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Chapter 31: The Diversion Mask

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR

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

Chapter 31: The Diversion Mask.

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: The Crow's operations center. Interior. COM hub.

SOUND: (cavernous drone, Foundry-drone-291122.mp4)

NARRATOR

After Dr. John told the Crow that Marco was an albino who could not work under bright light they turned the lights down to a faint glow.

The real reason of course, was to hide what they were doing from the cameras mounted on the walls.

MUSIC: (Nino Rota - Juliet of the Spirits)

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THORNFELD

What's with the music?

MEMYSELFANDI

Well Mr. Thornfeld, it helps me focus. As exciting as it is to hack into the Emperor's system, I'm afraid this part of the work is rather tedious. You see, terabyte number crunching is extremely boring but if you want to worm your way into the kernel of the system—and not get caught—one must go bit by bit. It's mind-numbing but if you're patient it works...eventually. In the meantime I like to listen to this for entertainment.

GUARD

Entertainment? It sounds like cheesy elevator music if you ask me.

MEMYSELFANDI

Everyone's a critic. Well feel free to leave. Your presence here is hardly required.

THORNFELD

We'd leave if we could but our orders are to watch you.

MEMYSELFANDI

Ah—well, one must serve one's master, eh?

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GUARD

(Grunts) There's nothin' on these computer screens but snow...God, this is boring!

SOUND: (cavernous drone, Foundry-drone-291122.mp4)

NARRATOR

All the computer monitors, including Dr. John's monitor, showed a cascade of raw integers in tiny pixelated type.

Inaudible, but looping behind the flickering scroll of numbers was the audio hypnotrack, Quintilianis's so-called Diversion Mask.

Both Dr. John and Marco had activated their special earbuds so they couldn't actually tell if the Diversion Mask was working or not. They just hoped Quintilianis was right back when he tried to explain it to them.

QUINTILIANIS

So...while the visual display runs, the spool and refresh rates capture the eyes' reflex to track moving objects. Meanwhile the subliminal audio track keeps looping so that everyone in the room without filter protection will slip into in a coma while you do your work...at least, in theory.

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MUSIC: (transitional passage - drone/menacing voices)

Scene Two: The Crow's operations center. Interior. COM hub. Later.

SOUND: fade-in drone/EventHorizon)

NARRATOR

Cassie had seen the look before. It was the same look her friends had when they watched DVDs and got pulled into the story so deep they sat still, lips slightly parted, eyes wide and staring, fixated on the action before them. That was the look on the faces of Thornfeld and the security guards after Dr. John had launched the Diversion Mask software. And that was their cue to launch phase II.

MUSIC: (EventHorizon)

SOUND: (Drone)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Dr. John took off his kaleidoscope spectacles and rubbed them with a cloth as if he were clearing a smudge. That was the signal he

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and Marco had practiced in rehearsals. Seeing it, Marco reached into his kit bag and took out a folding keyboard which he connected to a port on the console, as instructed by 901.

The keyboard was a visual distraction for the cameras mounted above them. It made it look like Marco was doing something essential to Dr. John's processes but actually it was a cover for smuggling the data drive that Queen Mavis had reencrypted with Cassie's biometrics.

The drive was tucked in a slot under the keyboard so Cassie could press her thumb and forefinger on its sensor and activate it. Once activated the mini drive began uploading the top secret files containing all the latest updates on who, what, where and when the Crow was plotting his revolution against the Emperor.

SOUND: (computer blips, electronic burbles)

NARRATOR (cont.)

With the data drive updating, phase III was launched. Dr. John went to his wagon, opened a side panel and uncoiled a long, thick hose, the hose that Sly was packed inside of.

Marco took one end of the hose and ran it across the floor to the ventilation shaft. Dr. John unscrewed the end-cap and pulled out the decoy fiber optic bundle. This was the cap that Thornfeld had

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pulled off earlier, nearly giving Sly a heart attack. (In the rush of last-minute preparations Quintilianis forgot to tell the Strangers his engineers had designed the hose with a false end-cap just in case someone tried to inspect it.)

Sly slithered out of the hose down into the ventilation shaft and snaked around till his sensor lit up. He sidled up to a com node and twisted around so it could hook onto the first module.

SOUND: (Bleep)

SLY

It worked! One down, eleven to go.

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN)

NARRATOR

Next: Just as Assam suspected, if things are going unbelievably well, then it's time to worry!

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE OUT)

[end Chapter 31]