



Mystic Acoustics

A story by Vylet Pony & Sylver Stripe

I. Regarding Princess Celestia, and How Equestria Came to Be

Hullo. I am called Yorick Thana, and I am just a girl who tends the library. Though I hail from the Locus, my identity and visage should bear no importance to you, for I am only the librarian. A storyteller. Well, we both understand that your mortal curiosity constitutes I—or some such other poet, perhaps musical, perhaps lecturing—regale of stories, both fantastical and ordinary. But I suspect... Is it possible you have heard this story once before? Dear reader, should this tale knell familiar, may my account of its events prevail over any previous, erroneous chronicle. Aria bid that I impart to thee, then, a chapter from Featherdance's world.



“Have ye no courage, Ponies? We lead our children unto the Age of the Stars, which beckons thee to a destined revival of Equestrian tradition. We, Alicorns, Unicorns, Pegasi, and Earth Ponies—the brave many—stand as pillars of the lands we preside over. For no civilization endures virtuously as ours. Wise heralds of magic and science, place your faith in your Princesses and your pride in our bastions, for we shelter thee from a degenerate world, one which knows no might in Friendship or amity. Smile, Friendless

few, for the way we trot shall grant you a purpose. O' pathfinders, look to your skies. Thy brilliant day and beautiful night are promised eternal, as sure as the cornerstones we have built together. Lay down your differences. Reach out and cradle the heritage that you are fated to have."

So crescendoed a vain requiem, a pale blanket gloom which concealed the broad valleys and hidden creeks, baptizing the land in curses unseen. Threaded into seams of an earth which bled vile secrets and strange promises, wefts of her legacy—indeed, the legacy of the Princess of Light; of Daybreak; of the Sun: Princess Celestia—were dying underground. Had the world opened its wounds to mere glimpses of her seedling distortions, it would have laboured anguished, surrogate to a sapphire famine. In antiquity, ages of Creation and Chaos begot an epoch of Ponykind, harboured by her, that fair Alicorn. Then, after thousands and thousands of years, the dynasty she had conceived eroded into her Age of the Stars.

It is through Celestia that Ponies came to conduct the world around them by heralding “the Magic of Friendship,” a doctrine that Equestrians believed to be a grace intrinsic to their kind. This has always been Celestia’s way, and for generations, this ideology has penetrated even the farthest reaches of the realm. One may conjecture, as many have, that this commonplace trait—which has seemingly always belonged to all of the gods’ creatures, as it were—could in no way be the masterwork of an only species. Indeed, not as intuition—rather a sort of commodity—“Friendship” has been replicated, packaged, and divulged by the docile, common Equestrian for ages. If the Princess so much as sneezed, many would take care in observing how she covered her mouth; or how she didn't. And all would bow deeply as she, and at once borrow her stride, and then make prose in her stead. It was so that they smiled just as widely when they professed of Friendship, seeking indefatigably, as the fair Alicorn, to new Friends they had hoped to assimilate to their flock, their herd.

It would seem, though, such sentimentality would ultimately, and much later, sway naught but a dwindling congregation of starry-eyed Ponyfolk. Ponies. Well, there are Alicorns, Unicorns, Pegasi, and Earth Ponies, to be precise. All breathing, thinking, hoping, plotting, and scrounging. Earth Ponies are as you are likely already familiar with; while described by Celestia as being magical in their own way, they are but mere mortals. She has spoken, too, this way about Pegasi, and while they are not truly magical either, they have sprouted wings to fly with and oft toil in the skies, where the Earth Ponies may not. Unicorns, though, are adorned with horns ‘pon their heads; and these creatures, comparatively, harness the magicks of the ley lines, which thread spacetime in all directions, levitating, transforming, transmuting, transcending all manner of things and peoples.

But Alicorns are all of these things, and far more vigorously. Indeed, they are not merely both winged and horned, but persist for eons at a time, wielding magicks far mightier than that of an ordinary Unicorn. Yet inexplicably, fewer Alicorns would emerge with every passing millennium; tapestries of their family trees fractured at their unraveling seams, ink sputtering into faint inconclusions. It has been surmised by scholars that, perhaps, the species is overloaded

socially, economically, and evolutionarily. While there is no consensus, nonetheless, the Equestrian matriarchy has always made itself the house of Alicorns (which Celestia, indeed, is).

To describe all such equines as merely “Ponies” or “Ponyfolk” is the proper, wonted Equestrian lexicon; this is unless one wishes to specify one of the “races” for any particular reason.

Well, what follows is a consensus of Equestrian historians in Canterlot regarding Celestia’s assumption of power (or “The Equestrian Genesis”):

“Ten thousand years ago, Celestia was born to a noble family during the period of Discord. The almighty scion of chaos, who had unsewn evermore the order of all things, expunged and purged reality into a stew of perturbed motion. None but acolytes of his archaic monarchy could flourish in a world such as this. It was thus that the young Celestia’s covenant was forged, a solitary oath to usurp Discord.

She grew a century older chasing phantasms of seizing the profane draconequus’ power, till the seasons bestowed her a younger sister, Luna. It was then that their noble parents’ moribund rite, a hope contrived through fifty thousand years of Alicorn reign, proclaimed they rise to the occasion as princesses of the future Kingdom of Equestria. The imminent cessation of the old ascendancy heralded anew Celestia’s ambition, which became later entwined with the adolescent Luna.”

At last, the two eminent Princesses. Yet, fore the dawn of Equestria, when Discord reigned, the lands wrought fogs and mists that churned upon the frayed twines of barley and wheat, casting perverse spindles o’er the pale sods which stretched seemingly forever in all directions. Each tree spat sick oozes of strange sap, adhering as gauze to the spouts in their trunks, which stood not upright, but jagged and warped, evoking incongruent geometries like obstructed curves of a neglected cello. And the air smelled of both sugar and ash. What grazed these lurid meadows were beasts strange equally as they were indescribable; the tufts and twills of matted hairs and the slurries and slouches of amorphous goos—wide, unblinking eyes attached without sense or depth to each and every animal—nibbling at bodies (acting like some manner of vulture). They were undeniably different. Checkered patterns of pink, black, and gold rested merely as patchwork arras upon flat surfaces, and sickly pale yellows had incandescenced, at all times of day and night, in, around, through, above, and below every crevice and mountain.

The excerpt continues:

Together, the Sisters prevailed in the Divergence of Chaos, banishing Discord to his prison of stone. Then, they ruled as equals, nourishing their sovereign nation of Equestria. The legends wove of Celestia’s dominion over the Sun and Luna’s command over the Moon. Yet, as the Kingdom prospered greatly, horrible beasts, foreign

beasts—monsters, demons, apparitions—descended from the vast empyrean, envious of Equestria’s abundance. And still, the Princesses prevailed, expelling the darkness whenever it came.”

And so they say the Age of Ponykind flourished, though a remarkable superstition persisted in the minds of the cosmos-fearing Equestrians. Not a mere fear, but a total rejection of interfering with the world that lay beyond the skies gripped every generation. After all, even in times not yet observed, surely those beasts would continue to prey upon the common folk.

At the age of eight thousand, Celestia harbingered the arrival of an unprecedented paradigm. She professed to have foreseen an even brighter dawn awaiting the Kingdom of Equestria and declared that time itself would begin again. Thus, the Sun rose once more, but upon the first year of the modern paradigm: “January 1, 0 e.c.a.” (or Equestrian Contemporary Aeon).

Such grand intuition is folly in times of great wickedness. And wicked indeed were the times rhapsodized by this royal procession. At the turn of the first millennium, Celestia fell suddenly to a malady no one could explain. As her magic began to diminish into that of a Unicorn’s, she stepped further and further away from the public eye; though, it could be that she had already been sick, perhaps for thousands of years already. Longer and longer she spent condemning herself to her chambers in between addresses to the Kingdom, appearing more fragile and vulnerable with each sermon. Then, on some eve of the year 1010 e.c.a., it was revealed that Princess Luna had been banished to the Moon. Celestia sought to justify her decision by denouncing her sister for conspiring as the dreaded “Nightmare Moon” in order to seize the monarchy for herself. Luna was to remain there for a millennium until the seal that imprisoned her there inevitably wore away. It is notable that Celestia was rarely ever seen using magic again, beyond this incident, and whatever spells she did perform were themselves pedestrian, and oft behind closed doors.

A thousand winters had swiftly passed by the time Celestia found herself a loyal apprentice. The Unicorn Twilight Sparkle—who excelled profoundly in her highly advanced, applied magic practices—proved herself through her studies to be of exceptional value to the Princess. On the thousandth year of the Summer Sun Celebration, Nightmare Moon returned. Twilight, joined by her new friends Applejack, Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and Rarity, prevailed over the Princess of the Night by exercising the power of Friendship against her, turning her back into Princess Luna.

With the Princesses reunited, Twilight’s studies resumed. She was evaluated through trials of Friendship, which served to substantiate her loyalty to Celestia. Time and time again, the frail Princess of Light called upon Twilight and her friends—a group many knew as “The Elements of Harmony,” to face the cosmic threats that plagued her Kingdom. And time and time again, The Elements of Harmony prevailed in the Princess’ stead. So and so, such and such.

Eventually, Twilight was grafted wings, gifted a crown, and promised the Princess of Light’s own Kingdom of Equestria. Alas, an unnatural Alicorn, betrothed now by the ordinary

and the studied, she ambled a newborn fawn into an inheritance of seedling distortions. Indeed, Twilight had been disciplined from childhood to grow inevitably into the Sun's heir, cursed to an unkind destiny of kings and judgements.

Twilight's baptism as a fledgling Princess was proclaimed aboundingly by the Kingdom; after all, she had earned first her reputation budding as a folk hero, a far cry from the Sisters' otherwise shrouded lineage. But not only was her earthly comfort itself trumpeted as a blessing, so knelled also a dusk o'er the legacy the former Princesses were leaving. In the years that preceded their apparent and sudden retirement, they had grown disfavoured in their unpopular campaign to look toward the stars. 'Twas but heresy, blaspheming the cradle sanctuary that Equestrians had so long contended for. And while at first the Sisters had insisted on their proposals, professing ardently in favour of scientific advancement and the so-called pursuit of truth, the verbal pushback in the capital of Canterlot turned to protests, then to riots. Such an exhibition had not before been witnessed in all the land. It was so that when Twilight Sparkle was set to succeed them, the Kingdom's sudden anxieties were wished away, for she spoke not of prodding the cosmos, but of uniting the world and its many civilizations together in Friendship, as was the creed of Equestria in its nascency.

II. Forewarning

We understand, then, Equestria—through first the cutting leadership of Celestia and Luna, then, after they had retired, the brief and perceptibly more benevolent guidance of Twilight—had metamorphosed over ten thousand years into the trivial visage of a fairytale land you may know now, regarded, perhaps by the callow pups spurned by the Fall of Innocence, as a civilized, crown jewel of the world.

Broad, verdant dunes, salted with blanched, pine grasses, marigold straws, and sapphire thistles, undulated roundly this way and that, bowing there yonder to the Celestial Seas of the east, and skewing—as a juvenile moss creeping ‘pon stony facades—up to the western crags, perturbing the otherwise occasional vegetation at its base. Those mighty mountains stood as mauve sentinels over pastoral expanses and meadows, probing with their slate spires up into the empyrean that was, as you know, so feared by the common folk. At the earthly edge of that empyrean, which was oft concealed in the thick of clouds spun into cotton powders by the skilled Pegasi of Cloudsdale, nursed its seabirds, which would plunge down through the heavens’ fabric veils, lacerating vapor fibers as they dove bravely into the sea. That sea, which lapped dutifully at the Kingdom’s edges, billowed calmly and expectantly; no violent crest nor vile crash disturbed the land, nipping only at the breast of mineral and ore. Those waters constituted a defensive moat which encompassed the Kingdom, safeguarding it from far-off, different lands, known only to the Princesses and their scholars.

‘Twixt these hills, mountains, plains, meadows, and fields lie the vast metropolitan settlements of the Equestrian folk. Railroads sprawled, now scarcely used, subordinate beside the industrial traffics and modern vessels made possible by the engineering of circuits and magicks. They adjourned hither budding villages and thither enormous cityscape domains protruding from the arboreal canopies, clumped rigidly and endeavouring upright as the southern mesa ranges.

Massive cities such as Manehattan and Las Pegasus (though always paling to the capital, Canterlot) boasted skyscraping castles and towers, augmented with screens and neon bulbs that affronted daylight, apostates of Equestria’s arcadian pasts. Outstretched roadways formed sacred geometries, intricately connecting high rises which stood in command over the skies and the earth. Mostly Unicorns and Pegasi would step eagerly into crowded marble halls, ascend spiraling quartz staircases, and be entertained by moving pictures and arcane holograms long into the night.

Conversely in the villages (like those of Ponyville or Appleoosa), humble stone and brick dwellings—stacked and cobbled together, entwined steel siphons and incremented by phosphorescent crystalline apparatuses—warmed under the day’s

radiance and glow of the arcane. One would fear their thatched, golden hay roofs would be lost to a mere gust, but no; for Ponies have always prospered in their ingenuity.

Within these meeker places, the gentle masonry bubbled ‘round corners, revealing unassuming furnitures and tapestries. A working Earth Pony, perhaps a mason, or a painter, or a baker, would totter open a cedar gate (whose wood croaked of three generations before, rusting clasps clattering harmoniously). Her hooves thudded as hollow percussion, the boards arching and bowing, but not splitting, under her. She propped herself up against the doorframe as she entered the kitchen, tossing her leathery rucksack onto a candlelit table, clinks and clamours of various tools, buckles, and bottles shuffling about when the bag landed. On her own, she is of no concern to you. Yet, as if wholly unaware of the rare sight of a full rainbow cascading through the raised, hobnail windows across from her, she beheld instead a peculiar machine which she had plucked from her twitching ear. Resting in her hoof was something that seemed plainly antithetical to the folk things that surrounded her. ‘Twas a trifling little thing, in fact, consisting of acute angles and precision insets which glowed eerily.

This thing was what Equestrians called an “Adaptive Magic Channeling Device,” or an AMCD. And unlike the sorcery-powered machines that decorated the grander provinces of the Kingdom, these devices came to be relied upon by every one of every ilk at the start of the 2030s. At some point in Twilight’s fledgling administration, a corporation known as PegaSystems emerged as the sole proprietor of magic technologies. It introduced the first and only AMCDs to the market, allowing non-unicorns to use magic spells. These advancements were, at first, bulky, unwieldy, and often fit only for industrial use and implementation in public facilities and scientific instruments. So at first they innovated on such things as minimizing the use of fossil fuels, powering homes even in the most remote lands, and paving the way for highly efficient agriculture. Alas, not only were these advancements hindered (and on occasion altogether squandered) by red tape and tall tales, but despairing premonitions of uprisings—grimly hastened by the awesome, lawless power that AMCDs could supply the commoners—also rattled the aristocracy, the magic barons, and those genuflectors in Canterlot.

And indeed, as the jade arcane was unceremoniously imprisoned and herded into every home in the Kingdom, everyone—the fisherman, the whore, and even the painter—lay as seedbeds to a yet unknowable strife; had the monarchy itself rejected these things, as many of Twilight’s allies and peers did, perhaps these queer magicks would have abated for a time. Again, and alas, the Ponyfolk had seen that Twilight welcomed these machines. And as perplexing as it was, few Earth Ponies or Pegasi who were offered these powers rejected them utterly.

Now, whenever nightfall came, no settlement touched by moonlight would ever know deep slumber as in antiquity; for even the quaint hamlets and backwater coves cast shadows upon themselves by the fluorescence of the AMCD machines and arcane augmentations. And then came the pursuit of resources, the overpopulation crisis, and whispers. Those whispers, first, were utterances of the Equestrian monarchy's ineptitude in solving the evident crises. While magic technologies promised to enlighten their cultivating ways, PegaSystems' miserly control over the industrial machines, which were all contracted and lent out to farms, labs, and many such other facilities, severely limited their clients, plunging many of them into harrowing debts. Whispers that, all the while, the Equestrian population had been exploding since the earlier tech revolution of the previous mid-century; this compounded even more, as countless new families had hoped to enjoy the novel conveniences which AMCDs had audaciously assured. Whispers here... Whispers there... and there.

These crises were only exacerbated by what many considered to be Twilight's timid approach to her own authority. Indeed, she did not possess the decisive ruthlessness that her predecessors had; rather, she ruled quietly, fairly, and thoughtfully. And whispers... those whispers among Ponyfolk examined her competence, questioned her authority, and hypothesized a world where the old Princesses had returned. They wondered aloud in churches, in taverns, in their skyscrapers and their castles, that if these profane engines were to remain, would then they gloam sinister 'pon a vessel to the damn heavens? But then those whispers transposed to rumours, rumours which began to conjecture at the cornerstones of what Equestria was becoming. Steadily, everyone—Unicorns, Pegasi, and Earth Ponies all, then yonder in the other lands, even the Yaks, even the Hippogriffs, even the Dragons, even the Griffons—speculated as to what the Sisters had been doing with their retirement. Two matriarchs, once so cherished, their likenesses committed as etchings to every Equestrian's heart for a myriad of generations, had made of themselves commoners, emerging only occasionally—from wherever—to be spotted in Twilight under the dim veil of moonlight. Ten thousand years of their prosperous reign had faded like a constellation's gleam becoming obscured by an infant nebula; their parting words harbingered a radio silence of more than twenty years which, overnight and all at once, constituted rumours, and rumours still.

Then, through some contingency—none could determine whether fantastical or inconceivable—the Sisters returned.

Well, I confess that I have never understood such superstitions, dear reader. For the Equestrians, perhaps their terror was wholly misguided. After all, if it is one's inclination to fear the unknown, why then ship off merrily, from harbours at every shore, vessels which teeter to and fro as a pendulum rod in different, perilous seas? Then, those vessels, oft manufactured and laboured upon by the commoner, ferry only cosmopolitans who deliberate among each other the extent to which the seadogs—hammer in hoof—are owed the fortunes that they themselves have happened upon. And then, in reaching their destination, a place no qualm of the mind could argue, they would impress it more degenerately than the great homeland. Yet, so long as it served their delegation, passing as tool or touch of pleasure, it would be of the course to make merry on the beaches, and in the weathers, the natures, services, and peoples, because it pleases. Moreover, far-away places prescribe journeys, and recall those perilous seas, the ones already traversed. There below, many too many leagues of dark shroud seethe, then simmer, at its lowest points, lurked by and for different specters, a world rarely known to the realms. This place, where water crushes and vaporizes, foiling the layman's grip on their physical sciences, is yet a flounder to what stirs below. Molten crusts are pulverized and liquefied, slurring through crevices, syruping onto impenetrable slates which shield the planet's core.

Lest I get too carried away, is this not also a strange and different world in its own right, one which rests—at all times—just beneath their hooves, one which affords all manner of earthquakes, eruptions, sinkholes, hurricanes, and tsunamis? It is often that the aristocrat would brave the weather if they could find a way to sell it, or charge admission to witness it, especially if they could convince the commoner to carry out the menial undertakings in their stead. It is as I say, then, that many like the Equestrians are drawn to what they consider exotic, gawking like hippos at their plunder; however, if it is ugly, if it cannot be sold, if it terrifies them too greatly, then it may as well be useless to them. But what is useless and confusing to the moderate capitalist would inevitably offer a challenge to the most cutthroat among them to do the impossible: bottle the stars as fireflies to a wire.

III. The Girl With the Blue-Tipped Wings

November 30, 2034

“House, age, unit,” the guard barked, his commanding voice echoing out through the evening air. He was clutching his rifle tightly, and though he was holding his head up, chin angled out towards the opposite side of the sandy residential avenue, he was straining his eyes downward at a little pegasus in front of him.

“Ha, Ha, Haa!” The pegasus forced, even with as spry and lilting a voice as hers, a brusque chuckle—probably imitating how she’d heard the large, armoured stallion sound in jest—before swiping at the ground with her right wing, sending powdery sediment clouds fizzling upward, prodding for a sneeze from the guard in front of her.

“And pray tell,” she taunted, her inflection now like a vampire’s, “what you intend to do about it, my good liege.”

“You—” the guard started, but lost his composure as he became ailed by a brief coughing fit. He turned so that his rifle would be obscured to the girl, his armour clamouring sharply, chains clinking granularly against the broad steel plates, and leather straps flapping about the cloth accents of the man’s uniform. He turned back to her, and readjusted himself. Without turning his head away from the pegasus, his eyes darted from one side of the road to the other. Then he bent down clandestinely.

“C’mon girl, I wanna make sure you eat tonight,” he said with a hush.

The girl leaned and tilted her head, attempting nonchalantly to peek behind the stallion through the window of the residence entrance, which was fitted with a sleek, anodized door and decorated with what she knew to be the symbol of the king. The guard mimed her movements, blocking her view.

“Hey,” the girl snorted outward, as if to blow the man back, “this isn’t even—”

“It’s getting late.” The guard’s eyes drifted to a mural which covered a watchtower bulwark on the adjacent road. He scrunched his snout in its direction.

Without turning her head, the girl followed the man’s gaze to look at it, too. The painting featured an imposing-looking unicorn whose posture was arched and broad. His stoic countenance would have been the most profound aspect of the illustration were it not for his scarred, featureless eyes, which gashed across his face like narrow pores of marble set deep within his equine skull; and his altogether strange and seemingly barbed horn protruded grotesquely from that skull. Furthermore, the mural itself was, even at this late hour, lit by incandescent spotlights situated just below. It was illuminated more brightly and deliberately than anything else at the interchange.

“Psh,” the girl snorted again, “you think he’s going to come for me personally?”

Now standing upright, the guard tapped his rifle stock against the iron steps that separated him and the pegasus. “Girl—”

The little pegasus giggled. “House, age, unit. Respond.”

She pointed at the guard, her poise and tone carrying a wholly manufactured bombast.. However, the ironclad stallion somehow appeared shaken, tightening his grip on the rifle.

Again she taunted. “House, age, u—”

Before the girl’s considerably less commanding parody of the guard’s orders had scarcely left her lips—*fssh-crack!*—the guard’s rifle stock swiftly struck her shoulder. At the far end of the gun, the girl tumbled backward, orbits of sediment and dust catching the ends of her snowy equine coat. On the barrel end, the guard stood with his front legs outstretched (and I shall remind you that most Ponies stand on all four legs, in the event that you are tempted to call their front legs “arms,”) gripping the weapon; but now his head had swiveled around to look over his right shoulder, scanning the road just behind the residence. Voices could faintly be heard over the subtle clip-clops of hooves—which themselves also resulted in clouds of dust that produced even fainter *fizzes*, *crackles*, and *sizzles*—and rattling of armour that accentuated each step. The stallion’s ears were perked, twitching and transposing between different angles, likely attempting to discern the voices.

“Zee,” the girl called quietly out to the guard, and now soberly, “my mistake, I’ll just—”

“You’ll not address me as so,” the guard’s muted command was subtly urgent as he continued to survey the road.

“202.”

“Yes.”

“I get it, sorry.” The little pegasus was back up on her hooves. Then her ears, too, perked, listening out for the same voices that 202 had concerned himself with. She raised her eyebrows and smirked. “Man,” she rubbed her shoulder, “could’ve just, like, told me.”

“Doesn’t always work on you, girl.” he muttered, turning back to her exigently.

“House, zero-three. Unit—” the pegasus started.

“Wrong order,” the guard said.

“Dude.”

“House, *age*, unit.”

“You ever thought about how that order doesn’t make sense?”

“Yep.”

The girl sighed. “House, zero-three. Age, one-zero. Unit, two-seven.”

“Alright, *in now*, quickly.”

202 started for the horizontal brass bolt, gripping its knob and sliding it out of the bracket. Then, he placed his right hoof on the door, just below the window, and his horn began to incandesce a pale green (which the King’s symbol began to emanate similarly). *Click, click, chk, chk*. All manner of magical gears and shackles became undone, then all at once silencing with a single, resonant *pang!* He reached hurriedly for the door handle and made way for the little pegasus.

“Like, how do I put this?” The girl jogged up the stubby, iron steps and—for a brief moment—peeked cautiously around the entrance, toward where the voices were coming from. “My house and unit numbers don’t change, but my age does. Why not make age the last—”

“Later, 327.” 202 hastily scooted the girl through the entrance. “And, don’t close the drapes ‘till ten-thirty.”

“But—” 327 protested.

“Be good.”

“You mean ‘be equal,’” 327 muttered.

202 lowered his brow down at the girl, and shut the door.



Inside, and straight ahead from the front door, there was a kitchen immediately to the left of an uncannily long hallway which led to the rest of the flat. The kitchen itself was humble and ordinary; there were a few fully stocked cabinets, a gas stove with a single, bubbling pot which appeared to contain an abundance of thin, stringy noodles and lentils submerged in a milky stock. To the left of the gas stove sat two whole potatoes resting on a cutting board, and to the right was a refrigerator. At the center of the room was a rather unremarkable wooden table; one would assume it would be where the tenants ate, and this was so, but there were no chairs in the room, as such accoutrements would leave no more room for anyone to walk around. Every surface was completely spotless and coated in a plain, cream white, save for the stovetop’s stone-hued burners—which coiled defiantly against the otherwise homogeneous-looking gadgets. A dainty, stained-glass lamp hung by a single linked chain from the ceiling, whose fabrile shade spun freely and independently of the light fixture; gentle breezes from the window would nudge it gently into a slow, ambling orbit, emanating gentle light beams in all directions, which crawled dutifully across the various sterile kitchen surfaces.

At last, leaving the kitchen and continuing down the hallway, a rickety sideboard sat against the left wall, precisely at the halfway point between both ends of the dimly lit

passage. Upon it sat an only plant—a succulent called “Amira’s Flower,” which featured cactus-like tendrils that poured over a ceramic bowl (there was no flower)—and, just below, a single, wooden drawer, whose thin handle quivered wildly, dinking against its intricately embossed backplate at even the faintest brush against the thing. Hanging above the table was an elegantly framed, gouache portrait that featured the same eerie unicorn from the mural outside. A small, ochre nameplate beside the painting read “Satellite, the King of Statera,” in bold, ornate letters, followed by a smaller, italicized quote: “Upon the fulcrum from which we judge, we know all men of all creeds to be not one greater than another, but archetypes evolved of all the same ambitions. In the truest unity, all would stand Equal. This is what we strive for. May the stars guide our settlement of Statera to this felicity.” On the opposite wall stood a plain, wooden door, which was fitted at its top with a latch bolt. Though difficult to discern, as most surfaces and furniture in the home appeared unblemished, this entryway seemed particularly trivial, as if it were seldom interfaced. Still, one could press their ear up against the grains and gather indistinct conversations through it. Then around, and up, and up, and up still. Whispers, wails, domestic amblings, and a tea kettle’s whining to drown them out altogether... Perhaps it connected all the particular units within the housing block into a common area of some variety. Alas, it never opened.

Now, at the far end of the corridor was a room. To suggest it was a “living” room would be an undue benevolence, as its barren setting lent itself poorly to even the most imaginative description of living. Viewing it from beside the mysterious door, the carpet continued (let us say, “north”) into the “living” room, covering every inch of the floor, then jutting sharply to the east into another hallway. Then, stepping in to occupy the entryway, the “living” room extended just over two meters west, then arced clockwise, forming a quarter-circle until it reached the northern wall to form a turret. A window was sandwiched into the middle third of the wall—separated into discrete, bowing panes—and spanned the same arc. It exposed an orderly array of housing blocks that lined a dusty, central avenue where patrolling guards regularly peered into the residences. Beneath the window, a console table also stretched across the same quarter-circle arc. On its north surface sat a television set and clock radio, which were overseen from the southwest pocket of the room by an ashy leather loveseat. Between the couch and the television was a small wooden coffee table, upon which nothing sat. In fact, the shelves of the console table, too, were empty. There were no books in the house.

Turning east, one would observe the previously mentioned east hallway. Contrary to the previous one, this passage was short and contained four sets of doors, two on each opposite-facing wall. First on the left was a door which led to the master

bedroom—doubtlessly tidy and well-kept like all the other rooms; then going clockwise, merely a closet, which contained nothing of particular interest.

At the far end of the hallway a colour photograph hung on an otherwise unfurnished wall. It portrayed the little pegasus, 327, positioned between two other adult ponies—one a pegasus, the other an earth pony. This brood was one of many in a greater assembly of others, all appearing in accumulations of 3–5 ponies at a time. There were twenty-seven faces in the photo; among them all, 327 appeared to be the smallest.

Then, to the right, one door led to 327's room. And finally next to it, the door to the washroom.

The bathroom door shut behind 327, who used her wing to keep herself upright against the wall as she hobbled over to the sink. Warm vapors and steam diffused softly from the running faucet, ascending as specters up to the ceiling, drifting aimlessly, then condensing onto the steel vents. The girl closed her eyes and inhaled deeply, allowing the fumes to thaw her coat; she could feel the warm dews manifesting onto her face. Holding a small, pale-green washcloth, she placed her hoof under the faucet and let the water trickle onto the rag. Once it was well and doused, she placed it on her right shoulder, which was reddened and rosy from her fall. She stifled a wince under her closed eyelids, grinned softly behind her gritted teeth, then finally exhaled shakily.

“Zee, bastard,” she snorted.

327 wiped away the fog from the mirror. Staring back at her was a girl, ten years only. She was of average height for her age; a little too thin, a bit too bruised as well. Her snout was faintly shallower and her jaw somewhat more contoured when compared to those of other girls her age. Her mane—like a brush that had emerged from a sea of congealed acrylics—was saturated in cobalt, draping as thick waterfalls ‘pon her shoulders (and often concealing part of her face); under the right light, subtle sheens of bluish spearmints streaked like thin fibers in her hair. Only the tips of her wings shared these pigments, as the rest of her body's coat was an alabaster white, which was an unusual, recessive colour for a pony to be born with. Indeed, even her blue-tipped wings were too rare a sight among ponies. Truly, she could be mistaken for a kind of magpie; indeed, one could not at least once avoid the thought of this (and her coat was rather feathery in texture, anyhow). Her tail fell long and straight; no waves or curls, merely unperturbed, arching naturally as a willow. And on her flank, there was no cutie mark (an emblem which, in this world, would appear to reflect a pony's developed skills).

Once she had shut the faucet, the sound of its steady stream ceased; one may have not noticed it running at first, but now the resulting silence was profound, only ever being broken only by rare, indiscriminate droplets from the spout (or the vent above). It was as if it had always been running ‘till now. 327 wrung the thin cloth out over the sink and

dried her shoulder. She peered closer into the mirror. Her eyes were a pale, icy blue, ashen and stormy. The girl lifted her hair away from her face to reveal the number branded into her forehead, “327.” She raised her (rather bushy) eyebrows and began to rub half-heartedly using the mostly wrung-out cloth, raising her eyebrows. It was with a quick snort that the girl resigned from prodding the imprint and finished up in the washroom.

She stood out in the “living” room, not fully aware that she had begun staring at a wall, lost in thought.

“Supper is nearly ready.” a gruff voice cracked from the kitchen. “When your mother gets home and she sees that shoulder, you tell her you got no marks today.”

“Yes, sir,” 327’s voice monotone reply echoed down the corridor. “It was just a fall on the w—”

“Hush down,” the stallion barked.

“Well,” the girl said under her breath, “you’re the one trying to, like...” She couldn’t find the right words in her brooding.

Suddenly, a single, loud *pop* rang out from the central avenue, followed by the sound of something abruptly hitting the kitchen floor. The little pegasus’ ears remained unflinching.

“Shit,” said the father’s hoarse (well,) voice croaked.

“Warning shot,” the girl said, still staring off.

“Eh?”

“I said—”

“Just come here and tell me.”

She started down the hallway, her eyes still glazed over in thought, staring at nothing. Neighbourhood dogs had begun barking in a frenzy, warranting chastising hubbubs from the nearby residents, though it was all rather muffled from within the flat. The frothing bubble of boiling water and clattering of ceramic plates and wooden wooden spoons grew louder as she approached.

“Said it was a warning shot, sir,” the girl spoke apathetically as she peered into the kitchen. A small, diced potato was resting on the pale, grey vinyl floor.

“‘Izzat so?” grumbled the stallion. He was a tangerine, pale-orange earth pony. His subtly marigold mane was thick, puffy, and resembled matted wool, and his stubby tail flickered about, buzzing and twitching curiously. “Man” his tone softened, “Uh, girl. I—hell.”

327 grimaced slightly. “9:23pm on a Thursday. It’s those Poker Boys, I’d never bet on either of them hitting their target in one shot.” Her voice trailed off slightly as she

raised her eyebrows at the jettisoned potato. “Sir,” she added rather lethargically, without breaking her gaze from the floor.

The stallion hastily set down a half-prepared bowl of noodles onto the kitchen table and trotted down to the “living” room, idly followed by 327.

“Oh those guys,” the man’s surly tone had a touch of whimsy in it, pitching upwards with intrigue. “Yeah I think they’re chewing someone out. ‘Know why?’”

“Let me guess...” The girl’s eyes had unglazed. She was staring at the back of the man’s head, anticipating him turning around.

“N-no, I was asking sincerely.” He didn’t turn around.

“Uh-huh.”