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#34

WHITLEY PRICE BRECKEL

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THE ARCTIC WASTES BEYOND THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE.

FOR GENERATIONS THEY WERE USED AS A PRISON FOR THE WORST OF MONSTERS.

ABSENT THE TERRIFYING CHARM OF TARTARUS.

ALSO ABSENT ITS REVOLVING DOOR.

THE REALITY IS THAT IT ENDED UP BEING THE PLACE THE TWO SISTERS PUT MONSTERS THEY HAD NO CONCEPT OF HOW TO HOLD.

PERHAPS THE EVEN WORSE REALITY IS THAT THERE ARE OLDER MONSTERS LOCKED UP HERE THAN EVEN THE TWO SISTERS KNOW.

THIS WAS THE PRISON FOR THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE IN ITS EARLIEST DAYS.

THE RULERS OF THE CRYSTAL PONIES WERE RENOWNED FOR PUTTING MONSTERS ON ICE.

AND AFTER THE FALL OF THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE, RECORDS WERE LOST.

AND WITH PRINCESS AMORE'S DEFEAT, THE SECRET KNOWLEDGE OF THE ROYALS WAS LOST.

AND THE CONTENTS OF THE ARCTIC WASTES WERE FORGOTTEN.

BUT FORGOTTEN IS NOT GONE.

AND THINGS YOU LOCK AWAY HAVE THE WORST WAY OF COMING BACK.

LIM and FLAM

WELL, BROTHER, THAT'S ANOTHER SCHEME FOILED.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER BAD APPLE IN THE BUNCH.

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN. IS THERE ANYWHERE IN EQUESTRIA TWO HONEST CONMEN CAN SET UP A SCAM WITHOUT A MEMBER OF THE APPLE FAMILY SHOWING UP AND RUINING IT?

WHY DO THESE APPLES CARE SO MUCH? WHO ASKED THEM TO BE HALL MONITORS OF ALL EQUESTRIA?

IT'S A BUM RAP, IT IS. EVERY TIME WE SET UP IT'S LIKE APPLES FALL RIGHT OUT OF THE TREES.

WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM, BROTHER.

I CAN HELP WITH THAT.

WHOA!

GAH! WHERE'D YOU COME FROM?

WHAT IF I OFFERED YOU THE CHANCE TO GET RID OF THAT PESKY APPLEJACK FOR GOOD? WHAT IF I TOLD YOU I HAD THE POWER TO MAKE YOU WEALTHY BEYOND YOUR IMAGINATION?

AND YOU CAN LEARN ALL OF IRON WILL'S SECRETS TO BEING THE NEW ASSERTIVE YOU FOR JUST FOUR EASY PAYMENTS OF—

WHINNYAPOLIS MOTEL
· CONFERENCE ROOM ·
9AM · WELL-TO-DO INVESTMENT CANCELED
2PM IRON WILL ASSERTIVENESS CLASS
5-8PM COLTBERG BAH MITZVAH

WAIT! *STOP!* IF YOU ACT NOW IRON WILL WILL THROW IN THIS EASY POCKET HORSESHOE CLEANER!

4! EASY PAYMENTS

IRON WILL DOESN'T KNOW, BERTHA. IT'S LIKE IRON WILL HAS LOST ALL HIS CHARISMA. EVEN THE OTHER GOATS HAVE LEFT ME.

BAAA!

YOU'RE RIGHT! I DID SAY ME! NOW I SAID I! IRON WILL IS LOSING IT!

BUT I CAN HELP YOU GET IT BACK.

WHY SHOULD IRON WILL LISTEN TO YOU, PONY? YOU DON'T EVEN SPEAK IN THE THIRD PERSON.

BECAUSE YOUR CHARISMA CAME FROM FEAR.. EVERYBODY USED TO BE AFRAID OF MINOTAURS. IF YOU FOLLOW ME, THEY CAN BE AGAIN.

?

YOU KNOW, I OUTRACED RAINBOW DASH AT EVERY TURN.

DOWN N OUT

CIDER PUB

THUNK

I JUST HAD THE GUTS TO DO WHAT NEEDED TO BE DONE TO WIN AND SHE CARED MORE ABOUT MAKING FRIENDS. WHY DOES A WONDERBOLT NEED FRIENDS?

I SHOULD BE A WONDERBOLT RIGHT NOW AND SHE SHOULD BE THE ONE SITTING HERE.

THUNK

CHICOLT GO CUBS

CANTERLOT KNIGHTS

APPLE CIDER

WELL, SHE'S NOT. SO IF YOU WANT TO STAY HERE, YOU NEED TO ORDER SOMETHING.

ANOTHER ROOT BEER.

THIS ONE'S ON ME.

MIDGE

WHO ARE YOU?

I'M THE PONY WHO'S GOING TO GIVE YOU THE CHANCE TO PROVE YOU'RE BETTER THAN RAINBOW DASH ONCE AND FOR ALL.

OH YEAH, HOW YOU GONNA DO THAT?

BY TAKING HER AND THOSE FRIENDS OF HERS DOWN. SOUND GOOD, LIGHTNING DUST?

WELL, WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

WE HAVE ONE LAST STOP TO MAKE.

ATTENTION, EVERYBODY. ALL FOOD VENDORS ARE DIRECTED TO TAKE THE EAST ROAD TO THE CRYSTAL COMMONS. FLUGELHORN VENDORS, PLEASE FOLLOW BALLOON VENDORS TO THE CRYSTAL COURTYARD.

DO THEY REALLY HAVE TO CALL EVERYTHING "THE CRYSTAL WHATEVER"? WE GET IT, IT'S CRYSTAL.

FAIRE OFFICES

THEY'RE PROUD OF THEIR HOME, SPIKE. ANYWAY, I THOUGHT YOU LOVED THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE. YOU'RE A HERO HERE.

I DO. I THINK THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CRYSTAL FAIRE ARE JUST STARTING TO WEAR ON ME.

WELL, THE FAIRE IS TOMORROW, SO AFTER THAT NO MORE FAIRE TALK UNTIL NEXT YEAR.

IT'S ABOUT TIME. THIS LAST WEEK HAS TAKEN FOREVER.

HOLD ON.

WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING HERE?

JUST SELLING OUR LEGITIMATE WARES, MA'AM. YOU REMEMBER OUR OLD SUPER SPEEDY CIDER SQUEEZY 3000, RIGHT?

DO I? THAT WAS THE WORST CIDER I'VE EVER TASTED!

CRYSTAL FAYLE

WELL, WE'VE MADE SOME ADJUSTMENTS. IT MAKES LEMONADE NOW.

DO YOU HAVE A PERMIT?

YES, MA'AM. WE'RE LEGITIMATE BUSINESS PONIES. WE WOULDN'T DO ANY LESS.

OF COURSE, PRINCESS TWILIGHT. LIFE GAVE US LEMONS SO WE MADE THE WORLD'S MOST EFFICIENT LEMONADE MAKER!

HUH, EVERYTHING LOOKS IN ORDER.

I DON'T TRUST THEM, TWILIGHT.

ME NEITHER. BUT THAT'S WHY WE HAVE THE PEGASUS SECURITY AND OUR FRIENDS MONITORING THE OTHER PARTS OF THE FAIRE. I'LL HAVE APPLEJACK KEEP AN EYE ON THEM. SHE'LL HAVE A FOOD STAND TOO.

IRE NURSE

BRIDLE

ALLEY

RAINBOW, WHAT'S ALL THE COMMOTION?

FLUTTERSHY! GOOD, YOU'RE HERE! TELL THIS GOON HE'S NOT GETTING INTO THE CRYSTAL FAIRE!

CRYST

THANK GOODNESS, FLUTTERSHY. IRON WILL WAS HOPING TO SEE YOU. PLEASE, TELL MS. DASH THAT YOU AND IRON WILL ARE FRIENDS NOW.

WILL, ARE YOU HERE TO SEE THE CRYSTAL FAIRE?

BOOP

WE'VE HEARD IT'S REALLY BEAUTIFUL. IRON WILL HAS BEEN TAKING MEDITATION CLASSES AND WORKING TO BECOME MORE KIND.

WILL! THAT'S GREAT. FLUTTERSHY IS... I MEAN, I AM PROUD OF YOU.

THAT WARMS IRON WILL'S HEART, FLUTTERSHY.

LET THEM IN, DASH. WILL IS WORKING REALLY HARD TO BE A NEW MINOTAUR.

FINE! BUT I'M WATCHING YOU.

CRYSTA
CRAFT
CORNER
THISAWAY!
NOW, PINKIE, YOU UNDERSTAND THAT I'LL BE OVERSEEING THE ARTS AND CRAFTS TABLES AND YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF THE LESS... SHALL WE SAY, AESTHETIC TABLES.
Circus
RIGHT, I'M IN CHARGE OF CLOWNS AND FLUGELHORNS. THIS IS WHAT I WAS BORN FOR.
LET'S SEE. MMM-HMMM. I LIKE WHAT YOU'RE DOING HERE. THIS IS VERY NEXT SEASON.
ALL RIGHT, YOU, LET'S SEE A LITTLE SOMETHING IN SLAPSTICK.
WOW!
KER-SPLASH
I DIDN'T EVEN SEE THE WATER BALLOON! WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?
RAAAGH
WHO DARES?!
WOW, YOU'RE REALLY GOOD!
HAHAHAHAHAHA! LOOK AT YOU! YOU LOOK RIDICULOUS.
AND BEFORE I'M DONE, ALL YOUR DUMB ARTS AND CRAFTS WILL BE SOAKED TOO!
THERE MAY NOT BE A DUNGEON DEEP ENOUGH FOR THE OFFENSE YOU'VE JUST COMMITTED, BUT CELESTIA KNOWS I'LL KEEP LOOKING! *SECURITY!*
CRYSTAL SNACKS
CRYSTAL FUNNEL CAKES

HA! THERE'S ONLY ONE PEGASUS THAT'S EVEN FAST ENOUGH TO GET NEAR ME!

SECURITY

YOU TWO! I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO BUT I KNOW YOU'RE UP TO SOMETHING!

APPLEJACK! YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG IDEA. WE KNEW YOU'D BE HERE, SO WE DIDN'T EVEN BRING APPLES.

WE'RE IN THE LEMONADE GAME NOW, DOLL FACE. NO NEED FOR THE CONFRONTATION. PLEASE LOOK INSIDE FOR YOURSELF.

THERE'S THE HEART. REMEMBER, WE WAIT FOR THE SIGNAL.

LIGHTNING DUST IS TRYING TO RUIN THE CRYSTAL FAIRE! COME ON, FLUTTERSHY!

WHY ME? I'M NEVER GOING TO CATCH HER.

WAIT, THERE'S SOMETHING IN HERE...

BZZ
BZZ
BZZ
ZZZzzzz

THAT'S THE SIGNAL, LET'S GO.

YOU'LL NEVER CATCH ME, DASH!

YOU KNOW I'M FASTER THAN YOU, LIGHTNING DUST! IT'S MY JOB TO PROTECT THE CRYSTAL FAIRE TODAY AND I'M NOT ABOUT TO LET YOU RUIN THIS FOR THE REST OF THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE!

THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE...?

YOUR MAJESTIES, THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE IS UNDER ATTACK!

UNDER ATTACK? FROM WHERE?

I'M NOT SURE. IT SEEMS LIKE EVERYWHERE.

I'LL GET THE FORCE FIELD, YOU GET OUT THERE AND HELP.

I'M ON IT!

I HAVE TO GET TO THE PALACE.

NOT SO FAST, LITTLE PRINCESS.

CHRYSALIS! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU WERE BEHIND THIS!

CAKE

BEHIND IT? NO. THE ONLY REASON I AGREED TO ANY OF THIS WAS TO GET ANOTHER SHOT AT YOU.

AND I WON'T HAVE YOU RUNNING OFF!

YOU WANT ME, CHRYSALIS? YOU'VE GOT ME!

NO!

DON'T LET HIM GET THE HEART!

Ba!

I WILL NOT LET THEM RUIN THE CRYSTAL FAIRE!

...WE LEFT THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE WAY BACK THERE.

?

?

POOR DASH, SLOW AS USUAL.

IRON WILL HAS STOLEN YOUR CRYSTAL HEART! IRON WILL IS THE GREATEST!

GET BACK HERE WITH THAT!

IRON WILL IS RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE!

FAIRE

OUT OF THE WAY!

GET HIM!

BOOTH

GET HER!

GET THEM!

BANZAI!

Crunch ATTACK!

BIP

ZOT

POW

KID

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. THAT'S A PARTY CANNON. THERE'S NO WAY SHE COULD STOP ME WITH A PARTY CANNON, IS THERE?

WELL, YOU'VE GOTTA WONDER: WOULD PINKIE PIE RELOAD A COMEDY CANNON WITH A REAL CANNONBALL JUST FOR A GOOD LAUGH?

WELL, WHATTYA THINK? DO YA FEEL LUCKY, PUNK?

OOPH!

CRAFTS FOOD

OOPS.

BOOM

RARITY! WE WERE HAVING A MOMENT!

HONESTLY, PINKIE, MY HAND SLIPPED.

WHAT DID YOU PUT IN THERE, ANYWAY?

VELVET. VERY HEAVY FABRIC. VERY HIGH STOPPING POWER.

YOU'VE GOTTEN A LITTLE STRONGER, TWILIGHT. YOU'RE ALMOST A MATCH FOR ME NOW.

CHRYSALIS, I WAS A MATCH FOR YOU WHEN I WAS A FOAL. AND ALL YOU'VE GOTTEN IS OLDER.

OLDER?! HOW DARE YOU! NOW YOU'LL KNOW MY REAL WRATH!

BAM

ARGH!

SOME WRATH.

KNOCK KNOCK

THE CAGES DON'T FEEL RIGHT.

IT'S JUST TEMPORARY UNTIL CELESTIA AND LUNA GET HERE TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH THEM.

GOOD JOB, EVERYONE. THANKS TO YOU THE CRYSTAL FAIRE IS STILL ON FOR TOMORROW.

RIGHT, STARTING WITH GETTING THIS BACK TO WHERE IT BELONGS.

THAT'S GOING TO MEAN A LOT OF CLEANUP, BUT NOTHING WE CAN'T HANDLE.

ALLEY

WHERE IS IT? WHERE'S THE CRYSTAL HEART?

WAIT.

THE SATCHEL WILL CAME IN WITH HAD A SYMBOL THAT WAS A DIFFERENT COLOR.

HELLO?

I'M GLAD YOU LOCKED ME UP. I LOVE WATCHING YOU ALL REALIZE WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IT'S ALL A DISTRACTION, LITTLE PRINCE. IT WAS JUST MEANT TO GET YOU ALL AWAY FROM THE CASTLE.

THE CASTLE? CADANCE IS STILL IN THERE!

WAIT! WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU'RE RUNNING INTO!

I'VE GOT TO SAVE HER.

WOW. AFTER ALL OF THESE YEARS, I STILL WASN'T READY TO SEE THIS PLACE.

YOU CAN COME OUT, I KNOW YOU'RE HERE.

THERE'S NO NEED TO HIDE FROM ME...

SOMBRA.

FINE. YOU MAY NOT RECOGNIZE MY VOICE, BUT YOU WON'T HAVE FORGOTTEN MY FACE.

LOOK AT ME, SOMBRA. DO YOU RECOGNIZE ME? WHAT'S MY NAME?

HOPE.

YOU'VE COME TO FINISH THE JOB, HAVE YOU?

FINISH THE... SOMBRA, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.

I UNDERSTAND PERFECTLY. YOU WERE MY BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD AND ON THE DAY I FOUND OUT THAT MY LIFE WAS A LIE, YOU ABANDONED ME. THEN YOU BROUGHT THE TWO SISTERS TO VANQUISH ME.

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE, SOMBRA. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT YOU WERE. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT PRINCESS AMORE HAD DONE. WHAT THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE HAD DONE.

BUT I'VE LEARNED A LOT IN THE TIME I'VE BEEN GONE. AND NOW I WANT TO MAKE IT RIGHT.

MAKE IT RIGHT? HOW? LOOK AT ME! IT'S TAKEN ME MORE THAN A YEAR TO GET THIS FAR! IT MAY BE A DECADE BEFORE I AM STRONG ENOUGH TO LEAVE THIS ROOM.

HOLD ON! THIS IS GOING TO HURT!

AARGH!!

THE PAIN!!

WHUMP

WELL, HOW DO YOU FEEL?

THUMP!

THE KING HAS RETURNED. LONG LIVE THE KING!

Heart of DARKNESS

SIEGE of the CRYSTAL EMPIRE

PART ONE