

# Stargate: Equestria

## Connection

### Chapter 3

The team laid out a thermal blanket from Jackson's pack to transport the wounded horse, and they slid him onto it as carefully as they could. One thing O'Neill did know about horses was that they were heavy as all get-out, but to his surprise and relief the pegasus proved easy to shift.

When he said as much, Carter shrugged. "It stands to reason, sir. It would take some pretty huge wings to lift a normal horse. He probably has a lighter frame so he doesn't have to expend as much effort to fly."

Rainbow Dash hovered in the air above them, turning lazy rolls. "Oh yeah! I wouldn't be the fastest pegasus in Equestria if I had to carry around an earth pony's weight." She grinned mischievously down at Applejack. "Hear that, 'Freckles'? I'm tryin' t'say you're fa-"

"I *know* what yer tryin' ta say, Dash," Applejack huffed. "Why'd ya have to go and give her the idea to call me that, Colonel?" Rainbow just giggled and looped in the air over her friend.

Teal'c and Applejack did most of the heavy work hauling the Jaffa over the plains, both of them steady and tireless as they each took a corner of the blanket and pulled it smoothly over the grass during the long hike back to Ponyville.

Rarity took charge of the three little ones, although they seemed to pay her little mind. They clustered around Carter, who appeared to enjoy their company and chatted amiably with all of them. O'Neill picked up that their names were Apple Bloom, Sweetie Bell, and Scootaloo, and apparently they were sisters to the larger ponies. Beyond that, the chatter soon stopped making sense to him.

O'Neill tapped Jackson on the shoulder and they fell back a little way, letting the party walk ahead for several paces. "So," O'Neill asked quietly. "Epona?"

Jackson adjusted his glasses, resettling them more firmly on his face. "Bear in mind I don't have my resources with me, Jack, and my expertise is Egyptian." He cleared his throat as O'Neill made a rolling gesture with his hand. "Anyway, I do recall coming across the name in my studies. It's Gallo-Romanic in origin, and I believe she was the -"

O'Neill held up a hand. "Let me guess. God of horses."

Jackson frowned. "Sometimes I think you know more than you let on and you're just having fun at my expense."

"Of course not." O'Neill paused and thought about that. "Okay, sometimes. But," he waved a hand at the four-legged companions up ahead, "again, lucky guess."

Jackson nodded. "All the System Lords we've encountered so far have taken humans as slaves. They turned them into Jaffa and used them for their own private armies. If I had to guess, I'd say this Epona did the same thing but with horses. That's probably why they're intelligent and can talk; she modified them to be able to do so."

"What do you think about our new, uh, friends? Are they under Epona's control?"

Jackson shrugged. "Teal'c would probably know more about that than me. But," he nodded at their wounded prisoner, "that one looks nothing like the others. He's a full-grown horse with wings, and his buddies looked exactly like him. These are small, more colorful and..." He smiled a little. "They're...well, they're cute. Hard to imagine them being a threat."

O'Neill grunted. "That's the problem. They're cute. I don't *trust* cute. You never saw Gremlins? Or Child's Play?"

"I'm sure they're not that bad. Cultures that value their children the way these three did usually aren't, y'know, bloodthirsty or anything. Anyway, the horses *were* abducting the kids."

"Yeah. All right." O'Neill let out a long breath. "Another Goa'uld to take down. Great. You know, two days ago I got up, had a bowl of Froot Loops, and thought to myself, 'This'll be a nice, easy day. A routine survey on a new planet. Take some readings, get some fresh air, be home in time for American Idol.' Now here we are, on a completely different planet in System I-Don't-Even-Know-Where, up against a Goa'uld we weren't expecting to fight, and the only locals are freaking talking horses."

"Ponies."

"Whatever!" The others in the group looked over their shoulders at O'Neill with puzzled expressions. He managed a weak smile and a wave.

Daniel continued once the others had turned back to what they were doing. "Look, Jack, it's not like we knew there'd be a Jaffa camp on P5J-924. It didn't look like they'd been there that long."

"We didn't even get a chance to figure out which Goa'uld they're working for. Not that it matters, I swear every one of them is a cardboard cliché crook cut from a common cloth. And other words that begin with C."

Jackson blinked and looked briefly impressed. "Nice alliteration. Look, if it helps, I'm not so sure we've got a Goa'uld here. Remember what I said about the castle being deserted?"

O'Neill frowned. "Yeah?"

"No Goa'uld would have left a Stargate alone that long. That was probably Epona's own castle with the gate under her control, but for whatever reason she's gone now, and she's been gone a long time."

The colonel mulled that over. "Huh. Good point. But what about this guy and his buddies?" He nodded again to the captive.

"No idea, but I hope to figure that out."

"Plus how to get us home."

"Plus how to get us home," Jackson agreed.

Their conversation fell off as Rainbow Dash buzzed over to them. She floated in the air at O'Neill's shoulder, giving him an apologetic smile. "So, hey there, Colonel. Sorry about the way I acted before." She paused, frowning. "So what should I call you? Colonel, Jack, Colonel Jack, Colonel O'Neill?"

O'Neill glanced at Jackson, who just smiled and increased his pace to catch back up with Carter. O'Neill shook his head and looked back at Rainbow Dash, then straight ahead. "Jack's fine."

"Pleasure to meet you, Jack!" The pony beamed. "So Sam over there tells me you're with something called the *Air Force*!" She did a little flip in the air and hovered in front of him,

somehow managing to float backward as he walked. "Is that anything like the Wonderbolts?" Her voice was hushed, eager, and Jack had trouble looking away from those huge eyes.

"The What-erbolts?"

"The Wonderbolts! Only the best flying team in Equestria!" She waved her hooves vigorously in the air, excitement written all over her face. "No pony can match them for speed and skill!" She paused, then gave him a sly look. "Unless yours is better."

"...Yeah. Something like that. I like to think I'm pretty good at it."

Rainbow Dash blinked as something occurred to her. She looked him up and down, zipping around him curiously. "But if you can fly, where's your wings?" She prodded at his back with one hoof.

He shrugged irritably, though the contact wasn't as hard as he'd expected. Hooves were supposed to be like one big toenail, right? This felt more like a stubby hand. "Do you...ponies...have planes? Trains? Automobiles?"

The pegasus took up a position by his shoulder again, considering. "Well, we have trains, and flying chariots. But the pegasi always have to do the actual flying."

"That's what a plane is." He groped for a simple explanation where he wouldn't have to chatter too much. "It's like a big mechanical thing that does the flying for me."

Rainbow Dash blew a raspberry, already bored. "Laame!" she declared, but gave him a bright smile. "But hey, we're cool, right? You don't have your plane, so if you need anypony to do your flying for you, just let me know!" She puffed out her chest proudly, striking a pose midair.

O'Neill cocked his head to consider her for a moment. "I'll keep that in mind," he said after a moment's thought, and smiled.

The plains eventually gave way to rolling hills, and the wild brush eventually began to be replaced by apple trees in the hundreds. "Welcome ta Sweet Apple Acres!" Applejack announced proudly. "This is my farm! Ponyville's just a little ways on down that road over there!" She let her corner of the blanket fall as she trotted over to one particularly productive tree. Turning around, she gave it a solid kick, causing a rain of apples to thud to the ground. "Help yourselves!"

The ponies let out cheers; it had been quite the long walk, after all. They all rushed over and nabbed one up, chomping them down with expressions of simple pleasure. O'Neill grabbed a couple, tossing one to each of his teammates. They all inspected the apples carefully, Jackson sniffing at his, before taking tentative bites.

Carter was the first to speak, staring at the fruit in her hand. "I'm...not sure I can ever eat an apple from the supermarket again." She took another large and juicy bite, eyes closing with pleasure.

"It's a lot better than eating roast bug," O'Neill agreed, swallowing his bite. "I just wish one of these days we'd visit a planet where the local dish was a honking big steak."

The ponies looked at each other, then to O'Neill. "What's steak?" Apple Bloom asked, tilting her head.

O'Neill stared at the suddenly obviously four-legged animals, then at Jackson, silently pleading for help. The linguist shrugged, then finally settled for answering them with, "A kind of dish we have back home."

There was an uncomfortable stretch of silence before Applejack cheerfully answered, "All righty then! Glad ya like the apples! Come on, we best get this feller into town before it's too late."