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## **A Fly in the Ointment**

by [J.A. Berger](#)

Han Solo drew a long, satisfied sigh as the Millennium Falcon slipped smoothly into hyperspace. His lean Corellian frame stretched out in the pilot's seat, with strong fingers of work-hardened hands interlaced, cradling his neck, he gazed out the cockpit at the dark silence of hyperspace's nothingness. He was a contented spacer.

"Do you realize how long it's been, Pal, since you and I took to the stars just for the hell of it?"

The massive, russet-coated Wookiee who filled the co-pilot's seat shifted a knowing look toward the reclining spacer but remained strangely silent.

"Even I can't remember how long it's been since we've shipped out without some Alliance business guiding our coordinates." He glared at his silent partner. "Will you quit that!" he snapped. "We haven't deserted them! I just need a little time away, to find myself--" A haunted look crossed his features, his hazel eyes hooded with something close to pain--to confusion--to a life that had changed from what he had once known.

Attempting to control a rapidly building temper, Chewbacca's powerful hands tightened about the co-pilot's yoke. \*You have found far more than has been lost,\* he quipped. It brought a defensive glare from Solo.

"I ain't in their Alliance! I come and go as I like--" The belligerence left his voice as he studied the nothingness before him, the peace and serenity suddenly disrupted by memories of a young woman who continued to invade his every conscious thought. "I'm losing myself. I--" he sat upright, hands unthinkingly checking and rechecking his controls. It was busy work. There was nothing to be

done until they emerged from hyper. "Damn it, Gruesome, I had to get away. I was getting too close to them. To her."

A large, furry fist delivered a powerful blow to the Falcon's framework as the Wookiee roared his own conclusions. \*You're running!\*

"I'm not running! They can contact us anytime they--"

Chewbacca threw his long arms skyward in frustrated anger. \*In hyper?!\* His voice, deep with heavy-coated sarcasm, was directed at Solo.

"No, they can't," Han agreed. "I should have left you with 'em. I can see this ain't gonna be no joyride." Hazel-eyed accusation met blue-eyed disappointment. Dropping his gaze first, Han ran long fingers through his unruly hair before drawing a deep breath and reaching for the navi-comp. "Okay," he mumbled softly, "we go back. I don't know where in hell I thought we could go any way with all those warrants out on my head. Universe's gettin' too damned small."

Glancing at the readouts before him, Han pulled a silver lever back and another forward. The darkness of hyper was suddenly dabbled and streaked with the brilliance of the appearing starfield, and the Millennium Falcon slipped gracefully into normal space, her cautious crew flipping all of her defensive shielding into place.

"Keep an eye open while I check our loc. We should be just outside Ramult and she's gone Imperial. I want to make sure we stay well clear of her defense beacons."

Chewie reached across his human's console and activated the system that would recharge their gunnery batteries. A high sonic beep resounded from the small, electronic box mounted above his console and he reached for it quickly, throwing Solo an accusing 'I told you so' glare.

Han ignored the glance, watching the red, flashing light of the small device reflecting off the metal ammo boxes on Chewbacca's ever-present bandolier. "Activate the scrambler before you open the channel."

The shaggy head tilted to one side as the small blue eyes glared at the Corellian spacer in the pilot's seat next to him. He snapped an irritated reply.

"I know you helped install it," Han voiced sarcastically. "It's still the first time we've used it. I wanted to be sure you remembered how."

Mumbling under his breath, Chewbacca activated the scrambler. Immediately, data started filling the small luminescent screen.

"You did forget, didn't you?" Solo accused as his co-pilot showed him a mouth full of sharp teeth. "You're sure touchy today," he grumbled.

He got up and moved to the back of Chewie's seat, looking over his shoulder at the screen where printed data continued to accumulate. "Rellala Four?"

Chewie adjusted the tuning and the printout sharpened, but the destination remained the same. He mumbled precise coordinates for the world.

"I know where it is. But it's an ag world. What can--" Han fell silent as the screen continued to fill. "Malantis. That explains--"

A growl and Solo fell silent until they had read the completed transmission. "She wants us to pick up and transport a full consignment of Malantis to base as soon as possible." He reached over Chewie's shoulder and hit the transmission received button, then pushed the hold. "Her Royalness has a lot of nerve," Han grumbled. "This ain't no ag transport--"

A flow of Wookiee execrations filled the small cockpit and Solo warded them off with an uplifted hand. "Okay! It's important or she wouldn't ask." He gently tapped the screen where the message had been moments before. "'Sides, I think I know what she has in mind." He hit the scrambler and tapped a quick acknowledgement. "I'll set up coordinates for Rellala, you scramble our loc to base. If my figuring's right we're less than a day out."

Chewie nodded, replying softly to the worry in Solo's expressive eyes. "Yeah, they need the stuff bad. With the raw grain they can process a hell of a lot of Malinizide. They were running damn low when we lifted off. I gave them all but a dose or two of what we had on board; that last Imperial strike seared hell out of a lot of the Princess's supply sources."

Han reprogrammed the computer with jump data and waited, his worry increasing as he stared sightlessly at the starfield before them. "I wouldn't have thought there was a chance in hell of us getting our hands on a consignment of the hybrid grain itself."

With lips pulled away from his teeth in a grotesque grin, Chewie repeated a single word from Solo's mumblings, then chuckled knowingly.

"Yeah, us--" Han reached for the silver levers. "I guess I knew there was no leaving. We may not wear any uniform, Pal, but like it or not, we are Alliance."

Chewie shook his shaggy head and commented knowingly, \*It's the belonging, Small One. Doing because you want to do, not because you get paid for the doing.\*

Solo glanced quickly at the Wookiee, Their gazes met in silent understanding from a long, comfortable relationship. "Yeah--I guess--" he whispered soft acknowledgment and took the Falcon hyper.

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Solo secured the last container, then moved out of the crowded cargo hold to meet Chewbacca. "I'll tell TeMas we're finished, you get her fueled up and run preflights. I want us out of here quick. We're too close to Imperial lanes to suit me." Solo pushed his holstered blaster into its customary place on his right thigh, uneasiness tightening his shoulders as he descended the ramp to meet the small humanoid who stood waiting.

"Captain Solo," the being acknowledged with a deep bow. "The loading is completed, I see, and all is in readiness for your departure. I've cleared your lift-off with planetary defenses--"

"Hold it. What's the hurry?" A native, TeMas was small, which Han decided seemed to be the total description of a Rellalian. A human in miniature with abnormally large hands and feet and a skin tint of something between a green and a blue, TeMas had an irritating nature of overbearing meekness. Maybe that was why he didn't like the little Rellalian, Solo reasoned.

"Yes, Captain, a question?"

"What's in this for you?" Han frowned. "That cargo's worth a small fortune. Yet you say no one has paid you for it?"

The little man sighed. "Corellians are so distrustful," he complained. "There are some of us, Captain, who do things for other than monetary gain. We do it because it must be done for the betterment of our total existence." He sighed again heavily. "I feel I am wasting my time, and yours, trying to explain it to a man of your race."

Solo grunted, his hazel eyes attentively searching the little Rellalian's mild, totally unreadable expression. 'Little snipe would make one hell of a card player,' he thought as he hesitantly shook the small man's hand. "I guess, TeMas. Look, the Falcon's ready, so we'll get moving."

TeMas nodded eagerly. "Good luck, Captain Solo, and may the Force be with you."

"Yeah--sure." Han paused at the familiar words, then hurried up the ramp of the Falcon. Entering the ship, he coded the ramp retrieval and hatch-lock mode as the freighter's power converters roared to life. His brows knit tightly with continued unease, he hurried to the cockpit. It had been too easy. None of his

business trips went this smoothly without cold, hard cash flowing, and a lot of it, for a cargo of this nature.

"Chewie, stall for a few minutes with planetary authorities. I want to check our cargo--close."

Chewbacca grunted his acknowledgment as the tall spacer disappeared down the corridor to the ship's bulging holds, coded in his override and entered.

"Corellian suspicions," he grumbled as he wrenched the lid from one of the large containers. "We'll see."

He reached in, scooping up a handful of the golden grain, and pulled it out. It looked like Malantis. Touching a finger to the small pile of living gold, he moved it about, then lifted his hand to his nose. He took a cautious sniff, coughed, sneezed and shook his head; it smelled like Malantis, he admitted. Hesitantly, in expected repugnance, he touched the tip of his tongue to the grain, shuddered in distaste as he spat the bitter, offending taste from his mouth. No doubt, he swore. It was Malantis.

Maybe, he reasoned, TeMas was right. Corellians were naturally suspicious. Still. He looked again at the opened container and the hold full of the tightly sealed cargo. It was worth a hell of a lot of credits. He sighed and returned the grain to its container, resealing it carefully, then hurried to the cockpit for liftoff, his suspicions mollified.

Han set the autopilot, releasing the Falcon to the control of his computer as she cleared Rellala Four's defenses and disappeared into the safety of hyper. Climbing to his feet, he stretched cramped muscles, his long arms brushing the panels over his head. "Offworld without a hitch and in hyper with coordinates set for home," he grinned at his co-pilot and thumped him good-naturedly on the back. "With enough Malantis in our holds to keep even Her Royalness happy for a long time. I don't know how she arranged it, but she sure made it a milk run for us."

Glancing over his board, Han turned toward the corridor leading from the cockpit. "I'm gonna look in on our load again, then catch a bite to eat. You did get the food processor restocked, didn't you?"

Chewbacca shot him a baleful glance.

"Okay, okay, I was just checking. Are you hungry?"

The shaggy head shook in negative reply then turned back to bend over the co-pilot's board to recheck the hyper coordinates.

"Everything's done," Solo assured him. "When you get tired of watching nothing, come on back and I'll beat you at a game of Le-Fante."

An amused light flickered in Chewie's small blue eyes and the Wookiee mumbled a sharp retort. \*Rather play chess.\*

"No chess!" The Corellian refused emphatically. "You've had all the luck lately. I'm changin' the game."

He was still grumbling about Wookiee luck sometime later as he pushed the plate away in dissatisfaction. He glared accusingly at the processor. There was just no way the thing could be persuaded to produce a tasty meal. He swore in mounting irritation. Probably the manufacturers way of making sure there was no such thing as a fat spacer. He had thought several times of restocking perishables to supplement the processor, but the last time he had attempted the ancient art of food preparation from raw ingredients, Chewie had threatened to mutiny. Since then, he had agreed to leave their meal preparations to the computer/processor.

He looked again at his plate. He could eat no more of the unappetizing fare, but he was still hungry. A sudden thought sent a flicker of anticipated pleasure through him. The Malantis.

On Rellala Four, Malantis had been the major food staple for centuries before scientists of the Old Republic had found that, with proper treatment and processing, it could be a valued drug against many human ailments. Even now, with the value of the golden grain quadrupled, Rellalians still existed almost entirely on food made from the grain.

He stumbled to his feet and headed for the bulging holds. It wouldn't take much to make a rich batter that could be programmed into the processor. In a matter of minutes, he could be sitting down before a platter of Corellian dawncakes. The thought lent wings to his steps. In had been years since he had enjoyed the early morning fare of his childhood.

It was a happy and very pleasantly full spacer who pushed his plate away with a contented sigh somewhat later. Disposing of the dishes, he stored the leftover batter in the refrigerated storage unit of the processor, where it would stay fresh for his next meal. Very much satisfied with his successful deception, he moved to the lounge console and opened a channel to the cockpit.

"Five minutes, Gruesome, and you're on." He silenced the transmitter and turned to the gameboard. He was reaching for the game pieces stored under the table when the first wave of pain caught him. He groaned as a sharp cramp bowed him double. He gasped. Grabbing the edge of the gameboard, he steadied himself as another wave hit him harder. Then it was gone.

"Damn system can't handle decent food," he complained. He straightened slowly, kneading the tight muscles of his stomach. The pain did not return. Taking a slow, careful breath, he ran a shaking hand across his forehead and sat down. He was only partially aware of Chewie's entry until he slid into the booth across from him. He could not avoid the questioning eyes which settled on him and the soft-voiced inquiry.

"Of course I'm all right," he snapped. He drew another careful breath and began setting the game pieces on the surface of the board before them. "Corellians don't get sick."

\*Corellians don't get lost either,\* Chewbacca commented sagely as he accepted his game pieces, his attention remaining on Han's features as the color slowly returned. \*You look sick.\*

"I don't look sick," Han denied hotly. "How can I look sick if I'm not sick?" he grumbled. "Probably that damned food processor trying to poison me. Your move."

Chewie gave the Corellian another searching glance, then settled his huge elbows on the gameboard and carefully executed his first move before mumbling softly to himself.

"You'd think that of me?" Solo voiced innocently. He made his countermove. "I wouldn't take advantage of you that way--" Again the pain hit. This time there was no use denying it; he was going to be sick. Stumbling out of the booth, he hurried from the lounge.

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He crumpled to the decking before the waste disposal unit and waited. Already he felt he had vomited everything that could possibly come loose. He sighed. "Okay, I admit it. I'm sick," he mumbled to the huge shadow that darkened the doorway.

Chewbacca laid a gentle hand on Solo's shoulder, steadying the human as more heaves sent waves of discomfort through his rugged frame. Han moaned in obvious pain, "There's nothing you can do." He grimaced and spat the bile into the unit, trying to, clear the bitter taste from his mouth. "Go check our arrival time, will you?"

Chewie turned toward the cockpit, then glanced at the miserable Corellian, worry naked in his small blue eyes, before he hurried to his co-pilot's controls.

Solo rubbed a shaking hand across his face, the cold clamminess of his growing illness increasing steadily. He was sick. It was something he could no longer deny.

He got to his feet and wobbled in mounting weakness toward his quarters. At the door to his small cubicle he met Chewie and a hairy arm reached out to steady him, guiding him into the room and over to his bunk.

"How long, Gruesome?"

\*Twenty standard timeparts\*, Chewie answered. He eased Han down, then pulled the high-topped boots from the Corellian's feet.

"Almost a full day," Han's voice faded. "Gods, it's cold in here!"

Securing a blanket, Chewie covered the chilled spacer.

Solo's eyes closed, his breathing labored as he rested.

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"Luke? What are you doing here?"

Starting guiltily at the soft, pleasant voice behind him, Luke Skywalker turned to meet Leia Organa, who had entered the communications center behind him unseen. "Waiting for word from Han. They should be on their way back by now."

"He was close to Rellala when we contacted him," Leia reminded him unnecessarily. "Unless he runs into trouble, there's really no reason for him to contact us." She studied Luke intently. "You're worried. Why? It's a milk run. There's absolutely no way he can get into trouble on this trip."

"I just don't feel right about it," Luke sighed, unable to put into words the uneasiness he had felt when he learned of Solo's mission. It was too easy.

"If you're that worried, why don't you scramble a message to him?"

"I've already tried. They've gone hyper--"

"And you're gonna stay here until you get through to him, or he calls in, right?" Leia guessed. "Okay. I've got to go see General Dodonna and get things ready for the unloading when he gets here. We'll need all the medidroids set up and ready to process the grain as quickly as possible. Call me if you hear from Han."

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Han Solo groaned his discomfort growing with each passing hour. With Chewie's help, he had managed to get up several times to relieve himself of stomach contents that no longer existed. Perspiration masked his pale features and he shivered from the growing illness. It had come on so quickly, giving him no warning; it had to be the food from the processor, he reasoned. "Chewie."

The Wookiee appeared in the doorway and worried blue eyes settled on him. "Pal, you didn't eat anything out of the processor, did you?"

Eyeing his human in puzzlement, Chewbacca shook his head.

"Don't--Pal--," Han groaned as another wave of pain hit him, leaving him all but breathless.

\*You believe The food--\*

"Must be," Han interrupted weakly. "It hit me right after I'd eaten. You sure you feel all right?"

\*Yes,\* Chewie assured him.

"Good," Han said. "I didn't think there was a being around with tougher innards than a Corellian--ah--" The pain hit again. He fought to keep from crying out.

Chewie moved helplessly to the spacer's side, lightly brushing Han's dark hair away from his forehead. The obvious heat of a building fever stayed the Wookiee's hand. \*There is fever, Small One. That does not accompany food poisoning.\*

"Yeah, it can--if it's bad enough," Han commented. "And it's bad! Sure--more than an upset stomach. Got to get-- it down. Can't fight the other--with damn fever--better get some Malinizide in me."

Han chuckled weakly as Chewie laid him gently down and disappeared down the corridor, "Ain't fair--I have a hold full of the Universal miracle drug--and unprocessed--it's just grain." Returning, Chewie laid the medikit on the edge of the bunk next to Solo and helped the spacer struggle to a sitting position.

Han opened the kit, fumbled among the various vials until he found the one he wanted. He drew it out. Relaxing, spent, against his co-pilot's shoulder, he moaned. "I--can't--" His face glistened with the perspiration of his struggle, his eyes bright with the burning fever. "We're in trouble, Chum--"

Chewbacca shifted his bulk from under the Corellian's lean body and took the vial. Retrieving the hypo-kit, he deftly assembled the syringe and snapped a sterile needle into place. With a dexterity unbelievable in one so large, he inverted

the vial, pierced the rubber seal with the needle, and filled the syringe under the watchful eyes of his human,

"I hate needles--but it should bring the fever down." Han struggled weakly out of his shirt.

Chewie swabbed a sterile field on his right arm, and injected expertly. \*It will,\* he assured him softly.

"If .it wasn't for the cramps and the vomiting--" Han paused, knowing he could no longer keep his fears to himself. "It could be Renalogia. I remember...having it as a kid. Damn near died, It came on quick--like this."

\*You're immune, Small One.\*

"And, between you and the Alliance, I've been inoculated against every damn virus known to affect humans," Han finished for him. "It is got to be the damned processor. We junk it after this run. Should have done it ... before now."

Chewbacca carefully sterilized the syringe and put it away. He had no ready answer for his friend. Han was right, he should not be sick. Not with the symptoms of a virus that had been controlled and conquered to extinction since the end of the Clone Wars. And, unless the antidote worked on whatever was making him sick, he was going to get sicker. Renalogia had once been fatal. Quick. Deadly. A man was virtually consumed with a fever that raged unchecked until death relieved the sufferer. The fever had died with the discovery of Malinizide from the newly developed hybrid grain which filled their holds. He shook his head. Solo was right. It had to be the processor.

"Chewie." The soft voiced plea brought the Wookiee out of his reverie and he met the fever-bright gaze of his human.

"Contact base as soon as we come out of hyper." Another wave of ever-increasing pain hit the Corellian and he leaned gratefully into the shaggy breast of the Wookiee. "Get a medic on the scrambler--none of those damn droids--someone who remembers the Wars. Give him a full rundown of my symptoms--" The spacer drew a painful breath. "Unless I get a hell of a lot better real quick, we've got problems--and we can't take them to base." He clipped off his words and waited for the nausea to subside as he fought to override the dominance of the growing fever. "Don't land. No matter how bad this gets. Pal, listen to me--" Solo's voice hardened as he felt the defiance in the muscles of Chewie's massive breast. "If it's food poisoning, I can weather it with the dose of Malinizide you gave me. If it's not--it could be contagious. We can't take that chance. She's lost so many--" he rambled. "Until we know--we can't land..." His eyes closed as the fever claimed him.

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"Doctor, what is it?" Leia asked.

The medical man studied the received message. "It's difficult to say at this stage. It could be food poisoning. The symptoms are right. I ran a computer check on Solo's inoculations; they're all up to date. Chewbacca has acknowledged that he administered a standard dose of Malinizide to Solo as soon as the illness hit. So far, however, there has been no improvement. That doesn't sound like food poisoning."

"No improvement?" Leia repeated in disbelief. She shifted a worried look from the Alliance medic to the blond Jedi who stood before the communications console linking them to the Falcon. "Luke, did you make a discreet inquiry on Rellala Four?"

"Yes," Luke confirmed. "There's been no outbreak of any contagious virus there in over thirty standard years."

"He had to have picked it up somewhere between the time he left here and arrived at Rellala Four." Leia reasoned.

"That's of no help to us, Princess," Doctor Bante interrupted. "The symptoms, other than the high fever, all point to a bad case of food poisoning. If it is a virus he's contracted, we have no reference point or incubation periods. Luke, contact Chewbacca and tell him to inject another full dose of Malinizide and report any changes in the next standard hour."

Luke turned back to the scrambler and opened the channel to the Falcon. Repeating the medical orders, the lines of worry deepened around the young Jedi's mouth. He studied the data that began correlating on the screen before him. Deftly clearing the screen, he expertly coded his reply in to the keyboard below the screen and acknowledged message received. "Chewie's a jump ahead of us, Doc. He gave that dose--their last--to Han just before they achieved planetary orbit, His condition has not stabilized and continues to worsen. We have one very worried Wookiee on the line." Helplessness hardened his voice. "There's got to be something we can do!"

"Luke." A comforting hand tightened on the Jedi's biceps. Turning, he met the anguish that glowed naked in Leia's expressive eyes. "We must be very careful--"

"The Princess is right, Luke. Whatever Solo has is not only resisting massive doses of Malinizide, but growing stronger. Solo has been inoculated against every virus we know of. He's as well protected as our medical knowledge can offer and better able to handle it than over half of the personnel on this base. Because of his mission," Bante continued, "and the constant contact with other races and

world,s, we.have inoculated him, along with our other pilots" regularly. However, With the shortage of Malinizide since the raid, the rest of our contingent have had to forego the regular boosters. Without their normal protection, this virus could be fatal to them."

"If it's a virus," Luke reminded him, his determination hardening. "You said it yourself, Bante. Han's had all the protection you could give him, and he's sick--very sick. He needs us."

"Doctor?" Leia looked at Bante expectantly. "There's got to be something we can do other than just waiting--"

The Alliance medic sighed as he read the helplessness in the two young people before him. "We can send a medi-droid up to start running preliminary tests and have it send back data to us here in the lab. Solo has a pretty decent emergency setup on the Falcon; we should be able to eliminate a lot of possibilities by running test results and symptoms through the med-computer. Until we start getting those results.we can't. I repeat, we can't bring him down."

Luke grimaced. "Leia, you know how Han feels about droids--"

"Yes," Leia whispered. "If there was any other way, Luke,you know I would--"

Luke nodded. "I know." He turned to the medic. "Get the equipment you want sent up. I'll see to the shuttle."

Leia's hand tightened on his arm. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going up there."

"Luke--no--" Leia pleaded softly.

"Someone has to dock with the Falcon to get the droids and supplies to Han. It's best if whoever does it stays there in case he's needed."

"Luke, I refuse to allow it," Doctor Bante said hotly.

Leia stopped him with a look. "If I could, I'd go, too. But there's too much I must do here in the event of a plague." She turned back to Luke. "Take Threepio with you. He may be able to help with the tests." Her voice softened. "Take care of him, Luke. I want you both back, safe and well."

"The main thing right now," the medic said urgently, "is to get his fever down. Come on, I'll get the things you'll need and walk you to the shuttle. I also want to give you a massive dose of Malinizide. It may not keep you from getting whatever Solo has, but it can't hurt."

"No," Luke refused. "We have little enough; keep it. I've had the same inoculations Han's had. If it hasn't helped him, it's not likely to help me either."

Bante swiftly ordered the supplies needed over the comlink to his lab and surgery, stopping Luke again as the young Rebel turned toward the door. "Do one thing for me, Luke."

Skywalker met the old man's direct gaze, reading the worry there. "If I can."

"I can understand your determination to help a friend. But don't throw your life away--"

Turning away, Luke was stopped by a firm hand on his arm.

"Please listen," Bante hurried on. "Whatever Solo has, came on fast. We must assume it's likely contagious. If you're going to be of any help to him, we must do all we can to forestall your exposure for as long as possible. It could mean the difference between life and death for you both."

Luke listened.

"When you dock, send the droids ahead to Chewbacca. Give them a chance to do what they've been programmed to do. I know--" Bante held up a restraining hand before Luke could object. "I know Solo's dislike for droids, but he's sick, very sick, and I don't think he'll be in any condition to object. After we get the test results I can better instruct you on what has to be done. You may not have to be exposed at all. And, if you're needed, you'll be there." The medic's faded blue eyes studied the young Jedi closely. "Like the Princess said, we want you both back--alive. I for one would not like to disappoint that lady. She's lost enough in this fight against the Empire. I would not like to see her lose still more to the ravishes of disease. I remember the Wars--the diseases--millions of people dying to Renalugia Fever. People of your age cannot even imagine. I don't want to see it again--here. If it is Renalugia, it could do in a few days what the Emperor and his Vader have not been able to do in three years--destroy our last hopes for a free Universe. Think on it carefully, young Luke, before you step through that airlock into what may well be a plague ship."

Luke nodded, unable to force words past a throat suddenly dry with fear for his friends, understanding what an attempt to save one man might cost Leia and her band of freedom fighters. He shook the doctor's hand, then hurried to the hangar and the shuttle that awaited him there.

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Easing the shuttle alongside the orbiting Corellian freighter, Luke allowed Chewbacca to guide him toward the docking clamps before he locked on and shut down all systems except communications and life support.

Getting to his feet, Luke moved to the ship's small lounge area where Threepio awaited him with the medi-droid and the supplies from base.

"Are you ready, Threepio?"

"Yes, Master Luke. The doctor briefed me on what must be done. I will channel all test findings to the base medical facilities through the scrambler on board the Falcon.

"You're sure you can translate the medi-droid's findings," Luke asked.

"Of course. I am programmed in over six million--"

Luke held up a restraining hand, silencing the golden droid. "I know, Threepio. I didn't mean to imply you couldn't do your job. I'm just worried about Han, You be careful around him, you hear? He's sick and I don't want you upsetting him any more than necessary. Understand?"

"Upset Captain Solo?" Threepio replied in a voice very close to sarcasm. "He has never been overly concerned with upsetting a droid."

"He could have left a certain droid on base, too, when the Imperials invaded. As I heard it, he didn't lift ship until you were safely aboard."

The golden robot's photoreceptors blinked. "Understood."

"Good." Luke grinned as the droid turned toward the airlock, his alloy frame stiff with something Luke thought looked very much like indignity. He shook his head in amusement. Threepio was so very human at times, it was hard to remember he was a droid.

Unsealing the airlock between ships, Luke hurried to the cockpit and signalled the Falcon that all was ready for transfer. A red light blinked on his console and he released the hold button on his comlink to the freighter. "Chewie, let me know when the droid starts processing the tests. I want to monitor each one as they're sent to base. Threepio should be able to link directly to me through a comlink installed on his vocabulator circuits, but it would probably be a good idea to keep ship's channels open."

Chewbacca barked quick agreement.

A moment later, Luke heard the static of crossed circuitry, over the comlink. "Chewie, I'm picking up Threepio--cut back on your gain a little." He waited. The noise dissipated. He tapped to the droid. "Threepio, can you read?"

"Yes, Master Luke. I have everything set up. We're outside Captain Solo's cabin now. The mediunit has the necessary implements to draw blood to begin the first tests ordered--"

"Blood?!" Luke groaned. "Threepio, is Chewbacca there?" "There is no need, Master Luke. It is not a painful procedure."

Luke heard the swish of a vacuum release as the door of Solo's cabin opened. His attention drifted past Threepio's banter as he struggled to make out the other voice beyond the droid.

"Captain Solo, sir, we were sorry to hear of your illness--" A soft reply answered the droid's bedside query. Luke struggled to pick up the soft remark but the gain was too close to Threepio's vocabulator to make out the voice he was sure was Han's, which, he was also sure, had held a threatening tone to it.

"If you will just lie down," Threepio pleaded, "this will only take a moment. Humans make such a thing of drawing a little of their life fluid--"

There was an ominous silence, followed by a howl of infuriated pain, then the distressed voice of the golden droid. "Captain Solo, you are ill! You must not upset yourself! We are here to help. No--No."

"Threepio!" Luke swore as a loud explosion sounded over the comlink. "Threepio?" He grabbed his comlink and opened the channel to the cockpit. "Chewie, get to Han quick! I think I heard a blaster discharged--"

The young Jedi jumped to his feet and headed for the airlock, his worry for the hotheaded Corellian overriding the danger to himself as he flooded the corridor between the ships with breathable atmosphere. A moment later, he stepped aboard the Falcon and hurried toward the Corellian's cabin.

The door swished open and Threepio hurried out, allowing the door to shut behind him. Chewbacca had stopped outside the cabin to question the robot. Luke joined them, breathless with fear 'as much as his speedy exit from the shuttle.

"Oh my, I believe he has killed the mediunit!" Threepio said, wringing his hands in a very human-like way. "I could have been shot!"

Rushing past the droid, Luke activated the door control and entered the room. His eyes widened as a shaky hand attempted to level a blaster in his direction.

He threw himself to one side as a blue energy bolt sparkled against the metal framework of the doorway, "Han! It's me-- Luke! Put down the blaster!"

"Luke--" the blaster's muzzle dipped, then fell from suddenly weary fingers, and the sick Corellian lay back, spent.

Luke got cautiously to his feet, motioning Threepio to stay outside as Chewbacca entered and picked up the dropped blaster. "Han?"

Breathing hard, his face flushed with a fever already dangerously high, Solo moaned softly. "Damned droid tried to--" He motioned halfheartedly toward the medi-droid which stood unmoving beside his bunk, bent at the waist, a bared needle in its extended appendage.

"I know, I brought it up here. Han, tests have to be run before we can start any treatment."

"Damn processor tried to poison me--draw its blood,not mine."

Glancing at Chewbacca, Luke read the naked worry in the Wookiee's eyes. He sighed. "Chewie, get the mediunit out of here. Threepio, see if you can get it working, then have it run tests on the processor."

"But Master Luke, we were programmed to do the bloodwork first--"

"I know," Luke interrupted. "You get the droid repaired. Chewbacca and I will draw the blood."

Threepio wisely remained silent as Chewie carried the damaged unit into the corridor and deposited it before the golden droid.

"Han, listen to me. You've had two shots of Malinzide and your fever is still climbing. We've got to bring it down, and we can't work on that until the base medic can get a scan of your blood."

"You... shouldn't be here. I warned ... the base, " Solo rambled.

"You just shut up," Luke admonished softly. "I've got things to do and I'm not going to waste time sitting, here arguing with you "

"Sure..." Han closed his eyes, drifting with the lethargy of the building fever.

"Let's get it done, " Luke said, turning to the Wookiee. "I'll get the necessary equipment from Threepio, you get him read .I don't think he's going to be able to give us any more trouble, but keep that out of his reach." Luke nodded toward the blaster in Chewie's hand.

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Rubbing at tired, red-rimmed eyes, Luke leaned back in the lounge seat, drawing a deep, weary breath. He frowned as he concentrated on the computer printout from the mediunit's first tests that Threepio had brought to him. He could make nothing from it.

Getting to his feet, he moved to the hastily set up lab where the two droids labored over small vials of human blood. "Threepio, I'm going to need your help translating this computer jargon before I can scramble it to base."

"No need, Master Luke. Chewbacca wired a channel directly to base through their scrdmbler. Just insert the printout here--" Threepio pointed a golden finger toward a jerrybuilt screen. "Open the channel and the base's medicomputer can pick up the coding sequence and rescrumble it on their computer screen. They should have the results of those tests by the time you remove--"

Threepio was interrupted as the makeshift scrambler beeped and the printout sheet was released. "It has been received."

Retrieving the printout, Luke hurried back to the lounge console and opened the channel to base. "Doctor Bante, you have the results of the first tests?"

"Yes, Luke, I'm looking at them now. Hold on while I scan this..." Luke fumbled impatiently with the buttons on the console as he waited for the Alliance medic to get back to him. While he waited, he re-read the printout with its incomprehensible row of figures and symbols. He could make nothing of them.

Doctor Bante's voice was harsh with worry when he again opened the channel to Luke. "These aren't the blood tests I ordered--"

"No," Luke hedged. "They'll be along soon. Threepio and the medi-droid are running them now. Han was so sure it was the processor, we decided to run it first. What did you find?"

"Nothing. The droids have run samples of every staple stored in the programmer. How's Solo? Any more vomiting?"

"He's still complaining of stomach cramps and he's had some nausea. But there's nothing left in his stomach to throw up."

"Force fluids down him."

"Chewie's doing that now, " Luke interrupted. "With the fever so high, Han drifts in and out. Half the time he doesn't understand what we want." Luke hesitated.

"Doctor, if we don't get that fever down soon, I don't know how--" He couldn't finish the ominous thought that had invaded his weary mind.

"That's why I needed the blood tests first. We have to know what we're fighting. How long before I get them?"

"Just a minute." Getting up and moving down the corridor, Luke called. "How much longer on the blood scans?"

The golden robot looked up, checked something the mediunit handed him, then turned back to the blond Jedi. "At uni least another hour, Master Luke. Without the base facilities it must be processed manually. It takes time."

Luke nodded, returned to the com outlet and sat down. "It's going to be another hour yet."

"You checked Solo when you first went aboard. Has the fever climbed since then?"

"Two degrees. The Malinizide had no affect on any of his symptoms that I can tell." There was an ominous silence at the other end of the channel. "Doctor?"

"I'm right here, Luke. We can't wait for the blood scans. Have Threepio prepare that packet I gave him. I told him how to mix it, but I'll tell you, too." Bante said. "Empty the full contents into a sterile container and fill it half full with the solution in the green bottle, then wash him down thoroughly, every finger, every toe. I want him cold, don't cover him. When you finish the first wash, go over him again, and keep washing him until his temperature starts dropping."

Luke frowned. "I've never heard of such a--an uncomfortable way to fight a fever. Are you sure this will work?"

"I've not tried it in thirty years." Bante confessed. "It was something we tried with Renalogia Fever victims when nothing else worked."

"Did it help?"

"Sometimes," Bante answered softly. "If the fever had not incubated the ull time. If the victim was young, strong-- and lucky."

"We don t know that this is Renalogia--" Luke reminded him.

"No. No, we don't. Maybe we'll get lucky. Get busy and start that wash. Call me if there's any change, good or bad. And let me know as soon as those tests are finished."

Luke closed the channel.

He found the container among the medical supplies and carefully followed the directions Bante had given him. Grabbing up several sterile towels, he hurried to Solo's cabin with his awkward burden. Chewie met him at the door and helped him settle everything beside the Corellian's bunk.

"Chewie, help me get him undressed." Together they struggled to undress the weakened spacer, pushing aside his feeble attempts to help.

Han's torso was wet with the clamminess of his illness, his forehead and face hot to the touch, his respiration ragged and labored'. Yet he watched Luke's movements with obvious curiosity. Settling himself on the edge of the bunk, Luke dipped a towel into the solution and began bathing the Corellian's body vigorously, explaining his motions to the spacer and the Wookiee, who grabbed an extra towel and started on Solo's lower extremities.

"If I'd ... needed a bath." Solo complained through clenched teeth, "I'd have..called Leia..."

"Shut up," Luke admonished softly. "We've got to get the fever down." Washing with gentle but firm strokes as he had been instructed Luke lifted each hand and washed each finger, before moving on. Han's body revolted in a mounting display of gooseflesh, his teeth chattering in discomfort.

"Luke--" Han protested weakly.

"Lay still." Luke glanced up and met the amused glance of the Wookiee. "I know," he mumbled, as he started the procedure over again. "He'll get even somehow." He lowered his eyes to the ill Corellian. "I hope soon..." It was a silent prayer, and he quickened his efforts.

A shadow passed over him and Luke turned to see Threepio standing uneasily behind him, well out of reach of the reclining Corellian.

"Doctor Bante is on the comlink, Master Luke. We finished the blood scans sooner than I originally estimated and I've fed the results to him. He's waiting to hear about Captain Solo's condition."

"All right, Threepio, tell him I'll be right there. Chewie, have you gotten a reading?" Passing the small portable mediscanner over the spacer's body, Chewie checked it and held it where Luke could read the gauge. Solo's fever had started down. Luke grinned triumphantly. "Keep washing him, Chewie, while I check with Bante."

Chewie nodded and turned back to the naked Corellian, who had drifted into a restless sleep. Luke got to his feet, then caught himself against the small desk next to the bunk, his legs complaining with the pricks of pins and needles from the retarded circulation of his seated position. He flexed them with a series of deep knee bends before hurrying to the lounge comlink. He opened the channel. "Doctor what did you find?"

"More riddles. How's Solo?"

Luke's brow furrowed in worry. "His temperature is falling. He's just drifted into a normal sleep. Chewie's still working with him."

"That may not be necessary," Bante commented. "Go get Chewie, will you? And cover Solo lightly before you leave. Let him sleep if he can; he deserves it."

Luke, leaving the channel opened, hurried from the lounge. A moment later he was back with the worried Wookiee. Together they listened to the medic's report. "According to the medi-droid's findings, there were minute traces of Renalogia Fever in Solo's blood scans, but there're also antibodies and massive evidence of Malinizide which seems to be effectively holding back the disease."

"I don't understand," Luke said.

"Chewbacca, has Solo had Renalogia?"

Chewie glanced at young Skywalker and nodded affirmative, then replied into the scrambler. His series of barks and howls assembled into a printout on the screen before them as it was being recorded on the doctor's scrambler at base. \*As a child. He survived an epidemic on Corell.\*

"Is that why he's throwing off the fever?" Luke asked hopefully.

"Luke, if he had it as a child as Chewie says, and the antibodies in his blood confirm, he shouldn't have it at all. Han should be completely immune. Yet it is there, attacking his immunity, weakening it. It doesn't make any sense!"

Luke and Chewbacca exchanged worried looks before the young Jedi turned back to the comlink. "You're sure it's Renalogia? What about the nausea, the vomiting?"

A disembodied sigh came over the comlink. "The traces of Renalogia are there, Luke. In a man who should be fully immune. The other has to be something else. Somehow he's been poisoned."

"There's got to be something we're missing!" Luke swore helplessly.

"Luke, I'm checking everything we have on Renalogia but until I get more information I'm as much at a loss as you are."

"Is that all you can tell us. Luke pleaded.

"No." Bante said. "I can tell you that if Solo had not had the antibodies of Renalogia immunities in his system, he would be dead now."

"And what if we don't find some answers soon?" Luke whispered fearfully. "What then?"

"The comlink remained silent for several heartbeats. "I don't know," Bante admitted truthfully. "He seems to be in no danger at the moment. His immunity and the Malinizide are...holding off the full impact of the disease--"

"Which he shouldn't have," Luke repeated angrily. "What do you suggest we try now? If it is the Fever, we can't bring him down."

"No, we can't." Bante agreed. "He'll have to stay there until we know more than we do now."

"Are there any more tests we can run?" Luke asked.

"Can you get a sample of what Solo has thrown up?"

Luke threw Chewie a questioning look. The Wookiee nodded affirmative. Luke spoke into the comlink. "Yes."

"Good. Have the mediunit run it through analysis. I want a complete breakdown of the contents. Meanwhile, keep forcing fluids down Solo. We can't have him dehydrating. Call me as soon as you get those results. Bante out."

Luke closed the channel. "Chewie--" He grinned wearily. The Wookiee was already lumbering out of the lounge and headed down the corridor toward the freshener and the disposal unit.

Getting to his feet, Luke stretched weary muscles as he glanced at the chronometer mounted over the console. It was ship's night. He had been aboard the Falcon for over a planet day. Rubbing at red-rimmed eyes, he tried to figure out how many hours it had been since he had slept. He couldn't remember. Yawning, he strolled to the processor and helped himself to a cup of c'afa. The hot stimulant awakened his sleep-starved nerves.

Closing the tap, his eyes settled on a gauge above the refrigeration unit. It registered a temperature suitable to perishables. Puzzled, Luke lifted the latch and opened the small unit. Inside stood a small covered container. Pulling it out,

he opened it. "Batter of some kind." He lifted the container to his nose and sniffed. Nothing out of the ordinary, except where he had found it. In Solo's unit. "Threepio!"

The golden robot entered the lounge and joined him.

"When you checked out the processor did you run tests on this batter stored in the refrigeration unit?"

"No, I didn't check the unit, Master Luke. I guess I should have," Threepio apologized, "but Captain Solo has never carried perishables in the past. I checked with Chewbacca and he verified that there was nothing taken aboard this 'trip. I'm sure he didn't know about this."

"Okay," Luke interrupted the droid. "It's okay. I almost missed it, too. It smells fresh, but just the same, I think we'd better check it out. How are you coming with the sample Chewie gave you?"

"It should be ready soon. it's a fairly simple breakdown."

"While the mediunit finishes that, why don't you get started on this. I want everything analyzed. A complete breakdown, like you're doing with the stomach contents. Can you have it for me by the time the other tests are done?"

Threepio blinked. "I believe so, Master Luke. The procedures are all quite simple, just time consuming."

"Get on it. I'm going to look in on Han. I'll be there if you need me." Threepio took the container and watched as the young Jedi left the lounge on his way to the captain's quarters. He slowly shook his head. Humans could be so inconsistent.

Entering Solo's quarters, Luke pulled a chair over to the bunk and sat down. From habit, he picked up the medscanner and passed it over the Corellian, who seemed to be sleeping comfortably. The scan showed the fever down another degree. For the first time since he had come aboard, Luke felt a surge of hope for his friend. Han's system was fighting back and the scanner verified that for once, not only was he holding his own, but he was slowly overcoming the deadly effects of the fever that had invaded his body.

Laying the scanner aside, Luke stretched out as comfortably as he could in the chair, his eyes growing heavy as he studied the pale features of the sleeping spacer, "Where in hell did you get it?" he mumbled inquiry to the man, "A disease which has been dead for thirty years. Where, in hell could you have picked it up? And why haven't I gotten it?" The questions echoed through a brain foggy with dulled senses that screamed for sleep. His eyes slowly closed.

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Luke jumped as the firm hand of the golden droid fell on his shoulder. He glanced first at the robot, blinking the heavy dregs of sleep from his eyes, before glancing at the bunk. Solo still Slept. "How is he?)" Chewbacca got up from the side of the bunk where he had been sitting and handed the scanner to Luke. "It's down again" he grinned as he returned the scanner to the Wookiee. "He's winning."

"Master Luke, the tests are done, I've just fed them into the scrambler. Doctor Bante will be waiting for your call.

"On my way! Chewie, stay with him. Maybe now we'll get some answers," Stretching sleep-stiffened muscles, Luke followed Threepio out of the cabin and took the now-familiar seat before the scrambler. He opened the channel. "Base. Doctor Bante? Luke here."

"Yes, yes, Luke. I read you." There was puzzlement in the doctor's voice, "I've received two reports. One's Solo's stomach contents. The other, Threepio reported, came from a freshly mixed batter you found in the perishable unit of the processor."

"That's right. I don't know if Han has eaten any of it, but I didn't want to pass up anything that might give us a clue to this mess, What did you find?"

"I'm not sure," Bante admitted. "The first report on Solo's stomach contents shows a complete breakdown--but there has to be some mistake--this doesn't make any sense."

"What?" Luke pressed urgently. "What did you find?"

"There's traces of Renalogia bacteria in the sample."

"But you found Renalogia in his blood--" Luke commented.

"Yes, " Bante acknowledged. "I would have expected to find R.F. in the blood stream, but not in the digestive tract. And there were obvious signs of Malantis. Not Malinizide--that too would be present in the blood--but Malantis. The raw grain."

Luke stiffened as a sudden thought began to prick at his Force-sensitive awareness. "Read me the findings of the other report."

"There must be some contamination to the sample the droids ran," Bante suggested. "These results make no more sense than the others."

"Read it."

"That batter was fresh. There were no signs of spoilage. But there's something there--it's defying computer analysis. We're running it through the medicomputer banks now."

"What else?" Luke's voice was low, soft as he waited for what he had begun to suspect.

"Malantis."

"Thanks. I'll get back to you in a few minutes. I have to check something out at this end."

"Luke?"

The young Jedi closed the channel and hurried down the corridor to Solo's quarters, his mind alive with the active suspicion of betrayal as he entered the room.

"Han," Luke smiled. Solo was sitting up while Chewbacca helped him into fresh clothing. He was pale from his illness, but the flush from the fever was rapidly leaving his cheeks. "How are you feeling?"

"Better. Still damned weak. What the hell was wrong with me?" "That's what we've still trying to find out. Doctor Bante found Renalogia bacteria in your system--"

"I've had the Fever. I should be immune-- "

"We know Chewie told us," Luke interrupted as he studied the Corellian intently before he continued. "Han, I found a container of some kind of batter in the processor's cold storage unit. Did you make anything to eat with it?"

Solo fell silent as he worried over the front of his shirt, obviously avoiding the Wookiee who had suddenly gotten to his feet, glaring at the Corellian.

"Han?"

\*You've been cooking again?!?\* Chewie's angry roar filled the cabin. Both humans covered their ears.

"Stow it, Chew." Solo swore hotly. "I didn't feed any to you, did I?"

\*I'm not sick, either,\* Chewie retorted angrily.

"Hey, I didn't do anything--"

\*You almost killed yourself\*

"It couldn't have been the batter!" Han defended strongly.

"Han! Chewie!" Luke shouted. "This isn't getting us any where ... I take it you did use the batter?"

"Sure I did. There's nothing wrong with it. It's fresh. I mixed it myself." Sudden understanding locked three pairs of eyes together. "The Malantis?" Color--normal, healthy pink--mounted in the pale face of the Corellian. "Luke, help me up--"

"You shouldn't--we can--"

"Help me up!"

Luke, with Chewie's help, got the shaky spacer to his feet.

"Chewie, get some decontam gloves and strip...the bulk."

"Han--"

"Get rid of my clothes, too, Gruesome," Solo mumbled under his breath as he leaned heavily against Luke while Chewbacca carefully followed his orders. "Airlock it, Pal. Go over the whole ship. Get Threepio started decontaming everything I might have touched since we left Rellala--now! We:ain't taking any chances--"

Luke shook his head in wonderment as the Corellian stepped into command, tottering beside the young Jedi."Han", lay down. We can do whatever has to be done without you tiring yourself out."

The Corellian shook himself free of the helping hand of the young Tatooine native and moved weakly down the corridor towards the freighter's holds. "Tell Threepio to bring me a specimen container with a good tight seal."

Following the spacer closely, Luke paused only long enough to pass the request on to the robot, then hurried to help Solo step into decontam overalls and hand him the matching gloves. "Han, Threepio could do this or me."

"Uh uh, Luke," Han fitted the gloves comfortably into place. "If what I suspect is true, I don't want you anywhere near that stuff. I'm already infected--let's leave it at that."

Luke nodded uneasy agreement, glancing back towards the spacer's quarters where Chewbacca worked feverishly with the decontam equipment. "It has to be the shipment," he voiced aloud.

"We'll soon know. You just stay away from the hold."

Obtaining a sample of the grain from the container he had opened earlier, Han resealed it. With the specimen rendered harmless he stepped out of the hold and handed the container to Threepio. "Analyze that quick, and keep that specimen isolated and sealed."

The droid nodded. Taking the container from the Corellian, he hurried away.

Han leaned against the hatchway while he weakly stripped and stepped cautiously away from the clothing and airlocked them. He wavered and Luke moved to steady him as they moved toward the Corellian's quarters.

"Get some decontam solution from Chewie." Han ordered, breathless from the building weakness. "You and me's gonna take a shower--"

"I didn't know you cared." Luke teased as they moved through the corridor side by side.

"Didn't care," Solo repeated as he touched a finger to Luke's cheek. "You looked damned good to me when you came aboard."

"It was the fever."

A questioning eyebrow lifted, and Han chuckled at Luke's uneasiness. "Sure."

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"Doctor?"

The medic nodded as he stepped into the small, sterile ward and moved to join Luke at the Corellian's bedside. "You were right." He glanced at the spacer with mild approval. "The grain was heavily contaminated with Repalugia bacteria. If it had been unloaded and processed we would have been injecting the bacteria right into our people. Very likely every man, woman and child would have died. It would have swept this base in a matter of hours. I still can't figure how you knew. I'm a medical man, and have been for the better part of my life, and I've never seen the bacteria so highly concentrated--bacteria that I thought I'd seen the last of thirty years ago."

Solo frowned. His hazel eyes were afire with only half-suppressed anger, "It didn't get there on its own, that's for sure. This smells of Imperial nastiness. If I were you, Princess, I'd have a long talk with a certain Rellalian--"

"It's already been done," Leia assured him. "You're right; he was an Imperial agent. He'll doctor no more of our shipments." Leia's voice softened as she moved closer to the Corellian, "How did you know, Han?"

"I didn't, really," Solo admitted uneasily. "In fact, when it first hit me, I thought our food processor had poisoned me. There was no reason for me to link the Malantis batter to my illness. Until Luke mentioned the doctor here finding traces of the bacteria in my digestive system. I was 'immune. There was only one answer. If the batter was to blame, it had to be the Malantis."

"You've had Renalogia. Chewie said you survived a Corellian plague."

"Yeah, when I was a kid. It swept Corell--killed millions. I was one of the lucky ones."

"Yes," Bante agreed.

"What I can't figure out is why it made me sick. The vomiting, the cramps--I don't remember that when I had the Fever before."

"The grain was impregnated with highly concentrated levels of the Renalogia bacteria. The Imperials knew that it would be processed into Malinizide and injected into our people. We would have had an epidemic and never knew how, or where, it came from," the medic explained, then smiled, "however, they didn't expect anyone to eat the Malantis. The bacteria, so heavily concentrated made you sick--or I guess you could call it a simple case of food poisoning. Like you suspected all along." "Simple, he says," Solo groaned. "I thought I was dying."

"What made you suspicious enough to order Chewie not to land?" Leia asked.

"The Fever," Han explained. "I'll probably never forget what I went through when I had it before. I guess just Corellian suspicion. I've been told we have too much of it for our own good." "I'll never question it," Leia mumbled softly. Her hand reached out and touched Solo's which rested on the blanket at his side. His fingers opened, then closed over hers and gently squeezed them. She did not withdraw them.

"Doctor, can any of that grain be saved or is the whole shipment ruined?"

Bante smiled at the Corellian's words. "Now that we know what's been done to it, we can decontaminate the grain in much the same way Chewbacca's doing to

the Falcon. It'll take a few days and a lot of care-and meticulous tests, but we should be able to start processing it into Malinizide before the week's out."

Han sighed contentedly, A sudden thought settled his hazel-eyed concentration on the young Jedi. "Has the Falcon been completely decontaminated?"

"Chewie's finishing it now," Leia commented in puzzlement as she saw an amused smile pass between the Corellian and the Young Jedi. "Why?"

"I just had a sudden urge for a sonic shower--"

Luke groaned as he witnessed the puzzlement in Leia's eyes. "Don't ask, Leia, don't ask!" he pleaded urgently.

"Kid, you take all the fun out of being sick. All I wanted was--"

"I know, Han, I know."

***THE END***

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