

Not Exactly As I Dreamed
Part One: Equestria

"My faithful student, Twilight Sparkle,

A group of dedicated ponies at the Canterlot Academy have developed a magical device that, if successful, could revolutionize all of Equestria. However, this device is far from complete. I know that a unicorn of your caliber and mental aptitude would be a valuable asset to this project, and, at my recommendation, the head scientist has requested your assistance. Included is a signed travel pass to Canterlot, for you and your friends. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Princess Celestia"

Spike finished reading the letter. "So, Twilight," the baby dragon asked, "What kind of device do you think they're working on?"

"I don't know," the purple unicorn said, a contemplative expression on her face. "From the way Princess Celestia wrote the letter, I can't really tell what it could possibly be."

Spike shrugged. "Well, are you going to go?"

"I'll have to talk to everypony first to see if they want to go," Twilight turned and faced the door to the library in which she lived. "I know Rarity will definitely want to go to Canterlot, and Pinkie Pie might, too. But I'm not sure about the others," she sighed. "Especially Fluttershy." She opened the library door.

Not one instant later and three young fillies had charged past Twilight and into the library. "Cutie Mark Crusader Librarians! Yay!" they all shouted, faces rampant with enthusiasm.

"Sweetie Belle! Get back here this instant!" A frantic voice called out from behind them. Rarity was running up the path to the library, panting.

"Hey, Twilight!" Apple Bloom, younger sister to Twilight's friend Applejack, ran up to her. "Wanna help us be librarians? Maybe we'll find our special talent and earn our cutie marks!"

A tremendous crashing noise erupted from within the library. Twilight winced.

"Umm, I'd love to, Apple Bloom, but I'm pretty busy right now. Maybe some other time, okay?"

Sweetie Belle, a young white unicorn, and Scootaloo, a pegasus filly, bolted past again, this time chased by Spike, who was shouting some rather unfriendly things.

Rarity, clearly exhausted, finally walked through the library door. "Goodness me, where do they get all that energy?" she breathed. "Twilight, you must excuse me for this intrusion. It was just that I was watching over these girls as they played, when they suddenly decided to run off."

"Oh, it's no problem, Rarity," Twilight smiled. Another crash sounded, followed by laughter. "Not that big a problem," she amended gingerly.

"Girls!" Rarity called. "It's time to leave!"

For a moment, the chaos ceased. "Awww, sis," Sweetie Belle whined. "Can't we play a little more?"

"I'm sorry, girls, but you heard Twilight. She's very busy, and we must leave her in peace."

“Actually, Rarity,” Twilight said, “I was meaning to talk to you. Princess Celestia has invited me to work on a scientific project at the Canterlot Academy. She sent a travel pass with the letter for my friends and I. So would you like to come with me?”

“Would I!” Rarity’s eyes lit up in excitement. “I’d love to go to Canterlot, darling. Just let me see these fillies home, and I’ll pack my things.”

“I thought you’d want to,” Twilight laughed. “Well, I’ll see you soon then!”

“Come, girls,” Rarity commanded in her usual regal demeanor. “It’s time to go home.”

“Awww,” came the youthful chorus.

Spike walked by. “Did Rarity leave yet?” he panted.

“Sorry, Spike, you just missed her.”

“Don’t worry, Twilight, we’ll clean up this mess. You go talk with the other ponies.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Twilight said.

“It’s no problem at all!” Spike puffed out his chest proudly. “What else is an assistant for?”

“Well, if you say so,” the unicorn laughed. “Well, I’m off then!”

It took only a few minutes to get to Sugarcube Corner. Twilight couldn’t help but smile at all the fun times she and her friends had had here. It never ceased to surprise her that even though it wasn’t really that long since Twilight had first arrived in Ponyville for the Summer Sun Celebration, she had experienced much more here than she ever had in Canterlot, her home city. The battle with Nightmare Moon, the grand harvest of Applebuck Season, the Running of the Leaves, and her first Winter Wrap-Up were only a few of the exciting adventures she had had.

“Whatcha thinking about, Twilight?” A high, perky voice interrupted her reverie. Pinkie Pie was standing right next to her.

“Huh? Oh, nothing, Pinkie,” Twilight laughed nervously.

“Nothing?” Pinkie asked, confused. “Well, if you were thinking about nothing, then you must be contemplating the vast vacuum of the void, into which nopony has ever vowed to venture. Very philosophical!”

Twilight stared.

“So, what brings you here? Are you hungry for something sweet and delicious?”

“No, Pinkie Pie,” Twilight shook her head. “I actually came to ask you about something.”

“Okey dokey lokey!” Pinkie Pie grinned from ear to ear.

“You see, Princess Celestia has invited me to work on a special scientific project at Canterlot.”

“Oooooooh!” The pink pony looked impressed.

“She also invited you and the rest of my friends to come with me. Would you like to come?” Twilight asked.

The pony thought for a moment. “Hmm... Sure! I’ll go get my stuff packed right away!”

“Okay, then. I’ll go talk to Applejack. See you in a bit, Pinkie!” But she was already bouncing into the bakery.

“That pony...” Twilight said. Then she decided to head over to Sweet Apple Acres.

Sweet Apple Acres, the large orchard owned and run by the Apple family, was past the outskirts of Ponyville. Once you entered through the gates, you could see hillsides and valleys, all bursting with verdant apple trees. The trees were festooned not with apples, though, but with many white blossoms. As she walked, Twilight wondered if the orchard always looked this beautiful in the springtime.

"Howdy, Twilight!" Apple Bloom, spotting the unicorn, trotted toward her. "Sorry we couldn't help ya be librarians."

Twilight couldn't help but cringe slightly at the thought of the Cutie Mark Crusaders running wild in the library. "No, that's quite all right," she said. "Really."

"Wait," she suddenly remembered the reason she came to the orchard, "Do you know where Applejack is?"

"Hmm..." the filly thought for a second. "I think she was down by the barn."

The two cantered down the path to the center of the farm, where Applejack was busy fixing up the barn. Springtime was when the Apple family did most of their cleaning and maintenance work around the orchard.

"Applejack!" Twilight called as she came into view.

"Howdy, Twi!" the earth pony shouted back. "What's goin' on?"

"Well," Twilight said as she trotted closer, "I got a letter from Princess Celestia this morning, and basically, I'm going to take part in a major scientific project that she says will revolutionize Equestria. She's invited us all to come to Canterlot."

"All of us?" Applejack raised an eyebrow. "Even..." - she looked around for a minute before continuing- "Even Fluttershy?" she asked in a whisper.

"Well..." Twilight looked discomforted. "I haven't asked Fluttershy yet."

"I don't know, sugarcube," Applejack whispered. "She may not have recovered yet, ya know, from the incident. Going to Canterlot may not be the best thing for her, ya hear?"

"I know," Twilight looked down at the dusty path. "But it would still be nice to ask her, right? I mean, it just wouldn't be right to ask everyone but her."

"Well, darlin'," Applejack said in her usual voice, "I'd love to come with ya, but as ya can see," she gestured to the nearby barn and farmhouse, "We still got a lotta work to do 'round here. I gotta do my part 'same as the rest of the family."

"I understand," Twilight said. "Farming sure is a busy life."

"But, hey," Applejack winked as Twilight turned to leave, "If ya get into a bind while you're over there, just give me a note, and I'll be there faster than you can bite an apple, okay?"

"Will do, Applejack!" Twilight smiled.

"Apple Bloom!" she could hear Applejack calling for her sister, "Could ya help me paint this barn?"

Now to talk to Fluttershy, Twilight thought.

Fluttershy's cottage was nearby, and Twilight didn't take long to get there. The leaf-covered house was quite large, as the kind pegasus kept a large number of animals there to take care of.

Twilight came to the door of the cottage and knocked three times. There was no answer. The unicorn knocked again, still to no avail. Twilight wondered if Fluttershy was out in the

forest, looking for more animals to help.

"Fluttershy?" she called.

"Oh!" a small cry came from behind the treehouse. The yellow pegasus pony flitted over the cottage into view. "Oh, hello, Twilight," Fluttershy said softly. Fluttershy said most everything softly. "I'm sorry I didn't hear you knock. I was watering the flowers in my back garden." She lifted her right hoof to reveal a pink-painted watering can.

"That's okay, Fluttershy," Twilight gave a friendly smile. "I came to ask you a question..."

After Twilight had told her everything about Princess Celestia's letter and invitation, she asked, "Do you want to come with us?"

"Oh..." Fluttershy looked away, blushing. "I'm not sure, Twilight. Do you think it would be a good idea? I don't know if the princess wants me back after I ruined the Grand Galloping Gala."

"Fluttershy, the princess values your company just as much as anypony," Twilight attempted to reassure her friend. "But you should only come if you want to."

"Well, who else is going?" the pegasus asked. "You, Rarity, and Pinkie Pie? What about Rainbow Dash?"

"Um..." Twilight started to speak, but was interrupted by a multicolored blur of motion whooshing past.

"Hey, Twilight! Hey, Fluttershy!" Rainbow Dash greeted as she landed. "I just got done talking to Rarity and I heard the whole story. So I flew over here to say, 'Count me in!'"

"I'll go, too," Fluttershy said. "I mean, if that's okay with everyone else."

"Are you sure?" Rainbow asked, incredulous.

"I want to be there for my friends," Fluttershy continued. "And Angel can take care of the animals while I'm gone."

"And Derpy Hooves can take care of the sky for me," Rainbow Dash added. "We've got it all covered."

"All right, then," Twilight smiled. "I'll let the princess know right away."

"Dear Princess Celestia,

Today I learned that even if you think a friend will say no to an invitation, it's still always good to ask them. I was sure that Fluttershy would be adamant against going to Canterlot with us, but she has decided to come and be with her friends. Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie, and Rarity are all coming as well. Applejack is busy at the orchard and, regretfully, is unable to make it. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Your faithful student,

Twilight Sparkle."

"And done!" Spike exclaimed as he finished writing. "Shall I send it now?"

"Yes," Twilight said. It was mid-afternoon, and Twilight had arrived back at the library to find Spike and Owliscious, her newest assistant, hard at work cleaning up the chaotic mess caused by the Cutie Mark Crusaders. After she helped them finish the job, she had Spike take a letter to send to Princess Celestia.

"All right," Spike said. He took a deep breath, and exhaled a small jet of green flames,

which consumed the letter. The resulting ashes flew through the open library window, toward the Princesses' palace in Canterlot.

Not five minutes passed before a loud belching sound exploded from Spike's mouth and another letter appeared. "Wow," Twilight exclaimed in astonishment. "I didn't think the Princess would respond that quickly."

"My faithful student, Twilight Sparkle," Spike narrated, holding the letter in his hands.

"My faithful student, Twilight Sparkle,

As always, I appreciate your input on the many wonders of friendship, and I am glad to see that you have accepted the invitation of the Canterlot Academy. I know you have the diligence and magical knowledge needed to help make this project a success.

I am also pleased to see that your friends are coming to Canterlot as well. I hope that they will enjoy their time here, and, if needed, provide you support in the coming days. I will send a coach with some of my most trusted guardsponies to retrieve you at dawn tomorrow. I look forward to seeing you soon, and wish you a safe journey.

Princess Celestia"

The five ponies met in front of the Ponyville library just as the sky was beginning to lighten. Twilight was up nearly all night in anticipation of what wonders the Canterlot Academy would have in store for her. She had barely gotten any sleep, though the excitement kept her alert in the chilly morning air. She had just woken Spike from his slumber to see them off, and the two came out of the library to find Rarity, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, and Pinkie Pie waiting in front of the building.

Rarity had a large traveling case on the ground beside her, which Twilight suspected with great certainty was filled with all sorts of fancy attire. The rest of the group had a few saddlebags, each pony's emblazoned with their respective cutie marks. Twilight's own pack contained a good book for reading on the way to Canterlot, some various measuring instruments, a light breakfast of chocolate-chip muffins from Sugarcube Corner, some paper, an ink bottle, and two quill pens.

Rainbow Dash was antsy. She kept doing acrobatics a few feet off the ground, talking excitedly about whatever the scientific project was. Pinkie Pie was tossing out wild guesses between Rainbow Dash's backflips. Twilight smiled. "It seems everypony else is just as curious as we are," she told Spike.

"Yep," the baby dragon murmured. Still half-asleep, his eyelids were clearly droopy from fatigue.

Twilight went to speak to Rarity. "Will your shop be okay while you're gone?" she asked. Rarity was well-known in Ponyville for being a fashionable trend-setter, and her tailor shop reflected that aspect of her personality.

"Oh, don't worry," Rarity tossed her luxurious purple mane. "Sweetie Belle is watching over it." She stopped, as if realizing what she had just said. "Oh, dear," she shuddered.

The sky grew brighter. Rays of light began to appear as the sun peered over the horizon. Right on cue, the shape of a royal coach took form in the distance, approaching the ponies. The silvery coach, pulled by pegasus ponies clad in gold and blue armor, landed on the eastern road to Ponyville, driving until it finally came to a halt in front of Twilight and company.

“Are you Miss Twilight Sparkle?” one of the guards asked, standing rigidly at attention.

“Yes, I am,” the unicorn answered. “I have the travel pass right here.” Twilight’s horn glowed, and the slip of paper floated telekinetically toward the guard who spoke.

The guard read it carefully, then looked back at Twilight. “Would all of these ponies be your companions, Miss?” he asked, gesturing toward her friends.

“Yes,” Twilight answered.

“Very well,” the guard affirmed. “Then, please board the coach.”

Though Twilight had seemingly expected to read her book on the way to Canterlot, she ended up falling asleep in the seat shortly after the trip began. Rarity wondered how she could possibly sleep, with Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie still chattering enthusiastically.

“What if it’s a machine that makes food into candy?” Pinkie asked, grinning wildly.

“No way, Pinkie,” Rainbow Dash shook her head. “It’s something that’s going to revolutionize Equestria, not give it candy. I think it should be something powerful, like a weather control machine. Think about it. We would always have sunny days, and if we need rain, we got it!”

“Could the weather control machine make it rain candy?” Pinkie Pie squeaked.

Rainbow Dash responded by putting her head in her hooves.

Rarity finally spoke up. “No, darlings, you’ve got it all wrong. This device is obviously meant to turn raw, base materials into precious stones! We could be rid of ugly, useless rocks, and be surrounded by beauty!”

Rainbow Dash gave a sigh as she rolled her magenta eyes. “Come on,” she complained, “That would never happen. How would that revolutionize Equestria?”

“Well, what do you think it is, Fluttershy?” Rarity turned her attention to the pastel yellow pegasus.

“Oh, um, I don’t know,” she said, peeking through her long, pink mane. “But I hope that it’s something good, and not, um, you know, something bad.”

“Like that would happen,” Rainbow Dash scoffed. “As if the Princess would do something that would harm Equestria.”

Twilight stirred, turning over in her seat. Her eyelids ventured open as she sat up. “I fell asleep, didn’t I?” she asked.

The other ponies nodded.

“Looks like I didn’t even need to bring my book,” the unicorn sighed. Just then her stomach growled. “Although I suppose I could still use those muffins I packed.” She moved the muffins out of her pack and set them on the seat next to her.

“Hey, we should all have breakfast!” Pinkie Pie exclaimed. She reached into her pack and began pulling out an array of baked goods that could not possibly have fit inside. There were scones, miniature pies, cupcakes, muffins, and cookies. At the sight of such a smorgasbord, everypony felt the twinge of hunger, and they quickly finished off the treats.

“Thanks, Pinkie Pie!” Rainbow Dash said after devouring the one remaining sugar cookie. “You sure do know how to feed a pony!”

“Aw, anything for my friends!” Pinkie Pie replied.

“Look!” Fluttershy pointed her hoof out the window. “We’re here.”

Sure enough, the coach was landing on a paved, white marble road and approached the royal city of Canterlot. The guardsponies continued until they reached the large palace of the

two princesses of Equestria: Celestia, the raiser of the sun, and Luna, the ruler of the night.

“Miss Twilight Sparkle,” one of the guards announced as the other opened the coach’s door, “We have arrived at the palace. Please disembark and enter the palace.”

The ponies did as they were told, exiting the coach. The guards continued to escort them to the royal chamber, where they met Princess Celestia.

“My little ponies, welcome back to Canterlot,” the Princess addressed the group. Tall and white, Princess Celestia had large wings, broader than those of Rainbow Dash or Fluttershy, but on her head was a horn, similar to a unicorn’s. Her flowing mane shone with all the colors of the early dawn. “Hello, my faithful student,” she smiled at Twilight. “Did you have a pleasant journey here?”

“I did, Princess,” Twilight looked around at her friends. She couldn’t believe that only last year, she had only spent time studying in her room, all alone except for Spike. She had believed that she did not need friends for anything. She had learned after she and the others had worked together to defeat Luna, then known as Nightmare Moon, that friendship was just as important to a pony’s life as studying. She was grateful to Princess Celestia for teaching her about the magic of friendship.

Twilight suddenly remembered the reason they were here in the first place. “Excuse me, Princess,” she ventured, “could we see the project now? I’d like to get to work on it right away.”

“Of course,” Princess Celestia smiled. “But I have had a breakfast made for you in honor of your visit. Wouldn’t you like to rest from your journey from Ponyville?”

The ponies looked at each other. Each felt a spur of guilt, having already eaten.

“We’re sorry, your majesty,” Twilight said humbly, “but we have already had breakfast on the way here.”

“That’s quite all right,” Princess Celestia assured the young unicorn. “I shall change the purpose of the breakfast to a charity gathering. Make it so,” she said aside to a nearby guardspony.

“Now,” the Princess announced, “Let us go to the Academy!”

The Canterlot Academy was an expansive complex, with ornately designed buildings, artistic fountains, and beautiful natural courtyards. Everypony was in awe of the place, even Twilight, who had studied here for much of her life.

As they passed various buildings, Rainbow Dash began to get impatient. “How much longer?” she groaned just out of the Princess’s hearing range.

“Ah, this is it,” Princess Celestia stopped in front of the door to a large tower. “This is the research and development building. Ponies here use science to learn and discover new things about the world around us. Follow me, if you please,” she said, stepping inside.

The excitement from earlier that morning resurfaced inside of Twilight. She couldn’t help but grin to see all the scientists working inside the large building. Each one was hard at work trying to understand the nature of magic and physics. The rules laid down by these fundamental forces of nature governed not only Equestria, but the whole world.

“Up these stairs now,” Princess Celestia directed. The ponies followed her up the spiral staircase along the tower wall. Ten floors up, they finally stopped at the door to a room closed off from the rest of the tower.

The Princess knocked at the door. “It’s Princess Celestia,” she called. A moment passed,

and they could hear shuffling from inside. The door was opened by a pale blue stallion wearing a lab coat and glasses.

"This is Professor Star Gazer," Princess Celestia introduced the scientist. "He's the pony in charge of the project I told you about."

"You're Twilight Sparkle?" the professor looked at Twilight, astonished. "How did such a young mare as yourself get the Princess's recommendation?"

"Now, now," Princess Celestia said calmly before Twilight could say anything, "You should know that this 'young mare' has my utmost confidence. She is one of Equestria's most brilliant minds, and I have unshakable faith in her intelligence and resourcefulness."

Star Gazer's expression humbled at the Princess's words. "Well, if you trust her, your majesty, I do as well."

Princess Celestia nodded in approval. "Professor, I have other duties to which I must attend. Could you show these ponies around your laboratory? I'm sure they're all very interested in what your team has been working on."

"Very well," Star Gazer bowed as Princess Celestia turned to leave. His attention turned to the group of friends that stood before him. "Come with me, if you please."

The ponies followed the professor into the chamber. In the middle of the laboratory was a large machine that vaguely resembled an arch made of marble and steel. Various areas on the machine glowed with the aura of magic.

"Let me introduce you to my team," Star Gazer motioned to the other ponies in the room.

"This is our mathematician, Dr. Test Tube," he gestured to a green pony with an indigo mane and tail. Like Star Gazer, he wore a white lab coat. Test Tube sat at a desk by the wall that was covered in pieces of paper with various mathematical equations and formulas written on them.

"And here is our mechanic and device specialist, Magnet Pulse," This was a yellow unicorn with jet black mane. Her lab coat had wide pockets on it which held screwdrivers, wrenches and other tools. She was leaning on the device casually, smiling at the newcomers.

"And this," Star Gazer pointed to the last scientist, "is Dr. Solar Flare. She is in charge of theoretical research and with recording the progress of this project." Solar Flare, a unicorn with a lavender coat and golden mane, seemed too busy to notice them. She was at a desk opposite Test Tube, writing something furiously.

"We have an intern, Summer Leaf," the professor said, "but he has the day off today. He should be back tomorrow morning."

"Excuse me, Professor," Twilight spoke up. "But what exactly is it that you're working on?"

Star Gazer drew himself up proudly. "This, Twilight Sparkle, is a transdimensional gate."

Twilight's eyes lit up in amazement. "A transdimensional gate? I thought those only existed in theory." Suddenly she noticed that all her friends had confused looks on their faces. "Basically, it's a magical portal that can lead to another world," she explained.

Star Gazer nodded. "That is the layman's explanation. Science has developed the theory of the transdimensional gate by observing similar forms of magic used by unicorns. We believe that the type of magic involved in a transdimensional gate is closely related to that of teleportation spells. The only problem is, the amount of magic needed is much too high for a unicorn to realistically create one on his or her own. That is why we are developing this device: to facilitate the creation and maintenance of the gate without causing unnecessary strain on the

user's magical powers.”

“All right, that explains a lot,” Twilight said thoughtfully. “I’d like to review your experimental notes, if that’s okay.”

“That’s fine,” the professor replied. “If you’re going to work with us, you might as well understand what’s going on.”

“Wait a minute,” said Rainbow Dash, “If you’re making a magical gate that doesn’t rely on unicorn magic, what does it use for power?”

“We haven’t figured that part out just yet,” Star Gazer admitted. “That’s why a gate hasn’t been made yet. But scientists are making new developments, and perhaps we can find a resource that can store a large amount of magic energy soon.”

“Well, let’s get to work, shall we?” Twilight asked enthusiastically.

As the ponies left Twilight to talk with the scientists some more, Pinkie Pie opened her mouth and a torrent of excited words burst forth.

“Oh my gosh! Can you believe it? Twilight’s gonna help make a transdummy-thingy! We’re gonna get to go to other worlds in the blink of an eye! It’s gonna be so fun! And great! And fantastic! What do you think other worlds are like? Maybe there’s a world made entirely out of chocolate! Or maybe a giant ocean where instead of ponies, there are friendly talking octopuses! Or maybe a place that’s all shiny and made out of gold!”

Then, as Pinkie Pie was known to do on occasion, she broke into song.

*“Oh, I want to go
To a different world
And see what I can see
There’ll be so much
To see and touch
And do and think and be!
I’ll show them how
To bake a cake
And how to eat candy
It’ll all be great
And I can’t wait
To have a transdimensional gate party!”*

Pinkie Pie suddenly noticed all the other ponies in the large building had stopped everything they were doing and were staring right at her. Rainbow Dash looked rather uncomfortable with the sudden attention. “Maybe we should take this somewhere else,” she suggested cautiously. Rarity and Fluttershy agreed.

Days passed. Twilight and the scientists were hard at work, rarely taking breaks. Whenever Twilight wasn’t working in the laboratory, she was busy reading scientific documents

about the study of magic. She was certain that she could help, and she wouldn't let the Princess or her new colleagues down.

Twilight had gotten accustomed to the rest of the group. Although Star Gazer had seemed uptight at first, he actually had a good sense of humor, although it was often stifled by his sense of duty to scientific progress. Test Tube had a natural talent for math, as revealed by both his work and his pi-shaped cutie mark. Magnet Pulse was much more casual than the rest of the team, more apt to joke than the others. Solar Flare, on the other hand, was reserved, and the very paragon of seriousness. She rarely spoke to the other scientists unless it was in technical terms. Summer Leaf came in to help out most afternoons, doing odd jobs for the scientists when needed. He was a sky-blue pegasus pony with a short green mane, and his personality was much like Magnet Pulse, though he talked quite a bit more than the mechanic did.

Outside of the laboratory, however, Rarity, Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, and Fluttershy were beginning to become bored with the halls of Canterlot. Rarity occupied her time by socializing with various celebrities, such as the famed fashion critic Hoity Toity, but it soon became apparent that they didn't think much of anything she had to say. Pinkie Pie had brought some board games along, which she played with Fluttershy and, later, Rarity. As time went on, though, they were becoming more of, as Pinkie would say, "bored games." Rainbow Dash practiced her acrobatic moves outside, hoping to catch the attention of the Wonderbolts in case they came around, but the only pony who consistently watched her was Fluttershy, who offered soft interjections of encouragement.

Finally, when the four ponies were all together in their hotel suite, idly playing Hooves and Ladders for the twenty-first time, there was a knock on the door.

Rainbow Dash jumped up and flew over to the door to open it. On the other side was Twilight.

"I have good news!" Twilight announced, entering the suite. "I think we may be finished!"

"Finished?" the other ponies gasped in unison.

"Yep. According to Dr. Test Tube and Dr. Solar Flare, the device should be able to open a transdimensional gate now. They said I could let you all see the first activation, so I came to ask if you wanted to see it."

"Well, it's about time!" Rainbow Dash flew into the air, excited.

Pinkie Pie jumped up as well, her face the perfect picture of glee. "Whoopee! Let's go!"

"I quite agree," Rarity added. "After waiting this long, it would be silly not to want to see it."

One by one, the ponies walked past Twilight out of the room. The last one to leave was Fluttershy. "Um, Twilight?" she asked nervously. "Are you sure it's a good idea to do this? I mean, what if, um, there was something, you know, scary on the other side of the gate? I'm worried that it won't be as good as Pinkie Pie makes it out to be."

"Don't worry, Fluttershy," Twilight reassured her friend. "We should also be able to close the gate in case of danger. There's really nothing to worry about."

"Oh," Fluttershy broke eye contact to look at the floor. "Okay. As long as you know what you're doing. I trust you, Twilight."

The two friends followed the rest of the ponies to the laboratory.

Twilight knocked on the laboratory door. "I'm back," she called to the other scientists. "I brought my friends to see the demonstration."

Star Gazer opened the door. "Hello," he said. He bore an excited look on his face, a stark contrast to the stern expression he had when he had first met the ponies. "Please come inside!"

At the center of the lab stood the transdimensional gate. Magnet Pulse was in the middle of inspecting the machine, searching for loose parts. Solar Flare and Test Tube were off to the side, looking happily at the gate.

"So, Professor," Rarity asked as the other ponies were staring in awe at the completed device, "Did you figure out how to power the gate?"

Star Gazer grinned like a young schoolcolt who had received a perfect score on his final exams. "Yes, and the answer was simple once we thought of it. It was actually Miss Twilight Sparkle who came up with the idea. We used Catria Stones."

"Catria Stones?" Rainbow Dash asked, bemused. "What are those?"

"Catria Stones are a rare type of gemstone," Rarity explained. "Very few ponies have access to them, as they can only be found in remote locations."

"That is true, Miss," Star Gazer nodded, "but most ponies are unaware of some of the other properties of Catria Stones. For instance, they are strong conductors of magical energy, or what I mean is to say they can store a large amount of it. Much, much larger than what the average unicorn can generate without straining him or herself. In fact, some ponies theorize that the manifestations of the Elements of Harmony may very well take the form of Catria Stones."

"Two Catria Stones are stored here at the tower," Twilight added. "After we explained our situation, we were able to take them in order to power the transdimensional gate with their stored energy. Both of them are currently at maximum capacity, so we shouldn't have any problems."

"Well," Star Gazer looked toward Magnet Pulse, "Shall we start it up?"

"Everything's all clear here, Sir," the unicorn saluted with her right hoof. "The machine's in top shape."

"I've checked, double-checked, and triple-checked my math," Test Tube added. "I even had Dr. Lewis Corral look it over. No errors."

"And the magical part is taken care of," Twilight declared confidently.

"All right." The professor stomped with one hoof. "Magnet Pulse, please throw the switch."

The yellow unicorn did so. The machine began to rumble. The lights in the room flickered as the two Catria Stones glowed a respective magenta and teal. At the center of the device, a distortion of the light appeared, oval in shape. For an instant, a landscape could be seen through the distortion, faintly visible. A split-second later, the image appeared again, clearer this time. Soon the image was as clear as life. The machine continued to hum as the clarity of the view stabilized.

"It works!" Star Gazer's face wore an expression of pure triumph. "We've created a transdimensional gate!"

The lights all went out except for the two Catria Stones and the glow of the world beyond the gate. The other world appeared to be very similar to Equestria; the sky was blue, the land was covered in green grass, and there were trees that looked a lot like Equestrian trees.

"This is interesting," Solar Flare observed. "It appears that we've come in contact with a

parallel universe.”

“Interesting?” Test Tube remarked. “It’s absolutely mind-blowing!”

Rainbow Dash spoke up. “Well, who’s going to be the first to go through it?”

Everypony stopped and looked at her. “Yeah,” Pinkie Pie added, “Who’s gonna be the first pony to go to the other world?”

“Wait,” Star Gazer said authoritatively. “We can’t be hasty in dealing with another world. For all we know, the atmosphere of that world could be poison. The life-forms there, if indeed there are any, could be hostile. Everything in that world has the possibility of being extremely dangerous.”

“Well, we’re never going to know unless somepony tries, are we?” Rainbow Dash argued.

“Rainbow Dash, listen,” Twilight tried to calm the bold pegasus. “Professor Star Gazer is right. We’ve only just discovered this world. There’s still so much we have to figure out before we can send ponies through the gate. And we don’t know if it’s safe.”

“Are you kidding me?” Rainbow Dash threw up her hooves in frustration. “All this work and energy gone into this thing, and you won’t even use it? This was supposed to revolutionize Equestria, and you’re just going to let it sit there? Are you serious? That’s crazy!”

“Rainbow Dash,” a small voice revealed herself in the midst of the uproar. “Please don’t do this,” Fluttershy squeaked. “You should listen to Twilight and the rest of the scientists. Please.”

“I’ll listen when they stop being cowards!” Rainbow Dash shouted. “I’m gonna fly through there and show you there’s nothing to worry about!”

“Rainbow, no!” Pinkie Pie yelled, but it was too late. The pegasus had bolted across the room, leaving a polychromatic trail. Within a second, she had gone through the transdimensional gate.

“Rainbow!” the ponies cried out in unison.

The sound of laughter emerged from beyond the gate. The ponies looked through and saw Rainbow Dash, hovering in the air of the other world, completely unfazed by the travel.

“You’re all right!” Twilight exclaimed in relief.

“Of course I’m all right!” Rainbow Dash looked sure of herself. “What did you think was going to happen? I couldn’t be more-”

She suddenly disappeared, along with the rest of the other world. Somehow the transdimensional gate had closed. The machine had powered off.

“Rainbow?” Twilight asked, in shock. “Rainbow? Rainbow!”

“-safe.”