

The Conversion Bureau: Third Party

By PonySoldier

Chapter 2

“Present ARMS!” shouted Commander Thompson.

Every member of the EES raised their right hands or paws to salute Daniel’s body as it was laid in a cardboard casket on top of a conveyor belt, and then covered it with a sheet. A technician pulled a lever and the conveyor belt moved the casket into the furnace, where a heavy-duty door slid up and closed it. One of the human members of the EES raised a trumpet and played taps. As soon as the somber tune had finished, the furnace erupted to life.

The EES, being as secretive as it was, cremated all the bodies of their fallen canine agents to prevent any of their physical remains from being accidentally discovered. They hadn’t had to do so for a combat casualty in a long time, and combined with the fact that this was for the most respected agent in the EES, it was an extremely emotional time for everyone.

It was especially hard on Gunter. He had inspected Daniel’s fatal wound along with the EES Coroner when the Coroner had determined that the fatal shot just happened to hit the one weak spot in the armor Daniel was wearing; the zipper in the middle of the chest. Knowing that the rest of the armor would have otherwise prevented Daniel’s injury from being fatal, a feeling of dread went over him. The assailant wasn’t even that good of a shot; that bullet was the only one that hit him. All the other shots hit the wall and the floor. Yet, for one weak point in the armor, exploited completely by way of a freak accident, the best agent in the EES fell. He wouldn’t have felt this way if it was a head-shot, as that at least meant that the assailant was a very good shot, but somehow, knowing that he was a bad shot and still managed to kill the agent that every other canine in the EES looked up to really depressed and somewhat distraught him. Gunter grudgingly accepted that there wasn’t anything else he could do and as soon as the commander gave the “At Ease” order, where he turned and headed back to his bed to lay down and think. All he could think of, however, was what had happened.

Gunter and Daniel both realized that the one they had shot was an impostor due to their always-useful eyepieces, as they pointed out that there was a bullet hole in the black lapel of the Secret Service coat right where the heart is. This normally wouldn’t be alarming, since Secret Servicemen wore body armor, but when the eyepiece also picked up copious amounts of blood stained on it, the two canine agents knew something was very wrong, and quickly deduced that he was an impostor.

After Daniel had died, Gunter froze. He could only blink and breathe, but once the EES paramedics had arrived and removed the body, his mental haze broke. It was then Ambassador Quill’s turn to console, as she nuzzled her head against his side as he knelt at the same spot,

which still had a small blood stain on it. He didn't cry like she had, but he did put his paw on her back.

After that, it was a blur, but he did remember that the Ambassador was allowed to continue on her diplomatic duties without having her memory wiped, which included allowing her access to some relatively classified information, but not much, even though normal procedure would be to wipe her memory at the earliest possible time. It was a diplomatic formality, really, as having the Ambassador's memory wiped would have been a disastrous political move.

Gunter had also been assigned to personally escort Ambassador Quill back to the portal to Equestria the next day. Apparently she was staying in one of the White House's many guest rooms as it wasn't deemed safe enough to allow her to travel outside for a few days given what had happened. The Ambassador invited Gunter to attend a ceremony in Equestria's capital city, where he would be honored with an award, and Daniel with a posthumous one, for protecting her. He said that he would do it for Daniel, for the EES, for his country.

Before he knew it, he was back in the transport vehicle, this time wearing his standard armor with some added patches to be more ceremonial. It was very ad hoc, as EES agents never make public appearances, and only occasionally held their own private award ceremonies. On the upper-right chest portion of his armor was a patch with the EES logo, which resembled that of the CIA, but with a blue paw print in the center of the shield instead of a compass rose, and the words "Experimental Espionage Service" written above instead of "Central Intelligence Agency." On his left shoulder was his Agent ID number, which was 1425. 14 indicated his breed; a German Shepherd, as there are 14 letters in "German Shepherd," and 25 was a randomly assigned number, which indicated his individual identity. On his right shoulder, a patch with his name was placed. He was also suggested to wear a black beret, but he declined. Other than that, he wore all of his usual armor and gadgets, just to be safe, and at the request of Ambassador Quill, who wanted to present the awards to Gunter in, as she put it, "much the way he was when he valiantly protected me."

It was an exaggeration, sure, but he shrugged it off. Besides, he was going to an unfamiliar land, and he wouldn't want to be unprepared. He had no idea what the place looked like, what the general population was like, how they would react towards visitors from Earth, whether or not there was some religious cult that would try to lynch him on sight, or what, but he was armed to the teeth with weapons and years of training and missions under his belt. This time, though, he only carried his two pistols, but had a combat knife sheathed on his left hip instead of an MP5. A downgrade, sure, but he could wield either weapon equally well.

The van made a stop at the White House to pick up Ambassador Quill, which went uneventfully, as the Ambassador and her bodyguard were simply rushed into the van by the Secret Service from a dark space, likely the same underground parking garage where he and Daniel had been dropped off for the White House security mission. It went by without a word, and the van quietly proceeded to the D.C. Conversion Bureau.

Although he and the Ambassador were to enter Equestria alone, they were accompanied in the van by a squad of human EES operatives dressed and equipped like a police SWAT team to cover him as he made his way to the Bureau. Conversion Bureaus were built directly at the site of portals to prevent any unauthorized immigration into Equestria, as one would have to pass through the entire complex before reaching the portal, which itself was locked down like a bank vault. The actual conversion process took place within the bureaus, but orientation took place within Equestria itself. For Gunter's entrance, however, he had been granted a special permit by Ambassador Quill for temporary access to Equestria, meaning he did not need to go through the conversion process. The Bureau was temporarily closed to maintain the secrecy of the EES to unauthorized eyes, and in the interest of protecting Ambassador Quill. Since the EES did not have any operations going on in Equestria, nor did they plan to perform any, they figured there was little harm in exposing Gunter to the ponies of Equestria. That, and he was going to a private ceremony with only a few trustworthy guests, including the Princess, Ambassador Quill, their bodyguards, and a few additional, unspecified guests whom the Ambassador insisted were trusted by the Princesses themselves.

The van suddenly executed a 180-degree turn, and then stopped. The back doors opened and the human agents quickly filed out and secured the area. Gunter looked out and saw the entrance to the Conversion Bureau of the D.C. area; a plain-looking brick building. Nicknamed "The Equestrian Embassy" due to its location in D.C., it bore the nickname with pride in gold-plated letters above a glass double-door, each one with a portrait of the front halves of two ponies whom Quill identified as the two Princesses who ruled Equestria; On the left door was a white one with a horn similar to the one on Ambassador Quill's forehead, except longer and white, a golden tiara atop her head, a necklace with a purple jewel, and a flowing mane of blue, green, violet, and pink. On the right door was a smaller version of the white one, except a shade of grey-purple, a black tiara, a dark blue mane, and a crescent moon symbol on her chest. Both were portrayed in the act of performing a welcoming gesture, looking at the viewer as if personally welcoming him or her into Equestria.

Gunter didn't take too long to look at it, as he had already been briefed on the Equestrian rulers, including who they were and a basic idea of how government worked there; the white one on the left was Princess Celestia, and the darker one on the right was Princess Luna. They were revered as the ones who bring up the sun in the morning, and the moon and stars at night, respectively. Whether or not they actually did so was unknown, but Gunter was advised to not question it. He was also told that essentially what they said was law, but popular opinion in Equestria suggested that they were benevolent leaders. Although they both held the same position and title, Celestia was the top of the chain of command during the day, while Luna took up the top spot at night, which was why Luna would not be attending the ceremony. In all, he had little to worry about. The only thing he was worried about, even if only slightly, was the unspecified number of guests of the Princess. But, if the worst happened, he was ready.

Gunter stepped out of the van once the "all clear" signal had been given and walked casually

through the door depicting Celestia, while the Ambassador went through the door depicting Luna. Inside was a desk, behind which the canine guessed attendants and receptionists would be sitting if the Bureau was open. Ambassador Quill, walking just ahead of him, lead him through the complex, clearly knowing it like the back of her hand... or hoof, in this case. She hadn't talked much on the van, likely due to the intimidating SWAT team surrounding her, but once she was out of sight of them, she became far more upbeat. Apparently, the two days since the attack had been enough for her to get over the shock of the attempt on her life, or at least it looked that way.

"We've cleared out the building just for you, Gunter!" Quill explained, obviously excited to be going back home, "We'll be at the portal in no time!"

Sure enough, in less than a minute, through a series of shortcuts that had clearly required moving lots of heavy furniture before their arrival, they had arrived at a door that resembled the door to a bank vault. It had a giant spoked wheel in the middle, a latch on the right-hand side, and a small blank pad at the eye-level of Quill and her bodyguard. As Quill quickly demonstrated, it was a pony equivalent of a fingerprint analyzer. Quill put her hoof on the pad, and after a second, there was a computerized sound that emanated from speakers embedded somewhere in the door, and then, the sound turned into a voice, which said, "Welcome, Ambassador Quill."

Quill's bodyguard then pulled the latch down to a vertical position, and then the spoked wheel turned about 270 degrees counter-clockwise. The door proceeded to slowly open inwards, so the party stepped back a few paces to avoid the door hitting them. Once the door opened completely, Gunter looked upon it. What he saw resembled a European city: a mixture of old and new, castles and grand buildings that have withstood the test of time alongside relatively modern, yet quaint shops and houses. Banners hung from the lamp posts bearing images of Princesses Celestia and Luna.

"Welcome," Ambassador Quill began, "to Canterlot, the capital of Equestria!"

"It's beautiful," Gunter commented, "it is a city to be proud of, for sure."

"We wouldn't want anything less for the city where our Princesses reside!" Quill replied cheerily, "come on, we've got transportation to get to!"

"Transportation?" the German Shepherd asked.

"Your government expressed concern about civilians seeing you, so we arranged for special accommodations to make sure that only the Princess and invited guests see you," the yellow pony explained, "come on! They're expecting you!"

As soon as she said that, Gunter heard the galloping of horses coming from his left. He put his

paw on his pistol, but soon took it off once he saw what it was; a closed-top horse-drawn carriage, pulled by white ponies similar to the Ambassador's bodyguard, who had quickly gone to join their ranks and took up a harness. The carriage itself was elaborate; it rivaled the Royal Carriage used by the British Royal Family back on Earth in terms of the amount of decoration done to it. It was off-white, almost yellow, decorated liberally with sapphires and dark blue tinted windows, making it impossible to see inside. The door to the carriage suddenly opened, seemingly automatically, but Gunter, even with his sharp canine ears, couldn't pick up even the faintest sound of a humming motor, which confused him. He looked to Quill, and then blinked a few times; he could've sworn he had seen some kind of aura around that yellow horn on her forehead. She suddenly looked up at him. "Well get in, Gunter! Princess Celestia is expecting you!"

Gunter snapped back to the moment and climbed in. The interior was... quaint, to put it nicely. The six-foot canine couldn't sit straight up, as it was clearly meant for the four-foot tall ponies that inhabited this world. Ambassador Quill got in after him, and immediately noticed his discomfort. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "I forgot how tall you were... here, let me fix that."

Gunter wasn't having eye problems, apparently, as he once again saw the strange aura around the yellow pony's horn appear, and suddenly, the roof raised just tall enough to comfortably allow Gunter to sit straight up, and a window even appeared on each side at eye level. Gunter, again, didn't pick up any mechanical noises to indicate this was being done by machines, so he had to ask. "Uh.... how is this happening?"

"What do you mean?" Quill wondered.

"Well... this!" Gunter clarified, motioning to the entire interior of the carriage, "things don't just spontaneously grow three feet higher without any sounds! What just happened?"

"Oh! I forgot! Earth doesn't have magic like we do..." she said to herself, "Well," she explained as the carriage began moving, and the clopping of hooves began outside, "us unicorn ponies, like myself, can do magic!"

Gunter decided not to press the point about magic, since he did remember that the laws of physics were slightly altered in this world, but he was interested in how she did it. "So, unicorn meaning you have that... uh..." he stammered, trying to find a polite way of referring to her horn.

"Yes," she answered for him, "my horn here is where our magic energy is stored and where it comes from! All unicorn ponies can do at least some magic. Most often it's used for telekinesis, but some, like me, can do more, like changing the physical properties of objects!"

"So is there any limit to what you can do with it?"

"Aside from raising the dead, which is impossible, it's really limited to how well-versed you are,"

she explained.

“And I guess the Princesses can do magic, too?” Gunter wondered.

“Of course they can!” Quill replied, almost laughing, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, “They can perform the most powerful magic in the world! How else could they raise the sun, moon, and stars?”

Before they knew it, the carriage had stopped, and the doors were opened by two more of the armored white ponies, where a red carpet was literally laid out for them. They arrived right in front of the front door, as the German Shepherd noticed that he was looking at a hallway, followed by a stairway, with an elaborately decorated ceiling with chandeliers even the British Monarch would envy. On either side of the hallway and the staircase was a line of white armored ponies at fixed intervals. One would have to be crazy to try to carry out an assassination here; the security in the front entrance alone had about the same number of Secret Servicemen guarding the entire White House! Each of the Royal Guards stood at fixed distances away from the one next to him, making for a depth-of-field effect that was as intimidating as it was, in some ways, artistic. And plus, if Quill was correct, and Celestia and Luna really did have power enough to raise the sun, moon, and stars, an assassin’s targets in this place were clearly a force to be reckoned with, too.

The pair proceeded in silence down the hall and up the stairs, with Quill taking the lead. Gunter, naturally, was wary. He had been practicing worst-case-scenario situations for a long time, but those simulations had assumed that his enemies were human and did not have supernatural abilities. But then he reminded himself that in all likelihood, there wasn’t going to be anything to worry about.

The two came to the top of the stairway, where a tall, grand double-door stood. It was sort of plain, but it was painted immaculate white with a stylized sun painted on the middle, split right down the center by the line where the two doors met. Quill opened the doors with her telekinesis magic and revealed before him was the regal figure of the ruling monarch of Equestria, Princess Celestia. She stood on four legs about the same height as Gunter, which surprised him that she was really that much taller than every other pony in Equestria. Her multicolored mane and tail appeared to be perpetually flowing by means of magic, Gunter guessed, since he could not feel any wind in the room. Her tiara shone brightly in the sunlight that came through the windows, and her coat was as immaculate white as were the doors Gunter had just passed through. On her hooves were what looked like golden shoes, and on her chest was a thick gold necklace with a purple jewel that matched an almost identical, yet smaller one on her tiara. On her rear flanks were matching symbols that were the same design of the sun symbol on the door he had walked through. This was a leader, Gunter felt, that was born to lead.

By reflex, Gunter took two steps forward, stood at attention, and saluted. Then he felt a light

kick on his shin. He looked down, and he saw Quill was trying to get his attention. "You bow to the Princess!" she hissed at him. Gunter was surprised at her sudden change of tone, but he didn't think much of it, since it was, after all, the most beloved leader of Equestria he was dealing with. So, without much hesitation, Gunter got down on one knee and lowered his head.

"Your Majesty," he said, reciting from memory what Commander Thompson had told him to say to the Princess so he wouldn't accidentally do something embarrassing or unintentionally insulting, "I send greetings and the best of regards from the United States of America, and the agency I represent, the Experimental Espionage Service. I have humbly come to accept the-"

"You're a spy?! That's -!" went a very loud female voice to his left. His left ear turned towards the source, and his eyes opened and looked in the direction, while he kept the rest of his body still. There, he saw a group of six ponies as colorful as Ambassador Quill. The one whom Gunter had assumed had spoken, a light blue colored pony with wings and a rainbow colored mane and tail, was apparently prevented from saying anything further by a purple-colored unicorn pony with a mane of very deep purple and a small streak of pink that was styled in such a way that it covered the bottom portion of her horn. She looked the most frustrated at what the rainbow-and-blue one was doing than the rest. That, and she had shoved a hoof into the other's mouth. He hadn't noticed them earlier because his full attention was on Celestia, and he did not bother looking to the side, something he realized he should have done when he walked in. For the first time since his first days of Espionage training, his nerves were getting to him.

"You may go on," said the soft, kind voice of Celestia.

Gunter cleared his throat and continued, "I... uh... *humbly* accept the honor you wish to bestow upon me, ... and the posthumous honor for my fallen comrade, Agent Daniel, for whom I will accept in his place."

A moment of silence, possibly for the memory of Daniel, ensued. Then, he heard the clapping of hooves approaching him. "You may rise, Gunter," Celestia said, her voice coming from right above him. Gunter stood up, and once again, by reflex, saluted as he stood at attention. Face to face with the supreme ruler of a vast land, Gunter's heart started beating. She was beautiful, and even looked benevolent, but knowing that she quite possibly had immense amounts of supernatural power in the horn on her forehead, made him very uneasy and nervous, but he did his best not to show it in his face.

To his great relief, Celestia smiled. "At ease, soldier," she said soothingly. Gunter lowered his arm, and Celestia stepped back a couple paces. "Today," she said in a slightly louder voice, "in honor of recent events, for acts of selfless bravery and sharp intuition that helped save the lives of two of the most important people to Equestria; our own Ambassador Quill and Equestria's dear friend His Excellency the President of the United States, it is my privilege to award the Order of the Sun, one of our highest honors, to Gunter Shepherd and his partner, Daniel Collie."

Her horn suddenly sparkled, and from somewhere behind her, two medals in the shape of the sun symbol on her flanks, made of gold and with a white lanyard with a gold stripe down the center, floated towards him. Gunter lowered his head as one was put over his head, and hung around his neck. The other one floated in front of him, and Gunter carefully grasped it. "Thank you," he said to the Princess, who smiled in return.

"Now turn around," the Princess urged him, "this is your moment," she said with a smile, "and also a moment for your country." Gunter smiled back slightly and performed a precise about-face. There, he saw the six other ponies had assembled directly behind him, and were smiling. Ambassador Quill was there, too, but off to the left. They all then proceeded to stomp their hooves on the ground, which Gunter took to be, judging by their expressions, a pony's equivalent of clapping. He held out his arm and waved, even though this was a very small crowd, but it was what everyone else who got an award at the EES ceremonies did, and he didn't know what else he could do, anyway.

When the applause died down, Celestia stood next to him. "Allow me to introduce you to some of my most trusted ponies, Gunter," she said, walking over to them. They all bowed as she approached them, but they only held it for about a second before standing up. "This is Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, Rarity, Fluttershy, Applejack, and my personal protege in magic, Twilight Sparkle," she said, naming them in order from left to right, and each one raised a hoof, nodded, or whatnot when their names were mentioned. Gunter stood for a moment, slightly confused.

What kind of names are those? he thought, *What kind of self-respecting parent would name their child "Fluttershy" or "Rainbow" or... any of these? Jesus, I feel like I've walked into a-*

"Ahem," Celestia said, which snapped him back to the present moment.

Gunter knelt down so he was at face level with them and offered his paw, "it is a pleasure to meet you all," he said, "You must be important pe- uh, ponies, if Celestia holds you in such high regard and trust."

"It's an honor all its own to be trusted by the Princess," said the orange pony with a blond colored mane, wearing what looked to be some sort of Wild West themed hat, named Applejack, who, unlike most of the others he had seen up until now, did not have wings or a horn. Oddly enough, she spoke with a very distinctly southern accent, something Gunter was certain was restricted to that region of the United States. She raised her hoof and placed it in Gunter's paw, and the two shook briskly.

"It certainly must be," Gunter commented, smiling. She smiled and bowed her head a little, then stepped back to make way for whoever was next. To his surprise, the pink one, aptly named Pinkie Pie, according to Celestia, bounced in from seemingly out of nowhere and was all up in his face. Her speaking was so fast-paced that at first he could barely make out what was being said by her very high-pitched voice, but he eventually picked it up somewhere in the middle,

“...and I’ve never seen anyone from the other side of the portal who wasn’t turned into a pony before and so I was like ‘Oh my stars!’ so when I was told that I was invited here, I couldn’t help but say yes so I could throw you a big party! And so-”

“PINKIE PIE!” came a shout from behind her. It was the blue and rainbow one, the appropriately named Rainbow Dash, the one that had interrupted him earlier. She had a slightly more masculine voice, almost sounding as if she was going through puberty. Immediately, Pinkie Pie stopped her rambling and bouncing and shook Gunter’s paw, smiling, though still with a very giddy look on her face. The rainbow pony then extended her wings and flew over to Gunter, and shook his paw as she hovered in mid-air.

“So you’re really a spy from the other side of the portal?” she inquired, looking interested.

Gunter nodded, even though technically he was an operative, “spying” was what most people would call what he did in the course of his job, so he rolled with it.

“That is so cool!” she exclaimed, “You should have your own movie or something! You could even star in them!”

Gunter laughed a bit, “we’ll see... I’m not one for big publicity,” he explained, “but maybe I’ll send you a script based on one of my missions one day.”

He was about to speak to the others, when he was suddenly stopped by his intuition. His nose had picked up a very out-of-place scent; humans. Gunter looked towards the door. The scent was clearly getting stronger, and his ears picked up footsteps ascending the staircase. There was also a trace of the unmistakable smell of gunpowder and C4.

“Is there something wrong, sir?” Twilight Sparkle asked.

“Get behind Celestia,” he said, still staring at the door and drawing his pistol, “now.”

CRASH!

The double doors behind the group of ponies were broken open by what Gunter could only guess was some sort of improvised breaching charge. He looked up and saw a group of four men masked in balaclavas brandishing light machine guns casually walking in. The ponies turned around and most of them immediately backed away, gasping in shock. Rainbow Dash, clearly possessing a lot of bravery, but not well-directed bravery, immediately tried to do a flying charge at the four, but was held back by Applejack, who bit down on her rainbow tail.

“Hey!” Rainbow Dash shouted, “You can’t just go barging in on the Princess like that!”

Gunter stood up. “Get back!” he shouted. Celestia was still behind him, but began backing

away. Gunter couldn't see the expression on her face, as he only looked forward towards the intruders, but he imagined it was one of shock. He backed to Celestia, and as soon as he was beside her, he leaned his head in towards her ear. "I don't know much about this whole thing you guys have with magic," Gunter said softly, "but if you can create something that can block projectiles, you'd better do it now."

"Everyone get behind me!" called out Celestia, and all the ponies in the room dashed behind her, even though Rainbow Dash had to be pulled by Applejack.

Gunter cocked and aimed his pistol, taking a few steps forward. "I'm gonna give you guys *one* chance to surrender!" he shouted, "and we can forget this whole thing ever happened!"

The four intruders laughed. "We're the ones with machine guns, bitch!" one of them shouted.

"Kiss your precious Princess goodbye!" shouted another, and without any hesitation, he, along with the others, raised their weapons and opened fire.

Gunter managed to pull off two shots in return, which killed one, before his gun inexplicably thrust itself out of his hands and fell to the floor! Gunter looked up, and it appeared that the same was happening to the four would-be assassins, except their guns, along with their bodies, began floating in the air. Able to move their bodies, but unable to traverse distance, they all, naturally, panicked. Then Gunter heard the light pinging of metal on the floor. He looked around and saw that the hostiles' bullets had fallen to the floor in a perfect line about a foot in front of him. Celestia's magic certainly was potent indeed if even .50 caliber bullets couldn't penetrate whatever shield she had created.

Gunter heard clopping behind him. He turned his head around, and saw Princess Celestia walking towards him. "Don't worry, Gunter," she said, calmly, but in a more serious tone than she had before, "I've got this."

Gunter nodded and drew his pocket revolver from his ankle holster. "I'll cover you," he said as he obligingly stepped to the side and allowed the Princess to confront her would-be assassins.

The Princess smiled very slightly. "That won't be necessary," she reassured the canine agent before she turned to her attackers and switched to a more serious tone. "You know," she began, "I'm actually impressed you managed to make it this far! Now, since it appears my security is lacking today, I'll have to deal with you myself."

Suddenly, all three of the remaining terrorist's machine guns unloaded on their own, their magazines dropping to the ground, some spilling out their ammo belts. The assassins immediately began to draw their pistols, which they had stuffed in the back of their pants, but those were immediately yanked away by Celestia's magic and were unloaded as well, the small clips clattering to the floor.

"Unlike your country, we don't perform capital punishment here, as fitting as it would seem for this offense," she explained, "but this will suffice," she concluded. The empty weapons fell to the floor. Then, with a loud electrical sparking sound, a bright white aura surrounded the three now condemned humans, which sparked with St. Elmo's fire on all sides, became brighter and brighter, until a clap of thunder sounded, and once Gunter recovered from the flash and loud noise, he looked around and discovered that the three assassins had vanished into thin air. Gunter stood in awe. There was far less doubt in his mind, now, that she could actually raise the sun.

"What did you do to them?" came a soft voice belonging to one of the ponies behind Gunter.

"I sent them to the one place where they can't possibly hurt anyone," Celestia reassured, "let's just say that Luna certainly knows that place quite well."

"You sent them to the moon!?" another voice exclaimed.

Gunter's jaw dropped. *The moon?* he thought, *Wouldn't that just kill them anyway, unless they arrived there with a pressurized space suit? Wasn't that capital punishment without a mess to clean up?* "Wait, the moon?" he asked, "I thought you said you don't do capital punishment?"

"I don't, Gunter," assured Celestia, "they're alive and well, I assure you, but I don't think they'll remain so after their thousand-year sentence is up."

"Who were those people?" the purple one, Twilight Sparkle, asked. Gunter turned around to face them.

"Total barbarians, if you ask me," the white one, Rarity, replied. She had a very upper-crusty accent to her, sort of what Gunter imagined people of that social class in the 19th century sounded like, "what kind of ruffians would barge uninvited into the Royal Palace like that and make all that dreadful noise?"

Gunter turned to face the entire group. "Assassins," Gunter replied, "Targeting Celestia, I'm sure. But I can't for the life of me figure out how they got this far..." he then turned to Celestia. "You might want to check your security detail, your majesty, it is my professional opinion that you have a leak or a mole or something."

"I will get right on that," Celestia replied.

Gunter then walked towards the other ponies and crouched down once again so they were at eye level. "Are you girls all right?" he asked.

All of them responded in the affirmative, although the yellow one, Fluttershy, was still cowering

behind the rest, visibly shaking, but she didn't appear to be physically hurt. Gunter turned to Ambassador Quill. "What about you?" he asked.

"Oh, me?" she said, "Yeah... I'm fine..." she assured him, panting heavily, getting over the shock of what had just happened.

"What were those things you and the bad guys had that made all those loud noises?" Twilight Sparkle asked him, "I've never seen anything like them before."

Gunter was about to explain, but Celestia interrupted, "I think that's a matter you're better off not discussing right now," she said rather sternly, "Either way, though, Gunter, I don't think I could've awarded the Order of the Sun to a better recipient today. You certainly demonstrated very admirable qualities bravery and selflessness just then."

Gunter turned and saluted. "As the leader of a place allied with the United States, I would protect you as I would my country's own president," he stated. Gunter did not, however, let on that his sworn duty did not actually specify protecting heads of state unless specifically ordered to do so, and he was not ordered to protect Princess Celestia or Luna. It was mostly because nobody felt that the Princess was in any real danger, but still, Gunter did so out of sheer reflex. *It wasn't technically violating a direct order... he thought, or was it?*

The thought came as a shock to him. Not once in his entire time of service to the CIA's EES branch, since swearing an oath to serve the United States of America, did he even *consider* even *potentially* violating a direct order from his superiors! It was just "What do you want me to do?" and "Yes, sir!" for him. Was he really questioning his loyalty to the country he was sworn to protect and serve? Gunter's pulse started pounding, he could feel it in his neck. What if he was given an order to assassinate Princess Celestia? What if he was told an assassination would happen, but ordered not to protect her? Sure, he didn't doubt that the Princess could defend herself, but what if-?

Celestia smiled and used her hoof to lower Gunter's arm, which snapped him out of his haze of thoughts. "The United States should be proud to have such a dedicated agent as you on their side!" she proclaimed reassuringly.

Gunter simply nodded. He agreed, but he realized that for all he did for his country, none of the people whose lives he had saved, except the President during the previous White House mission, even knew that a threat was facing them, much less the identity of the one who saved them from that threat.

At least it was good to know there were some individuals outside of the EES's inner circle who appreciated what he did, even if they were from another world. But he felt especially glad to know that Celestia was one of them. She was a leader he would be proud to serve under if he could.