

## Saturday 7th April 1001

After waking up promptly at 6:30, I made my bed impeccably and navigated my way through the single bedroom cottage which was my residence in Ponyville. At the front door, my saddlebags lay pre-packed with some clothing, a few essentials, spending money and the devices from Shatter's basement, plus a few other curiosities to keep myself occupied.

I made my way to the airship landing pad on the outskirts of the town, which seemed near deserted due to the early hour. I saw a medium-sized airship docked on the first platform. It was named "*Shadowchaser*". Beneath it there was a tan earth pony with a red-brown mane, lazily hoofing through a clipboard. I approached her cautiously.

"Ah, hello! It's, er, Cobalt Spark?"

She flipped through a few sheets until she found my name. "Yes. you have been cleared to board. Your room is D2 R3S."

"Oh, thank you." I hesitantly moved forward a few paces before enquiring further. "Uhm, I'm really very grateful for this trip, but would you mind telling me what this is all about?"

Sunny didn't look up from her clipboard, "Just a vacation. Have a pleasant trip." She nodded to the ramp, and I moved forward. I was afire with curiosity, but simply too nervous to keep pushing for answers.

I found my path blocked by a foreleg. "Hold on. Do you know a mare named Shatter?"

I replied without hesitation, "I do indeed - we're meeting onboard the ship, if I recall."

Her eyes returned to the clipboard as the leg was retracted. "Very good. Carry on." I paused for a moment, then proceeded to board the open top deck of the ship.

As I found my way to Deck 2 Room 3 Starboard, I bumped into a mare I had met before - Ink Nib. "Ah, fainty-guy!"

*Oh please Celestia, don't let that become a nickname.*

"You takin' up a lot of space here!"

I was a little surprised to see her here, "Oh! Hello! Ink, isn't it?" She nodded in response. "So you were summoned here as well?"

She replied in her classically inexpressive tone, "Yes. How long is travel time? Yes. Will there be many ponies? Are there more, that is?"

*How am I supposed to know this stuff?*

"Well, Shatter got a letter, so she'll be coming along soon. No idea what the travel time is - I'd check with the cabin crew." I was trying to be as helpful as possible.

"Shatter? I know her?" It was quite clear she did not.

"Really? That's odd - it seemed that everypony knew everypony around here..."

*Oh Sisters, I am a moron.*

"Whatever. Got to go talk to cabin crew." I tried to compress myself into a corner and squeeze past, but she just barged through. Not exactly the epitome of politeness.

I soon located my cabin. It's fairly small, but comfortable enough to live in. There are some chairs, a table, and storage - all of which are of course bolted to the floor. To sleep in I have a

sort of hanging cot - some fabric with a quilt and cushions tied at four corners to the wall. It will suffice.

I noticed that the lighting in the cabin was provided by two yellow tinted orbs hung from rope slings that looked very familiar. Comparing them to the ones from Shatter's basement, I found them to be identical. Just to the right of the door, I noticed two small grey switches, which from experimentation, I concluded operated the lighting orbs. This time I couldn't hold back my curiosity.

I closed and deadbolted the door before unscrewing<sup>1</sup> the switch from its retainer in the wall. I was pleased to find that it was almost an identical mechanism to the trigger devices I found in the basement - however the image engraved into the wood was different:



The switches were connected to the wood with the same alloy wire I saw before.

I guessed that the patterns on the block of wood must signify the function performed by that switch position. On the lightswitch, there were two solid rings - therefore a solid ring must represent a yellow orb.

Now to determine the order of the mapping of functions to switches. When I pressed the first button on the trigger device, a blue orb had detonated, not a yellow one. With the diagram there showing a solid circle in the centre and a sort of zigzag one on the outside, I concluded that as one moves from left to right with the switches, one moves towards the centre of the diagram describing the function.

However, there were still two functions that I didn't know about, shown by a sort of smudged ring and a wavy ring on the diagram. I took out one of the red smoke orbs - knowing full well that if I pressed the wrong button I could be knocked out or worse. Once I knew this unknown function, however, the release of the sleeping gas would be performed by the only button remaining.

There were two buttons to choose from - numbers 2 and 3. 50-50, right? I pressed button number two - the smudged ring.

Suddenly, red smoke started pouring out of the orb.

I frantically rushed to the door, only to remember that I had deadbolted it. Rather than

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<sup>1</sup> For me, a toolkit comes under 'essentials' - and it should for you too!

attempting to fumble with the mechanism I crashed against the window, trying to open it, only to discover that it was sealed. I kept breathing in the smoke, my limbs becoming heavier with each second.

With my last ounce of energy, I constructed an air filter around my mouth and nose. It didn't work.

*Well it would hardly be effective if every unicorn and his mother could block it, would it?*

I felt strangely calm.

I regained consciousness to the feeling of hooves and wings pounding on my chest. I opened my eyes and gasped for air, to see the concerned face of a brown pegasus with a red and white mane.

"Ah, guess yer not dead after all!" He had an unusual accent - clearly Equestrian, but from a region I was unfamiliar with<sup>2</sup>. Nothing like Manehattan, but nowhere near Canterlot either.

My eyes went wide as I remembered the recent incident. "Oh heavens, the gas!"

"What in holy hay were you doing messin' with the lighting orbs?" The colt asked, a little confused and annoyed.

"Oh, the lighting orbs," I said as I got to my hooves, "Well, erm, I was only using them to compare with my own devices. The red gas you saw was something I found elsewhere." I sighed wistfully, "I still don't know what that wavy ring does..."

The colt stood up, "Well, uh, if I wasn't here you'd probably been dead. What's this wavy ring?"

I suddenly remembered my manners, "Oh yes, thank you very much for your assistance, my apologies for any inconvenience caused. The wavy ring is the last piece! The solid is the yellow orbs, the lighting orbs, the zigzag is the blue, I call it a 'flashbang', and the smudged is the sleeping gas!"

As you can tell, my mind wasn't quite back to normal just yet.

"You sure do talk a lot, you sure yer feelin' okay?" He looked through the open door of my smoke-filled cabin, "A think you'd better turn that thing off before it gasses the entire ship out, you don't want to catch the captain on a bad day..."

"Turn it off? Oh, I can't do that, once they've been activated they remain so until all the energy is released, it shouldn't be long now. And it seems the gas is only effective in large concentrations. It won't affect the rest of the ship."

*I just pulled all that out of my well-educated plot!*

"And really, I'm feeling fine!" I actually was. I felt brilliant! A new mystery to solve, as it were!

"Well, if you say so, I only know airships and talismans," he started to walk along the corridor, then stopped suddenly. "I don't think we introduced each other. I'm SteelWing - I'm on maintenance while this old girl is flying. You are...?"

"Cobalt Spark, arcane engineer," I stopped when I heard shouting from upstairs. SteelWing looked upwards.

"Yeah, that's the 'captain' right there. Talk to you later." He cantered off down the corridor and upstairs.

Having nothing better to do, and far too afraid to test the orbs' final function, I lost myself in a

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<sup>2</sup> In case anypony couldn't tell, I speak with a mild Canterlot accent.

good book.