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Chapter 12
The Far Side

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR (V.O)

You're listening to The Blizzard of Osborn by Michael Sheen Cuddy.
Chapter 12: The Far Side.

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: Ext., outside the Count's mansion – Night.

SOUND: crickets + crowd commotion

SLY

Head for the trees!

CASSIE

What about Memyselfandi?

SLY

Forget about him, the Icemen are coming!

SOUND: (FootstepsRunning.4)

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NARRATOR

Cassie ran across the lawn then jumped up and down and waved her arms outside the ballroom window. Memyselfandi saw her out there and waddled onto the terrace. Cassie, holding Jet tight, waved.

CASSIE

Follow me!

NARRATOR

All four of them dashed into a dark grove of trees.

Scene Two: Ext., in woods surrounding Count's mansion – Night.

SOUND: Footsteps running, bushes rustling, crickets

NARRATOR (cont.)

Apart from Jet, who had excellent night vision, it was hard to see in the dark. Cassie set her down to lead the way. When Jet got too far ahead Cassie called and Jet meowed in response. By following the sound of Jet's meows they made their way through the dark woods until they came to a river.

SOUND: flowing water

MEMYSELFANDI

Oh bother, now what?

SOUND: jungle night

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CASSIE

How far is it to the other side?

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi reached into his vest pocket and pulled out his Swiper.

SOUND: electronic bleep

MEMYSELFANDI

The river at this point is 961 v wide.

SLY

How does that thing know where we are?

MEMYSELFANDI

Kinematic GPS, of course.

SLY

Does it tell you where the closest bridge is?

SOUND: electronic bleep

MEMYSELFANDI

Hmmm. Twenty-six penta south-southeast.

SLY

If we jump in right here and swim across we can lose the Icemen

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because they'll only cross at a bridge.

MEMYSELFANDI

How can you be so sure?

SLY

The Icemen won't go far without their Rovers. That's where they keep all their equipment—weapons, computers, remote sensing devices, infrared ultratrackers—the works.

CASSIE

Then let's do it!

MEMYSELFANDI (desperate)

I can't swim!

SLY

I can!

MEMYSELFANDI

Well bully for you, but how exactly does that help *me*?

SLY

You can stay behind, you fit right in with the Narsies anyway.

CASSIE

C'mon! If we cross right now we'll get a good jump on the Icemen!

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MEMYSELFANDI

There's absolutely no way I'm going to jump into that river!

SLY

OK, well, nice knowing you, egghead.

CASSIE

Wait! Wait! Sly, can you swim really well?

SLY

Ever see a water moccasin glide through a swamp? It's a thing of beauty!

MEMYSELFANDI

Yes well, to a snake, maybe, but to me, it's a thing of horror!

CASSIE

Listen: how about this? Sly jumps in the water, I hold onto his tail with one hand and with my other, I hold your hand. That way Sly can swim us all over to the far side!

SLY

What about Jet?

CASSIE

Jet's a super good swimmer. Don't worry, she'll keep up with us.

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SLY

Well, I said I can swim, I didn't say I'm a beast of burden.

CASSIE

I don't weigh much. And Memyselfandi is just egg white and yolk. Plus, we'll be in the water so it'll be easy for you to pull us along, like a tug boat!

MEMYSELFANDI

If I hit a rock in the water I'll break my shell! Or if you let go of me I'll drown!

SLY

I say we lose egghead here and dive in the river while we have a chance.

CASSIE

We can't just leave him here!

SLY

Why not? He's only an egg!

CASSIE

He saved us from the Narsies! We'd probably be in jail if Memyselfandi hadn't translated for us!

SOUND: Rover motors revving

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CASSIE

The Icemen!

MUSIC: (IcemenPursuit)

SOUND: motors revving

NARRATOR

All four scrambled down the embankment.

SOUND: shuffling feet, motors revving

NARRATOR (cont.)

Sly slid into the water, spiralled around and flicked his tail out for Cassie to grab. Memyselfandi hesitated on the shore. Cassie took hold of his hand and dragged him into the water.

ICEMEN

Halt!

SOUND: rapid bursts from shock blaster, splashing water

NARRATOR

Sly plunged underwater and darted out into the swift current.

SOUND: rapid bursts from shock blaster

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MUSIC: (Icemen pursuit)

Scene Three: Ext., on the far side of the river – Night.

NARRATOR

The current was stronger than expected. When they landed on the far side it was four v downstream. The first thing they noticed in the darkness was a loud buzzing sound.

MUSIC: (ElectricTubes-F.mp4)

CASSIE

What *is* that?

SLY

I don't know, but something's glowing up there.

NARRATOR

The shoreline was a dark, steep embankment about 10 'd high, topped with an even darker mass of black bush. Beyond the bush was an eerie glow, a blue-green shimmer like the Northern Lights, and the buzzing seemed to come from there as well.

Cassie started climbing up the embankment.

SOUND: Footsteps, foliage rustling

MEMYSELFANDI

Where the devil are you going Cassie?

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CASSIE

To see what's up there.

SOUND: Footsteps, foliage rustling

MEMYSELFANDI

Is everything OK up there? . . . I say, is everything OK up there?

MUSIC: (ElectricTubes-F.mp4)

SLY

Hey, why don't you climb up there and see what's going on?

MEMYSELFANDI

Why don't *you* climb up there?

SLY

Because that's a very steep incline, not my strong point, climbing uphill.

MEMYSELFANDI

Well it's not my strong point either.

SLY

What *is* your strong point, eggman?

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MEMYSELFANDI

Thinking. Unlike yours.

SLY

Thinking of yourself you mean, that's all you ever think about.

NARRATOR

Cassie came sliding down the embankment.

SOUND: rustling footsteps

CASSIE

You've got to see this! I don't know what it is but it's really weird!

MUSIC: (ElectricTubes-E.mp4)

NARRATOR

With a lot of huffing and puffing and backsliding Sly and Memyselfandi climbed to the top of the embankment.

SOUND: rustling footsteps

CASSIE

Over here!

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NARRATOR

Sly and Memyselfandi followed the sound of her voice then saw her silhouette lit up from behind by the blue-green glow. They saw what she was pointing at: a broad and flat expanse like an airport runway. But instead of a landing strip for airplanes there were endless rows of giant white vats buried in the ground.

MUSIC: (ElectricTubes-E.mp4)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Each vat contained a swarm of writhing snake-like tubes of all sizes. Some were tiny and sheer like spider web filaments. Others were worm-size, while others were longer and thicker, graduating in sizes like garter snakes, rattle snakes and pythons. Some were as huge as anacondas and others were even bigger, larger than any snake, the size of industrial conduits, railway tunnels. But all of them were squirming and writhing and glowed with the strange blue-green light they'd seen from the river's edge.

MUSIC: (ElectricTubes-F.mp4)

CASSIE

I feel dizzy.

MEMYSELFANDI (shouting)

What?

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SLY

We should get out of here.

MEMYSELFANDI

Yes, but how? It looks like glowing snakes as far as the eye can see.

SLY

We can jump back in the river and float downstream.

MEMYSELFANDI

I will *not* go back into that freezing river.

SLY

You'd rather stay here? I don't know about you but these things are giving me a headache.

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi didn't want to admit it but he wasn't feeling well either.

MEMYSELFANDI

Hmmm . . . I wonder if it's the chain arrays.

CASSIE

What's that?

MEMYSELFANDI

Chain arrays are controversial. Critics say they emit electromagnetic frequencies that can cause health problems.

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SLY

How do you know so much about this stuff if you've been stuck up on a wall for years?

MEMYSELFANDI

I had nothing but time on my hands so I perused the network on my Swiper and learned all sorts of things. For instance, proponents of chain arrays claim that the denser the array the greater the concentration of propagating fibers. That means accelerated fractionating, which produces more energy.

SLY

Yeah well, I'm with the critics, 'cause I feel like pukin'!

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi pulled out his Swiper again.

SOUND: electronic bleep

MEMYSELFANDI

The thing about the network is, you can find opinions for or against anything. The official Empire site says the chain arrays are a 'proud example of bleeding edge technology enabled by a forward thinking collaboration between private enterprise and the Empire.'

MUSIC: (ElectricTubes-F.mp4)

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SLY

Yeah, of course they're gonna say that.

MEMYSELFANDI

However, certain unofficial sites—the so-called back channels—say that super dense concentrations of interlinked chain arrays pose serious threats to nearby residents and wildlife. Rumors of increased birth defects, higher than average cancer rates and bizarre genetic mutations abound.

NARRATOR

Cassie was trying to think of another way—other than jumping in the river—to get out of there. As she pondered, a sound—different from the buzzing chain arrays—grew louder.

SOUND: locomotive (fade in)

NARRATOR (cont.)

This sound was lower, deeper, more like thunder. And the louder it got the more they could feel it in the ground, especially Sly, as his belly lay in the dirt.

CASSIE

What is that?

MEMYSELFANDI

Not an earthquake, I hope.

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CASSIE

No, I mean, what is *that*?

NARRATOR

Cassie pointed to the horizon. A bright yellow ball was floating into view. As the thunder sound grew louder the yellow light grew closer and brighter.

MEMYSELFANDI

Is that a train?

NARRATOR

And sure enough, when it was close enough to see through the haze of the glowing chain arrays, there it was: a long line of industrial tank cars, flatbed, gondolas and boxcars pulled by a massive engine crowned with a brilliant yellow lamp.

The train gradually slowed, then stopped.

SOUND: hissing

NARRATOR (cont.)

Vacuum seals popped open the lids on top of tank cars. Then long, snaking tubes unravelled from within the tank cars and spilled down into the white vats of the chain arrays.

SLY

What's happening?

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MEMYSELFANDI

It appears to be some sort of fuelling operation.

CASSIE

Maybe we should hop onto one of those boxcars and hitch a ride before the train leaves.

SLY

Yeah but, who knows where this train is going?

CASSIE

It's gonna go somewhere, and somewhere is better than here.

MEMYSELFANDI

There's a good chance this train is heading to Aspire because that's where they burn the most fuel.

SLY

I don't know, what if this train takes us right back to the Icemen?

CASSIE

Or what if it takes us straight to Aspire? Wherever it goes has to be better than being stuck here getting sicker by the minute.

NARRATOR

Sly had doubts but his headache was only getting worse. In fact, by now they all had headaches and felt dizzy and nauseous. The hope of

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getting away from whatever was making them feel so awful made them do it. They came up to the train and walked alongside it till they found an open boxcar. Cassie put Jet inside, then asked Memyselfandi to help her lift Sly up and put him on the boxcar floor.

MEMYSELFANDI

Why can't we just leave him behind? He's only a cold-blooded snake-in-the-grass!

CASSIE

Please, you two! Stop your stupid fighting and let's get out of here!

SOUND: locomotive (fade in)

NARRATOR

Next: Hopping a mystery train may be the quickest way to escape, but where is the train headed?

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE IN)

SOUND: train slow, then accelerating

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE OUT)

[end Chapter 12]