

FEVER

Chapter XVII

“Is it possible that the traitor is no longer on the ship?” Denise volunteered.

“Computer, set our course for the Colonus sector in this quadrant,” Joseph told the CPU.

Then switching most of the interior systems back to normal he said, “Computer, give a status report,”

“Reserve fuel thirty percent, life support operational at minimal levels, light speed can be maintained for approximately three hours forty-nine minutes twenty-four point eight seconds, trazer power twenty-two point six percent, Ralston torpedoes none, defensive shields at sixty-one point five percent,” the CPU reported.

“Why have you reduced our speed? And what’s in the Colonus sector?” Dr. Xelco questioned. “This isn’t what we had planned. After pulling the *Burmi* so long, we barely have enough fuel to get to Colonus, much less get us to a CIG outpost.”

“I have an idea. I think we can set a trap and destroy all of them,” Joseph began to unfold his idea.

“Don’t listen to him. He’ll only get us into deeper trouble.” Denise Wantis said with a smile on her face.

Joseph spun around to see Denise, using a crutch, standing behind him with a big smile on her face. “Come on Bigshot let’s get this plan into action before someone chickens out on us, OK?” Denise encouraged Joseph.

She turned around and sat in one of the recliners next to her dad in the back, obviously still in pain, and exhausted after her ordeal.

Joseph just stared bug eyed at her, not believing that she was alive and on the mend.

“Better get your mind on the task at hand or we might run into something,” Dr. Xelco joked with Joseph.

“OK, son, you had better bring us up to date on this plan of yours, or we may just mutiny against you!” Dr. Xelco prodded Joseph.

“Remember when I had the emergency signal sent from the Sigmata colony?” Joseph asked.

“Yeah, I remember,” Dr. Xelco responded.

“Well, I had Artor give them the coordinates to the Colonus sector rather than Sigmata. It’s closer to a CIG battle station and I thought if we could lure the Reidforcians to follow us, we could set a trap. Hopefully we will have enough support ships there, because if my guess is right, the Reidforcians who are following us won’t be the only ones to try to intercept us at Colonus,” Joseph began to unfold his plan.

“That’s all great, but we don’t have enough fuel to get back. We’re gonna be stuck in one of the biggest battles of the war and no place to go,” Yendor jumped in.

“My vote is that we go with the *Burmi* to Velos and let the battle forces handle the Reidforcians,” Yendor jumped in.

“If we do that, then how are they going to be lured into the trap?” Joseph questioned Yendor.

“I don’t know, maybe we could send a probe or one of the escape pods off of the *Burmi*. I don’t care, just why does it have to be us?” Yendor continued to whine.

“Yendor, sit down. We’ve got things under control. Besides, with the life support on minimal we don’t have much air to waste on idle chatter,” Dr. Xelco admonished Yendor.

Still not satisfied, Yendor returned to his seat muttering something to himself.

Mrs. Wantis came forward with some treats Fragon had brought on board with the medical supplies.

“Would you like some dingles?” Mrs. Wantis asked. “These are especially good.”

Dingles are small pastries filled with various berries from the planet Molteri which is in the Solari sector. They are very sweet and have a taste that lingers in the mouth for hours. Joseph and Dr. Xelco helped themselves and then went back to the task of monitoring the console.

“They’ve locked onto us again,” Joseph said with anticipation. “I just hope that our fuel reserves are big enough to stay out of trazer range.”

“We will stay out of enemy range for approximately”

“Knock it off computer,” Joseph repeated to the CPU. “When I want information I’ll ask for it.”

“As you wish,” the CPU answered back.

“We’d better relax, we have a long trip ahead of us,” Dr. Xelco suggested.

“I could monitor the console for you so you can get some rest,” suggested Mr. Wantis.

“That’s a good idea. Joseph, please go back and get some rest while Mr. Wantis takes over the controls,” Dr. Xelco urged Joseph.

“That goes for you too, Doctor,” Fragon interjected.

Joseph felt the pressure and knew he was in a no win situation so he relinquished his seat and moved to the back taking Mr. Wantis’ old seat next to Denise. Dr. Xelco tried to go back to his workstation, but the others wouldn’t let him. They all forced him to take a seat and relax for a while.

“Well hot shot, looks like you got us out of one situation and into another. Seems to be a habit with you,” Denise jabbed at Joseph with a smile on her face.

“It would have been a whole lot easier if you hadn’t gotten yourself all banged up, you know,” Joseph jumped back.

“ME get all banged up, hey that was your idea!” Denise responded not giving any ground.

“Knock it off you two,” Mrs. Wantis interrupted. “Joseph has got to get some rest, and so do you Denise. So knock it off and get some rest,” Mrs. Wantis admonished the two kids.

“Parents, they never give us a break,” Joseph whispered to Denise hoping her mother wouldn’t hear.

“I heard that,” Mrs. Wantis responded.

Joseph and Denise looked at each other and giggled.

“I was really upset when I thought you had died. I didn’t know how much I counted on you being here until I thought you were gone. Everyone told me that you had died and I believed them. Boy, it’s a good feeling knowing that you’re OK,” Joseph said as he looked into Denise’s eyes.

“That’s the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me. You know, even though you can be such a jerk sometimes, Joseph Xelco, I kinda like being around you too,” Denise smiled and took Joseph’s hand and gave it a squeeze.

Joseph curled up and began to get comfortable when up into his lap jumped the little whitther.

“Where was he all this time?” Joseph reacted to the little creature’s reappearance.

“I don’t know, but I’m glad to see him,” Denise said as she reached over and petted the whitther.

The whitther began to search Joseph’s pockets for food. Joseph had a piece of the dingle left and tried to feed it to the whither, but it just turned up its nose. It then curled up in his lap and fell asleep with a soft sigh.

“Huh, that’s funny, whitthers are not usually that particular about food. He must be full.” said Joseph as got comfortable, finally going to sleep with his head resting on Denise’s shoulder.

Jesse Wantis and Fragon took control of the little craft and made sure all of the systems were operating as they should. The Reidforcians were following behind, slowly gaining on them.

It felt lonely being this far from home, the enemy closing in, and no way of knowing if the CIG high command had received the emergency signal or not. However, the feeling of having control over their own destiny had a better taste than being locked up in a Reidforcian ronadium mine for the rest of their lives. They maintained radio silence,

hoping not to give anything away to the Reidforcians.

Fragon continued to monitor the transmissions between the Reidforcians. Most of the communication concerned damage assessment and some tactical information. It became apparent that they were in touch with their nearest battle station and that reinforcements were coming to join them. The good news was that, with their current supplies, it would allow the ZX/2 time to reach the Colonus sector before the enemy. If the reinforcements from the CIG battle station were there to meet them, then the small craft would have a chance against the army that pursued them.

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Joseph began to stir. As he began to stand up he buckled over in a heap and gave out a cry of pain that awakened everyone else on the ship.

“What’s the matter Joseph, what’s wrong?” Denise begged Joseph as he lay in a heap on the floor groaning.

The little whittier had jumped off his lap when he stood up, but was now licking him trying to make Joseph feel better.

“Let me look at him,” Mrs. Wantis reached to him and rolled Joseph over. His face was wincing from the pain. It hurt so badly that he couldn’t tell them what was wrong, and he was burning up with a fever.

“Quick get him up onto the observation table so that I can help him,” Mrs. Wantis ordered two of the male passengers who were sitting across from where Joseph had fallen.

They picked him up and placed him on the table while Mrs. Wantis prepared the QRE. Denise hobbled over to the closet and got out some thermo blankets to put over him. Joseph just lay curled up in a ball moaning and groaning with pain.

“What do you think the problem is? Mom, help him, please,” Denise begged her mother as she tried to comfort Joseph by holding his hand and caressing his forehead.

“I don’t know yet. Let me run some tests first and then we’ll have a better idea. Denise, you should know to stay calm before the facts are in. That’s what I taught you. It’s

the first rule in nursing, isn't it?" Mrs. Wantis admonished her daughter.

"Yes, ma'am, how can I help," Denise calmed down and decided to help in any way she could.

"Just keep doing what you're doing while I run the tests," Mrs. Wantis replied while she adjusted the QRE to the correct settings.

Mrs. Wantis took the device and starting at his head she began to move it slowly over his body while taking note of the readings. As she read them off, Shalley one of the Phaluvians rescued from Sigmata, wrote down the information on the C-Tablet.

(Phaluvians are unusual creatures in appearance. They are extremely intelligent and have an uncanny ability to mutate to survive in even the most hostile of environments. They have lizard shaped heads with eyes on either side. Their eyes work independently of each other which gives them tremendous visual abilities. They have four part brains which allows them to conduct a conversation while doing other activities at the same time without any distraction. They have four arms with three fingered hands that are surprisingly dexterous. There is a tiny opening, on the front of the face, which has adapted for communication. It originally was only for respiration. The Phaluvians communicate with each other through a variation of musical tones produced by rubbing their lower sets of arms against their sides. Recordings of these musical tones are very popular around the galaxy as relaxation music. They are famous throughout the galaxy for their bravery and military strategy. After the Reidforcians attacked several of their outposts, they joined the Confederation of Interplanetary Governments.)

"Brain scan, normal, five point five; neural fibers, normal, six point two; cranial muscles, normal, five point seven; brain stem, normal, five point one; deltoid group, normal, six point zero; heart, above normal and distressed, eight point two; lungs, labored, seven point zero; digestive system, abnormal, nine point two; intestinal tract, abnormal nine point nine," Mrs. Wantis stopped and looked at Denise. "It looks like he has some type of food poisoning, where would he have gotten that?" Mrs. Wantis asked with a puzzled look on her face after reading the results of the scan.

"It might have been the dingle," Denise interrupted. "When Joseph tried to give

some to the whittier it just turned up its nose and ignored it.”

“That makes sense. That should be it. Let me check,” Mrs. Wantis said as she began to probe Joseph’s stomach.

“OOOHHH!” Joseph groaned louder as she pressed on his lower abdomen.

“Quick get me the fluid extractor from the medical case that Fragon brought with him,” Mrs. Wantis ordered Shalley.

Shalley fumbled through the case, found the tool, and gave it to Mrs. Wantis who immediately began to gently guide it down Joseph’s throat so she could get a sample of whatever it was that was making him so sick.

“Hold him down, this isn’t going to be too comfortable, but I have to do it,” Mrs. Wantis ordered those who were standing around observing.

Denise held his head while the others held down the other parts of his body. Joseph fought the tube, but lost the battle. As soon as Mrs. Wantis had enough of the fluid drawn into the tube, she removed it, and took it over to the counter and began to analyze the fluid to see what it was that had made Joseph so sick.

Denise took a cool cloth and began to slowly dab his forehead, and held his hand for comfort. Dr. Xelco came back to see how things were progressing, choosing to stay out of the way so that he wouldn’t crowd Mrs. Wantis and her work.

“How’s my boy doing,” Dr. Xelco asked.

“Not so good. We think he may have gotten some kind of poison from the dingle he ate,” Denise replied. “The whittier wouldn’t eat any of it when Joseph offered it to him, which is strange for a whittier. They’ll eat almost anything.”

“I ate one and I didn’t get sick,” Dr. Xelco offered.

Looking at a monitor that was magnifying the sample she had taken, Mrs. Wantis began her diagnosis. “Here it is. I think I’ve isolated the problem. I don’t recognize this small microbe. It’s reproducing so fast I can’t believe it. I’ve never seen anything like it before. Matthew, come over here and take a look at this and tell me what you think,” Mrs. Wantis urged as she motioned for the doctor to come over and look into the electro-clotrometer.

“Can you see it?” she asked.

“Do you mean the blue streak that seems to be moving across the dish?” Dr. Xelco inquired.

“Yes that’s it. Have you seen anything like it before?” Mrs. Wantis asked trying to stay calm and under control.

“I think I have..... The last time I saw one of these was on the planet Bristus. We were studying the outbreak of the Sunga fever on Bristus. That’s it! He’s contracted Sunga fever from that dingle! Hurry, we don’t have much time. This could be fatal not only to Joseph, but to all of us as well,” Dr. Xelco panicked. He began to clear a work area on the counter. He went to his workstation, and brought over several pieces of equipment. He then opened drawer after drawer along the wall looking for anything that could be of use to him.

While he was searching he directed those taking care of Joseph, “First, we need to use the thermodilometer to bring his internal temperature down to thirty degrees Celsius. Hold him down and restrain him. Put a cloth or something in his mouth. It can be very painful. I’m going to need clean rags, hot water, and a syringe, and I mean NOW!”

As soon as he had the syringe he began drawing off blood. He put the sample into a cooling tank and left it to cool down. While he was doing that, he directed the others to take hot cloths and drape them over Joseph’s body, who was now stripped down to his briefs. Mrs. Wantis took the thermodilometer and inserted it under the skin of Joseph’s abdomen, and activated it. During the process Shalley was continuing to monitor his statistics with the QRE.

“We have to cool his insides while we raise the external temperature. Keep the hot towels coming! The radon stove should have them at temperature faster than this. Come on, come on, keep them coming! We don’t have much time.”

“Denise, keep replacing these towels,” Dr. Xelco moved with professional precision.

Regis took over for Dr. Xelco who then went over to the workstation. He began to put very small amounts of the abdominal fluid and blood together. After blending them into a mixture he set the trays in the centrifuge. He turned on the centrifuge, and then

returned to working on his son.

He took out a small amount of the fluid in the tube and filled a syringe. Then taking the syringe he injected the serum directly into Joseph's abdomen.

"Another minute or so and we'll know if we were in time," Dr. Xelco said as he looked up and said a silent prayer for his son.

Everyone worked feverishly to keep the temperature where Dr. Xelco had said it needed to be. Suddenly Joseph opened his eyes. He let out a tremendous scream and then fell back unconscious.

"I think we did it!" Dr. Xelco jumped up and cheered. "He's past the worst of it."