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Chapter 30: Incognito

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR

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

Chapter 30: Incognito.

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: The Crow's lair. Interior. Night.

SOUND: Minimal, room ambience, slightly cavernous, dynamo hum
in far background.

NARRATOR

Chief of security services Thornfeld was briefing the Crow on the meeting they'd set up with Dr. John Chillykonkon.

THORNFELD

Mostly, he avoids being seen in public. But when he has to travel he's notorious for moving about in outlandish disguises. It's now

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believed that Dr. John was the imposter who posed as the Marquis de Sang during the Bergoyne coup of '29. And for the past week he's been sending encrypted messages through the back channels telling us to expect a visit from Professor Williwaw any day now.

THE CROW

Williwaw? That charlatan from Poteka?

THORNFELD

Yes sir, the clown who roams the hinterlands in a wagon pulled by a donkey.

THE CROW

What the *burutuku* is Chillykonkon up to?

THORNFELD

He says he has his reasons, sir.

MUSIC: (ominous)

Scene Two: Drawbridge outside The Crow's operations center. Night.

SOUND: Wind, crow cawing, creaking wooden cart wheels, hooves.

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NARRATOR

When Memyselfandi--posing as Dr. John Chillykonkon, disguised as Professor Williwaw--steered his donkey and wagon onto the drawbridge the Crow's guards shoved a Swiper at him.

GUARD (gruffly)

Enter the password.

NARRATOR

The real Professor Williwaw never would have known the password because it was issued in separate non-sequential bits over the mesh's back channels and matrixed within a codex only a brilliant hacker could crack. Luckily for Memyselfandi, 901 and her team at the Ministry of Omniscience had decoded it.

So now Memyselfandi--posing as Dr. John Chillykonkon, disguised as Professor Williwaw--entered the password and pressed OK.

SOUND: Computer blips, chain, crank turning

Once the wagon cleared the portal, the drawbridge lowered and thundered shut as ominously as a sealed tomb. A squad of Icemen descended upon Memyselfandi.

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ICEMEN (fiercely)

Get down from there!

NARRATOR

The Icemen pulled him off his seat and shoved him through a metal-detector.

SOUND: Computer blip

NARRATOR

A sickly looking attendant wearing latex gloves approached.

ATTENDANT

You must drop your trousers for a cavity search now.

MEMYSELFANDI

Oh dear...I must warn you that I have a case of Shackleton's *purpura*.

ATTENDANT (nearly retching)

Uh...very well...you may proceed...

SOUND: Donkey hooves on cobblestones, echoey water dripping

MUSIC: (ominous)

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NARRATOR

Memyselfandi--posing as Dr. John Chillykonkon, disguised as Professor Williwaw--hadn't expected state of the art facilities like those at the Ministry of Omniscience. After all, other than the Emperor, who could afford them? Nevertheless, he was shocked to see the Crow's equipment, a hodgepodge of third-rate junk that made his headquarters look like a deranged hoarder's basement.

An even bigger shock: the total lack of basic maintenance! Again, he wasn't anticipating environmentally controlled clean rooms like the Emperor's, where temperature, humidity, electromagnetic interference and barometric pressure are all automatically monitored and regulated. But he never dreamed he'd see mold, mildew, frayed cables, puddles of stagnant water, rust-stained ceiling tiles and burnt out light bulbs. But there it was: the sordid guts of an underground movement exposed in all its squalor. As he looked around in disbelief a shadow caught his eye: a mouse-or rat-darted out of the baseboard and scurried across the damp floor.

MUSIC: (Stravinsky - Octet for Wind Instruments)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Escorted deeper into the Crow's operations center

Memyselfandi--posing as Dr. John Chillykonkon, disguised as Professor

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Williwaw--took pains to look around slowly to capture the details of his surroundings through the special contact lens microcameras Quintilianis had provided.

At a heavy double door guarded by two Icemen, Thornfeld glanced at Dr. John's wagon.

THORNFELD

You said you'd be disguised as Professor Williwaw. I didn't think you'd go as far as driving a mule-drawn wagon.

MEMYSELFANDI

The Imperial Police know Professor Williwaw, and ignore him as a harmless fool. So for total realism, I had an exact replica of his wagon custom-made.

NARRATOR

Ever suspicions, Thornfeld paced around the wagon, poking here, looking there. He pulled open one of the wooden panels and peered inside.

THORNFELD

What's this?

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NARRATOR

Thornfeld unravelled a long metallic hose, the very hose in which Sly was hiding.

MEMYSELFANDI (nervously)

It's...a fiber optic dense pack probe...We use it to map the nodes in your mainframe's transceiver so you'll be able to tap into any CCTV camera throughout the Empire.

NARRATOR

Thornfeld looked doubtful, bending the hose, shaking it, inspecting the hose's end cap, rapping his fist on it, sending Sly into a panic.

THORNFELD

How's it work?

MEMYSELFANDI

Uh...you actually shouldn't be handling that...without...uh...wearing the proper anti-static gear.

THORNFELD

Why not?

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi glanced nervously between Thornfeld and the Crow.

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If Thornfeld unscrewed the hose's end cap and Sly dropped onto the floor they were doomed.

SOUND: (screw cap popping off)

THORNFELD (yelling)

What the hell is this?

NARRATOR

The red screw cap on the end of the hose had popped off, exposing thousands of tiny twinkling lights.

MEMYSELFANDI

I...told you...it's a fiber optic dense pack.

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi picked up the red end-cap from the floor and quickly screwed it back onto the hose.

MEMYSELFANDI

Excuse me, but this fiber optic bundle is hypersensitive to static electricity. Handling it could cause serious damage.

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NARRATOR

Thornfeld looked to the Crow who glared at Dr. John, then shoved the hose back. Struggling to keep his hands from shaking, Memyselfandi--posing as Dr. John Chillykonkon, disguised as Professor Williwaw--concentrated on packing the hose back into the wagon.

MUSIC: (time passing)

Scene Three: The Crow's COM hub. Night.

SOUND: Electronic equipment humming, droning.

NARRATOR

Inside the communication hub the real work began. The Crow ordered one of his technicians to give Dr. John an overview of the hub's system architecture. Coached by 901, Memyselfandi--posing as Dr. John Chillykonkon, disguised as Professor Williwaw--asked questions to give the impression that he knew what he was dealing with.

Apparently satisfied, the Crow dismissed his technician then turned to Dr. John.

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THE CROW

The footage you sent was impressive. Now if you can deliver on your promise to hack the Emperor's entire surveillance network you will be rewarded handsomely.

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi--posing as Dr. John Chillykonkon, disguised as Professor Williwaw--recalled what 901 at the Ministry of Omniscience had repeated over and over:

901 (>reverb)

Once you're inside, don't overthink your situation, just follow the next step in the plan.

NARRATOR

So Memyselfandi took a deep breath and said to the Crow,

MEMYSELFANDI

I...I'm afraid I must tell you something.

THE CROW

You better not go back on your word now, Chillykonkon. You guaranteed me you'd deliver.

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MEMYSELFANDI

And I will, I assure you. However...there is one matter in which I haven't been entirely forthcoming.

THE CROW

What are you saying?

MEMYSELFANDI

I can deliver as promised. But the nature of the operation is so complex that it demands at least two superior brains and four highly trained hands. Therefore, I had to bring along my assistant, the genius extraordinaire, Marco Davinci.

THE CROW (incredulous)

What?

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi strode over to his wagon and unbolted a side panel. Behind this panel was a drawer which he pulled open.

MEMYSELFANDI

Marco--come join us!

NARRATOR

And then a strange white-haired albino dwarf slowly rose up from the

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sliding drawer like a back-from-the-dead cadaver.

THE CROW (enraged)

Seize him!

NARRATOR

Thornfeld stormed over to the wagon and thrust a dagger against Marco's neck.

MEMYSELFANDI

Wait! This is my assistant, Marco Davinci, the celebrated savant who brought the entire Farfellow realm to its knees by hacking the Imperial power grid. If you harm him I cannot complete the work on my own. And--no offense--but a challenge of this magnitude is simply beyond the capabilities of your rather...primitive staff.

NARRATOR

The Crow signaled Thornfeld to lower the dagger from Marco's throat.

THE CROW (thundering)

Why didn't you tell me before? Why smuggle him in?

MEMYSELFANDI

Uh...well sir, your feelings about the Monegrins are well known. I was concerned you might suspect my gifted colleague of having

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sympathies with some of his wayward compatriots, and ban him from entry. But I assure you, Marco is 100 per cent apolitical. He's strictly in it for the glunk.

NARRATOR

The Crow glared at Marco but seemed relieved to hear that he was merely greedy, and not a religious zealot.

MEMYSELFANDI

Now, as you can see, Marco is an albino, so bright light is intolerable. When we travel in daylight the only way for him to avoid sun poisoning is to remain sheltered in the darkness of the wagon. In fact, I must ask you now to dim the lights here as well. If Marco is to work effectively he must do so in subdued lighting.

NARRATOR

Thornfeld looked at the Crow. The Crow looked at Marco, short and slight as a child, pale as a slug with wispy white hair, and wearing black wraparound sun glasses that made his head look shrunken.

Memyselfandi dreaded the way the Crow stared at Marco, as if he could see right through Cassie's disguise to the little dark girl inside. He was desperate to shift the focus.

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MEMYSELFANDI

Sir, let me show you something that should put your mind at ease.

NARRATOR

Memyselfandi powered up his Swiper, made a few swiping motions, then held the screen so the Crow could see better. Shadowy black and white footage showed a clip of Cassie, Jet, Sly, Memyselfandi and Assam skulking in the night, looking like very suspicious trespassers.

THE CROW (shouting)

That's the Cheney bridge they're crossing! Not far from here! Send a hit squad right now and waste them!

MEMYSELFANDI

Now hold on. What you see here is not a real-time feed. I captured this last week. There's no telling where they are now because the network isn't fully integrated yet. Once it's complete however, you'll be able to geo-locate any camera feed with precise coordinates. When Marco and I finish, the next time you spot your targets you'll be able to tell exactly where they are and deploy your forces to nail them on the spot!

THE CROW

And when will that be?

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MEMYSELFANDI

The sooner we get started the sooner you get your real-time footage.

THE CROW

Well get on with it then!

NARRATOR

On his way out the Crow turned and said to Thornfeld,

THE CROW

Keep an eye on those two, especially the Monegrin...you can't trust those people.

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN)

NARRATOR

Next: Next, Memyselfandi, Cassie, Sly and Assam put one of Quintilianis's strangest tools to work, and hope they're protected from it, otherwise they're doomed!

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme

[end Chapter 30]