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Lair of the Blue Falcon

Chapter 10: Ancient Allies

by [J.A. Berger](#)

Under the brutal blasts of the storm, Luke Skywalker climbed, struggling to breathe without choking on the wind-driven rain that pelted his face and lashed viciously at his body. Pressed tightly against the cold, wet rocks forming the outer wall of the hidden bay, he glanced down. The raging storm obliterated the form of the small droid he had left standing at the base of the wall.

Ducking his head against Quaylan's weather, he rested, focusing his thoughts on the generator he had seen at the rear of the bay. Ahead, he saw a faint flicker of light. His breathing slowed, he moved on, searching for the outside ventilation necessary for the unit's operation and the open shaft from which he hoped to observe the unfolding drama within.

Fighting for each meager hold on the rain slick granite, the young Jedi reached the air duct, only to find it smaller than he had hoped. Out of breath and disappointed, he edged toward the light radiating from the shaft and the hollow ring of voices coming from below. Drawing a deep breath to control his trembling, he cautiously peered down the shaft and into the bay.

Below him stood the massive figure of Darth Vader with several uniformed troopers forming a semicircle around the prone figure of a motionless Corellian.

"Han," the wind tore the name from his lips.

Searching desperately for signs of life in the unresponsive man, Luke watched helplessly as Solo was hauled to his feet and half carried, half dragged toward the bay doors. Surely, he reasoned, they would not have gone to such lengths to capture the Corellian only to kill him moments after he was taken.

Ionized lightning flashed, brilliantly lighting the barren landscape in sudden bursts of neon blue. Luke cautiously drew back, struggling against gale force winds to maintain his precarious hold on the rough stone.

Pressing his body into a small depression to hide the whiteness of his rain soaked clothing, the young Jedi clung to the barren wall his arms numb from fatigue and the cold. In misery, he watched Vader and the troopers with Solo leave the bay and move toward the open hatch of the Imperial shuttle.

A sudden thought sent his heart pounding against his ribs. What would Vader do when he found the dead trooper and no captive?

The shuttle was too small and its transmitters too weak to contact a mother ship. Until the storm passed, Vader would be unable to take the small craft off world. Would he move the shuttle into the bay and use the time to wage a thorough search of the area, knowing that Luke could not have gone far in the violence of the storm?

Luke blinked rapidly, trying to clear his vision without the use of his hands. If they stayed, he was as good as dead. He could not survive if left exposed to the storm, nor could he remain much longer clinging to the rocks above the bay. His strength rapidly failing, he was finding it harder and harder to concentrate. Already the cold, driving rain was forcing his body temperature down. If he did not find shelter soon, he would not have to worry about finding a way to free Solo.

In cold, numbing weariness, Luke watched the darkened figures below him enter the shuttle. Almost immediately Vader reappeared, his arms waving towards the bay; the troopers spread out. It was not a good sign. Was it possible they were going to search for him after all? He groaned.

Luke watched Vader reenter the shuttle; a muffled shout and the troopers hurried back and quickly boarded. A moment later, the small craft's thrusters fired and Luke Skywalker sighed in relief.

As the small shuttle lifted and disappeared into the building storm, Luke immediately started down. Shivering from the cold and half blinded by the hard driving rain, he reached the ground.

"R2!"

Getting no response, he struggled to the bay doors, grabbed hold, and pulled; the doors remained tightly closed. Locked! The guards he had thought to be looking for him had been securing the bay! Locking him out!

There *was* only one bright side to his predicament. The Imperials would not have left the protection of the bay if they had planned on leaving Quaylan soon. By staying planet-side, they were giving him a chance of finding Solo. Once they took the Corellian off world his chances would go to nil. But for now, he reminded himself, he had to help himself or he would not live to help the outlawed spacer.

The bay doors moved and, before his numbed mind could react, they opened spilling Luke forward and into the sheltering warmth of the bay.

From out of the semidarkness, R2D2 whistled an eager greeting.

"R2?" Struggling up, the young Jedi wiped a hand across his face, clearing his vision. "How did you get in?" He shook his head, his teeth chattering. "Never mind, it's not important. Let's get the doors closed and warm this place up."

Crossing the silent and empty bay, Luke threw a switch bringing the huge hangar to glowing, brilliant life, than turned to the little droid. "Thanks, R2."

The droid's electronic whistle echoed through the bay and Luke smiled. "Of course, you had to get in out of that downpour. I feel like my joints might freeze up, too." He stammered through blue lips. "Let's look around and see if Han's 'friend' kept any dry clothes in here."

At the back of the bay, they found a well-stocked closet. Eagerly, the young Jedi pulled out trousers, long sleeved shirt, and a well worn, heavily insulated flight jacket. Encouraged by his find, Luke dug deeper into the closet's recesses, his search rewarded with a pair of high-topped, spacers' boots, a holstered blaster, and a towel, all clean but faded and worn from long use.

Hurriedly, he stripped, his flesh cold to the touch, quickly warmed under a vigorous rubbing with the dry, soft towel. Finished, he stepped gratefully into the dry clothing. Before the small droid, the Tatooine farmer materialized into a slim, graceful spacer. R2D2 whistled his approval.

Already he was feeling better about his situation. He was warm and dry; the clothes a close fit, the flight jacket, snug and comfortable.

Returning to the communications console, a warning light flashing from the high-gain receiver caught his eye. Puzzled, Luke took a seat and waited for the transmission to repeat itself to the open channel. Through the ionized static, he picked up bits and pieces of a weak signal. It was a ship, somewhere above Quaylan, requesting permission to land.

Luke flipped in Garn's call letters than switched to full power as he struggled to locate and hold the faint signal. He had about given up when it appeared again, badly garbled and incomplete. "R2, plug in and see if you can boost the gain!"

Extending a small appendage, R2D2 inserted it into the receiver's power input. A moment later, the message repeated itself, still weak but audible.

From a chart mounted above the communications console, Luke transmitted coded clearance to the unfamiliar call letters of the ship, putting the transmission on constant repeat. What he was doing was dangerous, but he needed a ship...and whatever assistance its crew might be able to offer; willingly or otherwise, he thought grimly.

Leaving R2 to monitor the transmitter, Luke Skywalker crossed the bay to activate the landing beacons and open the bay doors, the green neon pathway glowing strangely unreal and ghostly in the driving rain and violent explosions of ionized lightning.

From the protection of the bay, the young Jedi searched the storm-laden skies. Picking up the sound of braking thrusters, he stiffened as a huge shadow dissolved out of the darkness before him.

Grabbing hand beacons, Luke directed the hovering craft carefully into the bay, gasping as he got his first good look at the immense size of the craft; there would be little room to spare.

Staying well clear of the gigantic ship, he watched in awe as she hovered just above the deck while powerful hydraulics activated her landing gear. The great ship settled onto the carbon-scored decking, her engines whining to silence as her crew shut down her many systems and prepared to berth her.

Luke deactivated the hand beacons and sat them aside, studying the ship closely as he activated the heavy bay doors into closing. He had seen the ship before. He shook his head; too much had happened. He could not recall where.

The probability of being sadly outnumbered did not concern the young Jedi unduly. He had grown accustomed to expecting the unexpected. He smiled tensely, thinking of the Corellian spacer who had seen to his training in that sense.

The hatchway opened on the vessel's starboard side; a massive ramp descended and a huge form darkened the entryway. Luke gasped in surprised amazement. "Chewie!"

Howling his welcome, the Falcon's first mate moved down the ramp to meet Luke, his gaze searching the otherwise empty bay. By the time he had reached

Luke side, naked worry reflected in the blue-eyed stare he settled on the young human.

"It's a long story, Chewie," Luke advised him, "but I'm sure glad you're here." A sudden thought and Luke glanced again at the huge ship. "This is the Stellar Jack, isn't it? I saw her just before we lifted off." Luke exclaimed excitedly, then stopped. "Can you understand me?"

Chewbacca, massive paws on furry hips, tilted his head to one side and mumbled a sharp affirmative, then nodded.

Luke held up both hands, palms out. "I'm sorry. I've gotten so used to Han translating for us, I...I wasn't thinking." He hesitated, his attention shifting from Chewbacca to the Stellar Jack. In speechless wonder, he watched a huge, black Wookiee appear in the hatchway and descend the ramp to join them.

The new arrival voiced a deep-throated concern to the Falcon's copilot, while his royal blue eyes studied Luke with naked suspicion.

Fascinated, Luke watched Chewbacca converse with the newcomer in the strange hoots and howls of their language, before the great, dark Wookiee nodded and turned back to the young Jedi. Their eyes met and a strange look drifted across the Wookiee's stern features; Luke immediately sensed short-tempered anger and uneasiness in the big Wookiee. His demeanor warned the young human that he would not be easily talked into a cause in which he did not believe. Glancing first at the Falcon's first mate, then back at the slight figure of the young Jedi, the black Wookiee gave Luke an appraising glance then motioned him toward the ship. Luke nodded and followed the Wookiees up the ramp and into the ship, R2 close on his heels.

At the hatch, Luke stepped aside to allow a third and fourth Wookiee to exit the ship. Armed with bandoliers and bowcasters, the two positioned themselves at the bay's portals. It was obvious that the black Wookiee didn't like being here any better than he did, Luke surmised.

Shown to a high backed seat before a table in the ship's Duty Room, Luke Skywalker sat down feeling immediately dwarfed by the impressive size of the freighter and her crew.

Suddenly uneasy, the young Jedi frowned; something in the atmosphere of the vessel was struggling to bring his Force sensitive powers on line. Too tired to do more than acknowledge the strangeness of it, Luke waited for Chewbacca and the black Wookiee to take their seats.

Another Wookiee moved into the lounge with a tray of large drinks. Accepting the hot beverage with a grateful smile and soft-spoken thanks, Luke took a

welcomed sip. The Wookiee nodded before moaning a soft comment and leaving the room. Luke frowned. Had he understood what that Wookiee had said?

Luke glanced at Chewbacca. "How many crew this ship?"

Mumbling a short reply, Chewie raised shaggy brows in question.

Luke frowned. "Say again, Chewie."

Chewbacca repeated his words slowly, his expression puzzled. The black Wookiee studied the young Jedi intently.

Luke repeated the number.

Chewbacca blinked, then nodded.

"If you go slow..." Luke tried to explain, then shrugged it away. Closing his eyes, he drew a deep breath. Again he felt the ebb and flow of the Force within his mind impatiently awaiting his summons, like spider tracks across his brain or low charges of electricity along his nerve endings, strange and unsettling.

Sensing something far back in his memory, Butaka studied the slight human seated before him. The boy had closed his eyes as if marshalling his weary thoughts, but when they opened, for a brief heartbeat, the ancients had reflected from their depths. Butaka bowed his head in reverence.

Luke blinked, then started as if suddenly aware of the silence. Both Wookiees were watching him closely.

Shrugging the weariness from him, Luke told all that had happened since he and Solo had lifted off Tatooine, taking special care to leave nothing out. He was interrupted only once when he told of Solo's wounding.

Chewbacca's lips had pulled back from sharp, white fangs and his small eyes had flashed with unbridled fury. But a sharp command from Butaka and Chewie reluctantly relaxed, allowing Luke to continue.

Finished describing his escape from the shuttle, Luke again sensed the uneasiness in the black Wookiee.

"I don't expect them back until the storm breaks," he added, hoping to reassure them. "Then I figure a detail will be sent to either monitor the facility or dismantle and destroy it." His eyes dropped to hide his anger. "And to find me."

No longer able to sit still and weary to the point of near exhaustion, Luke Skywalker got to his feet, the warm tingle of the Force still dancing urgently at the

back of his mind. Taking a deep breath, he turned back aware of the interest and close scrutiny in the eyes of the black Wookiee. He forced it aside and resumed his discussion.

"In a shuttle of that size, they can't lift off world or contact their cruiser until this storm breaks. Their transmitters and receivers are too low gain to break through the interference. That means they're here on Quaylan...somewhere." He shrugged helplessly. "This could be the only chance we have of freeing Han, but I have no idea where they've taken him." Desperation touched his voice. "Chewie, if they get off world with him, they'll head straight for Imperial headquarters. If that happens..."

The black Wookiee voiced a tense statement, his hard gaze never leaving the small human.

Luke started. This time there was no denying the truth; he had heard and understood. "What?" He could think of nothing else to say.

"While in the asteroid belt, we monitored Imperial transmissions. There is a base on Quaylan. They will take Solo there." Butaka voiced slowly.

"I...I don't understand," Luke whispered, his blue eyes meeting the intense gaze of the black Wookiee with naked puzzlement.

"They will take Solo to the Quaylan base," Butaka repeated, watching the young human closely. "They will not wait to get off world before they interrogate my nephew's bondsman."

"I...understand you," Luke stammered. "I've never been able to understand Chewie. How is it I am able to understand you?"

"You do not know?!" Butaka questioned, his brow raised in surprise.

"No," Luke whispered.

"I am Butaka, Elder of the Kitcuk Clan, Captain of the Stellar Jack. My dialect is very old," the black Wookiee explained, his eyes hooded. "Perhaps as a man child you were taught the language of my clansmen."

Luke frowned, his memories rolling backward to...nothing. He slowly shook his head. "I...can't remember ever having seen a Wookiee before I met Chewie." He looked up and for a moment he read something kin to understanding in the black Wookiee's expression. "You know, don't you? Why I can understand..."

"Perhaps," Butaka hedged. "But I do not think it is my place to explain, young...Jedi. It is enough that you do. It will make it easier planning a way to rescue Han Solo."

Chewbacca touched Luke's arm, moaning a sharp question.

"I...I'm sorry, Chewie, I don't understand..."

Luke shrugged in frustration, shifting his attention from the Falcon's first mate, to the captain of the Jack.

"My nephew wishes to know of his ship."

Luke nodded, turning back to Chewbacca. "From what I can surmise, this friend of Han's may have turned him in for the Falcon as well as the reward. She lifted off shortly after we were taken, just as the storm broke. I saw when Vader and the detail boarded the shuttle with Han; they were all accounted for. Unless there was someone else here, Garn's the only one who could have left with her."

Chewbacca nodded, a calculating light sparkled in his small blue eyes. He growled a quick comment to the black Wookiee.

"Chewbacca says the betrayer will go to Mos Eisley," Butaka translated. "He will not be hard to find."

A nervous excitement built inside the young Jedi. "I know." It was becoming easier to understand the Falcon's first mate. "Good. We know where the Falcon will be and where we are likely to find Han. Maybe, just maybe, we have a chance."

The stern growl from the black Wookiee and a sharp whistled warning from the R2 unit brought Luke Skywalker back to the reality of their situation. "I know," he admitted. "I have a bad habit of getting ahead of myself. And, you're both right, there's still a lot we don't know."

end Chapter 10

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