

Read an Excerpt from
Gene.sys, Magigate Returns

The Glide Trilogy ★ Book III

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Examination

Maddy shivered violently. She felt queasy, overpowered by the nauseating smell of her own sweat—stale, cold, mingled with other cloying odors. The plaintive cries of animals coming from outside her room frightened her. Strange sounds. Haunting, mournful melodies. Yes. That was it: the sounds were musical. Not like anything she'd ever heard before, and certainly not like lab animals howling in pain or whimpering in fear as she might have expected from the dungeons of Rue le Regrattier, Dr. Janot's private laboratory and lair. These sounded alien and intelligent, as if conversations were being held in a language of chords. She had no recollection of these sounds from her first captivity, which seemed like eons ago. She couldn't be sure of the days any more than she could be sure of the sounds. Back then she'd been unconscious most of the time.

Now, the straps holding her against the metal rails of the gurney bit into her wrists and ankles. Her arms and legs felt numb. Unfamiliar medical instruments surrounded her, casting ominous shadows on the walls and ceiling. A crisp, white sheet had been hastily thrown over her naked body. Her head was strapped down, too. Her toes, which felt like ice cubes, protruded from the end of the sheet; between them she could see a door, and through the door's porthole window, the hall. At first she'd considered herself lucky to be able to see that far, but now she knew she'd been positioned this way on purpose. Shadows flitted by the tiny window, and once she thought she saw a pair of round luminescent eyes pressed to the glass. Inquisitive eyes. Alien eyes. But she might have been hallucinating, too, or maybe Janot was using a Cyband[†] again to induce unsavory thoughts and images.

In the last clear memory she had, guards dressed in g*suits[†] were coming for her in the Quonset hut on Isla del Tiempo Muerto. After they bound and gagged her, she lost consciousness. But she was conscious now, and terrified.

The door opened. A doctor dressed in full surgical regalia with a cap, mask, smock, and gloves entered the room. As soon as he spoke, Maddy knew it was Janot, who insisted on being called Jeneuf.

“Welcome back, Princess,” Jeneuf said in his trademark timbre. His voice was lower and more ominous than Maddy remembered.

“Wh-why am I here?” she stammered. The words lodged in her throat. She hadn’t noticed how dry her tongue and lips were.

Jeneuf smiled.

Maddy couldn’t see his smile behind the blue mask, but his eyes gave away his sadistic delight. “I need to examine you, my dear.”

He pulled the sheet off Maddy. Although it was no more than a thin linen covering, she instantly felt the dank dungeon air. Another violent shiver.

“It’s a shame, really,” Jeneuf said, running his gloved fingers along the contours of her body. “That such lovely young skin has been so badly ravaged.” He pressed his fingers into the pockmarks polka-dotted her body. “Then again,” he went on, as if dictating a surgical procedure, “it’s a miracle, really, that you survived at all given how far gone you were.” Loosening the straps, Jeneuf turned Maddy’s wrists so that her palms faced up. He released the straps on her ankles, too, turned her feet, and ran his fingers up her thighs. “Dr. Longe must be commended for your spectacular recovery. A most virulent organism—Rust[†]. Or perhaps Magigate’s antidote had some special healing properties?” Jeneuf began to apply pressure, squeezing Maddy’s muscles, depressing her abdomen. “One can never rule out the impossible when dealing with the likes of Magigate.”

Suddenly, Jeneuf’s expression turned venomous. He grabbed Maddy’s hair and pulled her head back, exposing her neck. “I intend to discover what makes you tick, Princess,” he hissed. “You may have survived Rust, and now my Renaissance[†], but you will not thwart me again.”

As abruptly as his rancor erupted, Jeneuf’s expression resumed its clinical tranquility. He let go of Maddy’s hair and turned to a nearby sink where he removed his gloves and began to wash his hands.

Maddy felt another wave of nausea. Her skin tingled and itched

as beads of sweat erupted.

“All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved,” Jeneuf said, almost humming the words. “Sun Tzu was an oracle, Princess, a soothsayer who understood that war is the engine that turns the cycle of life. Peace is but a respite. Victory the objective.” Jeneuf shut off the water and turned to face Maddy, casually drying his hands and putting on a fresh pair of gloves as he spoke. “To achieve victory requires strategy, discipline, and order.” Jeneuf reached for a stainless-steel tray across which various handheld instruments were neatly arrayed. He picked up a palm-sized MRI scanner and adjusted its controls.

“I have worked hard to achieve the order required to assure victory.” He began to run the scanner up and down Maddy’s body, stopping at points to examine the projected hologram. “And I will not have a small agent of chaos,” Jeneuf pressed a finger painfully into Maddy’s solar plexus, “such as yourself disrupting my moment of victory. Not again.”

Maddy coughed. “I—I don’t know what you mean.” She trembled and coughed again.

“Don’t be coy with me, Princess,” Jeneuf said threateningly. He pointed to the holo[†], to an image Maddy did not understand. “What happened to my nanophages[†]?”

“I—I don’t—”

“They have all been destroyed!” Jeneuf thundered, shaking the scanner in Maddy’s face. “I want to know how you did it. And I want to know how you recovered so quickly from your Renaissance symptoms. Who helped you? Who was it? Who betrayed me?” The veins in Jeneuf’s neck and temple bulged with fury.

Even if Maddy wanted to answer—to tell Jeneuf about Glimmer, or Em, who Jeneuf would have remembered from his early days with the Resistance, when he and Captain Magigate were still young—she could not have. Even if she had found her voice, why would Jeneuf believe her? Em’s very existence defied reason. Jeneuf would only think Maddy was mocking him. Her lips trembled and her skin felt suddenly cold and clammy.

“Not to worry,” Jeneuf went on, regaining control. “I intend to find out.” He reached for a scalpel and held it against Maddy’s skin.

“N-no!” Maddy screamed as Jeneuf plunged the scalpel into her

lower abdomen. She writhed.

“I wouldn’t do that,” Jeneuf sneered. “It will only make a mess of things.”