

= The Return of Harmony =

" The Return of Harmony " is the collective name for the first and second episodes of the second season of the Canadian @-@ American animated television series My Little Pony : Friendship Is Magic , as well as the twenty @-@ seventh and twenty @-@ eighth episodes of the series overall . Both episodes were directed by Jayson Thiessen and written by M.A. Larson . Part one of the episode aired in the United States on September 17 , 2011 on the Hub Network . Part two aired the following week , on September 24 . The episode received a Nielsen household rating of 0 @.@ 2 and was viewed by over 339 @,@ 000 viewers , making it the highest @-@ rated episode ever broadcast by the Hub at that point . This is also the last My Little Pony : Friendship Is Magic episode to be produced by Studio B Productions .

The series follows a unicorn pony named Twilight Sparkle as her mentor Celestia guides her to learn about friendship in Ponyville . Twilight becomes close friends with five other ponies : Applejack , Rarity , Fluttershy , Rainbow Dash , and Pinkie Pie . In the first part of the episode , a draconequus named Discord escapes from his stone prison and Twilight and her best friends discover that the Elements of Harmony have been stolen . They must retrieve them in order to save Equestria from eternal chaos , but they have to contend with Discord 's mind games first . In part two , Twilight is determined to find the Elements of Harmony after her best friends are hypnotically brainwashed by Discord and all of Equestria begins to fall into disarray .

= = Plot = =

= = = Part one = = =

Cheerilee walks her students through Canterlot 's sculpture garden , where she shows her class a strange statue of a chimera @-@ like creature known as a draconequus , a creature that represents discord and a lack of harmony . The Cutie Mark Crusaders ? Sweetie Belle , Apple Bloom , and Scootaloo ? get into a fight over exactly what the statue represents . Soon , the statue begins to mysteriously pulse , though no pony notices at the moment . As the group moves away from the statue , small cracks appear along its surface and an evil chuckle is heard .

Later , Twilight and her best friends Applejack , Fluttershy , Pinkie Pie , Rainbow Dash , and Rarity find strange phenomena occurring around Ponyville , such as cotton candy clouds dispensing chocolate milk , ears of corn in their husks instantly turning into popcorn , and Applejack 's apples turning bigger . However , Twilight 's magic is not strong enough to stop it , though they can get some of the phenomena somewhat under control . Soon , Spike coughs up a letter from Celestia , urging Twilight and her best friends to see her in Canterlot . On arrival , Celestia takes them to a grand hall with stained @-@ glass windows , including one heralding the ponies ' defeat of Nightmare Moon , and to the vault where the Elements of Harmony are kept . Celestia tells the ponies that the strange phenomena they have noticed is being caused by an old enemy of hers named Discord , the spirit of chaos and disharmony . Celestia tells of how Discord once ruled Equestria in an eternal state of chaos before she and Luna defeated him by turning him into a stone statue (the Draconequus statue that stood in the sculpture garden) . But he has recently escaped his prison and Celestia asks Twilight and her best friends to use the Elements of Harmony (as they did to defeat Nightmare Moon previously) to defeat Discord . However , as she offers the Elements to them , they are shocked to find that the box that normally holds the Elements is completely empty .

Suddenly , an image of Discord on the stained @-@ glass windows comes to life , teasing the ponies and Celestia . Discord claims to have taken the Elements and alludes to where they can be located . Twilight believes Discord is referring to the hedge maze near the castle and the six race there . Discord appears in his true form and challenges the ponies to a game , telling them that the only rules are they are not allowed to fly or use magic (enforcing this rule by making the unicorns ' horns and Pegasi 's wings vanish) , and that if any of them leave the game , he automatically wins .

Despite their handicap , the ponies enter the maze , but they are soon separated by Discord 's magic . He is able to individually test Applejack , Pinkie Pie , Rarity , and Fluttershy against their respected Elements , making them be momentarily hypnotized , lose some of their color , and become a polar opposite of their Element . Twilight encounters each of them after this point , aware of their personality shift , but oblivious to their encounter with Discord . Soon , they find Rainbow Dash , having regained her wings , flying away from the maze and betraying not only her Element of Loyalty , but also forfeiting the game by leaving ; the maze falls around them and Discord boasts his victory , warning of an incoming storm of chaos .

= = = Part two = = =

Twilight confronts Discord , accusing him of cheating since he destroyed the labyrinth before they could get to the end of the game . However , Discord counters this by reminding her that , while he had hinted at where the Elements were , he never said anything about them being in the labyrinth . As he disappears and teases the ponies with another storm of chocolate rain , Twilight realizes that a line from Discord 's riddle actually refers to Ponyville itself .

Determined and with renewed hope , Twilight leads her best friends back to Ponyville , which Discord has altered in a chaotic manner : The day @-@ night cycle is haphazard and buildings float off the ground . Discord continues to taunt Twilight , but she is determined to get back to the library in town to find a way to defeat Discord while her best friends ' personalities continue to become more warped , losing even more of their color until they are completely monochrome . Managing to get them all into the library , Twilight and Spike locate the book about the Elements of Harmony and after a brief scuffle with the other ponies over the book , are surprised and delighted to find the book actually contains the Elements . She forces her best friends to wear the Elements , though they are more willing to help after she angrily states that the sooner they defeat Discord , the sooner they never have to see each other again ; Twilight also assigns Spike as the temporary Element of Loyalty because Rainbow Dash is not present . They go to face Discord , but the Elements fail to activate . The other four ponies and Spike quickly drop the elements and depart , leaving Twilight despondent and finally losing her own color .

Twilight sadly returns to the library , preparing to pack and leave Ponyville , when she finds Spike coughing up scroll after scroll . Twilight is surprised to find these to be the friendship report letters that she had previously sent to Celestia , and the memories of her friendships in Ponyville make her regain her color . Inspired by this , she returns to her other four best friends and uses a memory spell to remind them of their friendship , cancelling Discord 's magic and returning them to normal .

However , Rainbow Dash is still apart from the group and without her , the Elements will not activate . They find Rainbow Dash protecting a cloud , believing it to be her home of Cloudsdale . They start to give chase , but Rainbow flies away . They quickly use a hot @-@ air balloon , pulled along by Fluttershy , to catch up to Rainbow . At first , it seems that Rainbow has the upper hand , but as soon as Twilight reminds Fluttershy that if she gets away Discord will win , Fluttershy puts on an enormous burst of speed and the ponies eventually catch Rainbow and manage to tie her down long enough for Twilight to cast her memory spell . The ponies share a hug before remembering that Ponyville is still under Discord 's influence .

The ponies collect the Elements and re @-@ approach Discord , who casually passes off their threat . However , with all six ponies restored , the Elements activate , firing a rainbow @-@ beam of light that engulfs Discord and Ponyville . In moments , Ponyville has been returned to normal and Discord is once again turned to stone . The ponies ' victory is celebrated by a large ceremony at Canterlot , led by Celestia , who praises their heroism and the power of their friendship and reveals a new stained @-@ glass window of the six ponies defeating Discord .

= = Production = =

" The Return of Harmony " was directed by James Wootton (with assistance from supervising director Jayson Thiessen) and written by M.A. Larson . John de Lancie guest stars in the episode

as Discord . According to Thiessen , Lauren Faust had conceived of Discord while watching a series of Star Trek : The Next Generation episodes , using Q (portrayed by de Lancie) as a template . When it came time to consider voice actors for the role , the production team had considered using a stand @-@ in for de Lancie , but were surprised to learn that de Lancie himself was available for the role . Upon hearing the news , the team altered some elements of the episode to provide more allusion to his previous role , such as the flash of light when Discord would appear or disappear. de Lancie was later surprised by the large positive responses from the adult fans of the series , leading him to learn more about this fandom and participating as executive director of the documentary about the fandom Bronies : The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of My Little Pony. de Lancie has since re @-@ voiced Discord for later episodes of the series and promotions on The Hub .

The episodes were the final to feature Lauren Faust as executive producer . Near the end of the first season , Faust announced that she had left the series , and for the second season , she stepped down as executive producer , to become consulting producer . Her involvement in the second season consisted mainly of story conception and scripts . Despite her decreased participation , she still has high hopes for the staff members , stating that " the gaps I have left are being filled by the same amazing artists , writers , and directors who brought you Season 1 . I 'm certain the show will be as entertaining as ever " . In addition , a new storyboard editor named Jim Miller was hired for the second season and a majority of the animation was " outsourced " to animation company Top Draw . According to Thiessen , this allowed for a greater pre @-@ production process for season two episodes .

" The Return of Harmony " was the first episode of the second season . According to Thiessen , the Hub and its parent company Hasbro had " approved the season two before we were done with season one ; they knew they had something good on their hands . " He explained , " they saw [the success] of the show early on , which is [?] rare because usually a season will be one and aired before a network will renew it because they want to know what the numbers are , but they , I guess , a bit of a risk on their behalf , but I 'm glad they did . " The finale scene of the episode is a parody of the ending from the 1977 movie Star Wars Episode IV : A New Hope . According to Thiessen , the joke was an " afterthought " ; originally , there was going to be a more elaborate ending , but due to time constraints , a new finale was created . During the animation stage , one of the directors noted that the scene was " kind of like the ending to A New Hope " and so , the decision was made to create " scene for scene " parody of the original .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

The first part of " The Return of Harmony " aired on September 17 , 2011 and the second part aired on September 24 . The first part was viewed by over 339 @,@ 000 viewers , making it one of the highest @-@ rated episodes ever broadcast by The Hub . In addition , the first part received a 0 @.@ 2 Nielsen household rating in the United States , meaning that it was seen by 0 @.@ 2 percent of all households watching television at the time of the broadcast . The episode received a 0 @.@ 1 18 @-@ 49 rating , meaning that it was viewed by 0 @.@ 1 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of broadcast . The episode was later beaten by " A Canterlot Wedding , " which scored a total viewership of 483 @,@ 000 and 475 @,@ 000 .

= = = Reviews = = =

Both parts of the episode received largely positive reviews from critics . Carina Belles from We Got This Covered , in a review of the first part , called the series " plain awesome " , noting that it was " basically Lord of the Rings , only with ponies . " Belles praised the expressing animation , writing that " the already incredible art has also improved , with a wider variety of styles being used . " A review from Republibot of the first part of the episode called the plot " an interesting revisit of the

premise of the pilot [' Friendship Is Magic '] " . Furthermore , the review called John de Lancie 's performance " superb " and praised the animation . Reviews for part two were positive as well . Republibot gave the episode a largely positive review , however , the site did note that the episode " feels a bit rushed , even as a two @-@ parter " and that " Fluttershy 's and Rarity 's restoration sequences in particular feel rushed and inadvertently echo [the mind wipe sequences from] Men in Black . "

Many reviews praised the series ' pop culture references . Carina Belles applauded the series for making subtle pop culture references , citing Pinkie Pie 's mention of " Chocolate Rain " , a reference to a popular Internet meme . Many reviews and critics positively commented on the episode 's ending , which featured a parody of the closing scenes to the original Star Wars . Cyriaque Lamar from i09 wrote positively of the scene , writing , " Honestly , modern My Little Pony fandom is one of those things I 'm live @-@ and @-@ let @-@ live about , even though it baffles me entirely [but] this morning 's episode of the show did a little homage to A New Hope . " i09 later named the scene one of " The Best Television Moments of 2011 " . John Farrier from Neatorama wrote , " It ? s hard for Bronies to get respect from some quarters , but [the closing Star Wars parody] scene alone says much in favor of the show . " The entertainment site Dorkly , an affiliate of CollegeHumor , featured a video comparing the two scenes and wrote , " May the adorable be with you . " Topless Robot writer Anne Mathews named the Star Wars parody the " Nerdiest Easter Egg " in My Little Pony : Friendship Is Magic , writing , " This scene is a direct shoutout to the fans and completely cements the creator Lauren Faust 's geek cred . The only thing missing is a Wookiee yell at the end ! "

= = Home media release = =

The two @-@ part episode is part of the Season 2 DVD set released by Shout Factory on May 14 , 2013 . It was also part of the " Cutie Mark Quests " DVD , which was released on June 30 , 2015 , alongside " The Show Stoppers " and , labelled as " Cutie Markless , " the two @-@ part season five premiere episode " The Cutie Map . "