

GLADIATORS

Chapter XXIII

“I will never give you the secrets you want, even if it means my own death!”

Dr. Xelco yelled as he was dragged away.

The guard took Denise and her mother from the waiting room, and dragged both of them down a hallway to where two more guards forced them to lean against a wall so they could be searched. They found nothing of interest to them. They then told them to remove their clothes. Having heard the strange stories about the Reidforcians in school, Denise was reluctant to obey. One of the guards took his Knoxthian trazer and jabbed it into her ribs, and told her he wasn't going to wait any longer. Denise and her mother obeyed

Denise remembered how the disgusting creatures looked without their armor, which didn't help any. Reluctantly she complied. They looked at them in obvious disgust (for humans are as ugly to Reidforcians as Reidforcians are to humans). Immediately they hosed them down with the disgusting milky fluid and then told them to get dressed. They told Denise she was to join Lord Froth and that she had better cooperate, or she might find herself dead.

They took Mrs. Wantis away. Denise yelled, “I love you mom!” and then she disappeared around a corner.

Two guards, one on either side of Denise, dragged her from the changing area, before the evil tyrant himself. Denise had the look of terror on her face as she was dragged before Lord Froth in his chamber.

“So, my sweet thing, you think that you and your friends can come here and defeat my Potentate!? HA! That is to be seen. From my point of view you have nothing to offer me. I hold all of the advantages. Tell me, what do you have to offer that will convince me to do anything other than throw you into the ronadium mines?” Lord Froth sneered at Denise.

“You will have to ask Joseph Xelco. He’s the one who brought us here. None of us wanted to come here, but he’s convinced that he has a plan that will put an end to your Potentate. All the rest of us just wanted to go home,” Denise slumped to the ground and began to cry. “Please don’t hurt me, I’ll do anything, just don’t hurt me!”

“Would you be willing to betray Joseph Xelco to spare your life?” Lord Froth questioned Denise.

“I said I would do anything to keep from being a prisoner for the rest of my life, please Lord Froth, don’t hurt me,” Denise began to beg Lord Froth.

“I have an idea. Jonasah here has been of great use to me, but the Confederation now knows that he was my aide in escaping their clutches. Are you willing to come under my control? Are you willing to assist in the dismantling of the ZX/2? Are you willing to help convince Dr. Xelco to give me the secrets of the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive system?” Lord Froth put the alternatives to Denise as he leaned closer and closer to her.

“I said I would do anything, just let me go home,” Denise whimpered.

“Take her to the laboratory and prepare her for the Obedience Bond,” Lord Froth ordered.

The two soldiers dragged Denise out of Lord Froth’s chambers and took her down a hallway to another room adjacent to the royal hall. The door swung open to reveal a dark room with tables similar to ones in the Processing Room on Reidforcia. They placed Denise onto one of the stretching tables, and then bound her hands and feet with the cuffs. One of the guards remained over her while the other went to retrieve something from the back of the room. He placed a tight band around her head and turned her head to her right. The Reidforcian who had gone to the back of the room returned with a small knife and a tiny electrical device. Denise could barely see it, but she recognized it as being identical to

the electrode she had removed from Yendor, and later inserted into Joseph's head.

Without any anesthesia, the guard cut an opening behind her left ear and mounted the device in the same spot. The pain was so intense that Denise screamed louder than she had ever screamed before, but to no avail. No one was there to hear or to help her. She fell unconscious from the pain.

When she came to she was still belted down, and alone. She felt dizzy, but her thoughts were clear. Surprised that she could still think clearly she looked around the room. Across the room she saw a cabinet filled with tiny vials of a yellow liquid. Under the cabinet she saw surgical tools, very primitive, but effective. These weren't tools of healing, they were tools of torture.

"I wonder how long I'm going to be trapped in here," Denise thought to herself out loud.

"That would tend to be up to the Reidforcian guards?" a voice from nowhere responded.

"Denise couldn't see much of the room so she quietly asked, "Who's there and where are you?"

"This is Digit and I am on the ZX/2 spaceship. Why do you ask?" the friendly CPU's voice rang out in Denise's ear once again.

"How did you do this?" Denise asked.

"It was quite easy, actually. When I reprogrammed the device for Joseph he later suggested that I monitor the same frequency range to see if any other units were activated. I guessed that if you were to receive one, which according to Joseph Xelco was quite probable, I would have to do the same thing for you. In fact, I have already deactivated the device in the one you call Jonasah. He's a bit disoriented, but he is doing fine. I have brought him up to date on what we are doing. He understands, and is willing to help," the CPU continued.

"Where is Joseph?" Denise asked the CPU.

"He is in a holding cell three floors below you. Dr. Xelco, Fragon, Yendor Remlap, Somat Donley, Joseph Xelco, your parents and Regis Fisbon are in separate cells on the

same floor. At the moment, Joseph is asleep,” the CPU replied.

Just then the doors to the laboratory flew open and Lord Froth, accompanied by two guards, followed by Jonasah, walked in.

“Are you ready to serve me now, or are you going to require further convincing?” the voice of Lord Froth bellowed out of his ominous uniform.

“I am at your service Lord Froth. What would like for me to do for you?” Denise looking out of the side of her eye still bound to the table answered the question.

“That will come in time. Release her. Give her a chance to freshen herself. Take her let and her choose from the clothing we took from the other prisoners.” With that Lord Froth turned and left the room followed by Jonasah.

The guards released the cuffs and the band around her head, and helped her off the table. Still dizzy from the implant, they had to assist her to her room.

“Is there anything that you need, ma’ lady?” the ranking guard asked her.

“I need some soap, water, a hairbrush, and some food would be nice.” Denise replied. She liked the sound of ‘ma’ lady’.

The guard brought the requested items to her. There was food provided, but to her disgust the food was the same mush she had seen on Sigmata in the dining hall. Even though the food smelled terrible, and tasted even worse, she ate it, hoping to fool the guards, whom she figured expected her to eat it readily.

She was able to find a small private area where she was able to clean the slimy goo off of her body. She vomited the mush, and then washed her mouth out. It was so disgusting.

The soap was refreshing, and as she poured the lukewarm water over her head, she silently wished that she had some fragrance and illuminants to put in her hair. It had been a long time since she had been able to pamper herself.

As she basked in the relaxation of the moment, she thought over the adventures she had been through, and wondered if life would ever be the same as before, not really wishing that it would.

A loud thumping noise on the wall brought her back to reality as one of the guards

came around the corner to inform her that Lord Froth demanded her presence immediately.

They gave her a box of clothes taken from the slaves forced to work on the *Fristle*. She found a dress, a sweater, and some shoes that fit her. She finished dressing and then walked down the hallway to the chamber where Lord Froth was waiting for her.

As Denise went down the corridor, she made a mental inventory of what she saw. She was looking for a means of escape.

Two massive doors swung open before her, that led to the throne room of Lord Froth. The room had the trappings of a medieval castle with armaments, banners, shields, and other displays scattered about the room, just like on Reidforcia. The throne sat on a riser to the rear of the room which gave the already dominating figure of Lord Froth, an even more dominating appearance. Lord Froth motioned for Denise to come forward. She walked slowly and deliberately down the carpeted pathway that led to the foot of the throne. When she reached the foot of the pedestal, she bowed her head and saluted the regal master.

“You have done well my sweet. You are more attractive like this than in the uniform of a CIG patriot. Here, take your new place beside me, for with your help we will destroy the only force left that stands in my way of ruling the entire galaxy. Come, sit beside me and feel the luxuries of being the queen of all Reidforcia,” Lord Froth decreed as he motioned for Denise to take the place that many had held before her. Jonasah was not to be seen.

Denise climbed the steps to take the place of honor that Lord Froth had offered; feeling uncomfortable for having obeyed him. Denise, nonetheless, realized she had to maintain the charade for as long as possible.

Just as Denise sat down, the doors flew open, and between two guards was Dr. Xelco. The guards dragged him across the floor to stand before Lord Froth.

“On your knees, you insignificant maggot!” Lord Froth commanded. “Once again I have you under my control, only this time there is no escape, nor is there any hope of avoiding the horrors of my Processing Room back on Reidforcia. You WILL give me the secrets of the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive system or you will watch as your son dies a

most slow and painful death.”

Dr. Xelco looked up at Denise with a shocked expression on his face not knowing what to expect. Denise winked at him and then regained her calm composure.

“Dr. Xelco, I now have control of this little creature,” pointing to Denise. “And it will be by my command that I will punish your son until I have the answers I want,” the tyrant bent forward and then laughed at Dr. Xelco in a bellowing laugh that had a hideous ring to it. Waving his hand he ordered, “Take this disgusting creature out of my sight. I have no more need of him!”

“I will never give you the secrets you want, even if it means my own death!” Dr. Xelco yelled as he was dragged away.

Lord Froth only laughed louder.

“We will be victorious over you, you just wait and see!” Dr. Xelco managed to get out just before he was dragged through the doors back to his holding cell.

Denise remained as calm as possible. She just stared forward trying not to look at anything in particular.

“My young lady, would you like to see your young man Joseph and let him know how you feel about the Potentate of Reidforcia?” Lord Froth turned and questioned Denise.

“As you wish, my Lord Froth,” Denise responded with as little emotion as possible.

“Bring the boy here, I wish to speak to him,” Lord Froth commanded the sentries at the door.

The sentries turned and left the room leaving Lord Froth and Denise alone.

Denise became uneasy as she sat in the room with Lord Froth. Neither one of them spoke as they waited for Joseph to be brought to the chamber.

The doors swung open and between two guards was Joseph, still groggy from being awakened suddenly from a very sound sleep.

“So, Joseph Xelco, we meet again, only this time I hold the upper hand. Bow before me and swear your allegiance to me,” Lord Froth greeted his guest.

“Never Lord Froth! I will never swear my allegiance to anyone other than the Confederation!” Joseph defiantly refused the order of Lord Froth.

“I didn’t expect anything less from you Joseph Xelco. You have just signed your death wish!” Lord Froth stood and walked closer to Joseph who was on his knees.

Suddenly he saw Denise sitting in the chair next to Lord Froth’s throne. She looked so different in the beautiful clothes and with her hair hanging down over her shoulders instead of being tucked up on top of her head. Because he had been sleeping he didn’t know that Denise was only pretending to be under Lord Froth’s control. From the look of no response on Denise’s face he could only assume she was under the control of Lord Froth.

“Denise, it’s me, Joseph,” He pleaded with Denise though she did not respond.

Denise just stared ahead and ignored him.

The guards dropped Joseph onto the ground, and then took several steps backwards. When they did, a transparent blue dome of energy raised up from the floor and surrounded Joseph and two of the guards.

“Bring the others to see the death that Joseph will suffer at the hands of my guards!” Lord Froth ordered the other sentries who were in the room. He returned to his throne and sat down. Even though no one could see his face, it was obvious that he was smiling.

The sentries at the door, obeying the command of Lord Froth, left to bring the other prisoners to watch what was planned for Joseph.

In the meantime Joseph looked around him. He realized that this was the same energy field they had encountered in the transporter room back on Reidforcia. He knew that if he touched the walls he would be a goner. He was on his knees looking up at the dome above and around him. He put his head down to rest. He was trying to gather all of his strength.

The CPU quickly brought Joseph up to date. “Denise has an implant in her head, but I have deactivated it. I am in communication with her as well, only on a different frequency. Lord Froth still thinks that he has control of her thoughts.”

The doors to the room opened once more and being herded into the room were Fragon, Dr. Xelco, Regis, Mr. and Mrs. Wantis, Yendor, Somat and to Joseph’s surprise, Jonasah.

“You will witness the death of the one who has caused me so much grief. I have no need for the likes of him anymore. To make sure that I treat him fairly he will only have to defend himself against one guard at a time.” Lord Froth laughed.

“Margon prepare to do battle with the human!” Lord Froth chuckled as he gave the order. He sat back in his throne to watch an entertaining fight, which was heavily in favor of the guard, particularly since Joseph was still weak from the Sunga fever and he had no weapon.

Joseph turned around. He watched the guard to his left step forward, pull his samitar from his belt, ignite it, and then approach at a slow pace attempting to trap Joseph against the wall of death.

As the armored guard approached, Joseph studied his options, which weren't many. The dome wall was behind him and the enemy was in front of him. Joseph backed up as close to the transparent energy field as he dared, and then held his ground. His feet were spread and his hands were in front of him. He moved side to side yet the guard kept coming swinging his red glowing samitar back and forth cutting off Joseph's avenues of escape. Just as the guard lunged with his samitar, Joseph dove between his legs and tripped the gladiator into the energy field. Blue flashes of energy like lightning bolts flashed all over his body and then he disappeared, leaving behind only a portion of his armor, his chronthium shield, and the samitar. A sigh of relief went up from the audience as Joseph eluded the first of his two foes. Joseph immediately picked up the shield and the samitar and prepared himself for battle with the second soldier, who was now approaching him.