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Lair of the Blue Falcon

Chapter 1: Return to Tatooine

by [J.A. Berger](#)

Note: This version has been corrected by the author from the original printed version.

Luke Skywalker watched the twin suns of Tatooine set against the bleak and barren hills of the hot desert planet. The shifting sands continually reaching to silently claim the last remnants of the only home he had ever known.

He blinked away the sting of tears as he faced the deserted moisture farm and the burnt remains of the gutted living quarters. His pain only strengthening his determination to fight, to give every last drop of his blood if that was what it took, to free the galaxy of the vile Imperial network which was strangling the very existence of a free universe.

His pale, blue eyes reflecting the anger within, he thought of the two fine people who had taken him in and raised him as their own. He would avenge their deaths and the death of his father; a man said to have been betrayed and killed by a friend corrupted by the Empire. A father he had never known. And, in his anger, he found himself thinking of Ben Kenobi, an old man who had opened his eyes and mind to the powers of the Force. The pain of loss tightened his throat making it difficult to breath. So many had died at the whim of the Empire, which continued to reach for the few freeborn souls who remained outside its deadly grasp. And now, those tentacles of death and destruction were reaching to seize and destroy a friend.

Darkness was settling about him as Luke turned his back on the past and walked away, leaving a life he had neither wanted nor regretted leaving; he would not be back.

Brushing aside sandy, unruly strands of hair, Skywalker slipped on the Alliance flight helmet and strode to the fighter he had flown in shortly before suns set.

A questioning beep issued from the small, tripod droid mounted atop the T-65 Incom fighter. Luke climbed aboard and settled into the pilot's seat. "The Imperial guidance systems went on automatic at suns set, R2, they're easy enough to miss if you stay low."

He adjusted his flight harness and flipped a switch closing the fighter's canopy. "I sure hope Han doesn't complicate things by making himself hard to find or--" he mumbled under his breath bringing the x-wing to life, "the hunters may find him first. Hang on back there!"

A moment later, the sleek, graceful fighter lifted and disappeared into the darkness of Tatooine's night, its nose pointed towards Mos Eisley.

Dressed in the rough, loose garb of a Tatooine farmer, Luke stuffed his flight suit behind the pilot's seat and anchored down the camouflage sheet covering the ship's familiar shape and damning insignia. Turning away from the hidden craft, he faced the small R2 unit. "You stay with the ship--"

The droid whistled a sharp refusal.

"Okay! Okay!" Luke smiled. "Come on then, we've got to find Han and get off planet before daybreak."

With the eastern horizon ablaze with the lights of Mos Eisley, the little droid forced its motorized treat into low and doggedly climbed out of the sandy ravine. Moments later, they fell into step with a surge of traffic moving

Under the floodlights of the huge crowded spaceport, Luke Skywalker stopped at the directory listing the ships in port. Glancing hurriedly down the entries, he shook his head in despair. "I'd forgotten how big this place is! There's over a hundred bays--all full!" He groaned. "Han's sure to have changed the Falcon's name and registry numbers, how are we going to find him without checking every bay?"

R2D2 chirped softly and with a small appendage pointed to an entry far down the list.

Luke chuckled. "I can't believe he'd change her name and then dock in the same bay every time he's planet side, still it's worth a try. Come on, let's have a look at the Galactic Hawk."

Among a steady flow of varied life forms moving to and from the numerous bays and their berthed craft, the Tatooinian youth and the small droid went unnoticed. Because of the Empire's heavily enforced laws, Luke knew the ships currently being loaded would not be allowed to lift off until daylight when Imperial troops would check the cargo and vessel clearance papers of all outgoing ships.

"I can't believe Han would come back here after--" Luke swore softly. "We've got to find him, R2. If we're still here when that broadcast comes through with his description and orders for arrest, we won't have a chance of getting him off world."

Anger fought anxiety as Luke thought of the foolhardy spacer they sought; angry because the blaster happy Corellian pilot continued to put himself at risk, anxious because they could already be too late to help him.

A rebel pilot, flying one of the many rebellion ships, Luke had remained anonymous after the battle with the Death Star. Such was not likely the case for the Millennium Falcon with her crescent shaped, Corellian hull, her foolhardy pilot who proudly flaunted the Corellian blood stripe, and the faithful Wookiee always at his side.

Remembering the intercepted Imperial message, the young rebel recalled the list of transgressions against the Corellian; piracy, smuggling, conspiracy, unlawful flight to avoid prosecution, illegal lift-off without proper clearance, forced entry into an Imperial detention area and the freeing of a political prisoner, as well as numerous armed assaults against Imperial troops. Every charge, Luke reminded himself, resulting from the Corellian's unintentional involvement in Alliance activities.

Piracy and smuggling were Han Solo's chosen livelihood and, for a price, he had agreed to take a small company consisting of Luke, Ben Kenobi, R2D2 and C3PO, the little droid's counterpart companion, to Alderaan. It was to have been a simple charter. But when the Corellian had brought the Falcon out of hyperspace into the shattered remains of Alderaan, it had set into motion actions and counter actions that had changed, forever, the course of all their lives.

Docking Bay 94. Luke slid to a halt. Berthed in the carbon scored, crater-like bay sat a battle scarred Corellian freighter. "It's her, R2."

Unseen by Skywalker and the small droid, an Imperial Stormtrooper stepped out of the shadows of the Falcon's loading ramp and moved forward, the ominous muzzle of a laser rifle pointed at Luke's midriff. "State your name and business!"

Luke froze. "Luke Skywalker," he stammered, trying to control the tightening knot of fear in his belly. "I'm looking for a freighter to bring equipment in for my moisture fields." The lie came easily; he'd made many such requests in the past.

"Your identification papers."

Pulling out his Tatooine citizens ID, Luke handed them to the trooper, hopeful that they would pass casual scrutiny, praying that neither he, nor the documents would give the trooper reason to check further. Breathlessly, he waited under the muzzle of the Imperial's weapon.

The white armored being returned the credentials. "You'll have to look elsewhere, Farmer. This freighter has been impounded. Her pilot under Imperial arrest."

Luke dared not question the trooper and risk arousing the Imperial's suspicions; he took the papers. "All right. I don't want any trouble. Come on R2." Turning away from the Falcon, Luke left the bay and moved into the hustling traffic of the spaceport. Finding a dark corner at the end of the docking bays, he motioned the little droid aside. "If they have Han, there would be no reason to post a guard on the Falcon." He reasoned aloud. His brow wrinkled in thought. "Likely, he's been posted there to get the drop on Han when he returns to his ship." Luke glanced back in the direction of the bay. "They might surprise them, but they won't take Han and Chewie without a fight. Come on, R2, we've got to find them first--and we're running out of time."

Hurrying through the spaceport and into the equally crowded byways of Mos Eisley, Luke Skywalker pressed on, the small R2 unit rolling silently behind him, providing the eyes at the young rebel's back.

Reaching a familiar corner, Luke drew up sharply. "That's it!"

Across from them was a grubby, sun baked, dimly lighted, mud cantina.

"The first time we met Han and Chewie it was here, I'm guessing it might be a good place to start."

Stepping into the shadows of the dwelling, the young rebel motioned the droid aside. "As I remember, they don't allow mechanicals inside. You wait here. I'll be out as quick as I can," he promised. "Quicker if I find Han."

Luke reached his hand to the doorplate only to be stopped by a frantic beep from his stubby companion. Exasperated, he shushed the small droid. "Quiet R2--we can't draw attention--"

Artoo whistled again with increased urgency.

"Something's wrong? What is--?" Luke's eyes focused on a poster freshly attached to the side of the cantina wall. He moved closer.

It was too dark to read the small print, but the rough drawing that covered the greater part of the billboard was of a fearsome looking Wookiee standing at the side of a tall human. What was lacking in detail was all too clearly outlined in the description given and the larger print at the top of the poster, which read: 10,000 credit reward.

"Oh--no--no.." The words pushed through pale lips, in rhythm with the quickening beat of his heart. Glancing over his shoulder, the young Jedi quickly tore the poster from the wall, folded, and slipped it into his shirt. "We've got to hurry, R2-- let's hope we're in time--"

end Chapter 1

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