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Lair of the Blue Falcon

Chapter 15: The Rescue

by [J.A. Berger](#)

They rode the platform to the third floor in silent expectation. The soft purr of the servos vibrating the plates under their feet, the dim lighting---cold, impersonal---reflecting dully from the weapons they held in their hands, charged and ready. The conveyance bumped to a halt and fingers tightened on trigger guards.

Luke nodded to the small droid who coded in an override opening the hatch to the detention level of the garrison. The small mechanical rolled out of the lift. A soft beep and his companions cautiously joined him in a narrow corridor, which stretched before them silent and empty.

The corridor opened before them lined on either side with matching rows of cells. Each paneled door with a small plate registering the cell's number and a flashing digital display; green for empty, red for occupied. One could tell immediately which cells were in use; there were none.

Maintaining a steady pace Luke watched the corridor ahead, while Butaka and Chewie checked each cell; they found no sign of the Corellian. Luke's respect for the furry warriors grew as he watched the Wookiees move with a grace and stealth surprising in beings of their size and bulk.

Ahead, the corridor ended at a circular island. Luke froze. Around the island mounted to the ceiling were security cameras turned to cover every angle of the

detention area and the corridor leading to the cells; they had not been activated. Relieved, Luke stepped onto the island.

When operational, the area where he stood would become the control center for the detention level. Had it been staffed, they would not have made it into the cellblock undetected.

In front of the control center were the turbo-lifts used to access the area. On either side were doors leading to what he assumed to be the interrogation rooms and the assorted horrors that one would expect to find on the detention level of any Imperial garrison.

Stepping from the island and out of sight of the lifts, Luke glanced down the line of closed doors. "He's here. Somewhere," he whispered, "Otherwise, there would be no reason for this floor to be lit."

Chewie growled excitedly, silenced quickly by his uncle who turned to the young Jedi. "He is here," Butaka moaned softly. "My nephew has picked up his scent."

"Chewie, can you locate him?" Luke whispered urgently. "Hurry!"

The Falcon's first mate, his head high, breathed in great breaths of air, exhaling through his mouth as if tasting the scents pulled in through his olfactory organ. His head moving from side to side, the russet-coated Wookiee followed the familiar scent unerringly to a door across from the lifts.

Luke nodded, motioning Chewbacca to silence. The door appeared to be the main interrogation chamber and the one, he reasoned, most likely to be used by Vader for the questioning of his prisoner. It was before this door that Chewbacca stood impatiently, his hand tightening on the bowcaster. He threw back his head, but stopped short of howling his anger.

Forcing down his anxiety and fears, Luke closed his eyes, allowing the memory of Ben Kenobi and his brief teachings to settle and relax him; he opened his eyes. Both Wookiees were watching him intently, but neither had moved from his side nor attempted to interrupt his reverie.

His senses keyed to the slightest sound, Luke put his ear to the door and concentrated, shutting out everything else around him. Immediately, he stiffened.

Through the heavy paneling he picked out muffled voices. Frowning, he struggled to sort out the distorted utterances. One voice, sensed more than actually heard, projected a strong aura of anger; and, although the individual words spoken could not be understood, he sensed a drama unfolding beyond the barrier. His concern deepened.

The Force prickled and he glanced at his companions, but hesitated. They would get only one chance. If they were wrong, they would be betting with Solo's life. Unwilling to take that chance, Luke shook his head at the questioning glances from the Wookiees and put his ear again to the door. He had to be sure.

A deep voice and possibly, two others, but not the voice he had hoped to hear. The deep voice again and the young Jedi immediately sensed his danger. More strongly, he sensed the Corellian's danger, along with something he had encountered before, something incredibly evil. He put a name to that evil, Darth Vader. Boot steps moved toward the door and he pulled back violently.

Spinning, Luke motioned the Wookiees back. Reaching the protection of the detention corridor behind the control island, they pressed themselves tightly against the wall.

A door opened. Boot steps entered the hall and the door closed. Silently, they waited, their weapons ready. The boot steps paused.

Sensing the danger of discovery, Luke Skywalker closed his eyes and desperately focused on the storm: the driving rain and the ionized lightning bolts cutting across the black night. Close to panic, he flooded his mind with Quaylan's fury, allowing the violence of the storm to absorb his anger, his fear, and his anxieties. Everything else he forced from his thoughts, allowing nothing to form in his mind beyond the power of the storm.

The boot steps moved away from them, than stopped again. The lift doors opened and the boot steps moved into the lift. The doors closed and the lift began its descent.

Spent from his efforts, Luke opened his eyes and drew a deep breath. "That's one less," he breathed softly, relaxing his hold on the light saber, his knuckles white, his fingers cold. "I figure there's still two more in there, maybe more. If they're interrogation Han, we can expect guards." He paused, meeting the concerned gazes of his companions. "Once we're through that door, we're going to have to move fast if we have any hopes of getting Han out of there."

"Nor can we leave anyone to raise an alarm," Butaka growled, death and mayhem reflected in his royal blue eyes. "For silence, Nephew, we will use the d'rks."

Chewbacca reached into the small knapsack attached to his bandolier and retrieved a short shafted, titanium arrow. He inserted it into the metal tray on top of the bowcaster. With a flick of a switch, he deactivated the weapon's laser, which automatically notched the arrow. He looked up signaling his readiness. Butaka notched his dart, than turned back to the young Jedi who stood ready, the light saber in his hand still dark.

Taking the lead, Luke glanced quickly down the corridor behind them, then advanced to the closed door, the Wookiees positioned at his shoulders, one on either side, their weapons up and ready.

With the control center off-line, there was no way of telling if the door had been rigged to a silent alarm when entry was forced. Taking scant seconds to study the computerized lock, the young Jedi activated his saber and slashed through the mechanism. They were committed; the clock had started.

Rushing the door, the three pushed their way into the room. Uniformed troopers whirled at their unexpected entry, blasters coming up from belted holsters.

Two massive bodies pushed past him and Luke heard the hiss of the bowcasters in a parody of continuing motion. Each arrow finding its target as guards fell, blasters slipping from their numbed fingers.

Luke rushed forward his hand tight on the hilt of his saber, its blue-white blade humming in deadly readiness. In a flick of an eye, even as the guards stumbled and fell, the young Jedi knew they would not be in time.

A figure stood over the bound Corellian, a needle buried in the flesh of the spacer's arm. As an Imperial officer stepped between them, his blaster raised, the medic drove the plunger home.

"No!" Luke hurled himself over the fallen guards in his struggle to reach the needle wielder, the light saber striking out with a life of its own to clear his passage. Commander Latu fell under the swift strike of Luke's blade, the saber's blue-white energy cutting him down in mid stride.

The room fell silent.

Luke stood in the center of the room, his light saber at the throat of the unarmed medic.

The empty needle still in his hand, Sacher met the small invasion force undaunted, an ugly smile pulled at his thin lips. "Very impressive, young man, though you're too late, I fear." He looked past the Wookiees to the forced door. "No one would have expected an armed assault from the detention block. I congratulate you and these...things." A look of open contempt touched the medic's cold voice. "But if you've come from him, it seems you have accomplished the impossible...for nothing."

Butaka, bowcaster poised, another arrow nocked, moved toward the white robed human, his small eyes ablaze with unbridled hatred and the naked desire to kill.

"Go ahead," Sacher taunted. "It's too late to help him."

"Butaka, wait!" Luke shot a quick glance at the quiet figure strapped to the interrogation chair, his head slumped forward, his body relaxed against the restraints; there was no sign of awareness in the Corellian.

"There is no time," Butaka cautioned angrily. "They will be coming."

Chewbacca paused to check the downed guards than moved to the side of his bondsman and tore at the bindings. They snapped like dry cordwood in the hands of the angered Wookiee.

"What did you give him?" Luke's hand tightened on the hilt of the saber and the blade moved closer to the collar of the medic's uniform.

"An overdose of Phayazine, it that means anything to you." Sacher commented coldly.

"Why?" Luke whispered, the knuckles of his hand growing white under his iron control. "He's of no use to you dead."

"Nor to you, I wager."

Butaka reached past Luke and grabbed the man brutally by the lapels of his robes and lifted the Imperial off his feet. For the first time since they had entered the room, the medic showed signs of real fear.

"Butaka, put him down!" Luke ordered. "But hang on to him, just in case we don't get the answers we want...fast enough." He moved the saber away from the medic, allowing the black Wookiee to set the man on his feet, but barely, his huge hands maintaining their cruel hold to the Imperial interrogator. "Now talk! And fast!" Luke snapped.

"Phayazine is a...strong pain...reducer." Sacher rasped, struggling to talk past the Wookiee's hold on his uniform, which tightened his collar; his face reddened. "I was in the process of administering enough of it...to bring him out of his self imposed stupor. When you busted in here, I..." he forced a painful breath, than sneered. "I inadvertently injected...the full...amount."

Butaka roared in anger and again the man's feet came off the ground.

"Butaka, no!" Luke glanced hurried toward the doors, than back at the medic who had again been set on his feet. "How do we know you're not lying?"

"Check it yourself," Sacher spat contemptuously. "You'll find the residue in the needle verified my story. The Corellian's a dead man and so are you and these...walking fur balls. Alarms were activated when you forced that door..."

A savage roar and a flash of russet coated fury pushed past the startled Jedi knocking him brutally aside as a furred hand grabbed the startled medic. The Imperial reading the Wookiee's intent in his angry eyes, screamed.

"Chewie, no!" Losing his balance, Luke stumbled into Butaka. The energy-enriched blade of his saber struck the decking and sent the weapon flying from his hand.

Catching himself, the young Jedi turned at the struggling sounds behind him. Bile rose in his throat and he turned away, sick. The body of the medic hit the floor and lay still.

A huge black arm reached to steady Luke before thrusting the deactivated saber into his hand. Pushing past the shock, the young rebel was suddenly aware of alarms sounding throughout the building.

"I'm all right." Averting his eyes from the body of the medic, Luke paused only long enough to retrieve the dropped hypo. Turning away, he stumbled to the side of the Corellian and reached for a wrist desperately searching for a pulse. His heart skipped a beat. It was there, thready, but strong. "He's alive! Let's get him out of here while we still can."

Chewbacca gathered his bondsman tenderly into his arms and rushed for the door leading to the cellblock, Butaka and Luke covering his retreat down the corridor to the waiting garbage chute. The small droid rolled aside allowing them past and into the smelly conveyance. Closing the chute against the mad scream of the alarms, R2 programmed their descent.

On the ride down, Luke studied the used hypo, focusing his attention on the milky residue, which ringed the inside of the sterile tube. The medic had not lied about the amount given, but had he lied about the contents? Compassion constricted his throat, making it difficult for him to swallow. *Were they too late?*

He glanced at the still form in the Wookiee's loving arms. Angry bruises discolored the Corellian's ribs and a bandage bound his right biceps. Unwilling to dwell in what ugliness the bandage might hide, Luke shifted his gaze to the cut trouser leg, which revealed the cracked sealant and the inflamed edges of the blaster burn. He groaned, knowing there was more to worry about than just the needle and its contents; infection had set into the wound.

Luke drew himself up with a deep breath. Now was not the time to worry about any of this, he told himself. Han was alive. For now, that was enough. Once they were clear of the garrison and its dangers, they would deal with the rest.

Carefully discarding the naked needle, the young Jedi jammed the empty tube into a pocket of his flight jacket and signaled R2 to code in the release. The platform thumped to a stop.

The chute opened to the driving rain and cold winds, immediately chilling the Tatooinian native to the bone. Struggling out of his jacket, Luke threw it over the unconscious Corellian, his eyes momentarily meeting the worried gaze of the russet coated Wookiee. He turned and led the way out of the chute. Emerging from the protection of the building, they stepped into the avenue of darkness Luke had created earlier.

"Wait!" Luke shouted above the storm. The Wookiees paused. Pressing themselves against the garrison walls, they looked expectantly at the young human. "We've got a problem. Han can't get over that wall on a rope and the speeder's not big enough for another passenger."

Butaka pulling thick lips away from white fangs growled his exasperation. Barking an order to Chewie, he touched Luke gently on the shoulder and pointed toward the southern end of the garrison and the maintenance area.

Excitement flickered across Luke's face and he smiled. "A shuttle! Right!"

They angled their steps hurriedly toward the enclosed bay.

Painfully aware of the brilliance of the lighted bays, Luke motioned his party into the maintenance area. At a refueling station his attention focused on a small shuttle he found unsettling familiar. He led them to it. "Quick, get aboard!" Butaka and the burdened Chewie entered through the open hatch and disappeared into the small sleek ship.

"R2, patch into that communications outlet. Hurry! Lock out any alarms coming from the garrison, then code an intruder alert to the front gate. Originate the break in from the rear of the compound! We've got to get the guards off the gate or they'll blast us before we can get enough lift to get out of here!"

The small droid rolled quickly to the outlet at the refueling board and plugged in. The shuttle's retros fired, their gentle rumble softening as the ship idled under Butaka's expert hands. A moment later a klaxon sounded at the rear of the compound. Luke smiled his approval and motioned the small droid back to the shuttle.

Boot steps rushed past the bay headed toward the rear of the garrison.

Following R2 into the shuttle, Luke coded the hatch shut, the small ship already beginning its move out of the bay. The shuttle lifted. Moving unchallenged past

the empty sentry box, it quickly picked up speed and disappeared into the night. They were clear.

With the sound of her retros booming, Luke Skywalker glanced about the dimly lit interior. Chewie had reclined one of the shuttle's seats and had carefully laid the unconscious Corellian on to it. The helpless expression that reflected from the Wookiee's gentle blue eyes drew Luke immediately to the spacer's side.

"Chewie, can you find a med-a-kit on this tub? I'll see what I can do..."

Luke reached out and gently grasped Han's limp wrist. Again he found the pulse; it was holding steady. He watched the easy rise and fall of the Corellian's respiration and decided there was nothing amiss. Yet the medic's words worried him. His hand still on the pulse point, he forced his thoughts back to some of the various drugs they had kept on the farm for emergencies when there was no time to seek a healer; one of those drugs had been the pain reducer Phayazine.

Chewie returned, handing him a small well-stocked med-a-kit before taking a seat next to his wounded bondsman.

Luke set about replacing the cracked sealant over the blaster burn, grateful that the Corellian was oblivious to his fumbling ministrations. Chewie sat quietly, handing him the needed medications as he called for them. Together they worked their way over the spacer's abused body.

Luke stiffened in repulsion, Chewie in fury, when they removed the bandage to reveal the blackened hole of the laser burn, its seared edges telling the brutal story of the second burn. Luke's eyes hardened; and he forced himself to concentrate on dressing the wound and not the pain the Corellian must have suffered.

Finished at last, Luke retrieved his jacket from where it had fallen while he had cared for Solo. As he covered the Corellian, something fell from a pocket and he reached over and picked it up; the empty hypo. He turned it slowly in his hands.

His eyes never leaving the face of his unconscious friend, Luke stretched his memory. Phayazine, the same drug he had administered to Solo himself on their trip to Quaylan, was a powerfully efficient pain reducer. Put directly into a vein and carefully monitored, it could reduce pain almost immediately. Thinking back, he recalled a small dose he had once taken, carefully administered by his uncle, and he remembered the drug's powerful intrusion upon his mind. He glanced again at the Corellian's peaceful features. Han would be feeling none of the pain that filled his body and for that Luke was grateful, but what about later? The syringe testified that an unhealthy amount of something had been injected into the Corellian; he had seen it done. But had it been Phayazine, or something else?

"R2, come here."

Luke held out the empty syringe. "Can you analyze the residue in this and tell me what it is?"

The small door opened in the turret of the little droid and a slide attached to a small appendage swung out. Luke carefully touched the tip of the syringe to the slide and tapped it lightly. A tiny bead of serum dripped from the syringe onto the slide. The small appendage along with the slide disappeared into the turret. A sensor flashed and the small droid hummed while a computer deep within the unit chattered. Luke waited.

Several minutes passed before R2 rolled over to the shuttle's computer board and plugged into its memory banks. Another moment and a formula appeared on the screen before him.

Moving to stand beside the small R2 unit, Luke studied the unfamiliar symbols in silence. Interested, but unwilling to leave the Corellian's side, Chewbacca whined a soft inquiry.

"I don't know, Chewie. But maybe R2 does." He turned back to the small droid. "R2, is it Phayazine?"

R2D2 chirped a soft affirmative.

Luke turned and nodded to the worried Wookiee, who moaned softly.

Returning to the Corellian's side, Luke slumped into his seat, carefully avoiding the questions reflected in the eyes of the gentle giant. He had no answers.

end Chapter 15

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