

## **A MATTER OF PRINCIPALS**

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### **Prologue**

*(Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of a closed wooden chest trimmed in brass. Spike flies down and pulls the lid open from above, revealing an assortment of items that are quickly floated out in a magic aura. A longer shot puts them, him, and Twilight Sparkle in her lecture hall at the School of Friendship; standing on the stage, she maneuvers the items up into a slow holding pattern above her students' heads. There are six: a silver necklace shaped as a winged eye, a scepter topped by a jewel held in a pair of pincers, a helmet adorned with yak horns and a red plume, a gold crown set with red gems, a spiny shell whose contours resemble a saddle, and a cloak secured with a flower brooch.)*

**Twilight:** Who can tell me what these are? *(Ocellus holds a sizable book.)*

**Sandbar:** *(awed)* Whoa...

**Gallus:** Me likey!

**Yona:** Shiny!

**Smolder:** Treasure?

**Ocellus:** Nope! They're all legendary magical artifacts!

*(Noticing the odd stares from her classmates, she wilts a bit and offers a sheepish laugh.)*

**Ocellus:** *(huddling behind her book)* I read ahead in *Equestrian Artifacts and Camaraderie, Volume Seven*. *(Gallus rolls his eyes; Yona smirks.)*

**Twilight:** You're right, Ocellus. *(floating items to herself one by one, in the order listed above)* This is the Amulet of Aurora...the Talisman of Mirage...the Helm of Yiksler...the Crown of Grover...Knuckerbocker's Shell...and Clover the Clever's Cloak.

**Spike:** *(eagerly)* And the gems are real! *(Quizzical stare from Twilight.)* Uh, not that I tasted them. *(He backs off.)*

**Twilight:** Princess Celestia gifted these to our school— *(moving them aside)* —since they each represent one of the cultures our students come from. And we'll learn all about them— *(dramatically)* —in a spell-venger hunt!

*(General bewilderment among the pupils.)*

**Smolder:** *(to Sandbar)* Is that a pony thing?

**Sandbar:** *(shrugging)* Eh. *(Twilight flies into his face.)*

**Twilight:** It's a magical scavenger hunt. *(backing off, hovering with Spike)* Each of you will work in pairs to try to find where in the School these artifacts are hidden. *(The two trade a high five.)*

**Spike:** The team that finds the most wins a private tour of the Canterlot Archives with Princess Celestia.

*(A giggle and ear-to-ear grin from Twilight prompt Silverstream to pop up from her seat into an amped-up hover when the camera cuts to her.)*

**Silverstream:** Ooooooh! Learning *and* fun? Does it get any better than that? *(She sits again.)*

**Gallus:** You've been underwater a long time, haven't you?

**Twilight:** *(from o.s.)* Gallus and Silverstream... *(Cut to her and Spike, the artifacts settling back into the chest.)* ...sounds like you're our first pair.

*(A collective gasp issues from the audience at almost the exact same moment that the sound of a chiming cutie mark is heard.)*

**Twilight:** What? They'll make a great team. *(Yona raises a hoof for attention.)*

**Yona:** *(pointing)* Um, why pony glowing?

*(Only now does the instructor shift her wings enough to get a good clear view at her own haunch and the summons flaring across it. Zoom in to a close-up, then cut to a long shot of both the School and the adjoining Castle of Friendship. It is daytime. Twilight is visible only as a speck racing across the walkway connecting the two, from the former to the latter; cut to a close-up of a set of closed doors, which are thrown open under her power. She and Spike enter from the other side and stop short, purple and green eyes widening in total shock, and the camera zooms out quickly to frame the throne room. Her other five friends are already here, regarding their own pulsing marks and not able to make head or tail of this development.)*

**Twilight:** *(entering)* Wait. You all were called on this friendship quest too?

**Fluttershy:** It must be a really important one.

**Rarity:** *(pointing across room)* And terribly far away.

*(Cut to an extreme close-up of a spot at the edge of the central table's map where copies of all six marks are circling lazily, then zoom out to an overhead shot. It is on the side opposite the group and the Ponyville/Canterlot area. Spike has now entered the room and is hovering over Twilight's shoulder.)*

**Rainbow Dash:** *(scoffing)* Just getting there will take days!

**Applejack:** Do y'all know what this means? *(Back to them.)* There won't be any teachers left to run the School!

*(A round of gasps from the other six, then fade to black.)*

## OPENING THEME

### Act One

*(Opening shot: fade in to the far edge of the map, the camera pointing through the parked cutie marks at the group.)*

**Fluttershy:** Should we send our students home? *(Cut to Applejack, Rainbow, and Pinkie Pie.)*

**Pinkie:** I say we take 'em with us! ROAD TRIP! *(The other two cover their ears; pan to Fluttershy and Rarity on the next line.)*

**Rarity:** In the middle of my friendship quilting class. I think not! *(unnerved)* All of those unfinished seams!

*(The very thought causes her to pass out with a weak moan, but Fluttershy is there to catch her before she can hit the floor. One yellow hoof fans at the white face to try and bring her around. Back to the first three.)*

**Applejack:** Problem is, we don't even know how long we'll be gone.

**Twilight:** *(from o.s.)* Don't worry, everypony. *(Cut to her, floating up a thick scroll, and Spike.)* I already have a seventy-point plan in place for this very situation.

*(Her confident wink is met with a round of extremely puzzled glances, after which the camera cuts to a close-up of a most perturbed Starlight Glimmer.)*

**Starlight:** You want *me* to be headmare?

*(Longer shot. She and Twilight are in the latter's office at the School, Twilight sitting behind her desk and facing Starlight, whose cutie mark has gone dormant.)*

**Twilight:** You're the perfect choice. *(circling to her)* You're a good leader and an expert in friendship. *(touching Starlight's chest)* I trust you to run this school exactly as I would.

**Starlight:** *(backing away)* Uh, that's a pretty big responsibility, Twilight.

*(She is unceremoniously scooped up in the boss's field and plopped into the chair.)*

**Twilight:** *(trotting to her)* Which is why I've prepared everything you need.

*(Now a small bell is floated up and rung, the cue for Spike to enter from a side door and push a severely overloaded wheelbarrow into the office. Books, scrolls, file folders, and other bureaucratic whatnot make up the freight. Upon reaching the two mares, it takes every bit of strength he can put into his flapping wings to tip the lot onto the desk in a papery avalanche.)*

**Twilight:** *(hovering more items onto the pile)* The curriculum, rules for the spell-venger hunt, dining hall menus for the next six months...

*(Spike just stares flatly at her through all this, which ends with Starlight completely hidden from view and only Twilight's rump and tail visible at one end. He scrambles up to the peak.)*

**Spike:** Six months?! *(Slide down, taking a few scrolls with him; Twilight steps out.)* You're not really gonna be gone that long, are you?

**Twilight:** *(levitating him back up on top)* ...and Spike. Anything that isn't covered in my files, he'll be able to help you with.

*(The base of a mountain of rolled parchments crumbles away to expose Starlight's head and forelegs.)*

**Starlight:** Then why not put him in charge?

**Spike:** *(laughing dismissively)* No thanks! *(Close-up.)* Uh, being a princess for Twilight was hard enough.

*(Referring to the events of "Princess Spike." Tilt down to the half-buried unicorn, who puts a mildly exasperated hoof to her forehead.)*

**Starlight:** I am gonna pretend that made sense. *(to Twilight)* But if you're sure it's what you really want... *(smiling)* ...I promise I won't let you down.

*(Cut to Twilight, on her way to the exit with a suitcase in her telekinetic hold.)*

**Twilight:** I knew I could count on you.

*(One door opens long enough to let her out, then closes again. Spike goes airborne with a shout of surprise as the colossus disintegrates into a cascade of scrolls, leaving Starlight enough room to sit up and prop her chin on a hoof.)*

**Starlight:** *(wearily)* Great. What could possibly go wrong?

*(Dissolve to Twilight and company galloping/flying away from the Castle and School, marks all quiet, then cut to Starlight waving goodbye on the walkway with a grin that is a shade too forced to be genuine. Spike pops up into a hover alongside her.)*

**Spike:** Goodbye, Rarity! *(Funny look from Starlight.)* A-And everypony! *(He lands.)*

**Starlight:** Come back soon! *(quieter)* Please!

*(Zoom out slightly to frame a teary-eyed Discord leaning into view and waving a handkerchief. After a moment, he blows his nose into it, setting off a foghorn blast that jolts then rudely back to the present.)*

**Starlight, Spike:** Huh?

**Discord:** I hate goodbyes, don't you? (*wiping eye*) I just go to pieces.

*(Which he proceeds to do, his body literally disassembling itself to end up as a pile of parts on the walkway.)*

**Starlight:** Uh, Discord! (*chuckling weakly*) What a...nice surprise! (*His lion paw gives a thumbs-up; cut to her and Spike.*) This is your first time at our new school, isn't it?

*(The baby dragon gives her a tiny, shaky nod. On the start of the next line, zoom out slightly to frame the chaos master—fully rebuilt, dressed in a gray suit, white shirt, and gray tie, and back to his usual unctuous self.)*

**Suit Discord:** Ohhh! Was I not invited to the grand opening? (*Another appears, in a blue sailor suit and multicolored beanie.*)

**Sailor Discord:** Friends and Family Day? (*A third, in a graduation gown and mortarboard cap, with white shirt and polka-dotted tie.*)

**Graduate Discord:** Baccalaureate?

**All three:** (*dryly*) I hadn't noticed.

*(A mighty flash of white clears away two of the three and leaves the original free of clothing.)*

**Starlight:** Well, at least you're here now. (*Pause.*) Um, why *are* you here now?

**Discord:** (*pacing toward School entrance*) To fill in for Twilight, of course, as head draconequus. I seem to recall a whole song about how this school is where you make your own rules. Now who better at that than me? (*Spike flies up to his face.*)

**Spike:** Then you also must have heard Starlight is in charge now.

**Discord:** Really! I thought there must be some mistake.

*(A flick of the lion-paw digits sends the little guy tumbling back toward Starlight and sours his mood.)*

**Starlight:** Nope. Twilight picked me for the job— (*pulling out Twilight's massive scroll*) —and she left pretty detailed instructions for me to follow.

**Discord:** (*taking it, reading quickly as it floats before him*) Well, I'm sure that she wouldn't mind if I made a few tiny suggestions.

*(A snap of the talons conjures up a minute quill, and a pair of pince-nez eyeglasses appears next, balanced on the end of his nose and connected to a cord around his neck.)*

**Discord:** (*writing*) Item one—gravity is optional.

*(He, the interim headmare, and her assistant begin floating slowly up toward the sky.)*

**Starlight:** Whooooaaa!

*(Stepping stones and walkway sections follow them up.)*

**Discord:** *(writing)* Item two—the School’s new mascot is an ambidextrous marmoset.

*(This very animal floats slowly up into view: white body, four light blue legs, blue-green at paws and tail, purple athletic jersey, wearing an oversized mascot head of a pale blue primate face ringed by darker fur and topped with an absurdly small “#1” baseball cap and lavender/white-striped ears. It chitters happily until Discord loops a string around one hind limb and reels it back in.)*

**Discord:** Item three— *(Starlight levitates herself over to him and takes the scroll away.)*

**Starlight:** Not gonna happen. I promised Twilight I’d handle this her way. So thanks, but no thanks.

*(As she steers herself back the way she came, Discord shoots her a venomous squint and lets go of the string to let the marmoset drift away. Zoom in on him, all geniality gone in a heartbeat.)*

**Discord:** Reeaaaally! Well, we’ll see if you change your mind.

*(With one taloned snap, he removes himself and re-establishes gravity, allowing the stones and walkway to fall into place. Starlight touches down on the doorstep and begins reading as Spike swoops to her.)*

**Spike:** Uh-oh. When we play Ogres and Oubliettes and he puts that many E’s in “really,” things don’t usually end well.

**Starlight:** Don’t worry, Spike. Discord and I are old save-Equestria buddies. He’ll be fine. *(standing, floating Twilight’s scroll up)* Now, what’s next on Twilight’s list?

*(Spike opens one door so the two can enter. Dissolve to a long shot of the marmoset bobbing on the air currents and into the distance toward the sun, and zoom out to frame the School.)*

**Spike:** *(voice over)* Okay.

*(Close-up inside; he walks alongside Starlight down a hallway, carrying a quill and a short checklist. Starlight is no longer toting Twilight’s massive missive.)*

**Spike:** I hid the artifacts for the spell-venger hunt *and* ordered school supplies for the week. All you have to worry about is teaching class.

**Starlight:** *(sighing happily)* Thanks, Spike. Maybe we *will* get through this okay.

*(Cut to a set of closed doors, which swing open under her influence to frame the pair on the far side; Spike’s hands are now empty. Zoom out slightly as both stop short, faces freezing in mingled fear and disbelief, then cut here and there in the surreal parody of a tropical rainforest laid out before them. Gaily colored birds perch in trees that are actually giant feather dusters; a*

*sunglasses-wearing potted cactus waves lazily from its pot attached to the side of one “trunk,” a window mounted in the floor blows open to admit wind and rain from a violent thunderstorm occurring just beyond. The camera then cuts to just behind Starlight and Spike and tilts up slowly, revealing that all this madness has been set up in Twilight’s office. The floor is stone, with a small pond at its center, and the desk now rests atop the flat boughs of an impossibly spindly tree growing from a platform at the center of the water. A huge shaving mug and brush rest by the roots. Discord sits behind the desk, his earlier pince-nez replaced by a transparent green eyeshade visor, and he is using a typewriter with a slice of bread rolled in rather than a sheet of paper. Close-up.)*

**Discord:** *(with slight impatience, adjusting/removing bread)* Come in, come in. You’ll let the twittermites out. *(He eats it.)*

**Spike:** Twittermites?

*(A cloud of the electrically charged insects—which Apple Bloom dreamed about learning to capture in “Bloom & Gloom”—descends and gives him a shock that sends him into the pond with a yell of pain.)*

**Starlight:** *(irked, as they clear out)* Discord, what are you doing? *(Spike surfaces for air; Discord has ditched his visor.)*

**Discord:** No pony was at your desk. *(He elongates himself to face her, still keeping his seat.)* Imagine what Twilight would say.

*(In a blink, he has dropped entirely to her level and switched his visor for a wig and horn to match Twilight’s.)*

**Discord:** *(imitating Twilight badly)* Oh, how could you, Starlight? You’ve broken my trust and failed me completely.

*(The wig is pulled off, its horn disappearing, and clapped onto Starlight’s head.)*

**Discord:** *(own voice)* Oh, don’t worry. I’ll cover for you. *(The incensed unicorn floats the wig off...)* By the way, I hope you like Limburger cheese.

*(...then throws it down as Discord floats by and Spike plies a can of insecticide against the twittermites.)*

**Discord:** I got a month’s supply for the teachers’ lounge.

*(At his snap, a large crate materializes across the way, tended by a uniformed delivery stallion holding a clipboard. He is most surprised to see the container fall open and an enormous cheese wheel roll out. Finding the dairy behemoth bearing down on him, Spike voices a yell of terror and tries to run, but gets only a few steps away before it topples and crushes him to the floor. One patch of the surface crumbles away to reveal the hapless dragon, now covered in lumps of cheese and emitting curls of the aromatic fumes. Green eyes water profusely, cheeks bulge, and*

*hands clap to mouth in a supreme effort to hold in his breakfast. Starlight sniffs the air and quickly covers her nose, while Discord has produced a C-clamp and screwed it into place on his own.)*

**Starlight:** *(with a forced chuckle)* We'll take it from here, Discord. *(magically opening door, ushering him out)* Go relax. Have a cup of tea—at home!

*(Just as the door is about to swing shut, his deer hind leg wedges it open and he puts his head back in with a scoff, the clamp gone.)*

**Discord:** *(offended)* Some thanks for all my help. And after I hired all those substitute teachers for you. *(He gives her a shiny-eyed whimper; Spike extricates himself from the cheese.)*

**Spike:** Actually, that does sound kinda helpful. *(pulling out besmirched checklist for Starlight)* And it was next on our to-do list.

*(Now it is the mare's turn to choke down her gorge for a moment, but she recovers quickly and turns two suspicious blue eyes toward Discord.)*

**Starlight:** Which teachers did you hire?

*(A devilish grin spreads over the snaggle-toothed face. Dissolve to a knot of badly scared students in one of the classrooms, the camera positioned so that a hooved hind leg slams down in the foreground. All cower from the crack of keratin against floor, and a longer shot puts them in Fluttershy's room—with Iron Will filling in for her.)*

**Iron:** They call it “making friends”—*(flexing muscles)*—because you have to make creatures be your friends! *(The students again; he points at Yona and continues o.s.)* Show me what you got, yak!

*(Wishing perhaps that she had gone in for a scholarship to a good university in, say, the Dragon Lands, Yona steps up to a broad tree stump at the front of the room. Iron has already rested a hoof on this, and he bends to bring his head down toward Yona's level and cups a hand to his ear.)*

**Yona:** *(clearing throat, very quietly)* Be my friend.

**Iron:** *(straightening up)* If you're quiet, I don't buy it!

**Yona:** *(louder, more assertively)* Be my friend. *(Tentative grin.)*

**Iron:** I've heard pudding that's more convincing!

*(Now the young yak goes full tilt: grimacing, snorting steam, rising to her hind legs.)*

**Yona:** *Be my friend!*

*(This attempt has the effect of causing the other students to scatter in all directions at top speed. Yona slaps hooves over her stunned mouth, but Iron looks thoughtfully off to one side. The*



*camera follows his gaze to the edge of the doorway, where a dismayed Starlight, a worried and cleaned-up Spike, and a smug Discord have been watching the lesson.)*

**Starlight:** *(to Spike)* That's not how Twilight teaches friendship.

*(Wipe to a buckball field set up outdoors and zoom in slowly as Gallus flies toward a gathering at midfield, carrying a tray. Cranky Doodle Donkey is stretched out on a lounge chair under a beach umbrella and being attended by several students. A close-up picks out Cozy Glow, the filly befriended by the Cutie Mark Crusaders in "Marks for Effort," filing one of the old jack's hooves; others are massaging, fanning, adjusting the umbrella, and Cranky wears the same sort of green eyeshade visor Discord used earlier.)*

**Cranky:** Some field trip. Where's my iced tea?

*(Gallus presents a glass from the tray he carries, sullenness etched into every inch of his face. Cranky takes a pull from its straw and immediately spits it all over him.)*

**Cranky:** This is too cold!

*(The griffon ducks away and immediately returns, carrying only a mug on his tray. A sip from its straw earns the exact same result.)*

**Cranky:** Now it's too hot!

*(Another trip, and Gallus now has a glass full of ice cubes and a pitcher on the. He fills the glass and offers it to Cranky, who uses its straw and lets him have it all over again.)*

**Cranky:** *(knocking tray aside)* Now it's too tea-flavored! You call yourselves friends?

*(Zoom out to put Spike in the fore, looking on from the bushes that line the perimeter of the field, then cut to a head-on shot of him and Starlight.)*

**Spike:** That is definitely not how Twilight teaches friendship.

*(Discord sidles up, glass in hand and slurping loudly from its straw, and gets an irked glare from Spike. Wipe to a close-up of the red-leaved, fully flowered boughs of a Dragon Sneeze tree—the species that touched off Spike's fiery allergies in "Princess Spike"—and zoom out. It stands behind the front desk of a full classroom, and its silent immobility draws puzzled stares from the students—some aimed at it, some at each other. Silverstream hesitantly eases up to the desk, sets an apple on its edge, and races back to her seat as if the fruit were a grenade with the pin out. Watching from the doorway, Starlight cannot believe her eyes as Discord smiles broadly, no longer carrying his tasty beverage. The spines atop Spike's head are just visible at the bottom edge of the screen below them.)*

**Starlight:** You hired a *tree* as a teacher?!

**Discord:** *(shrugging)* Its schedule was free.

**Spike:** *(from o.s.)* Uh, guys? *(Tilt down to him, eyes bloodshot and fingers covering nose.)* That's not just any tree.

*(He gets no farther before the o.s. Smolder goes into the windup for a sneeze. The orange dragon's cheeks are already flushed by the time the camera cuts to her, and when she finally lets it rip, the recoil throws her backwards off her stool and the rest of the students duck and cover with a yell to avoid the blast of flame that lances toward the front of the room. Spike blows his nose into a handkerchief.)*

**Spike:** It's a Dragon Sneeze tree.

*(Smolder's next sneeze comes within a hair of barbecuing Spike and Starlight, who dive to the floor just in time. Discord, on the other hand, leisurely pulls his head away from the line of fire and toasts a marshmallow on a stick when the fire roars through. All three clear the way for a stampede of screaming students, followed by a badly afflicted Smolder, and Discord eats his treat as Starlight and Spike race off to restore order, the latter now fully recovered.)*

**Starlight:** W-Wait! Calm down, everycreature! *(Spike begins to spray a fire extinguisher over the burning spots.)* It's gonna be okay!

*(A loud grunt from the o.s. Yona draws her attention; cut to a stretch of wall, through which the beefy bovid bursts from behind with a savage yell.)*

**Yona:** *(stomping, pounding chest)* BE MY FRIEND!!

*(She charges off down the hallway, Iron peeking out from the hole with a fiercely proud smile. Zoom out to put Starlight in the fore, her brain too locked up from seeing all the destruction and mayhem to let her form any words.)*

**Discord:** *(from o.s., patting her head)* My, my, my. *(Cut to frame both.)* You do seem like you're in over your head. *(circling lazily around her)* Won't Twilight be so disappointed with how you're ruining—I mean, *running* her school?

*(He goes on his way, the camera zooming in slowly on Starlight's shell-shocked expression as one eye begins to twitch alarmingly. Fade to black.)*

## Act Two

*(Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of the School, zooming in on the great front doors as they burst open to release a swarm of panicked students, including a still-sneezing Smolder. The situation is no better inside as Starlight, Spike, and Discord watch, the trickster eating popcorn from a bag he has procured and the dragon no longer toting the fire extinguisher.)*

**Starlight:** *(exasperatedly)* Discord, this is all your fault!

**Discord:** *(affronted, dropping a few kernels)* Mine? I thought *you* were in charge here.

*(He materializes a catcher's mitt on his lion paw and crumples the bag into a ball.)*

**Discord:** *(winding up to throw)* But I'm happy to pitch in if you need me.

*(Instead of hurling a fastball, he sets the wad back on the mitt and flicks it casually to the floor. The mitt itself then vanishes, and an annoyed Spike flies a recycling bin across the way and drops the litter into it on the next line.)*

**Starlight:** What I need is for you to leave!

*(He snaps himself into the form of a giant leaf, easily twice her height and still sporting his eyes and bushy brows.)*

**Discord:** Happy now? *(He turns his "back" on her; Spike returns without the bin.)*

**Spike:** Come on, Discord. *(Half-turn back to them.)* You know that's not what she means.

**Discord:** Fine! *(He drifts to a window.)* From now on, I won't try to help... *(Knock it open; float away on the wind.) ...at all!*

**Starlight:** *(sighing, wiping forehead)* Thanks, Spike. Let's just hope he stays gone.

**Spike:** I wouldn't count on it. I think Discord's trying to test you.

**Starlight:** *(sighing, pacing)* But why? I thought we were friends.

**Spike:** *(hovering alongside her)* Well, it's kinda what he does, even to ponies or dragons he cares about.

**Starlight:** *(laughing derisively)* Well, I'm ready for him.

*(The two approach a portrait of Twilight hanging on a wall.)*

**Starlight:** I told Twilight I'd run her school right— *(Stomp for emphasis on the last word.)* —and I'm gonna keep that promise... *(icily)* ...no matter what.

*(Once the two have moved on, the painting's purple eyes become the red/yellow ones of Discord, brows and all. After a long squint in their general direction, he pushes his whole head up past the top edge of the frame and both sets of digits extend out from behind it to grip both sides. The painting itself is left with two holes where the eyes had been. Dissolve to the exterior of the School that night, the sky rapidly lightening into morning of the next day.)*

**Starlight:** *(voice over)* Good morning, students!

*(Cut to the entrance hall and zoom in slowly on her; Spike, Maud Pie, Spitfire, and Trixie facing the gathered student body. Spitfire is in her military uniform jacket and sunglasses.)*

**Starlight:** I know there's been a little bit of adjustment since the professors left for their trip— *(Close-up; she gestures toward the new arrivals.)* —but I've brought in *new* new teachers!

*(Pan slightly to frame these three, the Wonderbolt giving a salute.)*

**Starlight:** *(pacing past them)* And now everything should run smoothly. *(Chuckles.)* Now it's time for class, and don't forget—this afternoon is the spell-venger hunt!

*(Excited conversation ripples through the crowd as the students disperse and the three fill-ins follow Starlight and Spike. Dissolve to a long shot of Twilight's lecture hall, a few last arrivals joining the audience already in their seats. The doors burst open to admit Discord back in his draconequus form; his unexpected arrival and choice of outfit elicit a round of gasps. Gray T-shirt marked by a black lightning bolt; red jacket and backwards baseball cap; long blue shorts that sag down far enough to expose the heart-patterned white boxers beneath them.)*

**Discord:** Yo! Greetings, fellow creatures! *(He poofs down to wedge himself between Gallus, Ocellus, and Smolder.)* Is this seat taken?

*(The three spread away from him, distrust playing across the faces of Gallus and Smolder as Ocellus voices a nervous little laugh. They and the rest of the class are promptly treated to an explosion of smoke from the stage, within which Trixie materializes.)*

**Trixie:** Welcome, class. You may call me the Great and Powerful Professor Trix—

*(The ringing of a telephone stops her cold before she can hit the last syllable; Discord glares indignantly around himself.)*

**Discord:** *(lion-paw digit to lips)* Shhhh! Really! That's so inconsiderate.

*(He offers Trixie a "please continue" smile and gesture, but a second ring breaks the silence all over again. Shifting in his seat, he exposes a lunch bag that had been tucked under his tail, decorated with drawings of a smiling sun and Fluttershy's equally happy face. A bit of fishing around inside brings up a banana, which proves to be the source of the noise.)*

**Discord:** Oh, I better take this.

*(He lounges across the cushions in close-up, fruit to ear as if it were an actual phone; the nearest students clear off with dirty looks. Muffled gabbling is heard over the line between his words.)*

**Discord:** Hello?...Oh, he did not!...And what did you say? *(Gasp; big smile.)* You did not! *(Gabbling continues.)*

**Trixie:** *(from o.s., really fed up)* Discord! *(crossing to him, pointing)* Why are you here? *(He covers the "mouthpiece" end of the banana; line goes quiet.)*

**Discord:** Why, I'm a student of friendship, of course—*(smugly)*—unless you don't think you're good enough to teach me.

**Trixie:** Of course I am! *(She stalks back to the stage, then rounds on him again.)* No fruit calls in my class!

*(As she returns to her post, he shrugs and peels the banana to reveal an actual telephone handset, which he swallows whole. Now Trixie addresses the class.)*

**Trixie:** Magic is the most important element of friendship. *(rearing up, spreading cape)* So today, I, the Great and Powerful Trixie, will put on a magic show.

*(Awed murmurs from every spectator save Discord, who snaps his talons without being seen. The blue unicorn floats her hat off, rests it upside down on the stage, and dips a hoof inside with the intent of producing something from it. What she pulls out partway is a fat, pink, happily squealing pig—perfectly ordinary, except for the fact that it has wings. It takes her a moment to notice and hurriedly stuff the porker back inside—clearly not the effect she had intended. A hasty grin and rummage, and now she yanks out Derpy Hooves by the wings, as far as the midsection. The cross-eyed pegasus waves to the crowd as Trixie offers a bigger, more embarrassed grin and shoves her back down—strike two. On her third attempt, she comes up with an Ursa Major—the gargantuan, star-filled, purple bear whose offspring ravaged Ponyville in “Boast Busters.” Claws and teeth and roar send all but Discord into a screaming flight toward the exit.)*

**Discord:** *(laughing)* I’m learning so much. Aren’t you? *(Trixie has wound up huddled on the stage.)*

**Trixie:** *(snarling)* DISCORD!

*(Now he follows the others out, the Ursa vanishing in a flash; she stands up and levitates the hat back onto her head, only to be immediately interrupted by a telephone ring. A banana is promptly floated out from under the headwear and the ends positioned by ear and mouth.)*

**Trixie:** Hello? *(Blabbering over the line; she starts to pace away.)* Um, uh, what exactly is a long-distance plan?

*(The indistinct voice fades away as the view dissolves to the buckball field. Cranky and his student-run pampering have been cleared from midfield, and Spitfire flies away as several students clamber wearily onto the bleacher seats around the perimeter—the end of a rigorous physical education class session, no doubt. Among them, Sandbar can barely prop himself upright, Silverstream is stretched out on her back, and Yona uses her looped braids as a makeshift fan to cool herself off. Discord appears here in a flash, having changed into a yellow golf shirt, blue shorts, red/white sneakers with striped athletic socks, and a red/blue baseball cap. He is equipped with a clipboard and a whistle on a lanyard around his neck, and he has grown a mustache to match his beard and eyebrows.)*

**Discord:** Take a lap, team!

**Sandbar:** Uh, actually, we just finished Professor Spitfire’s workout.

**Discord:** Sounds like somepony needs a little motivation.

*(A blast on his whistle and a poof from behind the bleachers bring a growling bugbear to the scene—see “Slice of Life” for details on this monster. Roaring and snapping its jaws, it begins to chase the luckless, screaming students around the perimeter of the field.)*

**Silverstream:** *(excitedly)* Oh, I’ve never run so fast in my life! Oh, this is great!

*(But perhaps not so much for Yona, who begins to fall behind and flag badly. Sandbar, badly winded, stops to address Discord.)*

**Sandbar:** Hey, Coach? We need a break.

**Discord:** Friendship is about honesty, so believe me when I say... *(leaning into his face)*  
...WE’RE NOT STOPPING!!

*(A whistle blast at point-blank range spooks the colt into resuming his mad dash, followed closely by Yona and then the bugbear. The savage jaws snap toward the yak’s short tail, missing by inches.)*

**Yona:** *(between breaths)* Yona...can’t run...faster!

*(She trips on the turf and slides to a stop on her belly, the behemoth going into a dive and angling its stinger. Before the barb can drive home, a beam of magic rips into view from one side and scores a direct hit to drop the bugbear like a ton of bricks. It rolls itself upright with a woozy grumble and scurries away, and Sandbar/Silverstream/Yona look back in the direction from which the spell was cast. The shooter proves to be a good-and-angry Starlight walking onto the field, followed by Spike.)*

**Starlight:** Discord, that’s enough! Endangering students crosses the line! I don’t know why you’re trying to ruin this school— *(stomping for emphasis)* —but it stops now!

*(The recipient of this tongue-lashing drops his clipboard, pulls off his cap and mustache, and reverts to his usual appearance in a flash.)*

**Discord:** *(smugly)* I wouldn’t be so sure.

**Starlight:** *(menacingly, warming up horn)* This is your last warning. *(Spike plants himself in front of her.)*

**Spike:** *(laughing gamely)* Hey, take it easy, Starlight. Discord’s your friend, remember? *(The students gather at a distance behind Starlight.)*

**Starlight:** Well, he’s not acting like it.

**Spike:** *(sighing)* She’s right, Discord. What’s your problem? *(Starlight powers down.)*

**Discord:** My problem? How is the fact that Twilight decided to put an incompetent, power-hungry unicorn in charge of her school *my* problem?

*(The unicorn in question utters one soft gasp, then kicks her horn up to overdrive without any warning and lets him have it with a yell. Her magical onslaught lifts Discord clear of the ground and disintegrates his flailing form to leave not even a single bit of beard hair; it also rips a*

*furrow in the earth that starts at midfield and extends well past one of the pole-mounted goal baskets. As the dust clears, the students murmur fearfully among themselves, catching Starlight's attention at last.)*

**Starlight:** *(laughing airily, turning to them)* Don't worry. I just banished him from School grounds forever. *(Spike inspects the torn-up area.)* He's fine.

*(The young scholars disperse, thoroughly unconvinced, and Starlight gloomily lets her head dip.)*

**Spike:** That probably made things worse. Why didn't you just talk to Discord?

**Starlight:** Because he's right about one thing. I've been doing a terrible job as headmare.

**Spike:** *(patting her shoulder)* No, you haven't. Discord is just being...Discord.

**Starlight:** Maybe. But I wonder why me being in charge bothers him so much. *(School bell rings; Spike brightens.)*

**Spike:** We can figure that out after the spell-venger hunt. *(running toward School)* Come on!

*(She trots after him, a hopeful smile settling on her face. Dissolve to an extreme close-up of the School's closed front doors, which three approaching students push open to frame a full entrance hall beyond. Zoom in slowly on Starlight and Spike addressing a large gathering.)*

**Starlight:** For this afternoon's spell-venger hunt...

*(Close-up. She conjures up images of the six artifacts presented by Twilight in the prologue, while a bucket rests next to him.)*

**Starlight:** ...you'll need to use the artifacts' history to find where they're hidden in the castle.

*(The images merge into a single question mark; close-up of this, zooming out slightly. Two ponies now stand flanking it, each with a wristwatch-like device strapped to one foreleg.)*

**Starlight:** *(from o.s.)* When you spot one... *(The mark becomes the Amulet of Aurora.)* ...touch it with a magic shield to keep track of your score.

*(One pony does so on the end of this line, his device's face changing to show a check mark. Cut to Spike gaining a bit of altitude and carrying the bucket—full of these shields—and a scroll. As he speaks, he unrolls the document to show sketches of the outlines of students' heads, paired up and joined by plus signs.)*

**Spike:** Twilight left a list of your hunt partners before she left. *(He sticks it to a column.)* I'll pass out the shields.

*(Now he cruises slowly overhead, dropping one to each student, and soon returns to Starlight's side with an empty bucket. She floats up a small gong and mallet.)*

**Starlight:** Ready...set...spell-venger hunt!

*(A tap against the brass touches off a scramble of happy conversation and sends them off on the search, and she sends the instrument away.)*

**Spike:** *(to Starlight, hovering, leaving bucket behind)* Come on! We can use Twilight's observatory to watch the teams!

*(She follows him away. Out in the hallways, the teams are hard at it, every member having strapped on his/her shield. Ocellus and Smolder form one such pair, the former trotting and the latter flying.)*

**Smolder:** I hope you know where you're going.

**Ocellus:** To the Helm of Yiksler!

**Smolder:** *(pausing briefly, shrugging)* Eh, works for me.

*(She catches up to the changeling at a junction, the camera zooming out to frame a connecting hallway lined with suits of armor and wall-mounted torches, banners, and weapons. The two proceed slowly down the way.)*

**Ocellus:** In our book, it says Yiksler was an honorable yak warrior. Any enemies that saw him put down their weapons in peace. I think his artifact must be in one of these suits of armor.

*(As she finishes, they stop not far from a suit whose head has been crowned with the Helm of Yiksler. Smolder then casts her eyes from side to side, the camera shifting to her perspective and panning among the suits until she spots the Helm. Zoom in on this, then cut back to her.)*

**Smolder:** *(dryly, pointing)* I'm guessing that one.

*(Zoom out slightly. Ocellus is now consulting the book she showed off in the prologue; she raises her eyes from the pages with a smile, snapped back to reality by her teammate, and both hold their shields near the Helm to check it off.)*

**Ocellus:** Yes! One down, five to go!

*(Smolder gives her a high five with just a bit too much force, knocking her to her haunches, then helps her up. Zoom out slightly, a circular border appearing around the image, then cut to Starlight and Spike on the start of the next line. They are in the uppermost room of a tower equipped with a telescope aimed out one window, star charts, and other astronomy/stargazing-related paraphernalia—the observatory Spike mentioned. He hovers near Starlight, who has been peering through the telescope from her perch in a small basket suspended by ropes from the ceiling. The floor has been cut away beneath this, suggesting that it serves as an elevator for entering/exiting the room.)*

**Starlight:** *(warmly)* Aw, Ocellus and Smolder found their first artifact. *(Looking through the eyepiece again, she becomes concerned.)* Wait. What's that?



*(Her perspective: the armor wearing the Helm begins to advance threateningly on the pair, forcing them to back up. Cut to the scene.)*

**Ocellus:** *(hiding behind Smolder as she lands)* Uh, I don't think that's part of the spell-venger hunt!

*(Its subsequent attempt to tackle them is definitely out of line, then, and they flee yelling as it hits the floor in a crash of metal and a cloud of dust. It gets upright and gives chase all too quickly for their comfort.)*

**Ocellus:** The School is haunted!

**Smolder:** *(yelping)* Not cool!

*(Cut to Starlight and Spike, who recoil from the eyepiece with a double cry of fear, and fade to black.)*

### Act Three

*(Opening shot: fade in to the School's library as Gallus and Silverstream enter.)*

**Silverstream:** We're totally gonna win this spell-venger hunt!

**Gallus:** Yeah, I doubt that. But at least I know where one of the artifacts is. Saw Spike hide it yesterday.

*(Cut to his perspective, stopping before three paintings on the wall—Yiksler the yak, Grover the griffon, and Aurora the hippogriff, judging from the accessories they wear. Gallus lifts his shield into view and is rewarded by a signal on its face locking in on Grover's image. Back to him, beak curving into a fiercely satisfied little grin; he flies to the wall and, with a bit of effort, swings the painting out on a hidden hinge as Silverstream arcs in for a look. Behind it is a small alcove containing...)*

**Gallus:** The Crown of Grover! Score! *(They lift their shields to mark it off.)* They say it's magic and King Grover used it to become the first ruler of Griffonstone. *(Both land.)* I know. Pretty sweet, right?

**Silverstream:** You paid attention in class!

**Gallus:** *(taken aback)* What?! *(indignantly)* I-I-If you ever tell an—

*(The painting swings back into place by itself, surprising both of them into silence, and the regal eyes burn red above a suddenly grimacing mouth. Grover's entire image leans forward off the canvas, becoming three-dimensional and giving them a new thrill.)*

**Gallus:** Whoa! *(Grover screeches at them.)*

**Silverstream:** Three-D painting!

*(The entire work takes the concept just a little too far by wrenching itself completely off the wall and going after the pair, sending them into a hollering race for the door. Elsewhere, a painting of a changeling—Mirage, based on the scepter she holds—begins to hiss at the nearest team and pops off the wall to get at them. Both flee with vocal cords working overtime, the earth pony jumping on her pegasus partner's back for an emergency airlift. Pan quickly to yet another team looking over the balcony shelves until a portrait of Clover the Clever—judging from her cloak—detaches itself from the wall with a venomous hiss and sends them yelling and clearing out.)*

*(Cut to Starlight's telescope-magnified perspective of the book-based bedlam, Aurora's picture having now gotten into the act, and zoom in on one particular stretch of shelves at the far wall on the ground floor. Discord's head protrudes among the masses of literature as a translucent gray specter of his usual form, and he is laughing himself stupid over the raging mayhem. He extricates himself fully with an ecstatic whoop.)*

*\*\*\* His laughter and whoop reverberate slightly, as will all of his lines and vocal effects until further notice. \*\*\**

*(Cut to Starlight in the observatory.)*

**Starlight:** *(pushing telescope away)* Yep, that's definitely Discord. *(hoof to forehead)* This is not good.

**Spike:** I thought you banished him from the School.

**Starlight:** Only his body. *(sourly)* Apparently his ghost can come and go just fine. Let's go. We have to stop this.

*(A pull at one of the central basket's supporting ropes triggers a mechanism to lower her through the floor. Cut to her descending through the tower's height as Spike flies down to her; the surrounding walls are studded with gems, stars moons, and the School's crest.)*

**Starlight:** How? No offense, but I don't think magic is the answer against Discord.

**Spike:** *(smiling confidently)* This time, I'm not using magic.

*(Wipe to Sandbar and Yona at the base of a staircase, the earth pony examining a few books on a nearby shelf as he climbs to a landing. The yak has chosen to strap her shield to one of her braids instead of a hoof.)*

**Yona:** Hmmm...what Yona look for?

**Sandbar:** The Shell of Knuckerbocker. It's like a seashell, but if you blow into it, you call a dragon. There's a sweet poem in our book about it. *(reciting)* "Climb to the heights with dragon flight."

*(He gasps as a burst of inspiration hits.)*

**Sandbar:** *(pointing upstairs)* Like “flight of stairs”!

**Yona:** Yona take pony word for it.

*(The first hoof she places on a step begins to sink into the surface, accompanied by a moist squelching sound as if she had just stepped in a great deal of gluey mud.)*

**Yona:** Huh?

*(She tries to pull free, only for the mire to suck her hoof down even deeper; soon she has all four of them on the stairs and is properly stuck. The entire flight wastes no time in transforming to quicksand, and Sandbar’s weight begins to drag him down.)*

**Sandbar:** *(grunting, grabbing at banister)* What’s...happening?

**Yona:** Y-Yona not know, but Yona do know...YONA NOT LIKE SPELL-VENGER HUNT!!

*(The inexorable tide sweeps both of them slowly off the stairs and back into the hallway as Discord’s spirit manifests itself with a hearty laugh and a string of goofy vocal sound effects. His snap causes Knuckerbocker’s Shell to appear in midair, and he seizes it and creates a portal just big enough for him to fly through and leave the area. After it fades away, the camera shifts to the far end of the hall, where Gallus/Silverstream and Ocellus/Smolder flee from their respective foes. The first team stops short to avoid being hit broadside by another pair fleeing from the armor bedecked with the Helm, while the second gets a good eyeful of the portraits of Grover and Mirage going after some other ponies who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Both pairs hustle to the quicksand staircase, Gallus working to free Sandbar and Smolder doing likewise for Yona; Silverstream drops to a terrified huddle and covers her eyes, while Ocellus bolts away with a cry only to find the crazed armor cutting off her retreat.)*

**Ocellus:** *(running from it and Mirage’s portrait)* Whoa!

*(All six gather into a terrified knot, Sandbar and Yona now free of the quicksand. The camera is positioned at ground level to point through Starlight’s legs as she steps into view; cut to her and Spike on the next line.)*

**Starlight:** Everycreature, STOP!!

**Silverstream:** B-B-B-But the School is haunted!

**Starlight:** It’s not haunted, it’s Discord.

*(A painting of Knuckerbocker floats by on this last—a formidable red dragon in gold robes, holding the Shell. One blinding flash then puts the entire hallway back in order, and a second deposits Discord in midair near the rafters, the artifacts circling around him.)*

**Discord:** Headmare Starlight, look at me, look! *(He angles himself closer.)* I won the spell-venger hunt! Well done, me! Now what’s my prize?

**Spike:** *(acidly)* Detention!

**Discord:** *(magically tossing items high overhead)* Well, that’s disappointing.

*(His eyes shrinking to panic-stricken points, the little guy hurls himself belly-first to the carpet and manages to catch the Amulet, Talisman of Mirage, Crown, and Shell with the help of both arms, one leg, and his tail. The Helm plunks itself down over his head, and Clover the Clever's Cloak settles over him and the lot.)*

**Starlight:** Discord, you can't keep messing up the School!

**Discord:** On the contrary, I think I rather can—and will.

**Starlight:** Then I have just one thing to say to you.

**Discord:** *(eagerly, floating down to her level)* Well, do go on.

**Starlight:** I'm sorry. *(Discord backs off, completely floored; Spike has stood up and piled the artifacts on the carpet.)*

**Discord:** What?

*(The acting headmare zaps him with a spell that restores his body and leaves him standing in the middle of the hallway.)*

\*\*\* *His voice loses its reverberation at this point.* \*\*\*

**Starlight:** I had to stop thinking like a headmare and start thinking like a guidance counselor to finally understand. You felt left out.

**Discord:** *(turning away, stammering hesitantly)* Uh...I-I-I don't know what you're getting at.

**Starlight:** No pony ever invited you to the School— *(crossing to him)* —and when you offered to help, I didn't listen.

*(Slow pan across the six students, who gradually begin to smile.)*

**Starlight:** *(from o.s.)* I was so worried about doing things Twilight's way, I didn't stop to think about being a good friend. *(Back to her.)* I'd like to apologize for that—and offer you the job of vice-headmare.

**Spike:** Huh?

**Silverstream:** Really?

**Gallus:** What?

**Ocellus:** Why?

**Yona:** No!

**Smolder:** Him?

**Sandbar:** Totally confused.

*(Pan/tilt up from them to the draconequis, who turns toward Starlight with a beaming smile and forelimbs thrown wide.)*

**Discord:** I accept! *(He shakes hooves to Starlight, then reins himself in.)* I mean, I-I suppose I can find some time in my busy schedule to help you out. *(counting off items on talons)* But I will need my own office, expense account, parking space...

**Spike:** You're new to the world of education, aren't you?

**Starlight:** *(to Discord)* Next time you want something, just ask for it, all right?

*(He sweeps a protesting Spike into a hug and turns to her.)*

**Discord:** But then we'd miss out on all those delightful misadventures.

**Spike:** Hey! *(He pulls free and hovers.)* Watch the wings!

**Starlight:** Now, Vice-Headmare Discord, if you'll help me get this spell-venger hunt back in order... *(He snaps his talons; the artifacts vanish.)*

**Discord:** Everything is re-hidden.

*(A small painting of a flower jumps off the wall and zooms off, causing Silverstream to cry out when it barely misses her and Ocellus.)*

**Discord:** *(chuckling)* Well, with a few surprises.

*(Zoom out to a long shot of the gathering, accompanied by the bang of a door being thrown open. Twilight and company plod into view toward them, every mare a disheveled, filthy wreck ready to flatten him with a steamroller if one were available.)*

**Twilight:** Discord! I can't believe you tricked us into going on a friendship quest that wasn't real!

**Discord:** *(disappointedly)* Oh, back so soon?

**Rarity:** A glamour spell on our cutie marks!

**Rainbow:** A fake summons from the map?

**Pinkie:** *(smiling)* Hey! At least we got to go spelunking in that really creepy cave with all those eyeless worm creatures chasing us.

**Yona:** *(elated, hugging Applejack)* Oh, Yona so glad ponies back!

**Applejack:** *(to other mares)* Uh...y'all get the feelin' we missed somethin'? *(All but Twilight and Starlight move off.)*

**Twilight:** Thanks for taking care of the School, Starlight.

**Starlight:** It was a challenge. Heh. *(They follow.)* But I think things turned out just the way you'd have handled them. *(Spike flies up to Discord.)*

**Spike:** *(smugly)* Guess this means you're not vice-headmare anymore.

**Discord:** *(holding up stacks of cards)* Oh, poo! I just ordered business cards!

*(He lets them spray toward the camera—his name repeated several times in varied font sizes, next to his beaming face—and the view snaps to black as one fills the screen.)*