

# *WEAKNESS*

## Chapter III

*“You’re looking for Dr. Xelco?” replied another voice with a touch of sarcasm,  
“Ha, you’ll have a hard time finding him*

CREAK --- BANG! The door behind them closed and a resounding echo rang in their ears.

“Now what?” Denise whispered with panic in her voice.

“How am I supposed to know?” Joseph whispered back at her as he turned to look at the door that had just closed behind them. Then turning to Denise he continued, “We’re in this thing together for sure now!”

“Thanks a bunch for that!” Denise replied in a smart tone. “I’ll thank you later for this.”

As they moved down the corridor, leaning against the wall and crawling close to the floor, Denise began to examine the triangles that were on each of the doors.

“Joseph, I think I can make out what the symbols on the doors mean,” Denise whispered. “I think they are labels showing which planets the people inside are from.”

“Can you tell if any of them say Earth?” Joseph asked.

“Not yet. Let me look closer. Yes, I can read these. There is Molteri, and.... Frosbutolo, and..... Phaluvia, and..... Manita, and..... There it is, Earth! The fifth door on the right,” exclaimed Denise still whispering. “Now that we’ve found the cell what are we

going to do?” Denise continued.

“What else does the triangle say?” asked Joseph.

They crawled down to the door that said Earth. Denise stood up and examined the triangle on the door. “Let’s see, Hmmm it’s hard to make out but I think it might be a list of the prisoners inside,” Denise responded softly.

Suddenly the echo of many footsteps in unison broke the silence.

“What is that?” Denise questioned with fear in her voice. “How are we going to get out of here?”

“Do the triangles say how to open the doors?” Joseph responded.

“NO!” was Denise’s only answer.

As the footsteps began to get louder, Joseph noticed a notch in the wall to the left of each door. He took out his Phaluvian army knife and jammed it into the slot, pulled down with all of his weight, and suddenly the door retracted. Denise rolled into the open portal. Joseph pulled the knife out and then followed close behind. Just as they cleared the doorway, the huge metal door closed shut. Joseph and Denise lay silently on the floor afraid to move. They found themselves in the smelliest environment either of them had ever encountered. The odor made their eyes water.

The room was even darker than the hallway. They heard soft murmurings, but they couldn’t make out what was being said. The footsteps echoed past the door, and then continued down the hallway. Then, silence, except for the murmurings inside the room.

Joseph pulled the hood of his atmosphere suit forward and turned on the headlamp. Joseph and Denise could only gasp at what they saw.

As Joseph and Denise gazed at the scene before them, they could hardly believe their eyes. Huddled closely together were several scrawny excuses for humans. They clung to one another as children would when a thunderstorm unleashes its fury. The eyes of the scantily dressed individuals were staring at Joseph and Denise although they were covering their faces because of the sudden bright light. So skinny were these captives that even their teeth appeared to be falling out, and their eyes seemed to be bugging out of their sockets. The smell in the room was almost enough to suffocate even the most stout hearted.

On the floor, small creatures scurried from side to side, not knowing how to react to the light that was beaming at them from the atmosphere suits. Squeals of panic came not only from these rodents, but also from the humans in the corner.

Only a small stream of light penetrated the darkness beyond. Slimy goo covered the floor from corner to corner, and thicker closer to the walls. It was like a carpet of gelatin spreading out under them to harden, but it hadn't.

Joseph and Denise looked at each other in amazement. What had happened to these people?

A soft voice broke the silence, "Who are you and what do you want?"

"We are humans and we have come to save my father," Joseph replied.

"What do you want from us?" a voice whispered from the darkness.

"Can you tell us where we might find Dr. Matthew Xelco?" Joseph questioned.

"You're looking for Dr. Xelco?" replied another voice with a touch of sarcasm, "Ha, you'll have a hard time finding him. They are detaining him in the Processing Room because he refuses to give the Reidforcians the information they are demanding of him. Dr. Xelco is a stubborn man, and he is paying the price for his mule-headedness."

"What do you mean 'He's Paying for his mule-headedness'?" Joseph inquired.

"The Reidforcians don't like it when we humans have information they want, but are unwilling to give them," the voice quivered, afraid to be saying what he had said to this point.

"How can we find this 'Processing Room'," Joseph pleaded. "Do you know how we can get there?"

"Sure I can tell you how to get there, but getting you there is another story," the voice replied with a smirk in his voice.

"Don't worry about me, I'll get out," Joseph responded defiantly.

"Wait a minute," Denise jumped in. "Don't you think that we should discuss this first before do something foolish."

"Wouldn't you say it's a little late for that," Joseph said turning his head towards Denise and rolling his eyes at her. "Besides, we've gotten this far haven't we." Joseph

continued.

“And just how far is that? We’re in a prison behind locked doors. I wouldn’t say that we have accomplished anything yet,” Denise reminded him.

Turning to the prisoners he asked, “Will you help us find my father?”

“You mean Matthew Xelco is your father?” another voice from the darkness said sounding very surprised.

Joseph shook his head yes.

“If you want our help we will try to do everything we can, however we are extremely weak from the lack of food and water,” a third voice continued. “Do you have any food you can share with us?”

“Denise, get out the can of manstaka jelly and the di-hydroxide water,” Joseph quickly responded to the question as he pulled his backpack off his back and began to search.

“You have manstaka jelly! I haven’t had that in years!” a voice from the crowd blurted out as the prisoners moved closer in anticipation of a delicacy..

“Joseph, I can’t get the lid off of the manstaka jelly,” Denise said wincing as she tried to remove the top off of the can.

“Use your Phaluvian army knife and pry it off,” Joseph demonstrated on his own can as he spoke.

As the prisoners devoured the meal, they began to relate their tales of how they had come to this forsaken land.

Conrad Darnoc was the pilot on a freighter traveling from the Baluvian colony to Rigmar in the Dosta sector when a Reidforcian scout ship captured his ship. Unarmed and unable to defend himself he was an easy target. At the time he was carrying a cargo of medical supplies desperately needed on Bristus, because of a serious breakout of Sunga fever. His cargo consisted of a vaccine and live cultures for research in the laboratory on Bristus.

Maxwell Linden, a chief laboratory technician, Thomas Reikof, co-pilot, and Somat Donley, chief duty officer, were on Conrad Darnoc’s ship when it was captured. Under the

terms of the Intergalactic Summit these men, who were civilians, should have been returned to their homelands, and not held as prisoners under hard labor.

The Reidforcians captured Mark Cooter while he was flying an attack mission against one of their outposts. He is an expert in navigation and engineering, and has knowledge of detection avoidance systems; when he has the right equipment. (His was not functional at the time of his capture.)

Regis Fisbon, an ambassador to the League of Nations on Earth, was en route to a summit of the leaders of the CIG on Bignol when the Reidforcians intercepted his ship.

They were all brought to this labor camp to work in the ronadium mines.

The effects of ronadium on humans aren't fully known, but from the sores on the skin of the prisoners, and the depleted look of their complexions, it appeared that the radiation was having a toxic affect. Reidforcians need to find miners from other planets, because ronadium is particularly lethal to them.

After eating the manstaka jelly and filling their stomachs with di-hydroxide water, the prisoners looked remarkably better, even though their clothes were ragged, and they had sores nearly head to foot. It was agreed, the only way this mission would be a success was if they were to help. Possibly by making a disturbance to distract their captors, long enough to allow Joseph and Denise time to get to his father.

“May I look at your equipment?” Mark Cooter asked while he reached for the communicators that Joseph and Denise had brought with them, and made some adjustments. Denise watched as she pointed her headlamp at the project.

Denise gave him the Phaluvian army knife. The tools on the knife were perfect for the project.

The other prisoners were curious about what he was doing and looked over his shoulder to see what how he was connecting the various components together.

“OK, I'm finished. What I've done is to create a crude, but effective, concealment device for each suit.” Mark said.

“This will keep you absolutely invisible to the guards and their sensors, but it won't last long on the batteries in the survival suits; maybe thirty to forty seconds. It should be

long enough to evade the detection devices at the end of the corridor,” Mark advised. “You will need to be careful, because when it turns off they will see you.”

“How did you figure out how to build a concealment device,” Regis asked surprised at Mark’s idea.

“I have always had an interest in creating concealment devices, or dimensional shifters as I call them. During my stay here, in order for me to keep my sanity, I have been designing something in my head that might help us escape. This is a miniature version of that, and if I am correct, the wiring harnesses and the connections on these suits should work,” Mark explained. “I have had success with designs like this in the past. It depends on the type of sensors they are using because the device is not effective on every system.”

“Joseph, when you asked the CPU how many people the craft would carry it told us seventeen average sized adults. Do you think we could get some of our friends out of here as well,” Denise questioned.

“Don’t worry about us,” replied Regis Fisbon. “We’ve already resolved ourselves to be here for the rest of our lives. Just save yourselves and your father if you can.”

Ignoring Regis’ statement Joseph responded, “That’s a great idea Denise,”

Then turning to the prisoners Joseph continued. “We will do everything we can to help you, but first I must save my father.”

“We’ll just get in your way. We’re weak and undernourished. Anyway we’re due to go back on shift in less than four hours,” Regis seemed to be begging them to leave them alone hoping to avoid an unnecessary conflict with the guards.

“That’s crazy! If we can get you out, we will,” Joseph replied defiantly. “If you’ll help us get to where my father is, we’ll help you escape.”

Joseph took out the C-Tablet from his backpack, unfolded it, and showed the map to Conrad and Regis.

“Our map is incomplete about the inside of the compound. Several of the areas are just question marks. Maybe you can look at this and tell us where we are and what some of these rooms might be?” Joseph began to get excited.

“Let me see that,” said Conrad with Mark looking over his shoulder. “Let’s see.....

We're right here," he pointed to the long corridor on the map. "We've got to go down the entire length of the hallway here to these doors. I think this is the guard's dining hall. We will have to hurry because it's getting close to feeding time," Conrad continued. "Beyond that is the auditorium where all of the special functions are held. I'm not sure what's past that."

The group began putting together a plan to distract the Reidforcian guards when suddenly; there was the loud clank of a key slamming against metal.

"Quick! Get behind us!" Ambassador Fisbon ordered in a whispered voice, "If the guards find you here, they'll kill us for sure!"

Joseph and Denise scampered to the back of the cell and lay down in the slimy goo that spread across the floor. The others spread themselves over the two attempting to hide them.

The giant door swung open and standing in the doorway were two of the fiercest looking Reidforcian warriors Joseph or Denise had ever seen. Actually this was the first time either of them had seen a Reidforcian in person. Each had a large belt draped over their right shoulder with different weapons attached, and on the shoulder strap was a long muzzled Knoxthian trazer (they have a longer range, but aren't as powerful as a CIG trazer). On their shoulders were large pads with different emblems on them; perhaps rank insignias. Large helmets extended down over their necks to their shoulders. Metallic gloves covered their six fingered paws and chains draped from their waists. Black metallic boots with pointed toes and spur like wheels off the back adorned their monstrous feet. Hanging from their sides, they carried a samitar in a sheath. (The samitar is a long curved blade with notched teeth along its edge. When activated the samitar turns bright red and can cut through almost anything like a hot knife through butter.) They carried a transparent shield made of chronthium. These shields can withstand the blows of a samitar and deflect an attack from a trazer. All in all the Reidforcian guards were menacing at the very least.

"Earthlings, Lord Froth requires your presence immediately," The larger of the two blurted out.

Without warning or forethought, Joseph leapt up from behind the people who were

hiding him and, turned on the hood lamp on his atmosphere suit. He pointed it directly at the first guard's helmet.

Coming out of the dark interior of the cell, the light blinded the guard, and left him confused. He grabbed the sides of his helmet and gave out a frightful yell. As he fell to the ground, Denise jumped up and did the same thing to the second guard with the same results.

The others, taking the lead from Joseph, pounced on the guards, knocking them to the ground. Mark Cooter pulled the helmet off of one of the guards and when the light from the atmosphere suit shone in his face, his eyes bugged out, and a greenish yellow substance like pudding began to flow out of his eye sockets. The oozing mass flowed faster and faster until his skull collapsed.

The Earthlings looked at each other in disbelief. Conrad ripped the helmet off of the second guard, and when Denise pointed her beam into his face, the same thing happened.

"I don't believe it!" said Regis Fisbon with a look of amazement on his face. "I think we've finally found a weakness in the Reidforcians! Can you believe it! Who would've thought these monsters had a weakness as simple as this," he continued.

"All this time we thought the helmets were for military purposes," inserted Mark, "We never dreamed that light would have such an effect on them."

"Do you think that with this discovery we might be able to defeat them?" Denise questioned.

"It would appear that we've stumbled onto something that could change the direction of the war," Regis replied. "I just hope we are able to share this with someone outside of this prison."