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**Chapter 18: At the Heart of the Skirling
Lies a Reclusive Spider**

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR (V.O.)

You're listening to The Blizzard of Osborn by Michael Sheen Cuddy.
Chapter 18: At the Heart of the Skirling Lies a Reclusive Spider

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: Ext., winding mountain road, day.

MUSIC: Desertification2.m4v

SOUND: footsteps walking, hooves, wind

NARRATOR

After walking for a very long time it felt like they were making no progress. The mountain road kept winding and curving and turning back on itself. At one point they came to a massive rock streaked with a dark red stain. As they kept walking they saw more rocks with the same red mark, a half-circle swirled around a bold X.

CASSIE

What do you think these marks mean?

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ASSAM

I assume they're a kind of sign, maybe directions.

SLY

Yeah well, you know what they say, when you assume you make an a-s-s
of u-m-e.

MEMYSELFANDI

These symbols look like a crude version of Nebulian script, possibly
a dialect of one of the nomadic tribes in this realm. Let's just hope
it's not a Skirling territory marker.

SOUND: galloping hooves, braying, shouting

NARRATOR

A Skirling patrol mounted on bellowing camelrams charged around a
bend in the road. Several warriors dismounted and approached.

SKIRLING WARRIOR

(unintelligible command)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Two of them seized Memyselfandi.

SOUND: tussling, grunting, struggling

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NARRATOR (cont.)

Two more grabbed Cassie.

CASSIE

You're hurting me!

SOUND: tussling, grunting, struggling

NARRATOR (cont.)

A lasso was thrown around Assam's neck and a hooded soldier picked Sly up with a long forked stick and tossed him into a sack.

SOUND: snake hiss

MUSIC: Desertification2.m4v

Scene Two: Ext., desert encampment, day.

SOUND: wind

MUSIC: (radio.garden – RadioDamash)

NARRATOR

Nearly invisible until they passed through its gates was a great wall woven of silk dyed the same color as the surrounding sand dunes. Cassie, Jet, Sly, Memyselfandi and Assam—all bound together by a braided rope of the same silk—were led like cattle into the Skirling

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encampment.

A squad of mounted soldiers led them toward a ring of brightly colored tents. Outside the largest tent—bright red and octagon-shaped—sat a glowering man bedecked in an ornate costume.

Three warriors approached Cassie, Memyselfandi and Assam from behind and shoved the butt end of their lances behind their knees.

SKIRLING WARRIOR

All kneel before the great King Hubaija!

NARRATOR

A warrior draped in black, red and white silk genuflected before the King and whispered something in his ear. The King glared at the strangers kneeling before him.

KING HUBAIJA

State your names and business.

SLY

As for me, I come from the River Orange, that's where I met Cassie first—

SOUND: whipcrack

SLY

Hey—take it easy!

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SKIRLING WARRIOR

You! Little girl—answer the King!

CASSIE

I come from Osborn, North Dakota by way of Biloxi, Mississippi.

SOUND: stir of murmurs

SKIRLING WARRIOR

Silence! You—eggman!

SOUND: electric cattle prod

MEMYSELFANDI

Would you please leave off with that devilish prod, sir? Can you not see that I am made of fragile stuff?

SKIRLING WARRIOR (mocking falsetto)

Oh—I'm made of fragile stuff!

SOUND: mocking laughter

SKIRLING WARRIOR

And how do you explain yourself jackass?

ASSAM

I'll have you know you're addressin' a purebred Andalusian stallion, sir!

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SOUND: more mocking laughter

KING HUBAIJA

Now, is your little cat a freak too? Like the snake and the ass, does it also speak?

CASSIE

She's not a freak. And she speaks her own language.

KING HUBAIJA

Maintaining silence in the face of uncertainty is admirable.

CASSIE

I think so.

KING HUBAIJA

Then why don't you take a lesson from your little cat and shut your mouth?

SLY

Hey—

KING HUBAIJA

It is clear to me that you do not know where you are. I don't know what brings you to this realm and I suspect you don't either, but it is fortunate for you that you do not hail from Pallafox as I would

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disembowel you on the spot.

MEMYSELFANDI

(swallows audibly)

KING HUBAIJA

As it is, I feel I owe you the courtesy of showing you where you are,
and why the Skirling are the greatest of all the tribes in the
Empire. Come!

MUSIC: (radio.garden - RadioSetifAlgeria)

KING HUBAIJA

Sun and wind. This is the soul of the desert. Only fools deny this.
And fools die, killed by sun and wind. From these elements come our
native crafts: weaving and flying. Behold the genius of Skirling
invention.

NARRATOR

King Hubaija spread his arms out, encompassing the bright tents all
around.

KING HUBAIJA

These tents are the envy of the entire Levn. They are ultra
lightweight—perfect—as we are a nomadic people. They protect us
from the killing sun and hateful winds.

The Skirling have roamed this desert for thousands of *klonas*. As

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you can see, we are survivors. And the reason we survived is because we have adapted and developed a unique and complex living arrangement.

SOUND: light activity, treadle pedalling

NARRATOR

The King led his guests into a series of tents filled with row after row of women and girls weaving skeins of fabric, never daring to glance up from their veils.

KING HUBAIJA

There are many tribes in this realm of the Empire, and most are nomadic. But only Skirling have mastered the art of this extraordinary fabric which lies at the heart of our culture. The Skirling live and die to hold our monopoly on *sa*, the source material of this wondrous silk. It is the foundation of our economy. Whereas the Shi'aav hold the main reserves of *gan*, the basis of crude fuel, and the Baikan monopolize the main supply of fresh *O*, Skirling provide the entire region with *sa*, from which countless invaluable products are derived.

NARRATOR

Flanked on either side by his guards, King Hubaija left the weaving tents and entered into a dark vault carved into the side of a massive rock outcrop.

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KING HUBAIJA

The secret behind this miracle fabric lies deep within the caves of the Kyrkut mountains, specifically within the silk producing glands of the *belisperus* spider, a rare albino arachnid.

NARRATOR

As King Hubaija explained this, Memyselfandi wondered why he was sharing so much information with them.

KING HUBAIJA

According to legend, the queen *belisperus* spider can subsist for *klonas* on little more than spring water and winter moonlight. Yet its silk is renown for having exceedingly lightweight and miraculously strong tensile qualities.

NARRATOR

Vats of bright dye interconnected by colored tubing were mounted on racks and tended by workers.

SOUND: pulling wooden levers, turning hand cranks,
pedalling treadles

KING HUBAIJA

We trade the woven fabric to neighboring tribes for jute, millet, pottery and steel. The fabric is dyed in rainbow colors and woven into an array of materials for clothing and shelter. Ultra-

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lightweight weaves are bleached white and serve as the coolest possible garment for protection from the sun. Skirling tents are prized for their 100% moistureproof properties as well as their ability to insulate against freezing desert nights.

NARRATOR

The King brought them along to a vast overarching structure enshrouded by more of the dyed silk.

KING HUBAIJA

Perhaps the most remarkable use of *sa* is in the manufacture of our *dinka*.

NARRATOR

The King pointed to a flock of brightly colored kites of many shapes and sizes darting about.

KING HUBAIJA

Dinka design and manufacturing has a long tradition in Skirling culture. The first *dinka* were, like your so-called 'kites,' launched for pleasure and amusement. But over time, contests evolved to determine who could make the highest flying *dinka*, the largest *dinka*, the funniest *dinka*, the scariest *dinka*.

Legend has it that Carius the Elder invented a so-called boomerang *dinka*, one that was launched without a tether and allowed to sail away freely but would eventually return to its master. So complex and esoteric was its design, only three boomerang *dinka* were

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ever created. Unfortunately, the secret behind the boomerang *dinka* burned, along with Carius the Younger when the parchment plans on which it was drawn went up in flames along with the tent and the harem inside it after a fire broke out in the midst of a hashish orgy.

Ha—forgive me—I get carried away when I speak of our glorious Skirling past. You must be starving by now!

SLY

I know I am, I could eat a horse!

ASSAM

Now don't even think about it.

KING HUBAIJA

Well, none of you have eaten until you've dined on Skirling cuisine!

SOUND: (hands clapping thrice)

KING HUBAIJA (cont.)

Underlings! Prepare a feast for our hapless visitors! Ha-ha-ha!

MUSIC: (radio.garden – RadioOwazTurkmen – fade to Blizzard theme)

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NARRATOR

Next: The real reason for the Skirling's unexpected hospitality is revealed, and it's a shocker!

[end Chapter 18]