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## THE BLACK SLEEP

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The bitter, poisoned blood seared its way into Indiana Jones' gut. It made the burning of his torn back seem nothing. He wanted to vomit, gagged but produced only hoarse, retching sounds. Chattar Lal and Mola Ram smiled benignly at him. He fought to say something offensive, prove his will was as strong as ever. Horror filled him as his tongue failed to obey. He heard sobbing, remembered Short Round, looked toward him and saw the same horror in the boy's eyes as they began dragging him away. The chains were removed from Indy's body. His torturers smiled and laughed; something stronger than chains was holding him now. Docilely, he allowed himself to be led toward a candle lit alcove. His guards dropped him disinterestedly and he lay flat on his back on an altar-like stone slab. All the while the burning grew more intolerable, the poison settling in his stomach like a lump of molten lava.

Then he felt movement. The lava was coming to life, uncoiling, spreading into his bloodstream. The image of a giant snake, an evil red-eyed serpent filled Jones' mind. Terrified, he began to struggle. The terror, his absolute dread of snakes, had given him the power to move. But nothing more. He could give no direction to his writhing, twisted limbs. The more he fought the snake demon the higher the fire flared. He bit hard into his lip; it seemed his tongue had suddenly come to life. He would not let his captors hear his screams. He was alone, no guards, no barred doors. Were the followers of Kali so sure of her power?

Desperately, he tried again to reach his hands to his face. It should be easy enough to poke his fingers into his throat, trigger the gagging

reflex, stop the poison from claiming him. He tried, oh how he tried, again and again. The agony became more than he could bear. His first scream echoed off the stone walls. The candles taunted him with knowledge of the Fire-Serpent that was eating him alive. It was gnawing at his brain now. He screamed as never before. Abruptly, the pain lessened, but still he could hear himself screaming, feel himself struggling. Distantly, he wondered at this. He knew his spirit was leaving his tortured body, drifting with the candle smoke, and he cared not. He was free of the agony, nothing else mattered. He must escape the Serpent.

The body on the stone slab stilled, then slowly began to sit up. The glittering eyes in the empty husk reflected the insane laughter that filled the chamber.

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Indiana Jones wandered in the void. To him it seemed a harmless thick, black fog. So cold, a welcoming chill after .... Fear returned. There was something he must not remember. The darkness became threatening. He knew not where he was, what it was he should be doing. Had he been searching in a deep, sunless cavern for some archaeological find? Was he trapped in a cave-in? Had he tripped and fallen into some bottomless shaft? Then he saw it. Not far ahead, there was a glimmer of light. Relieved, he hurried toward it.

A small pool of yellow light illuminated a huddled something lying on the .... what was it he walked upon ... a floor? No, not an adequate label. He moved closer. There was something familiar about the thing at his feet. With recognition his curiosity turned to utter terror. He screamed and ran back into the darkness.

It was his own body he had seen. He lay wrapped in the obscene coils of a monstrous snake.

\* \* \*

In another time, another place, there was also a body lying lifelessly upon a cold, shining metal, altar-like surface. Others, living beings, gathered about it, their words disturbing the solemn silence.

"It is beyond my knowledge. I am sorry, Your Highness." Two-One-Bee completed yet another thorough series of medical scans. The young woman to whom he spoke moved closer to the subject of this bleak prognosis. She kept her eyes lowered, hiding her sorrow as she carefully, meticulously lifted the insul-sheet and tucked it more snugly about the man who appeared only to be asleep.

"You have done all possible to help him," Leia agreed stiffly.

Chewbacca howled mournfully. Calrissian dared not offer comfort. He stared guiltily at the smooth floor of the intensive care unit. He and the Wookiee had been elated at the ease with which they had made a deal with Jabba the Hutt. Too easy. They should have suspected something, but their anxiety over Solo's condition had overridden all else. The Hutt had known all along. How he must be laughing now! Lando determined he would not laugh for long. The slug knew he could have neither monetary nor vicarious retribution from the carbon-entombed prisoner. Though Solo's body continued to function, all signs of brain activity were gone. They had been cheated into buying an empty husk. It would only serve to remind Calrissian of the cost of his betrayal.

Lando was so heartbroken that he no longer cared if the Wookiee should want to exact vengeance. He did not flinch as the mammoth being let forth a howl of rage and frustration. "Han!" But the Corellian lay as deathly still as ever. The Wookiee's next move cut Calrissian deeper than any physical wound. Silently, gently, Chewbacca lay a massive hand to his friend's brow and began stroking Solo's hair. Leia sobbed and Skywalker drew her to him, comforting her. Calrissian could no longer bear to remain with the evidence of his cowardice. He turned to go.

A scream, blood-curdling and human, spun him about. He stared at Solo. The man had come to life. He was sitting bolt upright and screaming as if all the demons of hell had come for him. Startled, Leia and Luke stood rigid, but Chewbacca forced the man down and Two-Bee injected something, a sedative, Calrissian supposed, as he saw Solo relax.

Han's friends crowded eagerly, hopefully about him. Leia had been the last to speak to him on Bespin. Now, with Two-One-Bee's prompting, she spoke again. "Han?" The Corellian's eyes were no longer empty. They showed surprise, over-shadowed by recent terror, and there was something else, indefinable, different, that made Lando shiver. Solo did not look at Leia. He stared at the ceiling, at the lights overhead. Something about them seemed to unsettle him. He moaned.

Leia swallowed hard, needing to control her unsteady voice. "Han Solo," she commanded sternly, "Look at me, damn you! You're safe! You're breathing! You're alive!" Her control broke, and she finished tearfully, "Come back to us!"

\* \* \*

Suddenly Indiana Jones found himself lying beneath harsh, glaring lights fixed into a smooth white ceiling. There was something odd about those lights. He knew he should be afraid, the after-taste of fear was still bitter in his mouth, yet he felt drowsy. He was content to lie

there and study the lights. A sound disturbed his blissful peace. Annoyed, he turned toward the intruder, gaping as he discovered a beautiful, delicate, yet fiercely proud woman staring at him, her dark eyes shining with unshed tears. Something deep within him responded instinctively to her distress. He tried to move to comfort her, but his arm had become impossibly heavy. He was lying on an upraised flat surface, something far too hard to be a bed. Pain reached for him, flaring in his back and chest, and he closed his eyes against it. The woman began to cry openly. He looked back up at her, realising that there was a great, empty nothingness where his memory of the recent past should be. Fear niggled harder at him, but he did not force his mind to provide answers. He'd had concussions and bad hangovers before. It would all come back to him. The lady captured all of his concern. He needed to comfort her. She reminded him of someone. An image came to him, a young woman from years back, Marion Ravenwood.

Again, he tried to reach up to his companion, to sit up, to move, still restrained by an unnaturally heavy, sluggish body. He gave up fighting the sensation, tested his dry mouth, and finally managed to croak out some verbal reassurance. "Hey, don't cry. You're too ..."

He got no further. The woman gasped and jerked in joyful surprise. She moved closer to him, reaching out to him. He wanted to touch her too, needed human contact badly, but still couldn't move. "Who are you?" Jones continued. All at once, there were a thousand questions. "Where am I? What happened?"

All the joy vanished from the woman's eyes, leaving only anxious confusion. She glanced behind her, then back to him, indicating she didn't understand. Indiana tried again, and again, in Hindu, Italian, Greek, Hebrew, nothing made an impression. The woman reached out and caressed his face very gently, the fingers moving from brow, to cheek, to jaw.

"Han?" she asked softly yet urgently.

That one questioning syllable seemed all the woman was capable of, and that made Jones' fear return, stronger now. He was aware that there was something very wrong about his surroundings. The wrongness had caused him to avoid examining it any further. He knew there were other people about him, none as close as the woman, but all seemed eager to move toward him. He didn't want to look at them, not yet. Fear kept his attention riveted on the woman. He concentrated on communicating. He must have suffered at least partial amnesia. Vaguely, he remembered being hurt, that there had been poison involved. How badly had it affected his mind?"

"Who ... are ... you?" he tried again, slowly and distinctly, speaking English. He muttered a curse, struggling to move his arm, and at last succeeding, he pointed to his chest. "Jones." Then to the woman. "You?"

Suddenly, she understood what he was about. Immediately her distress returned. Somehow, intuitively, Indiana knew such emotional displays were rare for her. "Leia!" she said tearfully. There followed more words he could not understand.

"Slow down," he pleaded.

When she saw he could not understand, she turned desperately to her companions. Nervously, Indiana followed her gaze. What he saw made him shudder. He drew his arms protectively over his head, wanting to block out what could only be an hallucination. The poison was still affecting him; he'd just have to wait it out. The nightmare vision had revealed two other humans, males. No problem. But a... a robot? And that ... that huge, hulking wall of fur and teeth!? God, what a nightmare!

The woman, Leia, touched his hand. Her grip was firm, warm, undeniably real. She said the word "Han" again, more controlled now, comforting him. Jones continued to cower behind his futile shelter. He heard footsteps, the young, fair-haired man coming closer. Gentle but strong hands tried to pull his arms away from his face. The man spoke softly, intently, and the creature rumbled in a tone that was surprisingly soothing. All Indiana could make out was the now familiar word "Han". These were gentle, caring people, even if only figments of his imagination.

Gathering his courage, Indiana allowed his aching arms to come down. He took a deep, steadying breath and opened his eyes. The hallucination hadn't altered, but the young man was smiling at him reassuringly. Giving up to the dream's absurdities, Indiana smiled faintly in return. The youngster's blue eyes sparkled in response, and he introduced himself as 'Luke'. Jones felt relief wash through him, that was a common name in English speaking countries: perhaps now he would be understood. He repeated his questions, but was met by the same frustrating blank expression. Luke said something, probably meaning he didn't understand. Again the word "Han" was added. Indiana was beginning to find it irritating. Then realisation dawned. That was the name they were giving him. Whoever, whatever, these people were, they thought he was someone they knew.

"No!" Indiana said emphatically. He shook his head, then pointed to himself. "Not Han! Jones!" The reaction was an exchange of worried, nervous glances, then nods of acceptance. Good. Progress made at last.

"Where the hell am I?" They simply stood there, staring at him, and suddenly he felt like laughing. He wasn't sure if it was the beginnings of shock or hysteria, and he didn't care. The idea was too funny not to be shared. "Are your friends going to a Halloween party? Great costumes!"

No one found the situation in the least amusing. In fact the woman seemed set to cry again. Her distress was no game. She was genuinely heart-broken. If she had mistaken him for someone she cared about, he could understand how she must feel about his inability to communicate, or even recognise her. "Look," he added gently, "you've got the wrong guy. I'm not Han. Let me go." He tried to sit up, but managed only to push the strange sheet down about his hips and find that he was naked. Damn! He looked about, searching for his clothes, and for an exit away from this madness. The more he saw, the more his stomach churned. Nothing was familiar. He felt like Alice in Wonderland. Well, he was determined to leave this weird rabbit hole, even if he had to do so wearing a sheet! He clutched it to himself, and, gritting his teeth over the pain, pushed himself upright and swung his legs from what he now recognised as a medical examination table.

Dizziness and nausea made a savage lunge at him, making faces and room swirl into a red-tinged whirlpool. He felt himself falling, tried to prepare himself for the impact with the hard floor, but was saved by a pair of incredibly strong, incredibly hairy arms. The creature had caught him, sweeping him up into its arms as if he were a small child. It felt undeniably real. He struggled to break free, grunting at the resulting pain. Dammit! What was wrong with him! He hurt all over; he was cold and stiff and as weak as a newborn! He continued to struggle nonetheless and there was a responding sound of hurt from the giant. Surprised, Indiana looked up into its face, and was immediately struck by the utter despair, the tearing sorrow he found in the intelligent blue eyes watching him. Gentle eyes. Slowly, carefully, the monster lay him back on the table. Stunned, Jones could do no more than stare. Along with weakness and pain, a bone-numbing fatigue was claiming him, quickly making it difficult for him to keep his eyes open. He blinked, trying to focus as the one named Luke approached him again.

"Chewbacca," the youngster said clearly, indicating the creature. "Wookiee." Then pointing to himself, he added. "Luke. Doma. Jones. Doma. Leia, domanna."

Indiana nodded acceptance of his first two words in this strange language. Doma, domanna. Man, woman ... he supposed. But what the hell was a Wookiee? Luke named one or two more objects, all obviously in an attempt to help the patient overcome shock, but Indiana was too tired to

concentrate. The woman seemed to notice this. She touched Luke's arm. He smiled at her and stepped back. Jones watched drowsily as she began speaking to the robot thing, which somehow he realised, ridiculously enough, must be the doctor.

Then a new voice joined the fray. One that was wonderfully British, causing Jones' fatigue to vanish as if it had never been. Grinning with sheer relief, he turned about only to have another shock jolt through him. The speaker was also a robot. A man-shaped, golden robot. Wonderful. It had been standing at the back of the room, now it moved forward, but with it came a rotund, squat companion. The packaging wasn't what he wanted, but the words were music to his ears. "You are in a medical facility. You are quite safe," the golden man told him. "We are your friends."

"You know my language?" Jones stated the obvious.

"Yes, sir," the robot answered. "I am sorry it took so long for me to decipher. But such an ancient, lost language is on record only from far distant predecessors. No one speaks English anymore. I really do not understand why you would want to ..."

Brass Man was interrupted as humans and Fur Face babbled at him. He answered in their language then turned back to Jones. "I told them I can communicate with you. What do you wish me to tell them?"

Suddenly, Indiana was dumbstruck. He had a translator, but he still wasn't sure he believed any of this was real. "I'm hallucinating," he mumbled. The robot repeated this observation to the others. Leia touched him, lightly, tenderly, brushing damp hair away from his face. Her eyes were soft with compassion as she spoke softly to him. He understood no more than 'Han', and she corrected that, hesitantly, reluctantly, to 'Jones', when he shook his head.

The gold man translated. "Mistress Leia is telling you not to worry. We have the very best medical facilities here. Soon we will discover how to correct the damage done by your prolonged period of carbon interment."

"My what!!?" Jones gaped. "Look ... Golden Boy ... I just want out! You got that!"

The robot seemed flustered, then he said, "I am sorry, sir, but that is not possible. You are not well enough to move yet. Two-One-Bee says you are to be taken to a more comfortable room, to a bed where you can rest."

"Forget it!" Jones snapped, interrupting the robot as he translated for the others, "I'm leaving!"

Again, he attempted to sit up, and this time Fur Face moved even faster. Indiana gulped back a cry of fear, flinching as the monster grabbed at him, closing those giant fingers about his shoulders. Incredibly, it was a feather touch, the kind reserved for something very fragile, a touch Indiana would not have believed possible from one so massive. And, as before, a touch that could not have more clearly indicated concern, rather than malice. He lay back, resigned to his fate, too weak to fight in any case. Order was restored as Leia spoke to him once more, and the robot, whom she referred to as Threepio, translated.

"You are not a prisoner. We only want to help you. As soon as you are strong enough, you may leave. However, Mistress Leia says we will not take any further action until we have your permission to proceed."

Indiana blinked in surprise, then looked gratefully back to the woman. She was smiling kindly at him, making his fears seem foolish. He nodded slow agreement, his lips twitching with a sheepish return smile that brought a glow of happiness to Leia's eyes. He kind of liked that, and his smile broadened in response. "So, what next?" he asked, suddenly feeling the fatigue return, worse than ever.

"You need to sleep," Threepio seemed exasperated at having to state the obvious.

"Yeah. Okay. Fine," Indiana mumbled submissively. He closed his eyes wearily, opening them when he heard more people enter the room, some sort of stretcher carried between them. He was relieved to note that they were human. They eased him very gently off the table, and began carrying him from the room. Luke, Leia and the others followed. Oddly enough, he found that reassuring. One thing was for sure, they were right that he was in no condition to go anywhere just yet. Even the small movement from table to stretcher had left him dizzy, exhausted and hurting. He found it annoying that he didn't even know what had caused what was now becoming severe pain.

As they neared the door, curiosity helped push his suffering aside. He lifted his head a little, amazed as he saw a part of the wall vanish, then reappear to slide into place behind them. Apparently it must have been activated by body heat or some such. Jones was impressed with the detailed quality of his 'dream'. 'Make notes,' he told himself, 'you can sell this stuff to Hollywood!' Aloud, he added, "Then they'll lock you up!"



"What did you say, sir?" the robot asked.

"Nothing," Jones mumbled; he was only interested in what lay beyond the door. He was disappointed. It was a corridor, not terribly dissimilar to any other hospital corridor ... except for signs in a language he didn't recognise. His new room was also nothing too much out of the ordinary, except for the one science-fiction-like medical gadget which he was informed was a monitor. He watched, with less and less interest, as various sensors were attached to his chest and head. Pain and exhaustion were rapidly taking the place of curiosity. Soon, he was hurting so much that he was unable to hide it.

Again, it was the woman who noticed; she seemed to be more alert to minute variations of expression, and she hadn't taken her eyes off him for a moment. Hesitantly, she squeezed his hand, gave him a heart-warming smile, then spoke somewhat sternly to the medical robot. Indiana closed his eyes, praying fervently that when next he opened them, this hallucination would be ended - or at least the part of it that required pain. In response to Leia's orders, the robot finished with its fidgeting over sensors, drew a sheet and blanket warmly about his patient, whom he only now seemed to notice was shivering. Wearily, Jones opened his eyes as Threepio spoke up.

"Mistress Leia has asked Two-One-Bee to administer painkillers. She wishes to know if we have your permission?"

"Hell, yes!" Indiana agreed readily. He turned slightly, to look directly into Leia's gentle, dark eyes. "Th ... thank you," he said with all the sincerity he could summon over another shivering fit. She stroked his cheek once, seeming to understand that one simple word. Then she drew up a chair and sat by his bed. "You're staying?" he asked, pleased but confused.

Threepio relayed the question to her, then repeated her answer in English. Jones watched her face as she spoke, and she seemed embarrassed, unable to hold his gaze. "Princess Leia cannot stay for long," Threepio translated. "She is needed elsewhere, but she will sit with you until you sleep."

Jones ignored the medical robot's fussing at his arm with an injection. He was more interested in this new development. He looked again into those fascinating dark eyes as Leia lifted her head. "Why?" he wanted to know.

As she answered this time, Leia managed to maintain control, looking directly, intently into his eyes, as if sheer force of will would bring

back his memory. Threepio sounded uncomfortable as he translated. "Her Highness asks you to remember that she told you she loves you. It has been six long months since Bespin. She thought your friends would never find you. She has been very worried."

The pain-killing injection sent waves of blessed relief washing through Jones' body, so wondrous in effect that he couldn't feel any annoyance at the drowsiness that came with it. "Yeah, sure," he mumbled sceptically as his eyes slid closed. The only words that stuck were "Princess" and "Your Highness". Royalty, huh? That decided it. This really was just an hallucination. There was some disappointment in that conclusion - she was, after all, very pretty. As consciousness drifted from him, he felt a firm hand descend on his brow. It remained there, forcing Jones to make one last effort to lift his heavily weighted eyelids. It was Luke who was touching him. Deep, dark, comforting sleep claimed him, leaving an imprint of piercing blue eyes that reflected a gentle, knowing smile.

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Leia and Chewbacca watched anxiously as Skywalker attempted to reach Solo's troubled mind. Luke closed his eyes, his hand still resting lightly on the sleeping man's brow. Time passed. Nothing changed. Chewbacca grew restless. Leia could no longer remain inactive. She got up and began to pace the short distance from wall to wall, her gaze shifting from the men to the medical monitor which placidly beeped out signs of dreamless sleep. That was a blessing Leia herself had not known in a long time.

"What could have happened to him, Chewie?" she finally asked. "Why does he think he's someone else? Where did he get the name 'Jones'?" The Wookiee could only shrug and honk sorrowfully. She turned to Threepio. "Did he say anything at all that could give us any answers?"

"Not really, Mistress. I am sorry," the droid replied. "He does not believe he is awake. He does not remember any of us. Or even himself. He thinks he is dreaming."

"Yes, yes," Leia said impatiently. "What about that strange language he's babbling? Where in all the galaxies did he learn that?"

"I would have to do more research, Mistress. The historians would know more about it than I. It is so very old. It is classified as a dead language. Not much is known of its origins."

Leia stopped her pacing. "Then how could Han speak it fluently?" Threepio babbled on again. She cut him off. "Two-Bee is certain there

has been no organic brain damage," she said to Chewbacca. "He's calling in a psych- med expert from the Rehab Centre at Rialda."

There was a sudden chattering from the medical monitor. It showed a surge of brain activity. Solo was dreaming, and whatever visions played in his mind, they were not pleasant. He tossed and turned, moaning and mumbling. "What's he saying?" Leia asked Threepio.

The droid listened then announced, "Something about a serpent, a monster serpent ..." C3PO made a sound of revulsion. "He says it's eating him alive. Then he repeats names, 'Shorty' and 'Willie'. It seems they are in danger, and then another name, 'Kali'."

Leia grabbed a stylus and made notes. Solo's nightmare worsened. The monitor registered signs of pain and distress. Two-Bee hurried in, but at that moment, Luke said something to the patient, and he quietened, sleeping restfully once more. Skywalker withdrew his hand, breaking contact with Solo's mind. He took a few deep breaths then opened his eyes.

"Luke?" Leia asked immediately. "What happened?" Skywalker seemed a little dazed. She poured a glass of water and waited impatiently while he sipped at it. His blue eyes were solemn as he looked up at her. "Tell me!" she demanded.

"It's not amnesia," Luke said quietly. "He's telling the truth. This man is not Han Solo."

"What!!?" Leia looked at her brother as if whatever Solo had was contagious. Chewbacca reacted in a similar fashion. The Wookiee pointed out that it was Solo who had been frozen and Solo they had thawed. The markings on the carbon block could not be tampered with, nor could that terrible agonised expression be copied. He began enumerating the physical evidences that this man was indeed his partner, telling of scars he recognised.

Luke waved a hand. "Hold on, Chewie," he interrupted. "Let me explain." He saw disbelief and fear in his friends' eyes and did not want to tell them.

"Well?" Leia prompted.

Luke held her gaze, wanting to convince her. "It's Han's body, but another man's spirit has entered it." Leia looked set to protest. "Please, believe me. I know what I'm saying. Wherever this man, Jones, came from, whatever

happened to him ... drove him from his body before death. He suffered great pain and fear. I'd say the same thing happened to Han."

Chewbacca growled a comment, something about the spiritual beliefs of his people, that such things were not unknown among them. Leia interrupted. "You're telling us that Han's spirit's gone?" Luke nodded. "Where?"

"Yoda spoke of a place, 'The Void', he called it, but it has many different names. Lost souls go there. Sometimes they reappear in our lives as spectres, voices, or can be channelled through one of the living. That can be dangerous as the new spirit, if evil or powerful enough, may claim the new body. Jedi Masters warned of these dangers when they taught students how to call upon The Lost Ones. The goal was to guide them home."

"Home?"

"Across the boundaries of death."

"Death!" Leia whispered. "Then Han is dead?"

Luke took her hand reassuringly. "No, absolutely not. That's what puzzles me. This man, Jones, is our only way of contacting Han, bringing him back. Wherever Jones came from, that's where Han is now. I tried to push through his fear, but all I get is images - darkness, a gigantic snake, and fire."

Leia stared at the peacefully sleeping man. 'Jones' he called himself. She had known, she had sensed it, seen it in his eyes. She knew Luke was right. It was not Han Solo's soul she could see through those twin mirrors. "But," she said desperately, "He has to remember. He has to go back."

"I know," Luke agreed wearily. "Yoda also said there is a limit to the length of time a spirit can exist in The Void."

"What do you mean?" Chewbacca insisted.

Luke turned to him. "Han's spirit will gradually grow weaker, fade, until there is nothing left. He could never move on to another life or return to this one." The Wookiee howled and moved to the bed to take up his friend's hand, as if somehow he could call him back.

"Is there nothing you can do, Master Luke?" Threepio asked.

"I'm not sure," Luke sighed. "The key is in Jones' memory. He is so afraid. We'll have to give him some time."

"How long?" Leia asked.

"Days, weeks ..." Luke shrugged.

"What about Han?" the Wookiee rumbled.

Luke considered. "He has an unusually strong will, a bright soul. Even Yoda spoke of it. He said that some Shadows, as he called them, could last for years."

Leia slumped dejectedly back into her seat. "By then he really will have forgotten us." Luke nodded sorrowful agreement. "Did you find out anything else about this Jones?"

"Yes. First, he is not an evil man; in fact, there is much about his soul that is similar to Han's. Perhaps that's why he was drawn here. Second, he has no understanding of anything above a very primitive level of technology. His world is very isolated. He believes it is the only one, that humans, his race, are all there is." Chewbacca's head jerked up in astonishment. He barked a question. Luke smiled sadly. "Whenever he looks at you he tells himself he is hallucinating. It protects his sanity."

There was a long silence as Skywalker considered the task ahead of him. "Listen," he said at last. "Jones has strong ties with his world. Slowly, carefully, we have to convince him of the truth. But we can't afford major shocks. We'll have to wait until he's fit enough, both physically and mentally. We have to get him up and moving. But not here. The knowledge that he is in space, aboard a starship ... well, it wouldn't help. He'd believe he was insane. It must be somewhere quiet, similar to his world. He must know he's awake, that this is real. He must want to go back." Luke sighed heavily. "I just hope that there's someone back there that he cares for enough to confront his fear."

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Gradually, Indiana Jones surfaced from the depths of sleep. There had been times when he had been aware of other people about him, of movement and sounds. Periods of pain had come and gone, always preceded by nightmares. Now everything was still, quiet and restful. He felt comfortable and relaxed. His body seemed to be healed, but what about his mind? Slowly he rolled over in bed, not sure he wanted to open his eyes. The silence continued; maybe he was safe at last. He opened one eye, saw nothing more threatening than a pillow and blank wall. He let out a

relieved breath, prepared to sit up, but all his newfound confidence vanished as someone spoke from behind him.

"Awake at last?" a male voice said cheerfully. "I was beginning to think you were going to sleep all day."

Quickly, Indiana turned to him. Nervously, he glanced about his room, discovering they were alone. No robots, no fur-covered monsters. Not too bad. "Where am I?"

"In a hospital," Luke said.

"No kidding," Indiana snapped. "So am I sick or nuts? I remember some pretty weird dreams."

Luke's smile faded. "You had some bad moments," he agreed. "But you're not 'nuts'. You're just suffering from partial amnesia. We found you lying injured in the jungle. You weren't carrying any identification."

"Yeah, well I do remember where I came from and who I am. So I'm going home; the missing pieces can wait. Any objections?"

Luke shrugged. "You're not a prisoner; we can't force you to stay, but I think you'll find you're weaker than you realise."

"I'll decide that," Indiana said firmly. He pushed back the bedclothes, finding he was dressed only in pyjama pants. "Where are my clothes?"

"In there," Luke said, indicating a closet door. He watched as Jones stood somewhat unsteadily.

Indiana pushed back the closet door. "These aren't my clothes." He looked sharply back at Luke. "What're you trying to pull?"

"Nothing." Luke's blue eyes were all innocence. "You were wearing only trousers when we found you, and they were in shreds. These are all we have for you."

Suddenly Indiana remembered the name they had first given him. "Han's clothes, right?" he asked sourly. The young man nodded. "Is he missing, too?"

"Yes," Luke replied smoothly. "He looks remarkably like you - thus the mistaken identity. Sorry."

Indiana grunted. "I seem to recall no one spoke English here."

"You were suffering severe concussion. You must have been having hearing problems."

Jones remained sceptical, but then, his nightmares had been outrageous. He sighed, giving up on the questions as he reached for the uniform trousers in the closet. "Well, unless nudity is the in-thing here..." He began dressing.

Luke laughed. "You'd give the whole base something to talk about for weeks if you went out there naked!"

Jones felt a smile tugging at his lips. Somehow he couldn't help but like his companion. "'Base'?" he probed. "And these look like military pants. What gives? You still haven't told me where I am." There was no answer. He looked up to a face devoid of amusement. "Is this place top secret or something?"

"Er ... yes," Luke said quickly. "It's a top secret military base. I'm Commander Luke Skywalker."

"Skywalker!" Jones snorted. "That's an unusual name." The young man simply shrugged and smiled sheepishly. Jones extended his hand, "Dr Indiana Jones." Skywalker returned the handshake. "Top secret, huh? Is that all you're gonna tell me?"

"That's all I can tell you," Luke said apologetically. "Orders, you know."

"Figures," Jones complained as he pulled on a shirt. "Have you people been screwin' around with my mind? I suppose you don't want me to report...."

"No, no!!" Luke denied adamantly. "I swear to you. We just found you out in the jungle. You'd been hurt. We brought you here. That's all. As soon as you're strong enough, we'll give you a guide back through the jungle to wherever it is you want to go."

"Fair enough," Jones said. Suddenly he had other problems. He couldn't work out how to fasten the catches on the shirt, and he could find no zipper in the pants.

Luke struggled to hide his amusement at the man's discomfort. "It just overlaps," he explained.

"Oh yeah?" Jones mumbled, as he followed the instructions. "A fancy military invention?"

"No," Luke laughed. "Just the way we wear our clothes here. They have static catches. See?"

Jones was surprised to find that indeed the material remained firmly in place without any stays. "You got something against buttons?" he commented as he pulled on a black vest which seemed designed not to close at all. Skywalker simply grinned at him, so he sat on the bed and picked up one of the very shiny black boots. "These look kinda flashy. Are you sure they're the right size?"

Luke shrugged. "Try them."

Jones did so. "Perfect!" he announced, amazed at how comfortable a fit it was. He would have sworn that he'd already worn them many times, so closely did they follow the contours of his feet. He stood up and tried a few paces. "This 'Han' you talk about must have been just my size. Did he work here? Have you known him a long time?"

"Yes," Luke answered. "Several years. In fact he saved my life more than once."

Jones halted his pacing, turned and looked sympathetically into now darkly solemn blue eyes. "You must really miss him, huh?"

"We all do," Luke nodded, unable to hold the sincere gaze. It was too much like the last emotion he had seen from Han, when they had said their farewells in the Hoth hangar. During the past two days he had learned much more about Jones, linking up with his mind as he slept. The images he had seen revealed that Jones was physically enough like Han to be his brother. Maybe even his twin. Along with the Mindlinks, Luke had spent hours in linguistic-trance, absorbing the once-dead language, English. Leia had done the same, as had the doctor supervising Jones' case and a specially chosen nurse. There would be no more robots to unhinge Jones' view of the world. Now, Luke decided it was time for Jones' first step toward realisation that his spirit had transmigrated. He pulled a photograph from his jacket pocket and handed it to Jones. "This is Captain Solo. You can see why we mistook you for him."

Indiana's jaw dropped in astonishment as he studied the image. Dressed in the same outfit he was now wearing, Solo could almost be his twin! There was, however, more of a daredevil in the impish, lop-sided grin adorning the man's face that did not match Jones' more schooled,



single-minded adventurousness. "He looks like the type who could get himself into a lot of trouble!" Indiana commented.

Luke laughed. "You don't know the half of it! He isn't happy unless he's in the middle of some mess or other!"

Indiana couldn't seem to take his eyes from the photograph. It was almost as if he knew the man; somehow they were kindred spirits. "The woman ... Leia ... is in love with this guy?"

"Yes," Luke said quietly. "Very much."

"It must have been hard for her then, when you brought me in, I mean." Skywalker nodded. "What sort of chance is there for him?"

"Well," Luke hesitated. "We've been searching for him for weeks, but we're sure we're closer now, and he's survived rough times before."

"He's been missing for weeks in the jungle!?" Jones was surprised they held so much hope. "You still have teams out looking for him?"

"Yes." Luke looked directly at Jones. "Perhaps you can help us find him."

Indiana shrugged. "I don't know." He handed back the photograph. "I mean, I can't even find my way beyond the corridor!"

"That's why I'm here," Luke replied with a smile. "I've been assigned to show you around."

"Good. I could use a guide." Jones frowned. "I really don't remember much. I think I was on my way to Delhi. I assume I'm still in India?" It was meant as a joke; Indiana couldn't see how he could possibly be anywhere else, but Skywalker avoided his gaze as he answered with a quick nod. "Strange place for a secret military base. I take it you're American?"

"I'm not at liberty to discuss that," Luke responded, trying to remember all he had learned in Link. "We're working in conjunction with a British team."

"Fair enough," Jones sighed. "Look, you people have taken good care of me, and I don't think I've even thanked you." He grinned. "So ... thanks! I suppose I owe you my life, so if ever I get all the pieces together, I'd be glad to help you find your friend. I can't recall the details of how I was hurt, but I do

know it was a near thing. If Solo's out there, then he's going to need all the help he can get."

"Right," Luke agreed solemnly. "You were in bad shape," he flashed a smile, "but you look pretty good now! Ready for the grand tour?"

"Damn right! But don't we need clearance from a doctor, or someone?"

"No. It's okay. I already checked. He says you're fit enough for light exercise only, so we won't go far. You must be hungry; how about first stop the Rec Room for breakfast, then maybe up to the watch tower? You can see the jungle from there. We have to keep clearing it, it grows so fast."

"Jungle's like that."

"Your work often takes you to jungle areas?" Luke probed.

Jones seemed to struggle to recall, then he nodded decisively. "Yes, archaeology can take you to some pretty wild places."

"I can imagine," Luke smiled secretively. Jones didn't know it, but he'd been moved from the hospital ship which orbited the jungle planet, Rialda. It was a densely green, humid world. Jones should feel right at home. This was an outpost some distance from the main base. There would be no shuttles or other advanced machinery to disturb him here. It was a refuge, a rehabilitation centre for the wounded, and also for those needing prolonged counselling after having endured torture as Imperial prisoners. Luke waved toward the door. "Let's go!"

Jones took a step forward, then stopped. He ran a hand through his hair. "Ahh, maybe I should wash up first?" He rubbed at his jaw, checking for stubble and surprised to find none. "I figured I would have had quite a beard by now."

"Oh, ummm," Luke stumbled. The truth was that spacers used a depilatory which retarded hair growth for months at a time. "The nurse gave you a shave. No extra charge."

"Yeah, well," Jones muttered. "She didn't bring me a bed pan!"

Luke reddened. He should have thought of that. "Sorry. It's in here." He walked to the wall, stabbed at a button and a door slid back to reveal a fully equipped sano.

Jones jumped. "I'm never gonna get used to these fancy doors!"

Nervously, Luke watched as Jones entered the small room and the door slid closed behind him. He'd hoped the man would avoid mirrors for a while yet. Solo and Jones were very similar physically, but there were subtle differences. How much would Jones notice? The minutes dragged on, but finally Jones emerged, water dripping from his face and a towel in one hand.

"Took me a while to figure out the lock," he announced sheepishly. "Pretty good plumbing you got here." He re-entered the cubicle to return the towel, caught sight of his reflection in the mirror, and stood staring fixedly at it.

Luke's mouth went dry. He swallowed hard, then urged, "Let's get a move on. Breakfast will be over before we get there."

"Yeah, sure." Jones responded distractedly. He took a pace closer to the mirror, squinting at it, then rubbing it with the towel. Something looked wrong with his eyes, and the lines of his face looked all wrong; his hair was parted on the wrong side too. Well, the nurse was probably responsible for that. He grabbed a comb and rearranged it, discovering more minute differences the longer he examined himself. He sure had lost a lot of weight, and there were bruises under his eyes. All to be expected, he supposed. Nonetheless, the image unsettled him, sending shivers down his spine. He heard Skywalker clear his throat impatiently.

Shaking his head, Indiana dismissed the doubts and turned away from the mirror. He shrugged apologetically at his companion. "Musta had it rougher than I thought. Hardly recognise myself!"

Luke chuckled nervously. "They should warn patients about that first look in the mirror. You've just lost some weight. Food awaits!"

"Right!" Indiana agreed. Ravenous hunger easily erased the last of his fears. "I'm right behind ya. Nothing wrong with the clothes anyway! This Solo guy is one helluva flashy dresser!"

Again, Luke laughed. "Han liked to impress the ladies!"

"Seems like he impressed Leia a whole lot," Jones commented as he fell into stride beside his guide, who led the way back down the corridor. It didn't look like the one Jones remembered, but then his memory wasn't too reliable at present. He looked across at Skywalker as the silence lengthened. The mention of that name seemed to have erased the merriment from the blue eyes. "You two were together when I came round that first time. You seem close. Is she a good friend?"

"My sister," Luke explained in a near whisper.

"Oh." Jones' eyebrows lowered as he considered this new development. "In my dream she was a Princess!" he added with a laugh.

"Really? Well, we call her that sometimes."

"Well," Jones continued, "I'm just glad she's real! Where is she now?"

"On duty in the Administration Building. She'll want to see you when her shift is over."

"Good," Jones replied briefly. They had reached the Rec Room, and the smell of hot food had his mouth watering. He felt like he hadn't eaten in months! "I'm starved! What's on the menu?"

"Ummm ..." Luke watched as Jones reacted with puzzlement to signs in a language he could not hope to decipher. "It's all in code. In fact only Leia, the medical staff and I have been given permission to speak English, for your benefit. We've developed our own secret language. It's part of our training program." Jones looked set to ask questions. Luke ushered him toward the food. "But, breakfast is just the usual ... eggs, meat, bread, cereal ... cooking methods and spices will be different to what you're used to, though." He rambled on, trying to prevent Jones having the chance to come up with any unanswerable questions. Fortunately, the man seemed so hungry that he was ready to forgive them their eccentricities. That was understandable - Solo's stomach hadn't received a meal in six long months.

Indiana did enjoy his breakfast, finding the new tastes delicious, but the surroundings made him uncomfortable. Even the seats were made out of some material he didn't recognise. Whatever research they were doing here seemed to spill over into their furnishings. The people about them were friendly enough, but he couldn't understand a word they said. He was glad when they left the Rec Room behind and took an elevator up to the watch tower. Here he felt less restricted even though they were closed in by glass walls. Far below them a dense green carpet stretched off in every direction.

"You feel okay?" Luke asked as the silence lengthened.

"Sure, I'm find," Jones looked back at his companion. "Just disappointed. It's gonna be a long walk outa here. I can't see any roads. How did you get all your equipment in here?"

That was one question Luke had anticipated. "Oh," he responded smoothly. "By river. You can't see it from here. After we established ourselves, we destroyed the major roads. Have to keep the place a secret, y'know!"

"Oh, great!" Jones muttered sourly. "How far is it to the river?"

"Umm, it's a good two days on foot. We go out on patrols fairly regularly. I enjoy it. I feel confined in here. I come from a desert ... environment. Lots of space." Luke continued with his ploy of doing most of the talking, babbling on about his home, but Jones interrupted.

"Sounds like the Middle East, or North Africa, but you don't look arabian!"

"Ah ... no," Luke moved to the eastern side of the tower where an elevator waited. "I can't tell you about my background. It's classified."

"Okay," Jones surrendered with a heavy sigh. He entered the elevator. "The sky looks strange today, don't you think? Sorta red."

"It's like that here. Most pl ... places it's much bluer. Must be the reflection of light from the jungle or something."

"Or something," Jones repeated with some annoyance. "Like maybe what you people are pumping into the air around here. I've been in jungles before, remember? Never noticed the sky being so red tinged." The elevator stopped, and the door slid open to reveal an outdoor courtyard. Jones took one whiff of the air and added, "Strange smell, too." Skywalker ignored the comment, waving him toward a bench in the shade of a huge, flowering tree. Flowers like he'd never seen before. "Look," he decided impulsively, "can't we go out into the jungle a little way? Maybe it'll jog my memory."

Luke agreed silently that this was probably a good idea. He had been studying his companion closely, watching his reaction to minor shocks. The man seemed very stable, strong-willed, and intelligent. Perhaps they would be able to move faster with him than they had expected. "Well," he said slowly, "if you're sure you feel strong enough. You're already half an hour past the doctor's limit."

"Hey!" Indiana protested, "it's still morning! Time sure seems to crawl around here. I'm fine. C'mon. Let's go."

Skywalker nodded agreement and led the way toward a barred gate. Jones was surprised to see there were no guards, but he made no comment.

They continued on to a semi-overgrown path that disappeared into the thick foliage. Indiana's scientist's curiosity was fully aroused. Everything seemed so exotic, so new, he couldn't identify either flora or the brightly plumed, raucous birds and buzzing insects. He stopped often, both because there was so much that needed closer examination, and because he was feeling shaky and weak.

"I'm sure I've never seen trees exactly like this before," Jones commented as he examined a leathery, five-pronged leaf. "And these insects are real weird. See? They only have four legs."

Luke was beginning to wonder if he'd done the right thing, disturbing Jones' new-found sense of security so soon. "We've come far enough," he said. "You look tired."

"Naah" Jones denied. He was tired, but no way was he going back to his boring hospital room. "I told ya, I'm fine. Let's see what's through here, off the track."

Before Luke could stop him, Jones pushed aside some vines and bushes and disappeared.

Luke hurried to the spot where the man had vanished. He moved even faster when he heard a startled cry. "What is it?" he called anxiously. "Where are you?" Jones called to him, and Luke found him staring at something that had flown up out of the undergrowth. "Oh ... mynocks."

"Mynocks?" Jones turned to him. His face seemed very pale. "I've never heard of that species of bats." He frowned. "They sure are big. There were big bats like that back at ..."

"Go on," Luke prompted.

"Where I was hurt," Jones said shortly. "Look, you were right. I do feel kinda shaky. Maybe we should head back. I'll rest up tonight and leave tomorrow."

"Right," Luke agreed. He knew full well that the incident had freed some small part of Jones' memory and the man was fighting hard to shut it out again. It was enough for the first day. He'd find more excuses as needed to delay Jones' departure.

\* \* \*

Indiana would never have believed that he would welcome the confines of his hospital room. But the bats had scared him badly. His head ached with the pressure of crazy bits and pieces of thoughts that had been lost

and now wanted to return. There was some part of him that was not ready to face the truth. Because of this, he was pleased when the nurse told him he had a visitor if he felt well enough.

"Yeah, I'm okay," he answered. "Who is it?"

"Me," the woman replied as she entered. "Do you remember?"

He stood and moved a chair for Leia so that she could sit by him. She smiled at him. "Sure, I remember you, Leia," he said. "I never forget a pretty face."

The smile faded. "That sounds like something Han would say."

"Hey," Jones apologised. "I'm sorry. This must be real hard for you, huh?"

"Yes, yes it is," Leia said quietly. She drove the thought from her mind and tried a hesitant smile. If she concentrated on his face, it wasn't so bad. There was a whole set of expressions that did not belong to Han. "Luke says you went for a walk into the jungle?"

"Yeah," Indiana said. "Kinda weird out there." He laughed. "Everything seems different to me since I woke up. I guess I'll be okay once I get back to Connecticut. You know, you remind me of someone I know back there. Well, that is, I'm not sure if she's still living in America; she could be anywhere if she's following Abner around!"

"Abner?" Leia queried.

"Her father. He's an archaeologist, too. He taught me most of what I know. You remind me of Marion ... dark hair, dark eyes, independent spirit!" He chuckled and was pleased when Leia also laughed. "Did you and Han have many fights?" he asked impulsively, then seeing sorrowful memory again cloud her eyes, he apologised.

"No, it's all right," Leia said. "If you asked anyone else around here, they'd be very amused. Han and I did little else but argue ... I guess because we didn't want to admit ..." She shrugged.

"I know what you mean," Indiana said thoughtfully.

"Do you love Marion?" Leia asked.

"I, I'm not sure. I haven't seen her in a long time." Jones took a huge lungful of air, then yawned.

"You should rest," Leia said. "It's been a long day for you, and you're far from fully recovered." She had intended to say more but now wondered if it should wait till morning. She stood up to go, but Jones caught her hand, then let it drop quickly.

"Please, stay and talk a while," he said. "I'm in no hurry to go to sleep."

"Nightmares?" Leia enquired. Jones shrugged. "The doctor can give you something to help you sleep."

"No thanks," Jones was adamant. "I've done enough sleeping! Besides, there's some things I need to think about."

Leia sat down. "Tell me."

"Well, for one, why should bats scare me all of a sudden? It's snakes I've always hated. Two, you remind me of Marion, but I keep getting an image of a blond woman. Dressed real fancy in a red evening gown. Balloons, ice-cubes, and Chinamen." He snorted disgustedly. "What a mess!"

"Maybe I can help." Leia decided it was now or never. "You mentioned some names when you were suffering those nightmares." Indiana looked at her intently, a little afraid, but obviously wanting badly to remember. "Willie and Shorty," she said.

"Shorty!" Jones exclaimed. He sat up and pounded a fist into the bed. "How could I have forgotten him! He's like a son to me! I, I think he was with me when all this happened. Your people didn't find any trace of him?"

"No," Leia replied. "Just you. I'm sorry."

Jones nodded distractedly. He was fighting hard now to remember. He had someone to go back to. "What about the other name? Willie?" Leia asked.

Jones shrugged. "I'm not sure. Maybe it goes with the blonde woman ... but Willie is not a woman's name ... wait a second ... yeah, she's the one who was scared of the bats. Dammit, if only I could remember more!" He rubbed at his aching head.

Leia stood, and though it hurt her to do so, she reached out and touched him gently. "You really do look exhausted. You should sleep. Face this with a fresh mind in the morning."



He sighed. "I guess you're right. Good night, Leia. Thanks for stopping by. I hope you find Han soon."

"Thank you," she said. "I hope you find your friends, too." With a final smile, Leia left to meet Luke and Chewbacca in the Rec Room and report the results of her conversation.

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Luke, Leia, and Chewbacca had finished a late evening meal and were discussing what they could piece together of Jones' memories when Jones' nurse came rushing in.

"Master Luke, Mistress Leia, Chewbacca," she announced urgently. "You must come to Jones' room immediately. Doctor Hirrins says you are needed urgently. Jones is caught up in a nightmare, screaming and yelling, and we can't seem to wake him."

They got quickly to their feet, but Chewbacca went only a few paces before stopping. "I will wait here. He fears me."

Leia could not bear the sorrow she heard in that rumbling statement. She reached out to him. "Come, just to the door, Chewie. Find out what's happening." The Wookiee nodded.

When Leia and Luke entered the room, they were surprised to see Jones awake and sitting up in bed. He looked pale and distressed, but otherwise all right. He smiled sheepishly at them. "Sorry if I woke everyone up with all my yelling."

"It's all right," Leia said. "They're used to that around here. More nightmares?" Jones nodded.

"It is more than that," Dr Hirrens responded. "I sent for you because I wanted you to see this." He was standing on the far side of Jones' bed, examining the man's back.

"That's what woke me," Jones explained. "My back hurt."

Leia and Luke were appalled to find Jones' back criss-crossed by a series of upraised, angry red welts. "What is it?" Leia asked.

"I am not certain." Hirrens seemed decidedly unsettled. "According to the medical scanners, it's not there. See, it reports no damage. I have checked the machine several times."

"It looks like something that would aggravate scars like those Han received when he was whipped," Leia commented.

"Psychic scarring," Luke said quietly. Everyone turned and looked at him for further explanation. "An injury recalled by your subconscious mind because you've been denying it consciously." He said this directly to Jones.

"I remember!" Indiana declared. "The bastards chained me; then they whipped me. A real big guy did it. He was as big as ... that furry thing in my dream. Goddamn them! They whipped me with my own whip! I remember burning, too. But why would my back hurt now?"

"Whipping? Burning?!" Leia grimaced. "What kind of people were you dealing with? Why did they want to hurt you?"

Indiana's brow furrowed as he concentrated. They waited anxiously, but he simply said, "I don't remember."

"Please try," Leia pleaded. "For Shorty."

"I am trying!" Jones said sharply, annoyed at his failure.

"That's the problem," Hirrens advised. "You're trying too hard. Maybe I should give you a sedative, let you get some sleep."

"Does your back still hurt?" Luke asked.

Jones was distracted; he shook his head.

"Good. The marks are fading now," Hirrens observed.

"I want to try something that I think might help. All right, Indiana? Dr. Hirrens?" Luke waited for their consent, then told Jones. "Lie back, close your eyes, and try to relax. I'm going to ask you some questions, see if I can guide you to remembering more. Okay?" Jones nodded, then slowly, gingerly lay back down. "Clear your mind of all images," Luke instructed. He waited until Jones seemed to be drifting to sleep, then asked suddenly, "What did this place look like? What were you chained to?"

Indiana grunted disgustedly. "It was a real ugly hunk of rock," he answered drowsily, almost as if he were talking in his sleep. "Carved sort of like ..."

"Like what?"

"Thugees!" Jones exclaimed loudly. He opened his eyes. "It was a Thugee Temple!" he said excitedly. "They were worshipping Kali. How on earth did I get mixed up with that?" He paused, and Luke left him to his thoughts. "Unless ... the Shankara stones. Maybe I was after them."

He said no more, so Luke prompted, "Kali is one of the names you mentioned in your dreams. There were two more: Willie and Shorty. Can you ..."

"Shorty!" Jones interrupted. He sat up suddenly. "The mongrels beat him, too! He's only a boy! I've got to get back there right now!"

"Back where?" Luke asked calmly.

"Pankot Palace," Jones answered immediately.

"We don't know of it." Luke replied.

Jones looked surprised. "But you must. It's a big place."

"Can you remember more? What happened after they whipped you? How did you escape?"

"Hell, I can remember it all." Jones declared, then added. "I think." There was another silence, then he said. "They poisoned me. The Blood of Kali. The kid said it would put me into some kind of trance. That I'd lose my will. 'The Black Sleep of the Kali' he called it." Indiana snorted at his own naiveté. "I didn't believe him! But when they led me away to ..." Fear froze him mid-sentence.

"Indiana," Luke said firmly. "Where did they take you? You must remember! Remember!" This last was given as a Force command.

"The serpent," Jones whispered. He began shivering. "It was ... eating me, trying to get at my brain. Then, when I ... I passed out ... I saw ... I thought it was me, but it wasn't. He was dressed in the clothes you gave me today."

"Han!" Leia exclaimed.

"Yeah. It must have been him," Indiana continued. "The snake was all coiled around him." He looked shamefully across to the woman. "I'm sorry, Leia. I'm so scared of snakes. I ran. The next I remember I woke up here."

Luke touched Indiana's arm, and as the man turned back to him he asked, "Indiana, you weren't unconscious, were you?"

"No," Jones admitted. "It was like ... all those stories you hear about astral travel, transmigration, and all that mumbo-jumbo." Luke smiled at the familiar scepticism. "But I have experienced something like it before. With the Shaman of the Hopi tribe." He paused, then looked squarely into Skywalker's clear blue eyes. "I'm considered an expert on the occult. I think I have this figured out now. This is Solo's body, isn't it?"

"Yes," Luke admitted. "You are no longer in your world, but I think I can guide you back there. I'm not a Shaman, but I do have some skills. This means you will have to confront the snake again."

Indiana grimaced, but bravely, he nodded. "I know, but I have to get back. I got Willie and Shorty into this mess, I have to get them out. I suppose my body must be ..."

Luke finished for him. "It has been claimed by the spirit of Kali. Only when you drive the snake away, can you return to it."

Jones smiled shakily. "I'm so damn scared of snakes, you know."

Luke grasped his arm reassuringly. "You won't be alone," he said. "I'm coming with you."

"But the snake!" Jones protested.

"We need fire to lure the snake away."

"Fire?!" Jones looked doubtful. "How can we take fire into ... a ... non-physical realm?"

"We can take a non-physical fire," Luke smiled. "A light saber."

"A what?" Jones watched as Luke unclipped a tube from his belt. He pressed a stud, and a dazzling beam of light shot forth, humming loudly with power.

"That should do it, all right!" Jones nodded, biting back his shock. "All that stuff I thought was an hallucination was real?" He gave his companions an intent look, as if trying to imprint them in his memory. Then he added softly. "If this works, I'm going to miss you people."

"We'll miss you, too." Leia kissed him softly. "For luck," she said. "Chewie," she called. "You can come in now." Nervously, the Wookiee crept into the room.

Indiana swallowed hard, then asked, "You're Han's friend?" The Wookiee nodded. "Well, I'm going to bring him back to you, I promise. Or should I say, we will," he smiled at Luke. "How do we get started?"

"I'm going to link up with your mind," Luke explained. "All you have to do is not resist me. Lie back. Tell me when you're ready, and don't be afraid. The Force will be with us."

"The Force, huh? I don't think our snake friend will like that." Jones grinned. "Let's get him good! I hope I remember all of you. Maybe I'll even write about you in my memoirs ... after it's too late for them to lock me up. But they should know there're more things between heaven and earth ..." He nodded, and Luke laid his hand to the man's brow.

Once again, the void, a tomb of dark isolation, claimed him. He was alone and afraid, chilled to the bone. Ahead, the light beckoned, like a doorway to another room. He knew the snake lay there. So did the man he had come to rescue, Solo. Indiana's heart pounded beneath his ribs; his throat dried up and fear threatened to choke him.

"Easy," a steady, gentle voice said behind him. "You are not alone. I'm here."

He turned and saw Skywalker standing nearby. He swallowed hard to find his voice then asked. "You got that light whaddy call it? Your friend and that snake thing are over there."

"Light-saber," Luke corrected with a smile. He drew the tube from his belt and activated it.

The Void seemed to recoil from its pure, clean glow. Whatever Demon it was that lay there, trapping unwary souls, it was instantly enraged at this violation. There was a hissing sound, growing quickly louder, seeming to close down upon them from the direction of the pooled light in the distance.

"It's seen our light," Luke said calmly, sensing Indiana's panic. He clasped the man's arm reassuringly. "It's coming. Good. It's clear of Han. I'll stay here, draw the snake to me. You circle round. Get to Han; get him up and moving. If I lose," Luke shrugged. "Run for it."

"Run where?" Indiana mumbled; then gathering himself, he looked into Skywalker's courageously determined eyes. "This is my fight. Maybe you should go to your friend."

"Don't argue!" Luke commanded. "Do as I say! It's almost here!"  
It was like a nightmare. Indiana did not want to turn and look, but he felt compelled to do so. His head turned slowly, reluctantly, and his heart froze as he saw a writhing, blurred form slithering toward them. At the lead were two hideous, hungry, evil red eyes.

"Get to Han!" Luke shouted. He backed away, holding the saber aloft, luring the demon further into the dark. "Call me when you find him!"

"Will do," Jones responded, admiration overcoming his fear as he watched the young Jedi lead the monster away from him. "Come on," he ordered himself, but found that fear still had him rooted to the spot. "Shorty, Willie, Han," he chanted, reminding himself of those who were relying upon him.

He began to move in some sort of smooth, strange fashion, aware now that he was spirit, not flesh. His form gathered speed and seemed to fly toward the pooled light, light he understood now was produced by Solo's essence. Good, then there was still something to save. They were not too late. There was an abrupt sensation of bumping into something, and he cried out in surprise. He looked down and saw a man lying on his side, curled apparently in sleep, but the image seemed to shift and waver, the light flickering and failing. Solo's life force was weakening.

Remembering the sorrow in Leia's beautiful dark eyes, Indiana bent urgently, wanting to rouse the man, but uncertain how to do so in this insubstantial place. The intent was enough; he felt his wraith-like hands close upon Solo's shoulder, gripping and shaking hard. The light leapt and flared, and Indiana felt a mild draining sensation. Some of his strength was being fed to the weakened Corellian. "C'mon, buddy," he urged. "Time for you to go home. No more foolin' around with snakes. Leia's waiting for you."

Solo's eyes opened, his expression dazed and groggy as he awakened from very deep sleep. But one word had registered. "Leia?" he asked hopefully. His gaze focused on the tall man standing over him, then shifted nervously to check for hidden horrors in the darkness that closed on all sides. He tried to push himself up as he asked again, "Where's Leia?"

Indiana smiled in relief as he assisted Solo to his feet, or whatever the equivalent was here. "She's waiting for you back home," he repeated. "Are you okay? Can you walk?"

Solo trembled with weakness, but gave a sharp nod. "I'll manage." He squinted, peering into the bright glow surrounding Jones. "Hey!" he added in astonishment. "You look a lot like me! Who are you? Where the hell did you come from? What is this place?"

Jones only smiled sympathetically. He knew the feeling. "We haven't got time for all that," he said, closing what he thought was his arm about Solo's ghostly waist, "We gotta get outa here." He peered into the darkness in which he could hear the snake's angry hisses. "Luke!" he called. "I've got him!"

Solo straightened in surprise. "Luke's here? Where?"

"He's busy," Jones said dryly. "C'mon, I gotta get you home ... somehow."

\* \* \*

Away in the dark, Luke heard the call. He allowed his spirit form to come to a halt, confronting the Demon. The snake's scarlet eyes gleamed with triumph as it rushed toward him. Calmly Luke stood his ground, saber raised high. Just as it appeared he would be engulfed by the serpent's gaping maw, he leapt smoothly aside, then darted back in, plunging the glowing blade deep into the creature's undulating flank. The clean, strong heat of the saber drew a steam-like vapour from the wound. The Demon screamed, its agonised, enraged cry echoing shrilly, and the Void itself cringed away from that awful fury. The thing turned about, and Luke struck again, drawing the saber point down across those dull, red, hate-filled eyes. This was more than the Demon could tolerate. It hissed in outrage, then opened its mouth wide, and seemed somehow to swallow itself up. It simply vanished. The Void was empty but for the light in the distance that indicated the presence of two souls. Luke flew toward them.

"You did it!!" Indiana called, his expression altering rapidly from elation to alarm as he realised he was falling backward, drawn away by some irresistible power.

"It's all right, Indiana," Luke called. "You're on your way home." He saw one last flash of a smile as the man heard and understood; then Jones too was gone.

That mission accomplished, Luke turned back to Solo. The man's essence was wavering unsteadily but was still vital. His spirit face registered absolute confusion. Luke smiled and reached out to help him.

"Who was that?" Solo asked groggily. "Where did he go?"

"I'll explain everything when I get you home," Luke replied.

"How?" Solo said. "I can't see any way out here, and I've been lookin' for it for a long time."

"I know you have," Luke said softly. "I want you to concentrate. Think of Leia. She's waiting for you."

"Leia?" Solo said with a drowsy smile. "Sure."

\* \* \*

In the hospital room, Leia and Chewbacca's nerves were taut, stretched beyond the limits of tolerance. Never had they known such helplessness. They simply sat and stared hopefully at Solo/Jones' limp body, Luke still in contact with him, but also apparently deeply unconscious. Finally, desperate to do something, Leia picked up Solo's cold hand, then clasped Luke's warm one as well.

Solo jerked, gave a soft grunt of pain, and clutched weakly at his side. Then, seemingly drained of all strength, the clutching fingers fell back to the sheets. Afraid of what she might find, Leia leaned forward and peered at the spot for which he had reached. There was an ugly black burn mark low on his side, but it disappeared even as she called Chewbacca's attention to it.

"What's happening?" Leia demanded. "Something hurt him!"

She turned about as she heard a sharp groan from Skywalker. Luke dropped his hand from Solo's brow, then opened his eyes and immediately smiled at his sister. "I found him," he announced.

"Han!??!" Leia and Chewbacca asked in unison.

"Right here," a deep voice answered from the bed. They turned about to see Han Solo, pale and shaken looking, but a wonderfully familiar grin pulling at his mouth. "Did you miss me?" he teased.

Leia gave one half-voiced sob, then flung herself at him, wrapping her arms about his neck and kissing him in tearful relief. Chewbacca waited until she drew back, then he grabbed Solo up in a huge hug that had him



begging for mercy. Gently, the Wookiee laid his friend back on the bed, sensing the weakness in the man's feeble attempts at breaking free. It seemed Solo would have some recuperating to do, which meant he would test their patience to the limit!

Chewbacca looked forward to that prospect with an unusual amount of joy. \*How do you feel?\* he asked.

Solo rubbed ruefully at the places where Chewbacca's hug had been overly enthusiastic. "You really did miss me, didn't you!" he complained, puzzlement more than complaint filling his eyes. "I can't remember anything after Bospin. Where am I, and where have I been?"

"It's a long story," Luke said ruefully as he stood and smiled down at his friend.

"I had enough of the amnesia routine with Jones," Leia said wearily. Determinedly, she picked up Solo's hand. He looked expectantly at her. "Han," she said firmly, "You do remember what happened to you on Bospin, don't you?"

She waited anxiously, watching as his brow furrowed in deep concentration. She felt him tense, his fingers closing tight about her hand; then he nodded sharply. When he looked up at her again, his eyes were alight with anger.

"I got a score to settle with Vader!" Solo growled. "And Calrissian!"

Leia smiled relievedly. "There're a few things we have to fill in for you first." Her tone grew sorrowful as she added, "You've been gone from us for six months."

"That long, huh?" Solo shrugged. Then he winked slyly. "I guess I got quite a few kisses owing to me, huh?!" His eyes rounded in surprise as she obliged willingly.

When she drew back, he didn't quite know what to say, so he spoke to Skywalker instead. "You came after me, didn't you, kid?" Luke nodded. "Good," Solo said, puzzlement once again filling his words. "Then maybe you can tell me if you remember seeing a snake? Biggest damn snake I ever saw!" Much to Han's surprise, Luke only laughed. Figuring he had nothing to lose, Solo added, "And there was another man, too. He sorta looked like me!"

That reminded Leia. "What about Indiana?" she asked worriedly.

"He's all right," Luke assured. "He's gone home."

\* \* \*

Back in the Temple of Kali, Short Round was very surprised when -- after jabbing a burning torch into Jones' side-- instead of hurling him into the lava pit, Indiana Jones winked at him and said, "It's all right. It's me. I'm back."

THE END

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