

Fragment of the interview № EKE44-0UVCX-KJH7S-8L99Y

Venue: DEPI, Equestrian headquarters

Date: 04.11.2037

Interviewer: (Administrator) Manestein

Interviewee: (Administrator) Iron Gears

Age: (with space-time distortions) 31 year

Sex: M

Race: Pony, Pegasus

[16:53] Iron Gears: You know what I'm thinking about looking at you, Manestein?..

[16:54] Manestein: Hm-m-m? What is it?

[16:54] Iron Gears: Do you often have dreams about ponies you knew once and who are not alive anymore?

[16:54] Manestein: Eh, no, I don't think so... I mean... well, I sometimes have dreams about my parents. And my sister with my cousin, who I used to spend a lot of time together with when I was just a foal. But seldom, very seldom... One could say almost never.

[16:54] Iron Gears: Lucky you. And I have these dreams quite often. They ask me questions about my life. And I answer it...

[16:54] Manestein: Do you? I didn't know.

[16:54] Iron Gears: Mhm... Well, not 'often' but... I have those once in two months or so. Sometimes less often. And this is when I start thinking what does actually happen to a pony after their death? I mean, yes, we know about it in general but... does it all really happen the way we think it does? We must pay our respect to zebras: it looks like they've reached understanding of the cosmic universe as close as possible it is for a pony to do with their complex studies of the Metasoul. At least much closer than all of the research facilities for exact and pony sciences together. Except for our research facility though.

[16:54] Manestein: Except for ours? You know, it all depends on the perspective you look at it.

*[16:55] Iron Gears: Beyond dispute it does. It's just what I find rather interesting is... if I have my own foals once, could I meet them after I die? I mean, well, not a single pony knows such a case, and I'm not talking now about the usage of the Amulet of Dreams by princess Celestia and some particular capabilities of princess Luna in necromancy. I'm talking more about whether **I** can see them after I die even if **they** won't, or my soul would go straight away to the Limbo having detached from this world entirely? Am I able to 'arrange' such a 'meeting' at my own wish while being in the Limbo? And what's even more interesting... whether I have a chance to see them after their death and further rebirth in another world I've never belonged to? And if the answer to this one is a 'yes' than, just theoretically, how far can I go down this chain?*

May 14th 2079. 10:44 AM. Equestrian Wasteland. Bunker 54.

After this incident with East Hammer and Lemon Flesh was over, I felt somewhat proud of myself and my parliamentarian work done! Of course I, as well as any other Bunker's normal pony, did not believe East could be a better Administrator than Lemon was (even is a ve-e-ery distant future). Due to many reasons: too young, too opinionated, too impulsive, too suspicious, too unstable... And incredibly dependent on the opinion of others. Heh, she reminded me somewhat of myself. Although... it would be better to put it like this: she did partially remind me of myself with all of my demerits in a highly hypertrophied form. And she wasn't like me in

anything else. Absolutely. Like, period. A have much more in common with Rusty than with her, you know! Actually, when you give it a thought, we were pretty much alike with Rusty in many respects. And it was peculiar indeed. In general, it was one of the main reasons for such a long-lasting perennial friendship of ours to be born. I wonder... if I hadn't eavesdropped by mere chance back then that Sharp was going to kill him, if I hadn't warned him about it and we hadn't skedaddled from Las Pegasus in that aircar, he would've been dead long ago and I wouldn't even know about his existence. A mere chance... if not for this chance, we would've never met with him. And what I didn't really like to think about: if Equus hadn't been flooded with a wave of nuclear explosions and megaspells twenty one year ago... none of my current pals: neither Catastrophe, nor Shadow, nor Nuclear, nor Rusty, nor even Spitfire, nor anycreature else would've met me in the first place. Of course I would still have my brother with sister but still, consanguinity won't do you many favors in a long run. Don't get me wrong: I love both Primary and Auxiliary, but when your circle of acquaintances is limited to two or three ponies, it's slowly starting to drive you crazy day after day. In fact, it was the reason I left Manehattan eleven years ago and departed to the Wasteland in search of adventures. Well, anyway, I never regretted doing so! But still... if everything had remained the same, I would be doomed to drag out my wretched meaningless existence further more all by myself. Yeah, one heck of a prospect, alright... Okay, I'll do my best not to think about it now. There, I have a corridor to patrol! An absolutely... empty... corridor... Argh! Who would've thought a bunker security guard's job is such a boring and tedious one? Heh, I'm starting to understand it better why East was so eager to sign up for the Scouts. I was strolling around all the passages in the sector slowly back and forth. Oh, Celestia, it was so bo-o-o-oring!.. It was an incredibly boring work indeed. I made a few remarks to some mares, lectured a couple of stallions breaking some generally excepted behavior norms in Bunker and kept wandering back and forth along corridors of the sector, lit by cold white luminescent lights, again. *BO-O-O-ORI-I-I-ING!*

I came back to where I began and started thinking how to entertain myself. Unfortunately, when you simply stand all the time, the number of the alternatives narrows drastically. Into none. Nevertheless, I came up with an entertainment, the one I would be obsessed with every time I had to wait for something – I started dreaming. To be more precise, I was contemplating about the plot of one more novel about Daring Do of mine. In difference with some third-rate literature writers I would always take my future books very seriously: I could literally spend months building particular characters, arranging its plot and remaking it once new original thoughts and ideas appeared, which would usually, proudly enough to say, end up pretty good, one could even call it a masterpiece almost every time, coming up with some interesting details and references to some other books of mine, various symbols, from zebra philosophy too, some vague allusions and mystical moments, which were left as potential theories for readers to make, and to be more precise to the listeners of the DJ PON-3's radio wave because it's a bit of a problem when we talk about printing of books at the Equestrian Wasteland. But I didn't lose hope that one day, maybe, my books would get a real hard cover with illustrations and become widespread in large circulation. Hm, I'm pretty sure I'll have to deal with Elite at some point, even though I don't like them. They must have book printing presses somewhere. But even my novels being as they were: written in a single copy by me on my Featherweight typewriter and often having a voice-over made by me and the DJ and sometimes by my other friends – and from time to time by radio guests too – made a great success in the Wasteland! Of course I had haters too, who did their best at getting back at me, but the number of my supporters was much, much larger indeed! Heh, I wonder would I be able to get a 'Golden Feather' literature award for at least one of my Daring Do books? Aw, that would be terrific! But I'm not boasting with my novels and tales or something, really! I just... make some serious proofreading of everything I write. And... well, I tend to analyze other authors' adventure fiction books, as well as mine, and I believe the one thing I've reached some equally great progress as in breaking locks and hacking into terminals is the craft of writing! Of course it may not be true but... I really wanted to think that way. On the other hoof, why not to think this way if I had a valid ground for it. Anyway, I got tired very

quickly of dreaming that day for some reason. I got my communicator out of my saddlebag, plugged the tiny headphones into my ears and started listening to music. I was standing like this for an hour or so.

And then I spotted a mare, lonely wandering at the further part of the corridor. Hm, that's interesting... I never noticed when she appeared there. But I was even more curious about who she was. A light lilac unicorn mare with her hair put into a bun in her middle forties to fifty, with her mane and her tail in striped dark lilac and red colors, in a pretty decent armor, very similar with the one Dery wears, with some sort of a strange unusual electronic contraption attached to her front left leg. She would appear in the Bunker 54 before as well, even though I was probably the only one who has ever seen her. And for the very least a few times. She would always either walk too far away from me, so when I ran to the place where she was, she was already gone, or she would succeed at slipping away in the very last moment behind another turn. And I had literally no idea how she was doing it! Our Bunker must've had some secret maintenance passages only she knew about and, perhaps, the Administrator as well. Anyway, despite the fact the female unicorn wore armor that looked suspiciously like the one worn by the Fifty Four's security guards, absolutely all the ponies who worked there, including Dery herself, replied to me none of them has ever seen a mare looking like this. And it would only add extra fuel to the fire of my curiosity. She turned the corner. Having packed my earbuds and my communicator back to my saddlebag beforehoof I galloped up to the intersection of corridors and saw her turning (this time) right at the next intersection. When I reached the second intersection the unicorn mare, who was incredibly far away from me again, turned left. I ran following her. I had no idea how she was doing it: the new-comer would walk slowly, but as soon as I would lose her from sight she turned up fifty feet away! The thing is: not a single unicorn is able to teleport with such a speed and stay in shape – normally, a few displacements in a row is enough to wear a unicorn out, so there's no way they can go on without a break. After all, even Nuclear can't transfer himself from one place to another that fast!

But as soon as I ran to a new intersection of corridors and dived into the one the stranger took, I found myself in the half-empty Bunker's Atrium. I looked around in a fuss, asked some ponies standing around... no use, the stranger literally vanished into thin air.

Her next appearance though wasn't long after – after about an hour and half I saw this familiar (or to be more precise, absolutely not) mare again not too far away from the place I was patrolling the sector all by myself while listening to music from my communicator. Having noticed her, I plucked out both earbuds right away and shouted:

“Miss, please, come here to me for a moment!”

Hm, did I say something wrong? Because the female unicorn totally ignored my words.

“Miss, miss! You! With a red with violet mane! I wanted to ask you something.”

And again no reaction whatsoever! The stranger went on walking along the corridor in a slow pace until she turned right at the closest intersection of the corridors.

“Is she mocking me or something?”

I kept following the lilac unicorn. And again, as soon as I thought I needed just a little bit to reach her, she would manage to increase the distance between us drastically!

“Miss, how... can you... cover such a... distance so... fast?” I asked her, panting. She showed no signs of hearing me again and then turned to the stairs. Now this is getting ridiculous! Is she playing tag with me? I ran four floors up the stairs, following the stranger, then another corridor intersections appeared. If it would be like that, she would simply get away from me! No way I could let it happen. For the very least 'cause this mare apparently did know some secret passages in the bunker and was not its dweller. How did she even manage to...? Oh, yeah, we are a 'Medical Bunker' after all, right... but anyway, it doesn't make up for the fact she deliberately acted mysteriously weird, not even mentioning nopony knows her in here in the first place! Finally, I was on a roll: a light-lilac mare hid away in the doorway leading to a storage room! I dashed to the door, slammed it close and tuned on the alarm. After a few minutes half a dozen ponies wearing the bunker's security guard uniform with batons and guns appeared, some of

them had helmets. At the head of this 'organized column' stood Dery – the chief of the Bunker 54's security.

"Paradox?!" she sounded surprised. "Did you turn on the sector's alarm? What happened?"

"Dery, do you remember me telling you about one middle-aged mare with a red and violet mane, wearing a security guard uniform who wanders around the Fifty Forth from time to time?"

"Yes, I do. And?"

"And I saw her entering this storage room! I slammed it close right away and turned the alarm so now we can finally find out who she is!"

"Yeah, that's, that's good indeed..." the chief of the security said and scanned me with her eyes, then she cleared her throat in a demonstrative way. "Ehem, may you step off the door then so that we could get in?"

"Oh! Yeah, sure thing," I replied with a silly smile and sprang away.

Dery opened the door to the storage room and cautiously entered it while levitating a police shotgun next to her. The other ponies entered it after her, including me as well. Security guards split up and started to frisk the passages between numerous racks. I stopped near the entrance, looking at flashlight beams running back and forth along the dull lit storage room. Ponies were investigating every corner of the room cautiously, and this is where I should give them credit: nopony would escape such a control. Nopony but for this mysterious mare. After fifteen minutes Dery exited the storage with the other security guards.

"There's nopony in there, Paradox," she stated.

"Wait, what?" I didn't get it.

"What you've heard. This storage room is empty. I've walked it around in a circle for the third time now by myself."

"No, Dery, give me a second... this can't be true, I saw her entering here..."

Feeling the chief of the security's skeptical look on my back (and other ponies' too, I presume) I entered the storage room and started looking for her at all the shelves, pipes under the ceiling – any places she could potentially hide herself in. I don't know why they used their flashlights, even though the lighting was dull here, it was enough to see everything around. One could even read those labels on crates easily with very little tension to their eyes, thanks to the brown color of the walls making your eyes feel somewhat relaxed.

"Erm-m, miss? Where are you? We don't wanna hurt you, I just need to talk to you about something..."

I was inspecting all possible and even some impossible places where the mare could hide. But all was in vain – it looked like the mare vanished into thin air.

"Miss? Miss, where are you?" I was more like asking myself after I've finished probably my fifth circle around this stupid storage. Okay, I must admit, this place wasn't so big after all...

"Paradox..." the chief said with some light traces of worry in her voice. "is everything alright with you?"

I stopped and looked back.

"What are you trying to say with this, Dery?"

"Me... no, I'm not hinting at anything but... maybe I should suggest somepony else replacing you? And in the meantime you could go, get some rest or something..."

Oh, I so don't like this tone of hers.

"Dery, I'm not crazy, okay? I saw her enter here! There's only one door to this storage, it means there's no way she could escape without being noticed."

"No, I didn't mean anything like that! Perhaps, well... you just overworked? You know, everypony can sometimes see something they want to see and not what actually is. Or even something totally unpredictable or random."

"But!.. But I saw... her..."

The chief of the security put her front hoof on my shoulder.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"I do. But face the truth: there's nopony here. Why do you deny your eyes could just be playing tricks with you, especially taking into consideration your current condition?"

"But... but she did..."

"Enter a tiny room that has no exit, and nine ponies couldn't find her?" I got it what she meant. "Pretty strange, isn't it?"

"Yeah... well, I dunno... she might've been a trick of my eyes in the end... I'm not sure in anything anymore."

"And so? Should I find somepony who would be able to replace you today until the end of the shift? There, I have like one sixth of my subordinates who are doing some sweet AF right now."

"No, Dery, I'm okay, thank you."

"You're sure? Paradox, are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Very well then. But if needed call me, and we will find a replacement for you."

And Dery with the other security guards left me alone in total bewilderment. I couldn't get it where she went since there was no other exit from this storage room! I walked again, more like because of my paranoia, along the racks and having found nopony got back to my patrol area.

Very soon, literally in half an hour if not less, was a lunch time break and I headed to the Bunker 54's canteen. Having taken a metal plate with pottage from Flan and another one with mashed potatoes and a salad I gave her my ration coupon and while levitating my tray with food chose a table at random, sat down to it and started eating being deep in thoughts. I couldn't get it how this female unicorn managed to escape. I was trying to find some logical explanation to what had happened, but it just didn't exist! Could she actually be just a trick played by my eyes today...? I actually had lots of doubts about it. And apart from it all she somehow looked like a vaguely familiar pony to me. Strange...

After finishing my lunch, I came back to my post and went on dying of boredom alone again. I kept thinking about when I'd be able to take the stranger aback and talk to her face-to-face. And lucky me, the chance didn't leave me hanging. In literally two hours I saw the lone, wandering along the corridor of my patrolling sector middle-aged lilac mare wearing a frayed bulletproof vest again. I ran after her, called her out a few times but again it seemed as if she either didn't hear me or ignored. Endeavored not to lose her from sight, I was galloping following her till we were on the second floor catwalk of the Atrium. The stranger went through a door leading to the next, now ordinary one, corridor, stopped opposite a square door, leading to Rusty Spanner's workshop, glanced at me, opened the door and entered. I got goose bumps. Having stopped for a few seconds not knowing what to do, I dashed forward again and sprang to his door. If she had disappeared this time again I would've had to ask Catastrophe to hold a few intensive psychiatry sessions with me. But she didn't. The violet female unicorn was standing next to Rusty in silence, who fell fast asleep of fatigue right in his own chair, whose right cheek was lying on the table, slowly stroking the pegasus's mane with her front hoof. I levitated my favorite revolver out of its holster and magically cocked it with a distinctive click.

"Miss, no funny business, please. Slowly step back from Rusty. You're doing anything stupid and you're dead, am I being clear?" I said, probably having got into a role of a bunker's security guard way too much. Or into a role of a bad cop from those old movies.

"You really are ready to shoot me?" the stranger said in sorrow with some hardly noticeable notes of pity in her voice, having turned around and made eye contact with me. Her look was unusual, deep, meaningful and mysterious... Her reply took me aback, to tell you the truth. I pointed my revolver a little to side from her even though I kept my telekinetic grip on a trigger lock.

"Miss, what's your name?" I asked her.

“What my name is?” the lilac unicorn asked again. “I’m not sure if my name matters anything now...”

“Still, who are you?”

The stranger looked at me with a pinch of surprise and disappointment.

“You don’t remember me, Paradox, do you?”

“Remember you? I don’t, to be fair. Except for all these few times you would appear here one day and every time you would succeed to hide away from me.”

“Well, as I expected. Even though I hoped your ability to see more than other ponies can would help to avoid such a confusion. But... not this time, apparently...”

“Have we met before? I mean... apart from these creepy appearances of yours in the Bunker here and there.”

The mare nodded.

“Yes, one can say so. But it was a very long time ago, that’s why no wonder you don’t remember me. It’s a pity... But rather expected nevertheless. And it’s still somewhat a pity you can’t really control your superpositions of memories. Otherwise, it would be much easier for both of us.”

“‘Superpositions of memories’?” I asked again. “Are you talking about these visions with nosebleed and eyesight ripple? Wait a second, where do *you* know about it from?”

The female unicorn kept silent for a few seconds. After that she turned her head to Rusty, smiled to the sleeping pegasus and patted his head for the last time.

“Do you mind if we go on talking outside? I think you don’t wanna wake up your buddy.”

I replied with something incoherent and went out from the workshop hesitantly. The lilac mare followed me. As soon as she left the room, a square door closed between us and Rusty. And it was at this moment I finally get it...

“You are Rusty’s mother, aren’t you?” I asked.

“Well... yes and no,” she replied. “The mare who gave birth to Rusty died about ten years ago in the Bunker Sixty-Three when a short circuit in the central mainframe occurred and maintenance robots started eliminating its dwellers. But I guess my impact on his character formation was still much more prominent than hers, believe it or not... And it’s somewhat surprising to me.”

Yes, I knew it perfectly well what happened in the Bunker 63, I was told about it by at least a few ponies, Rusty included. The pegasus was one of the small number of ponies who managed to escape the deadly underground trap back then.

“What are you trying to say by this?”

“A mere fact that his desire to live up to my standards played a cruel joke with him... I was a bad mother, Paradox. A pretty bad one. Good mothers don’t bring up their foals the way I did it. They don’t try to follow their every step, spy upon every wrongdoing they make as if eagerly waiting when it happens, having hidden oneself close by, peeping from a corner with a camcorder as a proof... They do teach their foals, for example, what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’ but never arrange a surveillance after them including help of other ponies with it. It was very low on my side. Even mean. And I also regret a lot my burning wish of him following in my hoofsteps. I should’ve not object against his hobby – playing cello. There was nothing shameful of it, and who knows what his destiny would be like if I hadn’t been so much strict with him.”

Oka-a-ay... I... think I got the main point. And even though I’d got a ton of questions to ask her, I decided not to interrupt the mare just yet and hear her out to the end.

“And this is what it has led to... You know, after my... incident... when I was... never mind... I... was able to follow and overwatch him. For quite some time, though it depends on the perspective you look at it. The main thing is I saw all of his deeds and everything that happened with him ever after. And it still makes my heart sad. No, not his deeds. But that I grew him up like this. You see, I cannot judge him for his decisions made due to my own life attitudes. It is so wrong, Paradox. I think you know it perfectly well what I’m talking about. You have been in the exact same situation he was. Like two peas in a pod.”

Was that an allusion to my parents? She actually knows something not any random pony knows about me, if you think of it...

"And I've seen almost all of his later life. And, unfortunately, it was only then I understood the main motive of his acts – the fact that he was trying to live up to my expectations, was trying to be the type of pony I wanted to make out of him. Even though, in fact, he didn't realize it. You have no idea how hard it was for me to be the one who was watching his following life, now off the Stable, and understood I was the only one responsible for all of his decisions. I regret it so much, Paradox. To the bottom of my heart I do. But he doesn't see me now, and I have no chance to make my apology. For everything. Even when his deeds were nowhere near what any decent pony would do... I didn't wanna rebuke him for it. Only myself. I never wanted such a life for him. I really didn't. And nonetheless I did my best *it* became his reality. And I also regret pushing him out right into the unknown so easily. But you know what... at least now everything's different. And I'm happy, I really am, that he did find his own happiness in the end. And of course I wanna say a great thank you for it. But... even now, after so much time has passed, he's still trying to follow my life attitude which, as it turned out, thanks to my efforts literally brainwashed him. And since you're almost the only one who can see me... Here," the lilac mare pulled an ordinary, turned yellow from time paper envelope out of her bulletproof vest with 'G. R.' letters written on its right top corner in a beautiful calligraphic hoofwriting and gave it to me. Erm, strange. She could've easily levitated it to me, she's a unicorn after all... I took the envelope hesitantly, "give it to him. He'll know what it means. Even though I'm more than sure that in the end he will just ignore these words."

"What's in there?" I asked.

"A guidance. Or to better say... just a piece of advice."

"Advice on what?"

The mare smiled sorrowfully and looked into my eyes.

"How not to become me."

The corridor lights suddenly shimmered, and when all the luminescent lamps tuned off for just one brief moment and turned back on again, the lilac mare was nowhere to be seen anymore.

"What the f*ck..." I said in half-whisper looking around. There was just no way she could've teleported away in such a small period of time, I'm telling you as a unicorn myself! I got shivers down my spine. Then my look fell onto the yellowish envelope, still being in my right front hoof. I ripped it accurately and pulled out a piece of paper folded in half. I unfolded it and after that a strong migraine stroke my head, it started rippling in my eyes and my ears were filled with a high-pitched whistle. I moved back right away just on my back hooves and hit a wall with my back that was the only reason I didn't fall. Having a pretty small nosebleed and heart palpitation I could literally hear with my ears, I was looking at the piece of paper that fell a few feet away from me in the middle of the corridor. Just an ordinary, usual yellowish-white square paper with just four words written on in with the same calligraphic hoofwriting the initial letters on the envelope were: "Do not ante up".