

CH1

Princess Twilight Sparkle and her expedition, under formal request from High Princesses Celestia and Luna, had been stationed in the Western Everfree forest for many weeks. They had been uncovering the secrets of what was a door predating even the Discordian Era. The door was initially discovered by a group of school fillies skipping class who had wandered too close to a ward. The ward had exploded, leaving two of the four fillies injured and one in critical condition. If they had not been terribly injured, perhaps the tale would have been written off as over-active imaginations, and another unlucky soul wandering too far into the dark forest would have been injured, or worse. While it was a regrettable situation, Princess Twilight was glad for it, if only to prevent further injury... and perhaps she was also a *tad* interested to see what was inside of the door. Despite being nearly as tall as Princess Luna had been once and with the maturity to show for it, Twilight never did out-grow her inquisitive and often neurotic nature.

Due to the nature of anything Discord, and how long his reign had lasted until Celestia and Luna had defeated him, it was very rare to see any treasures from before his takeover remaining, let alone full blown structures. Even after Discord's reformation thanks to Fluttershy a decade prior to the door's discovery, he spoke very little of the world before he came into control. So, it was up to Twilight and her team to unlock the mysteries of the past.

After weeks and weeks, the complex ward had finally fallen, but Twilight had ordered nopony enter until she could personally clear the halls of traps. While Twilight was already the finest mage known to pony kind from Equestria's Eastern seas to the sparse civilizations dotting the Western Frontier, she was also an alicorn. Alicorns were not only blessed with the natural gifts of all three pony races and innately magically adept, but they were also considerably hardy and able to dispel their physical forms to evade true death. To put it simply, Twilight could handle what her team of mortal ponies could not.

So it was with great curiosity that Twilight Sparkle, Princess of Equestria and Alicorn of Magic, strode into the unknown.

There were no traps, surprisingly. Rather, there were ancient carvings depicting the Thestral Kingdom, of which little was known. Twilight raised her brows in surprise; Thestrals were one of the rarer pony races, not even considered one of the 'big three' due to their sheer rarity by common ponies' standards (which she personally always found incredibly racist and exclusory).

Thestrals were an off-shoot of pony, technically considered a subclass set of species. Most commonly, Thestral Pegasi were seen in the presence of High Princess Luna, but they were only one side of a three-sided equation. Thestrals embodied all three pony races, sharing traits of Earth ponies, Pegasus ponies and Unicorn ponies. However, only Thestral pegasi were seen in any significant number since the fall of Discord. Earth Thestrals were rare, most commonly seen in Thestral neighborhoods in larger cities, such as Trottingham, Vanhoover and Seaddle. Thestral unicorns were even rarer, only perhaps 100 or 200 left among the 5,000-ish Thestrals remaining in

Equestria. Despite efforts by Luna after her return to restore the equality of Thestrals among the other pony races, they were largely discriminated against for their slitted eyes, thick coats, fangs and in the case of Thestral pegasi, membranous bat wings.

Thestrals were commonly seen in tight-knit communities, and never spoke of any history so significant that it'd be seen in pre-Discordian ruins. Even their folklore only went back as far as Discord's reign, and mainly described how Princess Luna 'delivered them' from a terrible, nondescript fate. Thus, Twilight's current fascination.

She would have stayed to read the murals' Old Equish scribing, if she had not caught a glimmer in the corner of her eye. A magical glimmer. Twilight cautiously walked deeper into the ruins, nothing but the droning sound of air entering this place after undoubtedly centuries of being hidden, her own heartbeat, and the sound of her hooves' clipping and clopping echoing through the long corridor. More murals tugged at her attention, but the glimmer could not be ignored. If there was a ward or a rune that could cause harm, she wanted to examine it and dispel it.

It took but a few minutes of cautious approach and constant arcane surveillance before Twilight entered a much larger chamber. It was full of opened sarcophagi, though they seemed to be more like upright stone coffins without coverings, not meant to be burial chambers. They were indeed meant to hold ponies, but they were empty. In the center, the magical glimmer intensified; a single sarcophagus surrounded by two larger ones. Twilight approached slowly, but there were no wards... Only a single point of magic that poured- absolutely *radiated* pure, ancient magic. The spell upon a simple scry was beyond imagining, so complex that Twilight's mind and heart raced with wonder.

Twilight caught sight of something that gave pause to even her own magical discovery. Before she could look within the sarcophagus in the center, she circled around to stare at the skeleton that'd caught her eye. It was suspended in some sort of invisible field, an incomplete form of the spell that radiated from behind her. She dared not disturb the remains, and limited herself to visual inspection only. What truly alarmed her was not that it was an ancient deceased pony, but rather...

It was no regular pony skeleton.

Its skull was elegant, refined and bore a long, spiraled horn about the length of her own, perhaps longer. It certainly was once a female specimen. *She*, Twilight chided herself. What alarmed her was the presence of wing bones. However, they were not pegasus wings. The bone structure was that of a bat's wings, the digits intact with one another as though the bones had simply been a biology classroom's skeleton model. It was clear as day; this had been a Thestral alicorn... But what killed her? The other sarcophagus held a similarly decomposed occupant, though the structure of the bones and skull indicated he was a stallion. A stallion alicorn! No modern alicorns had been biologically stallions; only mares had ascended thus far, to the degree that Twilight assumed only females could ascend. In hindsight, this was a bit sexist of her.

After she finished gawking, Twilight's eyes laid upon a jaw-dropping sight. Within the center sarcophagus, the suspension field was a bright coral pink, pulsing and thumping with some invisible heartbeat, as though the spell itself was alive.

Within that magical field was a Thestral alicorn mare, no older than perhaps 20 or 21 years of age if Twilight's stunned mind had to hazard an educated guess. Twilight gasped as she scried the occupant, receiving no resistance from the barrier. The mare was *alive*. Without a second thought, Twilight gently brushed the complex spell with a more complex scry, trying to discern the spell's purpose.

After a long while of prying at the spell's unfamiliar runic formulas, Twilight could hazard a guess... This suspension field was keeping the mare in stasis, suspending her biological and magical processes entirely while keeping everything that she was alive. Judging by the magical decay, the spell had been holding for thousands of years, and would perhaps hold for another thousand or three more.

Twilight closed her eyes in thought. Typically a good scientist wouldn't destroy such a powerful spell before she could study it, nor understand the consequences of doing such a thing.

Typically, however, a good pony wouldn't leave a perfectly healthy young mare locked in stasis any longer than she needed to be... Debating, Twilight opened her eyes and circled around to the front, where a slightly eroded placard was carved messily into the stone. She couldn't help but try to read the ancient carvings, a small frown on her face as she read.

To anypony whom might wander into these preservation halls, bear witness to our daughter, and spare her life if thou hast any mercy 'i thy heart. Spare her so that she may once again gaze upon the beauty of an unsullied land and live fully 'i a world without the corrupting one's influence.

In Caelo Speramus.

Twilight was touched, and could only imagine that the elder alicorns had been this one's parents. Though there seemed to be more scribbles, Twilight couldn't make them out. Instead, she furrowed her brows in determination.

Her horn lit, and the unweaving of the spell began...

Twilight rushed out of the chamber as quickly as she could without disturbing the ancient halls any further. Her team, who'd been waiting anxiously, called out to her as she flew out of the corridor.

"All wards and traps have been dispelled- actually, there weren't any! Begin your work without me, I... I have to return to Canterlot immediately. Rusty Brush is in charge! Bye!"

And with that, Twilight teleported in a puff of magic, leaving an extremely confused and stunned expeditionary team in her wake.

When the ponies were organized and finally entered the catacombs, they would find the suspended skeletons, many ancient urns and treasures, stories and legends from a time long forgotten. Documentation would begin, articles would be written, and no pony would know of the slumbering alicorn that had once occupied the central sarcophagus.



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