

Friday 6th April 1001

I managed to spend the entire morning working on circuitry at home. I got a fair bit of design work done before I hit a minor snag, which quickly became a major snag.

Do you know what it feels like to design a 500+ component layout, then to find that the power rails are shorted together? You have to go through *every single trace multiple times* until you find the short, and every test where you get it wrong, all you get is a loud bang and a destroyed board.

Needless to say, I wasn't feeling too impressed with myself.

I threw a board on the ground in disgust, something I quickly regretted, knowing that it was my last one. Fortunately it wasn't damaged.

Relax, I just need to calm down. I walked outside, greeted by the afternoon breeze, and rested my hooves atop a low wall. Normally in this situation I would talk to Bill, or somepony else in MagiTek, but of course I was in Ponyville. Alone.

When you explain your problem to somepony else, the solution often comes naturally. They didn't have to be especially knowledgeable, just mildly interested...

I set off to find Shatter's house. I didn't need to look for too long - I saw her flying upwards soon after I left.

I called out to her while she was still in earshot, "Er...Shatter! Hello!"

She quickly turned around and flew back towards me. I could immediately tell she was mildly intoxicated - her movements seemed fairly sluggish.

"Hi there Cobalt. What's up?" Strangely though, her speech was perfectly clear, as if she hadn't drunk a drop.

Suddenly my mind went blank. *What am I supposed to say now?*

"Oh...well...nothing much, now that I come to think about it...I guess I just needed to talk to somepony else for a while..."

Oh Goddesses, what are you doing Cobalt?

"Oh?" *Good...now, um, circuitry! Circuitry and small talk, yes!*

"I'm trying to get some regulation circuitry to work, but the damned thing is shorted somewhere...I know from experience that it's better to take a step back...but anyway! How are you doing?" I tried to sound cheerful. I think I pulled it off this time!

"I'm doing okay, I guess," she replied, "Can't even write the shittiest of shitty poems today, though."

Here we go! Cobalt to the rescue with unconditional praise and constructive criticism!

"Oh, I'm sure they can't be that bad! ...Mind if I take a look?" I couldn't hide the hopeful tone in my voice.

"Of course I mind!"

Wait, what? Who says that? No pony says that they do mind!

"Oh...of course..." I just about managed a feeble smile.

She must be really self conscious about her poetry...

"In any case, I was just about to go see Manehattan for the first time in a few years," she said,

smiling cheerfully, "Want to come along?"

I felt a lot happier all of a sudden. I beamed at Shatter, "Oh! Really?"

"Yep!" She replied, smiling back.

"Well, I guess I'll just teleport¹ there..." I began to gather my will, before Shatter interrupted me.

"Can you teleport me, too? I'm feeling lazy today. Plus it can be a bitch to find somepony in a city that big."

I smiled, "Of course!" I had trained in long-range teleportation, so I'm fairly accurate.

"One moment...If you could stand still for a while..." It's much harder to teleport moving targets.

I focused my energy, willing myself and Shatter to the centre of Manehattan, somewhere I had been once as a colt, so I could remember enough of the location for the spell to be successful.

Unfortunately, I didn't quite visualise the height correctly. We ended up materialising about 20 hooves up from the ground.

Shatter swept down, catching me, wide eyed, in her hooves.

"Oh, thank you!" I said as she deposited me on the ground, "My apologies...my teleportation's a little rusty it seems..."

"Don't worry about it, it's better to be too high than in the ground," She began to stumble, but I held on to steady her.

"So, here we are!" Shatter exclaimed.

"Yes!" I replied with similar enthusiasm. "...So...where are we going now?" A little more hesitant this time.

"I used to go to the park with my friends when I was a lot younger," Shatter explained, "I think it's this way..." She started walking down the long street.

"You'll never believe what I found in my house!" Shatter said as we walked towards the park.

"Oh?"

"There's a big red button on one of my walls. And when you press it, the floor kind of...I dunno, segments?"

That was something I certainly didn't expect to hear! I felt rather curious already.

"It breaks up into pieces," she continued, "Each piece goes downward, and it forms a stairwell down." She turned to face me, excitement in her eyes, "I have no idea what's down there!"

"Remarkable!" I said, wide eyed.

"I don't even know what happens if you press the button again. Kind of scared to find out, too."

Well, I certainly couldn't let this one slip by! "I don't suppose, when you go to check it out, I could come along? I mean, I am very curious about this whole affair..."

"Oh sure," Shatter replied nonchalantly. I couldn't hold back a broad smile.

We passed a small tavern, interestingly named "The Mount and Musket". I could hear the conversation from inside quite clearly.

¹ Teleportation involves complex arcane theory that I'm not terribly familiar with, but it boils down to the conversion of matter into arcane energy - then simply willing that energy to another location, where it coalesces automatically. Perfectly safe - unless you end up embedded in rock or something.

“Aye, who wants to be the designated ice-getter-pony??” I stopped sharply when I heard the noise.

“Hmm!” Shatter raised her eyebrows, “There seems to be a commotion.”

You don't say...

“Indeed, they seem quite the rowdy bunch,” I replied.

Shatter regarded the sign, “Catchy name,” she said, nodding towards it.

More drunken laughter from inside the tavern, **“Might have to geet it mahseelf!”**

“I'm not feeling too comfortable right here...maybe we should move on...” I really don't like being around drunk ponies. Especially in large groups...Celestia knows what they're about to do next, really.

“Yeah, let's keep going,” Shatter agreed.

As we trotted away, I heard a final crash and shout from the tavern: **“EY! Who put this floor here?!”**

I started to move a little more quickly.

We soon reached the park Shatter was talking about.

“It's strange - parks at night...” I remarked pensively.

“Yeah?”

“It feels...unusual. I quite enjoy it.” Unfortunately my reverie was shattered (no pun intended. Seriously. Don't even think about it) by a series of whoops and cheers from somewhere further into the park.

Oh sweet sisters, no...

I looked to the source of the noise to see: a *lot* of ponies.

“That sounds...interesting.”

What are you doing, Cobalt??

“Come on, let's check it out!” Shatter sounded far more enthusiastic than I.

Well, as long as she's going...

“Oh, well, if you say so...” I slowly followed Shatter over to the crowd.

She tapped a pony on the shoulder with her wing, “Pardon me. What are all these ponies here for?”

The pony turned to face us, “Only the best band in the land!” she exclaimed, “Vinyl Scratch and the Pegasi! You've heard of them, right?”

Not a clue. Not a bloody clue.

Shatter replied first, “No, can't say I have.”

Phew! I'm not completely ignorant after all!

“Yeah, I'm not really clued up about the current music scene...” I had to shout over the noise of the crowd.

“I haven't actually been in Equestria for the past few years, you see...”

I would have been incredibly curious about Shatter's remark if my eardrums weren't being assaulted at the present moment.

She continued, “So, what do they play?”

Another pony elbowed his way towards us to join in the conversation, “Well, there's Vinyl Scratch on the turntable, of course...”

I squinted at the lead pony on stage, "Oh! I think I recognise her...not sure from where, though."
Shatter shook her head, "I don't recognize her at all..."
I wasn't sure whether to feel proud or embarrassed.
"Drumstick's on the drums," the first pony added, "Wind Waker plays the lead guitar."
The second pony spoke up once more, "Octavia plays the bass, of course."
"That's not a pegasus!" Shatter interjected.
"No, but anypony can play the bass."
I remained silent. I'm sure that the bass is a very skilled instrument.
"Heh, guess so."

Just on a whim, I decided to ask, "...no pianists then...?"
Shatter answered me, "No. Looks like there's a keytar, though."
Pfft. Hardly a substitute for Beethoofen's symphonies.
"Ah! Of course..." I tried to sound happy - not wanting to make Shatter feel bad.
I could barely hear anypony over the noise from the crowd. I was not feeling terribly comfortable at that moment.
Then the band started to play. We were immediately engulfed in a wall of sound from the loudspeakers, but the cheering of the crowd was deafening on its own. I couldn't hear a word of the actual song.
Shatter turned to speak to me, "I wonder whether this Brass Ballad kid is this popular?"
I barely had enough energy to reply; "I'm not sure. He seemed surprised when I didn't recognise him..."
I shuffled my hooves together, making myself as small as possible without curling up on the ground.
Shatter seemed to notice my discomfort. "Say, have you figured out the problem with your circuit yet?"
Yeah. I do my best work at 130 decibels, don't you know.
"I...I'm not sure....I can't quite think straight at the moment..." My voice barely carried.
"Haha, I can imagine!" Shatter replied, "I didn't know there would be a concert in Central Park tonight!"
"Yeah...how...fortunate..."
Just at that moment I was released from my torment by the green light and fizzing sound of dragonfire, as two sealed notes appeared in front of us. Shatter cantered off away from the crowd to read hers. I was only too glad to follow.

Dear Fellow Comrades,
You have an all expenses paid vacation to the Zebra homelands. Meet your ride at the Ponyville landing pad at the rising of the sun. Look for a mare named Sunny. She will be waiting for you there.
- Wolf

"Well. Isn't that interesting," I mused as I read the letter, "I'm fairly sure I didn't enter any competition...and what does it mean by 'comrades'?"

Shatter didn't seem to understand straightaway. "Mine's about an all-expenses-paid vacation to the Zebra homelands. What's yours about?"

"Oh, the same thing," I replied, "I rather expected they would be - considering they arrived simultaneously."

"I suppose so." She looked up at me, "Hey, did you want to go see my basement now?"

I smiled, "Absolutely! If you would just stand still for one moment..."

I teleported me and Shatter back in front of her house. Since I had only recently been there I was more accurate this time around - but unfortunately I went too far in the other direction. We materialised with our hooves buried three inches in the ground.

"Oh dear, apologies again," I said as I wrenched my hooves out one-by-one.

Fortunately we weren't on a pavement. That would have been nasty.

"Safe and sound, at least!" Shatter laughed.

As we proceeded into Shatter's house, I could quite clearly see a medium length staircase going straight through the building and underground; as Shatter told me, the floor was cut cleanly across each step. On a nearby wall there was a small red button, neatly camouflaged with the wallpaper.

Noticing it was dark, I cast a Type-2 Luminescence², then proceeded down the stairway with Shatter. The room downstairs had little of its own light. I could make out what appeared to be workbenches with tools hanging on the walls, and several boxes scattered about the room.

"Some kind of workshop?" I mused,

"I guess so," Shatter replied, "I wonder why somepony would hide it like this, though?"

I walked forward to examine the tables, "Maybe they wanted to hide what they were building."

"Cobalt!" Shatter spoke from behind me, "any idea what this is?"

I moved towards her to see an opened box filled with what was clearly electrical wiring. I lifted some out just in front of my nose; it was very finely made - perhaps some chromium-silver alloy, but I couldn't be certain.

"Well, some kind of electrical wiring. I can't tell what material though...It looks very exotic."

"Why do you say it looks exotic?" Shatter asked curiously,

"Well, we never use this kind of material in our products - not even our precision instruments..."

Whoever was building electronics here had *very* expensive tastes.

Shatter opened another box. I moved over to find that it was filled with small black devices, with an interface of four buttons and a light above each. Shatter moved to press a button.

"Wait!" I cried as she froze in position, "I wouldn't do that. I have no idea what it will do. Stand back,"

² Type-1 luminescence involves simply 'burning off' arcanons at the tip of the horn - very simple to perform. Type-2 releases a matrix of arcane energy which will follow the caster and remain illuminated for a long period without additional effort.

I levitated³ the device quite far in front of me and Shatter. There was a red rocker switch to one side, which I presumed was power. Upon pressing it, a single light appeared above the first button - red for a moment, then green.

"Seems fairly normal," I remarked, before pressing the button.

Nothing happened. Then my vision was solid white. The noise was probably the loudest I had ever heard, and the ringing in my ears persisted for a good few minutes afterward. I fell back against the wall, trying to find some support.

Some moments later, I had somewhat recovered. Shatter was standing there, looking perfectly normal.

"Are...are you okay?" I said to her,

"Yeah, basically," she replied simply.

I'm not nearly as strong as she is. "Give me a moment..." I said, my hooves planted firmly on a wall.

After a moment, Shatter said "Was that there before?" I turned around to see a blue light on a workbench, quickly fading. I moved over to examine it.

"I don't believe it was." It was an ordinary magically shaped glass sphere. The light was only a glimmer by that point. "Looks like there was some magical energy in here at one point. Not much left now."

"Curious," Shatter remarked.

Just above where the glass orb lay, there was a small switch built into the wall. Shatter noticed it as well.

"Hm. Well, it could blow up the basement...or it could turn on the lights?" I smiled slightly. "I suggest we stand a respectable distance away this time. That is, about halfway up the stairs."

"Okay." We walked up the stairs far enough that I could just see the switch.

"Brace yourself..." I pressed the switch.

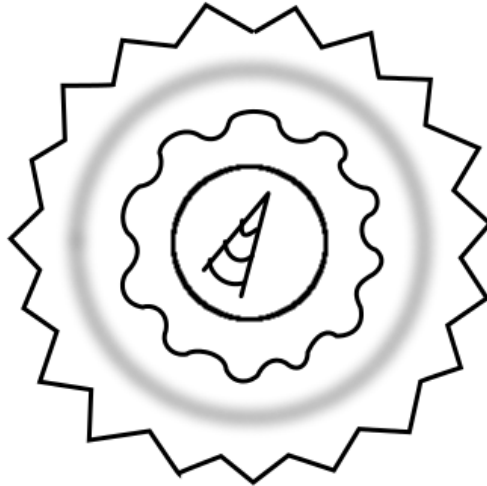
The lights came on. I have to admit, I felt a little disappointed.

Shatter set about opening more boxes, while I investigated the device some more. Seeing no way to open it, I took a saw from one of the workbenches and carefully cut off one side⁴. It was clearly metallic, very rugged design. The internals came out easily - there was only the buttons and lights, connected via the wire I saw previously to a small square of ebony black wood⁵. The wood had a curious symbol etched into it. It looked rather like this:

³ It surprises me how few earth ponies and pegasi understand the importance of levitation. As you know, magical levitation provides much greater precision and dexterity than hooves, so unicorns use it almost exclusively. Because of this, we find it far more difficult to manipulate objects with hooves. In terms of arcane theory, arcanons are manipulated in a mesh to exert a kinetic force on an object, very simple.

⁴ As a very wise pony once said: "Don't turn it on, take it apart!"

⁵ My work is involved almost exclusively with crystalline technology. Different crystals have different effects on arcane and electrical energy, and one can exploit this to create some remarkable devices.



My pondering was interrupted by a voice to my left, "Hey, Cobalt!" Shatter was stood over another box. I trotted over to find a whole load of glass orbs. On closer inspection I found them to have a slight blue tint - the same hue as the fading one we saw earlier. Another open box was again filled with orbs, this time being filled with some sort of red smoke.

I took out one of the blue orbs, examining it closely. On a whim, I decided to fire a small amount of energy into the orb. I was rewarded with another explosion - fortunately much smaller this time.

"Luna's teeth!" I swore, jumping back and knocking into Shatter behind me. She didn't seem fazed at all.

"I wonder what happens if you kick one? Or throw it at a tree?" I couldn't quite match her level of detachment - I was still a little disoriented. I examined the orb again to find that the blue tint had gone.

"Right, take two," I said as I levitated the red orb quite far in front of me. "We'd better not take any chances with this one." I proceeded to fire a *very* small amount of energy into the orb. Nothing happened.

I slowly increased the transfer power, getting more annoyed, until the orb glowed white hot; still nothing.

I sank to my knees as my magic ceased, dropping the orb onto the stone floor with a clink. I could see a small fracture appear in the glass.

"Cobalt - why do you think they made clear ones?" I slowly walked over to see Shatter standing over two more boxes filled with orbs - one load being perfectly clear and the other having a very slight yellow tint.

"I don't think the clear ones have any stored energy. It reckon it's transferred before use," I mused, "Maybe some form of non-lethal weaponry...?"

Shatter looked thoughtful for a moment, "I wonder if the black boxes are used to release the energy?"

I broke into a grin, "Yes! You're a genius!"

Shatter smiled back, "No I'm not!" she laughed.

I nodded to her, "It's very probable. This is why two heads are better than one!" I smiled again as I turned my attention to the other box, "Now, I wonder what this does?" I levitated the orb far away, like before. "Stand back..." I fired an energy beam. The orb glowed with a soft white light - the same colour temperature as the lighting in the room. I looked up to see what appeared to be the exact same orbs suspended from ropes⁶. I became very curious about the origin of this technology.

"So, the blue orbs explode, the yellow ones glow, and the red ones do nothing." I affirmed. "We could try a physical test, perhaps?"

"What do you mean?" Shatter asked, "Smash it?" I nodded. "Well, I've got a pretty good throwing wing," She flexed it as if to demonstrate. "I'll just grab one of those then..."

Just as she moved forward I noticed a small plaque on the crate. "Hold on," I said as I moved to examine it further. It depicted a sleeping pony surrounded by small clouds.

"Ah. Well, I think that clears up its functionality," I affirmed.

Shatter looked pleasantly surprised, "Sleeping gas? Could come in handy." She looked thoughtful for a moment, "Wait - I think I saw some of this stuff when I came back to Equestria. They pumped it in to knock us out. Anyway, no need to go breaking that one then." She quickly moved on to another box - not allowing me to enquire further.

This one contained a collection of the different orb types; nothing unusual, apart from a pair of brass hooves⁷. "Evidently somepony wanted to defend their research," I remarked, before moving on to the largest box - a huge crate only slightly shorter than us. I carefully pried off the lid and peered inside.

The crate contained a myriad of weaponry: hoof-maces, knives, and various mounting attachments for pony legs. "Look at this stuff!" I exclaimed, "You'd think the mafia was hiding out in here."

What really caught my eye, however, was a set of two finely engraved longswords.

Shatter spoke before I could investigate further, however, "I wonder why these ponies would give me a house with an armoury in the basement?"

"Hm?" Clearly there was more to Shatter's arrival in Ponyville than I first thought.

"I didn't have a house here, just like on the moon." *That* threw me a little. They hardly let anypony go to the moon these days⁸. "Then Wolf and what's-his-face were all, like: whoop-de-doo, here's a house. And I said, why would I turn down a free house? So I moved in." I frowned slightly, "What does Wolf do for a living then?"

⁶ Standard lighting comes in two forms: arcane, which is bright and efficient, but expensive and fairly low quality. Electric lighting is cheaper and more stable, but a little dim with current technologies. These orbs corresponded to neither.

⁷ These fit on a pair of pony hooves to give more weight, pressure and energy transfer when they are used to strike.

⁸ Relatively few ponies know that the New Lunar Republic even exists. All records relating to it have been excised, along with so much else. No pony can hide the existence of an entire race, however. Not even the government.

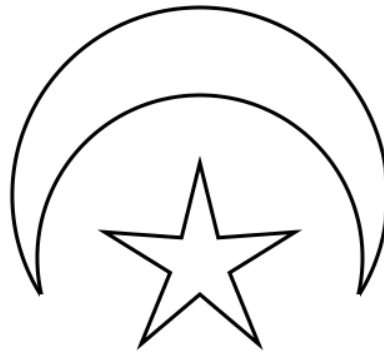
"I've got no idea. Pushes pencils and makes ponies' lives miserable." Wouldn't surprise me. My attention returned to the swords. I lifted one out, to find that it automatically interfaced with my magic⁹ - so it was clearly designed for a unicorn. I hadn't tried out one of these models before, so I was quite excited!

I gave the sword a few experimental swings. It felt incredible! The enchantment allowed me to perform increasingly elaborate maneuvers despite having never held a sword before. I started laughing maniacally - it was somewhat euphoric.

"Don't get carried away there, bucko. I'd like to leave this basement in one piece." Shatter warned, just as I made a small miscalculation which sent me crashing to the floor, the blade flying across the room and embedding itself into a wooden panel.

I was soon startled back to reality when the panel creaked, swinging out. It was, in fact, a door. "We'd better take a look," Shatter said as she moved forward.

Inside was a fairly small storage area. Biosuits hung from hooks on the walls, and suits of lightweight combat armour rested on wireframe stands. There were also combat harnesses to hold weapons in - one specifically made for the swords I used before, plus some saddlebags, travelling cloaks and other gear. A thin layer of dust covered everything. On the armour shoulderpieces, this symbol was painted:



"Well, I think we can be fairly certain this isn't Equestrian military gear," I remarked, while Shatter took a closer look at the armour.

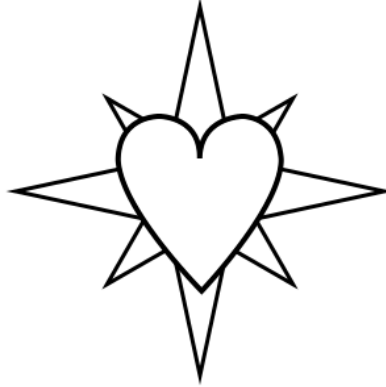
"Wait!" Shatter said, "I've seen this armour before. I think it's used by Luna's guards."

This threw me a little, "I thought Luna's guards wore that archaic spiky gear?"

"Were you ever on the moon?" Shatter chided, "I mean, of course they have ceremonial armour, but that's really only for drawing chariots and marching in parades. This armour is better in almost every way except aesthetics."

Hanging from the neck of one of the armour suits, there was a small silver pendant, shaped as follows:

⁹ A crystal in the hilt provides additional positional feedback and automatic levitation - allowing greater power and dexterity.



Unlike all the other gear, the pendant was free from dust. Shatter picked it up with a wing, “Don’t suppose you’ve ever seen this before?”

“Can’t say I have,” I responded, as Shatter lifted the pendant onto her neck. Just as it touched her coat I saw her eyes widen slightly, and she started to shiver.

“Are you okay there?” I asked, concerned.

“This pendant,” she replied hesitantly, “it makes me feel so cold.”

I frowned slightly, “Let me try it on. It doesn’t seem to be doing you any good there.”

“Okay.” I levitated the pendant over my head, and quickly felt a terrible chill spreading quickly from my core through to my extremities¹⁰.

“Whoo...sweet Celestia,” I said shakily, before quickly dumping the pendant on the floor.

“That...that is not nice.”

“I’ve honestly only ever heard of this sort of thing in myths,” Shatter remarked, “Weird shit. I’m not inclined to try on anything else in this room.”

I thought through it for a moment, “Agreed.”

The rest of the gear was pretty much standard Equestrian issue. “Nothing much else here,” I affirmed.

“Well, I guess I’d probably better get to sleep then,” Shatter replied.

I nodded, “It’s been a long day. I’ll take some of these orbs for further analysis if that’s okay with you?”

Shatter shrugged slightly, “I don’t see why not.”

“Thank you,” I said as I picked up an assortment of orbs, plus one of the trigger devices. “Well, I’d better be off now,” I said with a yawn, “I’ll see you in the morning.”

“See you!” Shatter said with a smile, and I teleported home (it being dark and cold outside).

¹⁰ I should point out that this is a psychological chill - physically the pendant was at room temperature. The enchantment is purely mental.