

MISCALCULATIONS

Chapter IX

“Quick give me the larger triangle off your belt. I can wedge it in here so we can slip through.” Conrad gasped under the pressure of the door.

With a flash of light the transported travelers suddenly found themselves floating through darkness, and then, just as quickly, they were engulfed in a murky fog; standing somewhere outside the walls of the Reidforcian labor camp.

“Where are we?” questioned Mark, “And where is the ZX/2?”

“It should be right here!” exclaimed Denise.

“Computer, give us our current location,” requested Dr. Xelco of the CPU.

“You... are... at... fourteen... degrees... six... minutes... and... two... seconds... north... by... twenty... seven... degrees... two... minutes... zero... seconds... west,” responded the CPU.

“Computer, where is the ZX/2 at this time?” questioned Denise.

The CPU responded, Fifteen...degrees...seven...minutes...”

“Computer, wait, where is that in relation to where we are now and where we were before?” Denise cut off the CPU panicking over the fact that they might be lost.

The CPU paused for a second and then responded, That... would... be... just... in... side... the... pris... on... walls.”

“ARE YOU KIDDING!? That’s in the courtyard. We’re supposed to be on the ship not out here in the middle of nowhere?” Conrad blurted out, “How did we make this

mistake.”

“I must have asked the CPU the wrong question before we left. I should have asked the CPU where the ZX/2 was now instead of where it was left. We must be where Joseph and I landed originally,” Denise said rather sheepishly, “What are we going to do now? Where is Joseph when we need him?” she continued frustrated at her mistake.

“We’re just going to have to figure this one out for ourselves,” commented Dr. Xelco. “First we should break out the canister of compressed air you have in the backpack so we can survive this fog,” Dr. Xelco suggested, “Then we need to try and find our way back to the prison camp,” he continued.

“Why don’t we try the communicators? We could let the others know of our situation and then they could try and help us,” Conrad was only stating what the others were probably already thinking.

“I don’t think so,” said Dr. Xelco, “If we use the communicators we will give away our position and probably the positions of the others as well,” Dr. Xelco said putting a damper on the idea.

Denise pulled off the Reidforcian helmet, took the hood of the atmosphere suit back from Mark, and put it over her head. Conrad, being curious, picked up the helmet and slid it over his head.

“Hey, I can see pretty well in here. If Denise would turn on her headlamp I know I could help us find our way back to the prison,” Conrad said with excitement.

“What good would that do?” Mark asked.

“At least we’ll be closer to the ZX/2, and if we do happen to run into the others, we’ll have a better chance of escape than if we remain out here,” Mark said making light of the situation.

“Whatever happens, staying out here won’t accomplish anything, especially if we die. At least if we are closer to the prison we will have a ray of hope,” responded Dr. Xelco in a fatherly manner hoping to reassure the others.

“Which direction is the prison?” Denise asked. The others shrugged their shoulders.

“Computer, which direction should we go to find the prison?” Denise queried the

CPU. There was no response.

“I think the CPU just died.” Dr. Xelco observed.

The four bewildered and dejected escapees tried to put a positive face on a very desperate situation. There was a glow in the distance; they guessed it might be from the prison. They headed that direction.

As they began the journey back to the camp Denise turned on the headlamp so they could see better and farther than before. The surface of the planet was soft and spongy under foot and the blue mist made it hard to see what was ahead.

It seemed a bit of a paradox to be looking for a haven in the place from where they had just escaped.

“Why was I so stupid not to have asked the CPU where the ZX/2 was at that time,” Denise went on and on mentally kicking herself.

“Denise you can go on and on abusing and blaming yourself for what happened, but you know you weren’t the only one there. Any one of us should have realized the mistake, and we didn’t. Anyway, we might have been in bigger trouble had we gone directly to the ship. With the guards around it we might be sitting in a cell right now or, worse yet, dead. Now knock it off and let’s get going,” Dr. Xelco did his best to console Denise.

The Reidforcian helmet helped them find their way. The helmet also adjusted for the atmosphere outside so Conrad wasn’t feeling the effects of the thin oxygen. They stopped every few cordons and shared the helmet.

Mark, who was leading the group suddenly said, “UHG, I think I just ran into something hard.”

Looming in front of them were the steep walls of the prison.

Denise turned off the light on her headlamp. They stopped and took a break leaning against the wall of the prison.

Once they had rested, they began to shimmy along the wall to their left, looking for a way into the camp. Several cordons later they came across the entrance.

“How are we going to get in there?” Mark asked as he saw that the door was solid.

“We can use the Phaluvian knife the way Joseph and I did when we first got here.

Boy, that seems like such a long time ago,” Denise said with a sigh. She was exhausted and realized that they hadn’t gotten any rest since arriving.

“Conrad took the knife and pushed it into the crack in the door, prying the doors apart. The doors began to move slowly allowing the amber light from inside to escape.

“Quick give me the larger triangle off your belt. I can wedge it in here so we can slip through.” Conrad gasped under the pressure of the door.

Denise obliged and after inserting the triangle into the space between the doors, all of them were able to slip inside.

After Conrad himself slipped through the doors, he removed the key that had activated the dome, and gave it back to Denise.

“Here keep this, we might need it later,” Conrad said as he handed her the key.

Once again they were within the walls of the chamber of horrors. No one in their right mind would return to such a place, but their current circumstances dictated otherwise.

Now that they were inside, the first thing they needed to do was find a place to hide. They spotted the empty containers in the corner where Joseph and Denise had hidden earlier. Conrad motioned for them to follow.

Once behind the first stack of crates Conrad looked up and motioned, “Look over there,” as he pointed across the yard.

Between them and the entrance to the prison was the ZX/2 surrounded by Reidforcian troops.

“At least I know where we are,” stated Denise. “I can always get back inside, if I need to. If we could just get past the guards then we could reenter the transporter and start all over,” she continued.

“I don’t think we have that option right now, especially since the CPU is dead,” Dr. Xelco reminded her. “I don’t think that’s such a good idea any way.”

Suddenly, out of the nowhere an orange blur flashed in front of them and then pounced on Denise. Hissing and growling, the ball of fuzz latched onto Denise and wouldn’t let go. It was all she could not to scream.

“WHAT IS IT?” Denise gasped trying to see what had attacked her.

“Hold on, I think it’s the whittther,” Mark responded. “Yeah, it’s the whittther. Where did he come from?”

“I don’t know, but get it off of me,” Denise panicked.

“Don’t worry, he likes you,” responded Dr. Xelco.

“What about the transmitter we gave him,” Conrad interjected.

“I think it’s may be gone by now,” Dr. Xelco surmised.

“I wonder how he could have lost it,” Mark asked quizzically.

“Think about it Bozo,” Conrad said sarcastically.

Turning their attention back to the task at hand, there in the middle of the courtyard in plain view of the entire compound was the ZX/2. It appeared to still be intact, but there were guards mulling about the yard making it impossible to gain access without being seen. What was worse was that the ship lay directly in the path to the prison door.

“Now what do we do?” Mark asked not really sure he wanted to know the answer.

“We’ll just have to sit tight and wait,” Dr. Xelco responded.

“Wait for what?” Mark questioned.

“I don’t know just yet. Joseph and the others are supposed to come out of that door and try to meet us at the landing site. If we can get their attention we might be able come up with an alternative plan.

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Joseph just gazed in amazement at the ZX/2 craft sitting out in the middle of the courtyard. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. Across the courtyard thought he saw the others hiding behind some crates.

Joseph went back inside the door and when he took off the helmet the others noticed immediately the look of confusion and disbelief on his face.

“Well, what did you see?” questioned Yendor.

“Right in the middle of the courtyard, in plain view of the entire complex, is the ZX/2, right where I expected it to be,” exclaimed Joseph. “But I saw the others on the other

side. They didn't end up on the ZX/2."

"Oh my, what about Denise and the others, are they OK?" Somat blurted out.

"So what does all this mean?" jumped in Fragon, surprising Joseph. "Do we get out of here or what?"

"Let me think for a minute," Joseph said as he motioned for the others to leave him alone while he tried to think of a plan. "I have to come up with a plan to save Denise and my father. I got Denise into this mess, now I have to get her out."

"We're going back to our cell where we will be safe, at least for the time being," Fragon said starting back for the cell door.

"Hold on a dog gone minute," Joseph spoke up. "Don't jump ship on us just yet. We've been in worse situations. We'll come up with something." Joseph implored them.

Joseph leaned against the wall as he tried to figure out the next thing to do.

"I've got an idea. Yendor, if you use the communicator in the suit, we can try and contact the others. Be brief and just ask them to give a simple yes or no to the questions like 'Are you OK?' got it?" Joseph said as he showed Yendor how to work the communicator. "We can't use it for too long or else they will figure out where we are. Set the power to minimum and then increase until we have contact. The lower the power settings the harder it will be for them to find us. It will also help us conserve the batteries."

Yendor turned on the transmitter and did exactly as Joseph told him. A few anxious seconds passed, but then, Yendor got the biggest smile on his face.

"They responded and said, they're OK! I think it was Conrad. Hold on a minute...." Yendor paused as he listened closely to the next transmission. "They're on the other side of the compound, beyond the ZX/2. They want to know our position. Should I tell them?" Yendor passed on the question.

"No, if we do we might be falling into a trap. Keep silent. If Conrad is working the controls anything could be going on." Joseph grumbled. "Let me think for a minute." Joseph once again wandered off in thought.

"Yendor tell them to blink their headlamp twice when I give you the signal, all right?" Joseph directed Yendor.

Joseph replaced the Reidforcian helmet on his head, and then opened the door. He signaled to Yendor who relayed the message to Conrad. To Joseph's amazement, across the courtyard he saw the others. He then saw Denise flash the headlamp as she had been told to do.

He walked back into the hallway and said, "I can't believe it, it really is them. Now all we've got to do is figure out a way to get to the craft and get out of here without being caught."

"Why don't we coordinate a dash for the ship from both directions? We have the chronthium shields and the Knoxthian trazers so we aren't completely helpless," Maxwell spoke up.

"And we've got the concealment devices that are still intact," Yendor added.

"OH YEAH! That's a great idea! I forgot about the concealment devices," Joseph jumped.

"Yendor, ask them if they still had full use of their concealment device," Maxwell suggested.

Yendor relayed the message and they responded with a simple 'yes'.

"Great, we're going to have to move fast because the longer we use the communicators the sooner they are going to be able to zero in on our location, and the less power we will have for the concealment devices to work," Joseph warned.

"If I go first I think I can get close enough to the craft to open the door. After that, have the others move under their concealment devices to the ship. I will attempt to distract the guards. Once Denise and the others are inside have them signal you to come across the yard under the cover of your concealment device," Joseph schemed. "Ask them if that will work for them," he gave directions to Yendor.

Yendor passed on the plan and the reply was in the affirmative.

Joseph once again donned the helmet of the Reidforcian Constine and proceeded to walk out the door, leaving the others behind. He walked towards the craft in a manner that would attract the least amount of attention. Not knowing what Reidforcians talked about when they were involved in idle chit chat; he just kept his mouth shut deciding to speak

only when spoken to. As he passed by the guards they snapped to attention and saluted him. He returned the salutes.

When he got to the craft he circled it as if he were giving the craft an inspection (which is exactly what he was doing) so the other guards wouldn't suspect him.

"Constine, what would you have us to do?" one of the guards assigned to the craft asked.

"Be more specific sentinel," Joseph responded.

"Haven't you heard? Lord Froth has reported that there have been radio signals from the invaders and they think that there may be an attempt to retrieve the craft in order to escape," replied the guard. "The signal is too weak to pinpoint, but he feels that it's originating from somewhere close to here."

"That is why I am here," responded Joseph. "I am here to relieve you. The intruders have been spotted just beyond the Crystal gate and are thought to be headed out of the compound."

The guards laughed, "That is unfortunate for them. They are walking right into the land of the goloti. (The biggest meanest animals on Reidforcia.) If they're going that direction we won't have to follow them. The goloti will take care of them for us!"

"Go and retrieve them, for Lord Froth wants them for his pleasure, not the goloti's," Joseph ordered the guards.

The guards moved off quickly taking the others to chase down the fugitives leaving Joseph and the ZX/2 alone, at least for the moment.

He motioned towards the crates beyond the ZX/2 as he opened the main hatch on the underside of the craft. He then stood guarding the craft to fool the guards on the walls surrounding the courtyard. It seemed like several minutes had passed when he noticed the door from the cell block open and close by itself.

"They must be on their way. That means that the others are already on the ship. I didn't even see them. That concealment device worked!" Joseph thought to himself.

All of a sudden about thirty cordons from the ship Joseph began to see figures approaching. The concealing device was fading because the batteries were failing, and they

didn't know it. They were all huddled together behind the chronthium shield.

In a moment of panic Joseph yelled out, "I CAN SEE YOU, HURRY!"