

Stargate: Equestria

Connection

Chapter 8

O'Neill watched the two former First Primes depart, then turned back to the group. "Rainbow Dash, front and center." He pointed to the space in front of him, raising an eyebrow at the blue pony.

Dash started in surprise, but darted over to him, hovering in place. She tilted her head at him, giving him a puzzled look. "What's up, chief?"

"That's Colonel to you." He folded his arms, eyeing her critically. "You said you're the fastest flier in Equestria?"

The little pony puffed out her chest, flashing him a challenging smile. "Darn right I am!"

"And just how brave are you?"

She snorted and shadowboxed the air in front of her, hooves darting out in a rapid series of punches. "I'll take *anypony* on! I'm not afraid of anything!"

"Good. Welcome to the Air Force, Captain Dash."

The pony froze mid-box. Her mouth fell open, her rose-colored eyes widening in surprise. "Omigosh omigosh! *Captain*? Seriously?" She let out a whoop and performed two quick little loops in the air, her friends beaming and congratulating her in the background.

O'Neill glanced at Jackson and Carter, who were both giving him very amused looks, before clearing his throat and turning back to Rainbow Dash. "Captain!" he barked.

Rainbow Dash froze midloop. She had probably meant to face O'Neill again, but as it was she blinked upside-down at her friends. She spun to face O'Neill and saluted, still upside-down. "Yessir!" The salute was crisp enough, but her smile stretched her face so wide it forced her eyes half-closed.

O'Neill really had to work hard to keep the smile off his own face. It wouldn't do for his image. He instead gave her his usual flat, steady look. "You get the title because you're also getting a very important, very dangerous mission. Do you think you can handle it?"

She finally got herself righted, narrowing her eyes at his challenge. "I can take anything you can dish out, buddy."

"That's *sir*, not *buddy*."

She blinked. "Oh. Uh. Right. Sir."

"You remember which direction the Jaffa were running yesterday?" At her confident nod, he continued. "Your mission is to fly that way and find their base of operations. I need to know everything you can discover: where they are, how many of them there are, the land between here and there. I need to know everything you can find out," he held up a finger, "*without* being spotted. Think you can do that?"

She gave him her usual half-lidded sly grin. "Easier done than said. You can count on me, boss!"

She began to dart past him for the open door, but found his hand pressing firmly against

her chest, holding her in place even as her wings beat powerfully in anticipation of zooming out into the sky. She looked down at his hand, then back up at him in confusion. "One last thing, Dash," O'Neill went on. "You need a wingman."

She cocked her head, giving him a blank look. "A wing-what?"

He scowled. "A wing...pony. A partner. You need someone to watch your back out there in case everything goes to hell."

She frowned right back at him. "I can take care of myself! Letting somepony tag along is just gonna slow me down!" O'Neill only looked at her, his hand not budging from her path, and she found herself fidgeting under the steady stare. She broke the gaze first, glancing to the side and grumbling. "Awright, fine." She rolled her eyes dramatically. "I'll find somepony."

O'Neill nodded over her shoulder, indicating Fluttershy. "Interested?"

The timid little pony shrank back, and Rainbow Dash snorted derisively. "I like Fluttershy fine, but she's scared of her own shadow. Trust me, you don't want her along." In the background, Fluttershy wilted, eyes and ears downcast.

O'Neill found himself wanting to delegate like a parent instead of a commander; the two acted like siblings, one trying to ditch the other. He took a breath, then nodded. "All right, fine." He poked Rainbow Dash lightly in the chest. "Find someone who can watch your back, then go find the Jaffa. Got it?"

"Got it!" she returned cheerfully. O'Neill finally lowered his hand, and Rainbow Dash blew by him, darting out the door and into the open sky.

Carter shook her head at O'Neill. "Captain? Really?"

The colonel shrugged. "You'll see. Besides, it's not like I'll have to run it by Hammond." He turned to Twilight. "I need maps of the surrounding area. The land to the southeast, specifically."

The pony nodded and looked around the room, frowning in thought. "Ah!" With a smile, she concentrated on one particular bookshelf. Her horn began to glow brightly for a second before a bound scroll popped out of one shelf, floating over to O'Neill.

He plucked the scroll out of the air and eyed it for a moment before giving Twilight the same look. He tossed the map to Carter, then pointed to Jackson, who was still holding Teal's gear. "Hey Daniel. Drop the staff." Jackson raised an eyebrow, then tossed the staff flat onto the floor. O'Neill turned to Twilight again, nodding to the staff. "Pick that up."

The little scholar developed a frown, and she gave him a severe look. "Would it kill you to say *please*, Colonel?"

"Probably."

Carter hid a smile while Jackson sighed. "Humor him, Twi? Please?"

Twilight snorted out a breath, but she turned her attention to the staff. She bowed her head, and her horn began to glow once more. After a moment's hesitation, the staff lifted off the floor, spinning around until it hung in the air vertically, a soft glow surrounding it.

"Good," O'Neill allowed. "Now push the center button."

She blinked at him, eyebrow cocked quizzically. "Um, hang on..." Her tongue stuck out a little in concentration, and the glow around both her horn and the staff intensified. With a sound of whirring servos, the top of the staff suddenly sprang open, the head splitting into quarters to reveal the hidden cannon. The movement was so sharp that Twilight squeaked in surprise and

fell onto her rump, nearly dropping the staff entirely. She looked up at O'Neill, panting a little. "I can do a lot of the same thing at once, but a bunch of different things wears me out fast."

The colonel nodded thoughtfully and gestured for Twilight to put the staff down. She gratefully let the magic go, the staff clattering to the floor. He turned his attention to the other unicorn in the room and nodded to the staff. "Now you."

Rarity blinked up at him, then gave the staff a wary look. "As you wish, Colonel." She lowered her head, pointing her horn at the staff. Her horn lit up just as Twilight's had, but the staff lay motionless on the ground. The light redoubled on itself, and she began to give little grunts of effort, but the staff never so much as twitched. After half a minute of trying, she finally gave up, breathing even harder than Twilight. "I *am* sorry, Colonel. It's just...not *fabulous* enough."

O'Neill blinked. Twice. "What?"

Twilight stepped up beside Rarity, giving the colonel an apologetic shrug. "That's unicorn magic," she explained. "It only works on things that relate to a pony's talents. Rarity's talent is fashion, so if something's not fashionable..." she shrugged again.

Rarity sniffed. "And that *thing* is quite the monstrosity, let me assure you."

O'Neill let Rarity's comment pass, frowning instead at Twilight. "So...how did you...?"

"My talent is magic, so any magic I do tends to work," Twilight explained. She looked down at the staff, a touch apprehensively. "This is a weapon, right? Something meant to scare and hurt others." She shook her head, eyes closed. "I don't think there's a unicorn in Ponyville that could touch it with their magic."

O'Neill grunted. "There goes my idea of an army that can control things with their minds."

"Telekinetics," Carter supplied helpfully.

"Yeah, that." O'Neill surveyed the remaining two ponies. "No wings, no horns. Is it too much to hope that you shoot laser beams out of your eyes?"

Applejack only cocked her head at him, a look of pure confusion on her face. Pinkie Pie, though, fairly bubbled with laughter. "No, silly!" She bounded forward, and O'Neill got a sickly little feeling as she began to bounce and dance in a circle around him.

"Weeeeeeeell earth ponies are the best ponies

You'll know we aren't phonies

We can sing and dance and run all day

And keep on going come what may!"

The humans all stared, utterly shocked by the random outburst of song. O'Neill dimly noticed the other ponies letting out small groans and shaking their heads, but otherwise seeming completely unfazed. Pinkie Pie didn't notice any of it, spinning around on one hind leg and belting out what had to be a completely improvised song.

"I like to party from dusk to dawn

And it's so much fun you'll never yawn

Lots of apples Jack'll buck

Legs so strong you'll wanna -"

"WOAHKAY that's enough!" O'Neill's urgent voice rang out loudly enough to override the song, and Pinkie Pie let out a startled squeak, tumbling to the floor from where she'd stopped midleap. She pouted up at O'Neill, folding her forelimbs. "I was just getting to the good part,

too," she grumped. On the other side of the room, the other ponies just shook their heads and facehooved in unison.

The colonel held out his hands to her, palms forward in a gesture of placation. "Please. For my sanity. Don't sing again."

An expression of heartbreaking sadness swept over the pink pony's face, and she looked up at him with tears in her eyes and a trembling lip. ...And before O'Neill could blink, the mood passed, and her face transformed into the beaming cheeriness she usually bore. "Okie dokie! But only 'cause you asked nicely, artichokie!"

Carter stood then, picking up Teal'c's staff. "Okay, kids!" she called out cheerfully, her voice a shade too loud for the room. "Let's head back to camp." She tossed the staff to O'Neill, and he managed to catch it without letting it fall. He shot her a grateful look for the change in subject.

Everyone gathered their things and began to leave the library, the small group flowing around O'Neill as he stood there, letting everyone leave first. The little dragon hopped up on Twilight's back, and her weight shifted to accommodate him as if they'd gone through the routine a thousand times before. Spike asked her, "Did Princess Celestia seem...I dunno, chatty today? I mean, she usually sends you some cryptic note and lets you figure it out for yourself, right?"

The pony shrugged. "She did have a lot more to say than usual. I don't know why, Spike. I guess this is just even bigger than usual." They passed through the doorway and O'Neill followed, shutting the door carefully behind him.

"Bigger than Nightmare Moon?" The skepticism in Spike's voice was frank. "Endless night is a pretty big thing."

"You heard her, Spike." Twilight's voice was quiet, and she sounded unsettled. "Equestria was nearly destroyed because of Epona's greed. Even if she is gone for good, we can't allow her influence to gain a foothold again."

O'Neill slung the staff across his shoulders lazily, ambling along beside the two. "Hey, we deal with this kinda thing at least once a week," he interjected, his tone lazily confident. "Nothing to worry about."

Twilight glanced up at him soberly. "I hope so, Colonel." She offered him a slight smile. "I still think you were kind of rude to Princess Celestia. But," she quickly added when he opened his mouth to protest, "she *did* put her trust in you to handle this." She lifted her chin, determination steeling her voice. "I want to help however I can."

"Trust me," he drawled. "It'll be a piece of cake."

Up ahead of them, Pinkie Pie's head shot up and she looked around wildly. "Did somepony say *cake*?! I love cake!" O'Neill groaned to himself and tried to look as inconspicuous as possible. Twilight giggled, and as Pinkie Pie began to bounce around in a circle, the group continued on the brief trek into the woods toward the campsite.