

PLAN

Chapter XIII

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As soon as they dropped to the ground, the entrance to the main facility opened, and sure enough an escort of Reidforcians marched in. Following behind, much to their surprise was Lord Froth!

The soldiers approached the ZX/2. Lord Froth looked up at the craft and inspected it.

“You have done well to get this far. I compliment you on your creativity. It is only by my pleasure that you have survived this long, but now I will have my ultimate goal. You have brought me a fully operational ZX/2 with the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive system. I couldn’t have ordered you to do any better,” Lord Froth chuckled. “Yendor, join your Lord and master.” Lord Froth commanded.

Yendor walked over and stood behind the Reidforcian leader. Under his atmosphere suit he had the QRE which must have fooled them. He winked at Joseph to let him know that everything was OK.

“Sentinels, bring the prisoners,” Lord Froth ordered his troops, “Station a guard at the *Burmi* just in case they have any surprises. Are all prisoners accounted for?” he continued.

“No your highness, we haven’t been able to account for three of the former

prisoners,” the ranking member of the team responded.

“Tell me where the other three are or you will be forced to talk, and you know we can,” Lord Froth ordered Joseph.

“Thomas Reikof was lost in the transporter room, Maxwell Linden was killed when we escaped from the prison, and Mark Cooter died en route from injuries he incurred when we were escaping. We ejected his body into space on our way here,” Joseph explained the circumstances that Lord Froth had demanded of him.

Surprisingly, this explanation seemed to satisfy Lord Froth because when he had finished his story, Lord Froth turned towards the exit and motioned for the others to follow.

Joseph wondered why they hadn't asked anything about Denise.

Lord Froth had a regal looking suit of armor on. The color of purple glistened on top of the overlaid gold. He had a sash draped over his left shoulder with several of the triangular shaped emblems on it, and had a large billowing purple drape hanging from the rear of his helmet. In his right hand he held the staff with the strange blue orb on top of it.

Joseph conjectured that Lord Froth had used this device to allow him to arrive ahead of the *ZX/2* to Sigmata. He couldn't think of any other way that he could have gotten there first, unless it was because they had lost so much time going in circles.

The prisoners marched between the guards into the heart of the complex that had once bustled with the activity of ships from the CIG. Now the entire building was deserted, with the exception of a few posted Reidforcian guards. The hallway that surrounds the complex has windows that look out over the empty expanses of the colony that had once been hectic with commotion. The stark reality of just how thorough these monsters were began to sink in. If the Reidforcians were able to take this colony and do this to it, just how many other outposts did they occupy, this was a question on the minds of the six prisoners as they moved deeper into the enemy camp.

The guards took them to a reception area. They told them to sit down and wait to be processed. After processing, they were to be taken back to the prison camp on Reidforcia. They were under strict security and told not to talk or they would be killed on the spot.

Individually they were taken through a doorway behind a long desk that was originally used to check passengers and guests in and out when the outpost was under the control of the CIG.

Joseph was the last to go through the processing procedure. They led him down a passageway to a locker room where he was forced to remove the atmosphere suit. They hosed him down with a white milky chemical spray that had a hideous odor to it in order to decontaminate him. (The Reidforcians are susceptible to many human diseases, but don't have the immune systems to fight off the illnesses.) Then two guards took him to another holding area where he was given back the atmosphere suit, but the batteries, trazer, and disrupter were missing. He was to find out later, the others were treated exactly the same.

After regrouping in the holding area they were taken down a long hallway to another larger room. This was the recreation center for the station, a large gymnasium normally used by the guests and residents of Sigmata. Along the walls, the prisoners taken during the raid on this facility, were sitting, as well as the crew members and passengers from the *Burmi*. Different races from throughout the galaxy were represented here.

The men were on one side, while the women were on the other. Joseph glanced down the rows of people and saw the look of despair on their faces.

Suddenly he noticed Mrs. Wantis on the other side of the room. He finally made eye contact with her. The look of surprise on Mrs. Wantis' face was quickly replaced with tears. She thought that if Joseph was captured, then so had Denise, but she wasn't there.

Joseph finally found Mr. Wantis who was sitting next to Admiral Vernondi. There was a no talking order given. The room only echoed with an occasional cough or the scuffing of shoes against the hard floor. Joseph used sign language to see if Mr. Wantis understood. (Sign language is a standard lesson plan in all schools throughout the CIG as it's the only truly intergalactic form of communication.) Mr. Wantis nodded that he understood.

Joseph slowly and cautiously began to unfold the plan they had for the release of all of the prisoners.

Dr. Xelco and the others, who had arrived on the ZX2, passed along as much

information as they could without arousing the suspicions of the guards.

Joseph and his father looked at each other, with a glance and a nod, and then continued to communicate the plans they had made. Many of the people in the room began to snicker at the ideas, but others watched intensely as the plan began to unfold.

The men seemed to take an interest in the plans for escape, but the women, across the room, couldn't make out much of what was going on. A low roar began to be heard as the message was being passed along. One of the men began to sob. Several of the women followed his lead and an air of desperation and futility filled the room.

Suddenly one of the Kryomian men in the crowd burst away from the group and began screaming, "They are planning an escape; stop them or we will all be killed, right here where we stand!"

A young Earth boy in the crowd jumped out and tackled the Kryomian and decked him.

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"No talking is allowed. The next time one of you talks, another one of you will be given the same fate!" the Reidforcian guard bellowed out over the screams of panic in the room.

Just then the doors at the far end of the room opened and in walked Lord Froth with his security team around him. He walked into the room bearing his scepter and royal garb as if he were the king of the universe, which wasn't far from the truth. His guards spread out and took various positions around the room.

A disturbing crashing noise startled the prisoners. A large pedestal was pushed out onto the floor, and a red carpet rolled out from its base towards the doors at the far end of the room. Lord Froth walked slowly past his prisoners as he approached the stage and turned his head from side to side looking into the eyes of his captors. He mounted the stairs while his guards took positions of security around the stage. Yendor followed Lord Froth up the stairs and took a position behind the now bigger than life figure. Lord Froth unrolled a manuscript, then handed it to an aide who began to announce to the bewildered audience,

Lord Froth's plans.

"I hereby order and decree that you are all prisoners of the Potentate of Reidforcian. As such you come directly under my control and will. If it be my will for you to live, so be it. If it be my will that you should die, then so be it. You are at my mercy and I, and only I, can change your fate.

"There are those among you who have chosen to defy me. Those attempts have not been successful, and any others who try will meet the same result. Those involved in this last attempt are to be severely punished. It is only by my will that you have survived this long, and it will be by my decree that you will die.

"From herewith you will follow my orders and only my orders. If you are to make the journey from this place then prepare yourselves. Those of you who are able to work in the ronadium mines will be taken to Reidforcia. The rest of you will die here. The trip to Reidforcia will begin soon," Lord Froth's aid finished.

A gasp went up from the audience. What was going to happen to them? Some of the women began to weep and the men stood in shock.

Lord Froth continued to stand in front of his new laborers and seemed to be grinning at the prospect of having such a large infusion of workers to work in his Ronadium mines.

The royal troupe then stepped down from the podium, walked along the red carpet, and returned through the doors from where they had entered, Yendor following behind.

While Lord Froth was speaking, Yendor had used sign language to communicate to the prisoners the Reidforcian plans he had overheard while with Lord Froth.

The translation is this: "The plan is for the *Burmi* to be used to transport the prisoners to Reidforcia. A repair ship is due to arrive within two hours to bring equipment to repair the damage done to the lift off and sub-light systems damaged during its capture. Until then, the prisoners are to remain in the gymnasium and under close guard," Yendor signaled slowly and deliberately. "Only sixteen armored troops are stationed here and most of those are within close proximity of the gymnasium."

"The *ZX/2* will be loaded onto the *Burmi* and transported to Reidforcia as well where it will be dismantled and the secrets of the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive system will

be copied and installed on all Reidforcian war craft.”

He had been behind Lord Froth and his guards so it was the perfect platform to be seen by all without Lord Froth’s knowledge.

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On the *ZX/2*, Denise watched as Lord Froth and his guards confronted the others in the hanger. The one-way glass provided excellent cover for observation. As soon as Lord Froth’s new prisoners left, the doors closed behind them.

Denise, in the Reidforcian uniform, dropped down quietly from the hatch and began to wander around the *ZX/2* as if she were inspecting it. She then wandered over to the *Burmi*. When the guard outside the *Burmi* noticed Denise, he immediately saluted her by raising his right arm, bringing it down to his chest and then to his side.

Denise repeated the salute and then in the deepest voice she could muster asked, “What have you found on this CIG ship?”

“Constine, we have found nothing of value to us. It is Lord Froth’s pleasure that we repair the ship so we can transport the prisoners back to Reidforcia where they can work in the mines. He has ordered a repair ship to come here to bring the necessary tools and equipment to repair it. The work crew should be here within two hours,” the guard answered.

“Have you checked the other side of the craft to make sure there no intruders that have entered from that direction?” Denise continued to question the sentry.

“No, Constine, I have not checked that. Is it your pleasure that I do so?” he asked.

“Yes, I will take your watch here,” Denise responded.

As the guard moved away Denise motioned to the *ZX/2* and out of the hatch the Bignols came tumbling out. They waddled as quickly as they could across the hanger deck and ran up the stairs into the *Burmi*. The plan was for the Bignols to repair the *Burmi* and make it functional. The *Burmi* was originally a Bignol craft that had been pressed into service by the CIG high command for the transport of troops and civilians. The Bignols

had a complete understanding of the systems and controls on the craft and were well equipped to get her into the best operational status possible, especially under these conditions.

Mark stayed on the *ZX/2* to protect it in case the Reidforcians attempted to dismantle her.

The guard returned unaware that the Bignols were now on the *Burmi*. He reported that all was clear.

“Lord Froth has ordered that supplies be made available for the trip to the home planet. Make sure that the supplies are ready to be loaded as soon as possible,” Denise came up with an idea on the spot and ordered the sentinel to make it happen.

“As you wish Constine,” The guard replied as he saluted.

Denise returned the salute and said, “Well done, keep up the good work.”

Then she turned and walked towards the doors of the complex. She walked very carefully trying not to seem nervous or over anxious. When she got to the door to exit the landing bay it opened as it had for the others, and she entered the hallway.

She made a mental note that there were only three guards in the hanger area.

As she passed through the entrance to the main complex, she remembered the others had gone to the right so she went that direction. She looked out the windows on her right and was startled by the lack of activity around the base. She had visited several of these stations in the past and was familiar with the activity that usually surrounded them.

She passed only two guards along the way and each saluted her as she passed by. She returned the salutes. Denise came to a large interior window that looked out over the gymnasium. Inside she saw Joseph and the others sitting on the floor.

She continued to walk around the building. As she came to the other side of the reception area she saw the women seated on the floor. She looked for her mother in the crowd. Her heart jumped when she finally saw her leaning against the wall. She was looking intently at something on the other side of the gym.

As she moved about the building it was her intent to look like she was on patrol, but her purpose was take an inventory of the weapons and the number of guards..

Inside the first doorway she saw the guards searching the equipment taken from the atmosphere suits. She approached the desk and saluted the guards who were checking the items and sorting them.

Denise ordered the guards, again in a deep tone, “Lord Froth has asked me to take possession of these devices and I am to bring them to him immediately so he can study them.”

“By your command, Constine,” The two responded, as they put the equipment into a box and then handed Denise the items from the prisoners.

“Thank you; you are doing an excellent job. I will put that in my report,” Denise complemented the two guards for helping her, unknown to them what her plans were.

Taking the box with her, she went down the stairs and circled the gymnasium. When she got to the other side of the building, she entered the gymnasium and took a position just inside of the door. She surveyed the prisoners and stood at attention as if she were one of the guards on duty. She set the box on the ground. She managed to kick it softly under the seating along the wall without being noticed.