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Lair of the Blue Falcon

Chapter 37: The Prophecy

by [J.A. Berger](#)

Darth Vader paced the Com Room of the Tatooine Imperial base, his red visored eyes shifting from one bank of long-range scanners to another. "Report. What have you heard from the armada?"

A uniformed officer turned from his station and shook his head. "Nothing, my Lord. But I was told Commander Pactella would not contact us until after the engagement to avoid forewarning the planet's populace or the Alliance of their unanticipated arrival," the officer reminded the Dark Lord.

"The armada is overdue," Vader stated unnecessarily.

"We can't be sure of that, Lord Vader," the officer denied carefully. "We have no way of knowing when the Rebel ships would have arrived nor the extent of their firepower when they did." He shrugged. "I can only repeat that Commander Pactella will contact us when he can. Unless..."

An urgent alarm and the Sith Lord whirled to face the planetary defense station. "What is it?"

"A small scouting vessel just popped out of hyperspace near Tatooine, well within the defense corridor."

"Her configuration?"

"She's Imperial," the officer angled his sensors toward the ship's coordinates, "...and drifting into an unstable orbit." He studied his screens closely. "Her careless entry will have stripped hyper drive and probably damaged her main engines." A light flickered urgently on the board. He opened a channel to the small ship.

"Captain?"

The officer held up a restraining hand silencing the impatient Sith. "I thought her possibly unmanned, however, her communications have switched on." He threw more switches, but only static greeted the open channel. "I'm attempting to reach her crew, but so far there has been no contact. Her orbit continues to decay."

"Put the ship on visual," Vader demanded.

The communications officer snapped a sharp order and the huge screen over his console flashed on, scrambled, then focused on a small, drifting Imperial scouting vessel.

Vader stiffened in recognition. "Are you...?"

"One moment, my Lord," the officer's hands moved over his board, his brow darkening with growing unease. "I'm getting a transmission, but it's...difficult to make out. Faint. I'm boosting the gain, but the trouble seems to be at his end."

A surprised expression pulled the officer's attention back to the robed figure. "He reports he's on auto and cannot land without assistance. He also says he brings news---from Kashyyyk, my Lord."

"The fool! If he has interfered with Pactella's mission I shall have his life!"

"His orbit is decaying, my Lord, rapidly." The officer cut in, his eyes carefully averted.

"Activate planetary tractors," Vader snapped. "Bring him down."

"Planetary tractors have been deployed, my lord. The ship is on approach."

Spinning on his heel, his black robes swirling about him, Darth Vader headed for the door. "Have a detail standing by, Captain. No one is to be allowed on or off that ship until I get there!"

"Yes, my Lord."

The officer looked up from his board, glancing at the departing figure in black. Drawing a relieved breath, he returned to his monitors to chart the small ship's entry into Mos Eisley.

Held safely in the base's powerful tractors, the small ship glided down effortlessly. Upon contact with the apron, her autos engaged and initiated docking sequences. A moment later, she sat benignly before a detail of stormtroopers that quickly surrounded her. Laser rifles at ready, they held the small ship captive awaiting the Dark Lord arrival.

Vader hurried to the ramp, his helmeted vestige carefully studying the small ship. "Sergeant, I wish to go aboard."

The white uniformed officer motioned two of his detail forward. "Release the hatch."

Only eerie silence greeted them from the semi-darkened interior.

"I will send someone..." The sergeant started.

"I will enter the ship alone, Sergeant." Vader interrupted. "You are to allow no one in or out of this vessel without my specific orders."

"Yes, my Lord," The officer stepped aside.

Vader turned and mounted the ramp. He paused, and then stepped into the darkened ship.

Something strange, eerie, prickled the edges of darkness within him and he palmed his saber before stepping deeper into the ship.

"I sense....a presence...strong in the Force." He touched a silver stud and the red blade of his weapon hissed to life, bathing the bulkheads around him in blood. With growing unease, he slowly turned within the narrow corridor. The darkness at the edges of the red stained glow of his saber remained unchanged, the feeling naggingly close, yet evasively out of reach. Angered by his reactions to the nothingness, Vader turned his back to the darkness and marched deeper into the ship.

Reaching the cockpit, he halted in surprise. Before him sat a helmeted being, his back to the dark lord. Heavy cargo binders secured him to the pilot's seat. "Finn."

In the soft glow of the control board, the armored body stiffened in recognition. "Vader."

Finn's shoulders moved under the restricting bindings, fighting helplessly against the continuing confinement. "Cut me loose."

The activated saber hummed its deadly promise, its red glow intensifying the darkness instead of driving it back.

Unable to see the being he knew stood behind him, Finn shifted in growing unease. "Vader, cut me loose!"

A gloved hand reached out and swiveled the bound figure until he faced the grotesque countenance of the dark lord in the red glow of his ancient weapon. Silence grew heavy within the confines of the small cockpit.

His attention drawn to the mutilated breastplate of the Hunter, Vader moved closer. "Your time is up, Finn. Where are the prisoners?"

"I don't have them."

"You dare break contract with me?" Vader snapped coldly, the breath screen hissing his anger. "I grow weary of your continued failures."

"I was not the one to break contract!" Finn denied. "By the conditions set forth and agreed upon, I was to deliver...alive---the Corellian smuggler," Finn clarified coldly, "and the Tatooine youth who spirited him away from Quaylan. I was unable to carry out my end of the contract because of----shall we say----unrevealed conditions, not afore mentioned at the time of the agreement. Therefore, I proclaim this contract null and void."

The light saber moved threateningly close to the bounty hunter's mutilated armor and the exposed flesh at the throat. "I resent your arrogance, Finn. And my patience grows very, very thin. Explain!"

"I tracked the Corellian to the Kashyyyk system, disabled and forced him down on a small moon in that system. I had him when your forces cut off my escape."

"What of the armada?" Vader questioned, the blade advanced.

Knowing a lie would only afford him a quick and painful death, Finn answered truthfully. "They were met, engaged, and defeated before they could reach Kashyyyk."

"Don't toy with me, Finn! The Alliance trap was carefully planned. They could not have been forewarned!"

Finn flinched under the cold denial. "Believe what you will, Vader, but your invasion was not as big a surprise as you had intended. Perhaps you should ask Tala Vito how they were alerted to your plan."

Silence met Finn's statement.

"I would venture a guess that it's too late and you've already silenced him." Finn hesitated, misreading the anger in the Dark Lord as realization of a missed opportunity. "Too bad. The dead harbor many secrets. I'm sure Vito had his."

"True, Finn." The deep voice was alarmingly soft. Cold. "A mistake I make all too often. Keep that in mind." The voice hardened with a promise of death. "What of Han Solo? You said you had the Corellian." The blade moved again until its tip touched the edges of the mutilated breastplate. "Did he do this?" Amusement tainted the muffled voice.

"Don't understate him, Vader," Finn cautioned.

"YOU allowed him to escape?!" Vader snapped, moving the blade carelessly toward the Hunter's throat.

"No," Finn denied. "You allowed him to escape; not once, but twice, from Mos Eisley and From Quaylan. I could not prevent his escape. It's all part of the 'unrevealed conditions' I spoke of earlier. Conditions you either purposely did not tell me or chose to ignore."

"I grow weary of this conversation, Finn. Tell me how a Corellian smuggler could make such a fool of you."

Finn stiffened. Information was all that kept him alive, but withholding it would only end his life that much sooner. He had no choice but to continue. "After I captured the Corellian, I tried to get him to call the boy."

"Call....him...?" The voice was cold as death.

"The boy carries the ancient weapon of the Jedi. He used it, along with the aid of Wookiees to rescue the Corellian from your garrison on Quaylan. You said yourself that Solo carries the mark of the Blue Falcon as well as the Circle of Completion." The air within the cockpit grew close, stifling close. "I believed the boy and the Corellian Sealed, bonded within their Orders."

"What do you know of such things, Finn?"

"I know that such bonding once developed into the most effective war machine in the history of our universe," Finn snapped in defiance of the Dark Lord's ridicule.

"Then you should also know that *only* Masters well versed in the Force had the ability, the control and the knowledge, to complete such a bonding." Vader voiced coldly. The Corellian has the maturity and the markings of a warrior, but the other is only a boy!"

"Yes," Finn agreed curtly. "And, for that reason, I believed I could take him. They are surviving members of two ancient Orders. I felt it likely that they had been brought together as symbols of a lost tradition and nothing more, a reflection of the old Republic and their ancient ways. I suspected the boy's powers, if any, to be weak, untried and untrained." Finn hesitated, relishing his next words. "That was *my* mistake. Your mistake, Vader, was in believing the Corellian could be taken alive. His total---almost insane---- abilities to do the unexpected, coupled with his skills as a warrior, make him a very dangerous advisory."

"You allowed him to escape!" Vader accused coldly.

"I could not prevent it," Finn repeated stubbornly.

"My patience wanes, Finn. You mentioned complications, go on."

"Yes," the bounty hunter admitted. "The Corellian could not summon the boy through their bonding."

"Of course not!" Vader snapped. "This...youth...is an untutored farm boy, looking for excitement and adventure; he is no Jedi."

Could Vader have seen them, Finn's eyebrows raised in amused speculation, "I witnessed the boy's skill with the ancient weapon, Vader. If he is, as you claim, unschooled, then he carries powers and maturity far beyond his years."

Vader scoffed at the Hunter's predictions. "There have been few Jedi who controlled the power of the Force at such an early age. I know of only one, and he..." Vader studied the blade of his saber, before continuing, his voice soft, "...is no more. And the last of the great Masters fell to my blade only a short time ago." Vader returned his attention to the bound figure. "I have heard enough of your failures, Finn. What of the armada?"

"Cut me loose and I'll tell you what I know."

"Indeed you will," The Dark Lord agreed. "If the battle goes as badly as you claim, how is it you are here...alive?"

Finn stiffened under the suspicion he recognized in the deep voice. "I was sent back, Vader, by those who wanted you to know of your failure at Kashyyyk. Do you think I tied myself into this seat?"

"The Alliance?" Vader whispered.

"Indirectly, yes," Finn admitted.

"Finn, I tire of this!"

"The Corellian and the boy," Finn replied. "I may have been wrong in thinking them Sealed, but they are a formidable team. The Corellian is teaching and the boy is learning...fast. If he is also being taught by a Master of his cult in the ways of the Force, they will become a power to be reckoned with...and soon," the Hunter prophesied.

"That sounds like an excuse, Finn," Vader voiced coldly. "Which brings us back to the original subject of this...meeting. Your broken contract."

"No," Finn denied anxiously. "I have never broken contract. I will not be the one to break this on; however, clauses will have to be drawn. One, if you want the boy, you find someone else or go after him yourself; I want nothing more to do with him. Two, the Corellian; I will find a way to dispose of him, if you wish, but I will not again attempt capture. If he is Sealed, I do not wish to meet the bonded Jedi, and Solo is far too dangerous to be taken alive."

"Ah, Finn, I think not," Vader's voice softened. The saber moved closer to the bound Shocktrooper, its glowing energy beam illuminated the grotesque highlights of the Dark Lord's breath screen. "There are no second chances with me, Finn, but there are prices to be paid for failure."

"No, Vader, wait!"

The blade descended, slicing neatly through the damaged armor to the flesh beneath, penetrated the vital organs, and stopped just short of segmenting the body.

The mindless flesh that had been Bashu Finn stiffened in delayed death throes, then relaxed against the bindings, the body finally accepting what the brain already knew; his life was done.

In the darkness of the cockpit, the scarlet blade flashed again and the binders parted.

"I release you, Finn...from your contract...and your life."

No longer held rigidly against the high-backed pilot's seat, the body fell, hit the console and slid to the decking, striking and rotating the copilot's seat as it came to rest on the decking at Vader's feet.

The glow of the saber was caught, absorbed, and then reflected back from an object, which lay benignly on the empty seat. Touched by the aura of the Force, the object glowed faintly, until it pulsed under its own Force influence.

Caught in a maelstrom of conflicting forces within the small confines of the cockpit, Darth Vader was suddenly overwhelmed, then consumed, by fires stoked by the dark side. Desperately, he channeled his powers and reached to part the darkness, moving in mystic defiance toward the glowing object; the symbol of a Sealing, the powerful bonding of Jedi Master to Blue Falcon warrior. Long forgotten memories swirled in tide pools of conflict and anger, among them, strange and powerful forces moving to repeal that which he had believed invincible.

"NO!" The power ripped the word from him. "The masters are no more!" Black rage fed the flames and the fires surged higher.

Reaching deep within, past the darkness fed by the flames, the being touched the essence of reason and sanity. The blackness receded before the soft glow of the strangely soothing essence of the object.

A trick.

The Corellian bore the mark of the ancient Order of the Blue Falcons. Finn had believed him sealed to a Jedi. The boy was too young for the ancient rite. The Corellian was not. Doubt and conflict; denial and disbelief raged within the dark lord.

The symbol lay before him as proof of a Sealing. Proof of something that could not be, he reasoned; therefore, it was a trick, put there to worry, upset, and throw him off stride. Yes, he would have expected such a ploy from the Corellian.

Angrily, the Sith Lord reached a gloved hand for the pendant. His hand closed about it, then opened when its sharp contours could no longer be felt; the emblem was gone.

A strange aura within the Force erupted around the being, the static of its energy field growing, intensifying until it encircled the dark lord with its unidentified power.

Caught within the strange aura, Darth Vader raised his weapon in anticipation of an unseen attack. The ancient saber flared, touched the aura, than flickered out.

Disembodied words resounded throughout the cockpit. *If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possible imagine.* The voice closed in upon the Sith Lord who stood helpless before it.

"Kenobi."

Betrayed, the Jedi will return and a son shall lead them. The voice reverberated about the cockpit, echoing throughout the empty ship. His name is...

Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith, stood alone within the sudden darkness and deafening silence of the Imperial ship and a whispered name touched his dark mind. *Luke Skywalker.*

end Chapter 37

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