

SIGMATA

Chapter XII

“Joseph, come over here and help me a minute,” Dr. Xelco motioned to his son. “I think I can assemble a disrupter out of the components I have here.”

“This is Sigmata colony. Please re-identify yourself,” a voice came over the headset.

“I’ve got them!” Mark yelled out in excitement. “I’ll put it over the ships sound system,” Mark said as he set the speakers so the rest could hear.

Taking control of the transmission to the colony, Joseph reported, “Sigmata this is the Confederation ship ZX/2. We left the Rescue ship *Burmi* to release prisoners on Reidforcia. Our mission was successful and we wish to land on Sigmata. We are asking for clearance.”

“Is this Joseph Xelco?” the voice questioned.

“Yes it is,” responded Joseph.

“How did they know that?” asked Conrad quietly to Dr. Xelco who was seated behind him.

Joseph heard him and turned and whispered, “The *Burmi* was on its way to Sigmata. They probably reported that I stole the craft off of the ship.”

Joseph went back to the radio, “We’re approaching Sigmata. Please advise us as to where we should land.”

“You are to proceed to the northeast corner of the complex and enter through gate B-5. From there you are to surrender to the authorities. All other occupants are to exit the

craft with you. You will then turn over your ship to the observation crews in the hanger. Maintain radio silence until you arrive. Additional orders will be given to you at that time,” The voice explained without any emotion.

Joseph turned off the microphone so they could talk without being overheard.

“Something’s wrong here. I don’t like what I’m hearing,” Fragon said as he waddled forward towards the control panel. “It doesn’t make any sense. They would normally request more information about our crew, and probably more details of your mission.” Fragon surmised. “They would also normally give you more detailed instruction on your landing. Something is not quite right. I just feel it.”

Turning to the control panel he asked, “Computer, can you recognize the voice from Sigmata?”

“Negative, there are no voice patterns on record that match the voice received,” the CPU replied.

“Computer, is there anything you can tell us about the voice from Sigmata?” Fragon continued to question the CPU.

“Yes, the tone of the voice most closely resembles the transmission from a Reidforcian universal translator,” The CPU answered to their shock.

“Now, all of this all makes sense,” Conrad commented.

“WHAT!? Computer, are you sure?” Joseph blurted out after hearing the CPU’s assessment of the voice from Sigmata.

“The voice patterns most closely resemble those of the voice translators found on Reidforcia,” the CPU repeated itself.

“Now what? We’re closing in on Sigmata pretty fast. We better have a plan or get the heck out of here,” Conrad commented.

“Slow the drives to light speed so we can decide what to do next. We don’t want them to know just how fast the McMarian Hyper-Warp system is,” suggested Dr. Xelco.

“No dad, I think we should continue on course and speed. They should already have received word of our escape from the squadron over their own ultra-frequency radios. If they have tracked our progress, which I think they have, they will already know what this

thing is capable of doing,” responded Joseph.

“Anyway, we don’t want give away that we are aware of who they are. That will put the element of surprise in our corner instead of theirs,” Joseph said smiling.

Denise stepped in. “Joseph Xelco, if I didn’t know you better I would say you are planning to go to Sigmata anyway, aren’t you?”

“Well the idea had crossed my mind,” Joseph said sheepishly expecting the rest of the crew to come down on him for even suggesting such a stupid idea.

“If that’s the plan then we had better get some ideas on how we intend to proceed,” Dr. Xelco interjected. The others agreed with the idea.

“We really don’t have much of a choice anyway. We are almost out of everything,” Denise added.

Joseph was surprised at this reaction. He had no idea that the others would agree with him on this scheme.

“Computer, has the Sigmata colony been able to track our progress?” Conrad asked the CPU, curious as to whether or not the Reidforcians were aware of exactly what course they were taking.

“Yes, they were able to lock onto our position upon our last transmission. However, since the jamming device is still operational they won’t be able to track the ship if it were to be engaged,” the CPU began to editorialize the situation.

“I don’t think we will need to use that just yet. Computer, how long before we arrive at the Sigmata colony?” Joseph asked the CPU.

“Twenty-one minutes precisely,” the monotone voice replied.

“That should give us enough time to put a plan together,” Joseph said in anticipation of another contact with the enemy.

Joseph and Conrad turned off all the unnecessary equipment and put the auto-navigation system into operation so they could join in on the discussion.

Fragon and the Bignols huddled together trying to understand what the humans were planning to do.

“Why don’t we just go to Bignol and get some help from there,” one of the Bignols

offered.

“That wouldn’t be such a bad idea except we don’t have enough fuel to get there. Unfortunately the prisoners on the Sigmata colony would probably already have been transported to Reidforcia before we could get back,” Yendor inserted, feeling better and willing to participate.

“What do we have available to us that the Reidforcians aren’t expecting?” asked Regis. “What could we surprise them with?”

“They probably aren’t aware that we found the device in Yendor’s head. That means they most likely think that he is still friendly to them, and that he will be helping them. If we used the QRE to reproduce the signal given off by the transmitter, they just might believe that Yendor is still under their control, at least for a little while,” Dr. Xelco offered. “We also have the Reidforcian uniform that Joseph brought on board.”

“I don’t think they know about the Bignols we freed either,” Regis inserted.

“We will help in any way we can,” Fragon volunteered.

Somat, who was feeling much better, but with a sling on his arm, and Conrad began rummaging through the ship looking for useful tools and instruments. Mark went below to check on the equipment to make sure that everything was in good working order. Meanwhile the others began to formulate a plan for when they reached the colony.

Joseph made notes on the C-Tablet while Dr. Xelco went back to his workstation and fumbled around with the spare parts he had found when looking for a way to get the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive system operational.

Denise got out the manstaka jelly and di-hydroxide waterm and passed it around so they would be refreshed before this next adventure.

The Bignol’s were unaware of these delicious delicacies, and when offered, they gorged themselves. In the cooling compartment she found a small container of ragine. Ragine is a sweet butter-like spread that is high in protein and very nutritious; as well as delicious. She also found some hard brakken to spread it on. Brakken is a cracker. It’s very hard until something like ragine is spread on it. Then it swells and becomes more like a roll that melts in the mouth, a nice change from the manstaka jelly. Brakken and ragine are

special treats introduced to the members of the CIG by the Molteri. She fed some aluminum foil to the whittier who gobbled it up.

Somat and Conrad found additional atmosphere suits in a compartment near the back of the ship. This brought the total to five suits that were at their disposal, along with the headlamps attached to them.

“Joseph, come over here and help me a minute,” Dr. Xelco motioned to his son. “I think I can assemble a disrupter out of the components I have here.”

“A what?” Joseph asked with a quizzical look on his face.

“A disrupter. It will disrupt all communications within a ten to fifteen cordon radius. It’s something I have been working on for some time now. I think, if my theory is correct, it will disrupt the universal communicators the Reidforcians have in their helmets so they won’t be able talk to one another. They will have to take off their helmets to talk and then whamo, we’ve got them!” Dr. Xelco explained his theory to Joseph.

Joseph picked up the helmet and put it on to test the device. After zeroing in on the correct frequency Dr. Xelco was successful at blocking the helmet’s ability to communicate. Joseph talked, but nothing came out.

“Hey, I think I can get this concealment equipment to work again,” Mark said after popping his head out of the hatch.

The others just looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. Regis brought over some more components to Dr. Xelco he had discovered around the ship.

“I sure am glad I don’t throw anything away,” Dr. Xelco said to Regis. “My dad was always telling me to get rid of things when I was a boy, but I always found places to hide them. I knew I would find a use for them one day. I guess I just carried it over when I began working on the ZX/2, and the McMarian Hyper-Warp system. You never know when some of these things will come in handy,” he continued.

“I’m gonna find out about our current status, I’ll be right back,” Joseph informed his father as he proceeded back to the pilot’s recliner.

“Computer, what is the status of our equipment?” Joseph questioned the CPU.

“Fuel thirty-seven point six percent for light and sub light speed, fuel seventy-two

point eight percent for hyper-warp, ninety-eight point one percent external shields, sixty-eight percent battery life, ninety-two point two percent thrust burners, seventy-eight point four percent trazer power, one-hundred percent Ralston torpedoes, one-hundred percent trailer energy,” the CPU relayed back it’s information.

Turning around in his seat, Joseph asked, “What are Ralston torpedoes, and what is trailer energy?”

“The Ralston torpedoes are short range missiles that have anti-detection devices built into the warheads, so defensive weapons can’t stop them. They have a sixty megathron power capability. I think we armed this craft with five or six of those little hummers. They are purely experimental and have never been tested in actual combat, but we’ve had excellent test results.”

“The trailer energy allows the ZX/2 to pull along a craft many times its size. When used it drains the power supplies pretty quickly, but can be used to help out stranded ships,” Dr. Xelco explained.

“Both of those could come in handy,” Joseph thought to himself.

“Entering Sigmata sensor range,” The CPU broke the silence that had invaded the interior of the ZX/2.

“Make sure you don’t turn on the jamming device!” Conrad yelled down to Mark who was still below altering the equipment.

“We don’t want them to know any of our secrets. It could come in handy later when we make our escape,” Joseph added.

“You sure are optimistic, aren’t you Joseph?” Conrad commented as he looked over at Joseph.

Joseph shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“All of the anti-detection devices are currently deactivated, but we can activate them again at any time,” Mark said as he crawled out of the hatch. “They’ll be able to track us right into the hanger. I’ve rerouted the controls so I can work them from up here from now on. It’s awfully crowded down there, you know,” Mark continued as he stretched his arms and wiped the sweat from his brow..

“Is everything secured for our arrival on Sigmata?” Joseph asked the crew.

An affirmative response came from all on board.

“Computer, set a course for hanger B-5 on the far side of the complex. Set all systems to automatic, release the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive, and reduce speed to half-light,” Conrad ordered the CPU.

“Joseph, I’ve been here before. Perhaps I should bring the craft into the hanger and then you can work with your father on what to do next,” Mark offered.

“No, I can handle it. We need you to reconfigure the atmosphere suits so that the concealment devices work on all of them. Also make sure that the batteries are fully charged,” Joseph responded as he checked over all of the data registering on the console panel.

Conrad and Joseph read off the console information and verified the course the CPU had brought up on the main console.

Mark moved back to the workstation, and checked out the equipment on each of the suits and rechecked the battery charges. He also made sure that all of the hand trazers were charged and ready to go.

Denise and Yendor, who was feeling much better, organized the cabin so movement throughout the ship would be as efficient as possible. Dr. Xelco put the finishing touches on his disrupters and then showed the others how to operate them.

“We should wait until the last second before we activate this device. The longer we wait the better chance we’ve got of making full use of its potential,” Dr. Xelco instructed.

Joseph maneuvered the craft as it came into visual range of the colony. Nothing was moving on the exterior of the rotating observation deck. Flashing lights gave a point of reference for which direction they should go to reach the hanger. Usually, activity around the colony would have been as busy as a bee hive with crafts from many different parts of the galaxy, moving in and out of the complex, loading and unloading goods for transport to and from the far corners of the CIG’s territory.

The Sigmata station was a transfer point for goods moving to and from the far corners of the Confederation. It usually had a small contingent of Forodian class attack

ships (which were conspicuously missing), but otherwise it was a civilian outpost. The lack of activity around the station only added to the suspicions that were already aroused by the CPU's assessment of the voice over the radio.

"It sure is quiet around here," Mark commented as he gazed out of the forward observation glass. "I don't think I've ever seen it this deserted."

"That would tend to confirm our suspicions," Dr. Xelco commented as he also looked at the empty space around the colony.

"Computer, continue operations and take us to gate B-5; standard landing procedures," Joseph said to the CPU as the sub-light engines kicked in and began to slow the craft.

The small ship began to circle around the landing hangers and closed in on its designated landing pod. As they neared the building, the ship's thrusters blew off a burst of energy, bringing the ship to a stop in front of two sliding doors with "B-5" in large blue letters painted on the outside. As the craft neared the doors, the massive doors began to slide apart exposing the landing bay. The lights above the landing port flashed on and off, and the spotlights within glared down on them. Slowly the craft moved through the entrance and came to a rest on the pod.

The last burst of energy blew off and then the thrusters went dead. Behind them the bay doors slid closed and the atmosphere in the landing area was returned to normal. Beside them sat the *Burmi*. The CIG's registration number and the ship's name emblazoned on its fore deck "*Burmi ~ CIG-2798*". She had slight damage to her exterior. The *ZX/2* looked like a fly standing next to an elephant.

"Joseph isn't that the ship we were on when we left Lambdata?" Denise asked with a desperate ring to her voice.

Joseph nodded as he observed the *Burmi* and its condition.

"That means they have my parents!" she cried out.

"Calm down Denise. One of the reasons for coming here was to free the people who were headed for those mines back on Reidforcia. I'm glad we can help your parents, if they happen to be here," Joseph attempted to settle Denise down.

Fragon and the other Bignols had taken refuge under the workstation, in the storage closets, and in the cupboards. Regis prepared himself for the trip. Joseph, Conrad, Somat, Yendor, and Dr. Xelco put on the atmosphere suits, while Denise put on the Reidforcian armor, picked up the chronthium shield, checked the samitar for operation, and adjusted the trazer setting to kill. Mark slipped down into the cramped quarters of the equipment bay with a hand trazer.

On Joseph's signal the hatch was released by Dr. Xelco and Joseph dropped to the ground with the others following behind. Denise and Mark stayed behind and watched for an opportunity to move off the ship in order to gain an advantage over the guards.