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## **Mission to Garin**

by [Sheila Paulson](#)

There were times when Chewbacca had to admit that he didn't really understand humans very well, but maybe it was simply that this particular human was a little bit more complicated than most. He had been crewing on the *Millennium Falcon* with Han Solo for three months now and, in some ways, it had been a rather perplexing time. He had to admit that he liked Solo; there was something engaging about the Corellian in spite of his reckless moods and his occasional prickliness. But Han was a good captain, always fair to Chewie and a good companion. They had had good times together. Chewie suspected that Solo did not yet completely trust him, but he was prepared to let Han take his time. Wookiees weren't all that quick to trust strangers, either.

This particular morning, Chewie wasn't quite in the mood to be tolerant of anyone, though. Last night--at least he thought it had been last night--he had encountered several distant kinsmen on Morrowla, and family duty required a celebration. That celebration had gotten out of hand and, the next thing Chewie knew, he was waking up in his cabin on the *Falcon* with the worst hangover he'd ever had. He had no memory of returning to the ship, but suspected that Han had come looking for him and hauled him home. In spite of the pounding of his head, he smiled. The penalties for drunkenness on Morrowla were very strict, and he owed Han for keeping him out of jail. But he suspected that Solo would make light of the entire thing.

The *Falcon* was in space. Chewie hauled himself out of his bunk and went forward to investigate.

Han glanced up from the controls when the Wookiee arrived. "Still alive, I see," he commented with a grin.

\*I wouldn't go that far,\* Chewie admitted wryly. \*I think my head is coming off.\*

"Well, I did warn you not to drink that stuff," Han said mildly. "Morrowla ain't got anything decent to drink, anyway." He looked a little smug for abstaining.

Chewie ignored that. \*Where're we heading?\* he asked instead.

"Garin. We're nearly there now. I got us a great offer last night. We're on our way to bein' rich, pal."

Chewie stared at him blankly, all the mists clearing from his head with a vengeance. \*Garin! I'm not going to Garin. You can just let me off someplace before we get there.\*

Han looked surprised and not too pleased. "What're you talking about? I made the deal already. We gotta go through with it."

\*I'm not stopping you,\* Chewie said. \*Just leave me out of it.\*

"I don't see why," said Han. "I know Garin ain't much of a place, but it could be worse. The Empire leaves it alone, mostly. Oughta be safe enough. And besides, this cargo's too good to pass up. What's the deal?"

\*I want to stay away from there,\* Chewie said unhelpfully.

Han gave him a suspicious look. "Somebody after you there? Local law?"

Chewie shook his head. \*Did you ever hear of somebody called Yorvath?\*

"Yorvath?" mused Han. "Lemme see. Ain't he a Drizillian? Seems I heard he was a slaver who got caught by the Empire, only he busted jail and disappeared before they could track him down. Green skinned bastard? That the one?"

\*That's him,\* Chewie admitted. \*I hear he's on Garin, and he has it in for me. I'd just as soon avoid him.\*

"Oughta be easy enough, pal. He doesn't know you're crewing for me, and he ain't got nothing against me, Easiest thing possible. We'll just slip in, pick up the cargo and be on our way. You don't even have to leave the ship. How's that sound?"

\*It will have to do,\* Chewie replied, but he wasn't very happy about it.

"What's Yorvath got on you, anyway?" Han asked casually.

Chewie remained silent. Their friendship hadn't progressed that far yet.

Han took the lack of response in good spirit. "Okay," he said. "No problem. Yorvath won't want to make trouble, not if he's hiding out. Lousy bastard. I hate slavers."

Chewie looked at him in surprise. This was a subject that hadn't come up before, and he was interested in Han's attitude. But he didn't comment on that, either. Instead, he asked, \*What's the cargo that's so important on Garin?\*

"Krellstones, " Han admitted smugly.

Chewie stared at him in disbelief. \*On Garin?\* he asked doubtfully. Krellstones were highly prized because they were said to increase psionic power. They were rarer than benevolent customs officials and worth enough to buy anything a person could ever want, but the Empire had outlawed their use, and penalties for possession were very high. Delivery of such a cargo would fetch in a very healthy fee, but if Han was caught with Krellstones, he would either spend the rest of his life in prison or face execution. \*We're taking a big chance,\* Chewie objected. \*You know what will happen if we're caught.\*

"That's what's so beautiful about the whole deal," Han told him. "Who's gonna expect anything like that to be found on a backwater like Garin? The Empire considers the planet a dead loss, and I gotta agree with them. They ain't gonna even suspect anything."

\*You hope,\* Chewie said. \*People have been betrayed for a lot less than a cargo of Krellstones before.\*

"Yeah, but I can handle myself," Han replied confidently. "I don't plan on getting caught. 'Sides, if we make it on this one, we can get that new navicomp. Think how much better off we're gonna be."

Chewie looked skeptical. Sometimes, Han's reckless self-confidence worried him more than a little, though the Corellian had always managed to land on his feet, so far. The Wookiee had a bad feeling about this run. But he couldn't be certain that it wasn't caused by his desire to avoid Yorvath, so he subsided. \*Whatever you say,\* he answered drily. \*You're the captain.\*

"That's right," Han grinned. "Come on, cheer up. We're gonna do fine."

\* \* \*

Han left Chewie on the ship, and went off to conduct his business alone. Since Chewie had joined him, Han had become accustomed to having the Wookiee with him on all his deals, and it felt strange to leave him behind this time. *So what*, he told himself. He'd worked alone before and probably would again. Just because Chewie was the best co-pilot he'd ever had and they got along so well

didn't mean he had to start getting used to having him around, did it? Of course, he *liked* having him around, but what did that have to do with anything? Han wasn't ready to lower his guard that much yet, not even to Chewie who was proving to be trustworthy and a good friend. Time enough for that later.

His contact was an Aldorrian named Fargas, a golden-skinned humanoid with short stubby horns on either side of his forehead and elaborate tattoos on his cheeks and forehead, as was customary with his people. He was a man of deceptively good humor and Han was wary of him, not trusting such seeming affability. He let Fargas ramble on as he poured him a drink that he had no intention of drinking, and settled down to talk terms.

"I have good reports of you, Captain Solo," Fargas said, after studying Han until he became uncomfortable. Now that Fargas was ready to talk business, he had become serious, "You keep your ship in decent shape, and you deliver your cargos on time and intact. That's what I need. And I hear you now have a Wookiee co-pilot. That ought to discourage the casual thief."

"Nobody gets on my ship unless I want 'em to," Han said smugly, "The Empire doesn't bother with Garin much, so getting outta here shouldn't be a problem, Trouble might come at the destination. Where am I supposed to take the, uh, cargo?"

Fargas looked pleased. "That's right, Captain Solo. A good choice of words. I value discretion highly. The cargo is to go to Tatooine to be delivered to Jabba the Hut. Are you familiar with him?"

Han nodded. "Yeah. I've never worked for him, but I know who he is. Sure. No problem."

"Good. Then, here is the cargo." Fargas produced a parcel almost small enough to fit in a pocket and handed it to Han.

The Corellian checked the contents, then stuff the parcel down the front of his shirt, easing it around to the side where his jacket covered it.

"Well, I'm ready," Han announced. "Now, about my pay..."

"Here you are." Fargas handed over another pouch. "Jabba will give you the rest."

"He better know that. I hear getting money outta Jabba ain't easy."

"No, but you have the cargo--and here is the contract."

Han carefully studied the contract before opening the pouch to count the credits. "Okay. Looks good," he said.

As Han was heading for the door, something else occurred to him. "Hey, Fargas, how'd you know I had a Wookiee working for me?"

"One of my business associates told me this morning."

Inexplicably, Han felt worried. "Uh, who was it?"

"I doubt you know him, Captain Solo. His name is Yorvath."

"Yorvath! Shit!"

Han didn't hang around long enough to say goodbye to Fargas. He just ran. If Yorvath knew that Chewie was on Garin and he had it in for him, then Chewie was in danger. The Wookiee had been right about not wanting to come to Garin, and he should have listened to him. But all he had thought about were the Krellstones and the profit. Now that it might be too late, he realized what a good friend Chewie had become, somehow getting closer to him than anyone else ever had. If something happened to Chewie, it wouldn't be just a case of having to hire a new co-pilot, it would be a personal loss. And, it would hurt a lot more so because it would be his own fault.

Han made it back to the *Falcon* in record time and dashed up the ramp yelling for Chewie. Silence was his only reply. "Chewie!" he bellowed, searching the ship as quickly as possible. But the *Falcon* was empty, Chewie was gone.

Han stowed the Krellstones and credits in a safe hiding place, then carefully checked the setting on his blaster. If Chewie could be saved, he was going to save him, and to hell with the consequences.

Han sealed up his ship and went out to look for his friend.

\* \* \*

Chewie had had no intention of leaving the *Falcon* at all. He understood and reluctantly accepted Han's need to come to Garin, and he planned to remain in the ship until Han came back and the planet could be left behind. It was he who was responsible for the Imperial pursuit of Yorvath, a fact which gave the Wookiee a great deal of satisfaction. But, he knew that Yorvath wouldn't let it go, that he'd try to get revenge. Yorvath would have built himself a new organization by now, and he was dangerous. There was nothing that would get Chewie off the ship. Nothing at all.

Then, the ship's intruder alarm sounded. Chewie wasn't surprised. Somehow, Yorvath must have learned that he was crewing for Han and come to track him down. But, on the other hand, this could be Solo returning from his mission. So, Chewie couldn't ignore the warning. Picking up a laser rifle, he headed for the ramp to investigate.

It wasn't Han, but it wasn't Yorvath, either. Instead, it was a small boy who seemed to be alone and unarmed. Chewie lowered the ramp cautiously.

"Please, are you Chewie?" The boy drew back instinctively at the sight of the huge creature who was pointing a weapon at him. But, he didn't retreat.

Chewie growled an affirmative.

"Then, you got to come right away. He's hurt bad, maybe dying, and he's calling for you. The healer said to get you fast. It might help him, if you were there."

\*Han?\* Chewie demanded urgently. \*Are you talking about Han?\* Somebody must have wanted the Krellstones badly enough to jump Solo to get them. For once, the Corellian's luck hadn't been enough.

The boy must have understood something of the Wookiee language. He nodded. "It's your captain. He's hurt bad. They found him in an alley--he's been robbed and beaten and stabbed. They think it'll help if you're there with him."

That was that, then. Chewie didn't even hesitate. \*Take me to him,\* he urged. \*Hurry.\* Han's life, he realized, was more important than his own safety.

The boy led the way through crowded streets, while Chewie followed anxiously. *Hang on, Han,* he thought urgently. *I'm coming.* The depth of his worry surprised him--he had known that he was growing fond of Solo but, until now, when Han might be dying, he hadn't realized just how fond. If there was any way to save him, he would find it somehow. *Hang on, Han. Don't you dare die before I get there.*

And then, almost in the blink of an eye, his small guide was gone--totally vanished. Chewie halted, looking around in alarm as several things occurred to him. It had been a trick. It had to be. A way to lure him from the safety of the *Millennium Falcon* into Yorvath's territory. The slaver had gambled on his loyalty to Han, gambled and won. Now, he had him exactly where he wanted him.

Han was probably still safe. All Yorvath would have to know for his plan to work was that Han was away from the ship. Attacking Solo would be a risky business and unnecessary, too. Besides, it might alert the authorities. So, Han must be safe. Chewie heaved a vast sigh of relief.

But there wasn't time for that now. Chewie had to get to shelter quickly, and it wouldn't be easy, since he was rather hard to overlook. For all he knew, he could be surrounded by Yorvath's thugs already. He wouldn't know anyone in the slaver's Garinian organization.

A blaster sounded, missing him by centimeters. So, it was going to be a kill, then; no plan of capture. Chewie dived for shelter, getting off a quick shot in the direction from which the shot had seemed to come. People scattered, and he still hadn't seen who was firing at him.

He drew back into the alley, alert to trouble from either direction, but there seemed to be no one behind him. Instead of making him feel safe, this worried him, giving him a sense of being herded, driven in the direction in which Yorvath wanted him to go. Still, he had no choice. To go forward was to expose himself to the deadly fire. So, he retreated cautiously, ducking behind crates and building projections to avoid being hit.

A side alley offered a chance of escape, but it also presented a new dilemma. Was one way safe and the other deadly and, if so, which was which? There was no way to tell, and Chewie knew Yorvath's methods too well to believe that the slaver would leave him a way out.

He took the side alley anyway, and almost immediately regretted it, feeling somehow that he'd made the wrong choice. The idea of escaping through a building occurred to him, but there were no doors or windows that weren't barred or bolted. The sudden intensity of the blaster fire made him wonder if he hadn't managed to find a way out after all. He quickened his pace, but not in time.

All at once, he felt a hard blow in his leg, knocking him from his feet. A moment later, the pain began, stabbing with agonizing sharpness. He could smell charred fur and flesh and, driven by desperation, he dragged himself around a corner into temporary shelter.

It was a cul-de-sac with no possibility of escape. Dazed by the pain in his leg, he pulled himself into the shelter of a parked speeder and raised his weapon. If this was the end, then he would take as many of the enemy with him as he could.

He could hear voices around the bend of the alley, maybe five or six of them. If they rushed him, he wouldn't have a chance. He'd get some of them, sure, but he couldn't hope to get them all, not the way things were starting to go fuzzy before his eyes. He knew he was losing blood, but there was nothing he could do. He was losing the strength to do anything at all. Groggily, he propped his gun against the side of the speeder and waited.

He hoped Han would be all right, and that he wouldn't blame himself for what had happened. Maybe, if he had explained to the Corellian about Yorvath, he

wouldn't have insisted on bringing him here. If Han had known that he had managed to escape from Yorvath's slave pens taking a couple dozen other slaves with him, and that it was his own testimony that had gotten Yorvath convicted on a slavery charge, then he might have dropped him off someplace else first. If he had leveled with Han, he could have persuaded him. But the memory of that year of slavery was still as raw as an open wound, and he couldn't talk about it easily yet--not even to Han.

There was a sound of movement in the alley. They were coming. Chewie tried to get a firmer grip on his weapon and waited. He was sure that he didn't have long to live.

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Han Solo heard the blaster fire as he left the ship. He stopped to listen, suspecting that it might involve Chewie. Since he didn't know where else to look for him, this was his best option. He headed for the distant fire as fast as he could.

If anything happened to Chewie, it would be his fault. It was as simple as that. He would do his damndest to save Chewie, if there was any way to do it. If the Wookiee chose to end their partnership afterward, he would understand and wouldn't really blame him for it. Chewie was his co-pilot and his friend which gave Han some responsibilities for him--responsibilities he had ignored for the sake of profit. He was still determined to get the Krellstones to Jabba but, if Chewie were killed, his enthusiasm for the job and even for the profit would die, too.

Han reached the scene of the shooting and grabbed a passerby. "What's going on?" he asked, drawing his blaster to reinforce the question.

"A Wookiee's pinned down in the alley there," the man replied, pointing, reluctant to lie to someone who looked so threatening.

"How many attackers are there?" Han demanded.

"Maybe six," the other replied, edging away,

Han let him go, He wondered if Yorvath had come out himself to see the results of his revenge.

The sudden silence from the alley worried him, but he took the time to look around the square and was rewarded. The Drizillian was heading toward the alley, a smug expression on his scaly face. He seemed to be alone.



Moving quickly, Han was soon behind the slaver, his blaster shoving into his back before he could enter the alley, "Not so fast," Han said, "I want you to call off your goons and do it now, or I'll strew your guts all over the street."

The lizard man's head swivelled around disconcertingly. "Ah, Solo. Worried about your partner, are you? By the sound of things, you're too late, boy. They'll be bringing out his carcass any minute now."

For an instant, Han's blaster wavered, and Yorvath chose that moment to make his move. But, even as he reached one of his mid-arms for a concealed weapon, Solo's weapon spoke. At that range, it practically ripped the Drizillian in two.

Han didn't spare the corpse as much as a second glance. Before Yorvath had finished falling, the Corellian was running toward the alley.

The men who had Chewie pinned down couldn't avoid hearing Solo's approach and, all at once, they opened fire on him. There were five of them shooting at him and, if he had reacted normally to being shot at, they would have gotten him instantly. It is the instinctive reaction of someone under fire to take shelter or duck, and Yorvath's men automatically compensated to meet these options.

But Han did neither of these things. Instead, he came straight at them, firing non-stop. He blasted three of them before the other two began to realize that they were dealing with a madman who lived a charmed life.

As he ran, Han yelled Chewie's name over and over. "Chewie! Hang on, Chewie! I'm coming. Where are you? Give me a signal, Chewie!" But his only response was blaster fire. All at once, one shot got too close, grazing his arm. It wasn't a bad wound, hardly a wound at all, but it hurt, and the pain awakened him to the reality of danger.

Yelling, he charged straight at the two remaining hoods.

This was just too much for them. Nothing seemed to stop this lunatic, and they'd had it with trying. Yelling in superstitious terror, Yorvath's men tried to run. But there was nowhere to run, except past Han.

The Corellian picked one off easily enough, but the other scuttled past him and fled. Han ignored him. When the man reached the main street, he'd find Yorvath's body, and with no one to pay him, he wouldn't stick around.

"Chewie!" Han shouted again, although he hadn't yet gotten any response from the Wookiee. He was sure that he was too late, that Chewie was dead. Racing around a corner, he came to a complete stop as he saw the huge form slumped against the speeder, the laser rifle fallen from fingers.

"Chewie," Han said in a voice that hardly made any sound. "Oh, shit, Chewie." He began to approach slowly, scared of what he would find.

And then, there was a movement. A faint tremor passed through the furry body and, slowly, the Wookiee raised his head. Blue eyes, clouded with pain, focused on Solo. \*Han?\* he said faintly.

Han was at his side in an instant. "Hell, Chewie, I thought they'd got you! How bad is it? Let me see." He examined the wound, relieved to see that, while it was messy and obviously painful and Chewie had lost a lot of blood, it wasn't going to be fatal. "You'll make it," he said. "We'll get you to doctor right now and get you fixed up."

\*What about Yorvath?\* Chewie asked.

Han grinned broadly, as he finished fastening a makeshift bandage torn from his shirt. "He won't bother you again, partner. He won't bother anybody again."

Chewie relaxed, the pressure off. \*And just how are you planning to get me to the doctor?\* he wanted to know.

"Easy. There's a speeder right here, ain't there?" Han examined the vehicle, removing its access panel. He soon had it running. "How 'bout that?" he asked, grinning. "I ain't lost my touch." He helped Chewie into the speeder. "Next time," he said sternly, "*make* me listen to you when you try to tell me something, okay?"

Chewie had stretched out in the speeder, trying to ease his leg. He knew that Han was trying to apologize to him, and that he could make it hard on the Corellian if he wanted to. But, what good would that do? \*I'll sit on you.\* he threatened.

Han took that as forgiveness and relaxed a little. "Be more careful next time," he said. "I've got enough troubles without having to break in a new co-pilot." He headed the speeder out of alley, giving Chewie a sideways look. "Hey, pal," he said softly, "I'm sorry." Then, with mock anger, "Now, will you tell me what the hell you were thinking of, leaving the ship like that when you knew that Yorvath had it in for you?"

\*Well...\* Chewie began.

"Well?" Solo prompted.

\*I walked right into it,\* Chewie admitted. \*They sent a decoy to the ship; told me you'd been hurt.\*

"And you fell for that? Hell, Chewie, even / could think up a better story than that."

\*Probably,\* Chewie said. \*What would you have done in my place?\*

"Well, uh..."

Chewie smiled. \*I thought so.\*

Han leaned over to rumple Chewie's fur. "Don't get smart with me," he retorted, smiling back. "Let's get you fixed up. We still got a cargo to deliver."

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