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Chapter 32: What Could Go Wrong?

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR

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

Chapter 32: What Could Go Wrong?

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: The Ministry of Omniscience, Strategic Defence Department.

Interior.

SOUND: (busy office, muted conversations)

NARRATOR

The decision to send the Strangers into the Crow's operations centre was a risky one. But in a 5-4 vote the Emperor's advisory panel decided that if Cassie, Sly, Memyselfandi and Assam were killed in the line of duty it would be no great loss to the Empire. And in the unlikely event that the Strangers succeeded, then the Emperor's archenemy the Crow will have been eliminated at no risk to the

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Emperor's forces. And while the Master Plan grew more and more elaborate, no part of it ever included Jet because there were already enough risks without having an unpredictable cat along to complicate things.

CASSIE

But Jet has to come, she's part of the team! And I'm always at my best when Jet's around.

CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST

You'll be with Jet every day during your training period. And Jet will be here when you come back. But the The Crow is known for his massive packs of killer attack dogs, far too dangerous for your little kitty. Don't worry, Bela will take good care of Jet.

NARRATOR

When it came time for the mission Cassie left Jet with Bela, a kindly old woman who loved to listen to Jet purr in her lap as she read in her rocking chair. But when Bela fell asleep before the cozy warm fire, Jet got up and followed the sound of Cassie's voice to Professor Williwaw's wagon where she jumped on board.

The replica of Professor Williwaw's wagon was very strange. Designed with hidden compartments and secret cubby holes, one panel

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dropped open when Jet stepped on it, swallowing her in an internal maze. Furthermore, some of those secret compartments had been soundproofed. So no matter how much Jet meowed and scratched, Cassie, disguised as Marco DaVinci and tucked into another compartment, never once heard a sound.

MUSIC: (time passage)

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

SOUND: (cavernous drone)

NARRATOR

While Cassie, Sly and Memyselfandi carried out their parts of the Master Plan, Assam, hitched to Professor Williwaw's wagon, wondered....

ASSAM

...The plan seems to be going well. Surprisingly well. Maybe even suspiciously well. Because our chance of success is so low, the odds against us so high, the Crow's security measures so strict and the technical challenges so daunting, well...I assume we're doomed to fail....

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NARRATOR

Then Assam recalled what Sly had told him long ago.

SLY

...Remember, I warned you about making negative assumptions all the time. You don't want to infect Cassie or anyone else with believing wrong assumptions that could get us all killed.

NARRATOR

Amazingly enough, the plan was rolling out flawlessly: Memyselfandi had launched the Diversion Mask audio hypnotrack so the security guards in the COM hub were immobilized; Cassie had successfully opened the data drive that Queen Mavis had reencoded with her biometrics, and it was copying the Crow's latest plans to attack the Emperor; Sly had managed to slither into the Crow's mainframe and plant the monitors that would transmit real-time updates to the Emperor's Ministry of Omniscience.

NARRATOR

Dr. John was packing the hose back into the wagon, returning Sly to his hideaway. Just as he was closing a side panel Jet popped her head out.

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SOUND: (meow)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Cassie—disguised as Marco DaVinci—was staring at the monitor as the data drive uploaded: numbers and text flashing by until they suddenly froze. Stuck on the screen before her was a thick black border framing the words, **EMPEROR'S TRUE IDENTITY REVEALED**

MUSIC: (Stravinsky: Octet for 8 Instruments)

NARRATOR (cont.)

At that very moment a mouse peaked out from the floorboard and Jet—being a cat—couldn't resist. She leaped off the wagon and chased the mouse across the room....

CASSIE

Oh no! That wasn't just any black cat, that was Jet! I'd never mistake that collar...the one I made myself from my old sneaker laces, Jet's red and white braided collar....

NARRATOR

And just as Jet couldn't resist chasing the mouse, Cassie couldn't sit still and pretend not to notice. She jumped up and ran after Jet.

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CASSIE

Jet!

MUSIC: (chase music)

NARRATOR

Out in the hall a group of Icemen chased Jet around a corner. When Cassie followed she saw three more Icemen, two of whom were being pulled by leashed Rottweilers. Jet bolted down a stairway. Everyone followed. At the bottom of the stairs Cassie saw a dingy corridor that ended at a closed metal door, a dead end where Jet was cornered, crouching and hissing.

ICEMEN (*triumphantly*)

Trapped! (*laughing*) Hello kitty! Meet my starving Rottweiler, Lucifer. (*To dog*) Snack time, Lucifer!

CASSIE (*desperately*)

No!!!

NARRATOR

The Rottweiler charged down the hall so fast it slid on the smooth concrete floor when it tried to stop, and slammed into the door.

Jet's timing was perfect: she leaped straight up just as the

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dog hit the door. When Jet landed she slashed four lightning strikes into the dog's snout.

SOUND: (door bang/cat hiss/dog yelp)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Cassie ran to the end of the hall and swept Jet into her arms.

ICEMEN (*hatefully*)

Grab that albino freak!

NARRATOR

The rest of the Icemen came rushing down the hallway, blocking her escape. Seeing there was no way out Cassie tucked Jet under her jacket hoping to protect her from the Icemen and their mad dogs.

One of the Icemen grabbed Cassie by the hair and shoved her against the wall. She was terrified for many reasons, not least of which was that her white Marco DaVinci wig would pull off into his hands.

Scene Three: The Crow's inner sanctum. Interior.

MUSIC: (dark, ominous)

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NARRATOR

The Crow's inner sanctum was carved out of the foundation rock according to his orders. He wanted a cave, an actual cave he could retreat to when needed. He'd ordered the excavators to leave a number of boulders in place to enhance the look of a gloomy subterranean cavern. He'd brought in dead trees and had their bone-white trunks and bare branches hideously lit by eery black lights. Mounted above the macabre setting sat the Crow's ceremonial throne, a massive black iron sculpture that he brooded in whenever he felt aggrieved.

Hanging over the throne was the official Crow Headdress, a grotesque mask of black feathers and shiny black beak with big glassy eyes that stared wet-black and unfathomable. The Crow lifted the Headdress from its stand and placed it over his head. This meant only one thing: he was about to issue a death sentence. Standing high above them, before his iron throne, suited up in full headdress, the Crow glared and pointed at Marco Davinci, who, of course, was really Cassie, in disguise.

THE CROW

I knew I never should have trusted a Monegrin. You're all the same. And now I will make an example of you, send a message to your filthy breed. They shall see what happens to Monegrins who dare trespass

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into the Crow's domain.

(pacing, menacing)

Perhaps I shall draw and quarter you, spread your remains over the salt flats of the Monegrin barrens. Or maybe I will return your head on a pike to be mounted in the town square of your miserable capital. And while I'm at it, I'll toss in the head of your lying Doctor friend as well. And that stinking donkey of his too! Nothing instills fear in the superstitious like a rotting donkey head in the town square! *(screeching laughter)*

CASSIE

You may threaten me, but if you hope to hack into the Emperor's security network you'll need Dr. John's expertise. He's the only one who knows how to finish the work. If you kill him you'll kill your chances of revolution.

THE CROW *(bellows)*

Silence! I will not listen to the lies of a filthy Monegrin!

NARRATOR

The Crow marched over and seized Marco by the throat.

THE CROW

Gimme that wretched black animal of yours!

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NARRATOR

The Crow grabbed Jet by the scruff of her neck and yanked her away from Cassie.

SOUND: (growl, hiss)

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN)

NARRATOR

Next: Now that the Strangers' cover is blown the Crow has issued all of them a death sentence...from which there is no apparent escape!

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE OUT)

[end Chapter 32]