



My Little Fortress Teamwork Is Magic

By Axel and Wheel

Table of Contents:

Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	8
Chapter 3	15
Chapter 4	21
Chapter 5	28
Chapter 6	36
Chapter 7	44
Chapter 8	54
Chapter 9	61
Chapter 10	73

Chapter 1

"You did what!?" The purple unicorn fumed, staring at Rainbow Dash angrily. Dash recoiled slightly, never seeing Twilight Sparkle this angry before.

"Well, I mean Trixie is back, and you're the only one in Ponyville strong enough to duel her with magic, and I..." She trailed off. Twilight let out an exasperated sigh.

"You can't just speak for me! I don't want to fight Trixie!"

"Twi, last time you showed Trixie up by a mile and a half! I'd bet you could do it again!"

"That was six months ago! She's probably gotten much stronger since then!"

"Well, so have you, silly!" Pinkie rose out of a bowl of apples sitting on a nearby table

Twilight's anger subsided slightly as she pondered how long Pinkie had been there. Pinkie just stood beside her, munching an apple. "C'mon, Twilight, it'll be fun!" She said, mouth full.

"Yeah Twi, we've got till sunset to prepare!" Dash chimed

Her brow furrowed, knowing that she really had no way out. If she declined, it would seem as if she was backing out. If there was one thing to never do, it was back out of a challenge set up by someone like Trixie. And it probably would be fun. From Dash's explanation, Trixie just wanted to test her new magic. She sighed.

"Fine. But I'm still mad at you" She trotted outside. "At least there'll only be a few people there"

"Don't know why I thought that" The stands were filled with ponies, cheering for Twilight. "How'd you even get these stands out to the outskirts of Ponyville?"

"Big Macintosh helped" Applejack said, motioning toward her brother. "Now don't you worry, Sugarcube, we've all got your back" Her friends sat on the sidelines, hooping and hollering. Even Fluttershy could be heard once in a while, and Angel sat on her head, waving a small flag.

"Still no sign of Tri-" As if on cue, the blue unicorn appeared in a brilliant puff of smoke.

"The great and powerful Trixie!" Snips and Snails yelled in unison

"The one and only! Now, Twilight Sparkle, are you ready for the duel? The rematch of the century?" Trixie reared up.

Twilight sighed. "Ready as I'll ever be" She said as she lowered herself to the ground. Spike, Snips, and Snails All stood between the two.

Spike turned to the crowd. "Fillies and Gentlecolts! Welcome to the magic duel between our own Twilight Sparkle and-"

"The great and powerful Trixie!" Snips shouted. Spike shot him a glance. "Thank you, Snips" He said through gritted teeth. "Let's just have a good clean match. And now, without further adu, let the duel begin!" They all ran to the sidelines opposite the bleachers.

Trixie fired a blue beam at Twilight, who stepped out of the way swiftly. She responded in kind, hitting Trixie with a blast that made her stumble. Twilight charged at Trixie, her horn glowing with her next spell. Trixie regained her footing and smirked, firing a purple light. It hit Twilight, and she teleported away, running into a tree.

"Teleportation spells? Two can play at that game"

She shot her own spell, putting Trixie up in a tree. They kept throwing teleportation at each other, disappearing and reappearing all over the field. They finally ended facing each other, almost where they had started. They

fired again, the beams collided in midair, growing into a large orb. They pushed all their energy into it, pushing it toward Trixie, then Twilight, then back.

"Twi-light! Twi-light! Twi-light!" Her friends cheered, stepping closer.

Trixie and Twilight pumped all their energy, panting. The Ball grew giant, until finally

BOOOOOMM!!!

A bright light blinded Spike and the ponies for a minute. When they looked back, Trixie and Twilight were gone. Along with the rest of Twilight's friends.

"Twilight?" Spike asked into nothing

"Trixie?" Snails looked around

"They're gone!" Someone in the stands shouted

The crowd gasped and started yelling

"Where... Where'd they go!? And... what if they can't get back..." Spike fell to his knees, Yelling at the sky. "NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!"

Twilight Woke up, looking around grogily as she took in her surroundings. all her friends were scattered to and fro. They were in a mostly white room, With a few benches, a large cabinet, and some cubbies holding strange equipment that she didn't recognize. There was a large metal door in one direction, and a small room opposite it she could see through it's glass doors. In the small room Dash was against a wall. Everypony else was in the main room, Applejack on top of the cabinet, Fluttershy and Angel under one of the benches, Rarity against one of the walls, and Trixie in the middle of the floor. She searched for Pinkie, then became aware of something heavy on her back. With a quick glance, she found her pink friend had somehow landed on her.

'Wait...' she thought, now a little more conscious. She didn't know what this place was. It didn't look like any place she'd ever been before, and nopony was around. 'How'd... the spell!' She yelled at herself. 'Stupid! You never cross teleportation spells!'

She shifted, and pinkie slid off her back and landed on the floor with a thud. Even with the fall, she was still out cold.

'Always was a heavy sleeper' Twilight started walking around, waking her friends up one by one. Applejack Nealy fell off the cabinet, but got down safely. Everypony looked around, slightly scared and confused. Except Pinky, she handled the situation with her usual energy.

"Anypony seen Dash?" Pinkie asked

Twilight pointed to the room, and Pinkie trotted toward the door. She didn't realize that it only opened from the inside until she smacked into it. "How are we supposed to wake Dash up if we can't get in?"

"Ah, let'r sleep. she'll wake up eventually" AppleJack looked around. "Anypony know where we are?"

"Well, wherever it is it's positively filthy! just look at all this grime on the floor!" Rarity lifted a hoof in disgust. Applejack rolled her eyes.

"Um... Girls?" Fluttershy mumbled, unheard

Trixie spoke over Fluttershy "Well, maybe-"

"No! You have no right to talk! You're the reason we're here at all!"

"Me!?"

"Girls?"

"What kind of foal counters teleportation with teleportation! You're lucky we didn't end up in the walls! Didn't they teach you that wherever it is you learned magic!?"

"I wouldn't have had to if you hadn't-" She was cut off by a gruff throat

being cleared.

A rather short man wearing overalls and a hard hat looked at the ponies with a shotgun in his hands, finger on the trigger.

Fluttershy mumbled "I tried to warn you"

Chapter 2

"So lemme get this here straight" The man said, still a little dazed from his discovery. It had been about ten minutes, and Twilight had convinced the man, Who didn't give his name and said to just call him Engineer, to sit down and listen to their story. "Y'all are from the magical land of Equeria?"

"Equestria." Twilight corrected him

"Right, and y'all with the horns can do magic?"

"Right"

"Okay, and you two" He pointed at Trixie and Twilight "somehow messed up and transported everyone here, to my world"

"Precisely! So you do understand!"

"Not in the slightest, but I think the jist is that y'all need to find a way home?"

"... Well, as long as you realize that part, I suppose it's all okay"

A bright light flashed in the small room. "Well, looks like someone's respawning. I get to see if all this work finally drove me crazy or if I really am seein' talkin' ponies"

From the room a giant of a man lumbered out, looking fuming mad and muttering what sounded like Russian swear words under his breath. at his side he carried a gun that was almost as big as the ponies. "Engineer! Entire RED team is evil babies!"

Twilight was a little stunned at the man's lack of reaction to them, but Engineer just smirked. "What'd they do this time, Heavy?"

"Well, I took down two or three itty bitty sentries, and I was pretty hurt. so I go to corner to eat sandvich and tiny Scout comes up, and he kills me and

has NERVE to steal sandwich! Can you believe it!?"

Engineer had seemingly lost interest. "Terrible. Hey Heavy? Do me a favor. Do you see anything strange over there?" He pointed toward the cubbies

Heavy turned and stared. "Hmmm... well, there is purse in Pyro's cubby"

"No, not that. Anything out of the ordinary?"

"What, like tiny pink horse hanging upside-down in Sniper's cubby?"

"...Actually, that's exactly what I meant. So I'm not crazy" He wiped his brow. "Gotta say, you took that rather well, Heavy"

"Heavy thought he was hallucinating again. So why are there many tiny horses around respawn?"

"Just wait, I want the whole crew here for this"

They both sat down, trying their hardest to make normal small talk. A flash of light, and a black man with an eyepatch on, taking a strong swig of something Twilight was positive was alcohol strong enough to remove paint, stumbled out of the room. He blinked a few times at the strange sight, taking a look at his bottle. "Did someone slip som'thin' into me drink?"

"No Demo. We see them too"

"Good. I'd hafta kill someone if they go messin' with me scrumpy"

"Why are all the crazy one's showing up first?" Twilight whispered to Rarity; She replied with a shrug

"Who knows. Maybe they're the normal ones here"

"I hope not, or we're doomed"

The next two out weren't much better. The first was a Man... Woman... Thing in a gasmask and fireproof suit, called Pyro. the second was a German man in a long coat, who was called Medic, and who after hearing

the ponies talk, got a gleam in his eye as he wondered aloud how their vocal cords worked. Fluttershy moved as far away from the Medic as she could.

"How many more are left, Engi?" Applejack spoke up.

"We Still need Soldier, Sniper, Spy, and Scout"

As If on cue, a man who's eyes were concealed by the large helmet on his head stepped out. "What are you ladies doing sitting around!?"

"Soldier, do you not see the ponies around?"

"I see the ponies! I also see a bunch of good for nothing slackers! Why are you people not on the field!?"

"Look, just hang around for a second till everyone's here, and we'll explain then"

"Fine. But this had better not cut into my killing time" He sat down in a huff

Another flash, and a man carrying a rifle in one hand and Rainbow Dash on his shoulder stepped out. "Anyone want to tell me why there's a rainbow colored horse in the spawn room?"

"Long story, we just need Scout and Spy"

"Ahem" A man in a suit and mask appeared behind Rarity, and she jumped across the room.

"DON'T SNEAK UP ON PONIES LIKE THAT!"

"I'm pretty sure sneaking up on people is in my job description"

"Ah hell, I'll just tell you now, I'm sick of waiting for Scout. I'll explain it to him when he gets here"

"So these here ponies are from another land called Eque-"

"We have taken the enemy intelligence!" A loudspeaker in the room

blared. Dash stirred slightly at the sound, mumbling in her sleep

"God that thing is annoying. any way, cuz of some magical mishap, they all ended up here, and they don't know how to get home. Now I think we should help 'em get back, seein as they showed up in our base"

"We have dropped the enemy intellegence!" Dash sat up suddenly

"Dammit!" She was still groggy, and didn't register her surroundings.

A last flash, and out stepped a boy in baseball attire, cursing in a thick Boston accent. "I had it! I had it and... Wait" Scout looked down at the Rainbow maned pony at his feet. "No freakin' way"

Dash looked up. "Could you keep it down, I just wo... No way" She reached up with a hoof a poked him in the stomach. "Y-y-you're real!"

"You're real too!"

"Omigoshomigoshomigosh" Both started Chanting in unison

"Uh, Dash?" Twilight looked at Scout "Do you two know each other?"

"Uh, duh! He's only my favorite Class in Team Fortress 2!"

Engi looked confused. "Team Fortress... hey wait, how do you know her, Scout?"

"She's only da coolest pony on My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic!"

"In what?" Twilight looked quizically around "Will somepony tell me what's going on!?" She yelled.

Suddenly in the vents something started banging around, like a frightened animal. It worked it's way Toward the opening, falling through a grate onto the Heavy's head. He picked the Grey pony up, Staring it in the eyes (Even though those eyes weren't staring back), looking angry.

"Muffin?" The Pegasus held up one of the treats, offering it to Heavy.

"... I like these ponies!"

"Derpy!" All the ponies (minus Trixie) gathered around Derpy to make sure she hadn't hurt herself in the vents. "Are you okay?"

"Absitively Posolutely!" She said with her usual enthusiasm, Never detered by the bad things that sometimes befell her.

"So how'd dey get here?" Scout asked, a wide smile plastered on his face

"Ugh. short version, magic spell" Spy snorted from the corner

"Good enough for me"

"Now I have an idea. I can try to supercharge my teleporter to get y'all home. But it'll take quite a bit of time. Someone'd have to take over my job"

"... What if I did it?" Applejack spoke up. "Y'all look like you could use a break. I think we could all take on one of the classes for a while"

"Heck yeah! I'll be Scout!" Dash Grabbed a spare headset and grabbed a scattergun "Lemme at em!"

"Well... I suppose you could. I'd have to modify the guns a little. and the regenerator. If Y'all are okay with that"

Murmurs of approval went through. Fluttershy looked concerned, but she didn't say anything. "Well, then I suppose we should pick classes"

Pinkie Jumped at the opportunity and ran over to Heavy. "I wanna be the Big Guy!"

Twilight looked sceptical "Not to be rude, but... why?"

Pinkie held up a sandwich "Sandwiches.." She said, slightly transfixed

"No no no, is sandvich!"

"Sandwich"

"Sandvich"

As the two argued about the proper pronunciation, Rarity was swooning over the intrigue and romance she perceived as part of the Spy's job. Spy leaned over to AppleJack. "I zink your friend reads too many romance novels"

"Read 'em? Heck, she could write her own" Applejack turned to Fluttershy "I expect you'll be goin' Medic?"

"Um... actually" She cast a glance at the Man, who had pulled out what looked like a giant syringe attached to a huge scalp. She squeaked in fear, hiding behind the Sniper's legs.

"I guess you're going with me?" She nodded in agreement.

"You have got to be kidding me. I'll go medic, you wimp" Trixie walked over to the Medic

"Bah. I refuse to be shown up by a bunch of girly ponies" His Shovel fell out of his back pocket. Angel picked it up, getting a feel for it. "Hey! Give that back you stupid rabbit!" Angel's eyes lowered. Soldier reached for the bunny. Angel ran up his arms, landing on top of his helmet and hitting the helmet with the shovel repeatedly. A loud ringing sound came every time he hit it. Soldier fell to the ground. Fluttershy looked at the two, terrified that something would happen to Angel

The soldier growled at Angel, who still had the shovel. Suddenly, he smiled wildly. "I like this bunny's moxie! I would be glad to have you as a soldier!" Angel slung the shovel over his shoulder, beaming.

Twilight looked around. "Well, that leaves Demo and Pyro" She turned to find herself face to face with Derpy with a fire axe in her mouth. "Demo it is"

Engi clapped his hands to get everyone's attention. "Combat has been called for the night, so we'll be able to train our new friends. I've got the Regenerator modified so that y'all will respawn as long as you're here, so give 'em the rundown. Get to know 'em. We'll meet back here in the morning. Deal?"

Everyone replied in unison. "Deal!"

Chapter 3

Dash grabbed the freshly-modded scattergun, specifically made for hooves instead of hands. Engi had made special weapons for all of them, capping it off by modding the regenerator so that the ponies could respawn. He even modded some of the clothes to fit the equines. Everyone stood around, firing their weapons to get a feel. Once they were ready, one by one they ran out the door.

Of Course, Dash was out first, flying over the bridge, past the enemy respawn, and down their spiral.

"I'll just run in, grab the intel, and run out. Easy" She peeked in, and the sight that greeted her was not a good one: A level three sentry pointed directly at her. She screamed and ducked behind the corner as the rockets missed by inches. "Okay, maybe not so easy. At least no Engi's were around. That would have been embarrassing"

"HI DASH!" Pinkie yelled right behind her. She jumped backwards, back into the sentry's sight.

"PINKIE! wait..." She looked around as the sentry beeped to confirm her presence. Before she could say a word, the force of three rockets gibbed her across the room.

After what seemed like ages (but in reality was 10 seconds), she "awoke" in the regenerator chamber.

"Wha? What happened? All I remember is a sentry pointed at me, some beeping, an intense hatred of Pinkie at the moment, and now I'm back here!"

"You died" The Engineer said nonchalantly, taking a sip of coffee and reading through some blueprints. "My Regenerator sensed your death and reconstructed you. Now your not dead. So run along and try not to die

again" He sounded as though he'd had to explain it more than a few times already.

Dash was taken aback. She'd died? No way. She was Dash. THE Dash! She'd show RED. No one kills Dash!

Her steely determination spurred, she bolted off, quick as a flash. She hasn't lost something she'd set her mind to yet! Not the Young fliers competition, not her first race, and certainly not these RED losers! She smiled wide, closing her eyes and picturing how she would utterly destroy them.

The lovely little dream of hers was cut short when something fiercely grabbed her tail, yanking her back. 'Why does everypony have to do that!?' she thought to herself. She swung around angrily, ready to fight whoever stopped her. "Alright, come and get s- Rarity?"

The pony with her tail wore a mask that was adorned with the enemy Pyro's face, but it was unmistakably Rarity. No pony else could keep their hair that luxurious during a war. Rarity spat the tail out, making a show of it by spitting and sputtering. "My word, Rainbow Dash! How often do you wash that thing!?"

Dash gave Rarity an annoyed glare. "None of your business. Why'd you stop me?"

Rarity spat one last time and pointed into the courtyard that Dash had almost entered. "If you'd gone in there that court's walls would be painted in Rainbow Dash. There is a pair of sentries that I'm trying to get rid of. Honestly Dash, you need to learn to look before you leap"

Dash peeked in and, sure enough, a pair of level two's were in progress. "Oh" She sheepishly offered Rarity an apology. Rarity went invisible, sneaking up on the unattended sentries and placing sappers on them. Dash ran down the straight stairs. "Thanks Rarity, I'll pay you back later!"

She snuck around the RED basement. Not gonna get caught this time. No way.

A beeping around the corner told her that the sentry was still operational. The pegasus gulped. Although, again, the Engineer wasn't around. she poked around the corner, just enough to see the sentry, and shot it. A few sparks jumped out. Another five or six shots, and the monster sentry exploded, leaving the room open.

"Yes! No pony outdoes Rainbow Dash!" She ran into the room smiling. At least, smiling until the second sentry in the room, hidden in the corner, noticed her.

She appeared back in spawn, looking incredibly surprised. "There are way to many Engineers on that team"

"I know, right?" The Scout sat in the room, bouncing a baseball off the wall. He looked over and the ball landed in his open hand. "Dey always do dat"

"Why are you hanging around here? You're on break! Don't you have somewhere to go?" She sat next to him. Talking to Scout sounded much more pleasing than getting plastered all over the walls again.

"Eh, I thought about takin' a trip home, but that'd take too long. Pretty much no one went anywhere. So what happened to you? Engi troubles?"

"You could say that. Any advice?"

"Don't do it alone. You're fast, Dash, but no amount of fast'll save ya from four hundred bullets in ya spine" He said with little enthusiasm, as if it had happened to him a thousand times.

"Use da Heavy, or Soldier, someone. Y'ain't gonna win without a little teamwork" He less said it and more recited it, a speech that he had apparently heard each one of those thousand reckless charges.

Dash looked thoughtfully out the door. For once she couldn't brute force something. "Thanks, I'll try that. 'course if I mess up, I'll be back anyway" She started toward the door.

"Hol' up a sec" Scout reached into his backpack, pulling out a soda can and throwing it toward her. She caught it and read the label.

"Bonk Atomic Punch? What am I s'posed to do with this?"

"Trust me, when you need it, y'll know" Scout went back to bouncing his ball off the wall.

The cyan Pegasus looked skeptical, but put the can in her saddlebag and ran out. She jumped down and sitting on the bridge, Pinkie had a strangely pleased look on her face.

"Uh, Pinkie? Shouldn't you be doing something? Like attacking the enemy?"

"Silly Dashie, I'm waiting for my sandwich to come back!"

Dash had long since given up on trying to figure the Pink pony out, but this intrigued her. "Come back? What, did it run away?" She giggled at the mental image of a sandwich running away from the ever-hungry Pinkie Pie.

"No, I ate it. But I found out that after I eat them, another one appears after a little while!!"

Just as Pinkie had said, a sandwich on a plate appeared in front of her. The only thing Dash could do was stand aghast as Pinkie devoured that one and sat waiting for the next one. Before any words could come to mind, She heard a voice from her earpiece. It was Rarity, barely audible. "Dash? are you there? I need help"

"Rarity? What's wrong?"

"I'm trapped, I can't get out of their intel room, They're standing in the exits. Please? I can't fight these on my own, there's Two Engineers and two of those dreadful Pyros"

"Why don't you just let them kill you and let yourself go back to respawn?"

"And lose all the hard work it took to get down here? Never! Oh no" She lowered her voice again to being barely audible. "I think they heard me."

Please hurry, Rainbow Dash" Then the Earpiece went silent.

"Uh Oh. I can't deal with that either. But I do owe Rarity..." She cast her glance at Pinkie, rump in the air and eyes on the pile of plates that was slowly but surely accumulating. "Hey Pinkie Pie? Wanna help me for a sec?"

Pinkie nodded happily, sandwich in mouth.

They ran down the ramp, leaving RED team behind, either waiting to respawn or pointlessly firing at where they were a second ago. Dash put a hoof to her mouth, signaling to keep as quiet as they could. "Okay, stay here and wait for my signal" She bolted around one corner, calling the Pyros out of their posts at the doorways. She ran out, and once both were in Pinkie's sight, she yelled "Now!" and the pink pony unleashed a hail of gunfire from the minigun. Both of them fell quickly, Dash barely getting a scratch. One of the Engineers came out of the room, and was swiftly dispatched with the scattergun.

"Time for part 2!" She ran to the edge of the room, this time looking all over the room. Two sentries, Level 3 each, and an Engi standing by one of them, fortunately looking away. "Now or never" She pulled out the can Scout had given her, popped the top, and chugged the thing. Her eyes went wide. She could feel the energy surging through her, everything seemed to move in slow motion. 'No time to marvel. Hope this works!' She ran out, and the sentries started firing. She used her caffeine time to dodge the bullets, placing herself behind the hapless Engi and causing him to be gunned down by his own building.
"Pinkie! Stage 3!"

Pinkie ran in, and while the Sentries were trained on dash, her minigun tore through one, then the other. The room was finally clear, and Dash returned to her normal speed as the Bonk's effect wore off.

"We did it!" She was tackled to the ground by an unseen force. A spy pony appeared over her, thanking her profusely. She got to her feet. "We're not out of the woods yet" She grabbed the intel. "All those guys we fought on

the way in will be back by now. So Pinkie, you go up the way we came. Me and Rarity will go up the other way. Got it?"

"You betcha!" Pinkie ran out, sandwich in hand.

"She is so random" Dash looked at Rarity. "You comin' or what?"

"You're not mad at me for dragging you into my mess?"

"Mad? That was the most fun I've had in ages! Besides, you didn't think the spirit of loyalty would leave a friend behind, did you?" she playfully jabbed Rarity on the shoulder.

"We better get out of here before we get caught"

They ran out of the room, past Pinkie mowing the enemy down, and out the front door, intel safely on Rainbow Dash's back.

Chapter 4

Leave it to Rarity to find a place for fashion in a war zone. The elegant unicorn couldn't let her friends just waltz onto the battlefield without looking the parts they played. While the weapons were being modified, she took it upon herself to modify some spare clothes to create uniforms that matched the classes. Everyone matched with some differences necessary due to differing biologies, but she was proudest of her work with Pinkie, turning Ponyville's Premier Party Pony into a spitting image of the Russian Mercenary.

Which is why Rarity was flustered when Pinkie respawned wearing a black, badly kept hairpiece

"Where in Equestria did you get that garish thing?"

"Dunno. Things just keep appearing on my head when I get back here"

"Things?" She asked incredulously. Pinkie pointed across the room to the cubby where Pinkie was keeping a large pile of hats. Rarity stood, mouth agape at the pile. The heavy let out a hearty laugh

"Horosho! Tiny Pink has discovered hats!"

"Hats?" Both said in unison, exchanging a glance

"Is greatest honor warrior can find! Hats show skill! Show Power!"

"Show luck" The Spy stood in the door, leaning against the wall.

"Bah. Tiny spy is jealous cause he has no hats"

"I don't need hats, you nitwit. I'm invisible or disguised ninety-nine percent of ze time. So why would I want somezing that is meant to be seen?"

The two started getting into a fierce argument, but by that point the two ponies had left. Pinkie ran toward the enemy base, shouting until she was

out of earshot.

Rarity tried to do her duty, but found her mind keep drifting back to hats. 'Focus, Rarity' She chastised herself after yet another time getting caught by those dreadful Pyros.

She started out of respawn, but stopped. Heavy and Spy were gone, and nopony was around. she took out her disguise kit and looked at herself in the mirror she used to replace the cigarettes.

"The Spy is right. Why would I need a hat? All it would do is mess up my mane" She kept trying to convince herself, but a nagging voice in the back of her head made her unsure. "Maybe Twilight will be able to help convince me" She trotted off to find her.

On her way, though, she started noticing all her friends had hats that were not made by her. Dash rushed past wearing a milkpony's cap, Derpy wore a propeller cap, and Trixie wore a Pair of goggles on her forehead. Even Angel hopped across the bridge wearing a Horned helmet. She sighed and continued her search

She found her in the intelligence room, grateful that she was Twilight was still wearing the hat she had made. True to form, the purple unicorn was reading some files. A pile of sticky bombs surrounded their briefcase of intelligence. Twilight looked up briefly.

"Oh, Hey Rarity." She went right back to reading. Apparently not finding what she was looking for, she threw the papers back in the nearby filing cabinet and withdrew a new set.

"Hello Twilight. Are you okay? You seem a little... distraught"

"Just looking for some information" She sounded annoyed. "Why are you down here anyway?"

"Have you noticed all the hats our friends seem to be finding?" Twilight tensed at the word hats.

"Hats? Nope, no hats. Haven't seen any. Nope, just the one Applejack always wears. Why, have you found any?" Twilight was almost frantic, talking very quickly.

"No I haven't, and I need to-"

"FOUND IT!" Twilight threw a folder out of the cabinet. It's contents spilled out, showing dozens of pictures of hats. A few Rarity recognized from her friend's heads, many she didn't.

"Oh Twilight, not you too"

"What! Just because I want a hat makes me a bad pony!?" She stopped herself when she realized she was yelling at the top of her lungs. She laughed sheepishly, blushing. "Uh... I mean... Okay, I have seen all the hats, and yes, I don't have one. No matter how hard I try I can't make them. It's like their Cutie marks: you have to find them. And I want to get one"

Twilight shifted through the folder, finding a sheet of paper with writing on it. She read the contents aloud:

"Easy Ways to Earn Your Hat"

"Throughout history, men have worn hats as a way of showing how much better they are than other men. "I buy hats," a behatted man seems to say. "I am better than you!" Rarity lowered her head.

"In wartime, hats were a useful way of conferring rank, and ensuring that casualties were confined to the lower classes (hence the famous command of "Don't fire till you see the tops of their heads" at the Battle of Bunker Hill by William Prescott, a general renowned for only shooting enemy combatants who were poor). During peacetime, hats have been instrumental for men to let the non-hatted know just who is wearing the hat around here."

"Now it is your turn to earn your hat. The easiest is the method known as idling. Simply stand around for a long period of time, and allow yourself to die every once in a while. With Patience, a hat will soon adorn your head. Of course, the only surefire way to receive a hat is-"

BOOM!

An explosion went off next to them. They jumped up, turning to see a RED Soldier firing wildly. Twilight fired bombs at their attacker, hurting but not killing him. He fired a rocket at point blank range, and it glowed brilliantly. All three were destroyed by the blast.

Rarity dusted herself off. She was getting quite tired of constantly finding her sent back to the white room. A bright flash to he right and Twilight stood there. "Stupid Crockets! I was at full health!" Rarity looked over and gasped. "...What? Did I say something wrong?" Rarity sighed, lowered her head. She shook it no, then pointed to her horn. Twilight felt the area and found, perched upon it, a stove pipe hat.

"YES! Yesyesyesyesyesyesyes" She bounced around in a circle, like she had when her cutie mark had appeared.

Rarity walked away, shaking her head. She passed Applejack in the court, muttering under her breath and repairing the damage the soldier had done to her buildings. True to Twilight's word, the orange pony only had the hat from her pappy on her head. But in one of her saddlebags sat a teddy bear, dressed like an engineer. The unicorn fumed and trotted away.

'It's not fair!' She thought to herself. 'I'm Rarity! Fashion-pony extraordinaire! I'm not supposed to be behind in trends! I make the trends!'

She tried to put the thought out of her mind, but they wouldn't leave her thoughts. Time and time again her thoughts would wander away from the task at hand and cost her another life. And every respawn she put a hoof to her head, but nothing new was ever there.

"After a particularly brutal death at the hands of a Sniper, she'd had enough. "That's it!" She yelled, sitting down and refusing to move. Her friends would pass by every so often. At first they tried to persuade her back to battle, but gave up eventually and stopped trying after a few respawns. She sat for almost an hour, but boredom got to her, and soon she fell asleep.

"Idling, Mon petit poney? I would think you would be better than that"

The Spy took a drag from his cigarette. He had nudged her awake after an hour or two. She had ended up explaining her day to him, while he sat quietly. At the end he had spoken up.

"You should be out there helping your friends, not pining for useless headgear"

"I am so sick of everypony telling me it's no big deal when they all celebrate when they get their hats. How would they know how it feels! They've found theirs already! I'm not going anywhere until I get one!" she was starting to tear up, until she realized how foolish she must look.

He sat next to her. "This is ridiculous. You have let the talk of a man who is convinced that his sandwich can speak get to you. You are no less a person... Er, pony for not having one. And the payoff for getting one isn't that satisfying"

He tossed his finished cigarette bud away, lighting a new one. "Smoking's bad for you, you know" her voice was a little weak.

"So is obsession. Look... Rarity, was it?" She nodded. "I know how you feel. Do you know how long I've been here?" She shook her head. "Neither do I. I've lost track of ze days. But in all zis time I have found only one thing that is considered a hat. Do you want to see it?" She nodded, and he went over to his cubby, pulling something out of a box. He put it on and turned around. It was a large fake beard with a camera sticking out the bottom. "Ze Camera Beard. I found it one Christmas. Needless to say, I wasn't happy. Ze payoff isn't worth ze hype. So get the thought of hats out of your head before you're disappointed"

Rarity stared at the floor deep in thought. After a while, she stood up. "Thank you, Mister Spy. I think I understand" She had more confidence. She didn't need a hat. Especially if that Garish thing was what could be considered her 'prize'. She put a medic disguise on and ran out. He watched her leave. Once she was gone, he took the beard off and put it back in the box, next to the beret he prized. 'Who said Spies have to tell the

truth' he thought as he put the lid back on.

The pseudo pep talk gave her all the energy she needed to focus on the work, successfully pushing the thought away. She'd sap engineer buildings and even got a few kills on Heavies, Soldiers, and even an oblivious Pyro once. That kill had made her laugh a little. She was in the middle of wreaking a little havoc when Pinkie came in and decimated the team. With all of RED incapacitated at the moment, they chatted a little.

"Feeling better, Rarity?" Pinkie had an umbrella hat on, but the unicorn didn't let it bother her.

"Much. I don't need to validate myself with some silly hat"

"That's goo- Whoa-a-a-a" Pinkie's tail started twitching violently. Rarity covered her head, waiting for a soldier or worse to fall from the sky. "Well, at least I know that still works" Pinkie took a step towards the spiral stairs. A gunshot rang out, and she fell to the ground. Rarity screamed and turned to see the enemy's Sniper throw a jar of something. It broke and covered her. After a second she realized exactly what it was.

"EWWW!!! YOU VILE DISGUSTING HORRID AWFUL-" Her tirade was cut short from a single swing of the man's kukri.

"Eweweweweweweeewwww!!!!" She was still yelling as she respawned. She'd closed her eyes and violently shook out her mane to get the feeling off of her. "If that never happens again it'll still be too soon" She shuddered and walked out. Pinkie looked back to see the source of the yelling.

"He got you too?" Rarity nodded. "I think I'm gonna stay away from him. I mean, I don't really wanna get close to any of them, especially that spy, and I guess it doesn't matter if I'm close because I mean that gun can hit everything from really far away right." Rarity kept walking, pushing the memory as far back as she could. Pinkie looked back and did a double take. "Waitamminute Rarity!"

Pinkie plopped something on the unicorn's head. Rarity pulled out the hand mirror and looked at it. It couldn't be... but... it was!

"A hat!" Atop her head sat a simple Fedora, it's color matching her suit's. She adjusted it to fit correctly, a smile plastered on her face

"It fell off when you were shaking from the... wait. That's it? That's what I sensed? A hat falling off someone's head? Well that's not much fun. Or was it that the hat was going to drop? But I suppose..." Rarity didn't hear much after that, as she trotted triumphantly out of the spawn, her Fancy Fedora taking it's place upon her head.

Chapter 5

'Dearest journal

It has been one week since our unfortunate accident. I have neglected to keep you up to date, but at night combat is put on hold, giving me a chance to catch up. First off, this world or whatever it is contains nothing like us. In fact in this world, as I have ascertained from the Scout, we are part of a television show. Likewise, as Rainbow Dash has told me, the humans here are all stars of a video game in our world. I must do more research to such dimensional anomalies once we are home. Second, We aren't going to get home for a while. According to the Engineer he hasn't even scratched the surface of dimensional teleportation. His teleporters are the solution, he has assured us, but the sheer energy they would require makes me doubtful. Third, and most importantly -'

"Doktor! Come quickly! Your video is here! " Derpy lost control of the pencil at the sudden yell. She scowled slightly, erasing the mark. The Medic stood up, running into the spawn room where the Heavy called from.

"Video?" Twilight looked up from the campfire

"Meet the Medic. It's his meet the team video"

"Meet the Medic's done!? And it's in there!?" Dash charged into the room.

"What's a 'Meet the Team' video?" Applejack said through a mouthful of s'more.

The Sniper shifted the flaming log with a large stick. "It's like a promo piece. They film us, make us look good"

"Promo for what?"

"...Y'know, I never asked. PR, maybe? Can't look good for a company to hire a lot of mercenaries to fight each other"

"Wait, didn't Mann Co. say dey were gonna deliver our weapons today, too?"

From the spawn, the crew heard a muffled yell in the spawn, as if to answer the Scout's question: "I AM HEAVY WEAPONS GUY! AND DIS! IS MY NEW WEAPON!" Everyone hopped to their feet and headed in. Except the Engineer. Applejack turned back for a second, spotting her new mentor still watching the fire, playing his guitar quietly.

"You comin, Engi?" She trotted back over. "C'mon, everyone's getting weapons. Don't wanna be the last one to get new stuff, do ya?"

"Wouldn't be the first time" His voice was slightly bitter. "'Sides, ain't nothing in that shipment fer me"

"Why not?"

"Didn't ask fer nothin"

"Why? Don't you want nothin?"

"Nope. Mann Co. won't make anything fer me."

Applejack scrunched her nose. "A'course they won't make anything if y'all don't ask"

"No, they wouldn't. Outta everyone here I've gotten the least from our 'Benefactor' Saxton Hale. I was the last ta get anything. When I did get mah new stuff, Y'know what happened? The SOB sent me mah grandfathers blueprints and a crate fulla scrap metal and junk. Told me ta take the blueprints and make em. An ya know why? It's cause I'm not important to them. Not to Mann Co. not to my team, not anyone" His voice was starting to slur slightly.

"Ah, you don't mean that. It's just that BLU Streak you been drinkin all night talkin'. Without you this team would fall apart!"

"Without my machines, this team would fall apart. I'm just here to build and fix them. Without mah sentries and dispensers I'd have gone the way the Civilian went" He stood up, heading to the barracks. "Now I'm goin ta bed."

I'll work on you and yer friend's problem tomorrow"

"Now just hold yer horses! Who's Civilian? Engi?" She stood, confused, as the man walked down the stairs toward the sleeping quarters. A gentle nudge snapped her out. She turned and Derpy was looking at her. "I hope he'll be okay, Derpy," She walked back to the fire, curling up and going to sleep. Derpy returned to her journal and continued writing.

'Oh dear. It seems as though the one person who can aid our return is feeling underappreciated. This may delay our trip farther. Who knows how long we may be here... Tomorrow's Sunday. Muffin night at home. Dinky loves those nights. I hope someone is taking care of her.

Derpy Hooves

"Sentry goin up!" Applejack put the toolbox down right next to her dispenser in the hallway and the gun began to assemble itself. It'd been two days since the campfire, and Applejack hadn't seen much of the Texan since. The day before had been a day off, and while the others were trying some of the new weapons, the Engi holed himself in his workshop, citing 'I got work to do' as his reasoning. Applejack smacked the sentry with her wrench. 'He think's he's useless. Hardly. He's the one we're all trusting to fix this mess. Hope he can figure that out in there'

"HEY APPLEJACK!" Applejack yelled in surprise, throwing a kick behind her that narrowly missed clocking the pink pony behind her in the head.

"PINKIE! What have I told y'all about sneaking up on me!?"

Pinkie giggled. "But I'm just so excited! I mean, have you seen this gun!?" She hoisted up the new minigun she had gotten. "It starts firing instantly! Plus I got these things!" She showed off the shiny brass horseshoes that adorned her hooves. "I feel so powerful!"

Applejack looked back to her sentry as her next swing turned the small machine into a level two. "You be careful, Pinkie Pie. If ya get too used to this place ya may never wanna go home"

"Yeah right. I love Ponyville! Plus, how am I supposed to make sweets here? All my ingredients are at home!" Applejack laughed a little. Typical Pinkie. "So where's your new stuff, Applejack? I didn't see you try anything out yesterday"

"Engi didn't get anything in that shipment. I feel kinda bad for him. He sounded so mad when he was talkin about it. There's gotta be some way to cheer him... Pinkie?" She looked around, but Pinkie was gone, leaving without a word.

"Probably chargin into the enemy base again. I swear, She's gonna get used to this whole thing and gonna be in serious trouble at home"

She finished the Sentry and as the Level three began beeping, she hopped on to of the dispenser, readying herself. Any minute now and the enemies would turn that corner and they'd be face to face with this mean Mother Hubbard. Applejack let out a slightly sadistic laugh at the thought of the opponents' faces when the gun caught sight of them. She had become lost in the thought until she saw Twilight run in. "Oh hey, Twi! Any enemies comin in?"

Twilight looked flustered. "Uh... there were some on the bridge, but I don't know if they followed me. Why don't you check?"

"You okay, Sugarcube? Yer voice sounds funny"

"I'm fine, just... check the corner" Applejack looked around the corner.

"Well I don't see anyone, looks like yer-" The sound of a sapper being placed on her sentry filled her ears. "Spy sappin' mah-" She was cut off by the RED Spy's knife sinking into her back. In her last look she saw the Spy start to disguise as her, running away and mumbling to himself.

"That dirty RED rat!" She respawned, fuming. Twilight was just about to leave the room, but turned back.

"You too, huh?"

"Yep. He was impersonatin you, Sugarcube"

"He got me by pretending to be Rainbow Dash. I should have known. Dash would never be on the ground instead of flying"

"So now we gotta be paranoid about our own friends tryin ta kill us. Great"

Twilight ran out of the room. Applejack ran down to her former sentry, still scattered around the ground. "Dirty good-fer-nothin..." She muttered under her breath as she set up a brand new dispenser and sentry. Both were soon fully upgraded. She hopped on top of her dispenser. "He can bet he won't trick me again" She stood tall, surveying the room in a similar pattern to her sentry.

The sentry beeped thrice and a very surprised looking Demoman was blown to pieces. A Pyro ran in soon after, trying to burn the sentry but quickly meeting a similar fate. The orange mare laughed. "It's gonna take more than a little fire to beat this baby"

Trixie ran around the corner a few minutes later. "You gotta run! They're coming!"

Applejack scowled at Trixie for a second, giving her a rough hit on the head with the wrench.

"OW! What is wrong with you!?"

"Spycheckin" Applejack smirked.

"Next time can you do that without cracking me over the skull? Fine then. Deal with the Heavy and Medic coming in on your own" She ran off, rubbing her head.

"I will, ya baby!" She yelled after Trixie. "Pfft. I can handle it. It'll take a miracle for them to get past"

"I am charged!" She heard from around the corner. The pair came around and Applejack screamed. The pair were glowing red like burning metal, their eyes shining a bright yellow. The Heavy laughed, shouting uproariously. "I AM BULLET PROOF!" The sentry fired at full force, but the

bullets bounced harmlessly off the beast. But his minigun bullets tore into the Sentry. The orange pony hit the sentry as quickly as she could, but the bullets were doing damage faster than she could fix it. The sentry exploded and the Heavy's fire came down upon her right after.

"What the hay was that!?" The Sniper looked up from the paper he was reading.

"What happened?"

"The Heavy turned invincible and he was shiny and his eyes were glowing and -"

"Ubercharge"

"Uber-what now?"

"Ubercharge. It's this special thing Medic's can do. I think Engi took down a bunch of notes about it in this book" He held up a leather-bound book and handed it to Applejack. "He said to give this to you. Said you could use it if ya didn't understand something. Oh, and this too" He handed her a shotgun, one that was much more ornate than the one she had at the moment.

"Wait, he told you? So came outta that room?"

"Only because there's no food or bathroom in there. I just happened to see him" He walked away. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'll leave you to your reading" With that he left the room. Applejack looked at the book, then put it in her saddlebag. She ran to the intelligence. 'Down here's safer. I won't have my stuff destroyed so quickly here. Plus I can look at this book'

She got the usual set up, then laid in the corner, delving into the book's contents. Across the first few pages were tips of all kinds, some written carefully while others looked like they were written on the run, in blue and black ink, some even in pencil. She turned until she found a page headed with 'Ubercharge' and began reading.

"Huh whazat?" She woke up, looking around. No one was around. A nearby clock told her she'd been down here for hours. At some point she had fallen asleep. She never was good at reading for long periods of time. She stood up and stretched, and as she did she saw what had woken her. A Scout's leg was just barely poking out from behind the desk. Her sentry must have just got him.

"Good job, AJ!" Dash ran into the room. "I was tryin to catch him, but the little sneak got ahead of me" Trixie and Angel ran in soon after. "Too late guys, AJ got him. What have you been doin' down here, Applejack? I haven't seen you for hours!"

"I was... Uh... Readin! That's it, readin" She smiled sheepishly. Trixie scoffed.

"Probably napping. I doubt you could be reading for two hours"

"What's that supposed to mean. You sayin I'm dumb?"

"Your words, not mine, bumpkin"

The two started arguing fiercely. Dash dared not intervene, knowing she'd probably get one of Applejack's famous kicks or get the full force of Trixie's magic again. Angel however started looking angrier and angrier as the two traded insults

"Why I oughta-" "Oughta what!? Hit me in the head with a wrench again?"
"Sounds pretty good to m-"

"ENOUGH!" Angel yelled. He jumped off the Sentry, and landed on Trixie's back. A second later Trixie was on the ground, dead while the RED spy stood in Angel's place. He threw a sapper onto the Sentry and fired twice with his ambassador: One hit Dash with a headshot, taking her out. The other hit Applejack's leg. In pain she dropped her wrench. The man kicked the tool across the room and pointed the gun at her head as she lay on her back.

"Do you know what I've had to go through today? Any Idea!? You stupid horses have killed me more times today than I've died in the last month.

You're stupid flying Pyro and that Know-it-all Demo. I've had to pretend to be FIVE HORSES AND A RABBIT TODAY! This is easily the most humiliating day of my life. But at least I get the consolation of grabbing the Intel and killing you" Applejack panicked and threw a kick in desperation. Her hooves connected with the man's stomach and he reeled backwards. She pulled out the new shotgun.

"I don't take kindly to you killin mah friends. And Trixie. Time to dispense a little Frontier Justice!" As her sentence finished the Sapper finished off her sentry, and the tool began to glow with energy. One shot and the spy flew backwards, laying against the wall. She sighed as the announcer called combat for the day and headed back to the respawn for the night

That night, The Engi came out to the campfire. He didn't really talk much, except for a brief apology for disappearing all day. Applejack sat next to the Engineer

"I'm sorry about all that. It wasn't fair for me ta get mad. I'm fine with what I got"

"Well, there was actually something in the crate fer ya" Applejack pulled out a pair of black, thick-rimmed glasses. The bridge was held together with a rubber band and paper clip. "I call 'em the Professor Speks. Givin to only the finest teacher's, and you've earned em" The Engineer smiled, putting them on. "That book y'all gave me helped me a lot. I know it's not much, I kinda had to fix em, seein as they were broke and sittin at the bottom of the box... Ya like em?"

He gave his protégé a hug. "Thank ya Applejack. I love em" The team sat, watching the crackling fire while the Engi played a quiet song to compliment the quiet night.

Chapter 6

"THAT IS IT!" Trixie fumed. "The Great and Powerful Trixie is tired of dying!"

"Are your teammates not protecting you properly?" The Medic tried to make sense of it all. The ponies were doing a good job, surely they know to protect the Medic...

"The Great and Powerful Trixie need no teammates! The enemy is filled with fear when they see the Great and Powerful Trixie heading for them!"

The medic's mouth was agape. "Y... What do you mean you don't need teammates? Who are you healing if you're going in alone?"

"Healing?"

"Mein Gott..." The final piece clicked in the Medic's mind, and he put his head in his hands. "You haven't healed anyone, have you?"

" Well of course not. The gun you have given The Great and Powerful Trixie cannot heal her"

The doctor started muttering under his breath a string of words that sounded like they'd be very offensive if Trixie understood his native tongue. "Of course it cannot heal you, you heal others! You have got to be kidding. You are joking. Very funny"

"The Great and Powerful Trixie was not telling a joke."

"That was what I was afraid of. You have not healed a single thing in the week and a half you have been here. Your team has worked themselves hard and you haven't done a thing"

"I'll have you know I have successfully killed five people!"

"TOTAL!?" He sighed heavily, shaking his head. "So not only are you not

healing, you've gone battle medic. Unsuccessfully."

Trixie sneered and readied a response, but the Medic cut her off.

"I am not sure if you understand what you're supposed to do, but let me lay this out. You are supposed to help. That means pointing that medigun on your back at someone who's hurt and assisting them. Trying to attack ze enemy yourself is almost the worst possible thing a Medic could do. So from now on you are going to go out there, look for people who are hurt, and heal them. Understand?"

Trixie glared at the doctor, but he shot a much angrier look. She grudgingly walked out of the room. "Who does he think he is. No one insults Trixie and gets away with it. That no talent hack. The Great and Powerful Trixie can do as she pleases! And she will start by treating these commoners to the luxury of her healing beam!"

She trained the beam on the first pony she saw. Unfortunately it happened to be Ponyville's best flier. Trixie struggled to keep close enough to keep the beam on the rainbow maned pegasus. "Ugh! Slow down you Technicolor featherbrain!"

Dash stopped cold in her tracks, and Trixie caught up, panting. "Trixie, you obviously don't know a thing about me"

"And that would be?"

Dash flared her wings "Rainbow Dash. Never. Slows. Down" With that she took off like a streak.

Trixie stood astonished for a few seconds, then scowled. "Ignorant little foal. She's obviously not smart enough to appreciate my helpfulness" She looked across the bridge, and saw a white unicorn entering the RED base. 'That was that one who's hair I messed up. Rarity, wasn't it?' Trixie followed her in, and saw her peering around a corner. She pointed the medigun and started healing. Rarity jumped and looked at Trixie harshly.

"What do you think you're doing!?" She said in a hushed whisper.

"Healing you. No need to thank me, The Great and Powerful Trixie can feel your appreciation radiating"

"No, you idiot! You're going to blow my co-o-O-OOWWW!!!" Her sentence was interrupted by a Pyro coming around the corner and burning Rarity quickly to death. Trixie tried to run, but a flare hit her backside and lit her up. She fell soon after.

Trixie respawned, and was met face to face with a fuming unicorn. "It is slightly suspicious to the enemy team when a BLU Medic is HEALING A RED PYRO!!" Rarity screamed. She stormed out, cloaking just outside the door.

"Well. No need to get snippy" she headed out toward the bridge, when she caught sight of a yellow pegasus cowering under the windowsill of the battlements. 'Oh for Celestia's sake' She thought. 'What's she afraid of? A bird might land on her? Still, I guess any amount of appreciation is worth it' Trixie started healing her. Fluttershy screamed, letting out a noise similar to a goat's and fell over, stiff-legged. Trixie began laughing uproariously. "There is no need to fear! The Great and Powerful Trixie has decided to help you out!" Trixie beamed, waiting for praise to be heaped upon her.

Fluttershy got up, not saying anything except a meek thank you that was too quiet for Trixie to hear. The blue unicorn frowned. 'If I'm not going to be appreciated, I might as well go find someone else. There's nothing up here to do anyway' She thought. "Alas, I have places to go, more important ponies to assist. Farewell!" Trixie walked away, but was stopped just outside the door by a very irate looking rabbit.

"Ah and I suppose you wish for the assistance of Trixie, do you not, rabbit?"

Angel jumped on top of her head, then gave her several quick thumps with his foot. Then he hopped away.

Trixie rubbed her head with her hoof. "Ow! Fine then, you have lost the support of Equestria's most magical unicorn!"

"Ugh. Yet again somepony is too foalish to appreciate my efforts" Twilight had politely declined any healing, as she was away from the battle zone for the day helping the Engi and therefore didn't need health. Trixie spotted the orange pony that had hit her with a wrench a few days ago. She begrudgingly trotted over and trained the beam on the new target.

"Oh. It's you. I guess I should thank you fer healin me. But I kinda got mah dispenser. So maybe you could find someone who need health more than me? " Applejack smacked the dispenser with her wrench as she spoke.

"Oh, but that is the great tragedy. All the others are not worthy of Trixie's assistance. You barely qualify as it is" Applejack started swinging the wrench harder. "They all refused to give Trixie the praise she so deserves, and therefore will not receive her assistance. You should count yourself lucky. You had the good sense to allow Trixie to honor you with her presence, Hayseed"

"THAT'S IT!" Applejack threw her wrench at Trixie.

Trixie yelled and ducked, the wrench just barely missing her horn. "What is the matter with you!?" She screeched indignantly

"I wish absolutely ANYPONY ELSE had come here instead of you! I'd even had taken that one who pops balloons all day over you! You don't care about nopony but yerself! You don't even know mah name! I don't like you! Nopony does! You got us stuck here in a world that ain't ours, and we may never go back! But you don't care as long as long as someone strokes yer ego. So why don't you just stay out of everyone's way until we figure out how ta fix YOUR mess!"

Trixie bared her teeth. "I refuse to be spoken to by some country bumpkin who probably can't count past four without using somepony else's hooves!"

"I suggest you get outta mah sight before mah hooves start talkin for me!"

Trixie angrily stomped away. Applejack picked up the wrench and Swung with all of her strength at the dispenser. She missed the spot she was supposed to hit, however, and put a giant hole on the screen. "Shoot"

Dash rushed out of the respawn. She rubbed her neck, where a Demoman had liberated her head from it's normal place with his sword. 'I'd rather that not happen again today...Wait...What's that sound?' As she passed the spiral ramp, she heard something just inside the door. It sounded like... crying? She poked her head in and saw a blue unicorn, back to the door with her head in her hooves. On the opposite corner the Medic's equipment laid in a pile that was thrown against the wall topped by the Unicorn's signature hat. Dash rubbed the back of her neck, embarrassed. "Aw geez. I hate to see anyone so upset. Even her' She walked all the way in. "Trixie? You okay?"

"Get out! I don't want to be seen like this!"

"What happened?"

"I said get out!"

"Not until you spill the beans!"

Trixie looked at her, her eyes rimmed red. "Fine then! Everyone hates me and wishes I wasn't here! Is that good enough for you!?" She yelled, then turned away, quietly resuming her sobs.

Dash was taken aback. "I'm sure that not everypony hates you"

"Well I am. Everyone here. You, Rarity, Applesmack"

"Applejack"

"Whatever! Even the rabbit hates me"

"Well... I don't hate you."

"I'm not stupid. Don't lie to me"

"I'm not! Well, I don't like you, per say, but I don't hate you. And I know that Pinkie can't hate you. She doesn't hate anyone or anything"

"...Who's Pinkie?"

"Pinkie Pie?"

"Who?"

"How do you not know Pinkie? She's been here all week!"

"Is she the pink one?"

It took all Dash had in her not to shout 'Well Duh' at the Unicorn. "Yeah, that's her. Have you even talked to her?"

"...No..."

"Well there you go! Go find her and heal her. She's perfect! She gets hurt all the time!"

Trixie dragged a hoof under her eye. "You...really think so?"

"Trixie, I guarantee it" Dash handed her her hat and playfully jabbed her on the shoulder. "Feel better?"

Trixie hugged the Pegasus quickly. "Much" She grabbed her equipment. "And if you ever tell a soul I just hugged you, I'll have your hide for a new cloak. Got it?" Dash mimed dragging a zipper across her lips. "Good" Trixie ran out of the room with newfound confidence, looking for her new pink target.

Trixie spotted the pink earth pony crossing the bridge, and she caught up with her. Trixie was about to say something when Pinkie suddenly broke into a song:

"Sandvich, Sandvich!
Pinkie loves her sandvich!
Tomatoes, Lettuce, cheese, and bread
Makes me strong to beat up RED
Sandvich, Sandvich!"

Going off without a hitch!

Healing me and healing you

Winning this for our team BLU!" Pinkie held the note for a few seconds, then looked over and saw Trixie, who looked very confused. "Hi! Trixie, right? Y'know Trixie I never threw you a party when you came to town! I just have to throw one when we get back! Well I mean as long as you want one but I mean really who doesn't want a Pinkie Pie party? They call me Ponyville's Premier Party Pony and with good reason" Pinkie continued talking nonstop for a few more seconds until Trixie interrupted her.

"Well, Pinkie. Today is your lucky day, because you have the opportunity to allow me to assist you!"

"Ooh! Fun! What are you gonna do?"

"See this special gun?" Pinkie nodded her head quickly. "Well it can heal you. You'll be able-" She was cut off by a bone crushing hug knocking the air out of her lungs.

"You mean I can fight without having to go to respawn as much!? YAY!" Pinkie let go, and Trixie stumbled for a few seconds, regaining her breath.

"Yes" she coughed. "But You have to do something for me. You have to keep me alive so I can use the gun on you. Deal?" She found her hoof in a very enthusiastic hoof-shake before she could respond

"Deal!"

'Why is she so strong?' As Trixie pondered a Demoman fell down from the enemy battlements, behind Pinkie. "Look out!" Trixie trained the beam on Pinkie as the earth pony turned around and rained a hail of bullets at the enemy. The Man launched grenade after grenade at the two. One hit Trixie and she yelled. Another hit like that and she'd be down. A shining grenade launched out and hit Pinkie square in the chest, exploding forcefully. But she still stood, finishing the Demo off at last.

"WOO! That was fun!" She turned to Trixie. "Wow! Usually those shiny ones can kill me instantly! That means you kept me alive!"

"Great. I don't feel too good..." Trixie was still reeling from the grenade that

hit her. It had nearly taken all of her health.

A sandwich sitting on a plate landed in front of her. She looked up to an expectant Pinkie. "Eat this! It'll make you feel better!" Trixie doubted any medicinal properties of the treat, but she hadn't had anything to eat all day and she had nothing to lose. She took a tentative bite, and felt a power surge through her. She did feel better... As soon as she finished, she felt at full strength.

"What was that about?"

"Sandvich can heal you. You can heal me!"

"You're right" The bell to end combat rang. "Looks like we have to head back. But I think I'll stick with you when we start again in the morning"

"Well, Ok, but as long as you heal my friends if they need it. Deal?"

"...Deal. I think this is the beginning of a beautiful partnership" Pinkie let out a giggle and the two headed back to camp for the night

Chapter 7

On the BLU battlements, a familiar yellow pegasus sat, ducked under the battlements, making sure not a single pink hair was poking above the window. It had become a routine: Wake up, hide under the windowsill until nightfall, go back in. Not a single chance to get hurt. She looked up on the wall, confirming the RED dot that had adorned it all day was still keeping vigil. She clutched the rifle in her hooves tight, squeezing her eyes shut. A small squeak of fear escaped her throat.

"You'll never hit him if you never fire"

Fluttershy jumped with a yelp, briefly exposing a part of her mane to the opponent. The dot scrambled toward it, but she ducked back down. The dot resumed slowly scanning the wall, waiting for its opportunity to strike.

"Oh. It's you, Mr. Sniper. I didn't hear you come in" She blushed slightly at her scream.

"I noticed" He took his sunglasses off and polished them with his shirt. "I just wanted to come by. I haven't really talked to you since you got here"

She didn't say anything, content to stay as quiet as ever. The silence between them lasted almost a full minute.

"Are you okay?"

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, Fluttershy. You haven't gotten a kill yet"

"Well, I mean, um, you know, um," She continued, never actually starting her thought.

"I know it's hard, but you can't just come in here every time you spawn and just wait until the day ends. That's not helping anyone"

"W-well I did get rid of a soldier once"

In actuality the soldier had blown himself up when his rocket hit her at point blank. Both knew this, but Sniper continued, "I understand, but that's not enough. Are you having problems?"

She whimpered quietly, not wanting to answer. 'I can't do this,' she thought to herself. 'I've never had to hurt something to protect something else. I'd use the stare, but it won't work, he's just so far away...' Her mind raced, but she didn't say a thing. Trying to break the tension, Sniper changed the subject.

"So what's it like in Equestria?"

The question, while simple, caught the pegasus off guard. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you didn't talk much while I was teaching ya how to fire. The only thing I really know about where you came from is it's name. So tell me. What's it like? How's it different?"

Fluttershy started thinking around, piecing together noteworthy things. "Well... what do you want to know first?"

"What do you all do back home. I mean, I assume you have jobs and such"

"Well, Twilight runs the Library, Rarity has the Boutique, Applejack runs Sweet Apple Acres, Pinkie helps at Sugar-Cube Corner, and Dash is on weather team"

"Weather team?"

"It's a group of Pegasi that control the clouds. It's why Dash acted so strangely yesterday"

He laughed slightly, recalling the day before. A rainstorm had rolled through and Rainbow Dash had repeatedly flown around the clouds, trying to find the pegasi operating them, but to no avail. "I think you forgot someone"

"Well, Trixie used to be a traveling magician, but I'm not sure-"

"Not her. You"

Before she said anything, Angel hopped in, looking at the Sniper suspiciously before heading over to Fluttershy

"Hello Angel. Noon already?" Fluttershy dipped into her saddlebag, pulling out a fresh carrot. Angel took it and greedily consumed it. "Now Angel, what have I told you about that. Your going to get a tummy ache" The bunny rolled his eyes under the helmet and finished the meal. He hopped out the window, back into the battle.

"What was that about?"

"Oh, Angel gets grumpy when he doesn't have something to eat"

"So I'm going to hazard a guess and say you're a caretaker for Angel?"

Fluttershy's eyes lit up briefly, and her voice rose slightly in volume. "Oh, not just Angel. I take care of all the critters around Ponyville. All the squirrels and the mice and the birds and everything"

"That's gotta be a lot of work. How do you manage?"

"Oh I don't mind. It keeps me busy, and the animals are wonderful friends. It can get a little frustrating at times, but usually I can handle it"

"Usually?"

The mare blushed slightly. "Sometimes there's a big rush of injured animals, and I have to help them all alone. Then there's the ones that for some reason I can't communicate with, like the migrating geese"

"So you can communicate with animals?"

"Yes, in fact it's my special gift. It's how I got my Cutie Mark"

"That's what that symbol is?" He gestured toward the three butterfly's that adorned Fluttershy's flank

She nodded. "They show up when y-" A bullet pierced the wall, and Fluttershy screamed, covering her head. The Australian sat, unfazed.

"Rude. You okay?"

Fluttershy squeaked. After a while, she slowly lifted her head, still shaking. "How do you do it?" She asked in a voice that was barely audible

"Do wh-" Another shot, another scream. Sniper felt the top of his head, discovering his hat was gone. He looked in front of him to find it sporting a bullet hole in the side, still smoking. "Bloody Mongrel! I like that hat!" He swept up the rifle and swung around, briefly looking through the sights before firing. The oppressive RED Speck disappeared. "That'll teach 'im"

"That... You killed him in cold blood"

"Not in cold blood. We've traded more shots than I can even remember"

"And that makes it right?" She raised her voice. Sniper recoiled a little. He could tell that The pegasus would never raise her voice unless absolutely necessary

He paused. "...Didn't say it made it right. Said it was a reason"

There was a dark silence between the two for a few seconds.

"Six years"

Fluttershy cocked her head, confused. "Excuse me?"

"It's been six years since I've seen anything that wasn't this place. I remember when I got here..."

A lanky Australian got off the train, a bag slung over his shoulder and a rifle in his hand. The building in front of him. A pair of buildings, actually, facing each other. Between them a covered bridge crossed a murky looking pool. The buildings looked so similar, except for their colors. One in shades of

red and the other, closer one, in shades of blue. 'What am I even doing here,' he thought to himself. When Builders League United hired him, they neglected to mention New Mexico as the location. What was this, some kind of arena? He walked in, looking around for anyone else. He caught sight of a man sitting on a tool chest, strumming a guitar idly. The man lifted his head, and smiled amiably.

"Howdy. I suppose you're number 2?" The thick Texan accent was accompanied by an outstretched hand.

He tentatively shook it. "Uh... I suppose I am. And you are?"

"I've been told that my real name shouldn't be used, so y'all can call me The Engineer"

"They told me the same. I'm Sniper. So you're a mercenary? Sorry to say but you don't look like much of a fighter"

"Mercenary probably ain't the best word to describe me. More like 'Scientist-fer-hire,' seein as my guns do the work for me"

"My gun does my work too, after all I can't will the bullet into their heads"

The man laughed. "I don't think yer gun," He paused and smacked the side of the toolbox. The sound of servos and motors began and the box opened. A pair of legs popped out, followed by a small cylinder that sported a gun barrel on the front. It paused, then the front split, reforming the barrel into a pair of Gatling guns, with the bullet chains attaching to the body. One more pause, then it shifted again, producing a box on the top containing four rockets. The Texan sat on the top of the contraption, beaming. "Is quite the same as mine," he finished.

The Sniper gawked. "Cripes! That thing could take out an army!"

"You bet. That's why they hired me"

The two's talk was interrupted by a loud yell from a skinny kid running on, a duffle bag on his back and a sawed off shotgun in his hand. "Finally!" he shouted. "Thought dat train wasn't ever gonna get here. Dat took too damn long!" A few people followed. A man who's physique reminded Sniper of a

propaganda poster grabbed the boy by the collar and lifted him up, bringing them eye-to-eye. 'Well, eye-to-helmet' Sniper mused.

"Do you ever stop talking, maggot!?"

"You better put me down or dat helmet a' yours is gonna have a fresh new dent in it!" The boy wrapped his hand around a bat. He was dropped to the ground with a growl. The rest started filing out: A German man in a lab coat laughing with a monster of a man with a Russian accent guffawing about some story that the German had told about a stolen ribcage. A suited man walked out next, smoking a cigarette. Over his shoulder was slung another man, drunkenly mumbling and occasionally laughing. And at the rear was a portly man, also clad in a suit, arguing with the woman that had hired Sniper. 'Ms. Pauling, I think?'

"Madam there is obviously a mistake, I am no killer! I'm a civilian! I am not supposed to be here!"

"I understand, sir, and I will try to rectify the situation, but there is nothing I can do at the moment" She turned away and faced the mercenaries.

"Now see here!" He grabbed her shoulder, Intending to speak to her face to face. Instead he was staring down the barrel of a large caliber handgun.

"If you place your hands on me again, sir, getting to your proper destination will be the least of your worries"

She went back to work. "Welcome, BLU team! Before I begin, let me just make sure everyone is here. Scout?" The Boston youth excitedly shouted to verify his presence. "Soldier?" He grunted. "Pyro?"

A sound was heard in the corner of the court, which sounded like a muffled "Present," No one had seen the person get off the train, but they were there now. Sniper couldn't see what he looked like, due to a large Fireproof suit, and a gasmask that covered his head.

"Okay, Demoman?" Here the drunken man burst out laughing, concluded with a slurring sentence that was completely incoherent. "I'll take that as a yes. Heavy Weapons Guy?"

"HERE!" She flinched at his quick response. "Engineer?"

"Here, li'l lady"

"Medic"

"Ja!"

"Sniper?"

"Present"

"And Spy?"

"Right here"

She put her clipboard down at her side. "Okay, now that we're all here, let's get down to business. My name is Ms. Pauling. I am here on the behalf of your employer. We at Builder's League United, or BLU as we normally go by, have reason to believe that Reliable Excavation and Demolition, also known as RED, is trying to sabotage our efforts. So to end their tyranny, we've hired you, the best in your areas. When RED heard of our plans to hire killers, they did the same. You will fight until RED gives in"

"What if they refuse to yield?" The Spy flicked his cigarette away and pulled out a new one.

"Then you'll have to try harder. Now, should you die, there is a machine that we have created, able to bring you back to life after fatal injuries. Unfortunately, the thieves at RED have stolen our technology, and have the same Regenerator. In fact, when they stole the blueprints, they also attained something else. You will not only be fighting other mercenaries, you will be fighting clones of yourselves"

"WHOA WHOA WHOA, There!" The Scout started shouting. "THEY'RE US!?"

"Calm down. Yes, you will. And we have contracts with all of you, meaning you're here until the contract is terminated. So I'd get used to it quickly," she said as she walked away. She boarded the train and it pulled away.

Before she disappeared, she shouted out the window, "Good luck!"

"So we kinda fell into our routine, and here we, six years later"

"But wait..." Fluttershy had stayed quite throughout the entire story, but something had been on her mind for a good part of it. "What happened to that one man? The Civilian?"

"Well, about a week after we all showed up..."

"AGGHHH!" The man stabbed his umbrella into the wall. "ANOTHER DAY WITH THESE BARBARIANS! I CAN'T TAKE IT!"

"Will you SHUT UP you whiner!?" The Spy snapped back. Every day since his arrival the civilian was getting louder and louder in his hatred of being stuck.

"I AM NOT WHINING! I REFUSE TO BE SPOKEN TO AS SUCH!"

The Sniper placed his hand on his gun, trying his hardest not to turn the rifle on the loudmouthed Brit. Even his patience was being pushed towards it's breaking point. If he died, though, that would be it. He wouldn't come back...

As he entertained the thought in his mind, a sound caught his attention. Train brakes...?

"FINALLY!" He pulled the umbrella out of the wall. "I CAN LEAVE THIS PLACE AND NEVER COME BACK!"

Ms Pauling walked off the train with a serious expression. The pudgy man ran up to her. "THANK YOU so much! You've come to take me away, right?"

"Of a sort. As much as it pains me, you will not leave here. This operation is a secret, and if we let you out, we cannot trust you to keep it under wraps"

A tense air began building. "Wh... What are you saying?"

Ms. Pauling held up a revolver. "That I've been sent out to take you out"

The Team dared not try to stop it. "You can't kill me! I-I'm important! Very important!"

"Not to us. It pains me to do this, it really does," She raised the gun, firing once. The man groaned and fell to the ground. A pair of large men walked out of the train, picking the body up and taking it to the train. "As harsh as this is, let it be a lesson. Trying to leave will only end in tragedy"

Fluttershy shook, the picture replaying in her mind. Sniper sighed. "I'm sorry, I didn't think it would upset you so much..."

"No... But that's not fair... It wasn't his fault..."

"It's why we fight. Maybe if we go long enough they'll let us go"

Fluttershy shuttered. 'I lose either way!' Her mind screamed. 'I don't want to kill anyone, but they'll... get rid of me if I don't'

Sniper grabbed the rifle and stood up.

"What are you doing!? Get down or he'll get you!"

"That's the point," He held the sight up to his eye. The trigger was left uncovered. "If you want to save your friends, sometimes you gotta make tough decisions. I've got 'im in my sights, but I'm not gonna pull the trigger. You are"

"What!?" She looked over the ledge, seeing the other sniper looking in another direction, distracted.

"If he kills me, that's it. I'm not coming back. The regenerator isn't set to me anymore. But even if you kill him he'll be back in a minute. So make your decision quick"

A blue dot caught his eye, and he looked over. 'No' He fumbled with the gun, trying to bring it up. The red dot hit the wall again. 'No!' It maneuvered toward her friends head. She looked at the trigger, tears coming to her eyes.

"NO!" She closed her eyes and swung for the trigger. The loudest shot she'd heard since she had arrived rang out. Had she done it? She was too afraid to open her eyes, too afraid at the possibility she'd messed up and her friend was dead. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"You can look now"

Her eyes shot open, and a blurry picture showed that she'd succeeded! She practically tackled the Australian in a hug. "Ohmygoodness! You're alive!"

"Well of course, you did take the shot," He chuckled, wiping the tears away from her eyes carefully. "Now do you get it?"

"I think I do," She nodded. "I'm not really hurting them, am I?"

"Well, for a split second. But because they regenerate you're not really killing anyone. So do you think you can do what you need to?" She pulled a hoof under her eye.

"Yes, I think so..."

The dot returned, but it felt different for her. It no longer symbolized the fear she felt. He stood up, walking away. "Good luck"

She looked down the sights, taking the target. She closed her eyes and pulled the trigger.

Chapter 8

Pinkie ran out of spawn, a smile plastered on her face. Unbeknownst to her however, a RED spy waited on the RED battlements, scoping for his next victim. 'The Pink one does the same thing every time. Bounce through the door, kill everything in sight, I stab her when her back's turned. Might as well cut the time' He saw her drop onto the bridge. 'Perfect. I'll just jump down and...' Before he finished he saw a strange twitch in her tail. She stopped on the ramp in. He jumped down, landing right behind her like a ghost. Before he could uncloak, however, she threw a fierce kick backwards, nailing him in the head and dropping him to the ground, dead. Pinkie turned around, surprised, but shrugged and continued inside.

"What just happened?" The Spy rubbed his head. "There wasn't anyway she could have heard me"

"Hey, Frenchy! Y'wanna shape shift into something who's helping get rid of dat damn heavy that's spawn campin?" The red scout ran past him, opening the door to reveal that she was just outside their door, mowing them down.

"Feh. Typical" He cloaked and walked toward the door. The demo ran out in front of him, and she turned to attack him. The door shut before he saw the aftermath. He got close, once again invisible, but stopped as he heard her voice on the other side of the door.

"Ear flop... eye flutter... knee twitch"

'Great, she's lost her mind. Now I can call it a mercy kill' He walked out the door and she turned around, cracking her front hoof into his invisible jaw, killing him

"What the hell!?" He respawned, holding his head. She'd hit him in the same place. "There's no way she would have known!" He ran out the door, furiously hunting for her. But any time he got close, somehow she would know. Dropping from the battlements, right outside BLU spawn, even hiding on the bridge, she always got him first.

He was nearly foaming at the mouth as he grabbed the Dead Ringer. As he dropped down from the battlements, he saw her. Pinkie's minigun started spinning. He ran at her, taking several minigun bullets. After a few he dropped the fake corpse and maneuvered behind her, dropping the cloak and swinging wildly. He missed once, and she turned around.

"WHY"

He swung and cut her arm.

"DON'T"

Another swing that missed.

"YOU"

A slash across her other arm.

"DIE!!?"

Pinkie backed up, than pulled out boxing gloves from behind her back and hitting the him square. She looked around confused. Dash walked up to her.

"Hey Pinkie, what's up? I haven't seen you all day. You okay? You seem kinda freaked"

"My Pinkie sense has been going off all day, but nothing is happening. Plus, every time I try to shake it off I keep hitting some invisible thing!" Pinkie looked around, eying the sky.

Dash looked over the dead spy and pieced it together. She threw an arm around her friend. "Pinkie, I think you'll be fine. C'mon, I need some power to clear the court" Pinkie followed Dash, still looking around.

RED Spy sat in the respawn, humiliated. "Screw it, I'm going after the Bunny from now on"

The crew sat around their fire, sharing their stories of the day, and just generally chatting. Everyone seemed to be in good spirits, except for Applejack, who's eyes were transfixed on the fire.

"Anything wrong, Applejack?" She looked up and noticed that Twilight was staring at her, concern obvious on her face.

"Yeah, I'm fine" She tried to put on a smile, but her eyes betrayed her.

Twilight looked at her skeptically. "AJ, you know you're terrible at lying"

She sighed. "I guess I'm just homesick. I miss Applebloom and Big Mac and Granny" She thought of the farm, overgrown from

Twilight looked down. "I think we're all getting that way. I haven't seen Spike since... How long have we been here?" She worried about the letters to Celestia that she couldn't do. Any time she learned some new lesson about friendship, she wrote it down and placed it her saddlebag. But she was quickly running out of paper and down to her last quill. Hopefully they could get it working soon.

"Almost 2 months" Rarity said almost immediately. "Sweetie must be positively worried sick" She hoped that her sister had stayed with someone. With her only caretaker gone, Sweetie couldn't fend for herself for two months.

"I bet Gummy's bouncing off the walls without me there" Pinkie imagined that she would open the door and find her room torn to shreds, bite marks everywhere despite Gummy's obvious lack-thereof. The image made her giggle slightly.

"I hope the animals are doing ok without me" Fluttershy looked at Angel, who was in a fierce staring contest with the soldier. 'Angel is one of the few that can handle himself without help. Oh, I hope someone is taking care of them'

"Well The Great and Powerful Trixie does not have time to worry of home! For she travels across the land, making the world her home!" Even with her usual volume, she cast a doubting look downward. "Still... Trixie would hate

to see her last tour end in such controversy. Rallied into a magical duel and then never seen again?" She shook her head. Everyone had grown used to her, and now Trixie had to work even harder to put on her façade.

"And I'll bet you're missing Scootaloo, Dash"

"I guess," Dash said in a melancholy, sotto voice. In truth, while she missed the kid who treated her as an idol, she realized she didn't have near as much as the others to go back to. The Wonderbolts and Scootaloo were the only reasons, really. Her heart reached for her throat as she fought back the thought. But she dared not show this to the others. If there was one thing she refused to show, it was weakness. To her relief the topic changed to something cheerier.

Derpy lay away from the group, notebook laid out again. While the others talked amongst themselves, she preferred to not let the others see her write. Everyone tended to label her as scatterbrained, or dumb, and she'd grown to accept that she couldn't change it. Not at the moment, anyways. She shook the mask off, customized so that it only covered her muzzle, and grabbed the pen in her mouth.

'Dearest journal.

I fear that my pages may become too vast to hold in this journal. As I write I am nearing the final twelve or so pages, so I shall try to be more brief in order to extend their longevity.

I have overheard Ms. Sparkle say that she is having difficulty understanding the blueprints. The most difficult part seems to be the understanding of this universe's spatial relation to our own. However, it seems that once we figure out the location, all that would be left to do is acquire a large enough power source to run the teleporter. The blueprints for it have been modified accordingly.

The others have begun talk of home. It's peculiar, they seem to avoid the subject when possible, trying to push past the anguish to work on the solution. I find it quite commendable.

I miss her so much. It rends my heart to think that I may never see Dinky again. It is my sincerest hope no harm may come to her, or me. She needs her mother...'

A few tear drops smudged the ink before she even realized she was crying.

She wiped her hoof across her eye and signed off, closing the book. As she went put it away, she felt a hand around her shoulder. She looked up into the reflective glass of the Pyro's eyes, who seemed concerned. She sniffled, and laid the notebook out. After reading through the pages, the Pyro nodded solemnly and sat beside her. It seemed strange, but she felt safe around her new friend. She fell asleep, letting the fire dancing be the last sight before she drifted to sleep.

"Ms. Pauling, how do our mercenaries fare today?" Ms Pauling heard the voice behind her, her eyes trained on the screens showing every facet of 2-fort, RED and BLU. The gaunt Administrator took a drag from her cigarette.

"The usual, Ma'am"

"Why, you seem as though you don't have your usual enthusiasm"

"Long night, I guess" 'Which isn't a lie' She thought. She stood up, letting the Administrator take her usual seat.

"Well, get to work on your duties. We are not paying you to slack off"

"Yes ma'am" She grabbed her clipboard and headed to her usual office, her head swimming. The day before she had been tasked to watch the cameras, and had overheard the Sniper's conversation. She had tried to forget her actions that day, but the story had dredged it back up. 'It's not fair. I was under orders! It was him or me!' The night had been spent, not watching the cameras, but watching the old tapes. The first day's specifically.

She sighed and looked at the first item on the clipboard. She grimaced as she picked up the phone and dialed. "Mr. Hale?"

"Ah! It's that plucky Ms. Pauling! I suppose you're calling about the new weapons for the season?"

"Yes"

"Well, I don't have them"

"What do you mean - "

"Fired the men in R&D. Buncha slackers, all of them. Spent a week on a shotgun! Aren't hats the easier solution?"

"No Mr. Hale, You were supposed to have new weapons"

"Welp, sorry little lady, I don't have any"

"Not a one?"

"Would a hippie protest sign work as a weapon?"

"I suppose, but... Mr. Hale? Mr. Hale?" she hung up as the other line went dead. She hated talking to that man. "Those ponies... they're changing everything. The routines, the people, everything... I don't think this is going to end well..."

"Ms. Pauling" Her intercom buzzed.

"Yes, Administrator?"

"Drop whatever you're doing. I have a new order for you" ...

Angel relaxed on Derpy's back as they walked, looking for new enemies. The two had become unlikely friends for a simple reason: neither had to say a word to communicate. The two hung around each other, Angel handling bigger and farther away targets and Derpy taking closer foes. He pulled the helmet over his eyes, starting to nod off. A jarring stop woke him up, however. He looked up to find them on the edge of the bridge. He cast his eye down the planks to see the enemy Pyro standing still on the other side, looking at them. 'Taunting us' Angel decided. He picked up his rocket launcher and fired. The Enemy didn't move. Just before the rocket hit, a burst of air emanated and the rocket changed it's course right back to them.

Derpy ducked quickly, the rocket flying over her head. She stood back up slowly. Angel looked back at the scorch mark on the wall, and turned back

around to see a flare hit him, setting him aflame. He felt a second one hit, much harder. With the last of his strength he pulled the trigger again before falling limp. The enemy blasted the rocket back, but she was ready this time, hitting the second trigger and sending it back herself.

The enemy sent it right back, unmoving. Derpy returned it, also unmoving.

Enemy.

Her.

Enemy.

Her.

The rocket flew back and forth on the bridge, it's two combatants only movement being the pull of a trigger. The world seemed to move in slow motion as she calculated exactly when to hit the trigger.

She sent it back a final time. 'I'm out of ammo!' The foe hit the second switch and the flamethrower clicked. A panicked look downward and the Pyro dodged to the right, the hot potato rocket slamming into RED base. An air of tension between the two lasted seemed to last for an eon. Her opponent lowered the flamethrower to the ground, and walked across the bridge, no weapon in hand.

She stayed on her guard. 'It's a trick' It felt like a lifetime before the firebug crossed the bridge. She gawked at a gloved hand being extended. Tentatively, she grasped it, and they shared a firm handshake. The Pyro ran back across, grabbing the flamethrower and disappearing into the building.

She sat there for a little bit, trying to piece together what happened. When she came out of her thoughts a white paw was waving in front of her face. She looked at an angry Angel, who jumped on her back and pointed toward the building. She smiled beneath her mask and charged forward.

Chapter 9

"...Some say that when the moon is right... and the ground is fresh... The Horseless Headless Horsemann will rise from his grave again and wreak havoc on the living once more" The Sniper looked around slowly, the light from the campfire highlighting his features in shadow. The girls were all huddled close together, shivering from the story he had finished. He gave a light laugh and retreated from the flames, casting him in a much more pleasant light. "'Corse that won't happen again. Ol' Silas hasn't shown up since Halloween last year. And I doubt he'd grace us with an appearance this year"

"How on earth did you defeat him at all!?" Twilight was playing the story in her mind. A monster destroying the team, it's jack-o-lantern grin belying the carnage it wrought.

"A lot of bullets"

"RAUGHHH!!!" The ponies all let out a shrill scream at the Pumpkin headed Creature turning the corner, arms extended and flailing a brutal looking axe. Their screams were intermixed, however, with laughing coming from Dash, Pinkie, and the team.

"Oh, we got 'em good, didn't we?" Pinkie snorted, tossing an arm around the monster. It grabbed the stalk on top of it's head and lifted up, revealing a hysterical Demoman laughing. Dash rolled over on her back, giggling fiercely.

"'S a good thin' I kept these, 'eh?"

"Very funny!" Twilight seemed more annoyed at the prank than the rest.

"Ah lighten up! Here!" The Scotsman tossed her a bottle of the liquor with three X's emblazoning it's side. She pushed the bottle away disdainfully.

"I'm sorry Twilight. It was just a prank. You're not mad, are you?" She wanted to be mad at the laugh at her expense, but one look into Pinkie's

eyes made any anger she had at the joke dissipate.

"I guess it was kinda funny..."

"The Great and Powerful Trixie knew it was a joke all along! After all, this pumpkin head is so obviously a mask" She picked it up and thumped it.

"Actually that's his actual head. We kept it after we defeated him" Trixie screamed and dropped the jack-o-lantern. It rolled and landed right side up, staring at her. Everyone shared a laugh at the spectacle, and Twilight didn't feel as bad.

They continued to tell stories as the night dragged on, about homes, about families, and even stories of their newest conquests, until the Heavy told a grisly story about how he killed an Engineer once. After that, everyone went to bed, hoping they could forget the Russian's sadistic tale.

Twilight awoke with a start. Something wasn't right. She looked around, and a glow in the courtyard caught her eye. 'Ugh. They forgot to put the fire out again'

She groggily walked into the court and froze. The campfire was nothing but embers at this point. Instead the glow was coming from the discarded pumpkin. As Twilight watched, it rose up, bringing with it a giant body, draped in ragged cloth. The lavender unicorn scoffed

"Nice try, Dash! It won't work twice!"

"What're you talking about?" The voice behind her sleepily asked.

"Pinkie then?" The pink pony lifted Twilight off her feet in response to her name. A cold chill went down her spine. Slowly her friends started gathering around, watching the arms pushing with all their might to free itself from the ground. They were frozen in fear as it walked slowly over on it's bone legs to the gruesome axe. When it grasped the handle a purple glow enveloped the weapon. Then the candle-light eyes saw the girls. It walked over menacingly, crouching down to their eye level.

"BOO!!!!!"

"THE HORSEMANN!!!!!" They scattered and the beast laughed, giving chase.

Pinkie fired wildly, hitting it in various places. The Horsemann laughed, not even acknowledging the bullets. The minigun gave an echoing click, and Pinkie grimaced.

"RUN!" Twilight was firing explosive after explosive, but to no avail. The pink party pony turned to run, but it was too late.

"Pinkie!" Twilight turned tail before she saw her friend's death, but as she did a multi colored blur rushed past her. Dash started circling the Horsemann quickly, firing inwards. It laughed and stuck the axe out. Dash tried to maneuver out of the way, but her inertia was too great and the axe ended her assault. He stepped forward, looking for his next victim. A sharp swing into his knee answered that. He looked down and saw Angel, smacking him with the shovel's thin side. He leaned down close, and shouted another terrifying "BOO!!!!," A sound so inherently terrifying that even Angel's hair stood on end, turning him into a big cotton ball with a helmet. The Horsemann raised his axe and swung. Right before the blade made contact, however, Fluttershy grabbed the bunny's tail and pulled him away. She threw him on her back and ran, all the while muttering "Ohmygoodness Ohmygoodness Ohmygoodness!" under her breath.

Derpy ran in, billowing fire around, but a swift strike ended the firebrand. Trixie had huddled into a corner. He charged at her and Trixie screamed. "Over here, Bone-brain!" Twilight caught his attention. She ran at top speed while he followed. Everything she had she threw at him, explosion after explosion. With her back turned, however, she didn't see the wall until she slammed into it. The impact dazed her, and when she realized where she was, a looming shadow covered her.

It raised the axe, the point gleaming in the moonlight. With a horrible laugh and a swift move, the axe flew towards her

"AH!" She screamed, sitting bolt upright. The scream pierced the silence

around. 'What... a... nightmare?' She looked around, taking in the silent night. Her friends all were fast asleep, perfectly safe.

"Twilight?"

She turned around and caught sight of a concerned Fluttershy. "Are you okay?"

She felt her heart start to slow down from its cadence, and her breathing returned to normal. "I... Yeah, just a nightmare"

"Oh, my. Do you want to talk about it?"

Twilight looked over, the Horsemann's Jack-o-lantern sitting and smiling. She kicked it away, and it rolled under the stairs and out of sight. "I think I'll be fine, thank you" Fluttershy nodded, and laid her head back down. Twilight curled up and closed her eyes.

"Shoot!" She erased the mark on the page. "That's not it either!"

A drunken Demoman swaggered in, spotting her in the corner of the room. "Oy! What's the problem?"

She sighed. As the days drug on, she was getting more and more aggravated with the Scotsman who refused to let her work uninterrupted. "The same as always. I need to concentrate, so could you, you know," She shook a hoof. "Scoot?"

"Y'know, ye could at least do me job while ya do the same thing every day"

She didn't look up "I am," She said, pointing to the door way. He looked in the direction and saw half a dozen placed haphazardly around the door frame.

"Ye cannot to anythin' with that!"

"Hey, there's no way they can get through that door!"

"An' what about th' other door!"

This made her lift her head. She shot a look to her right and indeed found the other door into the intel room completely unguarded. "Oh"

"Lass, y'need ta take a break from the prints! It's warpin' yer mind"

"I can't. I have to get these done. The sooner I can figure this out, the sooner we can get home"

"Ye been starin at the same sheet of paper fer three days now. And ye've made how much progress?"

Twilight furrowed her brow. "Your point?"

"Go have fun, take yer mind off! Blow up RED fer a while!"

"I don't find killing fun! I'm only doing it because we signed up for your jobs! We all are! No one here would be okay with killing if it weren't for that whole 'regenerating clones' thing. Why can't you get that through your drunken skull? Now could you leave me alone? Some of us have actual work to do instead of being useless drunks all day"

"Look here. My job is no easy task" He snatched the paper from her.

"Hey! I need that!"

"You'll get it back when you do what ye said ye were gonna when ye offered to take me job: blow up the REDs!" He bolted away, yelling over his shoulder. "When ye've done e'rythin I do e'ry day, the prints'll be right back on that table ya love so much!" Twilight gave chase, but the Scotsman knew the base much better than her, and she quickly lost sight.

"I can't believe this. He's gonna put us all in jeopardy for this?" She levitated the weapons she had been provided. "Fine. The sooner I get this done, the sooner I can work" She paced toward the Spiral, but stopped at the base, where a familiar bottle sat. On it was a note: 'You may need this - Demo' She scoffed, but grabbed the bottle. If she took it, it meant one less bottle for him to get drunk on.

The sun stung her eyes slightly as she wandered onto the battlements. 'Maybe I have been down in the intel for too long,' she thought. She jumped down, Grenade-launcher primed. The Scout jumped down and she fired, hitting him square and gibbing him. 'Ugh. I'll never get used to that' She avoided the blood and ran into the building. She fired another bomb, and a hapless Engi turned the corner at just the wrong time, taking the explosive between the eyes. Twilight ran around the corner, hearing the sentry beeping just a second after it noticed her, and moved swiftly out of the rockets path. A few stray bullets wounded her knee, but she was fairly unscathed.

'Ok Twilight,' she mentally prepped herself. 'What is the best course of action? Let's see... The grenades do their best when hitting directly, so I should hit the sentry with them head on!' She turned the corner and fired a single bomb before the sentry's chain guns tore her apart.

'Ok, maybe not' She trotted back to the Sentry, hiding behind a wall and studying it again. The Engi had retaken his place, vigilantly watching for her now.

'So if the direct grenades didn't work... the sticky bombs, maybe? How many should I fire? I don't want to waste my ammo... I'll run a test. Let's see what one can do,' She fired a spiky bomb next to the machine and detonated it. Nothing seemed to happen.

'One isn't strong enough, so, two, maybe?' She fired two next to the machine, and again detonated them. Some smoke slowly drifted out of the machine, and Twilight mentally cheered.

'Yes! Ok, two more, and - ' She heard a clang of metal on metal, and her brain jumped to the last time she'd heard a similar sound: Applejack fixing her own sentry. 'Shoot, that's right, he can repair it,' castigating herself for forgetting something so obvious.

'I'll save a little time, so let's go with four, th-' Her thought didn't end, however, as the RED Spy backstabbed her, standing still in the RED base.

She respawned. "Ugh! Ok, one more try!" She ran this time, blowing up all that stood in her way. She got back to the corridor with the sentry. 'Four'

She shot the bombs and detonated them quickly, hearing the sentry explode. She rounded the corner and was met with an irate looking Engi, who had a glowing shotgun pointed at her. 'Oh, I recognize that, it's the Frontie-'

'r Justice... Shoot' She had done her job, but at the cost of her life and time.

'Maybe he's put it back. After all, I did blow a sentry up. Demos do that, I remember it from the training,' She thought as she ran down to the Intel, but the corner where she was working didn't hold the blueprints, only a note.

'Sticky Jump'

"Well fine" She ran back up to the battlements. "Maybe if I sticky jump across the bridge I'll be able to get the prints back" She sat by the door, making angles with her hooves. "Ok, than I need an angle of-" She flinched as a light crossed her eyes. "What the hay? Who's-" A sniper shot answered her question.

She ran back out, this time getting her angle down from behind a large piece of sheet metal hiding her from sight. "Ok, so I want the maximum amount of thrust, and this thing can put out 8 at a time, so..." She fired the stickies one at a time into a tight dot. The Unicorn positioned herself over them and jumped, detonating them at her perfectly calculated time. The force from all eight was too much, however, promptly blowing the poor mare to smithereens.

"Too many. It's ok, learn by doing," She was trying to keep from getting angry at the constant mess-ups, but that was becoming a chore. "How about one. One won't kill me" She put the bomb in the same place, and jumped, again getting the timing perfect. She flew through the air, landing halfway on the RED battlements. She struggled to get up, but a shadow informed her of another presence. She looked up and sheepishly laughed at the Soldier.

"Um... Hi?"

She sat in the respawn room. A quick check had not only found no blueprints, but no note as to what to do next. She looked around. "I shouldn't be dying this much. What am I doing wrong?"

"You're too uptight, Twi" Dash spawned. "You're thinking about it too much. Just let yourself go"

"And how, pray tell, did you come to that conclusion?"

"Twi, the Demoman routinely uses high explosives with one eye AND while being constantly drunk. If he's doing all that, well, I think you're over thinking this whole problem. I gotta go. Got an Engi that's giving me trouble," She left quickly. Twilight looked back at the bottle she had packed away. 'You may need this' She sighed. 'I can't believe I'm going to try this'

She opened the top, and took a few tentative sips before coughing and choking. The drink was so strong that Twilight wondered how she could drink it at all. But once the initial burn wore down, she took a few drinks.

And a few more.

And a few more.

The alcohol burned her throat and her cheeks heated up. She'd polished off a third of the bottle before her brain caught up with the amount of alcohol in her system. "Alright, le's do this!" She ran out of the steel door.

All at once her instincts started taking control. It was as if the weapons knew they were in the hands of somepony inebriated, and were helping her. She fired a sticky at the base of RED's building, blowing herself up to the battlements. She landed on a very surprised Sniper, who got the brunt force of the bottle smacking him in the head. She ran from the body, and spotted a Level 3 guarding the entrance to the spiral. Eight stickies hit the ground in front of it, and she giggled when the Engi and the wandering Heavy and Medic team also got caught in the blast. The Unicorn barreled down the ramp, hitting the Pyro in the chest with a grenade and clobbering the Spy with the bottle when she heard the soft uncloaking sound behind

her.

The intel laid unguarded after her rampage, and she grabbed it, heading back the way she came. The top of the stairs was in sight, but in the way was a RED dispenser, taunting her. She fired the grenades twice, and the machine exploded in a shower of sparks. Down the grate and out the door she went.

"Home free, baby!" She yelled, but a yell from behind her pierced her ears. The sound of a man screaming. She turned, and saw what was making it: The RED Demo, bearing down on her at an incredible speed with a sword in hand. She tried to jump out of the way, but the sword caught her, and she and the intelligence fell in the center of the bridge.

She awoke in the spawn room with a clear head. "But... That doesn't make sense! I was drunk out there, I can't just be fine now!" She tried to figure it out, but no conclusion made sense to her.

She jumped down, wishing to finish what she started. She grabbed the case on the bridge and ran back unimpeded. She stepped onto the caution tape in front of the desk.

"Success. We have secured the enemy intelligence," The loudspeakers announced

"Well done lassie" The Demo stepped out from the corner, the prints in hand. "As I promised, 'ere ya go" He tossed the prints to her, and she unrolled them back onto the floor in her little corner.

"Thank you"

"Now do ya see what I really do?"

Twilight lowered her head. "I'm sorry I called you useless earlier"

"Ah, I didn't care about that. Soldier's called me useless more times than he can count. What I cared about is you puttin' so much work into somethin that wasn't movin. I bet ye can get a lot farther now," He sighed. "Look, I

know I'm not what ye wanted. Yer a smart girl, ye'd have been a good Sniper, or Medic. "

"Now now, I won't have my friends putting themselves down on my behalf. You must be smart, you taught me a lesson, right?" She smoothed the plans out, and gave them a look over. "It was just what I needed, apparently, cause I can already feel myself figuring this out a little bit more"

"Aye, yer welcome. I'm gonna go back to base, though" He turned, but she stopped him.

"Can you answer one question really quick?"

"Aye?"

"When I died I was drunk. Yet I was completely lucid when I respawned"

"Them regenerators got rid of the Alcohol in yer blood stream, just like mine"

"So that means..."

"Yep. E'ry time I die I start from scratch. I'll tell ya, though, without the spawn I keep wakin up with hangovers. I think I nee ta cut back a little," He chuckled and ran off. Twilight looked at the plans with new eyes, going over the new math. But before she did, She set a little something up under the Intel...

The Enemy has captured our intelligence!

Click

The Enemy has dropped our intelligence.

"So close!" She erased another mark. The Engi stood next to her, going over the designs.

"So what's the problem?"

"It's the power supply. There's just no way to supply enough energy to maintain the bridge for long enough"

The grey mare wandered in, a mailbox gripped in her teeth as her half-mask dangled around her neck. "Oh, Hi, Derpy. Sorry, I'm really busy, can you come back later?" The girl peered over Twilight's work, and put the mailbox down, grabbing a pen. "What? No! Don't!" Twilight sputtered as the mail mare wrote a few lines out. She put the pen down and Twilight looked over the marks.

"Ugh, who knows how far you've set us ba... wait a second..." Twilight crunched the number's introduced by Derpy's seemingly random scribbles. "She... That's it!" Twilight furiously drew a few more improvements. "Engi! She's done it! She figured it out!" Twilight launched over the table, grabbing Derpy in a bear-hug. "We're going home!"

Engi looked over the plans. "Well I'll be. I think these will work perfectly" He rolled them up, placing them in the pouch on his pants. "I'mma start building this. I should have it done by tomorrow, if I do it right," She smiled. "I suggest y'all tell yer friends" He walked out of the room while Twilight spun Derpy around happily.

"Why didn't you tell anyone?"

"Speak... Not... Ugh!" She shuffled through her bag, producing a journal. She handed the book to the Unicorn. "Read... Going" Derpy grabbed up the mailbox and left the room. Twilight opened to the first page, and took in the elegant hoofwriting. She sat down and started to read, until a thought struck her.

"Where'd she get a mailbox?"

She closed the back page carefully, wiping her eye with the back of her hoof.

'I never knew,' She thought. 'She doesn't deserve her reputation, and I'm

gonna fix this when we get back' She put the journal in her bag and looked at the clock. 'Oh my, it's so late,' She thought. 'I wonder why no pony came to find me. Probably partying and completely forget' She imagined Pinkie partying without a care and a smile plastered on her face.

But when she walked into the court, no one was to be seen, except for Applejack.

"Twilight! There you are! You gotta come! Something bad happened!" Applejack ran into the respawn, and Twilight followed closely. The door opened and she gasped.

Chapter 10

Everyone turned to the two entering the room. "Oh thank goodness, she's alright" All of them were in a large circle, surrounding a body on a cot.

"Engi!" The man had a dilapidated medigun trained on him. "What happened!?"

"The... RED Spy," he said through gritted teeth, obviously in pain. He was covered in bloody bandages, mainly around his chest and arms. "He ambushed me... Twilight, he took the plans"

The sentence hit her like a freight train. She looked around quickly, trying to piece it all together "No...No!"

"Dat's not the only thing he took..." Scout's voice was barely audible, but he pointed to the regenerator. A large section was covered in knife marks, and was sparking wildly. "Ain't no respawnin anymore"

"How'd he get in!?"

"Don't know. Doesn't matter. It's all over," Scout said more to his hands than anyone in particular, head clasped tightly. "We're done"

Twilight looked around at the melancholy faces. They had all given up hope. Just like Scout. Even Pinkie's enthusiasm had drained, her hair losing some of it's signature curl. She caught sight of a grey pegasus in the corner, her back turned to everyone.

Rarity levitated a small note. "The poor dear. She was holding this when she came in with Engi on her back, but she hasn't made a peep since she got here,"

Twilight brought the note to eye level and read the small print. It seemed hastily scribbled, and there was a hole in the top that obscured some of the words, but the handwriting still had an elegance about it that transcended the sloppy lettering.

'Mon Petite Poneys, I do hope you receive this note. After all, your friend with the lazy eyes could so easily be lost. It would be a shame to lose something so important to all of you. I did, however, pin it to the Engineer. Hopefully she's got enough brain cells to take him back to you.

You have awakened my rage. I can no longer stand this torture I'm put through day in and day out. I've written this little note not three feet from her. I could have easily done her in. The Engineer is your last mercy. I will end all of this tomorrow. You've got one life now. Let's see how well you use it. The plans are in our Intel, and I am the final guard. Now I get to watch you squirm and futilely fight to do anything even resembling progress.

RED wins. And you have lost. Au Revoir.

PS: Keep the knife'

Twilight was silent for a long time, drawing everything in. Her senses seemed distant, like a bad dream she was overdue to wake up from. She slowly trotted over to Derpy, taking care not to startle her. "Derpy?" The mare didn't turn around. "Are you okay?"

A loud sniff punctuated the silence, along with a quiet sob. She slowly turned, but not far enough to be able to see Engi, even out of the corner of her eye. Twilight looked into the normally bright, gold eyes, now rimmed red and dull. She was shuddering periodically as she slowly shook her head.

"My... fault"

Twilight drew her into a hug, trying her best to calm the sobbing mare. She tried to think of words of comfort, but her mind was drawing blanks. She couldn't even cheer herself up, let alone someone who had so much more to lose.

"You did your best, and no one blames you for what happened," she sputtered out. It didn't seem to help much, as Derpy turned away.

"What... now?" The question rang around the silent room. Everyone

lowered their heads in the realization.

"I... I don't know!" Twilight collapsed to the ground, the floodgate of emotion finally breaching. Her eyes welled up and her mind raced. "All we've fought for..."

They all sat quietly, some disappointed, others quietly angry, and still others barely containing their own flood of tears. The quiet hung in the air for what seemed like an eternity. It was Trixie that finally broke it.

"So this is how Celestia's prized student ends? Not with a bang, but a whimper, stuck in some world she doesn't belong. The Elements of Harmony, the defeaters of Nightmare Moon, of Discord, brought down by a man with a knife and a broken machine. I was wrong, Twilight. I thought you had the heart and soul to do whatever it took to return. But it seems I was mistaken"

"There's nothing that we can do, Trixie!"

"Twilight, do you know what I did after I left Ponyville?" Trixie asked. Twilight shook her head. "I trained. I went day in and day out, and every moment I had free I dedicated to topping the only unicorn who could best me! I thought it would be the match of the century to rematch you, and what do I find? Someone who hasn't progressed at all! You formulated a plan to defeat an Ursa Minor in all of 10 minutes, but now that you have a full night you can't think of anything?"

"What... what are we supposed to do?"

"I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to get those plans back tomorrow"

"It's hopeless!"

"No it's not!" Trixie shouted. "We've been here long enough! We are good enough to survive one attack! We can survive anything they can throw at us, but you don't want to do it because it might not work! Well I'll tell you this: it might not work, but we surely aren't gonna get home by giving up at the finish line because someone put a rock in the path!"

Twilight looked at the ground, deep in thought.

"I believe in you. I believe in all of us, but we won't get anywhere until you start believing in yourselves!" Trixie shifted her attention to the rest of the room.

"...you didn't refer to yourself as Trixie at all in that..." Twilight wondered aloud

"I'm not putting on a show anymore. What I've said is the truth. Now who's with me?"

No one moved at first.

"Fine. If no one will help, I'll do it alone. At least than I'll know that I died trying to save my friends"

"...Well, it ain't an attack without a little defense to fall back on," Applejack took a place next to Trixie.

"Not to brag, or anything, but I think you guys are a little too slow to get the job done," Dash's anger had channeled into her competitive nature, and sparked her to action. "I think you could use a Scout, don't you?"

A pink hoof clasped Trixie around the shoulders. "Silly, I can't let my Medic buddy do it without some firepower!" Pinkie's minigun spun wildly. "Just let me at 'em, Sasha'll teach them their lesson!" Her face was lit up like it was one of her parties.

"It would seem that the current arrangement is lacking a certain elegance, a certain, if you'll pardon the pun, class" Rarity twirled the knife with her magic. "And I cannot simply stand by and let a ruffian ruin all we've accomplished"

Fluttershy quietly walked over, if only to help her friends. Angel hopped onto her back, shoving the helmet over his eyes and grinning wildly. Trixie looked at the pegasus and unicorn still in the corner.

"Well?" Twilight kept her gaze downward. Her brain screamed to join, but it also told her to keep away. Trixie was right, she knew that, but the idea of

putting her friends in danger at all made her hesitate. Until she saw motion out of the corner of her eye. She looked up to see Derpy slowly trot across the room. She turned around, pulling the mask over her muzzle. In her eyes was a steely determination that Twilight had never seen before on anypony, let alone the resident mail pony.

"Trixie..." Twilight stood up, but her eyes locked back on the ground. "I couldn't live with myself if I knew that my friends deaths were ever caused by me. If I made one mistake on the field, if I miscalculated one variable, if anything went wrong at all, I will feel the most responsible because my plans led to it"

"But if I don't plan at all, I'll feel even worse, because I'd die knowing that I could have changed it. So, I guess what I'm saying is..." She lifted her head triumphantly, revealing a smile. "That we've got six hours. Time to get working"

The Scout watched them all move to a map of the buildings on the table. "Ya think they can do it?" He asked under his breath to the Sniper.

"If anyone can... It's them"

"Alright, so no one will leave the spawn until their part. I don't want anyone getting caught unaware. Got it?" They all shook their heads. "Any other questions?" No one said a word, their enthusiasm brimming. "Good. Time for part one. Dash, you ready?"

"You know it!" Dash popped the tab on the Bonk and chugged the can quickly. She felt her eyes open wide as the caffeine surged through her veins. Her nostrils flared and she blasted out of the spawn. In the eight real world seconds the Bonk would work, Dash's brain felt like it was an hour. Her wings pulled her as fast as they could as she weaved through RED's base, noting every person's position. A sentry beeped at her, but she was out of it's sight before it fired a single shot. She blasted back to the Spawn as the intense sugar high faded. "Well?"

"A level three Sentry in the court, at the top of the stairs. A dispenser blocking spiral, so I'm not sure what's downstairs. And it looks like most of

their team is going to attack the bridge soon. I saw the Medic hanging with the Soldier, the Heavy, and the Demo. Their Scout and Engi are patrolling. Sniper's in the usual place. I didn't see the Pyro or Spy, so I have to assume they're down in the Intel"

"Excellent. Now for part two. Applejack, set up the defenses. Rarity, Fluttershy, You're up! You too, Dash!"

The RED quartet headed to the front doors.

"So... War ends today?" The Heavy lead the group, the others letting him out front to act as a mobile wall to take their hits for them.

"Yes, mein kamerad. Ze Spy has assured the BLU's end shall come today!" The Medic shouted, an aura of sheer joy in his voice. They all stepped outside.

"AUGH!" They froze as the Sniper fell from his perch to the ground in front of them. A knife mark on his back revealed his fate.

"Where are you, Spy!? I know you are he-AAUUUGGHHH" The Heavy fell to his knees, a Sniper round piercing his head.

"Aye, i' looks like th' Sniper's finally learned the roOO-" He shot forward, propelled by two blasts from the Force-a-Nature. He landed hard on the other side of the bridge, collapsing from the fall damage. Dash rocketed out from between the Soldier and the Medic.

"How's it goin, slow pokes!" She laughed. The soldier fired rockets at her, but she easily dodged them in the air. He started to reload, but a knife interrupted him. The Medic stood alone on the bridge.

"It matters not! We'll respawn! And you won't!" He fired his needlegun at Dash, landing a few weak hits.

"Than we'll just have to be quick..." Dash flew right up into the Medic's face, slamming the barrel of the gun into his chest. "Won't we?" She fired upward, launching him skyward quickly. The Blue dot traced the wall, then

up the airborne German's coat to a point right between the eyes. Fluttershy shot and the Doctor plummeted to the ground like a limp doll. The timid Pegasus put a hoof to her ear, activating the microphone.

Twilight heard a small voice over the ear piece: "Bridge clear"

"Perfect. Time for part 3! Everyone, we're going!" Twilight, Pinkie, Angel, Trixie, and Derpy ran out. The group ran onto the bridge from the battlements. Twilight stopped on the ledge while the rest kept going. "Dash! Fluttershy! Rarity! Keep the bridge clear! I don't want any surprises on our way back!" Dash saluted, while Rarity and Fluttershy nodded. "Angel, go up! Everyone else, go down!" Twilight laid down a sticky and blasted through the air. Angel fired a rocket at his feet, launching him straight up. Twilight grabbed the rabbit in mid flight, tossing him onto her back with a flip and landing on the other side.

Trixie ran into the small room beside the court while Derpy ran into the nearby hall. They were about to turn the corner when a Boston accent greeted her. "Oh look! it's dat medic who can't figure out how ta use her weapons! What, ya come to die by my hands?" He chuckled. "Can't say I blame ya. I am pretty awesome"

"The Great and Powerful Trixie is not the simple Medic you once knew!"

"Really? So now ya ain't completely useless. Only 98% useless!" The Scout sneered. Trixie scoffed, eyes closed.

"Ye of little brainpower, you know not who you speak to! For the Great and Powerful Trixie has learned a technique that shall make even the bravest of souls tremble in my presence!"

"What, ya gonna talk me ta death? Look, I'm done messin around!" He ran at them, gun drawn, and pulled the trigger almost right next to Trixie.

Trixie's eyes shot open, glowing brilliantly. "Showtime!" A brilliant blue glow encased her and Pinkie, giving them a look of moving steel. The pellets bounced off of Trixie's chest, and she laughed. Pinkie swung a wide punch and connected with the Scout's face. "Quick, it won't last forever!" The ran

into the court and the Sentry greeted them with three quick beeps. A hail of gunfire and missiles launched at the two, bouncing harmlessly off.

"I AM BULLETPROOF!" Pinkie's minigun tore holes in the machine that a frantic Engi tried to fix. The gun exploded brilliantly, and the Engineer tried to run, but Pinkie's bullets took him out quickly. "Twilight! We've got it! Go go go!"

Twilight and Angel ran out from the battlements, charging down the spiral. Derpy meanwhile ran down the straight staircase.

Twilight stepped into the Room, and saw the Spy, standing in the middle of the room. "You've done well. I mean that. Not a single death so far. But that ends here"

"Why are you doing this!? We'd be leaving! You'd never have to see us again!"

"I don't care about not seeing you again. I want revenge. I've been humiliated for two months by a group of colorful ponies. You can't imagine what it's like to be the one who has spent his whole life fighting people and when a new enemy shows up, they are the toughest foes you've ever had! And they're horses!" He shook his head. "Now, say good bye. Because you're never going home!" A flare burst the man into flames. "AAU! What the-!?" He turned to the doorway, and Twilight took her chance. Angel jumped up. She did a roll, and the bunny landed on her hooves. She kicked as hard as she could, sending him flying. The Spy turned his head back just in time to see the white puffball smack him with a shovel. The RED spy fell to the ground, the plans unrolling away from him. Twilight grabbed the plans and quickly put them in her saddlebag. "Now for the final part! BOOK IT!"

They took off, running at full speed up the spiral. But Twilight's heart sunk as she saw the RED Pyro at the top. 'NO!' her brain screamed. 'We were so close!' The Pyro started toward them, but stopped. It looked around, as if to see if anyone else was around. When no one else was, the unthinkable happened: The Pyro stepped out of the way. Twilight gasped, but wasn't going to argue. She ran past and down the grate, out the door. When

Derpy passed by, the Pyro extended a hand to the mare. Derpy tearfully accepted the handshake, knowing she could never repay the person for what had just happened.

The RED Medic and Heavy crawled out of the sewers into the BLU base. "Dummkopfs! I bet they didn't even know about the sewers!"

"So what now, Doktor?"

"When they come through the door you mow them down!"

The two ran toward the front doors, but stopped suddenly. An orange earth pony stared at them with a smirk on her face. "Well, howdy!" Her sentry caught wind of the intruders and fired on them, reducing them to shreds. "Aw, leaving so soon? Don't come again!"

Twilight ran onto the bridge with the others in tow. "We've got it! Come on!" Dash zoomed into the spawn while Rarity followed them. Fluttershy was zoomed on the bridge, watching for any final threats. The group ran in the door, and she galloped in. The group ran past Applejack, who brought up the rear. They all filtered into the spawn, with the waiting classes looking at them eagerly as the door shut behind them.

"Well?" The Scout asked, wringing his hands

Twilight pulled the plans out of the bag, and they all cheered when she unrolled them on the table. She turned to everyone. "Victory!" The cheering was deafening.

"Not to spoil ze mood, fraulein, but we may already be too late," The Medic directed their attention to a curtain that hid Engi. "The Medigun isn't fixing him quickly enough, and I zink it's about to break,"

"W-what about Trixie's Medigun?"

"It's only set to work on you ponies, not humans. I'm afraid there's nothing

we can do"

Twilight's head sank, but Trixie spoke up. "Actually, I believe there's one thing I can do, but I would like some privacy with the Engi. I need to make sure he's okay with it" The doctor pulled the curtain back and Trixie stepped inside.

Twilight lost track of how long Trixie was behind the curtain. She was just about to look in on her to find out, when a brilliant light bathed the room. The sound of a medigun healing followed the light's dispersal. Trixie popped her head out of the curtain. "Fillies and Gentlemen. I have solved the problem" She pulled back the curtain, and they all gasped. Standing behind it was an orange earth pony. His short yellow hair was messy and unrefined. He looked up at the team with blue eyes. A familiar voice escaped his throat.

"So how do I look?"

Everyone's jaws were agape. "Y-you-you're a pony!"

"Courtesy of yours truly!" Trixie bowed. "Now hold your applause, please"

"How did you.. I mean... What!?" Twilight couldn't even begin to search for the words she wanted to say.

"It was the only way, I'm afraid. Since no one but him knew how to fix or modify the machines, and since the only working medigun only works on ponies..." She trailed off to let them put two and two together.

The demo poked the Engi's ear, trying to prove to himself that he wasn't hallucinating. "Ow. Yes, Demo. I'm real"

"So... is it permanent?"

"Alas, yes. There is no way for the spell to end. For all intents and purposes, Engi is now a pony forever

"And you agreed to this?"

"It's better than dying. Ah wasn't gonna survive too much longer, I'll be honest"

He looked over the plans. "Well," He pulled the goggles over his eyes and put his hard hat on. "I guess I better get started. We'll get y'all home soon, Ah guarantee it!"

He gripped the wrench in his teeth and set about, procuring the materials. The others would help, grabbing the metal that he needed. Twilight pulled Trixie aside. "How did you learn that spell?"

"Remember, Twilight, I trained for months since our first encounter. I've learned more than a few tricks since then"

"Could you... teach me?"

Trixie grinned, a strange mix between a competitive smirk and a genuinely friendly smile. "I think I can do that"

"And there's that... and here... and... got it!" Engi looked over the teleporter. It had taken him most of the day to get it done, but It was coming along. Instead of the smaller teleporter he'd always built, this was much bigger, functioning more as a portal. The apparatus was large enough to step through. He had scrapped the regenerator to attain the metal he needed. "Now for the finishing touches"

"I've got to hand it to you, you certainly have gotten used to the whole 'Being a pony' thing pretty quickly," Dash handed him another piece, while Sniper dug through another box of parts, looking for anything that could be used.

"It just feels natural, I bet it's part of the spell. Although I am forced to spend more time than I want, on account of getting mah bearings. I'll be done soon, though"

The man's work was interrupted by a sound he hadn't heard in years. The rumbling of a train engine. "No... it can't be..." Engi and Sniper looked at

each other, recognizing it. "You go out, I got sound, I'll listen from here"

Dash and Sniper ran outside, to the others in the court. A woman stepped off the engine and headed toward them. Fluttershy backed away. "It's her... isn't it?" Sniper nodded as she approached. "Ms. Pauling. It's been a long time"

"Good evening, Gentlemen. And you as well, ponies"

"What're you doin ere?" Scout eyed her with suspicion. "Cause last time ya came here, ya killed an innocent"

The statement made her business demeanor slip for a brief second, showing hurt on her face. She quickly recovered, however. "That was far in the past, and I would like it to stay there. No, I am here on a matter of business. a congratulatory matter. You see, RED has broken the terms of the war, by sabotaging a key piece of equipment. Therefore, BLU is declared the winner"

"It's over?" The Heavy asked.

"You mean..." The Medic pieced it together.

"We can go home?" Scout jumped up, excited. "I can see my ma again!?"

"I'm afraid..." She pulled out her revolver. "Not"

Fluttershy cowered, seeing the gun from her nightmares come into reality.

"You are in possession of precious knowledge that the companies of RED and BLU would like to keep private. And as they say, 'Dead men tell no tales'"

She took aim at the closest merc, which happened to be Scout. "I'm sorry it has to end like this" She slowly pulled the trigger...

Then swung quickly, firing a bullet into the wall. A shower of sparks burst out and a piece of paneling fell off, revealing a broken camera. She turned again and fired at another spot on the opposite wall. Another camera was revealed. One more shot, and a third camera high above their heads was

dismantled. "Ok, we're clear. She can't see us," She signaled to the train, and it pulled away from the base.

"What the hell is going on!? I want answers! Now! Why are you here!?"

"Yesterday the Administrator saw the RED Spy disable the regenerator, which as I said violated the terms of the war. She told me to come out here and terminate you. But I want to help you escape"

"So ya send away the only means of travel we have in a desert!?"

"You mean that train?" As if on cue, a massive explosion destroyed the train, lighting the night sky orange for a moment. "I found the bomb on my way here. She was going to kill you and me, no matter what. We no longer have a use to the companies, so they've planned to dispose of us"

"So what's the plan, then?"

"I... don't know..." The confidence in her voice simply drained. She adjusted her glasses. "I honestly didn't think I'd make it this far. But the point is that we've got one day to think of something, because she's probably already put some goons on a new train, and I don't think they'll be as sympathetic to your plight as me"

"Puh-leaze. You expect me ta trust some dame who was about ta kill us? No dice" Scout turned and walked away. "I'll find my own way outta here. I'll get home. I've got to see Ma"

"I don't think you realize what's going on here!" She yelled at him. Some deep seated anger that she had been harboring for a long time found an outlet. "You're wanted! They will go to any lengths to find you!"

"I don't care! My ma's the only reason I've been doin this"

"Please, stop..." She was starting to flush red.

"You think I enjoy doin the same damn thing every day? No!"

"For your own sake, stop..." Her voice was starting to lose the refined edge it had.

"I do it because I know my ma's getting the money I make!"

"Scout, your mother thinks you died five years ago!"

Never had a silence been so heavy. Not a soul breathed. Even the wind seemed to stop for that one moment. Scout didn't turn. The only sound was a softly uttered "...what?"

She'd broken down. "She sent them out! Death reports, on all of you! Anyone who knew you thinks you died within a year of coming here. You'd all said to give your money to your families. BLU faked your deaths so they didn't have to keep pay for anything bigger than hats or weapons!" They all stood in silence, as they looked to each other.

"So my ma... my brothers... they all think I'm dead? How do you know!?" He had gone from the silence to a boiling rage.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know what was in the packages! They told me years later... It's all my fault..." She collapsed to her knees, the force knocking her glasses off. Scout stood a while longer. He tromped away, presumably to find somewhere to be alone. As he walked away, he threw a mean punch at the wall, busting a hole in it. He continued in silence.

Fluttershy tentatively stepped toward Miss Pauling, picking up her glasses. She lightly nuzzled the weeping woman, until she calmed down enough to raise her head. Fluttershy dropped the glasses into her palms. "You dropped these"

Miss Pauling sniffled, putting her glasses back on. "Thank you..." She looked up at the concerned eyes of everyone in the court. "I guess I'm making a fool of myself... again. I won't blame you for not forgiving me. I can't say I truly forgive myself..."

An uncomfortable amount of time passed, but Sniper sighed. "Ya did what ya had to, Miss. it was part of the job," He said plainly. "As an assassin, I'd have to call myself a pretty big hypocrite for getting mad at someone for doing their job"

Slowly the mercs forgave, or at least put their feelings aside for a later time.

Miss Pauling looked slowly around, having a hard time looking anyone in the face. The air in the court was broken by Engi walking out to the top of the stairs.

"Hey y'all! I gotta wrap this up, y'think y'could..." He gestured that he needed his helpers back. Sniper and Dash traipsed back into the spawn room. The Engi walked down to the still bleary-eyed woman in the court. "Listen. What ya said... I believe ya. You don't seem like a bad person... But these things are gonna take a lot more time, y'hear?"

She didn't respond, only looking at the new colt in amazement. "Mr. Conagher?"

"Heh, I haven't been called that in a long time"

"You... you're a pony now?"

"Part of a spell. I didn't have much choice, it was either this or dyin'"

"But... I... What are you going to do? You can't go back into the real world, even if you could get out! You're a talking horse"

"That's why I was gonna follow 'em to their world" He pointed a hoof at the mares. "Speakin of which, I gotta keep workin, especially now that we've got a time limit"

"That's... ingenious! That's how we're getting out of here!" She got to her feet. "Who's the one who cast the spell?"

Trixie, now with a new audience member, put her showmare attitude back on. "That would be moi!"

"How long would it take to do that to everyone here?"

"For one as powerful as myself, no time at all!"

"So you can do it before tomorrow?"

"Of course, as long as my participants are willing," She turned to Twilight. "Especially if I could get a little bit of assistance?" Twilight nodded.

"What are ye goin on about?" The Demo chimed in.

"Don't you see? We have a way out of here! To their world!"

"So we're all gonna be turned into horses?"

"Look, I know it's a stretch, but it's all we've got. So who's first?" No one moved. "Guys, this is the only chance! We're not getting out of here alive as humans! But you have a teleporter out of here if you're ponies!" Still, no one moved, looking uncomfortably towards one another. "Fine then," She turned to Trixie. "I'll go first"

"You do understand that this is permanent, don't you?" She nodded. "Then let us begin. Close your eyes" Trixie's horn began to glow brilliantly. A bright light overcame Miss Pauling. the lights grew brighter and brighter, acting as a beacon in the dark night. Everyone averted their eyes. When they turned back, a violet Pegasus met their eyes, dark purple hair still in her signature buns, glasses perched on her nose. She looked startled, then began looking herself over. "A Pegasus?"

"The spell bases everything on your personality, I have no control over what kind it turns you into"

She took a few flaps of her new wings, slowly rising. "I think I'm getting the hang of this!" She hovered over the heads of the team. "Ok, now have I proven myself trustworthy?"

The Medic stood. "I still don't know how to feel about ze news, but it does no good to have died in vain. Doctor?" He cast a sly grin at Trixie. "If you would?" Trixie's horn began to glow, followed by the bright light. When it faded, standing in his place was a white unicorn, a shock of red for a mane. He perched his glasses back on his nose. "Well?"

"Perfect. Who's next?"

The Heavy moved forward. "Heavy will go" The Russian placed his weapon on the ground and plodded over to the Unicorn. She cast the spell, and the bright light overtook him. He looked over his sky blue hooves, then felt his head, bumping a horn but no hair. "Even as pony, I have no hair"

"If I give you a mustache for a while would that help?"

"...Yes"

Twilight put a black mustache on the smiling Ruskie's face.

The Pyro stepped forward next. "One... Two... THREE!" The spell hit and enveloped the pyromaniac. Pegasus wings flared. The coat was yellow with orange hair, like a living fire. Bright red eyes shown where a mask had been, now disappeared. But something seemed different than the two that went before. The muzzle was pointed more, similar to Miss Pauling...

"Yer a girl?" The Demo was the only one to say it, but shock went through almost everyone present.

"Uh... yeah? Duh," She looked around at the shocked eyes. "Wait... Seriously? None of you knew? I've been here all this time and you never knew? The Purse in my cubby? The gardening hat?"

"I always thought you were just a fruit," The Soldier sat, unmoved. The Pyro and Soldier started arguing. Dash listened over the speaker in the spawn.

"Pyro's a girl?"

"Makes sense to me" Engi didn't even look up, while Sniper was upside-down up to his waist in a large box, trying to reach a part at the very bottom.

Deep in the intel, he sat, looking at the only picture he had left. A faded portrait, taken one family holiday, when he was eight. His brothers surrounded his mom, mid fight captured forever. The eldest held two of them by the scruffs of their Christmas sweaters while he was being held apart from another by the length of his mother's arms. In the corner, His other brothers stood scoffing and shaking their heads. Half of them had seemed to inherit their fathers fiery spirit, while the others got his mother's cool head. He could never remember what had set the family off, but he

loved the picture as he grew older and wiser. So many mistakes he wished he could set right. As he looked at it he played with the dog tags around his neck.

'I'll always love them' He stood up, slipping the photo into his pocket.

He came up to a scene that he never thought he'd see. A large Blue unicorn, holding apart a white Earth pony with a helmet on his head and a fiery filly shouting Profanities at each other. It took him a second to register what was going on. His brain finally clicked, and he decided to stop the chaos with a trick his mom taught him. He put two fingers to his lips and let out a shrill whistle.

Soldier fell over, clutching his ears. "Loud! The Helmet doesn't help at all!" A purple unicorn with an eye patch over one eye laughed at him "'s what ya get, mate!"

A gold stallion turned to him, brandishing a pair of signature sunglasses and a vest around his chest. "Feelin better, mate?"

"Yeah"

A bright light caught his eye, and he saw a dark blue Unicorn step away from Trixie. "Merci," he could pick that accent out of a crowd of millions.

"I'm goin with you tomorrow"

Sniper cast a glance at him. "You sure, mate?"

"I've been thinkin about it pretty hard. And what happened was five years ago. Five years. By now they've gotten over it. And even if I did get to them, then what? Go back inta hiddin, never get to see them again anyway? Make em experience my death twice? Not a chance. I can't do that to them"

Trixie trotted over to him. "You are the final performance of the night. I suggest you remove anything that you find valuable" He pulled the dog tags off of his neck, then put them in his hat, along with his picture. He set

them on the ground. "Ready"

The group gathered into the spawn, all 19 standing in a semi circle. Behind them was a sealed crate, filled with items of sentimental value from all the classes. They looked expectantly at Engi.

"Well?"

He hooked a large wire into the base of the object, now looking like a doorway. After a few quick adjustments of the various knobs and levers on the device, he flipped a large switch. A formidable spark surged through, and the device began to whirl as the power surged. Bulbs on the frame lit up, one by one. The final light shone, and they began to arch. Energy built quickly, and with a mighty sound, the portal formed. It was like looking at a postcard. The dense amount of trees signaled that it was to drop them off somewhere in the Everfree forest in the middle of a storm, but it was definitely home. They cheered, Pinkie practically bursting with excitement. "Well, y'all, say yer goodbyes. Cause once we step through this, we ain't comi...anyone else hear that?"

They listened for the new sound, and sure enough, they could hear it in the distance. "...haaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLEEEEEEEEE!!!!!"

"Oh no..." Ms Pauling put a hoof to her face. The sound of splintering wood outside the steel door was drowned out by an exclamation of "PROPERTY DAMAGE!" that seemed to shake the walls themselves. They ran outside to see a gargantuan man standing in front of them, with a large bag full of what appeared to be bloody and battered protest signs.

"Mr. Hale, what are you doing here!?"

"Ah, Miss Pauling! You're here!" He didn't turn around, still working his right foot out of the wooden floors. "I came to deliver the new weapons! You did say that protest signs were acceptable, right?"

"Yes, but-"

A crack broke a part of the boards off, Saxton Hale's foot still firmly stuck in

them. He turned around expecting them to be at eye level. He looked down and gasped "Blimey! You're ponies! The ponies!" He picked up a panicking Fluttershy. "I can't believe it! I must be dreaming!"

"Please help me," Fluttershy quietly asked in the Australian's arms.

"Wait, you watch it to?" Scout cocked his head to the side.

"Of course!"

Miss Pauling stepped forward. "Mr. Hale, the war is over"

"What do you mean the war's over?"

"I mean that RED cheated, therefore BLU is the winner"

"So I... 'borrowed'... All these hippie protest sticks for nothing!? No, that won't do. Is RED still spawning?"

"Well I suppose so, they haven't shut everything down yet"

"Perfect!" He let Fluttershy down and patted her head. Then he picked up a sign with 'Give Peace a Chance' emblazoned on it. "Fillies, Gentlecolts, I've got a war to continue" He ran away, yelling at the top of his lungs all the way. Engi cleared his throat.

"As I was sayin', Say yer goodbyes, everyone. Cause we ain't coming back"

Zecora strode along the familiar path, heading toward a large group of flowers for her potions. Though it stormed around her, she needed the flowers desperately, A sound startled her into dropping the set of flowers she had just picked. A large doorway seemed to open up in a nearby oak, and a large group started trotting out of it. She shook her head and rubbed her eye, not believing it at first. "Are my eyes deceiving me? Or is that Twilight Sparkle I see?" She ran towards the unicorn, nuzzling her friend who had been gone so long.

"We did it! We're home..." Twilight looked wistfully over the landscape, taking in the sight of her colorful world as she remembered it. Even in the rain, she knew this place. Her heart fluttered and it felt as though a tremendous weight had lifted off her shoulders.

"Two months and a half since we saw you last. Where did you go after the blast?"

"It's a long story, and I'll tell it to you at another point, but I think we need to check in with Ponyville first," She looked around.

"Of course, my friend. Over that hill, You'll find the road to Ponyville," The group thanked Zecora, and stopped on the crest of the hill. A few miles away, she could see it clearly. Her home.

Mayor Mare shuffled a new set of papers onto her desk. Legislation that she didn't really care about. The entire day had been dreary. Life had been dreary since they disappeared, and it was taking its toll on her. Through all the trouble they caused the fact of the matter was the Ponyville needed the keepers of the elements of harmony. Search parties had been searching the land day and night, but to no avail. She put a pen to the paper, an order to stop the search parties. 'If they were going to be found,' she thought, 'We'd have found them by now'

A loud slam on her door followed by frantic knocking interrupted her. She grumbled as she answered the door to a grinning pegasus. "Yes, Cloudburst?"

"They- the-I mean- down the- Fillies" He was sputtering and pointing toward the town entrance.

"Spit it out, I don't have all day"

"They're here!"

"Wh... You mean?"

The pegasus shook his head so hard she thought he might hurt himself.

"Down Mane Street! C'mon!" He flew off in a hurry, the mayor giving pursuit.

The town went into a deafening roar of applause as the Keepers of the Elements of Harmony, along with their new friends, stepped foot onto Ponyville soil.

Rarity spotted a shuffling in the crowd, Ponies making way for the mayor. The tan mare adjusted her glasses. "It's true! you're back!" She turned to the Pegasus that followed her. "Call back the search parties! And alert the families!"

A million questions bombarded the group at once, but Twilight brushed them off. "We'll answer questions at another time. We've been through a lot, you know"

"Rarity!" Sweetie ran through the mayor's legs, running to her sister. The two affectionately nuzzled. "Oh Sweetie, I've missed you so much!"

A dog ran barking up to Applejack, followed by her sister and brother. The Apple family shared a group hug, finally reunited.

Pinkie's faithful yet clueless gator waddled up to her, as if she never left. She smiled at him, and he replied by applying a vice grip with his jaws to her hair. "Aw, I love you too, Gummy!"

Dash stood, waving at those who were welcoming her, but slightly concerned. Of all the people she expected to see, Scootaloo was the top of the list. But the filly was nowhere in sight. She flew high, looking for her biggest fan. She spotted her, far away, on a hill under a tree. "Hey Twi!" Twilight looked up. "I'll be back later! Don't start any parties without me!" Twilight nodded, before hearing a sound so sweet that she couldn't help but feel herself tear up.

"Mommy!" The purple filly ran to her mother, the golden eyed postmare. She leaned down and the filly jumped up, knocking her mother onto her back from the jump.

"Muffin...!" The two locked in an embrace, so tight that Twilight thought the two may never come apart. 'Although,' she thought, 'I think that would be

just fine for them' She searched for her own assistant, but the Dragon wasn't making an appearance. She moved toward the library, but the crowd was in her way.

"Excuse me, I need to get through"

"Just one thing, Miss Sparkle" The mayor pointed a hoof at the ten ponies following them. "Who are they?"

Twilight castigated herself for forgetting something so simple. "Ponyville, if you please, I'd like you to meet the Team"

The walk to the library was surprisingly quiet. She figured most of Ponyville had shown up to see their return, which left very few out in the streets. She slowly looked around, the sights and sounds of a world that had started fading from her memory in that unfamiliar world.

"Twilight!" She turned around, and saw Trixie galloping toward her.

"Trixie? What 's up?"

She slowed to a walk as she approached the Violet unicorn.

"I just wanted to..." Trixie's sentence trailed off, mumbling her last few words.

"To...?"

"To say... g...b..." Again, she mumbled. Twilight leaned in.

"One more time?"

Trixie huffed, then straightened her shoulders, Locking eyes with Twilight. "Good bye. I'm leaving town once I find my cart, and I... well... I couldn't have my rival not know about my departure!" She'd regained the ego that The Great and Powerful Trixie was known for. Twilight giggled.

"Will you be coming back, 'Rival'?"

"Count yourself lucky, Twilight Sparkle, for this will not be the final time you see The Great and Powerful Trixie!" Trixie looked around, as if some invisible entity would see her drop the facade. "Besides... if every time I come to town is this exciting, I may just come back more often," Trixie rose up on her back legs. "Farewell, Twilight!" A puff of smoke, and the mare ran off at a full clip. Twilight rolled her eyes, but smiled.

She stepped to the library door, pushing it open quietly. The house was dark, but in the darkness, she could make out her purple assistant snoozing on the sofa in a ball. She quietly walked over to him and nudged him. "Spike... wake up Spike..."

He rolled over, rubbing his eyes. "Stupid dreams. You don't have to keep reminding me, y'know" He rolled back over.

"Spike, this isn't a dream"

"That's what the last one said, so prove it" He held his arm out. "Pinch me"

Twilight prodded the dragon lightly with her horn.

"Ow! Wait..." The dragon's eyes lit up. He jumped at Twilight, hugging her around the neck. "It's you! You're back!" She wrapped a foreleg around him, tears flowing freely. "I'm not dreaming this time"

She was content to staying as close to Spike as possible for the moment. After a few minutes, the two let each other go. "Spike, I need you to take a letter"

Dear Princess Celestia,

It has been months since my last letter, and I apologize greatly. Due to a magical mishap, I was sent to another world. One so different from our own it's shocking. But even in the strangest environments, you can learn the majesty of friendship.

Over the months me and my friends, new and old, learned our lessons.

From the grip of obsession and finding ones place to forgiveness and just plain letting go of your inhibitions. While I will follow with more detailed reports, I wished most to say that we have all returned, intact and okay. But we do not return alone. Friendship takes on many forms, and these new ponies are no exception. Originally they were the only ones around to help us return, and we repaid them by saving their lives.

I will write again soon, but to be honest I need rest badly. So I will end with this: A good team and a good friendship are very similar. Neither can function without mutual trust, and cooperation. And just like friendship, teamwork can accomplish tasks even greater than ever seems possible.

*Your faithful student,
Twilight Sparkle*

~~~

# The End of My Little Fortress Teamwork Is Magic

~~~