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Insider Information

by [Judy Ebberley](#)

"Captain Solo, good to see you back!"

Han Solo's only response to this cheery greeting was a bad tempered growl.

The pilot from Rogue squadron accepted the rebuff with equanimity. Corellians were notoriously capricious, and communication was often a one way process. So he went on his way, leaving the spacer to continue to stare morosely into his drink.

It was not unusual for the pilot to be in the canteen, it was the first place he and his hirsute comrade usually visited on their return to any of the alliance bases they frequented. Long periods in space using ship rations meant that the duo made the most of any opportunity to eat fresh food. What was odd was the fact that Solo was alone.

No one in the canteen had had the temerity to ask Solo to explain this strange phenomena. It was obvious from the lowered brow that he wanted to be left in splendid isolation and most people at Bestine base had sufficient regard for Solo's skills with a blaster to respect that wish.

Had they been able to overhear the conversation Han was having with himself the reason for his solitary sojourn might have explained.

"Why did I have to get saddled with a know-it-all Wookiee for a partner," Solo muttered aggrievedly. "I wasn't in that much danger! I could've got out without his help."

"Could you?" The small nagging voice that had been needling at him in the last few days repeated the question yet again. It had been a pretty close call. If Chewie hadn't come looking for him? Han decided not to pursue that line of thought. Mentioning Chewie reminded him of the lecture he had been called on to endure on their return to the Falcon. A lecture that had been repeated at regular intervals every day since, and was likely to continue until he admitted he'd made an error of judgement and almost got himself killed

Han massaged his temples; he had one hell of a headache. "Face it," he told himself, "Chewie'll be like a Rancor with a bone until you do."

Leia Organa stepped into the pilots' mess hall and scanned the tables for her quarry. She eventually spied him tucked away into an unobtrusive corner. She took a deep breath to calm herself -- negotiating with the Corellian was always a stressful activity -- and moved over towards him.

Solo's defensive ring fence was usually impenetrable but today he was clearly distracted. Since he seemed unaware of her presence she took some time to study him. You could learn a lot about a person, when his guard was down.

The pilot looked tired and miserable, neither epithet usually attributable to Han Solo. One characteristic you could attribute, and Leia often did, was his less than sartorial dress sense. Not known for being a careful dresser, Han looked even more scruffy than usual. His light brown hair was more than usually mussed and the obligatory white shirt that never quite managed to stay tucked into the tight blue pants had clearly seen better days.

"A credit for your thoughts, hot-shot.."

Han glanced up in surprise at the tiny figure standing, hands on hips, staring down at him. "They ain't worth that much," he informed her, wincing as he took in the outfit Leia was wearing. Her rebel issue jump suit was strictly practical, her hair was braided in its most severe style; when she dressed like that she meant business.

"Underselling yourself, captain?" Leia was surprised by his response. "That doesn't sound like you." Her smile took the sting out of the words "Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Would it make any difference if I said yes?" Leia's smile slipped a little. "Look, it's your canteen, Highnessness." Solo gave her tacit permission to join him by removing his boots from the seat opposite. "As you will no doubt take great pleasure in reminding me, shortly." He added with a grumble.

Leia looked shocked at this accusation. "You have every right to use this facility."

Solo's jaw dropped. It sure hadn't sounded that way when she'd seen him there last month, she'd almost bitten his head off. "This canteen is for the use of committed alliance personnel," she had said at the time. Which could only mean she was about to have another attempt to get him to 'officially join' the rebellion. A run-in with the persistent princess was the last thing he needed.

Leia put out a hand to detain him as he levered himself to his feet. "Han I need to talk to you"

Ignoring her, he made for the door. He didn't look back when Leia called after him to wait.

Solo's rapid pace had slowed to almost a dawdle by the time he reached the bottom of the Falcon's ramp. Anyone watching might well have come to the conclusion that he was reluctant to go inside. Squaring his shoulders he took a deep breath and strode up the ramp.

"Chewie, CHEWIE!! Damn it, where the hell are you?"

A deep disgruntled growl informed the Corellian that the Wookiee was in the auxiliary loading bay. A furry head appeared through the open hatchway, and a pair of piercingly accusative blue eyes fixed themselves on the pilot. *I have been overseeing the unloading of the alliance cargo.* There was unspoken criticism for Han's absence during this heavy, dirty work.

"So sue me why don't ya?" Solo hooked his thumbs into his blaster belt and scuffed at the deckplate with the toe of one highly polished boot.

I would if I thought it would get me those credits you still owe me.

"Cute, real cute." Han grimaced at this reminder of his debts. "You made your point. I should have been here. Come on up, I'll finish off."

I've already finished!

"So come on up and read me another lecture, then. Maybe it'll make you feel better."

The Wookiee rumbled a snide rejoinder to this comment.

"I do listen," Han attempted to defend himself against the accusation of selective deafness. "Honest."

Chewbacca shook his head at Solo's forlorn face. *One day,* he scolded, *that little cub lost look of yours won't work. Then what will you do?*

Han's hang-dog expression disappeared to be replaced by a grin. "I'll call on my best friend to come an' bail me out. Like he always does. Like you did back on Salisst." He raised his hands in a gesture of acknowledgement of fault. "You were right, I did put myself at risk for no good reason" His smile became decidedly rueful as he added, "who am I kidding, when ain't you right? You'd think I would have learned by now." Patting at his partner's arm, he added "Now we've got that settled can we get down to some real work? I want to run a diagnostic on the navigators console." He turned towards the exit.

Chewie folded massively muscled arms across his chest.

"What's wrong now?" Solo looked back, puzzled. "I said you were right, damnit!"

The Wookiee pointedly reminded his captain that he, Chewbacca had been working for the last several hours. While Han had been off enjoying himself.

"Enjoyin' myself?" Solo looked like he was about to choke. "Dealing with those tight fisted clerks in accounts is worse'n facin' a Rettmarian gem dealer."

Hrumph! Chewie's expression told Han he was losing the argument. "Awright. I'll do it myself. Does that meet with your approval?" Chewie wuffed his agreement. "I thought it would!" he grumbled good naturedly. Pushing away from the bulkhead Solo made for the cockpit his voice drifting back to the grinning Wookiee. "After all when you get to be your age, you need all the rest you can get!"

Leia Organa heard yelling and deep throated chuckles emanating from the forward hold of the Falcon as she crossed the docking bay. Intrigued she slipped up the open ramp of the ship as Han's voice was heard begging for mercy. Intrigued, she hastened her step and was rewarded by the sight of Han Solo caught under the arm of his giant partner, suffering the indignity of having the top of his head soundly scuffed.

The sound of laughter brought the rough-house to an abrupt end. Somewhat self-consciously the Wookiee placed his captain onto his feet, patting Han's clothes into place and straightening his hair for him as they caught sight of their visitor.

Han attempted to gather the threads of his dignity about him. "Uhh, can I do somethin' for you, princess?"

Leia sobered immediately. "This just came in. I thought you would want to see it."

Solo took the proffered flimsies. After a less than cursory glance he was galvanised into action. "Chewie, it's Corrin. She needs our help. Thanks Princess, we'll take it from here." He was already ushering her towards the hatch.

"Hold it right there, fly-boy. This is an alliance matter. I only informed you out of courtesy. The rebellion takes care of its own."

"Yeah and so do I," Han snarled.

Leia decided to ignore his outburst. "I will organise a team to go out to her, and let you know the outcome."

Solo ignored her in return. "Outta my way, Your Royalness." He pushed past her heading once more for the cockpit. "I'm takin' off."

"Not without flight clearance your not!" she called after him.

In the blackness of space, day and night had little meaning. So it was ship's time that regulated sleep and work patterns. Leia lay in the hastily cleaned out navigators berth and stared at the metal bulkhead. Han Solo had to be the most infuriating, aggravating, irritating man she had ever had the misfortune to come across. a small smile flitted across her features. He had said something very similar about her, well shouted it actually when she'd insisted on coming along. she had refused to give him flight clearance until he'd agreed to her accompanying him and Chewie to Pelleron. He would have said much more but the Wookiee had shut him up by pointing out that since their goals were the same: To help Corrin Val-Dorn. They would do better to pool their resources and not waste time arguing.

Now they were more than halfway to their destination, and Han Solo was still refusing to do more than grunt at her. Deciding she would be better doing something than lying here unable to sleep she got up.

Are you going to cold shoulder the little princess all the way to Pelleron?

Solo, hands cupped around his mug scowled down into his drink. "I might!"

She was right to come along, Chewie insisted *This is an alliance matter. The possibility of a breach in security is of grave importance to them. And on a personal level she is very fond of Corrin.*

Solo muttered that Leia was only fond of the rebellion.

That is not true, Chewie rebuked, *and you know it.* Han gave him a jaundiced glare.*The princess gives the perception she cares for the rebellion above all else, because she is afraid to show how much she cares for the people close to her. You try to give the impression you care only for yourself! Neither of you are really like that. It is how you both protect yourself from hurt. In many ways you are very alike.*

"Geeze, Chewie, sometimes you have the oddest ideas ..." Unable to meet the Wookiee's knowing blue gaze, Han got up and paced across the small cabin. He did some totally unnecessary checks to the auxiliary engineering console. Kicked at the bulkhead with a booted foot, checked his chronometer and demanded to know how much longer the flight was going to take?

Chewie reminded himself that patience was a virtue. *A day, maybe two. Fretting won't get us there any faster. Sit down.*

"Damn it, Chewie, she could be in danger."

The Wookiee sighed at this line of argument. *She said there was possible trouble, not that she was in imminent danger. Stop over-reacting and start thinking instead. The Imperial installation on Pelleron will be difficult to get into, and let me remind you, Corrin Val-Dorn was dealing with such dangers when you were still--*

"In leading strings," Han completed the phrase for him, having heard it many times before. "Yeah! and don't she let me know it." The Corellian's nose wrinkled up in memory of all the times Corrin had denounced his lack of experience and youth. Then he added, "But that doesn't stop me worryin' about her, she's our friend, damn it."

In the darkness of the aft corridor Leia Organa allowed herself a quiet smile at these words of concern. So much for Han's 'I'm nothing more than a mercenary' act. This was a man, who despite all his protestations, cared deeply for those he called his friends, in deed was willing to lay down his life for this elite group. A stray thought passed through her mind, she wondered if he would be this anxious if she were in danger. He certainly hadn't been very helpful over providing her with an alternative wardrobe for their journey. Even though it was his fault she had been unable to go back to her quarters to collect the clothes she needed. He'd told her he'd take off as soon as she left the ship, and in his present mood she'd believed him. So the Alderaanian was reduced to re-cycling her clothes every day and making use of a few necessities Chewbacca had pried out of the less than co-operative Corellian.

Han glanced up as Leia entered the forward hold, his scowl deepened. "How long have you been standin' there?" he demanded suspiciously.

Ignoring him entirely, Leia walked on into the galley. "Can I get you something to drink Chewie?"

The Wookiee wuffed in the affirmative "Captain?"

"NO! Uh, thanks!" Han added hurriedly as the Wookiee barked at him.

Leia placed an oversized mug in front of Chewbacca and sat next to him. "Have you been able to reach Corrin yet?"

Briefly, just long enough to arrange a meeting and to give her our approximate landing time. She seemed pleased to hear from us.

Leia, nodded approval for this information. "I hope we can retrieve that data. Once it is de-coded it could put many of our operations at risk."

"Not to mention the operators!" Solo added sourly.

The princess's eyes flashed. "I hadn't forgotten them." Solo looked sceptical. "They put their lives at risk every day. The least we can do is offer them all the protection we can. That's why we're here isn't it?"

"That's why you're here, princess!" Han's fore-finger jabbed close to Leia's nose. "I'm here to help out a friend. Nothin' more, an' don't forget it."

Having got clearance, Solo set his ship down into the bay and watched with a jaundiced eye as the protective dome slid into place. The polluted atmosphere of the planet meant that prolonged exposure to the atmosphere caused the metal of most ships to corrode very quickly. Han checked the atmospheric controls again. Decided that they were holding for now and joined Chewie and the princess in the forward hold.

They were already holding the breather masks they would have to wear while making the journey into the central living area. Solo found such confinement irksome but was resigned to the inevitable. "Okay, lets get goin'. An' remember your royalness this is my mission. You do as I say. You got that?"

Leia nodded sharply, acknowledging that in this sort of situation. The Corellian and Kasshykian knew better than she what would keep them safe. Obediently she pulled up the hood of the dark colored wrap that Solo had provided her with, pulling the mask into place as she did so. Her first glimpse of the city as the

Falcon came in to land had confirmed what she had learnt from the ships memory banks. Huge cloud formations, flecked green and yellow. The city was shrouded in swirling, shifting yellow sulphurous mists.

The Falcon's computers were like their owner, highly individual but once she had learnt how to interpret them she had found a wealth of information on the Imperial installation on Pelleron as well as the planet itself. Leia only wished she found the Corellian so easy to understand. Solo had made life very difficult in the last few days. It was with a noticeable sense of relief that she felt the ship come out of hyper-space and they began their descent to the planet surface.

Highly industrialised in earlier years, Pelleron now suffered from intense pollution problems. The buildings had to be constantly drenched with water to wash off the corrosive gases. Few people chose to live there by choice. Even the miners and imperial workers spent no more than three planetary months there at a time.

A tug on her arm recalled her attention to the job in hand. The trio were just passing the Imperial data collection facility. The construction was by far the largest in the city. It's towering walls, made of an unknown metal shone dully in the fine misted rain. It was guarded by a small troop of storm-troopers who seemed more concerned with keeping under cover than in taking an interest in the threesome.

"Yeah, yeah I'm comin' don't get your fur in a knot," Solo grouched at the grumbling Wookiee "I don't much care for the weather either. Let's find Corrin and see what's got her all wound up."

The lodging house that they entered some few moments later was at least clean and had an air filtration system that allowed them to remove the breather masks. Solo's eyes lit up as he spied his old friend Corrin Val-Dorn seated in a quiet corner of the public lounge.

Major Corrin Val-Dorn checked her chronometer again. Drat that boy he never had been able to tell the time all that well! She had kept communications to a minimum in case of imperial snoops but now knew that the alliance team coming to help her retrieve some sensitive information was in fact made up of two of her greatest friends the Wookiee, Chewbacca who she had known for over 50 years and his volatile partner Han Solo. Corrin had known the Corellian since Chewie had first introduced them when Han was just seventeen. It was Corrin who had given them their first regular freighting contracts and over the years she had kept in as close a touch as the independent Corellian allowed.

Over time she had come to regard the wayward Corellian as the son she had never had. Worrying and fretting over his exploits, giving him what support he would allow and praying that one day he would be able to take his proper place in the galaxy.

As a self-appointed surrogate mother, Corrin had never been averse to treating Han to one of her more trenchant homilies when she felt he'd earned it. Han had long since become accustomed to it. Considering that suffering the rough edge of the major's tongue occasionally, was more than worth the trouble. He was genuinely fond of the Luetian, and had a great deal of respect for her judgement. Not that wild Bantha's would have dragged such a confession of caring from him.

A slight alteration in the air current told her the outer door had been activated, she looked and her smile grew.

She may be on the shady side of 130, but Corrin was still able to appreciate the handsome picture Han made as he acknowledged her wave with one of his own and gave her his lazy lop-sided irrepressible grin.

Corrin, continued to admire the figure hugging pants and the smugglers vest which formed part of the Corellians usual 'uniform' as Han turned to speak to someone out of her view. No wonder he was so popular with females, she decided, her eyes resting appreciatively on his rear-end.

"It's about time you showed up." She scolded him as he strode over to greet her. She gave the Corellian a bone-creaking hug. "Chewbacca" she transferred her hug to the grinning Wookiee "my friend, it's good to see you, even in these unpleasant surroundings. Where's my other guest. I thought you said you had someone else with you?"

The Luetian looked around the pair towards the entrance.

"Uh, we do." Han followed her gaze "she had to," he waved vaguely towards the rest rooms.

"A she? I might have guessed you'd have a female in tow," Corrin nodded her understanding. "Well sit down, tell me your news." she tugged the back of Han's blaster belt, causing him to fall into the seat next to her. Then appraised him critically. "Honest work seems to suit you half-pint."

Solo winced at the name, but knew better than to argue over it. He'd never yet won a quarrel with the Luetian major. It was unlikely he was going to succeed now.

"So," she slapped his arm lightly "how have you been?"

Much to his relief, Han was spared his usual interrogation on the state of his health as the Lauetian was distracted by the arrival of Leia Organa.

Corrinn broke into another broad smile and enfolded her new visitor in a welcoming embrace. "This is a pleasant surprise."

Solo's "Pleasant?" was rewarded with a sharp jab in the ribs. "Why didn't you tell me it was Leia that was with you?" The Lauetian chided.

"I didn't think it was that important," Han grunted, rubbing his bruises. "Can we get down to the business in hand? It ain't old home day!"

Corrinn nodded. "You're right for once. But this isn't the place. I've taken a pair of rooms, which I have set up to ensure we don't get snooped on. I hope you won't object to sharing with me, Leia," he added, before the princess could indicate that was not a problem.

Solo chimed in, "Can't I share with her highness? Chewie snores."

Corrinn gave him her most disapproving scowl. "It was just an idea." Han shrugged.

The Lauetian made it very plain that she considered it a very bad one. "Awright!" Solo attempted to stem the tide of disapproval. "I take it back. Geeze, can't you take a joke?"

"I've put up with you all these years haven't I?" The Lauetian as usual had the last word.

Han might not have approved of the plans for his overnight stay, but he couldn't fault the security set-up. There would be no possibility of any Imperial or other snoopers with the variety of sweeper and blocking devices Corrinn had put into place. Hooking one ankle over his knee he got down to business.

"So tell us exactly what sort of trouble is it that needs my 'expertise' this time." He buffed his nails on his vest, tipping his chair back onto two legs, and cocked an inquisitive eye at Corrinn Val-Dorn.

"It's a list."

Han rolled his eyes towards the bulkhead, "I know that much."

"Don't get smart. half-pint." The Lauetian warned. "And sit properly on that chair." She waited until Solo had obediently righted the seat before continuing. "That list contains some very important alliance contacts."

"We have to retrieve or destroy it." Leia sought to convince him further by adding, "The beings on that list have given up their lives to the rebellion, Han. They've left their families and friends, gone under cover to provide us with information networks, monetary support, political help in the Imperial senate. They have organised underground escape routes for rebel sympathisers, their importance to the alliance cannot be quantified. They have given us everything, we must protect them."

"I don't hear anyone dissenting from that opinion." Han countered. "Just 'cause most of em need to undergo brain scans for gettin' involved with you crazies in the first place, don't mean I can't appreciate their efforts. There may be other friends of mine on that list, people who should know better, but don't." He glanced across at Corrin, she noticeably failed to rebut his suggestion that her name was included on the list. "I thought so." He took her silence for confirmation. "And I wouldn't wish Imperial entanglements on anybody. Not even rebel supporters. "So the question is how do we do it? What do we know about the actual installation itself?" He questioned Corrin.

"The guards are rotated on a regular basis. They may not be the brightest of the empire's forces but they know their duties. Inside, well most of the file retrieval and cross checking is done by droids. For anything more than routine they have to send off planet. That's what gives us our opportunity to get in there and do something." She shrugged "What exactly, I'm leaving to you."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, I think!" Solo pondered the problem, further. "What kind of system are they usin'?" The major checked her information and passed over the specifications. "Uh huh. Standard set-up. The problem is goin' to be gettin' at the information without them knowing it. We can't just go in and erase the file, that's too damned obvious. Even the imperials would notice that, eventually. An' even if we did there's always the possibility that they'd be able to replace it."

"No," Leia spoke for the first time. "The source of the leak has been terminated."

Han nodded approval of the fact that the alliance had dealt summarily with the traitor. "I'm glad to hear it. So, we need to eliminate the data without them realising' it's deliberate. This is going to take some thinking about."

There was a period of quiet each member of the group reflecting on the task ahead of them. Glancing round the table Han noticed the growing tightness in Leia's shoulders. He was beginning to recognise the signs of incipient stress in the Alderaanian. It was time to lighten the atmosphere a little.

"We could just walk up to the main gate and ask for entrance." His tone was deliberately blasé.

We could, Chewie interjected, puzzled by Han's attitude. *But I don't think they'll let us in without a little persuasion and," he added somewhat censoriously "we can't afford to draw attention to ourselves.*

"Aww, can't I blast just a few storm troopers?" Solo clicked his fingers in mock disappointment

Leia shook her head at what she considered to be ill-timed levity. "Can't you come up with anything more original or workable than that?"

Han looked hurt at this accusation. "This may come as a surprise, your highnessness," he told her. "But I don't spend all my time breakin' into Imperial installations."

"No," Corrin put in, "he's usually trying to break out!"

Solo turned his wounded look on his old friend. She merely laughed, and patted his cheek. "It's true, half-pint and you know it."

I agree, The Wookiee joined in the teasing of his captain. *He has a certain expertise in that area.*

"It's sure nice to know who your friends are." Solo mourned

Despite her resolve Leia's lips twitched as she listened to the good natured banter between the friends. Her smile grew rueful as she recognised what Han had just managed to do. It was one of his strengths, she acknowledged to herself, this ability to ease people's spirits in even the most difficult and dangerous situations. "How long will it take for you to come up with this master plan, hot-shot?" she queried lightly.

"Oh, not long."

"Well, I hope it contains plans for getting out as well as in. We can't rely on the possibility of a convenient garbage trasher, every time"

Han winked at her, hand spread out on his chest. "Hey, this time, I'm the brains sweetheart. Trust me, I'll think of something."

"Good morning."

The princess deduced from Han's answering growl that as far as Solo was concerned there was nothing good about it. Sharing a room with a Wookiee had done nothing for Solo's mood.

The spacer was seated at the small central table, one hand being used to prop his head up. The other was poking in a desultory fashion at the food on his plate. "I told you," he continued what was obviously an on going argument "I was worried about you, I didn't want to waste time waiting for her holiness to choose the correct wardrobe. We could still be sittin' on the hangar deck if we had."

The major sighed and turned instead to the openly smiling princess, who always enjoyed seeing the Corellian on the receiving end of Corrin Val-Dorn's sharp tongue. "I can only apologise for his appalling manners, Leia. I'm afraid that sometimes his behavior more closely resembles that of an Imperial probe droid, than a reasonably well educated Corellian."

"Can we drop the subject?" Han implored. "We have more important things to talk about than my manners, ya know."

"For now," Corrin allowed.

Solo resigned himself to the inevitable. When Corrin Val-Dorn used that tone it meant that she was not about to let the matter rest. "When're we expectin' Chewie back?" he decided to change the topic of conversation before the persistent Lauetian could return to the subject. "If we're going to get in place before the change of the guards we don't have that much time to waste."

As if in answer to his question, the Wookiee appeared in the doorway of the room. *I have found a place on the walls that it should be possible for you and the little princess to scale.* He barked, helping himself to a hot drink. *You may need a boost to get you up high enough however. I'll come with you, in case.*

Han allowed himself an inward smile, recognising the words to mean that Chewie was not going to be persuaded to wait for them back at the Falcon. The Wookiee had been chagrined to realise that both he and Corrin were too large to fit through the slit like windows that adorned the installation. Which it had been decided would be the best mode of entrance to the computer rooms. The idea of having to wait and watch while his captain put himself into danger had never set well with the Kashyykian.

"Fine." No point arguing when Chewie had made up his mind. "Well, princess you ready?" Leia nodded. "Let's get on with it then, the sooner we start the sooner we'll be finished."

"Watch where you're putting your paws will ya, pal!" Solo complained as the Wookiee boosted his captain onto the wall surrounding the data repository.

Just be careful, Chewie scolded in return, *Don't take any unnecessary risks.*

Han spared the time to grin down at his partner as he hauled the princess up beside him. "Who me?"

Chewie was not given the opportunity to come back at this, as both young humans disappeared into the shadows of the compound buildings.

Leia watched with undisguised awe as the Corellians fingers flew over the console. Here was yet another example of Han's diverse talents. Who would ever have believed that the pilot was an expert computer programmer. He'd already managed to get both of them into the inner area by by-passing the security codes. Now they had been able to remove their breather masks as the air in the data room was breathable. So far all she had, had to do was keep watch for the patrols. Solo had taken it upon himself to deal with the needed alterations to the programming.

It had been Han's idea that they should infect the system with a virus. One that would give every indication that it was accidental but that would destroy all the incriminating data. He was now engaged in introducing his programme to various files within the system. It was important to make the Imperials believe that the damage was entirely random. That way they were unlikely to make a great deal of effort to replace the lost information. All Leia had done was confirm the information in the files. Han, hadn't wanted to know the names of the beings on the list. Such knowledge would be as much a curse as a blessing he'd told her.

She checked her chronometer, time was running short they had to be out of here before the change of the guard. "Han!"

"Yeah, I know, I can tell the time as well as you. I want to do just one more. This'll do." He punched up the details of the directory he intended to infect, then paused as one name on the scrolling screen struck him forcibly. General Rahandir Ansolodor of Corell. Han was not given to hero worship, but this one character had always intrigued him even when he had left behind the idealism of his early youth. Unable to resist. Indeed it seemed that his fingers were working of their own volition. He called up the available information to the screen.

Leia watched as all the colour drained from the Corellians face. "Han?"

Solo shook his head to clear it. It couldn't be! It wasn't possible! Leia's voice recalled him to the business in hand. Wiping the screen clear his hasty movement caused the breather masks to crash to the floor. Cursing, both Solo and Leia dived to pick them up.

Leia realised that she had Han's mask in her hand and offered it up to him.

About to exchange breathers Solo's sharp gaze picked up the tiny fracture that had appeared in the princess's mask.

He crammed it over his head allowing it to hang down over his neck. "Let's get outta here." He led Leia back towards their entry point. Blaster at the ready Solo eased himself around the corner of the corridor, an inquisitive droid spun into view, forcing him to withdraw hastily. "We can't get out that way," He hissed at Leia "we're going to have to backtrack and find another exit."

Once more the Corellian's direction finding abilities proved to be invaluable. Leia freely admitted that had she been left to herself she would have found the myriad of corridors terminally confusing. Han seemed to be able to find his way around with little problem. Getting both of them out of the main building without mishap. Crossing the open compound proved to be no problem either.

"Okay, highnessness we're going to have to improvise from here." Having reached the base of the outer wall Han cupped his hands, indicating that the princess should step into them so that he could help lift her up to the top of the wall.

Scrambling up beside her his sharp ears picked out the imminent arrival of a patrol. Grabbing Leia around the waist, Solo toppled from the wall, using his body to shield the princess from the fall. As they crashed to the ground he rolled into the shelter of the surrounding buildings, stifling Leia's protest at his actions with a hand over her mouth.

The sound of booted feet stopped Leia from future protestation. She may be bruised, dusty and disgruntled but she was also clear of danger. Holding her breathe she waited for Solo to give the all clear.

Their landing had knocked the breath out of the Corellian, who'd been more concerned with protecting the princess than himself.. Aware that sitting in the middle of the alleyway was not ideal, even when he was holding the princess in his embrace. Han levered himself to his feet. Catching his tongue between his teeth as he tried to put his weight on his right knee.

A sharp, hastily bitten off cry, caused Leia to turn round swiftly. Han was struggling for breath, one hand clutching at his leg. "Are you all right?"

"Do I look all right?" he wheezed. Rubbing at his twisted appendage.

The princess pursed her lips at this typical response. "I'll rephrase the question, can you make it back to the Falcon?"

The Corellian stood upright and took a few cautious steps. It was painful, but he decided that as long as they didn't have to make a run for it he'd manage. He adjusted his breather mask which had slipped in their escape. "Yeah, I'll make it.

Come on, lets go." Hobbling along in the princess's wake he pondered over his strange experience back at the console. What he'd seen was incredible enough but more worrying was the feeling that something had called him to that particular file.

The file he'd opened had been a bio on the legendary Corellian military leader General Ansolodor. The Corellian had stood up against the empire over thirty years ago and his name and deeds were the stuff that many young Corellians, including Han had found fascinating. Especially when the new government banned all mention of the man and destroyed most of the available 2D's and histories.. It was part of the appeal that any study or tid-bit of information was frowned upon by the authorities. As he'd grown up the mystery of the man's sudden and complete disappearance had continued to intrigue him. But despite much digging Han had never seen a picture of the man before The Imperial bio had included a 2D of the Corellian general taken thirty years ago. It was that picture, that face, that had taken Solo's breathe away.

He knew who that man was, knew where he was, knew his assumed name and persona, almost as well as he knew his own. Much as he'd have liked to laugh away his suspicions Han knew he could not. The man he'd known as a Loordian casino owner was in reality the Corellian General Ansolodor.

Preoccupied with his thoughts as he was he didn't see the pot hole in the walkway.

Leia turned at the sound of Solo's hastily bitten off curse. The Corellian was leaning into a convenient wall, panting heavily. "Han!" she hastened back to his side. "Here, let me help you."

Using the princess's shoulder as a prop Han allowed her to guide him to an overhang which would afford more shelter from the constant drizzle.

"I don't care what you say." Leia started "I'm calling for Chewie and Corrin."

Han didn't even give her an argument. Grateful for the pause he panted quietly while Leia moved out into the main roadway to enable her to contact the Falcon. Giving in to the inevitable with a sigh Han slid down the wall and laid his head back against the cool stone. Breathing was becoming more difficult and his lungs were beginning to tighten. He tried taking small shallow breaths to ease the growing pain. Surely a damned twisted knee shouldn't be causing him this much of a problem? It was then that he remembered the damage to the breather mask. "Oh shit!" Well at least that explained the problem he was having with his breathing.

"Han, Han?" Leia shook Solo's shoulder, more urgently. The Corellian didn't respond, having slipped into semi-consciousness. "Hurry up Chewie," she whispered. She checked for signs of other injuries but found none. Settling herself next to the spacer she put an arm around his shoulder and pulled his head down so that it rested more comfortably on her shoulder. His breather mask was digging into her arm but she ignored the discomfort. Concentrating instead on watching for the Kashyykian's arrival. She knew that the Wookiee's concern for his captain's health would cause him to lose no time.

Relief flooded through her as a huge furry shape blotted out the pale watery thin light from the twin suns of Pelleron. "Chewie, thank goodness. I don't know what's wrong with him. He said it was just a twisted knee."

Chewbacca grunted his dismissal of his partner's views on his health. In his experience Han made a habit of underplaying medical difficulties. But like the princess his inspection could find no other sign of external injuries. With surprising gentleness he lifted the Corellian into his arms, and set off for the ship. Leia had to run to catch up with him.

"Put him down here" Corrin instructed as Chewie strode into Han's cabin with his unconscious burden. She already had the med scanner in her hand and she began running it over Solo's torso. "Chewie where's his breather." She snatched it from the Wookiee's paw. Inspecting it closely. Her sharp eyes picked up the tiny split in the inner tube. The one Han himself had spotted back at the data facilitate, when he'd exchanged masks with Leia. "There's a hole in it. His lungs are full of gas, we have to clear them, quickly. But how?" She began to search for some kind of equipment that could be utilised.

Chewbacca didn't wait for her to finish her search. Snatching Solo off his bunk, he sat in the captain's chair, flipped his partner over his knee and began to pat his back with his huge paws.

"Quick thinking Chewie." The Lauetian applauded as she saw what he was intending to do.

The Corellian coughed and heaved as the build up of gas and fumes was loosened by the rhythmical pummelling of the Wookiee's huge paws.

Corrin ran the scanner over the spacer again. "It's working, Chewie. His lungs are almost clear. He's coming round."

It was another few moments before Han's breathing evened out enough for him to make a protest about this treatment. "I'm okay, now. Let me up will ya," he

wheezed. A sharp hoot from above ordered him to quit talking and to concentrate on breathing.

"What the hell do ya think I'm trying to do." Han snapped "Corrinn" From his unique vantage point Solo recognised the boots of Major Val-Dorn "will ya tell this big lunk to let me up. All the blood is rushing to my head. "

"There's gratitude for you." The Lauetian eyed the red-faced Corellian with relief and growing amusement. "I think you should stay where you are. You look quite cute like that, you know."

"It's not funny, Corrinn."

"It is from here." The major assured him. "Oh all right," she conceded as Han looked daggers at her. "Chewie help him up, before he blows a blood vessel, and I'll see what I can do for his knee."

As a relieved Han was placed back onto his bed by the Kashyykian he took the opportunity to ruffle his first-mates fur. "Uhh, thanks, for botherin' pal." His eyes said more than his words ever could "I might not have liked the method but it sure worked. I was beginning to think I was goin' to drown in that stuff."

TheWookiee rumbled a question at him. "I dunno!" he mumbled in reply. "Still we managed to get the job done so that's all right. Hey," Han was relieved to have an excuse to change the subject. "what're you doin'?" this demand was to Corrinn Val-Dorn who was just about to slit his right pants leg from knee to thigh.

"I have to inspect that injury," she told him. "I could take your pants off if you prefer," she offered generously. Her lips twitched at the expressions chasing themselves across Solo's mobile features. She thought it was a fair bet that he would not chose that option. Not in present company anyway.

A mischievous glint filled her eyes, "here, Leia hold this for me," She handed over the scalpel she'd been intending to use to cut the pants leg and made to unbuckle Solo's belt.

Han, made strangled noises of protest and flapped at her hands "Uh, no that's okay. They were an old pair anyway, go right ahead. Cut em off."

"I thought you'd see it my way." The Lauetian returned to her task, certain that she was going to get no more opposition from her patient on this matter at least. "This is a bad sprain," she ran a hand over the taut muscles. "Do you keep any bacta fluid in this excuse of a med kit? Ah thank you." She took the hypo-injector Leia held out to her, checking the contents carefully.

Han eyed the needle with distrust. "Is this necessary? Can't you just strap it up. It ain't that bad."

The princess hid the smile that was doing it's best to break out. She had never met anyone who hated medical matters as much as Han Solo did. He was one of the bravest men she had ever known. Yet the mention of medical procedures especially those pertaining to himself turned him into mush.

"Yes it's necessary," Corrin informed him "Yes it has to be done and no I can't just strap it up. Now keep still."

"While we have you flat on your back, fly-boy." The princess moved over to sit on the side of the bunk. Effectively hiding Corrin's preparations from the Corellian's gaze. "There's something I want to ask you."

Han tried to crane his head around her shoulder "Yeah, what?"

"Did you know that the breather mask you were using was damaged."

"I ain't that stupid, that I'd deliberately use a faulty mask."

"No not stupid." Leia agreed, "chivalrous maybe."

"Me?"

"Yes, hot-shot. You!" The princess was well aware of the interest the others were taking in the conversation

"When the two masks were dropped you deliberately handed me the one you had worn, going in. Why?" Han looked increasingly ill at ease with the direction the conversation was taking.

"Well, well." Corrin, exchanged knowing looks with Chewbacca, "that's the first time I've seen half-pint lost for words for many a long year!"

"A mask is a mask." Solo mumbled "I just gave you the one nearest, that's all."

"Did you?"

"Well sure I did. What are you drivin' at? Oww!!" He clutched at his knee where Corrin, taking advantage of his inattention had just injected the bacta. "That hurt." he accused the woman, blinking back the tears that formed as the stinging sensation of the bacta invaded his damaged muscles. "Geeze, I thought the idea was that this stuff was supposed to ease the pain. Not make it worse. It's killin' me."

Ignoring his complaints Corrin finished her first-aid. "So," she encouraged "are you going to admit to exchanging those masks?" Han's face took on it's most stubborn look. "Well maybe I can guess what happened." The Lauetian considered the man in front of her. "Leia's mask was damaged and you gave her yours." She knew she had guessed right when Han looked away and began fidgeting with his covers.

"Han, you didn't?" Leia stared at him. Her mind going back to the accident in the data room. "It was damaged when the masks were knocked on the floor wasn't it? All that time and you didn't say anything." Han had been hoping the princess wouldn't remember that part of their mission. "It could have cost you your life," The Alderaanian continued, "it almost did. Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wasn't that big a deal."

"Well it was to me." She bent down and planted a light kiss on his cheek. "Thank you Han, thank you, for all your efforts today, and for caring enough about your friends to want to do things for them."

Corrin and Chewie chuckled as Solo's pale face was suffused with color. "What're you two sniggerin' about?" he demanded hotly. "I only did what anybody would do in the same circumstances. I'm no hero. Here help me up will ya, I wanna get off this planet some time today." This ploy to divert attention away from his actions, had the desired effect. His erstwhile guardians yelled at him to stay put, while the princess put out a hand to keep him firmly pinned to the bed. Bowing to the inevitable Han capitulated "Okay. okay, I'll rest. Since everyone seems to think I should." He allowed the princess to settle him back into the pillows. Giving a wink at his partner over her shoulder he suggested impishly. "Why don't you and Corrin go get the ship ready to take off. Her highnessness here'll take care of me." He gave Leia his most innocent smile. "Ill need help gettin' out of these wet clothes. Then maybe a nice massage. Yeah, that would be nice!" He closed his eyes and waited. He didn't have to wait long.

"Han Solo, you are the"

Cub!

"Half-pint, one of these days"

Han laughed outright at their outraged faces "Hey you can't fault me for tryin' princess."

"No," she agreed returning his smile. "I can't. I'm going to get in touch with the base and let them know we've succeeded. Thanks to you."

"Hey!" Han called after her "Don't forget to tell em that's another one they owe me."

The Falcon's engines hummed softly as the ship made her way back to the alliance base. Leia completed preparing her report for the council and stored the data disk away safely.

Another successful mission one which would safe-guard the positions of many rebel supporters. And much of that success was owed to the Corellian whose ship she was on. Her eyes lightened and she shook her head reflexively. She had long since decided she would never understand him, or his motives. She knew without question that she could rely on him. While his moral code might best be described as eccentric she recognised his inherent honesty and integrity, and his fierce loyalty towards those he cared for, and after this trip it seemed she might even be counted among that elite group, the friends of Captain Han Solo. She was inordinately pleased to think that that might be so, even if it meant she had to put up with being teased and tormented, with being yelled at and argued with and called all sorts of rude names. It was she decided a small price to pay. Smiling, she closed down the reader she'd borrowed from the Falcon's recreational area and made her way back to the forward hold.

"Chewie are you sure you didn't move that tape-reader?"

The Wookiee rumbled an irritated retort, before turning back to his game of holo-chess. "Well it was here the last time, I used it." Han shifted another pile of tapes. "Damn it, the one time I want to read somethin' and the thing goes missing."

"What's missing?" Leia watched in amusement as Solo continued to rummage through the storage cupboard.

"His tape-reader" Corinn chimed in "And how many times do I have to tell you, half-pint. You are supposed to be resting that leg. Sit down."

"I will as soon as I've found the damned thing."

"Is this it?" Leia dangled the reader in front of Solo's nose.

Han snatched at it. "Yeah, what're you doin' with it?"

"I was reading, that's what it's for isn't it?"

"Yeah, I know that That's what I wanted it for!"

"You?" The Alderaanian put a wealth of meaning into that one word.

"I can read ya know!" He shoved the tape he'd been carrying into the slot and began scanning for the passage he needed. "I'm sittin', I'm sittin'," he grouched as Corrin demanded he seat himself without further delay.

Intrigued, Leia leaned over his shoulder and blinked in surprise, as she saw Han was purusing a history of Corell.

It didn't take Han long to find the information he'd been searching for. A small section on a certain illustrious Corellian general. He pursed his lips as he read the personal information section. Wife and two children, wife killed in an uprising on Corell. The two children, a boy and a girl were listed as missing presumed killed in the same raid. Han shook his head, he hadn't really needed the confirmation that the information he'd erased back at the data facility was accurate. Except that Rahandir had assured him his children were alive and leading full and active lives.

More than ever he was glad he'd destroyed the file, if the Imps had taken the opportunity to circulate that 2D, Rahandir's cover would be blown. It's destruction would allow the man to keep his identity secret and to go on with his work for the alliance. Han smiled to himself, and closed down the reader. Time enough to think about the implications behind his new knowledge later.

Instead he turned his attention to the conversation that was flourishing in the forward hold. "He is a very good example of that Leia, I quite agree," Corrin said, throwing the clearly distracted Corellian a knowing look.

"Huh?" Han questioned blankly "What're you talking about now?"

"We were talking about how people hide their true identities and feelings from others."

"Yeah, you're right." Solo still caught up in his own thoughts completely missed the Lauetian's meaning. "You think you know somebody an' then you find out something that makes you look at 'em in a totally different light. Never take a person at face value." He realised his friends were grinning at him. "What?"

"I didn't think I'd live to see the day you admitted that there's far more to you than meets the eye," Corrin informed him.

"I wasn't talkin' about me," Han spluttered as he finally realised they had been talking at cross purposes.

"But we were," Major Val-Dorn told him with a smile. "And there isn't a person on board this ship who doesn't realise it. The only one you're fooling with your play-acting is yourself."

Han opened his mouth to refute her words then decided to save his breath. Three against one were lousy odds especially when two of his opponents knew him better than he knew himself and the third had more than once proved herself capable of talking him to a standstill.

So, he told himself, what if it was going to be more difficult to keep up a facade of indifference and self-absorption. Life with the rebellion had its compensations. So the rewards were different. He risked a look at the princess, she was still laughing with Corrin and Chewbacca. Solo felt a smile growing on his own face. Deciding that if the rewards were different, that didn't make them less worthwhile.

He groaned silently. Now they even had him thinking like an idealistic rebel sympathiser. Just what in all the seven hells was happening to him? There was no reply, but Han had a sneaking feeling that he already knew the answer, anyway. He just didn't want to admit it yet.

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