**SHADOW PLAY—PART ONE**

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Note: Both parts of this episode make reference to characters who have appeared in the

IDW comic series *My Little Pony: Legends of Magic* and *My Little Pony: FIENDship Is Magic*, as well as the film *My Little Pony: Equestria Girls—Rainbow Rocks*. Familiarity with those stories is not essential to being able

to follow this one, but the events do dovetail with each other slightly.

Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of a book resting on a table by a quill, candle in holder, and stacks of notes. The design on the cover—stars and swirling curves within a hexagon—matches the book seen in Sunburst’s “blind buy” barrel at the end of “Uncommon Bond.” The only visible difference is the state of the cover: blue and intact, rather than dark gray and mottled with stains. A unicorn’s field opens the book and flips through the pages as a stern, elderly stallion’s voice begins to speak.*)

**Old stallion voice:** The best elements within us can spread light and virtue.

(*On these last two words, the riffle of paper stops to show a diagram consisting of five empty white circles, evenly spaced on the circumference of a ring; a sixth circle is in the center, connected to each of the others. Zoom in.*)

**Old stallion voice:** And I know ponies who represent them all.

(*For each of the first five attributes he names, a stylized storybook drawing of one of the five legendary ponies mentioned in previous episodes from this season appears in the peripheral blanks. In order: Rockhoof, Flash Magnus, Mage Meadowbrook wearing her bird mask, Mistmane, Somnambula. The third of these appeared in “A Health of Information,” the last in “Daring Done?”, the others in “Campfire Tales.” Each wears or carries the item associated with him/her in those old tales: shovel, fireproof shield Netitus, mask, flower, blindfold. His last word brings a picture of an old gray unicorn stallion to the center, whose copious gray/white facial hair and belled hat/cloak identify him as Starswirl the Bearded. The storybook style continues until the end of the prologue.*)

**Old stallion voice:** Strength, bravery, healing, beauty, hope, and sorcery.

(*Dissolve to the six standing in a line, each with a rising sun behind him/her; Meadowbrook has removed her mask, Somnambula her blindfold. As the narration continues, the camera pans to frame a smallish unicorn stallion standing alongside. Coat almost an exact match for Starswirl’s; pleading blue eyes; light blue-green mane/tail cut short and straight; short, ragged cloak. He stands outside a castle, and next to him is a grid containing the five key items and Starswirl’s journal.*)

**Old stallion voice:** Myself and these Pillars of Equestria were gathered together by another to maintain and share the light of these powerful ideals.

(*The unicorn glares at the array; on the next line, he casts a spell to vanish them and himself, and the camera pans further to show the castle now under a dark, threatening cloud cover.*)

**Old stallion voice:** But we soon came to believe the pony who brought us together— (*He reappears, levitating the items, and races off.*) —only wanted that power for himself.

(*A dissolve replaces the empty grid with profiles of the other five humorless faces and shows Starswirl ordering him away in the main frame. During the next line, the stallion disappears and all six turn sadly away.*)

**Old stallion voice:** Cast out and alone, this power-mad pony turned to darkness to satisfy his thirst.

(*Dissolve to the outcast passing through a rocky wasteland and becoming consumed by a flare of dark energy from the ground. He ends up perhaps three times his original height and nearly black, his overall contour and jagged-toothed maw calling to mind a passing resemblance to Queen Chrysalis. The mane/tail stream back, as does a ragged tendril along the body that evokes his threadbare raiment. The eyes have dark gray whites and lighter pupils, and the horn is bent sharply backward.*)

**Old stallion voice:** Transformed into a Pony of Shadows, he returned for revenge, to extinguish the Pillars’ light and rob the world of hope.

(*Dissolve to the Pony of Shadows—“Shadows” for short—and the heroic sextet—the Pillars of Equestria—charging toward each other as the sun rises over the hill. Meadowbrook is wearing her mask again.*)

**Old stallion voice:** To stop him, the Pillars and I must make a brave sacrifice.

(*Dissolve to them, all but Starswirl wearing/carrying their signature items and framed in circles that are connected to a blue central gem against a backdrop of thick clouds. During the next line, power flows into this from each pony and it becomes a blue/gold sunburst, the haze partly clearing to allow glimpses of sun and moon.*)

**Old stallion voice:** But we shall leave behind a seed, in hopes that one day it will grow into a force to stand against the darkness for all time.

(*A dissolve replaces each pony with his/her item, including the journal, and causes a sapling to appear at the center; the clouds dissipate entirely to show both heavenly bodies in a starry night sky.*)

**Old stallion voice:** We must now face the fiend with the only plan we have.

(*On the end of this, the view dissolves to show this final image on a book page, above a few last lines of writing. The rest of that page and the whole of the facing one are blank, and a zoom out shows it held aloft in Sunburst’s field.*)

**Sunburst:** (*reading*) “I only hope it will be enough.”

(*It should be clear by now that the narrating voice is that of Starswirl himself, and when Sunburst closes and lowers the book, it proves to be the one from the barrel—the venerable mage’s journal. He is in the throne room of Canterlot Castle and facing Princesses Celestia and Luna, haunch-sitting side by side on the dais that holds the seat of power.*)

**Sunburst:** That’s the last entry—

(*Cut to just behind the sisters, framing the rest of the gang from Ponyville behind him—Twilight Sparkle, her friends, Starlight Glimmer, and Spike.*)

**Sunburst:** —and maybe Starswirl’s final words before he vanished!

(*Celestia and Luna both recoil in horror at this pronouncement when the camera cuts to them. Zoom in slowly and snap to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the gathering, zooming in slowly as Celestia floats the journal up to her level.*)

**Celestia:** I’ve always wondered what happened to Starswirl. (*Close-up; she turns pages.*) This is quite a discovery, Sunburst. (*He bows.*)

**Twilight:** (*moving up*) So it’s genuine? (*rearing up, wings twitching*) You can verify that this journal really belonged to Starswirl the Bearded?

**Luna:** Indeed. (*shifting it to herself*) From the looks of it, the last thing he wrote before facing the Pony of Shadows.

**Rainbow Dash:** (*slightly rattled*) Uh, so the Pony of Shadows was really real?

(*Referring to the legend that had most of the group freaking out during “Castle Mane-ia.” Long shot of the throne room in profile; slow pan.*)

**Celestia:** It appears so.

**Luna:** We never met the other Pillars, and we were too young to understand the danger they faced.

**Applejack:** Hold on a second now. (*Cut to her and Sunburst; she steps up.*) All those legendary ponies were real too, *and* they went off with Starswirl to face the Pony of Shadows, and then none of them were ever heard from again? (*Sunburst nods.*)

**Pinkie Pie:** (*scoffing laughter, leaning into view to nudge her*) Yeah. Weren’t you listening? (*Big dopey grin; cut to Fluttershy.*)

**Fluttershy:** But what happened to them all? (*She backs off on the next line, framing Rarity alongside.*)

**Rarity:** They must have defeated the villain, since Equestria’s still full of light and hope.

**Starlight:** But how? And where did they go? (*Celestia floats the journal close and skims a page.*)

**Celestia:** My Old Ponish is a bit rusty, but I wonder if the answers can be found somewhere within the pages of this book. (*Close it.*)

**Twilight:** Well, I just happen to be an expert in Old Ponish. (*trotting in place*) I mean, I’ve practically memorized every ancient text about Starswirl there is!

**Spike:** (*dryly, hand to face*) Seriously. All of them.

**Luna:** We have fond memories of our old teacher. (*Her magic grips the journal.*) If you could discover what happened to him— (*Send it away.*) —we would be most grateful.

(*Twilight is so amped up that she leaps to snatch it out of the air.*)

**Sunburst:** Solving a thousands-year-old mystery could take forever! (*He wheels to face Applejack with a slightly crazed grin.*) Think of the research! The re-reading! (*to Spike*) The re-re-reading!

(*One pale-socked front hoof comes up for a high five; the baby dragon reciprocates by thumping a fist against it and giving him a dirty look. Celestia and Luna smile gently.*)

**Celestia:** You might find you need help.

(*Close-up of a grinning Twilight; pan slightly on the next line to frame the rest of the bunch ready to get at it, Rainbow hovering above the others.*)

**Applejack:** Luckily, she’s got a whole bushel of helpers— (*gesturing to others*) —right here.

**Rainbow:** Totally! (*suddenly uncertain*) Uh, how long will all this research take, exactly? (*Twilight floats the journal up.*)

**Twilight:** Let’s get this back to my library. I’m sure we’ll figure out what happened in no time.

(*Eight ponies and one dragon move out with a chorus of happy agreement and encouraging words. Dissolve to a close-up of a stack of books resting on the floor, in the library of the Castle of Friendship. Scrolls lean/hang into view against it on one side, and the edges of Twilight’s hooves are visible at the other. On a nearby table is a candle that has burned down to a stub; once the flame goes out, a yawning Spike steps in to replace it with a fresh one. Zoom out to show his equally fatigued boss at the table, poring over the journal and chewing on a pencil as soft snores are heard from somewhere o.s. The whole area is littered with notes, parchment, piled-up books, and even an open box of cupcakes.*)

**Spike:** Figure it out yet, Twilight?

(*She shakes her head without a word; he pitches the spent candle out of its holder and across the room. It bounces off an overstuffed box and into a trash can full of other lumps of used-up wax, giving an idea of just how long this search has gone on. The disturbance causes a pile of scrolls to rattle and fall off Sunburst as he snaps up with a cry, having dozed off beneath them.*)

**Sunburst:** Mmm—uh, what did you figure out?

(*Pan quickly away from him to stop on Pinkie and Rarity, both also zonked out at the table; the unicorn has donned her reading glasses. Pinkie jerks her head up from the box of cupcakes she has been using as a pillow, one ending up stuck to her eye and a few other crumbs dotting her face, and gasps as Rarity comes around more slowly.*)

**Pinkie:** You figured something out?

(*A flick of her tongue transfers the errant treat from eye to mouth. Now Applejack and Fluttershy come around from their naps on the floor, as do Fluttershy’s rabbit Angel and a few other small critters who are helping her out.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*rubbing eyes*) What is it? (*All gather in; zoom in slowly. Twilight has set the pencil down.*)

**Twilight:** (*sighing*) Nothing. I mean, Starswirl was a genius, obviously. But forget Old Ponish. There’s parts where his horn-writing is like another language!

(*She groans and pulls both front hooves down her face; Applejack moves a stack of books aside with a sigh.*)

**Applejack:** Twilight, we’ve been studyin’ and referencin’ and cross-referencin’ for three days straight now.

(*She crosses her eyes briefly on “cross-referencin’.” Cut to Rainbow, who wakes up atop the tower of tomes she has been using as a bed and stretches.*)

**Rainbow:** I haven’t spent this much time reading since the last Daring Do book came out. (*Pan/tilt down to Rarity on the start of the next line.*)

**Rarity:** Perhaps it *is* time to take a break. This mystery is over a thousand years old, after all.

(*Behind her, Starlight’s magic exerts itself over a door and swings it open to admit her, levitating a tray with a teapot and cup/saucer.*)

**Rarity:** Another day or two won’t make a difference.

**Twilight:** *Two days?!?* I don’t want to waste two seconds!

(*As she begins to pace, followed closely by Applejack, Starlight approaches the table and casts a quizzical eye toward the battered old book. A few steps bring the Princess to a blackboard chalked thick with diagrams and formulas, at the center of which is Starswirl’s hat.*)

**Twilight:** I’m close to an answer. I can feel it!

**Starlight:** (*now o.s., slowly) Herk seilfum se Ponehenge.*

(*Those words do wonders to pull Twilight’s attention from the board; on the end of this line, cut to just behind her, watching Starlight read from the journal as Spike looks on. Starlight has set the tray down.*)

**Starlight:** What’s that? (*Close-up; Twilight bumps her aside, eyes bugging out.*)

**Twilight:** “The temple of Ponehenge”? You can read that?

**Starlight:** The horn-writing’s pretty sloppy, but it’s nowhere near as bad as mine. (*reading, slowly; others gather around table*) “*Tawar dul grimnik al fola fierginborg*”?

**Sunburst:** (*with growing comprehension*) “At the base of Foal Mountain…” (*Twilight throws him a grin, then turns back to Starlight.*)

**Starlight:** “*Usur endemest shield*.”

**Twilight:** (*gasping, wide-eyed*) “Our last stand.”

(*Pinkie’s face is clean in this sequence. A loud yawn from the o.s. Spike; pan quickly to him, setting up a cushion and pillow amid the clutter off to one side.*)

**Spike:** (*drowsily*) Well, that sure sounds like a clue to me.

(*He blows out the nearest candle and is instantly asleep. Now Sunburst floats a book onto the table and opens it; as all eight equines crowd in for an uneasy look, the camera cuts to a close-up of a drawing he has indicated and zooms in slowly. The page depicts a sketch of a clearing in which four stone pillars stand ringed around something flat in the center that might be a table or altar. Once the image fills the screen, the view dissolves to this actual location, which stands in a thickly overgrown forest. Only the bottommost few feet of each pillar remain, the rest having long since crumbled away, but their girth suggests the sheer mass of rock that went into building this place—Ponehenge—untold centuries ago. The broken tops of two other columns can be seen rising above the trees in the edge of the clearing nearest the camera, making six in all. The central structure is actually a platform topped by a flat stone ring. Broken rocks and uncontrolled plant growth give away the ravages of time and poor maintenance.*)

(*Twilight and company make their way in from one edge, she with the journal in her aura and open. Rarity has removed her glasses, and all have at least had a chance to rest up.*)

**Twilight:** This is it. (*The others spread out.*) Ponehenge. I can’t believe it.

(*Rarity scrapes away a layer of grime from one column, and Sunburst clears away some vines to expose two rows of characters etched into the surface.*)

**Sunburst:** I’ve never seen magical runes like these before! (*to Twilight*) Have you?

**Twilight:** (*shaking head*) Huh-uh. (*She paces; Pinkie jumps off a column; Rainbow inspects another one.*)

**Rainbow:** I don’t think anypony’s seen any of this for a long time.

(*During this sequence, the night sky becomes visible through the trees for the first time. Rainbow clamps her teeth onto the end of a particularly tenacious vine and backs up in midair, wings beating furiously in an effort to tear it loose. When it finally gives way, the sudden release of tension sends her hurtling across the clearing and past Applejack at another broken column.*)

**Rainbow:** Whoa!

(*She crashes into a bush, but the farmer is quick to chomp into the brightly colored tail and extricate her. The hard landing has left bits of greenery matted into mane and tail, and Rainbow spits out the last bit in her mouth.*)

**Applejack:** It’d take a whole team of ponies to clear away all this brush.

(*Cut to Fluttershy, cleaning off yet another monolith. When a stone fragment breaks loose, she frantically shoves it back into place.*)

**Fluttershy:** Even then— (*It falls off again.*) —I’m not sure we’d find out what happened here over a thousand years ago.

(*As she finishes, the camera pans to Twilight and Starlight at the central platform. The winged unicorn closes the journal with a sigh.*)

**Twilight:** You’re right. (*crossing to one column with it*) I suppose it was a longshot.

**Spike:** Cheer up, Twilight. Finding a whole set of ancient ruins is pretty impressive. Or maybe you could write a paper on it.

**Twilight:** I guess I hoped we’d get here and the mystery would just magically be explained.

(*She lets the old book drop onto the column’s flat base and turns away. Almost as soon as it touches the rock, though, pale blue energy flares up from Starswirl’s insignia, the hexagon surrounding it, and the bands on the spine. Rainbow is now clean of her added foliage.*)

**Spike:** (*backing away hastily*) Uh, Twilight?

(*All the others except for her have seen the start of this new light show by now. She turns back, gasps at the sight, and hits reverse just before the cover opens on its own and the pages flip madly, sending up their own burst of magic that resolves into a translucent image of Starswirl. His colors are somewhat washed out, and there are faint horizontal lines across his form, as if this were the product of a television set with a slightly balky picture tube. Two previously unseen details can be discerned during the following: the tips of his hooves are a darker gray than his coat, and even with the faded colors, the gray-violet of his eyes can be made out.*)

**Twilight:** (*smiling breathlessly, advancing toward him*) Starswirl? I…I’ve wanted to meet you my whole life! (*hovering, clapping, as Sunburst moves up*) I can’t believe you’re here!

(*She drops to all fours, Starswirl showing no response whatsoever. Sunburst puts a hoof through the old wizard, but encounters no resistance—merely a projection.*)

**Sunburst:** I don’t think he *is* here. (*pointing across clearing*) I don’t think any of them are!

(*Every living eye widens in pure shock as avatars of the other five Pillars flicker into being at the bases of the other columns, all shown in a manner similar to Starswirl. The camera pans slowly across the area, showing Rainbow near Magnus, Rarity next to Mistmane, Pinkie by Somnambula, Fluttershy hovering just above the masked Meadowbrook, and Applejack boggling at Rockhoof. The image of Starswirl fires a beam from its horn toward the center; Applejack, Starlight, and Spike clear out a split second before it hits. In response, a gout of dark grayish-black slime gushes up and forms into a large sphere; one inky hoof stomps down from this, then another, and a ghostly copy of Shadows rears up and cackles madly over the scene. His eyes burn pure white, rather than the two-tone gray seen in the prologue, and the tendril of energy around his throat has lengthened to better resemble the frayed cloak. His voice carries a British accent and plenty of unhidden malice, and his words reverberate weirdly.*)

**Shadows:** You summon me at your peril, Starswirl! Once I defeat all of you— (*Slow pan across Magnus and Mistmane; he continues o.s.*) —this realm will embrace the darkness— (*Across the other three.*) —as I did so long ago.

(*Throughout this, the flesh-and-blood ponies have slowly moved to take cover behind the columns, Pinkie grabbing Fluttershy’s tail in her teeth and dragging her away. In a longer shot of the entire clearing, he unfurls a pair of nearly skeletal wings and roars, throwing out tendrils from the feathers that ensnare each of the six spectral heroes. Shadows laughs exultantly as umbrae close in, blackening both the sky and Ponehenge, and drags Starswirl away from his journal.*)

**Shadows:** Drawing me here will only make me stronger. You will never defeat me!

**Starswirl:** We did not come here to defeat you.

(*A flare from his horn vaporizes his bindings and allows him to stand upright, an immaterial duplicate of his journal rising from the real one and opening to emit a beam of white light. Magnus raises Netitus just high enough to take the hit, his own bonds vanishing; from here, the power shoots toward Mistmane and hits her flower to free her. On it goes to Somnambula’s blindfold on an upraised hoof, then Meadowbrook’s mask, and finally Rockhoof’s shovel, releasing each in turn. The beam passes back to Starswirl, forming a closed hexagonal perimeter, and begins to grow in intensity.*)

**Shadows:** What are you doing?!

(*Six vertical panels slide into place all at once to fill the screen, from alternating bottom and top edges. Each shows one of the six Pillars wearing/holding/levitating his/her item.*)

**Starswirl:** We came to contain you!

(*Long shot of Ponehenge; they slowly rise clear of the ground, taking the screaming Shadows with them in a giant, crackling, blinding ball of light. One almighty flash whites out the screen for a moment and clears to leave behind nothing but the six items. Ponies and dragon watch flabbergasted as, one by one, they fall and disappear into showers of sparks upon contact with the bases of the columns. The blade of Rockhoof’s shovel leaves a deep gouge in the stone surface when it hits. Last to fall is the ghost journal, which vanishes into the real one and causes its cover to close again. Starlight and Sunburst are the first to move toward it, their minds completely blown; Twilight is faring no better, but Pinkie is cheerful as always.*)

**Pinkie:** (*to her*) Well, you did ask for a magical explanation.

(*Twilight rolls her eyes wearily before the view fades to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of the journal as Twilight lifts it in her field.*)

**Rainbow:** Uh…what just happened?

**Starlight:** (*scratching at platform wall*) It looks like Starswirl cast a spell that banished the Pony of Shadows.

**Sunburst:** Of course! Powerful magic like that would leave an impression on this place. Bringing the book back here let us see what happened.

**Applejack:** Which was what? (*Zoom in slowly on Twilight.*)

**Twilight:** (*wrapping a wing around the journal*) Starswirl and the rest of the Pillars sacrificed themselves to save Equestria.

(*Dissolve to a long shot of the Castle and zoom in slowly. It is now the following day. On the start of the next line, cut to Starlight and Sunburst walking along a corridor inside.*)

**Starlight:** It’s amazing to think, one of the greatest mysteries of Equestria was solved with a musty old book from an antique shop.

**Sunburst:** (*stroking beard*) But I wouldn’t say the mystery’s solved. Starswirl’s spell was one of the most powerful feats of magic in all of history. (*lighting horn*) It’ll take years of study before we fully understand it.

(*They have stopped before a set of double doors by now, and his magic opens them to reveal the library on the other side—still as much of a disaster area as it was before. Twilight pops up from behind a table piled with at least twice as many books as it should be able to hold safely.*)

**Twilight:** I think I understand Starswirl’s spell!

(*Extremely confused looks pass between the two unicorns at the threshold. Dissolve to an overhead shot of the throne room, which might as well be a branch library for all the books and notes piled up and thrown about on the floor, and zoom in slowly. All seven thrones are occupied by their intended users, and Starlight and Sunburst stand at the edge of the central table and its magical map.*)

**Twilight:** I know I finished one of Starswirl’s spells before, but this one was on a whole different level.

(*Cut to table level, the camera placed near Fluttershy and Rainbow, as three books sail in past them.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) Was it an explosion of magical feedback? (*To Applejack/Pinkie/Rarity; ditto.*) An evocation? A kind of incantation?

(*Now she hovers over the table, the six volumes describing a lazy circle around her.*)

**Twilight:** (*doing a loop*) It’s Starswirl, so the possibilities are endless! (*All are sent flying; she descends to Starlight.*) And once Starlight set me on the right track with his crazy horn-writing— (*Snorting giggle.*) —I mean, he was a genius, so I guess we can forgive a little messiness. (*flying to Applejack, bopping her in face with levitated journal*) I went through the journal again, and it’s amazing!

(*The farm pony rubs her nose as the single-minded Princess shifts to a higher altitude with her favorite reading material.*)

**Rarity:** Twilight, darling, we understand you’re excited— (*dryly*) —but that’s all we understand.

**Rainbow:** Uh, what exactly is so amazing? (*Twilight swoops down to get in her face.*)

**Twilight:** Only how Starswirl and the other Pillars sent the Pony of Shadows to Limbo!

**Applejack:** They did what, now?

(*With an ever-so-slightly-unbalanced grin, Twilight settles back onto her throne and sets the journal on the table. She then ducks down for a moment and comes up with a cardboard model of Ponehenge; placing this in view, she uses her horn to kindle and grow a spot of light above its central platform. Zoom out slowly.*)

**Twilight:** They used their magic to open a portal between worlds, to Limbo, and pulled the Pony of Shadows inside. (*A poof, and the model is gone except for a curl of smoke.*)

**Rarity:** (*shocked*) Darling, your diorama!

**Twilight:** (*excitedly, pointing to one side*) I made more!

(*Pan quickly to a side table, which is stacked with both spare models and the raw materials and tools that went into their making. A stack of three in the middle chooses this moment to collapse under its own weight.*)

**Twilight:** (*circling table in air, carrying journal*) Starswirl thought the only way to trap the Pony of Shadows in Limbo was for the Pillars to take him there. (*It floats out of her grip.*)

**Applejack:** So they got stuck too!

**Fluttershy:** (*hunching down, shivering*) The Pony of Shadows must have been really awful for them to do that. (*Cut to Pinkie, idly crossing the room.*)

**Pinkie:** I suppose being trapped for all time with a super-duper bad guy in Limbo might be okay if you were *doing* the limbo…

(*On the end of this, she goes to her hind legs and bends the rest of her body backwards so that it is parallel to the floor, allowing her to avoid a collision with the slowly flying and reading Twilight. The pink pony then pops up with a laugh and shrug.*)

**Pinkie:** …but that’s still pushing it.

**Twilight:** The thing is, I think I can get them out.

**Sunburst:** Twilight, are you serious? You can save the most legendary ponies of all time?

**Starlight:** (*uncertainly*) I don’t know. (*scratching back of head*) Opening portals between worlds didn’t work out well for me. (*Nervous chuckle.*) Are you sure it’s safe?

**Twilight:** (*flying over table to point at her*) First of all, you opened portals through time. And second of all, Starswirl wrote the spell you used to do it. If he’d been here— (*Cut to a chastened Starlight; she continues o.s.*) —he could have stopped it. (*Back to her.*) Equestria would be safer with him in it. We have to save him.

**Applejack:** But…you’d be savin’ all the Pillars, right? A-And they disappeared ages ago.

**Twilight:** (*landing, setting book on table*) That’s the thing about Limbo. It isn’t one place or another. It’s in between, so time stands still. If we can pull them out, it’ll be like they never left. (*giddy*) I actually built another model to demonstrate—

(*A loud groan from Rainbow, couple with a thud of the blue head against the table’s edge, does wonders to silence her.*)

**Spike:** What can we do to help?

**Twilight:** If I’m right, we need to find items that are connected to the Pillars in some way.

**Rainbow:** You mean like stuff that belonged to them?

**Fluttershy:** (*as Rainbow lifts her head*) How would we know what to look for? Or where?

**Twilight:** (*levitating journal*) Luckily, Starswirl took a lot of notes.

(*A quick shuffle through the pages, and she lets the book settle into her hooves. Zoom out slowly.*)

**Twilight:** (*reading*) “My compatriots are as varied as the realm itself, and hail from every corner of our land, bringing with them artifacts and talismans of great power.”

(*She is so engrossed in the account that she fails to notice the glow that casts itself over the room from somewhere up and o.s.—but Fluttershy, Starlight, and Spike do not.*)

**Starlight:** Um, Twilight, what are you doing?

(*Now the purple eyes swivel upward, the jaw beneath them falling wide open in shock. Cut to a long overhead shot of the table; brightly glowing copies of the items corresponding to all Pillars except Starswirl have appeared and are circling beneath the chandelier’s roots.*)

**Twilight:** I’m not doing anything!

(*The sigils descend toward the map; cut to its level as they stop above different locations in time with the next five lines.*)

**Applejack:** Rockhoof’s shovel!

**Rainbow:** Flash Magnus’s shield!

**Rarity:** Mistmane’s flower!

**Fluttershy:** Meadowbrook’s mask!

**Pinkie:** And the blindfold Somnambula wore when she faced that nasty Sphinx!

**Twilight:** I guess we don’t need to figure out who should get what.

(*Zoom in to a close-up of the shovel, which has marked out the village that Rockhoof saved from the volcanic eruption in “Campfire Tales,” and dissolve to the actual locale. Time has worked the place over but good, and the volcano has gone extinct and eroded away to leave not much height projecting above its craggy foothills. From here, cut to an extreme close-up of a small brush being whisked across a patch of dirt to expose a long-buried, rusty helmet. The next voice that speaks is that of Petunia, the filly who proved to have a knack for archaeology/paleontology in “The Fault in Our Cutie Marks.”*)

**Petunia:** (*from o.s.*) Professor!

(*Longer shot: she and an earth pony colt stand over the spot, he with the brush in his mouth. They are soon joined by Professor Fossil, whom she has just addressed. Light gray earth pony mare, brown eyes behind half-moon glasses on a chain, square jaw, untidy two-tone gray-green mane/tail, brown bush shirt, blue kerchief tied around neck, cutie mark of a pickaxe poised over a stone, smudged with dirt.*)

**Petunia:** It’s a Mighty Helm headpiece! Maybe it belonged to Rockhoof himself!

**Fossil:** (*dismissively*) Legends don’t wear helmets. (*adjusting glasses*) This belonged to a *real* pony.

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) Oh, I can guarantee—

(*Cut to a long shot of the area, a dig site. Supplies and tents have been set up, and a few other researchers are on the job—and Applejack stands among them.*)

**Applejack:** —Rockhoof was as real as you and me.

**Fossil:** (*laughing contemptuously*) And I suppose that ravine was dug with his trusty shovel to save the village from an erupting volcano.

**Applejack:** Probably.

**Fossil:** I love old legends as much as anypony, but a pony strong enough to save a village from rushing lava with a shovel is…preposterous.

(*The head of a stallion’s pickaxe shatters a chunk of stone, setting off a tremor that prompts a round of fearful exclamations, and the massive boulder it had been supporting breaks loose and starts to roll across the site.*)

**Applejack:** *Huh?!?*

(*The monolith bears down on the petrified professor and her protégés, but stops inches short of turning them into pizza or puree. It quivers in place, a long shot disclosing the Herculean effort that Applejack is putting into holding it back with only her hind legs. One last heave sends it up and out of sight over a ridge; its unseen impact against the ground shakes the vicinity and spooks a flock of birds into taking flight. The blond workhorse just stands before the dumbfounded trio and works a kink out of one leg as the rest of the crew gathers around her.*)

**Fossil:** I…can’t believe you just did that. You saved us!

**Applejack:** (*smugly*) I bet if you told somepony else this story, it might sound… (*gasping; adopting her tone of voice*) …preposterous.

(*She drives her point home with a cocked-eyebrow smirk. The stallion who set off this near-disaster taps her shoulder for attention and points to the spot where the boulder had stood. Beyond it is the entrance to a small chamber built from stones, newly exposed by its motion. Cut to inside it, the camera pointing out at the entrance; visible to one side in the fore is a chipped, cracked, discolored shovel blade. Applejack moves cautiously in toward this, while Fossil and the stallion hang back at the threshold.*)

**Fossil:** I suppose some stories might be true.

(*Cut to just behind her. What they have found is a small shrine erected in Rockhoof’s honor, the shovel resting on a rune-carved altar before a panel that depicts the great stallion using it. As Fossil smiles and her colleague gapes, Applejack clamps her teeth around the handle and lifts the tool away, turning to face them. It begins to emit a golden glow.*)

**Fossil:** And Rockhoof’s appears to be one of them!

(*Wipe to an extreme close-up of the latch securing a pair of rusty wrought-iron gates. Rarity’s magic takes hold to release it, then swings one gate open in a longer shot. The gates are set into a wall and give onto a path lined by long-neglected tangles of towering bushes, brambles, and leafy undergrowth. Rarity steps warily through the gates and into view, pushing the uncontrolled greenery aside to find Mistmane’s flower in a small, cracked clay pot atop a moss-covered stone pedestal. It is in perfect shape, a sharp contrast to the expanse of chaos and disuse that has taken hold of all else in this place. Her eyes widen at the sight of it and one white hoof reaches toward the pot, only to be slapped away by a telekinetically held gardening trowel.*)

**Rarity:** Ow!

**Old mare voice:** You keep those hooves to yourself, dearie!

(*Zoom out on the end of this line to frame the speaker, a gray unicorn whose pale pink mane/tail are both tied into buns. She wears a dark pink-violet, sleeveless shirt with a pink bow tie, and she has violet-tinged blue eyes and a cutie mark of a blooming flower. The visible details of the house on whose porch she stands confirm the hunch suggested by the flower’s presence—this is Mistmane’s home village as seen in “Campfire Tales.”*)

**Old mare:** This place has been in my family for generations— (*descending porch with trowel*) —and I’m not about to let some whippersnapper take the last good piece of it!

(*Long shot, panning slowly: the entire settlement is nearly lost to the wild proliferation.*)

**Old mare:** Time was, ponies came from far and wide to see these gardens. (*Close-up.*) But that flower’s the only worthwhile thing left!

(*She stabs the trowel into the moss on the pedestal, unnerving Rarity for only a moment until she gets a big idea. Her aura pulls the tool loose; within seconds, she is on the move as the old mare watches, stupefied. The trowel and a pair of pruning shears attack a shaggy mass of vines in a blur of metal and flying leaves, quickly exposing a nicely manicured shrub in a hanging basket. A broom and dustpan are brought to bear as well, sweeping up bits of detritus as the high-speed vegetation cleanup continues. In no time flat, the path is left clean and lined with neatly tended miniature trees and bushes. Finally, two pairs of flying shears trim back the growth behind a bush gone brown from malnourishment, then hacks away the dead leaves to leave behind a mare-shaped bonsai tree studded with flowers.*)

(*Cut to a close-up of the old mare, staring in mute disbelief at the floral renovation that has just taken place, and zoom out to frame Rarity making one last snip with the shears before putting them away. The white unicorn is wearing a heaping helping of scuffs, dirt clods, and leaves tangled in her mane.*)

**Rarity:** Perhaps it just seemed like your gardens were worthless, but a little pruning can work wonders.

(*A long shot proves her words to be quite the understatement. Every square inch of the village has benefited from her ministrations, with lush flowers, plants, and bushes growing at all levels from ground to rooftop. Slow pan.*)

**Rarity:** Of course, you will have to look after more than just one flower now. (*Close-up; the aged eyes fill with tears.*)

**Old mare:** You’ve given me back my family’s legacy. (*wiping them dry, floating flower off pedestal*) The flower you wanted seems like a fair trade for that.

(*It settles on Rarity’s hoof and begins to glow as Rockhoof’s shovel did. Wipe to a rocky crevasse, the camera angled to point up into the sky from its depths. Rainbow swoops down from the sun with Spike on her back, punches through a cloud, and pulls up to a hover.*)

**Rainbow:** (*looking around*) I can’t believe Flash Magnus’s shield ended up in the Dragon Lands! (*She gets moving under an expanse of dark clouds.*)

**Spike:** Good thing you brought the official Equestrian friendship ambassador to the dragons to help you navigate our customs. (*eagerly, pointing down ahead*) Like our favorite sport, gorge surfing!

(*Several dragons are gathered at the top of a slope that serves as the bed for a sluggishly flowing stream of lava. Each is holding a large, flat slab of rock, and a lanky blue female leaps into the red-hot torrent, gripping hers so that she lands standing on it like a surfboard.*)

**Blue:** (*laughing*) Woo-hoo! Yeah!

(*She trails off into a string of enthusiastic whoops and yells while launching herself off an outcropping, touching down again only when she is almost to the bottom. A skid of stone on stone brings her to a stop and elicits a round of cheers from the rest of the crowd. Rainbow lands at a distance behind them.*)

**Rainbow:** (*to Spike*) Okay. That was *awesome!*

(*The dragons turn to the pair, all hostility in an instant, and an orange male speaks up as Spike climbs off Rainbow’s back.*)

**Orange:** Dragon Lord Ember commanded us to make peace with ponies, but it doesn’t mean you can surf in our spot. (*The others growl softly; Spike stops Rainbow before she can deliver a retort.*)

**Spike:** (*chuckling a bit, stepping forward*) Whoa, fellas! As the official Equestrian friendship ambassador to the dragons, I have to say that’s not very friendly.

(*The pegasus allows herself a cocky smirk during these words, but it goes away in a hurry at the sound of the next voice.*)

**Garble:** (*from o.s., chuckling nastily*) Well, what do you know? (*He bulls his way through the group, Netitus under one arm.*) The puny pony dragon’s sticking up for his pony pal!

(*He spins the mythical shield on one finger, showing rust and chips along the edges.*)

**Rainbow:** (*hovering, angrily*) Hey! That’s an ancient pony artifact! (*She charges; he shoves her back and down.*)

**Garble:** Hooves off my gorge board! I found it in the desert, and finders keepers.

**Rainbow:** It isn’t yours!

**Garble:** Huh. It sure looks like mine—but I might consider racing you for it. (*Rainbow stands up.*)

**Rainbow:** No problem.

**Garble:** Um…no. I mean… (*pointing to Spike*) *…you.*

(*The little dragon has no response but a lame, sweaty-faced chuckle and a scratch at the back of his head. Wipe to an extreme close-up of the lava flow, the sound of cheering dragons drifting down to the surface, and tilt up. Rainbow and Spike stand on one bank at the top, Garble and the other dragons directly across from them. Blue has rejoined the group, but Orange is not present. Spike now has a stone board of his own in hand; he cringes and sweats in close-up, the camera zooming out to frame his sneering rival, who blows a loud raspberry and gives him a thumbs-down. Spike doe his best to swallow his fear and nerves before Orange swoops down to hover above the stream.*)

**Orange:** On your marks…get set… (*blowing a jet of fire*) …surf!

(*Garble is considerably quicker off the mark than Spike and barrels ahead, sending up a spray of lava and throwing his opponent off balance. Spike belly-flops onto his board with a string of terrified shouts, then fires off a hearty scream as an outcropping sends him airborne. Rainbow grimaces in fear amid the spectator dragons’ cheers and jeers, and he bounces gracelessly from one rock to another before describing a long, full-throated arc over the head of the disbelieving Garble. The red bully zooms ahead, but just before he reaches the bottom, Spike and his board plummet to break a tape stretched between two stakes as a finish line. It takes the unlikely victor a moment to realize that he is still among the land of the living and let go of his board.*)

**Spike:** (*standing, smiling tentatively*) I won? (*confidently, pumping fists*) I won! Woo-hoo! Give up the shield, Garble!

(*Who grunts in disgust and kicks the edge to flip it up into his back.*)

**Garble:** (*dusting himself off*) Lord Ember only commanded us to be nice to ponies. (*advancing on Spike, ready to grab him*) She never said anything…

(*Close-up of Spike, who loses his nerve and gets a bad case of the shakes as the bigger dragon’s shadow falls over him; zoom in slowly.*)

**Garble:** (*from o.s.*) …about pony-loving dragons.

(*Snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of Spike, now sweating profusely, and zoom out slowly.*)

**Spike:** (*shakily*) Uh, s-since Dragon Lord Ember commanded you to make peace with ponies, you can’t very well attack one of their friends, can you?

(*Garble stomps into view in the fore and idly picks up a rock about the size of his head.*)

**Garble:** I guess we’ll find out.

(*He hurls the chunk toward Spike, but a rainbow-striped flash whisks it away before it can redesign the scaly violet skull. Spike cracks one eye open just in time to spot Rainbow heaving the rock back toward Garble, who screams and tries to run for cover. Too late, though; the weight lands squarely on his tail, pinning it and causing him to pitch to the ground face-first. In close-up, Rainbow comes in for a landing and gets a grateful hug from her traveling buddy; a groan from the o.s. Garble, and the camera zooms out to frame him.*)

**Garble:** Why’s he always hiding behind ponies?

**Spike:** I wasn’t hiding when I beat you down the ridge! (*Garble pushes the rock aside and stands up.*)

**Garble:** You fell.

**Rainbow:** (*smugly*) Wow. You must be slow if all Spike had to do to win was fall down. (*Spike snickers silently.*)

**Garble:** I’m faster than you!

**Rainbow:** Doubt it.

**Garble:** Fine! I’ll race you back to the top. If you win— (*pointing to Netitus on his back*) —you can have your pony junk. But if *I* win— (*poking Rainbow’s nose, then pointing to Spike in turn*) —*you’ll* leave, and *I* get to give it to him.

**Rainbow:** Fine. (*Garble limbers up.*) I’m pretty sure I could beat you anyway, but with that heavy hunk of metal on your back, it’ll be a snap.

**Garble:** Huh? Oh, yeah. (*He removes Netitus.*) Thanks for the tip.

(*It hits the stony plain with a clank, and he is off like a shot toward the peak.*)

**Garble:** See you at the top, loser!

(*He lands there in much less than ten seconds flat and turns two beady eyes back down the incline, puzzlement registering at the total absence of any sign of Rainbow. Orange taps him worriedly on the shoulder and points skyward to direct his attention—and sure enough, the blue mare is flying off, carrying Spike on her back and Netitus in her forelegs. Cut to a long overhead shot of the surfers and zoom out slowly.*)

**Garble:** HEY!! THAT’S MINE!! (*The shield starts to glow gold.*)

**Spike:** (*addressing himself downward, voice raised*) Finders keepers, remember?

**Orange:** (*to Garble, who growls quietly*) See, because that’s what you said to them when they first showed up—

(*A red palm shoved into his chest sends him sprawling before he can finish his completely superfluous explanation. Wipe to the overgrown, bramble-enmeshed tree on the shore of Hayseed Swamp that served as Meadowbrook’s old home in “A Health of Information.” It is late afternoon here, and a swarm of angry, glowing flash bees is parked just above the water’s edge. Meadowbrook’s descendant Cattail parts a patch of thick reeds, advances into view, and pulls her mask down to cover his face. Stopping at the shore, he rises to his hind legs and does a short, gyrating dance; a moment later he is on all fours and backing slowly away, leading the swarm, as Fluttershy peeks through the reeds. Recall that she had previously used the mask to fool the swarm into believing she was a queen bee so she could pacify them.*)

**Fluttershy:** Just remember not to turn away from them, Cattail. Flash bees can get pretty aggressive. I guess that’s why none of the other bayou animals can get to the water.

(*On the second half of this line, cut to a nearby patch of tall grass, which she pulls aside to reveal a fair number of amphibians and reptiles who have taken shelter beneath it. They express sad assent with noises and nods.*)

**Cattail:** Wouldn’t it make more sense for you to wear the mask that calms the bees?

**Fluttershy:** It would… (*She flies up to their now-empty hive…*) …if I didn’t have to fly up here to move their hive. (*…then unhooks it, carries it up to a higher branch, and reattaches it.*) There!

(*Down she comes; Cattail dives into the reeds, and the bees zoom straight into their relocated home. Fluttershy parts the grass so the refugees can return to the swamp, the camera panning to follow them and put her out of view during the next line.*)

**Fluttershy:** Now the other bayou creatures can get to the water without the bees feeling threatened.

(*Cut back to her; zoom out to frame Cattail crossing to her on the start of the next line, the mask no up on his forehead.*)

**Cattail:** You know, you didn’t have to help with this. I woulda lent you the mask anyway. (*He removes it and holds it out to her.*)

**Fluttershy:** I know. (*Giggle.*) But I couldn’t leave without helping.

(*As soon as the yellow feathers make contact with the item, it too becomes suffused with a sunny glow that surprises both of them no end. Wipe to a long shot of the pyramid in which Somnambula faced the Sphinx so many years ago, standing under a foreboding gray sky, and zoom in slowly to the sound of a young stallion’s voice.*)

**Young stallion voice:** I don’t think anypony can find anything in there.

(*Cut to the surface of the pool of bubbling green slime in the Sphinx’s chamber, the camera positioned just above the liquid and pointed at five ponies near the edge. One is a confidently smiling Daring Do, using one front hoof to pump a set of bellows whose outlet hose snakes into the pool; the fact that only one of the others is a stallion points to the speaker’s identity.*)

**Daring:** I wouldn’t give up hope just yet.

(*A sudden jerk on the hose yanks the bellows loose, and she very nearly goes into the drink while snatching it back. The level of the slime begins to drop with remarkable speed, a longer shot of the area showing that the platform on which Dr. Caballeron imprisoned Rainbow in “Daring Done?” has been removed. The last of the goop vanishes down a drain set into the floor of the pool, the hose snaking in as well; it proves to be attached to a deep-sea diving helmet worn by a wetsuit-clad Pinkie when she climbs halfway out.*)

**Pinkie:** (*holding up a strip of cloth, opening helmet’s face window*) This old blindfold was stuck in the drain.

**Daring:** Weren’t you looking for a blindfold?

**Pinkie:** (*smiling*) Oh, yeah!

(*She ducks away within the suit and leaps out through the helmet’s opening to snatch the item of interest in her teeth, causing it to glow like all the others. Dissolve to a long overhead shot of the Ponehenge ruins and zoom in slowly; it is daytime, and Twilight and Sunburst are at the central platform while Starlight inspects one of the broken columns.*)

**Twilight:** I can’t believe I’m gonna meet Starswirl the Bearded!

(*Close-up of her and Sunburst, with Starswirl’s journal open before them.*)

**Twilight:** You know, outside of my dreams.

(*Zoom out on the next line to put Starlight in view, her power wrapped around a vine.*)

**Starlight:** *I* can’t believe you’re actually going through with it. (*She snaps it loose…*)

**Twilight:** What do you mean? (*…and vanishes it.*)

**Starlight:** I’m all for pushing the envelope, obviously, but this is pretty out there for you, Twilight.

**Sunburst:** Wh-What’s out there about saving the most legendary ponies of all time from a thousands-year-old prison?

**Starlight:** (*chastened*) Well, nothing, when you say it like that. (*She paces; Twilight floats the book up.*) Unless the most legendary ponies of all time knew what they were doing and we shouldn’t mess with it. (*Down again.*)

**Sunburst:** I’m sure Starswirl and the Pillars did the best they could back then. (*Twilight nods.*) But magic has come a long way, mostly because of the work they did.

**Starlight:** (*to Twilight*) That’s true, and you did get your wings from finishing one of Starswirl’s spells. (*Twilight lets them flare out.*)

**Twilight:** Exactly!

(*She folds them away and brings the journal up once more as Starlight resumes her pacing.*)

**Starlight:** But then I messed with one and nearly destroyed the universe, so… (*Down again.*)

**Twilight:** (*crossing to her*) Starlight, Starswirl the Bearded is the greatest wizard who ever lived. The chance to have him back in Equestria is worth the risk.

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) That’s good news!

(*All eyes turn toward the surrounding forest, from which Rainbow wings into view, hauling Spike and Netitus.*)

**Rainbow:** Otherwise, we’d have brought this shield for nothing.

(*She plants it at the base of one column, wedging its point so that it stands vertically in the rock. It is no longer glowing; the same will be true of the other recovered items.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) I hope you don’t think you’re the only one to find her artifact—

(*Cut to her, carrying Rockhoof’s shovel and smirking alongside the column at which he appeared during the Act One playback. One bent foreleg is propped on the base.*)

**Applejack:** (*twirling shovel, balancing it on a hoof*) —because this here shovel says otherwise.

(*She lays it down; now Rarity walks in, properly cleaned up from her Act Two gardening blitz and levitating Mistmane’s flower in a new pot.*)

**Rarity:** (*laughing*) Honestly, you two. Not everything is a competition. (*setting it at another base*) But Mistmane’s flower is by far the most attractive of the artifacts.

(*On the start of the next line, zoom out to frame Pinkie peeking out from behind the next column over.*)

**Pinkie:** (*holding up Somnambula’s blindfold*) You’re just saying that because you didn’t have to scuba-dive in a pit of green slime to get yours.

(*It is still as mucked-up as when she fished it from the drain, and she plops it onto the base. Pan to Fluttershy on the next line, one column farther along and wearing Meadowbrook’s mask propped on her forehead.*)

**Fluttershy:** Or move a flash bee hive. (*Long overhead shot of the ruins.*)

**Twilight:** Good work, everyone!

(*Close-up of the closed journal as it is levitated into place on the base of the one unoccupied column, then zoom out to frame Twilight.*)

**Twilight:** Let’s do this!

(*Sunburst is first to rev up his horn and open fire; Starlight rolls her eyes with a weary groan and does likewise a moment later. They are both targeting the journal, and Twilight rises a few feet and adds her own magic to the effort. Fluttershy has taken off the mask and laid it at her column’s base by this point. After some seconds, the three mages cut their spells as the journal starts to glow translucent white on its own, firing off a beam that works its way clockwise around the circle of artifacts to close in the old hexagonal circuit. Twilight and Sunburst grin, the former eagerly and the latter with brimming curiosity, but Starlight’s features arrange themselves into a grimace of barely contained fear and apprehension. The shape of light rises several yards off the ground, taking the artifacts with it, and begins to spin in place. It quickly degenerates into a circular smear of white that contracts briefly into a single point and then explodes outward to white out the screen.*)

(*Fade in to the clearing, with a few very prominent additions floating above it—the broken tops of the six columns, and the Pillars in the horseflesh. One new arrival after another tumbles insensate out of the air, the artifact finders catching/pulling/tackling them and their items in order to keep the falling rocks from doing any further damage. Magnus is the only one of the six not seen during this sequence, and Starswirl is the last to touch down. Meadowbrook is wearing her mask.*)

**Starswirl:** (*dazedly*) What…what has happened?

(*He stands partway up as Twilight lands. Now Magnus can be seen, being helped up by Rainbow.*)

**Twilight:** It worked! (*crossing to Starswirl*) We brought you back!

**Starswirl:** (*rubbing head*) To where? (*He gets fully upright.*)

**Twilight:** You and the others have been trapped in Limbo for over a thousand years. (*His eyes pop.*) But I figured out how to get you ho—

**Starswirl:** *What?!?!?* No, no, no, no! You must undo what you’ve done!

**Twilight:** What? Why? I mean, I don’t think I can.

**Starswirl:** (*stepping down, backing her up*) You cannot bring us back!

**Twilight:** But I did! I brought all the Pillars back!

**Starswirl:** You cannot bring *only* the Pillars back!

(*Lighting tears through the quiet daytime sky, and all present back fearfully away from the central platform as a wisp of dark gray vapor appears and grows rapidly. Voices cry out and hooves bug out just before the miasma coalesces into the same sphere that appeared in the Act One playback. Runnels of slime ooze down and thicken and writhe horribly, the vapor dissipating, and the whole mass resolves into Shadows to the sound of his wild, reverberating laughter. He rears up as dark clouds drift in to choke out the sunlight, then brings his front hooves down hard enough to shake the camera and opens his white-glaring eyes.*)

**Twilight:** Oh, no!

(*She catches her lower lip in her teeth, too scared to get any further words out. Cut to a “To be continued…” title card and snap to black.*)

**Continued in Part Two**