

The Elder Scrolls: Equestria

Chapter Two: *Other Events And Complications*

“You mean you *didn’t* realise anything about what was happening when you fled? How couldn’t you?” Sil seemed almost upset with my lack of insight.

“Well... I heard something about assassinations. And there were the explosions, and the... the blackfire, but that’s it.”

“Then, I suppose it falls to me to explain everything to you,” proclaimed Sil, placing one hoof to his chest and posing majestically. Swift groaned and rolled over, facing away from him. Shooting her a glare, he continued; “Yes, well; the assassination you heard about? I believe it was targeted at Empress Celestia herself.”

I gasped in shock at this point; I hadn’t even thought it possible to kill a mortal goddess such as Celestia. Well, not by just anypony at least.

“Surprising, isn’t it? But my logic seems to point towards that as the obvious solution. That, and the fact that it seems remarkably similar to the transcribed prediction of an Elder Scroll I read in a book when I was just a colt. It was old, sure, and the source unreliable; but it’s just too much of a coincidence. The blackfire you saw, and those explosions; I believe they were caused by supporters of some cult. I don’t know what cult, exactly, and neither am I entirely sure of this theory, but it makes sense. Who else would know such a powerful, forbidden destruction magic like that but a cult; dedicated to the old gods, perhaps?”

I thought about all this. “But... The Empress, she’s a goddess, isn’t she? You can’t just kill a *goddess*.”

“Well, ostensibly; but what if they’d found a way to do so?”

Sighing, I lay down again. This was all a lot to think about. The whole empire thrived on the well-being of its Empress; it was an *empire* after all, for the love of Celestia! Who knew what would happen if it was true? *If* it was true. “I don’t know... I still say it can’t be done.”

“Suit yourself. Believe what you will.” And with that, Sil rolled away too. No-one talked now; I could hear Brash snoring gently. I was alone with my turbulent thoughts. And I had plenty of those, Celestia damn it.

“Alright, I’ll admit that I hadn’t thought about that.” We were outside Braevil, some distance from the gates where we’d be unseen by any guards.

“You hadn’t thought that your little ‘bracelets’ would give you away? They’re prison shackles!” Swift was prodding at the shackles on my hind legs with a small piece of metal.

“Well, they don’t have any chain between them, do they? Heck, they *do* look like bracelets or something now that you mention it. I could tell ponies that that’s what they are.”

There was a *pop*, and the iron clasp on my right hind leg came free. “There! Now hold still, I’ll get the other. I know how they work now.”

I stretched my leg gratefully; Luna, it felt good to not have that lump of metal stuck to my foot again. The other shackle fell off as Swift finished her work, and we continued on.

We approached the gates cautiously, trying to appear inconspicuous. I get the impression we failed, because we got some funny looks, but the ponies on guard were either too lazy or didn’t care; they simply let us trot on past. Once inside, I let out a breath I hadn’t realised I had been holding. “Well, that seemed easy. How we got into looking as we are... it says something about Braevil, eh?” A mare who’d been coming in the opposite direction snorted a snooty “Hmph!” loudly at this before continuing past, causing us to snicker with laughter.

“Oh, Celestia, that’s too much. Somepony sticking up for *Braevil*... Snrrrt!” Silenus began shaking with laughter, and had to stop to lean against a small stone wall for support. Once we’d all calmed down a little, I tried to remember what we were doing.

“Oh, right, we should go see that pony who I said might have a job for us. Did I mention that? I think I mentioned that. Heh...”

I led the others along the muddy path through town, between buildings ranging from stacked wooden shack-like buildings, to small stone cottages, to commerce districts with shops on the ground floor and houses above. The entire town seemed pretty destitute as a whole. Beggars could be seen on most street corners; some had legs missing even; others were just down on their luck. It was pretty depressing; sights such as these were part of what had convinced me to run away when I was a colt. I just couldn’t bear to see suffering like it while others lived in luxury.

I was lost in my thoughts when we came to our destination, and it was down to luck that I didn’t accidentally walk past it. It was easy to miss; just another wooden shack, somehow seeming to blend in even more than the others around it.

“This is it,” I announced. “Follow my lead.”

“Here? But it’s so... normal.” Silenus seemed confused.

“You’ll understand. Come on.” I pushed the door open, which made a noise like it was about to splinter, and entered. The room in front of me looked just as Silenus had described; normal. A rough cot, a small wooden chair and table and a fireplace were the only major furnishings to be seen. Another door led further into the shack.

With a grin, I called out to the empty room; “You can come out, Quiver.”

The three ponies behind me recoiled in shock as a dusty beige unicorn seemingly appeared in the chair, grinning. “Ah, almost gotcha though didn’t I? Anyway, what’re you doin’ here? Last I heard, you were done for smugglin’ skooma. And who’re them ponies?”

I gestured behind me; “This is Swift, Brash and Silenus. They’re some ponies I’m travelling with.” Turning around, I addressed them. “Quiver here’s speciality is camouflage and invisibility magic. That’s why the house seems so... uninteresting.”

“Don’t want nosy guardsponies pokin’ their heads around ol’ Quiver’s hideout now, do I?” Quiver

giggled to himself hysterically.

"No, I guess not. Speaking of which, that's kinda what I'm here to talk with you about; you're right in that I got done for smuggling. Moon sugar, though. I was about to be executed..."

Some time later, I had finished telling him all that had happened up until that point. He nodded sagely; "Yep, that makes sense. I heard 'bout somethin' happenin' over at Canterlot; somethin' bad. 'Course, the authorities ain't telling us horseapples. So no-one knows exactly what's happened. And lemme guess; you want me to find y'all some work so that you and your friends can get back on your feet."

"Well... yeah," I coughed nervously. "For an old adventuring partner?"

Quiver waved one hoof dismissively, and a letter wafted over to me. "Sure, sure, whatever. Take this contract, then. It's from a collector in town. Pretty simple job. I was gonna do it, but he sure as hay ain't gonna mind, s'long as he gets his trinket."

I brightened, and turned to leave. "Really? Thanks! You're the best, Quiver; I might not hold you to that drink you owe me after all."

He snorted, and his horn glowed as the door swung shut on us.

The contract took us well out of town, so Swift 'found' us some supplies - I didn't ask questions - and we trekked out to the location. We ended up outside the door to some ancient underground ruin set in a hillside. The note from the collector said we should be looking for a very old statue; apparently, some claimed it to be from another era even. I didn't know about that, but the sketch that was provided certainly looked foreign to me.

"I think this is the right place. Are we ready to do this?" I asked the other three. They nodded back. I pushed at the door; nothing happened. Frowning, I tried again; still nothing.

Shaking his head, Brash walked forward and pushed me aside with one hoof; "I'll handle it, then." He reared up, and brought his hooves down hard on the door. With a resounding *CRACK* it swung inwards, hanging loosely from the one hinge that remained intact. "See? Was that so hard?"

"Yeah, yeah; not all of us are built like draft horses," I retorted as I approached the entrance and waited for the dust to settle. It was dark inside; I focused a bit of magic so that my horn glowed. It illuminated a long, narrow passage, the end of which I could not make out. "For the love of Celestia... How far does this bloody thing go!"

Single file, we entered carefully, peering at the strange architecture as we went. Sil was saying something about it and the ancient ponies that built it, but I wasn't paying much attention.

Shortly, we came to a solid stone door; this one appeared to be locked with a heavy iron padlock. "Now, *this* is where I come in," proclaimed Swift proudly, and she pulled the wire from her neck strap and began to prod at it. "Thish ish an eashy one!" she called back at us through clenched teeth. With a ping, the lock came unclasped and fell to the ground, rolling to one side. Swift bowed dramatically to us; "And *that* is how you pick a lock."

I squeezed past her to the door; "No need to thank me or anything," she muttered before watching me curiously as I attempted to listen through the stone.

"Yeah, thanks, Swift. Sounds okay to me through here. Uh... Would you mind doing this one too,

Brash?" I asked, noting with distaste that this door again felt too firm under my hoof for me to open. I really needed to build some muscle mass. Brash stepped forward and delivered a powerful kick to the door from his hind legs. Freed of its padlock, the door scraped open with a groan.

Beyond lay a spacious hall, longer than it was wide, with a raised platform at the far end. In the very centre of this platform was a pedestal, upon which was a small, spiky structure of metal set with a glowing turquoise gemstone of some kind; it matched the sketch closely enough for me to assume that this was what we had come for. Faint squares of light shone from tiny grates in the ceiling, some distance up on the hillside above; the corridor we'd just travelled through must have been sloping slightly downwards, judging by the height of the grates. The light illuminated the dust stirred up by our entry; by the amount there was, I guessed we were probably the first ponies to come here for generations. This place was pretty far from the road, after all.

I made my way over to our prize; my hooves echoing hollowly on the stone floor. The place was still with the silence of death and decay; I didn't really want to be in there any longer than I had to. Focusing another tendril of magic, I placed this one around the statue in a weak telekinetic spell. It lifted, then moved over to hover beside me. "Okay, that was pretty easy. Anything else to do here?"

Swift, Silenus, and Brash all agreed that it was probably best to leave; we began to move back to the corridor. "So, what do you reckon this place was for anyway?" I asked the others.

"Well, if you'd been listening to me earlier, I told you that it looked like a burial site," Silenus sighed with a shake of his head. "Honestly... some ponies."

I paused; "Wait. A burial site? So, there's probably ponies buried in this chamber or something?"

"Buried? Oh, no. That wasn't the way of the ponies who built this place. They made one big burial room like this deep in a hill, or underground, and put the ponies in those, then sealed them off to stop the dead coming back to haunt them."

"To haunt them?" I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise. "And... did that ever happen?"

"What, come back from the dead or their own accord?" snorted Silenus. "Of course not. You don't really believe in such superstition, do you?"

"I was an adventurer, Sil. I've seen things you wouldn't believe if I told you. I just haven't been in one of these burial sites before. Besides, how do you know it's of their own will? Maybe there's some magic on them or something." I fixed him with a stern look to try and convince him of my expertise.

"Uh, I hate to interrupt you guys an' all, but... what exactly is that behind ya?" Brash was pointing a hoof at the far wall, behind us. I spun to look; all along the walls of the room, blocks of stone were gratefully sliding out to reveal hidden compartments. That was never a good sight to see in a dungeon of any sort. But something was coming out of them...

"Princess-*fucking*-Luna! Skeleton-ponies! Let's get outta here!" The skeletons began to clatter their way towards us, making strange clicking noises in their skeletal throats. We turned and fled for the door without hesitation. "Why didn't you tell us about all this earlier, Sil?" I yelled.

"If you'll remember for *just one second*, I did; but don't worry, I've got these!" Silenus hadn't turned to flee; he was standing facing the undead determinedly.

"Are you mad? *Come on!*" Silenus wasn't going to last five seconds against those skeletons. He didn't reply, but I noticed his horn beginning to glow.

Brash charged back to Silenus, yelling; “I got ‘im!” He had barely made it halfway there when the air around Silenus’ horn burst into a dark crackling fire. Black tendrils shot erratically from the flames, and a blast of the deepest purple erupted from him with an enormous *crack* of energy.

I was knocked well back by the shock wave that followed; I could barely see past my hooves! With some effort, I managed to stay upright. I had no idea what was happening elsewhere; my entire world was the stone beneath my hooves, the purple light that danced in my ears and the rumbling of the blast.

“*Silenus!*”