, however, and impassively ended the pig's struggles with a single swipe of its claw.

At this point, Carrot Top had seen enough. Slowly, while the monster was distracted by its recent kill, she moved her hooves back. *If I'm really quiet, I can get away while its busy with its-*

snap

The monster's head whipped around and, for the first time in her life, Carrot Top saw true terror. Its face, like the rest of its body, faintly reminded her of a gorilla's in its shape and ears.

But that's where the similarities ended.

Its lidless eyes were pools of ebony, through which Carrot Top was sure she could see eternity. It had no nose, rather just a hole in the center of its face through which it breathed, while its lip-less maw sported two rows of interlocking, inch long fangs. Drool dripped menacingly from its chin as it regarded her with an expressionless glare, its soulless eyes boring into her.

For a single second the two just stood there, staring at each other. The creature seemed to almost deflate at the sight of her, which broke whatever spell was holding Carrot Top in place. In a flash, Carrot Top turned and ran, determined to put as much distance as possible between herself and the nightmare.

Her flight was ended before it even began, however, when she ran headlong into the trunk of the tree that stood directly behind her. She felt a blinding pain, then remembered no more.

* * *

I would have winced if I still had the facial structure to do so. The poor mare had taken one look at my ugly mug and had wisely decided to make a hasty retreat. Unluckily for her, however, she had failed to notice the tree that had stealthily spent the past seventy to eighty years growing in the exact spot where it could conk some poor soul attempting to flee from an alien monster. Her face made a loud thunk noise as it struck the evil wood, and instantly she was down.

Carefully, I made my way over to her to check if she was alright. The bump looked pretty nasty, and I could see a small trickle of blood drip down her forehead. However, her breathing was strong, so I was sure that the wound was just superficial. She would wake up in a couple of hours with a blinding headache, but otherwise, she would be fine.

However, I wasn't sure on her chances if left out in the woods. Animals might think that her body was up for grabs, or she might not wake up in time for sunset. Plus, her injury *was* kind of my fault. Well, mostly it was the *tree's* fault, but I couldn't exactly force the unmoving wood to pick her up and take her home.

I knew that it was up to me to make sure that she got to safety.

Sighing slightly to myself, I bent down and gently picked up the poor mare. *So help me, if I get chased by an angry mob for this, I'm going to kill you, tree*, I thought vindictively at the offending plant growth. The tree, unable to hear my vehement oath of vengeance, just continued to stand there, smugly pleased that its seventy year evil plan had finally seen fruition.

Sometimes it really sucks to be the good guy, I thought to myself.

Author's Notes:

Well, I hope that was enjoyable to you all! Comments and concerns are appreciated, but just as a warning, I'm probably not going to get very far on this one. Not until Nautilus Protocol and Fool's Gambit are finished that is. I only really wrote this because I was having writers block with my other two stories, so if you want updates here, you're going to be waiting for a very long time.

Edit: It's been a while since I first wrote this chapter. That being said, I'm still glad to see new people pick this story up. A lot of people have expressed an inability to picture our main character correctly, so let me give you a little illustration:



This was made by the very talented [xXmarkingXx](#), and commissioned by [Gogofan](#). I described the character to Gogofan, he had it commissioned, and other than that I had absolutely no input into this picture. That being said, it is 100% accurate to how I imagined our protagonist, with the sole exception of the obvious censorship. Hope you weren't planning on sleeping tonight!

Chapter II

Chapter II

Written Script pranced a little as he came out of the restaurant, humming to himself as he did so. *That went a lot smoother than I expected!* he thought as he briskly trotted down the road. *Now all I have to do is get flowers delivered, and I'll be set for tonight!*

Script honestly wanted this evening to be as special as the mare he had married. It had been two years now, but he still felt like a newlywed, especially whenever he saw her smiling face.

As that thought crossed his mind, others soon followed. Memories of her working in her garden, of how her mane seemed to glow in Celestia's sunlight, when they first met, all swirling in the happy stallion's brain. That's why he wanted today to be special, surprising even!

It's also why he had pretended to forget their special day.

Written Script had the whole day planned out to the smallest detail: He would pretend to forget about today, let her think he was a forgetful plowhorse, while in the meantime, he got everything prepared for their big night. (After all, how is it a surprise if she knew it was coming?) After she had had some time to stew over his (apparent) lack of brains, he would have his best friend Caramel deliver the roses along with the note, surprising her in the process. If everything went as he expected it to, she would have the best night of her li-

Written Script's plotting was interrupted, however, when he heard a sound that made his blood run cold. It was a long, drawn out howl that was louder and more terrifying than anything he had ever heard before. It sounded similar to a wolf's, but only if this wolf was capable of making a screeching, ear shattering scream that overlapped its usual howl.

The direction of the howl, however, was a bit odd. Instead of coming from the Everfree Forest like he expected it to, it instead seemed to be coming from the direction of White Tail Woods, a place that everypony *knew* was completely safe.

Written Script's heart just about stopped at that point. He knew that Carrot Top liked to roam those woods when she was feeling upset or needed to think something through, and he had left her very, very upset this morning. Even as the ponies around him started screaming and running away, his brain instantly jumped to the worst-case scenario, and he started to run in the direction of White Tail, hoping against hope that he was wrong about what had happened...

* * *

I crept up to the town as silently as I could manage, fully aware of how exposed I was. I tried to keep a low profile, but it was hard, seeing how there was absolutely no cover between the forest and the town. It was also in the mid-afternoon, so I didn't exactly have the cover of night to protect me. Not to mention that I pretty much stood out like a sore thumb in the looks department, or the fact that I was carrying what looked like a dead body.

Other than that, I felt sneaky, all things considered. Kinda like an alien ninja.

Lucky for me, however, it didn't seem like very many ponies came this way, or even looked in this direction. That being said, I was able to get fairly close without being seen. And by fairly close, I mean that I reached the halfway point between the town and the forest that I had called my home for the past six months. Honestly, I felt like this was a little *too* close, especially after watching that blue pegasus break the sound barrier everyday. After making sure no one was around, I carefully laid the poor mare on the road, satisfied with a job well done. *There! She should be safe here, now all I need to do is...* I thought, but trailed off as I saw the fatal flaw in my plan.

She was covered in blood.

Don't look at me like that! I didn't lay a claw on her! It just so happened that I had completely forgotten that I had just recently killed a wild pig. Naturally, as an extension to this boneheaded forgetfulness, I had also forgotten to clean up before I had taken her back to town. As a consequence to my thoughtless action, she now looked like she had just stepped out of a slaughterhouse.

Now, I wasn't really sure how things went down around here, but back home, when someone showed up in town looking like a mass murderer, it usually meant jail time at the very least. Sure it was only pig's blood, but I've been watching this town for a while. Despite the whole magic thing, I was fairly certain that they didn't have the level of technology required to perform a blood analysis, much less a proper forensic analysis. As I thought about that, memories of history class came to mind where people would

get stoned or burned at the stake for simply being different.

Imagine what they would do if they thought you were a murderer.

I wasn't *certain* that these people would react like my ancestors would, but being this close to town was making me jumpy. Plus, I was already a fairly paranoid individual even before the alien abduction, so it wasn't *too* surprising that my mind was jumping to conclusions this quickly.

However, I was still me, despite my paranoid frame of mind, and I had a nasty habit of putting other's needs before my own. Honestly, I had enough weighing down my conscience, so I didn't need "send an innocent to the hangman's noose" added to the list. So, being the glutton for punishment that I was, I decided to err on the side of caution. Caution for her, not me, in case I was unclear about that.

True, this would mean more pain for me, but I was already hosed as it was in the pain department. No sense in spreading that pain around, if I could help it.

I gulped nervously as I stood up to my full height, acutely aware of how stupid this idea was. I then threw my head back, and let out the most blood-curdling shriek I have ever heard in my life. Seriously, up until this point, I haven't had much of an opportunity to scream all that much. Usually I would just quietly weep like a pan- I mean, shed manly tears of awesome over an amazing life lost. Because of this, I ended up scaring the crap outa-I mean, startling myself at how freaking manly my voice was.

Almost immediately, I could hear the shouts and cries of alarm. I waited a fraction of a second longer, just to ensure that some of the flying ones had seen me, then bolted for the relative safety of the forest. I just hoped that that blue pony wasn't looking this way, otherwise I would have had zero chance to reach my cave before she caught me.

Hey, I might be fast enough to catch a wild pig, but I had no illusions as to which one of us would win a race.

* * *

Written Script barreled around the corner just in time to see something bizarre turn and bolt towards the forest. The small amount that he could see from this distance made him think it was some kind of white, tailless dragon. Most ponies probably would have paused upon seeing something like this, but Written Script's mind was too busy worrying about Carrot Top to even consider the danger to himself.

As he started to accelerate, Written slowly became aware of an orange form lying on the road in front of him. He faltered for a second, then redoubled his speed. "no...no, no, no, no, no," he muttered under his breath as he quickly closed on his fallen wife.

About ten feet before he reached her, he froze in his tracks, unable to comprehend what he was seeing. There was so much blood... just so much... Quickly he dashed to her, his worst fears realized. *She's dead! Some monster has come out of the woods and brutally murdered my wife! She was-*

She was breathing.

She was breathing! Written Script quickly bent down, examining his wife for injury. Other than a rather large bruise on the forehead, she seemed to be completely fine. Sighing in relief, he gently cradled her head, blissfully unaware of all the activity around him. "Thank Celestia..." he whispered into her blood-covered mane, not even caring that he was getting covered in the sticky substance.

After several seconds of this, he slowly became aware of somepony shaking his shoulder. He looked up to see the face of the local weather manager, her face a mask of concern. "Is she...?"

Written shook his head. "No, she's fine. Looks like all she got was a bump on the head, but she'll be fine," he said, his relief palpable.

Rainbow Dash sighed at these words, though her expression was still one of worry. "We should still probably get her to Ponyville Medical, just to make sure," she said, letting her hoof fall to the ground.

Written nodded, tears of relief running down his face. "Yeah...yeah... What was that thing, anyway?" he asked in alarm as he slowly levitated Carrot Top to his back.

"...I don't know, but I betcha fifty bits Twilight might," Rainbow said as she looked out towards the suddenly foreboding White Tail Woods.

Author's Notes:

Okay! so, because of the HUGE positive reaction that this story got, I went ahead and wrote the

next chapter. I really hope that I didn't disappoint you guys with what I have here, but I never intended our unnamed human to actually be a monster. I just wanted him to look like one.

Anyway, as I said in my blog, I will be making this story more of a priority, mainly because of the huge success it has had relative to my other stories. Seriously, it took me a year and a half to reach the number of likes and reads that this story has gotten in four days.

I really don't understand it.

Chapter III

Chapter III

Tired, hungry, and angry at evil foliage in general, I stumbled back into my lair, fully aware of how hard the next couple of weeks were going to be. Now that the locals were aware of my presence, I wouldn't be able to hunt as openly as I had in the past, if at all. *They will be on the lookout for me*, I thought as I curled up on my makeshift bed of cured animal hide. *They might even go as far as to form hunting parties or hire monster killers to come and get me, or even call in the government if they feel like they cannot take me by themselves. I'm a threat, an alien menace, and I know how I would be treated if this were home.*

At least, that's how I would react if I had seen me, I thought bitterly.

As I made myself comfortable, lost in my thoughts as I was, I took a second to look around at the cave that I had claimed for myself. All in all, I had scored pretty well in terms of places to lay low. The nearby river provided me with a decent supply of water and fish (when I could catch them), while the cave itself was fairly difficult to reach, seeing as how its entrance sat about fifteen feet up a cliff face. The tree outside was how I managed to get in and out, so I felt pretty safe from things without opposable thumbs like bears or cougars getting me in my sleep.

Or ponies for that matter. I figured it would be hard for them to climb trees without any opposable digits, so this was a pretty good place to hide if a mob came looking for me.

...Unless some of the members of the mob were the flying kind, though. I didn't really have a plan for pegasi.

I'll burn that bridge when I come to it, I thought as I snuggled a bit further into the fur that surrounded me. However, as I tried to rest, my stomach decided to make itself known at that point, reminding me that some scavenger had grabbed my pig while I had been otherwise occupied. I grumbled slightly as I got up to take another crack at fishing, fully aware at how quick those little buggers could be.

I just hoped that I would be able to catch something before the sun went down.

* * *

The first thing she became aware of was a beeping noise.

That confused her at first. It was almost as if it were mocking her, trying to trick her into believing what she knew wasn't true. *I must be haunting a hospital...* she thought ruefully to herself. *But why would I be haunting a place like this? At least give me somewhere entertaining, like a movie theater, or a music hall...*

"Hey Script, you holding up alright?" she heard somepony close by say. The voice was familiar, but she couldn't place who it was for some reason. However, despite not being able to recognize the voice, what it said brought things into perspective for her.

She wasn't haunting a hospital, she was haunting her husband.

"Yeah, I'm doing alright. I just wish she'd open her eyes and tell us what happened," she heard Written Script say listlessly.

She knew that tone. It was the tone that he always adopted when he was worried sick, but didn't want everypony to know. He was always cute when he talked like that, with those big sad eyes and that worried frown. Almost cute enough to make her forget that he had forgotten that their anniversary was today.

Almost.

"So, about tonight..." she heard the other voice trail off.

"No, it's not going to happen. Can I trust you to take care of everything?" she heard Written ask.

What the heck are you talking about? Did you plan on going out and partying somewhere on our anniversary? she thought angrily.

"Don't even worry about it. I'll swing by on my way home and tell them what happened, you just stay here with her. I'm sure she would have loved the surprise, though," the other voice said in a false chipper tone.

...*Surprise?*

"Thanks Caramel, I don't know what I'd do without you," Written said listlessly.

"...Wait, what surprise?" Carrot Top mumbled, opening her eyes as she spoke.

Upon opening her eyes, several things became apparent almost instantly:

1: She had a blinding headache.

2: Her husband was staring at her with a strange mixture of joy and relief.

3: She was alive.

That last one took her a while to fully process. Even as Written Script wrapped his gray, furred hooves around her, mumbling incoherently and gently squeezing her, she still couldn't quite believe what was happening.

So many questions chased themselves around in her head, but one bubbled to the top of her list, forcing itself out of her mouth before she could even comprehend the meaning of the words.

"Why am I not dead?" she asked in disbelief into Written Script's purple mane.

"You don't have to sound so disappointed, Carrot," Caramel said, sitting down next to the bed with a cocky grin on his face.

"No, you don't understand! The monster was right there, it should have killed me the instant I started running!" Carrot top said, confusion clear in her voice.

"Don't worry about that, you're safe now and that's all that matters," she heard Written say as he gently nuzzled her.

"No, I'm not going to stop worrying. And what do you mean by surprise?" she asked, her stubbornness shining through despite the headache.

Written Script didn't answer at first. Instead, he squeezed her once more, then gently let her go and leaned back. "Well, I had a huge surprise planned for this evening for our anniversary, but we're going to have to take a rain check while you recover," he said after he had settled himself beside the bed.

Carrot Top pouted a bit at this. "I thought you had forgotten... You didn't even give me a kiss goodbye this morning..." she said in a sullen tone.

Written Script gently laughed at this, then booped her on the nose. "Just a ruse to make the surprise all the better," he said. His smile fell a little, though, and was replaced with a guilty frown. "I am sorry about that, however. When I saw you lying there, all I could think about was how your last memory of me was an unhappy one, about how I didn't give you a kiss goodbye this morning, all because of some stupid plan I had..." he said as tears began to form at the corners of his eyes.

She smiled at that. "You're sweet," she said, pulling him in for a kiss. However, as soon as they had finished, she reached behind him and hit him on the back of the head with her hoof.

"Don't do it again," she said, her tone still sweet, but her eyes as hard as stone.

Written just nodded in stunned silence, despite the chuckling sound coming from the other side of the bed. "I wouldn't cross this one if I were you Script. She's feisty," Caramel said as he stood up.

"And don't you forget it," Carrot Top said, leaning back as she spoke, a smug smile on her lips.

The smile quickly faded as a thought crossed her mind. "However, that still doesn't answer my other question," she said as she rubbed her aching forehead. "Why didn't that monster kill me?"

Her husband just shook his head at this. "I don't know. I'm just glad that all it gave you was a concussion..." he said, relief clear on his face.

Carrot top looked a little embarrassed at this. "Um, Written? It didn't give me the concussion," Carrot said sheepishly.

Written Script did a quick double take. "It didn't? How did you get it then?" he asked in amazement.

Carrot settled a little more into her blankets, her face a mask of concentration. "Well, I was busy wandering the forest, trying to collect my thoughts after what happened this morning, when the creature burst out of the woods chasing a wild pig! It-" Carrot Top shuddered at the unpleasant memory for a second, but smiled when Written placed a hoof on her shoulder. "Well, after it...finished...the pig, I started to back away, but it heard me. It turned and saw me, so I started to run," she smiled ruefully at that point.

"I saw the tree an instant before I hit it. I vaguely remember seeing the monster look down at me, but I think I blacked out at that point."

The other two exchanged a confused look that Carrot Top completely missed. "So, don't leave me hanging! Who was the pony to drive it off and carry me back to town?" she asked excitedly.

Caramel gave Written another look. This one, however, Carrot caught out of the corner of her eye. "What?" she asked, confused at their silence.

Written took a deep breath, then looked her in the eye. "Carrot, nopony came to your rescue in the woods," he said slowly.

The silence that followed this statement was profound. All that anyone could hear was the heart monitor, and even that seemed to skip a beat at Written's words.

"I...I don't understand..." she said, not sure that she had heard him correctly.

"I was in town today, getting things ready for tonight, when I heard a roar unlike any I had heard before come from White Tail. I rushed to see what was happening when I caught a glimpse of something pale, gorilla-like, and covered with spikes make a break for the woods. I also saw you, lying in the middle of the road, covered in blood," he said, not quite believing what he was saying.

Carrot just gaped at him. "So, it carried me back to town?" she asked, the words sounding even more unlikely out loud than in her head.

Written shook his head at this. "I don't know. All I know is what I saw. It must be pretty important, though, because Twilight Sparkle was here earlier, and she wanted to talk to you as soon as you felt well enough. Something about how the Princesses needed to know or some other fate of Equestria stuff," he said, a rueful smile on his face.

Carrot Top was about to answer, but her stomach made its presence known first, causing her to blush furiously. "Um, I think I really need to talk to her, but maybe after we've gotten something to eat? I don't know about you, but I feel like I haven't eaten in ages," she said in embarrassment.

Written Script smiled at this. "Of course."

* * *

Celestia sat back in disgust, throwing another useless report onto her desk. It had been six months since the alien craft had crash landed in the mountain range near White Tail, and they were no closer to solving the mysteries it held.

That was unsurprising, however, considering how much damage it had sustained in the crash. The thing had exploded long before the first ponies had arrived on the scene, leaving behind nothing but twisted metal and questions.

Well, that and the bodies.

Celestia looked at the autopsy report again, well aware of what horrors it contained. Most of the bodies had been consumed in the explosion, leaving behind nothing but burnt husks. However, a few appeared to have survived the crash long enough to begin crawling away from the wreckage, only to bleed out a few hundred feet away from the crash site.

She flipped through the pictures, her lips pursed as she studied each one. Most of the strange creatures appeared to be the same species: They appeared to be strong, quadrupedal insectoids with two sets of arms that ended in claw-like appendages. Their heads looked small for their bodies, but that was probably because of the large set of mandibles that each one bore. Each one wore a uniform of some kind, while several wore body armor made from a strange, yet strong material.

However, as monstrous as these creatures appeared, they were nothing compared to the ape-like abominations that had crawled out of the ship alongside the other aliens. What was even worse, however, was that several of the insectoids had wounds that appeared to have been inflicted by the razor-sharp talons that the ape-like creatures bore. The apes themselves hadn't come out unscathed either, each of them bearing not only injuries sustained in the crash, but burns that appeared to have been inflicted by dragonfire. Other than the collars that each one wore, they were all naked.

The apes were not natural either. During the autopsy, her ponies had found a number of complex devices implanted into each one. One of the devices in particular had filled her with absolute horror. It was located in the brain, and exited out of the back of the subject's skull to connect to the collar that each one wore.

What was implied by this was terrifying.

Celestia had been able to piece together very little from the evidence that she had. Clearly there had been a battle of some kind, but neither side had survived to tell the tale. This left the Sun Princess with nothing but questions. Questions that she highly doubted would be answered during even her lengthy lifespan.

As Celestia brooded over the evidence on her desk, she was interrupted by a steady knock on her office door. "Come in Luna," she said, not even bothering to look up to see if she was right. She had already made it clear to her staff that she was not to be disturbed, so that had left only one pony who would visit her.

As expected, the Lunar Princess entered, a worried expression on her face. "Tia, it is time to lower the sun," she said, concern clear in her voice.

Celestia quickly shot a look at the clock, shock running through her mind. *How in Tartarus did it get that late?* she thought to herself. "I'm sorry Luna, I lost track of time."

"It is alright, but I think you should take a break. You've been poring over those reports for months now, you barely sleep anymore, and it's starting to show," Luna said, her voice stern and reprimanding.

Celestia rubbed her eyes in exhaustion. "You're right, but I cannot afford to take a break now. The crashed vessel may have just been an accident, but what if it is a precursor to something much larger? I have to-"

"Celestia, if we are attacked by aliens tomorrow, but you haven't had the rest necessary to plan our defenses, wouldn't that place Equestria at an even greater risk than if you took a break from all of this?" Luna interrupted, her voice unyielding. "Besides, it is my duty to guard the night. Equestria will still be standing if you take the time to get a good night sleep tonight, I promise."

Celestia opened her mouth to argue, but was interrupted when a wisp of smoke entered the room through the open window and, in a flash of green fire, resolved itself into a scroll. Celestia attempted to make a grab for the scroll, but her sister was too quick for her. "Your student can wait, Tia, but the sun cannot," she said, a roguish glint in her eye

The Sun Princess sighed at this, knowing that she had been defeated. "You're not going to bend on this, are you Lulu?" she asked, exhaustion creeping into her voice.

"No, I am not. I will not read your letter, but I will send word to your student, to let her know that the letter has been received. Now go lower the sun and get some sleep," Luna ordered, her voice brooking no argument.

Celestia grumbled something about little sisters, but did as she was told.

As soon as her sister had left the room, Luna gently set the still unread letter on Celestia's desk. She then retrieved a blank sheet of paper and quill, then carefully wrote a response to her sister's student. As soon as she was finished, she incinerated the note, sending it on its way.

Satisfied that things were taken care of, Luna turned to leave, but was interrupted when another scroll appeared in front of her. This one was addressed to her.

Intrigued, Luna opened the letter. It was short, and appeared to have been written in haste.

Dear Princess Luna,

I understand that Celestia is otherwise preoccupied, but this is a matter of the utmost importance. It involves the object that crashed into the White Tail mountain range six months ago. Please take the time to read the letter I sent her.

Awaiting your quick response,

-Twilight Sparkle.

Wondering what possibly could be so important, Luna reluctantly opened the letter addressed to her sister.

Minutes later, Luna burst out of her sister's office, eyes wide and frantic. Her gaze locked onto one of the Solar Guard that stood at attention next to Celestia's office. "Private, I need you to send word to Captain Dark Seeker as quickly as you can. Tell him to meet me in the throne room in one hour, and that he needs to be prepared to deploy," she said, sweeping past the startled stallion.

He wasn't fazed for long, however, and quickly snapped a salute. "Yes your Highness," he said, taking off down the hallway in search of the Captain of the Night Sentinels.

Luna nodded in satisfaction. She was sure that Celestia would want to know about this, but she could wait until morning. Action had to be taken now, and Luna was confident in her ability to handle this.

Hopefully the trail hadn't gone cold by the time she reached White Tail.

Author's Notes:

Yay! Luna is involved!

Well, I'm not dead, so any comments about this chapter is greatly appreciated.

Also, if you were hoping that the mane six would be more involved in this story, then you are not going to be disappointed. They just aren't too involved *yet*. I have to build it up, it's bad story telling if I dump all the characters on you in the first couple of chapters.

Anyway, hope you guys enjoyed the story so far, and if you were wondering why I haven't described what certain ponies look like yet, well that's coming up soon. I'm trying to go with a certain style of writing where familiar objects and people to the particular person's point of view are not described, simply because he/she is already familiar with that person or object. However, when someone who is unfamiliar with that object or person sees it or them, such as Carrot Top seeing our mysterious human for the first time, I will then describe it for both your benefit and the character's benefit.

You know, just in case you were wondering why I wasn't going into a whole lot of detail.

Also, Written Script isn't an OC. He's in the show, and I can prove it.



This is from Games Ponies Play and Just For Sidekicks. This picture is also the reason I decided on Written Script as Carrot Top's husband. I know it's not canon, but I'm in charge, so what I say goes.

Chapter IV

Chapter IV

Finally! I thought as I hefted my prize. It had taken me the better part of three hours, but I had finally caught one of those slippery little buggers. It was a beauty, too. Three feet long, and probably somewhere around thirty pounds. Man, I was going to eat well tonight. And tomorrow night. And the night after that.

I love salmon.

However, I had not gone through the ordeal unscathed. I had broken the fishing spear that I had made earlier this month, and was forced to resort to the old-fashioned approach. Bare hands.

Now, catching a fish with your bare hands is usually a pretty impossible feat for a normal human. But seeing as how I not only had claws now, but also faster reflexes and muscle speed, it wasn't *too* hard.

...Still would have been easier if I hadn't broken my spear on that first strike, though. I wouldn't be quite so wet, either. Say what you wanted about claws, tools are where it's at.

Speaking of wet, I was starting to feel pretty cold now. The moon had already risen, and it was in the middle of autumn. Because of these two factors, the temperature was actually dropping pretty fast.

I had to get back to my cave soon. When I had said that I had scored when it came to living spaces, I wasn't lying. The cave actually ran much deeper than it looked, with the back of the cave playing host to a hot spring. I might be cold and wet now, but in a few short minutes I was going to be nice and toasty, munching on fish, and well on my way to a delightful night's slumber.

As I approached my cave, though, I stopped short when I heard voices up ahead. The words were unintelligible to me, but that didn't stop me from straining my ears to listen.

There seemed to be a lot of them, and by the sound of the jingling, they had a lot of metal with them. Now, I wasn't an expert in these sorts of things, but when you have a large group of people that jingle, that can usually mean only one thing.

They might not have found my lair, though, I thought as I slowly started to make my way towards my cave. *I might not be able to cook my dinner, but I can still warm and dry myself.*

Deep down inside, however, I knew that Murphy and his freaking law was at work here.

I was certain that this was going to be a long, cold, fish-less night.

* * *

"Sir, the trail ends here. At least, I *think* it ends here," Sergeant Fleet Foot said in a confused tone of voice, saluting sharply.

"Hmm... where did you go..." Captain Dark Seeker said as he rubbed a hoof underneath his chin.

The tracks they had been following were quite strange. They were elongated, five toed tracks with the heel forming a neat little circle behind the rest of the foot. The toes also clearly had claws, though judging by their length they were mainly used to help the creature find traction. The uniqueness of the tracks, coupled with how heavy the creature seemed to be, meant that they were relatively easy to follow.

However, they had hit a slight snag. The tracks led right up to a cliff face with a gnarled old tree growing on its side. From here, however, the tracks became impossible to follow because of all the other similar tracks that crisscrossed through the area.

"Sergeant, what do you make of all of this?" Captain Seeker asked in a thoughtful tone of voice.

"Well sir, I can only see two viable options here. One, there are many of these things in these woods, and they all like to gather to this spot for some bizarre reason. This is highly unlikely, seeing as how most of the tracks here are all older than these three sets here," Sergeant Fleet Foot said as he pointed the three tracks out with his hoof. One of the sets was the one they were following, while another looked like it led east, while the third seemed to lead to the nearby river. "My guess is that the creature has set up a den somewhere close by, probably at the top of the cliff, and uses the tree to get in and out."

"Thank you sergeant," Captain Seeker said as his eyes scanned the cliff face.

"Do you think, perhaps, that that cave might be where the creature is hiding?" he heard Princess Luna ask behind him. He didn't need to look to know where the Lunar Princess was pointing at, seeing as how

he had spotted the cave only seconds before she had pointed it out.

"I would assume so, Your Highness. I really wish you would stay at the entrance of the forest, though. It's dangerous out here," he said, his voice filled with concern.

"I will manage just fine, captain. I have seen combat before, but I do not think that it will come to that," the Lunar Princess said as she gently unfolded her wings. "Do you think it is home?"

"I don't think so, Your Highness," Sergeant Fleet Foot answered. "The set of tracks that lead to the river are much more recent than any of the others. It probably left to catch itself something to eat."

"Thank you sergeant," Luna said as she readied herself for takeoff. Before she left, however, Captain Seeker held out a single hoof. "With all due respect, Your Highness, I would really feel much better if you let us go first. The creature is most likely not at home, but I'd rather not bet your life on it," he said respectfully.

She considered him for a moment, then pouted slightly. "You like to suck the fun out of everything, don't you?" she asked him, her voice dripping with disappointment.

Captain Seeker wasn't fazed by this, however, and just continued to give the Lunar Diarch a flat look. Finally, after what seemed like hours, the Moon Princess relented. "Fine, but remember, if the creature is home, do not engage unless necessary. I want to try to communicate with it. If you find that you must fight, I want you to do your best to capture it," she said, her eyes quickly sweeping over the assembled soldiers.

After each one in turn had saluted to the Lunar Princess, Luna finally took a step back to allow her soldiers to do their jobs.

"Alright, Private Heart, I want you to carry Lieutenant Burst up there while Sergeant Weather and I secure the cave. The rest of you will patrol this area in case the creature isn't home," Captain Seeker ordered, his tone very business-like. "I want you each in groups of three. If you see it, send one of the members of your patrol for reinforcements while the other two attempt to keep the creature in the area. Do not engage it by yourselves. If it flees, attempt to herd it back towards this cave. If it attacks, fall back and attempt to lead it here. The creature is assumed to be intelligent, but unable to speak Equestrian, so while communication is possible, it is not advised. Lethal force is only authorized if a pony's life is in danger. Any questions?" he asked, his eyes sweeping over his troops.

When no questions came, he turned back towards the cave and unfurled his wings. "Good. Sergeant Fleet Foot, I'll leave it up to you to organize patrols. Sergeant Fair Weather, let's do this."

The entrance to the cave was only about fifteen feet up, so it only took Captain Seeker a single beat of his wings to get him to the cave. The opening was fairly small, probably only three feet in diameter, leaving them very little room to maneuver if things got dicey. Captain Seeker wasn't an idiot, however, so he first pulled a lightstone from his combat saddlebags before entering.

Yeah... entering a pitch black alien monster's lair before throwing one of these? I'd have to be some moron from a cheap comic book to try that one, he thought as he hurled the stone into the cave.

As soon as the lightstone hit the hard surface of the inside of the cave, the enchantments on the stone took effect. Instantly, the whole cave was filled with a warm, white light, illuminating every corner of the cave with its glow.

As soon as the darkness in the cave was lifted, Captain Seeker and Sergeant Weather dove in, fully prepared to meet the horrifying beast head on.

It was actually pretty anticlimactic when absolutely nothing jumped out at them and ate their brains. Captain Seeker almost felt cheated, almost like fate had purposely skipped out on a perfect opportunity to shank him and his team.

The cave was actually pretty large, the center of the room being dominated by a shallow pit. Inside the pit was the clear remains of a fire, still somewhat fresh, probably from this morning or late last night. Scattered around the pit were a few bones which were picked clean long ago by whatever creature called this place home, while to the side of the pit was a large pile of what appeared to be animal hides.

"Sweet mother of Celestia..." Captain Seeker heard Private Heart gasped in horror behind him. Captain Seeker turned to see that Private Heart had entered with Lieutenant Burst. However, as soon as the private had laid eyes upon the animal hides, he had frozen in his tracks.

"I know we were told this was a carnivore, but why would it keep the skins of its victims? That's just grotesque!" he said in disgust.

It took him a couple of seconds, however, to realize that his disgust wasn't shared by the rest of the team. Instead, everypony present was giving him a flat 'are you serious?' look. "What? It's disturbing and-" he started to say, but was cut off when Lieutenant Burst smacked him on the back of the head.

"You've never served on the griffin borders, have you soldier?" she asked in a flat, level tone. When he didn't respond immediately, she rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Private, most sapient omnivores and carnivores have a tendency to keep parts of the animals that they kill. We're exceptions to this of course, but most other species either use them as tools, or they keep them as trophies. Get invited into a griffin's home sometime if you really want something 'grotesque' to complain about," she said, striding quickly past the confused private.

"You're telling me that we're allies with *monsters*?" he asked in shock.

Even Captain Seeker rolled his eyes at this. "Private, unless you have something non-racist to say, I suggest you keep your pie-hole shut for the remainder of the mission. Otherwise, if I hear one more peep from you, I will personally ensure that you are put on latrine duty for the rest of your career. Do I make myself clear?" he ordered, his tone unmistakable.

Private Stout Heart wisely realized his folly at that point and chose to shut his mouth.

"Sir, as offensive as Private Heart's words were, he still makes a very interesting point. Why would the creature collect just the skins of its meals? And why so many?" Sergeant Weather asked, his face a mask of confusion. "Also, why haven't they rotted by now? Some of these look like they've been here for a while..." he said as he slowly started to shift a few around with his hoof.

"At a guess? I'd say it was using them as bedding," Captain Seeker said, not taking his eyes off of the back of the cave. He could faintly make out the entrance to a deeper complex, but was unsure of what it contained.

"Lieutenant, you and Heart go and scout out that passage in the back and call if it's clear. I want to get the Princess up here as soon as possible, and we can't do that until we clear this cave," Captain Seeker said as he gestured towards the back of the cave with his hoof. "Sergeant, you stay here and help me look to see what clues we can find in this area. Let's see what we can learn about our carnivorous friend."

As they started to dig around, a few more questions they had were answered, while other new questions were brought up. For example, they found that the creature had somehow cured the hides in a fashion that neither Captain Seeker or Sergeant Weather were familiar with. However, since neither of them were in the practice of curing animal hides, this was hardly surprising. *A griffin taxidermist would probably recognize this...* Seeker thought to himself.

Before they could start searching the rest of the cave, however, Burst and Heart came back, giving the other two the all clear sign.

With a little trepidation, Captain Seeker stuck his head out the cave entrance and quickly located Princess Luna. "It's all clear, Your Highness. The creature doesn't appear to be home," he called out, waving a hoof at the Night Princess.

As soon as he gave the signal, Princess Luna gave a single flap of her wings, bringing her level with the cave entrance. It was a slightly tighter squeeze for the Moon Princess, but she still managed it just fine. "What have you discovered, captain?" she asked after a cursory glance around the room.

"A great deal, actually. The creature seems to collect and cure the hides of its previous meals and use them as bedding, though why it needs so many we are still unsure," Captain Seeker said as he gestured towards the pile of skins. "It also does not appear to hunt anything it recognizes as sapient, judging solely on the types of hides that are gathered here. We were about to do a more thorough investigation of this room when Private Heart and Lieutenant Burst returned from clearing the back of the cave."

"Very good captain. Continue your search of the cave and alert me if you have found any interesting developments," she said as she swept passed the still saluting soldier.

Captain Seeker nodded, then turned to the ponies under his command. "You heard the Princess, spread out and search. I want everything in this cave examined thoroughly and brought to my attention. I don't care how insignificant it may seem, it's evidence," the captain ordered in a commanding tone of voice.

Princess Luna didn't hear a word of this, however, nor did she hear any part of the conversation that followed her captain's orders. She was too busy concentrating on the aetheric energies that surrounded the recent resting place of the alien visitor.

Every creature that slept also dreamed, and dreams were the special domain of the Lunar Princess. Usually it was difficult, if not downright impossible, for her to sense and enter the dreams of anyone other than her subjects. This restriction could be circumvented, however.

If she managed to get a hold of an object that held great importance to the person she was attempting to contact, or if she managed to find the location where that person usually rested its head at night, she could pick up the subtle aetheric imprint left behind. Once she had that imprint she could find anyone and enter their dreams once they were asleep, pony or not.

Getting the imprint took some time, however. She had to attune herself to the imprint that the creature left behind, and that could take awhile if its emotions were too dissimilar from those of a po-.

Please no! The pain... why would you do this?

Luna's eyes shot open. The words, while in a different language entirely, were easily translated through the aetheric plane. The voice sounded like that of a stallion, probably in its mid twenties, though she couldn't really be sure since she had no references for the alien species' gender or age. The words themselves carried a potent cocktail of emotions with them as well. Pain, sadness, loss, homesickness, anger, regret, guilt.

There was so much guilt here. The creature clearly blamed himself for something, and regretted it deeply. The emotions were strong here, stronger than anything she had felt before in the dreamscape.

There was only one reason why she could hear the creature's thoughts, though. This was the site of some pretty potent nightmares. Also, judging by the sheer strength of the emotions attached to the imprint, she wouldn't have been surprised if it had had one every night it had been asleep.

However, as unpleasant as it was, she closed her eyes once again and started to delve into the imprint left behind by the creature.

Please no! I don't want to do this!

Please, whoever you were, please forgive me! I didn't want to do it!

Why are you making me do this? Why would you turn me into a monster?

Please, I just want to go home, to see Valerie again, to hug her, and hear her say it's going to be okay...

She wouldn't even look at me though, not after she sees me. She'd probably scream and run, wouldn't even recognize the monster that used to be her boyfriend...

Why can't I wake up from this living nightmare?

I just want to go home... I don't want to hurt anyone...

Princess Luna opened her eyes, gasping for breath. She had the imprint, though what she had learned from it had been far more important than the imprint itself.

There was no doubt in her mind that this creature was sapient and highly intelligent. She was also sure that the creature would never hurt another sapient if he could have helped it.

However, she was also sure that the creature hadn't always been given a choice in the matter.

"Captain, are you ready?" Luna asked as she rose from her seat.

"Yes, Your Highness," Captain Seeker replied, saluting sharply.

"Then meet me outside and gather your troops, we have a lost soul to find," she said grimly.

Author's Notes:

Well, I know that I just posted something yesterday, but I had a lot of free time today. I'm currently at a friend's house waiting until tomorrow to move into the dorms. Until tomorrow happens, though, I'm pretty much left to my own devices.

And that makes for a bored writer. Bored writers tend to get stuff written.

Hope you guys like what I have written here! Also, don't be too hard on poor Private Stout Heart. I wanted to show an Equestria that had ponies that were okay with carnivores, and also those who found everything to do with the concept disturbing. Obviously the more experienced soldiers would be more okay with the idea, simply because of how often they have dealt with them in the past.

Anyway, I hope I didn't disappoint you with this chapter. Anyone else here constantly second

guess themselves?

EDIT: After talking with a couple of people and rereading this chapter, I have decided to edit a few things. nothing major, just how the Night Sentinels act in a few scenes.

Chapter V

Chapter V

Huh... Well there's something you don't see everyday, I thought as I examined the ponies breaking into my lair.

For starters, they were far less colorful than the various ponies that I had seen in the nearby town. While the ponies in town were literally every color of the rainbow, these ponies all had the same gray coats and dark blue manes and tails. These ponies also each bore sharp, vampire-esque fangs and yellow, cat-like eyes.

Those weren't the only differences I noticed, however.

The pegasi among them each bore webbed, bat-like wings, while their unicorn counterparts had curved, rhinoceros-like horns instead of the usual straight, spiraled ones of their cousins. As for the 'normal' ones, I couldn't spot any real differences other than the fangs and the eyes.

They were clearly soldiers, if the dark, night-themed armor and weapons were anything to go by. Overall, they looked pretty intimidating. Ya know, if you got around the whole four foot tall, adorable pony thing.

Whether they were from the government sent to 'take care' of the monster in the woods, or a mercenary band hired by the villagers to hunt down the threat to the village, I wasn't really sure yet. Didn't really matter to me which one they were though. If they were mercs, they would probably just kill me and be done with it. If they were the government, though, I could expect experiments followed by an autopsy. Everything inside me was telling me to run, to forget about my nice warm lair and make for the hills.

Yeah, I know what you're saying: "But these are *ponies*! They couldn't possibly do anything like that! Just look at how cute they are!"

...I've been kidnapped by aliens, turned into a monster, then stranded in magical ponyland. Frankly, I didn't care about how cute they were, I wouldn't put it past the universe to drop me in Care Bear land and have me vivisected at this point.

Again, I wasn't *sure* that these people would act like that. However, I couldn't be certain that they *wouldn't*, and as I have already stated, I had become downright paranoid after my abduction.

However, despite my overwhelming urge to bolt for the hills, I decided to observe for a few seconds more. I might not be able to understand what they're saying, but it was still interesting to see how much different they were from humans.

However, Murphy had other ideas.

A startled gasp to my right quickly broke me from my thoughts, causing me to thank Murphy for being such a total prick. I turned my head towards the sound, dread filling me as I laid my eyes on the source of the noise.

Three pony soldiers were standing there, two with their hooves over the mouth of the third, trying desperately to keep their colleague from revealing their presence.

All of their eyes were wide with fear.

We just stood there for what seemed like hours, staring at each other in shock. Slowly I raised a single finger to my mouth, then shushed them as I started to inch my way backwards.

This seemed to have the opposite of the desired effect, however. The two that were holding onto the other's mouth quickly gave their colleague a shove towards my lair, yelling something in their strange language as they did so. He immediately took off like a shot from a rifle, disappearing almost instantly into the thick foliage around us.

I am really going to kill that tree, I thought as I heaved the fish at the two remaining soldiers, then turned and bolted.

* * *

Princess Luna gently landed, her face an unreadable mask. "Captain, what have you learned from your examination of the creature's living space?"

"We think we know why the creature needed so many animal hides," he said as he landed next to his

Princess. "It was attempting to make clothing from them, though it is clear that the creature has no expertise in the art."

"What makes you say that?" Princess Luna asked curiously.

"We found no fewer than fifteen ruined hides, all attempts at making pants," Captain Seeker said ruefully. "I'm not sure why it's so desperate to make simple clothing, though."

Luna thought for a second, then smiled sadly as an idea came to her. "It is trying to survive."

Captain Seeker looked confused at this. Before he was able to ask her to elaborate on her cryptic statement, however, Private Longshot came barreling into the clearing, looking for all the world as if he had seen a ghost. "Captain! We found it! It was hiding on that ridge over there when my team stumbled across it!" the dust pony said as he gasped for air.

Captain Seeker gave a worried glance towards Princess Luna, but quickly took charge of the situation. "Come on ponies, let's move!" he ordered as he raced off in the direction that Longshot had indicated.

* * *

Nope! I thought over and over again as I tried to put as much distance between myself and the two ponies chasing me. Luckily for me, the two that were on my tail were both unicorns, and therefore a bit slower than their pegasi and 'normal' cousins.

Unluckily for me, however, was the fact that the two chasing me were reality warping unicorns. Any moment now, I was certain that one or both of them was going to take my head off or strangle me from a distance using their telekinesis. Every so often I could hear the weird humming sound that usually precluded unicorn spell work, but for some bizarre reason nothing was happening to me.

Briefly, I glanced behind me, only to realize what it was they were doing.

While it was better than trying to kill me outright, it was still pretty bad, seeing that they were throwing up signal flares into the skies every couple of minutes. At this rate I was going to have the whole freaking troop breathing down my neck unless I did something to shake those two.

The combination of the terrain around me and my bipedal nature was working in my favor, though. What took me only a couple of seconds to navigate was taking them much longer due to their less maneuverable frames. If this was a simple race, I knew that I was destined to leave them in the dust.

This wasn't a race though, this was a chase. I knew that the two of them would run me into the ground given the chance, and as soon as my strength failed me, I was theirs. I didn't have all that much strength to start with, either. I was still exhausted from my earlier attempts at fishing, not to mention chasing down the wild boar earlier, or the fact that I hadn't gotten to eat either of the animals I had caught and killed.

The plain truth of the matter was that, despite the heavy body modifications I had gone through, I was still only mortal. They were going to catch me and put me on a freaking autopsy table and there was nothing I could do about it.

As my strength lagged, I pulled around one last tree and spotted my salvation. If I still had the facial muscles, I would have been smiling like a troll. Sure it was dirty and underhanded, but I didn't feel like I had any other options.

Reaching to the side, I took a single swipe of my claw at the thin tree to my right. As expected, my razor-sharp claws sheared straight through the weak sapling, causing it to slowly tumble to the ground. I then accelerated, trying my best to make it to the river that I knew was close by.

Right on cue, I heard the tell tale sound of the tree falling, followed closely by the sounds of frightened swearing in an unknown tongue, followed even closer by the sounds of a thousand angry hornets rising from their destroyed nest.

Now that the uni-pair are off my tail, I can make a clean getaway, I thought as I dived into the river, hoping that the fast current of the water would carry me to relative safety.

I felt a little guilty at leaving those two in such a state, but I quickly got over it. *I'm a rat, but I'm a live rat,* I thought as I was swept downriver and out of the two soldier's reach.

After what seemed like an eternity swimming with the current, I finally pulled myself up to the bank of the river, exhausted, freezing, but still very much alive. Grunting softly, I crawled along the riverbed, hoping that I would be able to find someplace to hole up and build a fire.

I was just so tired though. Not just from the running or the swimming, or even from the lack of decent

food. No, this was an exhaustion that ran far deeper, that had plagued me ever since I had crawled out of that accursed spacecraft and into this strange, yet familiar world. In the back of my head I was faintly aware that hypothermia was setting in, but as my eyes closed, I couldn't seem to build up the will to care.

I had fought so desperately for survival, determined to beat the odds, beat the despair that had threatened to consume me, only to die here on this miserable little beach. The thought brought tears to my eyes, and I cried openly as my arms gave way underneath me. I tried to gather the strength needed to continue, tried to fight the fear and despair that had been chasing me through this whole ordeal, but it seemed that my despair had finally caught up to me.

I am going to die alone, I thought as I rolled over on my back. It was my greatest fear, that I would die alone and afraid somewhere, and no one would even care at my passing. Valerie had changed that for me, had made me feel like I was the most important person in the world. She had become everything to me, had given me purpose and passion, had erased my greatest fear with her presence alone.

And I was never going to see her again. The thought rattled in my head as I stared up at the beautiful starry sky, faintly aware that the warmth of my body was quickly slipping away.

Valerie, I'm so sorry. I tried my best, I thought, as my eyes slowly closed.

* * *

Captain Seeker rounded another tree, just to run headlong into Corporal Jade and Corporal Lancer running in the opposite direction. This confused the captain at first, but that confusion quickly gave way to terror as a thousand wasps began to bombard the entire column, making sure that every single pony there felt their displeasure at being awoken at such an early hour.

The chaos that followed would have gone on for at least an hour had it not been for Princess Luna's quick thinking. With a single stomp of her hoof she formed a protective bubble, quickly expanding it to simultaneously drive the insects away, while protecting her soldiers. The wasps continued to beat against the shield for a few more seconds, but eventually gave up.

"What in Tarterus happened corporal?" Captain Seeker asked as Lieutenant Burst started to apply healing magic to the whole column.

"We were tailing the creature as ordered sir, but it was far more cunning than we thought," Corporal Jade said, saluting smartly despite the pain that still lingered in her forelegs.

"It escaped? We need to-" Captain Seeker started to say, but was interrupted as Luna gasped, her face pale. Captain Seeker looked at her in alarm, concern written clearly in his expression. "What is it Your Highness?"

"A nightmare, filled with anguish, despair, and longing, but it is fading..." she said, her voice filled with pain. "We have to move now. Thestrals, with me. Everypony else, stay here until I have sent for you," she ordered as she took off in a flash.

Fear gripped her heart as she pushed herself faster and faster towards the source of the nightmare. Even as she pushed herself, however, she could feel the nightmare slowly slip away. She knew that there was only one reason why a nightmare would fade like this, and it wasn't because the person having the nightmare was waking up.

It was because the person having the nightmare would never wake up.

Author's Notes:

BUM BUM BUM!

Remember! The whole chase scene was seen from our protagonist's point of view, so things seemed a lot worse than they were to his tired, food deprived brain.

By the way, if you didn't get the memo, I went back and edited a few things with the previous chapter. If future chapters confuse you because you remember something different, I would suggest you going back and re-reading what I have changed. If you got the memo, then disregard this statement.

Anyway, I hope that you guys liked this! comments and criticism are appreciated, since they not only give me power, but also teach me what I'm doing wrong. Also, thank you so much for pointing out the errors I had with the last chapter! hopefully this one is more up to snuff than the last one!

Chapter VI

Chapter VI

I was alone, running through the smothering darkness, hoping against hope that I could reach my destination unhindered. I needed to reach her, but I knew this wouldn't be the case as the hoof steps behind me increased in volume, letting me know that my capture and death were only seconds behind me.

Without warning, the hoof steps stopped, only to be replaced by the sound of skittering insects. I doubled my speed, hoping that I could put some distance between myself and...Them.

I didn't know what to call Them. They haunted my dreams, filled me with a nameless dread so profound that it transcended terror and became something new entirely.

Then everything changed. I was lying on some sort of hard metal surface, above me was a plethora of metal arms, each holding a blade or needle of some kind. A face appeared in front of me, and I tried to ward it off, but my arms seemed to be missing. I tried to kick, only to find that They had taken those too. I heard voices somewhere, but what They said was beyond my understanding.

I had to escape, but I knew that there was no way out. I watched in horror as one of those blades slowly made its way towards me, inching ever closer to my paralyzed eye. Then, without any warning, it lunged downward, impaling my cornea on its cold, metallic edge.

As I screamed in pain and horror, I felt the world around me change again. I was in some sort of tank, floating in a viscous goo with something metal over my mouth and nose. They were there again, watching me while They took notes on Their devices. I could see other tanks behind Them, ones with humans in them, others with monsters, and some with something in-between the two. I hammered at the tank walls, begging Them to let me go, pleading with Them to have some compassion.

As one of Them came closer, the world shifted once again, and I was alone in the darkness again. Or at least I thought I was alone. A sound behind me caused me to whip around, only to be confronted with a nightmare.

It was similar to what They had turned me into, only far larger and more grotesque. Its claws dripped with a vile ichor, and its maw was open, eager to swallow me whole. I started to run, well aware of the ponderous footsteps behind me, coming closer with each passing second.

"Please! Somebody! Anybody!" I screamed as it finally caught me in its claws. I could hear it laughing, its monstrous voice tinged with insanity as it turned me in its huge hands to look me in the face.

"Why are you doing this to me?" I shouted at it, hoping that I could stall it for a few seconds longer.

It just looked at me, then continued to laugh. "I'm not the one doing this, monster," it said.

The world around me changed again. I looked around, trying to figure out where I was. I heard a voice somewhere close by, but I could not understand it. I looked down, and noticed the mangled corpse that lay at my feet. I lifted my hands, only to see that they were no longer hands, but claws.

They were covered in blood.

"Why would you make me do this? I'm not a monster!" I screamed in horror.

"You are now," I heard the beast say in my ear.

I shook my head in disbelief and fell to my knees as the darkness started to close around me. Despair kicked in, and I heard voices all around me. Ones I knew, others that I didn't, but they all said the same thing.

"Monster."

"Monster."

"Monster."

"enough."

"Murderer."

"Evil Beast."

"Thing."

"enough!"

"This is only the beginning you know."

"You will continue to kill everything around you."

"You are our plaything, now."

"Why don't we have some fun? Maybe have you kill everyone you know and love?"

"ENOUGH!"

A bright light pierced the darkness behind me, silencing the voices that surrounded me. I turned towards the light, dreading what new terror was in store for me.

I saw a moon, far larger and more beautiful than any moon I had ever seen. As I watched, the moon started to move closer, its light filled me with a feeling that I didn't have a name for. It was an alien feeling, but it was one that I was sure that I had felt before. As the moon got closer, I was finally able to place a name to the glorious feeling.

Peace.

Slowly a shadow formed on the face of the moon, its figure distinctly equine in shape. It got closer, leaving the moon behind to stand next to me. As it got closer, the shadows fell away from around it to reveal something familiar, yet alien.

She was a pony, but far more regal and graceful than any I had seen before. If you included the horn, she was almost as tall as I was, standing nearly at five and a half feet. Her midnight blue coat and wings seemed to glow with some unearthly light, while her ethereal star field mane and tail fluttered and waved in a wind that I could not feel. On her flank I could make out a dark blotch, upon which a crescent moon hung, suspended as if in the night sky. Her hooves were shod in silver, while at her neck was some kind of black jewelry with a silver moon which was identical to the one on her flank. On her head I could see she wore a tiara made from the same black material, and on her face I could see a look of profound sadness.

"Who are you?" I asked, strangely unafraid of this new arrival.

She didn't answer at first. Instead she just looked at me, her teal eyes filled with compassion and sorrow as the world around us changed once again.

This time I was at home, in my bed. I felt safe as my comforter was pulled up around my neck. "Shhhh..." I heard a female voice say nearby. "There will be time for that later. For now, sleep. Sleep the sleep of the dreamless, and finally rest from your cares. Take comfort in knowing that you are safe now."

Her voice had a strange, musical quality to it. I could also tell that she wasn't speaking in my language, but somehow I could understand the meaning behind those words. *How the heck does that work?* I thought to myself as my eyes got heavier.

I could hear her nearby, her voice humming softly as my mind started to slip off. Before I knew it, I had fallen into a deep, dreamless sleep.

* * *

"It's experiencing extreme hypothermia, but I think we managed to catch it in time before its heart failed," Sergeant Fair Weather said as he saluted smartly.

"Him."

"What?"

"The creature, it is a him, not an it. He is a living, thinking, sapient individual that has experienced far too many horrors for one as young as he is," Luna reprimanded the guard sadly.

"Yes Your Highness," Sergeant Fair Weather said with a bow of his head.

"Did you get a name, Your Highness?" Captain Seeker asked.

"Not yet. He has been through so much, has seen so many horrors, that I thought it better to let him sleep peacefully tonight," Princess Luna answered, her voice filled with compassion.

"Did you find out what he is though? Or why he was so dead set on avoiding capture that he'd risk his own life?" Captain Seeker asked as he sat down by the shivering biped.

"Yes, and yes. Some things I must speak with my sister about first, but I will tell you this much. His form is not his own. He was turned into this shape by creatures of unfathomable cruelty, forced to do a great many horrors in their name, only to finally awaken and see the horror that he had become," Princess Luna said, shivering a little as she spoke. "He is not a monster, but he sees himself as one, and he fled from us because he assumed that we would treat him as nothing but. He thought that any encounter with ponies would result in his death and dissection, so he has made it a point to avoid all contact with us."

Captain Seeker nodded in understanding at this, compassion in his eyes. "How long has he been alone?"

"Six months."

Captain Seeker blanched at this, his eyes filled with worry. "I'm surprised he hasn't gone mad by this point!"

"He is incredibly strong willed, this much is true," Princess Luna said as she sat down on the cool grass that lined the riverbank.

"So...what do we do with him? Take him back to Canterlot?" Sergeant Fair Weather asked a little awkwardly.

Princess Luna thought about this for a few seconds, then shook her head. "He doesn't trust us, nor can I blame him after the horrors that he has gone through. It would be unwise to take him back to Canterlot directly, so instead we shall take him back to his cave. We shall come back later with my sister to attempt to communicate once more with him, but for now, he should be fine if left to his own devices."

A couple of the younger guards looked uneasy about that, but they did not say anything. Captain Seeker saluted, however, then stopped as a thought struck him. "Princess, I think I understand what you meant earlier when you said he was trying to survive. His bare skin seems very susceptible to the cold, and I doubt that he would survive for very long if the weather were to turn foul. I think it would be prudent if we left a few things with him when we go to drop him off, as well as some form of note, letting him know that we will be back in a few days."

Luna nodded in agreement as she stood up from where she was sitting. "He has had a rough time of things, let's see if we can improve the quality of his life a little."

* * *

I woke with a start, my head pounding and my limbs exhausted. *Why am I still alive?* I thought as I sat up from where I was lying.

I nearly jumped out of my skin, though, when a nice, thick blanket slid off of me as I became upright. I looked down in confusion, noting the patchwork pattern of the cloth in utter disbelief. *A...what?* I thought intelligently as I stared down at the impossible cloth.

My sense of smell, tired of being ignored for so long, burst down the door of my consciousness and slapped a status report on my brain's desk. My brain took a good, long look at it before finally handing it over to me in confusion.

I smelled fish fillet.

Not just any fillet, either. This was salmon, rubbed down with a mixture of salt and rosemary, then fried gently over a slow flame. I turned my head towards the heavenly scent, only to see something that I refused to believe.

I got up and went to the entrance of my cave, just to make sure that it was really **my** cave. *Yup, there's the tree and... a ladder?* I thought in disbelief. There, standing braced against the cliff face, was a fifteen foot tall ladder. I could tell right off the bat that it would allow me easier access to my lair, though I was still confused as to why it was there in the first place.

I looked back inside the cave, my mind reeling with confusion. There, sitting over my fire pit was a professional-looking cooking spit and grill. Next to the fire pit I could see a wide assortment of cooking utensils, pots, pans, and spices.

More importantly, however, was the fish fillet that sat on a metal plate next to the fire. It was a simple meal, sure, but as I picked it up along with the silverware that sat on the mat next to it, I felt that it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

As I picked up my new plate, I noticed a note that had been placed underneath it. It showed a picture of a

sun, a moon, then a sun, as well as two winged unicorns and a rough caricature of myself. Our arms were raised, and it appeared that I was shaking the hoof of the larger one.

A drop of water suddenly landed on the page, and I looked up, confused about where it came from. When I couldn't see anything, I looked back down at the page, then carefully put it down.

Think about that later, I thought as I brought my attention back to the fish in my lap. I gently cut into it with the provided knife, then took a bite, taking special care not to shear through the metal fork with my razor-sharp fangs.

As the flavor exploded in my mouth, I broke down completely, weeping at the kindness that I was shown.

I'm gonna give that freaking tree a medal.

Sometimes you're right. Sometimes everyone really is out to get you. Sometimes the whole world is trying to stomp you into the dirt, trying its best to kill you, trying to break you, turn you into something not worth saving.

Sometimes you're wrong.

Author's Notes:

Well, I know I said that I was going to write the next chapter of The Nautilus Protocol next, but I just couldn't leave this until I had resolved the conflict.

I gotta say, I was pretty surprised at what I had written. I hope that you guys enjoyed this just as much as I enjoyed writing it.

This story isn't over yet though, but I'm not going to continue with it until I have written at least three chapters for The Nautilus Protocol and one for Fool's Gambit, so expect a bit of a delay.

Again, thank you all for liking and favoriting my stories as well as watching me. You guys are amazing.

Thank you also for your comments and criticism, it really helps me learn how to be a better writer.

Chapter VII

Chapter VII

Space. Cold, lifeless, still. Nothing but stardust and radiation for as far as the eye can see. It is an awe inspiring sight, one designed to make the average observer feel insignificant, as if they were just a speck amongst the vast cosmos.

One observer watched with almost indecent indifference, however, caring only about the subtle electromagnetic waves that flowed through the empty space that surrounded it. Most of the electromagnetic waves were filtered out as just static, emissions from nearby stars, nothing more.

Others it recorded, only to send them back home as a subspace databurst, traveling the vast expanse of space to reach the observer's point of origin in a matter of weeks.

As it observed the stars around it, it received a repeating subspace transmission from a strange nearby system. The observer watched impassively as it decoded the transmission, then sent it back home, marked as a priority message.

If the observer was sentient, it would have been a little more concerned about the content of the message. After all, it wasn't every day that it received a distress signal from a Krin science vessel.

This hardly mattered to the small probe, though, so it merely readjusted its main receiving dish and continued its impassive watch of eternity.

* * *

Princess Celestia yawned as she poured herself a cup of tea. Despite having slept the sleep of the dead, she still felt exhausted. However, if she were being honest with herself, she still felt better than she had in months. *Maybe Luna was right, maybe I am overreacting about this whole alien thing...* she thought as she sipped at her tea. After all, it had been six months since the crash and there had been no other alien sightings. No UFOs, no missing ponies, and no alien monsters ravaging the countryside.

As she raised a pastry to her lips while lost in thought, she heard a knock on the door. "Come in," Celestia said, taking a bite of the sugary treat.

Celestia looked up to see her sister enter the room. "Good mor-" she started to say, but the greeting died in her throat when she saw the look on her sister's face.

She looked like her best friend had died.

"Luna, what's wrong?" Celestia asked, worry written on her face.

"I have had a...difficult night," Luna said as she collapsed on a cushion next to her sister.

Celestia scooted closer to her sister and gently enfolded Luna with one of her alabaster wings. "Do you want to talk about it?" Celestia asked uncertainly.

Princess Luna didn't answer immediately. Instead she snuggled a little closer to her big sister, then levitated a pastry towards her. "Do you remember last night? When I sent you to bed before reading Twilight Sparkle's letter?" she asked uncertainly.

Celestia nodded, unsure of where this was headed. "Yes, you told me you were going to send a note telling her why I hadn't responded."

Luna fiddled with the pastry for a few seconds before continuing. "Well, I sent the note, but she responded almost immediately, telling me to go ahead and open your mail myself," she said, then took a bite of the pastry.

Celestia's eyes widened in surprise at this. "Whatever it was, it must have been extremely important for Twilight to let you read my mail like that," she said, her mouth turned down in a frown.

"It was. Sister, yesterday one of our subjects encountered a terrifying creature hunting wild boar in White Tail. She was so disturbed by the creature's appearance that she fled at the sight of it, only to injure herself to the point where she could not escape," Luna said carefully.

Celestia gasped at this. "What did it do to the poor mare?" she asked, her imagination running wild with thoughts of butchery and death.

When she asked this, though, Luna merely smiled at her sister, almost mischievously. "By all accounts, the

creature picked her up as you would a foal, then carried her back to town."

The silence that filled the room after this statement was so profound that Celestia could have sworn that she could hear a pin drop.

"...What?" Celestia asked intelligently.

"I had the same reaction when I had read your student's letter, but that isn't what gave me pause. What really worried me most was the description that she gave for the creature," Luna said before taking another bite of her pastry.

There was a pregnant silence while Luna finished her treat, Celestia almost exploding with impatience as she watched her sister. The waiting finally became too much for Celestia, and she gently nudged Luna. "Well? What did she say it looked like?"

Luna again didn't answer immediately. Instead, she picked up another pastry and fiddled with it nervously for a few seconds. "Sister, it was one of the gorilla-like aliens from the crashed ship," she said finally.

Luna had to admit that the look on her sister's face was priceless.

* * *

Carrot Top whistled in a distinctly nonchalant way as she wandered to the edge of her farm. Every so often she would bend down to inspect one of her rows of carrots, or a patch of cabbages, and to the untrained observer that was exactly what she was doing.

However, a trained observer would note that her eyes would occasionally dart around the perimeter of the farm, or occasionally glance over towards the farm house. They would also note that it was odd that she was inspecting her crops while carrying a loaded pair of saddle bags on her back, or that she seemed to inch ever closer towards the edge of her land.

After she had taken one last look around the farm, she turned and leaped over the fence that surrounded her land, quickly making her way towards the road as soon as she was on the other side.

Carrot Top would be the first to admit that she wasn't the bravest of mares, but after what had happened yesterday, she had found that she couldn't sleep through the night. She kept wondering why the creature had not simply ended her, why it had taken the time to carry her back to town despite the danger that the town presented. Not even timberwolves ventured that close to a pony settlement, and Ursa only came close if provoked.

When she had told Script about her inability to sleep, he had told her to let the princesses handle it, that it would all be better in the morning.

Well, morning had come, and all Twilight Sparkle had said about it was 'it was being taken care of, the creature is benign, but the ponies of Ponyville should avoid it anyway, so as not to provoke it.'

Carrot Top had noticed that Twilight seemed a little annoyed when she had told Carrot this, almost as if she were disappointed about how little information she had been given. Carrot was pretty sure that she felt far more annoyed, however. She had seen the creature up close, seen its soulless black eyes, seen the blood drip from its claws and the drool drip from its chin. It could have killed her in an instant right then and there, but as she played back the memory of what had happened, she was sure that the thing had *deflated* when it had seen her, almost as if it were scared of her.

That was why she was having trouble sleeping. She wasn't having nightmares about the terror she had seen, but rather she couldn't put to bed the questions that endlessly plagued her.

She was so lost in her own thoughts that she completely missed the other pony lying by the side of the road. She didn't miss the throat-clearing sound he made, though.

"I thought I would find you out here, love," she heard Written say.

Carrot Top spun around to see Written Script lounging against a tree next to the road, his hooves behind his head and a blade of grass between his teeth. He had a very nonchalant attitude, though his eyes were filled with worry.

"Don't try to stop me, Written, I have to do this," Carrot Top said as she turned back towards the road.

"Who's trying to stop you? I know you well enough to know that when you get into one of these moods, not even Discord would be able to turn you from your course," he said as he sprang up from where he was lying. "I'm just here to make sure that you don't get into any trouble."

She smiled thankfully at him as he walked up to her. "Thanks for understanding."

"No problem, though to be honest, I couldn't really sleep last night either. Kept thinking about what happened, and how certain things really didn't add up," Written said as he gave his wife a peck on the cheek.

"Like what?"

"Like why it howled to alert the town that it was there. It could have just left you there, but instead it purposefully let everypony in town know it was there, and even went so far as to let some of us see it," Written said thoughtfully. "That doesn't sound like a wild animal to me."

"What do you think it is then?" Carrot asked as they resumed their journey towards White Tail Woods.

"Just a hunch, but I think it might be sapient. I've never heard of any race that looks even remotely like it, though," Written Script said, a thoughtful look on his face.

"Well, if it is, I think it deserves a bit of a thank-you for the kindness it showed me yesterday," Carrot Top said, smiling as she opened the top of her left saddlebag to reveal a box of cupcakes.

Written Script looked a little dubious at that. "I'm pretty sure it's a carnivore, so I doubt that it would be able to even stomach those."

Carrot Top looked a little crestfallen at that, but cheered up when her husband threw a foreleg over her withers. "However, if I'm right, and it is sapient, then I'm pretty sure that it will appreciate the gesture all the same," he said cheerfully.

Carrot Top smiled at this, and leaned into his embrace, glad that he was there to support her.

"Besides, if it doesn't eat them, I'm pretty sure that it wouldn't mind if I took a few," Written said, a mischievous glint in his eye.

Carrot gave him a rough shove and an eye roll at that.

* * *

I smelled baked goods.

Not just any baked goods either. These were cupcakes, probably baked this morning, and topped with frosting made from scratch.

By all that is holy, I have missed baked goods. I thought as my saliva glands kicked into overdrive. I missed them so much that sometimes, during my weaker moments, I would go to town under the cover of darkness and stand outside that weird gingerbread house, just to smell the wonderful scent that emanated from that building.

I had stopped going recently, though, because I had noticed that the inhabitants of the building had started leaving a plate of baked goods out on the front porch at night. Most people would have thought that as just odd, but my paranoia had led me to believe that some sort of trap had been laid for me.

On retrospect, especially after taking a bath with *real soap*, they were probably just being nice. They probably had noticed a shape that had lurked outside their store, and had thought that I was some sort of homeless pony that needed food.

Still don't think they would have left the cupcakes if they had known what I was, though.

I was confused though. Usually I could never get that smell this far away from town, but my nose was telling me otherwise. This could only mean that there were ponies in my woods, and that they were carrying cupcakes, probably for some kind of picnic.

How likely was it that ponies were having a picnic in a monster infested forest, though?

Now don't get me wrong, my opinion of the ponies had been significantly raised since last night, let's get that out of the way right now. However, I still couldn't trust that the soldiers from last night had told the townfolk that I was friendly, nor would the townfolk necessarily trust the government when they told them that the evil looking monster that haunted the woods was perfectly safe.

True, I was again applying human logic to ponies, but that was what had kept me safe so far.

It was also what had kept me so freaking lonely these past six months.

So, against my better judgment, despite the whole thing reeking of a trap, I started to follow my nose through the woods. I tried to be as stealthy as possible though, my paranoia still very strong despite recent events.

After all, If I'm going to err, I'd rather err on the side of caution rather than cause a misunderstanding that could get somebody killed.

That somebody being me, most likely, I thought as I made my way through the woods.

* * *

"So, how did you expect to find it exactly?" Written Script asked nervously as the pair trudged through White Tail. Normally the forest was a bright and cheerful place, but now each tree seemed to be a little more sinister, each shadow seemed to hide a claw, and each sound seemed like a nameless terror inching ever closer.

Of course, we've already seen that the creature isn't like that, he reasoned with himself as his eyes scanned the forest. However, Written couldn't help but feel a small worm of doubt enter his heart at the wisdom of what they were doing. Sure, dragons were sapient, but they were just as likely to eat you as they were to talk with you...

Well, Spike's the exception to that rule, but still... he thought.

"Well, I figured we'd start with where I met it last. We can look around a bit and see if we can find any leads, but if not, we should probably leave," Carrot Top said, her voice quivering slightly. *This seemed like a much better idea earlier,* she thought ominously as the shadows in front of her seemed to shift and move.

Despite their growing apprehension, though, they reached the clearing without any incident, although Written Script couldn't help but feel like something was out of place. Carrot immediately started searching for clues, but Script opted out, deciding that keeping a lookout was a far more intelligent idea.

As he swept the perimeter with his eyes, though, he couldn't shake the feeling of *wrongness* he was getting. The sun was out, the trees gently rustled in the breeze, everything pointed towards today being a completely normal day.

Something is wrong though, he thought grimly.

"Well, here's where the pig was," Carrot said in disgust as she spotted the blood trail. "But I think something else got to it while our friend was escorting me home, if these bear tracks are anything to go by."

"Well, there are other animals in these woods, so it shouldn't come... to..." Written Script started to say, but trailed off when he realized what was setting him on edge. "Uh... Carrot, honey?" he said, his voice quivering with fear.

Carrot Top paused at that, looking back towards her husband in alarm. "Yes? Did you see it?"

"No, but it is very, *very*, close by."

Carrot cocked an eyebrow at that. "What makes you say that?"

"Listen, and tell me what you can hear," Written Script said as he slowly edged closer towards his wife.

Carrot Top frowned, but swiveled her ears around anyway. "I don't hear anything."

"Exactly. For the past half hour there hasn't been a single tweet of a bird, or a rustle of a bunny in the grass. In fact, if I didn't know any better, I'd say there wasn't a single animal anywhere near us," he said as he reached his wife.

Carrot Top's eyes widened in understanding, her body language suddenly becoming far more nervous than it was before. "Do you think it's stalking us?" she asked, stuttering a little as she spoke.

"I don't think so. It would have been-" Written Script started to say, but his voice died in his throat when a shadow detached itself from the branches of a nearby tree and landed on the forest floor with a dull thud.

The two of them started to shake in earnest as it rose to its full height, then slowly started to creep forward.

It's a demon, Written thought in fear as the creature came closer. Its soulless black eyes, razor sharp fangs, spindly build and spines all spoke of a creature made from the sickest and most depraved of nightmares. However, as it got closer, Written Script couldn't help but feel his fear waning. Maybe it was because its fore claws seemed to be sheathed. Maybe it was the way its head kept darting from side to side.

Maybe it was the quivering, fearful way it took each step, almost as if it were forcing itself to move closer

despite its better judgment.

Carrot was right. It's downright terrified of us, he thought to himself as his own body relaxed.

The creature kept moving forward until it was only ten feet away. It stared at them for what seemed like an eternity before finally plopping itself down on the grass in front of them.

Well, now what? Written Script thought to himself.

* * *

I had been watching these two for a long time, and frankly I couldn't figure them out. They seemed nervous, as I would have been had I been wandering these woods, knowing that a monster was on the loose.

I had instantly recognized the orange one from earlier, but the other one was somewhat new to me. I had seen him from time to time in town, but I hadn't really payed any attention to him before. He was a unicorn who stood a little taller than the mare, probably around four feet three inches if you counted the horn. His coat and horn were both a dull shade of gray, which complemented his purple mane and tail quite nicely. On his flank I noted that he had a tattoo of a unfurled scroll with writing upon it, while his eyes were a deep green color.

What those marks meant still eluded me, but I figured it was probably some sort of clannish, coming of age thing, seeing as how the extremely young ones did not have tattoos. Despite my lack of understanding over the marks, though, it still made giving nicknames to the ponies extremely easy.

However, there were far more pressing matters at hand than the question of what those marks meant. Questions like 'why on earth are they even here?' The orange one in particular was a complete mystery, seeing as how during our last encounter I had very nearly made her wet herself in fear.

The two stopped in the clearing that we had met in yesterday and started to look around. Carrot was busy searching the ground in the clearing, while Scroll seemed to be keeping a lookout of the forest around them.

They looked scared, especially the gray one.

Well no duh. I would be shaking in my boots if I were them, I thought to myself.

As I watched them talk, however, Scroll suddenly became ten times as nervous as before. I briefly wondered why, until I noticed that he seemed to be whispering now. Carrot got up from where she was to look around, only to ask a question in confusion.

That's when I saw her ears turn, as if listening for something.

Well crap, their hearing must be better than I thought, I thought to myself.

I turned, readying myself to make a hasty break back towards my cave, when I suddenly stopped myself. I turned back, looking at them while deep in thought. I didn't know why, but something deep inside me wanted to go up to them, to at least try to communicate with them, find out why they were here, no matter how futile the gesture might be.

No, that would only scare them further. They might come back with a mob, despite what their rulers might say, the more paranoid part of my brain whispered. I had to agree with it, but somehow I found myself dropping from my perch in my tree, landing on all fours with a dull thud.

Their reaction was instantaneous. They both stopped what they were doing and started shaking with fear in earnest, their eyes wide and their ears flat against their skulls. *They didn't flee though,* I noted in amazement.

With each step forward that I took, I couldn't help but shout at myself, informing myself that this was a truly stupid idea. However, I soldiered on, regardless of my skyrocketing fear, though I did have the brains to keep looking around for any potential ambushes these two might have set up for me.

That's far enough, I thought as I stopped ten feet away from them. They seemed a lot less fearful of me now, so that was a plus. Either that, or I had just walked into their trap as planned.

We stared at each other for what seemed like hours, until I finally let my guard down and plopped myself down on the grass in front of them, looking at them in what I hoped was an expectant way.

Well, now what? I thought to myself.

Author's Notes:

Yeah, yeah, I know that I said that I wouldn't write this chapter until I had finished another chapter of The Nautilus Protocol, but I couldn't help myself.

I really hope that I did the characters justice. I know that if this kind of thing had happened to me, and some kind of alien monster had delivered me to my home safe and sound, I would have gone back to find out more.

Maybe I'm just an idiot, though.

I also felt that Written Script, while scared, would have been on board with trying to find our human protagonist. I really hoped that I portrayed their growing "This is a freaking bad idea" attitude correctly, though.

As for the human, he's still very fearful of ponies, but he recently had a positive experience with them. While his fear still rules the majority of his brain, he still hungers for more positive contact, and that drives him to break away from the routine that he has worked himself in.

I'm just gonna say this now, he really *really* needs a hug.

Chapter VIII

Chapter VIII

Sergeant Smooth Glider gently scratched his chin with his hoof, thoroughly bored with his current assignment. He and Corporal Thunder Rider had been sent here to relieve a pair of Night Sentinels some two hours earlier, and so far they have seen nothing of the creature that lived in the cave below.

At first, he had been excited about his orders. Keep an eye on an alien creature? Every fiber of his inner colt had squeed at the mere mention of the task, though the information that came with those orders had put a dampener on his mood.

"Sarge, do you think what Lieutenant Burst said was true? That it's just somepony who's been...changed...by aliens?" Corporal Rider asked nervously.

"We've seen worse from Discord, so yes, I do think that Lieutenant Burst has told us the truth," Sergeant Glider said as he settled further into the cloud the two of them were hiding in.

"Yeah, but do you really think that something like *that* isn't a monster?" Corporal Rider asked, pointing down towards the cave as he spoke.

Sergeant Glider looked over the edge of the cloud, his heart beating loudly in his ears. *He's even more grotesque than I had imagined...* he thought as he watched the pallid beast leave the cave.

"Keep your voice down and follow him, but do not interfere," Sergeant Glider said as he started to flap his wings, pushing the cloud through the sky as they followed the strange alien through the forest.

* * *

I continued to look at them, content to let them make the first move. *After all, I'm the monster here, anything I do would probably send them running for the hills,* I thought sardonically to myself.

Problem with this approach, though, was that they seemed to have the same idea. Honestly, I was just surprised that they had lasted this long, and by their own free will no less.

So, we just gonna sit here until the world ends? or... I thought, but was interrupted when Carrot approached, Scroll close behind. She reached behind her, somehow managing to twist her neck to the point where she could reach into her bags with her mouth. I had seen the ponies in town do this from time to time, so it wasn't too surprising. I was still impressed by her flexibility though.

I reflexively flinched back when she started to pull out whatever it was she was reaching for, only to be confused when all she removed from the bag was a medium-sized box. My confusion only mounted once I recognized the delectable scent of baked goods emanating from the box, my saliva glands instantly kicking into overdrive as the heavenly smell tickled my scent receptors.

She crossed the last few feet and gently set the box down in front of me, then nervously backed up. I couldn't believe my eyes, or my nose, when I opened the box to see thirteen perfect, beautiful cupcakes sitting in the bottom of the box.

I took one out and carefully examined it as I peeled the paper wrapper off of the treat. It was small, round, and perfectly shaped. It appeared to be made of a substance similar to chocolate, judging by the color and smell of it, and was topped with pink frosting. Oddly enough, I could also see that somebody had piped a tiny picture of a pink pony with poofy pink hair, waving its hoof on the top of the confection. The picture looked similar to The Pink One I had seen around town who had preoccupied herself with throwing confetti at the other ponies.

The similarities were uncanny, especially when I looked back into the box and noticed that all the cupcakes bore some kind of picture.

Intrigued, I looked closer to discover that the piping told some kind of story. The cupcake I had taken seemed to be at the beginning, so I put it back and picked up the box, trying to figure out the riddle in front of me.

The first one was the picture of the mare, waving happily. The next few showed me, surprisingly enough, as I made my way up to the gingerbread house from town. The last few were covered in sprinkles and piped balloons, while the last had a picture of the two of us hugging.

I looked up at the two ponies in front of me, to see if I could get any answers out of them. *Nope, they look just as confused as I am,* I thought as I watched them study the cupcakes in front of me.

I decided that whatever the message was, it wasn't as important as the sweet, delicious taste of the cupcakes it was written on. I carefully set down the box, then, with almost indecent haste, picked up the first one in the row and stuffed it into my mouth. I couldn't really chew properly, seeing as how my jaw and teeth had been redesigned with a more carnivorous mindset. However, I had found out through personal experimentation that my digestive system was still more or less omnivorous. It was just harder for me to eat vegetables now that I couldn't chew them.

Cupcakes were easier, though. I could just pulp them with my powerful tongue, then maneuver the mush to the back of my throat where I could easily swallow them. It was far more time consuming than the normal way of eating, but as the chocolate, chocolate-cream filled cupcake topped with raspberry icing exploded in my mouth, I couldn't bring myself to care.

How on earth do they have chocolate here? I thought in amazement as I picked up another cupcake. *This isn't earth, but the parallels here are uncanny.*

I looked up at the wonderfully brave duo, tears in my eyes at what they had done for me. I then took out two cupcakes from the box and set them in front of the two heaven-sent ponies.

They looked surprised at what I had done, but that didn't register in my brain as I moved the box of cupcakes out of my way and started to draw in the dirt in front of me.

* * *

"Uh, honey, why is Pinkie Pie on the cupcakes?" Written whispered in confusion as he examined the confections.

"I don't know. I had asked her this morning for a baker's dozen, and she had just given me the box right then and there, almost as if she were expecting me," Carrot Top said in amazement. "I just passed it off as Pinkie being Pinkie at the time, but this goes beyond that."

"Well, I don't-" Written started to say, but was interrupted when the creature popped one of the cupcakes into its mouth without hesitation, closing its eyes in satisfaction.

Written was slightly amazed to find that when it closed its eyes, it did, indeed, have eyelids. The eyelids were hidden, though, in a similar fashion to the secondary eyelids that beavers and certain other aquatic mammals had when swimming, though these did not appear to be transparent in any way.

The creature's face was truly an oddity. It seemed incapable of expression, somehow lacking the muscular structure required to show emotion. However, as he watched the creature pick up another cupcake, it was clear that it could feel, if the tears in its eyes were any indication of that sort of thing.

"Why is it crying?" Carrot asked, concern creeping into her voice.

Written just shook his head in confusion. "I wish I knew, honey. I just wish it would talk to us. On a guess, though, I would say that it almost seems... lonely."

As they watched it pop another cupcake into its mouth, they were again surprised by the creature when it reached into the box and pulled out two of the delicious confections. It then gently set the two cupcakes down in front of the two ponies, then moved the cupcake box off to the side.

What it did next confused the two even more at first. It quickly smoothed out a patch of dirt in front of it, then began to draw with some apparent skill.

The first thing it drew was itself holding a cupcake, though the differences between the picture and the actual creature were too many to count. For starters, the picture didn't have fangs, but instead a smile, as well as a single hand raised with one of its thumbs pointing up. What this gesture meant was lost on Written Script, though he assumed that it meant something positive.

He also noticed that the creature had drawn pupils and irises on the eyes, though why it had done this was a mystery to him.

"I think he's trying to say he's thankful," Carrot said slowly.

"He?"

"Well, he's clearly not a she, and I'm starting to feel uncomfortable calling him an it," Carrot Top answered, blushing a little when she spoke.

Written Script didn't say anything, as his attention was again disrupted when the creature smoothed out the dirt again, removing his previous work to begin something else. This time he started to draw two heads, one of a pony, and another of himself. Above the pony head he drew an oval, with a small semi-crescent leading down to the pony's mouth. Inside the bubble he started to draw a series of wavy lines.

It was obvious that the creature was trying to show a pony talking, though why it was doing this was beyond Written's comprehension.

At least, that was the case until he noticed a similar word bubble over the creature's non-pony drawing. This word bubble was different, though. Instead of being filled with wavy lines, it was filled with an odd assortment of lines and dots, arranged in a clear structure that Written Script's trained eye instantly recognized as a language, though the actual meaning of the words and symbols were something that Written couldn't understand.

"What is this supposed to mean?" Carrot asked as she sat down in front of the strange drawing, chewing on the cupcake in front of her.

"I think he's trying to say that he can't understand **our** language, though he still understands **a** language," Written said as he examined the writing closer.

The characters were strange and block-like, hinting at a far more intelligent creature behind the savage exterior that stood before them. Written's line of work as a scribe had exposed him to almost every language under Celestia's sun, so he was certain that this language wasn't something that anypony would be able to decipher without magic.

Written's eyes narrowed as he concentrated on the writing before him. He had a number of translation spells at his disposal, though even his best only had a thirty-five percent transcription accuracy if he himself was unfamiliar with the language.

It's worth a shot, though, if it means we are able to communicate on some kind of level, he thought as he charged his horn.

The creature flinched back at first, clearly scared of the magical display in front of him, though he calmed down when he noticed that the only thing that was happening was that his own writing was glowing. He cocked his head to the side as this happened, clearly intrigued as what Written was doing.

Okay, time to see if all that work back in college payed off. Translation Matrix, show me the money! Written thought as he weaved the arcane energies in front of him, trying to use the aethiric impressions left behind by the creature's thoughts while writing to decipher a meaning behind the words themselves.

The words glowed even brighter, then began to rearrange themselves, twisting the lines and breaking themselves into new and interesting shapes, until finally they formed into words in the Equestrian tongue.

The message was small and simple, just a few words, so the errors caused by the translation were very small (if Written was any sort of judge about that kind of thing). The meaning itself, however, was crystal clear, and Written Script could only hoof pump when he realized that he had been successful.

"I do no understanding what you are speaking to me?" Carrot Top read in disbelief. "Why would he write that?"

"Probably the first thing that came to his head while he was drawing," Written Script said as he silently congratulated himself. "Also, I'm not certain this is accurate, seeing as how the spell only has a thirty-five percent transcription accuracy when translating a language that I don't know."

"Can you translate a message to him?" Carrot Top asked hopefully.

Written Script just shook his head at that. "No, for that I would need to understand his language completely. The spell simply can't translate into a language that I do not understand, and barely works translating his language into a tongue that I do understand without a proper understanding of his language. There are spells that would allow me to speak to him directly, though those are beyond my understanding. Twilight might know a few, though."

The creature seemed transfixed by the writing in front of him, almost as if unable to believe what had just happened. He seemed to snap out of whatever world he was lost in, and began to scribble out more and more writing in the dirt at his feet.

"Hey, hey!" Written yelled, waving his hooves to get the creature's attention. The creature looked up at Written, cocking his head to the side as he did so. Once Written was sure that he had the creature's attention, he held his hooves far apart while shaking his head. "It's not going to work if you write too much, the spell breaks down if you make it too complex." He then significantly reduced the distance between his hooves while nodding. "Try to make it smaller."

The creature just looked at him for a bit, before smoothing out the words he had just written. He then replaced the novel he had been writing with fifteen short characters.

Written Script nodded once at this, then began to charge his horn once more, attempting to once again

translate the words in front of him.

This was a bit more... complicated, though. One of the words seemed to have a meaning that the Equestrian language had no word for, not to mention it was extremely complex, despite the simplicity of the four characters. This lead Written to believe that the word was important to the creature somehow, and that the word, despite being very short in the creature's native tongue, would somehow translate into a far more complex and lengthy phrase in Equestrian.

Finally, Written released the spell and looked down at the writing in front of him. The words didn't make much sense, but that was to be expected when you translated someone's name.

"My name Defender of People." Carrot read out loud, her eyebrows bunched in confusion. "Why did he write that?"

"He didn't. He wrote his name, but his name has a far more complex meaning despite the shortness of the word he gave us," Written said as he rubbed his chin. "His name is something small, probably only one or two syllables, though the meaning behind those syllables translates to 'Defender of People' in our language."

"Well, how about we call him Defender than? That sounds pretty good to me. Much better than 'monster' or 'the creature' anyway," Carrot Top said with a smile.

Written's only answer was to smile back.

* * *

Sergeant Glider watched excitedly as the creature continued his impromptu communication session with the two ponies in the clearing. Corporal Rider also watched, but with a far more guarded expression than Glider's look of pure wonder.

"I think that would answer your question, corporal," Glider said with a smile.

"I really think we need to go down there and get those ponies out of there. Weren't we ordered to prevent it from interacting with anypony?" the corporal asked uncertainly.

Sergeant Glider just shook his head at that. "You're remembering our orders wrong. We were ordered to make sure no harm came to him from ponies, not to prevent him from interacting with them. I'm pretty sure Princess Luna is going to be peeved that she wasn't here to see this, but she won't mind if we bring these two with us when we give our report."

Corporal Rider still looked a bit dubious at this, but nodded anyway.

* * *

Celestia studied the picture of the ape-like creatures from the crash intently. "...And you're sure that the collar was missing?" she asked as she pointed towards the creature's neck.

"I am certain, sister," Luna said gravely.

"What is his mentality?"

"He is alone and afraid. He longs for companionship, but knows that he will never be accepted looking the way he does. He misses his home greatly, and holds a large amount of needless guilt over what his captors forced him to do while he was their slave," Princess Luna said as she brought another pastry to her muzzle.

"...Do you think he would ever harm a pony?" Celestia asked quietly, instantly hating herself for even asking such a question.

"Willingly? No. He carries so much guilt in him that I doubt that he wouldn't dare to lift a claw against another sapient, even in self defense. He would rather run if attacked. If he were cornered, I believe that he would lay down his life rather than take another's," Luna said, taking another bite of the pastry.

Celestia nodded at this, satisfied that that question was out of the way. "What horrors could he have gone through to turn him into this? A shell of what he once was, running through the dark, hating himself for crimes he did not commit? What kind of person would do this sort of thing to another?" Celestia asked as she levitated another picture in front of her.

Luna just shook her head at this. "I only caught a glimpse from his nightmares, though it is clear that the other victims that shared in his fate deserve a proper burial, while their tormentors deserve a fate etched in stone."

"You are right, Lulu, though punishment for their crimes is out of our hooves now, seeing as how they have already passed beyond the veil," Celestia said as she packed up the pictures in front of her.

* * *

Pinkie Pie looked over the refreshments that she had prepared, going over each and every detail with extreme precision. Cookies, cupcakes, pies and punch all covered the table, and if her calculations were correct, her invitations would have reached their intended targets by now.

Soon, Sugar Cube Corner would be filled with the sounds of laughter and merrymaking, the perfect welcome to somepony new in town.

Slowly, Pinkie crept over to the window and looked out. There, just off in the distance, she could barely make out the edge of White Tail Woods. If she used her imagination, she could also make out a strange bipedal new friend coming out, ready to enjoy a wonderful party.

There really was nothing quite like meeting a new friend. That rush of excitement, the feeling of seeing that new smile, the feeling of contentment, knowing that she was the one to put that smile on their face.

She just hoped that he wouldn't chicken out this time.

Yes... *soon*... she thought as she stared out towards White Tail Woods, rubbing her hooves together in anticipation.

Author's Notes:

I CAN'T STOP MY INNER MUSE!

I want to start working on The Nautilus Protocol, but I found myself drawn to another chapter of this instead! What is wrong with me?

Anyway, if you were wondering, the human's name is Alexander, or Alex for short. Alexander literally means 'Defender of Man', and I thought that would be cool to put in as the pony translation for his name, though 'man' would have to translate as 'people', seeing as there are no humans in Equestria, and therefore no men.

Anyway, hoped you enjoyed what I've written here! No, translation isn't going to be easy in all cases. Certain specific ponies will be able to do it (Luna, Celestia, Twilight, and to a smaller extent, Written Script.) However, for the common pony, he will remain an enigma. A scary, scary enigma.

Anyway, I promised an introduction of the Mane Six, and here is the first real one with Pinkie! Yay Pinkie!

Chapter IX

Chapter IX

Carrot Top's mind was spinning with everything that she and her husband had learned from their encounter with the strange creature. At first, Defender had tried to get them to talk to him, but after using an imaginative combination of drawings, miming, and interpretive dance, they managed to convey the fact that their method of translation was strictly one-sided.

He seemed to deflate a little upon finding this out, but that didn't stop him from writing a few more things about himself before leaving. And while the translation of those few precious words were highly suspect, it still gave Carrot and Written a lot to think about as they slowly made their way back home.

"Carrot, what do you think he meant when he said 'my shape not shape'?" Written asked, suddenly breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

Carrot just shook her head at that. "I don't know, I'm more concerned about what he said after that."

"'I monster, not monster. Real monster bring me here?' Yeah, that's not ominous at all," Written said, shivering a little as he spoke.

Carrot Top was about to answer, but stopped when she heard a fluttering, clinking sound from somewhere above her. Then, without much further warning, an armored pegasus fell out of the sky and landed gracefully in front of them, scaring the crap out of both of them.

"Don't do that!" Written Script said, desperately trying to get his heart rate back down to normal.

"Sir, ma'am, I'm going to need you to come with me," the soldier said stiffly.

"Umm... are we in trouble for something?" Carrot asked nervously.

"No ma'am, the Princesses would just like to talk to you about what you saw in the forest," he said stiffly.

Oh dear, I was not prepared for royalty, Written Script thought as his heart dropped into his stomach.

* * *

Almost, and... there! I thought, as I lifted up the fruit of my labor.

After months of effort, planning, experimenting, and failure, I had finally made a wearable pair of pants. Sure they were ill-fitting, sure one leg was longer than the other, sure they were just barely held together with leather strips, but at least I wasn't going to be running around butt-naked anymore.

This was especially important for me, now that I could expect at least some non-violent interaction with the locals. I knew that ponies weren't exactly big on clothes, but they could kind of get away with it since their...stuff...wasn't exactly hanging out in full view of everyone.

I, on the other hand, would never be able to get away with that. Sure, I could get away with it while running through the forest by myself, but human men without pants rarely do well in social situations.

One thing's for sure, though. After going through all of that, I now had a real respect for all the crap that tailors had to go through. I was just glad I didn't have to learn how to tan hides in the wild too.

That would have been a nightmare. Thank you Uncle Jerry and your obsession with hunting. Especially for your obsession with brain-tanning, despite how completely disgusting it is, I thought as I put on my new pants, making sure to tie off the leather strip I was using as a belt.

Now that my loins had been girded, I was ready to meet with alien royalty.

...Yeah, I couldn't keep a straight face either. I would have preferred a nice suit, probably something dark, with a rather snazzy tie to go with it. However, as I thought about that, I figured that a suit would probably make me look too much like slender man, so maybe that wouldn't have been such a good idea. Anyway, that wasn't until tomorrow, if the piece of paper was to be believed, so I pretty much had the rest of the day to myself.

Which meant that I was now bored. Up until this point, I had always had something to do, whether it was cooking, hunting, or trying to make these freaking awesome pants. If I was lying to myself, I would say it was because I was such a hard worker, and I hated to be idle.

If I was being truthful, however, it was because the nightmares weren't quite so bad if I went to bed exhausted.

As I looked around my cave, my eyes were irresistibly drawn to the pink box that sat next to the fire. Half of the cupcakes were already gone, but enough remained to give a pretty good idea of the message that was written on the top of each one. Now, after really looking at them, they seemed to be an invitation of sorts. It was clear that The Pink One wanted me to come to that delicious-smelling gingerbread house, but why? The sprinkles and balloon cupcakes between me arriving and the hug between us made no sense, and why on earth would she want to hug a monster?

I should probably just forget about it, I thought as I plopped down on the log next to the fire. *There was no way I would be welcome in town, not now at least. She probably didn't know just how horrifying I was. I suppose I should grab a stick of charcoal and see how much my drawing skills have deteriorated since coming here.*

As these and other thoughts chased themselves around in my head, I couldn't help but pick up the box of cupcakes and absentmindedly stuff one into my mouth.

* * *

"You're here! I'm so glad you could make it!" Pinkie Pie said in excitement as she opened the door.

"I'm glad I could come too! You always throw the best parties, though I'm not certain why you threw this one," Twilight said as she entered Sugar Cube Corner. "You only said that there was a new pony in town, but you didn't say who it was, or when they arrived."

Pinkie just smiled at that as she pulled Twilight into the building, shutting out the cool autumn night as she did so. "Of course I didn't, silly! He hasn't introduced himself yet, so I don't know what to call him! Though as for when he arrived, he's actually been here for a while. I've seen him about, but he's been really difficult to get an invitation to," she said as she bounced her way over to the snack table.

"That doesn't sound like you, Pinkie. As far as I've been able to tell, you've always been able to get an invitation to anypony," Twilight said dubiously.

As Twilight made her way through the party, she noticed a few more things that were out of place. For starters, other than Twilight, Spike, and the other Elements of Harmony, there wasn't anypony else here. Even if the guest of honor hadn't shown up yet, this was still pretty sparse for a trademark Pinkie 'Welcome to Ponyville!' party.

Also, while all the fixings for the party were there, such as music, food and party games, the ponies weren't really involved in any of it. Instead, they were all watching Pinkie with varying levels of intrigue.

"Umm... Pinkie? You know as well as I do that there hasn't been anypony new in town for a while now. The last one to come to town was Cranky, and you've already established that he's not one for parties. You mind telling us what's going on?" Rainbow asked as she hovered over her pink friend.

However, before Pinkie Pie could open her mouth to respond, all six of the assemble ponies jumped when an ear-piercing, soul rending shriek came from outside the building. In a flash, Pinkie was already out the door before any of the others could even get their thoughts in order. In fact, Twilight could have sworn that Pinkie hadn't so much as ran out as she simply disappeared in a cloud of dust. Only the opening and shutting of the door marked her passage, letting the others know that no spellcraft had been involved in her vanishing act, though that last part was still a bit suspect (This was Pinkie Pie after all).

As Twilight ran to the front door, closely followed by the other four, she could hear a commotion outside as well as the echoes of Pinkie Pie's voice fading in the distance. "Wait! come back!" Pinkie said, though to whom, Twilight wasn't sure. Once outside, Twilight immediately spotted the pony who had caused the shriek, as well as those who were making the commotion.

In the center of the street Twilight could see Mrs. Cake, who looked like she had seen a ghost. On the ground behind her was what looked like Mrs. Cake's weekly supply of groceries, scattered where she had dropped them when she had reared up, throwing her loose-hanging saddle bags from her back. Around her Twilight could see that quite a crowd had gathered, all questioning her, trying to get some sort of answer out of the seemingly comatose baker.

"Mrs. Cake! What happened?" Twilight asked as she approached the shaking mare, her friends close behind.

"M-m-m-m-monster! Monster trying to get into my house! Trying to get to my children!" she stuttered, horrified at what she had seen. "I-I-I-I screamed, and it went that way!" she said as she pointed off to where Pinkie Pie could still be seen in the distance.

* * *

"Where in Tartarus did he go?" Sergeant Weather said as he searched the forest below. After he and Private Heart had relieved Sergeant Glider and Corporal Rider, they had faithfully kept an eye on the creature, only for it to disappear once the sun had gone down.

Sergeant Weather wasn't even sure what had happened. One minute the creature was standing at the entrance of his cave, and the next minute he had vanished. He hadn't even looked away for that long before it had pulled its disappearing act either!

"Princess Luna is going to kill us..." he said as he rubbed his forehead with his hoof.

* * *

Why did I think that this was a good idea? It must have been the cupcakes. Why am I such a sucker for baked goods? I thought as I sprinted towards the edge of town, desperate to reach the safety of the forest before I was caught by the mob.

Something was wrong, though. Instead of a large group of hooves, I could only hear a single set. Instead of the huge, deafening drone of noise from a lynch mob, I could only hear a single, pleading, tearful voice.

My ears must be playing tricks on me, I thought as I doubled my speed, determined to put as much distance between me and the perceived mob. *There can't be just one pony behind me, there must be at least a hundred, all clamoring for my blood.*

I knew I wasn't going to lose the mob if I stayed on the street, so as I ran, I coiled my legs underneath me and launched myself towards the building on my right.

If I had been a normal human, all that would have happened is I would have made a short hop, followed closely by me landing on my face after tripping. However, as I've stated before, I wasn't exactly human anymore. So when I launched myself, I easily cleared the edge and landed on the thatch roofing.

Fortunately, I managed to land on the ridge of the roof, the center support beam preventing me from falling through and allowing me to bounce to the other side. *Okay, now that I've left them in the dust, I can finally get out of here...* I thought as I ducked into the alley in front of me.

...Only to run straight into something pink, teary eyed and adorable.

She said something, something that I couldn't understand. I didn't bother trying, though, as I turned and fled the other way, deftly dodging her outstretched hooves as I bolted. *If she's here, the mob can't be far behind...* the irrational, fear riddled part of my brain told me.

Then why was she trying to hug me?

I twisted and turned, dodging down alleys in my mad dash to get away, then stopped after ducking into what appeared to be a closed train station to catch my breath. I knew from my previous excursions that the northern edge of the woods I made my home in wasn't too far from here. If I could just make it, I'd be in the clear.

I was interrupted in my thoughts when I heard a shuffling sound behind me. I quickly turned to spot the pink specter from before, rising out of the garbage can I was leaning against. In a flash I was off, racing across the tracks and towards the woods, praying that she'd lose interest once we reached the tree-line. *What does she want from me? Is she really that determined to make me pay for being a monster? For coming into town and scaring everybody?*

But she was the one who sent me the invitation in the first place...

I shook my head, trying to rid myself of the thoughts that plagued it. *No, you've had extremely good luck with the ponies that you've met so far, but you're still just a monster. You cannot expect that luck to carry you through forever!* I thought as I reached the trees. *Your only hope is to somehow escape that pink demon.*

She hasn't acted like how you think she is. She isn't even armed.

I twisted and turned, changed my path, doubled back, and generally did my best to lose The Pink One and her mob, hoping against hope that I could somehow get away

I slowed down as I reached the stream, a quick glance told me that no one had followed me, and as I listened, I could tell that I had somehow lost my pursuers. I then sat on my haunches in front of the stream, out of breath and exhausted. As I sat there, I noticed that I had reached one of the eddies in the stream where the water formed a perfect mirror, allowing me to see myself in all of my terrifying glory.

I had seen the sight before, but I was still horrified each time I saw my own reflection. I still couldn't quite reconcile my new face with the one in my memories. *I'm nothing but a monster. What other reason could she have to chase me? What possible reason could she have?* I thought as I lowered my head to take a drink.

As I sat up after my drink, I studied my reflection again, the water rippling and distorting the image before finally becoming calm again. As I watched, a plethora of emotions clashed inside of me: Rage, despair, loneliness, all boiling inside of me, seeking release. The feeling built until I could no longer contain them, and I found myself pounding my fists impotently against the hated reflection in front of me, splashing the water in all directions.

As the feelings inside subsided, I couldn't help but turn upon myself. *Why am I like this? There was no mob, yet I still ran. Am I truly that scarred from my abduction? From my self-imposed exile?* I thought as I stared at the slowly reforming reflection.

As I watched, I spotted a pink figure slowly approach from behind. At first I thought she looked scared, what with her tail being as low as it was and her ears flat against her skull. Her hair also seemed to have deflated at some point during the chase, making her look like an entirely different pony.

It took me a second longer than I would like to admit to realize that it wasn't fear in her eyes, but something else entirely. It was an emotion that I hadn't seen in over six months, unless you counted that weird moon dream I had had last night. It was something that had become so alien to me, that I had almost forgotten what it looked like.

Slowly, she crept closer, almost as if she were trying not to scare me again. On reflex, I tensed up as I felt her hoof touch my shoulder. When nothing happened, though, I slowly I turned my head towards her, fearing what I would see in those brilliant blue eyes.

What I saw wasn't hate, or even fear. All I saw was sadness and compassion, with a deep undertone of empathy that I had rarely seen in anyone before. She said something in words that I could not understand, her voice filled with hope, but framed in the form of a question. All I could do was stare into those eyes, unable to even move as she reached with her other hoof towards my other shoulder and pulled me into a sudden, inexplicable hug.

The gesture was so unexpected, so uncalled for, so *needed*, that I couldn't help but wrap my arms around her as tears ran freely from my eyes. I felt my whole body seize up and start to shake as a shuddering sob tore itself from my throat, all the emotions that I had bottled up for the past six months suddenly crashing down on me as I hugged the soft, pink pony in front of me. I don't know how long we sat there as I felt the emotions inside of me drain like a poison, but at some point I became aware of other voices nearby. Some were alarmed, some were belligerent, some were fearful. The Pink One responded in a cheerful, bubbly voice, however, only to be answered with what sounded like arguing.

I didn't care though, all that existed for me at that moment was the pink pony in front of me who, somehow, was leeching away all the sadness, loneliness and pain I was feeling.

Then, without warning, I felt someone else join in the hug. I tried to see who it was, but I couldn't quite make it out through the tears that blurred my vision. The moonlight was bright enough for me to faintly make out something yellow, but anything other than that was frankly beyond my understanding.

What...? I thought incoherently as the two ponies gripped me tighter. I couldn't quite grasp what was happening around me, but I wasn't afraid of them anymore.

Something inside changed at that point. I had feared rejection so much, even when the ponies had proven time and time again that they weren't anything like what I had expected, that when they had tried to give me a chance to prove myself, I had repaid them with nothing but fear and doubt.

Yeah, I was a monster alright, but the monster I was wasn't something I could ever see in the reflection. No, the monster I fought was instead something deep inside me, causing me to second guess myself and everybody around me, despite all the evidence I had to the contrary.

I no longer tried to hold back the tears after that realization, and for the first time since I was ten, I cried like a child.

Author's Notes:

Yeah, yeah, I know. You guys were probably expecting more of a fear reaction from the ponies, and let me tell you that there was one. After Alex and the mane six left, the town pretty much went into an uproar. Monsters trying to get into pony's homes? nuh-uh, they ain't having any of that.

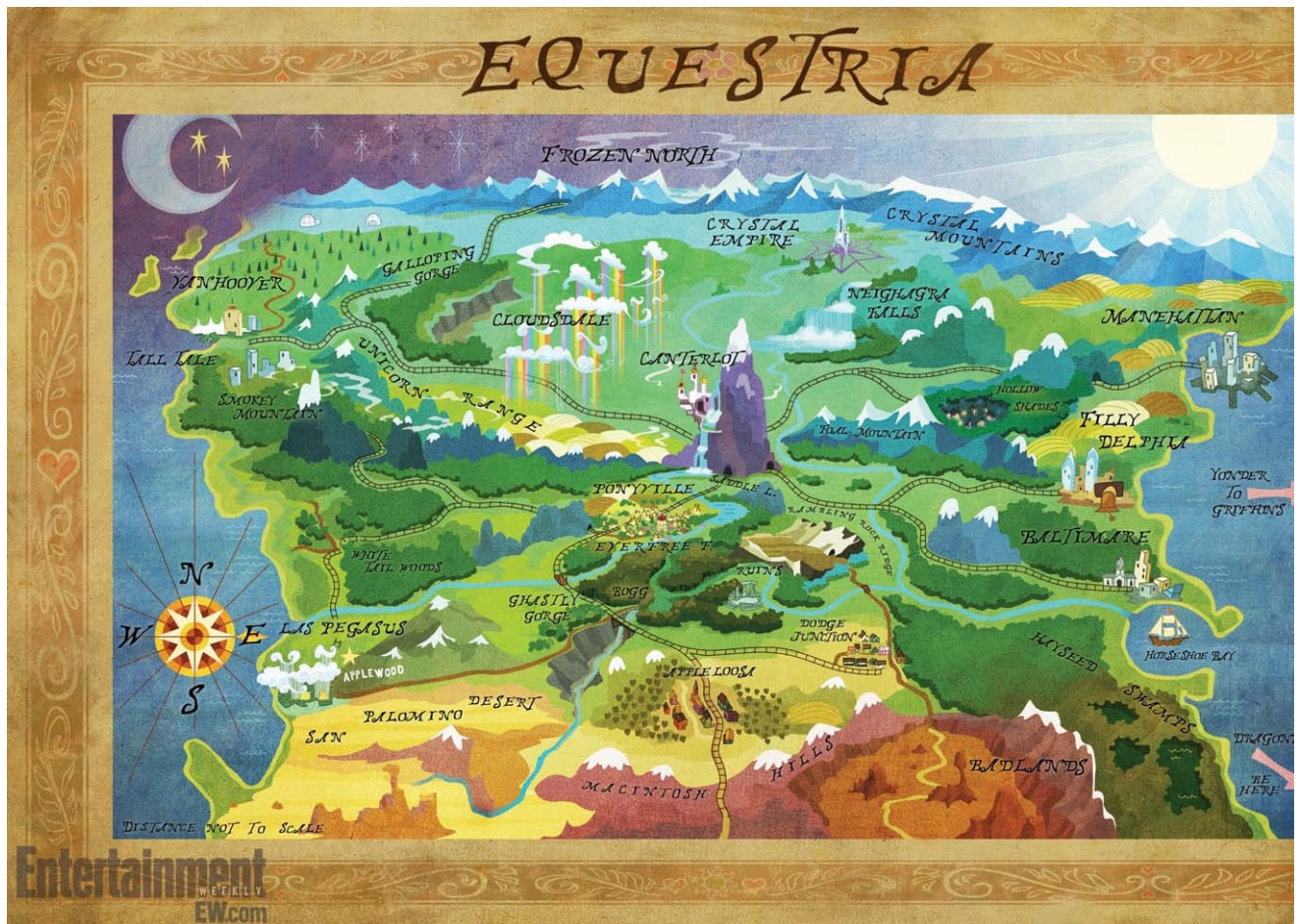
However, Pinkie is different. Despite their reaction to Zecora, I always imagined her and Fluttershy to be the first to welcome Alex with open hooves, Pinkie because she's Pinkie, and Fluttershy because to her, Alex just looks like a far more scary, yet far more hurt version of the manicore from episode two.

Don't worry though, still setting up stuff, and Alex is in for a large amount of resistance as the story progresses. He just isn't going to see much (if any) from certain ponies, simply because of his past actions and their inherent character traits. Opposition is what makes a story. Any tale without it is just plain boring, and you guys didn't come here for boring, you came to be entertained.

Also, why did he run? Well, despite what had happened with Luna and Carrot Top, he still harbored a deep distrust and fear. He knew that you can't gage a whole civilization based on the actions of a few, so with that point of perspective, his reaction at hearing the scream was totally justified.

Also, how did Alex manage to give the guards here the slip? Well, to be honest, he wasn't even trying. He just stepped out of his cave and decided to practice being sneaky at precisely the right time. Plus the Sergeant failed his perception check.

Well, prepare to be entertained.



Also, I wanted to show you something here. See this map? I always envisioned that the White Tail Woods wasn't just the portion of woods to the west of the mountain range to the west of ponyville, but that it was also the woodlands that stretched north and around that mountain range, especially since I don't see any other name attached to those woods. That makes White Tail pretty big, and close, if you had trouble visualizing it before.

Chapter X

Chapter X

Written Script was so busy hyperventilating that he didn't even notice that he and Carrot Top had entered the throne room. He had never done well in social situations, less so when dealing with celebrities. Factor in that it wasn't a celebrity, but *the Princesses of the Sun and Moon* that they were meeting, and one could see why he was so freaked out.

He was freaking out so much that he didn't even notice that he had reached the center of the throne room, or that the guard to his right had already announced the two of them. He did, however, notice that the two Princesses were looking at him with a mixture of concern and compassion. "Written Script, are you feeling well?" Princess Luna asked him uncertainly.

Written Script gave a squeak similar to that of a stepped on mouse, then promptly passed out.

"I'm sorry, Your Highness," Carrot Top said, trying to simultaneously bow and wave off the concern being directed towards the comatose stallion. "My husband... doesn't do well when meeting others, especially those he holds in high regards. I'm afraid that your presence has overwhelmed him."

"Are you sure he will be okay?" Celestia asked as she examined the comatose stallion.

"Quite sure. He'll be fine," Carrot Top said as she rose from her bow, shuffling back and forth on her hooves.

"Very well," Princess Luna said, sitting back down on her throne. "Captain Seeker, please have the poor stallion moved somewhere where he may recover."

Captain Dark Seeker saluted at this, then motioned for a pair of guard ponies to move the unconscious Written Script to another room. After he had left, both Princesses sat down on their thrones again, then looked at the quietly sweating mare that was left behind. "Miss Top, it has come to our attention that you and your husband recently met with a... rather unique being while exploring the White Tail Woods. We were hoping that you could tell us what happened during that meeting," Celestia asked.

Carrot shuffled nervously from hoof to hoof before answering. "What do you intend to do to him?" she asked.

"We merely want to understand him, and to help him if we can. The creature's life is, to be frank, a tragedy. We hope to change that," Princess Luna said, sadness in her eyes.

Carrot Top looked up at the Princesses at this, a question in her gaze as she opened her mouth. "What happened to Defender?"

* * *

I don't know how long we remained like that, but my sobbing eventually slowed, then stopped as I finally cried myself dry. I sniffled a little, slightly mortified that not only had I cried like a sissy, but that I had witnesses to my emasculation. *Well, at least they have no way of knowing that crying in public isn't the most masculine thing to do on my planet...* I thought as I wiped my eyes on the back of my hand. I also had a large buildup of mucus where my nose was supposed to be, but there was very little I could do about that until I got my hands on a decent tissue.

Now that my eyes were clear and I was somewhat coherent, I could finally make out the forms of the other individuals around me. The two closest to me were The Pink One (who's mane had somehow re-inflated, don't ask me how) and, surprisingly enough, the yellow pegasus with the butterfly tattoo. Her long mane and tail were pink, and her mane seemed to form a heart shape whenever I glanced her way. As I looked at her, she smiled, her sapphire gaze boring into my soul, filling it with a quiet peace. She had seemed timid whenever I had spotted her in town, but apparently that timid nature hid a much braver pony underneath.

About fifteen feet in front of me I could see the other four that had followed me into the forest. I recognized them all, having seen them from a distance as I had observed the town, but only now being able to really get a good look at them. I could see that the blue, rainbow maned, sound-barrier breaking pegasus had a rainbow lightning-bolt tattooed on her flank. It suited her spectacularly, especially seeing as how she was probably just as fast as the electricity depicted on her flank. She was hovering above the others, an aggressive expression on her face as she gave me the stink eye with those large, violet eyes (not that I could blame her).

Directly underneath her was the orange pony with the stetson. I had spotted her selling apples from time

to time, and she seemed to be responsible for running the apple orchard just outside of town. Her hair was a deep golden color, with her mane and tail both tied up into ponytails. I could see that three apples adorned her flank, but on her face was an expression of distrust, written as plain as day in those green eyes of hers.

She also had a lasso in her mouth. How she thought she was going to swing that darned thing was beyond me, but I was still leery of it. After watching the pegasi control the weather, I wasn't really sure about what was impossible anymore. She wasn't making any threatening moves at the moment, though, so I filled the lasso under 'freak out about later.'

To the farm pony's right, I spotted a white unicorn with an immaculately styled purple mane and tail, while on her flank I could see a trio of diamonds that reminded me strongly of Minecraft for some reason. I knew that she ran the weird carousel clothing store, but little else, thanks to my less than stellar knowledge of pony customs or languages. On a guess though, I figured she was probably a little snobbish, and just a bit too obsessed with appearances.

On her face was a look of complete disgust and horror, though her sapphire gaze wasn't trained on my face. Rather they were locked on my Awesome Pants of Wonder. Why on earth she was so enamored by my pants was beyond me, though on a guess I would say that she was probably struck speechless with just how awesome they were.

However, as fascinating as the various reactions of the alien ponies were, my attention was inevitably drawn to the purple unicorn who was cautiously approaching me. She had dark blue hair with a pink and purple stripe running through her mane and tail, and on her flank I could see a starburst tattoo with five, smaller stars surrounding it. I had seen her about town before, and honestly she had terrified me more than any of the others, what with all the teleporting and spellcraft that I had seen her use.

She looked at me with those violet eyes of hers, almost as if she were asking a question. As I watched, I saw her fear fade, only to be replaced by something else entirely. Someone behind her said something, and she responded in an almost off-hand manner, almost as if she wasn't really paying attention to the question.

She said something, a single word, phrased in the form of a question. It took me a second to realize that she was talking to *me*. I just shook my head at this, then shrugged my shoulders, trying to convey that I couldn't understand what she was saying.

She nodded at this, almost as if she were expecting that reaction, then closed her eyes in concentration. I saw her horn light up, and I reflexively flinched back, only to be comforted as a yellow hoof touched my arm. The yellow pegasus, Butterfly I decided, then said something to the purple unicorn. Her tone was stern, far more so than I thought would ever come from such a timid creature. She then spoke to me in a comforting fashion as she gently rubbed my arm with her hoof, similar to how one would comfort an animal when it was scared.

I was okay with this, oddly enough. It wasn't like we could understand each other, so the animal approach was probably her best bet on how to interact with me. That being said, I felt a lot more calm as the purple unicorn, Star, quickly spoke to Butterfly. I assumed she was explaining what she was trying to do, but that was all I could do; assume.

Star's horn began to charge once more, but with both The Pink One and Butterfly at my sides, I felt no fear as whatever Star was doing began to take effect. I felt a slight tingle in my ears and throat, but other than that, nothing seemed to-

"...happy greetings?" Star said, though I could tell that that wasn't what she really said. She had said something in her native tongue, but somehow I could hear a second instance of her voice overlaying the first, translating what she said into words I could understand.

"...Do you understanding reached?" she asked, tilting her head to one side.

This was it. After months of lurking in the shadows, being unable to communicate, fearing what the response to my presence would be, I finally was able to talk to someone. Someone on this planet had finally been able to translate what they were saying into words that I could understand!

...Only, there was a problem. I could understand her, sure, but that didn't mean that she could understand me. Whatever They did to me, it included making sure that it was impossible for me to communicate in any normal fashion. Trust me, I tried. All that has ever come out of my throat since waking up on this world has been unintelligible garbage and a howl that would have soaked the pants of any horror film fan.

This did not stop me from at least trying.

* * *

"Do you think it worked?" Fluttershy asked nervously as she looked up at the strange creature.

"How do you even know that it has a language to begin with? It could just be an animal, and that your gift with animals is the only thing keeping it from killing us all?" Rainbow asked, jutting her chin out aggressively at the creature.

"Hold on there Rainbow, the critter may be as ugly as sin, but it 'taint no animal. Don't you remember how it treated Carrot? And what about the fact that it was hugging Pinkie Pie before we even showed up? Fluttershy had nothing to do with this, and you know it!" Applejack said, spitting out her rope as she spoke.

Twilight just rolled her eyes at this, and turned her head to say something to Rainbow Dash as well, only to stop and whip her head back when she heard something come from the direction of the creature. "I... understand..." the masculine voice said. However, underneath the voice created by her spell, Twilight could hear another voice, one that was far more terrifying and completely unintelligible. Honestly, the voice just sounded like tortured grumbling with a high pitched scream overlaying the grumbles.

At that point, Twilight knew that something was very wrong with the creature. The spell was designed to take the words that were spoken by any sapient, and used the aethiric vibrations carried by those words and create new ones in the subject's own voice that could be understood by anypony under the spell's effects. However, the words created here were garbled, almost as if the creature was speaking through a hoof full of marbles.

This could mean a number of things, such as the subject of the spell having some form of brain malady that would prevent it from forming words correctly. However, that was unlikely given that such a malady would make translations just as garbled and random as whatever the subject had said in the first place. *No, another reason is probably at work here...* Twilight thought grimly to herself.

Historically, whenever the spell had been used on anypony who had had their tongues removed, or if their vocal cords had been damaged in some way, they would usually talk in a similar fashion, despite the fact that they were unable to form intelligible words at all. This fact added itself to the others that were part of her growing hypothesis about the creature.

"Are you unable to speak properly?" she asked the creature uncertainly. It closed its mouth with an audible snap, then slowly nodded its head while closing its eyes, almost as if it were ashamed.

"Don't worry, we can still understand you, but barely. The spell translates what you mean to say, not what you actually say," she said clearly and slowly, making sure that the spell had plenty of time to work its magic.

The creature's eyes shot open at this, and its head shot up in what she could only assume was surprise. "I... ask how, but knowing I wouldn't understand... saying what you mean," it said, its words filled with frustration. "Whatever you use make understanding happen, only broken understanding happen. I know pony saying, but not pony *saying*."

Twilight nodded at this, and was about to ask a question, but stopped when she felt a nudge to her side. "Well? What's it saying? You didn't exactly cast the spell on the rest of us," Rainbow asked, slightly irritated.

"Oh! Sorry! I forgot, here..." Twilight said, quickly casting the spell on the others. "The spell doesn't create a perfect translation, and the creature noticed this. Other than that, you already know everything I've learned. Don't pester it-*him* with questions, though, I don't think he's ready for a full blown question and answer session yet."

"No, not ready. Ready tomorrow, not want talk long, meet with high rulers. Talk then, tell all," he said as he sat down on his rump. "Will talk some now, though, answer questions, not lot."

"You're meeting with your rulers? What are they like? Do they like parties? Ooh, I bet they-" Pinkie said as she bounced around the terrifying creature.

However, the creature interrupted her with a single finger on her lips. "I not speaking 'my rulers', I did wish. Speaking *your* rulers," he said, lowering his finger.

As Twilight tried to work this fragmented phrase out in her head, she was interrupted by a gasp from behind. "You're meeting with Princess Celestia and Princess Luna? *Wearing that!?*" Rarity asked in horror.

Twilight turned her head to tell Rarity off, thinking that the creature might be offended by this, but stopped when she heard him chuckle. "Not come with triple part suit. Only skin on back, not even my skin..." he said darkly. "However, just made today, myself. No knowledge before, proud what done. Not easy, not easy at all," he said as he picked at the leather pants he wore.

Twilight wasn't too concerned about the leather, though she knew many ponies that would have lost their lunch even at the thought of one creature wearing the hide of another. After all, Twilight had a pet owl, and one of her best friends happened to be an omnivore. Not to mention that when she had lived in Canterlot Castle she had met many of the dignitaries from the Griffon Kingdom. Most of these dignitaries would wear the traditional garb of their clan, which usually involved a trophy of some kind worn around the neck, usually obtained from a hunt or battle.

"So, where do you come from? I haven't seen anything like you before, that is, if it's okay that I ask, that is..." Fluttershy trailed off nervously.

"I not answer that, not knowing if rulers want you know where come from," he said uncertainly.

"Then just what are you? Can you answer that? And why were you hanging outside Sugar Cube Corner?" Rainbow Dash asked as she flew up close to him, eyeing him, daring him to make a move. The creature just flinched back at this, almost as if he wanted to run away again.

However, before he was able to do so, Pinkie Pie's forehoof shot up like lightning. "Ooh! Ooh! I know the answer to one of those! I invited him! He was the guest of honor at the 'Welcome to Ponyville' party we were having!" she said, as Twilight pulled Rainbow back with her magic.

"What? Why would you invite a monster to Ponyville? What were you thinking!?" Rainbow asked in shock.

"Rainbow Dash, he's not a monster!" Fluttershy gasped.

"No... she right... Am monster," the creature said, shaking his head sadly as he cradled his head in his hands. "Taken from home, from family. Changed, made weapon, weapon to hunt, to kill. Escaped. If go home, killed for looking like monster. Am monster, am..." the creature said, his voice shakier, more garbled than it was before.

Before the creature was able to say anything else, though, he was interrupted when Fluttershy wrapped her arms around the creature's neck, pulling him into a soft hug. "There there, you're not a monster..." she said softly into his ear as he continued to shake uncontrollably.

Rainbow backed up a bit at this, clearly shocked by these words. "I... I didn't know..."

Before she was able to apologize further, however, the creature continued to speak, its voice becoming increasingly harder to understand. "I come, hide in many trees, thinking ponies never accept. Would be killed, go pony town, but wrong. When orange pony hurt self, I bring to town. Guards find me, not hurt, return to cave. See that not monster, just monster on outside."

He then looked up at Rainbow, his expressionless, soulless eyes boring into her. "Why? Why ponies give doubt? Why ponies give chance? Look monster," he said, looking down at his hands. "Am monster. Scare ponies, but still give chance. *Why?*"

Rainbow just shook her head, unable to shake her gaze from those black eyes that seemed to be reaching into her soul, searching for the reason behind her kinds inexplicable kindness. When he didn't find the answers though, his gaze dropped as he let out a sigh. "Couldn't even try talk, not know language. So watch, remember old life, hunt, survive. Try make clothes for coming winter, out here for long time. Know death come eventually, but not willing die. Decide fight, live, prove that can turn sour fruit into drink, or at least into burning sour fruit," he said as he chuckled mirthlessly to himself.

"What's your name, partner?" Applejack asked uncertainly, breaking the uncomfortable silence that had followed that last cryptic statement.

"My... name... Defender of People," he said, wiping his eyes with the back of his hands.

"Defender of People? What a lovely name, very noble," Rarity said, trying to cheer him up.

Defender shook his head at this, then hiccuped. "Not 'Defender of People', Defender of People."

"You've lost me darling..." Rarity said gently.

"It's not his fault, Rarity," Twilight said quickly. "He said his name, but we don't have any words in our language that directly translate to what his name means. This made the spell string a collection of words together that best matched the meaning of the name. I'm not even sure what the original name is supposed to be because of how... radically... his mouth and throat have been... changed."

"Well, if'n it's a spell that's making him look like that, couldn't you change him back?" Applejack asked as she came closer to Twilight.

Twilight just shook her head at this. "I don't think it's magic. I scanned him while I was casting my translation spell, and I couldn't detect any polymorphic magic, much less any magic from the

transfiguration school. Whatever...*They*...did to him, it isn't magical in nature. At least, it isn't a magic that I can detect."

Defender nodded at this, then stood up. "Point reached, going home. Not want you trouble with rulers, for what said today. We talk later, yes?" he asked hopefully.

"Hold it! You can't go yet, you haven't even had a slice of cake!" Pinkie said as she leaped to her hooves, a look of horror on her face.

Defender just chuckled at that, then bent down and patted her on the head. "Not happen. Tired, need sleep before meeting royalty. No, party later, once everything calm," he said.

He then turned and disappeared into the forest. Twilight wanted to stop him, ask him more questions, but stopped herself. She knew that Defender had been through a lot, that he wouldn't answer anything that he wasn't ready to answer. She also knew that Celestia would contact her after meeting with Defender, especially if she sent a letter to Celestia tonight.

"What kind of monster would do that to an innocent creature?" Fluttershy asked, her eyes filled with horror as she watched Defender disappear.

"I don't know, Fluttershy, I really don't know..." Twilight said.

Author's Notes:

Well, here we go! Finally! two way communication between Alex and the ponies!

I really hope I did this scene justice. Most of it was done in a feverish haze (I've been sick, sue me), and I'm really not sure if I got the personalities of the ponies right. If I didn't, please tell me instead of hitting that downvote button.

I've actually been dreading reaching this point in the story, where the main character actually talks with the ponies. Will it fail spectacularly? Will I do the characters justice? Will you all lose interest and decide that you have better things to do? you know, classic second guessing bullcrap that **hopefully** every artist goes through before publishing anything.

Also, don't really have an editor for this story, not even a prereader. The prereader I have for The Nautilus Protocol finds this story uninteresting, so I can't get him to do it. That being said, I don't really have anypony to bounce ideas off of for this story before I publish it.

What I'm trying to say, is, please... be gentle...

clenches up, preparing for pain

Anyway, up next, meeting with royalty!

Chapter XI

Chapter XI

"...You of course understand that all that we have talked about this day is strictly confidential?" Celestia asked as she raised an eyebrow.

Carrot Top nodded once in understanding, her face thoughtful. "Can I at least talk about this with my husband? Even though he wasn't..."

"Of course you may, though I would advise discretion on some of the matters we've discussed," Princess Luna said as she nodded her head in understanding.

"Of course, Princess Luna," Carrot Top said as she turned to leave.

A thoughtful silence seemed to fill the throne room after the mare's exit, and Luna found herself unwilling to be the one to break it.

Fortunately, though, she did not have to, as her sister turned to her with a grin on her face. "So, his name translates into Defender, I really could not have foreseen that," Celestia said as she raised an eyebrow at her sister.

Luna just nodded at this, her face still a mask of concentration. "Yes, though I would still like to know his name properly, if only-" she said, but was interrupted as the door to the throne room burst open, allowing entrance for Captain Dark Seeker. His expression was one of worry as he galloped to the twin thrones, and Luna felt the bottom of her stomach drop when she heard what he had to say.

"Your Highnesses, I regret to inform you that the creature of the White Tail Woods has been grievously injured. Our doctors are seeing to him now, though they are unsure of his chances, seeing as how they know so little of his biology," Captain Seeker said as he bowed respectfully to the Diarch of the Sun and Moon.

* * *

I was tired as I made my way back to my lair, more tired than I had been in a long time. Well, unless you counted the hypothermia fueled pity party I was having the other day, but I was trying to forget that that ever happened. In fact, despite the deep-seated weariness I was feeling, I still felt far lighter than I had in months.

It was as if a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and I knew that it was in no small part due to the fact that it wasn't 'me against the world' anymore. I now had people that I could turn to if things became too great for me to handle. I had people that I could go to if I was struggling to survive, or if I just wanted to talk. Believe me, if you've been out in the wild, lacking even the basic ability to talk to *yourself*, you'll start wishing that the *trees* around you would speak, if only to break the monotony. Honestly, I didn't want to end our Q&A session, but I didn't want them getting in trouble with the authorities for knowing too much. Sure, the royalty were okay with my presence, but that didn't mean that they wanted everything about me available to the public.

...Okay, maybe that's a little bit paranoid, but government is still government. Even such well-meaning organizations such as the Men In Black did their best to keep the local populace in the dark about everything that went on alien-wise on earth.

I admit it, I'm a bit of a cinephile, but that didn't make my worries any less valid. Best not to anger this 'Sun Goddess' and 'Moon Goddess' if I could.

At least, I *thought* that was their names. Star's translations, while effective, weren't perfect. After all, I really didn't think that the blue one's name was 'Multi-chromatic Speed Demon.'

As I climbed the ladder into my lair, I couldn't help but wonder what the future would hold. Would these 'Goddesses' ask me to come with them to their city? To some sort of research facility? What then? Would I spend the rest of my days as a lab rat? Or would I be allowed to live free?

Well, if they wanted to lock me away in a lab somewhere, they would have already done that. I thought to myself, trying to banish away the paranoid thoughts that plagued me.

I decided that what I really needed was a good soak, so I threw off my pants and made my way to the back of the cave where the hot springs were located. I didn't bother lighting a fire, seeing as how my eyes would automatically adjust to the darkness, allowing me to see into the infrared spectrum. This had the beautiful side effect of making my bathing area a brightly lit canvas of reds and oranges, allowing me to

find the basin with ease despite the darkness that surrounded me.

I probably won't be allowed to live among them, but at the very least I can rest easy knowing that there won't be any hunting parties out looking for me, I thought as I sunk into the mineral water, letting out a groan of pleasure as the hot water eased away my tension and worries.

Maybe I could get a house somewhere? Or a job? I don't think they have computers here, but I could still teach them of my home and stuff... I thought lazily as I slowly drifted off.

* * *

I don't know how long I was asleep for, but I did not feel well rested when I awoke, so it couldn't have been too long. However, something was...off, and whatever it was was causing my heart to pound loudly in my ears as my breathing became erratic. Everything *looked* fine, but I had long since learned to trust my instincts over my senses, they having proved time and time again to get my sorry hide out of a number of tight spaces.

I strained my ears, hoping to pick up something other than the bubbling of the hot springs, hoping against hope that I was just scaring myself. *There...* I thought as I heard a faint humming sound behind me. I didn't know what to make of it, but it kind of reminded me of...

Oh crapbaskets... I thought as I pushed off against the basin of the hot spring, jumping straight up out of the water, barely dodging the blue beam of energy that had been aimed for my head. As soon as I had landed, I ducked and dodged, avoiding several more of those weird blasts before finally throwing myself behind a large outcropping of rock, my claws bursting from my fingers as my back hit the wall. I quickly risked a peek at my attackers, only to freeze in terror when I recognized the quadrupedal form and insectoid-like faces of the species that had kidnapped me and turned me into a monster.

My first thought was to run, to get as far away from here as possible and never look back. This thought was quickly squashed when I noticed that they had blocked my only exit from my lair. I was fast, that was true, but not nearly fast enough to weave and dodge through the incoming fire long enough to make a clean getaway. As they trained their weapons on my hiding place, I felt my shoulders sag in defeat. *This is it... they've come back for their property...I'm not going to survive this one, am I?*

However, as the aliens pulled the triggers on their weapons, a roaring sound started to echo in my ears, drowning out my previous despair, and replacing it with a far more primal emotion. Despite the fact that there were four of them, I still jumped out of my hiding place, lunging forward as I screamed in rage. They had taken my *home*, my very *humanity*, couldn't they just leave me alone?

The world seemed to slow down, and I could actually *see* the trajectory that the blasts would follow. Following this odd, but useful quirk in my eyesight, I quickly weaved back and forth, dodging each and every shot while simultaneously bringing myself closer to the alien in the front. I heard what sounded like swearing, but could see nothing but my own reflection in the alien's shiny black visor, its hideous mandibles clicking in what I could only assume was terror.

With an audible sigh, my claws found their mark, shearing through armor and chitin and bursting out the other side. The creature grunted something as it stiffened in my grip, but whatever it said was lost in my blind rage. The other three started screaming something as they fiddled with their weapons for a second, after which they let loose a much faster barrage of weapons fire, this time their blasts being a far angrier green color.

I assumed that they had not only switched to full auto, but had also switched the settings from 'stun' to 'kill', if Star Trek could be believed about that sort of thing. Again, time seemed to slow down as the energy bolts raced towards me, my augmented eyes easily picking out each bolt's trajectory. However, I knew that there were just too many this time, and that there was no possible way I could dodge the wall of death that was barreling towards me.

Fortunately, I had other options.

Snarling in anger, I whipped the still twitching form of the alien in my grasp up, using it to shield me from the fire that was directed my way. I then tucked my elbows in and crouched down, easily hiding my thin, emaciated frame behind the alien corpse's much bulkier one. I could feel each bolt as it struck home into the body on my claws, but I remained unscathed as the alien voices became more frantic. Thinking quickly, I started moving forward, throwing the corpse at the three as I did so. Their swearing intensified as the body bore each of them to the ground, and I quickly rushed them, kicking one in the head and slashing at another one's throat as I pushed past them into the cave beyond.

I was rewarded with a gurgling sound as my claw found its mark, but I didn't pause to inspect my handiwork. Instead, I pushed onward, knowing that if I could only reach the entrance, I would be home free. *I'll lose them in the forest, pick them off one by one, make them rue the day that they ever came back to this-* I thought as I leaped for the cave entrance, only to be cut off as a searing pain shot up my

back, causing me to tumble several times before falling out of the cave, crushing the ladder on my way down.

My whole backside felt like it was on fire, and I knew that they had hit me with one of those green bolts of energy that had claimed the lives of so many of my countrymen. I howled in pain, my mind screaming in terror and anguish as I thrashed on the ground, desperate to put out my burning back. After a few seconds of this, I stilled, unable to move anymore because of the pain, but no longer on fire. I spotted an insect-like head pop out of the cave, its weapon pointed at me, and I closed my eyes, knowing what was to come.

Time seemed to stretch on for an eternity as I waited for the shot to come, terror and certainty filling my mind as I waited for death. Imagine my surprise when instead of searing pain followed by blackness, I heard a mighty crack of thunder, followed by a fleshy thump of a body hitting the ground next to me. My nose hole detected the scent of burning flesh, and I tentatively opened my eyes to see what had happened.

Lying next to me was the charred corpse of the alien who was about to end my life. My mind seemed to stop as I turned my head upwards, and I was dimly aware of something dark blue and covered in armor streak down to stand next to me. I recognized him as one of the bat-winged pegasus ponies from before, but I couldn't for the life of me understand what he was doing here. He looked at me with concern, and I heard him say something to me. His words were still gibberish to me, but his tone was something that I could easily identify; he was worried.

Instead of trying to let him know I was alright, though, I shouted in pain, pointing a shaking finger back at the cave, hoping that I could warn him in time of the impending danger. I watched in horror as the fourth alien raised its weapon, took aim, and let loose a stream of death on my furry savior.

The pegasus looked up in alarm, and I could only watch as bolt after bolt of white-hot death struck the poor pony, lancing into him, burning the air around him...

Leaving him completely intact.

I stared, my jaw hanging open as the until-now hidden runes on the pony's armor lit up, flashing a pure, white light with each bolt that struck. The plasma that struck the warrior seemed to become absorbed by the light, dissipating even those bolts that struck his exposed flesh and wings. I could only watch in awe as the monster lowered its weapon in shock...

Only to fall out of the cave as a second bat pony struck the beast from above. The beast tumbled uncontrollably head over heels until it finally smashed into the ground below.

The second pony approached me far more cautiously than his colleague had, asking his friend a question in a frightened tone of voice. The response was curt, almost as if he were annoyed at what had been said. The first pony, Lightning, I nicknamed him, after the way he had killed the first alien, gently started to nuzzle my shoulder, making it clear he wanted me to roll over. I tried, but it was as if my muscles wouldn't respond to my commands, especially those muscles that were on my back.

He seemed to realize this, judging by the way he was using his hooves to gently roll me over. I heard a sharp intake of breath from Lightning once he saw my wound, followed closely by a shout that sounded like an order. I then heard something snap, then smelled something delightful as something was shoved into my face. It was a nice, soothing smell, and after a couple of seconds, the pain seemed to leave me as my body went numb.

Darkness took me soon after.

* * *

"...Many of his spines were melted off, and his back was severely burned, almost straight through the muscle and into the bones and organs beneath. The wounds look almost identical to Dragonfire, which is probably why the Dragonflame wards on Sergeant Weather's armor withstood the punishment that it did. Any longer, however, and Sergeant Weather would have been reduced to ash by the onslaught of the alien's weapon," Captain Dark Seeker said as he rubbed his forehead in exhaustion. "The doctors are currently treating the wound as Dragonfire, though their lack of knowledge of the creature's biology isn't doing them any favors. Several of the scientists who were present at the autopsy of his kin are helping with the effort, though there are still several unknowns, seeing as how they've only been able to examine broken, lifeless bodies, not living breathing ones."

Celestia and Luna looked at each other, an understanding quickly having been reached between the two of them. They then rose to their hooves in unison, their posture firm. "Thank you captain, Please inform the Guard that we are now on high alert. Double the guard that is posted at both the crash site as well as the labs where we are storing all the alien artifacts that we have recovered up to this point," Luna said as she and her sister quickly swept the tired Night Sentinel.

"Do you think that wise Your Highness?" Captain Seeker asked nervously as he fell into line behind the swiftly moving Diarchs.

"Yes. As of now, we are harboring an alien fugitive, one that his tormentors seem bent on recapturing, despite his innocence. Send a missive to Captain Armor to inform him of the situation, as we may need his expertise in the months to come," Celestia said as she reached the double doors of the throne room. "We will personally call a council later, to plan our next move as well as to inform our allies of the troubles that will follow. However, for now, a far more pressing matter is upon us. For now, just see to the protection of our ponies, as well as the protection of our injured friend."

"Yes, Your Highness," Captain Seeker said as the Lunar and Solar Princesses left the room.

Author's Notes:

Gotcha.

I know some of you were expecting this to turn into a Gary Stu story, where the protagonist beats up all the bad guys with only marginal help from the ponies, but as I hope I've shown to you already, this is not that tale.

This is a much better one.

Anyway, thank you so much for watching me and my story! as I've said before, I really haven't had time to tell you individually that I'm grateful for all the support and comments that each of you give me, but just know that I am. I also read each and every comment, despite not always being able to answer each one.

In other words:



Chapter XII

Chapter XII

"Lieutenant Talian, status report on *The Caliban* if you please," Captain Hazalk ordered as he settled more comfortably into his chair.

"*The Caliban* has made planetfall, and our extraction and recovery teams are making their way to their various targets. Sergeant Verilo and his team has already made it to the crash site and has reported that the site is currently infested with what appears to be the native populace, while Sergeant Casianon is still on route to signal site beta," the lieutenant said as she input a few commands into her console.

"Hmm... That could prove problematic. Order Verilo to observe for now, at least until we get a measure of these creatures. What of Sergeant Inaz?" he asked as he stroked his mandibles.

"Team Zen reported that they traced the personnel locator to a cave in the woods at the foot of the mountain. They are awaiting your orders before they enter, though Sergeant Inaz wanted you to know that something didn't feel right about the situation. He also said that the locator's signal isn't transmitting an IFF that he recognizes," Talian said as she swiveled her chair to face the captain.

"Throw the marker's signature and data onto my datapad. I want to see it myself," Hazalk said as he picked up the datapad sitting on his upper right armrest.

Hmm... definitely marked as a friendly, though why does the information on the IFF say classified? In fact, all I'm getting is a name... the captain thought to himself as he perused the nonexistent information on the datapad.

The name didn't tell him a whole lot, but it did tell him enough to know that he needed to call in someone with a higher pay grade before he sent his soldiers into danger. "Agent Ilisk, this is the bridge. We've been able to track down the only survivor of the crash. My men have gotten close enough to receive IFF information, but haven't made contact with the survivor yet due to the nature of the IFF he received; everything but the name is classified. Would you care to explain?" Captain Hazalk said after pressing down on the intercom button at his armrest.

"What is the name?" he heard the spook say over the intercom.

"Subject-38, I hope that means more to you than it does to me," Hazalk said.

"It does. Captain, you haven't found a survivor, rather you have found one of the experiments that the science team were working on. Please transmit the information to me, I need to have a look at it," Hazalk heard the spook on the other side say.

"What kind of experiments are we talking about here? You haven't exactly told us what we're dealing with here," Captain Hazalk asked, apprehension creeping into his voice as he sent the data to the spook.

"One second captain, let me decode this first..." he heard in response.

The silence seemed to drag on forever, only further compounding the captain's growing concern. Finally, the intercom buzzed to life again. "Um... captain, due to the nature of the information that I've received, I feel that it is necessary to warn you about extracting this specimen. Be sure to alert your troops of this as well. The experiment that you've located is a highly unstable, yet highly valuable genetic and cybernetic augmentation experiment. The subject is designed to strike terror into whatever it is unleashed upon, so be sure to warn your soldiers."

The captain's heart sank when he heard this. "Anything else we need to know before I send my troops into the lion's den?"

"Yes. The creature is extremely fast, extremely strong, can see in the dark, and will most likely become irate as soon as it sees your soldiers," Ilisk said in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Why would it attack us on sight? Isn't it programmed to not attack allies?" the captain asked, a little confused at what he was hearing.

"While the creature is usually more restrained, its MC unit is currently either damaged or missing entirely. It is running off of its... base programming, and will most certainly view anything with our particular morphology as a foe," the agent said evasively, clearly not wanting to reveal anything more than that.

"What do you mean by 'base programming'? Shouldn't the scientists who grew the thing have conditioned

it with a 'base programming' of not attacking any Krin it sees?" the captain asked flatly.

"I'm sorry captain, but I really cannot tell you more; it's above your pay grade. Be sure to warn your troops to watch out for the claws, but try not to kill it. More money went into the development of that thing than what you and your crew will make in their entire lives," Ilisk said dismissively.

Captain Hazalk rolled his eyes at this, then shut off the intercom. "Lieutenant Talian, patch me through to Team Zen. Put their armor cams up on the view screen as well, I want to see this terror that the science team managed to cook up."

Talian obediently did as instructed, and almost immediately the view of the planet below, complete with its physics-defying orbiting star, was replaced with four different viewpoints of a vibrant, green forest. "Sergeant Inaz, you are clear to engage," Captain Hazalk said.

"Engage, sir?" the sergeant asked, clearly confused at the nature of the order.

"The target inside is one of the science team's more twisted experiments. Usually it's on some kind of leash, though right now its leash is broken and it isn't going to be very hospitable towards anyone. Expect it to be fast, strong, and very, very lethal," the captain clarified.

"Yes sir. Anything else I should know before me and the boys head in there and kick its face in?" the sergeant asked coolly.

"Yes, try to keep it alive, expect it to be asleep, and watch out for claws," Hazalk said dryly.

"Yes sir. Okay boys, shut your yaps and be quiet. Don't want to wake the poor baby, now do we?"

After receiving confirmation from each of his soldiers, Sergeant Inaz led his troops to the base of the cliff that the cave was situated in. The cave's narrow entrance and higher elevation made the feat of entering difficult for a Krin in full battle gear, but the extraction team still somehow managed it without much fuss. The cavern's much larger interior gave the extraction team plenty of room to maneuver, which would only serve the extraction team if they actually got into a fight.

However, as the captain watched, he couldn't help but feel increasingly uneasy about this whole thing. He wasn't sure why, but something about the cave just seemed... off to him. The cave just didn't look like the sort of place that a ravenous beast created by a Krin science team would hole up in. For starters, the creature had made some kind of bed out of animal hides. Not to mention that there also seemed to be a firepit complete with a wide assortment of cooking accessories nearby.

Something here doesn't add up... he thought as his soldiers made their way deeper into the cave. Maybe it found the campsite of some poor native and decided to help itself? There certainly seems to be enough skin and bones to suggest that. Looks like the previous owner was some kind of primitive trapper...

The captain shook his head to clear it of those thoughts as his soldiers made their way deeper into the cave. *No time to think about that now, just keep your eyes open*, he thought to himself. The cave looked almost unnatural, due mainly to the flickering green quality of the night vision that had been enabled on the armor cameras. Silently the soldiers rounded the corner, quickly bringing to view the mutant that had come to call this place home.

It was hard to make out. It seemed to be lounging in a bubbling pool of water, completely unaware of its surroundings as a faint snoring sound could be heard through the camera's speakers. Silently, each of the soldiers raised their weapons, removed the safeties, and opened fire on the creature.

Captain Hazalk couldn't believe his eyes with what happened next. Somehow, against all odds, the creature became wide awake, jumped straight out of the water, and managed to dodge each and every stun blast as it dived for cover. The thing moved so fast that Hazalk couldn't even make out its form or shape. He thought it was probably bipedal, and it seemed to only have one set of arms, but other than that he wasn't sure what he had seen.

"What the..."

"Did you see it move?"

"Stay sharp! It might be fast, but if we keep it pinned down, we can catch it. Light it up!" Sergeant Inaz said, taking a couple of steps forward as he started to unload his weapon on the rock outcropping that the creature had taken cover behind.

However, just before the soldiers opened fire, the creature jumped from cover, screeching at the top of its lungs as it barreled towards the oncoming wall of blue.

It was truly a terror to behold. Pale, damp skin. Black soulless eyes, and arms and legs that seemed to go

on forever. It seemed to have an emaciated frame which belied a speed unmatched as it dodged each of the stun blasts headed its way. Captain Hazalk could only watch in horror as it closed in, its mouth opened in a snarl as it reached out and ran Sergeant Inaz through with its foot long claws.

Captain Hazalk heard his soldiers swear as the sergeant flat lined, clearly shaken at what had happened. "The sergeant's down! Switch to plasma, light the monster up!" he heard Corporal Vizalz scream.

The others did as ordered, but the creature didn't even pause for a second. The captain could only watch in horror as the creature snarled at the three remaining soldiers, then proceeded to use the broken body of the late Sergeant Inaz as a shield. Round after round struck the corpse, only to be absorbed by the combat armor that Inaz had been wearing.

After a few seconds of this, the creature started to press forward, throwing the dead sergeant at the three remaining soldiers. The camera feed became jumbled after that, giving the captain only a faint understanding of what happened next.

Two things he did know, though. Private Juli was down, and Corporal Vizalz had gotten a lucky shot off as the creature had made a break for the cave entrance.

"Quickly! Secure it while it's stunned!" Hazalk ordered as the corporal got to his feet.

"Yeah, I'll 'secure' it..." Vizalz said, taking off his helmet as he calmly walked towards the sound of the screaming monster.

"Vizalz! Put your helmet back on. Vizalz!" Vizalz didn't respond, though, seeing as how he had removed his helmet, and therefore his way of receiving orders. Hazalk hit one of his armrests in frustration at this, swearing as he did so. "Private Golin, Vizalz has taken a leave of his senses. Stop him from killing the creature."

"On it..." came the slurred reply. Hazalk noticed that Golin's camera seemed a bit shakier, making him wonder at what had happened to the young private during the scuffle. *Best not to worry about that now. Just pray that he'll be there in time to stop Vizalz from killing his career...* Hazalk thought as he watched the corporal take a bead on the trembling beast underneath him. Hazalk heard Vizalz sigh in satisfaction, his breath quickening as the monster closed its eyes in resignation. "Take this, you murdering piece of--"

Then, just before he pulled the trigger, Vizalz's camera went out, as did the audio and the entire readout of his suit. Golin's still seemed to work, though the sight it revealed was nothing short of horrifying.

Private Golin seemed to be frozen in shock as he watched lightning ground itself into Corporal Vizalz, frying him from the inside out. The crack of thunder was so loud that it blew out the microphone on all of the cameras and helmets, effectively muting everything that happened afterwards.

Golin rushed forward as Corporal Vizalz tumbled out of the cave's entrance, the world oddly muted as he stumbled to the cave's entrance. He then laid down on his belly as he crawled out of the cave, pulling himself into a position where he could see what was happening.

Underneath him there seemed to be some sort of armored, winged equine. It seemed to be reaching out for the crippled creature, almost as if it were trying to help it. "Private, if you can still hear me, remove the native from the picture. Don't say a word, the freak lightning blew out your microphone, so we wouldn't be able to hear you anyway. Just kill the native, stun the creature and drag it and your own butt back to the landing craft," Hazalk ordered the private.

Hazalk watched as the monster pointed up towards the cave, almost as if it were warning the equine about what is about to happen. *That can't be right...* Hazalk thought as another puzzle piece fell into his lap.

His thoughts were interrupted, though, as the equine looked up in alarm, just in time to see round after round of plasma strike it repeatedly in the face, back and wings, scoring hit after hit...

Only for each blast to dissipate as the armor that the native wore glowed brightly. Before Captain Hazalk could even comprehend what he was seeing, though, Private Golin seemed to pitch forward, hurtling head over heels until he had struck the ground next to the fallen corporal. Captain Hazalk opened his mouth to call the fallen private, but stopped when he saw that the private's heart had flat lined as well.

Hazalk just stared at the monitor for a few minutes, his mind in shock at what he had seen. "Sir? What just happened?" Lieutenant Talian asked shakily.

Captain Hazalk didn't answer at first. Instead, he stood up, straightened his coat, and pressed the intercom button on his armrest. "Agent Ilisk, meet me in my ready room in thirty minutes," he said, as if nothing had happened. He then made his way to the lift, stopping just before he opened the door to turn and look at his Lieutenant. "I don't know what just happened Talian, but that wasn't a mindless terror

weapon gone crazy. It was clever. It fled at the first chance it got. It attempted to warn the native before Private Golin fired, showing that it somehow made allies, despite everything going against it. In effect, it and its allies just obliterated an entire extraction team, all because we were under the assumption that it was a mindless, rogue terror weapon on a rampage."

"If it isn't that, then what is it?" Talian asked quietly.

"I don't know, but I intend to find out," Hazalk said as he left the bridge.

* * *

"What do we have?" Doctor Tender Care asked as she entered the operating room.

"Multiple third-degree burns across sixty percent of its back. The wounds appear to be similar to Dragonfire in nature, though not nearly as severe as some of the cases we've seen," Nurse Life Line answered as she pushed the light closer to the creature's back. "Most of the muscle and skin were eaten away by the fire, but the organs and bones appear to be largely unaffected. We just finished cleaning the wound when you arrived."

"Very good. What anesthetic is it on?" Care asked as she started a level three medical scan.

"Demon's Bane, though the sergeant who brought it in told us that he used a painkill stick on it a few hours ago," Life Line answered.

"That shouldn't complicate anything. A painkill stick's effects only last for about an hour and a half, so we should be... good..." Care trailed off as she finished the scan.

"What seems to be the problem, doctor?" Life Line asked.

"I finished the scan, but I'm having trouble interpreting the data. From what I've been able to gather, the creature seems to have two sets of DNA," Doctor Care said, shaking her head a little.

"What will that mean for regeneration magic?" Doctor Stout Heart's voice came through from observation.

"I don't know. To my knowledge, this sort of thing has never happened before, so there is no precedence for it," Tender Care said as she began to cut away the charred flesh. "We don't even know how it will respond to regeneration magic, much less how having two different sets of DNA will affect the process itself. Our magic has to use a patient's DNA as the blueprint for everything it does, so I can only imagine what the spell will do. Will it latch onto one over the other? Will the magic cause the two to battle, killing the host? Or will it cause the patient to split into two separate entities? Tartarus, we're trying to use magic on an alien entity, any number of things could happen, each one more horrifying than the last."

"For what it's worth, the bodies that we examined only had one set of DNA. This creature seems to be exactly identical, so why would it have two?" Doctor Heart Beat asked from across the operating table.

"Not so, Beat. This creature isn't exactly identical. The ones that you and your colleagues examined were all dead. They lacked souls, and a soul can have powerful and far reaching effects on such things as polymorphic magic," Doctor Level Head said from observation.

"You will have to forgive me doctor, but transmutation isn't really my specialty," Care said as she used her magic to stem the bleeding.

"It is mine, though, and what you just described is a symptom of a polymorphed individual," Level Head said.

"Doctor Head, if you are telling me that this thing has been hit with a transmutation spell, then you are sorely mistaken. The medical scan returned a negative for any binding magical auras holding it in this form, so it couldn't possibly be that," Doctor Care said as a nurse used a sponge to wipe away the sweat on her brow.

"Not by magic, no. However, we are dealing with an alien species that has already shown the ability to implant a variety of artificial devices into a living host, while making them work perfectly with the physiology of said host, all without magic. Isn't it possible, then, that they have discovered a way to change a living creature's DNA without magic?" Doctor Level Head asked.

"Then why would he register two different DNA strands? If non-magical means were used, we should only get one," Doctor Beat asked as he aided Doctor Care in her blood clotting spell.

"Not necessarily. When a specimen is under the effects of a polymorph spell, its DNA completely changes to match the new body it is given. The specimen's soul still remembers what it was, though, which is why a medical scan reveals two sets of DNA. A level three medical scan spell returns both physical and

spiritual data, on the off chance that the patient is currently suffering from a shadow magic infection," Level Head explained.

"So one set is the patient's changed DNA, while the other is the patient's remembered DNA? What will that do to the regeneration spell?" Doctor Beat asked pointedly.

"In the case of polymorphic magic, the changed DNA always wins out over the spirit DNA. This, however, is a completely new scenario. We can only speculate on what might happen were we to apply regenerative magic. For all we know, we might make things worse for it," Doctor Level Head said as he leaned back.

"Nevertheless, we must try," a new female voice said from observation. Doctor Care instantly recognized the voice as Princess Luna's, though Care was far too busy to even contemplate a bow at the moment.

"Princess Luna, Princess Celestia, it is an honor to see you here," she heard her colleagues in the observation booth say.

"No need for formalities. You are correct in your deduction, though. The patient's current form is not his natural one, which will present some complications when applying regenerative magic. However, we must try, seeing as how we have no one who is able to donate blood or skin to aid in his recovery," Celestia said.

"She's right. I'm applying the magic now; I'd rather feel bad about something I did than something that I didn't do..." Doctor Tender Care said as she charged her horn.


Author's Notes:

Hey there! I'm back with another chapter! This time we get a glimpse into the minds of those who were sent to 'extract' Alex.

Yeah, I know that a large portion of this was a retelling of what had happened during the previous chapter, but it was necessary for the progress of the story. We needed to see the *people* behind the monsters. Antagonists aren't very fun if they are reduced to nothing but "bleh! I'm evil because reasons!"

Also, I know this seems to be a bit exposition heavy, but honestly I've gone through eleven chapters with very little exposition. It was long overdue and very necessary.

As I've stated before, 3-dimensional characters are where it's at, and a story is only as good as its characters. ALL its characters, especially the villains.

As for why the aliens have American army titles, I learned a while ago that the enjoyability of a fic is inversely proportional to how many new words you introduce. Sure I could have made up titles, but I think it better if they are names that you guys can understand and relate to. If it makes you feel better, you can imagine that the titles got translated to their English equivalents when their language was translated. 

Chapter XIII

Chapter XIII

"Come in," Captain Hazalk said as he tapped a few more buttons on his console.

"You wanted to speak with me captain?" Agent Ilisk asked as he entered the room.

"You mind telling me what Subject-38 really is? Or did you want me to lose another four soldiers before you admit your mistake?" Hazalk said in a perfectly level tone.

Ilisk shook his head at these words. "You failed to capture it? I am extremely disappointed in you captain, I was expecting-

"When were you going to tell me that it was sapient? Or were you just hoping that I would look the other way as you attempted to sweep this whole thing under the rug?" Hazalk interrupted, his tone still completely level.

"...I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't play coy with me, Ilisk. Subject-38 has shown the ability to use tools, has gained the support of the natives, and has shown a willingness to fight only as long as it takes to allow it to escape. It is clearly more than just a monster that the Krin Science Team grew in a tank. Unless, of course, it was designed to have sapience in the first place. If that's the case, then they broke an entirely different set of laws," Captain Hazalk said as he clasped both sets of hands in front of him.

"I never knew you were so squeamish, captain. I thought to expect more from the Hero of Thana," Ilisk said as he sat down in the chair across from Hazalk.

"Don't believe everything you read. In any case, I may have a stomach for war, but this is something else entirely. This breaks so many laws, that I don't even know where to start. My men also didn't know what they were getting themselves into, and that cost them their lives. Their blood lies squarely in your hands for not warning me beforehand," Hazalk said as he stared Agent Ilisk down.

"Don't give me any of your sanctimonious preaching. I have enough on you to get you the death sentence twelve times over, so if you're thinking of taking me down, I'll take you down with me," Ilisk said with a negligent wave of a hand.

If this statement worried Hazalk in the slightest, he didn't show it. In fact, Hazalk acted as if Ilisk had said nothing at all. "Not only did the Krin Science Team break the law, but by doing so, they have put our treaty with the Quzin Empire at risk, and need I remind you what happened the last time we went to war with them?" he asked as his eyes narrowed menacingly. "If they find out, the Krin will cease to exist, and it just so happens that this world sits within Quzin territory. I can understand wanting to put this under wraps, but in order to properly sanitize the crash site, I'm going to need to know what I'm dealing with. I'm willing to work with you here, even get in on your little operation, but first I need to know what's going on. So I'll ask you again, what is Subject-38?"

The two just sat there for what seemed like an eternity. Neither of them budging an inch, until finally, Agent Ilisk cracked a smile. "Captain, I didn't know you were such a risk taker. I take back what I said before about you being squeamish," Ilisk said as he leaned back into his chair. "Fine then, I'll let you in. Subject-38 and its fellows are the first experiment in a new type of warfare. They hail from a backwater, underdeveloped world, from which the science team abducted them and modified them to act as the perfect terror weapons. They were designed to be dropped on planets in large groups, to terrorize the planet so that when our boys showed up, they would be hailed as alien saviors instead of conquering invaders. Even when properly controlled with an MC unit, Subject-38 and its fellows would show an unbelievable level of intelligence and ingenuity, making them the perfect soldiers, and in turn, the perfect weapons."

"Were they ever tested?" Hazalk asked slowly.

"Yes, and to great effect. They brutally slaughtered anything that would get in their way, and showed great competence in group tactics as well as solo stealth missions. There was but one problem with the design, however," Ilisk said as he leaned forward.

"What was that?"

"Intelligence was what we strove for, it was what made the creature the ultimate weapon, and ultimately, that proved the science team's downfall. The team were going to test it on this very planet, but the weapons seemed to develop a... resistance... to our method of control. We aren't entirely sure what

happened, but according to the last data packet we received, the entire stock had simultaneously broken free from their MC units and had proceeded to attempt a take over of the ship. We don't know what happened next, but I'm sure you can put together the pieces," Ilisk said pointedly

"Yes, yes I can. By the way, just how high up the chain of command does this little experiment go? I'll need to know who will be signing my checks for the foreseeable future," Captain Hazalk said pointedly.

"Magistrate Quazal, but no higher. I doubt the Hiarch or the chief of staff are even aware of the real purpose of our mission," Agent Ilisk said as he leaned back again.

"And that is all I needed to hear. Agent Ilisk, you are under arrest for war crimes and for being an accomplice to this entire affair," Captain Hazalk said as he rose from his chair.

"wha- captain, you're making a mistake. If I'm going down, you go down too. And believe me, your ledger is far more red than mine," Agent Ilisk said as he sprang to his feet.

"Don't make me laugh, Ilisk. The Hiarch is well aware of every detail of my past, and unlike you, I have his blessing. Didn't you get the memo?" Hazalk asked as he quirked his head to the side. Hazalk then strode towards a nearby cabinet and began to pour himself a drink.

He just barely raised the glass to his mandibles, however, when a burst of plasma fire struck him repeatedly from behind, throwing him into the liquor cabinet and smashing it to pieces. "I must have missed it," Ilisk said cockily as he stepped towards the smoking body in front of him.

However, as he raised his pistol to finish the job, the door behind him hissed open to reveal two armed Krin soldiers, their weapons at the ready. "Troopers, your just in time. Take this treacherous swine down to the brig. He was trying to-" Ilisk started to say, but was interrupted when one of the soldiers smacked him in the head with the butt of his weapon.

"The only traitor here... is you, Ilisk." Captain Hazalk said with a gasp. "Did you really think I would confront you without a contingency plan? The whole ship heard you confess AND shoot me. Take him away, and get medical up here as soon as possible, my vest failed when the scum shot me."

if only I had my camera... Hazalk thought as Private Vala grabbed Ilisk by the scruff of his collar. *That look on his face is simply priceless...*

* * *

Ow, my everything... I thought as my mind slowly became aware that it was awake. I tried to move, but my arms just didn't seem to be up to the task. Neither did my eyelids for that matter; but I knew I couldn't just fall back to sleep, not when my throat was as parched as Death Valley.

I attempted to stick out my tongue to lick my super dry lips, though my tongue didn't seem to want to work either. In fact, I was having trouble even opening my mouth, as strange as that might sound.

Speaking of sound, I found that I couldn't hear anything either. Well, that wasn't exactly true. I could hear things, but it was as if everything was muffled, almost as if I were wearing earplugs.

I seemed to be lying on something soft, with what felt like a pillow underneath my head. I wasn't too certain about that, though, because it felt as if my sense of touch was off as well. It kinda felt like my whole body had fallen asleep, everything being a close approximation of feeling rather than the actual thing.

There seemed to be someone in the room with me, though who they were wasn't something I could figure out at the moment. I tried to ask for help, but was foiled in my attempt as unconsciousness pulled me into its sweet embrace.

* * *

I became aware again when someone started messing with my bedspread. I wasn't really sure what they were doing, but whatever it was, it was keeping me from sleep. I tried opening my eyes again to see who it was, and instantly regretted it. Everything was just so *bright* that I had no choice but to close my eyes and groan in pain. "...why is the world on fire?" I asked in a raspy voice as I rubbed my eyes with a shaky, jerking hand.

Something about what just happened didn't sit right with me, but for some reason I couldn't understand what it was. Someone close by said something, but whatever they said was beyond my understanding. My ears still felt like there was cotton stuffed in them, however, so you could hardly blame me for that one.

"...can you help me? I seem to be having trouble with my everything..." I said as I rubbed my weak, shaking hand over the rest of my face. My hand froze, though, when it encountered a familiar, yet alien

structure in the center of my face. It was small, round, and seemed to have two small holes on its underside.

Wait a second...

Slowly the clues started falling in place, but I refused to believe it. *Was it all a dream? A nightmare? A coma from an accident?* I thought as I tried to push myself into a sitting position. Someone nearby was shouting something, but my mind didn't even register the noise as my muscles strained against my weight. Ultimately, I gave up and flopped back down onto the downy softness underneath me, unable to even lift myself. *What on earth happened? Was there a car crash? No, I was probably poisoned. That would explain the bizarre coma dream. Valerie probably rushed me to the hospital when she found me...*

However, as I allowed myself to sink in further into the belief that I was home, a hoof touched my shoulder, instantly shattering the illusion that I had constructed for myself. How did I know it was a hoof, and not something else? Well, once you've been hugged by not just one, but two equines, the sensation is kind of hard to forget. Their hooves were hard, but covered in short, coarse hair. This created an odd, dissonant feeling whenever they touched my bare skin.

As interesting as all of that was, it was still beside the point. I was still on this weird, equine planet, light years away from home. As disappointing as that was, I couldn't bring myself to get worked up about it, or even care. I had awoken so many times in the past months in the exact same circumstance: believing a dream of home, only to have it torn from me by the cruel hands of reality. By this point it had almost become the norm.

There was something different about it this time. Not only did I have a nose again, but if my fingers could be believed, eyelashes, eyebrows and proper eyelids as well. The hair felt extremely fine, though, almost like a newborn baby's hair. As I moved my hand lower, I started crying when I discovered that not only were the fangs gone, but I also had lips again as well!

However, as I continued to explore my new face, something terrible began to happen. My arm, which up until this point had been dutifully following my every command, began to twitch and thrash, accidentally smacking whoever was nearby. Not to be outdone, my other arm began to join in, followed closely by my legs as they decided to get in on this action.

I tried to call out for help, but all I could manage was a strangled scream as pain shot through my entire brain. My pain was so great that I wasn't even aware of the hooves holding me down, or the needle that was inserted into my arm.

Unconsciousness claimed me soon afterwards.

* * *

I don't really know when I became aware of the voices in my room, but I had been listening to their strange, musical words for quite some time before I realized that I was awake again. I groggily opened my eyes, only to shut them again almost instantly. "...man, why is everything so bright..." I grumbled as I raise my hand to my face.

Or, at least, I tried to. Instead of obediently reaching my face and rubbing my aching eyes, my hand stopped as it jerked against the padded restraints holding me to the bed. This confused me at first, causing the more paranoid parts of my psyche to come to bear as I tugged against the restraints. The fear soon left, however, when a gentle hoof touched my shoulder, and a female voice hushed something nearby. Rational thought soon followed when I remembered what had happened earlier. *They probably restrained me to keep me from hurting myself... I thought ruefully to myself. But why did I go into a fit in the first place? And where am I? Come on eyes, work. It's not like you're my most important sense or anything...*

I tried to open my eyes again, only to shut them again in pain. "Why can't I open my eyes? Why is that such a chore?" I asked, not really expecting an answer. If the mare next to me gave one, it certainly wasn't in a language that I could understand.

Someone else came into the room at that moment, but seeing that I was effectively blind, I couldn't really tell who or what it was. They talked with whoever was nearby, the voice sounding male in my ears, then left in a hurry. "He's going to bring back someone to translate, right?" I asked. I knew she couldn't understand me, but that wasn't the reason why I had spoken. "You really don't appreciate the ability to speak until it's been stolen from you. Seriously, it has been six months, and the only voices I've heard have been the voices in my own head. And let me tell you right now, they are as boring as jelly-less, peanut butter sandwiches."

On and on I went, but after what had seemed like an insane amount of inane banter, I eventually fell silent, letting my poor nurse have a rest from my bout of chattiness. After all, as fun as it was to talk at the mare in the room, there was only so much a guy could say before he became bored with a one-sided

conversation. Besides, talking itself had become tiring, almost as if I had never used those particular muscles before. *That makes sense, though. Whatever they did to me regrew the missing parts of my face. It only stands to reason that those new facial features act as if I have never used them before, simply because I **haven't** used them before,* I thought as the door opened again.

Whoever had entered seemed to be female, judging purely by the quality of her voice. She sounded familiar to me somehow, though I wasn't really sure where I knew her from. This was surprising, seeing as how I was only familiar with eight of the natives, seven of which happened to be mares. This made the pool of people that she could possibly be very small, and I was certain that her voice didn't match any of them.

She said something to my nurse, and I heard her say something that sounded like an acknowledgement. She then left the room, closing the door softly behind her. My ears picked up the tale-tell hum of spell work, and soon afterwards, my throat and ears began to tingle. *Must be doing what Star did...* I thought to myself as the mare cleared her throat.

"Greetings, you having understanding towards me?" she asked uncertainly.

"Yeah, I understand. Mostly," I said wryly.

"Good. Spell not perfect. Understanding not perfect. We teach later, say us tongue, yes?" she asked carefully.

"...yes?" I answered hesitantly. I couldn't be certain, but it *sounded* as if she wanted to teach me her language. I was okay with this, seeing as how our only method of communication was shaky at best, and a complete train wreck at worst.

"Good. Lessons happen later, happen questions now. We ask much, you ask much. Much learn, much grow. Yes?" She asked briskly.

"Okay... why does it hurt whenever I open my eyes?" I asked, fearful of what the answer would be.

She hesitated at first, taking a second to inhale deeply, almost as if she were steadying herself for something. "You... burn badly. Incredibly badly. Try heal, almost die. Use spell that... grow back lost. Two instructions follow, original follow, not... broken instructions. Spell nearly kill. Old instruction take over. Reject everything done. Reject eyes. Reject tongue. Reject teeth. Reject strength. Try grow new in old place," she said apologetically.

I just sat there, my eyes closed as I listened to her explain what had happened through the broken translation. It was hard, but if I understood her correctly, then it sounded as if they had used some sort of weird healing spell to patch me up after the fight. It also sounded as if there had been complications, and that I had almost died as a result. *But... did she mean what I thought she meant when she said that these 'instructions' rejected my body parts?*

"What exactly are these 'instructions' that you're talking about, and what do you mean when you said that they 'rejected' my eyes, tongue, teeth and 'strength?'" I asked carefully.

"We know monsters take you, change you, give body new instructions. When spell cast, body revert old instructions. Nothing in instruction about claws. Eyes fake, been replaced. Teeth different instructions too, as tongue different instructions. Body think alien, is alien. Attack, kill, remove body, from body. Spell force body regrow new in place of old. Force us cut, remove fake devices before kill. Still attacking alien fakes," she said apologetically.

Well, by the way she was describing what had happened, these 'instructions' sounded an awful lot like DNA. I wasn't a doctor by any stretch of the imagination, but I had watched enough Bill Nye as a kid to know a little about how genetic code worked. If she was saying what I thought she was saying, then it meant that whatever magic they worked on me had fixed the damage that the aliens had done to my DNA.

That correction had apparently come at a great cost, however. From the sound of it, my body had apparently then mistaken itself as a foreign entity, and had done its best to defend itself from itself. That would have been hilarious, had in not happened to me. Since it did happen to me, I nearly crapped myself in terror then and there.

"Well, its a good thing your magic was there to get me out of the woods, then," I said in a fake jovial voice.

"Yes and no. Not done yet, body still attacking arms, legs. Try kill arms, legs. We slow, attempt fix, but may need remove and regrow. That we not want. Have re-learn everything, in bed for months, limbs regrow. Still could die. No, not done yet. Not safe," she said ominously.

I just gulped at that as I tried desperately to hold onto my bladder. That right there was probably the

scariest thing I had ever heard someone say. It certainly explained why I was strapped in, why I had gone into convulsions earlier, and why my arms and legs felt so weak and shaky. If my body was still busy attacking itself, then it was a miracle that I wasn't thrashing and howling in pain right now. Whatever they had me on must work though, because all I felt right now was a dull ache, as compared to the white hot agony that I had felt earlier.

However, as terrible as all of that was, it was paradise compared to the living nightmare that my life had been for the past six months. I could now look forward to a nice warm bed, three square meals, and a fresh supply of water. I didn't have to hunt for my food, and if I managed to get some money, I could get some clothes as well. Sure, there was the threat that my body would kill itself as it attempted to repair and regenerate, but that was just the *chance* of death. It wasn't certain, and I probably had a pretty good chance of surviving.

Out in the wild, though, death was a certainty. I had absolutely no illusions about my ability to survive the winter, despite my 'can do, will survive' attitude. I had only just barely made a pair of pants, and those hadn't exactly been the epitome of warmth.

On top of all that, I could now speak as well. Not just speak, either, but *communicate*. That alone was worth any risk. Honestly, I was still having trouble convincing myself that this wasn't some sort of dream.

However, as the minutes passed by in silence, it became increasingly obvious that it wasn't. This was the real deal.

"...Thank you..." I said as I softly began to cry.

She didn't say anything at first, almost as if she were shocked that I had shown gratitude for the pain and suffering that I was going through. "You're welcome," she finally said.

We just sat there for a while as I tried to get my emotions under control. After what seemed like an eternity, I finally managed to get a hold of myself long enough to ask another question. "I don't believe I ever got your name."

"Moon. What yours?" She asked in reply.

"My name's Alex," I said, as the first smile I had made in months appeared on my face.

Author's Notes:

Well, so soon after the last chapter, and here's the next! hope it lived up to your expectations!

Chapter XIV

So, in case you didn't read my blog post, because the character belonged to someone else, and I am not a thieving jerkwad, I changed Captain Steel Song's name to Dark Seeker. Everything about the character is the same, the only thing that is different is that his name has changed. That isn't going to matter much for this chapter, because he doesn't appear here. However, it will matter in the books to come, so heads up.

If you want more details on the change, go ahead and check out my blogpost [Um... Oops...](#)

Chapter XIV

Princess Luna gently closed the door, well aware of the loud snoring that was coming from the other side. As she did so, Nurse Life Line approached the princess nervously. "How is it?" she asked.

"He is fine, the poor thing simply wanted to talk," Princess Luna said as she took a quick glance back at the door. "Our conversation tired him out far more than I thought it would, and he actually fell asleep mid-sentence."

"Did it-*he* tell you what he was?" Line asked curiously.

"I cannot say, I must meet with my sister and discuss what I have gleaned from the patient before I will discuss it with the medical team," she said as she swept passed the mare.

"Is it... is he dangerous?" Line asked nervously.

Princess Luna stopped at this, then turned and faced the mare. "Is he dangerous? Yes. Very much so. So is a pony, or a griffon, or a minotaur, or any of the sapient species that inhabit our world. Should you fear him? No. In fact, he is far more scared of us than we are of him, especially in his now weakened state."

"I- I didn't..."

"Keep an eye on him Nurse Life Line, he is not out of the woods by any stretch of the imagination. Keep me apprised of his condition, I will be consulting with my sister if I am needed," the princess said as she turned and left.

"Yes, Your Highness..." Life Line said with a bow.

* * *

Celestia rubbed her head in irritation. She had the possibility of an invasion looming over her head, the political nightmare that that had forced upon her, and the day to day rigors that ruling a nation brought upon her.

And yet, as stressful as all that was, it wasn't *nearly* as irritating as listening to Blueblood ramble on about tax exceptions.

"*Clearly* it was just a mistake auntie. You couldn't possibly think to impose such a tax upon me and my business, it is just too horrible to imagine!" he said pompously.

"Blueblood, we go over this every year, and for the last time, your company must pay its taxes regardless of who is currently running it, as do you," Celestia said dismissively. "You may be a prince, but you do not rule this nation, nor have any right in declaring who is and isn't exempt from its taxes."

"This is an injustice! Our tax code shouldn't apply to a *prince of the realm!*" Blueblood said indignantly. "If the tax code allows such injustices to occur, than I think it is high time for a reform."

Celestia's lips curled up in a smile at this. "If you really think that the Equestrian Tax Code needs a reform, than you will need to talk to the person who wrote it," she said as she raised a single eyebrow. "She should be holding court in about four hours, so if you would like to stick around until then, I would be happy to accommodate you."

Blueblood glanced about nervously at that statement. "I was sort of hoping that we could settle this matter without involving Ni- Princess Luna," he said, barely catching himself before he let something slip.

Celestia's eyes narrowed at this. "I am afraid that unless you talk with my sister, there is nothing that I can do for you. Especially not after a near slip like that."

"Ah, yes, of course. Then by your leave, auntie," Blueblood said as he turned and left with almost indecent

haste.

Celestia sighed as he left, her head throbbing unpleasantly as she watched him go. "Why do I tolerate you, Blueblood?" she said to herself.

"Probably because he is the last, living descendant of the ancient unicorn royal family? Or had you forgotten that?" Celestia heard her sister say as she entered the throne room from one of the side entrances.

Celestia's face lit up upon seeing Luna. "Please tell me that you have something more interesting for me than tax exemptions." Celestia said desperately.

"I do. Our friend awoke a little over an hour ago, but has since fallen asleep again," Luna said cheerfully.

"He did? How is he?"

"He is recovering, though poorly if last night's accident is anything to go by," Luna said sadly. "His new eyes still do not work properly, and I have since ordered the lights in his room dimmed by a significant amount. I explained what we have done to him as well as I could, but I fear that something may have been lost in translation..."

"How so?" Celestia asked as she leaned in a little.

"He was... *thankful*, that we have consigned him to what may be one of the most agonizing deaths I can think of if he does not survive, and one of the most agonizing existences if he does," Luna said as she shook her head sadly.

"Ah, I see... well, I think we need to see this from his perspective," Celestia said as she leaned back into her throne. "He has lost everything, has been imprisoned in an alien form and let loose on an alien planet. His very *reflection* was a reminder of everything he has lost. As far as I can discern from the information that has been given to me, he probably felt that he was a dead stallion already. His reflection has changed, now, giving him new hope for the future. In fact, I'm pretty sure he craves companionship far more than his own personal safety or comfort."

Princess Luna nodded thoughtfully at this. "I believe you may be right."

"Now, as sobering as all of that was, it was somewhat off topic. I believe you said that our new friend was awake? What did he say?" Celestia asked excitedly

"Well, he is apparently something called a ~human~, which roughly translates to 'he who knows' in our language," Luna said ruefully. "His actual name is ~Alex~."

"~Alex~ huh?" Celestia asked as she rubbed her chin with a hoof.

"Yes, I was going to ask him about his capture, but I decided not to tear open old wounds. At least, not yet," Luna said sadly.

"A wise decision, though we are still going to have to ask him about that sooner or later," Celestia said pointedly.

"I know, but I would prefer to postpone that conversation if I can," Luna said with a shake of her head. "At any rate, I asked him about his homeworld, and he tried to tell me, though he fell asleep mid-sentence. I am a bit fuzzy on some of the things he has told me, though personally I blame the translation spell for that one."

"What sort of things did he say?"

"He spoke of a world devoid of magic, which instead relied upon machinery and industry. His race knows of magic only as a fairy tale," Luna explained.

Celestia looked at her sister in shock. "How do they control their sun, if not by magic? And what about the weather, or the tilling of the earth?" She asked, confused at this statement.

"From what he has told me, his world operates in a similar manner to how the Everfree Forest does, wild and uncontrolled. From this information, I would extrapolate that his planet has a very weak magical field, though how his planet does not simply fall into the sun from the gravity exerted is beyond my understanding," Luna said slowly.

"I suppose he could explain that matter in detail after he has learned our language, though the fact that he has no prior experience with magic would explain quite a lot about his behavior," Celestia said thoughtfully.

"That it does, Tia, that it does..."

* * *

Captain Hazalk winced as he eased into his seat, his aching back a clear reminder that he shouldn't be returning to active duty yet. "Status report on our recovery teams, lieutenant," he ordered.

"Team Zen's locator's show that their bodies have been moved to site beta, while Qu and Gel have returned to *The Caliban* and are en-route to rendezvous with the ship as per your orders, sir," Talian said as she saluted smartly.

"That only confirms our suspicions that site beta is where the natives are taking the items that they remove from the wreckage. What about Subject-38?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Subject-38's locator was moved to the castle on top of the mountain. It is still transmitting, so I would assume that Subject-38 survived the wounds that Zen inflicted upon it," she said carefully. "Sir, what do you intend to do to it?"

"In the long term? I have no clue. I would like to return it to its home planet, but after what our scientists have done to it, I'm not sure that is even possible at this point. For now, we wait, we observe, and we prepare. I've already sent a priority one message to The Hiarch explaining our situation, and the ramifications that it may present should a Quzin ship arrive and discover what has happened here," he said as he started rummaging around for his pain pills.

"Sir, it may take months for The Hiarch to respond. What will we do if a Quzin ship does appear?" Talian asked quietly.

Hazalk didn't answer at first. Instead, he opened the bottle in his hands, then popped two of the small, white pills into his mouth. "We tell them the truth. We explain that traitors have broken the treaty, and we are simply here to clean up the mess they left behind."

"But sir, wouldn't that start a war?"

"Lieutenant, let me ask you something. Do you want a war?" Hazalk asked her as he swiveled his chair towards her.

"No sir."

"Neither do they. They might be able to wipe us out without much of a hassle, but it would still be costly to them. They would lose valuable lives and ships exterminating our race from the galaxy, not to mention that their soldiers may begin to question their orders once they reach the last vestiges of our people. No, they do not want a war with us any more than we do with them," the captain said as he turned his chair back towards the view screen.

Lieutenant Talian looked puzzled at this. "Then what do you think will happen?" she asked.

"I don't know. But I do know that they will be more likely to accept our apology if we punish the traitors responsible for this whole debacle. Especially if they are allowed to take part in that punishment," he said vindictively.

"Yes sir," Talian said as she turned back to her console.

Hazalk continued to stare at the spinning blue globe on the view screen, completely lost in thought as he felt the pain pills kick in. *Poor sod. You have no idea what crap you've found yourself in...* he thought to himself.

* * *

Ilisk patiently twiddled his thumbs, well aware of the cameras and guards that were watching his cell. If he cared, however, he did not show it, preferring instead to give a thousand mile stare to the wall opposite from his bunk. Every hour his eyes would twitch to one corner of the room, than to the other, almost like the pendulum of a really slow clock.


Finally, after about seven hours of this, his eyes dilated and his antenna twitched, almost as if he were listening to something. His mandibles clicked in excitement at the sounds only he could perceive, and just barely, he tilted his head upwards to look at the ceiling. He then gave an almost imperceptible nod, as if acknowledging someone that wasn't there.

All according to plan... he thought to himself.

Author's Notes:

Just a short, wrap up chapter here. After a lot of thought, I decided that this arc was pretty much finished, and that I would just end the story arc here, then move on to the next one. Hope you guys all enjoyed reading my story, and that you guys will stay tuned for the sequel: "What I've Done"!

Also, just so you know, my prereaders haven't had a chance to look at this before I posted it. I sort of wanted it out of the way so that I could get started on the sequel immediately. I hope it didn't suck too badly!

Anyway, thank you all so much for all the advice, suggestions, praise and criticism that you have given me through this ride. It really helped me grow as an author, and I really hope that I'm able to not disappoint you wonderful readers as I continue writing. You all are beautiful people for helping me write this piece of fiction. 

Epilogue

Author's Notes:

Edit: Hey, everyone! I've finished this book's published, non-copyright-infringing version! It's available right now on amazon, so go check it out!

[=>What I've Become: the actual book you can buy right now to support me, only \\$3.00!<=](#)

IMPORTANT! do not skip over this Author's note! it contains information on the sequel!

Anyway, I know that some of you missed the fact that I published a sequel to this story. For some reason my tagged blog posts are not reaching those who have favorited this story, so some of you may have missed the memo. I tried to publish a non-story chapter to alert you guys to the fact that I published a sequel, but that was taken down.

I didn't know it was a no-no here on fimfiction, so please forgive me for that one.

So here is an *extremely* short chapter designed to introduce some new characters for the sequel (WHICH IS OUT NOW, JUST IN CASE YOU MISSED THE MEMO!)

Anyway, you guys already knew that the Quzin were on their way, so I thought I would start to flush them out a little bit before they actually showed up.

You can find the sequel here: [What I've Done](#).

Thank you so much for supporting me and reading my work. You guys are truly awesome!

(PS, for those of you who were already aware of the fact that I had made a sequel, I will be posting the next chapter within a couple of days of posting this one, so please forgive me for my brevity here, that is taking up all of my available creativity.)

Epilogue

Priestess Akitesh kept her attention locked on her oratory notes, trusting her personal drone to not let her bump into anyone as she made her way to the chapel. "Let's see, choice is sacred, the Creator's dominion must be safeguarded at all costs..." she muttered to herself as she typed on the datapad in her left claw.

She was still somewhat new to the position, her ordination having only taken place a few days ago. That being said, she was fairly nervous about addressing her new crew. If it had been up to her, she would have forgone the whole tradition entirely. It wasn't up to her, though, and now she was going to have to subject herself to the worst torture she could imagine: public speaking.

As she was reviewing her notes, however, she felt a light tap on her shoulder as someone tried to get her attention. "Priestess, I apologize, but something has come up," a male voice said behind her.

Akitesh turned and immediately recognized the face of Jedon, her Second Voice. "What is it, Jedon?" she asked curiously.

"We just received a transmission from The Speaker. It seems that a Krin science vessel has issued a distress signal from somewhere near the planet Euti," he said with a bow.

"Which one was that again? Was that the world with those weird, monkey-like beings obsessed with cats?" she asked as she pocketed her datapad.

Jedon shook his head at this. "No, priestess. It is the world with the abnormally high spiritual aura, the one that forces its sun to orbit the planet," he said as he handed her a datapad.

As she took the datapad, her world suddenly burst into flames and darkness. She saw a group of strange, terrifying bipedal creatures loping through the darkness. They appeared to be hunting a group of Quortoth soldiers, slaughtering the mighty beastfolk with surprising efficiency, despite the fact that the beastfolk were armed and the monsters were not.

Something was... off... about the nightmares, however. As terrifying as the bipedal creatures were, there seemed to be another, lighter form that overlapped them. These ghostly forms mimicked their more

beastly counterparts move for move, yet seemed to scream against what they were doing at the same time.

Everything seemed to change again, taking on a night time hue as she found herself standing in front of a burning, twisted wreck. She could see shadows stumble and drag themselves from the burning starship, clutching at their bleeding bodies as they attempted to get away. Their forms were hazy and indistinct, though, and quickly disappeared.

One form did not disappear, and instead limped from the burning vessel with almost indecent haste. As she watched, it turned to stare at the destruction behind it, revealing its face to her.

"Priestess! Are you okay?" Jedon said, shaking his priestess as he tried to wake her from whatever vision had taken her.

"Yes, yes... I'm fine," Akitesh said as she shook the last vestiges of the vision from her head. "Set a course for Euti, I want to be there yesterday."

He gave her one more worried look before bowing in respect. "Yes, priestess."

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to address the crew," Akitesh said as she levitated her datapad out of her pocket, while simultaneously handing back the one that Jedon had given her. "We have a lot of work to do..."