



# Mines of Dragon Mountain

By Hephestus

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# Intro

It was dark and stifling in the mine and the air was rank with the smell of machinery and dirt; the only light available was the jittering circle cast by a helmet lamp bobbing up and down in tandem with the sharp metallic clangs of a pickaxe. The miner grunted as he swung the pickaxe into the side of the mineshaft, knocking out loose chunks of dirt and rock. The miner panted in the stifling environment, it was too hot and the air was stagnant. The ground was hard and black, high amounts of carbon, minerals, and pressure saw to that. But where there was carbon, minerals, and pressure, there were diamonds and other gemstones. The diamond dog miner swung his pickaxe with all the strength his long ape-like arms could muster, battering away chunk after chunk, searching for gems.

"Look!" cried an excited voice. "I found one! I found the first gem!" The miner turned to see one of his fellow miners dancing in joy, holding in his paw a ruby the size of a tangerine.

"And what a gem! This is your lucky day Tozer!" He said to his dancing compatriot. There was only the two of them down here; this was an expeditionary dig, to set up seismic sensors while searching for gemstones. Naturally, neither of them had expected to find any gems, but instinct practically forced them to at least try to find some while they prepared the equipment.

Tozer smiled and slipped it into his vest pocket. "Sorry to snatch this'un from ya Balt, but y'know the rules 'First gem found in the shaft goes to the finder'! This'll cover my grog bill for a whole year!"

Balt snorted and went back to chipping. "Good thing you have your priorities straight!"

"I'm a realist!" Tozer said as he continued to work. "I could bark all day about company stocks and shares, but at the end of the day the grog is what keeps me happy!"

"Yeah! Grog keeps your wife happy too!" He said chuckling, knowing what pushed his young friend's buttons. "Takes the edge off waking up next to your sorry hide every morning!"

There was a sound like a surprised squeak before the sound of machinery filled the air once more.

"Heh..." Balt said, the lack of expletive laden retorts filling him with unease. "...H-hey Tozer, don't take it so personal, ya? I'm just tuggin' your

tail!"

The sound of machinery filled the air.

"Tozer?" Balt said as he began to turn around. "Tozer, you-"

Stars exploded in his head as something hard and jagged hammered across his face, lacerating his cheek and sending him sprawling on the hard rocky ground. Wide-eyed he rolled onto his back, shining his helmet lamp up at his assailant. For an instant he saw a horrible visage that was diamond dog in shape but something else entirely; damp green mottled skin, lank stringy black hair, and huge dilated sun-orange eyes, and *teeth*, green-yellow *teeth*. Another blow cracked his helmet in half, shattering the light and causing the inky veil of darkness rushing in. He felt enormous clawed hands clasp around his head, a foul organic stench emanating from the putrid dank flesh permeating the stifling mine air. He let out a final scream before the hands wrenched his head around; the thunderous sound of his own vertebrae snapping was the last thing he heard before true darkness settled in.

As the scream echoed up the mineshaft, the workers who followed it down heard something like sobbing before finding the mangled bodies and nothing more.

(Dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da  
etc)

## DOCTOR WHOOVES

Episode 2

The Mines of Dragon Mountain: Part 1

Starring:

The Doctor

Twilight Sparkle

Pinkie Pie

Rainbow Dash

Applejack

Fluttershy

Zecora

Rarity

Spike

Featuring:

Zeitgeist Stardust

# CHAPTER 1

“Get back here!” shouted a heavily accented voice from behind. Twilight Sparkle wasn’t listening; she was far too busy running. “In the name of the Emperor, we demand that you *stop!*”

Twilight looked over her shoulder at the three bizarre looking aliens shouting demands, their bodies looked just as any pony’s body should but where their neck and head should have been sprouted a torso, complete with and set of arms and the head of a pony. Two of the creatures clad in shiny gold armor raised their weapons and glittering balls of blue-white plasma arced forth, sparking and flashing as they missed her by a hairs breadth.

“No you fools!” bellowed the more important looking of the three, reaching out and striking their weapons from their hands. “The emperor wants his bride unharmed!”

Twilight ran down a hallway, she had to admit that the emperor’s castle far outstripped anything in Equestria in terms of sheer decadence and raw enormity. Everywhere was marble, gold, silver, and platinum; everything was encrusted with precious stones and the statues were among the best pieces of workmanship she’d ever seen. This was the residence of the most powerful being in an interstellar empire after all, it had to be showy and gaudy or else how would anyone know? A sign would suffice, or maybe a nametag. But what had truly gotten her attention was the library; it occupied roughly one quarter of the enormous building; a room a thousand meters on each side, forty meters high, filled to bursting with books and tomes, scrolls and parchments, and even stone tablets from ancient times! The entire history of a powerful and successful civilization was at her hoof-tips, the sheer enormity of the knowledge was-and then the one-hundred-and-twenty year old alien emperor ‘requested’ her hoof in marriage. So now she was running from a platoon of heavily armed alien guards intent on ‘persuading’ her to reconsider his most generous offer.

“Down that hall’s a dead end!” she heard from behind her. “We have you now your ladyship!”

She scurried up to the door, pulling on the handle in vain. She spun around to see the three guards approach her joined by twelve similarly armed soldiers. “In the name of Emperor Alzex Mollari, we demand that you...‘reevaluate’ your decision regarding his Excellency’s requests!”

Twilight's ears perked up slightly, a smile spreading across her face as she looked back at the guards. "I'm sorry gentlemen, but his Excellency will have to be content with his harem-city."

\*Vrrrrrt...Vrrrrrt...Vrrrrrt...Vrrrrrt\*

"That's my ride!"

A blast of warm electrified air blasted back her mane; the wonderful sound of the TARDIS filled the air. The telltale light began to flash as the impossible ship began to materialize. The guards jolted forwards, circling the box just in time to see her slate blue purple and pink tail as it disappeared behind the doors of the blue box. The guards began hopelessly blasting the box with their weapons, the powerful super-heated plasma harmlessly fizzling and dissipating across its surface with an insultingly impotent \*poof\*.

\*Vrrrrrt...Vrrrrrt...Vrrrrrt...Vrrrrrt\*

The box was gone, and with it their chances for a raise.

Twilight entered the TARDIS, she still couldn't quite get used to the impossibility of a ship that was several orders of magnitude larger on the inside than it was on the outside, but after a month of adventures with The Doctor she had come to accept the impossible as something new and exciting rather than frustrating. Greeting her was all her friends; the ever energetic Pinkie Pie, whose eccentricities perplexed even The Doctor. The always brash Rainbow Dash whose impulsiveness would have been a serious setback were she not so capable. Rarity, whose usual poise and grace somewhat damped by the sulk she was in, having been dragged away from the most sophisticated and glamorous social event in the stellar neighborhood will do that. Timid and soft spoken, Fluttershy only hugged Twilight tightly, whispering her joy at Twilight's return. Applejack simply smiled and patted Zecora on the back, garnering a smile from the pensive zebra.

"Brilliant..." said a voice behind her. She spun around to see The Doctor looking at a monitor by the door. "...I still can't get over that! The Centauri Republic is populated by actual *centaurs* here!" he turned to face her, a smile on his face. "I love this universe!"

Twilight didn't like to admit it to herself but The Doctor, a good-looking stallion by any metric, had a smile that could make marble statue swoon. She wrapped her forelegs around his neck in a grateful hug. "Perfect timing! How'd it all go?"

“Excellent!” The Doctor said, gesturing at the group. “You all did wonderfully! Rarity and Pinkie did an excellent job of distracting the palace officials!”

“A party is the best distraction a pony could hope for!” Pinkie cheered.

Rarity sighed longingly. “Yes, it was a magnificent party, such elegant dresses, the culture, the glamour! Amidst royalty and nobility, it was where I truly belonged...”

Twilight rolled her eyes and turned to Applejack. “You, Zecora, Rainbow Dash, and The Doctor did what you had to do?”

Applejack winked and clicked her tongue. “Those weapons and warships ain’t goin’ anywhere anytime soon! The Professor did somethin’ to ‘em that’ll pass for a design flaw if they check!”

“Sonic’d the reactor alloys, they’ll melt the second they get over 1% capacity! All the ‘kaput’ without the ‘boom’! A someone will probably get canned, though...” The Doctor said happily.

“If it saved some lives a job will suffice, to be the only sacrifice.” Zecora said before adding. “And were it not Rainbow Dash’s sonic rainboom, those guards surely would have spelt our doom!”

Rainbow Dash donned a pleased expression and polished a hoof on her chest. “They probably thought it was a weapon or something because it was so awesome!”

The Doctor turned to Twilight. “All in all a job well done! The Centauri Republic’s vaunted battle fleet is going to have to make due with a shoestring budget for the next few years, ought to put a damper on their recent expansionist regime! The surrounding governments would thank us!”

The muted thud of the TARDIS powering down permeated the console room and a slight jerk under their feet signified its landing.

“Where are we now Professor?” Applejack said excitedly. “Off to save some civilization from rampagin’ mutant fruit or some such?”

“Again?” The Doctor snorted. “Like I’d shortchange you lot with a rerun!”

Rarity smiled. “Is it that planet made of Cerrulian gemstones that you told me about? Where there are beaches of diamonds on oceans of sapphires?”

“Maybe later.” The Doctor said before spinning around to the group. “No...we have just landed on the most important planet in the whole universe!”

Pinkie Pie gasped with joy and sped for the door. “Oh! Oh! Oh! Is it a super big whole-planet party? With alien music, alien dances, and alien



goodies like space sugar cubes and space sugar canes and space sundaes and space sun-beams and space sasparilla? Where the parties are longer and funner than anything..." She burst out the door.

"...In...Ponyville?"

The ponies exited the TARDIS; around them were the quiet, thatched roofed houses of Ponyville, the dirt roads quiet and deserted. It appeared to be quite early in the morning.

Rainbow Dash shot into the air, looked around, and dropped back to the ground. "*Ponyville* is the most important place in the universe?"

The Doctor shrugged. "Isn't it?"

"When are we Doctor?" Fluttershy said, looking around at the empty streets. "There should at least be somepony out, even early in the morning!"

Zecora smiled. "I know these town ponies have never been dozers, so this quietness must be blamed on hangovers!"

"Heh...that was a good one..." The Doctor laughed and nodded. "Yep! Six AM local time, approximately twelve hours after we left. Everypony is sleeping off the celebratory applejack...not you, the drink."

"Ah know Professor. Sweet Apple Acres supplied the spirits, remember?"

"But why are we here?" said Twilight. "Are you dropping us off?"

"No silly!" chirped Pinkie Pie. "The Doctor is just stopping here to fuel up!"

The Doctor cleared his throat and said. "One of these days I'll find out how you know these things Pinkie."

"No you won't!" Pinkie giggled.

The Doctor shook his head. "...Anyway...yes Ponyville is my new pit stop for the TARDIS."

"What kind of fuel can you get here of all places?" said Twilight, stepping over the streamers and deflated balloons from a party that was, to her, ancient history. "Does the TARDIS run on small town quaintness?"

The Doctor smiled as he always did when he got to show off his knowledge. "You see, when I first arrived with the Hervoken and the Carrionites, there was a multi-dimensional tear in the walls of this reality. Princess Celestia and Princess Luna closed these tears but as with all wounds it left a scar. This scar in the fabric of reality bleeds off harmless radiation that my TARDIS can use to power its passive systems. The scar is in a geosynchronous orbit with Ponyville and constantly showers it with this harmless radiation. All I have to do is park the TARDIS in Ponyville, activate the collector, and KA-POW! Fill 'er up! Remarkably similar to

another pit stop I frequented, actually.”

“So, you’re not dropping us off?” Twilight said cautiously.

The Doctor blinked in confusion, a look of concern on his face.

“No...do you want me to? You can leave the TARDIS whenever you want, I won’t make you stay.”

She shook her head frantically. “Oh no! I love traveling with you Doctor, we all do! I was just-well you see...never mind.”

“Alright then!” The Doctor said, smiling again.

Twilight suppressed a sigh of relief that shocked her with its genuineness; she was honestly horrified at the aspect of returning home, returning to normal life! She could still remember that fateful night The Doctor literally dropped out of the sky and into her life. He had initially brought her near unbearable confusion as every aspect of his existence was an affront to everything she had learned to trust in up to that point; magic, physics, logic, the very cornerstones of how she perceived the world were either shaken, flaunted, or outright defied. It was a challenge to her sensibilities that could not be ignored, and in her quest to find answers she had inadvertently involved herself and her friends in a battle against an unspeakable being of unequalled malevolence.

The mere recollection of the S’Müz sent a shiver down her spine, the existential manifestation of hatred and negativity, a being of such manifold atrociousness and depravity that its cohorts, a cabal of powerful alien witches, were but minor nuisances in comparison. A small part of her was actually glad that the first enemy they faced with The Doctor was nearly without peer in terms of sheer monstrosity; compared to fighting an enormous thinking cloud of malefic psychokinetic energy, the fact that she had nearly become the exotic fille de joie to an aging alien emperor barely registered as a minor event to her now. In fact, much of what they had experienced as a group over the past month had been eased by their initial trial by fire, they had made powerful enemies and had become heroes of legend on far away worlds, witnessed the deaths of stars and the births of galaxies, the true magnitude of the universe had unraveled before them and it was glorious. Seven ponies from what could generously be described as a backwater planet had borne witness to the majesty of creation and had saved whole civilizations, all thanks to a pony-shaped alien and his impossible blue box. Now, back in Ponyville, it all seemed so small; the town, the planet, the sky, all of it was positively minuscule. She knew that one day she would return to her home of her own volition, but she also knew that that day could only come after many more days of travel, of adventure, of *fun*.

“Hey Doctor...” said Rarity. “I had a book on loan from the Trottingham Library that I brought with me. We’ve been traveling for about a month and even though it’s the next day in this timeline does that still mean it’s late?”

Rainbow Dash laughed. “Unless they have a pan-dimensional chronitonic wave manipulator thingie, I don’t think you have to worry.”

Rarity laughed before adding nervously. “And if they do?”

“Pray.” Twilight said with a mischievous smile on her face. “We library types are pretty hardcore when it comes to overdue books! They may just put a hit out on you!”

“Speaking of that...” Fluttershy said. “What if the Centauri blame us for their ships being sabotaged? Could that be an act of war?”

“It could be...” Twilight said, recollecting the star charts she had been so interested in. “But I checked the star charts, not only are we a year’s travel from their border, but they’d also have to send warships through Minponi territory to get to here, and not even they would be that stupid!”

The Doctor stood ramrod stiff before clapping his hoof against his forehead. “Oh! Dammit! How could I have forgotten?! I’m so thick! I’m Mr. Thick-Thick Thickety-Thickface!!” He spun around to the confounded ponies, a look of utter dismay on his face. “We were supposed to retrieve and return the Triluminary to the Minponi!”

“So?” Rainbow Dash snorted. “Those bone-heads dumped us in prison for eating some flowers! Let’m wait!”

The Doctor shook his head frantically. “Not just any flowers. You all ate from the memorial garden; those flowers were fertilized with the remains of their most venerated officials. As far as the Minponi are concerned you all killed and ate their most respected citizens! *That’s* an act of war!”

Fluttershy gasped, looking ill. “What will happen if we don’t return the Triluminary?”

“Oh nothing, they’ll just declare war on your entire species and send a battle fleet to melt Equestria’s surface into molten glass.” The Doctor said with a shrug. “I was only able to convince them to *not* do that if I got their dinky little artifact back from a rogue faction! You lot are still banished for life from Minponi territory under pain of death, though.”

“For eatin’ some stupid flowers?!” Applejack exclaimed, furious.

“Despite their accountant-monk demeanor, the Minponi are very prone to...overreaction.” The Doctor said as he trotted back to the TARDIS. “No matter the reality, they take themselves far too seriously!”

He turned to see the group following him, a mildly irritated look on his

face. "What part of 'banished for life' didn't you understand? They've got genetic scans and telepathic nets set up to find you lot if you show up! I'll be right back!"

Twilight gasped. "You're...leaving us?"

The Doctor paused and turned around to the plaintive faces before him. "No, never...But I have to do this alone, the Minponi won't uphold their end of the agreement if you're all present, even in the TARDIS. I'll be back in a couple days or so, trust me." Twilight looked at the ground, disappointed, The Doctor smiled and stepped forward. "Trust me?"

"Sure ah trust yah Professor!" Applejack said happily. "It'll be nice tah get back into normal life for a while! But you come an' get me when you're back!"

"It's been divine, Doctor! Don't be a stranger!" Rarity said. "Ooh! I'd better call Mr. Stardust back!"

Rainbow Dash smiled and stomped her hoof. "You'd just better come back, I still haven't flown in the zephyrs of Clorin like you promised!"

Fluttershy stepped forward and bowed her head. "I loved seeing all the alien animals Doctor, please drop by the next time you're in!"

"You'll be back!" Pinkie Pie said with certainty. "Now I just have to figure out how to make Alteran cupcakes without gorbles, it'll be fun!"

"If you must leave then you must go, just be sure to drop by and say hello." Zecora said with a respectful bow.

"Just...come back in one piece." Twilight said lowly. "You know where to find us."

The Doctor smiled and nodded. "Until we meet again, you've all been brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!" he opened the doors to the TARDIS and stuck his head out. "Allons-y!"

The doors closed and that wonderful alluring sound began, a blast of warm electrified air, a few flashes of light, and the TARDIS was gone, leaving behind the pony's accumulated luggage.

"Crap." Twilight said quietly.

Rarity sighed as she opened the door to her boutique; there was something to be said about the comforts of home. She had done her best to spruce up the TARDIS, maybe get a few carpets in to cover up the grated metal floors, a clean up on that awful cluttered console, anything! But every time she redecorated the next morning it was back to its normal kitschy self. It was sometime during her sixth attempt at redecoration that

The Doctor mentioned something about the ship being alive, and that it probably had its own ideas about how the internal design should go. Bad taste knows no boundaries, it seems. At least here she could maintain a truly elegant design philosophy. Even so, she was definitely looking forward to whenever The Doctor next came calling; the things she had seen, the things she had done, she could scarcely believe that a single month had held so many adventures! Faraway worlds, alien cultures, sights to behold and customs to witness; travel with The Doctor was non-stop, every time the adventure ran down in one place The Doctor would flip a switch and they'd be off once again. It never stopped and would have been exhausting otherwise, but each adventure, each new place, and each new person met brought with them a sense of accomplishment and achievement that more than made up for it. There was danger of course, and her life had been directly threatened on at least twenty occasions, but after their first adventure she felt her friends and her had been steeled to the worst the universe could throw at them, facing and defeating what could conservatively be called a god will do that. It was amazing how much things like a kilometer long serpent or a genocidal dictator lost their ability to intimidate when they were but sweet dreams compared to what she and her friends had witnessed. Genuine lack of fear does a lot to deflate such events into more manageable forms; truly, there was nothing that could perturb her now.

"Rarity?" said a voice from behind.

Almost nothing.

Rarity turned around to see her little sister Sweetie Belle, her mane was mussed and unkempt, it was early and she hadn't been through her morning grooming rituals yet. The look on her face was that of tired disorientation giving way to excitement. "You're back..."

Rarity felt an uncontrollable joy rise in her; she hadn't realized how much she missed her klutzy little sister until that moment. "Sweetie Belle!!"

Still half asleep, Sweetie Belle wasn't aware of what was happening until she had been scooped up into a tight affectionate hug. Rarity felt a small tear roll down her cheek as she drew her little sister closer. "Oh Sweetie Belle...I missed you!"

"You did?!" Sweetie Belle said in amazement.

Rarity broke the hug and smiled at her. "Oh yes!" she said before remembering, "Waitamminute! Aren't you supposed to be at Applejack's? I thought she was taking care of you while I was gone!"

"She was..." Sweetie Belle began. "...Big Mac and Applejack were off working and left Apple Bloom and I with Granny Smith, so we waited until

she was asleep and went to Ponyville to find Scootaloo and then-and then..." Tears began to well up in the little filly's eyes as her speech became hitched with sobs. "T-thuh-there was a thuh-thuh-thing! It was a cloud b-b-but there was something inside! It huh-hurt to look at, an-an-and everypony just started running and shouting! And I-and I-and-"

Rarity drew her into a comforting hug, silencing her rapid-fire speech before it descended into babble. "I know Sweetie, I know...the monster's gone now. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Sweetie Belle calmed herself down and looked up at Rarity. "I got separated from Apple Bloom when everypony started panicking, so I ran here and hid in the basement. I was too scared to come out until late, and by then I was too tired to do anything but sleep and...I'm just so glad you're back!"

"Me too Sweetie Belle...me too."

There was a curt knock on the door, followed by a familiar voice. "Delivery for Ms. Rarity! I hope you don't mind my forwardness ma'am, but this package is labeled 'urgent'!"

Rarity opened the door to a familiar grey pegasus mare, Ditzzy 'Derpy' Doo the walleyed mailmare. "Ah! Ms. Doo, I would have figured you'd have taken the day off like everypony else!"

"No ma'am!" Ditzzy said with pride. "Neither rain nor hail nor sleet nor snow nor heat of day nor dark of night nor Eldritch Abomination shall keep this carrier!"

"You're a better mare than I, Ms. Doo." Rarity said with a smile.

"I'm flattered, but one Mister...er...'Stardust' seems to think the world of *you* ma'am." She said as Rarity signed the postage. "Express delivery via personal courier, an ex-Wonderbolt if I'm not mistaken, *very* fast. It has the bureaucracy stamps all over it too, so it must be magical. *Very* expensive to get through all that red tape in a timely fashion, one would have to grease a few hooves if you'll excuse the common parlance."

Rarity gasped and levitated the package into her boutique. "Must be important! Oh, um, well thank you Ms. Doo! I hope to see you in here sometime, I have a dress design that would suit you perfectly!"

"Will do Ms. Rarity!" Ditzzy said as she took off. "You take care now!"

Rarity smiled as she closed the door, Ditzzy wasn't remotely as scattermaned as everypony assumed she was, in reality she was actually quite intelligent, especially when it came to her profession. She did, however, have a not-undeserved reputation for being clumsy, and the walleyes didn't help matters of course.

“Whatcha got there sis?” Sweetie Bell said, combing out her mane. “Did someone send you a present?”

Rarity opened the box and gasped, inside amidst packing straw and padding was a single emerald sphere. Within the rounded gemstone was five other multi-colored gems arranged in a pentagram. “An Emerald Contact Combine!”

“What’s that?”

Rarity levitated it gingerly out of the protective straw and padding. “It’s a new kind of communication device, my richer clients have things like Carnelian Conversation Apertures or Ruby Communication Ansibles, but *this...*”

The gems inside flickered and glowed, a spectral image of a handsome refined diamond dog appearing above the sphere, it was a recording from Zeitgeist Stardust. “Ms. Rarity, if you are receiving this I can only assume that the business with the blue box was resolved. I have sent you this ECC in hopes of establishing a more efficient means of communication with you, and I hope that in this capacity we can expand upon our professional relationship. Anyway, down to business...I have decided to go with color swatch number three-B, the black-blue color, for the main body silk, with crimson internal lining. As for the rest I will defer to your suggestions on the matter, I look forward to your response.”

“Well! A lady’s work is never done! I’m going to get started on this suit...” Rarity smiled and turned to Sweet Belle. “...Right after you and I have a little breakfast, hmm? Waffles?”

Sweetie Belle smiled happily and nodded. Rarity escorted her sister into the kitchen and began to tell her where she had been.

Applejack strolled up the long dirt road to Sweet Apple Acres; her saddlebags now packed to bursting with trinkets and memorabilia from her amazing travels. It was about 6:30 AM meaning Apple Bloom was doing the rounds up near the pigpen. The pigs were ideal tenants, all they wanted was a roof over their head and a steady supply of food and they’d sniff out delicious and valuable truffles when the season came. The traffic Sweet Apple Acres got from their annual truffle sale more than covered any rent the pigs may have had to pay otherwise. As predicted Apple Bloom was pouring buckets of slop into the feed trough, politely and friendly responding to the pig’s half muffled thanks.

One of the pigs said something and Apple Bloom turned around, a

smile spreading across her face. "APPLEJACK!!"

Applejack couldn't help but smile as the little filly ran towards her at full speed. "Hey there Bloom!"

"Ah didn't know where you were but Big Mac said you were fightin' that scary monster cloud an' when you didn't come home ah thought-" Apple Bloom said before being silenced by a raised hoof.

"Whoa there sprout! Slow down or yer tongue'll catch fire!" Applejack said with a smile. "But don't you worry none, that monster won't be botherin' anypony anymore! Yer sister Applejack saw tah that!"

"So, just what was that thing Applejack?" Apple Bloom said, bouncing around her older sister excitedly as they walked up the road to Sweet Apple Acres. "Big Mac told me that you had somethin' tah do with beatin' it! All the ponies in town was so scared and panicky they almost trampled me an' Sweetie Belle!"

"Well, ah got some stories for you!" Applejack said before realizing what Apple Bloom had said and she turned to her energetic younger sister, a stern look on her face. "What were you and Sweetie Belle doing in Ponyville without a grownup?! Land sakes!! Where is she anyhow?!"

"Ah don' know, we got separated last night..." Apple Bloom sagged immediately and looked down at the ground. "Ah'm sorry Applejack, we just wanted to find Scootaloo so we could plan our next crusade! You weren't there an' Big Mac was busy, an' we couldn't ask Granny Smith to head out..."

"So you went into the city without supervision and now we don't know where Sweetie Belle is!" Applejack sighed and shook her head. "Ah'm *not* looking forward tah telling Rarity that we lost her kid sister!"

"How was ah supposed to know a horrible monster was rollin' into town that day? Besides, she probably just went tah her house when we was separated! I was gonna swing by when ah'd done all m'chores! Ah-" she said before being silenced again, this time by an affectionate hug from her sister. "Applejack?"

"Ah just missed you is all. It'll be so good tah see Big Mac and Granny Smith again!" Applejack said, a broad smile on her face. "Ah've got stories to tell!"

"Missed me?" Apple Bloom said. "But you saw me last night, just before ah went tah sleep!"

Applejack chuckled to herself; this was going to be an interesting day of stories. "It was a *lot* longer tah me! C'mon sprout, I'll tell you all about it after I say hi tah Big Mac an' Granny Smith!"

Apple Bloom beamed adorably. "Okay! But, uh, keep it quiet. Big



Mac's feelin' a little under th'weather today! Ah think it was somethin' he ate!"

"Close enough." Applejack said with a laugh. "S'okay though, ah picked up a little somethin' from Inebrë-8 that'll clear that right up!"

" 'In-ee-bree-ate?" Apple Bloom raised an eyebrow. "What're you talkin' about?"

Applejack opened the door to their home and entered. As usual Granny Smith was up fixing her exceptionally large grandson an equally large breakfast, she looked up from her cooking and saw Applejack, a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. "Applejack! Good of you tah come home! An' here ah thought you'd let a little ol' monster keep you from work!"

"Y'all know me better'n that Granny!" Applejack said as she walked up close and nuzzled her grandmother.

Granny Smith smiled, a hint of shock on her weathered features. "Land sakes girl! What's gotten into you?"

"Ah'll tell you in a sec!" Applejack said. "Where's Big Mac?"

Granny Smith's eyes darted over to Apple Bloom and back to Applejack. "Err he's upstairs in bed...he's feelin' a mite 'delicate' this mornin'." She said, punctuating 'delicate' with a wink. "Ah think it was somethin' that that Caramel boy talked him into dri-um-eating."

Applejack raced up the stairs quietly, careful not to wake her brother. She nudged open the door to his room; an enormous snoring lump dominated what was once a bed, now a small mountain of blankets of pillows. Applejack stealthily made her way over to the bed and prodded what she assumed was a flank. Her prod was greeted with a grunt. She prodded again, harder; this time rewarded with a louder grunt and a leg roughly the size of a small tree warding her away.

"Is that anyway to welcome your own sister home?" She said, tucking her nose under the bed frame. "Rise'n'shine yer majesty!"

With a hefty grunt her powerful compact workhorse muscles flipped the massive bed onto its side, sending a shocked Big Macintosh spilling out onto the floor.

"AJ?!" He exclaimed indignantly. "What the Sam Hill're you doin'?"

Applejack chuckled and pulled a small black object out of her left saddlebag and pressed it to his forehead. Blue energy arced from the object and Big Mac bolted upright, eyes wide. "AAAAAAH! Whoa-I-who-what-it-how'd you do that?!"

Applejack put the trinket back into her saddlebag. "Just a little something I picked up on Inebrë-8. Handy-dandy ain't it?"

“What the hell are you talkin’ about?” Big Mac said, eying his sister cautiously, she seemed in awfully good spirits to not be planning some kind of prank.

“Oh, it’s just a colony of the Terpin Conglomerate. There’s a fungus that pumps alcohol straight into the atmosphere, so the Terpinites invented that little doodle-hickey tah ‘maintain optimum functionality’ as they put it.”

“...What the hell are you talkin’ about?” Big Mac repeated.

“Oh just come to breakfast you scattermane!” Applejack said dismissively. “I’ll explain it all over some home cookin’!”

Rainbow Dash raced across the skies of Equestria, her heartbeat thundered in her ears as she soared through the air. Everything seemed strange; it was something she just couldn’t quite put to words. The way the air smelt was familiar and comforting, the way the wind blew across her body as she tore through the skies was as it had always been. She could see the minute eddies and dead pockets in the air and skillfully dodge them or work them to her advantage. What Rainbow Dash understood about flying, what she knew in her heart but could not articulate, was that true control while flying, true finesse, was even more important than speed and power.

A finely honed sense of airflow, balance, and her innate pegasus sense when it came to identifying the consistency of the air ahead allowed her to not only to compensate, but also to *manipulate*. The key to her speed was power, but the key to her endurance, to her grace, to what made her a truly gifted athlete was her control. There were times when she would look at how other ponies flew and she would feel a sudden sense of superiority, Applejack would call it egotism but Rainbow Dash *knew* she was better than someone just by looking at how they fly. Most pegasi simply power their way through the air, flapping their wings and occasionally tucking their legs in to reduce drag, more skilled ‘professional’ trick fliers were a little better but they still seemed to treat the air as though it was an obstacle. Fliers like the Wonderbolts understood, they moved through the air at unthinkable speeds while still maintaining the control and finesse of a complex dance, they could *use* the air rather than just push it. And so could Rainbow Dash, in movements that were barely conscious her body would shift for optimum airflow, reducing drag and maximizing speed with a minimum of effort.

Maximum speed.

She smiled to herself; the citizens of Ponyville needed a wakeup call. She rose into the air, one thousand, fifteen hundred, two thousand, twenty-five hundred...at three thousand meters she looked down at the sleepy town; there were clouds lazily drifting about over Ponyville, marring what would have been a flawless blue sky for those below.

"I'm gonna have to talk to my team about getting drunk on a work day..." Rainbow Dash said mischievously. "Wakey wakey, everypony!"

She angled herself down towards the ground and was off like a shot. The wind howled in her ears as her mane was blown back and thrashing as she picked up speed. The air around her began to warp as the shockwaves rolling off her body began to collect moisture. The wind was deafening, lashing against her body with an almost painful intensity, tears streaming from her eyes were blown across her face.

"...Allllmost theeeere..." she said through gritted teeth. "C'mon!"

As the town rocketed towards her she saw the barrier as she began to strain it, it pushed back against her but she kept on pushing through, gravity and skill where on her side. The air began to arc and prism as she prepared to give her final push; this was where she had failed all those times before, but not this time. She gritted her teeth and gave one final ounce of power to compliment her perfect form. The world filled with color as a terrific \*crack\* split the air and rattled the windows below. Rainbow Dash pulled up suddenly, her mane and tail becoming a fused blur of rainbow colors, behind her trailed a sparkling rainbow extending from a single glowing epicenter of incandescent light. The super-sonic pegasus grinned widely and looked back, forms of surprised ponies leaving their houses becoming smaller and smaller as she arced away. It was good to be home.

Rainbow Dash set down on a cloud and laid back. A nap sounded like a good idea. As she looked up at the sky and waited to doze off she felt herself feeling somewhat restless. This was all too easy. The sense of accomplishment from doing her signature move had already begun to fade. She had noticed before that the air felt strange, strange in its utter familiarity. This was the sky she had flown in for every year of her life; she knew it like the back of her hoof. All the little eddies and wind currents were so tame and bog-standard that flying at her exemplary level barely took any conscious effort. Flying in alien skies, skies that had never had a pegasus in them before, was a different experience every time.

Even for a more articulate pegasus pony the sensation would have been difficult to explain to wingless ponies, it was like the sky itself was an ocean and the seemingly calm 'surface' belied a complex and alien lattice

of wind currents, updrafts, air eddies, downdrafts, and unpredictable weather. Flying in it and feeling those forces, being unable to predict and manipulate them, was akin to drowning in terms of the panic it often brought fliers. Flying in these new skies made her feel like a novice again, a temporary sense of inability before the inevitable exaltation of mastery. She had conquered the skies of countless worlds! She had encountered tornadoes made of *lightning*, she had flown between levitating mountains, encountered and evaded enormous predators that disguised themselves as storm clouds, and above all else she had survived! Wonders upon wonders seen, challenge after challenge met and defeated, and yet...

She sighed in frustration and lightly kicked the cloud. "That idiot."

All she had ever managed to get out of The Doctor was a 'good job, Ms. Dash' or a 'brilliant' or two, but he used *that* word so much it was practically his catchphrase. It was something she found nearly unbearable; ponies should be in awe of her, should watch her feats and gasp as they wonder 'how does she do it?' But The Doctor? It was almost like he wasn't impressed at all with her skills, that every compliment on her flying was more like a parent flattering an overactive foal rather than genuine commendation. What was worse was the almost irrepressible need she felt to impress him. The Doctor had that way about him, like he'd seen *everything* at least once. It had a way of making a pony want to impress him, want to show that *old* stallion that there was something unique and wonderful about them, something to make them worth his time.

She had come to appreciate and even somewhat depend on The Doctor's abilities; of all the times he had gotten them out of scrapes not once did he seem completely out of control. Sure, he was silly and funny and even charming in a dorky sort of way, but time with him revealed an edge, something hard and cold inside him. Something *dangerous*. That was another thing that made Rainbow Dash want to impress him, he seemed happier with them around, that coldness inside him was chased away. In his own way he needed them, needed their company, their friendship, because without it that cold vengeful being inside him would do something terrible, something The Doctor himself would be horrified at. Rainbow Dash sighed, The Doctor was intelligent, brave, heroic, and good; all were things that truly endeared him to her and she was even willing to admit that he was very easy on the eyes. But for all his intelligence and bravery there was still that undeniable tint of arrogance and superiority; that he felt that he knew better than anypony else. Combined with that vicious edge to his soul Rainbow Dash could definitely see The Doctor doing something frightful, his unwavering self-confidence not allowing him to see

even the slightest possibility that *he* might be wrong. Without someone there, someone he *respects*, he might very well follow through. *That* was what she and her friends would bend over backwards to do, earn his respect. Be his conscience. Be his friends.

Rainbow Dash contemplated this and inhaled deeply. A small bird caught her attention and she followed it with her eyes, watching as it bobbed up and down before disappearing into the clouds. “Well, I’m bored. I wonder what Pinkie’s up to?”

She rolled over onto her hooves and flicked her mane, preparing her wings. Her take off ritual was interrupted by what felt like a small earthquake...in the *clouds*. The vibration in her hooves increased exponentially, a low thunderous rumble building like an explosion or a stampede or...

An immense white shape plowed through the cloud-head, sending the semi-solid substance scattering like vapor. Rainbow Dash cried out in alarm as one of the many bellowing nacelles extruding from thing’s body obliterated the cloud she had been resting on. She watched it as it passed, its enormous bulk belying its true speed. Once it cleared the cloud-bank it turned in a fashion that Rainbow Dash would have not thought possible considering its size. Its *size*! At least three hundred meters long by fifty meters wide, it was long and tubular and tapered at both ends, four huge fins sprouting from the sides of the stern-most end. On each side of the main body there were six sterling white oblong pods, a familiar glowing aura emanating from the tapered ends of each, magitech no doubt. On its underside was what appeared to be part of a hotel, with dozens of windows dotting the sparkling streamlined fuselage. The behemoth vehicle lowered itself down into the still half asleep town, Rainbow Dash angled herself towards the airship and with a single powerful flap she sped towards it at full speed.

Mr. Cake smacked his lips as he opened his eyes, it was early and he had the distinct impression that he *should* be sleeping, an impression immediately reinforced by his detoxifying body.

Pain behind the eyes. “Eeeerg...”

Nausea like a roiling can of worms in his stomach, worms made of *lead*. “Uuuugh...”

There was a stale taste in his mouth; the taste of whatever had been on his tongue the previous night, in this case strawberry wine and Mrs.

Cake. “\*Smack-smack\*”

Who or what could have jostled him from his much needed rest?

\*CRASH\* \*clatter\* \*Giggle\* \*SHATTER\* oopsy-doopsy-whoopsy\*

Pinkie Pie, who e/se could it have been?

He yawned and groaned as he got out of bed, turning to check that his wife was still asleep. She was sleeping off the alcohol like he *should* be doing, but duty called and it was up to him to supervise Pinkie Pie. He smiled as he pulled the cover over Mrs. Cake’s sleeping body, she had been up all night cooking up sweets and goodies for the town-wide party, all those poor ponies had been through something of an ordeal and she had taken it upon herself to help any way that she could. It was only after considerable persuasion on his part that she had finally decided to start celebrating, things got hazy after that...

“Sweet dreams Honey-Bunny.” He said quietly and made his way to the door, following the clatter of hooves and cupcake trays, bowls, and various other cooking paraphernalia. He sighed; He and Mrs. Cake had taken Pinkamena Diane Pie off her parent’s hooves almost five years ago, they had been happy to see her go despite her being one of the few bright spots in their lives. They owned a rock farm kilometers from everywhere, they knew Pinkamena had to leave in order to thrive, she was just too vibrant a person to be squandered on such a place. Just as well too, Pinkie just so happened to be a savant when it came to baking, literally being able to bake soufflé with her eyes closed. He had come to think of her as the daughter he and Mrs. Cake never had. She was sweet and kind if a little exhausting, and there was literally no situation she could not brighten with her personality, a valuable asset for a confectionery, as happy customers were generous customers.

“...Nooooow...” He heard her say. “...No gorbles, so I’ll just use some Bhut Jolokia Peppers instead!”

“Pinkie Pie?” Mr. Cake said, still somewhat groggy. “What are you doing up so early?”

Pinkie Pie spun around and beamed at him. “Oh! Mr. Cake! I’m just making some Alteran Cupcakes! Oh they’re great! The actually walk up to you and politely request that you eat them! They’re sweet, spicy, savory, and some other flavor whose true nature cannot be grasped by mortal minds! I call it god-berry!”

Mr. Cake sighed and rolled his eyes; Pinkie must have gotten into some celebratory cider. Everypony agreed that she had enough spirit already and should never dip into the drink, especially since ‘the incident’. “Pinkie, it’s eight in the morning and Mrs. Cake and I are feeling under the

weather, if you would please-”

Outside a thunderous \*Boom\* shook the windows and a wave of incandescent light shone in, casting the room in a rainbow glow. The shock caused Pinkie Pie to drop all the assorted trays and plastic bowls she had been carrying, adding their clattering to the cacophony.

“...That was loud.” Pinkie said with a giggle. “A Rainbow Dashalarm! Not a Dashalamb, the sheeple from WoolTech-6!”

“Heh-heh...very good Pinkie, now would you please go back to bed?” Mr. Cake said, preparing to clean up after her.

“Why would I do that? I only just got in, silly!”

“What? Where have you been all night Pinkie?”

Pinkie Pie sighed and smiled. “Oh! Where *haven’t* I been? I’ve danced on worlds far from here! I moonwalked on the moon and I watched stars form; I partied with kings and cracked jokes with The Cutie-Marx Brothers! Harpo’s my favorite!”

“They’ve been dead for forty years Pinkie...” Mr. Cake said before remembering not to encourage her ramblings. “...And what have I told you about accepting drinks from strange ponies?”

“Umm...Don’t?” She said before giggling. “Aw no Mr. Cake! I’m fine! The night before yesterday a stallion calling himself The Doctor fell out of the sky in a little blue box, see? Only it wasn’t a box! It was a spaceship *and* a time machine! So my friends and I have been traveling through time and space with The Doctor, having fun adventures, helping people, and eating the local sweets! We just got through with sabotaging a powerful alien armada!”

Mr. Cake paused, looking at Pinkie Pie with a skewed expression. “You’ve been travelling around in that box that fell out of the sky?”

“Yes indeedy!”

“You *and* all your friends?”

“Twilight Sparkle, Rarity, Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and Zecora!

“*And* that stallion?”

“Well we couldn’t fly the TARDIS without The Doctor!” Pinkie said, rolling her eyes. “That’s just silly you silly-billy!”

“Of course, what was I thinking...” Mr. Cake shook his head and sighed. “Awfully cramped in there isn’t it?”

“Naw! It’s dimensionally transcendental!” She chirped.

“Bigger on the inside?” Mr. Cake said soberly, all this was sounding less and less like the standard Pinkie Pie fare of silliness. “Pinkie, I think you should get some sleep.”

There was another thunderous sound; this time it was a steadily building blast of wind as it beat against the window. Mr. Cake saw all the ponies outside exclaiming as their manes were whipped around by the sudden and vicious wind before they looked up at the sky, mouths agape with shock.

He turned to see Pinkie racing out the door, leaving the pots and pans to clatter loudly in the floor, Mr. Cake sighed and began to clean up. "See you later, then."

Pinkie Pie raced out the door and looked up, her fluffy mane bouncing and jumping in the hurricane winds and with a big smile on her face. "We *have* these?!"

Above her and getting closer was a colossal white airship, the body was a sterling cloud white and the structure seamlessly extruding from the bottom was a dazzling platinum with bright silver ornamentation. The swirled metal decorations were stylized representations of wind, swirling and curling about, and in the middle of them was the name *Brünhild*, in huge five-meter high Copperplate text. Several large clawed mechanisms on chains were lowered to the ground, touching down and digging into it, anchoring the airship in place.

"Hey Pinkie!" called a familiar voice.

Pinkie Pie looked up and smiled. "Oh hey Rainbow Dash! How's your morning been?"

The sky-blue pegasus flicked her rainbow mane and shrugged. "Eh, it was okay. At least it was until this big thing rolled in!"

The airship lowered down on its anchors until the bottom of the structure was a mere four meters above their heads. There was a loud mechanical hiss and a long ramp detached and extended from the underside, reaching down to the ground with a whirling hydraulic sound. It came to a stop at the hooves of Pinkie and Rainbow Dash, they looked up at the ramp as four figures began walking down it; the two in the middle was a tall thin bone-white diamond dog and the other a long-legged cream-orange unicorn mare with a bright red mane and dark green eyes, they were both flanked by two enormous brown diamond dogs, their long ape like arms as thick as tree trunks attached to densely muscled barrel chests.

The thin white diamond dog stopped in front of Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash, a smile on his face as he gestured at Rainbow Dash. "Ah! What luck! You were one of the ponies in that box that absconded with Ms.



Rarity!"

Rainbow Dash sighed and rolled her eyes. "Yeah...Zeitgeist Stardust right?"

"I'll have you know my client is not obligated to-" The bespectacled orange unicorn said before being silenced by a gesture from Zeitgeist.

"Litigia, please!" he said sternly before turning back to Rainbow Dash, running a hand through the expertly styled white fur on the top of his head. "Yes, you've heard of me I trust."

"Well, Rarity wouldn't shut up about some big name client named Zeitgeist Stardust." Rainbow Dash said appraising the airship. "Do you usually land your airship in the middle of towns?"

He smiled and laughed. "Heh...no. You see I was flying through on official business and I thought I'd drop by and talk to Ms. Rarity about our business arrangement."

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes, she detested people who minced words. "You mean your suit for the gala?"

Zeit paused before nodding. "Yes."

"You're doing all this for a *suit*?" Rainbow Dash said incredulously.

"Yes." He said glibly. "It's going to be a nice suit."

"Rich people are weird..." Rainbow Dash said with a shake of her head. "Come on, I'll take you to her. I'm sure she'll be happy to see you."

"Thank you Ms...hm, I don't think I caught your name."

Rainbow Dash flicked her tail. "That's 'cause I didn't give it. C'mon, Rarity's boutique is this way."

His smile faltered and he followed after her. "...Of course Ms. Dash."

Pinkie paused for a moment before hopping after them, a wide smile on her face. "I *like* where this is going!"

Twilight knocked on Rarity's door, biting her lip anxiously. '*C'mon Rarity...*'

The door opened and Twilight was greeted with the bright adorable face of Sweetie Belle. "Oh...hey Twilight Sparkle. What're you doing here so early?"

Twilight smiled impatiently. "Oh, hey Sweetie Belle! I'm just here to see Rarity about a favor."

Sweetie Belle looked over her shoulder before signaling for Twilight to come in closer. "Good thing you came, I think Rarity's gone crazy!"

Twilight blinked and said. "What makes you say that Sweetie?"

"Well, she keeps going on about how she's been traveling in a time machine, meeting aliens, and fighting monsters! She even said she had

been worshiped by a bunch of primitive aliens! The, uh, the...umm...Zopy? No...Zattie? Shoot...Zentraedi?"

"The Zottil." Twilight said before she could stop herself.

"Zottil, yeah! She-" Sweetie said before realizing.

"...Waitaminute...How did you...?" Twilight cleared her throat awkwardly.

"...It's true?"

"I really need to talk to Rarity." She said, pushing her way in.

"By Celestia!" Sweetie Belle exclaimed. "Rarity said you'd been with her the whole time! You and all your friends! You *all* went! Wait until Apple Bloom and Scootaloo hear about this!"

Twilight sighed in frustration. *'Applejack's probably told her family too! If we're not careful we could all get sectioned...until I ask Princess Celestia to pardon us, that is...'*

Rarity entered the room and saw Twilight. "Oh! Twilight, is there something wrong?"

"Nothing *wrong*..." she said sheepishly. "...I was just wondering if you had a gemstone to spare. See, I haven't seen Spike in a long time and I wanted to surprise him with a treat."

Rarity smiled and nodded as she went off to her jewel box. "Yes of course dear! I think I have a cloudy ruby around here somewhere, no good for actual jewelry or decoration, I just use them for stand-ins whilst I embroider the proper patterns for the finished product." She produced a rather large clouded ruby. "Ah! Here it is, I heard Spike say clouded rubies are just as good as clear ones, albeit with a sharper taste. He said that they were definitely something to have with a nip of Cabernet Sauvignon or a nice rich Zinfandel."

"So that's where all my wine has been going..." Twilight said, a small amount of irritation in her voice.

"Zecora is staying with you for a while right?" Rarity said as she put the gem into a small ornate box. "I can't believe I forgot that her house was destroyed! It all seems so long ago..."

"It *was* long ago for us. I bet the wreckage is still burning!" Twilight said, shaking her head. "It takes a bit of getting used to, dropping in and out of time like that, going everywhere, seeing so much..."

Rarity paused and looked over at Twilight, it was fitting that someone who reads so much could be easily read in return. "Twilight...he'll come back."

"He didn't come back for them..." She muttered.

"Who?"

The purple unicorn sighed and shook her head. "Rarity, you think

we're the first people he's traveled with? The Doctor's old, I mean really old."

"Yes." She said thoughtfully. "He's a looker for a stallion of nine-hundred...very shapely haunches..."

Twilight almost responded to that last part before relenting. "I don't think he's nine-hundred...I think he's a *lot* older than that! But anyway, he told me that he's had at least two dozen people he's traveled with, barring all of them dying how can you explain the fact that he was alone when we found him?"

Rarity paused. "...All I meant was that The Doctor doesn't seem the type to break a promise. Don't worry Twilight, The Doctor will be back in no time and you'll be back off to the stars!"

"We'll see..." Twilight said wistfully.

A knock at the door turned both their heads, a familiar drawl sounding through the wood. "Rarity? Rarity! You there?"

"Applejack?" Rarity said before turning to Sweetie Belle. "Oh!"

She ran over to the door and opened it, a somewhat nervous looking Applejack walking into the boutique. "Rarity! Ah don't want tah worry you, but have you seen-" she said as she looked over at Sweetie Belle. "Sweetie Belle! Oh thank Celestia you're safe! Ah'm sorry Rarity, it's just that we left Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle with Granny Smith an'-"

Rarity smiled thankfully. "No need to apologize. You and Big Mac were at work, I never expected you to watch her at all times. Anyway, it all worked out in the end!"

"Still..." Applejack said seriously. "Ah brought Apple Bloom here to 'pologize fer puttin' Sweetie in danger like that!"

A somewhat downtrodden Apple Bloom shuffled out from behind Applejack. "Ah'm sorry Rarity."

"You're forgiven Apple Bloom." Rarity said warmly. "Now why don't you and Sweetie Belle go play for a bit, I've got a suit I should get to work on!"

Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle voiced their agreements and shot out of the room giggling and chattering to one another.

"A suit? Fer that Stardust feller?" Applejack said, with eyebrow raised.

"The same!" Rarity said proudly. "He sent me a message with regarding his choice of fabric with *this!*" she said as she produced the Emerald Contact Combine.

"An ECC?!" Twilight exclaimed. "B-but those are barely in production yet!"

"One of the perks of owning the company that makes them is early

acquisition.” Said a somewhat deep refined voice.

The ponies turned around to see the form of a tall thin white diamond dog and two ponies, one of who was Rainbow Dash.

Twilight gasped and rushed forward, her eyes aglow with excitement. “Mr. Stardust! Celestia’s mane! I can’t believe I’m talking to-er-all of my equipment have Stardust-brand components, I find they’re the highest quality outside of special-grown Canterlot gem mediums-oh I haven’t introduced myself, have I? That’s so rude-I’m sorry-I’m-”

“Twilight Sparkle.” He said with a smile.

Twilight inhaled sharply in shock. “You know my name?”

“Indeed. The fact that Princess Celestia’s star pupil almost exclusively patronizes our products is a point of pride amidst our marketing team.” He said before pointing to the other ponies in the room. “I also know of Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie, and Fluttershy. I did a little research after you and your friends showed up in that box.”

Rarity stepped forward with a large smile on her face. “Mr. Stardust-er-Zeit! How good it is to see you again! I hope you don’t mind me asking, but why have you come here?”

Zeit cleared his throat and looked at the cream-orange mare at his side, who cast him a stern look back. “Just stopping by on my way to...official business. A recent development, I sent the ECC before its occurrence.”

“Mr. Stardust...” The unicorn mare said flintily.

“Excuse me mares, I have not introduced my counselor. Allow me to introduce Litigia Statute, she pulls my choke chain when I get too...yappy.”

The mare donned a severe expression and said. “May I remind Mr. Stardust of his duty to his company? Details regarding the nature of this trip are strictly need-to-know.”

He cleared his throat and turned to Rarity. “Which is why I dropped by. I’m afraid that this business will detain me from the Grand Gala, thus negating my need for a suit.”

Rarity blinked in surprise. “O-oh...I see...well, at least you had the good character to tell me in person...”

“Indeed...” Zeit said, watching as the young unicorn held back her disappointment. “...Which is why I’ve decided to treat you to an all expenses paid weekend at Dragon Valley Resort!”

Litigia gasped in shock, green eyes wide. “Sir?!”

He continued. “...For Ms. Rarity *and*...” he turned to one of his body guards. “Feist, how many spare rooms do we have on board?”

The enormous diamond dog responded with a refined voice unfitting

of his huge stature. "Three rooms Your Excellency; one three-bed family room, one three bed steerage compartment, and a single VIP luxury suite."

Zeit turned back to the ponies. "...Seven friends of her choosing!"

Rarity's mouth hung open in shock. "The Dragon Valley Resort? With the magical hot springs rumored to take years off one's appearance?"

"Not that you need it Ms. Rarity."

Twilight stepped forward. "The resort near the mine that's the source of 80% of all of Equestria's spell-medium gems?"

"More like 88.34%, Ms. Sparkle."

"Isn't that a place for rich, powerful business people?" Applejack said hopefully.

"From all over Equestria! Many of them are advertisers and marketers! Were one to, say, charm them with a hearty hoof-shake and a winning smile they'd be inclined to promote just about anything to just about everyone!" he said before turning to Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash. "Ms. Dash, the thermals above Mount Calcipher make for some of the best flying on the planet...but only the *best* fliers can master them; and with all those aforementioned advertisers around, who knows, good things are bound to come from such mastery! Ms. Pie, the local bakeries and confectionaries are without peer outside of Canterlot, and the parties can go on for *days*!" he smiled and turned to all the ponies. "So...interested?"

Rarity, Twilight, Applejack, Pinkie Pie, and Rainbow Dash all huddled together in a circle.

Applejack nodded. "Ah say we go! It's just for th'weekend! And ah'm sure ah can drum up some advertisement for the Apple Clan!"

"Yeah! I've heard Spitfire of the Wonderbolts got found by the team after riding Mount Calcipher!" Rainbow Dash said in an excited whisper.

Rarity smiled. "Well, far be it from me to turn down such a generous offer! Applejack, do you think Big Macintosh and Granny Smith would mind looking after Sweetie Belle for a few more days?"

"Not at all Rarity, Granny Smith loves havin' Sweetie around!"

"I wonder if Dragon Valley bakeries have gobble eggs?" Pinkie muttered. "Only one way to find out!"

"Yeah! And there's a whole mess a'critters and whatnot for Fluttershy to gawk at!" Applejack said excitedly.

"I don't know..." Twilight said quietly. "...We just got back. Shouldn't we at least-"

"I bet he'll take us there in his big pretty airship!" Pinkie said enthusiastically.

"He has an airship? Here?" Twilight said.

"Oh yeah!" Rainbow Dash said, a smile on her face, knowing just which buttons to push. "Great big thing, seems to use some kind of magic crystal technology to get around. Landed it on the other end of town!"

Twilight stood up, a big smile on her face. "When do we leave?"

"As soon as possible." Zeitgeist said with a smile.

Zeitgeist made his way towards the *Brünhild's* ramp, followed closely by Litigia and his two bodyguards. "That went well."

Litigia scoffed and cast him a harsh look, her cold green eyes locking onto his grey ones. "Well?! What part of 'need-to-know' did you not understand? Now we'll have that little diva and seven of her cackling friends traipsing about where they don't belong! If they learn of what's going on at the mine it could be very bad for the company's image!"

Zeitgeist smiled and gestured calmly. "Settle down Litigia, that 'little diva' as you call her is the key to Stardust Industry's future monopoly. I was merely facilitating her future cooperation. Besides, they'll all be too busy with their respective obsessions to bother with our business. Like all ponies they're single minded, easy to distract with the right stimuli...no offense."

"None taken. Ours is a society of savants, it's how we got to where we are." Litigia said with pride. "It fills me with confidence that you know my people so well, manipulative bastards are always a viable investment."

"You flatter me." Zeit said flatly.

One of the bodyguards raised a paw to his ear, touching a finger to the blinking carved gem in his ear. "Your Excellency, the superintendant of Calcipher-Del-Kaffelerram Mine is on line three. He says his security force has apprehended one of the... 'perpetrators'."

"Very good Hahnenkam, tell him I'll be a few minutes." Zeit said, good-natured smile disappearing from his face. "Also tell him I should like to have this 'perpetrator' interrogated...aggressively."

"By your command." Hahnenkam said.

Twilight burst into the library, a huge smile on her face. "Zecora! Spike! I've got a surprise for you!"

Spike rushed down the stairs and jumped at Twilight, catching her in a big hug. Twilight smiled through partially gritted teeth, most ponies didn't realize that Spike was far stronger than he looked and right now he was

just a little too overcome with joy to reign himself. "Twilight! Oh! I was so worried when you didn't come back for the night!"

"Spike, I tucked you in last night, you knew I was alright!" Twilight said affectionately, touched by the young dragon's sentiment.

"Well, yeah, but ever since that Doctor guy showed up things have been weird! That cloud, that thing inside the cloud, I was just scared that something else got you!"

Twilight drew him in close, she hadn't quite realized how much she had missed Spike until she had seen him sleeping that morning; she just *had* to give him something special. "Oh! That's right. Spike, I have a gift for you."

She handed him the box and he looked at it. "What is it?"

"Open it up and see!"

Spike tore away the box in a matter of seconds, his eyes widened as he produced a large red gem in his little purple hands. "Oh wow! A clouded ruby, this'll go great with the new wi...uh...this'll be great! Thanks!"

"Twilight Sparkle you are back, you found the thing that you did lack?" Zecora said as she entered the foyer of the library.

"Hey Twilight, did you hear? Monsters blew up Zecora's home!" Spike said, worried. "Can she stay with us until that gets sorted out?"

"Yes Spike, she'll be staying with us for a while, okay?" Twilight said smiling at Zecora.

"Great! I've always wanted to know how she makes that tasty tea you're always bringing home Twi!"

Twilight smiled. "The tea will have to wait! Rarity just got paid a visit from Zeitgeist Stardust, and he's taking us for a weekend at Dragon Valley Resort!"

Spike gasped. "I'm coming too?"

"Well, I need my scribe if I'm going to write to the Princess about what I've learned, right?"

Spike cheered and hugged Twilight again. "Oh thankyouthankyouthankyou!! Oh! I gotta pack!"

Zecora approached her, her eyebrow raised. "To a resort you say, and without the need to pay?"

Twilight smiled. "Yep! He had to cancel the suit Rarity was making for him, but I guess he felt bad and decided to take Rarity and seven of her friends (that's us) to Dragon Valley Resort for the weekend!"

"All of us plus young Spike, what is this Mr. Stardust like?" Zecora said warily. "I of all people have come to see, that nothing in life is truly free."

Twilight was taken aback by this question, just what was Zeitgeist Stardust up to? “W-well...He seems like a nice person, very polite and obviously well regarded. I guess we’ll just have to see. Worst-case scenario, we kick a little arse and Princess Celestia teleports him into the sun...or I do, I’ve been working on that sort of thing lately.”

Zecora blinked before laughing at what she hoped was a joke. “Twilight Sparkle, I rest assured; I’m sure his motives are completely pure. You know how I like to stress and worry, now let us pack in a hurry. ”

“We’re still packed from this morning.” Twilight said with a smirk.

“Right.”

Rarity stood outside the enormous airship, tapping her hoof impatiently. She turned to see Zecora, Twilight Sparkle, and Spike chatting amongst themselves, and Applejack extolling the virtues of proper business connections to Pinkie Pie. Fluttershy was excitedly talking to Rainbow Dash about the unique biosphere of Dragon Valley, something about several species of lizards unique to the area and the natural population of phoenixes being among the highest concentrations outside of their natural habitat in the big volcanic chains. Fluttershy had been surprisingly enthusiastic about the trip, but then the resort had an attraction for all of them. Obviously Zeitgeist and the business potentials stemming from a friendship with him was first and foremost on Rarity’s mind; Applejack was chomping at the bit to spread the Apple Clan gospel to all the rich patrons of the resort; Pinkie Pie was surely going to bring a few alien baked goods to life, no doubt causing an uproar amidst the bakers and patrons in the process; Rainbow Dash had her sights set on the infamous air above the actively-volcanic Mount Calcipher in the hopes of being discovered by a talent agent; Twilight got to see where all her precious technology came from and she got to look at all the neat magitech of a rich well-equipped occultophile like Zeitgeist; there was no doubt something there for Zecora and Spike too; new herbs to catalogue and use, not to mention the fact that one was rumored to not be able to take ten paces without tripping over a delicious (for a dragon) gemstone; above all else this was an opportunity to unwind after a month with The Doctor.

The uptight orange unicorn mare Litigia Statute approached the group and caught their attention with a curt whistle. “Fillies and gentle...dragon. Boarding will now commence. We are expected to arrive at Dragon Valley Resort at 06:00 hours of Saturday. Flight time will be



twenty-one hours at a cruising speed of one hundred fifty kilometers per hour. Altitude: five kilometers.”

“Excuse me Ms. Statute...” Rarity said hesitantly. “Where is Mr. Stardust?”

She locked a cold gaze on Rarity, sending a shiver down her spine. “Mr. Stardust is indisposed at the moment. Please give your baggage to the boarding staff and they will show you to your rooms.”

Zeitgeist stood before a hologram of another diamond dog, Calcipher-Del-Kaffelerram’s chief of security. “Bring it in.”

The diamond dog motion and two large guards hauled in what appeared to be a skinny, hairless diamond dog with a bag over its head. Its skin was the sickly green-yellow color of rotting tallow. The guards secured the creature and removed the bag. It was hideous, its face was flat save for a grotesque warty protrusion that could sparingly be called a nose, and lumps and growths dotted the leathery green skin of its face. Its lower jaw extruded a good deal out from its face, giving it a petulant and almost pitiable pouting look.

Zeit motioned and the guard to the creature’s right shoved the butt of his truncheon into the creature’s potbelly. “What are you doing here?!”

The creature mumbled in its own language, and was struck again. “Tell us! Do you know *who* you’re dealing with?! Duke Stardust’s patience wears thin!”

The guards then both laid into the creature with truncheons and shock sticks. Zeit merely watched for minutes as the creature was given time to regain its composure before being pummeled again. Zeit raised his hand and they stopped. “Grundel...answer me.”

The creature raised its head, surprise clear in the one orange-red eye that was not swollen shut, Zeit continued. “Yes...I know of your kind. Tell me, why do your kind destroy my expensive mining machines? Kill my personnel?”

The Grundel grimaced in what could have been regret and croaked. “...No other way...must stop...must save.” It gulped with a loathsome sound and continued. “The Thin White Duke and his mine will unleash the Holder of The Source of Darkness!”

Zeit stepped forward, intrigued. “Who?”

“The Great Corrupter!” The Grundel shouted as he shook back and forth and pulled against his restraints. “The Demon God Tirac!!”

“What-” Zeit began to say before the Grundel stuck out his long purple tongue as far as it would go and biting down with a horrible crunching sound, cleaving it in half. A vile green ichor poured from the Grundel’s mouth as he threw his back and made a series of swallowing motions followed by a string of gurgles. As a final grotesquery the Grundel’s jaw proceeded to snap to one side and up, breaking it and locking it in place.

The guards rushed in and tried in vain to pry his jaws open, but to no avail. The Grundel shuddered and twitched before slumping forward dead, green blood coating the front of his mouth and dripping from his flared nostrils and wide bloodshot eyes.

“He’s dead sir.” The security chief said.

“I can see that you cretin.” Zeit snapped. “I will be there within fifteen hours. Make the appropriate arrangements as I will be bringing my own forces.”

The hologram saluted and turned off, Zeitgeist activating the comm in his room. “Captain Aufwuchs, category: Diamond; Code: Red. Execute.”

“Condition Red Diamond, sire?” replied the voice.

“Best possible speed.” Zeit said through gritted teeth. “Airzones be damned!”

“Right away, Your Excellency.”

With a thunderous roar the *Brünhild* lifted off from the ground, its twelve rotating engines pushing the huge airship up into the air. The engines tilted to give the airship forward velocity as it rose, the nacelles housing the engine crystals glowed bright blue and the enormous vehicle blasted forwards and up at a reckless velocity. In less than two minutes the *Brünhild* was two kilometers into the air and was plowing through the clouds at over two hundred kilometers per hour. It would make Dragon Valley in less than twelve hours.

It had begun.

# CHAPTER 2

Apple Bloom laughed as Sweetie Belle acted out one of the stories Rarity had told her hours ago. "...So then the Judoon says 'Bo-lo fo do-ro shum-cho!' and he raises his gun, but Rarity magically yanked his helmet to the side so he missed!"

Apple Bloom nodded and began to mime also. "Yeah! An' then Applejack ran forward 'n' kicked him square in the chops! Hi-yah! Yah!" Apple Bloom said as she clumsily mimed a series of kicks and jabs. "An' the Judoon didn't even know what hit 'im!"

Scootaloo blinked slowly, an unimpressed look on her face. "Have you fillies been eating forest mushrooms again?"

"One time!" Sweetie Belle exclaimed.

"No Scoots, we's serious! Applejack 'n' Rarity all told the same story!" Apple Bloom said defensively.

"But you saw Applejack *last night*, Bloom! She couldn't have gone off and done all that!"

Sweetie Belle smiled and waved a hoof. "No see, The Doctor's TARDIS is also a time machine, it can go anywhere, anywhen!"

"Yeah!" Apple Bloom said triumphantly. "They was out fer a month but came back this morning!"

"So..." Scootaloo said, hoof to her chin. "If they were out for a month, but traveled back in time to this morning, that means they're still out there right now on their second day of traveling even though they came back this morning after a month?"

Sweetie Belle put a hoof to her forehead and rubbed. "Owww..."

"And you can prove this?" Scootaloo said with a smile.

"Sure ah can! Applejack brought back all this cool stuff from alien worlds!"

Scootaloo rolled her eyes. "Cool stuff? May I see it?"

"...No, Applejack took her bag with her this morning." Apple Bloom said dejectedly.

"But what we're telling you is really truly true!" Sweetie Belle said with a stomp of her hoof.

"How'd they all fit in there?" Scootaloo said with a shake of her mane. "I saw that thing! It was tiny!"

"Rarity said it was bigger on the inside...and really cheesy looking, too!" Sweetie Belle added.

"Uh-huh." Scootaloo scoffed. "So, lemme get this straight; that weird blue box that fell out of the sky on Wednesday was not only a space ship but a time machine, and not only that it's also bigger on the inside?"

"Yeah!" Sweetie said with a nod.

"Applejack wouldn't lie tah me!" Apple Bloom said with certainty.

Scootaloo looked back and forth between them. "It was the green mushrooms right? I've *always* wanted to try those!"

"No mushrooms!" Sweetie Belle shouted.

There was a loud knock on the door followed by a high-toned inquisitive voice. "Applejack? Applejaaaaack! Hello? It's me, The Doctor! You home? All that business with the Minponi got sorted out...kind of..."

Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle gasped and rushed to the door and opened it. Before them was a startled looking stallion, but the look of surprise soon gave way to a bright smile. "Apple Bloom! Sweetie Belle! It's great to finally meet you! Your sisters have told me so much!"

Apple Bloom beamed and stepped forward. "Doctor! Oh wow! Ah've heard so much about you too!"

"Me too!" Sweetie Belle exclaimed excitedly. "Can we see your TARDIS?"

"Ah wanna see yer sonic hex-key!"

"Screwdriver." The Doctor corrected. "They told you all that?"

"Yep."

"Uh-huh!"

"And you believed them?" The Doctor said, his eyebrow raised.

"Sure!"

"Course!"

The Doctor smiled widely. "This is why I love kids...anyway, Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle..." Scootaloo arrived at the door.

"...Errrm...uuh...noun-verb or noun-noun? ...Orange...Buzz?"

"Scootaloo." She said flatly.

The Doctor raised a hoof to his mouth to stifle a laugh. "\*Snerk\* phhht-What, really?"

"What's wrong with 'Scootaloo'?" she said defensively.

The Doctor suddenly donned a serious expression. "Nothing at all! Scootaloo is a perfectly reasonable name for a pony who...uh...scoots. Who am I to talk with a name like mine? 'Teh Dok-Tah' perfectly silly!"

Scotaloo smiled furtively and The Doctor cheered. "Eh! There we go! Anyway, do you girls know where your sisters and their friends are? I've checked everywhere, not even Twilight is in!"

Apple Bloom piped up. "Applejack an' Rarity an' all them left with some rich guy, Applejack said it was on 'fficial business!"

The Doctor turned to Scotaloo. "And Rainbow Dash too?"

Scotaloo looked down at the ground. "...I guess, Rainbow Dash isn't my sister so I wouldn't know..."

"Oh..." The Doctor said, clearing his throat awkwardly. "Sorry, I thought that...uuuh...with 'some rich guy' you say?"

"Yeah! He dropped into town in his big white blimp and took them all away to a resort for business!" Sweetie Belle said.

"Ah think it was an airship Sweetie, not a blimp." Apple Bloom said matter-of-factly.

"What's the difference?" Sweetie retorted.

Apple Bloom rolled her eyes. "Plenty! An airship, or dirigible, is a ridged-bodied lighter 'n' air aircraft first constructed by diamond dogs about a hundred years ago. They usually use segmented chambers fer their lift gas and have a lightweight cast-duralumin skeleton. But judging by the way that airship moved about and how big it was ah'd be inclined to say it was made of lightweight composite materials tah better use the lift gas...a blimp is basically a funny shaped balloon." Everyone stared at Apple Bloom. "What? Ah just like stuff like that is all."

"I didn't know ponies had airships." The Doctor muttered.

Apple Bloom rolled her eyes. "Well a'course we don't have 'em! A third a' the pony population can *fly*, why would we need 'em? No see, it's the diamond dogs what need 'em, so they built 'em."

"Getting off topic here..." The Doctor said, rubbing his hoof against his head. "So, where did they all go?"

"Dragon Valley." Sweetie Belle said quickly. "Home of not only the wealthiest mining community in Equestria, but also one of the most biologically diverse bird, lizard, and fish populations in the world! The world famous Dragon Mountain Resort has all the creature comforts necessary to make your stay a memorable one!" Sweetie Belle gauged the response from those around her before saying. "...I read the brochure."

The Doctor smiled and winked at them. "Thank you girls! Now, I best be off if I want to catch up to them!"

"Catch up? Don't you have a time machine?" Scotaloo said sarcastically.

The Doctor turned around with a smirk. "Why yes, yes I do."

He stomped his hoof on the ground and a large blue box plummeted from the sky, kicking up a huge amount of dust as it landed. Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo ran over to the cloud of dust only to see a door slam shut.

“Doctor! Doctor!” Sweetie said as she beat on the door. “Don’t leave yet!”

The door opened and The Doctor poked his head out. “What is it?”

“Can we come with you?” Apple Bloom said excitedly.

The Doctor smiled leaned in close. “Ask your sisters when they get back. If I take you lot now and possibly endanger you there’s a high probability of one or both of them will...well...murder me. G’bye!”

With that The Doctor closed the door with a slam and an incredible noise began, bright pulses of light emanated from the bulb on top in tandem with waves of hot energized air as the TARDIS flashed out of existence, the dust blasting out in all directions. Scootaloo stood in stunned silence as the sound wore away into nothingness.

Sweetie Belle laughed and nudged up against her. “See? No mushrooms!”

(Dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da  
etc)

## DOCTOR WHOOVES

### Episode 2

The Mines of Dragon Mountain: Part 2

Starring:

The Doctor

Twilight Sparkle

Pinkie Pie

Rainbow Dash

Applejack

Fluttershy

Zecora

Rarity

Spike

Featuring:

Zeitgeist Stardust

Litigia Statute

The *Brünhild* thundered steadily over the clouds, her bulk belying her speed. Through on of the windows that dotted the carriage structure peered a small, purple head.

"I can't believe it! This thing is so cool!" Twilight said excitedly.

Applejack nodded and smiled. "Ah have tah agree with you Twi, this here ship's the swankiest thing this side a'the royal palace! Big too, ah wonder where Pinkie, Spike, and Zecora wandered off to?"

Fluttershy looked at the fish tank in the wall with fascination. "Pinkie and Spike said that they were going to find a bathroom, Zecora followed them to make sure they stayed out of trouble-Oh! Is that a Rainbow Parrot Fish? And a Regal Tang! And a Psychedelic Mandarin! Wow!"

"What's so great about it Twilight?" Rainbow Dash said dismissively. "You've seen ships that travel faster than light, what's so great about a big balloon?"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "The same reason you want to fly over Mount Calcipher even though you've flown around in gas giants! It's the best of what we *know*."

"Indeed she is!" said a familiar voice from behind them. "My *Brünhild* is the most advanced vehicle on the face of the planet! The most expensive one, too." Standing in the doorway was Zeitgeist Stardust and Litigia Statute.

Twilight bowed. "Mr. Stardust! Let me say again how much of an honor it is to be spending the weekend with you sir."

He smiled and gestured fondly. "Think nothing of it, Ms. Sparkle. As a dedicated patron of my magitech products, *I* should be thanking *you*. Also, do call me Zeit, I get enough 'Mr. Stardust' from my employees...weren't there more of you?"

Rarity nodded and said. "Yes, there are. They're around somewhere, on a ship this size I imagine getting lost is quite easy."

"Quite." He said with a nod. "I'm not too proud to say that it has happened to me once or twice. Now, I believe it is only a common courtesy as a host that I personally take you on a guided tour of my flagship. Are there any questions any of you have before we begin the tour?"

"Okay Zit, here's one..." Rainbow Dash said, flying over to the white diamond dog. "...Care to tell us why we've cut across two air zones in the past hour? Also the fact that we're going at least fifty clicks faster than what your lawyer said!"

Rarity gasped and less-than-gently nudged Rainbow Dash. "Dash! Show some respect!" she turned to Zeit and smiled apologetically. "Er-



excuse Rainbow Dash, she's a little bullheaded and doesn't *think* when she talks!"

"Hey!"

Zeit smiled again and gestured dismissively. "No need to apologize. One doesn't get to where I am with thin skin, Ms. Rarity."

"You're too kind." Rarity said with a bow.

"*Far* too kind." Litigia said flatly, garnering a 'hush' from Zeit.

Zeit cleared his throat as he eyed Rainbow Dash, something close to unease in his eyes. "To answer your question, there has been a slight change of plans that require we forgo common aerial courtesies. Consequently the trip will be considerably shorter, thirteen hours at most, less than eleven at current speed." Zeit turned to the ponies and clapped his hands, eager to change the subject. "Now, how would you girls like a guided tour of my newest ship? A light lunch of your choosing will be served afterwards."

Litigia sighed in exasperation. "Sir, I don't think that's a--"

"Litigia...I believe there is some paperwork for you to fill out on my desk. It's in my privacy office..." Zeit said with a smile. "...If I remember correctly."

"But that's on the other end of the ship!" She said with growing irritation.

"Is it?" Zeit said with faux surprise. "Well, you'd better make tracks now if you want to fill it all out by lunch time."

"...ck you, sir..." she mumbled as she walked out the door.

"Language!" He said before he turned to the ponies with a smile. "How about that tour, hmmm?"

As they walked through the ornate hallways of the airship, Twilight examined the various interesting pieces of technology that dotted the walls. Cameras, closed circuit telecommunication screens, long-lived light crystals; nearly everything was of the highest grade imaginable. Including the decorations, the floors were lined with an expensive, soft carpet that was both easy on the hooves, increased traction, and boasted an intricate design both colorful and subdued. The windows were gilded with silver and gold molding that glittered in the high-altitude sunlight. The walls were lined with old oil paintings and expertly carved marble statues sat in alcoves in the walls every three meters.

“Beautiful, isn’t she?” Zeit began. “Three hundred and thirty-five meters long by fifty meters wide, exactly two-hundred tons of technological innovation! Many of the systems and materials you will see are of my own design. The use of sturdy composite materials ensures that the *Brünhild* will not succumb to wear and tear within the next century. Expensive, but worth it in the long run, I think.”

“Even the engines?” Twilight said excitedly.

“*Especially* the engines!” He said with a wink. “Would it interest you to know that the propulsion systems on the *Brünhild* have no moving parts whatsoever?”

“No!” Twilight said incredulously. “How’d you do that?”

He chuckled and continued, obviously liking her enthusiasm. “The engine nacelles house enormous spell-medium crystals, specifically wind-spell crystals. Power flows through the crystals and activates the spell that accelerates the surrounding air that in turn provides thrust proportionate to the power input. No moving parts to wear down and it’s extremely energy efficient.” Zeit said proudly. “The *Brünhild*’s engines are powerful enough to accelerate a mass of over five hundred and fifty tons to speeds of two hundred kilometers per hour, which is roughly the *Brünhild*’s maximum takeoff weight.”

“That’s amazing! How do you power them?” Twilight said, running up to his side excitedly.

“I think you’ll find this particularly interesting. The skin of the *Brünhild* can shift from white to black, absorbing and utilizing nearly 85% of the solar energy impacting her surface. Using an experimental capacitance gel we managed to store all the energy from one day in the sun, allowing her to run while maintaining her more photogenic visage. It’s a technology I hope will catch on...once I get approval from Celestia, of course.”

Twilight looked out the window at one of the huge engine nacelles, the telltale glow of magic radiating from the intake ports, a huge smile on her face. “I think I could drop in a good word for you! How high can she go?”

“Her gas bags expand enough to lift her dry weight to an altitude of about eight kilometers.” Zeit said before adding. “But she can go higher with some risk.”

Rarity piped up, drawing attention away from Twilight as Applejack whispered in her ear. “I have to say I’m in awe of your internal decorating, they’re all different statues, are they not?”

Zeit nodded. “My entire family line, over two hundred and fifty statues in the main halls of this ship! I had two hundred and fifty of the best

sculptors working on each of them separately, so each statue has it's own unique attributes."

"Representing the different personalities of each person the statue is based on." Rarity said in awe. "This is a truly elegant design philosophy, not like...anyway what kind of paintings are these?"

"Emperor Beowulf Era, he had a love for oil-paintings and decreed that all previous art was inferior and was to be destroyed...so many people died..." He said, looking over at the paintings. "...But they're still rather chic, aren't they?"

Zeit and Rarity continued to talk as they went down the hallway; Rarity drawing Zeit's attention while Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and Twilight had stopped at the behest of Applejack.

Twilight opened her mouth to say something before Applejack silenced her, motioning to a door to their left, it was rather small and had been painted over to mask its presence, obviously somewhere they weren't meant to be. Its lock took Twilight mere seconds to overcome. They stepped into the door and into a low ceilinged area of grated metal and various pipes, Applejack looked around at the ceiling.

"Applejack, what's this all about?" Twilight said in a whisper.

"Ah just thought we could use some time away from the cameras, talk 'bout what we've seen...what they don't want us to see."

"You noticed it too?" Fluttershy said gravely.

Applejack nodded as Twilight said. "What are you mares going on about?"

Rainbow Dash snorted. "C'mon Twilight! I know you're excited about this airship thing, but you couldn't have missed it!"

"Missed it?" Twilight blinked as her friends stared at her. "Missed what?"

"Just the fact that there's somethin' really wrong going on, that there's somethin' rotten at Dragon Valley!"

Fluttershy nodded. "Something's happening that has got Mr. Stardust angry, maybe even a little scared."

"And it's got something to do with whatever's got him in a hurry!" Rainbow Dash added.

Twilight furrowed her brow; a part of her knew they were onto something. "Okay...what do you think is going on?"

Applejack rolled her eyes in frustration. "Well, a'course we don't *know* anything. But it's just like The Doctor says, we gotta hear what they *aren't* sayin'! An' right now ah hear a lot!"

“Yeah!” Rainbow Dash said. “He puts on that happy face and uses those fancy words, but he’s avoiding a certain topic like the plague! I saw it in his eyes when I asked him about why we’re in such a hurry.”

“The mine...” Twilight said with dawning realization.

“What is it Twilight?” Fluttershy said.

“The mine, the mines of Dragon Mountain!”

Rainbow Dash looked over at Twilight. “What’re those?”

“The place I was talking about in the boutique when he first came in!” Twilight sighed and tried to remember the details. “One of the two major mountains that gives Dragon Valley its unique appearance. One mountain is the actively volcanic Mount Calcipher; it’s the tourist attraction, with the hot springs and all that. The other, Mount Calcipher-Del-Kaffelerram, that’s where the mines are located. It’s been said it was just another pick and scratch operation until he took it over, and now sixteen years later it’s the source of nearly all technology-grade crystals in Equestria! He was rich before, but his success with that mine made him famous.”

Applejack nodded, her hoof to her chin. “Now what d’you suppose coulda happened at the mine that would get the CEO himself tah haul flank across the continent?”

“He can communicate just fine with his magitech.” Rainbow Dash added. “So this is something big, something he feels he needs to be there for.”

Fluttershy turned to Twilight. “It couldn’t be an accident or a worker’s strike, he must put up with stuff like that every day! If what you say is true, this mine is very important to him and not just financially.”

“You’re right, this is probably personal.” Twilight said with a nod. “There’s something going on there, at that mine, something that could not only shut it down, but maybe disgrace it too.”

Applejack put her hoof down with a clank. “So it’s settled then? Once we get there we look into things?”

Twilight sighed and shook her head. “Do have to get involved? I mean, we’re being taken to a Six-Star resort for free! Can’t we just sit this one out and relax?”

Rainbow Dash chuckled as she made her way over to the door. “You say that now but trust me, this whole set up seems awful familiar to me. We set down in a new and interesting place with all sorts of stuff to occupy ourselves with, and then something happens; someone screams, a child is crying, weird lights, whatever. It doesn’t matter what it is, because in the end it’s the same. We’re drawn into an adventure, not because we have to, or even because we really want to, but because it’s there.”

Applejack smirked as she opened the door. "Now if ah didn't know any better ah'd say you're talkin' like a certain someone we know!"

"What we've been through has that affect on a pony." Fluttershy said with a furtive smile. "The world will always seem small to us now, so we're drawn to its mysteries and adventures to make it seem big again. If just for a while."

Twilight sighed, that heavy feeling of dread settling on her shoulders again as she exited the door. *'It's like that for them too...I hope you come back Doctor! We haven't seen enough, we haven't done enough, showing us all that and then just leaving us here...'*

"Excuse me madams." Said a deep cultured voice. "Enjoying the tour?"

They all looked up to see four large diamond dogs; one of them was Feist, the bodyguard that had been in the boutique.

"Uuuh..." Twilight stammered.

"Rhetorical question." He said tersely. "Dogs, escort these...fine mares to His Excellency's dining room."

Flanked on all sides by diamond dogs several times their size, Twilight, Applejack, Rainbow Dash, and Fluttershy were led down the hall. "Your friends will be waiting there for you."

Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Twilight, and Fluttershy were ushered into the room. In the middle of the room was a large ebony wood table covered with fine silver gilded linen. The walls were decorated with large tapestry of various depictions of festivals, battles, and historical events.

"Pre-tee swank!" said a familiar voice.

Twilight turned to see Spike, Pinkie Pie, and Zecora examining the decorations. "Spike?"

He turned to her and smiled. "Isn't this ship cool? I mean it's literally like a flying palace!"

"Yeah..." Rainbow Dash said slowly. "Say, why would a CEO have a ship this nice? I know they like to show off their wealth, but this is something royalty would buy!"

"Well, he *is* royalty." Twilight said glibly.

"What, really?" said Spike.

Twilight nodded before pausing. "Yes...actually, kind of. He's regent of the Duchy of Sternenstaub in his home country, which makes him a duke. So he's just short of actual royalty. However, he's a good deal richer

than most of the higher nobility, so it goes without saying that he'd make any status symbol he has as amazing as possible."

Pinkie hopped around the room, appraising the myriad vases and sculptures. "If you don't flaunt what you got in an imperial court, you get eaten alive! And boy howdy does he flaunt!"

Zecora made her way over to Twilight, moving her head close to hers. "During our walk within the halls, I heard some talking through the walls. When we tried to listen closer, the guards had 'offered' to be our chauffeurs."

Twilight nodded. "They're a little cagey aren't they?"

The door on the other side of the room opened and Zeit and Rarity walked in. Zeit's expression lit up as he saw the ponies, while Rarity donned an accusatory look obviously not approving of their behavior but helping anyway. "Ah! I see all our lost guests found their way to the dining room. Never underestimate the allure of free lunch, Ms. Rarity."

"That and an efficient security force." Rarity muttered.

"Well, yes...anyway, take a seat everyone, the menus will be handed out momentarily." Zeit said, pulling out a chair for himself.

The 'chairs' for the ponies were actually large beanbags that stuck out of the floor; they were surprisingly comfortable whilst being firm enough to support their weight, as with everything else on the ship the material appeared to be something as expensive as it was functional.

Spike clambered onto his soft pillow chair, his claws sinking into the surface, tearing it instantly and spilling its contents onto the floor.

"Uuh...could I have a chair?"

Zeit's eyes widened. "A baby dragon?"

Twilight looked over at Spike as he hung off the edge of the table.

"Oh...I suppose you haven't met Spike yet!"

He got up and walked over to Spike, a broad smile on his face. "Why hello there! Spike was it?"

"Yeah..." Spike said, eyes shifting around. "...Could I have a chair?"

"Of course." Zeit said, signaling to some servants before turning back to Spike. "Would you also like some gemstones to for lunch?"

Spike nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah! That'd be great! Do you have any rubies?"

"More than you can eat."

Twilight chuckled. "Famous last words."

The ponies sat around the table as the staff served them their food, a somewhat confused servant holding a large china bowl filled with rubies. Applejack had ordered a home-style baked potato with a side of hay fries; Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie both got an oats and spinach salad with violet petals; Rarity and Fluttershy shared a strawberry spinach and feta cheese salad with a tangy vinaigrette sauce. Zeit was enjoying some sort of omelette while the plate of fried apple slices and daisies sat to his right, untouched.

Twilight looked up from her immaculate daffodil sandwich, the chefs had clearly prepared for ponies before. "Mr. Star-er-Zeit, who is that plate for?"

He looked up at her and smirked, holding up his paw and counting down on his fingers from three. "...Two...One."

The door to the dining room opened and in stepped Litigia, her usually prim and proper mane a little frazzled and the remnants of sweat was still visible across her hairline, she had been in a hurry and had had a long way to run.

"Ms. Statute." He said fondly. "Please, come sit and have lunch."

"Thank you Mr. Stardust." She said through partially gritted teeth.

"You got the paper-work done, I trust?" He said, adding a dash of salt to his meal.

"Indeed sir." She said, sniffing her meal with relish, she was obviously famished. "My request for a transfer has once again been rejected, and I noticed on the last page someone had written something to the effect of 'neener-neener-neener' in legalese."

"We have such fun." Zeit said with a laugh.

A loud burp was heard from across the table, accompanied by a flash of green fire. "...scuse me."

"Ah yes! I've just recently met young Spike here." Zeit cast a wary eye over Litigia. "Charming young fellow...you didn't tell me we had a dragon on board."

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't realize the implications at the time." Litigia said with growing concern. "Do you think this will be an issue?"

"Why would it be?" Twilight said; things seemed to have taken a worrying turn.

"Nothing dangerous, Ms. Sparkle! Quite the opposite in fact, the native residents of Dragon Valley are quite infatuated with dragons and there may be a bit of a...fuss. They never get to see dragons because...well, you know."

“No...” Twilight lied, detecting a golden opportunity to gauge Zeitgeist. “...I’m afraid we don’t.”

Zeit set down his knife and fork and cleared his throat. “Well...legend has it that Dragon Valley is where the Dragon God Calcipher sleeps. Told of the legend by their parents, most dragons avoid the place as they would the lair of a larger sleeping dragon, but I take it Spike was raised by ponies?”

“His egg was a donation from a sickly dragoness who wished for him to have a loving home. He’s been with me since he hatched.” She said, before turning the conversation back to where she wanted it to go. “...So, Calcipher sleeps in Dragon Valley?”

Zeit chuckled and made a dismissive gesture. “That’s just the native’s explanation for why one of the mountains occasionally snorts smoke and fire. An Elder God does not *literally* slumber beneath the mountain.”

Twilight grinned on the inside. “Which mountain would that be? I always get them confused!”

“Mount Calcipher...” Zeit said, ears displaying low-level suspicion.

“Right, right! Calcipher-Del-Kaffelerram is where your mine is, isn’t it?” Rainbow Dash interjected, subtlety as alien a concept to her as manners are to parasprites. “Funny name, that. What’s the story?”

Zeit cleared his throat, he had an excellent poker face but after their adventures the seven friends had become very adept at seeing through deception. “It’s native.”

“Native for...” Rainbow Dash said eagerly.

“Well, ‘Del’ is a possessive adjective, and in the native grammar one always puts the possessors name before the possessive adjective...” Zeit said, before sighing and continuing. “...And ‘kaffelerram’, politely translated, means...‘latrine’. The mountain’s wealth of gems has been known for centuries, the natives chalked this up to Calcipher, being the god of all dragons, having a...*rich* diet.”

Spike continued chewing his gems. “Makes sense...what’s a ‘latrine’?”

Zecora leaned towards Spike and whispered in his ear, Spike’s eyes went wide with horror. The ponies all chuckled as Spike turned a lighter shade and pushed the bowl away, hand to his mouth. Twilight looked over at Zeitgeist who was whispering to Litigia, they had caught on faster than she had hoped. No matter, she and her friends now *knew* that something was under Zeitgeist’s skin, and it definitely had something to do with that mine. All they had to do was wait and see.



The Doctor pulled a switch on the TARDIS control console as it bucked and whirled. "Aaaaand...There! A little off, 8:00 PM local time...I must be losing my touch!"

The whirling sound stopped with an audible 'thunk' as The Doctor smiled and turned around. "Another happy landing, eh..." he said, before realizing there was no one there with him. "...npony?"

The Doctor sighed, surprised at how much he had missed those equines over the past relative week, that business with the Minponi had taken a little more...effort than anticipated. The Warrior Caste held a not-undeserved reputation for holding a grudge, and this time it had cost them dearly. The Doctor didn't like putting arrogant prats in their place, but there was a certain satisfaction to be had in letting the air out of a so-called 'enigmatic' and 'advanced' culture. By the time he was through the Warrior Caste had some explaining to do with regards to how a warehouse holding five thousand tons of valuable quantum-40 got vaporized from orbit on official orders. Needless to say there was enough accusations and scandal to discredit the military into political obscurity for the next few centuries. *'A job well done. A pity Rainbow Dash wasn't there, she'd have loved to see the fireworks!'*

The Doctor opened the door and stepped out into an alleyway. He looked out to see the well-lit, clean streets of a high-end pony town, or what was meant to look very much like a high-end pony town. The Doctor stepped out of the alley and into the streets; there were dozens of ponies young and old, mares and stallions, fillies and colts. The only thing they all had entirely in common was that every single one of them was appallingly wealthy, not that one could tell from the overabundance of Hawaiian style shirts and awful hats.

"Is there some kind of multiversal law stating that tourists must be fashion victims?" The Doctor wondered aloud.

"Apparently." Said a voice from behind. "Do you need some assistance? I ask because I just saw you coming out of that alley looking a little..."

The Doctor spun around to see a unicorn stallion wearing what was unmistakably a uniform. The stallion had a sort of marble colored coat with a subdued red mane and orange eyes, his broad smile hid a slight tinge of apprehension. "...Out of sorts...hello, I'm Fire Dazzler, I make the..."

"Pyrotechnics displays and special effects for the nightly shows." The Doctor finished.

“Y-yes...how did you...”

“There is a fine residue on your collar from a premature flash-powder ignition, you’re lucky you didn’t lose an eyebrow. Also, your coat is saturated with aluminum powder and there are trace amounts of expired potassium chlorate on your hooves. Not to mention the rather copious amounts of bicarbonate-based buffers present in the fabrics of your uniform, likely the result of trying to stabilize acid levels in a homemade aluminum- potassium chlorate mixture; trying and *failing*, hence the premature detonation. Also...” The Doctor said, sniffing the air curiously. “...Do I detect a hint of magnesium-polytetrafluoroethylene?”

The stallion smiled furtively. “It burns really bright, a few pellets here and there in a mix makes for some really dazzling flashers.”

The Doctor whistled. “You know your stuff there don’t you? That’s not strictly legal, and for good reason; too much and you’ve got yourself a self-oxidizing magnesium mixture everywhere!”

“I manage...” Fire Dazzler said as he gestured at his flank, showing a cutie-mark of a fantastic explosion. “It *is* my calling in life, you know!”

The Doctor smiled broadly. “Ponies...you have it so easy! No fuss, no muss, just one day ‘boom’ and you have a little tattoo on your arse telling you what you like. Built to be happy, you lot! Brilliant design by the way, all I got is a boring old hourglass!”

Fire Dazzler blinked in confusion before asking. “Well, here I’ve been talking about myself. May I ask who you are, sir?”

The Doctor pulled out his psychic paper and held it out. “Time Line, Department of Health and Safety. Pleased to meet you Mr. Dazzler.”

The unicorn blanched his white coat even further. “O-oh Celestia...I don’t mix in PTFE into the mix often, honestly, I swear on my mother’s mane!”

The Doctor donned a serious expression. “That’s a serious violation, Mr. Dazzler. People come to this resort to be wowed, not burned alive.”

“P-please! This could mean my job!” Dazzler begged.

“It *will* mean your job unless...” The Doctor said with a smile. “...You give me a guided tour of the place...and cover my dinner bill.”

Fire Dazzler looked up at the Doctor, the look of panic giving way to relief. “Wh-whuh...sure! Anything!”

The Doctor winked. “Glad to hear it!”

The two ponies walked up the panorama walkway at the edge of the resort. The resort had been built at the mouth of the valley, elevated exactly thirty-five meters above the valley floor, it had a sprawling view of the entire valley. The middle of the valley was the picture of natural paradise with no less than ten rain-fed waterfalls feeding into a pristine lake that sparkled even in the moonlight. Lining this ten-kilometer long by three-kilometer wide lake were dazzling white sand beaches broken up by cliff sides ideal for climbing and diving. A lush green forest surrounded the lake, it blanketed the four-kilometer space between the lakeside and the mountains, the calls of hundreds of different kinds of birds could be heard even late into the night. Perhaps fittingly, surrounding Eden was two of the most ominous geological formations in all of Equestria. Marking east and west were two large mountains that jutted out of the landscape like teeth. The tallest was a huge stratovolcano with an open glowing maw on the western side of the valley; the various peaks around it looking like smaller teeth surrounding an intimidating fang. The easternmost mountain was a truly sinister looking jet-black spire, several large chunks of carbonized rock jutted out like spines, cruel barbs on the stinger of an enormous insect.

*'There are some things that scream **'do not touch!'** That mountain is the exclamation point to that phrase!'* The Doctor thought to himself as he took another mouthful from the feedbag around his neck.

"...And over there is the Missing Mountain Lake, all the water you see is pure rainwater, no streams in from outside the valley. Because of this the water is the clearest in all of Equestria!"

The Doctor lifted his head from the feedbag, mouth filled with honey-oats and rose-petals. "Mmmph...\*gulp\*...'scuse me. Ahem, why do they call it 'Missing Mountain Lake'?"

Dazzler smiled and gestured at the larger of the two mountains flanking the valley. "There is Mount Calcipher, at its peak its around four kilometers above sea level..." he gestured to the mountain on the east side of the valley. "...And that is Mount Calcipher-Del-Kaffelerram, at its peak it's about two klicks above sea level." He then gestured to the lake.

The Doctor nodded, chewing another mouthful of oats. "Missing Mountain Lake is three kilometers deep, I take?"

Fire Dazzler nodded. "Yep! It even has an inverted widows peak, the very bottom of the lake converges on a single point no more than four meters wide!"

The Doctor regarded the surrounding geology. "Hmmm...that mountain shouldn't exist."

"...What do you mean?"

"Well..." The Doctor began. "...See, this whole place is basically a big ol' slab of rock known as a shield. Shields are the most geologically stable places on any given planet. Now, what is a big ol' smoking, fire-spitting, red flag for geological instability?"

Fire Dazzler paused before guessing. "...A volcano?"

The Doctor nodded. "Very good. And what does this valley-on-a-shield have?"

"A volcano."

The Doctor smiled. "Right again! Now you say 'maybe there's a hotspot here'. No! Hotspots generally result in shield volcanoes that, ironically, don't happen on shields. Mount Calcipher is a stratovolcano in the middle of a shield thick enough to hold a three-kilometer deep crater lake. That. Is. A. No-no." He said before pointing at Mount Calcipher-Del-Kaffelerram. "But I'll look into that later. Tell me about *that* mountain, the sinister looking carbon-black one you call 'Calcipher's Dung-Heap', why's it called that?"

"You speak the language of the Narragansetts?" Dazzler said with amazement.

"Sure, why not." The Doctor said before taking another mouthful. "Whph ih kalld tha?"

Dazzler shrugged and said. "I think it's called that because of all the gemstones in it."

"Yeah, that helps." The Doctor said impatiently. "What does that have to do with the, er, the...dung part?"

"Well, dragons eat gemstones." Fire Dazzler said matter-of-factly.

"What, really?"

"Yeah! They're like candy to 'em! They can chew them up or dissolve them in their mouths. It's amazing! Anyway Calcipher, being the Dragon God, ate a *lot* of gems so Calcipher's Dung-Heap is lousy with 'em."

"Quod Erat Demonstrandum." The Doctor said, somewhat put off his meal.

"That's also where the mine is. That's why you're here, right?"

"Eh? Oh yeah, that big ol' mine, mining things...and stuff." The Doctor said looking at Fire Dazzler. "Wanna come?"

Fire Dazzler jumped in surprise. "What?! To the mine?"

"Yeah."

"The mine. The mine full of mean snarling diamond dog miners?"

"Yeah."

"The mine full of mean snarling diamond dog miners who'd eat a pony like me for breakfast?!"

“...Yeah.”

Dazzler scoffed in amazement. “I’m sorry, I have to say no. I-I can’t just run off with some weirdo to do Celestia knows what in a dangerous, cursed mine!”

“Cursed you say?” The Doctor said, a smirk spreading across his features. “That sounds like fun.”

“You’re insane!” Dazzler exclaimed with shock.

“Yeah!” The Doctor said, a grin on his face.

Fire Dazzler opened his mouth to retort before he was silence and was blown off his hooves by an explosive blast of energized air.

The stallion spun about and looked up, eyes wide. “What is *that*?!”

Fire Dazzler slowly clambered to his hooves, shaking his head in confusion. “I don’t know, it was like some kind of freak...wind or...somethi...”

Above their heads and drifting towards the resort town was a huge bright white airship. It hovered over the small city, dwarfing the many buildings it quietly glided over. Its engines occasionally blasting air to adjust course and slow the huge ship, glowing with whatever arcane forces that had been harnessed to move such a thing. It was a personalized ship, the undercarriage looking more like a portion of a large building had been expertly and seamlessly crafted onto the leviathan lifting body, the forwards facing portion of the under carriage smoothed and streamlined. It spun around a full one-eighty before lining itself up with a mooring mast.

“Wow!” Fire Dazzler said, eyes wide with excitement. “That’s Mr. Stardust’s airship! I’ve seen it a few times from afar, but it’s never docked in the city while I’ve been here!”

“Mr. Stardust!” The Doctor stepped forward; his eyes widening as jubilant expression crossed his face. “Brilliant!”

He sped off towards the airship, Fire Dazzler sighed. “What about the mine...? Hey! Wait up!”

He took off after The Doctor, eventually catching up with him. They ran astride each other as they deftly avoided spellbound ponies. A crowd began to form behind them as fascinated ponies began to take their lead and follow them.

“H-hey!” Fire Dazzler said. “Hey, Mr. Line!”

“Yes?” The Doctor responded, eyes bright.

“Who are you? Really?”

The Doctor laughed and increased speed. “I’m The Doctor and there’s something strange about this place! Want to help me find out what?”

Fire Dazzler blinked for a moment before shaking his head. "I'm sorry, I've got a job to do!"

"Then why are you following me?"

"I've got to see what this is all about!" He shouted over the increasingly loud din of the crowd that had gathered around the mooring tower.

The Doctor threw his head back and laughed. "That's the spirit!"

The *Brünhild* descended from the twilight sky, even in the dark its brilliant white body seemed to glow and shine. The huge airship lined up with a mooring mast in the middle of the resort and began its final descent. A small conglomeration of ponies gathered around the mooring tower, watching the incredible vehicle as it lowered itself to the ground. The crowd beneath it parted as the ramp began to lower, it set down on the cobbled stone street with a loud clank.

Zeitgeist Stardust sauntered down the ramp arm raised in a wave, a gesture that was greeted by a fusillade of camera flashes from reporters and tourists alike. Twilight and her friends began a slow decent down the ramp.

Twilight reached Zeitgeist first. "Let me say again, thank you so much for your generosity. If there's any way I can pay you back..."

He leaned in a bit. "A word of recommendation to Princess Celestia?"

"Done." She said with a wink.

He greeted each pony with a personalized send off. Zecora was bid farewell in her native tongue; Fluttershy was given a ticket to the Dragon Valley nature sanctuary; Rainbow Dash was given a subdued respectful nod that she returned with a smirk; Applejack was awarded with a hearty hoofshake and as they smiled and posed for the hundreds of camera flashes that followed. Some good publicity for the Apple Clan.

Finally, Rarity was bid farewell with a deep respectful bow and a card. "I'll call you later, there's another business proposition I'd like to discuss. A *valuable* one."

"Thank you Zeit." Rarity said with a deep courtesy. "You've been very good to me."

He began to say something before barely containing a yelp as a small-clawed foot dug into his. Spike looked up at him, hands raised to his face in faux-mortification. "Geez! Aw, I'm sorry Zit...Zeit. That was a complete derp moment on my part, sorry."

Zeit bit his lip and forced a smile as the little clawed foot ground in a bit before lifting. "Ah yes! The young gentledragon...erhg...I have a special present for you..." he produced a large incandescent orb. "Black opal, very tasty I hear. From my homeland...no latrines."

Spike blinked and reached out for the sparkling gem before looking Zeit in the eye. "I'm sorry about that. For real this time."

Zeit nodded and patted him on the head before making his way up the ramp, turning around to wave once more to the ponies and to the crowd before disappearing into his ship. Eight of his servants then began exiting the ship in single file, each of them carrying the ponies' belongings.

They approached the group and the lead servant said. "Please follow us to your rooms madams."

Twilight nodded before she spun around, having seen a familiar face out the corner of her eye, a face amongst the crowd, a grinning, winking face.

"Twilight Sparkle?" Zecora said with her eyebrow raised.

Twilight scanned the crowd; the face was nowhere to be seen. "I thought...it's nothing."

The Doctor watched as the airship anchored itself to the mooring mast, short upwards bursts from its swiveling engines pushing it down. The bow-most section of the bottom of the undercarriage opened and lowered itself down to the street with a sharp metallic clang, and down the ramp strolled a bipedal figure. He seemed familiar but The Doctor couldn't quite put his hoof on it.

"Wow..." breathed Fire Dazzler behind him. "...That's Zeitgeist Stardust! I can't believe it! He never comes here, he's got his own private estate further down the lake."

"*That's* Zeitgeist Stardust?" The Doctor exclaimed. "The fellow Rarity was with when we...sometimes I'm so thick! She could not stop banging on about this big name dog person, and all this time he was just the ponce I met all those weeks ago! Bloody nice ship though..."

Fire Dazzler scoffed at The Doctor's dismissive attitude before seven rather cute mares made their way down the ramp, followed by what appeared to be a small lizard. "Who're they?"

"Friends of mine." The Doctor said with a smile. "Good friends."

He turned to The Doctor, eyes wide. "They're friends of yours? And they know Zeitgeist Stardust?"

“Evidently.” The Doctor muttered.

“That’s so cool! Wow! Do you think you could introduce me to them?” He said before turning back and murmuring. “...That unicorn’s pretty cute...”

“Who? Rarity? I’ll have to take your word on that one, although she’s posed as a goddess on one occasion, The Great White Mare they called her.”

“What? No...” Fire Dazzler shook his head dreamily. “...The other unicorn, the purple one!”

The Doctor blinked in genuine surprise. “Twilight Sparkle?!”

“Twilight Sparkle...” he said dreamily.

The Doctor rolled his eyes and sighed. “*Someone* likes the librarian look apparently...” He said before turning back to the spectacle and hissing through his teeth. “Ooh!! Ha-HAH! Good one, Spike!”

The Doctor began to make his way towards them before stopping, smile disappearing from his face. *‘Stop right there! Why do you think they came here? This is a vacation spot! They came here to relax! You know full well that there’s something strange about this place and yet you go marching off to drop an adventure right in their laps without asking? That’s why you always wind up alone...let them live for a bit, you can handle this one.’*

“Well? Doctor? Aren’t you going to introduce me?” Fire Dazzler said hopefully.

He turned to him and shook his head. “Nope! I leave that daunting task to you, Mr. Dazzler! As for me, I’ve got a mine to inspect! And an airship!” With that The Doctor sped off, stopping to eye his friends as they left, a warm smile on his face. *‘Have some fun, you lot!’*

Fire Dazzler watched as the strange stallion disappeared into the crowd. “Mad as a spring hare that one...”

“I prefer ‘crazy like a fox’ myself!” The Doctor said, somehow behind him now. “Oh by the way...” he said, getting very close and looking Fire Dazzler square in the eye, a rather cold unfriendly smile on his face. “If you are indeed going to try and pursue a relationship with my good *dear* friend Twilight, do take her feelings into consideration, she’s a little...awkward socially. If you in some way...*distress* her, I will make you very, very sorry...**forever**. Compris?”

Fire Dazzler blinked, fully believing that this stallion could easily unleash some kind of eternal arcane torment if he so wished. “Y-yeah...I’ll be the perfect gentlecolt.”



“Brilliant!” The Doctor said, a warm grin replacing that cold hard smile. “See you soon! Allons-y!”

Zeitgeist Stardust sat down in his chair, the large window of the observation room filling his view. The large crowd was being kept from harassing his guests by his security forces; they were having a particularly hard time keeping the valley natives from absconding with young Spike. He sighed and rubbed his foot, that little dragon had three things that had made that experience particularly unpleasant, very hard claws, an amazing power-to-weight ratio, and a sizable crush on a potential business partner that he was trying to charm. Luckily his life as a member of an imperial court had made him particularly good at saving face amidst public displays of pettiness. An understanding grin and a trinket later and his reputation as a dragon sympathizer would be cemented in the minds of the resort going ponies as well as the dracophiliac Narragansett natives. Still hurt though.

A knock came to his door; he rubbed his right temple with his index and middle fingers. “...Enter.”

The door opened and in stepped Litigia Statute, her normally stern expression softened into a look of worry. “Mr. Stardust, mine security just contacted us. They say they’re reasonably certain where the next attack is going to happen...at a cost. They plan on drawing them out with the new super drills.”

“Bait.” Zeitgeist said, rubbing his tired eyes with his thumb and index finger before pinching the bridge of his nose. “They’re going to use the new XMC-703s as bait?”

“Yes sir. Three of them.” She said with a sardonic smirk. “Security sergeant Ansatz feels that putting our biggest most effective vehicles out on display will encourage a sabotage raid.”

“Biggest and most effective, not to mention our most *expensive*! I could have built a whole fleet of class-500 lifter airship transports for one 703!” Zeitgeist sighed and looked out the observation window at the crowd of tourists and resort employees. “Can he guarantee results?”

“He says his forces may be enough to repel or defeat a small raiding party, but he’ll need a few of your grenadiers to combat a larger force.”

“Oh hell, why not! I brought two-hundred of the foaming bastards for a reason!” Zeitgeist said heatedly. “I’ve got half a mind to bring a whole diamond-damned division of them! Dig down to those animals’ hive and wipe them out, burn them out of my fur forever!!”

Litigia walked forward quickly, worry clear on her face. "Zeit...please don't talk like that."

He hung his head before smiling weakly. "Sorry Lit...this whole thing has gotten out of hand. All I need is one of them to talk to. Find out if they see reason, if they can be *bought*. But judging by that one from before...I'm beginning to think that even if we do open a dialogue they won't rest until that mine, *my* mine, is closed down...I can't let that happen."

"But at the cost of lives, Zeit?" Litigia said quietly.

He growled lowly, baring his teeth. "While I draw breath I swear that the mines of Dragon Mountain shall never close. They will overcome this trial, be it through diplomacy or the emitters of a lightning gun." He brought his fist down against his armrest, activating the com. "Captain Aufwuchs, are all the crew onboard?"

"Yes sir." A gruff voice sounded through the com. "Your orders?"

"Tell my grenadiers to arm themselves and prepare for combat. I want us taking positions within the hour, understood?"

"Yessir!"

The *Brünhild* detached from the mooring mast and made her way towards the mine ten kilometers away. The blue glow of her engines soon a collection of dots in the night sky to the ponies in the crowd.

The Grundel opened his eyes as he rose from beneath the ground, even in the supposed darkness of night the light of the half moon at its zenith still made the backs of his eyes itch. He still enjoyed looking at the moon though; the work of The Junior Daughter was something his kind had always appreciated, even if her direct subjects did not. His was an old race, leftovers from an ancient era when gods did battle over the surface of the planet, the valley lake one of the few remaining scars from a particularly vicious fight of a particularly vicious era. It had been the final battle of that epoch, where the great Equine Gods Radian and Terra fought alongside their allies to maintain stability of the world against those who would cast it into darkness. It was there that one of the most powerful beings to have ever existed, the Dragon God Calcipher, gave his life. From that sacrifice Dragon Valley was born, the evil sealed, and the era of war and darkness forgotten for the greater good. It was his people's duty to prevent *His* return; He who had fought the Equine Gods to a standstill; he who had corrupted entire species beyond redemption with his dread magics; he who

was sealed away inside the great black mountain. Him. The Beast. The Corruptor. The Demon God Tirac.

He approached one of the great machines; a massive construct of metal and magic, its sole purpose was the erosion of His prison. These creatures, these 'diamond dogs', had mined the mountain for centuries, harmlessly scraping at the surface, never able to pierce the great diamond barrier within the mountain. It had been the first line of defense, a wall of diamond 1-meter thick, and for a while there was nothing the miners could do other than curse the shield and scrape at it impotently. But then he came, the new owner, the Duke. Young and industrious, this noble had seen the wall as a challenge and vowed to vanquish it. When told of renewed efforts to pierce the barrier the Grundel elders simply clicked their tongues and dismissed it as youthful folly, this new dog would bear his teeth and growl, but his bite would never come. Such was their complacency. Such was their ignorance. What they had not considered was the brilliance of this new Duke; that he would not only bite, but also that his bite would shatter their peace as deftly as it would shatter the great barrier.

The technology wielded by the new miners allowed them to penetrate the first three barriers within a decade, causing much uproar amongst the Grundel community. It was decided then that action would be taken but the Grundels were a gentle and kindly people by nature, and could not bring themselves to perform more than minor mischief. Acts of sabotage against the mining machines were the most common, as it slowed their advance but no one would be hurt. However, it had become clear amongst younger Grundels that slowing their advance was doing just that, slowing them. To prevent His release the mining had to stop dead. This younger generation had grown up with the constant threat of His return poisoning the atmosphere; they were of a different sort than their parents. As the miners prepared to penetrate the fourth barrier all ten mineshafts collapsed, crushing and killing over one hundred diamond dogs. The Grundel council condemned the act and lamented the dead miners, but could not argue with the results, the mining had completely ceased its relentless pace for the first time in fifteen years.

For the next six months the Grundel forces sabotaged machine after machine, siphoned poisonous gasses into smaller mineshafts, and collapsed nearly all the major mineshafts save one. It was at this point of victory that the Duke once again revealed his brilliance, for this last mineshaft was not only magically reinforced, also but booby trapped. All attempts to collapse the mine were met with failure and death; the energy

field that sustained the mine did so by pushing out with tremendous force, collapsing any undermining tunnel in on the saboteur. By the end of the day seven Grundels had been crushed into jelly by the Duke's fearsome technology, and soon all of the collapsed mineshafts had been reopened, protected by this new system. Mining had begun anew and began to make up for lost time at a furious pace. Now things had escalated, the Grundels were out in full force; a large brawny Worker Grundel had murdered two scout miners at the behest of his Thinker. They had been establishing the groundwork for a new major shaft and the Thinker saw no other alternative. Despite the Worker having been severely traumatized by his actions the tactic caught on, actual attacks were being carried out against diamond dog miners, Worker Grundels being more than able to kill with their bare hands. In response the diamond dogs fought back, being relatively physically potent themselves they could effectively combat small attacks. This had turned into a war.

The Grundel sighed in the moonlight, why didn't the Grundel elders explain the situation to the diamond dogs? Surely they'd see reason. But his Thinker had told him that diamond dogs *must* hunt for gems, it was part what they were, and so long as the great mountain existed they would mine it. So they would fight them, they would break their machines and their mines and their bodies. They would continue until no diamond dog set foot in Dragon Valley ever again.

He looked over at several dozen of his fellow workers and signaled silently to them. 'I will break. You will trap.'

'I trap.' He signaled back before adding. 'Where Crut? He was scout. Why not back?'

The Grundel was about to shrug before a sound unlike anything he'd ever heard split the air; it was a great hissing crack, something like a thunder clap and a fire-hose. An impossibly bright blue line touched the Worker Grundel to his left, and his arms and legs stiffened like pistons as his skeleton briefly became visible. The Worker Grundel collapsed in a heap as smoke and steam roiled off his charred body. Suddenly the cries of diamond dogs were all around him, bright floodlights blinded him as lances of blue blasted through the air. The zapping sounds followed by the loud thuds of his fellow Grundels as they were slain back-dropped the victorious howls of the diamond dogs. Stars exploded behind his blinded eyes as something solid and heavy smashed into his cheek. He fell to the ground and looked up in a daze. Standing above him blocking out the bright light and the moon was a tall thin white diamond dog flanked by two burly guards. The Duke.

“Hello.” He said. “I think we need to have a little talk.”

# CHAPTER 3

The *Brünhild* loomed over the facility like a massive predator closing in on prey, creeping forwards at a slow controlled pace as not to betray its presence. Several dozen blasts of steam bloomed from her underside, her large clawed anchors streaking out and grasping the specialized masts of the mooring station while the main mooring cables looped around the larger dedicated mooring masts. A muted mechanical whirling sounded as the airship drew itself down to the ground. Several hatches on the side of the ship's ornate undercarriage flew open as cables dropped from each. A series of commands were barked out as several dozen figures began to drop down the ropes. They were organized and well equipped with plated armor and tough looking fabrics covering their bulky bodies. Slung over their shoulders were large metallic cylinders with handles and an expertly carved cyan crystal at one end. They were unmistakably soldiers.

The ramp on the under carriage opened and descended to the ground, Zeitgeist, Litigia, and their bodyguards already making their way down it before it even touched down.

One of the soldiers ran towards Zeitgeist and began to walk beside him. "Your orders, Excellency?"

"Sergeant Doppler, coordinate your efforts with the mine security team. Do as they say without question." Zeitgeist said, removing his coat as he walked towards the complex's entrance.

The soldier paused before nodding lightly. "...Yes Excellency, if we must."

Zeitgeist spun around, a cold look in his eyes but a warm smile on his face. "Sergeant, I hope you appreciate the gravity of the situation. The future of this *entire mine* may depend on this mission succeeding. Now, if you allow your military ego and your rivalries with my security forces to compromise this mission, to cause it to...well, to *fail*...heh...I will have you skinned alive and thrown into a salt pit. Understood?"

Sergeant Doppler blinked and gulped. "Y-yes, your Excellency, clear as diamonds!"

"Good." Zeitgeist said cheerily and turned back towards the complex. "Feist, contact Ansatz and tell him the grenadiers are here and ready for combat. Tell him to contact me the minute our forces are ready and in position."

“By your command.”

Once all the soldiers and servants had vacated the airship, a small shape shimmied down the rope before setting all four hooves on the concrete. The light brown stallion straitened out his large brown trench coat and tugged on his tie, smoothing out his pinstriped suit.

“Steerage is never the best way to travel...” The Doctor groaned as he clapped dirt and grime off his cloths. “...But at least I got a good earful!”

The Doctor made his way towards the walkway to the facility; a tall well lit building of concrete and glass, its austerity something he felt to be very out of place in the gilded and fanciful land of Equestria.

*‘Why would a mine need a whole contingent of soldiers? What is this mission and why is it so important? Where can I get a good cup of tea around here?’* The Doctor thought to himself before saying. “Well! This looks like a job for Time Line, Department of Health and Safety!”

He ran towards the doors of the facility, they were large and metal, almost dungeon-like with large blots and rivets studding the support brackets. The Doctor put his ear to the door, listening for anyone on the other side. Luckily, whatever had called in the soldiers appeared to have had the same affect on the security forces. The Doctor smirked and pulled out his sonic screwdriver. A brief buzz over the door and the lock leapt open with a mechanical click, The Doctor trotted in at a brisk pace. The corridors were well lit and clean, the use of metal and artificial materials brought back memories of his old universe. A far off and distant place, both cosmologically and spiritually; he hated to admit it, but this universe was beginning to cast his home-verse in a much darker light. Sure there were still dark patches here and there, but overall there was beauty and peace. Amazingly the big empires in this universe were surprisingly mellow, even the Minponi to an extent. Where there had been genocides in his universe, here they had been somewhat unpleasant occupations; where there had been wars in his universe, here there had been skirmishes; where there had been hate in his universe, here there was love. It’s like this universe had consciously dialed back the horrific extremes aggression could bring out in all its occupants, a decision he was in full support of. In six hundred non-linear years the dimensional walls would have healed, only then could he return to his own reality. Would he return? Of course, he *had* to. But would he *want* to go back?

As he made his way through the corridors of the building his feelings of suspicion and unease grew steadily. *'I should have at least run into a rent-a-cop or something by now...whatever's got the guns out also has all the available security...'*

"Hey! You! Stop right there!" said a voice from behind him.

"Ah good! *Just* what I needed!" The Doctor said lowly, turning around to meet his discoverers.

He turned around to see two diamond dogs running towards him, long staffs holstered over their backs. They stopped directly in front of him, brandishing their 130-centimeter metal poles. As they got closer The Doctor could see two small knobs on the tips of each staff. One of the diamond dogs jabbed his staff at The Doctor, stopping just centimeters short of his face. Arcs of electricity spat and cracked from the knobs, casting the hall in a blue-white light for an instant.

The Doctor smiled widely. "Hello!"



(Dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da  
etc)

## DOCTOR WHOOVES

### Episode 2

#### The Mines of Dragon Mountain: Part 3

##### Starring:

The Doctor  
Twilight Sparkle  
Pinkie Pie  
Rainbow Dash  
Applejack  
Fluttershy  
Zecora  
Rarity  
Spike

##### Featuring:

Zeitgeist Stardust  
Litigia Statute  
Fire Dazzler

Twilight Sparkle, Pinkie Pie, Rarity, and Spike sat in their luxury suite, idly chatting amongst each other as they enjoyed the splendor of their accommodations. Fluttershy and Zecora sat in a scented Jacuzzi as they read over the various guides, excitedly exchanging facts and anecdotes about the various plants and animals that populated the valley forest. Applejack helped Rainbow Dash stretch for her flight above Mount Calcipher tomorrow. Pinkie Pie was feasting on a bowl of chocolates, gourmet of course, and was laughing and giggling with Spike as she told him stories of their adventures in the TARDIS, her recollections of the events alone was entertaining in and of themselves. Rarity polished her hooves as she waited for her hair to dry within the mass of towels she had wrapped around it; she had enthusiastically accepted the hotel's offer for their patented Ten-Minute Spa, the otherwise exorbitantly expensive treatment had put Rarity into a very agreeable mood. Twilight Sparkle sighed and stared off into the mid-distance, unable to shake the feeling that she had indeed seen The Doctor in the crowd grinning his encouraging grin. Their beds were arranged in a circle around a single crystal sphere. On it was the local news' recounting of their arrival, at the moment the reporter mare was interviewing a thin-bodied and rather tall chestnut mare with long tapering legs and high-held head. Twilight could identify her as a member of native ponies called the Narragansetts.

"Hello I'm Cherry Ginjin and with me is Ruby Beryl, local correspondent of the Narragansett Heritage Society. Tonight visitors and residents alike were treated to a show when mining magnate Zeitgeist Stardust paid Dragon Valley Resort an unexpected visit. As seen in the footage, Zeitgeist's personal luxury airship passed low over the roofs of Valley City and moored with the docking mast in the plaza. Upon landing, Mr. Stardust himself exited and personally bid farewell to seven mysterious mares and a single infant dragon. Needless to say the events of tonight have certainly piqued the curiosity of Valley City."

"Ugh!" Rarity exclaimed. "If I had known that the press would have been there I would have put something fitting on. I guess they'll just have to make due with simple beauty rather than perfection!"

Twilight rolled her eyes and smiled. "I think they'll survive."

"Indeed this is a great occasion for my people, Mrs. Ginjin." said the tall chestnut mare on the television. "As Mr. Stardust's arrival has brought excitement to the resort, the Narragansett elders sent my associates and I as a liaison to Spike, the young dragon accompanying the seven mares. Although our meeting was brief, we convinced Spike and his legal guardian to attend the Arrival Celebration."

Cherry Ginjin nodded and inquired. "For our viewers at home, could you explain what are they hoping to gain by seeking his company?"

"That's a very good question." Ruby Beryl said with a smile. "As subjects of Equestria we natives of Dragon Valley acknowledge and accept the divinity of The Royal Sisters. However a point of pride amongst our people is the fact that our culture and history is what makes us unique. Ancient Narragansett lore has it that a magnanimous clan of dragons kept our ancestors warm with their magical flames during the Great Darkness brought by Nightmare Moon. They then led them to the warming embers of Mount Calcipher and the fertile soil of the valley. We have lived here ever since."

"As such dragons are highly respected in Narragansett culture." Cherry Ginjin said as she looked back at the camera. "So the Narragansett elders hope that acknowledgment from an actual dragon will be a boon to your cultural history?"

Ruby Beryl nodded in agreement. "Exactly, they hope that the actual participation of a dragon in one of our celebrations will make younger generations of Narragansett ponies interested in their heritage. We sincerely hope that our honored guests feel welcome and that this year's celebration will be one for the history books!"

Twilight Sparkle looked over at Spike who was wearing a large, bright smile. He hopped down from the bed and laughed. "Y'hear that? Guest of honor at a celebration! I bet that means all the gems I can eat!"

"Ooh! Ooh! D'you think you could use your 'honored guest' status to talk them into letting me cook a few treats for the party? I've got some alien recipes I've been *dying* to try!" Pinkie said, hopping around the room excitedly.

Applejack chuckled and snatched one of Pinkie's chocolates and popped it in her mouth. "Ah'm sure the local bakeries will be interested in getting' their hooves on a few a'those recipes, Pinkie! You could make this celebration one tah remember! ...Wow! Those blue-blooded sweets're great!"

Rainbow Dash swooped overhead, a confident smile on her face as she snatched a chocolate from Pinkie's bowl. "I just hope you all aren't too busy with your little celebration to watch me get discovered! I know at least one of the bored rich people here'll be impressed enough to sponsor! ...Oh hey, these *are* good!"

Fluttershy smiled as she soaked in the Jacuzzi. "I just hope I can see all the phoenixes and be there in time for both! Zecora says she can make some very useful medicines from phoenix feathers, so she'll be with me."

Zecora nodded enthusiastically. "With a poultice made from a phoenix's feather, I could make even the dead feel better! Between Fluttershy's talent and my stealth technique, we could make any potion that you seek!"

Twilight smiled and nodded, everyone was getting into the spirit of the vacation. "Okay, here's the plan! We all head over to the celebration with Spike and split up from there. I'll stay with Spike while you mares go off and do your things; Pinkie, you can tour the bakeries, I think the brochure said they bake until one in the afternoon. Zecora and Fluttershy, the largest gulch at the base of Mount Calcipher is where the phoenixes spend the mornings, so you'll head down there with Rainbow Dash. Dash, tours run through Mount Calcipher at nine, eleven, and one, each one has about a hundred ponies in them so put on a show!"

Applejack stepped forward and gestured at Spike. "Ah'm not particularly interested in the birds and whatnot, so ah'll just stick with you and Spike. See if ah can wrassle up some good publicity fer the Apple Family."

Rarity shook off her towels and began to run a brush through her luxurious mane, a bright smile on her face. "After that news coverage, the media will be out in force tomorrow! I'll put on my best 'out on the town' attire for the cameras!"

Twilight nodded, with a smile. "Then we meet up in the plaza at three and have some fun together! How does that sound?"

"Those tourists won't know what hit 'em!" Rainbow Dash said triumphantly.

"I can't wait to meet all those wild phoenixes! Hopefully they'll be a little less mischievous than Philomena." Fluttershy said, excitement clear in her quiet voice.

"I need only ten feathers to make my wares, there's no reason for them not to share." Zecora said reassuringly.

"Right, so it's all planned out! Let's get some sleep, tomorrow's going to be a busy day." Twilight said as she looked out the window. *'...Because we all know something strange is going on here. We should at least try to enjoy our vacation before getting involved. We never seek out adventure, but we never ignore it either...I wonder what trouble The Doctor's getting into now?'*

The Doctor flinched as a shock stick sparked on the wall on his right, a low growl emanating from the fatter of the two guards. The two diamond dogs were relatively tall for diamond dogs at over 160 centimeters. However, one was visibly middle aged with a pronounced paunch and the other was far too young, his innate adolescent ranginess exaggerated by his long thin arms.

The young one attempted a threatening growl, succeeding in a somewhat throaty squeak. "What're you doin' here pony? This is a restricted area!"

"Yeah! It's, uh..." The paunchy dog said, trying to continue before realizing he had nothing to add. "Yeah!"

The Doctor stared at them with an underwhelmed expression, the fact that these two were patrolling the halls and not an even lower priority location gave him the distinct impression that the valued security forces were concentrated on that important thing, whatever it was.

"Normally you'd be right. But then..." he said before revealing his psychic paper notebook. "...There's this. Time Line, Department of Health and Safety; I'm here to inspect the mine for safety violations. Word through the grapevine has it that Kaffelerram mine has been 'cursed'! And a shock stick in my face isn't a terribly good hoof to start the investigation on, now is it?"

The older dog grunted in surprise, stiffening like a board. "Ah! Oh, I'm sorry sir! We didn't, uh, we-um-y'see-"

"Ain't it a l'il late for an inspection?" The younger one said suspiciously.

The older diamond dog clapped the younger one on the head. "Saller! It's never too late to accomy-date an inspector! Especially when that inspector can shut this mine down with a letter!" He turned back to The Doctor. "Sorry sir. He's a good pup, just a l'il o'ereager to get his eyeteeth as a mine-sec! Makes him a touch blind to who his betters are. No offense?"

The Doctor waved a hoof and scoffed. "None! But, now that you know you best be on your way! I've got some inspecting to do!"

The older dog shook his head apologetically. "Sorry sir, part of our contract states that we escort all non-mine personnel through the complex. We have to stick to you 'til Lord Stardust is available, an' Sarg Ansty said that he'd be busy for a while."

The Doctor sighed; this could be a minor impediment. "Very well...let's inspect shall we?"

Nearly an hour later and the two guards were still with him, offering their anecdotes regarding their time at the mine as a way to break the silence. The Doctor ran his sonic screwdriver over the various panels and power cables. Not only was he being kept from finding out what was really going on, but this was also an uneventful inspection as well. The electrical systems in the complex were flawless, the safety systems responsive, and even the latrines were **far** less nightmarish than they had any right to be!

"Mr. Stardust runs a tight ship, I'll give him that." The Doctor sighed.

"You bet your fur!" young Saller said, admiration in his squeaking voice. "Duke Stardust never lets his employees down! Why, when Archduke Steinkopf exiled a thousand proles the Duke took 'em in and gave 'em jobs here! I'm alive 'cause of him!"

The Doctor smirked; even the CEOs in this universe had a touch of sugar to them, if only a touch. "So he's popular amongst his employees then?"

The paunchy dog named Desler nodded. "Oh yes! This mine and its town was drownin' before he showed up. We'd dug up nearly all the gems we could out of the top layers, and there was no way to get through the diamond wall. But then he came along an' his new drills blew clean through that wall, sixteen years later an' we's the best paid miners on the continent!"

The Doctor nodded before realizing. "...Waitaminute. He's a duke?"

"Course! Where have you been?" Saller said.

"And he's Thin and White, this Duke?" The Doctor said, a smirk growing on his face.

"...Yes. Why?" Desler said curiously.

"Oh, no reason..." The Doctor said, suppressing a laugh. "...This is ground control to Major Tom..."

From outside the complex came an incredibly peculiar sound, something like a hissing thunder crack. The Doctor's ears perked up and his head snapped towards the source of the sound. A moment later and the sound was repeated several dozen times, overlapping and blending into one another.

Desler fidgeted and laughed out loud, it was a hard artificial laugh meant to draw attention. "Oh those night-miners! Sometimes they like to activate their drills to signal that they've started work! Annoying, ain't it Saller?"

The young diamond dog blinked before connecting the odd statement to Desler's desperate expression. "...Oh! Uh, yeah! Those night-miners are a silly bunch! Ha-Ha."

“Hm.” The Doctor said with an eyebrow raised. “I don’t know much about drills, so correct me if I’m wrong, but they don’t usually sound like 200-kilowatt anti-personnel electrolasers, do they?”

Saller looked over at Desler, who literally barked nervous laughter and said. “Ha! Yes, well, everyone makes that mistake! In fact, last day Pilsner said they sounded just like lecter-lazers! He-”

“You don’t know what an electrolaser *is*, do you?” The Doctor said flatly.

“No, sir.”

The Doctor spoke as he made his way down the hall. “Using a highly focused beam of light called a laser, a plasma channel is made in the air. Through this plasma channel a coherent beam of electrons can be conducted, effectively shooting lightning in a straight line: an electricity-shooting laser, electro-laser. They can either shock and incapacitate, or they can kill with excessive efficiency.”

The two diamond dogs nervously followed The Doctor down the hall, Saller snapping his fingers excitedly as he said. “Oh! You mean like a lightning gun!”

The Doctor smirked. “What’s that? Some kind of weapon?”

Saller rolled his eyes. “Well it sure as rubies ain’t a can opener!”

“So...” The Doctor said, approaching a window. “...What are lightning guns doing at a mine? Or in this reality for that matter?”

He looked down at the yard between the mines and the complex, it was lit with huge floodlights and as several dozen diamond dogs were milling about. They were carrying various strange looking objects and putting them into a pile in front of one of the three enormous machines on display in the yard. The machines were exactly twenty-five meters long by eight meters wide; their huge caterpillar tracks had sharp looking hooks and grooves on them for traction in any terrain. At the front of each of them was what appeared to be a huge disc; from the window it was apparent that the disc was studded with spell-stones and other such magic-technology, some kind of drilling mechanism?

“What are they doing down there?” The Doctor muttered as he put on his scanning glasses. “What are they...oh no...not that, not here...”

The diamond dogs were piling smoldering charred bodies in front of the business end of the machine. He couldn’t quite make out what species they were; the bodies were so badly burned. It didn’t matter what they were, what mattered was that there were at least three-dozen bodies in that pile, some of which were still twitching and squirming. One of the diamond dogs standing next to the machine whistled and signaled with his hand,

prompting the pallbearer soldiers to hurriedly drop their victims into the pile and run. The great mining machine began to whirr and glow, arcane energies lighting up its insides as it charged up its massive instrument. The disc on the front glowed and arced as energy surged through it, the whirring slowly becoming a high-pitched shriek. As the rising sound hit its maximum pitch it abruptly dropped into an almost inaudible basso thrum, heard and felt in one's bones instead of one's ears. The flashing glowing lights emanating from the disc arced out and exploded into a single expanding sphere of light that promptly imploded with a low-pitched electronic sound. The pile was gone. No smoke, no flames, no vapor or debris. It was *gone*.

"Impossible..." The Doctor said.

A call of alarm went up amongst the soldiers as a single one of the creatures jumped up and made a beeline for one of the mineshafts. The Doctor could now clearly see what the creatures looked like when undamaged. It was big for this world, almost as tall as a human, with long ape-like arms that it used to propel itself forward in its desperate bid for safety. Its skin was a mottled green color with patches of jaundice yellow and sprouting from the top of its head was shiney coal black hair tied in a single long braid. Its face was somewhat human but with grossly exaggerated features like its long pointed ears, its large warty nose, and its protruding underbitten jaw.

"A troll?" The Doctor said in disbelief.

The troll almost made it to the mouth of the shaft before laser guided lances of blue-white lightning from two dozen different sources converged on it for a whole second, causing it to disappear in a blast of flame, smoke, and steaming meat. Four soldiers approached the shattered smoking remains of the troll, weapons raised. One of them signaled to his superior and pointed at the mining machine questioningly. The superior shook his head and brandished his weapon instructionally. The soldier nodded and spoke to his comrades; all four turned a knob on their weapons and took several steps back before brighter lances of red-blue-white energy obliterated the remains further, reducing them to ash.

"Th-they killed em?" said a squeaky voice from behind. "I-I-I thought they was only lookin' to take prisoners!"

"They were." Desler said in a disgusted voice, pointing at the single unconscious troll being dragged into the complex's western wing. "See? A prisoner."

"I'd like to have a talk with your manager..." The Doctor said, cold fury in his voice.



"My thoughts exactly." said a strong refined voice from behind them.

Standing in the hall were three hulking diamond dogs, two were dressed in soldier garb while the one on the middle was dressed in what appeared to be a business suit. He was undoubtedly a member of VIP security. The soldiers raised their weapons and charged them, a high electrical whine emanating from their emitters.

"And I'm afraid I must insist." The bodyguard dog said with an unpleasant smile.

Fire Dazzler walked down the crowded streets, absent-mindedly shouldering his way through the crowd that had gathered to see the beautiful airship and were now patronizing the 'late night establishments' to drink and gossip. He sighed as he looked up at the clear night sky, the moon hanging in the blue-black of the star-studded abyss. *'Who was that crazy pony?'*

He realized that he was standing in the exact spot he had been when he noticed the strange 'Doctor' strolling out of the alleyway between his favorite bar and his favorite pub. Fire Dazzler felt an overwhelming urge to run into that alley, an urge he indulged. The alley was narrow and dark and smelled exactly how the space between two purveyors of alcohol should, still he walked in deeper, subconsciously ignoring the tall blue box that sat between the overflowing garbage can and the fragrant dumpster.

*'Maybe he was just a drunk?'* Fire Dazzler thought to himself as he strolled through the pungent alley. *'Maybe he was just a **crazy** drunk?'*

"...Maybe..." He muttered to himself, unaware of the two large shapes quietly walking into the alley.

"*Maybe* you should check your back before running into a dead end alleyway, eh Fire Dud?" said a dreadfully familiar voice behind him.

Fire Dazzler spun around to see two tall Narragansett stallions. They were taller and better built than him, sleek but by no means spindly; both had coats of the darkest carbon black, their blood relation obvious in their identical features and the innate cruelty within their bright yellow eyes.

"Shock! Thunder! H-hey, what's new?"

The two large stallions circled him, unpleasant smirks on their identical faces. They were slightly more observant than their quarry as the two only willingly ignored the blue box, their expressions that of mild confusion every time they looked directly at it.

Shock spoke first. "Oh not much...just that we may have to call in your debt for all those 'unregistered' chemicals we got for you. Five thousand bits, right?"

He stammered for a bit before Thunder interjected. "It was a rhetorical question, don't answer."

Fire Dazzler blanched and shrunk away from them. "No! I don't have the money yet! My paycheck comes in next week!"

Thunder laughed and stomped his large hoof on the cobblestone, sparks flashing from his iron-shod hooves as they hit. "Well gee, that's too bad. See, we really wanted that money today. In fact, you could say we was *dead* set on it!"

"But now..." Shock said from behind Fire Dazzler. "...We won't get it 'cause you don't have it. And when we don't get what we want from the deadbeat ponies who owe us...well, I guess you could say we get disappointed."

"Real disappointed." Thunder growled. "*Horn-collecting* disappointed, if you catch our drift."

"P-please! Not that! I can't do my job without my horn!" Fire Dazzler said, panic clear in his voice. "I'll get fired and I'll starve before it grows back!"

Shock looked over at Thunder and nodded. "...I guess you're right. See, we're reasonable ponies Fire Dud. We won't take your horn, or crack your hooves, or take that thing that looks like a cheese grater mixed with a power tool to your cutie-mark. In fact, we's willing to drop the debt altogether so long as you do this one thing for us. This one. Little. Thing."

"Reasonable, see?" Thunder interjected.

"Th-thuh-thank you! Oh Celestia bless you!" Fire Dazzler said with relief. "What is it? Anything!"

Shock flicked his glossy black mane. "See, our boss has recently been contacted by an old friend. An old friend our boss owes a favor to. An old friend who holds dragons in high esteem."

"What does this have to do with me?" Fire Dazzler said carefully, not particularly liking where this was going.

Thunder looked at Shock, who nodded in approval. "See, tomorrow's the Narragansett celebration of our people's arrival at Dragon Valley. Now, the tribe elders persuaded the little dragon that showed up here in the Grand Mutt's blimp to attend and participate, as a publicity stunt y'see?"

"That's where me 'n' Thunder come in." Shock continued. "We've been ordered by our boss to... 'unexpectedly escort' the l'il drakling from the ceremony and deliver him to his old friend."

Fire Dazzler barely suppressed a horrified gasp before working up the gall to say. "Where do / figure in?"

"Here's the beauty of it. Our people can arrange for you to put together the pyro-display for the show. What we want you to do is make it a little less 'fire' and a little more 'dazzler'." Shock said with a suppressed chuckle, amused by his own 'wit'.

"A distraction."

Thunder tapped his nose with his hoof, making a clicking noise with his tongue.

"You in?" Shock said bluntly.

"If I'm not in it's a date with Mr. Electric Cheese Grater, isn't it?" Fire Dazzler said flatly.

Shock nodded. "Him, and another toy we call 'Mr. Thingy'. You ever see a pony try to eat his own head? We have."

"It's horrible." Thunder said with a laugh. "Take our word for it."

Fire Dazzler cleared his throat and nodded. "Alright. I'll do it."

The two stallions smiled and made their way out of the alley, Shock turning around to say "We've got a bit of planning to do. Meet us at the stage in the plaza at seven in the morning, bring your things and don't mess this up!"

Fire Dazzler smiled and nodded until they left, whereupon he promptly slumped, hind legs splayed as his head drooped. "...Oh Celestia...what have I gotten myself into?"

*'You know what you must do.'* said a voice inside his head.

Fire Dazzler blinked and looked around him. "Who...who said that?"

*'You know what you must do.'* It repeated. *'To ease your soul.'*

"Are you my conscience?"

*'What.'*

"Ease my soul, eh?" Fire Dazzler said miserably. "You're right. I need a drink."

Fire Dazzler got to his hooves and entered his favorite pub through the alley door, calling out to those inside. "Hey! Shake'N'Stir! Poison, now! Grab the killingest thing you got and put it in a glass!"

The door slammed shut and the blue box with glowing windows dimmed a shade. *'...P'tagh.'*

Zeitgeist Stardust laughed as he entered his lounge, clapping his hands together in joy. "Brilliant!"

"Everything went according to plan?" Litigia said, stacking paperwork on his desk.

"Precisely!" Zeitgeist said happily. "No casualties, no damage, and a prisoner to pump for information! If things keep going the way they are I'll see to it that everyone gets a 50% raise!"

Litigia bit her tongue as to the economics of that statement and said. "I see your little motivational speech to sergeant Doppler worked, hmm? What was it that you said? 'I'll have you skinned alive and rolled in salt' or something."

Zeitgeist chuckled and poured himself a drink of dark brown rum from a crystal bottle. "Salt pit. I threatened to skin him alive and have him thrown into a salt pit."

Litigia shuddered. "What's the difference?"

"The implication of the salt pit is that I'll leave him there without his skin until he dies." Zeitgeist sipped his drink. "Much more effective."

"Why did you threaten him like that, Zeit? That's not like you."

Zeit looked over at her, his smile making way for a comforting look. "Look, *ponies* are inherently agreeable people, ask them to do something and there's a good chance they'll do it for the sake of being neighborly. Diamond dogs...not so much. One has to be domineering either physically or charismatically. Like the story with Ms. Rarity, she got through that ordeal through sheer force of personality. She spoke and acted with enough dominance that it shook them up, allowing her to pick apart their self esteem."

"What about when she started crying?" Litigia said flatly.

Zeit shrugged. "There's also evidence that when she goes into histrionics her voice hits pitches that hurt a diamond dog's ears. Anyway, the point is that one must talk the talk to lead diamond dogs. I was merely speaking like an alpha to get them to work better."

"What if he had allowed his rivalries with Mine Sec to sabotage the mission?"

"Then I would have had him shot for insubordination and incompetence." Zeit said casually. "What do you think I am, a monster?"

Litigia scoffed as she made her way over to him. "I hope you don't make that an official policy. The paperwork for a single firing would be a nightmare!"

"No, no...to my employees I'm Mr. Stardust: CEO and rich idiot. To my soldiers and vassals, I'm Duke Stardust: lord and master. I do try to keep the two separate." Zeit said with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Now,

you've been biting your tongue for the past five minutes. What news do you have that's going to spoil my good mood?"

"Our security systems detected a stallion here by the name of Time Line. According to the audio he claims to work for the Department of Health and Safety."

Zeit paused and looked at his drink. "...Will my malpractice insurance cover me meeting this stallion while drunk?"

"No." She said flatly.

Zeit sighed and put down the drink. He got up and walked over to his desk, activating his videoconference crystal ball. "Let me see his face first. Maybe I'll get lucky and he'll be a soft touch."

"He doesn't look it." Litigia said with a sigh. "It's strange. I've made a point of knowing the face of every major inspector in the DH&S...and I've never seen this stallion before."

Zeit simply stared at the face in the crystal, a decidedly unfriendly smile on his face. "That's because he's not with the Department of Health and Safety..." Zeit pressed a communications button labeled Feist. "...He's an imposter. Restrain him and bring him to me."

"By your command."

The Doctor looked over to the soldiers as they waited in the hall outside a rather important looking door. The unpleasant smell of roasted meat coming off their armor making his herbivorous pony stomach churn. Whatever was going on at this mine he knew nothing could justify such a slaughter. Worse yet was that this world would not tolerate such violence, so he had to be covering it up. The soldiers were quite adamant on destroying the remains either through immolation or whatever *recherche* mechanism at work inside those huge machines. A small part of The Doctor still pined to poke around one of those brilliant-looking vehicles, but now was not the time. For the moment he merely had to content himself with picking the brain of the top dog. The door opened.

"Send Mr. Line in." said a voice from within; it was the put-on-airs voice of his hulking captor, a rather unpleasant dog by the name of Feist. "His Excellency will see you now."

"My honor." The Doctor said sarcastically. As he entered the room he noticed that in stark contrast to the austere industrial look of the mine facility, this office was lavishly decorated. Carved mahogany, Impasto

paintings, fancy rugs, all the fixings of a rich twit with too much time on his hands and delusions of culture. "Fancy. Must have cost a pretty penny."

"Not really Mr. Time Line." Said a voice from behind him. "It's all quite cheap. Monetarily and sentimentally."

The Doctor turned around to see a tall thin diamond dog pouring two glasses of alcohol, his bright white fur a stark contrast against his dark silk suit. The Doctor smirked; this dog may yet be a challenge. "Before we carry on appraising the decor, let's get this identity thing over with first. Sound good, Mr. Stardust?"

"Indeed." He said flatly. "You're an imposter. I saw you yesterday in Trottingham. You appeared and disappeared with a teleportation method I am unfamiliar with in a box I strongly suspect to be impossible. You are not from around here, are you?"

The Doctor nodded and smirked. "Yes, yes, yes, and no."

"Right, now back to appraising each other's character with false repartee. My office is cluttered with tacky low value garbage."

"Yes...low quality ebony, mass produced materials clearly used in the rug, and duplicate or mediocre original paintings." The Doctor said with a sniff. "Your cologne is nice, though."

"Eau De Méchant Loup, a personal favorite. My office furnishings, on the other hand, are not. A gift of 'good faith' from a rival noble, given to me through gritted teeth and bristling fur." The diamond dog said coolly, his silvery grey eyes locking with The Doctor's. "Like his gifts he was bland, superficial, and gauche."

"Ah, feudal rivalries are always good for a lark!" The Doctor said with amusement. "Mass murder on the other hoof..."

"I take it you don't approve of my methods of business preservation?" Zeitgeist said, sipping his drink and setting the second glass down on a table near The Doctor.

"Looking out for your business is one thing. It's the slaughter that I'm inimical to, Ziggy."

He nodded and shrugged. "I suppose it wouldn't change anything if I told you they started it?"

"Oh what? Did the nasty troll people pull your tail and call you a doodyhead? Or did they take your favorite toy and push you down in the schoolyard?" The Doctor exclaimed, making no effort to hide the disgust in his voice.

"They've been murdering my miners!" He said hotly, slamming his empty glass onto the table. "I knew all about them the second I set up security cameras fifteen years ago! They broke my machines,

compromised minor operations, and cost me millions a year! I didn't care because until six months ago they weren't *hurting* anyone! Since then I've had to sign off almost two hundred death certificates! Face two hundred families! Don't try to play this as a petulant noble out for revenge or a CEO concerned with returns! People. Have. Died!!"

"Yes they have. Over three-dozen people died just ten minutes ago. You think those creatures are just attacking you for giggles? They must have a reason! Everything has a reason! But you just get your guns down here, roast them alive, and dispose of the evidence without even trying to talk to them!!" The Doctor shouted back.

"What makes you think I haven't?!" Zeitgeist retorted.

"You're too sure of yourself." The Doctor said quietly. "You're clever, I know that now, and the thing about clever people is that they're smart enough to *not* be absolutely certain about anything involving conflict. I've seen enough situations like this to tell when a dialogue has been attempted; any reasonably intelligent person would be able to entertain the other side's point of view long enough to put at least a hint of doubt in their souls. You have none."

"You're half right...we attempted a dialogue with a prisoner roughly fifteen hours ago. He bit his own tongue in half and choked to death on it before he'd tell me anything of value. I do not take that sort of willpower lightly." Zeitgeist said steadily. "We have a new prisoner. A dialogue will be attempted with him. Can you help us?"

The Doctor grinned widely. "That's the smartest thing you've said all day!"

Shock and Thunder entered the clearing in the forest, the trees and plants taking on an almost ghostly appearance in the unusually bright moonlight. A stray wind rolled through rustling the leaves and bending the branches, creating a sound not unlike omnipresent whispering and ominous moaning. It was the sound of ghosts.

"Can we get out of here, Shock?" Thunder muttered. "This place is freaking me out!"

"Oh shut up you big foal! The boss told us to meet our contact here tonight and tomorrow, y'know, to coordinate." Shock said before jumping at a loud snapping sound as a branch broke in the wind. "...But yeah, I know what you mean."

"Surface walkers do not like the darkness," said a high-toned voice that seemed to be everywhere "They do not trust what they cannot see, or will not see."

"You our contact?" Thunder said, trying to keep his voice steady.

"...What is word...? Ah, yesssss..." The voice said slowly. "For a millennia our peoples have been working together. From the early days of darkness to today, our peoples have been friends without ever facing one another."

Shock laughed nervously, just what was this thing? "Yeah, looking out for us and ours, right? We valley folk, we oughta stick together! So, when d'you want us to show up with the dragon?"

"As soon as you have him." The voice hissed. "He is to be brought to us here and he is to be undamaged. He is very important to us, be sure to handle him with care and respect."

Thunder cleared his throat and stepped forward. "If you don't mind me asking, just what're you gonna do with him? I mean if he was a full-grown dragon...yeah, definite uses there! But I've seen the sprog and he's just a baby! Hardly eye-to-eye with my flank!"

"He is *perfect* as he is." The voice croaked. "He is young, his mind malleable, easy to turn to our cause. You need not worry yourself with the details, just deliver him to us alive and unharmed."

Shock nudged Thunder and hissed quietly. "We're getting paid good for this T, remember that!"

"Here. Tomorrow. You will come with the infant dragon, or not at all." The voice said coldly. "I stress, he is to be unharmed."

"We got it, we got it!" Thunder said dismissively. "By Luna's rump you're worse than the boss when it comes to the damn dragons!"

"...Here. Tomorrow. Unharmed." It repeated throatily.

"Here, tomorrow, and not a scale out of place." Shock said smoothly. "I hope you guys deliver on your end."

"We will." The voice said with a loathsome chuckle. "In 48 hours your organization will become the wealthiest in the valley. The resort itself will be within your grasp, to do with as you wish."

Shock smiled broadly. "Oh yes, we're getting paid well indeed!"

Zeitgeist and The Doctor made their way to the holding cell, flanked by an increasing number of soldiers as they neared the holding cell.



“Just how many toy soldiers did you bring?” The Doctor said with a snort.

Zeitgeist appraised the stallion’s reaction to the military presence here, he held the air of a person who abhorred violence but was by no means a pacifist, someone who had seen more than enough soldiers to not be impressed by them. “Two hundred, I could have brought three times as many but I wanted to keep this thing on the down low.”

“Yes, setting your ship down in the middle of a resort populated by vapid gossipy snobs is a surefire way to avoid attention.” The Doctor said with a roll of his eyes.

“If they had simply seen my flagship land at the mine they would have been curious, so I dropped off a few guests to redirect their attention. Gossip and media regarding my social life is sure to eclipse anything business related.” Zeitgeist said with a smile.

The Doctor sighed, even here the tabloids ruled. “Very shrewd, Mr. Stardust.”

“Thank you Mr...you know, I don’t think I ascertained your real name, Mr. ‘Time Line’.”

“Oh, it’s Time Line...” The Doctor said as he produced his psychic paper and flashed it. “*Agent* Time Line, Celestia Secret Service. She’ll be wanting to have a word with you after all this is done, Mr. Stardust.”

Zeitgeist stopped and looked at the paper, eyebrow raised. “I say Mr. Line, I do believe someone’s pocketed your I.D.”

The Doctor blinked and looked at the psychic paper. “...Huh. Clever boy, aren’t you?”

Zeitgeist scratched his chin and grabbed a nearby soldier. “You. Tell me what that paper says.”

The soldier leaned in and lifted his flash-protective goggles. “It appears to be CSS identification, sire.”

Zeitgeist patted the soldier on the shoulder and sent him a way before turning back to The Doctor. “*Interesting*. Tell me, how did you do that?”

The Doctor looked around at the soldiers, each one ready to ‘persuade’ him into answering. “Reactive imaging article connected to a passive PKE matrix.”

“Psychic paper?” Zeitgeist said with amazement. “It shows what you think?”

“More to it than that, but yeah.” The Doctor muttered. “Doesn’t work on certain people though.”

“Evidently.” Zeitgeist turned to his soldiers. “I think I’ll take it. It will be a fascinating technology to expand upon.”

The Doctor chuckled and put the paper away. “Sorry Ziggy, no deal. Handing out my tech isn’t in my job description”

“Allow me to rephrase that.” Zeitgeist said coldly. “Grenadiers, search him. Confiscate any items you find.”

The dogs quickly encircled The Doctor and restrained him as he began to protest; they removed his trench coat and patted down his suit. “What are you doing?!”

Zeitgeist chuckled unpleasantly, a smile on his face. “My duty as a law abiding citizen. You have claimed to work for two Equestrian federal agencies, since you work for neither you are not only a fraud but a trespasser as well. According to the law you are a felon and will be detained by my security forces until further notice. Any unique items on your person will be confiscated as evidence.”

“You’re making a big mistake Zeitgeist.” The Doctor growled.

“Excellency.” One of the soldiers searching The Doctor said, producing his sonic screwdriver.

Zeitgeist reached out and took the metal cylinder, tapping the blue crystal on the end with a claw. “Fascinating. It’s some kind of...molecular oscillator? No...impossible. This device cannot exist...” he rotated the nodule and pressed the button, sending a high-pitched whistle through the air, causing every door in the hallway to pop open at once. “Amazing! I-I can’t even put to words the mechanism behind this device! And with all these settings it could conceivably do anything!”

“Except wood.” The Doctor mumbled.

One of the guards yelped in alarm and jumped back. “Demon! He’s a demon!”

“What are you talking about?” Zeitgeist demanded. “Oh don’t be so superstitious! It’s only technology.”

“H-h-his coat! Th-the pockets! They’re-they’re-they’re-” The soldier sputtered.

Zeitgeist signaled to one of the other soldiers who then approached The Doctor. He lifted up the trench coat and slowly reached for one of the pockets, he slid his hand in up to the wrist, then to the elbow, and finally to the shoulder. The soldier looked at the other side of the coat. Nothing. He looked up at Zeitgeist. “Sire?”

Zeitgeist stared incredulously at the spectacle; the soldier had his entire arm inside the pocket, but there wasn’t a sign of it on the inside of

the coat, it was gone. "Im-impossible! It's bigger on the inside? I can't even... Who are you? *What* are you?!"

The Doctor wriggled free of the stupefied soldiers and patted his wrinkled suit. "I'm The Doctor and give me back my screwdriver."

He watched them coldly as they walked away. These particular equines put an unpleasant feeling in his stomach. They looked like any other pony, soft features, large eyes, funny little tattoos; but these ponies held an unpleasantness in their souls, a deep rooted mean streak that may or may not endanger the dragon. Sensing such things was his kind's special ability, ever since their creation during the days of battle and conquest; they had been hurriedly fashioned by Calcipher to sense His evil magic within seemingly innocuous creatures. In those days whole species were corrupted by Him, perverted into armies of evil slaving beasts. The Corruptor could only do this through his signature possession, The Source of Darkness; a moldering sack pulsating with dark elder magics. With it he would craft any evil within a creature's soul into a hideous living armor, encasing and enslaving the creature within to His whims. Once enveloped with the physical manifestation of their own evil, the poor being would be tortured by it, producing terror and despair on which the armor and The Source fed. It was with the help of his people that Calcipher learned of the nature of Tirac's magic, information valuable to him and his allies the Equine Gods. Tirac had eventually been defeated but only at a great cost, the dragon god sacrificed his life to weaken and imprison Him. The Equine Gods mourned his passing, marking his grave with a beautiful valley filled with life, a constant reminder of the world he helped save. For their pivotal role in Tirac's eventual defeat, his people were offered a place astride the gods for all eternity. They had respectfully declined, not only were they unwilling to leave the side of their creator even in death, they knew that their services were still required. For only his people, only the Grundels, were immune to His corruption. They would maintain his prison, they would keep him starved of evil, they would protect the world from a force it would be unable to resist, and they would do it by any means necessary. With the employment of the two equine mobsters, his means to this end had just begun to form.

He sank into the ground, the malleable dirt giving way to his weight as he mentally altered its consistency. He fell through the roof with a loud thud, his eyes adjusting to the blue light of the tunnel.

A young Thinker Grundel approached him with an anxious look on his face. "Brother Gabbro, news from tonight's sabotage attack!"

Gabbro smirked internally, outwardly donning an expression of grim concern. "What news do you bring, Son Pellet?"

Pellet looked at the ground, barely containing a torrent of sobs. "...Dead."

He blinked, somewhat surprised. "Which ones?"

Pellet looked up at him, tears streaming down his young face. "All of them! Thirty-eight Grundels, all killed! It was a trap, the Duke brought soldiers! Weapons!"

Gabbro was taken aback, he had known it was a trap when he ordered the attack, hoping the inevitable casualties caused would advance his plan with the Grundel Elders, but he had not foreseen this. "Even..."

Pellet nodded fervently, sobbing. "Brother Cheppu too! I'm so sorry Brother Gabbro!"

Gabbro clenched his fists, rage and joy building in him in equal amounts. A total loss would no doubt cause the Elders to grant him full freedom to combat the hated dogs...but Cheppu had been his favorite Worker, he had raised him from a hatchling! He had loved him. "I'll see to it that this sacrifice will not be in vain! No more will we content ourselves with delay tactics! I will see to it that no diamond dog breaths air within a hundred kilometers of this valley!"

Pellet looked up at Gabbro, hope in his large eyes. "What are you planning, sir?"

Gabbro smiled and patted him on the head. "It will all be clear soon, Son Pellet. All I need is a key, and I expect to have this key by tomorrow."

The Doctor and Zeitgeist once again walked down the halls, the soldiers were keeping their distance however, leery of the strange stallion now. Zeitgeist however, was not one to be intimidated, his curiosity getting the better of him. "Am I to understand that your box is also bigger on the inside?"

The Doctor sighed; the revelation of his otherworldly status had brought the eager curious creature out of Zeitgeist. There was no doubt in The Doctor's mind that Zeitgeist had absolutely no intention of releasing him now, but at least this curious puppy was less likely to have him dissected than his predatory business-dog persona. "Yes. It has a pool."

“Really!” Zeitgeist said, excitement clear in his voice. “Can you tell me how that is possible? Dimensional transcendentalism, not even as a child did I entertain such a thing was possible!”

“You must have been a boring pup.” The Doctor muttered under his breath.

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing.” The Doctor said quickly, wishing to steer the conversation away from him for the time being. “D’you think you could answer a few of *my* questions?”

“Of course. What do you want to know?”

The Doctor cleared his throat. “There’s something that’s been bothering me that I’d like cleared up. How is it that an industrious bunch like you diamond dogs haven’t spread father than you have? You have all sorts of neat technology, and yet this world is decidedly lacking in canine influence.”

“Would you try and challenge the devout subjects of a physical god?” Zeitgeist laughed. “Ever hear of the Dark City of Tambelon?”

“No.” The Doctor said. “Should I have?”

Zeitgeist shrugged. “They aren’t in the normal pony educational curriculum. A couple thousand years ago it was the single dark spot on all of Equestria. One day its inhabitants took it upon themselves to enslave the entire equine race, for a lark I guess. Long story short: they live on the sun now.”

“Celestia killed them all?” The Doctor said incredulously.

“Worse.” Zeitgeist shook his head. “They *live* on the sun now.”

“Oh.” The Doctor muttered before clearing his throat. “Anyway, you lot have zeppelins, vehicles, and laser weaponry. But...”

“A third of the pony population can fly, some of the more talented ones can go supersonic! Yet another third has a natural PKE crucibles growing out of their faces!” Zeitgeist winked at The Doctor. “Not only that, but each and every one of them is technically a genius.”

“Their cutie marks...” The Doctor murmured thoughtfully. “Each pony has a single field of study in which they absolutely excel, as well as several dozen or several hundred related areas of expertise in which they are more than competent.”

“A single pony in a moment of innovation can outperform an entire taskforce of scientists with a budget in the millions. Many of the magitechnologies I did not create myself were constructed in my stead by specifically chosen unicorns, Equines whose talents pertained to whatever

spell I was trying to graft onto a medium stone.” Zeitgeist said proudly. “Some of them even innovate beyond my designs! True brilliance!”

“So that’s why you picked up Rarity, hmm?” The Doctor inquired. “Her gem finding spell?”

Zeitgeist cleared his throat, his face suddenly very serious. “That’s confidential.”

The Doctor shook his head, they all had to make it difficult didn’t they? “I’ll deal with that issue as it comes. For now, this little war of yours is my primary concern.”

They stopped in front of a heavily padlocked and guarded door. The myriad locks and bolting mechanisms covered the right side of the tempered steel door, keypads, combination locks, card swipes, and key locks. The works.

The Doctor gave an impressed whistle. “Let me guess...”

“We’re here.” Zeitgeist said. “Inside this room is our ambassador. If we can communicate with him, reason with him, we may just end this conflict before it can escalate further. Can you put aside your anger with me long enough to facilitate this?”

“I’m not angry, I’m just disappointed.” The Doctor said in a condescending tone.

“...I detect sarcasm.” Zeitgeist growled.

“Good, for second there I thought I’d have to draw you a map.” The Doctor said gesturing at the door. “Does this thing open, or is it just for show?”

“Yes, just a moment. Unlocking it may...” Zeitgeist looked down to withdraw his multi-key for the door, looking up at the sound of a high-pitched buzzing. “...Take a while.”

The door swung loosely on its hinges, the sharp clapping of hooves echoing out of it as the stallion traipsed in, humming a jaunty tune to himself as he did. Instantly a guard brandishing a shock stick set him upon. “Halt right there! Who are you?!”

“I’m The Doctor.” The Doctor said with a smile. “And you?”

“Pilsner, sir.” The diamond dog said returning the smile, before regaining his posture. “And you’re not permitted to enter!”

“He’s with me.” Zeitgeist said as he entered the room. “Permit him to enter.”

The guard instantly straightened out and shot a salute. “Of course Your Excellency! However, I must insist that his device be confiscated. We’ve restrained the creature beyond its ability to harm itself, and don’t want to take any risks with foreign objects.”

“Have you immobilized the jaw?” Zeitgeist said as The Doctor reluctantly handed over the sonic screwdriver.

“No sire.” The guard said before adding. “It’s got no tongue to bite, sire.”

Zeitgeist turned to The Doctor. “Still think you can help?”

“Watch me.” The Doctor said as he waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness, as they did a shape in the corner became clear. He was enormous compared to him, at least 180cm tall if it were standing, his huge arms and upper body thick with solid muscle. But even through his intimidating size and troll-like visage, The Doctor could detect strong undercurrents of fear and distress from the creature. As he approached the creature recoiled and attempted to pull itself even further into the corner, the chains binding its arms and legs clinking and clacking as it did so.

“Hey now. I’m not going to hurt you.” The Doctor said soothingly.

The creature raised his head, surprise and something close to hope on his features, The Doctor saw this and smiled. “Yes, that’s right. You understand me, and I understand you. Now, tell me what happened, start with yourself.”

The creature motioned at The Doctor, his hands moving in smooth intricate patterns punctuated by grunts and low vocalizations.

“Pleased to meet you Cheppu. I’m The Doctor.”

A questioning gesture.

“Just ‘The Doctor’.”

Another gesture, this time somewhat amused.

“Oh, all the time! I say ‘just The Doctor’ so much you could shout out ‘Just’ and I’d probably turn my head!” The Doctor said with a laugh.

“I see you two have already become friends.” Said Zeitgeist as he stood in the doorway. “Ask him why they’re attacking my mine.”

The Doctor rolled his eyes. “It’s not that easy, Ziggy! He’s a sensitive creature who’s been through a traumatic experience, he’s going to need a bit of tenderness.”

A series of harsh, forceful gestures from Cheppu followed.

The Doctor sputtered and cleared his throat. “Now, I hardly think you need to bring his mother into this! Oh, that’s just-oh-no! Cheppu! You’re better than that!”

“What did he say?” Zeitgeist said, neck bristling.

“Nothing Your Excellency needs to hear.” The Doctor said quickly, turning back to Cheppu. “So, tell me about yourself. And do try to keep the expletives to a minimum.”

Cheppu signed and gestured, his movements fluid and flowing, practiced over his many years of life. The Doctor nodded and muttered in response to Cheppu, occasionally exclaiming in alarm and shoot Zeitgeist dirty looks. Cheppu's movements suddenly degraded into jerky, panicked motions, the transition not unlike a person breaking into hysterics midsentence.

"Cheppu! Please, just-what? No, there's no one evil here-who? Please slow down!" The Doctor pleaded. "What's a Tir-"

Cheppu shrieked and gestured frantically, causing The Doctor to flinch back. "Okay! Okay! I won't say it! What does it mean?"

"What? What is he saying?" Zeitgeist exclaimed. "Doctor!"

"Be quiet!" The Doctor snapped. "Look, Ziggy. This is going to take a while, he's very confused, very emotional, and has absolutely no desire to work with *you*! We may be here all night."

Zeitgeist sighed and rubbed his eyes, it had been a long day and his patience was wearing thin. "...Can you at least tell me what he's said so far? I don't care if it doesn't make sense; I just need something to go on."

The Doctor scratched his head with his hoof. "Something about a prison that you and your mine are breaking into. He keeps repeating a phrase, a word that doesn't make sense. I think it's a name."

Zeitgeist stepped forward. "Tirac?"

Cheppu squealed and donned an expression of abject horror, trying to lift his hands to his ears as though the mere utterance of the word hurt them in some way. The Doctor turned around, eyes blazing. "How do you know that word?"

Zeitgeist aimed a glance at set of empty chains on the wall. "The other Grundel we captured...he spoke of something called Ti...The Great Corruptor."

"Did he say anything else?" The Doctor whispered.

"Something similar, something about releasing The Holder of The Source of Darkness. Then he bit his own tongue in half." Zeitgeist said grimly. "I don't think they like to say or hear his name."

"Observant, aren't you?" The Doctor muttered.

"Doctor..." Zeitgeist growled. "I need more information, plans of attack, future events, anything!"

"It doesn't work that way!" The Doctor retorted. "You can't force these things, especially from such a sensitive creature!"

"Sensitive?! These things have been killing my staff for months! Don't tell me they're just misunderstood!" Zeitgeist roared.



The Doctor made a disgusted noise and turned away from him. "If you want my help, you'll do things my way. That is my only condition."

"Very well..." Zeitgeist sighed and turned to one of the guards. "Send a message to the *Brünhild*, tell them to prepare the Aurora Chair."

"B-by your command, Excellency." The guard said with unease clear in his voice.

"What's that?" The Doctor demanded.

"Belay that order." Zeitgeist said to the guard before turning back to The Doctor. "The Aurora Chair is the first device the Emperor ordered me to construct. Ten PKE taps are placed at predetermined areas on the skull of a subject, usually to target specific areas of the brain. A charge is then run through them, causing them to pull the energy patterns straight out of the section of brain they are attenuated to. A set of vocoder and auto-imager spell stones then translate the data into images and sounds. Thus far it has only been used on those found guilty of treason, as a punishment and as interrogation. I have been told the experience is...unpleasant."

The Doctor stepped back, a horrified look on his face. "That's barbaric!"

"Indeed, but then plan B is always the less favorable option." Zeitgeist raised his hand to signal the guard. "...Unless of course you think you can conjure up a more merciful form of extraction?"

The Doctor galloped forward, placing his hooves on either side of Zeitgeist's head, touching their heads together. Zeitgeist gasped as the words '*After everything is said and done, you and I are going to have a serious talk.*' Raced through his head, bringing with them cold fury and damnation from the alien pressed against his forehead.

"Merciful enough?" The Doctor said as he pulled back, looking as though he had a bad taste in his mouth.

"Aah!!" Zeitgeist gasped and nodded, hand against his forehead. "Y-yes! Guards, cancel that previous order! Just...ah...just don't do that again!"

"It wasn't fun for me either." The Doctor said, turning back to the Grundel. "Cheppu, I'm going to do something that may feel a little strange, but don't panic."

Cheppu smiled at the shaken look on Zeitgeist's face and nodded, gesturing a question.

"No, I'll be gentler with you. I just wanted to take some air out of that pompous windbag." The Doctor said with a smile, moving in closer. "Now, just open your mind."

The Doctor placed his head against Cheppu's, his brow creasing. As the two minds became one The Doctor exhaled and spoke, his voice taking on a reverberating quality. "...Thinker Gabbro, boss Grundel...with plans-attack plans. So sad...don't want to... but must kill. Must stop them. Why? Thinkers send us, make us kill. Don't want to...The Evil One, from the before time. The Creator gave his life to imprison Him. The dogs dug, for so long they dug...The Duke, The Duke breaks the walls of His jail. The Duke must stop. Must stop. Must stop but will not. Thinkers know, no...say he will not. Talk? Workers not talk. Thinkers talk. Thinkers don't want to talk. Want Workers to kill. New attack. After new machines are broken, new attack will...will...be..."

The Doctor pulled his head away, shaking it violently. "Aah! Worst possible time!"

Zeitgeist gave an exasperated sound. "What? You were so close!"

"I know!" The Doctor said. "The link broke down, I need to reestablish it."

"How?" Zeitgeist said desperately. "Anything you need!"

"I'll need my sonic screwdriver and a lot of space." The Doctor said.

Zeitgeist turned around to the guard holding out his hand. "Give it to me! Now!"

The guard tossed the small metal cylinder and Zeitgeist snatched it out of the air, rushing over to The Doctor excitedly. "Here it is!"

"Thank you." The Doctor said, taking it in his mouth. "Now I just need to..." He turned his head to see an excited looking Zeitgeist hanging over his shoulder. "...Get a little space."

Zeitgeist took several steps back as The Doctor made shooing gesture, The Doctor smiled and looked at the screwdriver. "Say Ziggy...before I get you this information, there's something I want to tell you."

"Yes, Doctor?" Zeitgeist said impatiently. "What?"

The Doctor smiled widely. "Allons-y!!"

He held the screwdriver high into the air, the tip glowing as the device trilled. At that moment, every single active light crystal in the building cracked and popped, casting the entire facility into darkness.

"Flash light!" Zeitgeist bellowed in the dark. "Flash light now!!"

Feist burst into the room with a now-active light crystal. "Your Excellency! Are you hurt?"

Zeitgeist turned to see the source of the voice before swinging back to the corner where his prisoners had been standing, now empty. A low, throaty growl built up in him and turned to Feist and the dumbstruck

guards, his voice low. "Search the building, they can't have gone far. Bring them to me alive and unharmed."

Feist nodded and bowed. "By your com-"

"**NOW!!!!**" Zeitgeist howled, the tight concrete walls of the small room turning the howl into an explosive demonic sound.

Feist and the guards bolted out the door like scared rabbits. Zeitgeist was left in the dark room, panting in rage. "This means war."

The Doctor and Cheppu raced across the now dark courtyard, the distant shouts of diamond dogs and the sweeping circles of flashlights heralding their pursuit. Blue-white lances arced from the darkened complex, obliterating rocks beside them as they passed and igniting trees in the forest ahead of them.

"Those were warning shots!" The Doctor shouted. "They'll be firing to hit next!"

Three arcs passed over his head and touched the ground around them, kicking up only small tufts of dust. "Stun shots! They're trying to take us alive!"

The Doctor felt a huge hand wrap around his midsection as he was hoisted off the ground. Cheppu signed to him to hang on and dived forward. The Doctor instinctively shielded his face as the two pushed through the dirt like it was air, landing solidly inside a blue-tinted tunnel.

The Doctor looked around in the tunnel, snorting dust out of his nose. "Where are we?"

*'In the outer tunnels of the Grundel city, they lie beneath every square meter of the valley, extending a little beyond as well.'* Cheppu signed and grunted. *'Grundel magic allows us to push through the dirt lining their walls.'*

The Doctor whistled, before turning to the hulking Grundel. "Cheppu, you know what your people are doing is wrong, don't you?"

*'Yes.'* Cheppu nodded. *'But the Thinkers tell us to attack. As Workers we must, even though we cannot abide killing or violence.'*

The Doctor sighed and kicked at the ground. "There's always some person who thinks they're so clever that they can decide who goes off to war! Ordering you lot to kill and die for them!"

*'It is our duty. Workers obey Thinkers, that is how it is.'*

The Doctor nodded and turned around. "Would I be correct to assume that there are tunnels leading to the resort city?"

‘Yes.’ Cheppu said slowly. ‘*Why?*’

“I need you to take me there, it’s important.”

‘*But in your thoughts I saw that you were going to help us, why go to the resort?*’

“Cheppu listen, I’m not going to help just you and your Grundels, I’m going to help the diamond dogs too. Now, I know your Thinkers believe they have a good reason to be doing what they’re doing, but people have died and I cannot allow that to continue.” The Doctor said in a low serious voice.

‘*What’s in the resort that can possibly help?*’ Cheppu said inquisitively.

“My task force.” The Doctor smirked. “Friends. Seven of the most talented ponies I’ve ever met. It pains me to pull them out of their vacation, but I need some extra hooves and no others will do.”

‘*They’ll help?*’ Cheppu said hopefully. ‘*They can stop the killing?*’

The Doctor nodded. “If they can’t do it, I can’t think of anyone who can!”

# CHAPTER 4

Fire Dazzler approached the plaza of the resort city, saddlebag thumping lightly against his flank as he trotted towards the stage. Worker ponies were busy setting up the various lights and sound systems for the celebration. He gulped nervously; Shock and Thunder had set him up with a permit to work on the pyrotechnics so that he could install their 'distraction'. It was an aluminum rich mixture with a hint of his own special dazzling powder, similar to his regular mixes but with a severely skewed ratio between reactants and stabilizers. There would be a show all right, a five second flare burn that would disorientate and temporarily blind anyone looking at it. And by the time all that was going on, he'd be in his favorite bar trying to forget the whole fiasco and hoping that the trail didn't lead back to him.

"...And here we go." He muttered to himself as he approached the foreman. "Fire Dazzler, pyrotechnics."

The foreman, a short grey Pegasus with a green mane snorted and gestured towards a slender orange earth pony. "Talk to Stone Carver, he's the FX director."

"T-thanks..." Fire Dazzler said numbly.

"Hey, you okay?" The foreman said. "You look like someone's walked over your grave!"

Fire Dazzler laughed nervously. "Oh it's just nerves! If we're gonna impress a dragon the fire's gotta be pretty spectacular!"

The foreman nodded and gestured at Stone Carver. "You better talk to him about that, then. You take it easy now!"

The orange stallion saw him approach and waved him over, leaning in close. "You Fire Dazzler?"

"Yeah."

He looked around and over his shoulder. "You got the stuff?"

"In my bag." Fire Dazzler said, cocking his head towards his saddlebag. "Twenty canisters worth, five minute duration each."

"That's plenty!" Stone Carver said with a smile. "They were right, you are good with the fireworks!"

"Can we get this over with?" He said with a sigh. "I need a drink."

"Yeah fine. Just don't mess this up," he hissed quietly. "I put a twenty empty cases of the normal canisters under the stage, so you can pour in your mix under there. We don't want the authorities to think someone switched out the powder. This has to look like an accident, if only for a little while."

"Got it. So, where do you want them?"

"Five on the front of the stage, five going down the steps, and ten along the runway. They want to run on stage left and exit right." Stone Carver said, pointing along the route. "That way they got a straight run for the forest once they get across the street and into the alleyways."

Fire Dazzler nodded and got to work, making his way toward the stage. "I just want to get this done and wash my hooves of it."

"Under the stage, they should be there in a burlap sack."

The white stallion ducked under the stage and began to work. He quietly set down his bag onto the cobblestones. Gingerly he set out the canisters, careful not to set them off. Their effectiveness would also be their greatest flaw, as a stray static charge or spark would set them off in all their glory, and he would be charred to a cinder. He lit up his horn and began to scan around for the empty cartridges, turning his head over some cobblestones, checking around a support beam. A sound like grinding stones and shifting soil drew his attention, causing him to snap around back to his bag. There they were, twenty small black canisters with the company logo plastered on the side. They sat right next to his canisters; he could have sworn they hadn't been there before. No time for speculation, there was work to be done. As he poured the powder into the emptied cartridges he felt a prickling sensation on the back of his neck. He spun around, eyes wide. Nothing. Fire Dazzler sighed and began to turn around before coming face to face with another pony, his brow furrowed and eyes alight. Fire Dazzler squealed in fright before a rough hoof covered his mouth.

"Keep it down, will you!" the pony hissed. "What's the matter with you?! I'm in on this too, you idiot!"

"Suh-sorry...I'm just a little on edge. Not every day I assist with dragon napping!"

"Yeah well thank Celestia for that, because you stink at keeping a low profile!" he said disparagingly, looking down at the cartridges. "That them?"

"Yeah. Be sure that Shock and Thunder wear eye protection, these'll be really bright!" Fire Dazzler said quietly, noticing an odd look on the pony's face. "You did bring eye protection, right?"

He rolled his eyes. "Yeah, what'dya think we are, a bunch of idiots? It's just that you sure brought a lot of 'em!"

"I always over prepare." Frie Dazzler said proudly, nose subconsciously curling at a wet organic stench as it permeated the air. "Worked out this time, Stone Carver said he wanted five for the stage, five for the stairs, and ten for your escape; to cover you across the street and into the forest. Is that where your client is?"

The stallion snapped up at Fire Dazzler. "Yeah...Stone Carver told you, eh?"

"Yeah." Fire Dazzler said, that smell was really becoming noticeable.

"He's thorough, I'll give him that. Telling ponies what they shouldn't know just so they get it right. Must be why he sent one of our friends in here with you, to tie up the loose end. He's pragmatic like that." he said, a somewhat amused tone in his voice. "By the way...sorry."

Fire Dazzler blinked in confusion, the tingling on the back of his neck was back with a vengeance. "What are you-?"

Fire Dazzler spun around at the familiar sound of shifting rocks and dirt. What he saw caused him to freeze in fright, an enormous green creature rose out of the floor its huge arms open wide. Even though it was still up to its waist in the cobblestone street it towered at least forty centimeters above him, its large orange eyes peering down on him from the floorboards of the stage. Fire Dazzler attempted to flee, hopelessly scuffling on the cobblestones when the beast's enormous hands clasped around his neck and shoulders. He thrashed and bucked in the grip but it was no use, the muscles and tendons beneath its rank clammy skin were like steel cables. One of the hands moved up his throat, squeezing it shut just enough to silence any sound he might make while the other kept its iron grip fastened around the terrified pony's shoulders, its single thumb able to restrain both of the stallion's legs.

"Well, it's been nice Fire Dazzler." The other stallion said, picking up the bagful of flash canisters. "Mr. Slag here is going to try and make it quick, quiet, and painless I'm sure."

'Mr. Slag' motioned like he was going to twist Fire Dazzler's head just as the other pony left, stopping the instant he did. Fire Dazzler gurgled in confusion.

"G'un'gles gud." Mr. Slag gurgled through his tongue-less mouth. "S'raag gud?"

"Yes!" Fire Dazzler choked, having had talked to his share of drunks in his time mush-mouth was a second language to him. "You are a very good Grundel, Mr. Slag."

Mr. Slag smiled and donned a worried expression. "S'raag wa' o'd 'oo kiw po'ee. Don' wan' 'oo..." Slag inhaled sharply, two froglike bags expanding on the sides of his throat. "Po'ee s'leep."

He opened his mouth and exhaled, a green smoky fog blasting from his throat. Fire Dazzler coughed and sputtered as the chemical smoke entered his lungs, a burning sensation stinging his eyes and nostrils. "Aah! What...ooh...what're you...do...ing..."

His head slumped in the creature's hands, unconscious. Slag looked around for witnesses and back to the unconscious pony in his hands. "G'un'gles gud...no kiw..."

He sunk back into the street, taking the unconscious pony with him.



(Dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da  
etc)

## DOCTOR WHOOVES

### Episode 2

The Mines of Dragon Mountain: Part 4

#### Starring:

The Doctor  
Twilight Sparkle  
Pinkie Pie  
Rainbow Dash  
Applejack  
Fluttershy  
Zecora  
Rarity  
Spike

#### Featuring:

Zeitgeist Stardust  
Litigia Statute  
Gabbro  
Fire Dazzler

All eight friends trotted merrily through the town, early morning crowds clotting the cobbled streets with excited ponies. Spike bounced up and down on Twilight's back as they made their way through the crowd, ponies taking notice of the small dragon began to whisper to one another and part the crowd.

"This is great!" Spike said with glee. "All I have to do is watch them celebrate, eat a few gems, and tell them how great they're doing!"

Twilight smiled and looked up at the ecstatic dragon on her back. "I'm sure you'll be the belle of the ball, Spike!"

Rainbow Dash flitted over their heads, letting out an impressed whistle. "Geez! There must be thousands of ponies out today! I guess that whole fiasco with Zeit really put the word out!"

Fluttershy smiled as a squadron of trained phoenixes capered overhead; doing magnificent loops and twirls, their small ethereal feathers fluttering behind them like tiny tongues of flame. "Ooh! Look Zecora! Aren't they beautiful!"

"If we can find those performer's rooms, we may not have to scale Mt. Doom!" Zecora said with a chuckle.

Applejack spied a group of stallions sitting in VIP stands for the show; a collection of well fed and slightly bored ponies. "Ah recognize one a'them ponies over there! Seen 'im in a farming magazine! Ah bet if ah could just get 'im a talkin'..."

"Look there!" squealed Pinkie Pie, pointing erratically. "The caterers have brought an E-Z Bake Magic Oven!"

Rarity hopped from one cobblestone to another, careful to only step on the highest ones to avoid scuffing up her elegant dress she had meticulously put on that morning. "A magic oven? That means they mix and make the goods out here and the magic automatically prepares it right?"

"For maximum freshness!" Pinkie said excitedly. "...Now if I could just get them to let me use it, I could make some of those alien goodies I've been wanting to make!"

"While you're doing that I'll be enjoying my time in the limelight! Ah, the photographers, the spellbound ponies, the interviewers! All will be clamoring to meet me, the mysterious mare who flew into their lives like a glittering falling star!"

Twilight cleared her throat curtly, getting all their attention. "Now everypony, this is a big day for Spike and we should be here for him. Try to stifle those ambitions of yours until after the opening ceremony."

As the group trotted towards the stage the Narragansett announcer took notice and let out a cheer into the mic. "Aaaaaand here they are fillies

and gentlecolts! Our honored guest Spike and his seven lovely acquaintances! Let's have a big round of applause for the 1001<sup>st</sup> Narragansett Arrival Celebration!"

A rolling cheer rose from the crowd, young native ponies clambering up on their parent's shoulders to see the proceedings. Twilight carried Spike up the stairs as he waved his clawed hand as regally as he could muster, a large smile on his face.

The energetic announcer bolted over to Spike, holding a mic in front of his face. "So Spike! What do you think of our legendary Valley City hospitality?"

Spike noticed a large bowl of gemstones as it was shoved towards him from behind the curtain. "It's great! Really, this is probably one of the best festivals I've been to! That includes the stuff I've been to in Canterlot!"

"Canterlot, everypony!" The announcer said jubilantly, an even larger cheer rising from the crowd. "That's high praise Mr. Spike, I'm sure we'll try to live up to that. Won't we?"

A raucous cheer exploded from the crowd as music and street performers began to do their carefully planned routines. Acrobats and contortionists leapt through flaming hoops as the newest remixes of recent hits blared over the speakers.

"Hey! I love this song!" Pinkie exclaimed. "And this beat seems familiar."

"Yeah, we know the DJ who mixed this original beat!" Rarity shouted over the music. "Vinyl Scratch was her name I think!"

"Ah loves me some DJ-P0N-3!" Applejack said, hoof tapping to the beat.

Rainbow Dash smiled as she watched the festivities. "Y'know, I think I could get used to this!"

"Mmmh! Me too!" Spike said through a mouthful of chewed gems. Spike reached into the bowl for another handful. Instead, his claws closed around something thin and plastic. "Huh?"

Out of the bowl came a pair of dark black sunglasses. They were wraparound clips with what appeared to be thick deeply tinted lenses; the right arm the sunglasses had a note attached. On the note, scrawled in large messy letters, was the message 'Put these on. Stand in center stage ;)'

"Well, okay." Spike muttered to himself, putting the glasses on. "Erhg...can't see a dang thing in these..."

Spike stumbled out onto the center stage, raising his hands in a double wave. The crowd laughed and clapped, Spike smiled and waved harder. "Good morning Valley City!"

From five different points what appeared to be suns burst from the edge of the stage. A simultaneous gasp of shock rose from the crowd, followed instantly by panicked screams as a sea of white light washed their sight away. Spike saw the frantic crowd bump into each other, eyes wide but unseeing. He turned to his friends, Fluttershy huddled against Zecora as Applejack and Rarity stumbled around as they blinked violently. Rainbow Dash had her leg over her eyes as she muttered obscenities drowned out by the crowd. Pinkie Pie was nowhere to be seen.

"Spike!" he heard, turning to see Twilight rushing towards him. "Spike, stay away from the-"

Two large black stallions wearing similar glasses cut off Twilight as they burst from behind the stage curtains; one of the stallions skidded up next to Twilight and reared up on his hind legs. "Sorry babe, nothing personal!"

The large stallion shot out his right hoof driving it into the side of Twilight's head with a resounding thwack. Twilight's head shot to one side as she was sent sprawling by the powerful blow.

"Twilight!" Spike shouted as he ran forward. "Don't you touch her you son-of-a-"

Spike ran head long at the tall stallion, sharp diamond-hard claws primed and ready. The second stallion streaked behind the young dragon and snatched him up in a large bag.

"I got him!" the stallion said through a mouthful of bag. "Let's go!"

The other stallion nodded and the two took off down the stairs, following their trail of blinding flares to a darkened alleyway across the street.

Deep underneath the valley forest a vast network of tunnels crisscrossed and intersected, connecting the large open areas of a subterranean city. The solid bedrock made excellent tunneling material once the right digging magic was used, the walls and roofs of the tunnels solid and secure. Inside one of the deepest chambers an organization of Grundels gathered. The room was tall and well lit with soft blue light, congregated in the myriad alcoves were several hundred Thinker Grundels all watching the single Thinker Grundel standing behind a podium, Gabbro.

He was quite tall for a Thinker at 150 centimeters, and his features were smooth and refined with youth. Indeed he was several decades younger than any of the other Grundels watching him, but it was that very fact that put him ahead of them. They were stuck in their ways, inflexible, unable to cope with the threat they currently faced. They were unprepared to do what it took to ensure that The Great Corruptor remained imprisoned, to ensure the continued survival of all species.

He had grown from a young age with the sword over his head, with the constant threat of total annihilation looming. He had joined the sabotage teams early, coordinating the Workers to carry out plans devised by his superiors. It had become clear to him immediately that they had no idea what they were doing, no idea how to stop these driven creatures from fulfilling the biological urge to hunt gems. At the time neither did he, but one night while he was leading one of his Worker packs through the sabotage tunnels a bolt of inspiration hit him. It was electric, almost like the thought had not even existed before then, suddenly appearing in his mind like it had simply been dropped there from outside.

Kill them.

Oh, he had taken the indirect route first, ordering the unauthorized collapse of mines, poisonings, all in addition to the sabotage of machinery. The sheer effectiveness of his tactics had allowed his meteoric rise throughout the operation's ranks, soon becoming the executive officer overseeing the whole thing. Times were good, the mining had stopped, and he was famous and respected amongst his peers. But soon the diamond dogs were back, this time with magic that prevented such tactics. Gabbro had felt within him a sense of doom; he had no idea how to proceed now that those anomalous bolts of inspiration had ceased. The diamond dogs reopened all their mines and even began work on a new major mineshaft, all the while Gabbro was struck dumb by their dedication. What to do? Once again, inspiration came as he walked the tunnels beneath the mountain; a small contingent of Workers and another Thinker named Greywacke had accompanied him as they walked. He had been thinking but his mind was too gentle, too Grundel-like to formulate new and lethal strategies. Those bursts of inspiration always had an odd flavor to them, their patterns of thought decidedly alien to his sensibilities; despite their flawless logic they were...horrible. They must have come from somewhere deep within him, away from morality and compassion. A part of him had detested contemplating them, fearing that they would in some way contaminate his conscious mind and turn him into something terrible. In

spite of his own conscience he pursued the perverse theories and as they had done before new ones came, but this time they were far more...direct.

Worker Grundels could crush rocks with a bear hug, and these diamond dogs were but delicate pieces of meat, nothing to a Worker. Conveniently, Workers also had a deep-seated compulsion to obey Thinker Grundels, it took but an utterance and less than a minute later two miners were dead. The Worker had been horrified with his actions, but the result was replicable with other Grundels. Soon, many more miners lay dead and the digging had once again halted. But a new problem had arisen, the Grundel Elders had been growing more and more disgusted with his tactics, seeing the traumatized Workers and disturbed Thinkers had made them look into the operation with predictable results. An uproar seized the tunnels, several Thinker Grundels openly opposing the operation altogether, pleading for other solutions to put an end to the bloodshed. Others still demanded a return to the old ways when the worst a Grundel would ever do is tinker with a machine until it no longer ran. The outcry could not be ignored, and Gabbro was commanded to perform sabotage techniques only, much to his internalized disgust. The tiresome cry of 'Grundels Good' rang throughout as they returned to their fool's errands. What was 'good' anyway? Was 'good' allowing the literal embodiment of evil to be freed based on some petty and outmoded moral code? He thought not. His newest burst of inspiration had brought something up from within him; something driven and flexible, something that could think in ways that were impossible before. Something cold. Something dark. Something...No, don't doubt, no doubt. The evil must be stopped. *He* must be stopped.

He had seen the miners setting up their newest machines, they were big expensive looking things and they had just left them out in the yard. It was obviously a trap, but it was also very useful. A team would go up there to sabotage it just like the weak-willed Elders wanted them to, but then the trap would be sprung and many Workers would die. A few pretty words, a tear here and there, and he could easily spin this debacle in his favor; work it toward reinstating *his* tactics. But something unexpected had happened; the diamond dogs had *obliterated* the team, killing thirty-eight Grundels in a matter of seconds, including... This was no debacle. This was no error in tactics. This was a disaster. A tragedy. But it was also very, *very* useful.

"My fellow Grundels." He began, speaking into the amplifier crystal. "Last night a standard sabotage team set out to destroy the dog's new mining machines, machines my agents suspect to be a dire threat to His

continued captivity. However, the diamond dogs were ready for them with weapons the likes of which we've never seen before. Losses were...total."

A collective gasp followed by incredulous murmurs rose from the observing Grundels, Gabbro smiled internally and continued. "Thirty-eight Grundels, including my own personal favorite Cheppu...I'm sorry, I mean Chip. See, I prefer to call my Workers by their pronunciations of their names and I-I..." he raised his hand to his face, covering an expertly crafted expression of anguish. "...Forgive me. It is my personal belief that the diamond dogs are no longer a threat simply because of their mining, but they are now a threat in and of themselves! Any further action against the mine must take this into consideration. We are on the precipice of oblivion and we can no longer afford to make due with sabotage and mischief."

Elder Granite rose from his throne, the look on his ancient face that of concern. "What do you propose? It was your policy of murder that brought their weapons to bear. They have shown that they are as capable at combat as they are at mining, I doubt the our ability to resist them!"

"Indeed, the honored and wise Elder is correct." A Grundel shouted from his alcove. "If it is a war of escalation it is the diamond dogs who will prevail!"

The courtroom exploded into a ferocious cacophony of arguing voices, Grundels shouting at one another from across the room, gesturing heatedly at each other. Gabbro smiled internally and raised his hands. "Brothers...Elders..."

The courtroom died down as Gabbro leaned forward to the amplifier. "I propose that we see the diamond dogs for the threat that they are and that we adjust our tactics accordingly. Thus far we have been combating the mine exclusively, I propose we combat the diamond dogs with similar vigor. Without them the mine will die."

"How are we to combat the diamond dogs?" shouted another Grundel. "Isn't attacking the mine the same thing?"

"No..." Gabbro donned a grim expression and activated an imaging crystal, causing a picture of the valley to appear. "This is our valley. This mountain here is His prison and the location of the mine." He toggled a few switches and the picture shifted, showing a city. "This is Stardust City, four kilometers to the east outside the valley. It is the spring from which the miners flow. Its population is estimated to be between forty and fifty thousand. I nominate this as our new target. Destroy the hive and the bees will fall."

"Are you suggesting that we kill everyone in that town?" Elder Slate said with horror in his voice.

"To stop Tirac?" Gabbro said, about to answer before his messaging crystal came to life, no doubt information regarding his delivery. "...The Elders no doubt require deliberation on this proposal. May I retire for the moment? It has been an emotional day for me."

"Indeed Brother Gabbro." Elder Feldspar said, worry creasing his brow. "Our verdict and the collective poll will be ready within the hour. Rest well."

"Thank you, Elders." Gabbro said with a bow "May peace be with you."

Gabbro exited the courtroom and activated his communicator, speaking quietly. "Gabbro, identify."

"Stone Carver." said a familiar voice. "I have called to tell you that your package is being delivered. Shock and Thunder will be delivering him to the appointed location."

"Good!" he said happily. "That is very good indeed."

"One thing." Stone Carver said. "I had to get your Worker Slag to kill somepony. He was too close this thing."

"Understood. Is there anything you want me to do with our delivery ponies?" Gabbro said coolly.

"At your own discretion." Stone Carver said ambivalently. "I'd rather you didn't, but they're a vicious pair so who knows what they'll make you do."

"It will depend on the condition of their sacred cargo." Gabbro said lowly.

"We'll see." Stone Carver said with a sniff. "So long as I get my cut."

The crowd had calmed somewhat, once their sight had returned the tourist ponies' set upon the resort staff with a vengeance, demanding an explanation for the experience. The announcer was talking to the authorities while Ruby Beryl sobbed into her hooves at the state of her carefully planned celebration. Up on the stage a pair of medic ponies was examining the stage for hazards and treating its occupants for flash burns.

Twilight blinked groggily as her mind returned, the side of her head throbbed abominably. "Urrrg...did anypony get the number of that carriage?" She blinked the stars out of her eyes and snapped to her hooves. "Spike? Spi~ke! Spike?!"

"Twilight Sparkle, save your voice." Zecora said lowly. "Spike is gone, though not by choice."



“What happened?” Rainbow Dash demanded. “Who set up those fireworks?!”

“Why did they grab Spike? What’s going on?” Applejack said angrily. “If ah ever get my hooves on those crooks!”

“Where’s Pinkie Pie?” Fluttershy exclaimed.

“Shh!” Rarity hissed. “We’re not going to get anywhere asking each other! Twilight, what should we do?”

Twilight looked up at her friends, eyes blazing with fury. “I say we investigate. Okay! Applejack, Rainbow Dash, you take the high and the low, start with the alley across the street from the stage, that’s the most likely route they’d take. Zecora, Fluttershy, I want you two to ask around the crowd, find anypony who wasn’t flashed and ask if they saw anything, get details. Good cop-bad cop, understand? Rarity you stay here with me, I’ll talk with the authorities while you call up Zeit and sweet talk him into giving us a hoof. Everyone clear? We’re going to find Spike and Pinkie even if we have to tear this whole valley to pieces to do so!”

Applejack reared up on her hind legs and cheered. “Yee-haw!! Now yer talkin’! C’mon Dash!”

Rainbow Dash smiled and saluted at Twilight. “I’m on it!”

“Come on now Fluttershy, we must find who knows what and why.” Zecora said with a hard smile on her face.

“Don’t worry Twilight, we’ll find Spike and Pinkie in no time.” Fluttershy said, the conviction in her voice clear even in her soft speech.

Twilight sighed as her friends scattered to their duties, comforting hoof patted her shoulder, and it was Rarity. “Don’t worry Twilight. We’ll find him.”

“It’s my fault!” Twilight said quietly. “I knew there was something weird about this place, but I still let Spike go out there!”

“Twilight, we all knew that there was something wrong. But we were ready to give this whole ‘vacation’ thing a shot.” Rarity said with a sigh. “But that went out the window, didn’t it?”

Twilight nodded sadly. “Yeah...I just hope they don’t hurt Spike.”

“If they know what’s good for them, they won’t.” Rarity said, looking over Twilight’s shoulder. “Twilight there’s an officer heading this way. You talk to him while I give Zeit a call. I’m sure he’ll help us.”

Twilight nodded and turned around to the officer making his way up the stairs. “Hello officer, how goes the investigation?”

The officer made back and forth gestures with his head. “It goes, Ms. Sparkle. However, there’s an agent from the CSS who wants to talk with you.”

"Celestia Secret Service, here?" Twilight said disbelievingly.

"Yes ma'am." The police pony said with a nod. "And he wants to talk to you, requested by name."

"Alright. Good, if anyone can help it's a CSS agent!" Twilight said as she descended the stairs. "What's his name?"

"Time Line..." said a familiar brown stallion as he walked out from behind the stage. "Celestia Secret Service. Hello, Ms. Sparkle."

"Doc-" Twilight began, stopping herself as The Doctor made a slashing motion at his throat. "...Time Line!"

"Ms. Sparkle, I'm afraid I must pull you and your team away from this crime scene, there's-"

Twilight Sparkle caught The Doctor in a tight hug, silencing him. "Oh thank Celestia! Doctor! Something terrible has happened!"

"Yes, I know! There's this huge problem up at the mine, it-"

"Some ponies kidnapped Spike!" Twilight interrupted. "Just now!"

"What?" The Doctor said incredulously. "Is that what's going on here?"

Twilight blinked. "You didn't know?"

"No." The Doctor said lowly. "They kidnapped him?"

"Yes! Spike was attending the celebration as a guest of honor. As the celebration got going these big flares lit up and blinded everypony! The kidnappers then burst out, snatched him up, and ran off towards that alley!"

The Doctor pushed his way past Twilight towards the stairs. "Right then, let's get on that shall we?"

Twilight smiled and began to follow him before remembering. "Wait. What was the problem you were talking about?"

"Something else. It can wait. Besides, I have the sneaking suspicion that they're connected." The Doctor said, trotting across the stage, flashing his psychic paper to the police ponies guarding the scene.

"Dragons...they're important to *them* as well..."

He knelt down and examined the charred remains of the pyrotechnic canisters. "Hmm. Let's have a look here..." he tapped a canister and licked the tip of his hoof, smacking his lips.

"...Aluminum...magnesium...and a certain something...ah...Fire Dazzler."

"Doctor?" Twilight said as she approached him. "What's the composition of the flash powder?"

The Doctor rose to his hooves, a serious look on his face. "A specialty mix created by a savant, the perfect balance for its purpose. Aluminum/magnesium mix with a skewed stabilizer ratio and a little something extra for the punch. A real dazzler."

Twilight examined the canisters. "They're company brand, and the technicians wouldn't usually use containers that had been tampered with. This was an inside job."

"Very good Ms. Sparkle." The Doctor said with a smile. "I know the fellow who mixed this powder, and he's got some explaining to do."

"What's going on?"

"I'll tell you, but we need to get everypony together. Something big is about to happen and we need all the help we can get." The Doctor said as he walked down the stairs with a canister in his mouth.

"How long have you been here?" Twilight said. "You didn't just get here, did you?"

The Doctor stiffened. "Uuh...no time for that, better round up the gang and-"

Twilight snorted. "Doctor..."

"Really? Are we going to do this now?" The Doctor said as he tried to walk away.

Twilight followed after him, brow furrowed. "Doctor!"

Shock galloped through the forest at full speed, trying to keep up with Thunder as he plowed through the underbrush. Thunder occasionally shuffled the struggling bag back into the center of his back, ensuring that their cargo remained safe. The whole plan had gone off without a hitch, Fire Dazzler had done his bit and they had done theirs. All in all, this whole thing had gone swimmingly.

As they entered a clearing there was the sudden tearing sound of rending fabric and something purple and green tumbled from Thunder's back. Shock let out an exclamation of surprise as he trod over it, his legs tangling sending him tumbling in the dirt. Shock shook his head as soon as he got his bearings and looked up, seeing the small purple dragon as he sat up and rubbed his head.

"Thunder!" Shock shouted. "Thunder, he got out!"

Thunder spun around and shot after the dragon, heavy hooves tromping on the ground. The dazed dragon turned to the sound and leapt to his stubby little legs, he tried to run but Thunder was on him in a second.

Thunder tackled the dragon, catching his tail under his hoof. "Ha! Gotcha!"

The dragon growled and spun around swinging his arm as hard as he could. The open handed blow connected with the side of Thunder's face

with a heavy thud. Thick scales and hard bones powered by panicked dragon-strength made the stallion's head snap to one side, red blood spraying on the dusty ground. Thunder grunted and stumbled away from the blow, collapsing in a heap after a few missteps. The dragon turned around to run away, only to have Shock leap in front of him from above and plant two hooves on the side of his face in a single backwards kick. The little dragon was sent hurtling across the small clearing, bouncing off a tree and landing face down in the dirt.

"By Luna's rump! That was like kicking a rock! Ow!" Shock said shaking his back legs before turning to his fallen brother. "Thunder, you okay?"

Thunder rose to his hooves and shook his head dazedly. "No! That little parasprite hits like a stallion!" he whined as he spat blood and a few broken teeth out of his mouth. "...Oh Celestia..."

Shock inspected the side of Thunder's face; the dragon's claws had dug three deep channels into his cheek, the teeth visible through the middle one. "Ah geez! The little sucker laid into you good now didn't he?"

Thunder made his way over to the dragon on the ground. "I'll teach the little turd to mess with me!"

Shock sped over and restrained his brother. "Hey! We won't get paid if he's too banged up! Unharmd, remember?"

There was a hiss from behind as the little dragon shot up from the ground and landed on Shock's back. Shock bucked and kicked wildly as the angry dragon tore at his sides with claws and pummeled his head and neck with furious blows. Shock lurched forward and to the side as the infuriated dragon punched and kicked the back of his head repeatedly, finally opening his mouth to bite with jaws and teeth that could easily crush gemstones. At the last moment a mouth closed around his tail and the infant dragon was swung with full force into the ground. Before he could regain his senses he was lifted again and swung back down in a large arcing motion. In a final blow the now limp dragon was swung around and thrown into a large boulder with a resounding crack, sliding down the side of the boulder and onto his back, not moving.

"Shock..." Thunder said worriedly. "Shock, are you okay?"

Shock groaned and got to his hooves, his flank and haunches covered with crisscrossing scratches and abrasions. A lump was beginning to rise on Shock's head and his left eye had already begun to swell shut. "Do I *look* okay to you?"

They both turned to look at the dragon, he was largely unharmed but for a single cracked scale and a rivulet of blood running out from beneath it.

Shock spat in disgust. "Celestia's wings! The little monster did all this to us and we barely scratched him!"

"I got some ropes and stuff in my bag, lets wrap him up tight and get him out of our lives!" Thunder said with a sigh. "I only hope our client is some kind of weird pervert! Anything else'd be too good for the little parasprite!"

Once the unconscious dragon was secured, Shock and Thunder placed him inside a new bag and renewed their trek, now more than ever eager to make the delivery.

Zeitgeist rushed from one end of his office to another, fistfuls of paper flying in the air, his suit top strewn on the floor and the long-sleeve under shirt wrinkled and mussed from a long night. "Where is it?!"

Litigia Statute walked into the messy office with a levitating tray holding two mugs and a coffee pot. "Where's what?"

"My 'get out of violating multiple airzones free' form! I need to fill out about two dozen of them for my trip here!" Zeit said frantically.

"Perhaps they're in the file cabinet marked 'legal loopholes'? You know, the file cabinet you open at least once a week?" Litigia said, setting down the coffee on his paper-covered desk.

Zeit halted before running over to the cabinet and thumbing through the files. "Air obstruction, no. Air transport re: unauthorized, no. Air vehicular pony/dog/misc-slaughter, no. Ah! Air zone violations! Thanks Lit, where would I be without you?"

"In jail." She said flatly. "Awaiting execution...with fire."

Zeitgeist smiled and sat down in his desk. "Sounds about right."

"I thought you were busy formulating some kind of crippling attack on those underground Gumples or whatever?" She said, pouring her exhausted looking boss some coffee. "Why all the little things?"

"Grundels. Also, I can't very well die with my paperwork out of order." Zeit said glibly, scrawling on the legal form with a ballpoint pen. "Get all this over and done with and *then* plan my climactic showdown with the subterranean beasties."

"Zeit. Get some sleep." Litigia said imploringly. "You haven't stopped working since The Doctor and your prisoner escaped last night. Please, you're not thinking clearly."

Zeit continued to write and scoffed as he gulped his coffee. "Nonsense! See? All I need is a bit of bean juice and I'm ready to go!"

Litigia walked up to Zeit and looked him in his tired eyes. "Is that why you've been writing for the past few minutes with the pen cap still on?"

Zeit looked down at the bare plastic tip of the pen cap and looked up at Litigia. "I was just practicing."

"Zeit." She said sternly.

He sighed and rubbed his tired eyes. "I tried to sleep, honest. But I just couldn't stop thinking. About the Grundels, about The Doctor, about the mine, about everything!"

"Let me handle that." Litigia said softly. "Sit down on the couch."

Zeitgeist slowly made his way across the room and sat down on the soft upholstery of the couch. Litigia walked behind the couch and reared up on her hind legs, placing a hoof on each of Zeitgeist's shoulders and began to massage, tension kneading out of his shoulders.

Zeitgeist exhaled in relief and rolled his head back. "...And you wonder why I never approve your requests for a transfer..."

"Even if you did I wouldn't follow up on it. After ten years who else could keep you in line but me?" Litigia said before quietly adding. "And who would put up with you but me?"

"We have such fun, you and I." Zeitgeist said drowsily, raising a paw to her face. "If I weren't so professional..." From behind a sharp telltale whistle of Zeitgeist's ECC sounded, causing his ears to perk. "What's that?"

Litigia clicked her tongue and whispered in his ear. "Hold that thought. And stay put, I'll take care of this."

She trotted over to the ECC, activating its caller hold function and its caller display. Up popped the perfectly proportioned face of a familiar white unicorn mare, Rarity. Her large azure eyes saturated with distress and worry, giving her a vulnerable and endearing look that only added to her appealing visage. There was no way Zeit would relax upon seeing her indigent expression; he'd be out to spend away whatever problem plagued her, which was no doubt her intention in Litigia's mind.

"Who is it?" Zeit called from over the couch, his voice still somewhat lax.

"I'll take this into the hall, you just relax." Litigia said, levitating the ECC from the desktop and leaving the room. Once in the hallway she sighed and opened a channel, sure to deactivate her own video feed. "Mr. Stardust's office, how may I help you?"

"What?" said Rarity, "I thought this was his personal...anyway, I need help! Please tell Mr. Stardust that something terrible has happened!"

"I'm sorry Miss, but Mr. Stardust is indisposed at the moment, may I take a message?" Litigia said, trying to keep the satisfaction out of her voice.

"Yes! Please tell him that our young friend Spike has been kidnapped and we need his help right away!" Rarity pleaded, the distress in her voice and on her face almost genuine sounding.

Litigia fought the urge to roll her eyes and responded. "You do realize that this is a mine, don't you? Have you tried contacting the authorities? This sort of thing is more suited to their expertise."

"Don't you use that tone with me!" Rarity said ferociously. "How *dare* you!! This is an emergency and we need Zeit's help to get our friend back!"

Litigia suddenly became aware of the veracity of her predicament and quickly changed her tone. "...Alright, what kind of assistance were you seeking?"

"I was hoping that Mr. Stardust could lend a few of his security people to our search party or maybe a search airship, but anything you can do would be much appreciated!"

"Very well." Litigia said. "I'll send a few agents to help and an ornithopter to search the surrounding area. You'll hear back from Mr. Stardust in a few hours."

Rarity sighed in relief and smiled. "Oh thank you! Really, anything you can do is more than enough! Thank you!"

"Your welcome." Litigia said flatly as the line went dead.

She reentered the office and set the ECC down on a table. "It's been taken care of sir. Now, as you were saying..."

Zeit sat with his head stooped forwards, eyes closed and an unmistakable snore emanating from his slightly open mouth. Litigia smiled and quietly made her way over to him, telekinetically laying him down on the couch, placing a pillow beneath his head and draping his suit top over his sleeping body. She leaned over his face; his usually animated features now serene and still.

She leaned in closer and nuzzled his forehead. "Sleep well Zeit."

Litigia quietly exited the office, turning out the lights and softly closing the door. Once down the hall she activated her communicator. "Feist. Come in."

"Yes, Ms. Statute?" Feist responded.

"Take Hahnenkamm and two other agents in Ornithopter Three to the Valley City Plaza. There has been a kidnapping and the suspects may still be visible from the air. Search the area and assist in any way that you can."

Litigia said sternly, sure to not let any softness into her voice.

"Understood?"

"By your command."

Gabbro rose from the ground in the secluded clearing, the daytime light dimmed by the thick canopy but he still needed to drape a thick black cloak over his head and shoulders to protect his eyes and skin. His sensitive ears could detect the rustle of bushes and underbrush as his delivery ponies made their way to him. Everything was going according to plan; the Elders would soon reinstate his tactics and give him the authority he needed to carry out his scheme. The dragon would be the key to it all, the key to the diamond dog's destruction and His eternal imprisonment. All that stood between him and his goals now was time.

A large black stallion broke into the clearing, his single open yellow eye locking onto Gabbro, the other one having been swollen shut.

"...Hey...you Gabbro?"

Gabbro nodded. "I am. The dragon?"

The stallion snorted and gestured at his severely scratched flank. "Yeah. I tell you, if you tick off a dragon it doesn't matter if it's an adult or a baby, it will give your flank a spanking."

"The dragon." Gabbro repeated.

"Oh." The stallion said flatly. "Yeah, we got him. Hey Thunder, bring him out!"

Thunder walked out of the bushes dragging a burlap bag with a rope tied around the end, the left side of his face already starting to swell from his injury. "Hey, we better get paid extra for this! This little parasprite almost killed me an' Shock!"

"You will be paid." Gabbro said shortly, a sort of indignant rage boiling in his belly. "The dragon is...unharmd?"

Shock bit his lip and pulled the bag off of the heavily restrained dragon, stepping back as Gabbro rushed in to examine him. "Well see, there was a bit of an incident. He got free and we tried to catch him again and...the important thing is that he's alive."

Gabbro ran a hand over the cracked scale on the infant's forehead, moving his hand over his mouth to feel for breath. "Yes, he is. And he is very healthy too."

"Yeah, that's for sure." Thunder grumbled. "Healthy and *strong*!"



Gabbro undid the ropes binding the dragon's limbs and removed the bandana that held his mouth shut. "Good nutrition has given him length of bone and a metabolism that's advanced for his age. Judging by his appearance I'd say he's little more than a decade old, and yet he's already metabolized enough gemstones to partially mineralize his bones and skeletal structure."

"Is that why the little sucker's so tough?" Shock said, rubbing the swollen lump on his head. "Also payment."

Gabbro reached into his cloak and produced a small bag. "Red diamonds, twenty half-carat stones. Now leave."

Thunder took the bag in his mouth and placed it in a saddlebag, looking over at Shock with an unpleasant smile on the uninjured side of his face. Shock walked up close to the kneeling Grundle, casting his imposing shadow over him. "Now, in light of recent circumstances, I think a bonus is in order."

"A bonus?" Gabbro said incredulously. "That bag alone is worth a million bits! I warn you not to get greedy equine."

"A million is pretty good..." Thunder said, advancing on the Grundle. "...But two would be even better! As compensation for, uh, injuries sustained in the field of duty."

Gabbro stood up, they were smaller than him and in a one on one situation he could easily dispatch the average pony, but the two of them at once combined with the viciousness he sensed in their hearts gave him pause before resorting to confrontation. "...But of course. A twenty carat cerulean gem."

He held out a large blue gemstone, Shock leaned in to grab it before Gabbro intentionally snapped his hand back with a cry and the gem fell to the dusty ground. "Forgive me. My people startle easily."

Shock and Thunder were too busy trying to gather the stone to answer. Thunder began to mutter. "I swear it's times like this I really wish I had thumbs, you know? ...Say, do you smell someth-?"

Thunder was cut off as a huge hand wrapped around his neck from behind. Both Shock and Thunder were hoisted far off the ground as a 190-centimeter Worker Grundle walked into the clearing.

Gabbro turned from the still unconscious dragon and smiled. "S'raag! Good of you to join us. Ponies, this is S'raag. He is a very good friend of mine."

Slag motioned at the squirming ponies in his grasp. "Po'ee ba...baa...baaa...no gud?"

Gabbro gestured at the unconscious dragon lying on the ground. "No S'raag, they are not good ponies, not at all. Look what they have done to this poor little baby dragon."

Slag growled at the ponies in his grip. "Ba' po'ees!"

"Indeed." Gabbro said, lifting the dragon off the ground. "Kill them."

Without a moment's hesitation Slag jerked both his wrists to one side, a crisp snapping noise rang through the silent forest. Slag gasped and dropped the limp corpses causing them to collapse in a heap on the ground. He shivered and whimpered as he raised his hands up to his mouth. "I s'ry! No wan' kiw po'ees!"

Gabbro sighed and walked up to the distraught giant, patting him reassuringly, mentally willing the two corpses to sink into the earth as they were clearly upsetting Slag. "There there S'raag. They were very bad ponies, they would have hurt this little dragon much worse if hadn't told them not to, and they would have hurt me very badly if had not handed over your identification gem. They were dangerous."

*'I know.'* Slag looked down at Gabbro, wiping tears away with one hand and signing with the other. *'I just don't like it. Please stop making me do it.'*

Gabbro smiled warmly and gestured at the baby dragon in his arms. "Don't you worry S'raag. This little guy will guarantee that there will be no need for a Grundel to kill ever again!"

*'He will? How?'*

Gabbro held the unconscious baby out in front of him. "It's all part of my plan. You'll see."

Slag ran a huge finger over the infant's smooth scales, a warm smile spreading across his features. *'He's so cute!'*

"I know!" said an upbeat voice from behind them. "It's hard to imagine how big scary dragons started out so cutesy-wootsy!"

The two spun around to see a bright pink female pony standing in the clearance; she had large blue eyes and a comically poofy mane of dark pink hair, an enormous jubilant smile on her face.

"Who are you?!" Gabbro sputtered, clutching the dragon to his chest.

"Hi!" she said springing over to the confounded pair. "I'm Pinkie Pie! I just love meeting new people, even if they're not crazy about meeting me! Actually, I was just looking for two stallions who took a friend of mine without asking! But I can see that you've already found Spike! That's so nice of you, I think I'll throw you a party!"

*'Is she dangerous?'* Slag signed.

"Of course not silly-billy! Whatever gave you that idea?" Pinkie said before turning to him, her infectious smile spreading to him. "What's your name?"

*'Slag, but my friends call me S'raag. Pleased to meet you Pinkie Pie.'* Slag gestured amicably.

"Likewise S'raag! And you?"

Gabbro cleared his throat. "My name is of no consequence equine!"

Slag made a small sideways gesture to Pinkie, she laughed nodded. "He does take himself a bit too seriously doesn't he?"

Gabbro huffed indignantly before he realized what was going on. "You understand the Worker Sign? How?!"

Pinkie snorted and laughed. "Oh that? The TARDIS can psychically translate any form of communication. I once made friends with a sentient colony of gastrointestinal worms that communicated through gas emissions! Oh, he had such a way with words..."

Gabbro sighed and pinched his nose. "Speaking of gas, S'raag!"

Slag inhaled sharply, gasbags on the sides of his throat inflating, leaned forwards and belched a green cloud of gas into Pinkie's face.

Pinkie coughed and sputtered. "Well that was rude! And stinky! Oh...unless that's your custom, in which case..." Pinkie rushed up to Gabbro and belched into his face. "...To you too!"

"You are supposed to be unconscious!" Gabbro shouted.

"OooOOOoooh..." Pinkie said, her hoof to her chin. "Okay!"

The energetic equine abruptly toppled forwards with face landing in on the ground, kicking up a small cloud of dust.

Gabbro grabbed a stick from off the ground and prodded the unconscious mare, Slag laughed and clapped his hands, signing. *'I like her! Can we keep her?'*

The exasperated Thinker Grundel looked up at the hopeful expression of the Worker's face. "Yes...it's either that or we kill her."

*'Please no!'* Slag signed desperately.

"Don't worry S'raag!" Gabbro said calmly. "I was just sussing out the options. In fact, she said she was a friend of the dragon. If we bring her along I may be able to use her to get the dragon to work with us."

Slag clapped his hands and gingerly picked up the unconscious mare. Gabbro walked up to him and looked at Pinkie. "I hope I don't regret this."

The two shapes sunk into the ground and the forest noise of birds and animals once again returned.

Zecora walked through the crowd with Fluttershy, the dazed and confused ponies had been less than forthcoming even with Fluttershy's reassurances. She shook her head and looked over at Fluttershy, who was just barely holding back the sadness that she felt over the sudden loss of Spike. The obstinate and often belligerent resort ponies weren't helping matters either, most of the time they would be too stunned to answer questions, other times they would request a lawyer before they'd say anything, and others still would be directly hostile. For this reason alone Fluttershy had to restrain Zecora from trouncing the fat old ponies on at least four different occasions.

"Zecora, what do you think those ponies wanted with Spike?" Fluttershy murmured.

Zecora shrugged and said. "Their intentions for Spike is something we'll learn, their actions are now my primary concern."

"Yeah...but what if they want to hurt him? Or sell him?" Fluttershy said worriedly. "Or-or-or-"

"Enough!" Zecora said sternly. "If we wish to find him soon, we cannot afford thoughts of doom!"

Fluttershy bit her lip and nodded. "You're right. I'm sorry."

Zecora smiled and shook her head. "Do not fret my gentle friend, all will be well in the end."

A sharp crack was heard that turned the heads of all ponies in attendance. It was a bright glittering ball of energy that fizzled and spat; the coloration was dark purple, blue, and pink. Twilight Sparkle. Zecora and Fluttershy exchanged knowing glances and rushed over to the stage, Zecora shouldering her way through the crowd of dumbstruck ponies while Fluttershy floated above them. As they approached the stage they saw Twilight speaking with a tall slender built stallion, her expression was stern and his was somewhat defensive.

"Doctor!" Fluttershy exclaimed, swooping in from above. "You're back!"

The Doctor smiled and turned to Fluttershy. "Fluttershy! It's good to see you! Oh it's been a while, well, it has been for me."

Zecora approached them and smiled. "Doctor, it is not even the afternoon, I did not expect to see you so soon."

"Hey Zecora! Yeah, well, something came up..." The Doctor said rubbing the back of his head timidly.

"He's been here since last night!" Twilight said indignantly. "He saw us come in and he didn't even say hello!"

"Oh excuse me for wishing you a relaxing vacation!" The Doctor retorted. "I swear, every time I try to be nice..."

"Nice?" Twilight said rolling her eyes. "More like arrogant! You thought you didn't need our help!"

"But now I do!" The Doctor said sternly. "I need all of you! You, Rarity, Zecora, Fluttershy-"

A loud cheer cut off The Doctor as an orange earth pony caught him in a large hug. "Professor! If you ain't a sight fer sore eyes!"

"Applejack..." The Doctor croaked.

"Ahem!" said a voice from above, Rainbow Dash looking on from up high.

"...Rainbow Dash..." The Doctor said, freeing himself from Applejack's greeting before looking around. "And...no? Hmm."

Twilight turned to the group of assembled ponies. "Alright girls! What's your report?"

"Um, a few of the ponies in the crowd saw a couple of stallions running into the alleyway across the street, one of them had a bag over his shoulder." Fluttershy said in her best approximation of a stern professional voice. "That's about all we could get."

Applejack nodded and looked up at Rainbow Dash. "That plays into the tracks Dash and I found in the alley way, it went along for a while and we was followin' it when we saw your signal Twi."

"Yeah!" Rainbow Dash cut in. "From the look of the tracks they were heading for the woods."

"Good." Twilight said with a nod. "Doctor, what do you think Doctor...Doctor?"

The Doctor was up on the stage, running his sonic screwdriver over the bowl of partially eaten gems Spike had been given. "...And there we go."

"Doctor, what are you-" Twilight began before The Doctor leapt from the stage.

"Hmm? Oh, just getting Spike's DNA signature as a precaution. And to get this!" The Doctor said producing a spent pyrotechnics canister.

Twilight blinked in confusion. "Okay...what are you going to do with Spike's DNA signature and a spent flash canister? And why?"

"Because of this." The Doctor said quickly.

Rarity turned the corner, a large relieved smile on her face. "Alright, Twilight I've called Zeit and he's sending some people over to help us look

for Spike. Oh! Hello Doctor, I didn't see you there. What luck too, between Zeit's dogs and The Doctor we'll have Spike back in no time!"

The Doctor chuckled nervously. "Uh yeah, about that...we should run."

Rarity blinked. "Whatever for Doctor?"

"Well..." The Doctor said, ears perking up at the sound of an approaching ornithopter. "Last night I enjoyed the company of our mutual acquaintance Jareth the Goblin King and..."

"And now you're on the run from the security forces of one of the richest and most powerful people in Equestria?" Twilight said flatly.

"How did you guess?" The Doctor said with a bashful smile.

Twilight sighed and rubbed her temples. "With you, first impressions with powerful people either result in imprisonment or imprisonment awaiting execution."

The Doctor winked and clicked his tongue, looking over to Rarity. "Would you be a dear and think up a baseline locator spell?"

Rarity rolled her eyes. "Doctor, what's going on?"

The loud insect-like thrum of the ornithopter's wings began to ring in their ears as a clearly mechanical shape became visible in the sky. The Doctor turned to Rarity with a pleading look in his eyes. "The quicker the better, Ms. Rarity!"

The small boxy craft thrummed over the rooftops, its 4-meter long wings a blur of motion and sound. It hovered over a relatively empty area of street, loudspeakers commanding ponies to make way for the landing aircraft. Once its wings had ceased their frenetic flapping four hulking diamond dogs exited the fuselage of the craft.

"Uh-oh." The Doctor muttered. "I was kind of hoping for a new face..."

"What?" Twilight said as the dogs made their way to the stage.

"That there is Ziggy's right-hand-dog, Feist." The Doctor said with an exasperated quality to his voice. "Just my luck he sends the meanest of his crew who can also identify me by sight."

"What do we do?" Twilight said anxiously.

"This." The Doctor said, throwing the little black canister out in front of the diamond dogs, he then jumped out with the sonic screwdriver in his mouth, pointing it at the canister.

"You!" Feist said, reaching for his sidearm. "Stop right there!"

The Doctor smiled and activated his sonic screwdriver, a high pitched whir emanated from the tip and the spent canister lit again, a bright white light exploding from the casing. The diamond dogs yelped and raised their hands up to shield their eyes. As the chemical residues in the canister

finally broke down, the diamond dogs lowered their hands from their eyes. The Doctor and his acquaintances were nowhere to be found.

“Damn it...” Feist growled. “Search the area, they can’t have gone far!”

The Doctor peered out from the alleyway, watching as the diamond dogs sniffed him out. “Even with all the chemicals in the air its only a matter of time before they pick up my scent.”

He turned to his friends and smiled. “So, we better get around to finding Spike, hmm? Rarity, can you still think up a basic location spell?”

Rarity closed her eyes and concentrated, her horn beginning to glow. “Yes...what do you need to find?”

“This.” The Doctor said glibly as he activated his sonic screwdriver and pressed it against her horn. “Oh, this may feel a little weird.”

Rarity’s horn began to spark and whirl. Rarity gasped in shock as her horn began to drag her around. “Doctor! What have you done?!”

“A bit of a messy software patch I’m afraid!” The Doctor said with a smile. “You are currently being drawn to Spike’s DNA signature.”

Rarity squealed while she was dragged horn-first down the alleyway. “DOOOOCTOOOOOR!!”

The Doctor smiled and turned to the other ponies. “Follow that unicorn! Allons-y!”

# CHAPTER 5

Spike groaned and rubbed his head; there was a swelling beneath a padded piece of gauze. He looked around at the room he was in; it was a wide semi-sphere with no windows and a single blue light crystal lodged in the roof. Shakily he got to his feet, still a little groggy from what had happened...what had happened?

“Urrrg...what is this place? Where...hey...I’ve been kidnapped!” Spike said with dawning realization.

There was the sound of shifting stones behind him, causing him to spin around. A door that hadn’t been there before was opening, revealing a pair of figures, one tall and one enormous. Their silhouettes seemed almost like a diamond dog, but the smell wafting from the huge one sunk that theory immediately.

The shorter creature stepped forward, still towering over Spike by almost a meter. “Hello young Spike. It’s so good to see that you’re awake.”

Spike flinched as the creature’s features became visible; it was bizarre looking, compared to its protruding nose and jaw the rest of its face seemed out of proportion, with an otherwise tall forehead appearing short and squashed with two fire-orange eyes peering out from under a thick brow. “W...what are you?”

“I...” it said, crouching down until it was somewhat more to his level. “...am a creature called a Grundel. I know I may appear strange to you, but please understand that we mean you no harm. In fact, you are very important to us.”

Spike cleared his throat, hoping he didn’t sound as scared as he really was. “Okay. Grundels. That’s cool. Why did you have those two kidnap me? Where am I?! What are you going to do with me?!”

The Grundel smiled, Spike could tell it was trying to look friendly but its horrible features were merely twisting in a way that showed teeth. “Do not fret young dragon. No harm will come to you, you have the word of a Grundel.”

Spike nodded, rubbing his chin. “Word of a Grundel, huh? Allow me to retort.”

Spike suddenly wound up and drove a fist into the Grundel’s midsection, rewarding him with a sudden exhalation and a grunt of pain. As the winded creature stooped forwards Spike charged headlong at him,



head lowered. The already destabilized creature was bowled over as Spike trod over his stomach chest and face with hard clawed feet.

"C-Crater!" The Grundel wheezed. "Guh-get him!"

Spike skidded to a stop as the huge Grundel rose to his full height, long muscular arms outstretched. Spike feinted to the right and then to the left before making a beeline for in between the creature's legs, sliding under them. The Grundel grunted and merely reached down with an enormous arm and grabbed his tail, effortlessly pulling him back and hoisting him into the air. The Grundel chuckled thickly as Spike struggled futilely as he hung upside-down, swiping with his claws and spitting the occasional burst of green flame that dissipated before it could touch flesh.

The other Grundel hobbled towards the two, a pained smile on his face. "Brother Gabbro said you were healthy and strong, but I guess I didn't figure that such a cute little creature could be dangerous! We'll just have to take precautions in the future. Crater, sleepy time."

Crater nodded and inhaled, his throat bags inflating, he belched out a particularly thick puff of smoke that enveloped the young dragon's head. Spike struggled and kicked before falling still, unconscious again.

"Good." The Grundel said, still rubbing his belly. "Now chain him up, we don't want him attacking anyone else."

Crater walked over to the wall and produced a steel chain from his backpack, fastening one of the shackles to Spike's right leg.

The Thinker Grundel groaned and rubbed his tender belly. "Great rocks! Imagine if Gabbro had gotten a dragon slightly older? The little monster nearly put a hole in my stomach!"

"Yeah!" said a chipper voice from behind. "Spike's a lot stronger than you thought, huh?"

They spun around to see a pink pony standing in the hallway, her pink mane an alarming dark clotted-blood red in the blue light of their tunnels. She was smiling her usual smile as she hopped into the room happily.

"How do you keep getting out of your cell?!" The exasperated Thinker Grundel said.

"A good magician never reveals her secrets, Granny!" Pinkie said as she looked down at the unconscious chained dragon. "You know, chaining him up won't do much good anyway, especially when our friends come down here to get us."

"Your friends will have to find you first!" 'Granny' said as he brought his palm up to his face and sighed. "...And my name is Granodiorite."

“But that’s so clunky! Why can’t you have a nickname like C’ayt?”  
Pinkie said gesturing at Crater.

“Thinker Grundels do not abbreviate.” Granodiorite growled. “And you are to stay in *this* room and get that little beast under control! Brother Gabbro will not be as forgiving of such behavior as I!”

“Such slander, Granny.” Said a voice from behind, the younger Thinker Grundel known as Gabbro stood in the doorway. “Pinkie Pie, do you think you can persuade young Spike to refrain from further outbursts?”

Pinkie paused and looked down at Spike, her brow furrowed. “...I think so. You promise you won’t hurt him?”

“I will personally exile anyone who does.” Gabbro said with a smile. “I would not go to such extremes to acquire him were he not monumentally important.”

Pinkie sighed and ran a hoof over Spike’s forehead. “Oh Spikey...what are you going to do with him? Why do you need him?”

Gabbro chuckled and shook his head. “That’s not your concern, Ms. Pie. I can acquire his cooperation one of two ways, *with* you or *through* you. Which do you think will be most beneficial to all parties involved?”

Pinkie cleared her throat and sat down next to Spike. “I’ll help you. But please, just let me talk to him before you start, it’ll make it easier.”

“Oh don’t worry about that.” Gabbro said with a smile, walking towards the door. “I await the reinstatement of my absolute authority, you have an hour before we begin the resurrection.”

“Resurrection of what?” Pinkie said.

“A god.” Gabbro responded.

(Dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da  
etc)

## DOCTOR WHOOVES

### Episode 2

#### The Mines of Dragon Mountain: Part 5

##### Starring:

The Doctor  
Twilight Sparkle  
Pinkie Pie  
Rainbow Dash  
Applejack  
Fluttershy  
Zecora  
Rarity  
Spike

##### Featuring:

Zeitgeist Stardust  
Litigia Statute  
Gabbro  
Fire Dazzler

Rarity screamed in alarm and disgust as her glowing sparking horn dragged her through the isolated back alleys of Valley City, knocking over trashcans and spreading their contents all over the alley. Her hooves clicked and clacked against the cobblestones as she attempted to resist her own power as it dragged her through the filthy garbage, coating her dress in pungent liquid.

The Doctor and the rest of her friends galloped after her. "Rarity! You're doing fine! Just keep steady!"

"Oh shut up!" Rarity shouted angrily. "Why does it feel like this?"

The Doctor cleared his throat nervously. "Err...what does it feel like?"

"Like my brain is trying to come out my nose! What did you do?!"

Rarity shouted, crashing through yet another set of trashcans.

The Doctor sped up until he was alongside her. "Rarity! I'm sorry! I was in a bit of a hurry and couldn't take the time I needed to get it perfect. It is imperative that you, whatever you do, don't think about cheese!"

Rarity made an exclamation of disbelief. "Why?! What happens if I think about cheese?!"

"Your horn is essentially a natural capacitor for PKE and I've just fiddled with its regulating software! Do you *really* want to know?" The Doctor said frantically.

The group followed the unwilling unicorn as she turned the corner and burst out into the street. Resort ponies and tourists yelped and dove out of the way as the group plowed through the busy street, eventually heading out of town and into the forest encroaching on the city limits.

"Doctor!" Rarity said as she was dragged towards the forest, her dragging hooves now kicking up copious amounts of dust from the dry dirt path that led into the forest. "I thought about cheese!"

"Good!" The Doctor said with a smile.

"Good?!"

"If you're thinking about cheese then you're not thinking about what you shouldn't be thinking about!" The Doctor said jubilantly. "Onwards!"

"You and I are going to have words about this Doctor!" Rarity said through gritted teeth.

"Over tea!" The Doctor responded.

"Doctor!" Twilight said, slightly out of breath and panting as they ran. "I think forgot to tell you, Pinkie's missing too!"

The Doctor turned his head and nodded. "I know! She went after the kidnappers!"

"How d'you know that?" Applejack said with a raised eyebrow. "Ah don't see a third pair a' tracks!"

"He's right!" Rainbow Dash said as she flew above. "I can see it clearer now on the dirt. There's a set of four prints every few meters or so!"

"Right you are Ms. Dash!" The Doctor said with a nod. "And who do we know with that distinctive form of locomotion?"

"But why wasn't she blinded like the rest of us?" Twilight said. "She was right there!"

"Um, yes, but she's also Pinkie Pie." Fluttershy said with a small smile. "I just hope she didn't try to stop those awful stallions, they might hurt her! They had no problems hitting you Twilight!"

Twilight prodded the sore side of her mouth with her tongue. "I noticed..."

"Doctor!" Zecora said as she pulled up next to him. "On his ship we did sense, a shadow of Zeitgeist's intent. You said that you met him last night, is there or is there not a fight?"

"Oh there's a fight alright." The Doctor said lowly. "A war."

"What's going on Doctor?" Twilight demanded.

"There's this subterranean race of creatures call the Grundels and for the past fifteen years they have been attempting to sabotage Zeitgeist's operation, they have recently turned violent, killing miners and collapsing mines." The Doctor turned back to them. "Zeitgeist has brought in the big guns and is ready for war, it's up to us to stop both sides from slaughtering each other."

"Grundels?" Twilight said thoughtfully.

"You know about them?" The Doctor said with an eyebrow raised. "The Grundel I met kind of said they were forgotten by the surface world. His name was Cheppu, nice guy."

"What's 'kind of said' supposed tah mean?" Applejack said questioningly.

"We were doing that mind link thing that I do." The Doctor said quickly. "I saw in his mind that his people are from a time before ponies existed, a dark and terrible time intentionally forgotten. How is it that you know of them Twilight?"

"I don't, not really." Twilight said. "Some of the Princesses older tomes and information crystals have small references to a race called the Grundels. It doesn't say much more than 'Grundels are good', but that doesn't seem so accurate now."

The Doctor leapt over a felled log and continued running. "The Grundels are a fundamentally good people, I could tell at least that much from Cheppu's mind. But they've been driven mad by desperation; they believe that Zeitgeist's mine threatens to bring about the end of the world

and now they're planning something! And I bet it has something to do with Spike!"

"What could they want with Spike? How is he going to shut down Zeitgeist's mines? He's just a baby!" Rainbow Dash said from above.

"I don't know..." The Doctor mumbled. "But whatever it is it can't be good."

"How do you know it has something to do with Spike?" Fluttershy said her brow creased in worry. "It could just be an inconvenient coincidence."

"Because..." The Doctor said coolly. "According to Cheppu Grundels only live in one place and that's here, the Dragon Valley, it has something to do with their god, the *Dragon* God Calcipher. It's too much of a coincidence that the only dragon to come here ever is kidnapped at a turning point of the conflict. The Grundels are planning something and Spike's the key somehow!"

"Could you be any more vague?" Rainbow Dash said impatiently.

The Doctor rolled his eyes. "The next time I'm facing incarceration and rooting through the mind of a traumatized troll I'll be sure to take notes!" He let out an exasperated noise as he sidestepped a rock. "All I have is a gut feeling that the two are connected! There are so many variables, so many facets! It's like putting together a puzzle in the dark, you can feel that they're all connected but big gaps put it just out of your reach! And Spike fits into it all somehow!"

"Whoever planned this out is very well organized! They had, what, *hours* to plan a kidnapping?" Twilight said, a disbelieving tone in her voice.

"I guess Cheppu calls them *Thinker* Grundels for a reason." The Doctor said. "Wait...yes that's it! Th-"

The Doctor crashed into Rarity's backside as she stopped abruptly in the middle of a clearing. Her horn glowed and sputtered, chiming that its purpose had been fulfilled, before returning to normal.

Rarity sighed in relief. "Oh thank goodness that's over!"

"Ooooh!" The Doctor said in irritation. "I had it! It was right on the tip of my tongue and I lost it! Also, try to steer better next time Ms. Rarity. I think you hit every trashcan on your way here! Phew!"

Rarity looked down at her once beautiful dress. It was horribly discolored and saturated with the pungent effluvium of a dozen festering garbage bins, the parts that had not been coated in putrid muck and dirt had been torn to shreds by the myriad twigs and branches that had caught the hems as she skidded semi-reined through the underbrush. She looked back up at the Doctor, who was running his asinine little screwdriver over something. She made her way towards him, a low growl growing in her

throat. Just as she was ready to pummel the thoughtless alien into a pony-shaped pile of viscera Applejack and Zecora restrained her.

"Whoa nelly!" Applejack said quickly. "Now Rarity, you know how the Professor gets when he's ontah somethin'!"

"Let me go!" Rarity hissed. "I must avenge my day wear!"

"We cannot allow your rage to sate, for we must get our priorities straight!" Zecora said calmly. "To allow the two of you to fight, may yet cost young Spike his life!"

Rarity seethed and relented, once again prioritizing her goals with the utmost professionalism, and tore the putrid tatters from her body. "Very well. Until Spike is out of danger and the greater crisis has been averted I will control myself. I will conduct this mission with the utmost grace and poise...and then I will murder him."

Applejack chuckled nervously and nodded. "Uuh...yeah, that's the spirit!"

The Doctor raised his head from his studies, a serious look on his face. "Girls...I found Spike..."

Twilight and the other ponies rushed up to him as he revealed a large stone with a small smear of reddish brown on the side. Blood.

"No..." Twilight raised her hoof to her mouth. "Doctor...?"

"It's Spike's blood. This is what we've been tracking."

"We'?" Rarity said before seeing the blood, gasping in shock. "Oh no! What happened?"

The Doctor looked around at the clearing. "The scuffling in this clearing suggests a fight took place. Spike didn't go quietly I imagine."

Rainbow Dash let out a sharp whistle. "Hey! Look at this!"

She pointed to a series of dark red splatter patterns and what appeared to be small white rocks. The Doctor approached them with a small smile on his face. "I'd expect nothing less from a dragon."

"What are those little white things?" Fluttershy said, lowering her head to examine them.

"Those're pony teeth!" Applejack said triumphantly, causing Fluttershy to recoil in horror. "Wow! Lookit that, they're busted up pretty good! Way to go Spike!"

The Doctor began to mime his way through the actions that took place. "So they came in there...Spike got out and tripped one of them...the other caught him but Spike...\*pow!\*...so he's down." He made his way over to a tree; the bark was dented on the side facing the clearing. "The other pony kicked Spike over to here...they stand over him and...oh! Spike clawed up the other pony pretty badly. Really badly in fact! Look at it all!"

Twilight came over and examined the dusty ground, it was speckled with small brown-red splotches, and her mind went instantly to Spike's claws, teeth, and armored scales. She hadn't given it much thought until now, but despite his cute appearance and friendly demeanor, Spike was very much a dragon. "I can't believe he did all this!"

The Doctor nodded grimly. "Unfortunately he still lost. The other pony gave him a pretty good trouncing and dragged him off to..." The Doctor traced the tracks to a somewhat grassy trail leading back into the forest. "...There. C'mon."

The Doctor made his way through the underbrush, followed closely by his teammates. Twilight trotted up next to him, worry and distress clear in her voice. "Doctor. Do you think Spike is okay?"

He sighed and shrugged. "I don't know. If the Grundels want him it can't be good."

"What are they, really?" Rarity said.

"From what I can piece together from Cheppu's memories the Grundel's were created by a powerful being known as Calcipher to act as detectors against an evil corrupting force. I can't really make sense of most of it, but from Cheppu's point of view there's been a change in the Grundels recently, a sort of...degeneration. Cheppu and other Workers are essentially incapable of violence; it is only at the behest of their Thinkers that they can commit such acts. In theory even Thinker Grundels should be incapable of conceiving violent thoughts, but recent generations have proven themselves more than capable while sabotaging Stardust's mine. It's causing no small amount of distress amongst the Worker caste."

Twilight nodded. "Why are they attacking Zeitgeist's mine? Is it damaging their home or something?"

"No..." The Doctor grimaced and scratched his head. "That's where things get fuzzy. They refer to the mountain as a prison. Whatever's inside it scares them so badly that they are hesitant to even think about it, and they fear that Zeitgeist's mining will free it. They refer to it by many names, but the one that causes them the most fear, the one that's probably its true name, is The Demon God Tirac."

Twilight felt a shudder roll down her back, the name seemed familiar somehow, and it brought up feelings of fear and disgust. "I don't like the sound of that."

They entered yet another clearing, this one was larger and more overgrown save a single patch of sand in the middle. The Doctor pulled out his sonic screwdriver and activated it, running through the spectrum of frequencies. There was a scream from behind as Fluttershy and Applejack



leaped backwards, two mangled corpses rose from the ground, their wide-open eyes filled with sand and dirt. Fluttershy put her hooves to her mouth and retreated to Zecora, who placed a comforting hoof on her back.

Applejack approached the corpses, examining them; they were large strongly built Narragansett ponies with black coats, exactly like the ones described fleeing the stage. One of them was covered in deep scratches while the other was relatively unharmed save a painful looking wound on the right side of his face. Both of their necks were unnaturally elongated and crooked, like some great force had simply squeezed their vertebrae apart. "Land sakes..."

The Doctor sighed. "These are the kidnappers?"

"They fit the description Zecora and I got from the crowd..." Fluttershy said quietly. "Those poor stallions..."

"Yeah..." Rainbow Dash set down next to them, looking into their frozen terrified faces, she sighed and shook her head, clearing the dirt from their eyes with her feathers and closing them. "No pony deserves to die like this, afraid and hurt."

The Doctor smiled widely and walked up next to her, as he knelt next to the bodies he made eye contact with her. He wasn't seeing her as 'Ms. Dash' anymore, no condescension or patronization, he smiled warmly at her. "Brilliant..."

Rainbow Dash barely suppressed a happy gasp and cleared her throat. "S-so, Doctor. What do you think happened here?"

"Well..." The Doctor said. "Looks like the work of a Grundel, Worker type to be specific."

"How can you tell?" Applejack said curiously. "Ah don't see a single track here 'sides ours!"

"If I may be so bold, The Doctor's point you have just told." Zecora said gesturing at the ground.

"Hey yeah..." Twilight said. "There are *no* marks on the ground except ours!"

"Grundel magic allows them limited control over earth. I suspect they got rid of their tracks as well as these stallion's tracks when they left...unmarked graves..." The Doctor said with a shake of his head. "Also, the injuries to their necks are consistent with Worker physiology. Note the finger marks."

Applejack examined the bodies, noticing a series of divots in the flesh of their necks; the marks suggest a paw width of almost twenty centimeters! "Land sakes! Just how big are these critters?"

“Big. Strong too.” The Doctor said sternly. “If things go pear shaped and a Thinker tells his Worker to attack you, run. Don’t try to fight them because they’ll tear you to pieces, they can crush rocks with their bare hands. Just get out of there as fast as you can.”

Applejack regarded the bodies, both of these stallions were a size down from Big Macintosh but were by no means weaklings. They had been killed quickly enough for them to still have a look of sheer terror plastered on their faces. “Ah understand.”

The Doctor nodded and motioned for them to follow him. “Okay. I think I’ve located a Grundel tunnel right below this sand patch. I can sonic it so we can go in, I just want to warn you; this is where things get dangerous. If any of you want to back out-”

Rainbow Dash flitted up to him and clopped him on the head with her hoof, causing the Doctor to wince in pain and exclaim. “Ow! What was that for?”

“Fer bein’ a dope.” Applejack said with a chuckle. “You should know better ‘n’ that by now, we’d never abandon you Professor!”

The Doctor smiled and nodded, looking around to the ponies surrounding him. “Alright then. Grundel City, here we come! Allons-y!”

The screwdriver trilled and the seven ponies sank into the ground. The sand rearranged itself as they did, leaving no trace that they had been there at all. The forest was quiet.

Gabbro made his way to the center stage of the Grundel council room. The verdict had been reached and he would soon proceed with his plan with the sanction of the Elders. He smiled internally; despite his own personal loss the annihilation of the raiding party had been extremely useful towards his ends. With the abject failure of their own strategies well in mind the weak-spirited Elders and council would undoubtedly turn to him for guidance. He would carry out his attack on the diamond dog city with the blessing of the council and Elders, he would be a hero, and his name would live on in Grundel lore. And all it had cost him was...

“Cheppu...” He muttered. It was still a bit of a shock, his fears had been piqued the second Cheppu requested to be part of the raiding party. Being the best at breaking machines he was readily welcomed into the fray, despite Gabbro’s knowledge of the potential danger. He couldn’t demand or even request that Cheppu resign as such an action would only get the other Thinkers postulating, jeopardizing his agenda. He had rationalized it

that even in the event of a counterattack gentle Cheppu would likely run or hide, or somehow be out of the way when the killing started. But no, the wretches had brought in their horrible weapons; the Thinker that had been overseeing the mission described them as tubes that shot 'straight lightning'. Evil creatures, how could the Regal Sisters permit the existence of such beasts? Was it greed? Apathy? No matter, once The Creator is reborn in his new body it would be no problem at all to burn them from the face of the planet. Such creatures would only fall quicker to Tirac's influence should he be released anyway.

"Brother Gabbro..." Elder Chert began. "The poll is in and the Elders have agreed unanimously."

"I await your verdict with eagerness, your Honor." Gabbro said, bowing behind the podium.

"Your tactics will be reinstated..." Elder Feldspar said.

Gabbro restrained a smile and nodded. "Thank you Elder-"

"We are not finished." Elder Granite interrupted. "As Elder Feldspar said, your tactics are to be reinstated, but they are only to be employed during extenuating circumstances and after heavy consideration by the council. Your contribution to the effort is appreciated, but some of your plans are far too...radical."

Gabbro barely contained an outraged explosion, his fists clenching furiously beneath the podium and out of sight. "I respect and honor the Elder's decision. If it is their will and the council's will, so be it. May I inquire as to why?"

"You have not been informed?" Elder Slate said questioningly. "We sent you a message by courier."

"Yes \*ahem\* I was attending to some other matters." Gabbro said, hands fidgeting nervously beneath the podium.

The normally silent Elder Olivine rose and cleared his ancient throat. "A survivor of the botched raid has returned from the mine."

"Why were we not notified the second he arrived?" Gabbro demanded.

"We were, mere minutes ago. He was exhausted and weakened by the ordeal, to the point that he had to walk the tunnels to get back to the city, which took all night." Elder Granite said. "He claims to have been taken prisoner, only to escape by way of a pony known only as The Doctor."

"What does this have to do with your honorable decisions, Elders?" Gabbro said anxiously.

"The survivor speaks of the Duke's desire for a diplomatic solution." Elder Feldspar explained. "We had not...considered diamond dogs capable of such complex ideas. This revelation has proved too valuable to disregard."

"Why reinstate my authority then?" Gabbro inquired. "If you wish to open a dialogue with those animals anyway!"

"Remember your place, Brother Gabbro." Elder Olivine grumbled. "We have taken this precaution because we feel that even though the diamond dogs have proved capable of conceiving such abstractions, we fear that implementation is still beyond them. Your tactics may yet prove to be the viable solution, barring certain...extreme options."

"Who is this survivor?" Gabbro said, barely keeping a quiver of rage out of his voice.

"Your own beloved Chip...excuse me, 'Cheppu'." Elder Slate said with the signs of a suppressed sardonic smile on his face. "This has been a productive day for you, Gabbro. Are you not pleased?"

Gabbro cleared his throat, trying to keep the conflicted emotions he felt out of his voice. "I am most pleased, honored Elder."

"Good." Elder Olivine said with finality. "Meeting adjourned. A diplomatic party will be assembled and a courier will be sent to inform the Duke of our willingness to converse. Rejoice! The crisis may yet be avoided!"

A cry of 'rejoice' rang through the council room, Grundels smiling and donning relieved expressions, like they had just awoken from a nightmare. Gabbro grumbled and left the room, trying his best to look jubilant, but the moment was sour. He knew he should have felt relief at the prospect of a bloodless solution but another part of him, *that* part of him, thirsted for *his* solution. That this turn of events may in some way interfere with his place in history filled him with a terrible and indignant rage. He had put so much time and effort into his schemes, and now it was simply the might of words that would end this conflict? He shook his head. There was no way that this final triumph of righteousness could falter now, the diamond dogs were still a threat just by their proximity to the prison. A multitude of tainted savage souls would no doubt awaken Him...somehow. The specifics weren't important, what mattered was the risk. His plan would still come to fruition, even if the council or the Elders didn't know what was good for them!

*'But first...'* He thought to himself. *'I have a Worker to see...'*

Seven ponies passed through the ceiling of tunnel, landing with muted clacks as their hooves hit the stony floor. The ponies squinted and strained their eyes, taking a moment to adjust to the blue-lit corridors.

"Okay..." The Doctor said. "We're here."

Applejack stood up and curled her nose. "Tarnation! What in the world is that smell?"

Rarity huffed and turned up her nose. "Let's see you get pulled through a heap of garbage and come out smelling like roses! It's not like I had any say in the matter!"

"No..." Twilight said. "It's not you, it's this really sharp wet smell, like swamp gas and decomposed meat."

"That would be the Worker Grundels." The Doctor said with certainty. "They have a method of communication that involves verbal language, sign language, body language, and chemical perception."

Fluttershy walked up to The Doctor, excitement clear in her eyes. "Oh how interesting! Advanced pheromone communication is very rare in higher lifeforms, it's how ants and bees and other social insects communicate. Every pattern of chemical release typically results in an instinctual behavior, it's very efficient if a little limited."

The Doctor grinned and nodded, Fluttershy's natural talent with animals and care taking made her an expert in biology, physiology, and psychology; an invaluable talent in a companion. "Right you are Fluttershy! If I was reading Cheppu correctly, smells relate to moods, emotions, and even simple ideas. This allows Grundels to perceive the state of other Grundels so that they can react to it accordingly. It's instinctive. This has the side effect of making Workers incapable of dishonesty. This also makes them smell like a dumpster on a warm day when they're depressed."

"They're depressed?" Rainbow Dash said.

"Breathe in through your nose." The Doctor said. "The TARDIS translation circuits should take care of the rest."

The ponies all took a deep breath, brows creasing not only at the smell, but the influx of objective emotions appearing in their minds.

"Depression..." Rarity said. "...And guilt. Sadness."

"Oh, those poor creatures!" Fluttershy said quietly. "They're in such terrible pain, and for the longest time!"

Twilight sighed and put her hoof to her chin. "Doctor...is this because what's been going on at the mine?"

The Doctor nodded. "Workers are psychologically incapable of premeditated violence, they just can't bring themselves to intentionally

inflict suffering. Their Thinkers, on the other hand, are perfectly capable of conceptualizing violence.”

“Let me guess...” Applejack said with a snort. “They can’t just say ‘nothin’ doin’ tah these Thinker fellahs, can they?”

The Doctor tapped his hoof against his nose sadly.

Rainbow Dash growled. “Man! That steams me up! These Thinkers think they know better so they send their Workers off to do something that’s not only dangerous but traumatizing as well?! That’s horrible!”

Zecora nodded and stomped her hoof. “It is easier to send others to die and fight, while claiming to know what is right. But behind every cloud there is a sun, they fight to restrain an evil one.”

“Zecora’s right.” Rarity said. “We can’t very well vilify these ‘Thinkers’, as The Doctor said they’re desperate and may not be operating under the moral code that they normally would. Let’s try and keep a even keel on this one!”

The Doctor turned to make his way down the tunnel. “Right then, this way! We’ve got a bit of searching to do if we want to find some answers!”

An enormous hand burst from the wall and grasped The Doctor by the midsection, hoisting him off the ground. The ponies rushed to his aid, only to have other large creatures phase from the walls and floor of the tunnel. The creatures towered over the ponies, their long green arms outstretched. Applejack growled and leapt forwards, kicking the creature holding The Doctor hard in the ribs. The creature grunted and stepped back, still clinging to The Doctor’s midsection. It aimed a clumsy swat at Applejack who deftly sidestepped it, rushing up and driving her right front hoof into the creature’s knee. Once again the large creature seem unfazed by the attack and aimed a highly telegraphed swat at her.

“Tarnation! It’s like hitting a rock wall!” Applejack said as she leapt back from the attack.

Rainbow Dash skimmed mere centimeters above the floor as she hovered around the lumbering beasts, dishing out quick jabs and blows as she did. “Yeah! But they don’t really seem into it, do they?”

The Doctor called from the creature holding him. “These are Worker Grundels, they’re deliberately pulling their punches! But be on your guard, when their Thinker gets here they’ll have no choice but to get serious!”

Rarity telekinetically tripped one and leapt onto his back, the Grundel rose to his feet and began to thrash and shake, reaching back to get at the offending pony. Rarity placed her hooves in the small of his back and pushed herself away with all the strength she could muster. The sudden change in weight and the force of the jump caused the Grundel to stumble forwards,

crashing into another Grundel who was halfheartedly menacing Fluttershy. Zecora took advantage of the situation and planted both hooves in the stumbling creature's face, sending it teetering backwards. Rainbow Dash called out to Zecora and the two rushed the Grundel holding The Doctor, Rainbow Dash slammed into the creature's face while Zecora placed a solid double hoofed kick directly into the Grundel's stomach. With a yelp of pain choked by a winded exhalation of air the Grundel stumbled backwards, letting go of The Doctor and retreating to its compatriots. The ponies regrouped and stood together, Twilight and Rarity pulling rocks out of the wall as Applejack, Zecora, and Rainbow Dash stood at the ready.

"Oh dear..." said a voice that seemed to be coming from the walls. "I suppose my Workers misinterpreted me when I said 'intercept', I did not mean for them to attack you..." another Grundel rose ominously from the ground, the smile on his face as insincere as the contrite tone in his voice. "...However, you have now shown yourselves to be a minor threat. I'm afraid I have to order my Workers to neutralize you."

The ponies took a defensive posture as the relatively diminutive Grundel raised his hand in a commanding gesture. "Fracture, Slag, incapacitate them would you?"

The two hulking Worker Grundels stepped forward cracking their enormous knuckles, a sound not unlike rocks shattering. Applejack snorted and scratched the ground with her hoof, a defiant smile on her face. "Y'all make it sound like a walk in the orchard!"

Applejack charged forward and leapt into the air, she performed a forward summersault breaking it just as she got close to the Grundel, and planted both hooves square into his chest. Applejack bounced off his heavily muscled body and landed rear-first on the tunnel floor, looking up incredulously at the Grundel's unimpressed expression. "Uh-oh..."

The Grundel known as Fracture inhaled sharply, large green sacks on either side of his throat inflating as he did. Applejack barely had enough time to rise to her hooves before the Grundel thrust forwards and produced a concentrated stream of thick green gas, blasting it into her shocked face. Before the gas could even partially dissipate Applejack crumpled into a heap on the ground.

"Applejack!" Rainbow Dash cried as she bolted towards her fallen friend. A wide green hand shot out and grabbed the lightning fast pegasus out of the air.

Slag brought himself face to face with the struggling pony, neck bags inflating. "S'leep po'ee."

He opened his mouth and blasted grey-green smog into her mouth and nostrils and Rainbow Dash struggled for a moment before falling still. Zecora, Rarity, Twilight, Fluttershy, and The Doctor rushed forward to help their fallen friends, only to have powerful hands phase from the walls and floor of the cave to grab their legs. The Grundels pulled their hooves partially into the rock before letting go, phasing the ponies directly into the rock floor, fixing them in place.

"Let me go!" Rarity cried. "You brutes! How dare you-" a Grundel rose his head and shoulders out of the floor and blew knock out gas into Rarity's surprised face. "Ah! You beast...how...I ...uuuhhg..."

The unicorn slumped, still standing with her feet stuck in the floor. The Doctor desperately tried to use his sonic screwdriver on the rock as the Grundels knocked out a cursing and struggling Zecora. "Twilight!"

Twilight turned to the Doctor. "Doctor! Any spell strong enough to overcome their magic could bring the tunnel down on us!"

The Doctor shook his head as the Grundels moved on to him. "Never mind that! You have to get out of here! Teleport!"

"What?!" Twilight said incredulously. "No! I won't abandon my friends!"

"No time!" The Doctor said as a thick cloud of putrid gas encircled his head; he activated the sonic screwdriver in between his teeth. The tip glowed blue through the cloud followed by the distinctive trilling sound.

"Doctor, what-" Twilight said as he horn began to glow and spark wildly. "No! Doctor, don't! I wo-"

The Grundels shouted in alarm as a blinding white light consumed the purple unicorn from her head to her hooves. An instant later all that remained of the trapped pony was the heatless sparks of spent magic and a spherical crater where the magic spell had displaced the rock surrounding her hooves.

"What happened?" The Thinker Grundel demanded. "Where is she?!"

*'It would appear, Brother Granodiorite, that the equine has some mastery of spatial manipulation. Clearly this was the work of a wormhole-based method of matter displacement, as evidenced by the semi-spheroid shape in the floor, the rock having been displaced along with the equine it partially encapsulated.'* signed Fracture, a scholarly look on his face. *'As for your other question, hell if I know.'*

Granodiorite looked at Fracture and blinked. "...Okay. Knock out the last pony and then get them all to the dragon's room, and be quiet about it. It would seem that Brother Gabbro was correct to listen to the ramblings of



the pink pony, otherwise they just might have gotten into contact with the Elders.”

‘*And that would be bad?*’ Slag sighed in confusion. ‘*Why?*’

Granodiorite smiled nervously. “Let’s just say that this business with the dragon is *still* on a strictly need-to-know basis. Now, no more questions.”

‘*Oh hell.*’ Fracture said, slapping his palm against his face. ‘*Brother Gabbro didn’t get fully reinstated, did he?*’

“What part of ‘no more questions’ didn’t you understand?”

Granodiorite growled. “Now, knock out that last pony and get under way!”

‘*Brother Granodiorite?*’ Slag signed. ‘*The yellow pony is already unconscious.*’

Granodiorite turned to a fainted Fluttershy and sighed. “Just...just get them out of the ground and to the dragon’s room, okay?”

The plaza was beginning to get back to normal, the police had cordoned off the area around the stage, and ponies were once again frequenting the many establishments on the street side. Two of the four agents dispatched by Litigia remained on the stage, helping local police officers with forensics and data interpretation.

“Whoever did this was quite good...” a medium sized black furred diamond dog called Knochen said, sniffing a spent canister. “These pyrotechnics are homemade, but clearly high quality. It might have passed for a technical error to a pony’s nose.”

His compatriot, a short sandy furred pug-face diamond dog by the name of Kiefer, nodded. “Yeah. Whoever planned this had some high quality last minute connections. There was no way they could have predicted that the dragon coming here ahead of time. This was a rushed plan, corners were cut.”

“Yeah...” Knochen said with a sigh. “...but nothing directly incriminating. Figures that a plan thought up in maybe an hour will probably take months to solve.”

There was a loud hissing crack followed by a bright flash of light and a blast of hot air. The two diamond dogs flinched and recoiled instinctively as the energized air rolled over them.

“-on’t let you...” said the purple unicorn who had materialized in the middle of the stage. “...do this.”

Knochen cleared his throat and approached the unicorn, she was young, barely even an adult, and yet she had just teleported onstage from Creator-knows-where. That, and she had what appeared to be a large concrete circle around her hooves, making her look comically like a figurine. "Hey! Are you okay?"

She snapped her head around to him, her face lighting up as she hopped up and down to face him. "Oh! You're one of Mr. Stardust's dogs, right? ...and no, no I am not okay. Quick! I need you to-"

Kiefer stepped forward, his confidence bolstered by the apparent weakness he detected in her voice. "Look, I don't know what weird stuff you ponies are into, but you just teleported into an active crime scene. We're going to have to ask you to leave."

"What?" Twilight said incredulously. "No! Listen, I was there when the crime happened, I saw who took the dragon! He was *my* dragon! Now they have my friends and I need Zeitgeist to help me get them back, please!"

"Please..." Knochen rolled his eyes and scoffed. "Hey, yeah. Weren't you one of the ponies that the Duke drove in here with?"

Kiefer nodded and pointed. "Yeah! You were with that other unicorn he picked up. Y'know, if I didn't know any better I'd say that the Duke has taken an interest in...er...'equestrianism'. I know I'd ride that white one!"

Knochen laughed and slapped his knee. "Yeah! To be honest I thought the yellow pegasus was the better looking of the seven!"

Twilight lowered her head and said in a low voice. "Call one of your ornithopters."

The two laughing diamond dogs looked over at her, lascivious smiles still plastered on their faces, Knochen snorted and said. "Yeah, we'll get right onto that. Now, would you kindly teleport away from the crime scene, we have a job to do."

Twilight looked up at them, her horn glowing and spitting sparks, her eyes became luminescent with purple energy, the high pitched whining of huge amounts of channeled energy cut through the air. The rock around her hooves began to glow white hot and melt, running out across the stage, tongues of flame lapping the liquid as it passed over the wooden planks. The glowing unicorn rose from the puddle of liquid rock, unscathed by the intense heat, and levitated over to the stunned diamond dogs, setting down and walking towards them, leaving scorched hoof prints in the wood.

"I'm terribly sorry..." She said, her voice now booming and reverberating with immense power. "...I must have made that sound like a *request*. ***It wasn't***. Call one of your ornithopters."

The two diamond dogs nodded fervently and clambered for their communication crystals, ears flat against their heads and tails wedged between their legs. Knochen bowed, shaking. "Y-y-yes ma'am! I-i-i-is there anything else you require?"

"Other than your silence, nothing!" She said throatily. "Now get out of my sight!!"

The two diamond dogs yelped as she summoned several arcs of electricity as they ran away. Twilight sighed and powered down. *'There is a certain satisfaction to be had from showboating...must be why Trixie does it all the time.'*

A series of claps and cheers drew her attention; in front of the stage was a small group of ponies that had stopped to watch the show. They were smiling and cheering at her 'performance'. Twilight blushed and bowed.

The Doctor's eyes fluttered open, there was a horrid chemical taste in his mouth and his head was still pulsating from what had been a major headache. "...again? I wonder what kind of creature I'll wake up as this time..."

"Doctor!" Pinkie Pie said, a huge smile on her face. "Oh Doctor, you're awake! That's super-duper fantastic!"

The Doctor blinked slowly, the headache had been just out the door, but had now decided to come back in a stay a while. "Hello Pinkie."

Applejack rushed over to The Doctor, a relieved smile on her face. "Hey Professor! You were out for a long time, we were starting to get worried!"

"We?" Rainbow Dash said, rolling her eyes. "Yeah 'we' also kept looking for excuses to perform mouth-to-mouth!"

Applejack cursed under her breath and The Doctor rolled onto his hooves. "Right then! There'll time for mouth to mouth later-"

"That a promise Professor?" Applejack said wryly.

"...Anyway...I have some questions. One: Where are we? And Two: What's going on?"

Pinkie giggled. "Oh that? We're underground in the Grundel City, Section Seven-A-RR5652."

The Doctor rolled his eyes. "Why don't I just ask you about everything to begin with? ...Actually...what's going on Pinkie?"

Pinkie cleared her throat. "Allow me to exposit..."

Rarity blinked in confusion. "Don't you mean 'explain'?"

"I know what I said." Pinkie said cheerily. "Alright, so here's the skinny, the Grundels have been fighting the diamond dogs-"

"Oh!" The Doctor exclaimed happily, causing all heads to turn to him. "Diamond Dogs! I *just* got that! Ziggy Stardust is a Diamond Dog! I love this universe!"

"Well he sure as shootin' ain't a lap dog, that's fer sure!" Applejack said with a chuckle.

"Doctor?" said a familiar voice from the shadows. "Is that you?"

The Doctor turned to see a haggard-looking stallion walking out of the darkened part of the room, a look of dawning relief moving across his features. "Fire Dazzler?"

"Hey!" Rarity said, pointing at the stallion. "Where did you come from?"

"Other room!" Fire Dazzler said, walking towards The Doctor. "I got grabbed by one of those things earlier this morning. He was told to kill me but instead he just knocked me out and brought me here."

Rarity sighed and shook her head. "Okay, but how did you get in *here*? If I recall correctly there are no doors connecting these rooms."

"Yeah, I noticed." Fire Dazzler said bluntly. "The Grundel who spared me, Slag, came into my cell and told me some other ponies were here and asked if I would like to see them. Naturally I said yes and he pushed me through the wall."

The Doctor smiled and looked Fire Dazzler squarely in the eye. "Grundels aren't in the habit of randomly abducting ponies. Would you be a dear and tell us *why* you're here?"

Fire Dazzler stepped back, a nervous smile on his face. "O-oh...uh...see, I was just walking around when this great big thing pops out of the ground and-"

"Ah thought you said he was told to kill you, but didn't." Applejack said, picking up on The Doctor's accusatory tone.

Fire Dazzler sighed. "...Yeah. I was working for some...unpleasant people. They sent the Grundel to kill me to tie up a loose end."

"Fire Dazzler..." The Doctor said lowly. "We're here because we followed a pair of stallions after they kidnapped our friend Spike. See, they used some very advanced pyrotechnics to create a diversion, some very *familiar* advanced pyrotechnics..."

The white pony sighed and nodded his head. "Yeah...they're mine. I helped them."

“What?!” Rainbow Dash said, streaking towards the now cowering stallion. “We’re all here because of you?!”

Fire Dazzler shrieked and recoiled. ‘Aah! Please! Don’t hurt me! It’s not my fault!’

Applejack advanced on him, a cold look in her eyes. “Oh yeah? Care tah explain how it ain’t?”

The cowering stallion hung his head and sighed. “They cornered me in an alley and demanded that I mix a distraction for them! You have to understand, my components aren’t cheap, I made the mistake of asking them to get me a few extra chemicals and I wound up five thousand bits in debt. They said they were calling in that debt and if I didn’t do what they wanted they were going to tear my horn off, crack my hooves, and use something they called ‘Mr. Thingy’! I wouldn’t have done it if there was any other way!”

“Enough from you, you spineless worm!” Zecora bellowed. “If you don’t pay for your mistakes you never learn! A kidnapping was planned by those two chumps, you should have said no and taken your lumps!”

“B-b-but-” Fire Dazzler said, gesturing at his horn.

“Horns grow back!” Rarity said sharply, although somewhat unnerved at the prospect of one being forcefully removed.

“A-a-a-and-” he stammered, waving his hooves in front of himself.

“Hooves heal!” Applejack said with a stomp. “Better tah be hurt than a coward!”

“And Mr. Thingy?” Fire Dazzler said miserably.

“Thingies...um...uhh...” Pinkie Pie said, the righteous tone in her voice giving way to good-natured curiosity. “What’s Mr. Thingy?”

Fire Dazzler shrugged. “I don’t know, but whatever it is it sounded pretty horrible! Have you ever seen a pony try to eat his own head?”

“Yes.” All seven ponies said in unison, followed immediately by a collective shudder.

The Doctor snorted as he made his way over to Spike, who still lay unconscious. “Either way, what’s done is done. Fire Dazzler, who were the two ponies who stole Spike?”

“Shock and Thunder.” He said, voice low with disgust. “They’re basically the muscle behind the ‘not-quite-legal’ elements of Valley City.”

“Mobsters.” The Doctor said, prompting a tentative agreement from Fire Dazzler.

“They are a piece of work those two. Twins you see, they’re big, strong, mean, and cunning, all the best qualities for a criminal but with two

for the price of one. They probably volunteered for the job!" He said with a flick of his mane. "I hope they get theirs one day."

"They're dead." Rarity said bluntly.

"Wuh-what?" Fire Dazzler blinked in surprise. "Who-what-how...wuh..."

"Worker Grundel." Applejack said with a sniff. "Probably had a Thinker around tellin' him what tah do. Nearly squeezed their heads off like tubes of toothpaste. Even with what y'all told me, that's no way tah go."

"Somehow I'll cope." Fire Dazzler said flatly.

The Doctor leveled a serious look at Fire Dazzler. "What else can you tell us about them? Who hired them? Planned the plan. Cunning and actual intellect are two entirely different things, and those two didn't sound like the managerial type to me."

"Yeah, bureaucrats they ain't...weren't." Fire Dazzler scratched his hoof against his chin. "They said their boss was working for some 'old friend' who called in a favor. When I showed up at the stage there was a pony there by the name of Stone Carver. He's the one who told the Grundel to 'dispose of me'."

"What else?"

"Beyond what I've been told or shown, I don't know much else about the whole plot. Like, who this 'friend' is or what they want with the dragon."

"More than you think, actually." said a voice from behind, a tall young Grundel stood in the 'doorway', the wall returning to solid rock as he stepped into the room. "In fact, anyone with a basic understanding of Narragansett lore will be able to connect the dots, as it were. My people lived here millennia before any ponies arrived, and when they did it was my people who helped them to survive. The Grundels and the Narragansetts are very good friends, even if few have ever met face-to-face."

The Doctor turned and locked eyes with the Thinker Grundel, a small chill raced down his back. There was something different about this Grundel, something he couldn't quite place his hoof on. It was like there was something just ever-so-slightly off about him; be it the unusual lack of warmth in his gaze, the emptiness of his smile, or the...the...*flavor* of his aura. All pointed to one thing, he could be no other than...

"Gabbro..." The Doctor said. "...I presume?"

The smile on his troll-like face widened, revealing several sharp teeth. "Guilty. You must be The Doctor. Cheppu has told me so much about you! Allow me to thank you from the bottom of my heart for saving him from the clutches of the Duke."

The Doctor smiled in return, hoping his looked at least more genuine than the tooth-bearing expression on the troll's face. "Naturally I have some questions."

"Naturally."

"The first one being: what are you planning?"

"I am planning to obliterate the diamond dog city and resurrect my people's god." Gabbro said glibly. "If you should like to know any details on the how and why, don't be afraid to ask."

The Doctor blinked in confusion, masterminds were usually a little cagier than this. "What...really?"

"Really."

"You're...just going to tell me? No monologue? No gloating? No 'and there's nothing you can do to stop me. Bwa-hah-hah'? Just answers?"

The Grundel shrugged. "Just answers. We are allies are we not? At least that's what Cheppu told me about you."

"Oooh..." The Doctor said slowly. "Okay, sorry. It's just that usually when I infiltrate a kidnapper's base and get captured more often than not there's some by-the-book adversarial banter involved."

The Grundel cocked his head in confusion before smiling. "Ah yes, I can see how your arrival and current accommodations would lead you to suspect villainy. But trust me, the side you have allied with is of the utmost righteousness!"

The Doctor nodded turning to the gathered ponies behind him, giving them a knowing wink. "Let me take care of this, all I want you to do is listen." He turned back to Gabbro. "Alright...ally. What's the plan for those pesky diamond dogs?"

Gabbro chuckled and nodded. "Indeed. For the years I have been constructing and crafting new and inventive ways to destroy that mine, each having been met with some degree of success, but nothing that could yet be called a solid victory. That is until I follow through with this plan!"

*'Lucky for me even Thinker Grundels are abnormally credulous beings...'* The Doctor nodded, expertly feigning enthusiasm. "Ooh! Tell me!"

The Grundel paused, eyeing The Doctor suspiciously. "Aren't you going to ask me why I've been attacking the mine?"

"The mountain serves as an enormous prison for a single evil entity known a Tirac..." Gabbro barely suppressed a flinch. "...Sorry, forgot about that. Anyway, long story short: mountain is prison for the personification of pure evil and the dogs are breaking down the walls. I've been through this before."

Gabbro nodded. "Very succinct. So, in recent times I've postulated that attacking the mine isn't good enough, we must attack the miners as well. For a while this worked, but it still wasn't getting the desired results and the dogs weren't wasting any time. Luckily inspiration struck, as it usually does, while I was walking the tunnels around the mountain. Without the miners, the mine will erode and collapse by them selves. Without miners all the machines we break will stay broken. Without miners, there is no mine! My solution?"

"Get rid of the miners?" The Doctor said.

"Yes!" Gabbro said triumphantly.

"How?" The Doctor pushed. "I was at the mine when your squad attacked. They were slaughtered! How are you going to kill all of the miners in the diamond dog city outside the valley?"

Gabbro sighed and ducked his head. "At first I attempted to have it undermined, but the rock proved too stable to feasibly create a sinkhole. For the longest time the secret tunnels connecting Grundel City and the base of the diamond dog city went unused. That is until late one night my spies reported that a dragon had been sighted in Valley City! One last time inspiration hit me, if I can get the dragon down here, I can destroy the diamond dog city and bring about a new age for my people all in one fell swoop!"

"How?" The Doctor said, eyes wide.

Gabbro opened his mouth to explain before being cut off by a curt buzzing sound. He grunted in annoyance and reached down into his cloak, producing a small crystal ear bud connected to another crystal that hung over the eye. "Brother Gabbro speaking...you have? Good! Everything's going according to plan!" He turned to The Doctor. "I'm sorry, but this conversation will have to wait."

"Oh by all means!" The Doctor said before stomping his hoof in frustration once the Grundel had left. "So close!"

The Doctor spun around on his hooves, facing his companions. "Alright! Does anypony have any theories?"

The ponies each began to reassess the information given. There were huge chunks missing and nothing really seemed to add up.

"Wait..." Pinkie Pie said slowly. "Earlier today Gabbro said something about resurrecting their god! I think that's the big piece here!"

The Doctor nodded, hoof to his chin. "Yes...but how? It has something to do with Spike, probably some kind of arcane ritual. But how is that going to destroy the diamond dog city at the same time?"



“Hey...” Fire Dazzler said, all heads turning to him. “...I think...Doctor! The volcano! Mount Calcipher!”

“The volcano?” The Doctor’s eyes widened as a revelation struck him. “The volcano! A stratovolcano! On a shield! Named Mount Calcipher! No, no, no, no...yes! That is far too big of a coincidence!”

“What’re y’all talkin’ about?” Applejack said.

Fire Dazzler turned to her, an excited look on his face. “Last night...wow it’s only been a few hours since this thing started? Anyway, last night I met The Doctor and told him about the Valley’s features. He then said that a volcano like this one couldn’t happen on a shield, which is a continent-sized slab of solid rock. Now, not many people know this about Mount Calcipher, but it wasn’t always called that. The true name has been largely phased out in favor of the catchier one. It was called Calcipher Del Montressar Del Fasin. Roughly translated, it means...”

“Let me guess...” Rarity said. “It means ‘Calcipher’s Resting Place’?”

Fire Dazzler nodded before The Doctor said. “No...that’s not what it means.”

“It’s not?” Fire Dazzler said curiously.

“No...” The Doctor said quietly. “It means ‘The Resting Place of Calcipher’s Heart’. The heart of a Dragon God lies imbedded deep in the basalt; even dormant it produces enough energy to melt hundreds of millions of cubic meters of rock. And Gabbro wants it.”

“But if it’s in the center of a huge pocket of magma...” Fluttershy said. “...Oh my...the tunnels! The tunnels under the diamond dog city!”

“To get the heart of the dragon slain, a red hot caldera he first must drain!” Zecora said, picking up on Fluttershy’s train of thought. “If into these tunnels it does go, a city destroyed in a single blow!”

“Even if he successfully siphons some of the magma into the tunnels and toward the city, it will still cause an eruption in the valley!” The Doctor said. “Gabbro could very well destroy both cities!”

Gabbro watched the ponies as they plotted and schemed in their cell, the imager crystal in his quarters flickering in the blue-lit room.. They were clever, he gave them that, clever enough to figure out his plan from information given and information apparent. They were dangerous; this revelation regarding the extermination of all pony life in the valley would surely turn them against him, had they been with him to begin with.

*'You think I'm a fool, Doctor?' Gabbro thought to himself. 'You think I'm just another stumbling Grundel, trusting and naïve? Such an oversight will cost you dearly Time Lord!' Gabbro blinked in confusion. 'Time Lord? What's a Time Lord? ...It's true though...he's...familiar...from before...from...from...'* Gabbro suddenly felt a stabbing pain behind his eyes. "Aaah!"

"Hello Gabbro..." The Entity said coldly. "...I must congratulate you. Most creatures do not think to question their own thoughts."

"What..." Gabbro said. "Who..."

"I think you know." The Entity said through Gabbro's mouth. "In fact, you been aware of me for quite some time. Every time you pondered your plans, every time you sent your Workers out to kill, every time there was a small part of you rebelling wholesale against it; the part of you that detested violence, the part of you that would sooner chew off his own tongue than contemplate evil, the... *Grundel* part of you. The part that *we* suppressed!" The Entity laughed a cruel laugh from the Grundel's mouth. "It took me so long to get this far inside your soul. So, so long...a testament to my old friend's craftsmanship, don't you think?"

"No...not *you*..." Gabbro said, horror thick in his voice. "...That's...that's impossible!"

"Oh, *nearly!*" The Entity said, the geniality in its voice belying the sardonic cruelty edging each word. "Over a decade of conscious effort to corrupt a *single* Grundel to the point of 'well-intentioned extremism'!"

"No..." He said, lifting his hands up to his ears in a vain attempt to ignore it.

"Yes!" He could feel it smiling with his face. "Even though I got to you when you were but a sprout, it still took me this long to nurture and grow such things as ambition and ego into you! Such things were necessary, you see, to get you to justify your actions to yourself!"

"No!" Gabbro squeezed his eyes shut.

"You would ignore the sickening guilt for the high of victory, the recognition from your peers, the adulation! You reveled in it! The knowledge that the Elders envied your prowess, your popularity, your skill; that you had something they could never have! The superiority you felt, the energy within you! It was intoxicating, wasn't it?"

"NO!!" Gabbro shouted, terror transforming to anger. "I am a Grundel! I am beyond such things!"

It laughed thickly, the smugness in its voice matched on by the contempt. "Beyond? The big lizard designed you without those aspects of your souls *in order* for you to detect them when my presence affected

them! You are deficient! Parts missing! I had to build them from scratch and it wasn't easy!" The Thing snorted in disgust. "It figures that the old lizard would think of something so novel as broken goods to win a war. If I could feel respect, it would be for him..." It bounced right back to the genial sounding contempt from before. "...What better victory for me than to corrupt his malformed little freaks, hmmm?"

"Beast! Monster!" Gabbro growled. "The diamond dogs will not release you! You have shown yourself too soon! My plan will be carried out and the city will be destroyed! Your hubris will cost you your freedom!"

It chuckled through his mouth. "Young fool... 'your plan' is nothing of the sort! It was I who formulated it and placed it in your mind! Your arrogance blinded you to the fact that this particular idea had materialized from nowhere! You actually thought that it was of your own conception, that you had become so brilliant that contemplation was no longer necessary!"

Gabbro blinked in confusion. "...But why? Why formulate a plan to kill off the diamond dogs? Were they not destroying your prison?"

"Mortals..." It groaned. "You think in such three-dimensional terms...do you actually believe that I physically inhabit that mountain? That one day those stupid mutts would just break through a wall and I would be standing there, rattling a tin cup on my cell's bars?"

"I..." Gabbro said, a terrible realization dawning on him. "They...they never could have unleashed you? They could have dug up every gem in that mountain and not have made you manifest?"

"I *am* the mountain...it holds me entirely, my degenerate consciousness forever bonded to the crystal lattices of its contents." He could feel the hideous joy of The Entity surge through him, It was enjoying this immensely. "In fact, they were the only true threat to my existence I have ever encountered. Tearing my very being apart and fashioning crude technology from it, their clumsy spell imprinting destroying my patterns in the crystal. Had they continued..." Gabbro felt his ribs tighten as It barely suppressed a mad cackle of sadistic glee; it whispered through his lips. "...I would have ceased to be..."

Gabbro fell to his knees. "But...but...we were left here to prevent you from escaping...how could we have been so wrong?"

"Your people are naturally kind, generous, and loving...the perfect people to preside over my incarceration." It said with disgust. "The dogs are not blameless, the penetration of the first barrier over fifteen years ago had allowed me to extend my consciousness beyond my prison. At first I tried to corrupt the diamond dogs; they are greedy and driven, perfect for my purposes. However, the mine was far too successful, spirits were much too

high. Each miner was paid well, cared for, each one felt valued and content and in my weakened state I was unable to overcome such positive energy." The low tone of loathing entered its voice again. "That blasted Duke, his miners idolized him, he was a bright spot in their dark tunnels, gave them hope...disgusting." Its voice took on the cruel mocking tone again. "So I turned to you."

"Me?" Gabbro whispered.

"You." It confirmed. "Even amongst the nicest of peoples there are malcontents. I could see it in you from the beginning, that there was just enough of *me* within you to corrupt. I seeded your young mind with the beginnings of aggression and ambition. Tirelessly I nurtured them until they ruled your personality, until the driven young Grundel who had enjoyed a meteoric rise in influence was well and truly...mine."

"Wh-what makes you think I'll help you?!" Gabbro demanded, fully aware of his eroding willpower. "My purpose in life is your imprisonment! How-"

"Silence." It demanded calmly, Gabbro obeyed. "You can talk about your purpose in life and your duty as a Grundel until the stars choke to death on their own bodies, but that won't change the fact that all Gabbro cares about is Gabbro. Regardless of what you told yourself, you joined the missions to sabotage the mines not out of some kind of sense of righteousness, but for the fame, for the hero's treatment you got from your peers! You knew you were special, and you would do anything to make your Elders acknowledge it! You took command! You killed! You maimed! You wrought such terrible carnage! You strengthened me enough to influence you more! All in the name of Calcipher!"

"I...didn't...oh no..." Gabbro sobbed. "What have I done?!"

"You have joined the winning team, my friend." The Entity said, the comforting tone in its voice almost genuine sounding...almost. "Through me, you will gain fame and power beyond your wildest dreams! Command armies as they roll across this pathetic planet, spreading my glory from pole to pole! The whole world will know and fear the name Gabbro! So...are you going to join me, or will I collapse your soul and use your meat to carry out my plan anyway?"

Gabbro nodded and buried his head in his hands. "Why...why must the diamond dog city be destroyed then?"

"Good..." The Entity said. "...Why? Forty eight thousand two hundred and sixty three souls screaming in fear and agony as they are immolated by magma and super-heated gas will give me the misery and fear that I

need to reactivate The Source of Darkness!" The Entity said triumphantly before adding. "Also spite."

"And the pony city?" Gabbro said numbly.

"Icing on the cake..." It said. "Speaking of equines. I want you to escort The Time Lord and his pony friends out of the cell and to a more secure location. Once I am free I shall pay them a visit. The Doctor will watch his precious friends die in agony, the sweet music of their screams shall be the only thing he hears for the rest of eternity!"

"Who is he?" Gabbro said, rising to his feet.

"An old acquaintance..." The Entity said, barely keeping a quiver of rage out of its voice. "From before...I will enjoy our time together Doctor! Oh yes, / will enjoy it thoroughly! Gabbro! Continue with the plan!"

"Yes..." the Grundel said quietly.

He stopped; his back ramrod stiff and The Entity spoke once more. "Call me by my name."

"Y-yes..." Gabbro choked out, resisting the urge to vomit. "...Luh-Lord Tirac..."

# CHAPTER 6

## FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND YEARS AGO

Terrified creatures huddled together on the scorched earth, hiding beneath the immolated remains of a tree. Beneath their paws the ground shook as shockwaves from far distant explosions pelted their quaking bodies. At once the explosions stopped and one of the creatures opened up its eyes and looked skyward. Filling the smoke choked skies were the unmistakable shapes of dragons. Huge, ancient, and powerful beyond measure, the dragons had decades ago assembled into an army to fight the Tainted Ones. The following war between The Corruptor and the assembled might of all of the world's gods had devastated the planet. Terra, Equine Goddess of Matter, had torn entire continents asunder to halt the hordes; her mate Radian, the Equine God of Energy, had vaporized whole populations of corrupted beings; all in a desperate effort to prevent Him from gaining more power. The Beast drew strength from all his followers, their hatred and malice made manifest in the form of a grotesque second skin that covered them from head to toe. This armor of living evil would then torture the purified creature residing within it. All the pain, all the terror, and all the misery of these poor souls fed His dread magics to the point where he could challenge the gods themselves!

The creature shielded its eyes as an enormous flash engulfed the horizon, followed by another, and another, and ten more like it in quick procession. Huge mushroom clouds reached into the sky, the smoke and dust of the debris clouds barely choking out the light from the massive fireballs within as they rose into the heavens. The dragon army had arrived; their ancient and potent magic coupled with their sheer physical power was razing the earth beneath the distant battlefield in a flurry of fire and monstrous explosions.

The creature smiled. Even though his world was destroyed; even though billions of creatures sentient and bestial alike had died screaming in the fiery desperation of the gods; even though he and his few remaining kin may well be the last of their kind left alive on this burning world. He still smiled. He smiled because *He* was losing. The Beast. The Corruptor. Holder of The Source of Darkness. The Demon God Tirac was *losing*. He

had been losing for months, ever since the gods had found a way to detect the taint of His magic early enough to neutralize the infected before they became new sources of power. Entire populations were obliterated, whole species wiped out before they could become His servants. The gods and dragons had been thorough, and now Tirac was forced to fight them by himself. Both Equine Gods had raced overhead hours ago to meet him in his last stand, their battle with the Demon God only seemed to gain ferocity the longer they fought. Despite His diminished power He was still an unimaginably powerful being, the hate and misery of decades of global war had fed into Him, even against the most powerful of the Elemental Gods Radian and Terra He was still a formidable foe. But all that was soon to change, the dragon army was but the harbinger of a greater power, a god unlike any other.

The creature felt it before he heard it, a static prickling sensation on the side of his body facing the approaching force. He turned to see Him. The great one. The last hope of this dying world. Calcipher the Dragon God. The creature squealed in joy and ran after the behemoth, eager to see the downfall of He who had wrought such terrible suffering. The tiny shape raced across the desolate landscape heedless of the danger; if his defeat was the last thing he ever saw, then his race would die content.

He soared overhead, gaining altitude, his massive length belying his speed; on a wingspan three kilometers wide from tip to tip the giant god hurtled towards the battlefield, his adamantine scales glittering in the refracted light of the many fires dotting the landscape. The polluted air electrified and arced as his body surged through it at supersonic speeds, creating a trail of lightning and plasma behind him. His enormous jet black spikes extending and sharpening as he drew closer, his jaws opening to reveal hundreds of ten-meter long teeth, the inside of his mouth glowing from within as he concentrated his incredible energy. As the battlefield quickly approached he could see his children relentlessly attacking a figure over seven hundred meters tall and at least a kilometer long. In body he was similar to a grey ungulate, a grotesque looking torso sprouting from where a neck should have been. The skin of this protuberance was an alarming crimson color with thick swaths of dark grey-blue fur about the head and shoulders in a sort of sardonic mockery of a manticore's mane. On his shoulders was a somewhat spherical head encased in blue-grey fur; his bald red face was flat and hideous and his ears were immobile flaps on

the side of his head, each one perched below long shiny black horns much like a bull's.

Tirac.

Tirac struck down dozens of his dragons as he haggardly fended off the quick and powerful attacks of this world's remaining Elemental Gods. Radian, a huge blindingly white stallion with a swirling luminescent mane of corporeal light, leapt at the beast with hooves outstretched, encasing them in destructive concentrated light. Tirac aimed a blast from his mouth at the Elemental, only to have the attack blocked by a summoned wall of neutron-degenerate matter willed into existence by Terra, a massive mare of the richest earth brown with a glittering mane of flowing diamonds. The evil energy destroyed the neutron matter almost instantly, but the ruse was effective; Radian had time to convert his entire kilometer long body into pure photons. From every angle Radian struck Tirac with the fury of an exploding star, each blow causing cracks to appear in the demon's giant body. Tirac roared in fury and reached out, grabbing the lightspeed God by the throat. He laughed and began to squeeze, attempting to crush the equine's head off. A monomolecular edged blade of neutron matter shot up from the ground and severed the beast's arm at the elbow. Tirac roared a scream of pain and rage as the severed arm decayed into simple stone, shattering to dust on the ground. The equines stood at the ready, a literal cloud of dragons formed behind them, ready to unleash their fury alongside the gods.

"You think you've beaten me?" Tirac said through gritted teeth, defiled black blood leaking through his fingers as he clutched the wound. "You think just because you wiped out all your precious creatures that I can no longer draw strength from them?" he reached into the pulsating sack around his neck, sliding his remaining hand into it and pulling out a ball of pure non-matter, The Source of Darkness; its thick black aura shivering and fluctuating wildly as it levitated above his hand. "They are in here, feeding me for all eternity! Just you wait...you'll pay dearly for this outrage..."

Radian and Terra flung themselves at him, only to have thick black tendrils of non-energy whip out from The Source and carve long deep wounds into their necks and sides, drawing the incandescent essence of the universe that is the blood of gods.

Tirac cackled with glee as the last two Elementals collapsed before him, wounded but alive. "You still don't get it, do you? Aggression makes it stronger! Hate makes it grow! You cannot attack it! You cannot defeat it! And through it...I. Am. **Immortal!**"



He raised his hand, the throbbing mass of unreality convalescing into a red and black ball of destruction, the smile on Tirac's face that of insane and desperate rage. "And now! I shall annihilate this pathetic planet and start anew elsewhere! There is so much life out there, so much potential misery!" Tirac felt warmth against his back, light from behind him bathing the battlefield in an almost serene glow. "Gaze upon your sun one last time! For this world will never see another day!"

Radian smiled through a grimace of pain, a thick chuckle rising from his throat. "Hate to break it to you Tirac...but sunrise isn't for another ten minutes."

The hideous smile on the demon's face dropped instantly, replaced by dawning realization and then terror. "...No..."

He spun around to see Calcipher as he hovered tens of kilometers above them, the energy emanating from his mouth now a small supernova of light. Calcipher smiled mockingly as he prepared to fire.

"NO!! YOU DIE!!" Tirac bellowed, hurling the death ball at the dragon god. Calcipher roared and unleashed his attack; a coherent beam of pure destructive power lanced through the air, impacting the demonic ball of energy as it arch towards Calcipher. The sphere of death blew apart and dispersed like a cloud under the onslaught of the Dragon God's power. Tirac's eyes went wide as the pillar of destruction bared down on him, bellowing a scream of mortal terror and utter panic before being washed away by the righteous blast.

The attack carved into the solid rock like it wasn't even there. It sliced a molten channel a kilometer wide clean through the planet. The Equine Gods gathered around the hole as it filled up with molten magma from the planet's core. Calcipher set down on the ground, causing it to tremor and shake. The dragon god reared up to his full height of over sixteen hundred meters, he curled his massive wings to his side and turned to his friends.

"He's still alive." He said in his booming reverberating voice. "As I feared, an attack made in anger, regardless of the damage dealt, will never completely kill him."

A twisted and blackened hand rose out of the magma, sending ropey strands of molten rock flinging out of the caldera. The hand and arm were horribly damaged; bone and tissue visible through the many lacerations and burns, the thick black ichor that pulsed from the wounds seemed to eat the light around it. The hand clutched at the rocky ground with skeletal fingers and began to pull. The body that rose out of the liquid rock was all that remained of the fiend who had pillaged and tortured the planet for decades; his quadruped portion had been completely destroyed by the

blast, leaving only the bizarre torso to pathetically crawl from the searing hot rock. His entire mane along with whole sections of his formerly adamantine skin had been flayed from his body, revealing bone, muscle, and viscera. He dragged himself forward with his remaining arm, a slimy section of exposed intestine caught on a hardened spire of molten glass, pulling his insides out of his side as he wriggled towards his victorious enemies. The arm steadied as the loathsome creature reared up, raising his shoulders to face them. Much of the skin on his head had been burned, areas of white skull visible through the patches where the force of the blast had sheared it away. His ears were melted stubs surrounding raw holes on the sides of his head; the once long sharp horns had been shattered, leaving only stumps of fractured bone and exposed nerves. Where his searing red eyes had been there was now destroyed craters, tears of liquefied tissue and jelly running down his shredded cheeks.

“Bastards...” he croaked, several broken teeth and the tattered remains of his tongue were visible through the jagged holes in his face, they moved and twitched as he spoke. “That...*hurt*...I’ll kill...yuh...I’ll chew on your hearts! Smash your skulls! Eat your souls!!”

A multitude of neutron-matter spikes shot up from the ground, impaling the gurgling remains in ten different places; the beast yelped in pain, its wretched whimpering degrading into mocking laughter. “...I cannot die you stupid horse! Heh-heh...the...the only thing you’ve killed is your precious planet! Hehehehehehe-AH-HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!”

Calcipher growled and shot a single blast of energy into the jabbering corpse’s back, blasting away chunks of bone and tissue. “You brag and brag about your precious immortality, but you will soon see your touted spell for the curse it truly is!”

“Calcipher! Don’t-” Radian ran up to Calcipher only to be casually swatted away by his wing.

Calcipher leaned over the wound, a dark and wriggling organ visible at the bottom of the oozing crater. “For what you’ve done you *deserve* to live forever...”

The dragon god’s head shot downwards, his massive jaws digging deep into the wound, grabbing hold of their target with jagged ten-meter diamond teeth. Tirac screamed in agony as the giant god pulled back slowly, his screaming rose with the wet tearing sound of rending flesh, both reaching a crescendo as Calcipher snapped his head back, a pulsating lump of ichor-spewing flesh between his great jaws. The corpse fell limp and the color faded from it, leaving only a stone statue of the great beast.

Left to its devices the single lump of tissue would regenerate, Calcipher snapped his head back and swallowed the heart in a single gulp. He extended his wings and rose into the air, calling down to his friends. "Terra! Radian! You know what to do!"

"Calcipher!" Terra shouted up at him, tears in her eyes. "It has been our honor to call you our ally!"

"It has been my honor to call you my friends!" He called back.

He grunted and concentrated, his internal furnace obliterating the flesh he had swallowed, destroying every semblance of Tirac's physical form and leaving only his degenerate essence within him. In its weakened state Tirac's soul could not hope to corrupt the great god...yet. But now that his past physical form was destroyed, it had imbued itself permanently into his tissues. Had he simply destroyed the heart, this evil spirit would roam the universe until a suitable host could be found, protected from them in its immaterial state.

Calcipher felt the depraved soul trapped within him and chuckled. "Enjoy your stay..."

Calcipher gritted his teeth and roared, a powerful glow beginning to shine through his chest. He bellowed in pain as the light began to move from his chest and into his throat. As his heart moved away from his chest his great body began to stiffen and petrify, becoming simple inanimate gemstones. The glowing heart moved into his mouth and he shot it down to the ground, it impacted the solid bedrock and burrowed deep into the shield. Calcipher crossed his arms over his chest and tucked his head and long neck down alongside his belly, his huge wings encapsulating his entire body as the last vestiges of life bled away. The bulk shifted in midair before plummeting to the ground, it impacted directly across from where his heart had fell. The force of the huge body falling caused his legs to shatter spectacularly, sending shards of every type of gemstone out in all directions. The wings cracked but stayed intact, burying themselves into the ground. The body glittered and shone, an entire mountain of crystallized minerals; even in death Calcipher was an astounding sight.

Terra hobbled forwards, tears in her eyes as she struggled to maintain the necessary concentration to perform her task. "For the sake of all beings I do this..." Rock began to snake around the corpse, encasing it. "...Your body will be transformed..." the gems inside began to shift and change into a great spire. "May Tirac's evil be forgotten, and from the ashes of our world may a new one grow, a world of peace and prosperity. In a world such as this there will be no place for Tirac...or us. Within me I carry the seed of the new gods, the daughters of Matter and Energy. It will

be their job to maintain this world for the good of the universe. The name Calcipher will live on in legend, but the knowledge of your death will not.”

Radian shot into the air and obliterated the petrified remains of Tirac, carving a gash several kilometers deep into the rock. He set down beside his mate and flicked his shimmering mane. “As for you Tirac, this new world will never degrade enough for you to rise again. For the rest of time you will be contained, fully aware and fully conscious of the outside world. Your need to corrupt and kill will continue unabated and go insatiate. It will torment you until the end of time. For now and forever...good bye.”

The creature rushed to the battlefield, the great Elemental Gods were levitating into the air, flanked on all sides by thousands of dragons. Serenely, they rose into the thick clouds of smoke and dust. Tirac was gone...but so was Calcipher. The creature strode forwards, for where there had been a relatively flat plane, there was now a single enormous spire jutting out of the landscape. The creature looked around hopelessly, disappointment rising. For all he had suffered at the hands of Tirac, he had not been there for his defeat. The creature shuffled towards the mountain, the ground was still too hot to touch in places, a misplaced step on a loose piece of rubble sent the creature sprawling. He looked over at the offending piece of debris; it appeared to be a simple rock, aside from its odd shape there was nothing out of the ordinary about it. There was a thunderous boom overhead, he looked up to see a huge shockwave spreading out over the sky, the thick cover of smoke and dust parting as the blast moved through it. Amazingly, the shockwave continued far beyond what was possible, sweeping the skies of the scars of war. All over the globe fires were extinguished, smoke and ruin purged from the sky. The creature felt a familiar heated sensation on his back; slowly he turned around to see the sun rise over the scarred landscape. As the sun rose he lifted his hand in front of his face, the brilliant light too much for his sensitive eyes. As they adjusted he noticed a beautiful glimmering in front of him, the light of the sun reflected off of something on the ground that split the light into all the beautiful colors of the rainbow. He scurried forth and picked it up, it was an enormous diamond.

“Cherish that.” said a voice from behind. The creature spun around to see a small brown equine clothed in strange fabrics. “Remember the simple beauty of things like this. The sun rising, a cloudless blue sky, a shiny rock you found on the ground...you have to cherish those things. Because when

you stop cherishing those simple things, you begin to lose focus on what's truly worthwhile. Soon you see nothing as beautiful or wonderful and the world becomes grey and pointless. Really, it's that sort of thing that got Tirac going in the first place. So, it's up to you to keep perspective, to make the world that Calcipher wanted possible. You think you can do that?"

The creature stared at the stallion and held his diamond up to the sun. "Yes...yes I think I can."

The stallion smiled broadly and made his way towards a box that the creature hadn't seen until that point. The stallion stopped and turned to him once more. "By the way...what are you anyway?"

His ears perked up and he blinked. "A stone wolf...why?"

"No reason..." The stallion said before stepping into the box. "...It's just nice to know where that lot came from! You stay out of trouble; you've got a species to create!"

The door slammed shut and a wonderful sound began to emanate from the box, warm blasts of energized air caused the stone wolf's fur to stand on end. After a moment the box was gone, leaving only a rapidly fading whirling sound in its wake.

(Dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da etc)

## DOCTOR WHOOVES

### Episode 2

#### The Mines of Dragon Mountain: Part 6

##### Starring:

The Doctor

Twilight Sparkle

Pinkie Pie

Rainbow Dash

Applejack

Fluttershy

Zecora

Rarity

Spike

##### Featuring:

Zeitgeist Stardust

Litigia Statute

Gabbro

Fire Dazzler

Tirac

Zeitgeist snorted and jostled himself awake. What time was it? How long had he been sleeping? Where-

He sniffed the air, the smell of eggs and roast Tartary lamb chops wafted in the air. A sharp tightness in his stomach followed by a loud growl chased away all thoughts of worry and subterfuge. He sat up from the couch, blinking sleep out of his eyes as he looked around. He saw Litigia sitting across the room, a pot of steaming coffee sat in the middle of the table as she set down her mug.

She smiled at him and gestured at the food. "Afternoon Zeit. I hope you had a good nap."

"Evidently, if it's afternoon..." he said with a yawn, getting to his feet and making his way towards her. "How long?"

"Three hours, enough for a diamond dog." she said as she poured him a cup of coffee. "But a little shallow by pony standards."

He chuckled and took his mug. "I manage. Lit, once again I don't regret taking your advice! I feel great! And hungry, too..." he sat down and began to eat voraciously, hardly chewing his eggs and noisily masticating the Tartary lamb chop. "Mmh! My compliments to the chef!"

"Thank you sir." She said, sipping her coffee and levitating a hay-fry into her mouth. "Now that you are in a better head space, I feel I must inform you of something. Your friend Rarity and all of her friends are allied with The Doctor."

"I know." He said glibly, sipping his coffee. "That's how I knew he was an imposter, remember?"

"No, I mean they're allied with him *right now*. He collected them and now they can't be found."

Zeit paused and put down his mug. "How do we know this?"

"I sent some of our operatives to investigate a kidnapping this morning." She said with a sigh. "Some ponies kidnapped Spike as he was opening the Narragansett celebration. Rarity called to ask you for help, but since you were asleep I decided to send Feist and three other agents to facilitate the search. They claim that upon arrival The Doctor had already made contact with our guests and they escaped shortly afterwards."

"Feist has reported back?" Zeit said with an exasperated exhalation.

"He left Kiefer and Knochen to assist in the investigation. He and Hahnenkamm returned here to fill out the paperwork." She nibbled another hay-fry. "A dog after my own heart."

"Indeed..." Zeitgeist sighed. "That Doctor must be gathering them up to help his Grundel friends! Especially if that Ms. Sparkle is with him...if Celestia gets involved this whole thing is over!"

"Perhaps that's for the better?" Litigia said cautiously. "Zeit, this situation has gotten out of hand. Maybe closing it down would be the best option."

"No..." he said lowly.

She continued, her voice soft but with the kind of strength in it that diamond dogs instinctively recognize. "It would be bloodless and relatively inexpensive. We have plenty of jobs for the miners in other mines, or even in the city..."

"No." he said, more firmly.

"...Which isn't even dependent on the mine revenue anymore." She said, her voice increasing in firmness in tandem with his. "And you've got ten other mines that would be more than able to fill in for lost gem production! Zeit, the company could get along just as well without Kaffelerram Mine. It's just a matter of allocating appropriate resources away fr-"

"NO!!" Zeit roared, slamming his powerful diamond dog arms down on the table, shattering it into splinters, Litigia jumped back with a yelp. "We will not abandon this mine!!"

His rage suddenly dropped as he saw Litigia's face, her large green eyes wide in fear. "...Oh...oh Lit I'm sorry...I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to, I just..."

She carefully made her way towards him, stepping over the splintered remains of the table. "Zeit. Tell me, why are you so adamant about this? I know you, this isn't like you!"

He buried his face in his hands and sighed. "It means more to me than money, prestige, reputation, even my own life! Were it not for this mine I wouldn't be the dog I am today!"

"Yes." She said with a nod. "Your success here made you famous! It makes sense that you'd feel attachment to it-"

"No, you don't understand." He looked up at her with silver grey eyes. "Without this mine I would not be a duke, I wouldn't be Zeitgeist Stardust!"

"What?"

He straightened the fur on top of his head out with his hand. "I never told you this Lit, I guess I was ashamed. I have every right to be ashamed too! I wasn't born the legitimate heir to the Duchy of Sternenstaub; rather I was the firstborn of my father's favorite mistress. A bastard of sorts, born at the same time as the rightful heir."

Litigia gasped. "How did you...?"

"My father deemed me legitimate on my mother's deathbed, took me in as his son and raised me alongside my brother Lohengramm." Zeitgeist



scoffed and continued. "We were friends he and I, like brothers but distant enough to not hate one another."

"What happened?"

"It all started twenty years ago." Zeitgeist said as he swallowed sadness. "When our father Duke Barbarossa Stardust died he was naturally the rightful heir. But at that time I had fallen into good relations with Archduke Steinkoff and several other nobles, they felt that I was the more eligible option for the position of duke. Lohengramm was...brilliant but lazy is a good way to put it. He wasn't remotely the kind of person who would benefit the court by holding such power. According to the Archduke, since I held the title of legitimate heir it was well within my right to challenge the inheritance if I had another equally powerful noble to be my patron."

"Which you did." Litigia said, already formulating an idea of where this story was going.

"I first offered to take the role off his hands, to take a job he never really wanted. But he was adamant about following father's will and I was forced to challenge him." Zeitgeist flicked a piece of rubble. "I was such a fool back then..."

"What happened, Zeit?" Litigia implored. "What did you do?"

"We tried every form of contest under the sun, each one of them ending in a tie. We were so evenly matched you see. But then the Archduke suggested the Trial of Diamonds, an ancient contest where we were tied together at the ankle and given specially sharpened diamonds. The way they were sharpened insured that no lasting damage could be inflicted, as it was primarily a test of endurance. We blocked and parried and slashed for hours on end, until we were both too exhausted to fight. It was only then that the Archduke revealed that any challenge of inheritance towards nobles above the rank of viscount was considered an act of treason, and that I was to be executed for my crime." Zeit's voice took on a heavy quality, like he was on the verge of tears. "We both began to protest, forgetful that we were tied together at the ankle. We tripped and fell...and when I got up he didn't. I'd accidentally stabbed him through the heart, killing him instantly."

Litigia gasped and pulled herself close to him. "Oh Celestia! I'm so sorry Zeit!"

He inhaled sharply, holding his composure. "The Archduke was planning to get rid of me the entire time, if my brother had been duke he would have gone to me for advice. I would have become his advisor and duke if anything had happened to him...Steinkoff wanted to be rid of me so that he could take advantage of Lohengramm's disinterest in politics to

drive the Sternenstaub fortune into his own pocket. He was ready to have the imperial guards shoot me on the spot had the Emperor not stepped in. The Emperor had seen Steinkoff's plan for what it was, and knew that the power vacuum caused by the death of the Sternenstaub family would upset the chain of command for much of the nobility. As such, he simply banished me, decreeing that I was not to return until I had proven my abilities as a duke and leader." He turned to Litigia with a bit of a smirk. "That's a fancy way of saying 'don't come back until you've made a lot of money'. In this case, a billion bits or approximately one fifth of my father's net worth at the time of his death. I was stripped of my name, rank, and resources; even my birth certificate and each and every official document holding my name were placed in storage. Zeitgeist Stardust ceased to be as far as the government was concerned."

Litigia looked down at the floor. "...So you came here, to this mine. Your success here not only made you famous, but it made you *you* again. It allowed you to uphold your father's name and avenge your brother's death."

Zeit nodded. "I built the first machines used to mine that mountain with my own two hands! The whole thing was going under when I bought it, but it was still several hundred thousand bits to buy the land and get a permit. I had no money; my assets were frozen, so I had to work for it. For five years I wandered around doing odd jobs and selling my ideas on technology to tycoons for pocket change until I made enough money to buy the mountain."

"You sold your designs and technology?" Litigia said disbelievingly. "How are you still able to claim copyright?"

Zeitgeist shrugged. "I withheld the fact that I still maintained patents and copyrights for said technology back in my home country. The fact that Zeitgeist Stardust didn't exist on paper at that point made the whole thing a non-issue as far as patent offices were concerned." He smiled and winked. "But when I suddenly existed again, all the predated paperwork came out of storage to say that I had patented the ideas years ago. Yet another thing that got Stardust Gems Inc going was the seizure and liquidation of assets belonging to those in possession of 'stolen' patents."

"You magnificent bastard." Litigia said in awe. "You should write a book."

"I just might..." he said thoughtfully.

Litigia shuffled up next to him, a smile on her face. "So you went back to the empire, got your name and rank back, and came back here as a foreign dignitary."

“Whereupon I was assigned a legal consultant and political escort on behalf of the Equestrian government.” Zeit said, returning the smile. “The best thing that ever happened to me.”

Litigia blushed, turning away. “Oh Zeit...”

He placed a hand on her back, a soft expression on his face. “I’m serious Lit. Look, if I don’t make it out of this thing alive...”

“Zeit, don’t say things like that.”

“Lit please. It needs to be said...” Zeit cleared his throat nervously. “I-”

A loud buzz cut him off as the intercom activated, followed by the voice of Feist. “Pardon me Your Excellency, but Ms. Twilight Sparkle just arrived a few minutes ago in ornithopter three with Knochen and Kiefer. She is at the entrance to the main complex, shall I let her in?”

“No.” Zeitgeist growled lowly in frustration. “Call security and the Grenadiers, The Doctor and the rest of them may be around. Feist, you apprehend her and prepare her for interrogation.”

“By your command.” Feist said before adding. “Do I have to be polite about it, Your Excellency?”

“No Feist, she’s working with the enemy.”

“By your command.” Feist said, a smile in his voice.

Zeit sighed and chuckled before turning back to Litigia. “That dog loves his job.”

“Are you sure that was wise?” Litigia said anxiously. “Her profile states that she’s unbelievably proficient with magic. If she’s here to cause trouble...”

“She’s also a pony.” Zeit said reassuringly. “Gentle. Passive. What’s the worst that could happen?”

A muffled explosion thudded through the complex as the floors shuddered. Zeitgeist and Litigia shot to their feet and ran over to the intercom and video crystal. Zeitgeist activated the intercom. “Feist! Feist, report!”

“...Liberate...tu...ta...me...ex...infernus...” a voice croaked back through the sputtering channel.

“Huh.” Zeit muttered. “Well, that can’t be good.”

A second explosion rocked the building as distant cries of alarm went out through the assembled soldiery and security forces, several dozen voices sounded over the communication channels.

“...intruder sighted entering the lobby, moving to interce~kkzzzzzzzzt~”

“Intruder sighted! It’s...it’s a pony! By the creator! She’s glowing like a sun! Sh-she’s doing someth~kkzzkzkzzzzzt~”

“Medic to lobby! Medic to lobby! They’re still alive! She’s~kzzzzzzzzkzztt~”

“Lobby! Lobby! Come in! Repeat your last message! ~**BOOOOOM!!**~ By the...intruder sighted on floor two! Repeat! Intruder sighted on floor two! I-wait...Grenadiers have arrived and are moving to intercept! They~kzzzzzztzzzzt~mother of~kzzzzzzzztkzt~AIEEEE!!~kzzkzzztkzzt~”

Zeitgeist rushed over to the video crystal and flicked the switch labeled ‘Lobby’. A grainy picture appeared on the crystal, the usually pristine imaging system disrupted by the large amounts of residual energy left behind by the intruder. The room was a shambles; debris from the destroyed iron door and parts of the concrete wall had been strewn across the cracked floor, windows and pottery had been shattered and roofing tiles had fallen to the ground. As he rotated the camera he noticed that there was least seven different bodies lay on the ground, all of them squirming in some way, alive but incapacitated. She had deliberately pulled her punches; this was her exercising *restraint*. He switched to the second floor; it was the same only with fifteen of his finest troops littering the room, each in some state of trauma. The ones who were not unconscious were either limping or crawling to their unresponsive teammates. A thundering crashing sound just down the hall caused Zeitgeist to spin around to the door.

“...This is third floor!” The com behind him chattered. “Contact with hostile confirmed! The unicorn appears to be heading towards Duke Stardust’s office, stop her at all~kkkkzzzzzztkzzzzzt~”

“Fire! F~kkzzzzzt~”

At the sound of gunfire Zeit quickly switched to the third floor camera; in the floor was a sizable hole and next to it one of his heavily armored second floor Grenadiers, who had no doubt been the source of the hole. Once again more of his soldiers lay scattered on the ground, only this time there was evidence in the drywall that they had merely been telekinetically flung into the walls and ceiling as opposed to magically incapacitated. He panned the camera to midway down the hall where the remaining five Grenadiers fired away with their lightning guns. The unicorn, completely incased in a luminescent aura of furious magic, effortlessly bent the directed energy beams away from her causing them to carve flaming channels into the walls and ceiling. As she stepped forwards the soldiers maintained a steady retreat until a single soldier ceased firing and lunged at the unicorn with his truncheon drawn. Almost comically he halted in midair just in front of the pony, frozen in place. The pony smirked and

proceeded to batter the remaining soldiers with the petrified body of the lone attacker, sending them flying in all directions to painfully crumple against the walls and skid across the floors. Once all the remaining soldiers lay groaning on the ground she held the single Grenadier in front of her, causally tossing him aside and through a heavy wooden door before making her way down the hall. Zeitgeist and Litigia spun around to the door, waiting for it to shatter into a thousand splinters.

There was a knock. Steady, polite, and firm.

"Come in." Zeitgeist said calmly. "It's open."

The door swung open revealing a single unicorn pony; her purple and pink streaked mane had barely a hair out of place, she was somewhat short, a little over a meter tall, and cute as could be. She also had a dimly glowing fire-like aura of purple and white energy undulating around her body, her eyes lit from behind by her immense power. "Hello Mr. Stardust."

"Ms. Sparkle! What brings you to my humble abode?" he said, the smile on his face genuine as the fear in his gut.

"I think you know." She rumbled, the power coursing through her body giving her voice an unnatural reverberation. This was not Twilight Sparkle speaking, but rather her power and rage.

"The Grundels weren't as inviting as The Doctor had hoped, I take?" Zeitgeist said, thinking of no other reason she would be alone. "The first impression makes the friendship, and yours went sour hmmm?"

"I've come for your help." She said tersely.

"You could have asked." He muttered.

"I did not come here to 'ask'." She growled. "I came here to trade."

Zeitgeist's eyebrow rose in curiosity. "Trade? Do you do this sort of thing at the pawnshop as well? Blow open doors and throttle personnel?"

"I was in a bad mood *before* I arrived here..." She said with a snort. "...And Mr. Feist was...impolitic in his choice of words regarding my predicament. Your security forces required neutralizing after witnessing my solution."

"Ah yes, Feist...if you don't mind me asking, what did you do to him? I did not see him in the lobby."

"He spurned my attempts at diplomacy." She said explanatorily. "So I sent him away."

"Away." Zeit nodded. "To where?"

"To Hurt." Twilight said glibly. "He'll do well to learn some manners there."

Litigia stepped forward, brow creased in incredulous anger. "So all this is because your friends got captured by some monsters? And you come asking for help like this?!"

"The captivity of my friends is of little concern to me." She said matter-of-factly, her absolute certainty clear in her voice. "They are highly competent and can fend for themselves..."

"Your dragon?" Zeitgeist said cautiously. "You want us to help you find your dragon?"

The aura surrounding the unicorn arced lightning and crackled fiercely. "Standing between me and Spike is...unwise."

"Evidently." Zeitgeist said quietly. "So, what's in it for me?"

"What you wanted." She said coldly. "What you *always* wanted..."

The Doctor paced in the cell, his mind racing for a way out of this scenario. Of course, he had already formulated several plans but none of them ended favorably for all involved. That was always the trick, the dilemma; he could never content himself with anything less than total success, which more often than not left him disappointed at the end of each adventure. *'This has the potential to end very badly! Even the best-case scenarios would see the deaths of dozens, if not hundreds of people! No illusions about what Gabbro plans to do with that heart either, someone that filled with anger and hatred isn't going to stop at one city, it's going to be open season on the diamond dogs! Zeitgeist isn't much better, even if he sees reason there's still a multinational corporation behind him that stands to take a loss it won't welcome. Both sides are ready for war and both sides are more than capable of inflicting terrible suffering. I don't know what-'*

"Um, Doctor?" Fluttershy muttered, stopping his relentless pacing. "Did Gabbro seem a little...off to you too?"

The Doctor looked over at her and nodded, welcoming the minor distraction from his endless postulating. "Yes, he's certainly a different breed to the Workers, and even the Thinkers. They say that he's the one who's been planning all the attacks on the mine, that fact alone makes him something of an oddity in the Grundel world."

"No..." muttered Fluttershy. "I think it's something other than that. Like there was something...*wrong* about him."

The Doctor's ears perked up, he had come to trust Fluttershy's intuition without question. When something was 'wrong' it usually meant

there was something fundamentally wrong, something unnatural. "What do you mean Fluttershy? Is it like with the Carrionites?"

She nodded and sighed, all eyes were on her now but it was her role in their team to detect this sort of thing. "His voice doesn't seem to quite synch up with the rest of him."

Rainbow Dash scratched her chin with her hoof. "What does that mean?"

"Um, well, you see..." Fluttershy took a deep breath. "When people talk their body language and facial expressions tend to work towards conveying the same message as what they are saying. Posture, hand movements, and subtle things like breathing and subconscious reactions all tend to coincide with how a person is talking. Gabbro's body language seems almost...false."

"So he's being dishonest?" Rarity said with her eyebrow raised.

"It's worse than that." Fluttershy said with a shake of her head. "I noticed that when his mouth said something his body language and queues would be delayed by roughly a quarter second and it would always catch up in the same descending order. First he would speak and then his facial expressions would begin, followed by his body language, and finally unconscious queues. It's kind of like he's subconsciously trying to synch with the words coming out of his own mouth, as though he isn't really saying them at all."

"What are you saying..." Fire Dazzler said incredulously. "That he's just sort of jittering around while something...oh."

"Like a ventriloquist dummy!" Pinkie exclaimed. "He's moving and his jaw is flapping, but he's not the one talking!"

The Doctor nodded, Fluttershy was right. With growing horror he realized that he had noticed every single thing that Fluttershy had but ignored them at the time. "...Oh no."

"What?" Applejack said, recognizing The Doctor's expression. "Whenever you make that face things get worse!"

"A perception filter." The Doctor said with a sigh. "And a strong one too, no wonder I didn't catch on earlier." He turned to the other ponies in the room. "I wish I could say that your observation is just a coincidence Applejack, but no, things have just gotten much worse."

"What now?" Rainbow Dash said with a groan. "No wait, lemme guess...The Big Bad Whatever held up in the mountain is not only out, but in control of that Gabbro guy too?" The Doctor tapped his nose in confirmation, causing Rainbow Dash to stomp her hoof in frustration. "Sometimes I hate being right!"

“How’d y’all come to that conclusion Prof?” Applejack said nervously. “Maybe it’s just a coincidence?”

The Doctor shook his head. “You all know what a perception filter can do, but what you don’t know is the history. They were first constructed by beings from beyond the third dimension, frequently and correctly seen as gods by those living here. In general the true form for such creatures is too incomprehensible to be safely perceived by simpler life forms, so to interact safely with this dimension they constructed perception filters. If you form one around a trans-third-dimensional being or object you automatically see what you want to see, ignoring the mind-melting unreal parts. Alternately, if you stick one on a third dimensional being or object their presence in your sensory field drops to easily ignorable levels, making it ideal for stealth. They tend to come into common use in any given society around the fifth age, or about three thousand years in the future for Equestria. At this point in time there are only three beings on this planet with access to perception filters and that’s the Royal Sisters and yours truly. To find them anywhere else is bad news.”

Fire Dazzler cleared his throat worriedly. “How bad is ‘bad news’?”

“If Cheppu’s knowledge of Grundel lore is accurate we just might be in the presence of one of the most heinously evil and murderous metaphysical beings in the history of this universe.”

“That’s bad.” Fire Dazzler said quietly.

“Indeed.” The Doctor said while scratching his cheek. “The only good news is that this Tirac creature is currently in a weakened or limited state. He only has control over one Grundel and that control is partial at the very most, explaining the shoddy synching.”

“What do we do?” Pinkie said. “Is there any chance that we can stop him?”

The Doctor smiled widely. “Of course there is! We just have to find out what he’s planning and hope that Twilight Sparkle is having more luck with Zeitgeist than I did!”

There was a shifting sound as the rock of the wall percolated and evanesced to create a door. Into the room walked a single Worker Grundel; The Doctor recognized him immediately.

“Cheppu!” The Doctor said happily.

*‘Hello Doctor.’* Cheppu signed. *‘It is good to see you again.’*

“Likewise! Did you tell the other Grundels about Zeitgeist?”

*‘Yes, the Elders are now prepared to attempt a diplomatic solution.’*

Cheppu signed happily. *‘Perhaps this will end well after all?’*



The Doctor sighed and stepped forward. "Cheppu, Gabbro is planning to do something very bad and a lot of people are going to die."

*'I know.'* Cheppu signed. *'That's why I came here. He's acting without the permission of the Elders, if they were to find out they would rescind his status as a Thinker, this would free the Workers under his command. Could you do that for me?'*

The Doctor blinked in confusion. "You know what he's planning? Why not go to the Elders yourself?"

Cheppu slouched. *'After he told me what he was planning he ordered me not to tell the Elders, as such I am compelled to obey. Please, do not allow him to follow through with his plan! I know Gabbro; he's not a bad person, just very stubborn! Don't let him do this!'*

The Doctor nodded firmly. "Cheppu, I know you love Gabbro but listen to me. I have reason to believe he's been corrupted by...Him."

*'What?'* Cheppu signed in disbelief. *'But...Gabbro's a Grundel, he can't be-'*

"Thank about it for a second!" The Doctor interrupted. "Could a Grundel really think up all the horrible things he has? Could a Grundel be so willing to kill an entire city of innocents?"

*'I...no...I don't believe you!'* Cheppu said defiantly. *'He's just obsessed! If this thing is resolved he'll be back to normal!'*

"When we linked I saw that Grundels could detect His influence!" The Doctor said with a stamp of his hoof. "Have you ever tried to scan him?"

*'No! There wouldn't be any point since Grundels can't be corrupted! Calcipher created us that way, therefore we can't!'* Cheppu signed heatedly.

The Doctor backed away with an understanding nod. "Okay, okay, calm down...I'll warn the Elders as soon as I can and hopefully we can help Gabbro before he goes any further."

*'Good.'* Cheppu said with an uncertain expression. *'You're still wrong, though.'*

"I'll leave that up to you to decide." The Doctor said steadily.

*'Anyway, Gabbro and Granodiorite will be here soon. Try to get to the Elders before thirteen hundred hours. Whatever Gabbro's planning, it'll be then.'*

The Doctor winked knowingly at Cheppu. "I understand. You take care now."

*'I will.'* Cheppu said, walking towards a newly materialized door before stopping and turning. *'And Doctor...thank you.'*

As the door sealed shut The Doctor sighed and turned to see Spike groggily rising to his feet, flanked on both sides by Rarity and Pinkie Pie. "Uuugh...what happened? Where-oh, I'm still here?"

The Doctor smiled and raced up to Spike. "Spike! Long time no see!"

"Long time?" Spike said with a scoff. "Didn't I see you yesterday? In fact, I still haven't completely cleaned up all that stuff you broke!"

"Ah well, it seemed longer to me." The Doctor said quickly. "Look Spike, we're in trouble."

"You think?" Spike said with a deadpan expression.

"What we do in the next hour or so will determine whether tens of thousands of people will live or die." The Doctor put his hooves on Spike's shoulders. "Can I count on you?"

Spike looked around, all of his friends (and one worried looking stallion) were watching him, their faces hopeful. "Yes, you count on me Doctor. What do you need me to do?"

He saw Cheppu exit the room, the door closing behind him with the sound of shifting stone. He walked forward, a large smile on His face. "Hello...Cheppu."

The huge Worker Grundel spun around, eyes wide before he recognized the flesh he inhabited and signed. *'Hello Brother Gabbro! How good it is to see you.'*

"Likewise." He lied. "Have a good conversation with The Doctor?"

'Yes.' Cheppu signed, nervousness clear in his scent.

"And what are his intentions?" He pushed.

*'He says he still wants to help us...but not you. He will try to stop your plan.'* The Worker answered, now almost terrified. *'Perhaps it is for the better?'*

He could barely keep his sneer of contempt off Gabbro's face. These Worker Grundels disgusted him most of all; they were literally impossible to corrupt, their minds incapable of duplicity and ambition, two things key to his power. Whenever he spoke to them they would respond in their ridiculous sign language, their moods conveyed with body odor making it impossible for them to lie. It was sickening to see such a straightforward and concise language, with none of the intrinsic loopholes or imprecision that made his job so much easier. It had been so long, so so long since he last killed something smart enough to understand and fear death, and the fool he inhabited dearly loved this creature! Even better!

"Cheppu." He said. "Come here. Kneel."

Obediently the Worker obeyed, kneeling down until his head was level with Gabbro's chest. He reached out, all it would take was a single touch and the Worker would die in a horrible foaming paroxysm of agony, his brain slowly melting from the dark energy instilled in His hand. He might even snap his own spine in the violence of his death throes! Such wonderful things rushed through His mind as He reached out, closer...closer...

"I just want you to know..." said Gabbro, patting him on the head before drawing in to a warm embrace, "...That I'm very proud of you. You handled your ordeal very bravely. I'm so proud of you. And...and I just want you to know that I'm sorry."

'*You're sorry?*' Cheppu said. '*What for? It wasn't your fault that I got captured.*'

"No." Gabbro said through gritted teeth. "I'm sorry. For the business at the mine, for my plans, for me, for everything! I'm sorry! And I'm especially sorry for what I'm going to do."

'*Gabbro?*' Cheppu signed.

"Go." Gabbro said with considerable strain, pushing Cheppu away. "Now. Leave me. Go to the Elders, you'll be safe with them. Go!!"

Cheppu rose to his feet and ran down the hall, looking back to see Gabbro double over and prop himself up against the wall. '*I forgive you...*'

"Idiot..." He growled. "How dare you! He was talking with the Time Lord! He had to die!"

"You listen to me, horror!" Gabbro hissed. "You do not harm him! You understand?! You do not harm Cheppu!"

"Such sentimentality! Don't worry, I'll soon flay that out of you!" He said, quietly shaken at Gabbro's ability to resist him. "Call the other Workers and Granodiorite, we must lull the Time Lord and his friends into a false sense of security by revealing our plans."

"Why? Why not just kill them?"

"Because..." He said, sadistic glee thick in his voice. "It's more *fun* when they don't expect it!"

"That's idiotic!" Gabbro muttered. "Why reveal our plans to them at all then? They seem to have pieced it together by themselves!"

"The fact that they know or not isn't the point!" He sighed through Gabbro's mouth; this host was becoming far too much of a hassle. "If we play this thing close to the chest now after he's just pretended to be your ally then he'll think that something is wrong! If we take him and his little party down into the ignition room we'll be able to trap them in an area that

no one but our little clique knows about, thus reducing the chances of the Elders finding out about them and the plan to zero. Understood?"

"...Yes." Gabbro sighed, sending a message to Granodiorite regarding the prisoners. "What will we do about them then?"

"From there they will bear witness to my return, whereupon I will inflict some kind of deranged torment upon their souls...or something."

"Or something?" Gabbro scoffed. "You don't know?"

"I have a lot of really depraved ideas after half a million years, it'll take a while to sort through them all." He chuckled through Gabbro's mouth.

"And we'll have all the time in the world, he and I."

"Brother Gabbro!" Granodiorite called from down the hall. "Who are...forgive me, I thought I heard you speaking with someone."

"You are mistaken." Gabbro said curtly. "Are all the preparations ready?"

"Yes sir, the re-vivification spell works perfectly, all we need is the dragon."

"Excellent. Did you tell Fracture and Crater to escort our new allies and the dragon down into the ignition chamber?"

"Yes, they should be waiting for us down there."

"Good, very good indeed-" Gabbro took several steps forward before losing his balance and tumbling to the hard floor. "Aah! What happened?!"

Granodiorite stepped forward and examined the floor; there was what appeared to be a shallow crater cut clean out of the rock. "Oh yeah, that."

"What is it?" Gabbro demanded, brushing himself off. "Where did that come from?"

Granodiorite fidgeted and gestured apologetically. "I'm sorry sir, it was from one of the ponies during the capture. We had phased their hooves into the rock and the Workers were going about incapacitating them, but then one of them began to glow brightly and was gone in a flash, leaving only this little dent in the floor."

"You..." He said through gritted teeth. "...You let her escape?"

Granodiorite took a few steps back, noticing the change in his voice, the hideous otherness behind his eyes. "S-sir?"

"You let her escape." He said, stepping forward with horrid glee in his now red eyes. "And you did not tell me? I'm afraid I must punish you."

"She had fled, sir. She was no longer invading our domain. S-she wasn't a threat." Granodiorite stammered, retreating a step back with every advancing step taken by the Thing inside Gabbro.

He began to hold out His hands, the Thing in Gabbro did the same. "S-sir? Sir what are you doing?"

“Just this.” It reached out and lightly prodded Granodiorite on the nose.

Granodiorite twitched as he felt an electric shock run across his face and down his spine. Before he could speak he felt an itching sensation on the tip of his nose that spread to his entire face. It grew in intensity until it was a terrible burning stabbing throbbing pain, the entire spectrum of agony swept across his face. He opened his mouth to scream but the Thing in Gabbro prodded his throat, killing any sound before it could be made.

“No, no. We can’t have you making a fuss.” It said. “Alas! I would love to hear you sing, but I’m trying to keep a low profile you see.”

A horrible realization streaked through Granodiorite’s agony addled mind; it was not ‘it’, but ‘him’...not just any him...it was Him!

He saw this realization on his face and grinned evilly. “So quickly you understand. In your final few minutes of life I want you to contemplate the fact that you were instrumental in my release.” He leaned in, smile growing wider than what should be possible, and whispered. “...*Thank you.*”

Granodiorite fell to his knees in despair and agony, hands clutching at his face. The unbelievable pain washed his mind away while The Beast watched, glee visible in his blood red eyes despite Gabbro’s tears streaming down his cheeks.

“My, my, if that face isn’t causing you all kinds of trouble!” he snapped his fingers in sardonic revelation. “I know!”

Granodiorite looked up at the sparkling gem in his hand, an almost comforting smile on his face. “I think you should take it off.”

The insane Grundel reached out and snatched the razor-sharp gem and drove it into his torment-moistened cheeks. Blood and pieces of meat splatted on the stone ground as he worked, tearing off chunks and throwing them away. But then the pain began to move away from the relief of the cutting, moving up his now exposed cheekbones and into his eyes before settling in the center of his brain.

“Oh dear.” He said with a chuckle, rubbing his chin contemplatively. “It’s dug itself right in there, hasn’t it?”

Granodiorite looked up at Him plaintively, garnering a twisted smile. “A smart boy like you should be able to figure out what to do next.”

He looked at his long clawed fingers, a revelation surging through him. His wriggling fingertips were the last things he saw, but not the last thing he heard. The high child-like laughter of a cruel god rang in his ears until his long fingers dug too deep and he slumped over, dead.

Tirac sighed happily, satisfaction surging through him. “Thinking of you, Doctor...”

Twilight walked alongside Zeitgeist as they entered the launch site. The site teemed with soldiers clad in heavy-looking metal armor, each one armed with one of Zeitgeist's incredible weapons. They hadn't proven very effective against *her* of course, but the technology was brilliant in concept. A powerful light-stone and a high-grade lightning spellstone were connected to a pack containing Zeitgeist's capacitor gel. The light given off by the light-stone was directed into a coherent beam of photons that would excite the oxygen medium into an excited state, thus allowing the directed passage of electrons through the conductive plasma medium. Such a weapon could just as easily stun as it could kill.

"Here, you better put this on." Zeitgeist said, gesturing at what appeared to be an equine variant of his soldier's armor. "Things could get hairy down there."

"I've got defense spells...and aren't you going to try some kind of chivalrous 'a lady can't go into battle' asininity or some such?" Twilight said flatly as she regarded the armor.

"Normally yes, but considering said 'lady' has just wiped the floor with twenty of my best soldiers in under five minutes I'll make an exception." He said with a smile.

"And Ms. Statute is alright with you going into battle against a numerically superior foe with a home-ground advantage?" Twilight said, looking over at the forlorn looking unicorn staring out the window of his office. "It would look bad on her resume if you got your head crushed by an angry Grundel."

Zeitgeist waved dismissively. "She's absolved of all responsibility when it comes to me fulfilling my duty as a duke. Being a responsible leader, I will lead my soldiers into battle, and should I die it will be in that capacity." He said before quietly adding. "For the record, no, she is not alright with it. I'm expecting an earful at dinner."

He donned some armor and shouldered a rifle from a gun rack before he led Twilight around the corner. She stopped and gasped. "What is that?"

It was an enormous machine, twenty-five meters long from tip to tip with a height of at least eight meters. The body was cylindrical with what appeared to be small sections of caterpillar tracks placed at strategic places on the chassis, no doubt to in some way assist the massive toothed tacks that grew from the belly of the beast. The body was covered in lines from where the sections had been connected, the spaces between them

showing exposed machinery that was unbearably tantalizing in its complexity. Most intriguing was the disc-shaped tool at the nose of the machine; the power cables leading into it were huge and heavily insulated, implying large amounts of energy involved. The gems studding the outside facing surface were huge and ornate, but the pattern they had been arranged in was no doubt functional in its precision. The combination of the ornate disc and the tough armor skin and cruel-looking-toothed tracks gave the distinct impression of a ceremonial war-machine.

"That..." Zeitgeist said with a proud grin. "...Is one of my XMC-703s. The newest innovation in mining technology produced by Stardust Incorporated."

"*That's* a mining machine?" Twilight said disbelievingly. "How? Where's the drill?"

"Drills are a thing of the past!" He proclaimed. "No more will miners risk their lives in dangerous holes in the ground! With the technology used in the 703s, miners will simply wait in the insurance-friendly safety of a distant quarry!"

"How?" Twilight repeated. "What does it do?"

"Utilizing a high-powered displacement spell and a beacon spell the 703 can teleport an eight meter sphere of matter as far as twenty kilometers. Developed by me, I had the world's best courier imprint the teleportation spell onto a stone. This way all I need do is send these out to tunnel into mountain while my mining staff pick through the teleported material that appears at the locator beacon."

"And that's how we're getting to Spike?" Twilight said her focus regained, waiting until the mission was complete before she would allow herself to gush over the innovation of it all. "Once your locator spell is attenuated to his DNA signature, of course."

Zeitgeist cleared his throat, his excitement damped by her sudden return to seriousness. "Yes...speaking of locator spells, thank you."

"I gave you that spell without the consent of its creator, one of my best friends. I hope you appreciate the gravity of that action." She said quietly.

"You have my word as a duke that my men and I will uphold our end of the agreement." He said steadily. "Ms. Rarity will understand, Ms. Sparkle."

"Still..." she murmured before shaking her head. "No time for that. We leave as soon as we've located Spike."

"But of course."

The Doctor and his friends walked silently down the hallway, escorted by morose looking (and smelling) Worker Grundels. The farther they walked the more rough and fresh the tunnels looked, like they had been recently and hurriedly carved out of the rock. Wherever they were being taken, there was a good chance that no one outside of Gabbro's team knew of its existence. They passed what appeared to be an alcove, inside of which was a series of large turbines, their thunderous thrumming silenced by a serenity spell.

"What's that?" The Doctor said to the Worker nearest to him, knowing full well what it was.

*'That is a geothermal electricity generator.'* The Grundel named Fracture said explanatorily. *'Utilizing an enclosed hydro-turbine loop, the heat from the earth is used to create electricity, it is what keeps the halls lit.'*

"Big turbines." Spike said thoughtfully, the cast iron chains restraining his hands clinked as he pointed at the roof. "A lot of juice for just some lights."

"What else are they for?" The Doctor said directly, knowing the Worker could not lie.

*'It is being used to power the phase spell in the ignition chamber.'* Fracture signed. *'To phase a small tunnel consistently for several kilometers for five minutes requires at least one gigajoule of energy.'*

"Why not connect it to the city's main generator?" The Doctor said, having already guessed the answer.

*'Such a drain in power would be noticed. Connecting even the lights for these tunnels would alert the others of their existence.'*

The Doctor shot Spike a knowing look, garnering an understanding nod from the young dragon.

They entered the room at the end of the long and twisting hallway. It was full of Worker Grundels and a single Thinker as they stood around a veiled object in the center of the room. The Thinker was young and wide-eyed, comically out of place amongst the burly towering Workers.

He shuffled forwards, a welcoming smile on his face. "Greetings! It is so good to meet you Doctor!"

"You've heard of me?" The Doctor said with a flattered smile. "From Cheppu I gather?"

He nodded fervently. "Indeed! Word spreads quickly amongst the Workers, the Duke has become something of a boogey-dog amongst them,



and your liberation of Cheppu from his clutches is a common topic of discussion at the moment!”

“And you are?” Rainbow Dash said impatiently, interrupting The Doctor’s ego trip.

“Oh!” The young Grundel exclaimed. “Forgive me please, I become careless when I become excited. I am Pellet, Thinker level-2, I serve Brother Gabbro in any way I can. I hope to perform the same service for you and your acquaintances.”

“Charmed.” The Doctor said with a reassuring smile. “Brother Gabbro said that this is what’s going to win you lot the war. Do you know how that’s going to happen?”

Pellet’s face dropped for a moment, like he was distressed by even simple contemplation of the idea. “...I confess I am not...completely certain how he will achieve this goal. B-but Brother Gabbro is indeed a genius, there are likely facets I am not considering.”

“Why don’t you tell us what you think is going on, hmm?” The Doctor said warmly.

“If that is what you wish...” The fidgeting Grundel said before clearing his throat. “Brother Gabbro intends to drain the caldera beneath Mount Calcipher in order to retrieve The Creator’s heart, the source of Calcipher’s power.”

“Wait...” Rarity said, raising her hoof. “Why does he want to get Calcipher’s heart in the first place? Shouldn’t its resting place be sacred to your people?”

“Indeed her ladyship is correct.” Pellet said with a respectful bow. “But Brother Gabbro believes that the resurrection of our creator is necessary to combat the diamond dogs and keep His evil contained. Should the heart be fused with the infant, there is a good chance that Calcipher’s great power will imbue itself into him, giving rise to a new dragon god!”

Spike sputtered and stepped forwards. “Back up. What do you mean ‘good chance’?”

Pellet cleared his throat bashfully. “There is also a chance that it will reject you and go dormant once again...and a very small chance that you would, uh, explode.”

“Explode?!” Spike exclaimed. “What do you mean I’d explode?!”

“The heart would partially fuse with you before rejecting you, whereupon it would detonate every photon in your body simultaneously.” Pellet said before adding. “...Followed shortly by every neutron in your body exploding also.”

"I'd explode *twice*?!" Spike said, turning to Applejack. "I thought that couldn't happen!"

"Neither did ah!" Applejack said with a confused look on her face.

"There'd be about a nanosecond between the two." The Doctor said pithily. "It would *seem* like one explosion, albeit a very large one."

"But the chances are small!" Pellet said reassuringly. "In all likelihood you would be reborn as the most powerful being in the universe!"

"Reborn?" Fluttershy said worriedly. "How do you mean?"

"Uuuh..." Pellet muttered. "The, uh, the process would involve less of a transfer of power to the intended vessel and more of a...*copying* of the vessel with changes made to accommodate the incredible energies."

Pellet recoiled violently when Rainbow Dash flashed in front of him, fury in her eyes. "That's sick! You'd kidnap a baby and murder him on the off chance it would make something as powerful as your creator appear?!"

"W-w-w-we're doing it for the greater good!" Pellet stammered, realization creeping onto his face. "If one should die that the rest may live-"

"Then the lives of the rest would be hollow at best!" Zecora said, walking over to Spike. "Take a good look, my Grundel friend, at the infant whose life you strive to end! To take his life without knowing his plight, makes you just as bad as He you fight."

A clapping from behind turned all their heads, Gabbro's deep refined voice carrying through the room eerily. "How poetic. You know, you almost had me convinced not to...but then I realized that every living being on the planet would soon be tortured to undeath by a maniacal abomination. Perspective thus gained..."

"Hello Gabbro." The Doctor said lowly. "How's life?"

"Quite good, victory is within grasp..." Gabbro strode up to The Doctor and leaned in, his facial expression suddenly shifting to that of desperate fear. "Stop me." A cruel smile replaced the fear with unnatural speed, his eyes flashing red for a split second. "Please, try."

He brushed past The Doctor and over to Pellet. "Pellet, how goes the preparation?"

"Quite good Brother Gabbro. The penetrator has been loaded into place, it now only awaits the phase generator to create the tunnel."

"And the revivification spell?" He said happily.

"We now only need the blood of a dragon to prepare the penetrator."

The Doctor stepped forward his expression serious, there was no doubt in his mind that things had gone from worse to critical; Tirac was in control now. "Care to tell us what's going on, ally?"

Gabbro turned to face The Doctor, the being behind his eyes radiating an almost palpable level of malevolence, obvious only to him and his team through the perception filter. "Well, you see, we need the dragon's blood to pattern the revivification spell off of in order to restore a small part of Calcipher to its original state for a short period of time."

"And that will accomplish...what?"

"Well..." Gabbro said explanatorily. "...A few years ago a team of engineers, whilst attempting to install a large geothermal generator, discovered something strange about the magma pocket under Mount Calcipher. Specifically, there is an adamantine spell cast upon the stone surrounding the magma chamber; so long as the heart resides within the chamber it is effectively impenetrable. Impenetrable to all but god-level weapons." He smiled and pulled the tarp off of the object in the middle of the room, it was a single spire of diamond roughly two meters long attached to a launch pad leading into the ground at a slight incline. "This piece of diamond has been conclusively determined by the Grundel historical society as the tip of one of Calcipher's pedal claws, one of the few pieces not transmogrified into the mountain structure by Terra upon his death. We are...*borrowing* it for the time being."

The Doctor nodded grimly. "When you revive it to its natural state, it will be more than enough to pierce the magma chamber and drain it."

Gabbro tapped his nose. "Correct! I trust Pellet has informed you of our intentions with the heart?"

Pellet shuffled up to Gabbro, nodded enthusiastically. "Oh yes sir! Indeed I have!"

"Good boy." Gabbro said before casually turning to the assembled Workers. "Restrain them."

The crowd of Workers immediately surrounded the ponies and held them fast. They struggled futilely against the incredible strength of the large creatures, Applejack needing to be lifted clear off the ground to fully immobilize her. Spike yelped as he was hoisted into the air by the chain rope tied to his restraints.

Pellet blinked in confusion. "Sir...?"

Gabbro produced a large blue crystal, activating a carved rune. A hologram appeared in the air with a low trilling sound, in it was a view of the mine's work yard as it bustled with activity. A large group of what was unmistakably soldiers gathered around one of those enormous machines. The picture zoomed in, and again, closer and closer until a single purple unicorn was visible, she was in the middle of a silent exchange with an armed and ready Zeitgeist.

"They are spies." Gabbro said with finality. "That purple unicorn there was with them when they entered our domain. She escaped and is now enlisting the help of the Duke. There can be no other conclusion."

"But..." Pellet muttered, turning to The Doctor. "...Why would he help Cheppu escape the Duke if he was working with him?"

"To sow discontent and doubt in our ranks, Pellet!" Gabbro said righteously. "He knew that Cheppu would return and spread the Duke's lies and deceptions to our Elders, knowing that they would rightfully lower their guard in favor of diplomacy thus allowing him to strike!"

"That's terrible!" Pellet said in disgust. "Such lies and deceit are worthy of The Beast Himself!"

"Thank you." Gabbro said under his breath. "Now they shall pay for their chicanery by witnessing our victory! Prepare for ignition!"

"Yes sir!" Pellet said excitedly, running towards the claw tip.

"Hey Pellet!" Applejack shouted. "Ah know you're doing what you think is right 'n all, but just think fer a second! Where in the blazes d'you think all that magma's gonna go?!"

Pellet rolled his eyes and opened his mouth to speak before blinking in confusion. "I...well of course it'd...sir?"

Gabbro cleared his throat nervously. "W-well naturally I have constructed a series of caves and pits for it to flow into!"

"But I've been helping you this whole time." Pellet said with realization. "You never ordered such a thing!"

"Why don't you tell him about the tunnels under Stardust City, Gabbro?" Rarity said icily.

"Ignore her!" Gabbro said angrily. "Prepare the penetrator!"

"But I thought the ground was to stable to undermine? What possible...use...could...?" Pellet gasped in horror. "A-and if the magma is released, the pressure differential in the chamber would cause a great deal of it to go upwards! The entire equine city would be annihilated as well! All those lives..."

"Prepare the penetrator!" Gabbro growled and turned to Pellet. "That's an order!"

"No sir!" Pellet said, distraught anger in his voice. "This is wrong!"

"Workers!" Gabbro barked. "Restrain Pellet! He has betrayed Calcipher!"

The unoccupied Workers reluctantly began to converge on Pellet when their intercom crystals activated, projecting a hologram of the ancient and stern features of Elder Granite.

“My fellow Grundels...” he said. “For over a decade we have fought valiantly against The Great Corruptor and those who would unwittingly free him. No one can call into doubt the importance of our actions or the righteousness of our goal. However, it has been brought to our attention by a reliable source that our resident tactician and strategist Brother Gabbro has been operating without express permission of the council or the Elders, and in this capacity intends to commit an atrocity! Due to this dereliction of duty and apparent contempt for our governing system, the Grundel known as Gabbro is hereby stripped of his rank of Thinker Level-10. He is to be apprehended by any Worker or Thinker who in his company or knows of his whereabouts. Upon apprehension he is to be brought before the council and Elders for official punishment. This is Elder Granite apologizing on behalf of the Grundel Governing Body.”

Gabbro looked around at the roomful of Grundels as they all turned to him, relieved smiles on their faces. “...Aw Grundelmumf...”

Pellet grinned and gestured at Gabbro. “Workers! Release the ponies and restrain Gabbro!”

Gabbro sighed and shrugged. “Plan B...”

He launched forwards with a roar, streaking past the bewildered Workers with unnatural speed in a single blurred motion. A moment later and his hand had wrapped around Pellet’s mouth, his fingers digging in painfully as he lifted the smaller Thinker off the ground. The Workers spun around to see a dark and terrible aura roiling off the Thinker Grundel like black fire.

“You know, I was actually willing to give this whole ‘subtlety’ thing a go...” Tirac smiled grotesquely with Gabbro’s mouth, his eyes now glowing pits of scarlet light as his fingers began to burn into Pellet’s face. “Oh well! It’s more *fun* this way!”

There was a hiss of ionized air combined with the sizzle of cooking meat as jet-black tendrils of energy exploded out the back of Pellet’s head, splattering the wall with blood and steaming brain. The body thudded to the ground, the remains of the young Grundel’s head hitting with a wet sound, Tirac turned around in a flash and extended his arms with his fingers splayed. More of the tendrils lanced from his fingers, each one lightly touching the foreheads of each Worker Grundel. The Workers twitched slightly before collapsing in a heap on the ground, small trickles of blood streaming from their eyes, ears, and nostrils.

“Now...” Tirac turned to the shocked ponies and dragon; his deranged toothy grin gave way to a more restrained but no-less sinister smirk. “...What shall I do with you?”

He raised his arms, garnering a collective flinch from the group. A purple ball formed above his hands, it silently exploded in flash of light, smaller undulating balls of light streaking towards the fallen Worker Grundels. They entered the fallen creature's heads through the small burn mark that dotted each of their foreheads, a small buzz of energy and the bodies twitched. Slowly each Worker opened their eyes, now glowing red with the dark magic that pulsed inside their heads.

"Restrain them again." Tirac said.

The Worker Grundels lunged at the ponies with ferocious speed, once again catching them off guard and immobilizing them.

Tirac gave Pellet's corpse a little kick and chuckled as it twitched slightly. "I wish hadn't done that...killed him so quickly, I mean." He turned back to his prisoners walking towards them at a leisurely pace. "If only I had the time to *thank* him. You see, these Grundels have dedicated their entire existence to my permanent imprisonment, so it's especially satisfying to tell them what pivotal role they played in my release! They practically lose the will to live!"

"And that's just nirvana for you, isn't it?" The Doctor said in disgust. "The degradation of other living beings!"

"Degradation, humiliation, mortification, mutation, I love it all!" Tirac said jubilantly. "Really, can there be any greater satisfaction than the utter destruction of a sentient being? Any greater music than the sound of screams?"

"You're a monster!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed.

Gabbro winked and clicked his tongue before turning to The Doctor. "Real sharp bunch you've put together here, Doctor! But then I guess the bar was set pretty low..."

"I'm sorry-I meet so many personifications of evil in my travels-have we met?" The Doctor said casually.

Tirac paused. "It's me...Tirac. Demon God. The Evil One. Holder of The Source of Darkness. The Beast. Him. Ring any bells?"

"Oh I know *who* you are." The Doctor said. "You just seem to be awfully familiar with *me*."

"Five hundred thousand years ago you helped the gods of this world to align against me. Had it not been for you, I may never have been defeated, I may never have been imprisoned!" Tirac said with a growl. "You woke Calcipher from his slumber, participated in my first defeat, and crippled The Source of Darkness...remember now?"

The Doctor played along and nodded. "Oh right! *That* Tirac."

“Remember?” Tirac said with a smile. “Good. Because I want you to reflect on every little thing you did to stop me while I torture you and your friends in increasingly horrible ways for the rest of eternity!”

Fire Dazzler chuckled nervously. “Isn’t an eternity of torture a little much for a measly half-a-million years of imprisonment? You’re a god, that’s like a dime for you!”

Tirac nodded and shrugged. “What can I say, I’m petty.”

“At least you’re willing to admit it.” The Doctor rolled his eyes. “Don’t be offended if I’m not scared, this isn’t the first time I’ve been threatened with an eternity of agony. After one hears it a thousand times it begins to lose its edge.”

Tirac scoffed and patted the restrained stallion on the head. “I see this universe hasn’t affected your wit the same way it did your height.”

The Doctor’s eyes widened. “What?”

Tirac’s smile broadened even wider. “Ah...it’s that moment of dawning realization that I live for! To be fair, there really isn’t any way for you to know who I *truly* am.”

“Who?” The Doctor said, his expression serious and his voice low. “Who are you?”

“No doubt you remember my other prison.” Tirac growled. “An ugly little rock inside the event horizon of a black hole? Those idiotic apes and their lobotomized squid-faced servants had been working so hard to liberate me! I was almost out, almost free, but then you and your pet chav appeared! You sent my body plummeting into the singularity while she shot me out of an airlock to follow it!”

The Doctor swallowed hard, this had just gone from critical to disastrous. “You...”

“Yes!” Tirac said with a smile. “Me! You know, I was actually surprised that that little tart wasn’t here with you! Heh-heh...what do you suppose her cutie mark would be? Fish’n’Chips? A sack of hammers? Oh wait, I’ve got it! A ball and chain! Heheheheheheheheheheheh!!”

The Doctor ignored that comment and asked. “How did you get here?”

“Painfully.” Tirac said bluntly. “Every atom in my body was crushed and stretched into nothingness, my immortal soul in constant agony as the dead heart of a star ground me down. But then I saw it; a pulsating orb of the deepest black, a dark nothingness so potent that it stood out even in the light-crushing heart of a singularity. The Source of Darkness, a large deposit of manifest non-matter, unbelievable power and it was mine for the taking!”

That's impossible!" The Doctor said. "Non-matter erases reality! It should have killed you the second you touched it!"

"It very nearly did! I reached out for it, it ripped me apart while smashing me together; I existed in all points of time and space for but an instant before being compressed to a point smaller than an electron. And then I was here, alive, free, and more powerful than ever! It would seem that the intense conditions of a singularity had tempered it into a usable tool! And through it I am immortal! Hehehehehehe-hahahahahahahahAHAHAHAHAAHAAA-"

"\*Snerk\* Phhht-! Heehee..."

A stifled snickering to his left cut off Tirac's triumphant laugh, he turned to see Spike as he dangled from the chain held by the revenant Grundel, biting his lower lip to restrain an amused giggle. Tirac loomed over the chuckling dragon, a look of bemused fury on his face. "What are *you* laughing at?"

"Heh-ha-he...o-oh nothing \*giggle\* J-just..." Spike calmed himself down and answered. "You."

"Come again?" Tirac snapped.

Spike rolled his eyes disparagingly. "You, dude! You're hysterical! A riot!"

"No." Tirac rumbled. "I'm really, *really* not."

"Oh come on!" Spike said with a scoff. "You're all like '*soon the world will be mine, moo-hoo-ha-ha-ha*'. Psht! Y'know, when I heard that 'The Demon God Tirac' was loose I was kinda expecting something more, I dunno, sinister and menacing! I *really* wasn't expecting some mugging chucklehead crooning clichés like a Saturday morning cartoon villain!"

"What." Tirac said through gritted teeth.

"Look..." Spike said with a sigh. "I was expecting you to be more 'Freezer from *Serpent Spheres X*', but you're actually some kind of cross between Snidely Whiplash and a Captain Planet villain."

Tirac's arm shot out, grabbing the small dragon by the throat and lifting him face to face. "And what if I just bled you dry and snapped your neck like the twig it is? Would that be sinister and menacing enough?!"

"More like spiteful and stupid..." Spike croaked through the infuriated hand around his throat. "...In case you forgot, we dragons turn to gems when we die! Blood and all! So unless you were just diddling around with all that spell-breaking garbage a minute ago, you need me alive to forward this whole plan of yours!"

Tirac hissed and dropped him, pointing a finger at the assembled ponies. "Once I'm truly free, you and your friends will beg for death!"



“Uh-huh, ‘till then.” Spike said, deadpan, and gesturing at the revenant Grundel holding his chain. “These guys aren’t alive anymore are they? That big light show you did killed them?”

“Yes.” Tirac said, turning away from the dragon and walking towards the penetrator. “I always loathe using revenants, they’re too stupid and uncoordinated even for minions, but the situation demanded it.”

“That’s a ‘no’.” Spike said with a smile, biting the iron chain holding his hands together. His razor sharp teeth cleaved through the cast iron links like butter, sparks flying from his mouth as he landed feet first on the ground. He opened his hand extending his claws as he spun around and raked them across the soft flesh directly above the revenant Grundel’s kneecaps. He dashed and rolled between the undead corpse’s legs as it toppled forwards, the tendons keeping the legs taught had been severed. Tirac spun around to see the revenant rise to its feet only to topple forwards again as Spike pulled a large wrench from the tool shelf in the room. Spike spun around to face Tirac, his expression serious as he held the wrench out in front of him.

Tirac chuckled contemptuously. “Oh no! What’re you going to do with that? Fix the plumbing?”

“No...” Spike said lowly. “I’m gonna wreck your power generators, allowing my friends and I to escape and preventing you from phasing your penetrator thingy. Clear?”

The Doctor shot Fire Dazzler a look; he nodded and began to concentrate.

Tirac raised an eyebrow, too distracted by Spike to notice. “Oh? Please, tell me how you plan to destroy three multi-ton generators twenty meters away whilst surrounded on all sides by my faithful servants...with nothing but a wrench.”

Spike smiled, hoping to distract Tirac long enough for that scatter-maned stallion to work his magic. “Easy. You ever hear the story of the watchmaker in the desert?”

Tirac blinked, oddly enough he *hadn’t* heard of it. “No, actually.”

“That’s because I made it up just now.” Spike said, still buying time for Fire Dazzler.

“Ah. Tell me then, how does it go?” Tirac said sardonically, raising his hand to magically attack the young dragon.

“A watch maker takes his pocket watch into the desert. It stops working.” Spike said, brandishing the wrench for emphasis. “The end.”

Tirac clapped his hands and laughed mockingly. “Ooh kid! Post that one on Equestria Daily, I’m sure it’ll get six stars!”

“The moral of the story, you see...” Spike said, his chest expanding as he inhaled air. “...Is that small things in the right place can cause *big* problems; like a grain of sand in the gears of a pocket watch or, say...” he smiled widely as magic fire built in his throat. “...A wrench in a turbine?”

Tirac’s eyes widened and he prepared to attack, but it was too late. Spike exhaled a bright plume of green flames onto the wrench in his hands; it disintegrated and disappeared into the evanescent green fire. An instant later a wrench materialized in-between the main fan and rotor of the middle turbine, stopping it dead and shattering it spectacularly. In a matter of milliseconds the entire fuselage and outer shell of the turbine was filled with superheated water vapor. A tremendous explosion followed as the equivalent of several hundred kilograms of high explosive obliterated the middle turbine, sending supersonic shrapnel out in all directions, shredding the other turbines and causing similar explosions.

As the lights went out Tirac’s laugh sounded out over the explosive din. “You little fool! Look at the body I inhabit, the environment in which it lives! Do you really think I would be hampered by darkness? My low-light vision in this body is a hundred times that of a pony or a dragon!”

“Actually...” said The Doctor’s voice from behind. “We were counting on it. I bet your pupils are good and dilated by now!”

Tirac spun around in the darkness, the dim light of channeled magic encasing the white stallion’s horn. “...N-”

Fire Dazzler’s face screwed with concentration. “PTFE!!”

His horn exploded in a cascade of blinding white light. Tirac’s sensitive Grundel eyes were wide open when the light burned in, sending white-hot lances of agony shooting into his brain. Tirac screamed and squeezed his eyes shut, his hands shooting to his face. “AAAAHG!!”

Tirac felt an equine mouth snatch something from his pocket and heard the clatter of hooves as the revenants released the ponies, the undamaged parts of their brains instinctively opting to shield their eyes. A clatter of hooves and jubilant congratulations raced down the hall away from him.

Tirac roared in fury, words unable to express his boundless rage.

The ponies raced down the hallway, their way illuminated by Fire Dazzler’s less intense illumination spell. The Doctor’s sonic screwdriver trilled and the door to the generator room, now a hell of superheated steam and shattered metal, phased shut. They ran through the rapidly cooling

cloud of steam left in the hall and continued to run full tilt, Tirac's scream of hatred echoing up the narrow hall, the pure malice in it almost felt as though it was crawling over their skin.

"Kudos is in order, Spike!" The Doctor said to the grinning dragon. "I hadn't expected Tirac to be in full control when I put the plan together, your adlibbing really pulled our flanks out of the fire!"

"Not gonna lie, I'il guy!" Applejack said with an admiring smile. "Talking tah Tirac like that took serious horse apples!"

Rarity voiced her agreement. "Oh indeed! That was amazing! You broke his composure quite handily, but how did you know he'd let you talk? He could have just knocked you out!"

Spike nodded and chuckled bashfully; Rarity thought he was amazing! "I wasn't lying about that Saturday morning cartoon stuff! I figured that if he was the type to bring us down to his lair and tell us his evil plan, he'd be the type to let me monologue for a bit!"

The Doctor laughed happily. "Brilliant! I can't imagine why Twilight thinks you'd be in danger if you traveled with us!"

Pinkie Pie galloped alongside The Doctor and looked up at Spike. "Since when can you bite through iron chains?"

"Since forever..." Spike said with a roll of his eyes. "I can chew *diamonds*! Those chains might as well have been made of gummy worms for all the good they did!"

"Mmm...gummy chains..." Pinkie said hungrily.

Fluttershy sighed and sniffled slightly. "Those poor, poor Workers. I liked Fracture and Crater, they were nice."

"They all were." The Doctor said, eyes narrowing. "We have to stop him. If we don't he'll just keep killing and killing..."

"You know him, don't you?" Rainbow Dash said from above. "All that in the room there wasn't just bluffing, was it?"

"A little from column A and a little from column B." The Doctor said with a so-so head tilt gesture. "The 'second' time we meet from his point of view is somewhere around five hundred thousand years in the past, or some point in time in my future. The first time we met for both of us was back in my universe."

"What was he there?" Zecora said inquisitively.

"Pretty much the same, a powerful godlike source of homicidal evil; although he'd been in that prison for a couple billion years by the time." The Doctor said, recollecting. "Rose and I dropped him into the black hole to stop him from getting free...but he just wound up here instead!"

The light began to return as they entered smooth walled room. Fire Dazzler deactivated his horn and turned to the other ponies. "Okay. We're in the clear! Wow! Was that a close one or what?" The other ponies simply stared, looks of shock and amusement on their faces. "W-what? What're you looking at?"

Rarity gestured at her face. "You've got a little...Uhh."

The Doctor trilled his sonic screwdriver and a small section of the magical walls became reflective. Fire Dazzler looked into the mirror and shrieked; all the fur around his horn, as well as a section of his forehead and mane had been burned away, leaving only slightly red exposed skin. "AAH!! This is why I use chemicals! Setting off pyrotechnic displays on your face is a *stupid* talent!! But then I've never used a PTFE *spell* before...I guess this is why!"

Applejack chuckled and nudged him heartily. "Ah'm just glad ya knew how tah do it in the first place! You did good Fire Dazzler."

He smiled and nodded shallowly. "Yeah...I guess I did..."

A dark bolt of energy blasted a small chunk of rock out of the wall, causing Fire Dazzler and Applejack to leap back. The demon wearing Gabbro's body lurched into view, his still dazed eyes blinking rapidly. "Damn..."

"That was quick!" The Doctor said exasperatedly. "I thought you'd be blinded for at least another few minutes!"

"I *am*, you idiot!" Tirac growled. "Doesn't mean I can't still navigate with my other senses! Mortals..."

"Fortunately y'all need eyes tah aim!" Applejack shouted at him, winking at Rainbow Dash.

"Ears do just fine." He said quietly, pointing a darkly glowing finger at her.

A blue blur flashed by impacting his arm at high speed, sending the deadly blast to fizzle harmlessly against the wall. Rainbow Dash chuckled and streaked towards the reeling demon. Tirac smirked and instantly regained his footing, planting a powerful punch directly into Rainbow Dash's face as she sped towards him. His wiry Grundel muscles sent the pegasus hurtling backwards, stopped only by the hand that grasped her back hoof. Tirac grunted and swung the semi-conscious pegasus into a charging Applejack, sending the two of them tumbling across the floor. Zecora silently sped towards him, only a small grunt giving her away as she leapt into the air, intending to plant the sharp edges of her hooves on the back of his cervical vertebrae. He smirked and ducked with unnatural speed, his right hand twisting into a large hideously powerful fist. He roared

as he drove his fist directly into her solar plexus as she soared overhead. Zecora exhaled in pain and instinctively doubled over, thudding loudly on the hard stone floor before skidding to a stop, immobilized by pain. Tirac cracked his neck and turned to the remaining ponies, a wide grin on his face. "Pity these Grundels can't be easily corrupted, they'd make excellent warriors."

Fire Dazzler shrieked and raced forward, head down with his sharp horn pointing forward. Tirac casually sidestepped him and planted an open palmed blow across the stallion's face, lifting him clear off his hooves and sending him flying across the room to bounce painfully off the stony wall.

He turned back to The Doctor, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie huddling behind him as Rarity nervously prepared to do battle. "So...what was your plan again? Run around and hope that I didn't catch you? To be honest-"

Spike hissed and leapt at Tirac from the side. Tirac lifted his hand and arcs of lightning lanced forwards, striking the young dragon and suspending him in mid air. Spike convulsed as the electricity danced over his body, a scream of agony silenced by convulsing vocal chords. Tirac telekinetically tossed the infant over his shoulder the moment he went limp, striking Applejack across the face with the unconscious dragon as she stealthily attempted to rise to her hooves, sending her sprawling once again.

"...To be honest, I expected better from you. That business with the generators and the living fax machine over there, now *that* was clever!"

The Doctor looked around, all the best fighters in the group (and Fire Dazzler) had been laid low over the course of a minute. He gulped lightly. "So...where are your zombie friends?"

"Dead." He said nonchalantly. "I told you I hate using revenants, and without their eyes they're even more useless! A waste of magic."

"So what are you going to do now? No generators means no phased tunnel for your ignition penetrator." Rarity said steadily, professional as ever.

"Part of Plan-A, may it rest in peace. / never really needed them, but Grundels can't channel near enough energy for that sort of thing, wouldn't want to give myself away or anything."

The Doctor's ears perked, a smile tugging at the sides of his face. "...Speaking of Plan-Bs..."

A deep thunderous rumbling began to reverberate through the room. Tirac growled in confusion and turned to the source of the sound, the right-most 'side' of the spherical room. A basso electrical sound accompanied a bright white flash that engulfed the entire segment of wall. An instant later

nothing remained of the wall and part of the floor, now replaced with a solid-looking wall of metal. A door sprung open from the metal object and dozens of heavily armored diamond dogs streamed out of a space inside. Leading the charge was Zeitgeist Stardust.

"Hold your fire! Shoot him if he moves!" All weapons were trained on Tirac as Zeitgeist made his way to The Doctor, looking around at the beaten ponies. "I see I've arrived just in time."

"Good to see you Zeit." The Doctor said with a smile.

"Never thought I'd hear that from you, Doctor." Zeitgeist said with a smile. "So, who's the Grundel? Friend of yours?"

"Hardly." The Doctor scoffed. "Careful, *that's* Tirac, he-"

"Fire!" Zeitgeist roared.

All of the soldiers opened fire with their lightning guns, two-dozen blue-white energy beams converged and Tirac disappeared behind a ball of bright light and smoke.

The Doctor clopped his hoof against his forehead. "I didn't say 'kill him'!"

"You said he was Tirac." Zeitgeist said with a shrug. "Excuse me if I *don't* give the Elder God time to attack! Now all we have to do is mop up and get out of here!"

The Doctor turned to the smoldering patch burnt in the ground. "Look again. No pieces. I know your weapons are powerful, but there's no way they could have vaporized him!"

A grenadier knelt down to gently scoop up the unconscious infant dragon lying next to a dazed pony being assisted by his comrades. He was internally surprised at how much the dragon weighed. He looked up to see a hideous face rise out of the floor, followed shortly by the rest of its body. He barely let out a yelp of alarm before the Grundel spread his arms wide and swung them inwards, smashing the balls of his fists into each side of the grenadier's head. The sturdy helmet crumpled and the soldier grunted before falling over backwards. As he collapsed Tirac snatched the Spike from his limp arms with one hand and his lightning gun with the other. With demonic speed he turned to The Doctor and took aim.

"Doctor! Watch-" Zeitgeist said, shoving The Doctor out of the way just as a blue-white spear of photons and plasma flashed into existence. Having moved into The Doctor's place while pushing him Zeitgeist grunted in pain as the laser beam instantly superheated a three-centimeter wide area of his torso armor into plasma, causing a small explosion that knocked him off his feet and sent him skidding across the floor.

“Your Excellency!!” Sergeant Doppler cried, turning to the offending Grundel and opening fire as he sidestepped his way towards his fallen lord.

Tirac gritted his teeth and mentally re-directed the beam away from him, but as more and more diamond dogs began to fire at him he was forced to deflect them all, a much more energy consuming process. He stomped the ground and super charged what little Grundel magic he knew, summoning a meter thick wall of rock between him and his attackers. He looked at the monolithic wall, panting softly. This past half hour had consumed nearly all of the energy Granodiorite’s suffering had given him, with the diamond dogs in the mix there was an actual threat of defeat now. Behind him there was flash of light and a rush of air, he spun around to see a single purple unicorn standing in a shower of magical sparks as they heatlessly dissipated.

She locked eyes with him, the hairs on the back of Gabbro’s neck stood up as the air became electrified. “Are you the one they call Gabbro?”

“Well, I’m *wearing* the one they call Gabbro.” Tirac said with a twisted smile. “I’m Tirac, the monster who killed all but three of this world’s gods half-a-million years ago, pleased to meet you.”

The unicorn’s face stayed the same, an expression of stern determination. “You could be Radian for all I care. The dragon in your arms, hand him over and I’ll consider leaving your skeleton where it is.”

Tirac laughed in genuine amusement, raising the lightning gun until it came to bear on her. “Oh! Was that a threat from a pony? I think I’m in love!”

Twilight ripped the lightning from his hand and snapped it in half, flinging the remains across the bisected room. Tirac leveled a glare at her, teeth bared. He raised his hand and pointed at her, summoning his strongest killing spell, hoping that in his weakened state it would cause an appropriate amount of pain for the disrespect he had just witnessed. The arc of deadly black energy lanced out towards the unicorn, eating the light around it. Tirac gasped in horror as the spell fizzled against a shield spell emanating from her.

Her eyes began to glow from behind as a hideously powerful magical aura began to undulate from her body, a small smile on her face. “That...was...a mistake.”

The Doctor rushed to Zeitgeist’s side as the wall rose up with a boom. He examined the ceramic/metallic plate of the armor with his sonic screwdriver; a fair sized crater had been blasted out of it, but no penetration.

“Impressed?” Zeitgeist groaned as he sat himself up. “My own design. Carbon nanotube enhanced titanium filaments suspended in a heat absorbing ceramic. That chest plate could take ten more such hits and still stop a crossbow.”

The Doctor clicked his tongue as he checked his readings. “The armor may hold up, but the wearer won’t! You have two ribs cracked, one bruised.”

Zeitgeist hissed through his teeth as he rose to his feet. “Feels about right...”

Sergeant Doppler rushed to Zeitgeist, doing a small salute and clearing his throat. “Your Excellency, the one known as Tirac has abducted the dragon. The wall he raised is a meter of solid granite, it will take us half an hour to get through with our lightning guns and the room is too unstable to dig around with the 703.”

Zeitgeist smiled and waved his hand. “Never you mind that, the dragon will be back with us in a matter of moments.”

The Doctor opened his mouth to ask a question before being cut off by Tirac crashing through the granite wall, punching a two-meter wide hole in it before smashing into the wall of the room with enough force to crater it. Twilight hopped through the hole she had made, Spike resting carefully on her back. As she did a low rumbling filled the room, dust and small pebbles falling from the ceiling.

“That last bit did it!” The Doctor shouted over the din. “Everyone get into the 703!”

The soldiers and ponies sprinted towards the 703’s open hatch. The grenadiers allowed the ponies to enter first, only entering after Zeitgeist limped in. The hatch closed and the 703 began to charge up its mechanism, its mighty tacks moving it backwards through the tunnel it had dug. Soon it was racing back to the surface, leaving the collapsing room behind.

The 703 shuddered and shook as it rolled through the rough tunnel forged by the machine’s entrance. Inside the cramped space inside The Doctor and his friends sighed a collective sigh of relief.

Applejack cheered and bucked happily, stopping only to hiss through her teeth as her bruised body objected painfully to her celebration. “Now that was a rescue! Honestly Twi, you an’ Zeit really timed that ‘un well!”



“Yeah!” Rainbow Dash said enthusiastically, limping on her back left leg. “Tirac was gonna take us apart like a bunch of potato heads!”

Twilight knelt over an unconscious Spike, looking up at them with a relieved expression. “Really, it was Zeit who deserves the credit, he brought the hardware...”

“Nonsense!” Zeitgeist said with a wave of his paw. “If what The Doctor has told me is true, you just tossed around an Elder God like a ragdoll! Makes your little stroll through my facility look like an elderly mare filing a complaint!”

Twilight sighed and shook her head. “He was weakened, severely weakened. The killing spell he threw at me was unbelievably complex like Celestia’s sun-raising spell, just thinking about it makes my head hurt. I only stopped it because he was running low on whatever energy he runs on.”

The Doctor nodded gravely. “He can only transfer limited amounts of his own power through whatever connection he has with Gabbro, but that doesn’t mean he can’t pull energy from an outside source...” The Doctor turned to Zeitgeist. “I imagine you have some sort of device for this thing that allows it to see through rocks?”

“Of course, we aren’t driving blind or anything...” Zeitgeist said with a smile that disappeared after some thought. “Do you think he’s still alive?”

The Doctor raced to the cockpit and opened the door. He hurried inside and began to look over the machinery, pulling out his sonic screwdriver and running over the control panels.

“Hey!” The pilot said indignantly. “What’s this business?!”

“None of yours.” Zeitgeist said sternly as he entered. “Back to work Mr. Gräber.”

“Y-yes Your Excellency.” He said before turning back to the controls, ears down.

“You never get tired of being called that, do you?” The Doctor said with a sideways glance.

“Comes with the job.” Zeitgeist said quickly punching in some coordinates, the imager showing a glowing red area. “Look, that entire room and everything in it has been crushed by several megatons of granite, nothing could survive that, especially if he was as weakened as Ms. Sparkle asserts.”

“I don’t suppose you can detect something as delicate as a body with this thing, hmm?”

“No, the scan penetrates all things save very hard or very dense materials like gems or certain metals. However, it does take detailed

chemical scans of what it does penetrate.” Zeitgeist said, looking over to The Doctor who was pulling what appeared to be a large crystal out of his pocket. “What’s that?”

“Personal communications/holo-imaging device...” he said, scanning over it with his sonic screwdriver. “...Ah hah! Just as I thought, it stores information as well!”

“...So? My company makes those too.”

“Heh. What are they called? I-Gems?” The Doctor said with a scoff.

“Don’t be foolish! My marketing department can do better than that!” Zeit said with a huff. “We make Mi-Shards.”

The Doctor rolled his eyes and the sonic screwdriver trilled, causing the screen to flicker as a hologram sprang from the crystal. In it was the ignition room; the floor was strewn with the dead bodies of the Grundels who had been discarded by Tirac. The Doctor blinked as a figure limped into the room, it was a Thinker Grundel whose face was turned to them as it made its way towards a crystal spire mounted on a launch platform. It was Tirac.

“How did he survive?” Zeitgeist said, shocked.

Tirac spun around, looking in all directions for the source of the voice. “What...”

The Doctor turned to Zeitgeist with a small smile on his face. “I synchronized the imager’s scanner with the communications crystal. We can put a carrier wave through it and see any and all places through the rock medium. Unfortunately he can hear us due to-”

“The communicator translating your input into sound waves by oscillating the rock medium.” Tirac finished, his sneer on Gabbro’s face. “I see you’re as thorough as ever, Doctor.”

“I never expect your type to stay dead Tirac, no matter the circumstances!” The Doctor said with a roll of his eyes. “It’s rather tiring actually.”

“Just as well Doctor!” Tirac snarled. “In fact, it’s ideal! You get to witness my ultimate triumph!”

“You must be going a little stir crazy in that body, Ticky! We have the dragon and, by extension, his blood. That means no restoring that claw, no rupturing the magma chamber, and no body to imbue with god-like energies for you to inhabit! *You’ve lost!*” The Doctor said with a stomp of his hoof. “Give it up!”

“Fool.” Tirac spat. “True, I would have liked to have the infant’s body fused with Calcipher’s heart, but it was never more than a convenient

bonus! All I truly need is to burn those cities alive, their pain will restart the Source of Darkness, giving me the power to free myself fully!"

"But you still need the blood to cast your revivification spell on the claw!" The Doctor said before adding under his breath.

"Three...two...one..."

Tirac reached into his sleeve and produced a small vial with a dark red liquid inside, garnering a frustrated 'tch' from The Doctor. "I took this while the dragon slept, just in case."

"I hate it when they're clever..." The Doctor sighed. "...What're you gonna do for power? That little fight nearly took what little power you had and your generators are a little fragmented at the moment!"

"I have my ways, Doctor." Tirac said, slapping his hand against the spire, crushing the vial of blood against it. "Ciao."

Tirac began to concentrate as his hand began to glow; the glow encapsulated the spire as heatless sparks of magic lanced around it. Slowly the spire began to turn a deep lustrous black, the launch pad and surrounding rock beginning to strain under the weight of the tempered adamantine coming into being atop it.

The Doctor stomped his hoof in exasperation, Zeitgeist biting his lip nervously. "Doctor, does that mean he's still..."

"Yes." The Doctor said lowly. "He's still going to destroy the city."

"Can we swing back and stop him, I mean, if he's as weakened as Twilight said he is..."

"No. By now he's already created the tunnel and launched the penetrator, we have a little over five minutes before it hits, after that I calculate another three before the chamber ruptures and both cities are destroyed." The Doctor lowered his head, a heavy sigh escaping his lips.

"Can't we intercept the object sir?" Gräber said inquisitively. "I can swing this thing around and get back there in less than two minutes!"

The Doctor groaned and shook his head. "That thing is solid adamantine now, literally a weapon of the gods! Anything that gets in its way will be obliterated at a conceptual level!"

Zeitgeist sighed and slumped. "My city...my people...there's no time for evacuation! Soon it'll just be a smoldering hole in the ground!"

The Doctor's ear perked up, a flash of inspiration behind his eyes, the beginnings of a wide smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Zeit...after seeing and hearing this machine of yours for a second time I'd have to say that it runs on some sort of displacement/teleportation mechanism, correct?"

"Yes...?"

The Doctor's smile lit up his face. "That's it!"

“What’s it?” Zeitgeist said worriedly. “Doctor...what are you planning?”

The 703 bucked slightly and evened out, a solid clunk was heard from outside and Gräber turned to them. “We’ve surfaced Your Excellency.”

The Doctor raced out of the cockpit, calling out to his friends. “Everyone out! Tirac’s activated the penetrator, we’ve got about six minutes until both cities go up!”

“Six minutes?!” Twilight said in horror. “But-”

“Don’t worry, I’ve got a plan!” The Doctor said happily as he sped out of the mining machine. “Ziggy! Tell your dogs to evacuate the mine and facility!”

The ponies and diamond dogs gathered outside of the mining machine, Zeitgeist ordering the Grenadiers to evacuate the facility of all personnel before turning to The Doctor. “Alright, what’s your plan?”

“Here.” The Doctor produced the Grundel communicator, activating it and projecting a hologram of the valley area into the air. “Alright, here’s the skinny; Gabbro has been attacking your mine through a series of tunnels under Mount Kaffelerram, and it is through these tunnels that he plans to conduct the magma towards the city.”

Rarity nodded and stepped forward, pointing to several bright orange lines leading from the mountain to the city. “As you can see there is an extensive series tunnels leading to the city from their base of operations under the mine, part of an undermining scheme that didn’t pan out.”

Twilight nodded and pointed at the tunnels. “Each of these tunnels are very narrow, that will insulate and keep the magma and gasses super heated until they hit this honeycomb like structure under the city...it’d be like one of those Centuari fusion bombs going off!”

The Doctor pointed at the network of Grundel tunnels underneath the mountain. “I calculate that a displacement of a sphere of matter exactly 200-meters in diameter, or in terms of volume moved that’s-”

“Four million one hundred and eighty-eight thousand seven-hundred and ninety cubic meters.” Pinkie said offhandedly. “...And two hundred and four cubic decimeters...give or take.”

The Doctor leveled a stare at Pinkie and sighed deeply before returning to form. “That much displacement underneath the mountain should cause it to collapse on the tunnels!

Twilight nodded excitedly. “Hundreds of megatons of diamond and gemstones, some of the strongest natural substances of the planet, not even a caldera could get past that!”

"But how?" Fluttershy said in panic. "How are we going to remove that much rock in...oh my goodness, *four minutes?!?*"

Zeitgeist chuckled lowly, a laugh devoid of mirth. "If the 703 is set to overload it would displace easily that amount, if not more."

The Doctor leveled with Zeitgeist and narrowed his eyes. "You understand that this means the mountain will no longer be minable."

"Only a mad-dog would mine an extended volcano, Doctor." Zeitgeist said lowly, turning to walk towards his 703. "But that's not going to be my problem."

"Zeitgeist...what are you doing?" The Doctor said sternly.

"Saving my people Doctor." Zeitgeist said calmly. "This mine means more to me than my own life...but not theirs. As a duke it is my duty to preserve the lives and safety of my subjects."

Twilight rushed forward, a look of shock on her face. "Can't you just set it on autopilot and send it down to overload?"

He shook his head. "I built these machines to be as safe as possible. An overload would atomize whatever it displaces, so I designed and installed over a hundred different fail-safes. The physical fail-safes I installed can be deactivated but the regulating software cannot, as it won't run without it. Unless you know a hacker who can stay ten steps ahead of thirty separate and very expensive fail-safe systems, I'll have to do it."

The Doctor stepped in front of Zeitgeist. "Well, since you asked nicely..."

Zeitgeist growled and grabbed The Doctor's mane and spun him around. "What do you think you're doing?! You'll be killed!"

"I'll figure something out!" The Doctor retorted, wriggling free of his grasp. "There isn't time for squabbles!"

"I can't let you throw your life away for this! This is *my* mine!" Zeitgeist hissed.

The Doctor gestured in the direction of the city, an outcropping of buildings on the horizon. "And *they* are your people! You can only serve them while you're alive, now perform your duty Duke Stardust!"

Zeitgeist stepped back and sighed, nodding silently. The Doctor snorted and turned towards the 703 just as a sharp hissing crack rang through the air. The Doctor went ramrod stiff and collapsed in a heap, Zeitgeist holstered his pistol and stepped over the twitching stallion. "Excuse the curtness of my retort Doctor, but I have the impression that you're far more important than I'll ever be."

Zeitgeist entered the 703 and turned to the ponies gathering around The Doctor as he struggled to overcome his dazed twitching body, a sort of

sad half smile tugged at the side of his mouth as he called out. “Ms. Sparkle! Tell Litigia to look in the third drawer of my isolation room’s desk on the *Brünhild*. There’s an approved transfer form in there along with a separate message in legalese, see that she reads it. And you, all of you, keep him out of trouble.”

Across the valley Mount Calcipher rumbled and roared, smoke and ash billowing from the crater. Zeitgeist closed the door and moments later the enormous machine sprung to life, seamlessly chewing into the solid rock and completely disappearing a second later. The rumbling from across the valley intensified, the ponies could practically feel the indescribably hot magma race through the narrow tunnels and towards the mountain. From the tunnel came a high pitched electronic whining sound, unlike before there was a ragged and wavering quality to it, like a turbine being pushed beyond its limits and crying out as vital parts began to fail. A thunderous basso thud reverberated through the rock as a solid pillar of light burst from the tunnel. A moment later the enormous black spire began to waver, a low straining sound vibrated through its formerly solid rock base. Well below the diamond spire a sphere of rock 500-meters in diameter had ceased to exist, as though it had never been there to begin with. The rock began to crumble as the immense weight of the mountain fully came to bear, instantly pulverizing and crushing the solid bedrock as though it was talc. Enormous jets of powdered rock erupted from newly formed fissures in the ground, the two kilometer high mountain plummeted into the chasm beneath, its huge size belying the speed at which it fell. With a monstrous sound the mineral spire lurched to a halt as it bottomed out the abyss beneath. The hard yet brittle diamonds that made up the mountain cracked and fractured, causing the sinister looking tip to shatter and slid down the sturdier base, filling much of the space with diamond shards the size of zeppelins.

An instant later a sound arose like nothing before, an explosive deafening thud as super-heated rock and gas slammed into the near-indestructible mass that now impeded it. Hot gas and dust shot up from around the sunken base as a minute amount of the caldera’s innards found their way through the cracks and crevices of the diamond seal, much of their deadly energy absorbed. Slowly crater around the shattered sunken mountain began to fill with dimly glowing magma, the immense pressures unable to move the indestructible obstacle in its path, now only strengthening the seal with the weight of the viscous liquid rock. With the pressure within Mount Calcipher’s caldera restored to its original

equilibrium, the great volcano thundered and roared no more. Dragon Valley was quiet and safe once more.

# CHAPTER 7

The ponies recoiled reflexively as the mountain sank into the ground, voluminous clouds of powdered rock roiled over the surrounding landscape. They stood in stupefied silence before a trilling crack rang through the air and Twilight Sparkle appeared, clutching to her mane was a slightly singed Zeitgeist Stardust.

He shuddered and reluctantly let go, quickly checking his body for missing pieces. "A-amazing! Successful teleportation of living organic tissue! That's something I've never been able to figure out! Not since that incident with the fly..."

Twilight shook her mane and sighed in relief. "Phew! I'm never doing that again, I almost lost both of us!"

Zeitgeist looked over at a recovering Doctor who was leveling a resentful gaze at him. "...I suppose that was part of your plan? You could have said something."

He nodded, his semi-spastic tongue stumbling through a response. "Thhre wathh no thhime!"

"Heh..." Zeitgeist chuckled and patted The Doctor on the shoulder. "Sorry."

The Doctor grinned and shook his hand, speech clearing. "You did good Zeit."

He looked over at the giant crater in the ground, gasses and debris shooting up as the magma was halted. "I underestimated the effectiveness of your machine. If I had to ballpark it I'd say it displaced at fifteen times as much as what was necessary."

"Sixteen, Doctor." Zeitgeist nodded. "At least the extra fall helped to fragment the mountain more, fill in the extra space."

The once great and ominous Mount Calcipher Del Kaffeerram was now but a jagged hill surrounded by sharp fractured debris, glowing magma slowly rising to fill in the hole; soon there would be no mountain to speak of, just a lump of cooled volcanic rock.

"So that's it then?" Fluttershy said cautiously. "We won?"

Zecora smiled and nodded. "Indeed my winged friend, our tribulations are now at an end."

Applejack cheered and bucked happily. "Yee-haw!!"



Rainbow Dash clopped hooves with Applejack and laughed. "Oh yeah! We rule!"

Rarity sighed in relief as she made her way over to Zeitgeist, who returned her smile. "Are you alright, Zeit?"

"Yes Ms. Rarity, I'm fine." He said with a grin. "Is travel with The Doctor always this fun?"

"Well, we almost get killed every adventure...so, yes, yes it is." Rarity said with a nudge.

Fire Dazzler let out a hefty exhalation and practically fell into a sitting position. "I think I'll pass on any more adventures! Almost getting killed by an Elder God is a once in a lifetime experience for me!"

Spike murmured and rolled his head, his eyes fluttering open. "H-huh? Wha's goin' on? Did we win? Is Tirac gone?"

Pinkie Pie leapt into the air and cheered. "We've saved the planet...again! Do you all know what this calls for?"

Twilight nuzzled a dazed Spike as he rose to his feet, a soft chuckle in her voice as she asked. "What does it call for Pinkie?"

"A PARTY!!" Pinkie cried as she rejoiced.

The ominous sound of shifting stone was soon followed by a low unearthly growl. Twilight spun around to see the towering form of Tirac rise from the ground behind her, his eyes literally blinding her with the baleful crimson light that shone from them. He opened his mouth and spoke, his voice filled with a malice and fury so potent that it chilled the blood of all around. "I concur."

(Dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da/ /dah-da-da-da  
etc)

## DOCTOR WHOOVES

Episode 2

The Mines of Dragon Mountain: Part 7

Starring:

The Doctor

Twilight Sparkle

Pinkie Pie

Rainbow Dash

Applejack

Fluttershy

Zecora

Rarity

Spike

Featuring:

Zeitgeist Stardust

Litigia Statute

Fire Dazzler

Gabbro

Tirac

Twilight gasped as Tirac lunged forwards, her horn lighting up instinctively. Tirac roared and swung both his arms inwards, jabbing his thumbs into either side of her neck. She squeaked in pain as her horn abruptly stopped fizzling, a curious numbness spreading across her forehead and down her neck.

"My magic! It's-" Twilight began to say before Tirac dealt her a powerful backhanded blow that sent her hurtling through the air, tumbling in the dust before coming to a halt, unconscious.

"Throw me through a wall now!!" Tirac bellowed furiously. "Not so tough without your magic, are you?!"

"Twilight-Urgh!!" Spike said as Tirac planted a solid kick into his midsection, lifting the dragon into the air only for him to be brutally smashed back into the ground by a single hammering fist.

Rainbow Dash cried out as she lunged forward, unleashing a flurry of kicks and jabs. Tirac's hands moved faster than the eye could see as he kept pace with the incensed pegasus. Applejack and Zecora bolted towards the fighting pair; Tirac grabbed hold of Rainbow Dash's forelegs and swung her around. He managed to catch Zecora across the side sent the two tumbling in the dirt. Applejack deftly leapt over the attack and closed in, engaging Tirac in furious combat. Tirac cackled as he expertly parried each one of Applejack's blows, unleashing a small counter attack each time.

"You think you can beat me?!" Tirac roared at the increasingly battered pony, "I who have had billions of years of war and combat as *entertainment!* I who have fought gods! I who have-AAAAAGH!!!"

Tirac turned to see Fire Dazzler's horn buried in his lower back, a smile on the stallion's face. "PTFE!!"

A light came to life inside Tirac, appearing red and orange through the front of his stomach. Tirac screamed in agony as the magic display burned inside him, small amounts of smoke and steam escaping from his mouth as he did. He kicked backwards and his heel connected with Fire Dazzler's chin with an audible crack, the stallion's head snapped back as the force of the kick sent him into a backwards somersault. Applejack leapt as Tirac turned his back only to be sent tumbling away by a casual backhand from the monster. Tirac picked Fire Dazzler up by the throat, a terrible reverberating growl emanating from his mouth. He wrapped a single powerful hand around Fire Dazzler's horn and wrenched it to one side, snapping it off at the base with a bloodcurdling sound. Fire Dazzler let out a silent scream as his face contorted into a paroxysm of agony before the sheer magnitude of the pain rendered him unconscious. Tirac raised the dripping horn in his hand and prepared to plunge it into the stunned

stallion's head before two cracks rang out as two smoldering holes appeared in Tirac's back. Tirac turned around to see Zeitgeist, in his hand a glowing pistol. Tirac dropped Fire Dazzler and flung the horn in a motion to fast to see. The horn connected with the pistol and sent it flying out of Zeitgeist's hand to clatter on the debris-strewn ground.

Tirac smile and walked towards Zeitgeist. "Ah, Duke Stardust...At last we meet face-to-face, or face-to-possessed meat as it were. Nice shot by the way, that second shot cooked Gabbro's heart."

Zeitgeist stood between the ponies and Tirac, The Doctor was still suffering from the effects of the stun and the other ponies were unfit to fight. "You're the one who's been killing my people?"

Tirac grinned. "Yes, hundreds of them. Their pain seeped into the mountain and made me stronger! Would you like to join them?"

Zeitgeist growled and lunged forward with surprising speed, catch Tirac off guard long enough to plant a powerful blow to his solar plexus. Tirac let out a winded exhalation of pain before Zeit hammered his left fist into the side of his face, sending him sprawling to the ground.

"So you're a competent fighter." Tirac said with a smile. "The more skilled the opponent, the more distress upon the moment of death!"

Tirac swung his legs out, sweeping Zeit's feet out from under him. Zeit attempted to get back on his feet but Tirac was upon him instantly, wrapping his hands around his throat and squeezing. Zeitgeist fruitlessly struggled against the obscenely strong demon as he slowly tightened his grip.

Tirac chuckled thickly, savoring the moment. "I have to say, everything was going pretty good right up until you showed up, I would have crushed all their skulls and taken back the dragon! But no, you and your unicorn friend just had to be big damn heroes and look where it got you! Your mine is gone, your reputation tainted with the deaths of your employees...and oh yes...you're going to die!"

The sound of shifting breaking rock caused Tirac to look up just as a large pillar of stone was telekinetically swung into his face. The enormous cudgel sent Tirac hurtling backwards to skid across the debris-ridden ground.

Rarity approached Zeit as he began to regain his footing. "Zeit! Are you alright?"

"Yes..." he choked. "Tuh-Tirac! Get Tirac!"

The Doctor, Fluttershy, and Pinkie Pie gathered around Zeit as he shakily rose to his feet. Tirac stood up and glowered at them, gritting his now-broken teeth as he willed an unconscious Twilight into his hands. He

wrapped his arm around her neck and roughly clasped the top of her head. "One more step and I'll cap her like a bottle!"

The Doctor leveled a glare at Tirac, stomping his hoof. "You just don't know when to give up, do you?!"

"You don't get to where I am by being a quitter!" Tirac said smugly.

"And where are you then?!" The Doctor said, fury burning in his eyes. "Look at you! That body you're in is falling apart, you're burning through energy just to keep it running...you can't possess anything else, can you?"

Tirac hissed. "A permanent link was the only way I could create a strong enough connection to possess this body."

"And those take years to create." The Doctor said steadily. "So if this body dies, you go right back into your prison! If that body dies you're through!"

"If this body dies..." Tirac said with a low chuckle. "Then Gabbro dies! He's still here you know! He's innocent Doctor, I got to him when he was but a hatchling. He never had a chance to be a true Grundel! Would you kill this poor unfortunate victim of circumstance to beat me?"

The Doctor paused and Tirac continued. "You'd better! I may not be able to possess anything else, but I can still perform a download! This unicorn is incredibly powerful, a true prodigy with magic, a perfect body for me! All I would have to do is override the patterns in her brain with my own, her power combined with my knowledge and experience will bring about the birth of a new god! And you will just stand there and let it happen because you can't bring yourself to kill an innocent being!"

The Doctor nodded slowly. "That's right...enough people have died today because of you. I won't let another one die, not if I can help it."

Tirac cackled hideously as his fingernails began to dig into Twilight's scalp. "I win. You know, I'm going to enjoy killing you all with the powers of your dearest friend. It'll be almost poetic! This perfect world will die at the hooves of a pony, how grand!"

"Hey..." a strained voice said to the left of Tirac; it was Spike and he was clumsily holding Zeitgeist's pistol. "...You talk too much."

Tirac casually kicked a small rock at the wounded dragon, knocking the weapon out of his hands. As the pistol tumbled through the air Spike let out one last weak burst and engulfed it in the teleporting flames. Tirac watched as the exhausted Spike collapsed to the ground, a small sigh of relief escaping his lips before he turned back to the congregation before him. Tirac jumped in shock as he saw Zeitgeist level the emitter of the weapon at him.

“Ah ah!” Tirac said nervously, brandishing the unconscious Twilight in his arms. “I’ve got a hostage! By the time you pull the trigger I will have moved her head into your weapon’s path!”

“Tch.” Zeit said as he rolled his eyes. The air was split by a buzzing crack; a lance of blue-white energy arced through the air and impacted Twilight directly in her midsection. Tirac screamed as the electrical shock passed through her and into him. The demon was sent hurtling back by his spastically contracting muscles and Twilight fell to the ground unharmed.

The Doctor rushed over to Twilight, running his sonic screwdriver over her. “She’s okay...he impacted a few nerve clusters in her neck, that’s what knocked her magic out! Ooh...she’ll be out for a few hours at least!”

“At least Tirac’s down...” Zeitgeist said, looking at the pistol. “That last bit drained the battery.”

Fluttershy examined Fire Dazzler’s head, the broken stump where his horn used to be was bleeding slightly and the exposed nerve was clearly visible. “Oh this poor stallion, but other than his horn he doesn’t seem to be hurt too badly!”

There was a series of groans behind them. They turned around to see Zecora, Applejack, and Rainbow Dash as they slowly limped towards them.

“Urgh...” Rainbow Dash groaned. “I tell ya, all this pummeling is not good for my self image!”

“Just be thankful he didn’t have time tah really hurt us.” Applejack said, still slightly dizzy. “Ah’ve been in scraps before, but he just walked all over us!”

Zecora nodded, nudging Applejack with a smile. “A fight survived is a victory, at least we can be sure that Tirac’s-”

“Look!” Pinkie Pie said urgently. “Tirac is getting back up!”

Zecora sighed and shook her head. “Never mind...”

The collapsed body shifted slightly, his arm partially supporting him as he shakily rose to his feet. He looked up at the ponies and diamond dog as they surrounded him. He sighed and bowed his head, falling to his knees. “...Do it...*please*.”

“Gabbro?” The Doctor said incredulously. “Is that you?”

He nodded pathetically. “Yes...my body has taken so much damage that he has to concentrate to keep it going. That last shock allowed me to take control but not for long...please, kill me.”

“Gabbro we can help you. I’m sure there’s some way-”

“No!” Gabbro sobbed. “He’s too strong! Too smart! Even if he’s stuck in this body I’ve seen in his mind a thousand different ways to regain his

power! If this body is destroyed he'll be trapped inside the mountain forever! He's used up so much energy between keeping me going and fighting you that not even he thinks he'll be able to do this again!" He looked up at The Doctor, tears running down his cheeks. "I'll try to do it myself...but if he takes control..."

The Doctor sighed and nodded, silently consenting.

Gabbro smiled and rose to his feet again, locking eyes with Zeitgeist. "Duke Stardust...I'm sorry for the suffering I've inflicted upon your people. I know there is nothing I can say to atone for my deeds, but please know that I am truly repentant."

Zeitgeist nodded and saluted. "As duke I speak for my people. Gabbro, you are forgiven. Godspeed."

Gabbro smiled and turned towards the glowing pit of magma. He started towards it before turning back to them. "Doctor. When you see Cheppu tell him...you tell him that I died a Grundle."

The Doctor nodded solemnly. "I will Gabbro."

He nodded and made his way towards the pit of liquid rock, a large happy smile on his face.

As he closed in on the fiery pit his stride began to become clipped and difficult, as though he was resisting himself.

*'Gabbro! What are you doing?'* The Beast cried in his mind.

"I think you know." Gabbro said mockingly.

*'You fool! You'll die!'*

"I know. I'm rather looking forward to it actually."

The voice in his head took on a plaintive tone, fear creeping into the words. *'Look. I know things got out of hand, but I can make it all better! I have several other plans, all we have to do is get you healed and we'll be back in action!'* Gabbro continued to walk. *'...What are you doing?! Gabbro this isn't funny! All those things I said before, about the power and fame? They were true! You'd be famous! Powerful! You, uh...er...you and **Cheppu** would live like gods!'*

Gabbro stopped, only a meter away from the scalding pit. "Cheppu?"

*'Yes! Yes, you and Cheppu would be the two most powerful creatures on this planet, aside from me of course!'* The Beast said, terrified hope clear in his voice. *'Now please, step away from the edge.'*

"Hmm." Gabbro said contemplatively, "Do as I say and I'll stop right now."

‘Yes!’ The Beast said frantically. ‘*Anything!*’

“Promise me power.”

‘*A million worlds will bow at your feet! Cheppu’s too!*’

“Fame. Promise me fame too.”

‘*Yes! Yes! Your names will be on the tongues of countless worlds!*

*There won’t be a sentient alive who won’t know of you and Cheppu!*

“Beg.”

‘...*Beg?*’

“Beg.” Gabbro confirmed. “Beg for your life like the foul wretched vermin that you are.”

There was a pause, as though the demon had to physically swallow his pride. ‘*I-I-I...beg...I beg you to spare me! I beg! I BEG!!*’

Gabbro smiled and chuckled. “Now fly.”

‘*W-what?*’

Gabbro closed his eyes and hurled himself over the edge. He felt the Beast in his soul attempt to flee his body and caught it; Tirac would feel every second of this. As he plummeted he felt the scorching heat wash over him, the enclosed nature of the pit had funneled the vast majority of the immense heat directly upwards. In an imperceptibly short amount of time the air had become the temperature of liquid rock, setting his robes and skin alight. As he burned over a hundred meters above the magma he still held on, Tirac bellowing in his mind as agony and death washed over the two of them. Gabbro smiled with the remains of his face and laughed. “I win.”

A small ball of flame fizzled against the searing hot magma, sending a small plume of flame tumbling across the viscous surface before sinking into the inferno.

The town was alive with activity as thousands of ponies celebrated. The unusual activity of Mount Calcipher and the fiery sinking of Mount Calcipher Del Kaffelerram had caused significant consternation amongst the tourists, but a calming speech from a CSS Agent had assuaged the population into resuming with their celebration. Now the air was thick with songs and music as fireworks and performing phoenixes arched across the sky.

The Doctor sighed and watched as the festivities. “The funny thing is, I probably didn’t do anything Celestia’s actual service wouldn’t have done!



Total transparency is a rare thing in a government...but then this universe has a funny idea of how things should be.”

“...And that’s when I learned that just because a flower looks tasty doesn’t mean that you should eat it, you may just be devouring a celebrated official!” Twilight said with a smile.

Spike scrawled busily on his parchment. “...cel...eb...rated...ficial! Got it Twilight, what other things did you learn with The Doctor?”

“Well, there was that business with the Centauri Emperor, buuuut I think you’re a little too young for that Spike, I’ll write about it later.” She said turning to The Doctor. “I’m sorry Doctor, what were you saying?”

The Doctor smiled and laughed. “Nothing important, just heaping accolades upon your universe as usual!”

“You do that a lot!” Pinkie Pie said as she bounced towards them with heavy looking satchels on her sides. “What were you doing Twilight?”

“Just catching up on all the missed friendship reports for Princess Celestia. I know I haven’t really missed any but I learned so much in the TARDIS I just had to document it!”

“Climactic battles with the Midgaard Serpent and all she can think about is the efficient documentation of reports!” Spike said in exasperation. “Also, not too wild about you leaving me behind again!”

“I’m sorry Spike, but after that business in the Everfree Forest, I knew that if I took you along you’d be in terrible danger!” Twilight said apologetically.

“Actually...” The Doctor said with a grin on his face. “Spike really came through for us this time, I don’t think we would have gotten out of there if it hadn’t been for him!”

Twilight looked at Spike and smiled. “Looks like I’ve got another report to fill out! I’ve learned a lot this particular adventure!”

“Like what?” The Doctor said.

Twilight cleared her throat and blinked. “Uuuh...Well you see, I...no...”

“I learned that it *is* possible to make Alteran Cupcakes *without* Gorable eggs!” Pinkie announced as her bags began to pulsate and groan. “...And I also learned that just because you *can* do something, doesn’t mean that you *should*! On a **completely** unrelated note, do any of you know where Rainbow Dash is? I need her to drop these bags into the volcano.”

Twilight raised an eyebrow and shook her head. “Sorry Pinkie, I think Rainbow is off introducing herself to some advertisers with Applejack...why?”

The sacks on her flanks began to emit dark light. “...No reason.”

“Uhh...Pinkie?” Spike said cautiously. “Are your bags *whispering*?”

“Oh sugar beets!” Pinkie said urgently. “Any of you know where a I could find a blast furnace?”

“No, but there’s a walk-in kiln at the Pottery Palace a few blocks from here...” Fire Dazzler said as he approached them. “Anyone else hear those...*terrible* voices?”

“Don’t listen to them!!” Pinkie said as she bolted off down the road.

Fire Dazzler shook his head and turned back to them. “Hey, how’re you liking the party?”

The Doctor smiled and nodded. “It’s going great! You ponies always know how to party! Oh, and I see you got your horn back...and are decidedly less singed.”

Fire Dazzler nodded. “Yeah! Fluttershy and Zecora got their phoenix feathers and made that medicine! Fixed me right up along with Applejack, Rainbow Dash, and Mr. Stardust!”

The Doctor chuckled and nodded. “Yes, I’ll have to get them to cook up a big batch, could come in handy in the future. Oh, by the way...” He stepped behind Fire Dazzler and pointed to Twilight. “...I seem to recall you wanting an introduction. Fire Dazzler, this is Twilight Sparkle. Twilight Sparkle, this is Fire Dazzler, he helped us to escape! He’s also an accomplished chemist! Knows all sorts of things!”

“Really?” Twilight said with a smile. “Pleased to meet you!”

Fire Dazzler smiled nervously and stepped forwards. “L-likewise! Uhh...I wanted to come over here to ask you to...dance?”

“Oh!” Twilight said, a blush forming in her cheeks. “W-well, umm...I’d love to, er, dance but I’ve got some work to do! Right Spike?”

Spike held out his quill and snapped it half. “Oh dear. I appear to have broken my only quill. Shucks.”

Twilight smiled and her horn began to glow. “Don’t worry, I can fix-”

Spike spat a tiny puff of flame at the fractured quill, dematerializing it instantly. “Oops. I accidentally sent it to the sun.”

Twilight Sparkle turned to a smiling Fire Dazzler, a blush still in her cheeks. “Well...I guess my schedule just got freed up! But how about we just go get something to eat, I’m not much of a dancer.”

“Me neither!” Fire Dazzler said excitedly. “Dinner sounds good! My treat!”

The two ponies turned and left, chattering to each other as they did. Spike turned to The Doctor, an amused look on his face. “How long until he slips up and she finds out he helped them kidnap me?”

"Five minutes." The Doctor said with a mischievous smile. "Ten at the most. What do you think will happen when he does?"

"I'll get some more of that phoenix stuff..." Spike said with a laugh. "...And a mop and bucket."

Zeitgeist stared out at the glowing ruin of his former life, stiff drink in hand. He smirked to himself as he reflected on just how much he had been willing to sacrifice to save the mine, but even his obsession had its limits. His people were in danger, and while he had many more subjects willing to call him 'Your Excellency' back in Canidia this was different. The subjects of Stardust City (a name not of his choosing) were all either exiles from their mother country or the descendants of such people. They had all been disowned and dishonored by an unfeeling aristocrat, cast out of familiar lands and forced to take refuge in the only friendly country in the hemisphere, Equestria. The whole affair was awfully familiar to him in particular. So he took them in, gave them jobs at his personal mine, and made a little piece of home for them in strange lands. Naturally Archduke Steinkoff had been livid, but they were outside of even his influence now, safe and sound from his petty tortures. The mere existence of that city filled him with joy, that there was now a place for exiles within these friendly borders, that banditry and panhandling were no longer the only options for the disowned. There was a home for them here, a home for *him* in a way.

"Zeit..." came a voice from behind; it was the smooth civilized coo of a radiant purple maned unicorn.

"Ms. Rarity..." he said quietly. "I've been expecting you."

She stepped forward, an inwardly directed look of shame on her face. "Twilight told me...uh...about the spell."

"Don't worry Ms. Rarity, should you desire I will destroy my copy." He said evenly. "However, I would be interested in pursuing a co-copyright on your spell, royalties will be yours of course."

"I'm a fashion designer Zeit." Rarity said with a sigh. "Mines and patenting papers aren't my passion."

"You've come to ask me if acquisition of your spell was my sole motive for associating with you." He said with a weak smile.

"Was it?"

"Yes." He said with a nod. "In that it is the reason I approached you. I very easily could have had Litigia or another employee talk business with

you and be done with it, but it's more than that. You do genuinely intrigue me Rarity, that's the truth."

"Is it?" Rarity said with a sigh. "No offense Zeit but you have a reputation for being a charmer, and that's all it is. Charm."

He leaned on the rails of the lookout. "If that's how you feel. I don't blame you; it's not a pleasant feeling is it? Being used."

"No." She said flatly. "No it's not..."

He produced a gemstone and held it up. "This is the information crystal that holds Twilight's interpretation of your gem-finding spell. Its complexity confounds even me; locator spells by definition demand specificity, and yet yours is able to reliably locate 'gems', not diamonds, not emeralds, not sapphires, rubies, or amethyst. Just 'gems'. That takes into account every single variation in chemical composition while still leaving a margin of error wide enough to make room for exceptional specimens. Rumor has it you fashioned this spell not only as an ancillary tool towards your true passion, but that you were little more than a filly at the time! Baffling!"

He casually tossed the crystal into the air, drew his pistol, and fired. A beam of energy arced into the heart of the gem, causing it to glow briefly before exploding in a beautiful purple explosion.

Zeit holstered his pistol and turned back to her. "Business venture canceled."

Rarity blinked in confusion. "Zeit..."

"Anyway!" he said with finality. "Since all this business with the mountain has been sorted out, it seems I will be...*\*sigh\**...*required* to attend the Grand Galloping Gala once more. As such, I am renewing my ensemble. Can I rely on you to make me look amazing?"

Rarity's eyes widened as a smile spread across her face. "Oh! Oh yes! I-*\*ahem\**-I would be honored to, Mr. Stardust."

Zeit smiled broadly, raising his glass. "I'll drink to that!"

"No you will not!" A stern voice said from behind them, it was Litigia. "Mr. Stardust, you sank a valuable mine, buried it in lava, orchestrated the destruction of a 703, and now you're getting drunk and firing weapons in a public place! Are you trying to besmirch my reputation or are you just self-destructive?!"

"A little from Column A and a little from Column B." Zeitgeist said with a shrug, brandishing his glass. "Confound you ponies!"

She trotted up to the two and glowered at Zeitgeist, anger on her face but almost joyous relief and happiness in her eyes. She turned to Rarity, taking on a decidedly less threatening but no less fierce stance. "And

you...thank you very much for keeping him alive, Stardust Inc is indebted to you and your friends.”

Rarity opened her mouth to respond before being cut off by an alarmed scream. “Oh Celestia! Get out of the way!!”

A familiar white stallion went hurtling by, his legs a blur of panicked motion. “Don’t let her kill me!!”

“Oh I won’t kill you!!” said an infuriated voice from down the street. “I just want to show you a nice world I know of! It’s called Hurt!!”

Twilight raced up the street, her horn glowing, she turned to them. “Where did he go?”

“Somewhere to cower and pray.” Zeitgeist said coolly. “World of Hurt, huh?”

Twilight powered down and smiled bashfully. “I wouldn’t have actually sent him there...I just wanted to freak him out, you know, teach him a lesson.”

“For?” Zeitgeist said with a raised eyebrow. “I thought he was helping you?”

“Fire Dazzler did help us, quite a lot actually.” Rarity said to Twilight and Zeit. “But he did get strong-armed into helping those crooks kidnap Spike for Tirac, so he’s not entirely blameless...”

“Speaking of...” Litigia said quickly. “I believe you have recently shunted one of our less amicable employees into your ‘World of Hurt’. Would you mind bringing him back?”

Twilight chuckled nervously and concentrated. A swirling purple vortex swirled and churned in the air, a sharp lightning crack heralded the materialization of a large diamond dog. He fell to the ground with a muted thud, the frazzled dog looked up and around, a look of confusion and shock in his eyes. “...I’m back?”

Zeitgeist put a hand on his shoulder, a smile on his face. “Yes Feist, you’re back. Now, go take some time off. You’ve deserved it.”

The slightly traumatized guard slowly, rose to his feet and cracked his neck. “If it’s all the same to you Your Excellency, I’d rather stay with you.”

“Indefatigable, that’s what you are!” Zeitgeist chuckled and patted him on the shoulder as he handed him his pistol. “Here, Ms. Statute seems to think I shouldn’t be holding one of these.”

Feist nodded and holstered the weapon. “She may be right, sire.”

Rarity looked over at Twilight, an unimpressed look on her face. “Have a little fun while you were at Zeit’s, Twilight?”

Twilight sighed and nodded. "I was under a lot of stress! You all were captured and dead as far as I knew, excuse me if I get a little on edge with rude people!"

Zeit chuckled and put a hand on her shoulder. "We understand, don't we Feist?"

"\*Grumble\* \*Expletive\* \*Grumble\*" Feist said under his breath.

"Don't we Feist." Zeitgeist repeated, no longer a question.

"Yes Your Excellency. Perfectly justified."

"See? We've all been through a bit of an ordeal. But it's over now, everything can return to normal." He said, raising his drink to his mouth seconds before it was telekinetically whisked away and tossed over the railing by Litigia.

"Oh Zeit, darling!" Rarity said with a laugh. "Normal never lasts!"

There was a rush of hot air followed by an all too familiar whirling sound. Litigia gasped and stood back as the TARDIS materialized into view, Zeitgeist looked on with excitement as the two unicorns simply smiled and waited for it to stop.

The doors opened and out stepped The Doctor and Spike, a broad smile on his face. "It took eight minutes! I was right!"

Spike nodded and stepped out. "Yeah, luckily for him you guys were here to stall Twilight!"

Zeitgeist stepped forwards, an eager smile on his face. "Doctor! I hope this isn't too forward, but may I have a look inside your vehicle?"

The Doctor grinned flintily. "Hmmm...say please."

Zeit blinked. "...Please?"

"Pretty please." The Doctor added, enjoying himself.

"Pretty please." Zeit said eagerly.

"With a..." The Doctor said.

"...Cherry on top." They said in unison.

Twilight stepped forwards. "Doctor! Try to show a little respect for the dog who just saved your life!"

The Doctor chuckled and relented. "Alright, alright! I'd love to bring you on board Ziggy..."

"But?" Zeit said, disappointment crawling over his face.

The Doctor stepped aside and revealed two Grundels, a familiar Worker Grundel and an elderly looking Thinker. "Buuuuuut...I think you have a few loose ends to tie up here."

Zeit turned to preemptively calm a startled Feist, who had already begun to reach for his sidearm. "It's alright. Things are different now..." he turned to the Grundels as they stepped out of the ship. "...Right?"

The Elderly Grundel nodded and spoke. "Indeed they are. I am Elder Granite and this is..."

"Cheppu..." Zeitgeist said with a nod. "We've met."

Granite gestured at Cheppu. "I feel that the Grundel who was closest to he that wrought such terrible suffering upon your people should be present at negotiations, to show you that we are indeed sincere."

"I appreciate the gesture, but I feel the need to inform you that the man you called Gabbro was under the influence of a being known as Tir...The Beast." Zeitgeist said with a respectful nod. "Gabbro died well, a true Grundel."

"We know." Granite said glibly. "It was The Beast's influence that allowed Chip to disregard his previous orders not to alert The Council. We assume that what remained of Gabbro subconsciously lowered the perception filter long enough for him to be scanned. Cheppu is here merely to validate our assertion that the Grundels were being manipulated, and that our regret is sincere."

Zeitgeist bowed respectfully. "Accepted. Come, there is much to discuss. I am currently formulating a story that will just about guarantee that no soul shall ever approach the remains of The Beast's prison ever again! By combining our efforts we can see to it that he remain imprisoned forever!"

The Elder nodded thoughtfully. "Perhaps we could spread awareness and warn all about His evil?"

"I was think more along the lines of irradiating the entire mountain with long-lived isotopes to ward off the lifeforms on which he feeds, but yours is probably a better plan." Zeit said before turning back to the ponies as they entered the TARDIS. "Doctor! It was a pleasure to meet you! Twilight! Try to relax! Rarity! I'll be in touch, let me know if you have any questions about the suit!"

"I will Zeit!" Rarity said with a smile. "Good luck!"

Zeit stayed and watched until the TARDIS faded away, soon only the sound and electrified air remained of the fabulous machine. "...We'll meet again Doctor..."

Inside the TARDIS Twilight, Spike, Rarity, and The Doctor trotted towards the center console. Inside already were Applejack, Zecora, Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, and Fluttershy.

The Doctor approached the console and grinned widely. "So! Where do we want to go now? Cerulean Shores? The Zephyrs of Clorin? Or maybe..."

Twilight stepped forwards, an almost apologetic look on her face. "Uhh...Doctor?"

He turned to her. "Yes Twilight?"

"Let's go to Ponyville." She said with a small smile.

"Why? We're all fueled up and I grabbed all your luggage from your hotel room!"

"Hey, Prof?" Applejack said. "Ah think she means, well, to stay."

The Doctor blinked. "Wh...what, like..."

All the ponies nodded, Twilight sighed. "Look Doctor, we all love traveling with you, but this adventure has made me realize just what I was missing here and how much it meant to me...A few days ago I would have rather faced the Shadows again than return to my normal boring life right away. But now...Oh! That's good! I'll get that down once we get home!"

"And ah need tah get back to mah business, travel is great 'n' all, but ah'm a working horse an' there's apples that need sellin'! 'Sides, I managed to talk a big name distributor intah taking a tour of Sweet Apple Acres!" Applejack said. "Ah can't just turn mah back on that..."

"I just landed a pretty sweet deal with some of those advertisers!" Rainbow Dash said with a smile. "I need to do some practicing in my home skies to live up to the hype I stirred up!"

Pinkie Pie giggled and nodded. "I'd like to stick around town and perfect my Alteran Cupcake recipe, I figure that I can do the least damage if I stay in Ponyville...besides, I miss Mr'n'Mrs Cake pretty bad!"

Zecora gestured at the large back of Phoenix salve she had made and sighed. "While it has been fun with you, I fear leaving is what I must do. A home in the forest I must rebuild, an insurance agent will yet be grilled."

Rarity clicked her tongue and gesture out the door. "You heard Zeit, he's renewed his suit! If I don't get to work on it soon I'm starting to think I'll lose my mojo as it were! ...And I do miss Sweetie Belle terribly..."

Fluttershy timidly scratched at the floor plating. "...I miss my animals..."

The Doctor looked at the floor dejectedly. "Well...if that's how you all feel I won't stop you. You all have a home and you miss it, it's perfectly understandable really. I-"

"Doctor..." Twilight said with a smile. "Stay with us. I know you don't like staying in one place for too long but please...give it a try. Besides, plenty of crazy things go on in Ponyville! Lots of stuff to keep yourself



occupied! We all want to go exploring with you, but we need a bit of time home...and maybe you do too?"

The Doctor looked up at her and smiled. "...Alright. Maybe you're right; maybe I've been on the move for too long. Maybe...maybe a bit of stability is just what the doctor ordered, hmm?"

The Doctor rushed over to the console and pulled various levers. "Ponyville here we come! Allons-y!!"

He waited alone. The birds and forest life having long departed since the hated diamond dogs had poisoned the rocks encasing his prison with long-lived radioactive isotopes. He waited. Waiting for the day when the sickening elements decayed and life returned to the area, waiting for the day he would infest and escape once again. Waiting for a day that would never come. He had been so close, his plans had been flawless, his deception perfect, had he succeeded this world would have died screaming a hundred times over in the intervening months. But those filthy mortals, those hateful stunted creatures, those *ponies*, had thwarted him. They had not been alone in their pathetic schemes; they had help of the highest order, the help of a Time Lord. A Time Lord who had foiled his schemes time and again, a Time Lord whose absurd self-righteousness was only surpassed by his hateful intelligence.

The Doctor.

How he hated The Doctor. How he loathed him in every conceivable way. His plan would have gone perfectly had the Time Lord simply stayed away. He knew in his dark degenerate soul that his plan had failed because he hadn't killed the wretched face-changer when he had the chance, but another part of him knew that had he simply killed The Doctor that his victory would be just as sour as defeat. For what would his victory be if due punishment had not been served? What would his victory be if The Doctor didn't spend every waking instant of his long, *long* life hating himself for his actions? Worthless, that's what.

So he waited, and hated, for six long months.

Until...

Something set down on the rocks above him. He could see it was a pony, but he could feel it was something else. Something familiar.

The pony set down on the volcanic rock from up on high, which was strange considering this pony had no wings. A better look showed a somewhat frazzled-looking mare with a white lined purple man. She was wearing a beanie and had the most peculiar eyes, swirled wingdings denoting an utter absence of intelligence. It took him a moment to realize that this wasn't a pony at all, but a construct. The construct locked its wingding eyes on the ground and blinked, and instant later a massive crater of rock exploded into a field of bubbles that scattered away as they were whisked into the air. The construct levitated down to the bottom of the crater, scooping away some excess foam and revealing a needle sharp shard of crystal, the new peak of Mount Kaffelerram.

"Tirac..." a voice whispered to the dark soul within. "You in there?"

“...Discord?” he said incredulously. “But...you’re dead! Terra killed you! I saw it, you were torn to pieces and vaporized!”

The construct sat down and opened its mouth; a hologram hovered in the air, the form of a grinning abomination looked down at the exposed spire. “Yes I know! I was there! Not a pleasant memory, you know! And pulling myself back together was no small feat, I had to...*improvise* to fill in the gaps, as you can plainly see.”

“You look disgusting.” He said curtly. “Supplanting the wonderful body I made for you with pieces of the filthy creatures of this world.”

“Glad to see you too, how’s it been, how’s the wife?” the monstrosity said sarcastically. “Don’t you see I couldn’t simply waltz around in my former body, with your stink all over me?! I had to hide; I had to do...*this* to myself!! ...I was scared...scared that they’d find me, scared that Radian and Terra wouldn’t stop at simply killing me this time, that they’d...well you know what they do to those who really anger them! Sure, they’d allow me to rampage all I want in this body, preferring to let their daughters fend for themselves. But the second I showed even the slightest inkling of who I really was they’d be back in a heartbeat, and even though I’ve learn a few new tricks in the intervening millennia I wouldn’t stand a chance against them!”

“Is that what you’ve come here to do, Discord? Mock me?” he said miserably. “Mock me and show off your new powers?”

He postured proudly. “Well, a few hundred thousand years does wonders for honing one’s talents, that and I’ve always had a natural affinity for creative magic...that’s why you made me your second in command.”

“So why are you here?” Tirac said defensively.

Discord rolled his eyes and sighed. “Well...I’m not. You see I’ve been imprisoned in stone...again. First it was the pathetic daughters who defeated me a thousand years ago, this time it was their dutiful little hench-ponies! Anyway, this is simply a familiar of myself inhabiting this construct, I gave it just enough power to create a link with you.”

“You were active a thousand years ago?” Tirac said, rage creeping into his voice. “Why didn’t you free me *then*?!”

“The same reason I didn’t free you a few days ago! No offense, but you’re not known for sharing! If I had freed you you’d just take over the world and torture it to death! So excuse me for wanting a little empire of my own, a nice little amusement park for me to spend my eons!”

“That’s why you’re my second in command, Discord. You’re gutless, no ambition. You’re just as happy tormenting a single planet as you are a whole galaxy!”

“And that’s why you’re trapped in an irradiated mountain! You’re arrogant and overreaching! You couldn’t just attack any old planet, it had to be the one with the most powerful gods, so you got trapped and I got torn to pieces!”

He grunted and began to erect psychic defenses to shut out the gibbering disgrace.

“Tirac!” Discord said in a panic. “There is a reason I’ve come, and it is important!”

Noticing the uncharacteristic urgency in his creation’s voice Tirac stopped and began to pay attention. “I’m listening.”

“Sure, I was happy enough just to torment this planet a little...but now...I want nothing more than revenge, I want nothing more than this world to fall into the pit and scream until it chokes on its own blood!!” Discord said with growing rancor. “I *watched* myself get petrified this time...the look on my face...so I endeavored to visit upon this world the single most Terrible, Insidious, Reprehensible, Abominable, and Contemptible punishment possible!”

“You flatterer you.” Tirac said flatly.

“So you’ll do it then?” Discord said eagerly.

“What are your terms?” Tirac growled, knowing that there must be a price to pay.

“This world. Mine. Forever” He said with a smile. “And do try to leave it mostly intact. That includes the pony population. I realize there’ll be a bit of the ol’ slash’n’burn, but hey, I don’t expect you to depart from your signature! Just leave them intact enough to provide me with toys for the next eternity or two.”

“...Agreed.” Tirac said with a sigh. “I’ll just have to make do with everything else in existence.”

“That’s the spirit!” Discord said jubilantly.

“So, how are you going to do this?” Tirac said with a grin.

The construct blinked and shuddered, emitting a strange keening whine before violently swinging forwards and impaling its head on the crystal spire. Tirac let out a cry of alarm as he was sucked into the construct, imbuing its artificial flesh with his dark energies. The construct slowly rose, blinking as the blood from its gaping head wound ran up its face and back into its skull, the bone cracking as it snapped back into place and was once again covered with flesh. Tirac looked down at his new body, it was sickening and hateful but it would do.

“Remember...” Discord’s voice whispered as the familiar faded from existence. “...you’re weak in this body, so you’ll have to be patient and

build power. There can be no second chances this time; Radian and Terra should stay away so long as you keep mum about what you really are. And whatever you do don't, I repeat, don't underestimate the Elements of Harmony. I look forwards to serving you again..."

It was gone.

Tirac grinned with his pony mouth and looked up at the blue sky. He levitated into the air and cast his evil gaze over the land. Tirac laughed. There would be no stopping him this time.

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## The End of Mines of Dragon Mountain

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### Starring

David Tennant.....	The Doctor
Tara Strong.....	Twilight Sparkle
Andrea Libman.....	Fluttershy/Pinkie Pie
Ashleigh Bell.....	Rainbow Dash/Applejack
Tabitha St. Germaine.....	Rarity
Cathy Weseluck.....	Spike
Dawnn Lewis.....	Zecora
Nora Dunn.....	Litigia Statute
James Urbaniak.....	Zeitgeist Stardust
Victor Caroli.....	Gabbro/Tirac