

# Perquisition

## Chapter 9

"So one of us is going to almost *drown* if we're going to get this to work?!" Kickbolt almost shouted.

Sketch shrugged. "Maybe if we were better prepared for something like this it might have been easier. Right now we're just lucky there's three of us. If it'd just been me and you, there's no way we could have done this," she replied. "Somepony needs to get the water level high enough for the floating altar to reach up to floor zero, and considering how the last set of stairs is twice the length, that should make it..." She flicked her hoof around like she was counting something in front of her. "...five floors, meaning the button needs to be pushed three more times if you take where the water is now into account." She pointed to where water was already running, not far behind them.

Kickbolt frowned after connecting the dots. "But if we just press it one more time, then the water will fill *this* floor. The one pressing it will be drenched!"

Sketch sighed. "Hence the problem. Somepony needs to stay here, and hopefully manage to last as the other two get the egg into place, and finally lower the water level again from the other button we found on floor minus one."

"W-Which will also be s-submerged at that point. Correct?" Crimson asked.

The green mare nodded towards the unicorn.

"So who will be staying here?" Kickbolt asked. He was met with two stares and an awkward silence. He finally gave in and slumped down. "Walked right into that one, didn't I? I guess you and Crimson will go and take care of the other two spots." He stood back up and cocked his head. "But how will I know when to press it? It's a bit of a walk for you to get all the way back there."

Sketch's ears fell. "I'm not sure. Maybe if you just wait a while and we'll try to be there by then?"

"I guess. I just hope I won't get the timing-"

Two small orbs floated up between the pair. "Uh... I b-b-brought these, just in case," Crimson said.

Kickbolt raised his eyebrows upon seeing them. "Are those my-"

"Your linked switches, yes," Crimson quickly assured him.

Sketch looked at the two of them, scrunching her nose. "His what?"

"S-Something he showed me back in town from his collection. I t-thought we could use them so I b-brought them, just in c-case..." He glanced at Kickbolt. "...sorry."

"No worries." Kickbolt smiled. "They're magically linked switches. If you use one, the other one gets flipped too. They work across distances, too."

Sketch looked upon the small circular objects closer, and noticed they did indeed have small switches on them. "Why have you never showed me these? They actually seem... useful."

The pegasus shrugged. "Didn't think they would ever have any use, and they're sort of boring." Sketch groaned from hearing the answer.

She took one of the orbs, releasing it from Crimson's magic grip. "If I take this with me, and you keep that one, I can let you know when we're in position?"

"Pretty much, yeah," Kickbolt answered, taking the second orb for himself. "Uh, whoever is going to take care of lowering the water again... don't let me drown, please?" he asked with a sheepish grin.

Sketch giggled. "I don't think you've got to ask us that. Just make sure you press the button three times when you get the signal. You can try and head for the stairs to get higher up once you've done it." She turned around, towards the stairs up. "Come on, Crimson."

They didn't get very far before Kickbolt yelled, "Wait!"

"What? Did we forget something?" Sketch asked.

"It's, uh... dark. I have the lantern, but when this place gets flooded... well..."

"Oh! Yeah that could be a problem..." Sketch hummed. "Crimson, give him a light stone. *Not* an illumination stone. He can use it as a light when we leave," she said, picking up the lantern herself. "Oh god dish really does dasde 'rrible!"

Kickbolt stuck out his tongue at the remark. "I know, right?"

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“S-So which one of us stays here at this button?” Crimson asked. By now he had picked up the lantern with his magic, seeing how Sketch was too short and struggled to keep it above the ground most of the time. His horn was still the current source of illumination as they stood before the first button they had found, the one pointing down. “A-Although... I d-don’t think I can swim,” he mentioned, squirming at the thought. “Could.... could I p-please deal with the egg, and you s-stay here? I-I’m not sure how well I would handle being submerged in water.”

Sketch didn’t answer. She just stared down at her own hooves while lost in thought.

“S-Sketch? A-Are you alright?”

“I... I can’t swim,” she mumbled.

“What? B-But... well, neither can I. Pardon m-me for asking... but shouldn’t you know h-how to swim?”

She quickly shook her head. “No. I mean... I just can’t... I’m sorry, but this isn’t an option for me... I can’t handle being submerged in water. I’m sorry, I just can’t. I’m so sorry I have to ask this of you... but can you please stay here?” she blubbered out, trying to keep a brave face.

Crimson’s eyes widened. “You’re... you’re serious a-about this?”

Sketch bit her lower lip. As she slowly brought her face up to look at the unicorn, her eyes were almost brimming over with tears. “I’m so sorry, Crimson. I just can’t do this. It’s just... impossible for me,” she croaked out.

“I s-swear, I will t-turn this expedition around if you d-don’t stop crying, missy,” Crimson said with an awkward smirk. “Sorry... I t-thought it w-would help, s-since you did that to me...”

The mare sniffled, but giggled as well. “Thanks. Would you... mind not telling Kickbolt about this? I don’t want him to know... he would freak out if he knew I had a problem like this.”

“Y-Yeah... don’t worry, I won’t say anything. And I’ll s-stay here, too, don’t worry a-about it.”

He was caught by surprise when Sketch was suddenly hugging him, sniffing into his shoulder. “Thank you, Crimson Aegis.”

He flushed more than he’d ever done before.

She let go and looked him in the face again, just in time to catch the pinkish tone of his blushing. “But... are you sure you’ll be alright? I’m so sorry I have to ask you to do this.”

"I-I should be able to manage. And... I think I j-just had an idea for how to do t-this," he replied.

She nodded and picked up the lantern again. Wiping away some tears, she looked back at the unicorn while her eyes were still tearing up. She nodded again and turned around, moving back to the first location they had come across, the egg and the hole.

As the light from the dirty lantern danced away in the darkness, Crimson could hear her starting to sniff again.

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Having already spent some time waiting, the blue pegasus was getting bored. After having re-equipped the wing harness only for the sake of examining it for damages after the last battle, he'd begun humming to pass the time. Now that bored him as well.

Not having bothered using the light stone yet, Kickbolt sat by himself in the dark. His eyes having adjusted themselves as much as they possibly could as he squinted to make anything out. Being tired of sitting in the dark, he picked up the light orb and activated it - it hummed softly as it began to glow.

He stared at the small metal orb in front of him- he could vaguely make out something that resembled a switch on it.

*I wonder if they're there yet, he thought. This is boring. I just hope Sketch is right about this, and I don't end up almost drowning for nothing.* He sighed. *Although, we're out of ideas anyway.*

He scraped his hoof against the ground in a circle, dotting the round dirt figure with two rocks for eyes, and slowly making a half-circle below the eyes. He smiled upon his simple creation, before slumping down again to keep waiting.

*Bored!*

He pulled out an apple to munch on, the juicy red fruit quelling his hunger.

*I wonder what Crimson brought to eat. I hope Sketch didn't bring turnips or anything again...*

He gave the light stone, lying next to the linked switch, a small poke. It flickered slightly,

but easily regained its normal glow.

*So, I'm going to need to keep that in my mouth while doing this... I wonder if I can find a way to fit them into the harness back in town.*

He returned to the drawing. Using his hoof again to make a large oval body, with four legs sticking out underneath, his 'earth pony' was now more complete. All that was missing now were the ears, a mane, and the tail. And the cutie mark, of course. He added a square with some dotted lines inside it, leading to a big X near the corner.

Done.

*I just need something yellow for the ma-*

*Tick.*

He looked around, before realizing what had just made that sound. He looked down to the linked switch, and saw that it was flipped to the other side.

He picked it up, and flipped it himself for clarification. *Tick.*

Only a couple of seconds later he got his answer. *Tick tick tick.*

He slipped the linked switch into his saddlebag, picked up the light stone that was still glowing a soft yellow color. Looking down at his creation, he gave a frown as he realized his marvelous piece of art would soon be washed away by the flood of water.

Light stone securely in his mouth, and everything else in his saddlebags, he was ready. He placed a hoof on the button that would start everything... and pressed it.

*Click.*

The process was fast- it only took a few seconds before the water was running past his hooves, and another couple of seconds and it was already up to his body.

*Click.*

He took a deep breath just before it reached his head.

*Click.*

*I was supposed to press it three times, right?*

He barely managed to press it a third time as the water was filling the room entirely, he was forced to swim by now.

*I really hope I wasn't supposed to wait for the water to fill the room entirely before pressing it again,* he thought as he started swimming towards the stairs.

His wings gave slow but strong strokes in the water as he worked his way up, the currents of all the water gushing in from somewhere making it harder to keep control. The light stone's glowing was severely hindered by the dirty water, but it gave him enough to see.

*I hope Sketch is right about this...*

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The altar looked the same as it had before, as did the hole.

Sketch had made her way up to the top floor again. She trudged towards the altar, dragging her hooves while doing so.

*I feel horrible... I can't believe I'm making Crimson do this,* she thought, feeling something tugging down her spirits.

Sketch rubbed her eyes and glanced upwards to see the little golden egg from before. She lowered her head to allow her eyes to meet with the gaping hole as well.

*I know I'm usually right about things like this... but...*

She sighed again as she imagined Crimson struggling to complete his task while underwater.

*I hope he doesn't have to do this for nothing...*

She stomped, snorted momentarily and took a couple of deep breaths.

*Right. Time to do this. I can't let Kickbolt see me like this later, either.*

She stared at the small podium like altar before her for a moment before sighing once again.

*What am I getting psyched up for? I'm the one doing the easy part...*

She reluctantly pulled out the linked switch from her bag and held it in her hoof. The small orb like object was roughly the same size as a magic stone. The small metallic lever sticking out of it seemed like it would break if you pushed it the wrong way.

*In hindsight, we should have tested these before we split apart. Oh well.*

After she gave it a light poke, she shrugged.

*Might as well just go for it. I'm here, after all.*

She flicked the switch, causing the orb to give off an unusually loud *tick* considering the size of the source. She flinched as she realized it reminded her way too much of Kickbolt's alarm contraption.

She focused on the ball in her hoof, expecting something to happen, or at least to hear the sound of water gushing in the distance.

Lowering her eyebrows she focused harder on it while listening for anything intently. *Oh come on, Kickbolt. Do something already!*

*Tick.*

She rolled her eyes. *I was hoping you would go for the water switch. Yes, that was me, now get to work!*

She flicked the switch back and forth a few times. *Tick tick tick.*

*Hopefully that should get him working. I want out of here... stupid water.*

A few seconds later the sound of something moving down in the hole could be heard. The altar on the floating pad seemed to be clinking back and forth against the walls while rising up in the water.

"It's working!" she shouted to herself, moving around the hole looking for a better angle to see anything.

After only a few seconds it appeared. The light from the lantern, stretching down into the gaping maw, revealed a stone formation, slowly reaching up through the hole.

Not wasting any time, Sketch stood ready by the egg on the first altar. As soon as the second one passed the floor and was finally getting into place, she grabbed the egg and started passing it over to the second altar, placing it in the middle of the small indent which secured the

egg in place.

The egg didn't disappear this time - it stayed where she left it, in the second altar that would bring it back down to the bottom floor.

*Okay Crimson, your turn! I hope he realizes this shouldn't take long once the water is up here, and he could press the button on his end to keep himself and Kickbolt from drowning. He's smart, he would be able to figure out that he shouldn't have to wait... right?*

She stared at the second altar, bobbing slightly in the water as it reached up to her floor. The water wasn't descending.

"No... no no no, oh no..." She grasped her face, covering her eyes momentarily before looking back at the altar.

It still wasn't moving.

She grabbed the lantern and started galloping back the way she'd come. "*Crimson! Kickbolt!*"

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*Pop.*

The orange bubble burst, letting out the compressed air Crimson had confined with his new magical affinity.

*Maybe, he thought, if I trap the air, only to shrink the bubble to increase the pressure inside of it, resulting in a louder pop once I let go of the magic. I wonder how much air I can fit into one bubble like that, I wonder how much air I can fit into one bubble before I pop it?*

An orange circle formed in front of him, the size of his own head. With some additional thought he managed to shrink it to eyeball size instead, with the air still trapped inside it, now pressurized.

He maintained the spell, smiling at his little creation. It was easier now that the bubble had already formed. The orange ball hung mid-air in front of him. He gave it a light poke. The added pressure was apparently enough for the thin cover he'd given it to snap, so it popped.

*Boom.*



Or exploded, in this case. Compared to the first attempt he'd done, a lot more air had been compressed which resulted in a wave of air being released at the same time, letting out a small shockwave for just a split second.

*That... He blinked. That was a better result than I hoped for. Maybe if I can somehow hurry up the process, I would be able to use that offensively somehow.*

His attention turned to his saddlebag. He nuzzled it, trying to get a feel of the contents. After recognizing some of the bumps, he opened it only to peek directly into it.

*Two light stones... one illumination stone... two heat stones... why didn't they have these when we first met? Could have saved me that cold I had. What else did Master give me for this trip? There's so many of these stones and I only have a faint idea of what they actually do. That one's a... gust stone? It blows air? I'm not certain what that could be used for. And what about this...*

Before he could continue pondering, he could feel his surroundings beginning to move. He realized that the water was rising up to his floor, and quickly. Apparently he'd missed the first warning - the sound of it - when he was busy thinking.

When the water started running in, he splashed his hoof playfully while waiting for his time to act.

*I need to wait for the water to reach the first floor, and then give Sketch some time to move the egg over... considering where the hole was, it should only take a second. Even if she would drop the egg or it doesn't work, it should reappear instantly, only taking up a short moment of her time before she tries again. But how do I know when the water stops rising? If I do it too early, then we would need to do this all over again.*

The water was getting up to his legs now, the cold making him shiver slightly as it reached up to his body.

*I hope I can manage to swim... Or, well, I just need to stay right next to this button so I can press it when it's time, that should be easy enough. But the question remains: how long I can hold my breath?... I don't think I've ever tried that. Wait... maybe I don't have to!*

Just as it started reaching up to his head, he leaned up, standing on his hind legs while keeping his head higher than the rising water to give him more time. He easily kept his balance.

*Just a bubble like before... no need to compress it or anything...*

As he concentrated, a sphere surrounded his head, effectively giving himself a helmet with his magic. It was done barely in time before he was unable to keep his head above the

water any longer. The moment his ears entered the water, he could clearly hear the sound of *something* forcing the water into the dungeon.

He smiled. *There's not a lot of air, but now I won't have to hold my breath for a bit longer. I wish I'd thought about this earlier though. Maybe I could have taken Kickbolt's place...*

Then he felt the currents. All the water rushing in at the same time, trying to reach higher and higher in the dungeon was bound to make a lot of movement. It wasn't until he had become completely submerged that he could feel this - and how helpless he was against it.

He struggled to keep his position, but never having swum before left him inexperienced, just like when he tried to walk for the first time. He got swept away from the location he had planted himself in, floating to wherever the water took him while flailing his legs desperately to get back to the button.

*No!* He thought. *How am I supposed to get back?! I can't figure out how to move around like I want!*

He tried, but nothing worked, and he was helplessly dragged around by the currents. The current wasn't strong, but Crimson was unable to learn how to move against it in such short time. He twisted and turned, but the best he could manage was a dizzying spin.

*Aaargh! This is even harder than learning how to walk!*

And then the noise stopped.

The same sound that could clearly be heard upon entering the water had now stopped, as if there was no more water needed.

Or it had reached the top floor.

*Oh no. It's time! I need to get to that button or Kickbolt... he'll...*

He tried running, trotting, just walking, jumping, even galloping. Every single movement he'd learned for getting around, but they didn't work while under water.

*I need to get to that button now! Think think think...* He bobbed his magical helmet with a hoof, as if it would help him. *Maybe I can press it with magic?*

He focus on the button that was out of his reach and tried to grasp it with his magic, only to use his telekinesis to press down on it.

But it didn't work, the button glimmered from his magic, but no matter how he thought or

focused about it, no force was applied. *I... can't push it! Do I need another type of telekinesis for that? Apparently picking things up isn't the same as in applying pressure to them...*

*Now what?! If I only knew some more proper magic, maybe I could just get that to work... What if I can use magic to get me to the button instead?* He hesitated slightly before beginning to act.

He turned his head. There was nothing behind him but water. Using his magic, he managed to conjure a wall - similar to the ones he'd used against the muddler earlier - right behind his hind legs. But instead of having it flicker out of existence, he maintained it for a few moments longer, enough so he could push himself away from it with his legs, and towards the button.

He reached out a hoof, and...

*Click click click click click.*

He managed to repeatedly hammer on it as fast as the water could let him. The results were noticeable a second after the first press. The same noise as when the water was rising could be heard, but he could see the water lowering as well. A few seconds passed before he was finally standing by himself again.

*I hope I wasn't too late.*

He let the bubble around his head fade away, as he greedily breathed in sweet fresh air once again.

*Oh... good. I was starting to feel woozy. I'll just... rest here for a moment while waiting for Sketch to return,* he thought as he slumped down to the floor in a groggy manner. *Note to self, lack of proper breathable air makes you dizzy.*

In a jolt he pushed himself back up again, slapping his face lightly to regain any lost consciousness. *I need to make sure Kickbolt is alright!* He began to gallop down back into the hall which lead to the crossroad.

Until he missed a step and fell flat on his face.

"Ow," he groaned.

As he picked himself up and continued back in a slightly slower but more stable pace. He could hear a voice calling out to him.

*"Crimson?! Crimson, are you alright?"*

His ears perked up upon hearing a female voice calling for him.

*"Sketch? I'm f-f-fine, but we need to check on Kickbolt!"* he yelled back.

As he passed the final corner before the crossroads, he finally met with Sketch again.

The earth pony's eyes were worse than the last time they'd spoken. Tears were running down her cheeks as she openly sniveled upon meeting the unicorn again.

"S-Sketch, I'm *so sorry*. I wasn't able t-to swim so I ended-"

"This is entirely my fault, Crimson. Now come on, we need to find Kickbolt!" she almost blubbered, wiping her eyes with a hoof.

"R... R-Right," he reluctantly agreed, their priority being on the pegasus' well being.

The two of them continued tracing back their steps, but in a hurry. Sketch was quick to go on ahead, but every now and then took a brief moment to rest - being tired after running all the way from the top floor - while allowing Crimson to catch up.

*"Kickbolt?! Kickbolt, please answer me!"* Sketch called out, her voice almost starting to rasp after having repeatedly having done this all the way since the first floor. *"Please, tell me you're alright!"*

*Cough cough.*

"I'm here..." a tired voice responded.

Sketch and Crimson were almost at the stairs. Upon reaching them, they could see the pegasus lying in the middle of them, having crawled halfway up.

The mare stopped momentarily upon seeing him, before rushing even faster to his side. "Oh thank goodness you're alright! You are alright, are you? Please tell me you're alright!" she demanded.

He closed his eyes and let out another cough. "I almost drowned, you know," he wheezed. "You could have been a bit faster with removing the water. Luckily I'm a good swimmer and managed to get up a floor and..." he opened his eyes again and looked down the stairs behind him. "...and a half. I'm not sure I could have taken any longer without air."

Crimson whimpered softly. "I-"

"I'm so sorry, when the water came rushing in it swept me away with it, I had to swim quite a way back to be able to press the button after Crimson moved the egg into place. It's all my fault!" Sketch sobbed. "Just... just tell me you're okay, please?"

Crimson didn't speak up, but looked anxiously at Sketch.

Kickbolt slowly picked himself up, one hoof at a time. "I'm fine, don't worry. Just a bit exhausted. Luckily wings are good for swimming too, and not just flying." He stretched out his wings, the harness creaking in an upset manner from the water. "Oh. I hope they don't rust." He frowned, stretching the wings back and forth to listen for any similar squeaks.

He suddenly turned towards Crimson. "So, did it work?"

"U-U-Umm..."

"Yeah, he said it worked perfectly. The egg should now be down at the bottom floor if everything went according to plan," Sketch said, covering for Crimson again. "So... we should probably head back down and see if it worked."

Kickbolt shook off some of the water still dripping off of him. He gave Sketch a quick glare before nodding. "Right." He turned on the spot and slowly started walking, still tired from the ordeal.

As soon as the pegasus looked away, Sketch turned to Crimson and smiled sadly, mouthing something that Crimson interpreted as "Don't worry about it."

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The water had subsided, and access to the bottom floor was possible again.

"It worked! It worked! Haha!" Sketch bounced around, almost singing at the sight of the egg. "It worked and everypony is alright!"

"While I'm happy you're suddenly so... *giddy*," Kickbolt said, carefully pronouncing the last word while squinting towards her. "I'm almost getting worried about you, Sketch. You're acting... *weird*."

Immediately calming down, the mare brushed away some hair hanging in her face as she blushed slightly. "Sorry... I just..." She looked in Crimson's direction, who gave her sad look in return, biting his lip. She turned back to Kickbolt and smiled. "Never mind."

The altar she had placed the egg on earlier had now floated all the way down to this level, and had somehow relocated itself in the very same pool as the first time they'd been there- right next to the platform.

Sketch carefully picked up the egg, and slowly started moving it. "Hopefully... this is what we need to do to continue on. Cross your hooves, everypony."

As she slowly brought it closer to the platform, careful not to trigger any magical reactions that could cause it to reappear - possibly at the top floor again - they all held their breaths.

The same moment she laid it down, it started vibrating. It began soft, as if it was shivering from a cold, but the shuddering quickly became violent shaking as if it was in the middle of an earthquake. The ponies almost panicked as the egg started bouncing around on the ground.

Then it grew.

It ballooned in size, in about a second it had become as big as one of them, similarly to the very first egg they had encountered in the dungeon.

However, it didn't need any applied pressure in the form of hooves to crack it open, as it seemingly did so by itself this time, letting the yolk flow out by itself. Crystallizing as it seemed evenly spread on the ground.

They all agreed to go through it without saying anything, knowing they had no choice.

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"Where are we now?" Kickbolt asked, rubbing his behind as he'd fallen out from the hole high up in the wall they had come from. "It looks more or less the same, but bigger."

Sketch was busy scanning what she could see, having been the first one to jump through the portal, simply out of joy of being able to jump through a portal again - and in an attempt to forget what had happened earlier by pressing on. "Guys, I think we've found something." She pointed in front of her, only to then move her leg to the side, pointing in an entirely different direction, and again but towards the other side. "It's all around us."

"What is?" Kickbolt asked. "I don't see anything but walls."

Her entire visage was lightening up by the second. "Look *at* the walls," she replied.

“They’re covered in runes, everywhere! I’ve never seen this many before!” She walked up to the nearest wall and started copying symbols. “Crimson, could you come a bit closer? I want to get a good look at these, and your light is a bit far away to see clearly.”

The unicorn didn’t answer. He was standing at the same spot since he came out through the portal. Right after he had gotten himself up on his legs again after the jump down, he’d been aimlessly staring around in the room.

Sketch walked back up to him, and waved a hoof in front of his face. “Hello, Crimson Aegis? Are you okay?”

Kickbolt joined in, noticing the lack of attention from the unicorn. “What happened to him? It’s like he’s sleepwalking or something.” He gently prodded Crimson’s side.

Crimson suddenly started blinking like he’d just woken up. After trading looks with the two confused ponies in front of him, he quietly started mumbling.

“What was that, Crimson?” Sketch asked. “Are you okay? You... dazed out again.”

Swallowing hard, he nodded a couple of times before responding. “Y-Yes. I’m f-f-fine. J-Just... c-confused...” He pointed at the wall. “These... t-these runes... I t-think I c-can read them.

Kickbolt’s eyes widened, but Sketch’s jaw fell to the floor in disbelief. “You... you *what*?! You can *read* these? Is that how you figured out how to enter this dungeon in the first place?” She furiously shook her head for a moment. “How long have you been able to do that? What does it say? We have whole books back in town filled with runes copied from different places all over the world, you could decipher them for us!” she rambled, quickly digging out more papers to take notes on.

“I-I-I-I...” he stammered. “I’m s-s-sorry... but I don’t think I can. It’s... v-very odd.”

Sketch winced. “What do you mean you can’t? Do you realize how much this could *mean*?! Ponies have been trying to figure out what these runes mean for *years*, but no pony has been able to!”

Crimson fell flat to the ground, covering his head with his hooves. “I’m s-sorry. But I c-can’t r-read it.”

“But you just said-”

“I told y-you...” he interrupted her. “It’s... v-very odd. I can’t r-read what t-they say, but instead I can... *understand* s-some of it. I l-look at them and it’s like... *thoughts* enter my m-mind,

but only f-for s-some of them.” He shook his head, avoiding eye contact with the others. “I-I-I’m... scared. I don’t k-know what’s g-going on. It’s... all so c-confusing.”

Sketch bit her lip. “I’m... sorry. I got a little excited when you first said you could read them. But could you please explain what you know? What you’re able to tell from them... anything could help.” She placed a hoof on his head, making him uncover his face again to look at her. “Please?”

Kickbolt cleared his throat. “I’d just like to point out I have *no idea* what’s going on here, so you two keep figuring this out.” This warranted a small laugh from the unicorn and the earth pony, lightening the mood.

As Sketch helped Crimson stand again, he explained, “M-M-Most of the r-runes in here d-doesn’t seem to m-mean anything at all. I-Instead, it’s as if they just f-fill my head with... e-empty t-thoughts. I t-think that’s why I... spaced out.” He pointed behind Kickbolt, who sidestepped to allow a better view. “But... o-one over there... i-it’s different.”

“Different? How?” Sketch quickly asked. By now she was writing down notes as fast as her penmanship allowed her to.

Crimson slowly walked up to a certain set of runes and placed a hoof on them. “It’s as if... when I l-look at it, an old m-memory of a conversation p-plays through my mind.”

He swallowed, staring at the odd shapes in front of him for a moment before continuing. “‘Thou cannot b-be serious about this undertaking,’ is what t-the first voice says. It’s f-followed by somepony else saying ‘You k-know as well as I do that w-without his offer, we cannot hope to protect all of them.’” He sighed. “That’s it.”

Sketch’s jaw had dropped again. After shaking her head, recollecting her thoughts, she asked, “Are you sure that’s what it says?”

He nodded slowly. “Y-Yes... it’s... I can’t misread it. It’s l-like the t-thoughts has always been in m-my mind, and I’m j-just remembering them very c-clearly.” He leaned towards the wall, staring off into another direction. “But I h-have absolutely no idea w-whatever it could m-m-mean.”

“Well,” Kickbolt said. “I still don’t really understand most of what’s going on, but I *do* know that you’re the first pony ever to be able to read these things. That’s... a pretty big deal. Considering the vast amounts of runes like these we’ve run into in the past. Your ability is definitely noteworthy.” He started grinning, smiling up to his ears. “I’m proud to call you my apprentice, Crimson.”

Sketch who had been writing until her pen almost burned through the paper



acknowledged that final statement with a small rock to his head. This seemingly cheered Crimson up as Kickbolt stared down the mare.

"I know there's a lot of questions right now, heck I've probably got most of them," Sketch said. "But right now I think it's about time we find a way out of here. Crimson... we're currently in the bottom of a dungeon with no passage out, is there any chance you can... uhm... see anything that could help us?"

He nodded and pointed behind her. "There, I s-see one that makes me t-think 'push'. I'm n-not sure what exactly it m-means, but that's t-the only other rune I c-can read. I think it means you have t-to push it?"

Sketch walked up to it and laid a hoof on it, only to pull it away. "Before we try and leave, are you sure you won't be able to read copied runes? If so, I could try and copy as many from here as possible for later."

"I'm s-sorry Sketch, but it's like... it's like s-something *b-behind* the r-runes holds t-the information, not the runes themselves. I'm assuming they're m-m-magical in nature."

She sighed. "Worth a try, at least." She placed her hoof on the rune again carefully. "Are you two ready? This looks like our last resort to get out of here... this... *button*." *I really dislike buttons right now*, she thought.

The other two ponies traded a look, and carefully nodded - being as ready as they could be.

*Click.*

After a sudden bright flash, they found themselves in a forest.

[~Chapter 8~](#)

[~Chapter 10~](#)

(Author's note: I'd like to thank ARBPW and LysanderasD for helping me with editing and making my story readable. Here I just usually ask for a comment and rating, but I'm going to go a step further and explain why as well.

This story gets posted on both Equestria Daily and Fimfiction, the latter has several neat

tracking features that allows me to easily see how many people view the story, when, etc. I can easily get an idea of how many are interested in it. But as for everyone that's reading the google document version straight from Equestria Daily, I have *no* idea how many of you there are.

It would mean a lot to me if you could somehow make your presence known to me, simply by either rating and leaving a comment. Or possibly a step further and contact me directly at [diexna@gmail.com](mailto:diexna@gmail.com). Feel free to make suggestions or... well, anything at all! Thank you.)