

The Epic Quest of the Brave Warriors in Search of the  
Mystic Treasure of the Forgotten City in the Distant Realm  
of the Lost Lands of the Fearsome Dragon King of Death

-Or-

Some Ponies Play D&D

By Lucre



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# Some Ponies Play D&D

*Grimstar the Black, mighty wizard of the southern deserts, squinted into the hazy distance of the enchanted forest. He was tall and thin, and the dark indigo robes he wore were covered with eldritch symbols. Sweat beaded on the jet black skin of his forehead as his staff pulsed with mystic energies, scanning the landscape for danger. After the mysterious disappearance of their prodigal companion, he was determined to defend his party. They were five strong, now: himself, the elvish rogue, the halfling cleric, the bard, and the barbarian, who was now approaching the wizard with the carcass of a stag slung over his shoulder.*

*“Ho, Grimstar!” he said, “There is much sport in these woods!” He was a mountain unto himself, with rippling muscles, broad shoulders, and a dark, penetrating gaze. His enormous broadsword clinked against his gleaming silver mail as he hefted the stag.*

*“Aye, that there is,” the wizard replied, “and much danger as well. I fear for the safety of our feminine companions.”*

*“What is there to be a-feared?” said the barbarian, depositing his game on the forest floor with a muscular shrug, “They are mighty heroes, all. Though, perhaps,” he said with a jocular grin, “not as mighty as myself!”*

*“Indeed, few are as strong as the celebrated Bloodcrusher Killthrust.” the wizard said, “But I have much doubt of our ability to survive the Catacombs of the Damned without the aid of a sixth stout soul.”*

*“Then perchance we are in luck!” said Killthrust, “For I think I espy a dwarf!”*

*“As do I.” said Grimstar, “Mayhap he will join our quest. Greetings, friend!” he addressed the dwarf, who seemed lost in the woods. “We are in need of a brave warrior such as yourself. Would you join in our quest to find the lair of the Dragon King?”*

*There was an awkward pause. “Uh,” said the dwarf, “Okay, what do I do now?”*

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Twilight sighed. "Come on, Applejack, we've been over this."

"Yeah, like, a billion times!" said Rainbow Dash, rolling her eyes.

"I jus' don't get this crazy game, is all." said Applejack, defensively.

"It's just like playing pretend," said Twilight, patiently, "Spike and I used to play it all the time back in Canterlot." She had been trying to get Applejack involved for weeks, but had only recently convinced her to give it a go.

All of Twilight's friends were gathered around an old table in a neglected corner of the Library's basement. Dice, reference books, and miniatures were scattered over an intricately drawn map covering most of the table's surface. Applejack sat between Twilight and Dash as they went over the rules one more time. Across from them, Rarity added a few more touches to her character sketch, while Fluttershy tried to avoid the cloud of snack detritus coming from Pinkie Pie's direction. Spike sat at the head of the table, a stack of DM's guides on his chair just barely bringing him up to the others' eye levels.

"Please, Applejack, could you just try to play along?" he said, poking his head above the DM screen, "Ever since Derpy stopped showing up a few weeks ago we've been short a player for my campaign."

"I'm tryin', I swear," she said, "but I don't really see the point, I guess."

"The point is FUN, Silly McSillerson!" said Pinkie Pie, spraying orange cheesy dust over the table. "You can fight monsters, and loot treasure, and explore dungeons, and pretend to be crazy made-up creatures like elves and dwarves and halflings and humans!"

"What's a human?" asked Applejack, blinking in the face of the crumby assault.

"It's like a little pink monkey," said Pinkie, "Only they don't have tails and they're not as hairy and they don't live in trees and..."

"...and sometimes they aren't pink." added Twilight.

"...and sometimes they aren't pink!" finished Pinkie with an excited bounce.

“Alright,” said Applejack, gamely, “then what’s a halfling?”

“The same thing,” said Twilight, referring to her player’s guide, “but smaller and less, uh, not-hairy.”

“Uh huh, so what’s a dwarf?”

“It’s... look, never mind.” said Twilight, “Spike put a lot of work into setting up this game, so just try to keep up, okay?”

“Honestly,” piped up Rarity, “it really is a *lot* of fun, Applejack.”

“Now, I can see Spike and Twilight gettin’ into this nerdy stuff.” said Applejack, “And Pinkie Pie, and Fluttershy, and maybe even Dash. But what in the heck do you see in all this, Rarity?”

“Oh, I felt the same way as you at first, darling.” she said, “But it can become rather addictive. Especially when Spike showed me all of the *adorable* little figures you can decorate!”

“And that, Fillies and Gentlecolts, is the story of how all my miniatures ended up in pretty pink sun dresses.” said Spike with a scowl, holding up a violently pink orc.

“Spike, dear, that’s clearly an evening gown. It’s much more formal, you see, and...”

“Look, can we get back to game?” interrupted Dash, “I’ve hardly even started kicking tail!”

---

*Grimstar and Killthrust led their new companion to their camp.*

*“Allow me to introduce our fellows.” said Grimstar, “Alas, where are my manners? I have not asked your name! What are you called, may I ask?”*

*“Um, my name is...” the dwarf said haltingly, “Uh, Dwarfgy... Dwarfgy... son. The dwarf.”*

*“Yes, well, a very... traditional name, I’m certain.” said the wizard, diplomatically. “You have already met our barbarian, of course. A terrible braggart he is, but there are no better to have beside you in the fray of battle.”*

*"I speak only the modest truth," said Killthrust, "If it seems as bragging, you have but your own jealousy to blame."*

*"The great beauty is Darlynn Evansong, the Fair." Grimstar continued.*

*"Charmed." said the elf with an elegant bow, her jewelry jingling against her armor, "I look forward to joining my bow to your axe."*

*"Our healer," Grimstar said, moving on, "Gracelove Silentall, a cleric of the order of the Silver Star."*

*"So, um, very pleased to meet you, ah, Dwarfy." The halfling said with a demure curtsy. She wore the simple gray robes of her order and clutched a set of prayer beads.*

*"And, last but not least," said Grimstar, "Zinnadiana Lyreplucker the twenty-seventh, our spoony bard."*

---

*"Okay, Spike," said Applejack, "You have to tell me what a..."*

*"It's-whatever-Pinkie-Pie-wants-it-to-be-I'm-not-having-this-conversation-again!"*

---

*The band of heroes advanced to the edge of the forest, entering the foothills of the Black Mountains of Elldör. Zinnadiana played a merry tune on her lute as they walked, the bells on her jerkin jingling to the beat.*

*"...and NE-ver a MIGH-ti-er par-ty there WAS! Oh, NE-ver a..."*

*"Be still your capering, bard," said Killthrust, "lest your head meet the flat of my broadsword!"*

*"Yeah, Pi... I mean, Zinnadiana," said Dwarfy, "I don't think a song is necessary right now. Uh, forsooth!"*

*"Cease your bickering, fellows!" said Grimstar, halting their progress, "My staff senses danger!"*

*Ahead of them, just as the forest cleared, lie a pack of Dire Wolves, snapping at each other over the remaining bones of a recent kill. They had*

*not yet noticed the heroes, and Grimstar took the opportunity to discuss their strategy.*

*“A spell of petrification would allow us to pass unharmed.” he said.*

*“And leave us open to attack, should it fail.” said Darlynn, “A flurry of my arrows will make short work of them.”*

*“Nay,” said Zinnadiana, “I shall play them to sleep with my magic flute!”*

*“Waste not your spells and arrows,” said Killthrust, “I will take them single-handedly!”*

*“I want to make friends with them.” said Gracelove.*

---

The entire table groaned, collectively.

“Not this again.” said Spike, his head in his hands.

“What?” said Applejack, “What’s wrong with that?”

“Oh, you know Fluttershy,” said Pinkie, cracking open another bottle of sarsaparilla, “she just loves the fuzzy critters!”

“Fluttershy, you can’t tame any more monsters.” said Twilight, “You already have two beholders, a mind-flayer, a kobald...”

“...three owlbeats, half a dozen zombies...” continued Dash.

“...and a gelatinous cube!” Rarity finished. “And I’m sorry, Fluttershy, but you aren’t spending any more of *our* gold pieces on cube food!”

“But you can’t just let Mr. Jiggly starve!” said Fluttershy, aghast. Her eyes welled up with tears.

---

*The party continued their journey, their new furry companions in tow. Grimstar led them on, forging a path through the twisting ravines and rocky*

outcrops. The way was difficult, and he paused to consult an ancient scroll for guidance.

*"The scroll of prophecy speaks of a tunnel which will allow us passage through these mountains," he said. "Though it is doubtlessly crawling with peril, it may save us a day's worth of climbing. If only the Gods would make their intentions clear, that we may decide on the best way forward..."*

Suddenly, as if in answer to Grimstar's wish, the sky was rent asunder and a fearsome archangel descended, wings blazing with holy light and bearing a flaming sword.

*"That was convenient," said Dwarfy. "Verily!"*

*"Lo, great heroes of the land!" the angel spake in a booming voice, "Your tarrying is most displeasing to the Gods! I bringith forth their instructions, that you may follow them and move on already!"*

Killthrust's eyes lit up at the sight of the magnificent angel. *"Finally, a challenge worthy of the Bloodcrusher!" he said, unsheathing his broadsword, "Have at thee, wingéd monster, I fear you not!"*

*"What foolishness is this?" said the archangel, its golden eyes narrowing.*

*"This is most unwise, Killthrust," said Darlynn as she attempted to hold back her comrade.*

*"Indeed," said Grimstar, aiding her efforts, "You must not antagonize an emissary of the Gods!"*

*"Oh, you doubt my strength?" said Killthrust, breaking free of their hold, "Taste my steel, foul creature! I will take thy wings as my own!" He charged forward with a terrible battle cry, his sword tracing a powerful arc towards the angel. A burst of holy light deflected the attack, however, and the angel turned its wrath on the stricken barbarian.*

*"You dare assault me?" the angel said in its fury, "I, who have guided your quest from the very beginning? If this is how you choose to use your strength, barbarian, perhaps you would do well to be free of it!" With this, a bolt of magical lightning struck the fallen warrior.*

*"Argh, I am cursed!" he said, "What be the heck?"*



---

“What the heck, Spike?” said Dash, “You can’t just curse me!”

“Actually, he can.” said Twilight, checking the rulebook, “He’s the Dungeon Master, so technically, he can do anything he wants.”

“Darn right I can!” said Spike, leaning over his DM screen at Dash, “I’m sick of you screwing up all of my encounters just because you had a few lucky rolls when we were making characters!”

“That wasn’t luck, I’m just better at this than you are.” The pegasus said with a smug grin.

“They were dice rolls!” said Spike, jumping with anger, “That’s the definition of luck!”

“Aren’t I supposed to get a saving throw?” she said, ignoring him and grabbing Twilight’s guide.

“You were stunned, you don’t get a saving throw!” Spike retorted.

“I have the Talisman of Mystic Barrier,” she said, standing up, “It protects against curses!”

“It’s a holy curse, it doesn’t work!” he said, jumping onto the table and marching up to Dash until they were inches apart.

“Fluttershy can heal me!” she said, leaning into his glare.

“Fluttershy thinks you’re a jerk!” he shouted with a furious hop.

“What? She does not!” she turned to the other pegasus, who was currently hiding with her head under the table. “You don’t think I’m a jerk, right Fluttershy?”

“I, um, well...”

“Don’t answer that, Fluttershy!” Spike said, turning and marching back to his place at the head of the table. “That’s it, no more Mr. Nice Dungeon Master!” he sat down and resumed narrating, “*You enter the tunnel, and the entrance snaps shut behind you, leaving you trapped...*”

---

*The ground shook under the parties' feet. They squinted into the gloom of the tunnel, but could not make out the source of the massive footsteps. A luminescent sphere rose from Grimstar's fingertips, casting a pale light on their surroundings.*

*"By the Gods..." he said as the light fell on their aggressor, "It's a Stone Ogre!"*

*The massive bulk of the ogre filled the tunnel, blocking any route of escape. Its skin was as hard and grey as the tunnel walls around it and its horrible maw was filled with sharp, jagged teeth. It carried the trunk of a fallen oak as a club, and wore a purple muumuu. It let out a mighty roar, and hefted its club to attack.*

---

"Whoa, Spike." said Twilight, "Don't you think that's a little above our level?"

"Yeah, that sounds a little... serious." agreed Applejack.

"I don't care!" he said, furiously, "I spend hours working on this campaign, and all of you just argue and mess it up! You kept pushing me and pushing me, and now you're gonna have to fight an ogre!"

"What-do-we-do?! What-do-we-do?!" panicked Pinkie, "I don't know any songs that work on ogres!"

"I have some armor with bonuses against ogres," said Rarity, "...or I would, if some dragon would let me carry more than three sets of armor at a time!"

"Wah, wah, baby wants a Bag of Holding!" said Spike, unmoved, "Better do something quick, it's getting closer."

"Fluttershy, sic your Dire Wolves on 'im!" said Dash.

"I can't, they might get hurt!" she replied from under the table.

"Come on, we can do this if we work together!" rallied Twilight.

Applejack cleared her throat. "Hey guys? What does it mean when the red one says 'twenty'?"

The table went quiet. Spike stared at the d20 in front of Applejack. He coughed.

---

*The massive body of the beast lie still on the tunnel floor. Darlynn checked it for treasure while Gracelove worked at healing the party's injuries. The others gathered to congratulate the shocked dwarf, his bloodied axe still clutched in his hands.*

*"A spectacular battle, my lad!" said Killthrust, holding aloft the ogre's head, "You've earned yourself quite the trophy!"*

*"Yeah, that was kinda cool." said Dwarfy, "Uh, zounds!"*

*"I'll write a new song about it!" said Zinnadiana, "The saga, no, the EPIC saga of Dwarfy Dwarferson!"*

*"Well done." said Grimstar, nodding sagely, "I knew you would become a valuable member of our band."*

*"Shucks, it wasn't any..." he stopped, "Holy pony-feathers, what time is it?"*

---

Twilight blinked at the clock. "Wow, you're right, it's after midnight already! We'd better call it a night."

"But..." said Spike, still staring at the d20, "But we didn't even get to the Catacombs of the Damned!" He looked up. Everyone was already getting up to leave.

"Sorry, Spike." said Twilight, patting him on the head on her way past. "Maybe next time." She gathered her books and headed for the door leading upstairs, the others following her.

"Good game, everypony!" said Fluttershy.

"It was, wasn't it?" Applejack said with a grin.

"I told you you'd get hooked!" Rarity said, putting a hoof around Applejack's shoulder.

"I'm TOTALLY serious about that song, by the way!" Pinkie Pie bounced after them.

Spike looked around, distraught, "You can't... I mean... I didn't..." he pulled himself together and shouted after Dash, "You're still cursed!"

"You're still a dork!" she said, not looking back as she left the room.

---

*Deep in the steam tunnels that twisted like a labyrinth under Ponyville, a small, grey pegasus knelt in the darkness. She waited patiently for the sun to rise in the grate above her, conserving her strength. She smiled grimly in the dripping gloom. Today, she would crush her enemies, and see them driven before her. Today, she would hear the lamentations of their women.*

*Yes, she thought as she sharpened her halberd, today will be a good day...*

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## *The End of Some Ponies Play D&D*

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*OR IS IT?*

*Yes, yes it is.*

*But there's a sequel! Read on!*

D&D Ponies 2: Electric Scootaloo

-Or-

Episode 2: Return of the Poni

-Or-

2 Dungeons, 2 Dragons

-Or-

D2: Judgment Neigh

-Or-

LARP Free or Die Hard

-Or-

That Sequel You Wanted



# Intro

It was a dark and stormy night. Well, actually, it was closer to early afternoon and a light drizzle, but Applebloom wasn't about to split hairs. Her friends Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle were sprawled out beside her on the rug in Twilight's library, bored out of their minds. This meeting of the Cutie Mark Crusaders was going nowhere, and not even very fast. Even though they were inside, the dull, grey light coming through the windows and the tapping of the rain on the roof sucked all the energy out of the little fillies. Applebloom narrowed her eyes angrily at the clouds through the window.

"Stupid pegasus ponies, makin' it rain on a weekend." she pouted, "No offence, Scoots."

"Whatever." Scootaloo shrugged and stretched her tiny wings. "Can you think of anything to do?" she asked for the umpteenth time.

"Shouldn't we be crusading for our cutie marks?" said Sweetie Belle. The young unicorn was feeling especially fidgety. She rolled over on her back, waving her hooves in the air absent-mindedly. "That's what the CMC is for, right?"

"Ugh, I'm so sicka' doin' that!" said Applebloom.

"Yeah," added Scootaloo, "It's, like, all we do anymore. I just wanna hang out sometimes, ya know?"

Their non-conversation was interrupted when Twilight and Fluttershy trotted into the room. The two had agreed to keep an eye on the kids while their big sisters were out for the afternoon, with Rainbow Dash treating them to a Wonderbolts performance.

"How's it going, girls?" Twilight said with a cheery smile.

"Lousy." said Applebloom, grumpily, "There's nothin' to do here!"

"Yeah, we're bored!" Sweetie Belle said, rolling upright.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Fluttershy said with genuine concern.

"It's not your fault, Miss Fluttershy." said Scootaloo, "It's just the dumb ol' rain." She sat down with her friends as they hung their heads in a theatrical display of self-pity.

"Aw, don't be that way, kids!" said Twilight in a peppy tone that was starting to irritate the fillies. "You're in a library after all, and I've got books just filled with fun things to do! You can read any book you want!"

The CMC rolled their eyes in unison. It was a move they had been practicing. They had gotten good enough to pull it off on command, the instant an adult started acting lame. Twilight didn't seem to notice them, though, as she started sorting through the books for an appropriate volume.

"Let's see, *Miss Mare's Rainy-Day Funbook*? Nah, how about *The Dangerous Book for Fillies*? Hmm, that's a little advanced for girls your age. Maybe we could try..."

"What's this one about?" said Applebloom, cutting her off. "It's called a '*Monster Manual*'. That sounds pretty cool!" She had found a stack of tattered paperbacks with colorful covers stashed in an out-of-the-way bookcase. They had been shelved out of order, as if someone were trying to hide them. In an instant, Twilight snatched it away from her.

"No no no, not those books!" she said, laughing nervously, "Those are, uh, boring! Yeah, you wouldn't be interested in..."

"Hey, check out this one!" Scootaloo said, ignoring her. "*The Dungeon Master's Guide*. Awesome!"

"I don't think this is a good idea, girls." Fluttershy said meekly. She and Twilight tried to keep them away from the forbidden books, but the fillies managed to squirm around them. In the struggle, a small velvet pouch was knocked off the shelf, spilling its colorful plastic contents on the library's floor.

"It's a game! It's a game!" Sweetie Belle squealed, "Look, it's got dice and everything!"

"What gives, Twilight?" Applebloom said, turning to face her, "Why are ya holdin' out on us?"

"Yeah!" rallied Scootaloo, "You said we could use any book we wanted!"

Twilight sighed, "I know, I know. I'm sorry. It's just... my friends and I decided we wouldn't play this game anymore after... the Incident."

"Incident?" said Applebloom, screwing up her face in thought, "Oh, you mean when that mailpony went all nutty?"

It was the only thing she could think of that would cause Twilight to speak in such hushed tones. It had been a major scandal in Ponyville for months, and the mayor even made a big speech about it. She mostly remembered afterwards, when Applejack had given her a long boring lecture about the difference between fantasy and reality. Still, she tried to put a positive spin on it.

"It wasn't so bad though, was it? I mean, no one was hurt. 'Cept for the beavers, I guess..." She trailed off.

Scootaloo jumped in, trying to salvage the argument. "But they got better! Fluttershy took care of 'em, right?"

Fluttershy looked away sadly. "Toothy and Chompers still aren't quite the same."

"Come on, please?" said Sweetie Belle, "We totally promise we won't go crazy!"

In desperation, the CMC turned their most powerful weapon on Twilight, another one they had been practicing. Looking up at the older unicorn, their eyes went wide and misted with tears, and their bottom lips trembled. They called it the D'aww Bomb, and they were masters at it.

"I don't know..." Twilight said, her resistance wearing down. Her friends had all been upset by what happened. Spike had taken the Incident especially hard, giving up DMing in the spirit of 'never again'. Still, she had to admit that she missed her weekly gaming session. "I guess it couldn't hurt, so long as Derpy doesn't find out..."

# Chapter 1

## Grim Twilight

*Grimstar the Black examined the three apprentice heroes before him in the courtyard of his wizard's tower. They were an undisciplined and rowdy bunch of scoundrels, but he had high hopes for their futures. Truly, was he not the same, in his own youth? Were his friends not equally unruly, even at the peak of their skills?*

*Once again, the wizard remembered the great tragedy which had split his own party asunder and scattered its members to the far corners of the land. The return of their prodigal companion had been both unexpected and disastrous. Sadly, their quest for the Dragon King would remain unfinished forevermore, as even the Gods themselves had abandoned them. He furrowed his dark brow, banishing the bleak reminiscences from his mind. Striking the rocky ground forcefully with his staff, he gained the young ones' attentions.*

*"Lo, novice adventurers," he said, "It is time to begin your training!"*

---

"Okay," said Twilight, setting up the DM screen, "we need to make your characters." Spike was in Canterlot on official business, so she decided to take over Dungeon Master responsibilities herself. The three girls sat on the rug in front of her, acting unusually quiet and attentive. Fluttershy sat on the couch nearby, happy just to watch for now. Twilight shuffled through her old character sheets, glad she hadn't had the heart to throw them out. "First things first, what should we name them?"

"Ummmm..." Applebloom said, trying to think of something appropriately medieval-ish, "Oh, I know! How about Apple-BOOM!"

"Yeah!" said Scootaloo, liking the direction this was going, "And I could be SHOOT-aloo!"

"And I'll be, uh..." Sweetie Belle thought hard, "I got it! Sweetie HE...umf!"

*"You know what?" said Twilight, her hoof in Sweetie Belle's mouth, "You all have such nice names already. Let's just stick with those, okay?"*

*---*

*The training session had gotten off to a rocky start, but Grimstar soldiered on. Leading his young charges onwards through the hilly countryside, he decided to try appealing to their intellectual curiosity.*

*"You are new to these lands," he said, "I do not wish to boast, but I am wise in the way of the warrior. Ask of me anything you like, and I shall answer you truthfully."*

*"Okay, then," said Applebloom, gamely, "What are we?"*

*"An excellent question," said Grimstar, "For what indeed is the measure of a man? Is he to be judged by his birthright or more by his actions? Or is there, perhaps, a deeper level of..."*

*"No, I mean, why are we all pink and weird?"*

*"Ah," said Grimstar, disappointed, "You speak of your nature as human beings. Although you have not yet revealed to me your racial heritage, so there may be something dwarfish or elfish about you."*

*"Can't we be ponies?" asked Sweetie Belle.*

*Grimstar laughed heartily, "Why would you want to? In this world, ponies are merely unintelligent beasts of burden!"*

*"That's... a little messed up," said Scootaloo, scrunching up her nose, "But I guess I'm okay with being a hoo-man."*

*"Yes, I can see now that you are all full-blooded humans," he said, quickly moving on, "Come, I shall teach you to wield a sword." They crested the hill and made for the edge of a wild forest, its floor tangled with undergrowth.*

*"What's so hard about using a sword?" asked Applebloom, struggling to keep up, "You just hold the blunt end and stick the pointy end in bad people."*

*"I assure you, it will take more than that to become true warriors." Grimstar halted the party as they came upon a path cutting through the dark woods. "Ahead is your first challenge. I will give you each a weapon,*

*that you may learn their proper use.” The wizard magically produced armaments from his robes and presented them. “For Scootaloo, a sturdy short sword. A bow of finest yew shall go to Sweetie Belle. And last, a stout mace for Applebloom.”*

*“A mace?” said Applebloom, dubiously, “Can’t I wield somethin’ cooler?”*

*“I want a sword,” said Scootaloo, “that’s, like, an axe too. An axe-sword!”*

*“Can I have a magic wand?” said Sweetie Belle, “I wanna point at stuff and make it go ‘pew pew pew’!”*

*“You are sure to come across finer weaponry on your journey. For now, these will do.” Grimstar patiently reassured the heroes. He pointed ahead, into the dusky gloom of the wood. “Behold, the first enemy on which you will prove your mettle!” There, in a small clearing dimly lit by the thin columns of light coming through the forest canopy, a small, blue-green gelatinous creature awaited them. It gurgled at them menacingly.*

*“That’s it?” Applebloom said skeptically, “A little jelly blob? What’s it gonna do, wiggle at us?”*

*“It is a creature appropriate to your level.” said the wizard.*

*“I kinda feel sorry for it.” said Sweetie Belle, “It doesn’t even have arms. Or... anything else.”*

*“YARRGH!” shouted Scootaloo, ignoring them and charging into the fray. Rushing into the clearing, she stomped the creature under her heavy leather boots, causing it to burst in a spray of blue slime. The others stared at her blankly.*

*“What?” she said, looking back at them, “It was comin’ right at me! You saw it!”*

*“Well, that’s one less a’ those things.” Applebloom said stoically. She turned to Grimstar. “What’s next?”*

*“Next... yes.” said the wizard with an awkward cough, “I sort of thought that would take... longer.”*

---

“Uh, let’s see...” Twilight flipped frantically through her guides. The fillies eyed her quizzically.

“You can’t think of anything, can you?” said Applebloom.

Twilight eventually gave up. “No... I guess I can’t.” she sighed, “This is harder than it looks. I guess Spike was right about that.” The girls groaned in disappointment.

“Wait,” said Sweetie Belle, an idea occurring to her, “What about Fluttershy?”

Fluttershy looked up from her place on the couch. “Me?” she said, startled, “What could I do?”

“You tell us bedtime stories all the time,” Sweetie Belle persisted, “I bet you’d be a great Dungeon Master!”

“You really think so?”

“Go ahead.” said Twilight, getting up and inviting her over, “You can’t be any worse at it than I am.”

“O... okay.” said Fluttershy, taking her place behind the DM screen. “I’ll give it a try...”

# Chapter 2

## Fluttershy Gives It a Try

*After bravely defeating the evil slime monster, the three little heroes continued through the dark, scary forest. They weren't afraid, though, because they were all so cool and strong, and they knew Grimstar the friendly wizard was there to protect them.*

*"Don't worry, girls!" he said in his deep manly voice, "I know of someone who lives in this wood and may have need of our assistance!"*

*As they walked, the forest began to open up into a beautiful secret glen, hidden away from the outside world. Wild orchids and lilies grew around their feet, and cute butterflies and hummingbirds drank their sweet nectar. A babbling stream filled with silver fish wound its way through the forest floor and dewdrops glistened on the green leaves of the tall trees. The sun was shining brightly and everything was very pretty.*

*Deep within the folds of the twisting valley, a lone halfling tended to her garden. She sang sweetly to her animal friends, who gathered on the eaves of the round wooden door leading to her burrow. She greeted the party as they approached.*

*"Hello, Grimstar!" she said, waving, "What brings you to my glen this morn?"*

*"Good morrow, Gracelove." he said, "I have brought along some neophytes in need of your instruction." A neophyte is like a student, but old-timey.*

*"Oh, how wonderful!" she said, "They just might be able to help me with my goblin problem."*

*"All right, goblins!" said Applebloom.*

*"Lemme at 'em," said Scootaloo, "I'll kick those goblins' butts!"*

*"No, don't do that!" said Gracelove, shocked, "These are NICE goblins!"*



---

Scotaloo made a sour face, glancing at the other girls doubtfully. They looked back at her and shrugged.

“What’s the matter?” asked Fluttershy, worried, “Am I doing it wrong?”

“No, no, it’s just...” said Applebloom, “I thought we were supposed to *fight* monsters, not help ‘em.”

“I don’t want to tell you what to do, Fluttershy,” Twilight said carefully, “but the book says that goblins are neutral-evil.”

“That doesn’t mean they can’t be nice.” said Fluttershy, reproachfully.

“Well, actually...” Twilight started. She paused, looking at the pegasus for a moment, then reconsidered. “I... guess it doesn’t.” she said, giving up.

“I don’t mind helping the goblins.” said Sweetie Belle encouragingly, “Let’s see how it turns out.”

---

*Following Gracelove, the party entered the goblin village. The little green creatures shied away from them as they approached, hiding in their mushroom-houses. Only one remained in the open, leaning on his cane as he hobbled up to meet them. He had a scruffy beard and wore a floppy white hat. Gracelove introduced him to the heroes.*

*“This is the Daddy Goblin.” she said, “He’ll tell you what’s wrong.”*

*“Thank the heavens you’re here!” he said in a squeaky little voice, “A big, mean owlbear has been attacking our village and stealing all our berries!”*

*Scotaloo rolled her eyes. Applebloom elbowed her in the ribs. “We’d be happy to help you out, Mr. Goblin.” she said, “Can you tell us where it lives?”*

*The goblin nodded and pointed to a hill nearby. “It lives in a cave up there.” he said, “But be careful! He’s really mean!”*

*They made their way stealthily up the hill. At the top, the owlbear pawed viciously at the ground outside a cave stuffed full of stolen berries.*

*"Now would be a good time to discuss your strategy." advised Grimstar.*

*"Strategy, schmategy, let's just hit the dang thing!" said Applebloom, sprinting up the hill, "Eat my plus-one mace, ya goofy-lookin' critter!" She landed a mighty blow directly to its beak. The owlbear reared back, momentarily stunned. As Applebloom prepared for a second swing, it turned tail and ran off into the woods, yipping with fear.*

*"Yayyy!" said Gracelove, clapping, "You did it! Good job, girls!"*

---

"This is lame." said Scootaloo.

"Is it? I'm sorry." Fluttershy said dejectedly, "I'm trying my best..."

"No, I don't mean *you're* lame, Fluttershy!" Scootaloo backpedaled desperately, "You just say lame stuff sometimes, and do lame things, and... I'll stop now." She wilted under the angry glares of her friends.

The doorbell rang. "I'll get it!" said Scootaloo, happy to have something to change the subject. She trotted over and opened the door. Rainbow Dash, Applejack, and Rarity stepped out of the drizzle, taking off their raincoats. Scootaloo called back to her friends.

"Applebloom, Sweetie Belle, your sisters are here!"

The girls rushed to the door excitedly to greet their siblings. "Hey, sis!" Applebloom said, emerging from a hug, "How were the Wonderbolts?"

"They put on a pretty good show!" said Applejack, grinning, "I wasn't expectin' much in the rain, but they sure pulled off some impressive moves."

"I told ya," said Dash, still high on hero worship, "Flying in the wet is totally different from normal flying. It's like an art form!"

"I hope you girls were having fun with Fluttershy and Twilight." said Rarity, nuzzling her sister.

“Uh huh!” said Sweetie Belle, looking up at her, “We don’t have to leave now, do we? We were playing a game!”

“Oh?” Rarity raised an eyebrow, “Which game is that?”

“It’s a secret!” Sweetie Belle said with a conspiratorial look.

“Yeah!” Scootaloo joined in, “Secret, but fun!”

Twilight walked up, a sheepish look on her face. “I... sort of let them use our old D&D stuff...” she said, reluctantly.

Rarity looked concerned. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Come on, sis,” Sweetie Belle pleaded, “we were having so much fun! Applebloom just beat up an owlbear!”

“Hmmm,” said Applejack, mulling it over, “I guess it’s okay by me. You kids are smart enough to not go overboard, right?” The girls nodded, putting on their best angelic faces.

“Wow, this takes me back.” said Dash, seeing the game set up on the rug. “Who’s DM?”

“Um, I am.” Fluttershy said timidly, “But I don’t think I’m doing very well at it.”

“Mind if I take over?” said Dash, “I’ve always wanted a go in the captain’s chair.”

Fluttershy joined Twilight and Applejack on the couch as Rainbow Dash took her place. The kids sat down in front of her eagerly.

Rarity excused herself and headed for the kitchen. “Anyone mind if I make some tea? I need to warm up a little after sitting in that rain all afternoon.”

“Yeah, great, whatever.” said Dash, waving her off and turning to the fillies. “Alright, stand back kids. I’m about to rock your faces off!”

# Chapter 3

## The Bloodcrusher Cometh

“Are you ready?” said Rainbow Dash, rubbing her hooves together.

“I’m ready!” Scootaloo shouted back gleefully.

“Are you psyched?” Dash continued.

“I’m psyched!” answered Scootaloo.

“Are you PUMPED?”

“I’m so FREAKIN’ PUMPED!”

“ARRRRRRGHH!”

“AAAAAHHHH!”

“Can we just get on with it already?” said Applebloom, annoyed.

---

*Suddenly, there was a HUGE explosion from deep within the cave, hurling the berries or whatever way out into the air. As the noise died down, they could begin to hear a deep, dramatic rumbling coming from the depths of the dark cavern. It got louder and louder, until finally an awesome flaming motorcycle rocketed out of the cave mouth! Riding it was a massive barbarian warrior, bristling with weapons and spinning a morning-star in the air. He ramped off a rock, flying over the party’s heads in super slow-motion, then turned the bike into a power-slide as he landed, screeching to a stop.*

*“I heard tell,” he said, removing his sunglasses, “that someone has need of Bloodcrusher Killthrust!”*

*“Whoa...” said Scootaloo, her eyes as wide as saucers. Applebloom and Sweetie Belle exchanged a look.*

*"How the heck do ya crush blood?" said Applebloom, doubtfully, "It's a liquid."*

*"You shouldn't have a motorcycle in the medieval epoch," Sweetie Belle astutely noted, "It's not thematically accurate."*

*"You're never gonna stop waving that vocabulary test grade in our faces, are you?" Scootaloo grumbled at her.*

*Sweetie Belle stuck out her tongue. "It's not my fault that I did better than you."*

*Killthrust ignored them and dismounted his magically powered and totally period-appropriate vehicle. "I've just returned from defeating the fire daemons of the Lower Reaches, but I believe I will require some assistance in my next epic adventure!"*

*"Alright," said Applebloom, deciding to play along, "what do you want us to do?"*

*Killthrust grinned, crossing his muscular arms. "King, uh... Ronnie... has been kidnapped by ninjas!" he said, pulling out his axe-sword-tar and playing a few power chords, "Are you bad enough dudes to save the King?"*

*"Aw, yeah!" said Scootaloo, pumping her fists in the air.*

*"Sure, that sounds like it could be fun." Sweetie Belle said diffidently.*

*"Then we will be off!" Killthrust threw down a smoke bomb, enveloping the party in an acrid cloud. When it cleared, they were standing in a desolated, pock-marked plain. Lava pools and rocky spires surrounded them, and peals of thunder ripped through the dark and tumultuous sky.*

*"How did you do that, Killthrust?" said Grimstar, waving the remaining tendrils of smoke from his face, "Barbarians can't make use of teleportation spells!"*

*"I think you'll find that barbarians do whatever they please!" Killthrust told the wizard, "Anyway, there's no time to talk. A dragon is*

*attacking!” Appearing seemingly out of nowhere, a terrible red and black dragon roared ferociously at the party.*

*“For Ponyville!” Scootaloo shouted as she led her friends forward. They charged up to the dragon’s massive fore-foot and attacked it savagely, but their weapons bounced harmlessly off of the scaly hide. It flicked its claw, sending Applebloom flying across the sun-baked clay of the plain.*

*“No fair!” she said after she slid to a stop, “This dragon’s too hard!”*

*“Nonsense,” said Killthrust, “You just have to know how to fight it!”*

*The barbarian leapt at the dragon, landing on its enormous snout and grabbing hold before it could shake him free. Wedging his foot in its horrific maw and gripping its upper jaw in his powerful hands, he levered the beast’s mouth open, his bulging muscles rippling with the effort. He took a glass vial from his belt and uncorked it with his teeth, its contents fizzing violently upon being exposed to air. Finally, he tossed the potion down the dragon’s gullet and jumped away, rolling as he hit the ground.*

*The dragon looked around for a moment, confused, until the potion reacted and exploded it from the inside. A blazing column of fire stood where the dragon once was, as its entrails fell on the party like rain.*

*“Looks like that dragon...” Killthrust said, putting his sunglasses back on, “...wasn’t fireproof!”*

*“Yeah...” Applebloom said uncertainly, wiping guts out of her eyes, “I don’t know how I feel about pretendin’ to kill dragons, since we know one in real life.”*

*“No time for that,” said Killthrust, “this battle has not concluded yet!” He pointed west, where an enormous army of orcs massed.*

*“A whole army?” Scootaloo blanched.*

*“That’s not all!” said Killthrust. East of them, ranks of skeletons chattered to each other as they marched forward in a flanking maneuver. A throng of frost giants advanced from the north, carving through the ground*

*like glaciers. The party attempted to move south, but they were cut off by a horde of giant spiders. Suddenly, the ground beneath their feet cracked open, and hundreds of balrogs emerged!*

*“Stand your ground, warriors!” Killthrust shouted above the din, “Today is a good day to die!”*

*“No it isn’t!” said Sweetie Belle, horrified, “Today is a terrible day to do that!”*

*“That’s quite enough of this foolishness!” said Grimstar. He put his fingers to his lips and whistled, high and loud. A flock of giant eagles appeared from above, swooping down to pick up each of the heroes in turn. They flew off towards the horizon, leaving the monsters below to fight amongst themselves.*

---

“Is it over?” Fluttershy asked, poking her head out from under the couch cushions.

“I’ll say it is.” Twilight said, looking at Dash crossly, “How could you possibly think that was a good encounter for level-one players?”

“Yeah, not cool, Dash!” said Scootaloo, narrowing her eyes.

A freshly prepared tea service levitated into the room, followed closely by Rarity. “What’s going on?” she asked.

“Rarity!” tattled Sweetie Belle, “Rainbow Dash is trying to kill us!”

“Seriously, Dash?” Rarity eyed the pegasus sardonically, “I leave for five minutes and you try to kill my sister?”

“I was just trying to make it cool...” Dash said, her ego stinging.

“Well, it wasn’t!” Applebloom scolded, “It was just a buncha explosions an’ stuff!” She turned to her big sister on the couch, “Why don’t you try it, Applejack? I bet you could show us how it’s done!”

“No way, forget it.” said Applejack, firmly, “I’m good at a lot a’ stuff, but I don’t know nothin’ about masterin’ no dungeons.” Applebloom looked disappointed.

“How about you, Rarity?” asked Sweetie Belle, hopefully, “You’re the most creative pony I know! Maybe even in all of Equestria!”

“Well, I’m not sure about that.” said Rarity, blushing from the compliment. “Though, now that I think about it, there *is* a scenario I’ve wanted to try out for some time.”

Rainbow Dash reluctantly joined the other failed DMs on the couch, Twilight moving to the floor to make room for her. Rarity carefully set the tea service down on the end table and took her place.

She cleared her throat, covering her mouth politely, “*Ahem...*”



# Chapter 4

## Rarefied Air

*The eagles soared through the cloudy sky, passing over tall mountains and wide, blue seas. Eventually they came upon a chain of remote islands, isolated from the brutish and uncouth mainland. Grimstar squinted at the edge of a cliff just below a dormant volcano's rim, making out a tiny light flashing in a distinctive pattern.*

*"Someone is signaling us," he shouted to his companions through the rushing wind, "We should land here!"*

*They circled the cliff until a suitable landing spot was found. After touching down, Grimstar slid off of his eagle's back, patting it gently on its beak. He helped Gracelove and the three novices dismount, but Killthrust refused his aid. Instead, the barbarian jumped from his eagle and executed a series of acrobatic flips, landing with a cocky grin. The wizard sighed testily, but said nothing. The party looked around at their new surroundings.*

*The area was well maintained, with a small cobblestone walkway leading up the mountainside from the island below. As the party followed the path upwards, it passed through an elaborate wooden gate and twisted gracefully around a small pond filled with large, golden-scaled fish. It continued on, leading to an elegant, multi-tiered pagoda nestled between two rocky outcrops that jutted from the volcano rim. Its wood was silver with age.*

*Though the structure had obviously been well looked after for most of its existence, at some point it had come into a state of disrepair. The façade had faded badly, and many of the decorative shingles were missing from its roof. The shimenawa (sacred plaited rope) above its door indicated that it was a shrine, or had been at some point. The multitude of omamori (protective paper amulets) and hamaya (evil-destroying arrows) covering its every surface implied that it was haunted. Surrounding the pagoda were dozens of finely carved stone statues of foreign gods. They were scattered throughout a grove of fragrant cherry trees, whose*

*blossoms drifted lazily from their branches and blanketed the ground like fresh snow.*

*“Cooooool...” said Sweetie Belle, “Everything’s all Japanese-y!”*

*“It is quite beautiful.” agreed Grimstar, “Though, I wonder where the person who signaled us could be?”*

*“I suppose that’s my cue.”*

*An elvish archer emerged from behind one of the stone statues holding a silver hand mirror, which she used to flash reflected sunlight at the assembled heroes in the same pattern they had seen before. Her pale features were offset by her dark, straight hair, which was held in a tight bun by a lacquered comb. Her kimono (Asian-style dress) was of the edo komon style, in white with indigo accents forming a repeating chrysanthemum pattern and featuring the triple-diamond mon (emblem) of its wearer. A silver obi (sash) was tied around her waist, a small tanto (blade) tucked discretely into it by the small of her back. Her long flowing sleeves were embroidered with matching silver silk, and trimmed in...*

*“Augh, stop talking about dresses!” shouted Scootaloo.*

*“It’s good to see you again, Darlynn Evansong.” said Gracelove. “What brings you to such a distant and exotic land?”*

*“My services have been engaged by the Shogun,” she explained, “His retainer has mysteriously gone missing of late, and treachery is suspected.”*

*“He should keep it by his bed.” advised Sweetie Belle, “That’s where I keep my retainer.”*

*“How amusing.” said Darlynn, dryly, “Though of course I am referring to a trusted servant, and not a dental health device. But, alas, look at the state of you!”*

*“Oh, don’t worry about it,” said Applebloom, brushing some of the filth from her shoulders, “It’s just dragon guts.”*

*“There is a hot springs nearby,” Darlynn said adamantly, “I insist you refresh yourselves before we continue.”*

---

"We don't have to role-play taking a bath, do we?" asked Scootaloo.

"No, no," Rarity reassured her, "We can just skip to afterwards."

---

*Feeling cleansed in both mind and body, the party gathered by the edge of the hot springs to discuss the challenges that lie ahead. Darlynn served them matcha (ceremonial green tea) as a purification ritual.*

*"You know," noted Applebloom, "if you said stuff in English to start with, you wouldn't have to keep defining everything."*

*"Are we actually having a tea party?" Killthrust asked, scowling, "Or have I gone mad with boredom?"*

*"It's a tea ceremony, you uncultured..." Darlynn started.*

*"So tell us, Darlynn," Grimstar said quickly, "how can we aid you in your mission?"*

*The elf regained her composure. "I have tracked the missing retainer to this location, the Silver Pagoda," she explained. "There is evidence that he entered the pagoda several months ago, but did not leave. I suspect that he was overwhelmed by obakemono." She paused, looking at Applebloom, "By which I mean, ghosts."*

*"Whoa, spooky!" said Scootaloo, impressed.*

*"Indeed," Darlynn replied, "The shrine is overwhelmed by such creatures. We will need to secure each floor one-by-one. In addition, the doors between each level are locked by fiendish puzzles, which will need to be solved before we advance. Doing so will give us access to the next room, and hopefully, reveal a clue to the fate of the Shogun's deceitful servant. Before we can begin, however, we must..."*

*Suddenly, a bunch of awesome ninjas jumped out of the trees, attacking the party and ending the stupid tea thing! They were armed with swords and throwing stars and those things that are like two sticks all tied together, and they began a vicious assault on the heroes. Killthrust drew his sword, bravely defending his comrades.*

*“Ambush!” he shouted, “To arms, warriors!”*

---

“What in Equestria do you think you’re doing?” cried Rarity, yanking the DM screen away from Rainbow Dash.

“I’ll tell you what I’m *not* doing,” Dash retorted, attempting to grab it back, “I’m not sitting around for hours drinking fancy tea and yakking about... stuff!”

“Please stop fighting...” said Fluttershy, too quietly to get the dueling DMs’ attentions.

The CMC watched the developing argument with interest, their eyes following the DM screen as both ponies tried to claim possession of it. It wasn’t a game, but at least it was entertainment.

“I’ve worked too hard on this to let you ruin it!” Rarity continued.

“You shoulda worked harder at not making it boring!” Dash snapped back at her.

“You had your chance, don’t mess up mine!”

“I don’t need to! You were taking forever to go nowhere!”

“It’s called setting a scene, you... you *barbarian!*”

“Would you two look at yourselves?” Applejack interjected, “You’re both acting like a couple a’ foals!”

“*Me?*” Rarity said incredulously, “If anyone is acting foalish it’s...”

The doorbell rang. Rarity and Dash stopped their struggle, looking at the door in confusion. It rang again, frantically, as if someone were leaning on the button.

“Twilight?” said Rarity, concern edging into her voice, “You weren’t expecting more visitors today, were you?”

Applejack gulped. “You don’t think it could be... you know...” She made her eyes go askew.

Twilight shrugged. "It's the weekend, so I don't think she'd be doing her rounds. Still..."

The ringing continued unabated. Twilight got up and nervously approached the library's entrance. Whoever was ringing the bell switched to pounding angrily at the door. Before Twilight could reach it, the door was forced wide open, slamming against the library wall. Lightning crashed in the sky, casting a terrifying silhouette in the doorframe.

"You..." it said in a deep, furious voice. It stepped forward into the light, revealing a shaggy mass of pink hair, dripping from the rain. "You... were having a party! *Without me!*" Pinkie Pie glared angrily at the gathered ponies. "I can tell, you know. My party sense was tingling! Oh, hey, are we gaming again?" Pulling a characteristic emotional one-eighty, Pinkie Pie shook herself off, transferring most of the rainwater to Twilight. Before anyone could object she zipped over to the rug, hip-checking Dash and Rarity out of the way.

"I've been wanting to try this forever!"

# Chapter 5

## Pink Thunder

*Grimstar, Gracelove, and the girls fought off the ninjas, while Darlynn and Killthrust fought with each other.*

*“You foolish oaf!” the elf shouted, “You gave away our position!”*

*The barbarian began a pithy response, but was drowned out by a sudden, strange noise, like a cracking hiss. The ninjas around them all dropped like rag dolls.*

*“What in blazes was that?” said Killthrust, looking fruitlessly for the source of the sound.*

*Grimstar prodded one of their fallen foes. “Arrows...” he said, “But from where...?”*

*Wind rushed around them, stirring up the cherry blossoms into a swirling mass. The source of the wind drifted downwards through the clouds above. At first, all that was visible was a rope ladder with a single figure in a leather aviator jacket hanging from the end. She removed her goggles and pushed aside her bright pink scarf, revealing a familiar face.*

*“Looks like I’m late to the party.” said Zinnadiana, “That’s a first for me!” The auto-crossbow in her hands hissed with released steam. “Hope you don’t mind, but I invited some friends along.”*

*With this the clouds parted, and the gleaming sliver and brass bulk of the bard’s personal airship became visible. The zeppelin was built in a surrealistic art-deco style, covered in complex hatches and mechanical details, the purpose of which were not entirely clear on first viewing. Copper pipes stuck out at odd angles from its gondola, powering six colossal prop engines. Inscribed on its side in large gothic script was the name ‘Pinkitania’.*

*“We get to ride a blimp?” Sweetie Belle said gleefully.*

*“What happened to ‘thematically accurate’?” Scootaloo smirked.*

*"Blimps don't count." said Sweetie Belle, not taking her eyes off the airship, "They're too cool!"*

*Zinnadiana jumped the last few feet to the ground, directing the airship's pilot to circle around and dock at the cliff. It was surprisingly agile for such a large and cumbersome craft.*

*"What about my mission?" said Darlynn, "The mystery of the Silver Pagoda lies yet unsolved..."*

*"Aw, that silly old pagoda will still be there later!" Zinnadiana said, patting the elf on the back a little too roughly, "You won't want to miss this. I'm hunting sky-pirates!"*

*"Pirates? I am SO there!" said Scootaloo as she and her friends rushed across the gangplank and into the airship. The other heroes followed, slightly hesitantly.*

*The interior of the ship was, if anything, even more complex than its exterior. Glass and metal tubing ran throughout the cabin, connecting various command stations. These were manned by a group of clockwork men, who moved jerkily about on rails set in the floor. One of them gave an erratic salute, steam whistling from its joints, as they boarded.*

*"Welcome – aboard – Captain – Lyreplucker – and – guests!" it said, mechanically.*

*"At ease, Ensign Clanky," Zinnadiana said, jauntily returning the robot's salute. "Turn up the engines to full power, and ready the artillery. Set us a course, Lieutenant Dwarferson!"*

*"Wait, what am I doing here?" said Dwarfy Dwarferson, looking around in confusion.*

---

*"I never said I was playing, Pinkie." barked Applejack.*

*"Well, I can't take off without my first mate, can I?" Pinkie Pie said encouragingly.*

*"Yeah, play with us, sis!" said Applebloom.*

*"Okay, fine..." Applejack sighed.*

---

*The Pinkitania took off through the clouds, crossing the sea and heading toward the mainland.*

*“Are the steam-torpedoes fully charged, Commander Dwarferson?” said Zinnadiana.*

*“Uh... sure.” said the dwarf, tapping uncertainly at a gauge, “But aren’t I supposed to be a lieutenant?”*

*“I promoted you, just now!” Zinnadiana turned to the girls. “Applebloom, Scootaloo, I need you to man the fore and aft cannons. Sweetie Belle, you can work the tesla coil!” Not needing any further encouragement, the girls rushed to their stations.*

*“What do you want us to do?” asked Gracelove, nervously.*

*“Just hang on!” the bard replied with a mischievous grin. The airship rocked as a shell exploded near the starboard hull. A fleet of enemy airships broke through the cloud cover below and began their attack. The Pinkitania banked hard as the clockwork crew took evasive action. Zinnadiana took her place as captain and began barking orders. “Battle stations, everyone! It’s my arch-nemesis, Captain Top-hat and his Mechano-Mercenaries!”*

*The girls wasted no time and returned fire. “Pew pew pew! Pew pew pew pew!” Sweetie Belle shouted ecstatically as electricity crackled from the gun barrel she controlled.*

*“Avast, me hearties!” Zinnadiana shouted as she led her crew into the dogfight, “Blast those scurvy dogs out of the sky!”*

*“Wait, are we the pirates now?” asked Applebloom, turning from the cannon’s controls, “That’s cool and all, I just want to...”*

*“Look out!” interrupted Zinnadiana, pointing to a buzzing cloud off the port side, “It’s a swarm of mecha-monkeybees! Rear Admiral Dwarferson, release the heli-bunnies!”*

*“What the heck are...?” started Dwarfy.*



*A hatch opened in the side of the airship, and dozens of rabbits leaped out, wearing flight goggles and carrying harpoon guns. Their helicopter-backpacks buzzed into life as they took off.*

*“Oh. I guess they’re just what they sound like.” said Dwarfy, blinking.*

*The ship pitched wildly as a cannonball ripped through the Pinkitania’s hydrogen tank. Orange flames burst from the side of the craft as it quickly lost altitude and plunged through the clouds, leaving a trail of black smoke in its wake.*

*“Curse you, Captain Top-hat!” Zinnadiana shook her fist at the sky, “I swear, one day your awesome hat will be mine!”*

---

“FWOOOM! PSHOOOOO! AOOOOGA, AOOOOGA! AAAGGHH, WE’RE GOIN’ DOWN!” Pinkie Pie collapsed in a giggling heap, sending dice and graph paper flying.

“That was certainly interesting.” said Twilight, still wringing out her mane.

Pinkie sat up, still giggling, “Okay, your turn, Applejack!”

“What?” said Applejack in surprise.

“She has a point, Applejack.” said Rarity, finally managing to disentangle herself from Dash, “We’ve all had a turn, so you may as well try it.”

“Go on, I bet you’ll be great!” Applebloom enthused.

“It’s actually pretty fun.” Fluttershy said with a slight blush.

“Yeah, do it!” said Pinkie, “You know you wanna!”

“Okay, okay, whatever.” Applejack gave in, “If it’ll shut ya’ll up, I’ll do it.”

# Chapter 6

## Jack of All

*Darkness engulfed the heroes. The black void around them yawned away from their feet like a vast, unknowable chasm. Wind rushed past their ears, or perhaps it was only the blood rushing through their veins they could hear in the deathless hush. Had the crash killed them? Was this the afterlife, or some place between worlds? They attempted to speak, but only silence fell from their lips, and only silence answered them.*

---

"Yeah, I got nothin'." Applejack said with a shrug.

"Wow," said Dash, "that was pretty disappointing."

"Hey, I only played this goofy game once." said Applejack, defensively, "What did you expect?"

"I know you can do better than that, Applejack!" said Pinkie Pie, "Just think of something cool, then say it. That's how I do it!"

"Okay, just give me a minute." Applejack huffed, "It's not like you gave me much to work with. How am I supposed to follow a blimp crash?"

The doorbell rang for the third time that evening. "Oh, for crying out loud!" said Twilight as she got up to answer it.

"It's not like I mind having company," she complained to no one in particular, "but since when did my library become Ponyville's... social... hub..." She trailed off as she looked through the door's peephole.

"What's wrong? Who is it?" Rarity said with sudden alarm.

Twilight turned around, her face as white as a sheet. She swallowed hard.

"Mail's here..."

# Chapter 7

## The Day of the Derp

Panic flooded through the library.

“Quick, hide everything!” Dash whispered urgently as she attempted to gather up the gaming paraphernalia on the floor.

“There’s no time!” Rarity hissed back, “She’ll think we’re hiding something if we take too long!” The doorbell rang again, underscoring her point.

“Everyone stand up and block her view!” said Twilight, “I’ll try to send her off before she sees anything!”

“What will Derpy do if she sees all this stuff?” Applebloom asked apprehensively.

“We have no idea,” Applejack said as she frantically helped the girls into position, “that’s what we’re worried about.”

“Look casual! She can’t know anything’s wrong!” Twilight directed. They tried to strike a nonchalant pose. If anything, it only made them stand out more. Twilight started to tell them so, but a third ring of the doorbell cut her off. She took a deep breath. “Okay, I’m opening the door...”

The door swung open. Derpy stood placidly on the stoop, apparently not bothered by the rain. She was wearing her mailbags, and she held a slightly soggy package in her mouth by the twine it was wrapped in. One of her eyes made contact with Twilight, while the other checked out something interesting in the door frame.

“Derpy!” Twilight said, trying to keep her voice from betraying her alarm and failing badly, “It’s so nice to see you! And you brought me my new book order, too! Why, I didn’t even know the post office started delivering on weekends!” She gave a shrill laugh, her eyes shifting back and forth.

The mailpony smiled with professional pride. Her good eye slid off of Twilight, noticing the odd positions of the ponies behind her. They were unmistakably trying to hide something. Her expression changed to one of confusion. Twilight quickly moved in front of her. "Well, you must have lots and lots of work to get to, so don't let me keep you here..."

Derpy ignored her, curiously leaning sideways in an effort to see behind the other ponies. They leaned with her, trying to keep themselves between her and the game. Rainbow Dash shifted her footing as they did, accidentally bringing her hoof down on an errant d4.

"Ow!" she shouted, her leg kicking involuntarily, "Dang it!"

The die skittered across the floor and ricocheted off a bookcase. Every eye in the room followed it as it bounced around the library. Eventually it slid to a stop directly in front of Derpy. The room held its breath. Derpy stared at the little plastic pyramid, her face going blank as she recognised it. Slowly, her wayward eye swiveled around, until both of them were focused, laser-like, on the d4. She gently set down the package and shrugged the mailbags from her back, swinging the door shut behind her. She stepped into the library, no one daring to stop her.

Without saying a word, she walked over to the DM screen, sat down, and cleared her throat.

---

*The heroes coughed as their vision returned to them. They were lying on a dusty plain, the smoking wreckage of the Pinkitania some distance behind them. The trails in the dirt behind them indicated that someone had dragged them to safety.*

*"We're... alive?" said Applebloom in astonishment, looking around.*

*The landscape stretched away to the horizon, filled with rolling mountain ranges and twisting valleys, deep blue lakes and dark jungles. Towers and castles could be made out, faintly, in the distance, and rocky roads and worn paths criss-crossed the countryside. Every nook of the world seemed filled with danger and possibility. Even the jewel-blue sky above them seemed larger, somehow, as if it had needed to expand to reach the edges of the land.*

*A single figure stood before them, facing away. He leaned on a halberd, its point embedded in the soft soil. He wore a wide-brimmed bush hat and a military greatcoat, both faded with age. Perhaps he was an ex-soldier, or perhaps the coat was stolen. He didn't seem like the type to tell. The adults seemed reluctant to speak, so Sweetie Belle steeled herself and greeted him.*

*"Um, hello..." she said, trying to be friendly, "What's your name, sir?"*

*"My name?" he said, turning to reveal his face. It was covered with deep lines and scars from past battles. He wore a leather eye patch over one eye, with a single dragon's tooth stitched into the center. He rubbed his stubbled chin, mulling over Sweetie Belle's question. "I have lots of names. None of them too well-respected in these parts. Those that bother calling me anything just call me... the Stranger."*

*"Cool..." said Scootaloo, unable to stop herself.*

*Applebloom couldn't help but agree. Still, she remained cautious. "If it's not too much trouble," she said, "can I ask what you want?"*

*The Stranger considered this, pulling his pole-arm from the ground and resting it casually across his wiry shoulders. "I don't want for much these days. It's been some time since I lusted for combat, since I sought glory so greedily." He looked away, sadly. "A warm meal, a soft place to sleep, that's all I need, really. You, on the other hand," he gestured to the girls, "you seem like you could use my help. Nothing sadder than a group of adventurers without an adventure."*

*"You... you have an adventure for us?" said Applebloom.*

*He nodded. "Sure do. Real important one, too." He gestured to the canvas bag slung over his shoulder. "I need you... to help me deliver a letter."*

*"That's all?" said Scootaloo, trying not to sound disappointed, "Just, like, walk to the post office?"*

*The Stranger grinned. "One does not simply walk to the post office." He pointed the blade of his halberd at the landscape around them. "The Lich Empire is allied against us, and they will do anything in their power to stop us from delivering our crucial communiqués. In addition, there are many leagues between us and our destination, and many dangers therein.*

*We will need to cross the icy peaks of the Devil's Spine mountains, the deep chasms of the Death's Grip Gorge, the orc strongholds of the Western Deserts, and, perhaps most terrifyingly, the black depths of the Soulless Swamp, crawling with blood-thirsty beavers!"*

*"M... maybe we can just go around the swamp." Sweetie Belle said haltingly, "You know, since those beavers are so terrifying and all."*

*"Good call." said the Stranger, nodding in her direction, "Quick thinking like that will do you well on this journey." He looked to the adults, who were still standing there, dumbfounded by his sudden appearance. "You are all welcome to join us." he said with something like a hopeful twinkle in his eye, "For old time's sake?"*

*Grimstar stared a moment longer. Finally coming to a decision, he walked over and extended his hand to the Stranger in a show of brotherhood. "I would like that, old friend. I must admit, I missed our companionship terribly. I feel I owe you an apology."*

*Killthrust joined the wizard. "Truly, you were the greatest among us." he said sagely.*

*"He's right." said Gracelove, "We never used to fight with each other when you were around." The others nodded solemnly in agreement.*

*The Stranger waved off the apologies, but accepted Grimstar's hand. "Let us not dwell on the past. There is much yet to be done." He took up his halberd and led the party forward. "The road ahead is long and arduous, but we will surely prevail, together." They headed towards the setting sun, their adventure only just beginning.*

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Eventually, the rain slowed to a stop. A few pegasus workers pushed the clouds aside, letting the sun shine through. A warm breeze blew as the sunlight gradually began to dry the damp earth.

The door to the library opened, and the CMC rushed out, laughing and full of energy. There were still a few hours of daylight left, and they were determined to make the most of them. Applebloom and Scootaloo found a pair of sticks and used them to duel with each other as they splashed through the puddles. Sweetie Belle chased after them, roaring as ferociously as her little lungs could manage.

Derpy exited the library soon after them, picking up her mailbags and continuing her duties. Twilight clicked the door shut behind her.

“Did... that actually just happen?” she said, still a little shell-shocked.

“I think so.” said Pinkie. She was being unusually quiet.

There was a long pause. Rarity eventually spoke up, her voice wavering with uncertainty, “Sh... should we tell the mayor?”

“What would we tell her?” Dash said with a shrug, “I mean, all we did was play a game, right?”

“A really *fun* game.” Fluttershy added, breathlessly, “I guess we should still do something, though.”

“The smart thing to do,” said Applejack, a little reluctantly, “would be to put all this stuff away and never talk about it again.”

There was another pause as they looked down at the game.

“We’re not going to do that, are we?” said Fluttershy. It was more a statement than a question. They went quiet again.

Twilight broke the silence. “I... kind of want to see what’s inside that Silver Pagoda.”

The floodgates broken, Rarity enthusiastically picked up the DM screen again. “Is it okay if I work in the *Pinkitania*?” she said, “I actually really liked that part.”

“Do you think Derpy would mind if I played her character?” Dash said, joining in, “Like, just for a few rounds?”

“I think Killthrust is pretty cool, too.” said Applejack, abandoning all pretenses of responsibility, “Maybe you could blow up another dragon?”

“Dash blew up a *dragon*!?” Pinkie Pie gasped, “See, this is why you guys can’t start this stuff without me!”

Twilight and her friends laughed and chatted excitedly, gathering around the rug again. There were still a few hours of daylight left, and they were determined to make the most of them.

---

*The Stranger hefted his mailbags as he left the library. The young heroes ran through the streets before him, playing cheerfully. He smiled. He knew that he may never earn the forgiveness of those he had wronged in the past. He also knew, more than most, that redemption was a less a destination to reach than a road to travel. Perhaps, he thought, making those children happy had put him a few steps further along that road.*

*He shook his head, clearing his mind to focus on the task before him. He had a job to do. He had to deliver the message. And the message always got through.*

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## *The End of Some Ponies Play D&D 2*

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Ponies Play D&D Part 3:

Applejack and Pinkie Pie's Excellent Adventure

-No, wait, that's terrible. How about-

Episode 3: Return of the Poni

-No good, I used that one last time-

Well, It Fits Better For This One

-You think I don't know that?-

What Do You Want From Me? I'm Just a Title

-This is getting irritatingly meta. Let's just go with-

Here's Some More Nerd Ponies

# Intro

“Come on, Spike! How long is this gonna take?”

“Hey, it’ll be done when it’s done, alright?”

Applejack narrowed her eyes. “It’s been *months*. How much time does it take to come up with a new campaign?”

“Look, do you want it done quick, or do you want it done right?” the little dragon huffed. He was surrounded on all sides by his guides and miniatures, covering what was usually Twilight’s writing desk. Applejack, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie craned their necks to get a look at his notes, but he snatched them up before they could see anything. “Hey, no peeking!”

“He’s always like this before a new campaign.” said Pinkie, pretending she hadn’t just been looking, “Spike’s a *super* perfectionist DM.”

“That’s right!” said Spike with a cocky grin, “You can’t rush perfection.”

“Yeah, sure.” Applejack snorted, “So what the heck am I supposed to do ‘til then? Now that the harvest is in storage I’ve got nothin’ to do ‘til Winter Wrap Up.”

“I’ve got a lot of free time, too.” said Fluttershy, “The cottage has been awfully quiet since all the little bunnies and everything started their hibernation.”

“And Sugarcube Corner’s kitchen is being rebuilt.” said Pinkie, “After that explosion that I had nothing to do with.”

“Well, tough cookies, sister.” said Spike, “I’m not rolling this out until it’s good and done. You’re gonna love it, too! I had to adapt the rules from *six* different games to be able to do everything I wanted, and now I’m customizing each of the areas for your characters.”

Applejack pulled a sour face. “Does that mean I’m stuck playing Dwarfie again?”

"Whats wrong with Dwarfpy?" said Pinkie, "You don't like Dwarfpy? I love Dwarfpy!"

Applejack shrugged. "Ehhh, I'm gettin' kinda sick of playing a generic dwarf fighter when there are so many cool races and classes I haven't even tried yet. I wanna experiment a little. Maybe try something crazy and different, like a Treant."

"I'd like to be a Treant." said Fluttershy.

"No, no! What? No!" Spike said, getting flustered, "I'll have to start all over if you make new characters!"

Applejack rolled her eyes. "Well, fine. But I at least want to take a prestige class or multiclass or something. Dwarfpy's a long way off from bein' optimized."

"Aw, listen to you!" said Pinkie, chucking Applejack playfully on her shoulder, "A few months ago you were all, '*Ah ain't unner-stan' this here dang ol' game*', and now here you are, min-maxing like a champ!"

Applejack grinned sheepishly. "Heh, yeah. Guess I've gone native, huh?"

Spike rubbed his temples irritably. "You know, I'm not gonna finish this any faster if you all keep standing around yakking in my ear."

"Okay, okay, we get the message." sighed Applejack, "Come on, guys. I've got an idea."

As they all turned to leave, the door to library's study clicked open and Twilight popped her head out. Her hair was frazzled, and there were dark circles under her eyes.

"Hey, Pinkie, can I talk to you for a minute?" she said, stifling a yawn.

"Oh! We were just..." Pinkie started.

"It's okay, go on ahead." said Applejack, "We can meet up back at the barn later." She turned back to Fluttershy, "So anyway, Fluttershy, I've been meanin' to ask you somethin' about chipmunks."

"Oh, I know *everything* about chipmunks!" she said, following her out the door.

Pinkie squinted in the dim light of the study as she entered. Books and scrolls were stacked high around the room, even more so than usual. The only source of light came from several candles surrounding a desk in the corner. Pinned to the wall above it were a series of complicated diagrams Pinkie couldn't even begin to understand.

"Wowzers," she said, "Looks like you've been hitting the books pretty hard. So *this* is what you've been up to for the last few weeks!"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah, sorry I've been so distant lately." said Twilight distractedly, sitting down at the desk, "I've been pretty busy working on a new spell."

"Cool-cool-COOL!" shouted Pinkie, doing an energetic little dance in place, "What's it do? Does it turn ponies into things, or blow things up, or make sparkles shoot out of things? Go on, tell-me-tell-me-tell-me!"

Twilight smiled wearily. "Nothing so dramatic. Not all spells can be sparkles and explosions." She yawned again as she shuffled through her notes. "It's a new method of magically assisted psychological analysis. It could be a boon to the mental health field. That is," she grumbled, "If I can get it to work, of course."

Pinkie stopped dancing and raised an eyebrow at Twilight. "Psychological? Like, for helping crazy ponies?"

"Ideally, yes." Twilight said, chuckling slightly.

Pinkie looked at the piles of books and notes around the room, then back at Twilight. Her voice was suddenly serious. "This... this is for her, isn't it?"

Twilight nodded, squeezing her eyes shut. "Yeah... yeah, it's for her."

"I thought she was getting better?" Pinkie said with concern, "She seemed okay the last time we saw her, didn't she?"

"She's not violent anymore, if that's what you mean." said Twilight, "But every time I talk to her, she seems so... lost. Half the time I don't know if I'm talking to her or the Stranger." She sniffed, tears beginning to bead in the corners of her eyes.

"Hey," said Pinkie, putting a comforting hoof on her shoulder, "It's not your fault."

"I was the one who introduced her to the game."

"None of us had any idea she'd react like that, Twilight." Pinkie persisted, "You can't blame yourself."

Twilight blinked away her tears. "It's not about blame, it's about responsibility." she said, managing to summon up a steely resolve, "I'm going to fix this. I swear it."

"Okay, if you say so." said Pinkie, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"That's kind of the reason I asked you in here." said Twilight, "Have you noticed how Applejack's been acting lately?"

"What, Applejack?" said Pinkie, slightly taken aback, "What do you mean? I guess she's a little grumpier than usual, but she always gets like that when the harvest season is over. Unless..." Pinkie cocked her head at Twilight. "Hold on... you don't think... I mean, this is *Applejack* we're talking about, here."

"I'm not saying she's turning into... you know." said Twilight, "I'm just concerned, is all. You heard her talking earlier. She's getting much deeper into the game than the rest of us ever have. I mean, *multiclassing*?" she gave an exasperated sigh, "There's no going back once you start with that."

"So, you want me to keep an eye on her? Keep her from going crazy?"

"I, uh..." Twilight blinked at her. "Well, when you put it like that, it sounds like a bad idea."

"No-no-no, it's a GREAT idea!" said Pinkie, the bounce returning to her step, "It's like a mission! A *quest*! The quest to save Applejack's marbles!"

"Just let me know if she starts acting strangely." said Twilight, "And try to keep her from playing the game, if you can."

"Aye-aye, captain!" said Pinkie with a plucky salute, "You can count on me!"

Twilight watched her as she bounced out of the study, a mare on a mission.

# Act 1

## Mac and Me

Sweet Apple Acres stood calm and still in the crisp late-autumn air. The trees' branches rattled skeletally in the breeze, their fruit long since picked and their leaves mostly fallen. A farm is never truly at rest; there's always work to be done somewhere. Still, it was a stark difference from the hustle and bustle of only a few weeks ago, when the last harvest of the year was in full swing. Now, the farm was eerily quiet, giving the impression that it was girding itself for the long winter to come. Pinkie Pie bounced her way along the rough dirt road leading to the barn, a bright splotch of color against the muted browns and grays of the landscape. The barn door creaked open as she approached and Applejack waved to her from the door frame.

"There you are! We've been waitin' for you." she said, letting her inside, "What was it Twi' wanted to talk about?"

"Magic!" Pinkie blurted out, "Just... magic stuff. You know, 'cause that's what she does, right?"

"Studyin' again, huh? Figures." said Applejack, shaking her head bemusedly, "Sometimes I worry about that girl."

Inside the barn barrels of apples were stacked to the ceiling, meticulously organised by cultivar. Despite how full the barn was packed it represented only a fraction of the total crop. Most of the harvest were sealed up airtight and sunk into the lake for long-term storage, where the cold and lack of air would keep them as fresh as the day they were picked well into spring. Applejack lead her friend through the maze-like columns of barrels.

"Come on, we're set up over here." she said.

"Set up?"

"Yeah, the game, remember?" Applejack said with a lopsided grin.

Pinkie thought fast. "Hey, uh, don't you want to do something else? Like, uhh..." she drew a blank, "...stuff?" After mentally kicking herself, she

tried harder, looking for any excuse. "I thought Spike wasn't finished with his campaign? We don't have a DM."

"Sure we do." Applejack said confidently, "I called in a favor."

They rounded a stack of barrels, coming on an open space lit by an old kerosene lantern. A rough circle of hay bails were arranged around a large wooden spool, tipped on its side and serving as a makeshift table. Fluttershy and Big Macintosh were already seated and waiting for them.

"Nice, eh?" said Applejack, "It's a mite chilly in here, but we've got some hot cider and plenty of apples to snack on. And the hay, if you get sick of apples. 'Course, then you gotta choose between food and furniture."

"Big Macintosh?" said Pinkie, "I didn't know you were into Dungeons and Dragons."

"Uh..." he started.

"He ain't, normally." Applejack cut him off, "But he owes me one. Right, big bro?"

"Whatever you say, sis." the big stallion drawled, "But I still don't get why you need me. I never even played this game before. Wouldn't one a' ya'll make a better dragon-master?"

"I told you," Applejack said testily, "Me and Fluttershy don't feel like it. Spike's great and all, but he can't improvise worth diddly squat. And Pinkie Pie's games always end up blowin' us all to kingdom come."

"That's my style!" Pinkie said proudly, "Gotta end with a bang!"

"I, uh, don't think that phrase means what you think it means." said Fluttershy.

"So anyway, you're the best we got." continued Applejack, "Just do it like I told you, and you'll do fine."

"Okay," said Big Macintosh with a resigned sigh, "Here goes nothin', I guess."

---

*Zinnadiana Lyreplucker the twenty-seventh leaned back in her chair, sipping her ale. The tavern around her buzzed with life. It was the kind of dive bar that adventurers always preferred: cheap liquor, an inexplicably large number of weapons available for purchase behind the counter, and a high tolerance for bar brawls. Seedy-looking characters of all shapes and sizes were packed into every corner of the room, talking, drinking, playing cards, and doing their best to project an air of menace.*

*"I don't like places like this, Zinny." said her companion.*

*"I guess it's a little clichéd," said the bard, "But we've gotta start somewhere. They gave you a booster seat, right?"*

*"That's not what I mean." said Gracelove Silentall, halfling cleric. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "A member of the Order of the Silver Star shouldn't be seen in a house of such ill repute."*

*"Pssh. Clerics." said Zinnadiana dismissively, "Try and show 'em a good time, and all they do is complain. Where's our third, by the way? We ought to get ourselves equipped if we plan on seeing some action."*

*"I haven't seen..."*

*There was a crash as the doors to the tavern flew open, and a man clad in leather armor with a dark green hood stepped through. All eyes turned to watch him as he strode boldly up to the bar and rapped forcefully on the counter top get the bartender's attention. He lowered his hood, revealing an unruly shock of red hair and a pointed beard.*

*"Greetings, barkeep! My name is Marcus Ealdræd." he said, flashing a devil-may-care grin, "I require a pint of ale and a shank of mutton, and I'd like to take a look at your selection of scimitars."*

---

*"Aw, you're not playing Dwarfy?" said Pinkie, looking crestfallen.*

*"Nah, it's like I said earlier." said Applejack, "I want to try out some of the other races and classes. Marcus is a ranger I built around dual-wielding melee combat. He's a human, too. Gotta love that bonus feat."*

*"How did you say that last name, again?" asked Fluttershy.*

*"Like 'all-dread'. Cool, huh?" grinned Applejack.*



“Oh, is that how you pronounce that little squashed-together a and e?” said Pinkie, squinting at the character sheet.

“Beats me.” Applejack shrugged, “Just thought it looked cool. You guys sure you don’t want to make new characters too? We don’t exactly have a balanced party, here.”

“No way!” said Pinkie firmly, “Every party could use a bard.”

“Yeah, but a bard *and* a cleric?” said Applejack, “That’s a little defense-heavy. Anyway, I figured Fluttershy was more the type to play a druid.”

“Oh, I thought about it.” said Fluttershy, “But Spike likes to use a lot of undead monsters, so I went with a cleric. The Order of the Silver Star is dedicated to the eradication of necrotic creatures.”

“Necrotic creatures, eh?” said Applejack, tapping her chin with her hoof thoughtfully, “Hey, there’s an idea! Big Macintosh, try to work in some undead stuff.” She bent over her character sheet, scribbling some notes. “I can get a truckload a’ bonuses if I pick that as my favored enemy.”

“Uh, sure,” said Big Macintosh, struggling to keep up with their conversation, “Let’s say there’s a haunted castle, or something, just west a’...”

“Whoa whoa whoa whoa, what are you doing?” Applejack cut him off, “You can’t just tell us where it is. I told you, no railroading!”

Big Macintosh blinked at her. “So, how’ll ya’ll know where to go if I can’t tell you?”

“That’s a knowledge skill check, duh!” said Applejack, rolling her eyes. She pulled out her DM’s guide, flipping to the appropriate entry. “See? I put a buncha’ skill points into Knowledge (streetwise), and darn it, I’m gonna use ‘em!”

“So let me get this straight,” Big Macintosh said dubiously, “If I just tell you, it’s ‘railroading’, but if we roll some dice and THEN I tell you, it’s fine?”

“Exactly.” Applejack said brightly, “See, I told ya you’d get the hang of it!”

---

*"Word on the street says there's a haunted castle just west of here."* said Marcus, sitting down at the table, "You want in?"

*"Sounds like a blast!"* said Zinnadiana.

*"It would be my pleasure, Mr. Ealdræd."* said Gracelove, demurely.

*"Super!"* said the ranger, clapping his hands together, "Need to pick up any weapons, or are you good?"

*In response, Zinnadiana plucked a few discordant notes on her lute, causing a bayonet to slide forcefully out of the instrument's neck with a barely audible hiss. She grinned at him. "Plus, I've always got my trusty steam-crossbow."*

*"Cool, cool."* nodded the ranger, "How about you, Gracelove?"

*"I have no need of earthly weapons."* said the diminutive cleric, "My faith will protect me."

*"Suit yourself."* said Marcus, "I'll get us some field rations and torches before we leave."

*"Make sure you get a ten-foot pole, too."* said Zinnadiana, "We might need to poke some stuff."

---

"All right, that's enough hanging out in the tavern," said Applejack impatiently, "Lets pick up the pace, here."

"Hey, go easy on the big guy." said Pinkie, "This is his first time as DM."

"I think he's doing really well, actually." said Fluttershy. She smiled encouragingly at him.

"He's doing... fine." said Applejack, giving her brother a doubtful look, "I guess he's got the right motivation. Right, bro?"

"Hey, uh, let's just move on, huh?" Big Macintosh said quickly. He smiled stiffly, his eyes shifting back and forth.

Pinkie exchanged a look with Fluttershy. She shrugged back at her, but remained silent.

The red stallion cleared his throat. "So, anyway, the castle's big and scary, and it's got bats flyin' around it an' stuff. The front doors open into a long hallway..."

---

*The hallway stretched out before the party. The walls were made of smooth gray stone, dimly lit by a few ancient, dripping candle holders and decorated with a series of faded portraits. They move forward cautiously, brushing cobwebs out of their way.*

*"Nice place." said Marcus, looking around, "Bit of a fixer-upper."*

*"Wait," said Gracelove, halting their progress, "What's that up ahead?"*

*Marcus squinted in the hazy gloom of the corridor. There was indeed something ahead, standing in the intersection of two hallways. The creature looked like a large cat, but very thin, almost emaciated. It was dark blue, bordering on black, and two strange, snake-like appendages slithered at its shoulders. Grooming itself casually with one of its six paws, it seemed to pay the adventurers no heed.*

*"Aw, sweet, displacer beast!" said Marcus, gleefully unsheathing his scimitars.*

*"Hold up," said Zinnadiana anxiously, "I've never seen them act like this. Aren't they usually the type to sneak up on you?"*

*"Nah, we got the drop on 'im." Marcus flashed his trademark grin, "My stealth score's though the roof."*

*"Zinny's right." said Gracelove, "We should exercise caution."*

*"You're over-thinking it." said Marcus, "Just get your buffs and heals ready, and I'll make with the choppity-chop."*

*The ranger crept along the stone corridor, his footfalls barely making a sound. The displacer beast faced away from him, appearing oblivious to his approach. Gracelove and Zinnadiana held their breath, not making a sound. When he was finally within range he leaped forward, spinning his scimitars savagely.*

*"Eat it, squid-kitty!"*

*The image of the displacer beast shimmered and disappeared as the blades passed through it, slipping out of his hands and clattering uselessly on the flagstone floor. Marcus froze in place, feeling hot breath on his neck. He slowly turned his head, coming face to face with a wall of needle-like teeth.*

*“Clever girl...”*

*A tentacle shot out, wrapping itself around the ranger’s torso and lifting him into the air.*

*“Marcus!” shouted Zinnadiana, rushing forward to aid her comrade.*

*“It’s okay, I’ve got this under... oomph!” he was cut off as the beast slammed him into the stone wall, “...Okay, maybe I could use some help.” he admitted, wheezing.*

*“I’m on it!” shouted Zinnadiana. She launched a volley of bolts from her auto-crossbow. The beast’s free tentacle lashed out, flicking them out of the air effortlessly.*

*Dropping her crossbow, the bard dove into the fray with her lute’s bayonet drawn. She played a stirring tune as she charged, sliding up the frets in a rapid glissando. The blade began to glow with arcane energy.*

*The beast tossed Marcus back down the corridor over Zinnadiana’s head, bringing both of its tentacles to bear on the new threat. The ranger landed hard behind her on the cold stone floor, the air knocked out of his lungs.*

*Zinnadiana didn’t waste the brief opportunity, ducking under the tentacle and jabbing her blade deeply into the creature’s side. The magical energy discharged, crackling across its flesh as it roared with pain. Rearing back on its hind legs, it brought its powerful claws down on the bard, knocking her to the ground. It staggered backwards momentarily, wrapping a tentacle around the lute still impaled in its side. Wincing, it gingerly pulled the blade out of the wound. It turned back to face the party, tightening its grip on the instrument and crushing it with a sad series of twanging noises. A deep growl rumbled in its throat.*

*Marcus lifted his head, his vision returning to him. Across the hallway, he could see Zinnadiana sprawled out on the floor, still stunned*

*from the earlier attack. Just beyond her, the displacer beast advanced on the tiny, unarmed cleric, its form shimmering and shifting like a mirage.*

*“Gracelove!” he shouted, “Hold on, I’m coming!” He hauled himself to his feet, rushing forward.*

*Suddenly, he felt his stomach lurch as the floor dropped out from under him. He fell headlong into an empty shaft, far too deep to see the bottom. Thinking fast, he pulled a dagger from his belt and jammed it into a crack between the stones of the wall, managing to arrest his fall several yards below the trapdoor. He pulled out a second dagger and began to slowly pull himself back up the shaft, using the blades as improvised pitons. It was an agonisingly slow way to climb.*

*“Dang it!” he shouted, inching his way up bit by bit, “Should have... put more... points... into... Climb!” Sounds of the battle above echoed indistinctly against the walls around him as he made his way upwards. His panic only worsened when the sounds went suddenly quiet.*

*“Gracelove? Gracelove, speak to me!” he shouted, straining his aching muscles in an effort to climb faster. As he neared the top, a small silhouette moved into view above him, offering a tiny hand to help pull him up.*

*“Thank the Gods, you’re okay!” he said, accepting her hand and cresting the ledge of the pit, “What happened? Where’s the displacer beast?”*

*“Oh, I took care of him.” she said with a sly smile.*

*“How could you possibly...” he started, then noticed a wobbly green form just behind the cleric.*

*“Gah! Cube!” he shrieked, stumbling backwards and almost falling into the pit again.*

*“Don’t worry, Mr. Jiggly’s friendly!” said Gracelove, “I summoned him to eat the displacer beast. Their illusions don’t work on gelatinous cubes. See? No eyeballs.”*

*On closer inspection, Marcus could make out a vague shape slowly churning within the cube’s squelching mass. He stared at it disbelievingly. “So, you actually trained this thing?” he said, “I thought they only had the intelligence of an amoeba.”*

*"Yes, but Mr. Jiggly is extra smart." she said with motherly pride, "Aren'tcha, boy? You're so smart! Yes you are! Yes you are! Who's a good cube? You want a Jiggly Snack?"*

*The cube quivered in what could generously be described as anticipation.*

*"Okay, here you go, boy!" She reached into her bag, pulling out a screaming zombie head, which she tossed to the cube. It sunk into the goo and began to dissolve.*

*Marcus looked away, feeling slightly ill. "Hey, where's Zinnadiana?" he said with sudden concern.*

*"I'm over here." said a sad voice from down the hall. Zinnadiana was standing bent over the crushed remains of her instrument. "I'm fine, but the dang thing jacked up my lute."*

*"Oh, Zinny," said Gracelove mournfully, "I'm so sorry."*

*"Ah, it's okay." the bard shrugged, "I still have my travel harpsichord."*

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"All right, what the heck was that all about?" said Applejack angrily. Big Macintosh swallowed nervously under her glare.

"What's the matter, AJ?" said Pinkie, "That was a great encounter! Didn't you like the displacer beast?"

"The displacer beast was awesome, I'm not talking about that." said Applejack curtly, "I'm talking about that trapdoor. It's awful convenient that it just *happened* to go off when it did. How many times did we pass over that spot?"

"Ya'll kept jumpin' over it!" said Big Macintosh, starting to sweat, "And Fluttershy was too light to set it off."

"I trust Big Macintosh." said Fluttershy, trying to defuse the situation, "I'm sure he's playing by the rules."

"He'd better be." said Applejack, still glaring at her brother, "We wouldn't want somepony to say something unfortunate, would we?"

"What do you mean by that?" said Pinkie, raising an eyebrow.

“Nothin’!” said Big Macintosh, “She means nothin’!”

“And besides,” continued Applejack, “We still haven’t seen any undead yet. I burned my favored enemy for that, and for what? And we could use some character motivation, here. Your story line’s a joke! So far we’ve just been wandering around a deserted castle like morons. I mean, who’s castle is this suppose’ to be, anyway? Who are we fightin’ against?”

Big Macintosh snorted, starting to get annoyed. “She’s an evil vampire queen, and she’s holdin’ all the innocent farmers hostage!” He blurted out, realizing what he was saying too late to stop himself. He fell silent, looking at his sister nervously. Across the table, Pinkie Pie stifled a giggle.

“That’s...” said Applejack, blinking, “...actually pretty good. You just come up with that off the top a’ your head?”

Big Macintosh coughed. “Sudden flash a’ inspiration, I guess.”

“Well, all right then.” said Applejack, rubbing her hooves together, “Let’s go kick her butt!”

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*The heavy wooden doors creaked ominously as the heroes pushed them open. They entered a cavernous room, devoid of windows and filled with a thick, oily mist. Twin staircases curved elegantly at either side of the room, mirroring each other and meeting at a raised balcony overlooking an ostentatious ballroom floor. At the center of the balcony was a raised platform, on which rested an elaborately decorated coffin.*

*“Okay, here’s the plan.” said Marcus, “Me and Gracelove’ll watch your back, and you shank her with what’s left of your lute.”*

*Zinnadiana looked uncertainly at the sharp shard of wood that used to be her lute’s neck. It did seem to make a decent stake. “You sure you just want to stab her while she’s sleeping?” she asked, “That doesn’t seem sporting.”*

*“Hey, XP is XP.” he shrugged, “Besides, I don’t want to get caught off-guard like last time. Who knows what kind of minions she has waiting for us?”*

*"I'll have Mr. Jiggly patrol the lower level." said Gracelove, "That way, each of us can keep an eye on a stairway."*

*"Good idea," said Marcus, "I think that covers all our bases. Let's do it."*

*Zinnadiana inched toward the coffin, the stake raised above her head. She glanced back at each of her allies, who gave her a nod when they were in position. She took a deep breath, then slowly lifted the lid. She paused a moment, staring into it.*

*"Aw, crap."*

*"What?" said Marcus, "What's wrong?"*

*"The coffin," she said blankly, "It's empty."*

*Cackling laughter reverberated through the room, coming from everywhere and nowhere at once. The mist around them swirled and coalesced, forming into the shape of a woman floating over their heads. The vampire had long, tangled white hair and a gaunt, feral face, and it wore flowing black robes. It grinned devilishly, showing off its sharp fangs.*

*"BLAH!" it shouted, "I'm the Vampire Queen Apel'Jek, and I suuuuuuuuuck!" It flew around them mockingly. "Also, I'm ugly and my face looks like a butt!"*

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Pinkie Pie erupted in a bubbling fit of laughter. She doubled over, clutching her sides with tears streaming down her face. Fluttershy suppressed a giggled of her own, looking nervously between Big Macintosh and Applejack.

Applejack glared at her brother. "Oh, har har." she said, "Real freakin' mature."

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talkin' about sis." said Big Macintosh, trying to keep his lips from curling into a grin.

"Come on AJ, that was funny!" said Pinkie, still snorting uncontrollably.

"It was childish, is what it was." said Applejack. She paused, a sadistic smile flashing across her face. She looked her brother dead in the



eye. “Just like when Big Macintosh used to borrow my dolls to play ‘mommy’.”

Big Macintosh exploded with rage. “You *TOLD*! You *SWORE* you wouldn’t tell!” He launched himself over the table, barreling into his sister and tackling her to the ground.

“Bring it on, bro!” said Applejack, maneuvering into a headlock, “Wouldn’t be the first time I kicked your tail!”

They rolled across the barn’s floor, kicking up a cloud of dust as they wrestled. Although Big Macintosh had a definite size advantage, the two were fairly evenly matched. Years of sibling rivalry gave Applejack the experience to be able to hold her own against her older brother.

Pinkie looked at them for moment. She turned to Fluttershy. “So, this is all kinds of awkward, huh?” she said conversationally, “What was it you were saying about chipmunks earlier?”

“Shouldn’t we stop them?” said Fluttershy. She watched anxiously as the brawling siblings bumped into a barrel, knocking it over and spilling its contents across the floor.

“Nah, they’re fine.” she said casually, “All brothers and sisters get into a scrap like this every now and then. Trust me, I grew up with two sisters myself.” She bent down to pick up one of the apples that had rolled near her. “All right, fuji’s, score!”

“Oh, well, okay, I guess...” said Fluttershy reluctantly. She furrowed her brow as a thought occurred to her. “Wait, *all* brothers and sisters? You mean, even little Applebloom...?”

“*Especially* little Applebloom.” said Pinkie, “I’ll bet she’s a biter, too. The youngest ones are always biters.” She crunched on her apple.

The siblings rolled to a stop, running out of steam. They each shakily stood up again, dusty, a little bruised, but none too worse for wear. Applejack looked around for her hat, her chest still heaving.

“Okay... *huff*...” she panted, “You... *huff*... got that... *huff*... outta your... *huff*... system.” She found her hat and slapped it back into place, managing to catch her breath. “You wanna get back to the game?”

“You’re kidding!” said Big Macintosh, “I did everything you asked me to, but you still told! Deal’s off!”

“Listen,” said Applejack, digging in her heels, “You and I both know you got nothin’ to do for the rest of the day. Unless some work just falls outta the sky, neither of us is goin’ nowhere.”

Fluttershy’s ears perked up. “Oh! I, uh, just remembered!” she said suddenly. All eyes turned to look at her. Her instincts told her to hide, but she soldiered on. “Big Macintosh, ah, agreed to help me with my animals.” she said her eyes shifting nervously, “One of them is, um, sleeping in the wrong place.”

Applejack looked at her skeptically. “Ain’t that somethin’ you could handle on your own?”

“It’s, uh, a bear.” she said, thinking quickly, “Aaaaand he’s really heavy, so he, uh, agreed to help me move him?” Her voice raised into an almost plaintive squeak.

Applejack looked doubtful.

“Hold on,” said Pinkie thoughtfully, “Are you talking about Harry the bear? The one you were house-sitting for that one time?”

“Y...yes!” said Fluttershy, “That’s him all right! Good ol’... Harry!” She laughed in what she hoped was a casual and disarming way.

Applejack glanced between her and her brother, who was putting on his best poker face. “Well...” she said eventually, “I wouldn’t want to get between you and your work...” Over her shoulder, Big Macintosh shot Fluttershy a silent, desperate *‘thank you’*. “I guess you’re off the hook this time, big bro.”

The stallion and the pegasus got up to leave. Pinkie called after them on their way out.

“Hey, Fluttershy!” she said, “You know, you really need to introduce me to Harry sometime.”

“Y... yeah...” said Fluttershy, a rictus grin plastered across her face, “I s...sure do! Well, we’ll, uh, s...see you both later!” The two made their exit quickly, before things could get more complicated.

Applejack snorted, kicking up some dust with her hooves. “Well, that was a wash.” she sulked.

“It wasn’t all that bad.” said Pinkie, “We still had some fun, right?”

“Yeah, but we didn’t get to finish!” Applejack huffed. “And now we’re down a DM *and* a third player.”

“Maybe we could do something else.” said Pinkie, remembering her mission. She scrunched up her face in thought. “Why don’t we check up on your sister? Isn’t she hanging out with her friends at the clubhouse today?”

“I dunno,” said Applejack doubtfully, “Are we already desperate enough to start playing with little kids?”

Pinkie rolled her eyes. “I meant we should just try hanging out with them.” she said, “You know, your beloved little sister? Maybe have a heartwarming family moment?” She paused, trying to think of a more compelling reason. “Um... I think Rarity’s keeping an eye on them. It’d be nice to see her, right?”

“Hey, yeah!” said Applejack, her face lighting up, “Rarity’s a *great* DM! Good idea, Pinkie!”

“But... but I didn’t...” Pinkie started, but Applejack was already on her way to the door. She slumped her shoulders in defeat. “Aw, man... This quest is gonna be harder than I thought...”