

The Elder Scrolls: Equestria

Chapter One: *Horseapples, What Was That?*

Cold, dark, miserable.

They were the three words that I'd use to describe my cell. Green, oozing moss sprouted from the dank grey walls of stone, the only touch of colour in a depressing sea of blandness. I sighed, falling sideways onto the mean patch of mangy hay that was my bed. It hurt to hit the hard stone floor, but I didn't care.

I'd been in this cell for a day or so now; it surely wouldn't be long before I was dragged off for my execution. That got me thinking about my life, and I began reminiscing about my days as a colt. At least, until my world was shaken by an enormous explosion that sent me flying into the opposite wall; not gently, either.

"Flamin' Celestia-damned HORSEAPPLES!" I cried, none too gracefully. "What in the hay was *that*!" When my ears stopped ringing and my eyes began to refocus, I started to realise my situation. In the distance, I heard whinnies and cries, and distinctly one voice yelling; "ASSASSINS!"

Assassins? Who was being assassinated? Not that I cared, really, because right in front of me was perhaps the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. "By Celestia..." I whispered, staring at the gaping hole in the wall that led into the darkness of the night. I shot upright, grimacing with pain as I placed one hoof in front of the other, trying to ignore my severely bruised limbs. I made it to the hole, which was roughly the size of a grown stallion and about as high as my head, or ground level outside; they made the prisons slightly subterranean so as to make them as uncomfortable as possible. I had a fairly cushy one, in fact; just below ground level. And was I lucky for it, because here in front of me was my ticket to freedom!

Suppressing cackles of joy, I lifted my front hooves through the hole and hoisted myself up, battered forelegs crying out in pain. With a gasp, I pulled my body through, and rolled upright. The night was dark, alright; I could barely see anything, barring torches placed along the walls and the occasional flare of - wait, what was that? I peered at the bursts of flaming light that streaked through the air. Recoiling with a gasp, I realised that it was forbidden blackfire, an ancient magic prohibited in use by just about everypony because of its incredibly dangerous power. I had thought that nopony knew it anymore; that it had been forgotten and thus made safe. Well, apparently not; and here was the proof.

So what in the hay was going on, then? Everything pointed to something bad happening alright, and I didn't want to get caught in somepony else's fight. I hightailed it right outta there, across the greens where normally I would have seen some guardspony patrolling; I didn't stop to think as to why they weren't. I just kept galloping, out of the city and until I reached the river surrounding Canterlot; once there, I proceeded to swim for all I was worth. It was a struggle, but I pulled up on the far shore, exhausted, battered and hungry. I barely made it to a nearby hedgerow before collapsing into an unconscious heap.

Daylight broke over my face, causing me to grunt and stir. It took me a few disorientated seconds to remember where I was, causing me to shoot upright in shock, only to regret it when my forelegs gave way underneath me, and I fell forward in a crumpled heap. I still ached all over; I wouldn't have been surprised if the knock I'd taken back in my cell had broken a bone or two. Carefully, I placed my hooves and straightened myself upright; only to find myself looking into the eyes of a dark green pegasus. I almost fell back again in surprise.

"You- buh- who..." I trailed off, looking desperately around for a clue. Only then did I notice that behind the pegasus and her smug smirk stood a white unicorn, absent-mindedly scuffing at a leaf with his hoof, and a solid-looking brown earth pony carrying a rough length of metal in his mouth.

The pegasus chuckled; "What's the matter? Lost for words? Let me fill you in, then. We broke out of the prison last night in the confusion. I presume, by the looks of things, that you did too," she added, nodding at the iron manacles around each of my hind legs, thankfully not joined. I hadn't thought about that at the time; had a chain been locked between them, I would have been one dead pony if I'd tried to swim across the river.

"Uh, yeah. Something like that." I quickly muttered, not sure what these ponies wanted; how did I know they weren't here to bring me back? That earth pony looked as though he knew how to use his shiv. I must have given away my fear, because he stepped forward and spoke, carefully enunciating around the metal in his mouth.

"We ain't here to harm ya, a'ight? We're just what she says; escapees." I breathed a sigh of relief; he seemed sincere enough. It was the best I had to go on.

"Well then... What *do* you want?" I tried, trying to sound confident and failing as my voice wavered.

"What do we want? We don't want anything, exactly. I just thought I might extend an invitation to you."

"An invitation? What do you mean?" I was getting more and more confused, my dazed mind trying to make sense of things.

She rolled her eyes, snorting; "By Celestia, you *are* a thick one. What I mean is that you're welcome to travel with us; we've decided to stick together, increase our chances of survival and all that."

Understanding washed over me like floodgates bursting open. "Ohhhh, right, I get you now. Well, sure, I guess. I don't see what else I can do... My picture's probably all over wanted posters everywhere now, what with me being a fugitive." With that, the white unicorn began to giggle softly. "Uh... Something funny?" I ventured.

With a deep breath, he launched into a flurry of excited speech; "Don't be so full of yourself, is all! Do you understand the scale of what happened at the imperial prison last night? At least half of those incarcerated fled, that's for sure! Not to mention that everypony is preoccupied with the rest of the events at hand. All in all, the Empire simply doesn't have the resources right now to be on the lookout for minor criminals such as ourselves. We are, more or less, free to do as we wish, so long as we remain inconspicuous."

I struggled to process his torrent of information; "Uh, right, yeah. Sounds good."

The pegasus shook her head, sighing; "While our friend here can be a little... long-winded at times, what he says is true. There are plenty of ponies that escaped last night. We're just several among what is possibly hundreds of fugitives. That, and the other complications, mean that we're probably pretty low priority for the time being. So, we need to keep it that way; no need to bring imperial wrath on us

for no reason.”

I smiled; “Thanks for the translation. Oh, the name’s...” Hesitating slightly, I contemplated giving them the false name I had used for years since I fled Canterlot for the first time, Arken; but then I settled on my birth name. I have no idea why I chose to, just that it felt right. “Cavalier. My name’s Cavalier.”

She nodded respectfully; “And I’m Swift; this here’s Brash,” she gestured to the earth pony, “And this is Silenus,” nodding at the white unicorn, “But I’ve taken to calling him Sil.”

“Well, uh... Nice to meet you I guess. But we should, uh, get going or something. Don’t wanna hang around Canterlot too long. We’ll look suspicious. I suggest we make for some other town, where we can fit in, maybe find some work... I was a freelancer before I got arrested. I know where we could get a job or two, earn enough bits to figure out our next course of action. How’s that sound?”

“My father always told me to follow the torch borne by our leaders,” Swift said with a chuckle.

“Eh?” I was back to being confused. Couldn’t these damned ponies make sense for once?

“Your mark. With the torch. I presumed that it showed that you were a natural leader; and you’ve just proven it, by giving us a course of action. Without even asking us if we needed one, I might add.”

“Oh!” Blushing, I realised with a start that I had probably assumed too much of myself with these ponies that I barely knew.

“Don’t worry. Swift’s teasing ya,” snorted Brash. “We didn’t have no plan. And feel free to come up with more, too. Trust me, she ain’t much of a leader; ‘course, she’d never admit that.”

“HEY!” Swift spun around, fixing Brash with a fierce look. “I may not have the best ideas, but at least I have *ideas!*”

I had had enough. “Alright, alright! Just... let’s go, okay? If we head off now, we could make it to Braevil by nightfall.” Thankfully, everyone seemed to agree, and any grievances seemed to be put off as we prepared to set off for Braevil. Not that we had much to prepare; it wasn’t like we had much while we were in prison. Not even food; I was getting hungrier and hungrier the longer we waited. If I didn’t get food soon, I felt sure I would starve.

It didn’t take long to get ready, and we began to make our way cross-country in the direction of Braevil. As we walked, I decided to break the silence; “So, then. I guess we should get to know each other.”

And so, I learnt all about my new friends. Swift was a pegasus born into a family of orchard workers, who worked hard in poor soil to grow what they could. She detested the work, and left when she was just a filly to find work elsewhere. After that, she was shunned by her family for deserting her duty there.

So, she was taken in by the local guild of thieves, and raised by them until she was no longer a filly. She got her cutie mark from that line of work, too; a lockpick. Not the most inconspicuous, sure, but apparently she could just pass it off by explaining that it meant she was good at finding secrets. The truth, of course, was that there wasn’t a lock that she couldn’t pick. She had become a valuable asset to the guild, and earned herself good money through her lockpicking skills. That all changed when she went for too grand a scheme, filching some noble’s prized artifacts. She had wound up in prison when the plan went astray, leaving her with a heavy sentence which she wouldn’t reveal to me.

Brash seemed hesitant to tell the rest of us about his colt-hood, but we coaxed him into it, and he gave us his entire life story in the end. He hadn't known his father very well; he'd been 'raised' by his mother; which meant simply that she let him sleep in her house. She didn't have much to do with him at all; he was forced to find his own way on the streets of Stablehal; which, admittedly, wasn't a bad city. Still, there were times he'd had to fight for his food, and there were times when he was on the losing side of those fights. He grew up as a street tough, and that was reflected in the cutie mark he got after a particularly nasty hoof-to-hoof brawl; a gleaming blade. Strangely enough, he didn't even own a blade of any kind up until then, but that made him think about his future; sort of. He joined a group of bandits, and ran with them for a while, honing his fighting skills further. It was never going to last, though, and sure enough he was caught eventually. He too was facing a death penalty when he escaped.

And Silenus... wouldn't stop talking. It was hard to pick up much in what he said, but from what I gathered he was from a relatively wealthy family, and had had a comfortable upbringing, much like mine. But he hadn't rebelled against his parents like I had. Well, not exactly. From what I gather, he was powerful in magic, particularly in his chosen field; which, as it turned out, was necromancy.

This was, however, not shown in his cutie mark, which was a quill. According to him, it was because of his highly studious nature; if something interested him in the slightest, he would do everything to research it entirely. However, he was very quick to explain to us that necromancy wasn't just about *"raising the dead, and other such 'evil' things"*; or at least that's what he told us. From what I gathered, he claimed that necromancy was simply the channeling of negative energies, the opposite of positive energies (such as those used to heal wounds). He was fascinated by these negative energies, and was determined to study them; however, what with necromancy being outlawed in Equestria, he found himself on the wrong side of the law, getting arrested and held in prison while his fate was decided. He didn't wait to find out, though; he took his chances that night like the rest of us. He didn't seem too fazed by the rough life of a wandering pony as I would have expected him to, coming out of his comfortable life in aristocracy as he did; but I think he was simply too preoccupied with his thoughts to really understand his situation.

And that's what I learnt of my fellow travellers; they wanted to know my story too, of course, and I was obliged to tell them. I glazed over my aristocratic upbringing, though, explaining my life up until I fled Canterlot as 'not important'. That raised a few eyebrows, but nopony said anything. I guess they probably all had a few things they hid from the rest as well. By the time I had finished telling of my exploits, dusk was soon approaching. We had been travelling almost non-stop since morning, and my hooves were killing me.

"Right," I said authoritatively; "The only way to make Braevil tonight would be to press on for an hour or so of night. It could be dangerous; we're relatively unarmed, and easy targets. Who knows what we might meet on the road. So, should we stay the night somewhere, or continue to Braevil?"

"Well, I'm right done in. Thinkin' it'd be best if we stayed here f'the night," drawled Brash with a yawn. I felt his fatigue, and soon I was fighting back a yawn of my own.

"Yes, I-" The yawn erupted from my throat. "Excuse me. As I was saying, I think it's best we stopped for the night. I'm in no state to go much further, myself." As if agreeing with me, my stomach rumbled violently. "Though, I could sure go for some food. I'm famished!"

"How about here?" called Swift from somewhere to our left. Ducking through some light foliage, we came upon Swift standing by a small alcove under a large boulder. By some chance, there was a small pile of non-perishable provisions here. Somepony who used this road frequently must have left this here in case they needed it; well, we needed it more right now, so I hoped they didn't mind.

“Sounds like a plan. Dried apple, anyone?” I called, peering into the small basket of provisions that we had found.

Shortly after, we were settled under the rock, talking quietly amongst ourselves. We had nothing to light a fire with, so we were making do without one. We’d found just enough food in the supplies to sate us, and I at least was no longer feeling peckish at all. Rolling onto my back, I thought about all that had happened over the last day or two. Not long ago, I was contemplating my own death. And here I was now, saved from that death by some inexplicable chance, and with a group of people whom I considered, against all rationality and common sense, my friends. It seemed as though things were going strangely well for me. Was this some kind of sign, that I had some path to follow? Was this Celestia’s guidance? I wasn’t devoutly religious in the least, but it still seemed a possibility. Or maybe it was just freak chance, and as usual something horrible was about to happen to even it out.

Something horrible...

I jumped to my hooves, startling everypony.

“Swift. Sil. You said something about ‘other events’ and ‘complications’. What’s going on?”