

## The Greatest Game II

Sobbing quietly rose from the room. Not just five minutes ago Fluttershy had her hooves wrapped around her young dragon friend sinking into the floor and now Spike was gone. The last thing she heard was her muffled name being cried out before he vanished.

The other ponies stood dumbly, seeing Spike getting sucked into the floorboards had shocked them all. Applejack was the first to break the silence after Twilight disappeared downstairs.

“Pinkie Pie? What in sam hill is wrong with you!? We *coulda* pulled him through if ya didn’t drop the rope.”

Pinkie blinked rapidly, “Because well, ya see, if the game fell into the gooey-ooey we could never finish it and find out who wins and also it was gonna be my turn again and I didn’t want to miss it really.”

“So you just LET Spike sink into the floor because you cared more about the game than your friend,” seethed Rainbow Dash getting right in Pinkie’s face.

“Uh-uh-uh, we were ALL helping him Rainbow Dash and I didn’t let him fall in there, he was getting pulled in by the muddy stuff and-”

“-and I think you need to get your priorities checked Pinkie Pie,” interjected Rarity, lowering her voice, “Spike has disappeared, and if any of you ponies could stop your bickering you’d realize our poor friend is crying her eyes out downstairs. Now we can’t always explain the things Pinkie Pie does but I believ-HELLOOO Twilight Sparkle, err, just how long have you been standing there?”

They turned to see their friend at the doorway, fur under her eyes damp with tears. “Long enough Rarity,” she said wiping her face.

“AJ I’m sorry that I didn’t listen to you. If I weren’t so, so analytical I could have seen that you were right this time and I was wrong and then *this* happened and now I can’t find...” she hiccuped and rubbed her eye again.

“Aw Sug come ‘ere,” Applejack grabbed her friend and gave her a strong hug. Fluttershy and the rest of her friends gathered around her and joined in, “we’re gonna fix this mess and get Spike back and erythin’ will be FINE.”

Twilight gave a small smile, “Thanks girls, I don’t know what I’d do without your support. Spikes been here with me since, since I met him in his little egg, he’s been my first frie-”

Thump **Thump** Thump **Thump** Thump **Thump** Thump

The ponies glanced toward the floor where the horrible game box sat,

rhythmic drum beats coming from inside.

“First we gotta get rid of this darned game Twilight, magic me an axe,” Applejack trotted over to the box “so’s I can break it once and fer all!”

Twilight closed her eyes and focused, with a poof and a small flash of light a large iron mallet apparated and fell to the floor with a clunk.

“Close enough,” said Applejack gripping the handle in her hooves “Here goes nothin’!”

Applejack brought the mallet down as hard as she could and slammed it dead center onto the box. It hit with a resounding THUD and a flash of green light filled the room throwing Applejack backwards into her friends.

“Oof! Did ah gettit?” she said clumsily, eyes rolling in their sockets “Oh no way,”

They got up and looked over at the game case sitting intact right where Applejack slammed it, pieces of the broken mallet head littering the area around the box with scorch marks decorating the floor.

“Well if that didn’t work what will?” thought Dash aloud.

“I don’t know...let me think for a minute...there’s got to be *something* to connect this board with,” Twilight sat and rubbed her head going over facts she knew so far about the game, trying to organize them in her mind.

Pinkie Pie trotted over to the board and opened it back up, halting the soft drumbeats that permeated the air. “K, while we’re waiting I’m gonna roll my turn reeeeeaaaal quick!” she said hastily rolling the dice in her hooves.

Applejack was not gonna have this. “Firstly Pinks, it’s mine and Rarity’s turn, second, we’re all tryin’ to catch our breath here, and thirdly ah don’t feel like rollin’ right now and I’m pretty sure nopony else does either, so wait yer danged turn!”

Pinkie’s face fell for an instant, “Fine we’ll put the game on hold for a little bit,” Fluttershy gingerly took the dice from Pinkie and held it in her teeth.

“Olll hold on t’ theesh,” she said and sat down giving her a look. Pinkie sighed, knowing was getting a lot of flak for seeming so indifferent to everything and winning felt like such a silly thing to think about, but it’s all she wanted to do after this tea party had started getting to be so much fun.

Peering into the box and counting up the spaces she saw she had twenty-four more to go. Her eyes rested on the boring blank inner flap of the box and she felt a little niggles of an idea about it.

“Rarity come over here a sec and bring your little wipey-rag with ya.”

“What is it darling? I’m a little preoccupied with fixing up these windows you know.”

“Just come over here pleasepleasepleasepleasepleaseplease-”

Rarity dropped what she was doing in a huff and trotted over “Yes Pinkie Pie what is it that needs my attention *sooo* badly?”

She pointed down to the box “I have a funny feeling about this flippy-flap, can you rub it with your little towel?”

Rarity's little embroidered handkerchief flew into the sink, soaking itself, and began scrubbing the inner box flap clean. “Oh my,” she whispered after a few steady strokes. “I missed something...everypony come look at this! Pinkie found more instructions to the game!”

*ADVENTURERS BEWARE!*

*Do not begin unless you intend to finish,  
the exciting consequences will remain,  
until a player finishes and calls out the name of the game*

“More like a warning,” snorted Rainbow Dash, shifting her wings, “I wish we’d found this sooner.”

“I’m scared again,” peeped Fluttershy.

“But you’re ALWAYS scared Flutters,” snapped Dash.

Pinkie looked less glum, “Now we have to play if we want the bats and snake to go away.”

Rarity sighed and turned to Applejack “All this rhyming nonsense is really starting to fray my nerves.”

Twilight, who’d been quietly lost in thought suddenly perked up “What did you just say?”

“...fray my nerves?”

“Nononono before that!” said Twilight breathlessly jumping over to her startled friend “*You* said rhyming nonsense,”

“Well yes dear I-”

“Rhyming nonsense...rhyming...”

“Eheh, um, Twilight what are you getting at?”

Rarity received a surprising hug from her purple friend “That’s it! I know where to go now! Rhyming messages, exotic wildlife, strange magical properties, cursed board game...I think we could find answers at Zecoras place!”

“Of course! Why didn’t we think of that sooner!” said Dash excitedly. Zecora, the zebra living on her own in the forest could very well have answers about this game considering her background.

“Um, isn’t the forest where you sent that giant snake?” asked Fluttershy thoughtfully.

Twilight stopped short for a moment as doubt and fear began creeping into

her thoughts, but her mission to save Spike forced her head clear. “Yes, we’ll handle him in due time, I’ll be right back to get some things,” she said trotting upstairs with newfound courage. No snake no matter how big would stand between her goal to recover Spike.

The other ponies stood around waiting for their friend, Fluttershy was shaking at the idea of going into the Everfree forest even if it was with her friends.

Dash noticed and commenting said “Don’t you sweat it Flutters, I’ll be here to take care of any scary baddies that’ll get in our way!”

“OOH! Do you think Zecoras played this before? Oh I just bet shes a WHIZ at this game,” jumped in Pinkie excitedly.

“Ah *really* wish you’d take this situation a lil’ more serious Pinkie,” responded Applejack curtly.

Pinkie giggled “Whys that? There’s nothing serious about it!”  
“Now ya listen here Pinks I dunno why yer actin so-

“OK everypony ready?” Twilight had hopped downstairs with her saddlebags on her back, binoculars slung around her neck and wearing her expedition helmet. “I’ve got almost everything I could possibly think of and no books this time. I don’t think we’ll need them now.”

“Twilight Sparkle *not* bringing a reference guide? This is quite the change of pace for you,” playfully jabbed Rarity.

“It’s completely necessary that I DON’T have my nose stuck in a book going through the woods. Besides, I don’t have any relevant reading material to take anyway so I’m really counting on Zecora helping us.”

Dash stopped flitting around and landed next to her friends “We should bring the game with us right?”

They all glanced at the face open case sitting innocently in the evening sunlight. Twilight shut her eyes and took a breath “I’ll carry it in my pack, Fluttershy you can toss the dice in the box and I’ll put it away.”

“Phew,” went the quiet little Pegasus, she felt awfully nervous holding the dice in her mouth and dropped them into the board. She was closing the flaps when she jumped away with a yelp

“I-It moved, the piece moved!”  
Applejack gasped, “But it was mine and Rarity’s turn!”

“Jeeeeeze, are ANY of you ponys paying attention?” said Pinkie Pie rolling her eyes “Don’t you remember that Spike rolled a four? He got doubles and got another turn but he’s not here to roll again but he was on Fluttershy’s team so she HAD to roll for him and that means it’s still Fluttershy’s turn so now the games moving again.”

Twilight did not like the implications of that. The board game knew who was

on who's teams? Something new to consider, but she wasn't waiting around for another monster to delay her this time.

"We'll read the clue and we're out of this house ASAP," Twilight said opening the front door "What's it say Pinkie?"

Pinkie turned the case towards her and read aloud:

*The forest holds brush and pine  
now the path holds vicious vine*

"Alright! We're off!" Twilight said magically shoving the box into her pack "Come on don't dawdle, we're *not* sticking around here," and with that began running out the door, her friends following in full gallop. Dash was flying at full speed above Twilight with Fluttershy following close behind.

"Don't be so worried Fluttershy 'cuz Dash has got your back!" she said doing a loop-de-loop confidently. Her friends bravado forced a meek smile on Fluttershy's face, but she was still clearly shaken by the foreboding message.

"Here's the forest entrance. Daaaaaash, Fluttershyyyy come down here and walk with us! We need to stick together!" called out Twilight waving her hoof.

The woods ahead of them were treacherous since nearly all the wildlife could harm a pony in some way. Although Fluttershy knew every creature in there it wasn't much help when it was trying to eat you for lunch.

Twilight looked through her binoculars "Alright...I'll lead the way to Zecoras so follow me in a single file line right in the middle of the path to make sure we're furthest away from the treeline as possible. Just in case."

They began their trek in higher spirits but started drifting into silence the deeper they delved into the forest. Rarity was noticing some new flora sprouting in the woods "Look at these adorable purple flowers blooming in the trees! They have the same azure quality as my mane, how pretty!" she gushed drifting off the path.

Applejack grabbed Rarity's tail and pulled her in line "Eyes on the trail missy, I ain't never seen them flowers before so look an' don't touch,"

"Well you do not have to be so rough Applejack. My hair and mane have been through a lot today," pouted Rarity, magically curling her tail.

Applejack groaned "After all that's happened ya think ya'd be a bit less worried on yerself ya know?"

Fluttershy shuddered, being in tune with animals and not seeing or hearing any about left her worried. She could swear she felt that something was following her, creeping in the bushes alongside her. Fluttershy attempted to concentrate on Pinkie's tail wildly bouncing in front of her to keep her mind clear. She heard another rustle in the bushes next to her and turned to look when- SMACK

“Oof, um, why’d we stop? Did something...happen?” Fluttershy asked after smacking into Pinkies backside.

“It’s a big twisted hedge in the way,” scowled Dash as if it were the most obvious thing ever “I can fly right over this stupid bush,”

“But,” interjected Twilight impatiently “you aren’t going to *because* you don’t know what’s on the other side, we’re going to cut our way through.”

Twilight lifted the slash slung around her neck and pulled a short squared sword out of the sheath.

“Woa, where’d ya get that big ‘ol machete Twi?” asked Applejack eyeing the blade.

“Found it with the hat and binoculars in my library. Apparently it’s an excellent tool for cutting through thick foliage and this is my first time I get to use it,” replied Twilight levitating the knife, diligently making sure to aim for appropriately thin vines in the tangled wall by pulling them out with her magic.

She was just finishing up when the bushes came to life.

“AAGH!” screamed Rarity as a vine tripped her and started dragging her away. Each pony was grabbed by a separate vine except for Dash who was luckily in the air and dodged it.

Twilight was slicing away at the vine curling around her waist with the blade and was working on helping her friends. “They’re everywhere!” she cried slicing two more that had tried coiling around her legs.

“I’ve gotcha Applejack!” Dash said ripping apart the offending vine around her friends foreleg with her teeth “Help the other three!”

“Don’t worry about me Dashie I’m fine,” Pinkie said expertly jumping and dodging the vines. A pair of them had knotted each other in their frenetic attempts to grab the prancing pony.

*SHHHHINK* another vine was slashed apart by the heavy knife under Twilights control. “Hold still Rarity I’ve got you,” Twilight sent the blade spinning at the vine that held her friend. It cut through cleanly and the vine disappeared squealing into the woods.

“HEY my knife!” A vine had grabbed the tool and was snaking back into the woods with it.

“Rarity help me pull it back!” she said turning to her panicked friend. They focused their magic on the blade and pulled, in an odd tug-of-war of might and magic.

Applejack and Rainbow Dash were both pulling Fluttershy together, two vines had wrapped around her back legs and she was frantically beating her wings to pull away. “Help Help Help!” she pleaded as the vines tightened their grip on her.

“Don’t worry Fluttershy, me and Aj’s got you, we’ve got you, don’t worry- TWILIGHT HELP US CUT FLUTTERSHEY LOOSE!” Dash yelled over to her friends.

A vine burst directly out of the ground on front of Fluttershy and smacked Applejack away, both Dash and Fluttershy were dragged to the tree line.

“I’ve got you Fluttershy, I’ve got you,” Dash grabbed her free hoof and also started pumping her wings “just don’t let go don’t let go don’t let go.”

Fluttershy’s eyes were shaking as she gripped her friend tight. “Dash, I-AAAAAAHHH!”

Another vine popped up from the earth and lashed Dash in the snout, she turned to snatch at her friends hooves but it was too late. Fluttershy disappeared screaming into the Everfree forest, her yellow form fading away into the darkness.

“WE HAVE TO GO AFTER HER!” shouted Dash making a break for the woods.

“NO we can’t!” yelled Twilight as she wrestled the blade free and began cutting away at the big hedge “We can’t lose you too Dash we need to get out of here! It’s getting worse!”

Applejack pulled her friend away from the treeline and through the hedge wall, it was still trying to close in on them.

“But what about-”

“Dash we NEED to leave before we’re all taken away! I don’t want to know what happens if we lose this game!” pleaded Twilight “Zecoras place is just up ahead and WE HAVE TO **MOVE!**”

With her legs shaking Dash turned and plunged through the closing vine wall and followed her friends to the wooden house just up ahead. Dash held her head high but her spirits dragged behind. Her thoughts were a muddled mess but one rang through clear as a bell.

*That zebra better have a way to get her friends back*

To be continued...