

# Long Distance

by Ezn

## Chapter One

*"Rise and shine, everypony! You're listening to K-FILY on a bright, sunny day in the great city of Fill-ey-delphia! The weather teams have scheduled a downpour this evening, so enjoy that sun while you can, fillies and colts!"*

White Noise rubbed his still-closed eyes with his hooves as he slowly lifted himself out of bed. He'd been up late the previous night, and it felt as if he hadn't had any sleep at all. He had half a mind to switch the alarm clock off and go back to sleep, but knew that wouldn't be the most responsible of actions. He had an example to set.

His horn glowed brightly as he put the kettle on for some coffee. One advantage to living in such a small apartment was that everything was in the telekinetic range of your average unicorn. Another advantage was the lack of walls – White Noise had some friends who loved to try lifting things on the opposite side of walls, but he himself liked to be able to see what he was doing.

Magic wasn't White's main thing after all – his speech-bubble-shaped cutie mark could attest to that. When it first appeared, his parents had been frightened he'd grow up to be a comic book artist, but White had known instantly that his talent was communication. Not saying things himself, that is, but figuring out easier ways for ponies to talk to each other under more circumstances.

White poured himself some coffee as he looked over the reports from his mail service – Dragonfire Delivery. He'd been too busy to read them the previous night, but that was fine, because business seemed to be doing wonderfully. Sales of bottled dragonfire were through the roof, and his dragons were coming to more towns and cities throughout Equestria by the day.

Finished with his drink, White Noise checked out his light blue mane and white coat in the mirror, decided they were presentable enough, and trotted out of his apartment, his mind already turning back to the problem that he'd wrestled with long into the previous night.

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Sky Wave had already been up for ages when the mellifluous tones of K-FILY announcer Chats travelled through the air and into her radio. Celestia was in the middle of raising the sun, way off in Canterlot, and Sky sat on a cloud to watch as the great big fireball rose over the mountains and turned them from black to orange to green.

She had got up before the sun to practice her flying routine against a backdrop of the pitch black night. For the past hour, Sky Wave had silently glided, looped around and dove in her graceful, majestic way. Some pegasi were all about speed, but she loved the feeling of control she had when flying at slower

speeds, and the way her flow carried her through the air from one move to another.

The sun was a little late this morning, which pleased Sky Wave. There had been a call to standardise the rising and setting of the sun, but Princess Celestia, in her wisdom, saw no reason not to vary the times for the good of her subjects. Cold winter days were shortened, and warm summer days lengthened. On a more specific note, the Grand Galloping Gala had happened the previous day, so Celestia gave her subjects a little time to sleep in.

Sky Wave picked up her radio in her mouth and opened her wings to fly off as the sun asserted its position in the sky. After performing her old routine at the Grand Galloping *Fillydelphia Party* Gala, she'd managed to work out a good chunk of a new routine this morning, and was pleased with her progress.

Some ponies thought Sky's practice of only performing routines once completely crazy, but she was committed to entertaining ponies in new and exciting ways every time she performed. The only constants between performances were her light pink coat and deep crimson mane – and she'd even toyed with the idea of dying *them* between performances.

Her cutie mark was a red ribbon with three loops of varying sizes. She often imagined it floating free on the wind, contorting and changing as it moved from one updraft to another, just as she did.

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*"Rise and shine, everypony! You're listening to K-FILY on a bright, sunny day in the great city of Fillydelphia! The weather teams have scheduled a downpour this evening, so enjoy that sun while you can, fillies and colts!"*

Sibwashie was jarred awake by the announcer pony's Filly accent. He'd been meaning to find something more in tune with his tastes to listen to, but he hadn't yet found the time. Being a Zebrican zebra in Fillydelphia, Equestria meant that he had a lot to learn.

Sibwashie switched off the radio as the announcer was in the middle of some speech about the previous night's Grand Galloping Gala. He preferred the radio's songs to its news – at least in song, ponies were polite enough to talk in rhymes.

"I miss my home more than I can bear  
But I'm learning more here than over there," Sibwashie said to himself in a slow, deliberate tone.

Making up an Equestrian-language couplet every morning had been a great way to learn this strange new language. It was harder to find good rhymes than in his native tongue, but their pursuit had greatly expanded Sibwashie's vocabulary. He'd spent many nights poring over his prized Equestrian language rhyming dictionary.

Sibwashie reminded himself that rhyming was not an Equestrian custom. In Zebrica, only close friends and family would talk to each other in prose, so hearing it everywhere made Sibwashie feel a little strange. But he would have to get used to it, if he wanted to succeed in his lifelong dream.

Sibwashie wanted to be a Zebrican ambassador to Equestria. Throughout his life, he had borne witness to interracial misunderstandings and fear. Ponies and zebras would get off on the wrong hoof with each

other because of their differing customs and ways of being polite. Each side would trumpet its own ways, and neither side would admit the other's merits.

Looking out the window, the zebra noticed that the sunrise was almost over. Taking that as a good reason to get a start on his day, Sibwashie slid into his brightly coloured saddlebags (adorned with intricate designs, drawn in traditional Zebrican style by a good friend of his) and headed out.

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White Noise used telekinesis to flip the "Sorry, We're Closed" sign around so it said "Yay! We're Open" instead. This would be the third day of operation for Dragonfire Delivery's Fillydelphia outlet – the second one (out of two) in Equestria.

The store was small and sparsely furnished, but its simplicity and cleanliness gave it a pleasant style all the same. White Noise moved into place behind a wooden counter that extended across the shop's width, separating its customers from the shelves behind White Noise that carried his wares.

The shelves were adorned with cylindrical jars, each with a neat little label with the name of a place on it – "CANTERLOT", "MANEHATTAN", and "HOOFINGTON", to name the most popular ones. What was really eye-catching about the jars, though, was that each one flickered with green light – they all contained that special type of dragonfire used for sending messages across vast distances. Unlike real fire, the green flames burnt eternally without fuel, and would actually *extinguish* once given a sample of fuel, however small. White Noise had considered marketing them for their perpetual light-giving ability on top of their primary function, but nopony liked the sickly green hue they cast upon dark surroundings.

No, Dragonfire Delivery had stayed true to its original purpose, concocted by White Noise while studying at Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. The young company had done an admirable job of bringing the convenience and speed of the school's internal mail-by-dragonfire system to the common ponyfolk.

"Good morning, White," said a cheery voice. "How are you feeling today?"

"Not terrible, thanks," answered White Noise, "but you sound quite happy, Turquoise."

"I try to be happy every day, you know that!"

White Noise smiled. Although he hadn't known her for very long, he found his Fillydelphia-branch assistant to be a very likeable dragon. She reminded him of Smooth Scales, his oldest dragon friend – currently managing the Canterlot branch – only she was perhaps a little less mischievous and prank-happy than that devilish creature.

"You'll be happy to know that sales are rocketing up. Our new partnership with the Equestrian Post Office was a fantastic idea, if I do say so myself."

"Yes Turq, you did good with that idea. I'm glad we're reaching more ponies!" White Noise replied enthusiastically, the good news wiping some of the sleep out of his eyes. "Dragonfire Delivery is going to change Equestria, I promise you."

"I wouldn't be working here otherwise, sir. And speaking of the post office, here's our liaison now."

Turquoise's words were punctuated by the entrance of a pink pegasus wearing an EqPO baseball cap on her head and a set of tan saddlebags over her back. She smiled awkwardly through gritted teeth, which gripped a clipboard.

"Hello Sky," White Noise greeted. "How are you feeling today?"

"Tired, but still just a little psyched from my performance last night," Sky replied, placing her clipboard on the floor.

"Ah yes, congrats on that. You were great up there! I was only able to hang around a short while, but I liked what I saw."

"Thanks, I worked really hard on that performance," Sky Wave replied, blushing almost imperceptibly. "Anyway, I guess I'd better pick up the goods. I've got the post office's order written down on my clipboard."

White Noise levitated the clipboard up to his face and then busied himself levitating various jars off shelves (parallel levitation, now that was a skill worth knowing!). The post office would be taking almost all of his Canterlot dragonfire today, probably in anticipation of all the letters that would be sent to-and-fro regarding the previous night's Gala. White Noise hoped he would have enough left for his own, private clients.

The jars landed softly in Sky Wave's magically wide-open saddlebags, making them bulge quite significantly, and putting a visible amount of strain on the poor pegasus.

"That looks really heavy. Are you sure you shouldn't maybe make two trips?" Turq asked.

"Nah, I can handle it," Sky replied, smiling bravely. "A good performer must be graceful *and* strong. Also resilient. Besides, I've carried heavier weights – I'm a mailpony!"

White Noise chuckled softly at this statement. "I'm not sure where the trend of mailing other ponies large gifts like pianos came from, but I guess it must be good conditioning for you guys. I know it doesn't do my business any good."

"My back longs for the day ponies can deliver parcels by dragonfire!"

With that parting wish, Sky Wave flew off into the air, her ascent slowed by the weight of her saddlebags.

"I *am* glad we partnered with the postal service," Turquoise commented. "She's nice."

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Later that day, White Noise and Turquoise were having a debate about the nutritional value of gemstones, when a tall, exotic shadow darkened their door. The conversation melted away as a large-framed zebra with a large and very traditional mohawk stepped into the establishment.

White's eyes widened as he caught sight of their latest customer. Clearing his throat, he launched into an

enthusiastic greeting:

"«A warm welcome to you, traveller from a faraway land  
Speak what you desire, and I will understand!»" White said in measured tones of his best Zebrican.

Sibwashie was taken aback at the unicorn's words. His rhyming was awkward and his words lacked the rhythm of a mother-tongue speaker, but he got his point across. Sibwashie hadn't heard any other ponies speak to him in his own language before.

"«Your warm accommodation finds welcome in my heart  
Now, I pray, aid a traveller by using your life's art.»"

"Uuuuh....." said Turquoise.

"«Where would you like to send a letter? Limited choices are available, I'm afraid.»" White asked.

"«My correspondence is with a mare in Hoofington, a fine lady of the farming trade.»" Sibwashie continued, completing White's rhyme as was the Zebrican custom.

"'Hoofington', I understand. I'll go fetch a jar of that from the back," said Turquoise, shaking the bewilderment off her face.

"Unicorn sir, your empathy and interest I will repay  
by speaking in your tongue, with you, today." Sibwashie said, switching to Equestrian.

"That's kind of a relief, I was running out of words!" White joked. "I'm White Noise, graduate of Princess Celestia's School For Gifted Unicorns, and owner of the Dragonfire Delivery company. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Sibwashie is the name I've borne since birth  
And I am the only Sibwashie on this earth."

The zebra and pony shook hooves just as Turquoise returned with a small jar of green flame labelled "HOOFINGTON". The flame flickered and swam about behind the clear glass, entrancing Sibwashie with its unreal colour and movement.

"Say hi to Mr Sibwashie, Turquoise," White gently commanded. "This is my Fillydelphia store manager, Turquoise. She's a good worker, even if she doesn't know too many languages."

"Hello Mr Sibwashie, sir," Turquoise said, handing over the Hoofington jar.

Taking the jar in his mouth, Sibwashie gave Turquoise a silent nod, grateful that he was presently unable to speak – his Equestrian rhyming still needed work, and he didn't want to get stuck on "Turquoise".

"So, if I may ask," began White Noise, as Sibwashie deposited some bits on the counter in payment. "What brings you to Equestria? Zebrica's quite a way away from here."

After placing the jar of dragonfire in his left saddlebag, Sibwashie put a hoof to his chin, thinking for a

moment before opening his mouth.

"The glyph upon my flank describes a very delicate mission  
It compels me to prevent international peace attrition.

"Or, to put it in a fashion more clear-spoken and plain  
Means my job is full of pony-zebra friendships to maintain.

"By travelling deep into pony country and living among you  
I hope to understand, and discover what is true."

"So, basically, you're a diplomat?" White surmised.

"Ambassador is the term I would prefer  
But, right now, I am neither.

"I am a young zebra, with so much to see and to learn  
I must make myself worthy of the position I yearn."

"Well you seem like a pretty interesting guy nonetheless. You know... I've always been curious about life  
outside of Equestria, and it's about lunch time. Would you mind accompanying me? I'm sure I can tell you  
a fair bit about Equestria, from my perspective anyway. And if you're at all interested in Dragonfire  
Delivery..."

Sibwashie smiled and nodded. *Perhaps this would be a beneficial relationship to cultivate*, he thought.  
*Communication technology IS an essential component of any relationship between nations.*

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"I can't believe I never thought of that before!" White Noise blurted out. "Distance doesn't matter to  
Dragonfire – there's absolutely no good reason why my business *shouldn't* have branches all over the  
world! Just think of the possibilities!"

"With such a grand, all-spanning system put in place  
I would be able to keep in touch with other members of my race."

White Noise and Sibwashie were sitting at a booth in the former's favourite Fillydelphia deli. White had  
eaten a daisy sandwich; Sibwashie had ordered the soup of the day. Their meals finished, they were  
leisurely drinking cups of coffee – White knew that Turquoise could manage the shop on her own, and  
Sibwashie didn't have any pressing engagements for the rest of the day.

"You've given me a lot to think about, Mr Sibwashie," White said, very truthfully, resting his coffee mug on  
the table.

"I can say with joy that it's the same on my end  
I am glad to have met you, my new pony friend."

Sibwashie felt that White Noise was maybe a little too absorbed in his job, but he had still managed to

learn a few new things about Equestrian culture from the unicorn. More importantly, he'd gained an insight into the Equestrian viewpoint on Zebrica and zebras from someone who had studied the subject. Who would've thought they found traditional zebra ceremonial masks frightening?

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Sky Wave swooped gracefully into one of the many wide entrances that lead straight from the sky into an upper floor of the Fillydelphia post office. She trotted up to her supervisor's desk, twisting and turning as she went to avoid colliding with any of the bustling mailponies scurrying around her.

"Got today's dragonfire for you, boss," Sky said cheerfully.

"Thank you," came the reply, spoken in a voice that was unfamiliar to Sky Wave. "I have something for you as well."

Sky did a double-take at the mare in front of her. She was wearing a uniform identical to Sky's supervisor's one, but a few sizes smaller, and obviously cut for a mare rather than a stallion. The light red mare who looked to be Sky's new supervisor also had a severity to her gaze, and a very neatly styled mane – a far cry from the shaggy, unshaven Stamp she had grown used to.

"What happened to Stamp?" Sky asked, trying to use as polite a tone as possible.

"He moved on. This department is currently undergoing a large-scale restructuring," retorted the strange new supervisor, pushing a brown envelope across her desk towards Sky.

Sky took the envelope in her mouth, hearing a rustle of bits as she did so. It was the beginning of the second week of that month, and Sky was fairly certain that payday was not on the agenda of "stuff to *restructure*"... but maybe it was a *special* bonus!

"Shank yew ma'am, but today'sh shnot payday."

"And that's not your wage. It's your severance package."

Sky Wave's eyes widened in horror, and the envelope of bits clattered to the floor as her mouth did the same. She was being *fired*?! Had she done something wrong? Delivered letters to the wrong addresses? Broken the contents of a package? Dropped a piano on somepony's head?

"The Equestrian Post Office and I feel you would be better suited to a career more in-line with your natural strengths," the red mare said. "New employee policy disallows us from hiring anypony without a mail-related cutie mark, so I'm afraid we have to let you go."

Sky Wave opened her mouth to protest, but thought better of it. This new supervisor didn't strike her as the compassionate type.

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Sibwashie and White Noise walked along one of Fillydelphia's many concrete pavements, watching the carriages go by as they made idle conversation.

"...and that's why Princess Luna has been missing for the last thousand years," finished White. "I heard her return was a public relations nightmare – took my civil servant friends in Canterlot weeks of sleepless nights to smooth over everypony's confusion and anger."

"But on a more personal note," White said, switching topics after Sibwashie's nod of understanding, "all this talk about the Princesses has reminded me of a problem I've been puzzling over for a good few nights."

White closed his eyes for a moment as he composed his thoughts.

"A few weeks into my first term at Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns," he began, "my class had a visit from the Princess herself..."

«-oOo-»

A young White Noise sat in the middle row of his General Magic class, staring down at his hooves. He was wondering why he of all ponies had been accepted into such a prestigious academy, and how long it would be before the school figured out that they'd made a mistake and kicked him out.

During his short time at the school, he'd met, seen and heard about so many ponies with magical skills far beyond anything he could claim to have. Sure, his earth pony friends back home had been impressed by his levitations, light-tricks and magical funny voices (great for pranks!), but the ponies here were ridiculously talented.

There was Ivy, the dark green filly who could make flowers grow and dance in front of her! And Steady Stand, the big red unicorn who knew a spell that made walls and carriages practically unbreakable! There were even some older unicorns working on inter-dimensional teleportation, whatever that was.

And of course there was Twilight Sparkle, Princess Celestia's personal student, as of the beginning of the year. White Noise hadn't met her, but he'd heard all kinds of stories about her entrance exam. He wasn't sure which ones were true, but he'd seen the giant hole in the exam room's ceiling.

What all these ponies had in common, and what made White Noise feel out of place, was that they had their cutie marks. White felt at times that he'd give his front hooves for a vine, or a wave crashing against a dyke, or even something lame like a hammer on his flank. How was he supposed to be a "gifted unicorn" if he didn't even know who he was?

White was distracted from his thoughts by the sound of an old mare clearing her throat. The class was starting.

"We have a *very special* guest teacher for you today, fillies and colts," said Chalkboard, the class's dusty grey teacher. "Please stand for her Majesty, Princess Celestia."

Gasps and squeals of excitement filled the air as the hundred-and-something little ponies in the class rose to their hooves, their eyes widening as the Princess stepped into room.

The Princess, regal as always, slowly stepped across the length of the small classroom, smiling at the



low-bowing teacher-pony before her. Her mane blew out in front of her face, despite the lack of wind, and the Princess seemed to radiate a magical aura all about her tall, elegant frame.

"Good morning, my faithful students," she said, giving her voice a magical boost that made it echo softly around the room. "I trust you have enjoyed your first few weeks at my school. You have learnt a lot under the guidance of Ms Chalkboard, but you still have much, much more to discover about magic... and about yourselves."

White sat up at this.

"You are all young ponies, and many of you don't know what your special talents are. Even those lucky ponies who have their cutie marks already may still be a little confused about their lives and what their marks *really* mean."

Princess Celestia paused for a moment, a smile crossing her muzzle.

"Not everypony gets something straightforward like a sun cutie mark that means they should go out and raise the sun every morning."

It was hard to tell if the Princess was making a joke, or whether or not she expected the class to laugh at it, so a few polite giggles rose up from the class before being strangled by awkwardness. White Noise smiled softly.

"Rest assured that you are all among the most magically adept unicorns in all of Equestria," the Princess continued, slowly gazing around the room. "Each one of you has amazing potential in one or more fields of magic, and this General Magic class is where you can find out what those fields are."

Just as Princess Celestia was pausing to let the class think about her words, a scroll materialised in front of her in a puff of smoke. Catching it with her levitation, the Princess set it down on the teacher's desk and continued speaking.

"That was an example of an *ambient* spell, my little ponies. Can anypony tell me what an *ambient* spell is? Yes, you in the front row."

"An *ambient spell* is a spell that does something constantly, Princess Celestia," came the front-row pony's matter-of-fact tone.

"Very good, my faithful student. My mail-delivery spell constantly looks for dragonfire letters addressed to me, and when it finds one, it delivers it directly to me."

This was new information to White. Like all the other ponies in his class, he'd been briefed on the school's dragonfire communication system, but he had been under the impression that dragons could only deliver letters to each other.

"Although the system sounds simple," the Princess continued, "it actually takes a lot of magic to maintain – that is the most important thing to remember about ambient magic. At the moment, I am the only pony with enough magic to use it."

«-oOo-»

"...with enough magic to use it," White said, his story coming to a close. "It was on that day that I discovered my fascination with communication. My cutie mark came later on – that's a whole other story – but the point of the story is that last thing the Princess said."

White Noise let out a sigh, and Sibwashie noticed the lines beneath his eye for the first time. It looked like White hadn't been getting enough sleep.

"The Princess said that nopony could cast that spell but her. And from what my research shows, she's absolutely right. The spell requires insane amounts of magic, and its ambient nature doesn't help matters. But I still feel like I have to figure out some way of using it. A spell like that would revolutionize Dragonfire Delivery – just think of all the places ponies' messages could reach!"

At this point, White's eyes had glazed over with excitement, and his grin stretched so far across his face that Sibwashie feared he'd hurt himself.

"I guess it's more than that, though," White continued, coming back down to earth. "If I don't have a way of casting that spell and making practical use of it, then what does that say about my understanding of dragonfire? I mean, the fire's literally the fuel that my business runs on, and sometimes I just get the feeling that I have no idea what I'm doing."

Sibwashie could think of a straightforward solution to his new friends' dilemma, one that he would enact were he in the same position.

"When seeking to understand problems like this, the only recourse is to begin your search by finding the source."

"Dragonfire is breathed by dragons, you know? Perhaps you should see what they have to show."

"Well, yes, but I'm just not –"

White Noise's eyes widened as an idea dawned on him. It was probably a bit of a stretch, and hardly an appropriate thing to ask of somepony (somezebra?) he'd met maybe an hour before, but at that moment White was overcome with a sense of destiny.

"Sibwashie, you're a diplomat-in-training, right?" he asked tentatively. "Isn't Dragonia awfully close to Zebrica? Have you been there before? Would you go there again?"

Sibwashie blinked. This was quite a bit to take in. He'd been to the outskirts of Dragonia a few times, but it wasn't a place he'd lavished much attention on. Dragons, for the most part, were solitary creatures who liked nothing more than to be left alone. The ones in Dragonia especially – their incredibly long lifespans meant that on the rare occasion they did make friends with others, the others in question would be other dragons. They viewed the zebra population with quiet amusement, watching them live out their entire lives in the time it took a dragon to take a nap.

Nonetheless, White Noise had made an interesting offer. It would merit some serious contemplation.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

Sibwashie noticed that White Noise had been busy talking to a pegasus mare while he'd been lost in thought. The light pink mare's head was drooped, and she looked rather down on her luck.

"I just got fired," she said in response to White's question. "The powers-that-be decided my cutie mark wasn't 'appropriate for a mail-carrier'."

"That's pretty rough," said White. "But you've still got your performances, right? Don't those bring in a fair amount of money?"

Sky sighed. "Sadly not. If it did, I'd not have taken that post office job. My gigs are just too irregular – my specific flight style isn't as breath-taking or daring as that of, say, the Wonderbolts, and even though I'm okay with that, and my fans are okay with that, it just means that I'm not the kind of performer most ponies want at their events."

"Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Know of any other jobs I can get?"

For the second time in less than five minutes, White's eyes widened at his own brilliance, and he felt that strange sense of destiny. Again, it was a bit of a stretch, but...

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"...and that's how it'll work, if you guys are sure you want to do this," White Noise finished, taking a deep breath. "Sibwashie, you'll use your local knowledge and people-skills to get us to some dragons who can help me with my magic studies, and Sky, you'll be our eye in the sky while we're hoofin' it to Dragonia. Both of you will be paid handsomely – Dragonfire Delivery is doing very well at the moment, and a trip like this would be the perfect opportunity to expand even further."

The pony and zebra nodded in agreement. For Sibwashie this would be a chance to see more of Equestria, and visit his home again; White Noise had promised they'd make a stop in Zebrica, seeing as they'd probably end up going through it anyway. For Sky Wave it would be a way to actually have something to do over the post-Gala event drought. White's mention of payment had a fair bit to do with their agreement as well.

"So we'll meet up at the edge of town tomorrow?" Sky asked.

"The edge that faces Hoofington, to be precise. We'll be travelling along the E7 for most of the way," White replied matter-of-factly. "I'm glad you guys don't have a lot of stuff you need to do before we make this trip, because I'd hit that road right now if I could."

"I will send some letters and give my landlady notice of my leave  
Then I just have to pack – that's all – hard to believe..." replied Sibwashie.

"I'm a leaf on the wind, White," said Sky Wave dramatically. "Wherever destiny takes me, that's where I

go."

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"So you're sure you'll be fine to manage the shop on your own?" White Noise asked Turquoise the next day.

"Don't patronise me, boss," she replied cattily. "If I wasn't able to do something as basic as that you wouldn't have hired me. It's not like you were going to stay at the Fillydelphia branch forever in any case. No offense, but you're a Canterlot pony, through and through."

"None taken," replied White, wistfully thinking of Canterlot's majestic towers, pathways and bridges. "It's too bad we're not going in that direction."

"Are you sure you know the way, White?"

White Noise levitated a map out of his right saddlebag to assuage his dragon shop-assistant's fears. A thick dotted line marked a path along the main roads from Fillydelphia all the way to Port Anchor, where a boat would take them across the sea to Zebrica.

"We'll be heading through Hoofington, Ponyville and a few other places. The Hoofington dragon I've hired will be glad to help open up a branch over there – he says the Post Office is far too noisy a working area for his liking."

"Sounds like you've got it all figured out quite nicely, boss," Turquoise said, raising an eyebrow.

"They don't give just *anypony* a degree in Communications Technology, Turq," White replied snidely. "Anyway, I'd better get going. Take care."

"Good-bye Mr Bossman," Turquoise replied as White levitated the shop's door open and stepped out.

The white unicorn hurried along the road to the edge of town, where he'd arranged to meet his travelling companions. He was a little nervous about going on such a long journey with a pony and zebra he didn't know terribly well, but something told him it would all work out fine. *Who knows?* he thought. *We could even become friends.*

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