

The Greatest Game

“LET’S START! LET’S START!” bounced Pinkie excitedly. Maybe this tea party was going to be fun after all. It was only five minutes ago when she came downstairs and discovered that her friends had found a fun new board game to play, and Pinkie Pie loved board games.

“Hold on just a moment Pinkie, can’t play something we know nothing about,” Twilight said while carefully opening the box. She glanced around the simplistic ivory board. “Hmm, I don’t see a manual here.”

Rarity spotted some muted letters as she began rubbing away at the lighter part of the case “It’s right here under this, ugh, nasty grime,” wiping gingerly she revealed the text concerning the rules. Twilight scooted over and read aloud:

*A game for those who seek to find
A way to leave your world behind
You roll the dice to move your token, doubles gets another turn, first player to reach the end
wins*

Twilight scanned the board, “Tokens...does anypony see any-?”

“They’re in this little box with the dice Twilight,” said Fluttershy nosing open a little compartment, “Um, I’m afraid that there’s only four tokens in the box though.”

“No problem! We’ll just make teams!” Squabbling immediately broke out around the table concerning partners.

“Girls we are *not* arguing over this. The pony sitting to your right will be your partner to make it less complicated,” said Twilight with finality. Rarity looked at the pony to her right and sighed, “No offense Applejack, I just wanted to be Pinkie Pies partner, she’s amazing at these games you know,”

“Or maybe yer just plum terrible, ya did lose to her in tac-tac-toe like 100 times in a row,” said Applejack chuckling at Rarity’s frown “Don’t ya worry, I’m great at this stuff and this here shouldn’t be too complicated from tha looks of it.”

“I didn’t even get a partner you guys, but don’t you worry your little old heads about me!” said Pinkie Pie nonchalantly.

Twilight glanced around the table “Me and Dash, AJ and Rarity, Spike and Fluttershy...oh shoot, I’m sorry Pinkie, I goofed up,”

“It’s OK, I work better myself,” replied Pinkie, actually excited being the lone wolf; she would get to roll every time now.

“Complicated!?! Applejack more like too easy,” retorted Dash looking at the

Eagle token, “this is just rolling dice, no strategy to it if you ask me,” Everyone sent her a flat look and Applejack snorted. “Ya’fraid of losin’ Dash?”

Fluttershy sighed at the silly banter, she was okay at board games but didn’t want this one turning out like Ponopoly always did. She turned to Spike, “Alright then, grab the tokens out of here and put them on the board please.”

“Can do!” he said placing the tokens down. The four tokens flew from his hand and set themselves upright at their starting points.

“Cool! How’d you do that Spike?” asked Dash with wide eyes.

“It wasn’t me, the game did it. Maybe it’s a *magic* board game!”

The group ooo-ed at the idea and Twilight shook her head. “It’s probably just magnets or something, and before you ponies start arguing *again* I say that Pinkie should roll first since she’s playing without a partner.”

Everypony agreed and Pinkie grabbed the dice, shaking them wildly in her hooves and tossing them onto the game board.

“WHOO! A three! My lucky number!”

Pinkie reached over to push her token but it had already started sliding across the ivory path. Another round of oo-ing rose from the table while Twilight shook her head.

“My turn! My turn! I roll first Twi! You know alphabetical order and stuff,” said Dash impatiently. Before Twilight could respond Applejack sat up and pointed to the center of the board. “Wouldja look at THAT!”

The smooth dull rock sitting in the middle was glowing slightly; words were appearing inside the sphere, like text shimmering through a glass of water.

*At night they fly, you'd better run
These winged things are not much fun*

“It’s not nighttime and what does it mean about running?” Twilight looked out the window cautiously “I think it’s a clue or hint or something.”

“Um, does anypony else hear birds flapping?” questioned a wide eyed Fluttershy.

“LOOK AT THE STAIRS!” Spike yelled.

A huge flock of the ugliest bats ever flew downstairs and started flying frantically around the room squeaking and banging into the walls, bookshelves and themselves.

Applejack held her ground at the swarm and started barking out orders. “FLUTTERSHY, RAINBOW DASH OPEN THE WINDOWS!” Applejack ran over to the door, ducking her head and losing her hat in the process. Fluttershy frantically struggled with the latches. Dash had a more efficient idea kicking out

window after window.

“Aaaagh, they’re in my MAAANE!” shrieked Rarity running for cover. Applejack gave a mighty kick to the door and forced it open; the bats started clearing out.

“DASH, FLUTTERSHY CORRAL ‘EM OUTTA HERE!” she shouted pulling her trusty lasso out over the din of beating wings, “I’ll wrassle some up too!” she said snagging a group of startled bats and hurling them out the front door. In a few minutes all the bats had left the building and it was quiet once more.

“Jeeez Twilight! Ya gotta get yer attic checked once in a while! Havin’ a swarm of bats hangin’ round ain’t healthy,” Applejack said wrapping up her rope. “Tarnation those things were *big* too. Why didn’t you use your magic to shoo ‘em away Twi?”

Twilight shook her head again and sighed “I’m *trying* to rationalize how they could have possibly gotten in here and how I could have missed them hanging around upstairs.” Twilight had a spell that detects living things around her that she occasionally used when searching for pests (and Spike if he tried shucking his chores). Faint purple light glowed as she checked the library again.

“Six ponies, one baby dragon and the tree, I’m not getting anything else.” Another, completely *impossible*, idea for where the bats came from sprung to mind but she kept it to herself.

“Five ponies darling, we’ve lost Pinkie Pie somewhere,” said Rarity absentmindedly as she magically brushed her mane with a comb.

“Right here Rarity!” Pinkie Pie’s head popped up out of the black chest like a silly jack-in-the-box “Sorry about ducking out there, but when I see bats a-coming I’m first a-running,” she jumped out and retook her place at the table. It was uncommon knowledge that Pinkie had a scary run-in with bats as a filly and couldn’t stand being around them.

“Alright since the bats are gone and we’re going around the table it’s MY turn now,” Dash said excitedly reaching for the dice. Twilight magically snatched them away from her hooves “Rainbow we’re a team *remember*, it’s OUR turn?”

“Ugh, fiiiiine you can roll this turn, *sorry*,” Dash pouted and ruffled her wings. Twilight magically jumbled the dice together and dropped them on the board.

“Ooh a seven! We’ve taken the lead Rainbow Dash! High hoof!” Twilight threw her hoof in the air, which was returned a little more forcefully by Dash. The token slid quietly to the seventh spot and more text appeared in the green dome.

*There is only fear in your mind
can you block it in a bind?*

“Fear in your mind...” repeated Twilight rubbing her hoof. “These clues or hints or whatever aren’t making much sense...it’s your roll now Fluttershy.” Twilight looked up to see that all her friends except Pinkie had left the table and backed into a corner of the room, fearful looks on their faces. “Uh girls, what are you doing over there?”

Twilight felt something in her gut, and slowly turned around to see the biggest snake she had ever seen dropping from the ceiling before her. It’s mottled hide bouncing light around as it dropped to the floor rearing its huge brown head, bearing its fangs as it hissed and coiled at Twilight.

“I-is t-that a-a-a s-s-snaaa-” she stammered as it began turning towards her, wracked with sudden fear Twilight blacked out on the floor.

“Oh nonononono, you can’t fall asleep now Twilight!” tutted Pinkie worriedly, “the games not even CLOSE to over.” She grabbed her friends tail and pulled her over to the sink, narrowly avoiding the giant snakes strike.

Applejack shook herself out of her frightened stupor. “O-ok, c’mon Applejack, it’s jus’ like dealin’ with the hydra,” she pulled out her lasso again. “Yer goin down ugly!”

“I have an idea! I have an idea! Fluttershy follow me!” Spike hurriedly ran into the kitchen behind the snake with the meek Pegasus trailing close behind.

The snake struck again, this time for Applejack. She saw it coming and turning around delivered a powerful kick to the snakes face.

“SSSSSSSSSSRRRRRAAAAH!” it recoiled sharply with a painful cry, and spat out a bloody tooth. Blinded by pain it thrashed its massive tail around and knocked a bucket of water out of Pinkies mouth.

“HEY WATCH IT!” she said in a peevish voice, picking the bucket up to refill it.

“Pinkie what are you DOING?! We’ve got waaaay bigger problems right now!” said a frustrated Dash, darting around the snakes snapping maw.

Spike returned from the kitchen doorway holding two large pot lids, “Alright Fluttershy pick me up and drop me on the snakes head got me?!”

“Ok I got you Spike,” said Fluttershy nervously “Lift up your arms so I can carry you,”

As Fluttershy lifted him into the air Applejack managed to snag her lasso on the snakes mouth wrapping it shut. It flicked its tongue out and struggled with the rope, twisting its head to break free when Spike landed on its head and slammed the two lids over the snakes eyes.

“Great tinkin’ Shpike! Shlip the rope ovfer th’ lidsh ‘nd git down from thar!” said Applejack struggling to speak with the rope clenched in her mouth, “Dash,

kick dat thang outta here!”

While Rainbow Dash was struggling to kick the blinded serpent out the room, Pinkie was having trouble pulling the now filled bucket out the sink; with an extra heave she dumped it over the edge and onto her purple friend.

“AAAH! Pinkie what the- why’d you do that!?” said the now sopping wet unicorn.

“Duh! You fell asleep when the snakey came in the house Twilight you’ve gotta be awake.” Pinkie said turning her friend around to face the giant snake.

“Oh right,” her ears folded, she was light headed again seeing that giant serpent thrashing in the middle of the room and her legs felt like jelly. “What should I do? You know I’m petrified of snakes!”

“You should USE your magic Twilight Sparkle!” demanded Rarity running up to her, mane a disheveled mess once again, “Do something and rid us of this *awful* creature right now!”

As if listening for her name only the great beast stopped its struggling and turned towards the quieter part of the room, tongue flicking curiously in her direction.

“Rarity what in Equestria can you expect me to do about THAT thing?”

“I expect something quick and efficient from you to make that snake leave this building; you’ve always had a better grasp on magic than I!”

It had started slinking blindly towards the 3 ponies, again tasting the air. Applejack was unable to get a footing and got dragged alongside it. “TWILIGHT! IT’S AFTER YOU! DO SOMETHIN!”

Pinkie gasped and jumped up. “OOH OOH I KNOW! Twilight, can you make another you for the snake to chase? If it chases your other self you’ll be fine and it’ll leave us alone!”

“Like a copy? A doppelganger? Of me? I’ve never tried anything like that before,” The snake was dragging itself closer, ignoring the kicks Dash was delivering to its face.

“Okay, here goes nothing,” Twilight closed her eyes and magical light coated her body completely. It dulled and then a fuzzy sparkling outline of herself stepped forward and materialized, hazily standing before her.

“Okokokokok, Twilight go hide and make your copysparkle run out the door. Rainbow Dash get ready to kick off those metal lids,” Twilight ducked around the corner, her doppelganger soundlessly trotting behind her. “I’m ready Pinkie!”

“NOW!” shouted Pinkie and Dash swiftly double kicked the lids off the snakes giant face. The snake hissed at having its sight suddenly restored and looking around spotted Twilights doppelganger running at full gallop out the door.

It quickly fell low to the floor and started pursuing the figure and Rarity magically slammed the door shut as the last bit of its tail disappeared outside.

“That. Was. So. COOL!” Spike jumped up and shouted. “This is the coolest game ever!”

Pinkie jumped and gave him a high hoof “I know Spike did you see how everyone handled that snake it and when you covered its eyes and didn’t know what to do was the best and Applejack you kicked that thing right in its face it was sooo super duper awesome!”

“Well I’m through playing this,” Applejack said tersely rolling up her lasso, “everyone’s thinkin’ it I’m just sayin’ it, this games cursed!”

“*Again* with this curse nonsense,” Twilight facehoofed, “We’ve been through this AJ, there’s a valid explanation for anything and a cursed board game is a stretch don’t you think?”

“Then where’d them bats come from?”

“My attic? They could have been roosting there for all I know.”

“The big ‘ol snake too? A 35ft thang that jus’ so happened to show up right after ya rolled them dice?”

“Maybe it showed up because of the bats?”

“C’mon Twi use that noggin of yers and apply some logic to what jus’ happened. The game even told us it was gonna happen!”

“I don’t apply logic to curses AJ,” said Twilight flatly. Although she saw where her friend was coming from her tendency to jump at supernatural scapegoats always irked the unicorn. “Besides, that clue was completely inspecific.”

Spike didn’t care much for the arguing going on; he looked at Fluttershy who was quivering at the table, drinking out of the only teacup that hadn’t somehow spilled in the ruckus. “Hey it’s our turn now, do you wanna roll?” he asked nicely.

Fluttershy shook her head no and took another quiet sip as she looked over at the arguing ponies. Dash had joined in the argument and Pinkie was helping Rarity with some tidying around.

“I’m rolling now,” The arguing drowned out anything Spike had to say, he looked over at Fluttershy who just shrugged her shoulders, “Here goes!” he said shaking the die.

“-and that’s why you don’t jump to needless conclusions Rainbow Dash, superstitions are easy excuses to problems with often sensible explana-”

“Help! HELP! Someone help!”

Spike had sunken into the floor and was disappearing rapidly, his head and arms the only thing visible. Fluttershy was grabbing hold of his hands, her wings furiously beating at the air. “HELP! Somepony grab his arm!”

The other ponies galloped across the room only to stop short, the floor around the baby dragon had become a goopy mess and the ponies couldn't get near him. The table was slowly sinking too but Pinkie and AJ leapt across the muck easily. Dash flew over to Fluttershy and began pulling Spikes other arm.

"Fight it Spike, you can do it, pullllll!" Dash struggled with the baby dragons little hands; he kept slipping on their hooves, mouth disappearing under the gooey floor.

"Tie this rope to 'im girls!" Applejack said tossing her lasso, she was getting a lot of use out of it today, "Tie his hand real good, okay, good job Flutters, now Pinkie, help me PULL!"

Spike budged a little, his nose reappearing above the floor. His green eyes were filled with fear and darting rapidly around the room.

The table began tilting like a capsizing ship causing the game board start to sliding down.

"Uh-oh!" Pinkie dropped the rope and jumped for it knocking Applejack off balance. Spike sunk deeper back into the mushy floor, they gave one final heave but it wasn't enough. Spike vanished beneath the floor.

Pinkie fell off the table and onto the floor which was suddenly back to its harder consistency causing the board to open up, revealing the games fading message.

*Beware the ground where you stand
the floor is quicker than sinking sand*

"No. No. Spike. Where did you go? Spike? This isn't funny Spike, come out!" Twilight galloped over to the door to the library basement and magically threw it open, nearly ripping it off its hinges.

"SPIKE ARE YOU DOWN HERE? Spiiiiiiiiike!" An empty basement greeted her silently, she looked up at the ceiling to see it was completely solid. She frantically galloped to the bottom of the room and cast her life detection spell. Six ponies and one tree was all that showed up. No baby dragon. Nowhere in the tree. Nowhere in sight. Spike was gone.

"....Spike"

To be continued...