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## Chapter 19: The Usher Launch

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

**NARRATOR (V.O.)**

You're listening to The Blizzard of Osborn by Michael Sheen Cuddy.

Chapter 19: The Usher Launch

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

**Scene One: Ext. Desert. Day.**

MUSIC: (radio.garden – RadioDamash)

SOUND: wind, footsteps, clinking dishes, silverware,  
background voices (busywork)

**NARRATOR**

Cassie, Sly, Memyselfandi and Assam were led to a pavilion of wooden poles lashed together and covered with a tarp of Skirling silk. The tarp was dyed white to reflect the intense sun. Under the shade of the pavilion, spread out on the ground, were long carpets placed end to end. Arranged on the carpets was an extravagant display of colorful dishes. Deep carved bowls and king-sized plates of food filled the air with enticing aromas. Glazed pitchers and ivory tankards were placed at every setting, filled with blood dark wine.

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MUSIC: (radio.garden)

**NARRATOR**

A Skirling superstition believed it was bad luck for cats to be present at a feast so Jet had been placed in a crate and brought out to a pen that housed *uven*.

Cassie was ordered to sit next to King Hubaija. Sly, Memyselfandi and Assam were placed on opposite sides of the carpet with four Skirling guards seated between each.

Sly was between Mosah on his left and Kel-ib'n-dah on his right. Mosah was the poet laureate whose various duties included attending ceremonial events, observing and memorializing them in epic song cycles called *èlage*. Kel-ib'n-dah on the other hand, was a butcher. Mosah turned to Sly and asked:

**MOSAH**

Is it true what they say about the River Orange?

**SLY**

I don't know, what do they say?

**MOSAH**

They say the river is orange from the dye used in the war paint of the fearsome tribes there.

**SLY (laughing)**

That's ridiculous. The only tribes along the River Orange are too

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lazy to be warriors.

**NARRATOR**

Sly dipped his head into a plate of copper coils and munched.

SOUND: munching

**SLY**

Hey these are delicious, what are they?

**MOSAH**

*Inelle*. They're good for you as well. But we were told the River Orange is guarded on all sides by fierce warriors.

**SLY**

Hah—whoever told you that was lying. The tribes in that region are notoriously lazy. All they do is fish, eat *perillions*, and float downstream in boats made from the giant leaves of the *belango* tree.

**NARRATOR**

In truth, Sly didn't know anything about the tribes of the River Orange. He was making things up because he feared that if he was completely honest his hosts would find him to be a bore. The fact was Sly spent much of his time hiding under rocks because he knew that people and animals were so terrified of snakes they would sooner kill him than look at him. So Sly decided to tell Mosah colorful stories because he'd once been told that people love hearing a good story when they sit down to a fancy meal. The taller the tale the more

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people seemed to enjoy it, especially when gathered around a big dinner with lots of wine.

**MOSAH**

*Perillions* you say?

**SLY**

That's right. *Perlillions* are the speckled mushrooms that grow along the river bank, and the reason why the Orange tribes are so lazy. They say that *perlillions* contain a powerful hypnotic that brings fantastical dreams to those who eat them. Since the Orange tribes spend their days floating down the river coupling with their fellow dreamers, they don't have the time or interest to fight.

**NARRATOR**

Sly was on a roll now. He knew none of this was true but couldn't resist watching the eyes of Mosah and Kel-ib'n-dah grow wide with amazement.

Meanwhile, Assam was eating from a bowl of the most delicious food he'd ever tasted.

**ASSAM**

I'd heard that Skirlings have a warrior tradition but I had no idea y'all have such great cuisine!

**NARRATOR**

The two soldiers flanking Assam ignored him, chewing their food like camels.

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SOUND: chewing, grunting, lip-smacking

**ASSAM**

Well now, I have to tell you, your dinka are truly amazing! Such ingenious designs!

SOUND: chewing, grunting, lip-smacking

**ASSAM**

When we arrived at your encampment, the last thing I expected to see was advanced flight technology!

**SOLDIER**

And, what *did* you expect, hm?

**ASSAM**

Well, I just assumed that a desert tribe...you know, a nomadic tribe...a tribe known for its fierce warriors...well...you know, to become such fierce warriors...a lot of training...a lot of fighting...now don't get me wrong...I just assumed....

SOUND: standing up, clothes rustling, swords rattling, etc.

**NARRATOR**

Both soldiers stood up and walked away. Assam wasn't sure if he had offended them or they had insulted him. Or both.

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MUSIC: (radio.garden)

**Scene Two: Ext. Desert, banquet under tents. Day.**

MUSIC: (radio.garden – RadioOman)

**NARRATOR**

After feasting and drinking for what felt like hours, Mosah was called upon to sing one of his epic songs, not a word of which Cassie, Sly, Memyselfandi or Assam understood. Finally, King Hubaija stood up and looked around at his guests.

**KING HUBAIJA**

And now, we arrive at the time everyone has been waiting for. Let us proceed to the Usher Launch!

SOUND: cheering, marching procession, swinging pendulum,  
drums

MUSIC: (radio.garden – RadioErbil)

**NARRATOR**

Everyone stood up and filed out of the pavilion. Cassie, Sly, Memyselfandi and Assam were bound together once again by the braided silk rope they were forced to wear before dinner.

Lance-carrying soldiers prodded them to walk behind a figure clad head to toe in black silk. This solemn looking fellow at the head of the procession swung a gold pendulum back and forth as he

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paced toward a raised platform. As it swung the gold filigreed pendulum emanated wispy trails of pale blue smoke which smelled of incense and burning hair.

SOUND: wind, crow caw

**NARRATOR**

Arriving at the Usher Launch the four captives looked up at a raised platform and saw four blocks of black wood, each one carved with a deep stained concavity in its center. Now not one among them failed to see exactly what the Usher Launch was.

**CASSIE**

Sir?

**KING HUBAIJA**

Silence!

**SLY**

Hey—I object!

SOUND: whip cracking, snake hissing

**MEMYSELFANDI**

I say, what exactly is the meaning of this?

**KING HUBAIJA (shouting)**

Your fate has been written. The Great One has delivered you into our

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hands. It is not for us to question why. It is our sacred duty to usher you to the Great Beyond.

**ASSAM**

But we're innocent!

**KING HUBAIJA** (bellowing)

You are Other! Therefore, it is written that you must be ushered forth!

SOUND: crowd roaring and cheering

**NARRATOR**

A giant henchman, tall enough to look like he walked on stilts stepped onto the Usher Launch swinging a gleaming scimitar.

SOUND: scimitar slashing through air

**KING HUBAIJA**

In the great Skirling tradition, we have honored you with the best meal you have ever had. Now I offer you your final courtesy: you may choose the sequence in which you prefer to be beheaded. Who among you four shall be ushered first?

**NARRATOR**

Memyselfandi looked at Sly who looked back at him with eyes narrowed to slits. Cassie wondered what would happen to Jet. Assam looked at



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Cassie, desperately hoping she knew a way to stop the Skirlings.

**KING HUBAIJA**

Very well, I command the serpent to die first!

SOUND: battle cry

**SLY**

No! Kill the eggling! He called the King a cuckold!

**MEMYSELFANDI**

What? I most certainly did not!

**KING HUBAIJA**

The snake and the eggman shall die together whilst you two watch.

Then both of you shall follow!

SOUND: battle cry

**NARRATOR**

Cassie felt dizzy. Then she heard a sound, a deep rumbling sound like thunder.

SOUND: deep rumbling

SOUND: rocket launch

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**NARRATOR**

Then the rocket hit.

SOUND: explosion

**NARRATOR**

A blast of sand stung her face and her ears rang from the explosion. She fell to the ground. All around her Skirling soldiers were falling like toys. She was afraid to move. But move she had to.

SOUND: Heavy artillery, gunfire, whining camelrams, swords clashing

**NARRATOR**

Next: Now there is only one way out and that is straight up!

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN / OUT)

[ end Chapter 19 ]