

## **Nina Jr.'s Search for Nightshade and Spirit by James DeHaas**

### **Fluffton, Ominous Mountain State University Room 314**

After hearing the news that a masked man at the local Waffleorium had kidnapped Nightshade and Spirit, I felt that it was my time to use my secret agent skills in order to try to bring them back. As much as Breakfast doubted by ability to perform as a secret agent – even going so far as to call me delusional – I knew I needed to do what I could to bring them back. When he made the decision to find Britnee to try to find out what she knew, I insisted that he remain in contact in case he would find out something of value from her that could help me track down the person who had taken Spirit and Nightshade. The last thing I did before I set out on my quest was to leave Otto in charge of guarding the room while I was gone. Whether or not that was a wise decision I'm not sure but at that point I had no other option.

During my time as a bookend with a name I had had a lot of time to read various novels about secret agents and I had watched my fair share of secret agent movies over Patel's shoulder while he had them on the TV so I felt as though I was prepared for what I was about to be getting into. I knew that it was a very dangerous world I was getting into and that I was merely a stuffed narwhal – which poses its own set of complications I can assure you – but I was driven to succeed in my mission. The problem for me was finding a starting point. I decided to start with my preferred contact, Clement, on the first night.

As good as this idea seemed in theory, I wasn't expecting that Clement's cable service would be down when I tried to contact him. Instead of seeing his face in front of me, all I received on my end was a useless image of static. I called the tech support offices for his cable company and before I knew it I was talking to some tech support tiger whose name I couldn't even begin to pronounce correctly and who lived in a country that I had never heard of up until that point. I figured that it was a start though. I folded myself up in a box addressed to the tiger's work address in Bangladesh and prepared for a long overnight flight there. I had no idea at that moment that I was about to be beginning the longest international voyage of my short life but I was ready for anything.

### **Bangladesh, Cable Company Tech Support Offices**

The next morning when my box arrived at the tech support offices of Clement's cable company in Bangladesh I got straight to work on my mission. I came unarmed save for my horn because a. I've never really been able to wrap my head around the idea of using a weapon and b. I'm a Squishable narwhal, using a weapon of any kind isn't really all that easy for me. I'm more of the infiltration type of agent. During my flight I had been listening to a recording I had made of my conversation with the Bengal tech support tiger in the hopes that I might be able to better identify his voice as I passed over his working quarters in the ventilation system. The building was massive and I got turned around multiple times in the labyrinth of vents in search of the tiger. Finally I could hear him talking on the phone to an obviously dissatisfied customer. I gently lifted the tile of drop ceiling over his head and waited to drop down until he was finished with his call. I always thought a secret agent should show some degree of courtesy, after all, since they had always been portrayed as being so debonair in the books I had read and the movies I had watched over Patel's shoulder.

With a soft thud I landed on the carpet behind him and ran through the questions I had for him in my head. I had no idea if he would lead me to anything meaningful but at the time he was the only lead I had. As he slowly turned around in his chair to see what had made the sound behind him, I tackled him to the ground and put my horn right between his eyes.

"Who can I talk to who can fix the cable service for a certain Clement who spoke with you yesterday to that regard? I need information and he might be able to provide it for me. It is imperative that his cable problem is cleared up so that I speak with him," I said in a breath.

"I know who this Clement is, but it is out of my hands whether his cable service comes

back on or not. I don't know why but about a week ago there were talks around the office about a person's cable in America being deliberately shut down due to seizures of the signal by someone else to send communiqués," he answered, "I assume that someone was you?"

"That doesn't concern you if it was me or not," I said, "Can you tell me anything about whom I can speak to about this? Two of my colleagues have gone missing and right now my communication with Clement is my only method of finding them."

"This company is based somewhere in Western Europe but information of this sort flows through the baggage claim area of the Stuttgart Airport. Don't ask me why they chose that location, but I assume it would be because they viewed that airport as being a less volatile location in comparison with others that they had considered for shady information exchanges," he answered.

"Excellent. What I want you to do is request information on the outage at Clement's and tell them to expect me in the airport to pick it up," I demanded.

"They will never divulge that kind of information to a tech support agent such as myself," he protested, "They only give it out to those in higher chains of command."

"Make them believe you," I said coldly, drawing my horn closer to his face – which, I admit, is a pretty idle threat since I'd have to be at some distance to really get some momentum behind it and make it useful as a real threat.

"I will do my best," the tiger replied.

"That's all I ask. Tell them to expect Nina," I said as I shimmied my way back into the vents and out of the building. By the end of the evening I had myself in another box on the way to Flughafen Stuttgart in the hopes that I might finally get some more information out of what I was hoping to receive in the baggage claim area. If it was thorough enough, I might be able to cut through the static at Clement's and work together with him and his resources to try to track down the kidnapper of Spirit and Nightshade.

### **Flughafen Stuttgart, Baggage Claim**

On the flight into the Stuttgart airport I heard from Breakfast once from Britnee's. He had been unsuccessful in uncovering any information as to Spirit's whereabouts from her and he was going to be on his way back to room 314 the next morning. I relayed to him what I had found out from the tech support agent in Bangladesh and that I was currently on my way in to Stuttgart to see what other information I could gather from one of the higher-ups in Clement's cable company. He told me to be careful and that was the last I heard from him until I got back to Fluffton. The descent was a little rocky given Germany's lovely tendency toward grey, rainy weather but I made it safely into the baggage claim to begin waiting.

Not long after my arrival a man approached me carrying an aluminum briefcase asking if I was Nina from the cable company. I replied with a simple yes while avoiding making eye contact. I could hear him lay the briefcase down next to me and then I could hear his departing footsteps. Without turning my head I reached out my fin to gather up the briefcase and pack myself into a box addressed to Otto. I didn't expect it to be that easy but this was just the first step. Everything I was searching for could be contained in that briefcase or it could be nothing at all and I'd be back to square one. I suppose I'd have to wait and see when I reunited with the group in room 314. At the very least I could say that I had potentially made some progress in the effort to find our friends. I can only hope that what progress I've made can link us back up with Clement in order to use the resources he has that we Squishables do not to our advantage.