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Chapter 22: The Strangers

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR

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

Chapter 22: The Strangers

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: Ext. Shoreline. Day.

SOUND: wind, surf, gulls, murmuring crowd

DENIZEN OF ASPIRE 1 (with excitement)

Why, this must be the single greatest event in the history of Aspire!

DENIZEN OF ASPIRE 2

Aspire? It's the most momentous moment in the history of the entire Empire!

LOYALIST

More momentous than the coronation of Emperor Primus?

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DENIZEN OF ASPIRE 2

Yes, because our ancestors crowned Primus, who rose from the heart of our civilization. But *this*—this confounds everything everyone has ever known! The Sea of Opacity has *never* before been crossed! We were always told it was impossible, that it is infinite, it extends out to the realm of the unknown and the unknowable.

NARRATOR

The onlookers gawked at the giant yellow kite and its bizarre crew being fished out of the water, onto an Imperial Navy patrol boat.

SOUND: jostling, murmuring, quibbling crowd

NARRATOR

The media had flocked to cover the news. A crowd of reporters jostled to interview the alien arrivals. No one had ever seen anything like them. But the media were quickly disappointed as Varis, the Emperor's representative, issued his first command.

VARIS (through a bullhorn)

By the Emperor's authority I order the strangers to be quarantined immediately. No Aspirants are permitted beyond the yellow demarcation zone. The strangers may be carrying lethal pathogens. They could also be radioactive since they passed through the Dauphin Anomaly, the lethal radioactive zone surrounding the Sea of Opacity's Bimini Atoll.

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SOUND: murmuring, jostling crowd

NARRATOR

That was the official line anyway, and it was effective. No one second-guessed the Emperor's motives when they were presented as a threat to public health and safety.

SOUND: murmuring

MUSIC: (ominous)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Behind closed doors however, discussions were different. The strangers' unexpected arrival triggered every primal fear that had lain dormant in Aspirant culture. Technicians and scientists who prided themselves in rational, objective thinking were suddenly confronted with a reality that undermined everything they'd ever learned.

SCIENTIST

I used to think only ignorant peasants were superstitious about talking snakes, donkeys and eggmen. But then I saw them—live and in the flesh—as real as you and me!

TECHNICIAN

And that strange girl, I've never seen skin as dark as hers, she looks very suspicious.

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SCIENTIST

Suspicious indeed! She was found to be wearing a strange silver necklace in the shape of a rhombus! We seized it immediately of course.

TECHNICIAN

And what a fight she put up! She kicked and screamed like a savage!

SCIENTIST

Have they determined what that strange silver rhombus is?

TECHNICIAN

No, they haven't been able to open it, they think it might be bio-encrypted.

SCIENTIST

Bio-encrypted? I tell you, nothing good can come of this!

MUSIC: (descent)

Scene Two: Int. Laboratory. Night.

SOUND: footsteps, fluorescent buzz, etc.

NARRATOR

As soon as the strangers were plucked out of the sea they were blindfolded and rushed off to a military base. A long time had passed

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in blindfolded isolation. Except for Memyselfandi who never ate very much, the others were extremely hungry. Each was given a ration of 0 to drink and eventually, a tasteless paste, presumably for nutrition, though it was hard to believe anything that tasted like putty could be nourishing. In the meantime, they were all scanned and had blood samples taken.

MUSIC: (time passage)

SOUND: footsteps, fluorescent light hum

NARRATOR

Finally, each was brought to a separate observation room with white walls of molded plastic, glaring surgical operating lights and glass shelves loaded with stainless steel instruments, probes, needles and cobalt blue jars holding unknown medicines. In the corner of each room sat a small wire cage containing two mouse-like creatures that, on closer view, looked like miniature sloths.

SOUND: computer blips, hissing, cage rattling

NARRATOR

Two technicians in bio-hazard suits slipped into the room every few hours, scanned the air with a handheld instrument, sprayed an aerosol mist on each stranger, then checked the micro-sloths in the cage.

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MEMYSELFANDI

I say, do you see what they're doing?

SOUND: rattling shelves

CASSIE

What?

MEMYSELFANDI

They're using those peculiar creatures in the cage as the proverbial *canary in the coal mine*. If they die they will alert the technicians to a bio-hazard.

ASSAM

Now hold on—they think we're a bio-hazard?

SLY

Heh-heh, welcome to my world!

MUSIC: (time passage, foreboding)

SOUND: footsteps, voices

NARRATOR

After several days, new visitors appeared. Instead of the two technicians there were now three men and a woman. Two of the men and the woman wore white lab coats and looked like doctors. The third man was dressed like a businessman, in suit and tie. All four were

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accompanied by heavily armed security guards.

BUSINESSMAN

Your quarantine period is over. Now it is time for you to make your deposition statements.

SLY

Deposition statements? What does that mean?

BUSINESSMAN

You will soon see.

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN)

NARRATOR

Next: The strangers are split up and interrogated separately, beginning with the mysterious dark girl.

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE OUT)

[end Chapter 22]