

The Cure

The Chronicles of Agent Thirteen

by Gene C. Jensen, ...

Published: 2021



Lawrence Fitzer opened his eyes with a start. He wasn't sure what roused him from his deep, dreamless sleep. It could have been the loud buzzing of loose electrical conduit spitting out sparks, or the vibrating walls like an explosion blasted somewhere outside. All he knew for certain was that when he opened his eyes he had no clue where he was or how he got there. The building where he awoke appeared war ravaged.

His military instincts kicking in at a sluggish pace, Lawrence shrugged off the dizziness and confusion. He rose to his feet—light headed. A concussion might have rendered him unconscious earlier, but he felt stable enough to explore his

surroundings. He scanned the room for any threats or visible hazards, but saw nothing except half destroyed electrical equipment he would be sure to avoid.

Wherever he was, the building had suffered numerous blasts from energy weapons—be it laser or plasma. The blackened scorch marks on the walls and chunks of cement littering the floor were a dead giveaway, but there was also the smell of burnt metal and chemical residue only advanced weaponry left in its wake. Where could he be? Had he been captured or left for dead on some mission he forgot about?

The last thing he recalled was departing a mining colony on a transport ship from one of Harakto's moons—a planet a short twenty lightyears from Earth. He had led a Company on a covert mission to quell a revolt that erupted amongst the workers. The operation was successful, but what happened after that? Was his ship boarded or shot down? He had no recollection.

Lawrence was startled when something unnoticed in his coat pocket quaked. Curious, he pulled out a rectangular computer tablet he had never seen before, but had heard about such gadgets. They were used to communicate across planets and even galaxies—either to make phone calls, order supplies and even play games. He never owned one—they were impractical for his personal use and overpriced. The most troubling thing at the moment was who could be calling?

He pressed the *Respond* button and the image of a man appeared on the screen. Whoever he was, he had neatly trimmed brown hair and was dressed in a tuxedo. Lawrence had seen the funny outfits in old pictures—a suit men used to wear hundreds of years ago for fancy get togethers and weddings. His expression looked dire. "Captain Lawrence Fitzer, can you hear me?" He asked.

"Yes," Lawrence answered. "Who are you and where am I?"

"I am Crisis Officer Ronald Pierre," the man answered. Crisis Officer? Lawrence had never heard of that rank before, then again his own position within the Interplanetary Armed Services wasn't known to many either. Things were always changing with structure on a weekly basis at times. "I don't have time to explain the situation," Pierre went on, "other than the fact that it's perilous."

"Perilous?" Lawrence asked. He was starting to sweat and his muscles were getting sore. "Is the building going to explode?"

"No," he answered, "you will." Lawrence froze. "Kidding!" Pierre was all smiles. "But in all seriousness, you've been infected with a rather nasty virus that will kill you in a short span of time."

The Crisis Officer wasn't joking, Lawrence could tell. "A virus?" He asked. "But how? What does it do?"

"I'm sure you're feeling the effects by now," Pierre said. "Precipitation, muscle weakness. Those are the just the first symptoms. It will only get worse as time goes by so it's important we get you to the cure, fast."

"There's a cure?" Lawrence hoped he heard right.

"I didn't mention that?" Pierre slapped his head. "Well, *of course* there's a cure! If you get to the top of this building in time. Which..." he looked down at his wrist as if checking a watch but nothing was there, "you're running out of."

"What do I need to do?" Lawrence asked.

“First, get out of this room,” Pierre said. “There are tiny nano-cams flitting about like cute little bugs monitoring your position, so I can see much of the same as you. You need to head towards that lovely zippy-zappy sound.”

He almost fell over from dizziness as he walked, but shrugged it off and kept going—he was a soldier after all. Using chunks of debris to steady his walk, Lawrence approached the buzzing noise. He discovered what was causing all the ruckus—an electronic door with its power source damaged. Sparks fired here and there as it continued to try opening and closing only inches.

“Door’s inoperable,” Lawrence said.

“I was afraid of that,” the Crisis Officer muttered. “Let me see...” He looked to something off the screen. “You’ll have to take the stairs, but it won’t be an easy climb.”

“I’m not in bad shape.”

“I wasn’t referencing your slightly larger than average gut,” the Officer said. “I spoke of the debris clogging the stairwells. Not only will you navigate through an atrocious and unforgiving terrain, your degrading health will make matters worse.”

“Whatever I need to do to get cured,” Lawrence said. He looked down. *My stomach isn’t big!*

Officer Pierre guided him to where the stairs were, and luckily the entrance wasn’t blocked. He looked up. The first few flights had scattered rubble where parts of the wall had fallen, leaving small boulder-like obstacles. As he ascended higher the debris became so thick he couldn’t see a way through. The feeling of doom started to weigh him down.

“No dawdling!” Officer Pierre shouted. “Have you forgotten about the wretched virus wreaking havoc on your internal organs like an all-you-can-eat-buffet for microorganisms?”

“I can’t see a way through!” Lawrence shouted back.

“Get closer!” Pierre persisted. “Look for a quaint little hole to wriggle through, or a loose piece of wall to clamber over!”

Lawrence listened to the advice of the odd man and inspected with more diligence. There was a crevice that would be a tight squeeze, but he sucked in and shifted through—step by step—until he was on the other side.

“Good work!” Pierre clapped. “Now continue up the stairs, and do be wary of the occasional loose rock gracing the boring décor. There should be a maintenance door somewhere ahead.”

“Looks clear to me,” Lawrence glanced upwards. “I could just take the stairs the rest of the way.”

“If it were me, I wouldn’t,” Pierre said, “because at the bottom of this stairwell dwells an angry line of conduit that’s about to regurgitate erratic electrons onto a clumsily spilled barrel of ion fuel. When the two meet, their short-lived moment of passion will turn this stairwell into a fiery paradise!”

Lawrence felt a rumble before hearing the explosion, and the area became ten degrees more hot. As fast as he could, he ran until he found the maintenance door the Crisis Officer mentioned. He panicked after reaching for the handle and finding it locked. The door was computerized!

“Hang on, Lawrence!” Pierre said from the screen. “I’m hacking the master password right now.” Lawrence watched helplessly as the orange glow from below grew brighter. “I got it!” Pierre clapped. “Tell the computer, *I’m a pretty lady.*”

“What?” Lawrence shouted in anger. “I’m not going to say that!”

“It’s the only way to open the door!” Pierre shouted. “Say it or die!”

The heat was intensifying. Lawrence shook his head and muttered, “I’m a pretty lady.”

Nothing happened.

“Say it louder!” Pierre shouted. “I don’t think it heard you!”

“I’m a pretty lady!” Lawrence yelled.

“Indeed,” a robotic voice came from hidden speakers and the door clicked unlocked.

Lawrence opened it and jumped through right as the creeping blaze filled the stairwell with fiery death. Out of breath and relieved, Lawrence looked at the tablet to see Pierre smiling. “What’s so funny?”

“Oh, nothing,” the Crisis Officer’s smile widened, “it’s just that... I programmed the password. Funny, huh?”

“You what?” Lawrence shook a fist at the screen. “I’m gonna—”

“Now now, don’t be upset,” Officer Pierre said, “it was only a joke.”

“A joke?” He coughed hard and noticed some blood came out. “I’m dying and you have the nerve to play pranks on me? When I’m out of here I’m having a word with your CO!”

“Laughter is the best medicine,” Pierre said, “when you do it, of course. Let’s get a move on, Lawrence! The rooftop is getting closer! Just a few more obstacles—possible explosions—and you’ll be cured!” Lawrence nodded and stood, though his legs felt heavier. “Now listen carefully. There’s one room you must avoid at all costs, and that’s—”

The transmission cut out and the screen turned blank. Lawrence hit some buttons and nothing happened. A text appeared that said *searching for signal*.

“I don’t believe this!” Lawrence shouted and nearly tossed the tablet to the floor in anger.

Where to now?

He was getting worse by the minute. Limping now, he walked through a hallway looking for any opening that would take him further up the building. Rooms were caved-in and blocked, but to his luck there was a room at the end of the long corridor that was passable. He limped faster—hope returning to him.

The room was dark. Lawrence couldn’t see anything so he grabbed onto a surface for support and guidance, but his hand slipped. It felt covered in a soapy substance, but was thankful he couldn’t see what it was.

The floor beneath his shoes was squishy. It could have been human or alien dismembered body parts for all he knew—it was debatable which was preferable. Fatigue was taking over and his body yearned to rest, but the room didn’t feel safe or sanitary enough to sit.

Lawrence continued to feel his way about the room. His heart raced with anticipation when he felt the frame of a door, but in seconds lost his footing and slipped to the ground. He groaned and his hand fell on something that felt like

slimy rubble, but as it slid across the mysterious object it felt more like a squishy face.

“Ahhhh!” He shouted and jumped to his feet.

The tablet glowed to life again and he could see the grin on Officer Pierre’s face. “I’m back, Lawrence! Did you miss me? We had a bit of electrical interference. Now, the one room you absolutely cannot enter is pitch black and filled with—”

“Squishy human shaped things?” Lawrence asked.

Pierre blinked. “I told you not to enter that room, Lawrence!”

“The transmission cut off before you told me!”

“Right,” Pierre nodded. “Um... nothing is moving, right?”

“Not that I can tell,” Lawrence tried to look but the light was too dim.

“Good!” Pierre said relieved. “Now, leave the room before something *does* start to move.”

More dizzy now, Lawrence nodded and went through the door. It led to a smaller set of stairs. “All right, Lawrence,” Officer Pierre said, “this actually might have bought us some time. At the top of the stairs you’ll find another door.”

Lawrence continued up but each step his legs felt heavier. Once he reached the top he had to sit and rest—panting while hunched over.

“Listen,” Pierre said, “beyond this door is the exit, but I have a confession. I’m not really Crisis Officer Pierre. My name is Agent Thirteen of Pyros Wolf.”

Lawrence couldn’t suppress a laugh. “Pyros Wolf?” He chuckled again even though it hurt. “That’s rubbish! Another joke?”

“No jokes, Lawrence,” he said, “or should I say Captain Fitzer—Company Bravo of the Zero Order?”

Lawrence was quiet now. “Only a few people outside the order know my rank and position.”

“Pyros Wolf knows everything, Captain,” Thirteen said with a glare, “and I have another confession—there is no cure for your illness.”

“What?” Lawrence shouted. “You mean, after all this I’m still going to die?”

“Precisely,” Thirteen said, “and let me explain why. Your Company was dispatched to quell a revolt on Harakto’s moon which you put down efficiently. However, you didn’t stop there, did you?”

“There was gunfire coming from somewhere!” Lawrence defended himself. “My men were dying!”

“And so you ordered them to kill everyone in the sector,” Thirteen said, “even after the rogue sniper was found and executed.”

“I panicked, okay?” Lawrence said. “Maybe it was a mistake, but it was my job to see my men come home.”

“There were civilian men, women and children gunned down who were clearly unarmed, Captain,” Thirteen had a look of disgust. “They may not have been human, but they were still people. You broke protocol for rules of engagement and have therefore been sentenced to death.”

Lawrence wanted to defend himself more, but couldn’t. The weight of his actions sank in and he knew Agent Thirteen was right—he deserved to die. “So why infect and torment me? Why not execute me the proper way?”

“Your actions deserved retribution,” Thirteen said, “but there were some who sympathized with your actions. I was one of the few—we all make mistakes. Once

upon a time I doomed an entire world to death. Billons, Captain Fitzer, and to this day I still don't know if I made the right choice. I've gone over your service record and until the incident on the Haraktan moon, you were a stand-up soldier. I helped convince Pyros Wolf to strike a deal with the Haraktan government.

"You are on their home world now, Captain," Thirteen went on, "and their planet has been plagued with a Xenosite."

Lawrence knew what the creatures were. They were a lethal parasite of unknown origin that infected different races and species. One Xenosite had the potential to extinct whole planets. "The virus you carry," Thirteen said, "is formulated to kill adult Xenosites as well as stop them from reproducing. You walk through that door and let the Xenosite horde occupying the roof attack and kill you, the whole colony will be eradicated."

"Why would I do that?" Lawrence muttered. "Die an even more horrific death? Haven't I been punished enough already?"

Thirteen nodded. "The choice is yours. You could sit here and die. The virus in you will puff out and the planet will be doomed." He moved closer to the camera. "I don't always tell the truth but I rarely lie. While there's no cure for the virus you carry, there *is* a different cure I'm offering you.

"The incident on the mining colony was a grave mistake on your part. The events haven't yet been released to any government sources or news outlets. You can imagine the negative media attention it would spawn across the galaxy.

"Your family knows you are in the military—if not exactly what you do. How would Martha Fitzer feel knowing her husband slaughtered hundreds of innocents? Your sons Robert and Lawrence Junior, knowing their father was a murderer? Your name would be remembered throughout history with shame."

Lawrence was quiet.

"The cure for your mistaken actions lies behind that door, Lawrence," Thirteen said. "Your death by Xenosites will save an entire race! The Haraktan have agreed to forgive and forget about what happened on the mining colony if you walk through that door to die. You will be hailed as a hero forever. Your family will be proud to know that their husband and father died saving countless billions." He paused. "And, I even talked them into erecting a statue in your honor. So, what will it be? Will you die a hero or a villain? Will you accept my cure, or not?"

Lawrence stood and held the tablet with one hand. "I accept your cure, Agent Thirteen of Pyros Wolf. Not so much to clear my name, but I will do it for this race I have committed crimes against. My life may not be enough to make up for my actions, but if I *really* can save the planet I'm willing to die trying." He saluted.

Thirteen saluted back. "That's the Captain Fitzer I've read about! Go, Captain! Your cure awaits!"

"Could you tell my family that I love them and I'm sorry I couldn't come home?"

Thirteen nodded. "I'll send them a letter myself and tell them your final words."

Lawrence nodded. He threw the tablet down and opened the door.

There was sunlight seeping through cracks in the ceiling of the grand building he had finally reached the top of. What greeted him were hundreds of Xenosite infected Haraktan bodies that turned their heads the moment he slammed the door shut. They growled and charged at him.

"Come and get me!" Lawrence shouted.

With the last of his strength he ran towards the horde thinking only of his wife and children. His life ended in seconds.

