

HOMeward

starship ponyville ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Credits	page 3
Homeward Story	page 5
Chapter I. Homeward	page 6
Chapter II. Square One	page 11
Chapter III. Convergence	page 21
Chapter IV. Strangers	page 25
Chapter V. Swarm	page 29
Chapter VI. Elysium	page 36
Chapter VII. Danger Close	page 48
Chapter VIII. Harbour	page 57
Chapter IX. Monolith to a Halcyon	page 63
Chapter X. Cataclysm	page 68
Chapter XI. Wayward	page 75
Chapter XII. Norphae	page 79
Chapter XIII. Penumbra	page 86
Chapter XIV. Asphyxiated	page 95
Chapter XV. The Armada	page 98
Chapter XVI. Tyr	page 108
Chapter XVII. The Prince of Sorrow	page 122
Lyrics	page 128
Concept Art	page 134
Artist Spotlight	page 151

HOMeward

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HOMeward

a story by Vylet Pony & Sylver Stripe



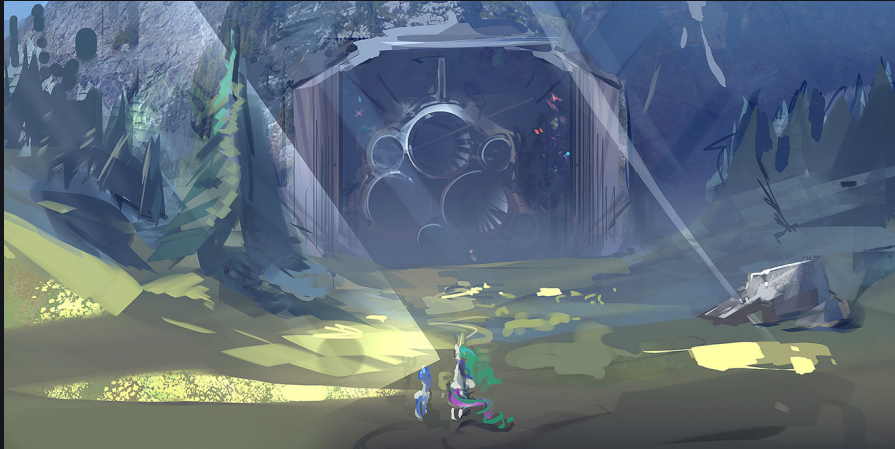
Homeward is based on the canon of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic (as of Season 8). All respective characters belong to Hasbro.

Many of the events and characters referenced and portrayed in the following novella have been developed in the TV series, and therefore some context may not be clear to readers from outside the MLP community.

I would highly recommend looking up any context that you need.

- Vylet Pony

I. HOMEWARD



Space.

Surely nothing could be more uncertain in such a primitive age. Very few things are so equally beautiful as they are terrifying. The hearts and minds of many have been saturated over the centuries, wondering and desiring, with the prospect of an unfathomable cosmos. They ask if it all has meaning and they ask if it should make sense... It is, perhaps, that in so much thinking they become shy to the possibility that all this wonder is for naught. These questions are asked out of mortality; so many look up to the stars, to feel as if they know all the secrets, when they are clueless of where they are walking.

The story so far. [A summary of Horse Friends, Control Freaks & Mystic Acoustics]

On December 8th, 2028, The pegasus “327” was born in the secluded authoritarian Unity of Statera; a state hidden from the rest of the world, created from the remains of Starlight’s Equality Village and its ideals. During its founding, It had been taken over by the powerful unicorn Satellite, whose origin was shrouded in secrecy. 327 grew up an outcast and spent her early childhood without a family. She eventually escaped the city shortly after her seventh birthday; a feat that no other Stateran had accomplished due to the high security forces and city walls. 327 was taken in by her adopted parents, Elden and Amber of Equestria. As mediated by Princess Celestia herself, she was given a more proper name: Satyrn. Although content with her new family, Satyrn lamented never knowing her true parents. She made a promise to herself that she would one day go back and save her family.

On June 30th, 2034, Celestia devised the Starship Ponyville program in secrecy. She had begun with a small team of scientists and engineers, aided by Twilight and Luna. The mission of the program was to search the cosmos for habitable places for expansion; Celestia had claimed that overpopulation and a decline in resources would soon threaten Equestria. The princesses had kept this program from out of the public eye. Murmurs and stirrings of fears and superstitions had plagued Equestria for as long as monsters had appeared from the sky. There were hardly any beings in the land that wouldn’t protest against a space program.

Princess Luna became tasked with monitoring the activities and dreams of ponies across Equestria more closely than she had in times past. She was asked to use the information gathered to recruit the most well-equipped members for the starship's personnel.

Around this time, a company called PegaSystems broke through the market with devices that allowed non-unicorns to harness the power of magic. This was viewed as highly controversial and unethical by many, but the PegaSystems products were sold at high volumes and with staggering success. Not long after their technologies became acclaimed, Celestia covertly partnered with their research and engineering teams to use magic technologies for the starship program. Adaptive Magic Channeling Devices (AMCD's) became available to the public soon after this partnership began. These devices were capable of letting individual users have access to magic, like unicorns did.

Over the years, Satyrn exemplified an incredible capacity for academics, particularly in the sciences. At a young age, she designed her own gunblade, displaying a certain interest in the art of war. However, during the beginnings of her life in Ponyville, Satellite had trained and deployed an assassin whose goal was to find the girl, believing she would eventually reveal the location of Statera to Celestia.

By 2048, Equestria had become entrenched in a civil war. This came as a result of The Black Hoof, a terrorist organization that denounced the corruption of Celestia's rule. Civilians began to fight on the accord of these terrorists, dividing the lands in conflict. One consistency that remained between the warring sides was the widespread whispers regarding how quickly and mysteriously The Black Hoof had come to be.

The Equestrian Civil War lasted for nearly two years, and Satyrn had served under the Royal Equestrian Military Division as a strategist and analyst. The conflicts eventually ended when the Winter Alliances (a pact between the Equestrians, Griffins, Yaks, Dragons, and Hippogriffs) captured The Black Hoof's acting leader, Feather Light.

However, after the war ended, in late November of 2050, Satellite's assassin found Satyrn in the eastern Canterlot bazaar. Failing to kill Satyrn, he was pursued by her through the marketplaces and into a hi-rise construction site. There, Satyrn captured and killed him, discovering a numbered branding on his forehead; she recognized the brand similar to her own "327" from Statera. Having forgotten about her past for some time, Satyrn traveled to where she remembered the city to be; she found it had grown into a fortified bastion that was surrounded by a mist, obscuring it from the rest of the world.



The following day, Satyrn went to warn Celestia about the presence of Statera, but Canterlot was already under attack by the Stateran state's militants. This offensive crippled post-war Equestria, leaving it nearly defenseless. Celestia planned a covert counter-offensive after word of Statera's possession of WMDs came out from orbital scans. Satyrn led the operation, joined by Sylver, a veteran aide-de-camp of Princess Celestia. They infiltrated the main Stateran spire where Satellite used Satyrn's last blood relative, 328, as a means to bait her into aggression. After killing 328, Satellite revealed this to be Satyrn's brother. This infuriated Satyrn, remembering the promise she made as a child to save her family from Statera. Satyrn fought Satellite in a final battle, defeating him sheerly in a vengeful display.



Satyrn was in a coma for roughly four days, having endured the devastating battle against Satellite. When she recovered, Luna invited her to be a commander on the Starship Ponyville, having displayed prodigious skill and leadership. By this time, the ship's crew had grown to nearly 10,000 members, and the ship was set to launch within two months. Satyrn accepted this position and began preparations with Princess Twilight.

On February 10, 2051 [Sol 1], the crew boarded the Starship Ponyville beneath the outskirts of Ponyville and launched into space. The Equestrian public had not known of the starship's existence until they saw it rocket into the late night sky. Starlight Glimmer and Princess Luna were left to lead Equestria during Princess Twilight and Princess Celestia's absence. Outrage and protests transpired throughout Equestria as a result of the ship's launch; news outlets reported on the widespread betrayal that the citizens felt, as the princesses had denied the existence of a space program throughout the past few decades.



A broken Equestria was left to watch a New Equestria unfold.

II. SQUARE ONE



June 14, 2051 [Sol 63]

Her bedroom floor was littered with various scientific instruments and chemistry books. A copy of the last Equestrian Inquirer from before the expedition was open on her desk. Satyrn wiped her eyes and groaned herself out of bed, shuddering as her hooves touched the cold starship floor. "09:29" her clock read. Satyrn saw this and groaned even more. She moved over to her desk and examined the newspaper. She flipped it over to see her face on the cover, reading aloud the title: "The Statera Crisis." Satyrn scoffed playfully.

...

It had been 63 sols since the starship left Equestria. On what would be March 29th, Celestia announced that the ship would be intercepting an unusual asteroid that astronomers had directed her attention to. She elaborated that the goal of the operation would be to investigate its properties and potential deposits of rare minerals to trace its planetary system of origin. What caused the asteroid to be particularly strange in nature was its anomalous relative velocity and path. According to the starship's research team, the asteroid moved autonomously, avoiding any potential collision points, and with no visible external force seeming to affect it. Celestia declined to offer any more information to the crew beyond this.

The time had come, June 14, Sol 63. The starship engineers prepared to intercept the asteroid, Celestia having adjusted the ship's course to do so. The hangars of the ship were crowded with hundreds of ponies. Some of them rushed in preparation for the interception, while others had gathered to watch everything transpire. During the starship's expedition, no landings or studies had occurred. The notion of a first mission excited the crew after a listless two months of stagnation.

"You're fucking with me right?" Sylver exclaimed into the comm.

"Not in the slightest," Satyrn giggled.

"All this excitement comes when I'm finally making progress on this Jasmine experiment. Do you know how hard it is to grow flowers in space without magic?"

"You're a unicorn. Why don't you try?"

Sylver raised a hoof in disbelief. "Hey! Isn't our goal of this expedition to further the prosperity of everypony? Non-unicorns might not always have access to magic channeling devices, you know."

"You're probably right," Satyrn replied.

Sylver sighed. He looked below his bed from his desk, examining the coffee beans that were still refusing to grow. His scruffy face scrunched in bewilderment.

"I'm the damn best botanist on this ship. If I can't figure out how to get this stuff to work, what am I to this team?" he questioned.

"Then you'd be our damn best engineer," Satyrn encouraged.

Throwing his head back, Sylver laughed heartily. "Not better than you, kid."

Satyrn smiled and ended the call. She looked out of the bedroom window, watching the stars twinkling by sluggishly. A faint reflection of herself on the glass revealed a messy blue mane and her blue eyes were distinctly flushed from a lack of sleep. She examined herself and tried straightening her hair; to her dismay, it was uncooperative as ever. Forfeiting a presentable appearance for the day, she stood up and made her way out of her room.



Earlier in the day, Satyrn had arranged a meal with Princess Twilight for the afternoon. They would be scheduling to do so every few days. The Princess always seemed to make time for Satyrn, and had never missed an appointment.

Ambling out of the elevator, Satyrn surveyed the main hangar. The room was a microcosm of Equestria's finest scientists and engineers. Hangar A is typically where the high class spacecraft are kept and maintained, but it had historically doubled as the starship's hub. It would normally smell heavily of the materials being soldered and welded by the engineers, but Princess Celestia convinced Twilight to design an industrial air freshener with an aromatic lavender scent that obscured the less desirable scents. Extensive hangar bays lined the west and east sides of the room, covered by deflector shields that were only traversable to incoming and outgoing spacecraft.

Satyrn's gaze became fixated on a grey pegasus sitting by the west hangar bay. Since the beginning of the expedition, Satyrn had watched him establish and follow the same routine every day. He would sit, look out into nowhere, and say nothing for most of the afternoon. Afterwards, he would go into an empty lab and remain unseen until the following day. Satyrn began to slowly make her way towards him, her countenance was that of a soft concern. However, as briefly as she began, she stopped. Satyrn stood in the middle of the hangar, like a child looking for her mother. She turned and left.



"Celestia has asked that you lead the excavation teams on the asteroid!" Twilight said, "Not everypony's going to get clearance for that, you know."

"No way!" Satyrn exclaimed.

"Yeah way! I know everypony's been all excited about the interception. Sure, it must be cool to be in space, but without anything to do out here—"

"Definitely gets boring," Satyrn interrupted, giggling as her cheeks reddened, "but talking to you makes it worthwhile."

Twilight giggled too. "Of course," she replied.

They were the lone occupants of the small private break room on the ship's bridge. The room was decorated to resemble the ground floor of the old Golden Oak Library. Shelves that were filled with books and journals of varying interests to Princess Twilight lined the walls. The scent of freshly brewed coffee and pastries filled the room.

"How well would you say you know the crew members here?" Satyrn sipped her latte.

Twilight sat for a moment, staring at the table before answering. "Well, I've interviewed all of them at least once. I've kept an account of as much information on everypony as possible."

Twilight's horn became surrounded by a deep, rosy pink aura, and one of the notebooks from a nearby bookshelf floated towards her. It drifted into her hooves, and Twilight proceeded to show it to Satyrn.

"You just leave that out where anypony can read it?" Satyrn questioned.

"How many ponies do you think are going to waltz in here to read a book?" Twilight teased.

"Uh-huh."

"Why do you ask?"

Satyrn stood up and motioned for Twilight to follow. Twilight trailed behind curiously. They made their way to the security room, stuffed from ceiling to desk with screens surveying the entire ship. A brown, scruffy unicorn was sitting in the front. He motioned to Satyrn and Twilight.

"HEYA!" he shouted.

"Sylver?" Satyrn laughed.

"I'm temping for Featherguard while she's at the gym. She gave me some chips. You want some?" Sylver said.

Satyrn brushed passed him and scanned the monitors for the main hangar. Sylver began to slowly move a potato chip to her mouth.

"They're jalapeñooooo," Sylver tempted.



Sylver

"Stop it," Satyrn hushed, playfully slapping his hoof away. After a moment, Satyrn motioned to a screen to her right. "There," she said.

On the screen, the grey pegasus was seen sitting in front of a hangar bay.

"What's his name, Twi?" she asked.

Twilight squinted at the blurry security monitor. She looked back at Satyrn.

"I'm pretty sure that's a liability waiting to happen," the Princess said.

"Yeah. Definitely is. Those deflector shields are cool to look at, but they'll burn your face off," Sylver agreed.

Satyrn rolled her eyes.

"But do you know anything about him?" Satyrn asked again.

Twilight looked more at the colt on the screen before sighing.

"Ah. Right, that's Vylet. He's one of our software engineers & analysts. But he spends a lot of his time in the labs experimenting with various compounds," Twilight explained.

Satyrn looked at Twilight as if she wanted to ask something else. She moved away from the monitors and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Twilight asked.

"I'll see you later, alright?" Satyrn replied, already out the door.

Sitting down next to Sylver, Twilight rested her head in her hoof and stared at the doorway. The room was silent aside from the soft whirring and beeping noises. Twilight felt something touching her lip. She looked over at Sylver, who was putting a chip to her mouth.

"Jalapeño," Sylver stated.



"Vylet, she's coming," Rayna whispered into his ear. She quickly darted away from view, as Satyrn approached.

Vylet wore a scarf around his neck, and was frequently adjusting his large, round glasses. His cutie mark was a white puzzle piece that contrasted against his light grey coat, and his greyish-purple mane was tied up into a bun.

"Are you Vylet?" Satyrn asked.

The colt looked back at her, silently.

"Do you mind if I sit with you?" Satyrn continued.

A moment of silence. Another. Satyrn sighed and conceded. She stood up and began to walk away.

Rayna flitted up to Vylet's face.

"I don't understand why you complain about not having anypony to talk to when this is how you go about making friends. Is there a probable explanation you could offer me?" Rayna inquired.

"This is peaceful for me. You could never see the stars through the fog back at home," Vylet replied.

Raising her voice, Rayna shouted. "Satyrn!"

Satyrn stopped and hesitantly turned back around. Rayna was perched in Vylet's mane.

"Where did you learn to sass like this?" Vylet smirked at Rayna.

"From the medical dramas you watch."

Vylet rolled his eyes. Satyrn sat down next to them and studied Rayna. She was a faded golden unicorn with a chilling, light blue mane. She wore a bow and drifted around Vylet when she wasn't resting on his head. Rayna could fit in Satyrn's hoof.

"I've never seen anything like this," Satyrn noted about Rayna.

"She," Vylet emphasized, "is my AI companion. She's a hologram!"

"I was Vylet's accident!" Rayna chimed in, excitedly.

Satyrn squinted at Vylet, a chagrin attitude was about her.

"I'm not sure if she's aware of the connotation of that phrase," Vylet assured her.

He looked back out into the cosmos and started to appear lost in thought again. Rayna started drifting about his head making propeller sounds in a juvenile manner. Perhaps she fancied herself a helicopter, but it was more likely that she was trying to get Vylet's attention. After a moment, Rayna decided this was not going to be fruitful, and continued to speak to Satyrn instead.

"He wanted to create a video game to escape the war with, using a magic channeling device to add an element of virtual reality. He did that successfully, but somehow I was born in the process," Rayna explained.

Satyrn became puzzled, "You mean you don't know how?"

"There are only a hoof-full of things I don't know in this universe and that's one of them," Rayna mused with her.

Just then, a small ping was emitted from the watch around Vylet's leg. Rayna darted to the screen, disappearing into the device. Moments later, she emerged and drifted up in front of Vylet's face.

"You have an update to your Playpony subscription," Rayna announced. Loudly.

"Rayna!" Vylet scolded. "What have I told you about reading my emails out loud in front of others?"



Satyrn attempted to hold back a chuckle, but failing to do so, fell back on the floor and erupted in laughter instead. Vylet's cheeks turned a bright red, putting his face in his hooves. Rayna's expression remained indifferent.

"Rayna..." Vylet sighed.

"What's Playpony?" Rayna asked.

"RAYNA!" Vylet shouted.

Assuming a normal composure again, Satyrn sat back up next to Vylet. Rayna flew over to her and began to study her intently. They sat together quietly and watched the universe drift past them as the ship continued its course.

"I can see why you sit here so much. It beats the small windows we have in the residentials," Satyrn said.

Vylet turned his attention to the chrome-like floor beneath him. He was indifferent to his face staring back at him, which was distorted as the metal reflected his figure. Satyrn's eyes softened as she looked down at the floor with him.

"I feel like we're in the same boat," Satyrn continued, "It feels like everypony knows each other and I don't really..." she trailed off.

Vylet looked up towards Satyrn, whose solemn expression was now made visible.

"Everypony calls me a hero. Then they never speak to me again," Satyrn realized aloud.

The grey pegasus hesitated for a moment, before turning himself to Satyrn. Rayna smiled and retired back to Vylet's watch.

"You've never known your real family either," Vylet recalled, "my mom and brother died when I was really young. I hardly know my father."

Satyrn wiped away some tears she didn't realize were there until then. She turned to Vylet and smiled.

"You doin' alright?" a familiar voice interjected. Sylver was standing over them with a curious twinkle in his eyes.

"Shouldn't you be in the security room?" Satyrn asked. Vylet rolled his head back to see Sylver upside-down.

"Vylet, I presume?" Sylver asked in a weird accent.

"Yeah," Vylet replied.

"I've been told you like chemistry."

"And who told you?"

"You should go with Satyrn into the cavern excavation."

"I don't think I'm allowed to do that," Vylet was perplexed.

Sylver was part of the Equestrian Captaincy, the same rank as Twilight, but below Celestia. He had assisted Satyrn during the infiltration of Statera, led many historical operations during the Equestrian Civil War, and was a hardcore coffee addict and botanist. His scruffy face was always expressive in a condescending or comical manner.

"Ever had coffee, kid?" Sylver already had his mind made up about something. No answer would change it.

"Not really," Vylet replied.

"Alright. In the residentials, room 302. Twenty minutes. Don't be late."

Sylver yelped as Rayna materialized out of nowhere. "I'd highly recommend against excessive caffeine intake, Vy. Your mental state doesn't need that."

"I'll be fine," Vylet said, turning back to Sylver, "and what's your name?"

"Oh, he's Sylver, he's our security temp," Satyrn joked.

"You know what—" Sylver started, but he was cut off by an announcement over the ship's comms, and Celestia's voice echoed through the hangar:

"My faithful crew, the CX38 asteroid interception will commence in 15 minutes. All operations personnel are to prepare for boarding immediately. Good luck."

As the announcement concluded, the sounds of hurrying crew members erupted across the hangar.

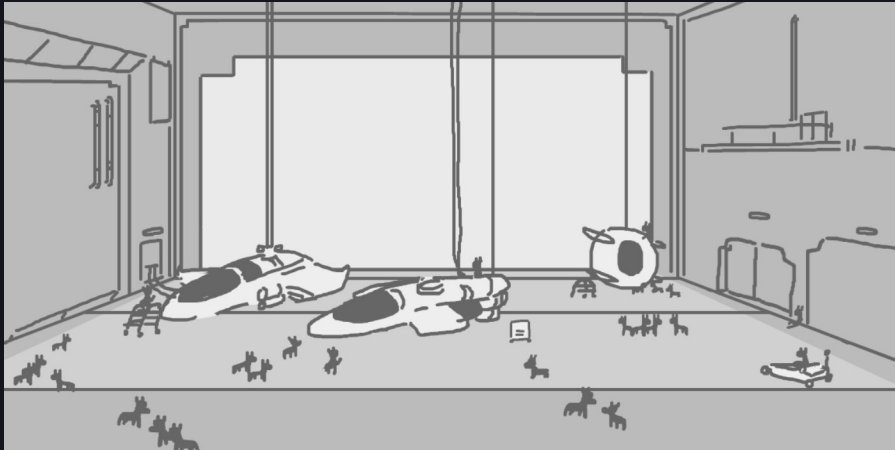
"Well, maybe next time," he said to Vylet.

Looking over to Satyrn, Sylver nodded, and exclaimed, "time to do this, kid. We're at square one now."



The New
Equestrian Flag

III. CONVERGENCE



The Starship Ponyville was the first of its kind: an Industry-Class Hyper Cruiser, capable of housing 10,000 occupants, 300 naval combat spacecraft, and 20 high capacity transports. All of these criterion were filled completely by the time of launch. It was built beneath the outskirts of Ponyville, with its production having started before the Equestrian Civil War.

For the past month, debates had increased among the crew about the very nature of the Starship Ponyville's purpose. Celestia had declared a state of emergency in Equestria a few years back, regarding the overpopulation and resource crisis. Her proposed solution was to find habitable planets outside of the Equestrian planetary system in order to find suitable locations to colonize. However, since the expedition began, they hadn't explored any planets. The decision to investigate an asteroid over anything else in the past three months confused many.

Hundreds of ponies had gathered along the east hangar bays across the ship to watch the asteroid interception. The plan was that the starship would match the relative velocity of the object and perform a soft touchdown. Celestia had determined that this would be the safest and most non-destructive means to investigating the asteroid, with no evident collision course otherwise.

Soon after the crowds had gathered, the asteroid came into view. Murmurs and whispers filled the rooms and halls of the ship. Satyrn, Vylet, and Sylver watched together in the main hangar where they had been. Rayna was watching intently from the top of Vylet's head.

"I've spent a lot of time going through the records kept on this ship," Rayna told them.

Sylver whipped around to Rayna, a bewildered expression had come over him.

"Rayna, how in the hell did you get access to those? Only Celestia has permission to see them. You could be convicted of treachery against the Equestrian monarchy," Sylver's rare tone of concern took Satyrn by surprise.

"Yeah.. Rayna are you serious?' Vylet questioned. Satyrn nodded, echoing his inquiry.

"The laws only apply to ponies that exist," Rayna was aloof, "but according to what I know, CX38 was logged as a point of interest the same date that we left Equestria."

Satyrn and Sylver exchanged curious glances. Between them, Vylet appeared to be contemplative.

"Well.." Sylver started, "Celestia didn't even know this asteroid existed until March, I think. Does that check out?"

Vylet and Satyrn nodded.

"So it wouldn't make sense. Are you sure you analyzed everything properly?" Sylver asked.

"I don't make mistakes," Rayna insisted.

"You kind of do. Hyper-intelligence doesn't make you invulnerable to everything," Vylet taunted.

Rayna's horn glowed brightly, revealing the records in question. Sylver covered his eyes, unwilling to view classified information. Vylet and Satyrn examined the records closely. The records revealed that CX38 was added to an index of locations to reach during the expedition. It was the only entry and was dated "February 10, 2051, Sol 1".

"So?" Satyrn's expression was patronizing, "why were you looking through these documents to begin with?"

"I want to keep Vylet safe. Any potential compromise in leadership must be found out sooner or later," Rayna replied defiantly.

"If you're desperate to keep him safe, why do you let him sit near the deflector shields?" said Sylver.

Rayna's looked over at Vylet for assistance. Vylet shrugged at her, with a smug expression.

"They burn your face—"

"Ok it's ... time for you to be ... quiet," Rayna was attempting to sound flustered, but fumbled over her words.

The four of them looked back outside to see the asteroid right along the ship. The crowd of ponies began to make various oohs and ahhs as CX38 inched closer and closer to the ship. About fifteen minutes later, the Starship Ponyville was hovering just over the asteroid. After a moment, the ship touched down on the asteroid, the hangar filled with cheering and applause. Satyrn, Vylet, and Sylver cheered with them. As Rayna settled into Vylet's hair, her face became contemplative.



The asteroid was sprawling with researchers and scientists examining the rock and its structural integrity, like ants moving about their subterranean colonies.

Satyrn was helping to set out a gravitational generator, as CX38's escape velocity had been deemed a risk factor of the operation. The surface was dry and brittle, breaking under hoof; it was silent as a grave for the time being. Satyrn set down the generator half a mile out from the ship's landing site. She waved up at Sylver, who was watching from the ship's bridge. Sylver dashed over to a command console and set out a terradome which covered the surface area of operations.

As the terradome locked down, Satyrn removed her AMCD head protection. The sound of mechanical whirrs and clicks echoed throughout the dome and then things were quiet again. Suddenly, the asteroid sprung to life, as the spotlights on the ship revealed the bluish-grey, rocky surface of CX38 in its full glory.

After flipping a few switches, the machine buzzed to life. Satyrn felt the asteroid pulling her towards itself as gravity began to normalize. When this occurred, she heard distant chirping sounds, like hundreds of bats flying together in unison. She listened for the source and traced it to the cavern entrance.

"Sylver, did you catch that?" Satyrn spoke over the comms.

Various bits of static and noise were heard before Sylver replied.

"Hear what? I was making coffee." Sylver was making coffee.

"There were some weird noises coming from the cavern, I think."

"Probably falling rocks or something. We just gave CX38 the gift of gravity. After all, you know what gravity does. Things fall." Sylver started snickering at his own sarcasm.

Satyrn glanced over at the bridge, Sylver was surveying the area in question.

"Honestly, everything looks good right now. All diagnostics come out safe." Sylver reassured.

"Alright. Thanks." Satyrn replied. She stood up and started towards the ship.



IV. STRANGERS



"Are you sure you want to do this again?" Rayna voiced her concerns to Vylet.

"Escapism is how I meditate," Vylet dismissed, typing away on his laptop. Functions and variables danced across the screen as the monitor lit what it could of the dim room. Rayna scanned every line of code, alerting Vylet of any potential errors or inconsistencies.

There was a knock at the door, startling Vylet. "Who is that?" he whispered to Rayna.

"Telegram," Rayna replied, her impartial tone could be perceived as an element of attempted comedy.

"Rayna, we don't have—" Vylet stopped himself, sighing. He stood up and trotted over to the door. Standing there was Satyrn, who was ever so slightly taller than him.

"Oh... Hey Satyrn," Vylet managed.

"Rayna sent me your room number, if you were wondering," said Satyrn.

Slowly, Vylet turned to offer a half-scowl at Rayna, who was hiding behind his leg.

"Well, come in, I guess."



The room was filled with quiet talking, the light sipping of tea, and occasional laughter. Various electronic displays illuminated the room which caused large shifting shadows to cascade across the chrome walls. Although the stars could be seen from the bedroom window, they had looked at them enough. The aroma of freshly prepared green tea moved about, bringing about an unparalleled pleasure.

"Seeing you sitting out there every day reminded me of my time in Statera," Satyrn admitted.

Vylet looked up from his laptop monitor for a moment to glance back at her.

"Even with so many ponies there, it was lonely. It's kind of like that now," she continued.

"Minus the authoritarian rule," Vylet added.

They laughed heartily.

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," Rayna insisted. There was a solemn tone in her voice.

"Well, you have at least one pony you can talk to on this ship now," Satyrn told Vylet.

Vylet went to sit down next to Satyrn on his bed.

"I appreciate that."

"That's how friends work," Satyrn smiled.

"Well, I have friends back home."

"Oh... I see."

Vylet stared at the floor. Rayna drifted around his lap.

"The truth is," Vylet started, "being alone isn't the problem for me here."

Satyrn studied his expression, listening closely.

"I'm just..."

There was a pause. Satyrn put her hoof on his shoulder. He was shivering.

"I want to go home..." Vylet began to tear up, "I don't know where—"

The boy began to visibly weep. Rayna rested on his shoulder in an effort to comfort him. Satyrn watched helplessly.

"I don't know where we are," he choked up, "I'm not brave. I'm just scared. I'm scared of everything. I can't handle being out here," Vylet cried.

He fell into Satyrn's embrace as she comforted him.

"I'm not brave..." he repeated, his voice was breaking.

"During the war, I created the Super Pony World simulation so I could feel like I had a reason to exist. I wanted to feel like I was strong and brave... but I'm not... In the real world, I'm scared of everything," Vylet confessed to her, "everything is so terrifying..."

Vylet's tears began to stop, but Satyrn was working to hold back her own sorrow. The room became quiet again as Satyrn stroked the boy's mane.

"Bravery comes in a lot of different forms," Satyrn said.

Vylet sniffled and wiped his eyes, looking up at Satyrn.

"Everypony calls me a hero, but really I was scared, and I ran. I ran from Statera," she looked down at him.

"But you were strong enough to get away," Vylet reasoned.

"You were strong enough to get here, right? You're here now," Satyrn replied.

"I guess you're right," Vylet sniffed.

In that moment, the universe seemed still. The burden of innocence carries a substantial weight, but such burden is the key to surmounting the ill-intent of a miserly king. Tracks that have been long obscured are uncovered usually through eyes untouched by power. Innocence is to be protected, nurtured, and is deserving of faith. At this time, they're all strangers to the world outside Equestria. The fear of the unknown is the natural way of things for beings of any relative intelligence.

The scent of tea dissipated.

V. SWARM



June 15, 2051 [Sol 64]

Sylver shuffled into the Stinger. The spacecraft was spherical and noticeably smaller than other dogfighter ships designed for the Equestrian Navy. On each side, variably-swept wings could be extended in-atmosphere, allowing for the Stinger to increase its aerodynamic properties significantly.

Vylet trotted up.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm going to orbit the asteroid and make sure everything is secure during the operation," Sylver replied.

"Did Celestia ask you to?"

"Well, Satyrn's a bit uneasy being here. She'll be able to focus if I'm keeping an eye out."

"Ah. You're a good friend for doing that!"

"Eh... I just want an excuse to get in one of these," Sylver caressed the dashboard of the spacecraft, "I've never been in a Stinger before."

"Never been—" Vylet began. Suddenly, Rayna zipped out from Vylet's watch to scold Sylver.

"Yeah! It says in my records that you haven't been approved to pilot anything at all," she was glaring at Sylver.

"Your records?" Sylver looked hurt.

"Well, okay, Celestia's personnel records."

"Fun police, honestly. Why do you keep accessing classified information?"

"If it's classified, Princess Celestia should do a better job of keeping it out of other ponies' hooves."

"To be fair," Vylet suggested, "no pony probably considered creating a firewall that protects against self aware artificial intelligence, Rayna."

Rayna huffed and scrunched her snout at him. Before they could say anything more, Sylver closed the door and waved at Vylet and Rayna.

"You're just going to let him go? This isn't legal," Rayna protested.

"I mean, you're committing treason, so..." Vylet replied, snarkily.

The Stinger hovered for a moment, brushing up a few loose papers and wires off of the hangar floor. It made a low whining sound that reverberated loudly against the walls, and the engine oscillated with a low, gritty rumble. Vylet put his hoof up to prevent the gusts from irritating his eyes. Then, the ship darted out through the deflector shields and disappeared as quickly as it left.

Vylet pushed his glasses back where they belonged and adjusted his hair.

"We're going to need to talk about your nosey behaviour," Vylet told Rayna.



The caverns were kindled by deep green and grey hues, reflecting the ship's spotlights in a myriad of directions and tints. Satyrn had led a group of 5 researchers with her to examine the interior components of the asteroid more intimately. The sound of their hoofsteps pulsed between the cavern walls. Stalagmites and stalactites jutted throughout the subterranean, casting falsely threatening shadows along the paths. The air was chilling, though Satyrn was not wearing her space suit.

Satyrn instructed her team to stop just within the cave's entrance to begin examining the cave's composition. She picked up her comm and dialed Sylver.

"Please leave a message," Sylver quipped.

"See anything interesting up there?" Satyrn replied.

"Lots of rock."

"Really? I would have never guessed."

"Our AO looks kind of small though. Are you sure we couldn't use a bigger terradome?"

"We're using the one Celestia wanted."

"Whatever."

In that moment, Satyrn could hear the same chirps from earlier, louder this time. She scanned the area, searching for anything unusual (not that exploring an asteroid is anything usual at this point in time). Deeper into the cave, a twinkle between the stalagmites caught her eye. Straying a little bit further away from the group, she examined the floor and discovered what appeared to be a pipe made of metal that seemed to go far into the cavern system.

She whispered into the comm in confusion.

"Sylver," she said.

"Copy Banshee, I hear ya," Sylver replied, embellishing the moment with pseudo-military jargon.

Satyrn sighed, "I think... I've found a pipe system in here."

Sylver hesitated for a moment before replying.

"I'm sorry, what? Come again?"

"A pipe system. I think there are pipes here."

Minding her step, Satyrn moved deeper into the cave. Darker and darker the tunnels grew as she followed the pipe down. Eventually she came to a dead end; the pipe passed into the rocky wall and could not be traced further. At this point, it was very difficult to see the rest of the area she was in, Satyrn fumbled to unsheathe her gunblade from her scarf. She stood on her hind legs and activated the blade's power, which illuminated the chasm with a dim blue light.

Looking up, Satyrn saw what appeared to be a large metal door, with no viable means to open it. She scanned the walls for a button or lever, but this was not fruitful.

"Sylver," she spoke over comms.

"Copy Bانش—" Sylver crackled through.

Satyrn interrupted, "I followed the pipe and there's a door."

Again, Sylver hesitated.

"A door..." Sylver sounded suspicious of her, "you're pulling my leg."

"I can't find a way to open it."

"How far in are you?"

"I don't know, when did we last talk?"

Sylver checked his dashboard clock. Squinting, he read, "Ehh, about seven minutes ago?"

"Oh gosh," Satyrn looked back towards where she came from, "I'm going to head back. We need to get a group down here right away."

"I'll ping the Princess," Sylver replied. The comm signal crackled, followed by silence.

Satyrn started walking back to the cave entrance. Her heart began to pound and she could feel herself perspiring. She found herself nervously checking every corner and wall of the cave system, her weapon still drawn.

And there it was again, the chirping noises. Satyrn gasped loudly and covered her mouth. The noises were much louder this time. She whipped around to see if something was behind her, but nothing was there. Her muscles tensed and she refused to blink; sweat was now racing down her forehead. Holding the blade in both hooves now, she moved slowly towards the entrance. She waved the weapon slowly around the cave, like a torch.

Again, the chirping noises came, louder and louder. Satyrn stopped in her tracks, holding back a scream. She stood motionless for a minute. Two. Three. Just before she mustered the confidence to keep moving, something fell from the ceiling, cracking and breaking onto the cavern floor. Satyrn bent down to examine what had fallen: it appeared to be some sort of salt deposit from the ceiling, perhaps from a stalactite. It had shattered over the floor, becoming a dust-like sediment.

As she rummaged through the debris, a thick liquid substance fell onto her hoof from the ceiling. Satyrn shrieked as it began to burn profusely. However, the pitch of her scream caused the liquid to slip off of her coat and fall to the floor. It began to seep through the rock, like a knife through butter. Satyrn grabbed her blade and swung it to the ceiling. As she did, hundreds of bluish-green eyes were staring back at her. In unison, the creatures began to make high pitched chirping sounds that rang through the cave system. Satyrn quickly darted for the entrance; she could hear the creatures break away from the ceiling and swarm towards her.

"SYLVER!" she cried desperately into the comms.

"SYLVER, COME IN," she cried again.

"SYLVER, WE HAVE A PROBLEM."

"Received. Callsign Bravo November Sierra, what's wrong what are you seeing?" Sylver replied.

"Some things are chasing me out of the cave, I don't know, I don't know," Satyrn stumbled over her words, trying to catch her breath between sentences. Her hooves pounded against the rocky cave floors, breaking the earth beneath her. "Tell Celestia, we need to evacuate the researchers off of the surface."

Satyrn whirled around and saw the creatures speeding behind her. She leapt from the ground, flapping her wings to begin her ascent; her weapon converted into a firearm with a swift tap to a button on the handle. The cave opening became visible and she saw her group examining the salt deposits.

She called out to them, "Run, run back to the ship now! We've got company."

The scientists became alarmed and frantic as they began evacuating the chasm.

"Sylver, give me an update," Satyrn demanded.

"We're opening the terradome, you need to get your suit on quick!" Sylver replied.

"It's gonna get cold out here. Get the plasma cannons ready!"

"That bad huh?" Sylver teased.

Satyrn shot out of the mouth of the cave and landed on the ground, sliding backwards and breaking the ground beneath her. The creatures had to catch up to her. She motioned for the researchers to escape; hundreds of ponies in lab coats were fleeing the surface of the asteroid. Satyrn tapped on her comm, which materialized a magic helmet and suit around her. She aimed her gunblade at the cave and waited. Around her, shouts and commands were coming in left in right. She took in a deep breath and closed her eyes and let her muscles relax. For a moment, everything was silent. She waited. And waited.

The terradome dissipated as thousands of chirps from the creatures were heard coming from the cave. Satyrn opened her eyes, and there they were. With fierce precision, she opened fire - missing no shots. With each round, a few of them fell to the ground, but it was becoming clear that she would be outnumbered shortly.

"SYLVER!" Satyrn barked over the chaos, "The asteroid is almost completely evacuated, are those cannons ready yet?"

A reply came over the comms, but it wasn't Sylver who answered.

"Satyrn, this is Celestia. You need to lead those things away from the ship. On my count, we'll fire at them from the bridge."

"You got it, Princess!" Satyrn huffed.

She started dashing and gliding across the terrain - taunting the creatures to get her - and picked them off one by one.

Then, a deafening blast was heard from the starship. Satyrn glanced back to see a huge plasma bolt hit the swarm of creatures. Terrain crackled and sprayed everywhere, and a huge chunk of the pursuers were nowhere to be seen. BANG! Another blast sent more of them flying. Satyrn started to breathe heavily and her pace slowed down. She prepared to leap into flight, but another loud blast was heard. The ground exploded beneath her and she struggled to stay upright. Failing to do so, she stumbled onto the ground, landing on her back.

Satyrn felt around to see if she was hurt, but she couldn't find any injury. She pushed herself up with her wings and stood on hind legs. Clutching her weapon, she aimed it where she had last seen the swarm, but all she could see were their bodies disintegrating from the plasma rounds. The surface of the asteroid had become hauntingly silent.

"What the fuck was that?" Sylver was heard shouting over the comm, "you almost hit her—no ,you basically hit her."

"What? What happened?" Satyrn asked frantically.

The comms turned to static. No response. Dust from the explosion was clearing. Satyrn squinted through to the bridge. Celestia appeared by the window.

"Celestia, did I almost get hit?" Satyrn questioned over the comms.

"You came out alright. That's what matters," the Princess replied.

Satyrn stared back, saying nothing. Her expression was jaded and tired. She quietly extended her wings and started back towards the ship, unhurried and solemn.

VI. ELYSIUM



The starship's bridge was dim and had a panoramic view of the area outside. The stars could be seen around the room. Countless buttons and monitors twinkled and blinked around the bridge. Soft buzzing and tones were emitted rhythmically. Shadows could be seen moving around through the bottom of the doorway.

Satyrn reclined in the admiral's seat, where Celestia would normally be. She was covered in bruises. She heard Celestia talking to somepony on the other side of the door, but she was far too tired to make herself concerned just yet. As she was listening, Princess Celestia entered the room alone. Her radiant, rainbow mane glistened and waved in an almost ethereal manner. Her poise was stoic, though her expression was calm and collected. Her voice was deep and maternal, and she spoke with regality. She was dressed in a dark coat with sherpa lining the collar, the formal attire of an admiral in the Equestrian Navy. Still, there was an ominous tinge in her eye. To confide with the Princess of Equestria itself is a mistake not many know to beware.

"We're suspending surface operations on the asteroid for the time being," Celestia said calmly. She stepped over to the pilot console, in front of Satyrn.

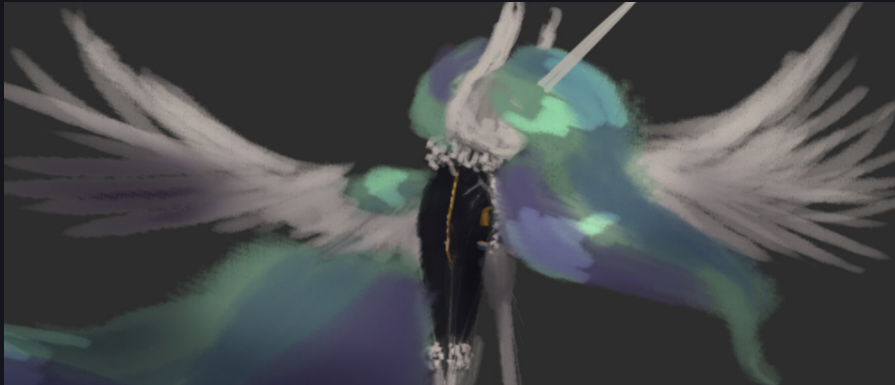
"Wait, that's all? Shouldn't we evacuate now? What are we waiting around for?" Satyrn protested.

"Enough of this. We are staying. With the current circumstances, the interest in exploring the asteroid further has grown substantially," Celestia rebutted. She stared coldly into Satyrn's eyes.

"Your highness... I think this is a high level concern. Don't you think so too?" Satyrn suggested.

"We will make sure that nopony's safety is compromised, that is a concern, yes."

"Well, whatever those things were, they're dead now."



"Good."

"Good?"

"They were a threat to our safety. You shot at them yourself," Celestia's tone became subtly coarse and hostile. She continued pacing, appearing as if she wanted to say something else, but only managing to stare back at the girl. She pushed a button on the console.

"He can come in," she said into a microphone attached to the console board.

Moments later, Vylet came in and rushed towards Satyrn.

"Hey, what—" Satyrn started, but was caught in Vylet's embrace.

"Are you okay? I was so afraid I had hit you," Vylet said.

"Hey it's okay..." Satyrn paused for a moment, "wait."

Vylet looked up at her, his eyes held back tears.

"What do you mean 'hit me'?"

"Well..." Vylet sniffed, "I was at the cannon."

Satyrn's expression softened and she held Vylet to her.

"You did fine. You saved us," Satyrn reassured him.

Celestia turned to observe the asteroid's surface. Carcasses of the slain creatures littered the grounds, stretching as far out as about a mile. The Princess scrunched her face in disgust, expressing so with a low sigh. Satyrn let go of Vylet and put her hoof on his shoulder.

"We'll talk later, alright?" she whispered to him, "I need to speak with Celestia about something first."

The Princess turned around, eyeing Satyrn. Vylet nodded and dismissed himself. When he had left, Satyrn continued to Celestia.

"You told me on your count, the cannons would fire," Satyrn said.

Celestia stood without a word, her eyes fixated on Satyrn's face as she sighed.

"He's a smart kid, but he's just a kid," Satyrn continued.

The Princess said nothing still. Her expression had become faintly gruff.

"You couldn't just do it yourself? You have magic after all."

"Enough," Celestia commanded, "I've given you the opportunity to make history on this vessel. Do not jeopardize your position, commander."

Satyrn bit her lip and glanced at her reflection on the floor. The Princess paced around her, eyeing the girl with a commanding expression.

"Your continued loyalty to us will see us through these dark times," Celestia assured.

"Your highness, I don't mean to—" Satyrn began.

"What you mean has nothing to do with the power of your words. Intent has no place in this discussion," Celestia interjected. She looked down at Satyrn, "You understand that, right?"

Satyrn nodded.

"You need to put your trust in me," Celestia said.

Satyrn nodded again, questioning, "but I must ask you something."

Leaning against the console, the Princess met her gaze.

"Yes?" Celestia said.

Satyrn stood up from the chair. She was much shorter than the Princess, and still had to look up at her.

"Why exactly did we land on this asteroid?"

"It displayed erratic movements, as if it was being piloted. We wanted to investigate."

"How exactly could you tell?"

"We looked at the asteroid," Celestia chuckled, "we studied its course."

"Yeah, but why were you looking at it to begin with? I thought we were looking for planets to expand to, not space rocks that happen to have living beings on them," Satyrn's tone became condescending.

Celestia frowned playfully, raising her eyebrows, "That's what we do in astronomy, Satyrn. We look at things in space, do we not?"

Satyrn silently conceded.

"Yeah. You're right," Satyrn replied, "excuse me, though. I want to catch up with Vylet now."

"Glad you're making friends here," Celestia smiled.

Satyrn nodded and started for the door.

"Godspeed!" Celestia shouted, as Satyrn was on her way out.



Vylet held a small bottle containing a metallic, grey substance. He rotated it in his hooves, causing the substance to shift and move about. He watched it with interest.

"What is it?" Rayna asked, sitting on his watch.

"I'm not sure. Can you run a diagnostic on its composition?" Vylet asked.

"No," Rayna's tone was apathetic.

"What do you mean, 'no'?"

"You have no external equipment for me to use, what the fuck am I supposed to do?"

"Woah! Hey hey hey!" Vylet was alarmed, "Where are you learning to talk like that?"

"Stop watching medical dramas," Rayna commanded.

The door to Vylet's room opened without warning.

"Hey, Vy!" Satyrn announced her arrival.

"How did you get in here?!" Vylet shrieked.

"Rayna gave me your key code!"

"Rayna... what the fuck."

"Woah! hey hey hey!" Rayna rebutted, "Where are you learning to talk like that?"

Vylet threatened to poke Rayna, but seeing as how she was a hologram, the threat was null and he was unable to follow through.

"How is she sending you this information?" Vylet asked.

"Oh," Satyrn drew a piece of paper from her scarf. "She emails me. I don't know how she got my address, though."

She displayed the paper which read:

"Dear Satyrn,

Vylet's key code is 89538. He's been coding for the past hour and I'm getting very bored of it. Come by soon, please. Also, I want somepony to help me design a cool scarf like you two have! Vy probably won't be competent enough to do that by himself.

Warmly, Rayna

P.S: he's been staring at a strange alloy compound and it's freaking me out, he really likes looking at it."

Satyrn looked up from the paper to see Vylet staring at the strange alloy compound.

"This is freaking me out," Rayna mouthed to Satyrn.

Rayna drifted up to the bottle Vylet was holding and examined it closely. Satyrn came over to them.

"This is the stuff that fell on me in the cave," Satyrn said.

"I went back out to the surface and took this sample from one of the bodies," Vylet explained, "As far as I can tell, they don't have blood, but... they do have this."

"May I?" Satyrn gestured to the bottle.

Vylet nodded. She took it and gently held it up to the light from Vylet's laptop monitor. The substance moved like mercury, but had a more distinctly rugged texture about it. Additionally, it was dull like smooth stone and did not have the same shine as a pure liquid. Satyrn squinted.

"I think I've seen this in a book my father wrote," Satyrn explained, "A liquid metal hybrid compound that had once been found in a crater somewhere out in Saddle Arabia." She then turned to Vylet, "You're a chemist right?"

The colt's ears perked up. "Would you want to analyze it with me?" Vylet asked, his excited smile made Satyrn giggle.



Satyrn and Vylet walked through the main hangar. It was empty, not even the spacecraft were being worked on at this time. The ship had ten laboratory spaces, all of which were also empty. Vylet led Satyrn into the one he normally used, furthest back in the research wing. They set the sample on the exam table.

The lab was filled with cabinets and drawers of varying sizes and heights, full of cylinders, microscopes, and a myriad of other tools for testing and researching. Flasks and dishes were lined up nicely along the counters among stacks of used notebooks.

"So, you said you found this in the caves?" Vylet asked Satyrn.

"Yes. It dripped down from one of the creatures onto my hoof. It burned like crazy," Satyrn replied. She started setting various textbooks and journals down next to the sample.

"Well surely, then, it's a great idea to put paper products next to the sample right?" Vylet mused.

"What do you mean?"

"If it burned, wouldn't those books be a fire hazard?"

"Wouldn't the bottle be melting?" Satyrn retorted.

Vylet looked down at the bottle, shrugging. "Yeah, that is weird I suppose."

Satyrn started swapping through the texts she brought, a multitude of books and journals from her family's library. Some of the writings were by her father, who had worked as a royal scientist for Celestia before the expedition. She flipped through an illustrated field guide of Equestrian creatures her father had put together.

"What's that for?" Vylet asked her.

"Look," Satyrn pointed to a dusty page from the field guide. There was a diagram of a creature with a black exoskeleton, green eyes, and apertures across its body. The title read: "Changelings: Prior to the Hive Revolution".

"These look a lot like the creatures from the caves," Vylet noted, "but aren't changelings vibrantly coloured? Like Chrysalis and Thorax."

"Yes, but they used to look different. You never read about the Hive Revolution?" Satyrn asked him.

"I failed history," Vylet replied, scratching his head.

Satyrn flipped to the next page. It was filled with diagrams of the insect-like changelings, followed by the metamorphosed, technicolour changelings that they knew from Equestria.

"More than three decades ago, changelings used to be the hive mind of Queen Chrysalis. The first major conflict we had with them was during the Royal Canterlot Wedding between Shining Armor and Princess Cadance of the Crystal Empire," Satyrn explained.

"They look kind of creepy," Vylet said.

"Yeah. They would feed on the love of friendship between other ponies and creatures in order to make the Queen more powerful. But one day, Starlight Glimmer confronted the hive with Trixie, Thorax, and Discord. Trixie was still a traveling magician, Thorax was still a pre-metamorphosis changeling, and Discord was.. Well he hasn't changed much has he?"

They laughed as Rayna chimed in. "They managed to convince the changelings to share their own love instead of relying on taking it from others. They're fueled by a very potent magic force, so it didn't take long for them all to transform. Although, Chrysalis took a few more years; she attempted multiple times to attack Equestria, even allying with the prisoners of Tartarus, like Tirek and Cozy Glow."

"Since when do you know so much?" Vylet tested her.

"I read as much as I can," Rayna stuck her tongue out at him.

Satyrn stared down at the illustrations in the field guide.

"So my question is, why do the creatures on the asteroid look so much like them..." she pondered, looking up from the book at the bottle on the table.

"My father wrote," she began, shuffling through another journal and turning to a page on pre-industrial history, "'Aisha Spellbound's Crater, a place in northern Saddle Arabia where a meteorite was believed to have hit centuries before. It was found by settlers during the 900's period, where many unique curiosities were procured.'"

Satyrn paused as she skimmed the entries. Vylet peered over her shoulder, mouthing some of the subtitles to himself. Satyrn stopped on an entry titled "Kytzdominum", which she read aloud, "Kytzdominum is an element between elements. Containing properties of both liquids and metals alike, it defies the life sciences we have relied on for so long to explain our world and our universe."

On the same page, a diagram of a container resembling the alloy in Vylet's bottle was sketched, likely hand drawn by Elden himself.

"That's all? This is pseudohistory. Does this even say anything else about the substance?" Vylet scrunched his face in suspicion.

"What do you think this is, then?" Satyrn gestured to the bottle.

Vylet glanced at the bottle. He saw his face, contorted by the shape of the glass reflecting his image every which way. The compound sat idly in the container.

"How sure are you of your father?" Vylet asked reluctantly.

"He worked under Celestia, he knows his stuff," Satyrn spoke eagerly.

Rayna scoffed at Satyrn, "I'm not sure that makes him more credible at this rate."

Satyrn appeared offended. She glared at the hologram. "We need to trust her, Rayna."

"Defensive. Are you sure you're not brainwashed?" Rayna escalated.

"Hey, what is up with you?" Vylet scolded her. Satyrn was restraining exasperation as she bit her lip back.

"I'm really sorry," Vylet apologized, "she's usually not so hostile."

"Don't patronize me. I've been trying to warn you that Celestia's keeping information from everypony," Rayna validated.

"Even if that's so," Satyrn replied, "it's a crime to be accessing her classified documents. We've talked about this."

"Even if that's so, she's very distant from the rest of the crew. If I know anything, documented news reports have proven to me that she's been like this since the war," Rayna was adamant.

Satyrn sighed and pointed her snout to the ceiling, as if she were silently imploring an external force for an answer.

"Just how many of her documents have you accessed?" Vylet's expression and tone softened as he questioned Rayna.

"As many as I've needed to," she replied.

"How long have you been suspicious of her?" Vylet continued.

"Since the letter."

Rayna flitted over to Satyrn, "You know that Celestia has had Luna spy on the thoughts and dreams of ponies across Equestria, don't you?"

Satyrn turned to Rayna. She opened her mouth but nothing came out.

"You're close to the royal family, of course you would defend them," Rayna said.

"I..." Satyrn started, "I didn't know that."

Rayna's eyes widened, "I see."

Suddenly the doors of the lab closed with a loud metallic blast, and the room became pitch black. Satyrn and Vylet fumbled around for the lights.

"What's going on!?" Vylet yelled.

A moment later, Satyrn flipped a switch and the lights of the lab flickered to life.

"What... was that?" Vylet said looking over at the now locked doors of the lab. Satyrn checked the time on Vylet's watch, and looked up at him.

"Curfew," they realized aloud, together.

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June 16, 2051 [Sol 65]

An hour past midnight, Vylet had set up a drip test station to see how the compound would react with other organic materials. They tested with various metals and woods; each time, the Kytzdominum would burn through, back into the bottle.

"This stuff is really inconsistent..." Vylet noted.

"Well," Rayna started. Satyrn and Vylet looked over at her. She was sitting on the exam table next to the bottle, a few virtual displays surrounded her. "The substance is highly conductive at its neutral state. From what I can see so far, there is no way for us to cause it to solidify or to melt completely using any temperature-oriented stimuli."

"That doesn't make sense," Satyrn replied.

"However," Rayna continued, "I would like you to try something. I don't think this is a natural compound."

Satyrn and Vylet stared intently at Rayna.

"Try whistling. I noticed that there were light fluctuations in its density whenever we were testing it with the copper, in correlation to the whining sounds the metal made," she said.

Reluctantly, Satyrn stood straight and tried whistling a song that Amber would sing her to sleep with. Nothing happened, and Rayna put her face in her hoof.

"What I meant was, do so at a high pitch and hold it."

Satyrn scrunched her face at Rayna, who rolled her eyes in response. She whistled at a relatively high pitch. The Kytzdominum began to climb the bottle and change shape. Then, started bubbling and moving erratically. When Satyrn stopped, it returned to a resting state.

"That's not normal," Vylet exclaimed, wide eyed.

"Precisely," Rayna replied, "The alloy has a significant Sor-to-atom ratio. This stuff was made using magic."

"I've never read of a spell that could do such a thing," Satyrn was slightly shocked, "How did you figure this out, Rayna?"

"Did you even hear what I said a minute ago?" Rayna scoffed.

Vylet started whistling as high as possible, Satyrn had to cover her ears. The Kytzdominum started moving about again, but suddenly, it began to melt through the bottle. Vylet stopped and frantically dashed towards a cabinet to get a glass petri dish. Before the compound could start melting through the table, Vylet scooped it up and dumped the rest of the bottle's contents onto the dish. He was breathing heavily.

Rayna burst out into laughter, and Satyrn joined her. Vylet stood there, aghast, and looked over at Satyrn with concern.

"Maybe don't do that again," Satyrn snickered.

Vylet turned his gaze back to the petri dish and ruffled his hair. Rayna spoke.

"So this is a magical substance. I saw its Sor packet count fluctuate as Vylet... Did whatever that was."

"This is amazing," Satyrn said.

"We need to go back into that cave," Vylet suggested.

Satyrn turned to him, a serious countenance had come over her. "Really? That idea doesn't frighten you?" Satyrn asked.

Vylet's expression slowly became brooding. He stepped to the table and examined the Kytzdominum closely. Rayna and Satyrn exchanged glances.

"This is rather peculiar, isn't it," Satyrn realized aloud, "of all the uninteresting asteroids we could have come across."

She looked out the lab window at the creatures' bodies sprawled across the rocky surface of CX38.

"Well, even if we wanted to, we couldn't leave the ship now. Celestia told you that she would be suspending operations on the surface until further notice," Rayna cautioned her.

"Since when were you somepony who likes to follow the rules?" Satyrn mused at her.

Rayna's admonishing tone became mischievous, "Never, I would say."

Satyrn turned away from the window to Vylet.

"Sylver could help us get out before tomorrow night's curfew. He knows his way around the ship pretty well," she said.

"So, you want to go, then?" Vylet yawned. He sat down on the floor and stretched out his legs.

"That's brave of you to want this," Satyrn said.

"I suppose..." Vylet paused, "What did you see in there?"

"A door."

"A door?"

"Yeah. We were going to bring a group down to breach it, but then the incident happened."

Vylet reached behind himself for the table and fumbled around sleepily for the field guide. He opened the book to the changeling page.

"Rayna, what do you think?" he asked, groggily.

"Think?" Rayna squeaked.

"Do you think those things are changelings?"

"The diagram shows correlations that one can't deny," Rayna analyzed, "I think they are changelings, but that leaves us with a question of why they're all the way out here."

"And why haven't they transformed like the ones in Equestria?" Satyrn added.

She looked over at Vylet who was now fast asleep on the floor. Rayna drifted over and rested on Vylet's head.

"Sleeping," Rayna scoffed.

VII. DANGER CLOSE



The doors of the lab opened at exactly 8:00 A.M. Satyrn nudged Vylet awake and they made plans to meet up with Sylver just before curfew to sneak out and explore the cave. Vylet started to voice second thoughts about the plan after Rayna suggested that another swarm could attack as a result of their poking around, but Satyrn convinced him that they could just fall back to the ship, and that things would end up like it did in the first attack.

There was a knock.

Sylver looked up from his bed towards his door. "Uh..." he struggled to make himself conscious enough to make sense, "don't come in I have..." he trailed off. "I have..."

Another knock came.

"Plants... PLANTS," Sylver jolted awake and leapt out of bed. The starship's residential policies included not growing anything outside a lab. Beneath Sylver's bed, rows of coffee beans were endeavoring to sprout, which he had realized, aloud, that they could compromise his qualifications to stay in a captain's' quarters suite, which was a type of room for high ranking officials.

The knocking continued.

"JUST A MINUTE!" Sylver shouted, frantically covering his various seedlings. Once he had succeeded in doing so, he opened the door. Satyrn stared back through the doorway.

"Oh, it's just you," Sylver exhaled.

"Just me?" Satyrn looked hurt.

"No, no, I didn't mean it like that."

"Well, then how did you mean it?"

Sylver stood there hesitantly.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Satyrn laughed and hugged him.

"I'm just kidding," she assured him. Sylver laughed nervously, but with subtle relief.



"You want me to... what?" Sylver's tone was bewildered.

"I need you to help Vylet and me sneak out after curfew," Satyrn repeated. She had explained to Sylver what she and Vylet had discussed during their experiments and what their findings were. Hearing these things concerned Sylver immensely, as he was a particularly high trusted official to Celestia. He was essentially being asked to betray that position.

Sylver sighed in reflection, "I don't know if I can help you."

"But—" Satyrn blurted.

"I don't doubt you, or Rayna, or whatever, and maybe you're onto something, but my honour and loyalty is with the royal family."

A bleep came from a cabinet at the foot of Sylver's bed. Sylver's horn started glowing and a coffee maker flew out of the cabinet alongside a mug. He willed the coffee to pour into the mug, nonchalantly.

"Don't you find these circumstances suspicious?" Satyrn implored.

"Yes. I do, but what am I to make of it? What if Celestia is just protecting us?" Sylver rebutted.

"Or what if she's protecting herself?" Satyrn suggested.

Sylver placed his mug on his desk. He stood and turned to Satyrn.

"You've been long affiliated with the royal family yourself, ever since you moved to Ponyville. This vigilante persona you've taken on is completely unlike you, no matter how much of a hero you've been to Equestria," Sylver said.

"Do you think I want to believe any of this too?" Satyrn raised her voice, startling Sylver, "I've grown up with classes and books about friendship and magic as the center of Equestrian culture. History tells me that in centuries past, Equestria's problems were solved with friendship and teamwork. Where is that?"

Sylver was silent. Satyrn continued. "The dark ages of Equestria, when Discord reigned, that's when chaos and warfare were the answers to everything. Sure, maybe friendship can't solve an economic crisis, but surely you don't mean to tell me that the Princess was always like this. I only know what I've been told."

As Satyrn paused, the room became hauntingly silent. Sylver hung his head and hovered the coffee maker back into the cabinet. He looked at Satyrn intently.

"No. She hasn't. I remember when we relied on the Elements of Harmony. No killing, no wars. I mean, Twilight is the Princess of Friendship. Celestia gave her that title," Sylver replied.

Satyrn nodded. "I should ask you, do you know where the changelings came from?"

"They transformed when Starlight—" Sylver was interrupted.

"Before that. Where did they come from?" Satyrn's tone was coarse.

Sylver sat at his desk and rummaged through his thoughts. After a few moments of silence, he looked back up at Satyrn, conceding an answer. "We read through the history texts last night. Ponies, and griffins, and dragons. We know they all evolved from somewhere. There's no evolutionary data for changelings," Satyrn noted, "out of every place we could have made first contact in the entire universe, why do we land on some cryptically barren asteroid with changelings?"

Sylver raised his eyes. It was of the ridiculous notion and concept of blind honour that many have toiled for eternities for an authority that holds no compassion or ethic for the laborers in their control. Though treachery retains the stigma it had been conceived amidst, it is in the most patriotic of revolutions that those who fight in just are persecuted as the villains of the story. This is, perhaps, the thought that occurred in Sylver's mind, as a paradigm shift came about thoughts he expressed further.

"You're asking me to become a traitor for your cause," said Sylver.

"My cause? I just want to figure out what the hell is going on," Satyrn retorted.

"Alright, then."

"Alright?"

"I'll help you two through the lower decks. I'll meet you at 23:30, but I'll need you to stay on comm. I'll try to assess and assist from my room."

Satyrn's mouth had hung open. Her eyes wandered as she considered what there was to say.

"Right now, what you have is a hunch. This is how much I trust you, kid," Sylver reinforced.

"Thank you," Satyrn's voice was sincere.

"I'm already kind of a traitor anyway," Sylver said. He got up and trotted over to his bed and lifted the sheets to reveal the coffee beans underneath.

They chuckled together at the beginnings of two varieties of infidelity: the movement to uncover the secrets that they suspected Celestia to be keeping, and the act of criminal botany, related to the growth of coffee beans and tea leaves.



A normal afternoon in the ship was a busy afternoon. Engineers scuttled about the hangars, marines marched up and down the corridors, and astronomers chattered about in the observatory. During the day, the ship was like a miniature city (and was occupied by more ponies than there were in a few of the small villages across Equestria). Since operations on the asteroid surface were suspended for the time being, many of the active researchers were left without much to do. Watchful eyes were everywhere, so breaking international laws were a difficult feat to get away with.

Satyrn had been asked by Celestia to lead a patrol of 25 marines earlier, scouting the perimeter of the ship in the event of any attempt at an infiltration. Around 13:00, she led the patrol to the bridge, where they were dismissed for the day. Satyrn started towards her room in the residential district. She trotted past custodians wheeling various carts and machinery through the halls between storage units and hangars, likely filled with tools and materials for building and maintaining the numerous spacecraft.

Approaching her room, Satyrn found that the door had been unlocked and was ajar. She advanced with caution and entered the room. Initially, nothing seemed erroneous or misplaced, but upon further inspection, Satyrn noticed that her gunblade had been taken out of its case and was now sitting at the foot of her bed. She came into the room completely, and bent down to examine it.

In an abrupt moment, light chirping noises came from below the bed, and Satyrn swiftly clutched her weapon. She activated the blade's energy core and it droned to life. The noise alarmed the creatures under the bed, causing various hissing and chirping sounds to be emitted before two changelings emerged from beneath the bed to dart out of the room.

Satyrn took flight and pursued them. They buzzed past attendants and researchers, often provoking shrieks of terror and surprise. The changelings bounded in and out of rooms and halls in an attempt to confuse Satyrn. In a moment, they had disappeared within the crowds of ponies in the hangar. When Satyrn caught up with where she assumed them to be, she had lost them completely. She surveyed the hangar and tried to spot them.

She hovered around the hangar, trying to narrow down any possible escape routes they may have taken. After a minute or two, she gave up and contacted Sylver. He picked up immediately.

"Hey, Sylver, I need to meet you in your room in a minute. It's urgent," Satyrn said.

"Uh alright," Sylver replied, dubiously.

"Great," Satyrn hung up. She sprinted over to the residential elevators. Around the halls, technicians and attendants were picking up various papers and equipment they had dropped when the creatures had buzzed past them. Satyrn apologized profusely as she flew by. A few moments later, she reached Sylver's room and burst in.

"Sylver, they're here!" she shouted

"Who's here?" Sylver inquired.

"The changelings, there's two of them in the ship!"

"But they all died," Sylver said, his expression was barren and unconcerned.

"Obviously not all of them," Satyrn tried reasoning.

Just then, Sylver entered the room, catching his breath.

"Satyrn, you're here!" he exclaimed.

He looked into the room and saw himself talking to Satyrn and chuckled. "Wow, he's good. Who's this? I've had a couple of impersonators come to a few parties, but this one tops them all." Satyrn looked back and forth between the two Sylvers in the room, and then glared at the one sitting on the bed.

"Hey Sylver, why don't we get some coffee?" she said, sweating.

"Sure! I'd love to try some," he said.

Satyrn looked over at the Sylver in the doorway, who was squinting bitterly at the Sylver on the bed.

"I take it back," the doorway Sylver said, "This is the worst fucking one."

The Sylver on the bed began to transmogrify grotesquely into a changeling. Vulgar cracks and squelches filled the room. Before it could escape, Satyrn lunged for the changeling and pacified it with a sedative round from her gunblade. In a moment's notice, the changeling had become unconscious.

"That was unsightly," Sylver commented. Satyrn grabbed him, and they headed back towards the hangar.

"How hard do you think it's gonna be to find the other one?" Sylver shouted.

"I can use my AMCD to track their Kytzdominum composition," Satyrn replied, as her hooves pounded against the metallic floor.

"That's the chunky stuff right?" Sylver questioned.

Satyrn ignored him.

They reached the main hangar and Satyrn drew her AMCD out from her scarf. In most cases, Satyrn was adamant against using the Adaptive Magic Channeling Devices, believing they unfairly rendered unicorns obsolete. Having inputted Rayna's diagnostics on the Kytzdominum, a monocle-like glass piece swiveled over her right eye which allowed her to scan the room. After a few moments, the AMCD highlighted any traces of the compound in the room. One pony was highlighted in red amongst a group of engineers.

"There he is," Satyrn said.

They dashed towards the group, they were working on a transport spacecraft. The pony in question was soldering some wires on the backside of the vessel.

"You!" Satyrn shouted, grabbing the stallion by his collar. The engineer shouted and tried to punch her. She threw him to the floor and put the barrel of her weapon in his face.

"You can surrender or die," she warned him. The other engineers started pleading with Satyrn not to hurt the earth pony, who was now cowering on the floor.

"Oh for the love of—" Satyrn grunted, and she pulled the trigger.

The blast sent him flying backwards, as he transformed back into a changeling port-mortem. Sylver and the other engineers exchanged gasps of both surprise and confusion. Then, the group of engineers started cheering and praising Satyrn for defeating the creatures. Sylver rushed over to examine the body. After a moment, he looked back to Satyrn before approaching her.

"You didn't have to kill him," he said.

Satyrn looked over at the body with contempt.

"You do what you have to do," she disagreed.

"We could've interrogated him, too."

"What is the meaning of this!" a loud, regal voice boomed through the hangar.

Everypony turned towards the north entrance, which led to the ship's bridge. Princess Celestia descended delicately from the ledge. She landed before Satyrn and Sylver.

"Changelings, your highness!" Satyrn exclaimed, "Two of them were found in the ship. I've killed this one," she gestured to the body.

"Changelings?" Celestia's arrogant tone made Satyrn shiver, "Who told you there were changelings?"

Satyrn's eyes widened, realizing that she had not divulged her findings or research to the Princess yet.

"Relieve us all of your wild imagination, Satyrn. Where is the other creature?" Celestia said.

"My room," Sylver replied.

Celestia looked condescendingly down at Sylver.

"Right," she said, "I suppose we should all keep one as a pet, then."

Satyrn and Sylver exchanged glances, shrugging at each other nervously.

"I shall send for the other to be brought to the stockade. The body can go with the others," Celestia nodded towards the hangar bay.

Two royal attendants came up and started dragging the body outside onto the asteroid, where the other changelings still lay.

Life as normal returned in an instant to the hangar, and to the rest of the ship along with it. Satyrn and Sylver stood there for a few moments to process the events and words that had transpired.



Princess Celestia's private office was never messy. She tidied her books and documents every two hours, unless she's was sleeping. On the far wall, opposite to the doorway, a variety of screens and buttons comprise the classified Equestrian Admiralty Console, its grandeur and confidentiality tempts any who have the privilege of being in the room. Various tea sets and paintings decorated the room in a particularly quaint fashion.

The Princess dialed a few numbers into her dynamic communicator and waited. After a moment, a voice came over the speaker.

"Sister, it's been a few days," Princess Luna spoke, the audio was crushed and tinny.

"Yes. Luna, how are affairs in Equestria?" Celestia inquired.

"Well," Luna began, "unfortunately, protests are spreading into the capital. We are trying our best to keep the situation under control for the time being."

"I see. I've left the country in capable hooves, I'm sure," Celestia promised.

"So you have. And how are affairs on CX38?"

"There was an attack. It was only a small swarm, though I'm sure there are none left on this one."

"I'm glad everything is alright," Luna sighed with relief.

"No casualties or injuries on our end," Celestia said.

"Is there anything else we need to discuss?"

"Yes, in fact."

Celestia looked over at a photograph of Satyrn, Elden, and Amber. She stood up and walked over to it, speaking over to the transmitter on her desk.

"I'm afraid the girl might know something," Celestia's voice was cautionary.

"Satyrn?"

"Yes. Two of the creatures attempted to ambush her on the ship, after the first attack. She referred to them as changelings."

"She is a historian, sister. It would be quite clear to somepony like her."

"Changelings haven't resembled their primal state for nearly forty years. We know he's changed their DNA before."

"He's corrected more mistakes with every variant, yes, but they still closely resemble the ones from Equestria," Luna reasoned.

Celestia sat back down at her desk and sighed.

"Maybe you should tell her. She has a right to know why you're out there," Luna continued.

"That will jeopardize everything we have worked for! Can you not see that?" Celestia roared, her mane became a fiery blaze and her luminous eyes became a hellish red, but only for a moment. She closed her eyes to calm herself.

"This is your burden to bear, sister. I'll not parley in your accord, regarding this," Luna said.

Celestia's eyes fluttered open.

"So it is," Celestia spoke curtly.

VII. HARBOUR



Vylet trotted rhythmically down the hallways of the residential district, humming the lyrics of the song playing through his earbuds, “Harbour.” Rayna sat on his shoulder, bobbing her head to the music.

“You’re in a good mood,” Rayna observed.

“There’s only one way to drown the crippling fear induced by being away from home,” Vylet shouted over the music.

“Harbour, ha-arbour” they sang together.

They arrived at Sylver’s room. Vylet switched off the song and knocked on the door. He heard various mutterings and fumbblings before Sylver showed up at the door.

“Sylver!” Vylet greeted.

He stepped inside and Sylver followed. Vylet glanced around the room and saw various sheets and blankets obscuring much of the floor and desk space.

“Uhh... what are you up to?” Vylet inquired.

“Oh. Oh, hey Vy.” Sylver was relieved to not be confronted for his plant operations. He started to remove all of the covers, “Well, I can’t say growing flowers in space is the easiest task.”

“Huh.. what are you working on?” Vylet moved about the room and inhaled the various herbal aromas.

"Jasmine!" Sylver said, sitting down at his laptop to type away. Vylet simply observed the empty pots on his dresser labeled 'Jasmine Leaves.'

"Well, trying to grow Jasmine. I've been experimenting with the natural heat that could be generated from the AMCD's. It just might work," Sylver explained.

Vylet nodded in interest. "Do you mind if I hang out here for a bit?" Rayna floated above his head, nodding.

"Sure," said Sylver, "but, uh, just don't tell anypony I'm growing coffee beans under here."

They both chuckled, although Sylver let out what would probably be considered a nervous guffaw.

"Alright, I can keep your secret," Vylet smiled.

"Well, what brings you here?" Sylver inquired.

"I guess I've gotten to hang out with Satyrn a bit more. I don't really have any other friends on the ship, and you two seem to be really close, so..."

Sylver's ears perked up. "Close huh? You could say that, yeah. Nothing says friendship like accidentally shooting yourself during a covert operation to save your friend, right?"

"Woah, what?" Vylet was intrigued. Sylver stood up and went to sit on the bed. Vylet settled and sat on the floor beneath him.

"Yeah, heh..." Sylver reminisced, "in the Statera infiltration, she got locked in the throne room with Satellite. I tried blasting the door open, but ended up shooting myself. It really wasn't funny when it happened, but looking back on it, that was really dumb."

Vylet chuckled. "How did you manage that?"

"You're a unicorn, you buffoon, why didn't you try using magic?" Rayna mused, swirling around Sylver and taunting him.

"Honestly? I'm not sure." Sylver realized, "The door must've been made of a compound that could withstand and repel bullets consistently. Why would I expect something like that, though?"

Vylet nodded in agreement, snickering.

"What's your story, kid? Any adventures, war stories, or times where you confused some unknowing stranger at the supermarket for your mom?" Sylver stared intently down at the colt.

Scratching his head, Vylet glanced around the room, trying to think of something to talk about. He shrugged at Sylver.

Sylver was unconvinced, as he started straightening stray hairs on his brown coat.

"Tell him about Super Pony World, Vy." Rayna squeaked, "That's a fun story, right?"

Vylet looked over at Rayna, who was hovering above his shoulder. She stared at him with her bright turquoise eyes. He sighed and looked back at Sylver.

"During the war, I was really reclusive. I almost never left the house, and I took classes from my computer," Vylet started.

Sylver leaned down, listening closely.

"My friend, Crimson, had stolen a prototype AMCD, her parents work for PegaSystems, and she gave it to me." Vylet held up his hoof, showing the watch that Rayna's hologram would display from.

"Looks nothing like the earpieces we have," Sylver noted.

"Mhm, I don't know if anypony outside of PegaSystems has one like this. Crimson knew I wanted one but couldn't afford it, so she thought it would be something I would adore. And I did."

"She sounds like a good friend, to go through all the trouble of stealing something like that."

"Yeah," Vylet chuckled, "well, I started developing a video game, sort of a virtual reality RPG simulation kind of thing."

"Say that slower, I don't quite understand," Sylver begged.

"An adventure game that you can basically experience in virtual reality."

"Ahh."

"I'm not great at naming things, so I called it Super Pony World."

"Why not 'Super Fish World'?" Sylver joked.

"Honestly!" said Vylet, "But, I managed to develop an algorithm that can take one's thoughts and dreams to create a world, and corresponding scenario to act through. However, I became frustrated at trying to figure out a way to transmit my consciousness into the game itself."

"Yes, I could see how that would be difficult." There was no end to Sylver's sarcasm.

"So, instead of solving this in the software, I tired creating an adaptor that allows me to seamlessly sync the operations of the computer and my AMCD. In the process, a surge of magic created Rayna." He gestured to her; she was still sitting on his shoulder.

"I was an accident," Rayna droned.

Sylver chuckled and tried to pat Rayna's head, but his hoof went right through her.

"Oh... sorry," Sylver murmured.

"Touchy," Rayna snorted.

"Using the AMCD, I eventually transmitted my conscious being into the game once it was complete. I lived out what seemed to be 3 months inside the game," Vylet continued.

"In reality, only 5 minutes had passed," Rayna chimed in.

Sylver's eyes were wide. "That's a lot to take in."

"Beats your self inflicted gun wound story," Rayna sasssed.

They laughed together.

"I guess it does," Sylver said.

They talked for a few hours and reminisced about their memories of Equestria. Sylver talked about his war stories, and Vylet talked more about Super Pony World. Rayna decided that she wanted to see what sleeping felt like and started imitating what she saw others do in the films Vylet watched. Although, she couldn't fully enter a sleepful state, she felt comfortable.



...

The clock beeped: 23:00. Sylver looked up from his bed and saw the time. They both stood up, and Rayna pretended to wake up.

"It's time soon, huh?" Sylver exhaled after a long yawn.

"Looks like it," Vylet shivered.

Sylver put a hoof on his shoulder.

"You'll be with Satyrn. I think you'll be fine," he said.

Vylet offered a stiff, but genuine, smile.

They walked together down the now quiet residential halls and took the elevator down to Satyrn's floor. Quietly, Sylver started towards her room, and Vylet followed behind nervously.

Sylver knocked on the door; a few moments passed before Satyrn opened the it. She glanced at Vylet and looked back at Sylver.

"Lead the way."

IX. MONOLITH TO A HALCYON



Sylvester led them through the undersurface of the ship. Typically, only the starship's engineers visited this section of the vessel. Arrays of tubes and pipes spanned the walls and ceiling of the maintenance chasm. A forest of wires and metal frames obscured much of what could be seen otherwise between the labyrinth of ducts. It was dark and musty. Various clinks and clanks were harmonized by the billows of steam and fumes. As this was the section of the ship most closely situated near the engine room, it shuddered and rumbled alongside low oscillations of the nearby machinery.

Rayna flitted about Sylvester, illuminating the narrow passages they traversed; they had to crouch in order to not bump into the ceiling. Eventually, the small group arrived at the far side of the chamber. A long and slender window spanned what would be the west, underside of the vessel. They could just narrowly see the asteroid outside.

"This is it," Sylvester whispered.

"Why are we whispering," Rayna said loudly.

"Because they might hear us," Sylvester rolled his eyes.

"Who?" Vylet asked.

"I don't know," Sylvester conceded, "I really don't. But they might hear us anyway."

"Suits on, kids," Satyrn commanded.

Vylet, Satyrn, and Sylvester tapped their AMCD's and their space suits and helmet materialized.

"Nanotech is so fun," Sylver admitted, "But out you go now."

Sylver kicked open the window to allow Vylet and Satyrn to slip outside. He closed the window and waved enthusiastically as Vylet and Satyrn got on their hooves, and turned to wave back at him. They started on their way, while Sylver scrambled to navigate back to the upper deck.



"So, why isn't he coming with us?" Vylet asked.

"Because he didn't want to," Satyrn replied, snarkily.

The asteroid was barren and lifeless without the multitude of analysts scrambling around, taking note on every crag and plateau.

A few moments later, Satyrn and Vylet arrived at the mouth of the cave. They stepped carefully and checked every corner for any surviving changelings. As they started towards the deeper end of the cave, Satyrn checked frequently for any traces of Kytzdominum. Nothing came up until they reached the point where Satyrn first encountered the changelings. A pool of still, grey liquid covered the floor, in which Vylet scooped some up into a bottle. They continued on.

Eventually, they reached the room where Satyrn found the door. Rayna drifted along the wall, willing her incandescence to become a brilliant beacon in the darkness. She looked back at them; Vylet and Satyrn were shielding their eyes.

"Little too much, Rayna," Vylet instructed.

Rayna frowned and reluctantly dimmed herself. Satyrn examined the door and the area around it.

"I couldn't figure out how to open it," Satyrn said.

"Open what?" A voice blasted into Satyrn and Vylet's ears.

"SYLVER!" Satyrn and Vylet shrieked simultaneously.

"Did you forget I was on the line?" Sylver chuckled. They exchanged glances with each other.

"Honestly, yeah," Satyrn replied.

"Oh... whoops, did I scare you?" Sylver bantered.

Vylet retrieved the Kytzdominum sample, and poured some on the door. Nothing happened.

They exchanged glances again, then nodded. Vylet began to whistle as he did back in the lab; the substance began to sear through the door slowly. He kept it up for as long as he could before running out of air. Promptly, the Kytzdominum stopped melting through the door. Satyrn picked the same note and whistled: the melting began again. Moments after, various metallic scrapes and pops echoed through the chamber, until the doors gave way.

"The alloy reacts with high frequencies. It might have something to do with how they can shapeshift," Rayna noted.

"That would make sense," Vylet nodded.

They peered through the doorway into what looked like an empty abyss. Satyrn drew her gunblade, and Vylet activated the recording function on his AMCD. He captured images and video of their surroundings.

No chirps. No hissing. Nothing hostile as far as they could figure. They stepped cautiously into the chamber. Abruptly, the room became illuminated as lights along the walls activated.

The room was filled with strange machines and monitors. Each machine was branded with an emblem of an overturned, striped triangle with three circles above it. Initially the machines were all lifeless, and each monitor was blank. However, as Satyrn and Vylet advanced deeper into the room, they realized that the machines were slowly stirring to life. The monitors began to display various transmission logs and diagnostics.



"What is all this?" Satyrn asked in awe.

Vylet was analyzing the text on the monitors.

"This place is like a satellite. Look," Vylet pointed to some transmission logs on one of the monitors, "this is in Polish."

Satyrn inspected the screen and her eyes widened.

"Sylver, you're getting this right?" Satyrn asked.

"Loud and clear, kid. Wish I could see it," he replied.

"You will, don't worry. Vylet's capturing everything right now," Satyrn said.

"Polish transmission data, standardized peripheral ports," Vylet inspected the machinery around the room, "this stuff could only be at least five years old."

He dusted off a keyboard that sat below one of the screens. Navigating through a series of data tables and diagnostics, he discovered a fully transcribed transmission that was dated to June 12, 2050. Vylet read aloud,

“Satellite, I have received your plans for the attack. I wish you luck.”

CALLSIGN: SPCRXI

SERIAL: 3890-1902

INTERCEPT: FALSE

TYPE-ID: XI02H - BD348 - MD000

OCN: EQCVWR

“Sylver, do you recognize the callsign ‘SPCRXI’? Vylet asked.

“No, not really,” Sylver replied over the comms.

Satyrn examined the transmission herself.

“Satellite,” she read aloud.

She exchanged glances with Vylet, who started scrolling through various windows and displays on the screen. A sudden tremor shook the room. Satyrn and Vylet struggled to keep their balance, and after a moment, it subsided.

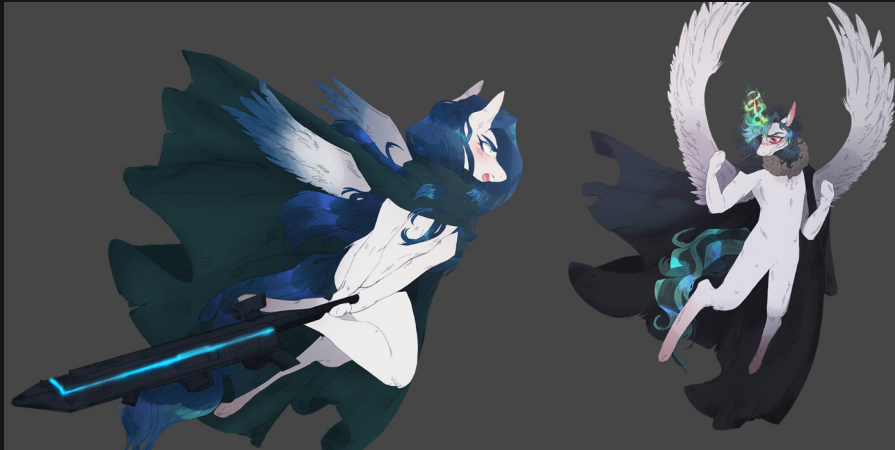
“What now?” Vylet complained.

“Listen!” Sylver shouted into their comms, “the asteroid is being bombarded right now. There are other ships coming in!”

“What the hell?” Satyrn asked.

Another tremor shook the room. Light debris rained down from the ceiling, sifting down onto the floor beneath them. Vylet hastily captured as many photos of the room as possible before he and Satyrn started towards the exit.

X. CATAclysm



“How much were you able to document?” Satyrn yelled to Vylet as they glided towards the mouth of the cave.

“Everything we looked at. Unless there was another room or something, I don’t think I missed anything.”

Satyrn glanced behind her as the tremors grew more frequent and violent. Vylet was tapping furiously at his watch and skimming through the footage and photographs he had taken. Fractures and fissures began to break along the walls of the cave, which caused rubble to tumble onto the path. After a few more moments they reached the mouth of the cave, and stopped to catch their breath.

“Look!” Vylet exclaimed; he was pointing east of the starship. The sky was saturated with smoke and explosions, and dozens of ships were hovering over the horizon. A large vessel, presumably the mothership, towered over the rest of them. Suddenly, an immense flash radiated from it. The Starship Ponyville’s regional deflector shields were shelled by a flurry of plasma rounds from the oncoming fleet.

“Shit! Vylet, let’s go. Now!” Satyrn ordered. They started towards the ship.

“The asteroid’s structural integrity is failing!” Rayna advised.

“How badly?”

“If those ships keep up the assault, we have about 20 minutes from now.”

“Until what?”

“Until the asteroid breaks apart.”

Smaller spacecraft began to race into the atmosphere from below the larger control ships. They blitzed across the sky, and changelings poured down as they passed. Equestrian Marines began to advance out against the oncoming attackers, and a firefight ensued. Satyrn and Vylet dodged munitions and debris as they hurried on towards the starship. They were nearly there.

Before they could reach the ship, something dropped down from the sky in front of them. The ground fractured beneath them, and they sprawled onto the sharp asteroid surface. Satyrn propelled herself back on her hind hooves in desperation, and pulled Vylet with her.

"Are you alright?" Satyrn was frantic.

"Yeah, I think."

They looked up to see what had caused the rift. Standing before them was an alicorn with a drab, grey coat and a wild green mane. He stared back at them with wicked red eyes in a morose, but strangely serene manner. The stallion had a starkly crooked horn that cursed his regal composure. He stood on his hind legs, and had no protective spacesuit.

"You and Rayna must go," Satyrn commanded. Vylet started towards the ship without another word. The alicorn turned to watch them leave, his eyes followed them with a forlorn expression.

"I cannot guarantee their safety," the stallion spoke. His voice was breathy and charming, but fragile.

Satyrn's expression became sullen as she drew her weapon against him. The alicorn turned to face Satyrn and stared lamentably into her eyes.

"You're beautiful," he spoke dramatically.

His cape fluttered about behind him, and his mane drifted weightlessly as he moved. Satyrn dashed forward and struck his face with immense force. The stallion clutched his cheek as he staggered back, but he kept standing. Satyrn activated her gunblade, and it began to rearrange itself into a rifle with various clicks and pops emitting from the device. By the time it had fully converted, the alicorn had rebounded and was standing still before Satyrn, who now aimed her firearm at him.

"Your allegiance is with the Princess," he said, "I wouldn't expect you to understand."

"Understand what?" Satyrn snorted.

"I am called Spectre. The only thing you must understand is that I will free Equestria."

Spectre's horn glimmered a deep crimson. Debris from the ground began to hover as a magical aura surrounded his body. Satyrn lunged to the side as a beam of energy flashed towards her from the alicorn's horn. Attempting to counter the attack, Satyrn landed and unleashed a barrage of bullets. Evading the onslaught, Spectre dashed around her with unparalleled agility. Satyrn stopped firing to launch herself back. Her hooves struck the ground with immense force.

A stream of dogfighter ships poured out of the starship's hangars, and hundreds of small explosions and flashes began to erupt across the sky. Tracing their movements and patterns with his eyes, Spectre watched them join the fray.

"You can't honestly consider this the answer to such corruption?" Spectre blustered.

"What the hell do you mean? We didn't start this fight!" Satyrn replaced a magazine from her weapon.

"You had no place being here. You've killed too many of ours, and we can take yours too."

"So, you are allied with them, then? Those creatures? We couldn't have possibly known they were here. Can't you see that?"

Spectre's expression grew solemn and his poise softened.

"How extraordinary you are, yet they don't trust you with the truth," he spoke theatrically.

Satyrn quickly converted her weapon into a blade to lunge at him. Spectre blinked into the air, evading her attack.

"Agh!" Satyrn cried as she hit the ground. She writhed fiercely to face Spectre, who was hovering a few inches above her. His expression was impersonal and desolate, as if he were imploring her forgiveness.

An abrupt blast was discharged from the Starship Ponyville and struck Spectre in the chest, causing him to spiral back towards the cave. Satyrn struggled to right herself, and made a break for the ship.

"Hey! Was that guy bothering you? I shot him just in case!" Sylver shouted over the comms.

"Damn you Sylver, I was gonna do it myself!" Satyrn laughed in relief.

She glanced back to see Spectre quickly recovering from the blow. The alicorn limped back onto his hind legs, and stood watching her escape. Satyrn heard a voice in her head.

"Don't forget what happened here, Satyrn." Spectre's voice entered her thoughts.

"I'm sure I'll see you again," Satyrn spoke aloud.

"Uh... Yeah?" Sylver puzzled himself over the comms.

"Not you."

"Oh, okay... Wait, not me?"

"Can you play some defense right now, bud?"

"Yeah, sorry," Sylver apologized. Several blasts began to erupt from the starship's cannons aimed at the oncoming fleet.

"That's better," Satyrn said.



Satyrn trotted swiftly past dozens of frantic personnel towards the bridge. Marines were scrambling about the central hangar as various alarms and tones screeched rhythmically through the ship. Innumerable shouts and commands conceived a din that was only decipherable by the recipients such orders were meant for.

Celestia spotted Satyrn coming up the stairwell leading to the bridge.

"Retreat. She's here." Celestia commanded.

Marines on the asteroid surface began to fall back to the ship, and the remaining spacecraft rushed to dock back in the hangars. Celestia dashed to open the door for Satyrn.

"Get over to the console, we're going to open a waygate," Celestia ordered.

Sylver shouted back from the admiral console, "We've gotta start the oscillation so it's ready by the time we've got everypony!"

Satyrn scrambled over beside Sylver at the console while Celestia barked orders to other scurrying attendants. Suddenly, Vylet burst into the room.

"Hey! We can't take off yet!" he shouted.

"Leave, you are not authorized to be here!" Celestia riposted.

"No! Our regional deflector shields have sustained critical damage. If we open an operative waygate, it could tear the ship apart."

"Shouldn't we have been warned on the console?" Celestia looked over at Sylver who shook his head.

"It wouldn't. The warning system for the deflector shields are set to respond on boolean values. The integrity ratios just need to be closely monitored in an event like this," Sylver explained.

"We don't have time to argue about it. Route the energy from the Sor reactor to the shield's power bank. It might blow the reactor's central transistor when we make the jump, but we can fix it after," Vylet instructed.

Celestia hesitated and glanced at Sylver. The scruffy unicorn nodded enthusiastically.

"Alright, carry on with it. We will make the jump in ten minutes," Celestia ordered.

Vylet hurried towards the console and began instructing Sylver on what to do. Satyrn navigated an array of menus and diagnostics in order to begin the waygate oscillation. Operative Waygate Oscillation is an alternative to traveling at the speed of light. The prospect of it entails the exploitation of imperceptible wormholes surrounding spacetime, and traveling through them with the use of magic. Once a vessel makes a jump through a waygate, most engines become idle until they are rebooted manually.

Moments later, the hangar bays sealed after all remaining personnel had evacuated the asteroid. Low blasts from the barrage of attacks caused the ship to rock violently. Celestia looked out the bridge window and watched the approaching ships. She squinted as she spotted a something ascending from the asteroid surface. The Princess's eyes widened as she caught a glimpse of the silhouette's crooked horn.

"We're in the air, your highness. On your orders," Sylver announced. He tilted his head to Satyrn who nodded back. They looked to the Princess intently.

Celestia hesitated as she watched the silhouette board a passing cruiser.

"Princess."

Her gaze was broken as a massive fissure began to open up along the asteroid. CX38 began to deteriorate and crumble. Rayna darted out from Vylet's watch.

"Celestia! The upheaval is being caused on purpose, the asteroid is going to detonate. We have to get out of here - now!" Rayna warned.

"Are we ready?" Celestia demanded, suddenly.

Everypony on the bridge nodded concurrently.

"Oscillation on my count."

The ship convulsed with the continued bombardments. The oncoming fleet was not far.

"Three," Celestia began.

"Oscillation standby," Satyrn announced.

"Two."

"Engines ready," Sylver confirmed.

"One."

Everypony braced as a brilliant light glitzed before the bridge window, reflecting everywhere. Then, for a few moments, everything was completely still and silent.

"Cover your ears," Celestia instructed.

A deafening bang shook the Starship Ponyville viciously, reverberating ferociously through the vessel. It lasted for about 20 seconds before dissipating, Then everything was quiet again. Everypony looked out the window to see they were no longer on the asteroid. All around there was darkness and no sign of the approaching fleet. The crew sighed in relief then started cheering. Celestia stared back out the window; her countenance was solemn and contemplative.



XI. WAYWARD



June 17, 2051 [Sol 66]

"Twilight!"

"Satyrn!"

They rushed in for a hug.

"Where have you been?" Satyrn exclaimed.

"I've been having talks with Luna and Starlight. We've been trying to coordinate through the protests and riots going on back home," Twilight seemed complacent.

"Well, we've kinda been dealing with a bit more than protests. The constant explosions and gunshots didn't concern you at all?"

Princess Twilight stared blankly for a moment.

"Ah, well, Princess Celestia had everything under control, surely," she laughed anxiously.

Satyrn nodded absentmindedly as she eyed the princess in a subtly dubious manner. Twilight's room was charmingly sybaritic and decorative. As was incredibly predictable to any acquaintance of the Princess of Friendship, the walls of her room were lined with extensive shelves that were brimming with novels and textbooks from home. It was situated on the top floor of the residential district, which lower ranking officials are typically barred from accessing. The ceiling opened up into a skylight that offered an extravagant view. The royal suite definitely bested the others.

Twilight sat down at her desk to open a notebook. She started flipping through the pages delicately, scanning them up and down.

"What do you have there?" Satyrn was curious.

"Ah. This is the crew journal. I'm just adding some new entries," Twilight replied.

"Oh, I see. I suppose I'm not allowed to pry about that."

"Not really, no," Twilight giggled. A quill on her desk floated out of its ink pot and began to scribble new lines in the journal.

"What exactly brings you today?" Twilight asked over her shoulder.

Satyrn began to nervously tap her hoof against the floor. Scratching her head, she sat down on the Princess's bed; her heart skipped a beat.

"I mean..." Satyrn began, but trailed off.

After a few moments of silence, the Princess set back her quill and turned in her chair to face Satyrn. Her ears softly lifted forward, and she was intent.

"It's been a couple of days... Did you want to get lunch or something?" Satyrn hung her head down in an effort to hide her blush.

"Ah, right!" Twilight squeaked, "I'm really sorry. Things have been so busy, and—"

Her speaking ebbed delicately as stood up from her desk. She walked toward Satyrn as she continued,

"I just can't right now," she whispered.

Twilight touched Satyrn's chin and lifted her head up. Upon making eye contact, Satyrn's ears perked gently.

"I am happy you came to see me today, though," the Princess added. She pressed her snout against Satyrn's, causing them to both blush profusely. Twilight turned and started back towards her desk, but she paused at an afterthought.

"Well, I can tell you some stuff that is in this journal. It is about you," the Princess's voice was coy.

"Oh? Like what?" Satyrn's eyes twinkled like a firefly.

Twilight looked back at her and smiled.

"I'm required to write as much as I can about everypony in this journal. Luna told me some more about the dreams you had in the days before we left Equestria. She said—"

An abrupt, alert tone sounded off from Twilight's dresser. The Princess shuffled over and answered.

"Yeah?" Twilight shouted. Celestia's voice came through.

"We're coming up on Norphae, Twilight. I need you present at the bridge to oversee the landing."

Twilight's eyes were wide. She looked back at Satyrn apologetically.

"Alright. I'm on my way."

She ended the call, and put her writing things away.

"What's Norphae?" Satyrn asked.

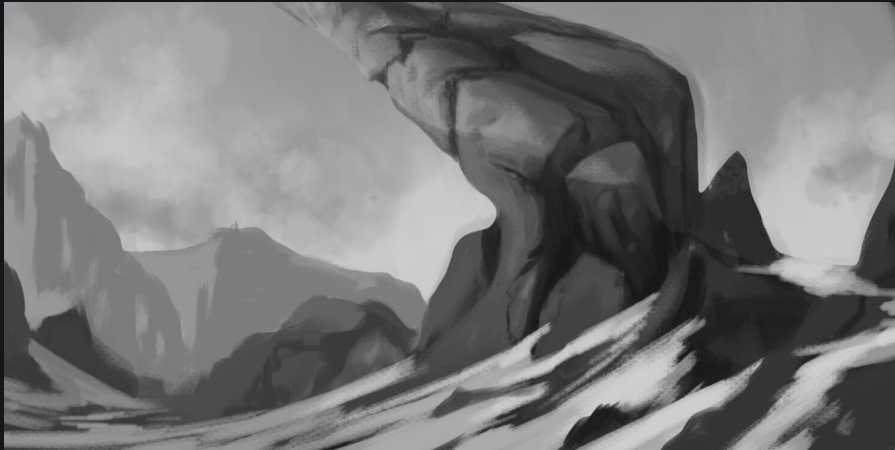
"It's a planet. We're going to seek refuge there for the time being."

"Refuge?"

"We were attacked. We don't want that to keep happening now, do we?" Twilight smiled and pecked Satyrn on the cheek before rushing out of the room.

In that moment, Satyrn stared jadedly at the floor as her cheeks burned with a rosy pigment. She eventually ambled out into the halls of the residential in a daze.

XII. NORP HAE



June 17, 2051 [Sol 67]

The waygate oscillation jump brought the Starship Ponyville a few light years away from CX38. Not long after, Celestia had re-routed a course to the planet Norphae. It's alleged that Norphae has been studied by Equestrian astronomers for the past few decades with interest in its position to the star "Yantrios." They believed it to be a possible life-sustaining planet with potential for the existence of an atmosphere.

As the ship approached the planet, updated scans indicated that Norphae was in an ice age. From a distance, it appeared primarily white and grey, strengthening such theories. Sylver helped develop a geological map of the planet as they approached, which aided Celestia in deciding on a landing place. An hour following this, the Starship Ponyville landed somewhere on the Norphae supercontinent.

Landing on Norphae would probably have been as eventful as landing on CX38, but most of the occupants of the ship had been distressed and exhausted from the events that transpired on the asteroid. Consequently, the occasion of the landing was celebrated by most crew members with sleeping in extensively. All was quiet through the hangars and corridors of the ship on the early morning of Sol 67.

Norphae's day cycle lasted only a few minutes longer than Equestria's, which came as a relief to the crew. Everypony on the Starship Ponyville had not experienced anything remotely close to a natural day cycle since the launch. However, ponies struggled when remembering to refrain from calling Norphae's local star "the sun". The ship's scientists quickly confirmed that Norphae was in an ice age, and at glacial maximum, which spanned much of what would be the planet's oceans. The average temperature of the planet at the time of landing was estimated to be around -5°C and was deemed safe for anypony to traverse the area without any protective spacesuits due to the presence of an atmosphere.



Satyrn sat and watched from the main hangar as Princess Twilight and Princess Celestia planted a New Equestrian flag. They had chosen to put up the flag on a plateau that the ship was docked near. A small group that had miraculously still been awake had gathered by the hangar bay, and cheered when it was placed. Satyrn felt a hoof on her shoulder.

"Everything okay?" Vylet's voice was hushed and benign. Rayna fluttered from Vylet's shoulder onto Satyrn's head and settled into her mane.

"I don't know. Everything's happened so suddenly," Satyrn replied.

"Yeah. It's a lot to take in."

The crowd that had gathered began to disperse. The sound of hooves shuffling across the metallic starship floor was almost cadenced and hypnotic.

"His name was Spectre," Satyrn murmured over her shoulder to Vylet.

"Spectre?"

"Yeah."

"Hm," Vylet scratched his head.

Satyrn stood up and turned Vylet. Her face became inquisitive.

"What?" Vylet asked.

"Would you be able to create a device I could speak to Starlight with?" Satyrn whispered, looking around cautiously.

"You mean, like, a communication device that could reach Equestria?"

"Yes, exactly."

"How many light years out are we again?" Vylet started zoning out. Satyrn looked at him, bewildered.

"I mean, I've modified my AMCD to communicate with my housemaid since my father would probably neglect everything anyway," Vylet said.

"Really?"

"Yep."

"Do you think it would be able to reach Canterlot?"

"Nah, that's a couple of miles too far," Vylet was smirking.

"I'm just glad you're up to your frivolous banter after all the bullshit we've been through in the past few days," Satyrn snorted.

They chuckled. Suddenly, Vylet's right ear perked up.

"Do you hear that?" he asked.

"Hear what?"

"Like... It's like..."

Vylet capitulated an explanation and hovered over Satyrn. He saw that Rayna was snoring in her mane.

•••

The sky was an icy sheet that obscured the stars from view, from which the snow fell down onto the earth below. Satyrn and Vylet sat near the edge of a snowy mountain shelf, not far out from the ship. As far as the eye could see, masses of mountains parted to create a snowy plain below the shelf. No natural vegetation nor fauna could be found anywhere.

Vylet finished tweaking some parameters on his watch

"It's ready," he said, handing it over to Satyrn. Rayna flitted from out of the watch's LCD hovered around it. Satyrn and Vylet exchanged glances and nodded as Rayna attempted to contact Starlight Glimmer. After a few moments, a voice was heard.

"Hello?" Starlight Glimmer's voice came through, staticky.

"Starlight! It's me, Satyrn."

"Satyrn! Well this is a surprise. What do I owe the pleasure?"

"I should ask... are you alone?"

There was a pause. Waves of grain and static filled the silence.

"Why do you ask?" Starlight's sounded troubled.

"I need this conversation to be confidential"

"Is Princess Celestia not mediating this discussion?"

"No."

Another pause. Satyrn gave Vylet a slightly worried look. They heard shuffling and muffled rambling before Starlight spoke again.

"Is everything alright?" Starlight asked with a concerned tone.

"Not really. Have you been in contact with Twilight or Celestia lately?"

"No. Princess Luna usually relays whatever I need to know from what's discussed between her and her sister."

Satyrn now gave Vylet a more distinctly worried look. Vylet stared back, shrugging.

"Starlight," Satyrn began, "I have a feeling the Princesses are keeping some very important information from us. A lot of things just don't add up. Twilight said she's been having meetings with you and Luna, and—" she trailed off.

"And?" Starlight asked.

"Do you know about CX38?"

"Yes, the asteroid. Did you get there yet?"

"We were there around 24 hours ago."

"How did that go?"

"We were attacked." Satyrn's voice became indelicate.

"Attacked?" a sharp tone came over Starlight.

"Yes. We think we were attacked by changelings. There was a cave system with a hidden room inside. We found a lot of stuff you might want to see."

Satyrn nodded at Vylet, who reached over and sent the media he had captured of the communication room within the asteroid. There was another moment of silence as Starlight looked through the files.

"What is this symbol?" Starlight asked.

"The triangle?" Satyrn replied.

"Yes.."

"We have no clue, but it was labeled on just about everything in the room."

"Who is 'we'?"

"Oh..." Satyrn looked up at Vylet. He had an annoyed expression on his face.

"Vylet, Sylver, and me. We're all trying to figure this out together, I guess." Satyrn continued.

"I see... So you've brought others into this as well." Starlight was pensive.

"That's just how it happened."

"How deeply have you been investigating this?"

"Well..." Satyrn trailed off.

She looked at Vylet who appeared lost in thought. She then looked over to Rayna who was drifting around and staring at the snow.

"I... have access to confidential documents," Satyrn flinched preemptively.

"Oh, Satyrn..." Starlight was disconcerted.

"But, can you explain any of this? Are you looking at what was sent to you?"

There was another moment of silence that was longer than any of the others previously. Satyrn heard Starlight sigh. They sat in silence as the wind began to blow harder around them. A few minutes later, Starlight answered.

"This transmission. It's addressed to Satellite." Starlight's voice quivered.

"Found light years away, on a changeling infested asteroid, with a secret communication room! It just doesn't sound like a mistake to me." Satyrn shouted indignantly.

"But why are you telling me this? Anything I do to help would be an act of—"

"Treason, I know. I get it. But, ten thousand of us are out here in a metal can, floating through space. I want to be sure that the ponies in charge of the metal can aren't going to get us all killed."

"You think there's an ulterior motive?"

Satyrn sat silently. She stared wearily at the snow.

"Satyrn?" Starlight inquired again.

"Yeah... I believe that Celestia knows something," Satyrn affirmed.

"So, what do you want me to do?"

Satyrn looked at Vylet, who returned her gaze with an intent expression.

"I need you to go to Statera, and see what you can find beneath the spire," Satyrn confirmed.

She could hear Starlight hesitating. The wind began to blow harder.

"It's starting to get dark," Vylet noted.

Satyrn looked up at the sky; stars were poking through the fog.

"Alright, I hope you're onto something." Starlight said reluctantly.

Rayna dashed in front of Satyrn's face and nodded in a condescending manner. Satyrn playfully rolled her eyes at her.

"We'll keep in contact," Satyrn replied.

"I'll be out there in the morning."

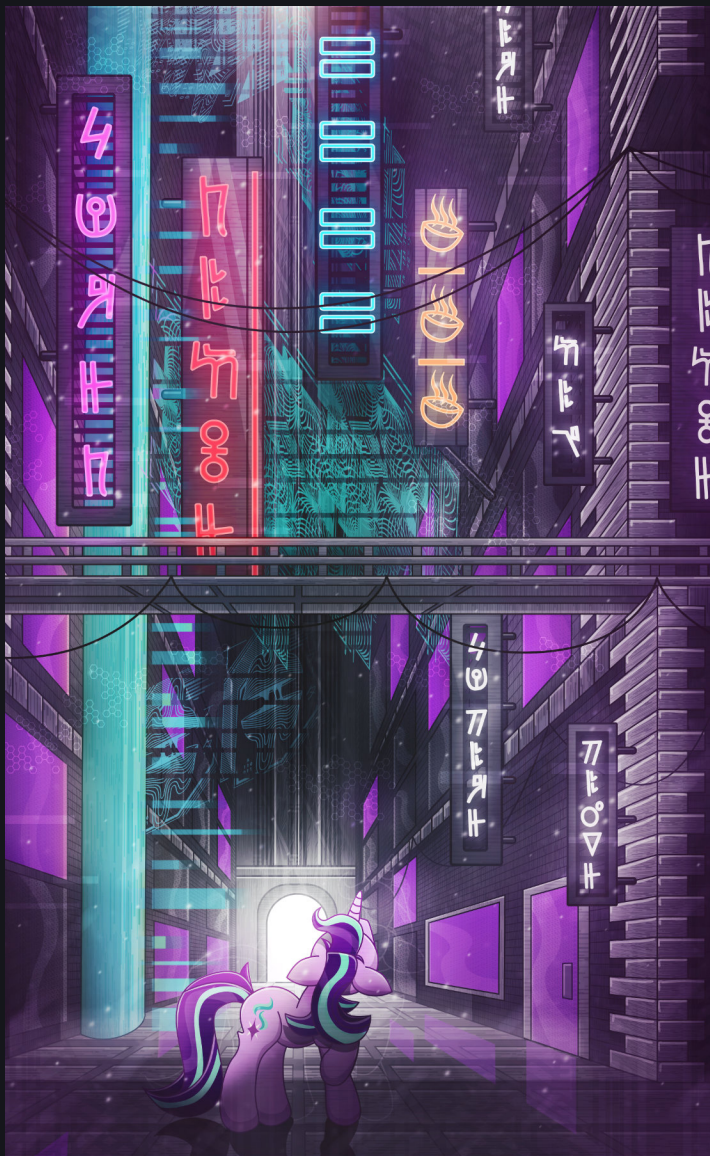
"Thank you, Starlight. We have to go now."

"I hope 'we' rest well."

"We will. Take care Starlight."

"Take care."

XIII. PENUMBRA



(In Equestria)

June 17, 2051 / 9:23am

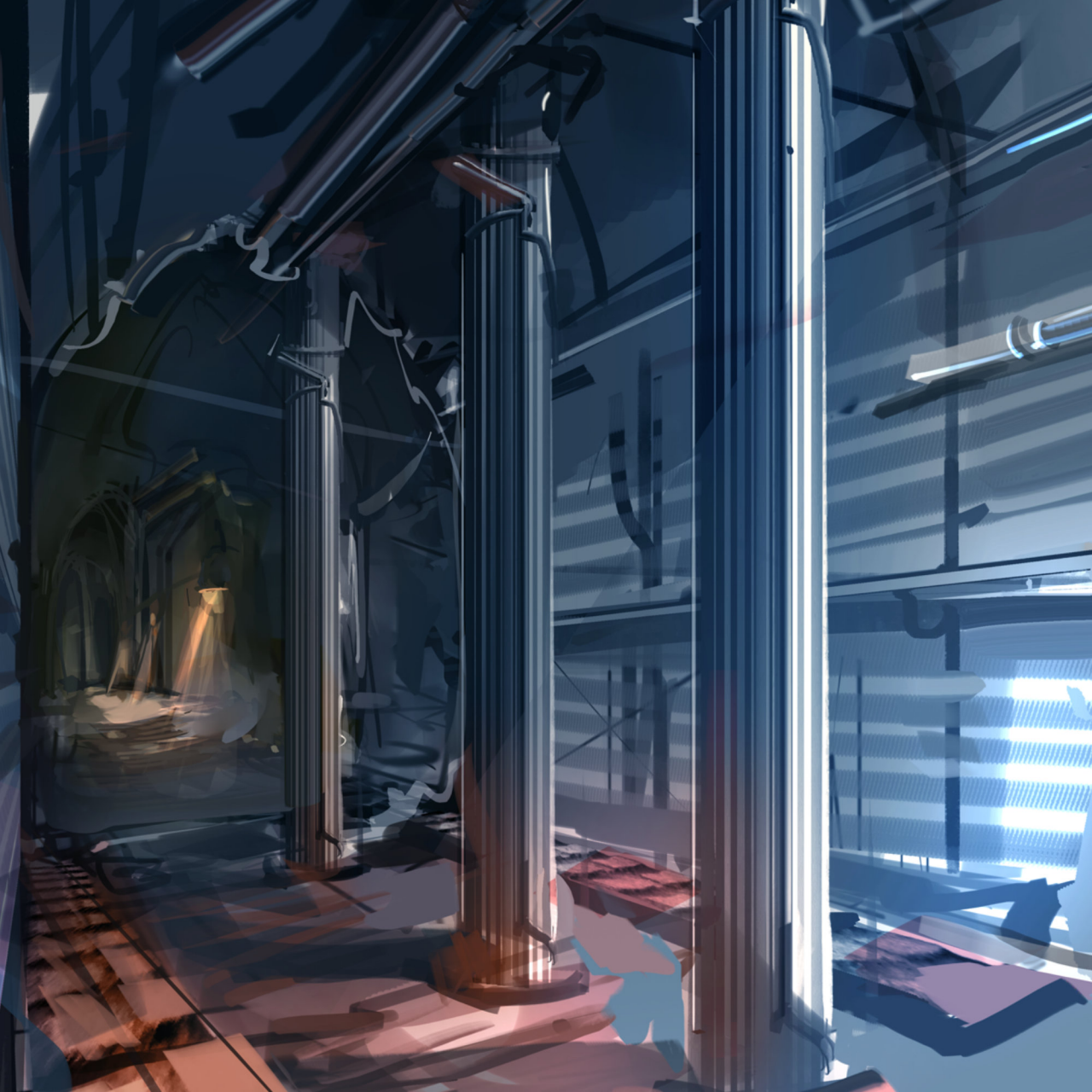
Statera was formally assimilated as a dependant city-state of Equestria after it was liberated from Satellite. In the months that followed the liberation, the promises of a better life there became a false hope as Equestrian sovereignty fell into its depression; it became unable to revitalize the broken city. It had become an anarchic slum, though this wasn't a new development to those who were living there before.

The mists that suppressed the city from the rest of the world had dissipated without Satellite's magic. Dazzling billboards and neon signs beckoned outsiders to a counterfeit sojourn that had been staged upon a sinister grave. The destitute wandered the dirt avenues into one of the gaudy taverns that lined the streets. Copious apartment complexes permeated the majority of the municipality, and an enormous steel wall encompassed the city. The central spire had been left untouched and uninhabited, as it had been severely damaged and left unattended as a result of the offensive that Satyrn led against Satellite.

Starlight trotted against the dusty trails of Statera. She was a pink unicorn with a purple and mint-green mane, and bright violet eyes to match. Glancing through each avenue she made her way down the central street, but she couldn't keep her eyes off of the spire that loomed daunting over. The city smelled of dirt and charred rubble. Citizens would stare at Starlight warily as she passed by.

When Starlight eventually entered the spire, she prepared her AMCD so that she could record any findings to share with Satyrn. Although it would seem redundant for a unicorn to use a device like an AMCD, the long-range communication was not possible through any spells known by even a gifted unicorn (it would take the power of an alicorn to be able to communicate such colossal lengths). Starlight began to descend the spiral staircase, down to the enigmatic underworld that lay below.

...



A magnificently sinister chamber lay below Statera. Large glass stained windows spanned the walls of the main passageway that led to Satellite's empty throne room. The chandeliers that hung from the beams were as macabre as they were ornate; they casted an eerie fluorescence with their green crystalline nodules, which radiated hauntingly. Crude cobblestone floors stretched through the labyrinth of halls and corridors in what seemed to be an endless maze.

Starlight peered into the throne room, where the battle between Satyrn and Satellite had taken place. The corpses had long been disposed of, but a familiar lifeless stench hung about. As she advanced into the room, Starlight noticed various runes and carvings that were embedded throughout the throne, which towered nearly ten feet above her. She ran her hooves along the imprints and examined them closely.

In a moment of abruptness, Starlight convulsed and collapsed to the floor. An agonizing pain swelled through her head and into her body. She writhed and screamed in a surreal display of torment. Then, all was silent. Trembling, Starlight struggled to right herself on all four hooves. She was surprised to see that everything had disappeared; she was no longer in the throne room, but, rather, was surrounded by absolute nothingness. Her eyes widened as she began to whirl around madly in a pitiful attempt to assess her predicament. Her horn radiated profusely as she searched for any clues to what had transpired.

"My dear, do not be frightened," a serene voice echoed through the darkness.

"Who's there?" Starlight's voice cracked. She was shivering, and her body had become strangely weak.

"It will come to pass, you have my word. Be at ease." An amorphous blaze materialized before Starlight and it began to contort, becoming the shape of a pony. A figure emerged from the embers, "I don't intend to harm you," it assured her.

"Who are you? Where am I?" Starlight demanded, her voice faltered.

As the blaze dissipated, the figure became clear. Spectre stood amongst Starlight in the darkness. "You are still in Statera," he said.

"Then where in Statera am I?"

"You are in the throne room."

"What is going on?!"

Spectre drifted closely towards Starlight. He settled onto the ethereal plane where she stood. "We are in your mind."

Starlight staggered backwards, "That's... impossible. Only the Princesses have the capacity for this kind of magic."

"Look into your heart, you know what I say is true."

"But how..."

The alicorn paced around Starlight. He moved in a theatrical and dramatic manner, exaggerating his movements as if he were performing in a play, "I know what you've done," he taunted.

"I... I don't understand," Starlight was faint-hearted.

"All those years ago. Subjugating and shackling the lives of so many. All in the name of Equality."

"The Equality Village."

"Yes, the very same. Does that guilt still linger, Starlight? So many years of so many lives, wasted!" Spectre raised his voice in an damning display, causing Starlight to wince acutely. He stood before her, "Is this arrogant act of treachery compensation for your crimes?"

Starlight's eyes began to tear up, "That was so long ago! I'm only trying to pass information along, nothing more," she opposed him.

"You had been the voice of reason and truth for Twilight, ever since the day you were forgiven. Why sully your honesty with lies?" Spectre glared, patronizing Starlight. It was clear he was beginning to display a temper, but he quickly settled down and composed himself, "I am no ally to the crown. Yet surely you can understand my suspicions."

"Just leave me alone. Let me go back." Starlight looked back at him firmly. "These things were all long behind me. I've changed."

"How sure are you? You are endangering your friends' lives by being here."

"Go away."

Spectre opened his mouth slightly, as if he had something more to say. Instead, he simply grinned, and a magic aura surrounded him. In an instant, he had disappeared.

The gravel was frigid beneath Starlight as her eyes fluttered open. She shuddered up onto her hooves and surveyed the room. Nothing had changed. Rubbing her eyes, she took out her AMCD and began capturing photos of the throne. After she had taken enough, she warily left the room.

Starlight attempted to navigate the maze of hallways. During the infiltration, the Equestrian Task Force did not have the opportunity to explore the spire further, as their goal was to stop Satellite as quickly as possible. The further Starlight explored, the more lost she became. Slowly, Starlight's expression became more frantic as the corridors began to seem familiar to her, yet she was unable to navigate anywhere.

She wandered aimlessly for about 20 minutes without any idea as to where she was going. Soon enough, she began to trot frantically. Her pace became faster and faster as the halls seemed to repeat at every twist and turn. The same paintings. The same windows. The same divergence at every end.

"Where am I? Where am I?" Starlight questioned herself aloud. Her horn sparked about as she tried several spells, in an attempt to reveal hidden paths and to see through walls. It was as if the chambers had a magic of their own, and they refused to let her have any chance. She started rushing every which way as an insanity came about her. Eventually, she came to a place where four paths met. She threw herself into the middle of it, and broke down. Tears streamed down her face onto the brisk floor.

"My dear... you know it to be true," Spectre's voice entered her head.

"Shut up!" Starlight was covering her ears in a futile attempt to shut him out as she weeped by herself.

"How long you have run from your past? Deep down, we are imbued with a sinister aspect. You've tried for so long to deny your craving."

"Who do you think you are! You don't know anything about me!"

"I am he who will cleanse Equestria from its wretched crown. Your heart has been suppressed to value friendship over truth."

Starlight screamed through her tears, "Just stop with this facade! If you're so powerful and righteous, how about you come right here and face me instead of taunting me from a distance like the coward you are!"

"Your invitation is generous, my dear. Now run along and keep deceiving yourself," Spectre said. "If silence could speak for a moment, you could hear her say: 'When the wind blows, that's a warning. But when the storm comes, that's the end.'" he said this slowly, as if he were serenading her.

"Fuck off!"

Starlight's voice rang out. Her shouts echoed through the halls. No further response came. She wiped her eyes and sat for a moment to recover. A few moments later, she stood up, and considered the different paths before her. She contemplated each of them, evaluating and examining them with a deep scrutiny. Suddenly, she felt a wind blowing from what appeared to be the northernmost corridor, which she began to follow.

Unlike the other hallways, this one continued down for a long time. She trotted for nearly 10 minutes before finally reaching the end of it. A large doorway stood 20 feet tall, opulently carved and painted with a scene of Satellite murdering the original founders of Statera. As she drew closer, the doors opened on their own.

She advanced cautiously into the chasm. Her horn illuminated the room to reveal hundreds of corpses sprawled out along the floor. Starlight gasped and covered her mouth, staring blankly at the carcasses, which bore a compelling resemblance to the hive mind changelings. Most of them were impaled with daggers, though some still held a dagger, even in death.

"They died by their own accord," Spectre's voice was heard again.

"They... killed themselves?" Starlight's voice trembled.

"Satellite had instructed them to take their own lives, should he have been compromised in any way. When Satyrn defeated him, they scattered here to the Ardent Crossing."

A gentle wind came from behind Starlight and blew towards the end of the room. She discovered an open door that led to another dark chamber. Looking back toward the bodies, her face became sympathetic.

"Even in war, the loss of life is a tragedy," Spectre sighed.

Starlight bent down by one of the remains, "In this state, they seem so innocent," Starlight examined. The room itself resembled the place that Satyrn and Vylet had discovered on CX38; monitors and machines sat on counters and desks. Plastered onto them was the same geometric symbol from the asteroid. Starlight gestured to one of them, "Can you tell me what this is?" she asked.

"It is the crest of my kingdom."

"What is it doing here?" Starlight pondered. She looked around trying to determine if the voice was still coming through her head. Nopony was around.

"Satellite was once my second in command. This room transmits and receives data and other information between my communication outposts."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Unlike Celestia, I fight for a noble cause. I have nothing to hide, and nothing to keep from you."

"So, I ask again, why haven't you actually shown yourself then?" Starlight challenged him.

There was no answer.

Starlight photographed and documented the room, stepping over the corpses as she made her way towards the doorway at the other end of the room, she found herself on a bridge known as the Ardent Crossing. It arced far down into an endless abyss that sank below. Down and on the other side of the bridge, a monstrous cathedral stood reaching the ceiling of the chamber. It was gothic and quaint. Starlight could hear bells begin to ring out ad-infinitum. She made her way down to the basilica entrance.

The room was unlike the gothic appearance of its exterior; the style and substance of the spire's corridors were echoed in the aesthetics of the interior. As she walked down the aisle, Starlight noticed a throne much like Satellite's, only it was golden, and made for a pony of her size. The same runes and inscriptions were present across its finish. A wind howled through from the entrance towards it, pulling her attention to a ghostly aspect of Spectre, who was sitting on the throne. The spirit was monochromatic and translucent.

"Will you ever actually show yourself?" Starlight derided him.

"I am very far from Equestria. Such an extensive teleportation spell would take some time to recover from."

"And you're saying you've done that before?" Starlight was suddenly bewildered.

Spectre nodded, his mane followed his head weightlessly, "My power is only fathomed by few."

"Why do you keep following me. To scare me?"

"I have said so already that I wish to simply warn you of your actions. When you report back to your friends with what you have found here, you will trigger the beginning of the end."

Starlight stared at him, her eyes questioning, "It was nice of you to give me an unguided tour of this place, but everything here is stained with blood. I should know better than to trust anyone with any relation to Satellite."

"We are not so different, Starlight. One day, I will free Equestria from the shackles that Celestia has made for you. Yet, while your mind is still imprisoned, you are simply a penumbra of your former self."

"Go to hell."

Spectre gazed down at her, his expression was that of feigned benevolence, "Then perhaps my visit has been without reason." He smiled disturbingly.

"So be it," Starlight's horn glared suddenly, and a massive bolt of magic shot out to strike the vision of Spectre. Dust and rubble blew about from the blast. When the dust and debris cleared, the throne had been destroyed and Spectre was nowhere to be seen. All that was left at the front of the cathedral was a torn flag with Spectre's emblem on it. Starlight could swear she heard thunder rumble outside the spire as she started to find her way back out.



(At the Norphae landing site)

June 18, 2051 [Sol 68]

11:40A.M. Equestria Time / 3:42P.M. Norphae Local Time

Starlight contacted Satyrn later that afternoon. Everything that she had documented in Statera was sent to be analyzed by Satyrn, Vylet, and Sylver. She also described her encounter with the aspect of a powerful alicorn. Satyrn explained that his name was Spectre, and that she had encountered him in his physical form herself before they evacuated CX38.

"I've told you everything I could find out. What now?" Starlight's voice came through the watch.

"I'm not sure..." Satyrn replied.

"The asteroid, the changelings, Spectre and Satellite; we know they're all connected now." Starlight's tone was no longer skeptical.

"Yeah. I think it's safe to say that Celestia knows something about this. I'm not sure if we've been out here searching for a planet to terraform after all."

"Otherwise, wouldn't Norphae be the answer to the overpopulation crisis? It's similar to Equestria aside from—"

"Aside from the eternal winter," Satyrn managed to chuckle.

"Yeah, that... Spectre told me he wanted to cleanse Equestria of its crown. Do you think he could mean Celestia?"

Satyrn tilted her head in contemplation. "That could be why we were attacked on the asteroid."

"Do I tell Luna what we've discovered?" Starlight questioned. Satyrn sat for a moment to consider this.

Rayna floated up from the watch to give Satyrn a dismal look. She shook her head, "If Celestia is hiding something, so is Luna. I don't think this is out of character for them, considering nopony other than those who were invited onto the expedition knew about the starship program." She drifted onto Satyrn's shoulder. "I mean, Luna had already been spying on other ponies' dreams."

Satyrn blushed. "Isn't that her job, though? She's, the Princess of the Night."

"From what I know, she used to only monitor ponies' dreams when it was necessary and she wouldn't stay for prolonged periods of time. She essentially spied on everypony when it came to this mission."

Satyrn looked back to the watch and sighed; Starlight was still awaiting an answer.

"No. We can't tell her. You need to keep this a secret for right now, Starlight."

"Alright... I have to go then. I'll let you know if I find anything else out."

"That sounds good. We'll let you know too."

"We'll talk soon."

XIV. ASPHYXIATED



"Alright. See ya, Starlight."

"Take care, Satyrn."

Princess Celestia finished eavesdropping on the conversation as she glazed over the various monitors in her office. She switched the computer off, and made her way to her desk. She dialed a few numbers on her communicator. Luna picked up.

"Sister?"

"Luna, they've seen Spectre."

"Who is 'they'?"

"Satyrn and her friends."

"Are you certain...?"

"Yes, sister. He was the one who led the attack on CX38. It seems that he's shown himself to Starlight Glimmer too."

"Starlight? Why would he do that?"

"I am unsure, but Satyrn has been using an unencrypted connection to contact Starlight back in Equestria. Did you know about this?"

"No..." Luna paused. "I'm... sorry, I did not realize that's why she was going to Statera."

"We must leave this planet. We'll fall back to Tyr."

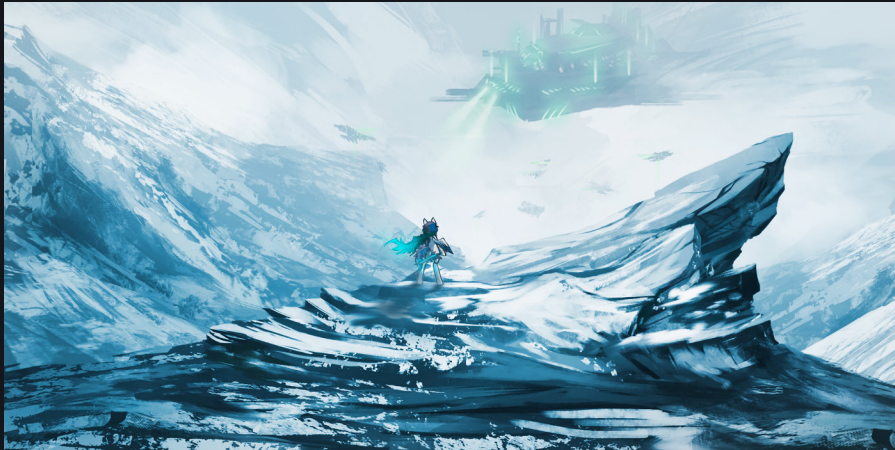
"Sister, do you think that is wise? If Equestria finds out what you have done—"

"It is the safest option we have right now. If Spectre has been tracking their transmissions—" Suddenly, the walls of her office began to rattle. Celestia's eyes widened madly, as her heart began to race, "We'll convene later. Goodbye."

"Sister—" Luna was cut off as Celestia swiped the communicator from desk. She rushed out of her office and looked out the bridge window.

"Damn it!" she shouted.

XV. THE ARMADA



Satyrn rushed out onto the plateau after she had heard the explosion. Out in the distance, the fleet that had attacked them on the asteroid hovered dishearteningly beyond the snowy plains. Low oscillating sounds echoed across the expanse.

Vylet soon joined Satyrn on the plateau, "Is that Spectre?" he asked, shivering from the cold.

"Yeah, it is." Satyrn replied. She tapped on the AMCD in her ear, "Sylver, where's Twilight?" She waited for an answer to come. After a few moments of silence, he responded.

"We're on the bridge right now. We're going to have to make another waygate jump," Sylver informed her.

"What?! Do we even have enough energy for that?"

"We will if we don't get shot at too much. Gotta move quickly."

Satyrn spotted smaller spacecraft break off from the mothership; they started speeding towards the landing site.

"Vylet, I need you to get back on those plasma cannons," Satyrn instructed.

"I don't want to hit you again... If I hit you—" Vylet objected.

"Aim at the sky. Keep any changelings from landing, and keep those fighters away from our ship. I know you can do that."

Vylet hesitated and looked back at Satyrn nervously.

"I—"

"If we can't trust Celestia, I'd like you to at least trust me."

Rayna flitted out from Vylet's mane, "I'll try to assist him with the guidance system. We can make this work," she encouraged. "Come on Vy, we can do it!" The grey colt looked back at Rayna who smiled optimistically back.. He turned to Satyrn and nodded before gliding back to the ship.

Satyrn contacted Sylver again, "Are you still there?"

"You're loud and clear, kid."

"Vylet's going up to the plasma cannon. He and Rayna are going to keep those the smaller ships away from us. If any ground forces start coming, I'll take care of them. Just let me know when we're ready to take off and I'll be there."

"Quite the plan you've come up with."

"Is Celestia there too?"

"Yes. She's plotting a new course."

"Already?"

"Apparently."

"Alright. Well, no time to waste. Get us in the air soon."

"Will do. Be safe," Sylver clicked off of the line.

...

Vylet scrambled into the turret seat as Rayna hopped on top of the control panel. The plasma cannon was a broad peripheral component in the hull of the ship. It had a prolonged rotating barrel that could fire plasma rounds in quick succession, or as an amplified single shot. It had been designed to be used while in space, so using it while the starship was still docked only allowed for a 360 vertical swivel when aiming.

"Peripheral Generator." Rayna said.

Vylet flipped a switch that activated the aforementioned generator. Monitors and buttons across the cockpit quickly illuminated, "Good to go." he said.

"Targeting System."

"Yep."

"Munitions Check."

"On it." Vylet rummaged through a series of menus and arrays on the main screen. "We're good."

"Check your rotation now."

Vylet took hold of the handle in front of his seat and pulled it to the right. The turret spun into a swift rotation.

"Latency is good, 89ms. Good acceleration. You're clear to engage, Vy." Rayna nodded at Vylet, who was taking a deep, nervous breath.



A deafening blast came from the hull of the starship. Satyrn glanced back to see the plasma cannon fire at an oncoming ship, which exploded into a cloud of debris.. She tapped into her AMCD, "Vy, was that you?"

"Heck yeah it was!" Vylet sounded like he was beaming.

"You're a natural! Keep that up," Satyrn looked up as more ships began their approach..

The Starship Ponyville was bombarded by attacks from the control vessels that were hovering out over the mountain ridges. Satyrn watched as Vylet took down another hostile spacecraft. Then another. Suddenly, changelings began to touch down at the outer rim of the landing site. Satyrn drew her weapon and leapt into the fray.

She dashed from one changeling to another, taking each one down as they rushed towards the starship. Up until this point, all of the changelings had been of the same variety: four legs, two wings, sharp fangs, black exoskeleton. However, from over the mountain shelf, a hostile transport dropped off a huge, dragon-like creature that still somehow resembled a changeling.

"Uh, what the hell is that?" Satyrn spoke to Vylet over the comms.

"I see it... Give me a minute," Vylet said; rapid bursts started erupting from the turret as he fired erratically at the fleet.



“Charging the Operative Waygate, your highness,” Sylver said.

On the bridge, the Princesses were dashing around the consoles preparing to get the starship airborne. Bright flashes of light and smoke filled the sky, obscuring most of their outside visibility. The ship shook heavily with every incursion that the deflector shields took.

“Every shot we sustain prolongs our stay here! Get the Stingers in the air,” Celestia barked orders.

“No! If we do that, we’ll have to leave without them,” Sylver warned.

“Then we will only send a few.”

“That’s suicide.”

“What alternative would you like to share with us, captain? Have you any clue the predicament we’re in?”

“We just need to get in the air as quickly as possible. The engines still have to initiate, but it won’t be long now.”

“I will make the call on my own accord, then,” Celestia’s voice held back a potent indignancy. She dialed the Naval dispatch, “Get ten Stingers up in the air and keep those hostiles out of our sector. We will hold our ground.”

Sylver stepped away from the console to confront Celestia, “Are you mad? We won’t be able to dock them in—” He was interrupted as Celestia struck him across the face, sending the staggering unicorn to the floor.

“Silence! A sacrifice has to be made today.” Celestia’s voice strained as her eyes became fierce.

Twilight watched helplessly from her station in dismay. She looked to Celestia who stared back in a threatening display. The Princess simply turned back to the console and continued preparing the ship for launch.



Satyrn heard rockets blasting back from the starship. She turned and saw Stingers pouring out from the main hangar, watching as they darted past the plateau and towards the oncoming armada. Her ears rang from the din caused by the continual blasts erupting across the area. She had been fighting off the smaller changelings when they retreated after the beast was set down onto the plateau.

The massive dragon hovered imminently near Satyrn. It towered over with 4 massive legs, 2 sets of wings, and a broad neck. Embers sputtered from its mouth and fizzled down onto the fresh snow; puffs of steam billowed as they melted into the ground. The air around its mouth quivered and distorted as it emitted a heavy growl, subsequently followed by a series of aberrant drones and screeches.

Satyrn converted her weapon into its rifle arrangement, "I don't think my shots are going to put a dent in that thing."

Vylet spoke over the comms, "I have an idea, but it's a trope I've seen in just about every sci-fi/action film I've watched on this expedition."

"What did you have in mind?"

"That thing isn't an immediate threat. The incoming ships are. I need you to keep it busy while I clear the skies. Lead it towards the ledge in front of the ship, I can get a clear shot of its head from right there."

"How long will this take?"

"The air forces are thinning, but I'm not sure."

"Alright. I'll see what I can do," Satyrn leapt into the air and started firing at the beast. The dragon started into a trample and surged upward, becoming airborne. Its massive wings beat ferociously, causing an extraordinary gale to surround the creature. As Satyrn expected, her weapon had no significant effect, though it marginally chipped away at the exoskeleton.

Satyrn swooped around, avoiding the harsh gusts coming from the dragon's wings. She saw the dragon beginning to open its mouth; although she was keeping her distance, she could feel a searing heat come about against the snow as the creature's mouth began to smolder profusely. In the moment, Satyrn fired a shot directly into its now exposed cavity. An explosion was heard, which she mistook as a successful attack. However, the creature had successfully sustained the projectile, and it began to expel plumes of fire. The snow and ice that the dragon hovered above evaporated on contact with the conflagration.

"Damn," Satyrn had narrowly avoided the flames.

"Everything alright?" Vylet asked over the comms.

"Are you almost done? I could use your help."

"But, my plan!"

"This siege isn't your personal fantasy to live out and I don't really feel like being burned alive!" Satyrn flew around the dragon. The creature's attention was fixated on her. "I've got it as still as it's going to get."



"Just shoot it!" Rayna was commanding Vylet, "Your shot is just 14.1 degrees off. Pivot left and bring the barrel up by 7 degrees. You don't want to hit its armour." She was staring intently into the fray, but no shot occurred. Rayna whirled around back towards Vylet, "Are you going to do anything?"

Vylet sat with a fatigued expression on his face. He was shaking his head ambiguously.

"No?" Rayna asked condescendingly.

"I can't, I might hit her."

"No you won't, just do what I'm asking," Rayna hovered around the targeting monitor and pointed to the crosshair, "You're telling me that you can hit a spacecraft that's going nearly Mach 1, but you can't hit a giant fucking dragon that's right in front of you?"

"It's too risky.."

"Vylet! The outcome will be so much more alarming if you sit here and let that creature trample all over this ship."

"I can't, I can't.." he repeated over and over.

"14.1 degrees to the left, 7—"

"I can't."

Rayna pulled at her mane and darted up to Vylet's face. She opened her mouth to shout, but her anger lessened when she saw his frightened expression. She tried to calm herself, "Vylet. Relax."

Vylet squeezed his eyes closed.

"You've done so well. You've gotten this far. We can all get out of here soon. All you have to do is hit that thing. Everything will be okay," Rayna assured him. She drifted over and sat on his shoulder, "Ready when you are."

A few moments passed. Rayna watched as Satyrn struggled to maneuver around the beast. She looked back anxiously at Vylet, who was now staring intently at the targeting monitor.

"You won't hit her," Rayna affirmed. She floated back on top of the dashboard, "14.1 degrees to the left," she began.



Satyrn broke out in a sweat as she endeavored to evade each blast from the creature's mouth, "Vylet, are you there?" she said over the comms. No answer came. She continued to unleash a barrage of shots to maintain its focus, "Any time now!" Satyrn shouted, feeling her stamina declining.

A blast came from the starship. Satyrn whirled around and watched as the beam traveled swiftly, striking the dragon's head. The creature slowly toppled over, falling over the mountain shelf, and a grotesque thud, then a crack followed.

Satyrn drifted to the ground to lay down in the snow; her body cooled against the ice as she gasped for air after having exhausted herself, "Good shot," she remarked. The sky near the landing site had quieted, though explosions were continuing as the Stingers bombarded the control ships over the mountain clearing.

"Satyrn! Satyrn!" Sylver's voice came through the comms channel.

"Yeah?" Satyrn replied.

"We're taking off in 10 minutes. Head back now, you've overstayed your welcome out there."

"You're damn right about that."

Satyrn had started towards the ship when she heard a sonic boom. A hostile fighter had zipped by, and a silhouette dropped in front of her from above.

Spectre stood up and shot a glare at Satyrn, "Time has run out," he announced.

"You're right. I don't have time for you at all," Satyrn replied.

In a moment's notice, Spectre leapt with inconceivable speed and knocked the girl to the ground. He willed a blade of magic into his hooves and pressed it to her neck.

"Talk about wasting time if you're not going to kill me at your leisure," Satyrn quipped, though her voice was faltering.

"I did not come to parley and execute for my own musing. I simply came to bring you back with me," Spectre was melodramatic.

"Likely story." Satyrn kicked him back allowing herself space to leap into a glide towards the ship.



Spectre recovered, then propelled himself into the air. He traced Satyrn's movements as powerful magic bolts formed in his hooves. Once the auras had quickly grown to their maximum, he thrust them with excessive force. The bolts struck and immobilized Satyrn momentarily, just before she reached the ship. The hangar bay shields were opening for her just as a squadron of Equestrian marines began firing back at Spectre. The alicorn simply willed a forcefield around himself, rendering him invulnerable to their attacks. He drifted across the snow towards Satyrn as she struggled to recover from the blast.

"You can come with me willingly, you know," Spectre taunted her. He watched her endeavor onto her hooves. "What will it be—" he was struck suddenly by a ray of magic, shattering his forcefield.

"You could surrender willingly too," Princess Twilight countered. Her horn remained steaming from the aggressive spell as she rushed to Satyrn. In a hurry, she lifted the girl into the ship as the shields began to close.

"We have to go, now!" Princess Celestia shouted behind her.

"No! Wait for our ships."

"The longer we stay—"

"They're coming." Twilight pointed out towards where the armada was steadily approaching. Some of the control ships began to rupture as the Stingers darted towards the Starship Ponyville.

Spectre rebounded again, standing back on his hind legs. As the fighters drew near to the ship, his horn glowed as he reached his hooves into the sky. One of the Stingers started to plummet towards the earth, making impact just below the mountain shelf. He attempted to bring down another, but was struck again by an attack from Twilight. He flew backwards, and willed another forcefield to materialize around him, breaking his fall as he hit the ground.

The hangar deflector shields activated fully as the rest of the Stingers rushed back into the ship. In an instant, the Starship Ponyville rocketed towards the plateau and blinked without a trace.

XVI. TYR



June 20, 2051 [Sol 70]

The members of the Starship Ponyville came to know the attack on CX38 as the First Cataclysm, and the invasion of Norphae as the Second Cataclysm. Vylet had been recognized alongside Satyrn as a war hero, though not that anypony was ready just yet to admit that a war had begun.

After the ship had escaped Norphae, Princess Celestia announced that they were on course to a planet called Tyr. The journey would take two days without any way to open another operative waygate for some time. The Princess declined to offer any details on what the planet was or why she chose it as their next destination. Nopony knew anything about it.

Satyrn spent the journey resting back in her room. Vylet and Rayna visited her often; they spent their time together by reading the books that Satyrn had brought, while also making time to design a virtual scarf for Rayna to wear. Sylver would bring her coffee and tea multiple times throughout the day, and asked her questions about botany. By Sol 70, Satyrn was up and about again.

She started reading a novel that her father had given to her before she left: "The Tales of Captain Astrid", the story of a seafaring adventurer who embarked on expeditions in search for buried treasure that she would bring back and give to the poor ponies who lived in her home country. It inspired Satyrn to design and fasten a nautical outfit for herself, more befitting of a commander at sea rather than space.



"Time has finally caught up to you," Princess Twilight said to Celestia. They sat alone in the dim command bridge. All else was quiet. "You've made this decision."

"I know," Princess Celestia was solemn.

"We don't know what we'll find there. Are you afraid?"

"I don't know what choice we have, Twilight. Tyr is our last hope of refuge. When we arrive, we must begin to try and locate his base."

"And what about Satyrn?"

Celestia's eyes became somber and frail. She sat for a moment in silence, taking in the vast cosmos outside, "I have dreaded what lies before me for nearly ten thousand years," her voice broke in a woeful tone. "ten thousand years, and yet it feels like it has come so soon," she continued.

"When the time comes, I cannot promise whose ally I will make," Twilight claimed.

Celestia looked up at her; tears fell faintly over her cheeks.

Sylver came into the room unannounced. The Princesses turned to him as he headed over to the bridge console, and began working away at the controls.

"We're coming up on Tyr," Sylver announced. He pointed towards a light in the distance that was growing steadily as the ship approached.

"We're going to start scanning the—"

"There's no need for that. Steady on ahead," Celestia interrupted. Sylver's mouth hung open as he gave the Princess a puzzled look. He turned nonchalantly to continue the task of navigating the ship.



"Another day another planet," Vylet grumbled. Rayna fluttered about the laptop monitor with her new scarf as Vylet entered lines of code into the program. He had continued to develop a new simulation software throughout the past three months, much like the one he had created back home.

The door to his room swung open.

"Hey!" Satyrn exclaimed in the doorway.

"Why am I used to this now?" Vylet muttered.

"We're going to be landing on Tyr soon. I wanted to know if you would come watch with me."

"Eh. We'll just get attacked in the next two days, and then have to go planet 'Dorf'."

"Ah... so is that a 'no'?"

Rayna propped herself up on Vylet's head, "It's a yes!"

"Ugh," Vylet grunted and rolled his eyes, "It's a yes then." He got up from his desk and started towards the doorway.

"Alright, cool."

As Satyrn turned to leave, she was stopped by a sudden hug from Vylet. This took her by surprise, but only momentarily; she returned the embrace, and ran her hoof through his mane, "Trust me. Everything will be okay," Satyrn's voice was maternal and soft.

"I never imagined anypony would ever give me the strength to believe in myself," Vylet whispered.

Satyrn managed to smile.



When the starship entered the atmosphere, communication arrays went down. A mysterious surge of energy had struck the ship, rendering all means of imaging and navigation impossible. Due to the dense fog that surrounded their point of entry, Celestia eventually decided to land the ship in a nearby sea so that the engineers could try to resolve the problem.

The ocean was murky and marmoreal, lapping and swaying as the wind commanded it to. The smoky amethyst clouds crept through the gloomy skies, warning of a coming storm. The dense fog obscured all but a few miles in every direction.

Inside the starship, engineers and pilots ambled through the hangars. They murmured to one another of legends and tales as they wondered what terrors would transpire next. Custodians plodded along the corridors unenthusiastically as they asked passersby if things would end up okay. Vylet and Satyrn sat in the central hangar and watched as the tides brushed against the vessel. They were soon joined by Sylver who lifted their spirits with cheap jokes and (as anypony could guess) coffee.

Hours passed by with no word on the downed communication arrays. Many crew members began to wonder if they would ever see the natural light of a star shining upon the land again. Whispers of a watery grave started to put ponies on edge.

The waves became listless, and the ship began to rock. It was slow at first, but it grew stronger and more violent. Princess Twilight and Princess Celestia quickly descended from the bridge into the main hangar.

"There!" Twilight shouted, pointing towards the ocean. Bubbles and foam effervesced outside of the ship, as a serpent began to emerge from the depths. It was a bright blue with an aquamarine sheen that glimmered in the water.

Vylet jumped to his hooves and pulled Satyrn up with him.

"What is that?" he laughed nervously.

"To your stations, everypony!" Celestia shouted. Groups of ponies that had gathered in the hangar began to disperse rapidly. Fear painted the face of each pony amidst the bedlam as they rushed to prepare the peripheral cannons. It was understandable to some, though, considering how much had happened to the crew by this point.

Rayna hovered in front of Satyrn and Vylet, "Wait... Her muscles are relaxed. And do you see her eyes? She's just observing us, it's not a threat." She pointed to the serpent.

"She?" Satyrn questioned.

"Yes. Look, she's not hostile." Rayna beseeched. They looked back to the serpent, whose eyes were wide and curious.

"Good. I'm tired of fighting," Satyrn huffed and darted toward the hangar bay. She deactivated the reflector shield and promptly flew out of the ship. Several groups of ponies in the hangar started shouting for her to stop and come back, but Satyrn was already too far away to hear them. She hovered up to the serpent's head to look into its eyes.

Celestia rushed to the cannon bay, "Wait!" she shouted, "Satyrn is up there. Hold your fire."



Satyrn maintained eye contact with the serpent for a few moments, it stared back, eyeing her with interest. She felt a small drop of water drizzle down from the sky and onto her snout, which caused her to sneeze. She made a strange convulsion with her face subsequently.

This made the serpent giggle, "Ahh... You are charming, aren't you?" her voice was silky and ambrosial.

"Oh gosh. You can talk?" Satyrn's mouth dropped.

"Yes, my child... And little did I know that you would speak Polish."

"You know me?"

"We have been waiting for you, in fact. The girl of prophecy with the wings of a magpie."

"Prophecy?"

"I am Myzhara, Goddess of the Seas of Lumi Tyr." She bent her head down to examine Satyrn closer, "How elegant you are."

Satyrn blushed and smiled brightly back at her, "Our communication arrays are down, and we're not sure what happened. When we entered the atmosphere, everything just stopped working."

Myzhara tilted her and raised her eyes.

"Ah! Okay, so, when we arrived here, our ship was damaged. We can't figure out a way to shore," Satyrn clarified.

"This world is surrounded by a magic barrier that protects our people from the outside," Myzhara smiled. A bright blue aura surrounded her causing the Starship Ponyville to shudder. Then, after a moment, it stopped.

"What did you do?" Satyrn asked.

"I've repaired your ship."

"That's some powerful magic."

"I wander, searching for sailors lost at sea. I suppose this makes you and your ship no different."

"Wow," Satyrn sighed in awe, "I have so many questions."

"You may ask them on the way."

"On the way?"

The starship became encompassed by the same magical aura that had surrounded Myzshara, and it began to hover above the water.

“Woah!” Satyrn laughed.

“Come, I will show you to the capital,” Myzshara smiled.



The fog and clouds began to clear as they made their way swiftly across the ocean. Satyrn gilded alongside Myzshara as the Starship Ponyville was carried along by the serpent’s magic. Water sprayed and parted as Myzshara floated through the ocean with ease.

“Where did you learn to speak our language?” Satyrn asked her.

“I have heard it spoken for a long time; Ponish is the tongue of the educated.” Myzshara looked over at her.

“So, there are others who live on this planet?”

“Yes, they are like you. They are ponies.”

“How is that possible?”

“The ponies arrived here thousands of years ago, brought by their own goddess. Though, much of their history has long been forgotten, even to me.”

Satyrn trailed alongside the serpent, a pensive expression had come over her. She glanced over at Myzshara, “Who was their goddess?”

“She is not known to any but the rune sages.”

“The rune sages?”

“Yes, they are the wise spiritual leaders of our world. It is certain that you will meet them, as you are the girl of prophecy.”

Satyrn scrunched her snout, “What is it about this prophecy?”

Myzshara laughed heartily, "It was foretold by the rune sages:

'The girl with the wings of a magpie and the eyes of the goddess of the earth will one day visit Tyr.. She will descend from the skies in a mighty vessel and lead her people homeward.'"

"I feel like I'm left with more questions than I started with," Satyrn became lost in thought.

"We may convene again, if you'd like, and discuss matters further in the future. Look to the horizon, my child."



The Capital City, Lumi Tyr

The planet's capital, Lumi Tyr, was built at the base of a mountain chain on the coastline. Myzshara led Satyrn and the starship to the city's sky harbour, where they finally docked. The airship dock was situated on the shortest mountain summit on the coast.

Lights from houses and apartments, that had been built on the sides of the mountains, twinkled even through the darkest and foggiest of nights. Copious overpasses bridged the mountains together, creating a closely knit network of communities and neighborhoods above the city. A magnificent waterfall fell between the two major mountain peaks, feeding into a lake below. A dazzling metropolis with skyscrapers and superstructures sat at the base of the mountains, marking the city center.

The starship's occupants disembarked out onto the summit to look down upon the city. Myzshara soared through the sky and reconvened with Satyrn.

"What do you think?" the serpent asked.

"I've never seen anything like this in my life," Satyrn stared in awe.

"Well, it has been a pleasure to meet with you, my child. You are expected by the Prime Minister Volshka Allariah, so I must go now. If you wish to speak with me at any time, you need only to come to the sea."

"Thank you, Myzshara."

"I will be watching over you." Myzshara spiraled into the skies and plunged back beneath the ocean's depths.



Sylver had coffee, "Hell yeah they are!" His voice boomed through the ornate halls of the palace. His selection of words and tone of voice were both equally inappropriate for the moment. Allariah gave him a curious glare.

"What exactly is the prophecy?" Twilight asked.

"The girl with the wings of a magpie and the eyes of the goddess of the earth will one day visit Tyr. She will descend from the skies in a mighty vessel and lead her people homeward," the Prime Minister echoed the words Myzshara had said to Satyrn.

"And what does it mean?" Celestia sounded uneasy.

"Tyrrians have spent æons pondering the nature of the prophecy. The rune sages say that the spirits of the Oathsworn came to them during the Great Storm and divulged these words. They believe it means that the girl of prophecy will one day bring the tale of origin to the Tyrrian people."

The room was silent for a moment, aside from Sylver's incessantly rude sipping noises. Satyrn's expression was tender and questioning; she looked at Allariah.

"What's the origin tale?" she asked.

"The Tyrrians believe they came from another world to this one. Our history was passed down by oral tradition for centuries, but the stories changed and were eventually lost. It's believed that the girl of prophecy will light the path towards understanding our place in the universe," Allariah explained.

Princess Celestia stood up from her seat. She was sweating.

"Your hospitality is very generous, but we have no plans to stay on this planet long," she said. Her voice faltered.

"I insist, your highness. We must discuss more about our worlds together. There's so much to learn," Allariah coaxed.

"Surely, but we simply cannot stay here any longer than we need to."

Satyrn stood up from her seat as well and faced the Princess, "Celestia, what are you talking about? This is the biggest discovery in the history of Equestria. We can't just leave Tyr behind." She looked around the room at everypony; eventually her gaze fell on Allariah, "Besides, I am the girl of prophecy, right? There's a lot we need to figure out here."

"But we must stay migrant. We cannot risk another attack," Celestia was adamant.

"Another attack? From whom?" Allariah raised her voice. Everypony looked around the room at one another

Celestia became frantic, "There are some creatures that had attacked us—"

“Spectre!” Satyrn interrupted, “A powerful alicorn, named Spectre, has attacked us twice.” Princess Twilight and Princess Celestia looked at her with alarm before exchanging glances with one another.

The Prime Minister stood up from her seat as well. “Spectre. The Curse of the Cosmos, I assume.”

“Do you know of Spectre?” Satyrn’s ears perked and she tilted her head in an inquisitive manner.

“Yes. He has come to this place before with an army of shapeshifting creatures. He’s a madman who claims that he can cleanse the universe of corruption. That is not so. If he is who you are running from, I can assure you that you can find safety in Tyr. He will not hurt you here.”

A silence had come over the room.

“I see,” said Celestia, “I suppose we can stay here then.” The Princess was visibly uncomfortable and wary.

“I hope you find your stay here fruitful, then,” Allariah bowed to her guests.



Satyrn sat on her bed and watched the clouds shift and float across the sky. Her room was clean for the first time since the expedition had begun. Vylet and Sylver played card games on the floor of her room.

“So, they think you’re like, a goddess or something?” Vylet asked.

“No, silly, they think she’s a gondola,” Sylver quipped.

“What’s a gondola?”

“Wait, really?”

“No, I’m just pretending to be as dumb as you.”

They chuckled together. Satyrn turned herself to look at her friends, “I think what they believe is that I hold the secrets of their ancient history. I’m not sure how I’m supposed to know any of that, when I can’t even find my hairbrush in the morning.”

“You use a hairbrush?” Sylver had a motto: It was never okay to badmouth, but when duty calls, it’s okay to dadmouth. It was an ode to twelfth dimensional dad jokes. Humour was a chess game to him.

“I mean, with that coffee breath, there’s a certain kind of brush I think you should be using more,” Satyrn giggled.

“Ha. Ha. Ha.” Sylver may have been peeved.

Vylet revealed what looked to be a royal flush while Sylver revealed his lowly single.

“Checkmate,” Vylet announced.

“That’s not the right word.”

“Eureka?”

“No.”

Satyrn sat down with them and initiated a group hug. Subsequently, Vylet stood up to go make Sylver some more coffee, “So... what’s next?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” Sylver replied.

“I mean, what’s next on this expedition? We’re obviously not on course for our mission goal.”

“Celestia is on a hunt for Spectre, it seems.”

Rayna darted from out of Vylet’s watch and sat on his shoulder, “I think that was her goal from the start,” Everypony in the room looked toward Rayna.

“Explain,” Satyrn said.

“Our presence on the asteroid led Spectre and his army to us. That can’t be a coincidence, especially when CX38 was logged at the very start of the mission when nopony allegedly even knew it existed yet,” She drifted over to Vylet’s desk and pointed to the monitor, which contained images from the Statera spire, “Then it turns out that Spectre and Statera are connected, which we know from what Starlight found.” She hopped up and started floating around the room, “Norphae was too good to be true. It’s the kind of planet we set out on this expedition to look for, so why didn’t we go there first if Celestia already knew it was out there? And now—” Rayna settled herself into Vylet’s mane, “—we’re here. Tyr. Do you think Celestia just has a knack for finding planets with life on them? Or does that likelihood seem a little suspicious to you?”

“There’s a lot to figure out here,” Sylver sipped his coffee, “But we’re in this together, right? We can get through this.”

Vylet and Rayna nodded. Sylver turned to Satyrn who was staring contemplatively at the floor, “That’s the magic of friendship, right? We’ve saved each other’s asses a lot in the past few days,” the scruffy unicorn put his mug to his lips but, alas, it was empty. He peered inside, having forgotten that, a few feet away, Vylet was making more coffee for him.

Satyrn smiled through her jaded expression, still staring at the floor. "Yeah. We'll figure it out." She stood up and pulled Vylet and Sylver towards her, embracing them, "I'm really glad I met you guys."

"Me too?" Rayna asked, as she nudged herself into the middle of the group hug to smirk at her.

"All of you," Satyrn assured.



XVII.

**THE PRINCE
OF SORROW**



(The Xiaoran Empire, on the planet Xiao)

June 20, 2051

10:37A.M. Xiao Local Time

Spectre walked out onto the balcony of the citadel. He looked out into a congregation of millions of changelings who cheered as he came into view. A spectral serpent, that encircled the citadel, swooped into the skies and obscured the daylight, causing the entire planet to be cast into an ephemeral night. The serpent expelled a ray of light from its tail, that of which Spectre used as a spotlight.

“We will find a way to make them understand that the world is at your knees,” Spectre began his speech; he held a hoof against his chest and reached out with his other hoof in a theatrical display. The audience erupted with applause and chirps.

“Find a way... To write your name in the stars, so they will never forget.” He climbed up on top of the railing of the balcony and reached out towards his subjects.

“Listen,” he implored, “Very close to your heart. It beats of revolution.” The changelings put their hooves over their chests in a patriotic manner. They began to rhythmically pound against their bodies, chanting in harmony with Spectre’s words.



"Where does your loyalty lie? With oppression, or the oppressed?" Spectre hummed, "Can you see it...? The beauty of it all. This freedom! You can smell it in the air." He leapt off of the balcony to hover above the crowds.

Spectre motioned with his hooves, "I can part the waters, and I can move the heavens," The spotlight cast by the serpent followed Spectre as he drifted across the congregation.

"Listen to the wisest of them all, I can tell you of their treachery," he gestured to himself, "Only I can tell the truth, with a fire in my soul." A brilliant blaze surrounded the alicorn, evoking an ardent ovation from the changelings.

He swooped back to the balcony, gently touching down onto the railing, and he beseeched them, "Now, can't you see? They've betrayed us all, and their only thoughts for themselves." He sat on the railing, staring down at the onlookers with a forlorn expression.

"I had everything. A crown, and a castle, the most beautiful of them all," He turned to face the citadel, then looked up to the serpent above. "All my life, just to grant you safety." He reached out to the skies above. Spectre closed his eyes, savouring the drama and the theatrics of the moment. He turned back to the congregation and stood back on the balcony.

"Who am I? I am he who will cleanse the universe of its corruption. I am the one who will bring an end to my sisters' reign; Celestia and Luna are not fit to rule the lands they command. I have endured for ten thousand years a mortal betrayal that will not go unpunished." The changelings continually applauded their leader.

Spectre stared into the black sky.

"Soon they will remember my name."



To be continued in Starship Ponyville III: Promise Complex



STRANGERS

Written by Vylet & Sylvr
Music & Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

There's a world above
With beauty in it's name
Still it couldn't
Be further than the truth

The stars that pierce
The darkness
The lights that once had shown the path
Are now in need of guidance

She looks inside her soul
To see something quite strange
The fear she knew before
Is realized once more

We're strangers
In a place we should've known
And still such beauty
Must end

We're strangers
Still the fear I can't contain
My heart still longs
For a hope

She fades into a dream
A fantasy of life again
What becomes of all
Her eyes conceal what's now and then

A tale of woe and awe
To caution them, the path awry
The child who dreamt it all
Dreams again of evil raw

Nopony told her
Nopony told.
That the monster she ran from
Does beauty behold

We're strangers
In a place we should've known
And still such beauty
Must end

We're strangers
Still the fear I can't contain
My heart still longs
For a hope

SWARM (ft. The Living Tombstone & KLRX)

Written by Vylet & Sylvr
Music by Vylet, KLRX, & Living Tombstone
Voice Acting by Namii
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

ELYSIUM

Written by Vylet
Music & Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

Pacing the room
With her heart by her side
Elysium
So far from her stride

The study room
Now dimly lit
She tinkers in the dark
With a child by her side

An ember
Lights up the room
A moment of stillness
A peace in bloom

The room fills with laughter
A spark of adventure
Glistening before
Their very eyes

An ember warms their hearts
The secrets of the universe lay bare

And they search
To find Elysium

DANGER CLOSE

(ft. PrinceWhateverer, Omnipony, & Namii)

Written by Vylet
Music by Vylet, PrinceWhateverer,
& Omnipony
Vocals by Namii & PrinceWhateverer
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet
Guitar performed by PrinceWhateverer

Moving slowly through the dead of space
Shadows dancing very out of place

And interlace the interface
A chilling feeling fills the air

From the bridge I see you
creeping in the halls
To know this filth is on my
ship makes my coat crawl

Twisting shifting in the dark
you scum will see there is no
safety here
no mercy found in me

Run and hide you fucking insects,
born to flee
You'll learn that I'm not trapped,
I've locked you in with me

Shapeshifting won't save you

HARBOUR (Pt. I: OUTER SPACE)

Written by Vylet & Sylver
Music & Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet
Guitar performed by Vylet

Cause baby we're out here
And we don't know a single thing
Leaving the harbour
We could hear the sirens sing

In the bustle of the hustle
Everything is blurred
Living in a silence
So long, no words

Nopony knows my name
That's just how it is
So far away from home
How long as has it been?

Harbour
Harbour

In a brave new world
How brave are we

Harbour
Harbour

Fuck all you've got
I'm the new kid on the block

Everyday is something new
Never know what you're gonna get into

HARBOUR (Pt. II: SANCTUARY)

Written by Vylet
Music by Vylet
Voice acting by Bien, Sylver, & Namii
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

MONOLITH TO A HALCYON

(ft. GalaxySquid & Namii)

Written by Vylet
Music by Vylet
Vocals by Vylet, Namii, & GalaxySquid
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet
Guitar performed by Vylet

There's gotta be another way inside
They think to themselves
Running through a corridor
Their faith that had fell

Deeper still they're going
And the darker it gets
When suddenly they find again
The darkness that crept

And it's a monolith to a halcyon
Running in circles to the break of the stars
They say we're searching for what we came for
Still we can't be sure of who we are

All my life
Bounding for a cause

And stepping into room
They find themselves surrounded
by pictures and words on the walls
A feeling of despair washes over the room

And the room goes deeper
And you don't know what's behind
What's behind

But before they can move any further
The room starts shaking
And they're in the dark

And it's a monolith to a halcyon
Running in circles to the break of the stars
They say we're searching for what we came for
Still we can't be sure of who we are

CATACLYSM (ft. Scraton)

Written by Vylet, Sylver, & Scraton
Music by Vylet & Scraton
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

WAYWARD

Written by Vylet
Music by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

NORPHE (ft. cactus flower)

Written by Vylet & Cactus Flower
Music by Vylet & Cactus Flower
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

PENUMBRA

Written by Vylet & Sylver
Music by Vylet
Vocals by Vylet
Background vocals by Sylver
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet
Guitar performed by Vylet

Part I: Statera

Part II: The Violet Nightmare

In the Violet Nightmare
She cries out in pain
When the rough of sand
Is sweeter than the blame

A circumstance turn sour
Armageddon by the hour

And I'm so alone

Part III: Hysteria

Part IV: Starlight's Lament

And deep within the fortress walls
The memories are lost again

And all that's left
Is the blame of the end

If silence could speak
For a moment

You could hear her say

When the wind blows
That's a warning

But when the storm comes
That's the end

Part V: The Ardent Crossing

Oh in a pool of blood
She moves on moves on

And stepping in the room
At the ardent crossing

ASPHYXIATED

Written by Vylet
Music & Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

Asphyxiated
I don't know how
That dreaded feeling
That you get sometimes

And everywhere you look
There's a fire in their eyes
Everywhere
I'm alone

You've got another thing coming
You've got another way out
You've got me
Asphyxiated

Oh and my body's torn apart
Oh the writing on the wall

You've got another thing coming
And you've got everything you want

And never once
could you trust
An alicorn

When all
the power
in the world
Is yours
to command

And as the winds
roar across the sky
A heart can turn
to ember but cannot die

And everywhere you look
There's a fire in their eyes
Everywhere
I'm alone

You've got another thing coming
You've got another way out
You've got me
Asphyxiated

Part VI: Penumbra

Equestria has seen from time to time
The world is near to end
And the heroes always bend

Whats the point of saving the world
If the greatest villain is you

I was the one who had the dream
Don't know a thing about me

I'm just a penumbra
Of my former self

Just take a look at the mess you've made
You don't know anything else but how to fake

These thoughts torment me day to day
Equality congeals strange

And who are you to deny me?
I know everything you think.

No pony's ever known a peace
That you offer onto me

And What of all the pain you've caused?
What about the lives you lost?

None of that will stop me now
From trying hard to make amends

Fuck you
You don't know the half of it

There's naught to gain from ecstasy
That can't belong to me

I was the one who had the dream
Don't know a thing about me

I'm just a penumbra
Of my former self

Part VII: Blood of the Aspect

THE ARMADA (ft. FlightRush & Roymond)

Written by Vylet & Sylver
Music by Vylet, FlightRush, & Roymond
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vyletv

TYR

Written by Vylet & Sylver
Music by Vylet
Vocals by Vylet & Sylver
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

ብሉግናቸው ለሁሉም ለሁሉም ለሁሉም ለሁሉም ለሁሉም
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ገንብ ለሁሉም ለሁሉም ለሁሉም

And we are the chosen
Of the stars
Bridge by bridge
We march

And we are the children
Of the stars
And we will fight
for the truth

An Odyssey (ft. Chi Chi & Bien)

Written by Vylet
Music by Vylet
Vocals by Vylet, Chi Chi, & Bien
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

You can live a life of tragedy
Although you'll be far from the truth

Nopony lives a life of happiness
A bittersweet perception in bloom

And though we see ourselves
Outside the way of peace
The world is always watching
Everything's on us

The future seems so far away
I'm a ballast in a maelstrom
The wake of a storm

And nopony seems to understand
That winter comes, without your wish

Nothing could seem more uncertain
An odyssey's call of a curtain

My soul in stagnation
The evil of peace

And though we see ourselves
Outside the way of peace
The world is always watching
Everything's on us

δακρυα

Written by Vylet & Sylver
Music by Vylet & Sylver
Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet
Ukulele performed by Vylet

Cascade below
The lights dance before her eyes

She thinks to herself
What will become of us?

A world that was shrouded
Unknown to the universe
'till now.

Find a place
Among the stars

Telling the tales
Of their people

The legend of the three
That burden chose

Oathsworn
To silence and to duty

And the secrets of the past
Are held by one

Find a place
Among the stars

And the echoes
Of their legacy
Stay whole

Manifest themselves
Asunder

In the land
Of tears and spirits

Hold a faith
The devil
Will reveal himself again

THE PRINCE OF SORROW SUITE

PT I: ROSES

Written by Vylet & Sylver
Music & Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

Find a way
To make them understand
The world is at your knees

Find a way
To write your name in the stars
So they will never forget

Listen
Very close to your heart
It beats of revolution

Where does your loyalty lie?
With oppression or the oppressed?

Can you see
The beauty of it all?

This freedom
Can you smell it in the air?

I can part the waters
And I can move the heavens

Listen
To the wisest of them all
I can tell you of their treachery

Only I can tell the truth
With a fire in my soul

Now can't you see?
They betrayed us all
And their only thoughts
For themselves

And I
I had everything
A crown and a castle
Most beautiful of them all

And all my life
On the run
Just to grant you
Safety

PT II: OVERRUN

Written by Vylet
Music & Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet

Pacing under
The hall's dim light
Smoke from your mouth
Kill you as it might

Step in the subway
Look left and then right
Your tongue is now stained
With the remnant of plight

The walls of your kingdom
Are slowly burning down
Anarchy echoes
To the edge of the town

High noon to come
Now there's nowhere
You can run
This sickly powerhouse
Ruled under one gun

You falter for an answer
By psychomagic means
The newspaper today wrote
All about your god damn fiends

The windows barred up
And the doors hang at the seams
You're a control freak
With the shit you want from me

Well can't you see
What you are doing?
Grabbing their guns,
Firing all around this ruining

They've taken everything
That's near and dear to me
Do you think there will be a city
Where we live peacefully?

They've brainwashed
Every colt and mare in this world.
This forlorn powerhouse
Is under their own word

Crying in the middle
Of the streets at night
I can't take this anymore

Oh, We're overrun
Oh, Live in ignorance
You're overrun

You had it all
On a platter
And you got yourself made
Got yourself made

Oh, We're overrun
Oh, Live in ignorance
You're overrun

You had it all
On a platter
I had it all
I had it all
Overrun

Oh baby can't you see
I'm not the villain here
Oh take a look in the mirror
What do you see?

But a washed up motherfucker
Like yourself
You can raise the sun
But I'll erase the ones you love

And you've got a promise complex
You can't seem to keep
Don't make a fool of yourself
High noon to come
Wake the fuck out of you

You're a control freak
But you're too afraid to show

Oh woaah is me
I can't deny!
Oh the sinister
I fell inside...

Oh no!
Please forgive me dear
Cuz I'm still
Overrun

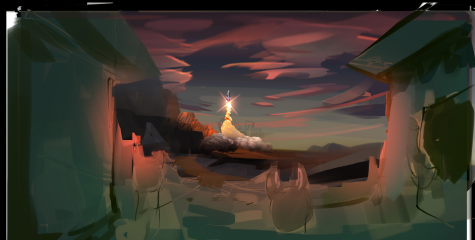
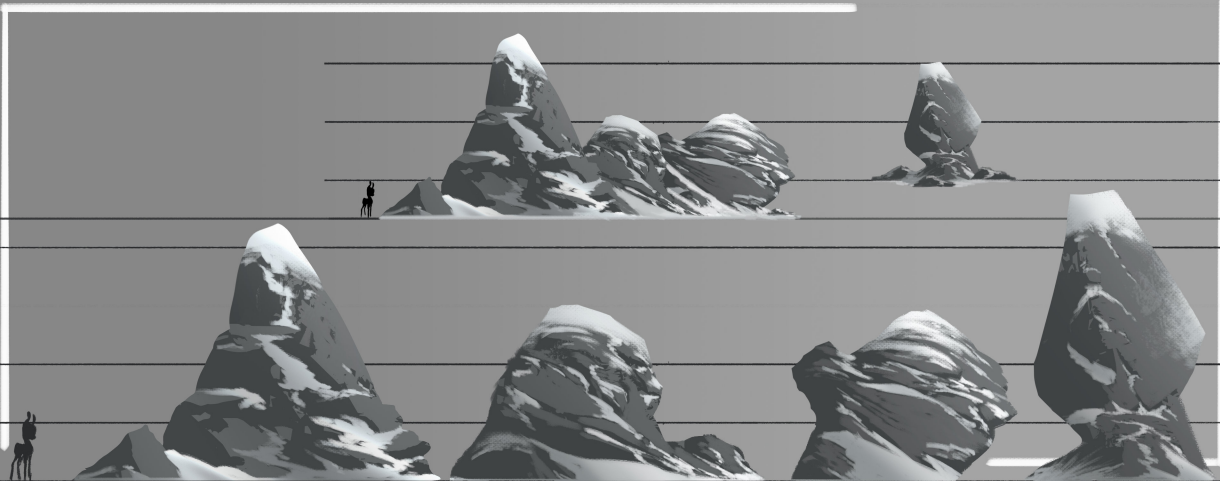
PT III: PRINCE OF SORROW

Written by Vylet
Music & Vocals by Vylet
Produced, mixed, and mastered by Vylet
Guitar performed by Vylet

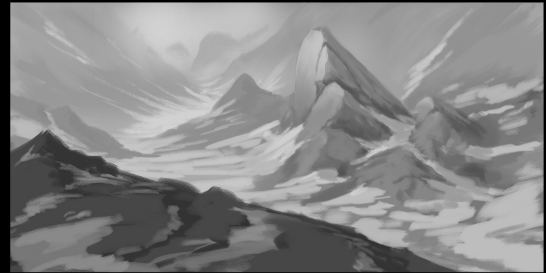
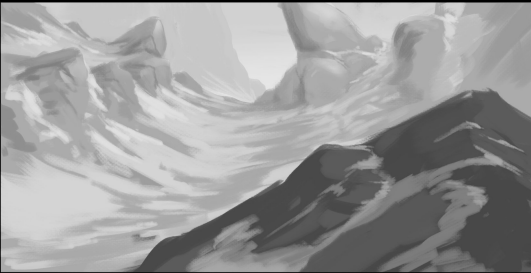
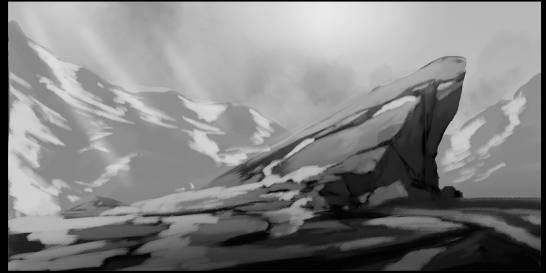


CONCEPT ART





Ponyville



Handwritten signature

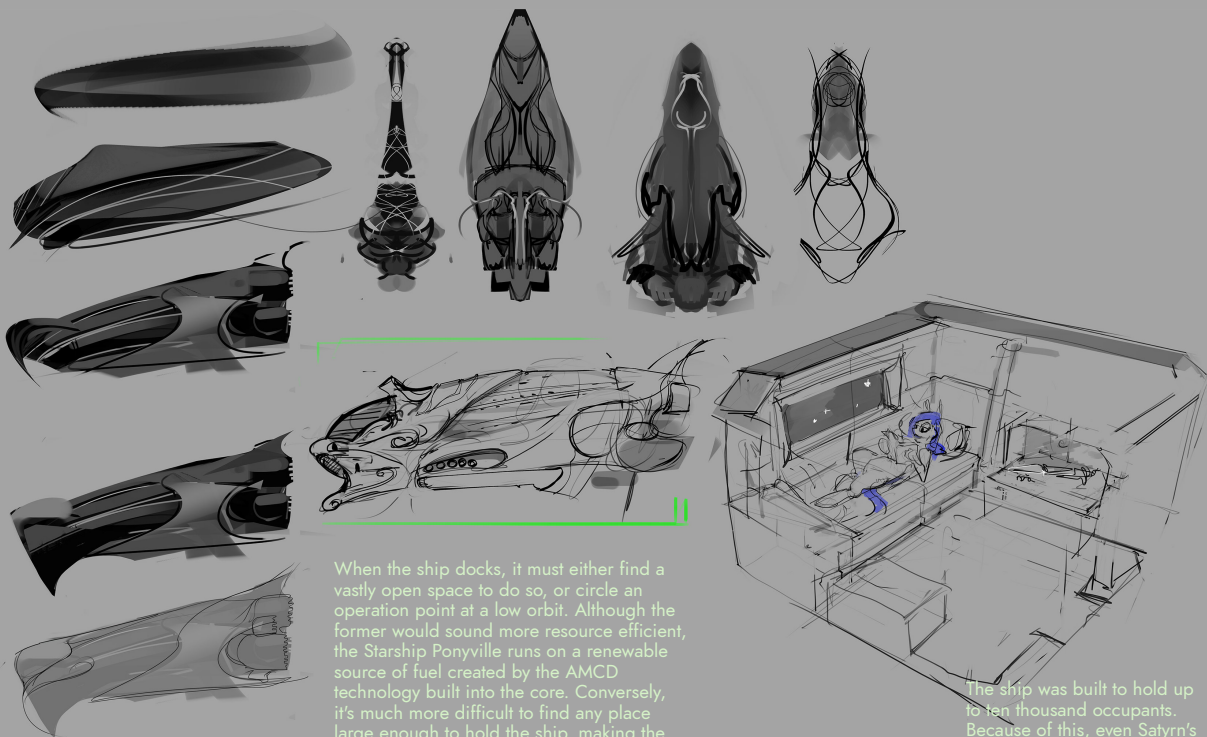
Norphae was first visualized by Two Voices. Originally, it was based on Hoth, from Star Wars, but was made to be much craggier and clear. During this age in the planet's life, there exists only the Norphae supercontinent, surrounded by a vast frozen ocean.



YOUNG
SPECTRE

Although Spectre is roughly ten thousand years old, he appears much like an adolescent. He was first designed by Fizzle Soda and fleshed out more fully by Alumx. The inspiration for his outfit comes from sherpa-lined aviation jackets. Sometimes he wears a cape over it.

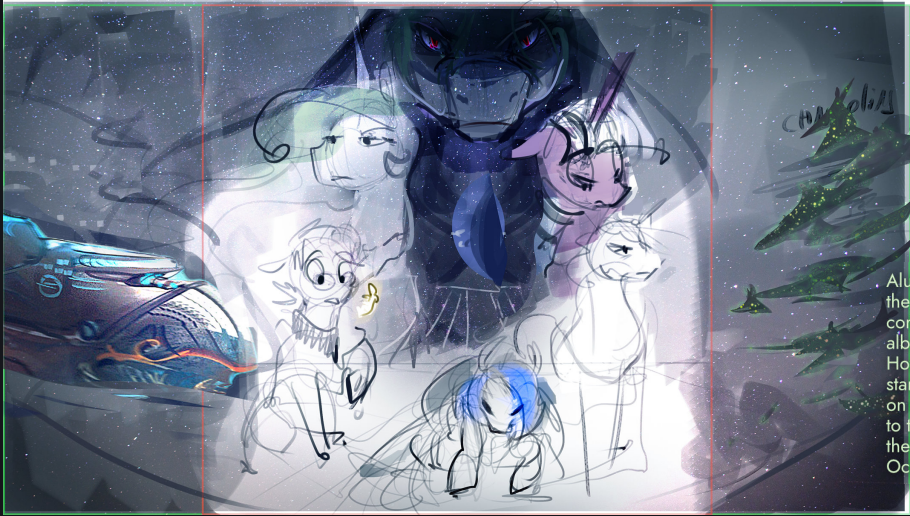
HomieRicky originally modeled the Starship Ponyville by hand, using my concept my sketches as a point of reference. Alumx used these models to get a dynamic perspective on what our ideas for the ship were. There were anywhere between 5-10 iterations of the exterior design.



When the ship docks, it must either find a vastly open space to do so, or circle an operation point at a low orbit. Although the former would sound more resource efficient, the Starship Ponyville runs on a renewable source of fuel created by the AMCD technology built into the core. Conversely, it's much more difficult to find any place large enough to hold the ship, making the latter option of docking much more uniform.

This would make the CX38 asteroid massive by comparison. One of the reasons it was deemed a point of interest was due to its constant changing course, despite no visible forces acting on it. The asteroid is piloted from the room that Satyrn and Vylet discovered in the caves.

The ship was built to hold up to ten thousand occupants. Because of this, even Satyrn's room is roughly 3.3m x 3.3m in size, despite her having the rank of commander. The ship itself is many times the size of the USS Enterprise-D.

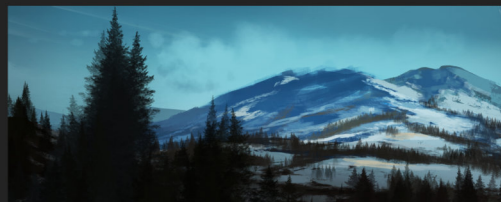
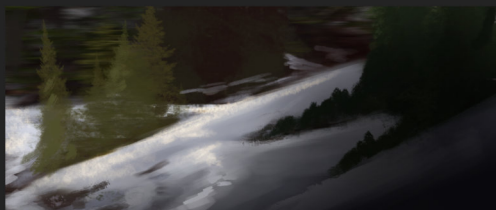
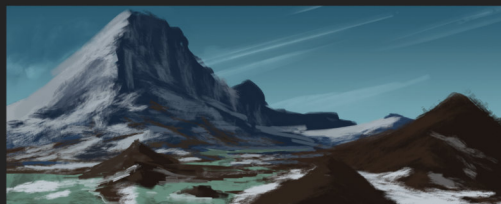
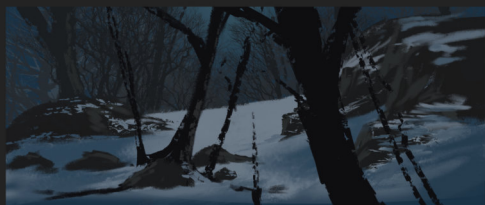
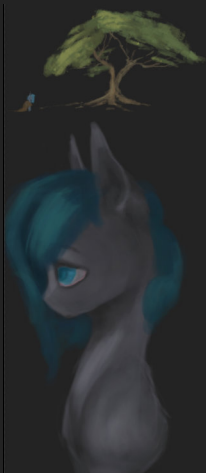


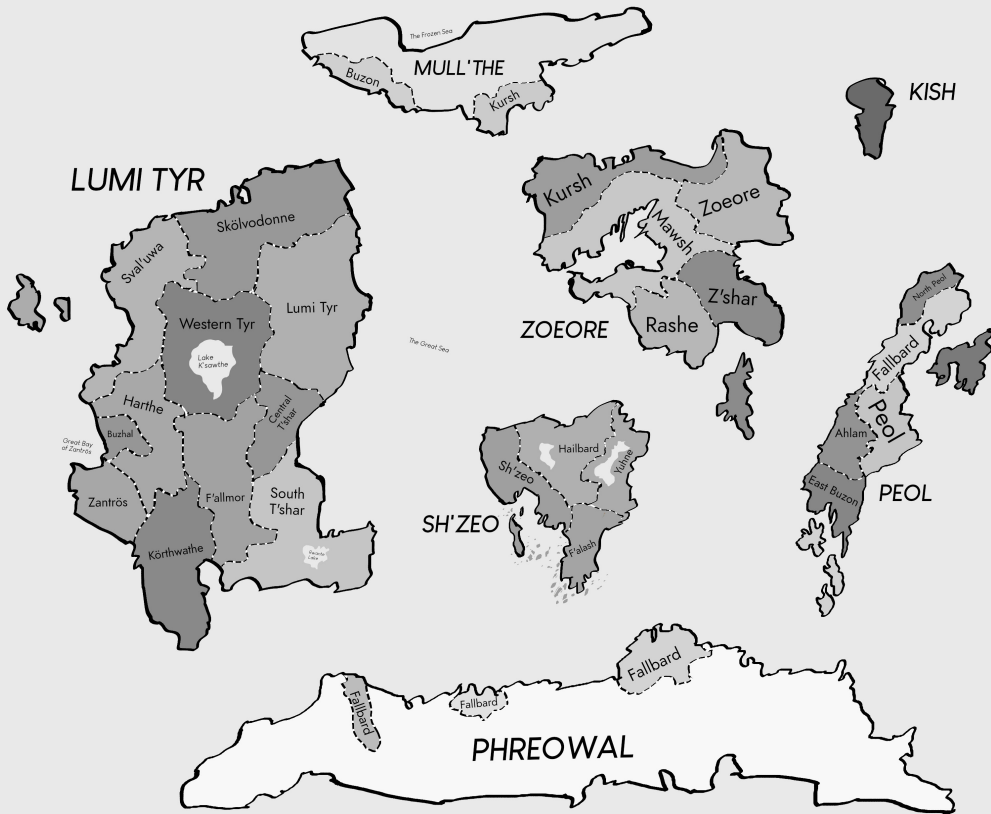
Alumx had created the original draft and composition of the album illustration. However, school had started to weigh down on him, causing him to take a leave from the project around October of 2018.



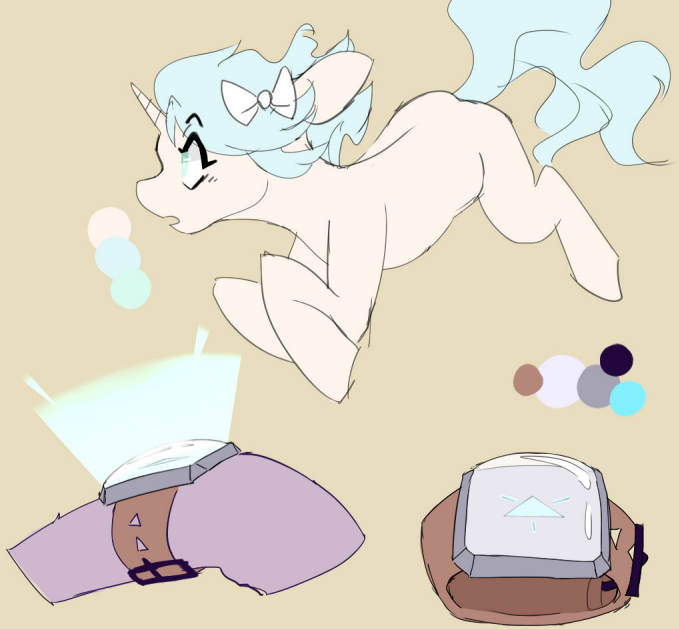
The full album artwork was picked up and illustrated by Stereo Flier. The piece features in order from top to bottom, left to right:

Spectre, Celestia, Twilight, Vylet & Rayna, Satyrn, and Sylver.





Map of Tyr (Created by Vylet & Alumx)



Vylet, you have one new email

Read it

Playboy, new issue.
How to get mares-

Rain check on
that Rayna

We are currently
without weather

Just don't read
the email

I didn't know you were subscribed
to this magazine

Rayna be quiet



SYLVER





New Equestria



Statera (under Equestrian control)



Tyr



Xiao

All of the flags were designed by me and Fizzle Soda.



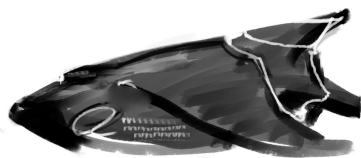
Fizzle Soda and GalaxySquid designed a series of outfits for the crew members of the Starship Ponyville to wear.

They are equipped with AMCD crystals that create a magic field around the user, providing them with oxygen and defending them against the elements of space.



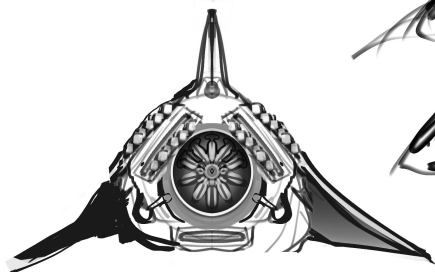
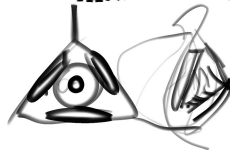
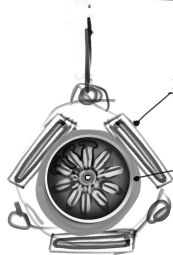


Starship Ponyville 327000 - Concept art



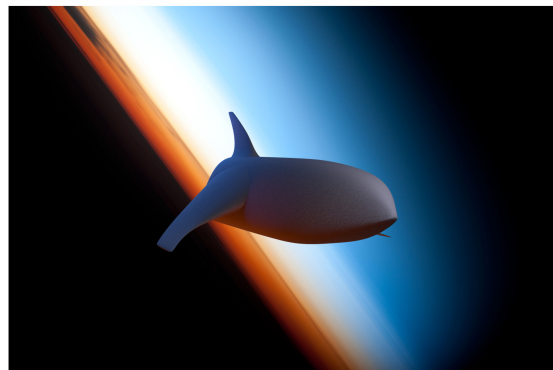
Linear Aerospike engines

Light speed engine



Starship Ponyville 327000 - design v1.0

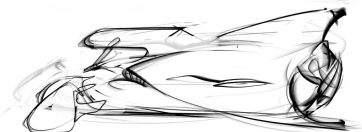
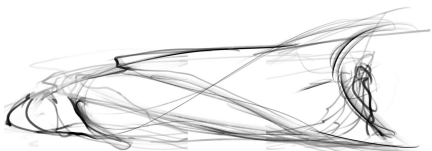
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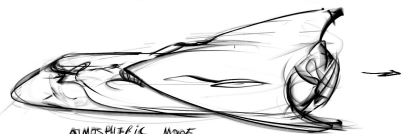
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Starship Ponyville 327000 - Concept art

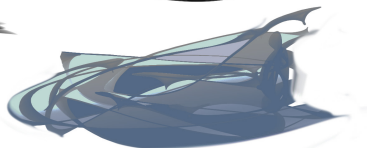
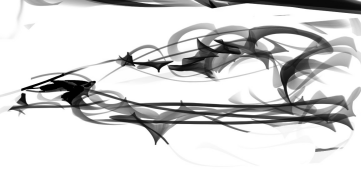
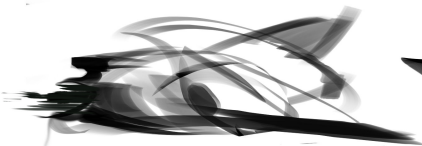
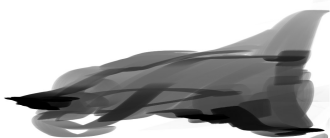
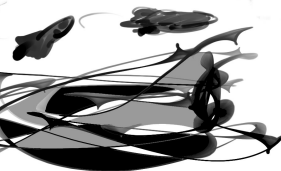
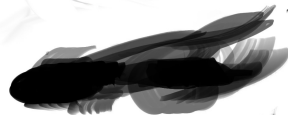
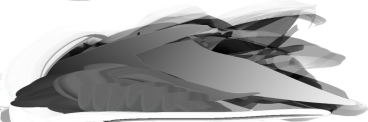
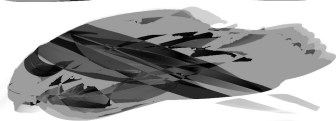
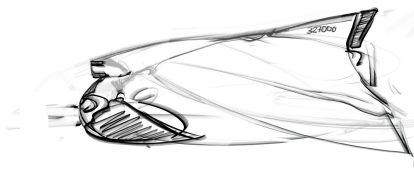
Designs brainstorm



SPACE MODE

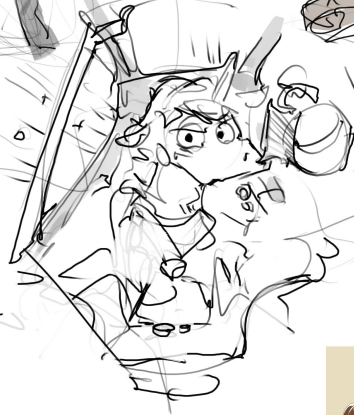


ATMOSPHERIC MODE





How do I get into a... in a... (what's the...)? There, a... (what's...)?



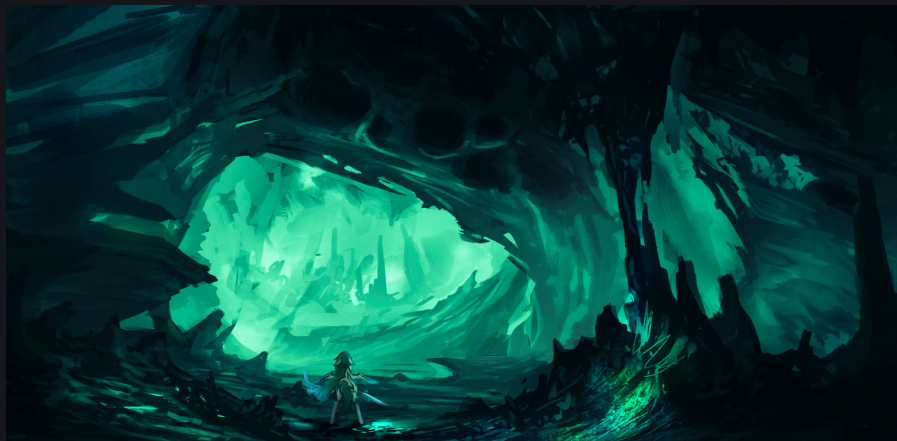
I'd like to offer a special thanks to everyone who made this album possible. I couldn't have done this without an amazing team of musicians, artists, writers, and friends bringing this world to life with me.

The lifeblood and inspiration in this project undoubtedly came from my team of artists who spent so much time listening to me ramble about this world in my head and trying to paint a picture of it.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my friend Israel, who many of you know as Sylver. He's been my rock and closest friend for over a decade. This album is our brain child. We have been writing the Starship Ponyville story for nearly 7 years now.

The final pages of this booklet are small biographies by many (however not all) of the amazing concept artists and illustrators I worked with on the Homeward project.

Please take the time to look them up on Twitter, DeviantArt, FurAffinity, etc.



Amaryllis (Norway)

Heyo, my name's Alexis, probably more known as Amaryllis. I produce music and I also make art. I like to paint and draw pictures of landscapes, preferably the kind that has sharp rocks and mountains in them. I did some of those kind of landscapes for this project, so if you see those, it's probably made by me, maybe.

—

Hei hei, eg heiter Alexis, truleg nok betre kjent som Amaryllis. Eg lager musikk og promotjonell kunst/concept art. Kunsten eg lager involverer for det meste landskap, helst den typen som har skarpe steinar og fjell i seg. Eg har laga eit par av dei til dette prosjektet, så om du ser dei, er dei sannsynlegvis laga av meg, kanskje.

https://twitter.com/Amaryllis_no

<https://fanlink.to/Amaryllis>



Chibadeer (Poland)

Howdy! My name is Julia, but some of my friends often call me Chiba, because of my nickname (ChibaDeer). I am a self-taught digital artist. I'm from Ukraine, but I speak in Russian because I lived in city that was near Russia. Sometime in early 2014, my dad gave me a graphics tablet and then my artist adventure began. At about the same time I had known about MLP and I fell in love with the show. For two and a half years, I had drawn for myself, just for fun, but in the middle of 2016 I met a wonderful girl who motivated me to study more and work harder. I have been doing my best ever since! (Thank you, Tanyesha!) In 2017 I started to get a little tired of drawing ponies, so I tried to draw humans as well. Nowadays, I usually create fan art of anime, games and etc.

In early November Namii wrote me on Twitter that Vylet wanted to order a commission and they wanted me to work on album on their project. That day, I didn't know what to say. I was so happy about it, and I was a little scared to write him, haha :“D But work on this project was super fun! I really hope that you enjoy this album, we worked so hard on it!

—

Привет-привет! Меня зовут Юлия, но чаще всего зовут меня Чибба, из-за моего ника (ChibaDeer) и мне 17 лет, хех. Я художник-самоучка, что часто рисует в диджитале. Я из Украины, но говорю на русском, так как родилась в городе близко к России, хех. Где-то в начала 2014 года, папа подарил мне графический планшет, и тогда моё художественное приключение началось, примерно в то же время, я узнала о сериале MLP и влюбилась в него. Два с половиной года я рисовала просто для себя, для удовольствия, но где-то в середине 2016 года я познакомилась с прекрасной девушкой, что сподвигла меня учиться многому в рисовании и трудиться упорнее и вот уже два с половиной года я стараюсь стать лучше! (Спасибо тебе, Taneysha!!!) В 2017 рисовать поней мне поднадоело, и я перешла на людей, теперь я рисую фанарты к аниме, играм и так далее.

В начале ноября мне в твиттере написала Namii о том, что Vylet хотел бы заказать у меня коммиску и предложить работать вместе над альбомом в его проекте. В тот день у меня не было слов, я была так рада это слышать и даже сперва пугалась писать, хаха :“D Но с ними очень весело сотрудничать!!! Очень надеюсь вам альбом понравится, мы так над ним старались!

https://twitter.com/Chiba_Deer



Stereo Flier ^(Canada)

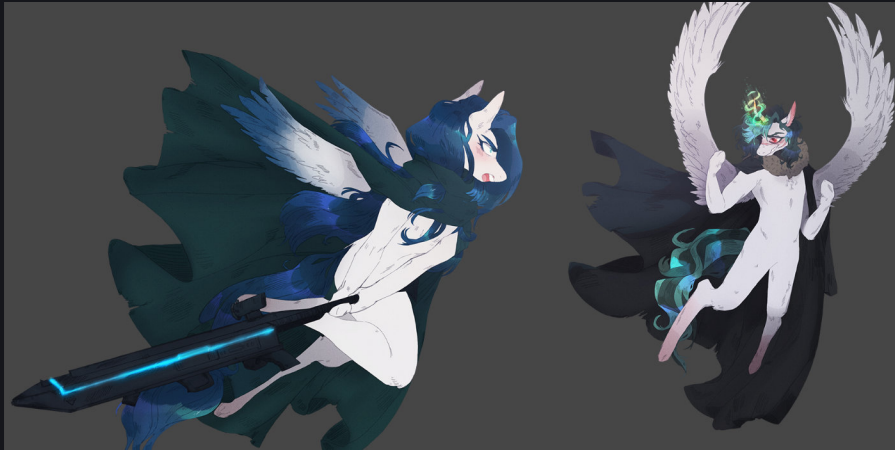
Hey, I'm Stereoflier, a visual artist based in Canada! Five or so years ago I got into the pony fandom, which subsequently got me back into drawing and painting, which I'd fallen out of since childhood. Although I've largely moved towards other subjects for artwork, I can attribute the fandom for reigniting my passion, and it was great fun being able to contribute artwork for this concept album! Interpreting the characters and creating illustrations and the cover artwork was both a challenging and rewarding experience! It was a pleasure to work with Vylet in bringing this project to completion.

(Editor's note, from Vylet: Fun fact, I've continually been calling her "Sterfler" by habit for the past three years. I eventually found out that was just a shortened version of "Stereo Flier" and I still haven't grown out of it. Real talk though, Stereo was one of the artists who saved my ass on this project when things started to go south. I couldn't be more grateful to know her.)

<https://twitter.com/stfrlr>

<http://uzon.tumblr.com/>

<https://www.sheyennesmith.com/>



milk ^(Hell)

milk is a gay and vegan millennial from the Mojave Wasteland. She makes comics about her OCs smooching when she's not reading Twilight or drawing Horse Friends for horse friends. milk is also an avid (but bad) video gamer that loves one (1) game per year. She's also deep in the k-pop hole, and is deeply in love with all of BTS. She thanks Vylet every day for bringing her back to the wholesome tunes of Horse Friends and Horse Friends Incorporated."

(Editor's note, from Vylet: milk was the other artist who saved my ass on the project. I love her to absolute bits, but I still can't shake the feeling that I should be taunting her for liking BTS. Ily <3 Also she doesn't actually live in hell, but rather Arizona.)

<https://honey-jams.com/>

https://twitter.com/got_honeyjams



Fizzle Soda (France)

Hi! I'm Fizzle Soda (Fizz for short, he/him), a digital artist from the south of France. I've been drawing since i was around 5 (mostly Pokemon at that time), then around my 13th birthday I discovered MLP and started making fanart and joining the community, without even knowing it at first! Since then, I've been looking to illustrate projects and even work as a graphic designer.

As I've recently turned 18 (and recently got involved in the furry community), I've been working even more with artists such as Vylet, Silva Hound and Zizkil to create album covers and single illustrations, which I absolutely love doing! As for my participation in Starship Ponyville, I've worked on the Harbour illustration. It was a real challenge for me, in terms of background, as I prefer drawing characters, but it's still interesting to learn new things about perspective, volumes and such. I'm really into creating atmospheres and emotions, and MLP characters can really help with that.

Salut! Je m'appelle Fizzle Soda (ou Fizz, il/lui), un artiste digital du sud de la France. Je dessine depuis l'âge de 5 ans à peu près (surtout des Pokemon à cette époque), puis vers 13 ans j'ai découvert MLP, commencé à faire des fanarts, et même rejoindre la communauté sans le savoir! Depuis, je cherche à illustrer des projets et si possible travailler en tant que designer graphique.

J'ai récemment atteint mes 18 ans (et me suis investi dans la communauté furry), et depuis je travaille de plus en plus avec des artistes comme Vylet, Silva Hound et Zizkil pour créer des pochettes d'album et des illustrations de titres, que j'adore absolument faire! Pour ce qui est de ma participation dans Starship Ponyville, j'ai travaillé sur l'illustration d'Harbour. C'était un vrai challenge pour moi, en terme d'arrière-plan, car je préfère dessiner des personnages, mais c'est toujours intéressant d'apprendre de nouvelles choses sur la perspective, les volumes, etc. Ce que je préfère, c'est créer des atmosphères, des émotions, et les personnages d'MLP peuvent souvent aider à cela.

<https://twitter.com/fizzlesoda2000>

<https://www.deviantart.com/firefizz4444>

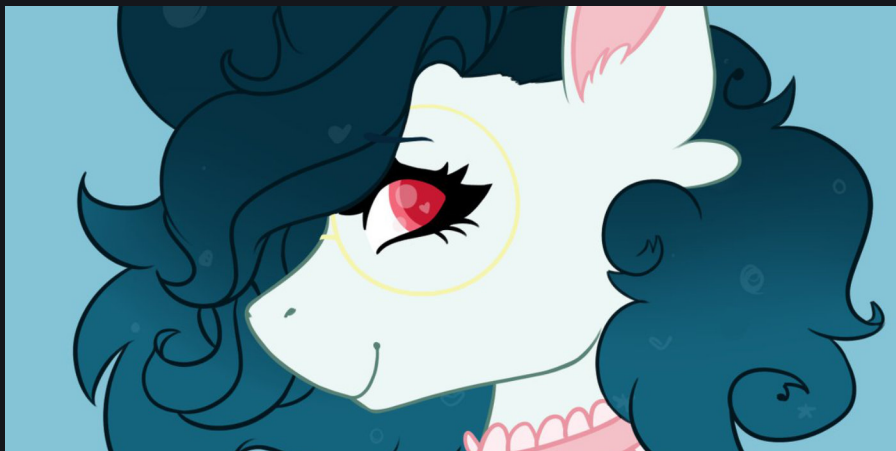


GalaxySquid (New York)

Heya, I'm galaxysquid. I'm a 19 year old artist and a music enthusiast from NY. I also do some vocals from time to time. I've been drawing and doing art since I was very young but got into it more seriously around the age of 12. I'm currently working on shaping my style and improving my skills. I helped with the character design and world building aspect of this album!

I love getting to work on projects like this. I was able to work with an amazing artist, Fizzle Soda, on some outfit design for the characters. We discussed the certain color palettes and clothing that would work best for different characters and tested them out, communicating on what we thought would fit best. A lot of it was based off of occupation as well as ranking of characters in the story. It was really nice working with him, he's an amazing artist and I look up to him as an artist as well.

<https://twitter.com/galaxysquiddo>



Namii (Alabama)

Howdy friends. They call me Namii, you should too! I am more widely known for my singing, but I also voice act and draw as well! I am truly blessed that I got to be so involved in this project. I did some character design and lots and LOTS of singing for this incredible album. It's always a pleasure and a privilege to work with Vylet.

(Editor's note, from Vylet: She has a crush on Spectre.)

<https://twitter.com/NamiiArts>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/cadence12111>





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