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Operation Antidote

Part One

by [Carolyn Golledge](#)

Han Solo had already called Hoth Sick Bay twice this morning, but phrases like "condition stable" or "as comfortable as can be expected" only served to irritate him. No amount of explaining that he'd bought this patient in and was a friend of hers seemed to make any difference in getting more details. He'd see for himself how she was doing -- and stars help anyone who tried to stop him. Some of his anger he knew, came from the fact he felt responsible for her suffering -- he had, after all, convinced her to join the rebellion and she'd been poisoned by the Imperials precisely because they'd feared her defection.

Fortunately, when he entered through Sick Bay doors, no one was there to protest -- well, no one other than a droid and Solo didn't count them. The thing followed him, but he ignored it and continued on to the inner wardroom. There he stopped and turned hurriedly to silence the droid.

He didn't want Leia Organa to know he was here -- or at least not just yet. He hadn't expected to find her here, but there she was, standing at Patrina's bedside and asking questions of the attending human medic, dark skinned human female Jay Oran.

The steady beeping of the vital signs monitor played reassuring counterpoint to the rhythmic hiss of the respirator. But the patient in the bed was far too still, obviously now in deep coma or under heavy sedation, and unable to breathe for herself. Not good. Solo slouched back against the rear wall and watched silently as Organa rubbed a hand over her face in a manner indicating profound weariness. How long had she been here?

Jay Oran moved around the bed, flicking Solo a glance as she spotted him, but saying nothing to Organa. The doctor squeezed sympathetically at the princess's shoulder, "You really should go get some sleep, Princess," she repeated. "I'll let you know immediately there's any change."

Leia shook her head. "I'm staying." Her jaw tightened and she added grimly, "I got her into this mess."

Oran sighed and lifted her head to lock gazes with Solo, the meaning obvious -- she'd heard him say precisely the same thing and her answer was intended for them both. "That's not true and you know it." She bent down to the still figure on the bed, peeled Patrina's eyelids back and tested the pupil dilation response. "Imperial High Command had already figured the value of Miss Kelvin's new alloy and suspected she might come over to us. They'd have wanted her drugged and shipped to Coruscant whether or not you and the team ever showed up."

"Fine," Leia snapped. "But she wouldn't be lying here --" Solo flinched, knowing Leia was cutting herself short of saying the word he too refused to admit -- 'dying'. Leia waved an angry hand, "like this. She'd be on Coruscant safe and sound. They'd have treated her for the security drug and she'd be enjoying her new found celebrity status. If only I'd let her be!"

"We," Solo said quietly. Leia jumped a little and turned toward him. He stepped further into the room, adding "Hi, Doc, still at it I see." Solo noted Leia Organa's face was drawn and white in the harsh light.

"It was an Alliance High Command decision to go after her -- based on my recommendation," Leia said crisply.

Solo looked away from her. "You'd never have known about her if I hadn't --" He ran a hand over his hair in a gesture of frustration. "Ahh, this is pointless! It won't change anything." He looked back to the doctor, and asked, "Well?" He leaned forward to peer at the datapad on which the doctor was making another entry. "Did it work any better than the last one you tried?" He was aware of the ever growing list of antidotes Oran had injected into Kelvin in the three days since her arrival at Base.

Oran couldn't meet Solo's desperate eyes. "No," she admitted sadly. "She's still losing ground to the poison." Annoyed with herself, she threw the data pad onto a nearby table. "I just can't understand it! She seemed to be fighting it off okay when we first treated her."

"I've been doing some thinking about that." Solo's tone was so murderously chill that both women turned to regard him intently. "You don't know Sovrynsky," he elaborated, "I do. Unfortunately. But you know how he treats prisoners."

Organa flinched, remembering the state Solo had been in when he'd first escaped back to the Falcon. Oran too had seen the medical evidence of his torture. "Sovrynsky is a sadist," Leia said tersely.

"And then some." Solo went to the bed and picked up Kelvin's limp hand. "You're not gonna die, Patri," he whispered fiercely. "We're not going to let that Imperial slime-spawn win." He turned back to face Organa. "Sovrynsky must have designed a special poison. He's smart enough. And low enough. Patrina told me he really hated the thought of her going to Coruscant and not him. I'll bet right now he's bragging to High Command about how he personally made sure she'd never survive to pass on her new technology." Solo's fist closed about the butt of the holstered blaster at his hip. "Well, he's not going to get away with it."

Leia nodded sharply and interrupted. "Just what I was thinking. There must be a record of the stuff in his files somewhere -- he'd still be hoping to get her back. I'm going back to Hargeeva."

"You're going!?" Solo's jaw dropped. "I'm the one who knows -- wait a second -- this isn't even an option. You stay, I go, and no hunting through files -- I'll be happy to beat it out of him!"

Leia shook her head. "He almost killed you last time you went in there -- tapping into the files is a much saner option and I have the codes --"

"Listen to you two," Oran put in. "Neither one of you is making sense. Get some sleep before you do anything rash."

"Look --," Solo hefted a forefinger in the Princess' direction.

"Look nothing. You can't get out of here without security clearance. I'll get it for you. Come on." She headed for the exit, both she and Solo completely ignoring the doctor who now stood gazing heavenwards as if asking divine assistance.

"Fine," Solo said. "You do the military mumbo jumbo to get me outa here without shooting to kill -- but you're not going any further."

"Oh, I see," Leia snapped, "Only you have the privilege of exacting sweet vengeance?"

Jay Oran shook her head as the departing argument faded beyond the corridor and she noticed her droid had been disconnected.

"What do you mean, 'No'?" Princess Leia repeated in angry disbelief. She was glad she had insisted Solo leave her to do this alone -- the Corellian would have

choked Baran by now. Surely she couldn't have heard what she thought she'd heard from the Base's little beady-eyed rodent faced Intell Officer.

Commander – now Major – Biro's Baran was fully human but his squint-eyed, snivelling expression and habit of hiding behind a littered desk in his back-tunnel office had most of Hoth Base personnel think of him otherwise. Unfortunately, he was rodent-like in appearance and manner only – he had none of the usual keen intelligence of a rodent. Leia wondered if the man knew everyone on Hoth referred to him as "Barren-Brain Baran". And this was the officer Leia had been forced to have approve her (and Solo's) proposed return mission to Darginall? Hoth Base Commanding Officer, Colonel Rieekan, also Leia's good friend, would choose today to be off-world! Damn Sector Command for calling the man away just when she needed him most!

"You heard what I said, Your Highness," Baran said, adding insult by not looking up from the datapad on which he was encoding. "Your proposed mission would gravely endanger this base. You almost brought the Imperials down on us during your last visit to Darginall. It was only the lack of competence of those Outer Rim Imperial interrogators that had them fail to break Solo and get the location."

Leia's jaw dropped in outrage. It was a good thing Solo had not heard that remark! Imperial Colonel Sovrynsky had been more than a competent interrogator – he was a sadist, Solo's personal enemy. Leia was sure Baran knew that, after all as Intell Officer he would have been privy to the medical report Base Doctor Oran had provided on Solo's condition immediately after the mission.

Leia's fists clenched and she trembled from head to toe as she fought the urge to reach across the desk and strangle the petty bureaucrat. She hoped General Rieekan was at this very moment laying down the law with Sector Command in regard to having Baran replaced. They'd lost too many good pilots because of Baran's inaccurate reading of incoming intelligence probe reports. And now the man had somehow managed to get himself promoted! It was insufferable.

"Look ... Major," Leia said as politely as possible. "I already explained how we could get around the security risk. I'm the only one who'll be going in and if things go bad I'll make sure they never take me alive." Leia's last experience of being held prisoner, being interrogated with mind probing by Darth Vader and then scheduled for execution on the Death Star, had given her plenty of time to come up with various means of ensuring she'd never be capable of talking if such a fate befell her again.

"You are wasting my time with your grandiose schemes to make yourself a martyred saint, Your Highness."

Leia took a sharp, shocked breath. She thought she heard footsteps behind her in the entry, but was too intent on Baran to turn and look. The little rodent man picked up another data card and fed it into his computer, also not noticing who had arrived.

"As I have maintained since Alderaan, you are far too emotionally unstable to any longer undertake active missions into enemy territory. You should never have been permitted to go to Darginall in the first instance. Now Patrina Kelvin is dying because of Solo's bungling and you want to make it all better by getting yourself killed. Well, I won't have"

Whatever else Baran might have said was cut off as the palm of Leia's hand landed a stinging blow to his face. His eyes widened in shock and he rubbed at the spot where Leia's fingers had left their imprint. Leia was now shaking openly, torn with the desire to hit him again – much harder – and astonishment at her own insubordination. She had no idea how rank applied to her, but any junior officer who struck a ... She blinked and realised Baran had begun talking in his sneering, patronising manner again.

"There. You see what I mean? Look at yourself. You're coming apart at the seams. Considering your obvious psychological disability I will not place you on report. But I will have you confined to your quarters until Dr Oran can"

"What?" Leia gaped disbelief. "You can't lock me up!"

"Oh, indeed I can." He leaned forward to reach for the communicator, but paused as he noted whoever it was who must still be standing listening in the doorway. He went a little pale and swallowed hard, but then recovered his usual arrogance to add even more maliciously, "Being confined will be good for you in more ways than one. The entire Base is gossiping about how much time you spend in this ... this ... ruffian's company."

Leia's fists clenched. This time she'd really floor the little worm. But first -- what ruffian? She half-turned to see who Baran meant and saw Han. And if she thought she'd seen Solo incandescent with rage at other times, it was nothing compared to the sheer fury now etching every line of his face, tensing every muscle. But his eyes – there was the true sign. Ice cold.

His gaze was fixed on Baran but, as he realized Leia had turned partly toward him, he seemed to shake himself and what Leia could only mentally dub his "smuggler façade" returned. All the cavalier, swaggering space jockey. But still royally pissed.

"Thinking of hitting him again, Your Tempestuousness?" he said to Leia, and found he had to clear his throat to get his voice back up from the deep freeze of

his emotions. He took two or three rapid steps forward and as Leia said "Yes" he continued, "Oh please, allow me to do it right."

Moving with that lightning speed that always amazed Leia, he shot out an arm to swipe the communicator from the desk. A tinny voice could be heard issuing from it, saying "Security here. Is there a prob..."

Solo's boot came down hard on it and the voice was cut off.

"Now see here, Solo," Baran was trying to lean as far back in his chair as possible and get to his feet all at the same time, his eyes wide with fear. "You can't ..."

"Oh, no?"

Baran's words were reduced to abrupt choking sounds as Solo's fist closed on the man's lapels, twisted to deny him air, and hauled him forward until their faces were bare centimetres apart.

"You snivelling insect."

Leia had to crane to catch the words as Solo's voice dropped to a deathly quiet, cold promise.

"If you think we're going to let a friend die while you play Pretend Emperor you can think again." He released his grip abruptly, dropping Baran back to his feet.

The bureaucrat gasped air, preparing to shout for help.

Solo's fist impacted with the soft flesh of Baran's prominent nose. The Intell officer's eyes rolled up in his head and he took a second jolt as the force of the punch sent him crashing into the wall behind his desk. Out like a light, he crumpled to lie in an untidy heap on the floor behind his desk.

Solo began to turn slowly back toward Leia and she quickly re-composed herself. As Solo had served his punch, she'd imitated him, taking vicarious satisfaction in imagining herself delivering the blow. Hurriedly, she re-arranged her features to what she hoped was a semblance of dignity, though she was pretty sure it was too late and he'd seen her swing. Solo met her eyes with a bright intensity of expression she was not quite ready for.

She dropped her gaze to the unconscious officer and shook her head in mild exasperation. "That should really have the Base talking."

"Entertainment is good for morale, Your Worship." Solo said. "You people should pay me more."

"Excuse me?" Leia said, but he was already out the door. She exited into the corridor and stood wondering what she should do now.

"You wanna leave the scene of the crime before Security shows up, you know," Solo advised over his shoulder, pausing momentarily, then striding forward again, "Unless you want to be locked up?"

"What??!" Leia jogged a few paces toward him and they fell into step, continuing along the corridor. "I'm not the one who knocked him out."

"Yeah, I know you're disappointed – next time move faster."

By some unspoken agreement, or maybe that's where you always wound up if you followed Solo – Leia exited the maze of corridors into the hangar bay of the South Entrance. There were no fighter missions planned today, and the place was unusually quiet. Solo's much longer strides had left Leia some distance behind and now she watched as he disappeared between ranks of ships, heading for the Falcon which was docked closest to the hangar mouth.

Leia came to a slow halt and stood wondering what to do next. Other than hide from Security, of course. At least until Rieekan returned and she could explain. She let out a weary sigh, creating a mini halo of fog in the icy air. She lifted a hand to rub at the bridge of her nose. It must be the cold, she seemed to be developing a sinus headache.

It wouldn't be stress related, now would it, Leia?' a sarcastic inner voice suggested.

She snorted in wry amusement. 'How do I get myself into these things?'

Someone hailed her from somewhere in the ranks of X-wings docked to her left and she realized it was Luke Skywalker. He'd seen her and was walking cheerily toward her.

'Oh damn,' she thought. 'I don't want to drag him into this, too.' She waved a hello and indicated she was in a hurry and jogged off until she was hidden by the bulk of a refueller cart and a cargo lifter droid. Ahead of her, bright morning sunshine streamed in through the hangar mouth, giving plenty of light but absolutely no warmth whatever. It looked like a beautiful day out there – for Hoth.

'Well, Leia, what are you waiting for? Rieekan? After what happened back there with Baran, Rieekan will probably agree you do need some downtime.'

She sighed again. 'If I'm going to do this, I need to leave now. I've already done the hitting a superior officer thing, why not try going AWOL next? One thing's for sure, I'm not letting Solo go back to Darginall. I almost got him killed last time. So

..' she allowed her gaze to go keenly to each of the docked Rebel ships in her line of sight, 'I can fly an X-wing ...'

"She's got a problem there, wouldn't you say, kid?" Solo drawled dry commentary from somewhere close by.

Leia jumped and spun about to see both Solo and Skywalker ducking out from under the shadow of an A-wing fuselage.

"Dammit, Solo!" Leia scowled. "Do you have to follow me wherever I go?"

Solo's eyes widened and his jaw dropped into that irritating pretence of innocence he liked to think worked so well for him. "Who's following who here, Your Royal Furtiveness?" He nudged Skywalker in the ribs and added, "Only the guilty jump out of their skins like that when people come up behind them. So, what do you suppose Our Great but less than Lofty Leader is up to now?"

Shaking his head with heart-warming sympathy, Luke stepped closer to give her a soft smile and say, "Ignore him."

Solo's jaw dropped for real this time and that made Leia smile a little. And it felt good.

"Patrina is no better, then?" Luke asked worriedly. Behind him Solo flinched and looked away, all the cheerful teasing gone from his expression. "I know Han's been wearing a path to Sick Bay – and he looks less happy each time he gets back. It's bad, huh?"

Leia nodded sadly and looked down at her hands, surprised to find she had one clasped so tightly in the other that it hurt. "If they don't find an antidote soon ..." she left the rest unsaid.

"So they're sure now it's an Imperial poison?"

"Yes." Leia's head came up, her jaw set. "Damn him to hell! I should have known Sovrinsky wouldn't take any chances with her knowledge falling into our hands. How could I have been so blind?"

"I'm the one who should have known better," Solo said quietly. "I'll choke that antidote out of the mongrel if I have to. Chewie's got the Falcon all primed and ready to go. So ..."

"We can't go in the Falcon!" Leia cried.

"What?" Solo blinked. "Why not? Wait a sec -- what do you mean "we". You're not going anywhere!"

"Oh, yes I am!" Leia insisted, pinning him with what she hoped was her most commanding glare.

"Oh, no you are NOT!" he rebuffed with equal intensity, taking a step closer to loom over her.

She met that challenge, taking a step forward and putting her hands on her hips, her chin lifted defiantly. "Listen up, Flyboy. I know it takes a lot to penetrate that solid rock you call a brain. The facts are – 1. It was my idea to recruit Patrina so I'm responsible for getting her hurt. 2. Sovrynsky nearly killed you once already and would love a second chance. 3. He never once laid eyes on me and if I disguise myself ..."

"Fine. Do what you want," Solo threw up his hands and turned away from her. "And I'll go ahead with my infinitely superior plan." He began to walk away but called back over his shoulder, "If you want a ride, the Falcon is leaving now."

"And I repeat," Leia shouted after him, "you cannot take the Falcon!"

Solo swung back momentarily, gave her a mock salute and said, "Bye, Bye!"

A shrill whistle drowned out Leia's intended rebuttal. She clamped her hands to her ears and turned, in unison with Solo, toward the source of the noise. Luke stood there, fingers in his mouth, prepared for a repeat whistle, then seeing he had their attention, he smiled brightly and said, "Now, now children, we don't have time for your usual free show ... as much as the audience always enjoys it."

He waved an arm behind him and Leia reddened as she saw that indeed there was a growing cluster of amused techs and pilots gathering to watch. 'Curse Solo! Why does he always do this to me! Argh!'

"... and," she blinked and refocussed on Luke as he threw an arm about her shoulder and ushered her forward with Solo falling into step on her other side, "I have our ship ready and waiting for us."

"What ship?" Leia said at the same moment Solo said "What ship?"

They threw each other a token glare over Luke's head.

"I hear you left Barren-Brain down for the count back there Princess," Luke continued conversationally. "My buddies will keep the MP's off your trail, but ..."

"I only slapped him," Leia said distractedly, still being ushered to one side of the hangar.

"Good for you," Luke said. "With Rieekan off Base for a while I figured that idiot would get delusions of grandeur. He turned down your plans for the antidote mission I take it?"

"Correct," coldness crept back into Leia's tone. "I'm not going to let him kill Patrina, Luke."

"Damn straight," Solo put in from her other side, then apparently felt compelled to add, "I love it when Royalty talks mutiny, don't you, kid?"

"Sure do," Luke agreed cheerfully. "And – as usual – I'm one step ahead of you both. Keep moving. Me and my tech buddies have a little surprise for you."

"Huh?" Leia said, totally nonplussed and coming to stand still.

Luke sighed and tugged at her arm, urging her forward again. Solo, brows raised inquiringly, followed, giving Leia a shrug of his shoulders to indicate he had no idea either.

"Over on the far side of the bay, in the new section they've only just started cutting out of the ice cave. I've got a small, unmarked freighter waiting for us. It still has legit registration – as far as Darginall knows anyway. It's the one Red Team and the Falcon captured last month over Ongella, remember? It takes a three person crew. Not big enough for a Wookiee – sorry, Han."

Solo stared at him but Luke only flashed another of those charming grins. "Yeah, I know we shot it up a bit, and it was a wreck. But not any more! My buddies and I have been working on her in our – you should pardon the expression – free time. She's all fuelled and ready to go. We can't take the Falcon for this mission – Sovrynsky will have everyone just itching to spot her again – he's probably put some kind of personal reward on your hide by now, Han."

"Don't they all?" Solo said with a wink for Leia just as she commented "which is precisely why Han can't go back there."

Solo rolled his eyes. Luke held Leia's gaze and said sadly but firmly, "It's just as dangerous for you if they find out your true I.D."

"Which they won't," Leia said, and Luke surprised her by nodding agreement.

"Right. I've been working on that, too. There's a disguise waiting for each of you on board, and," he raised one hand to stall whatever objection Solo seemed set to make, "before you say it ... I have to come along. I'm the only one who knows how we jerry rigged the hyper-drive on this baby. And, you'll need Artoo and I can explain to him better." Luke waved that same hand forward and gave a graceful,

sweeping bow. "Your Royal Highness, may I present your new ship -- 'The Century Chicken'."

"Ha-Ha," Solo said. But then he gave a soft whistle and stepped closer to examine the slim-lined freighter Leia too was studying. "Man, you guys must have worked your butts off."

"That's an understatement," Luke said with weary pride. "Now, can we please get on board?"

"But ... I ... I mean," Leia spluttered, dazedly reduced to monosyllables.

"Keep it moving, Your Royalness," Solo said with a chuckle in his voice, "You are about to go AWOL."

Imperial Colonel Harrin Sovrynsky had never been noted for his cheerful disposition. Presently, his administrators were all but drawing straws in hopes of avoiding their duty to tend him. He sat brooding in his office inside the high guarded walls surrounding Darginall City Refinery and garrison, disgraced by the last communique he'd received from his high command off-world.

Sovrynsky had always believed his talents were wasted on Hargeeva, a backwater planet useful only for its exotic mineral deposits and its genius metallurgist scientist Patrina Kelvin. Sovrynsky had hoped her discovery of a new heat-resistant alloy might also bring him favor. Coruscant had certainly been excited enough when he'd relayed her findings to High Command. They'd wanted her transferred immediately -- after first being secretly dosed with the latest Security Drug.

And then Han Solo and his band of Rebel friends had arrived on the scene.

Sovrynsky's hands clenched but he barely noticed as the stylus he had been holding snapped and broke in his grasp.

He'd captured the Corellian and one of his local Rebel contacts, a woman friend of Kelvin's. She had subsequently died under questioning. Sovrynsky would have earned a promotion and perhaps transferral to Coruscant too, if he'd only succeeded in torturing the Corellian into revealing the Rebel base location. But no, the man remained silent, as recklessly stubborn and stupid as ever.

Solo and Sovrynsky went way back -- rivals since their boyhood days at the Corelli Military Cadet Academy. At least that was, until finally, through various smear campaigns and other tactics, Sovrynsky, and another student named Hagren, had managed to get Solo dishonorably discharged.

Solo's family knew who was behind that and had appealed and were investigating --when they were all killed, massacred by Palpatine's forces. Solo and his father were Off world at the time and had survived to flee as fugitives of Imperial justice.

Now, sitting in his darkened office, Imperial Colonel Sovrynsky wondered what Solo would do if he knew the part his two Cadet rivals had played in that murderous betrayal of all the Corelli clans held sacred. He grinned evilly at the thought. He'd planned that last piece of information as the final card to play in breaking his prisoner.

But none of Sovrynsky's plans had borne fruit. He'd failed to break Solo and the man had escaped, along with Kelvin, presumably gone to that same hidden rebel base.

Today, Sovrynsky had been informed that, in a fit of sheer pique, his High Command superior had decided to hold him responsible. Sovrynsky was to be demoted and shipped to an even more isolated backwater world than Hargeeva. So much for all Sovrynsky's dreams of winning a posting back to his beloved AT-AT command.

And so he ensconced himself in his office, desperately trying to uncover a means of avoiding his ignominious fate.

Finally, just as parsecs across the stars Solo and his friends left Hoth Base, Sovrynsky found a solution. Having reviewed the Imperial protocol concerning various security poisons, he realized that Kelvin would almost certainly still be suffering the effects of the drug he personally had made certain she'd received before leaving Hargeeva. What would the Rebels do with an ailing, much-valued scientist? They'd send someone to search Sovrynsky's files for the antidote.

Chuckling wickedly to himself, Sovrynsky called his aide and had him arrange a communication with High Command. Sovrynsky would get that base location and win himself a combat posting. This time there were no flaws in his scheme, no way for the Rebel agents to avoid his trap. Sovrynsky chuckled again, making his aide flinch. He hoped Solo would again accompany them -- after all, Kelvin and Solo had once been lovers -- or so gossip had it at the Hargeevan Royal Palace. That same gossip had forced Solo into fighting a sword duel with his good friend, Kelvin's fiancée, Kintal, the Hargeevan Royal Prince. Another man who had later mysteriously disappeared at Imperial instigation.

Now, Sovrynsky would finally have his vengeance on Solo -- using the most torturous method he could create.

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