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Chapter 21: The Sea of Opacity

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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

Chapter 21: The Sea of Opacity

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: Ext. In a great balloon high above the sea. Day.

SOUND: Wind, grunting, straining, struggling sounds

NARRATOR

A giant yellow balloon rises high in the sky as an 800-pound donkey struggles to climb onboard. In the rush to escape, Assam got tangled up in his makeshift harness, and was twisting and turning in the wind. The rope Cassie had looped around him had clamped his jaw shut so now no one could understand a word he said.

MEMYSELFANDI

Good Lord man, what are you trying to say, 'box untoggle'?

ASSAM

(unintelligible grunting)

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CASSIE

Bog and tagging?

ASSAM

(unintelligible grunting)

SLY

Black and Taggart?

NARRATOR

Then Cassie noticed the gear stored in a corner.

CASSIE

Block and tackle!

ASSAM

Hmm-hmm-mm! Hmm-hmm-mm!

NARRATOR

Assam nodded his head vigorously. Cassie and Memyselfandi worked together to crank the pulleys that lifted Assam high enough to pivot him into the gondola.

SOUND: creaking pulleys

NARRATOR (cont.)

With his feet planted on the gondola floor, and finally disentangled from all the ropes, Assam let out a deep breath.

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ASSAM

Hoo-wee! Am I ever glad to be back with y'all! Where in tarnation are we anyway?

MEMYSELFANDI

According to my Swiper, we're high above the Sea of Opacity.

CASSIE

Does that mean we're getting closer to the Pinnacle of Aspire?

MEMYSELFANDI

That's rather difficult to say. All I can see here is water and more water.

ASSAM

Oh no! I assume we're lost now. We'll probably drift until the winds crash us into the sea and then we'll drown! Or die of thirst! Or starvation! Or hypothermia! Or get devoured by sharks! Oh no!

SLY

Hey, that's a lot of assuming Assam.

MEMYSELFANDI

Indeed. On the other hand, perhaps gentle trade winds shall carry us straight to the Pinnacle of Aspire!

SLY

Well, one thing's for sure: it's a lot better up here than it was

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down there with the Skirlings.

CASSIE

That's true!

MUSIC: (tranquil, serene)

Scene Two: Ext. Floating in the dinka high above the sea. Night.

NARRATOR

And so the wind carried them. The dinka drifted along the vast air currents of the Melippean fray, onward and outward until the sun sank, and the deep blue sky grew darker and darker until it was black as an onyx, and the stars came winking one by one, two by two, then hundreds, thousands, far too many for numbers, and the silence of deep space swallowed them whole.

MUSIC: (quiet, eerie)

CASSIE

It's so cold up here!

SLY

Yea, colder than those desert nights!

ASSAM

And quiet! I ain't never heard such quiet in my whole life.

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MEMYSELFANDI

That's true. We're too high above the sea to hear waves. But it's odd that the dinka's canopy doesn't make the slightest flapping sound in the wind.

SLY

This place gives me the creeps.

MEMYSELFANDI

Yes well, how do you suggest we leave it?

SLY

(groans...)

MUSIC: (eerie, spacey, dread)

CASSIE

I just thought of something. Assam, how did you know there was block and tackle equipment in the dinka?

ASSAM

Remember when King Hubaija showed us his hangar and boasted how they use the megadinka to import gold, silver and bronze from far off lands? Well, I asked his servant how it was possible to load such heavy material into the dinka. See, having worked as a pack animal, questions of load-bearing capacity are of special interest to me.

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SLY

How 'bout that? An ass with a brain, heh-heh-heh!

ASSAM

Excuse me?

CASSIE

Oh don't start bickering up here too! No one's better than anyone else. Memyselfandi has his Swiper, Assam has his strength, and Sly has his uncanny sixth sense.... In fact, you look like you're in deep thought right now, Sly.

SLY

Hmm? Oh, I've been wondering who was it that attacked the Skirlings. And why?

MEMYSELFANDI

It was the Icemen of course.

ASSAM

I beg to differ. It was the security forces of Empire Rail Services. I'd recognize them gray uniforms anywhere.

MEMYSELFANDI

Gray? I saw white uniforms. The white adamantine armor of the Icemen.

SLY

Could've been both. I saw Skirling warriors charge in opposite directions. Maybe they were outflanked on both sides by two different

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enemies.

MEMYSELFANDI

Mmm, that's possible. They have been known to work together when they have a common enemy.

CASSIE

Could the Icemen have tracked us all the way to the Skirling encampment?

ASSAM

We know that ERS security forces was huntin' us in the desert.

MEMYSELFANDI

And they may have called the Icemen for reinforcements.

CASSIE

Oh my God, will we ever get away from these crazies?

MEMYSELFANDI

Empire Rail Services won't be chasing us over the Sea of Opacity. Now the Icemen? I'm afraid that's another story.

CASSIE

You mean the Icemen could find us out here too?

MEMYSELFANDI

Not to make you worry Cassie, but the Icemen can go anywhere and do

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anything they want.

MUSIC: (foreboding)

Scene Three: Ext. In the dinka above the sea. Daybreak.

NARRATOR

Of all the strange things Cassie had seen since arriving in the Empire—talking snakes and donkeys, men who looked like Humpty Dumpty—the morning light breaking over the Sea of Opacity may have been the strangest. Instead of the gradual and very beautiful sunrises she'd seen in Mississippi and North Dakota, the sunrise here was shocking. It was as if someone flicked on a switch in a dark room: suddenly dazzling light blinded her eyes. Just like that: one moment pitch black, the next, painfully bright.

MEMYSELFANDI

What the bloody—

SOUND: SFX burble

ASSAM

What in tarnation—

SOUND: SFX bleep

SLY

Hey, what's goin' on?

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SOUND: SFX burble

NARRATOR

Sly lifted his head and squinted, flicking his tongue into the morning air. The only one who didn't look confused was Jet, perched on the edge of the wicker gondola, staring out to the horizon, totally unconcerned that losing her balance could result in a fall thousands of feet down into the sea.

MEMYSELFANDI

I say, hand me the canteen, won't you?

NARRATOR

Cassie went over to Assam, dug the canteen out of his saddle bag and handed it to Memyselfandi.

MEMYSELFANDI

This is empty, hand me a fresh one.

CASSIE

That's the only one we have.

MEMYSELFANDI

What? For all five of us you brought only one canteen? What were you thinking girl?

SLY

Hey! We were under attack! What supplies did you bring?

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MEMYSELFANDI

I—I had other things to think about!

MUSIC: (menacing)

SLY

Yeah, like what, yourself?

MEMYSELFANDI

I secured our getaway vehicle! You'd still be down on the ground, dodging rockets if it wasn't for me!

SLY

That reminds me: how is it you knew exactly where to find this dinka anyway?

MEMYSELFANDI

I used my Swiper's KGPS to record where the hangar was when King Hubaija took us there. Once I had the coordinates it was easy to map my way back.

SLY

Yeah sure. You were probably in cahoots with the Skirlings the way you were with the Narsies.

MEMYSELFANDI

Don't be absurd you slithering nincompoop!

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SLY

Admit it: you were just gonna fly away by yourself weren't you?

MEMYSELFANDI

No! I was planning to pick all of you up!

SLY

You lying egghead mother—

SOUND: thunder crash

MEMYSELFANDI

Lightning? Out of a clear blue sky?

ASSAM

Hey look!

NARRATOR

Assam nodded at the sea below them. Giant water spouts were forming, great towering funnels of water spinning and gushing hundreds of feet into the air. A mild breeze suddenly turned violent and blasted the dinka with bullet-like hail. Hurricane winds roared from one direction, then another. The dinka spun and tipped, nearly dumping everyone into the sea below.

SLY

Hit the deck! Stay as low as you can!

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CASSIE

Hold on Jet!

MEMYSELFANDI

How do you steer this bloody thing?

ASSAM

Oh forget it, I told you we was all gonna die!

CASSIE

Oh my God!

SOUND: (hurricane winds, torrential rains, etc.)

MUSIC: (eerie, haunted...FADE...)

NARRATOR

Next: One day, in the Pinnacle of Aspire, history changed forever when out of nowhere, five strangers suddenly appeared.

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN / OUT)

[end Chapter 21]