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It was supposed to be a little sightseeing trip, but then the crew and passengers got stranded on a seemingly deserted isle... err... planet. Published in Millennium 3, 2006

A Tale of a Fateful Trip - AU. Completely, bizarrely... AU ... muahahahaha.

by Mary Sue

A little system near the Unknown Regions.....

"I'm tellin' ya, this is a surefire moneymaker! Five lousy time-parts! What can go wrong?"

What can go wrong, he says.... The Wookiee sighed. *This is a bad idea. Bad.*

"Why?" the Captain argued. "We charge a thousand credits per passenger. We take four or five passengers out to see the Black Ice Curtain. We're back in five time-parts....four thousand credits richer. What's the big deal? It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The Black Ice Curtain only lasts for a few days every thousand years. People will pay big credits to see it. And we can show it to them."

Something will go wrong. I just know it.

"Ah. You're just jealous you didn't think of it."

Yes. That is the reason. The Wookiee shook his shaggy head in despair. There would be no talking his Captain out of this venture.

The redhead threw her satchel onto the ground, looking around the dingy spaceport. She'd been stuck on this backwater system for nearly a month. A month! Her agent had

promised her a local theater group was eager to pay big credits to have a star of her caliber in their stupid play. She should have known better. By the time she'd arrived, the play had flopped. Of course, if the idiots would have waited until she arrived, instead of trying to get by with a no-talent local actress, this wouldn't have happened. Her agent was dead meat. But right now, she needed a charter off this dinky system, and it didn't matter where the ship was headed. Anywhere was better than here.

The young man was full of wide-eyed wonder. His first trip from the farm, with money he'd saved for years. His aunt and uncle had not been pleased when he informed them of his vacation, but he was eighteen, by golly! They couldn't stop him, not anymore. He'd read for years about the Black Ice Curtain, and how it only appeared every thousand years, like clockwork. And he was alive to see it! He packed a small bag and put the strap over his shoulder. The hotel was less than sanitary. His aunt would have a fit if she saw the filthy sheets. The sheets didn't matter. As soon as he reached the spaceport, he'd find a local ship to take him up to see the grand sight. He couldn't wait.

They had been stalking her for days. She was certain of that. The petite dark-haired young lady sat in a tiny restaurant, trying to decide how to escape from her pursuers. They were relentless. She hated them. She desperately needed to ditch them. But how? Suddenly, an idea occurred to her. If she left them sitting on their ship and found another way home, they would never know where she went. The idea was brilliant. Now.... she just had to sneak past them, and find a way off this horrible planet. Then they would be someone else's problem. She pitied the poor soul that ended up with them.

"It's not my fault the shuttle left without us!" the beautiful woman exclaimed, looking up at her tall husband.

"Of course it's your fault!" he snapped back. "Look at the amount of makeup you wear! I can't understand it.... you're so beautiful, and you smear your face full of that white garbage!"

"It's fashionable," she argued. "Besides, why do you wear that awful outfit? You're as handsome as they come, yet you put an ugly mask over your face."

"It's a disguise."

"A disguise? From whom?"

"My investors. You know they're looking for me. That's what happens when you buy low and sell high. All of a sudden, they think you're a crook."

The woman shook her head. "You did use the Force to pull information from that poor stockbroker's mind. Isn't that against the law?"

"No. Only if he would have *told* me to sell my stock. Then it would have been against the law. Bunch of busybodies, anyway," he hissed out.

"Well, I don't care. As long as you stay rich. I need lots of money to pay for my hairdressers."

He looked over at her elaborate hairstyle. "I'll say." Then he pulled her hand. "There will be someone at the spaceport willing to take us up to the cruise ship, don't worry. Everything will be fine."

"I'm not worried," she replied, checking her lipstick in a small compact. "I know you'll take care of everything, dear."



Han Solo propped the homemade sign up next to his ship. "Five Hour Cruise to see the Fabulous Black Ice Curtan. Only One Thousand Credits per person. Satisfaction Guaranteed." He stepped back, smiling at his handiwork.

You misspelled 'curtain', Chewie grumbled, pointing at the error.

"Yeah, I noticed that. But it doesn't matter. You just wait and see - they'll be fallin' all over themselves to sign up," Han crowed gleefully.

Chewie rolled his blue eyes and headed up the ramp of the *Falcon*.

Solo pulled up a chair and sat down next to his sign and waited. And waited. And waited. Finally, he fell asleep.

"Hello?"

Han Solo was instantly awake. Snapping his head up, he grinned up at the wet-behind-the-ears kid staring

eagerly at him. "Can I help you?"

"Yes. My name is Luke Skywalker," the kid supplied, sticking out his hand for Solo to shake. "Are you taking charters up to see the Black Ice Curtain?"

"Sure am," Han said proudly as he stood up. "This is my ship... the *Millennium Falcon*."

"Your very own ship," Luke breathed, staring at the freighter. "Wow....."

Han's chest swelled with pride. "Yup. Fastest ship in the galaxy. I'm surprised you haven't heard of her."

"Well... no, sorry. But the little town I'm from on Tatooine doesn't get much news."

"Tatooine, huh? You're sure a long ways from home, kid."

Luke smiled. "My first time away. I always wanted to see the Ice Curtain. I've been saving my credits for years."

"Good for you. I'll take you so close, you'll feel like you're touching the thing. Only one thousand credits, too."

"A thousand credits is a lot," Luke said, pausing. He'd always bargained for goods in Anchorhead with the merchants. "How about five hundred?"

Han laughed. "Five hundred? That won't pay my fuel bill, kid. A thousand."

"Six hundred?"

"A thousand."

"Eight hundred? That's my final offer." Luke looked around the spaceport. There didn't seem to be much in the way of competition.

"Eight-fifty, and ya got yourself a nice trip," Han returned quickly.

Luke stuck out his hand again, and Solo grasped it. "Eight-fifty. Deal."

"Take your bag onboard, and my co-pilot will show you around," Han grinned, pointing his thumb up the lowered ramp. Things were already looking up.

Solo watched the kid disappear into the hold, still smiling.

"Are you taking charters?"

Han's head snapped around, and he found himself staring at a beautiful redhead carrying a small satchel over her arm. "Charters. Yes. That's me. Captain Han Solo, and this is my ship, the *Millennium Falcon*."

"It looks like a piece of bantha dung," the redhead commented, staring at the rusty freighter.

"Hey!" Han protested, his good mood disappearing instantly. "I'll have you know my ship is the fastest in the galaxy."

"Fast at what? Falling apart?"

"You don't like my ship? Find someone else for your trip, lady."

"Wait!" the young woman said, putting her hand on Solo's arm and stopping him. "The last shuttle out of this dump of a town left two-time parts ago, and who knows when another fool will land here. I need a ride."

"To see the Ice Curtain?"

"No, you idiot. I want to head to Coruscant."

"I'm not going to Coruscant," Han answered. "I just booked my first passenger to see the Ice Curtain. If you want to see the sight, fine. If not, take a hike, lady."

"Don't you know who I am?" she asked tightly.

"Not a clue, lady."

"My name is Mara Jade," she said, lifting her chin and waiting for his inevitable reaction. Now she'd get some results.

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

"How dare you!" Mara snapped out. "I'm Mara Jade! The famous actress! Of stage and holo-shows!"

"That's so exciting, I could just swoon," Han said sarcastically.

"I need a ride off this hell-hole of a planet," Mara said through clenched teeth. "How much?"

"For you, sweetheart? The famous actress of stage and holo-shows? Let me see.... how about ten thousand credits? But I take you to Coruscant *after* I show my other passengers the famous Ice Curtain."

"Ten....?? Are you crazy?" she spluttered.

"Actually, since the charter to see the Curtain is one thousand, the trip to Coruscant is only nine thousand extra. A real bargain."

"I'll find another ride," Mara huffed out. The nerve of that man!

"Go ahead, sweetheart." Solo turned and walked up the ramp of his ship, stopping just around the corner. A moment later, angry footsteps sounded as someone stomped up the ramp. Han stepped out, blocking her access. "What's the matter? Can't see any other possibilities out there in this lovely spaceport?"

"Ten thousand," she ground out.

Han grinned, and waved his hand toward the interior of his ship. "Welcome aboard the *Millennium Falcon*, Mara Jade, the famous actress."

Mara pointed behind her shoulder. "Go bring my bags inside," she ordered as she pushed past the surprised Corellian. Lying neatly near the far wall of the hanger was a pile of designer suitcases, stacked almost five feet high. It was very good the *Falcon* had lots of cargo space.

Mara Jade was not happy when she entered the hold of the ship. She was less happy to see a towering Wookiee trying desperately to communicate with a blond young man. "Which one of you is the idiot co-pilot and which one is the moron that hired Solo for a sightseeing tour?"

She was the most beautiful woman Luke had ever seen. Transfixed, Luke said breathlessly, "I'm the moron."

Mara looked down her perfect nose at the awestruck young man. "Of course you are. My name is Mara Jade. The famous actress. I'm sure you've heard of me."

"Mara Jade? *The* Mara Jade?" Luke gasped. Every night, he and Biggs would sit and watch holo-vids, fantasizing over the lovely, poised, actresses. Now here was the most beautiful one of them all... it was just too good to be true. If Luke had known Mara Jade was coming on this sightseeing trip, he would have given Solo all his credits, and worked as a galley cook for good measure. "I love you."

"Of course you do," she sighed. "Now get out of my way. I need to sit down - my feet are killing me."

Quickly, Luke turned a chair in her direction, indicating she should sit. "Can I get you some water? Some pillows? How about...."

Chewie had heard enough, and stomped off the ship in search of his Captain. He quickly spotted Han trying to haul enough luggage across the hanger to break the back of a dewback.

"Don't just stand there staring!" Han yelled over. "Come help me."

Chewie loped over to Han's side. *Is this all hers?*

"Women like lots of clothes," Han sighed. "What can I say?"

"You are quite correct, Captain," a deep, artificial voice hissed out. "My wife likes to own many dresses as well."

Han dropped the baggage, staring up open-mouthed at the black helmet of the masked man. "Uh.... h..hello," Han managed to stutter out. "Can I help you?"

"I hope so," the man replied. "My wife and I are looking for a ride. You have a ship. Perhaps we can work something out."

"I'm taking charters to see the Ice Curtain," Han said slowly. "Is that what you want to see?"

"We missed our cruise ship, and need to catch up to it before it gets too far away," the man answered. "A side trip to the Ice Curtain is irrelevant."

"But it sounds lovely," a woman's warm voice put in, approaching from behind the tall man. The masked man turned and embraced the woman. "We can see the Ice Curtain, too, can't we dear?"

"Of course, lovely. Anything your heart desires," the man answered, turning back to Solo.

Han was just as dumbfounded by the appearance of the woman. She was dressed from head to toe in shining blue and red robes, her hair coiled up over her head in a tight spiral corkscrew, and her face was painted a stark white. Her eyes were outlined in black, with red, perfect dots on her cheeks. Her lips were a blood red, with a perfect, large red strip running down her chin. Han had been from one side of the galaxy to the other, and never in all his travels had he seen a stranger couple. He wasn't even sure they were human.

Regaining his poise, Han stuck out his hand. "Captain Han Solo at your service, ma'am."

"And my name is Padme - "

"Vader," her husband said quickly. "My name is Anakin Vader, and this is my wife, Padme Vader."

"This is my partner, Chewbacca," Han said, nodding towards the Wookiee. "Let's talk credits, shall we?"

"By all means, Captain Solo."

*Why did you agree to take *both* of them for one thousand credits?* Chewie complained.

"I don't know...." Han stopped. "I was gonna charge them five thousand each. Then suddenly, I was agreeing to a thousand. I don't know what happened."

*Well.... *whatever*. I hope we find that cruise ship fast.* The Wookiee watched as the strange pair made their way over to the *Falcon*. *Those two give me the creeps. And *now* look at all the luggage we have to haul over to the ship!* he complained. Instead of one large pile, now there were three large piles of suitcases.

"Yeah," Han sighed. "I don't know what made me agree to cart all this, either. I must look like a bellboy."

No, Chewie disagreed. *You look like a sucker.*

"What the hell is in this box?" Han complained as he and Chewie wrestled with the last box, lowering it into the storage space under the corridor floor. This wasn't luggage - it was a heavy locked case, with reinforced durasteel sides. It weighed a ton.

"It is none of your business, Captain," Vader rumbled at the sweat-soaked Corellian. "Just store the container."

"I'm storing it!"

"Good." With that, Vader turned and stalked down the corridor where his wife was busy talking to some actress named Jade and a star-struck young man. He had almost reached the ship's hold, when he nearly collided with his wife as she came charging out into the hall.

"Anakin!" she breathed, her eyes wide. "That young man in there! He just told me his name."

"And his name would be?"

"Skywalker! Luke Skywalker!"

I'm going to make it! Leia Organa thought as she scurried along the edge of the wall. Finally! She was going to leave her chaperones behind her. Some coming-of-age trip this was turning out to be. First, the stupid hotel had lost her reservations. And the beach was a joke. Where were all the wild and crazy young people? Where were all the parties? Being a princess and a debutant had a lot of drawbacks. This was her first trip without daddy, and Leia had wanted to live it up. It was just like her uptight aunts to book her a trip to no man's land. She was certain they'd done it on purpose, just so she wouldn't have any fun. In two stupid months, she was being shipped off to an all-girl college, and would be back under tight supervision as she studied a bunch of boring subjects. Her aunts wanted her to study science, of all subjects! They claimed she had too many brains to just throw away her gods-granted gifts! Gifts! Those gifts were more like a noose around her neck. Why not just make her become a mathematician, as long as they were determined to destroy her life? No man in his right mind would ever look twice at a princess turned scientist! Did they think she *looked* like a professor? Leia glanced down at her boring white dress. *Maybe I do. Well.. that is certainly about to change.*

Entering the hanger, Leia felt her heart drop. There was only one ship, and what a hunk of junk! Then she spotted a tall man exiting and walking down the ramp, stopping next to a hand-drawn sign. Behind her in the distance, Leia could hear the prissy voice of one of her pursuers calling out her name. "Hey!" she shouted, running toward the man. He turned and looked at her. Leia felt her heart give a flutter. The ship might be beyond help, but the man had potential. Definitely had potential. And he wasn't a boy, either. This was a man. Her aunts would not approve of him at all - which gave him instant extra appeal. "Are you still taking passengers?"

Han looked down at the short female, sizing her up. Cute, but very young, with long dark hair that hung in braids on either side of her face. She was dressed very modestly from head to foot in a long white dress with a high collar. "You're in luck. I have space for one more. One thousand credits to see the Ice Curtain." This time, Han had no intention of bargaining with the passenger.

"Then this is my lucky day," she replied, winking at him. "I just happen to have a thousand credits with me."

"How much luggage do you have?" Han asked suspiciously.

"Just what I'm carrying."

"Good. Then welcome aboard the *Millennium Falcon*, miss....?"

"Miss Leia. You may call me Miss Leia."

"Alright. My name is Captain Han Solo," Han nodded, and bent to pick up his sign. A loud swat stung his backside as the young woman sashayed up the ramp, glancing back coyly over her shoulder at the shocked Captain. Han's mouth hung open and he stared, speechless, as his latest passenger entered his ship.

Han threw the sign aside and followed the young woman inside, pausing only to raise the ramp. Then he entered the hold where his passengers sat. All five were sitting, staring at each other in silence. Mara Jade sat at the holo-game table across from Luke, looking annoyed. The farmboy sat opposite the actress, chin in his hands, a dopey grin plastered on his face. Miss Leia sat on a barrel, arms folded across her chest, glaring at Mara. And then there was the odd couple..... they sat across the room on chairs, backs rigid, painted white face and black mask staring at Luke. At least Han assumed Mr. Vader was staring at Luke. It was hard to tell through that scary looking face covering.

Han cleared his throat. "If everybody's ready, we can lift off now."

"The sooner the better," Mara shot back. "Then you can get this stupid tour over with and take me to Coruscant."

Leia perked up at that. "Coruscant? You're going to Coruscant?" The idea of hurrying home was quickly replaced with the thrilling idea of extending her vacation on the city-planet that never slept. She could already picture herself in the all-night clubs, partying until she passed out from lack of sleep.

"Yes, but first I'm stuck taking this worthless trip."

"Could you take me to Coruscant, too?" Leia asked Solo.

"I suppose," Han replied dubiously. "But I'm gonna charge you more than just the thousand credits."

Leia leered at the pilot. "I'll gladly negotiate a fee we can both agree on, Captain. I'm sure I have something you'll want in exchange for a little trip."

"Uh.... okay then. Everybody strap in," Han replied, backing out of the hold. Maybe Chewie had been right...maybe this *had* been a bad idea. He quickly headed for the cockpit, where Chewie sat, staring balefully at his Captain. "Okay, pal. I know.... you told me so. You don't have to remind me. We just need to get this tour over with, find the cruise ship and dump off Mr. and Mrs. Freaky.... then take the redhead to Coruscant. We'll never have to see any of them ever again."

I hope so. Chewie turned back to his controls. *I don't think you could have collected a stranger bunch if you tried. They scare me, and you know what happens when I get scared.*

"Don't start shedding!" Han said, his anxiety increasing. "The last time you got scared, we spent a week vacuuming your hair out of the duct work."

I'm just warning you.

Threepio and Artoo watched in dismay as the old freighter lifted off, fading away into the afternoon sky.

"Prince Organa is going to be most displeased with us, Artoo," Threepio said fearfully. "He may even order us dismantled for losing his precious Princess. It was just like her to ignore me when I called out for her to stop."

The little unit gave a series of beeps, then rolled to the area where the ship had been docked.

Threepio looked down, tilting his head. "Of course I'm certain she was on that ship. All that girl does is cause us to corrode our circuits with worry."

"Beep broo beee."

"This sign?" The gold droid bent awkwardly at his waist, picking up the homemade sign. "Curtain is misspelled."

"Vreeopp."

"Oh. OH! You think the Ice Curtain is where we'll find the Princess! Why didn't you say so?"

"Rrreeeourr."

"How rude! Of course we will follow her. We can't very well return to Alderaan without her, can we?"

The short trip to the Black Ice Curtain was uneventful, if oddly quiet. The only sound was the respirator of Mr. Vader as he breathed. In less than two time-parts, Han reentered the hold. "We'll be coming out of hyperspace in a few minutes, so everybody strap back in. Then you can come up to the cockpit two at a time and look at the phenomenon."

"I'll pass, thanks anyway," Jade said. Her shoes were off and her feet propped up against the table as she painted her toenails a sparkling green to match her eyes.

"Are we going to get any food on this trip?" Luke asked Han.

"Food?" Feeding the passengers hadn't occurred to him. "Do you want some ration bars? I have some meat in the cooler, too. I guess I could cook it for you."

"You're kidding, right?" Jade said with a snort. "We'd probably all end up in the medic ward with food poisoning."

"I'll bet the Captain cooks just fine," Leia responded, licking her lips. "He probably doesn't even need to turn on the cooker, since he's so hot already."

"Listen, *Miss* Leia, you're just a little bit young for me, so why don't you quit with the innuendos?" Han admonished the girl.

"I'm not young," she argued back. "I'm eighteen. Perfectly legal for *everything*, if you know what I mean."

"I'm eighteen, too!" Luke said, suddenly noticing Leia for the first time since she came onboard.

"Oh, shut up!" Mara yelled. "I'm the same age as you two ... and I've been a star for almost five years already. I've had a command performance before the Emperor himself! What cave did you losers crawl out from?"

"Tatooine," Luke supplied politely. "But I didn't live in a cave. It was more like a mud hut. I plan on going to Alderaan after this trip and enrolling in school. My aunt and uncle really don't want me to leave the farm, though."

"What kind of school, Luke?" Mrs. Vader asked, very interested.

"It's a very specialized school," Luke said proudly. "I'm going to be a famous pastry chef!"

"WHAT?" Vader stood up roaring, making Luke flinch away in surprise and fear. "A *pastry chef*? No way will I allow that! No s-"

Padme quickly stood, grabbing her husband's arm. "Now, now, dear. Calm down." She looked at Luke. "Never mind Mr. Vader. He once had a bad experience with a fruit tart."

"I've been stuck in an all-girl school since I've been five," Leia told the group. "And I'm about to head into another all-girl school to become a scientist if my daddy has anything to say about it."

"That explains why you think Solo is so hot," Mara said with a laugh.

"Hey! How would you like to find yourself floating home?" Solo shot back at the redhead. He wasn't sure what was worse, the overt flirting of Leia, or the insults of Mara.

"How would you like to go pilot this ship, Solo?" Vader said darkly. "I would really like to survive this trip and arrive back on the cruise ship in one piece."

The words had barely left Vader's mouth when lights started flashing and warning sirens echoed throughout the small freighter.

Eyes wide, Solo held up his hands to his passengers. "It's not my fault!"

Get up here! Chewie roared from the cockpit. *Now!*

Han ran into the cockpit, sitting down hard as the ship bucked wildly. "What the hell...?"

We were pulled out of hyperspace, Chewie informed his Captain. *And into a major space storm.*

"Space storm? That wasn't on any of the sensors! Space storms just don't appear outta nowhere," Han argued.

This one did.

"Can I watch?" Leia purred from the entrance. "I'd really love to see you in *action*, Captain."

"Take a seat and strap yourself in," Han yelled at the girl. "Before I have to peel you off the ceiling."

"Where's the Ice Curtain?" Luke asked as he too entered the cockpit.

"Sit down!" Han yelled even louder. "What in the seven hells is the matter with you kids?"

Luke sat down behind Chewie and fastened his belt. "I just wanted to see the Ice Curtain," he said petulantly. "I paid a lot of credits to see it, and I'm the only one here that even cares."

"The Ice Curtain ain't here, kid," Han snapped.

"It appears that the Curtain somehow dissolved, and created this unexpected space storm," Leia said calmly. "Just think about the odds of that happening while we happened to be here. At least ten billion to one."

"What made you think up the nerfbrained idea that the Ice Curtain caused this?" Han asked over his shoulder to the young woman.

"Isn't this where the Ice Curtain is supposed to be?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And is it?"

"No."

"So it isn't a nerfbrained idea.... it's just the simple facts as I see them. The Ice Curtain is gone, and it caused this storm when it broke up."

"That's not fair!" Luke yelled out, stomping his feet on the floor. "I've waited years and years to see this thing, and now it's gone! I want a refund!"

"It ain't my fault it disappeared, kid," Han argued as he turned to face Luke. "No refunds!"

"You can't keep my credits! Your sign said 'satisfaction guaranteed!'"

"Not if things happened beyond my control. You ain't gettin' your credits back. "

"Your sign didn't say that - "

"Boys...." Leia said, smiling.

Han.... Chewie woofed softly.

"What?" Han yelled at his partner.

We have a bigger problem....

Han looked out the cockpit window, and stared in shock as blue strands of lightning shot out from the center of the storm. The pilot made frantic attempts to avoid the bolts - to no avail. The *Falcon* was tossed like a tiny toy on the edges of blue fingers, while the inside electronics of the ship sparked and crackled.

With most of the controls suddenly not functioning, Han and Chewie looked desperately for a safe haven. "There!" Han yelled, pointing at the appearance of a planet through the viewport.

Can it sustain life?

"I don't know.... none of the long range readouts are working."

"We can't land there if it doesn't have oxygen," Leia pointed out to the harried Captain.

"Let me tell you, sister - this ship is losing life support, and I can't fix it if we don't land. So you'd better hope it has oxygen, 'cuz if it doesn't, it ain't gonna matter unless you're so smart you can figure out how to breath in space."

For long minutes, Solo and the Wookiee fought the failing controls as the *Falcon* tore through the outer atmosphere of the planet. Even once they had entered the inner atmosphere, the storm continued unabated. "At least we still have shields," Han ground out through his teeth.

"Shouldn't you slow down?" Luke questioned.

"I would if I could, kid," Han replied, looking worriedly at the rapidly approaching surface. He tugged on the yoke, trying to force the nose of the craft up and increase the drag to slow the descent. It had little effect.... the ground kept coming, the landscape growing more visible and distinct with each passing second.

The screaming voice of Mara Jade carried down the corridor from the hold. "I'm too young and beautiful to die!"

No one remembered what happened next, as unconsciousness claimed the crew and the passengers.

"Chewie?" Han whispered, trying to keep his head from exploding. What had he been drinking? Slowly, he opened one eye and realized he was plastered against the control panel in the cockpit. He could see nothing through the cracked window of the cockpit except darkness. Carefully, he turned his head and looked at his partner. The Wookiee was breathing and starting to moan as he hung forward against his straps - a good sign. Han pushed back and turned to check out his passengers. They, too, were alive with no visible cuts or bruises.

Leia groaned and tried sitting up, tugging at her restraining harness. "What happened?"

"Hell if I know," Han answered with a shrug.

"Where are we?"

Solo turned back to his controls. "I can't tell.... everything's been fried. But at least we landed in one piece.... relatively."

Han?

"Hey, Chewie! Are you okay?"

The Wookiee pulled a large wad of loose hair out of his arm as more wafted away from his chest. *See? Now I am shedding! Next time I tell you something is a bad idea.... listen to me!*

The front section of the *Falcon* had ended up buried a third of the way into the ground, the back end of the ship facing the sky. The landing ramp could not be opened, since the controls were fried. Still, Solo's questionable luck had saved him once again - they had crash-landed on soft sand, near a large body of water. The landing site had undoubtedly saved all of their lives, especially the four that were in the cockpit at the time of impact.

"At least it has breathable air," Mr. Vader commented after the group jumped out of the top escape hatch to the surface.

"And we're alive," Mrs. Vader added as she freshened up the dots on her cheeks and stuck the makeup tube back in her large embroidered handbag. "Someone will come looking for us."

"I don't know why you had to cut open my escape hatch with that light sword of yours," Han griped. "Now you caused even more damage."

"You can consider yourself fortunate I only used my *sword* on the hatch, and not on you."

"I already told you this wasn't my fault!" Han argued back. "How could I predict that giant storm would show up right then?"

Mara looked around at their surroundings. Tall mountains rose in the distance, with a wide swath of green foliage between the sandy beach and the rocky walls of the mountains. "Do you think there are intelligent life forms on this system? Other than me, I mean?"

"There are many life forms," Vader rumbled. "But none of them seem to be sentient."

"How do you know? Have you been here before?"

"I do not know where we are, but I do know there are life forms." He turned and walked away from the actress without giving her time to ask more questions.

Leia and Luke walked up behind the Wookiee and Solo. "*Another* deserted beach!" Leia moaned in complaint. "Just my rotten luck we couldn't land on a beach with lots of boys! I think the Goddesses must hate me."

Han and Chewie checked out the exterior of his battered freighter. "Look at this damage," he said, shaking his head. "The hyperspace drive is shot to hell. Half the outside conduits are torn in half. And how will we ever get her out of all this sand and back on her feet? Who knows what kind of damage is here that I can't even see!"

"How are we going to get those pointy things unburied?" Luke asked as he tentatively gave the upright ship a push with his finger.

"Pointy things?" Han said, getting more annoyed by the second. "Those pointy things are called mandibles."

"Who cares what they're called," Mara shot back. "Can you fix it?"

"I don't have the parts to fix it. I'll be lucky to patch together the subspace radio to send out a distress signal." Deep inside, Han doubted he'd have the parts to do even that. The dish antenna was gone, and it was a vital part of sending out long range distress signals. The *Falcon* had been in bad shape before, but never quite this much damage all at the same time, and it had certainly never been half-buried.

"So you're telling us we're stuck here?" Mara growled out. "There'd better be civilization close by, and they'd better have a twelve-star hotel. I refuse to accept anything less."

"Chewie and me'll hike up the mountain to the highest point. We can check out our surroundings from up high, and see if there are any towns or villages nearby."

"Good idea, Solo," Mara said, crossing her arms and frowning. "If you don't come back, we'll just assume the local carnivores ate you, and believe me, no one will care."

"Either I'll be dead, or I'll be swimming in a luxury hotel pool while you're eating bugs and trying to figure out how to start a fire with a stick," Han returned as he stalked off.

It was nearly five timeparts later that a hot and tired Wookiee and Corellian stumbled back onto the beach and made their way over to the group sitting in a circle near the *Falcon*.

"Well?" Leia asked as she stood up, brushing sand from her dress. "What did you see?"

"Trees," Han answered wearily, scratching at all his insect bites. "Lots and lots of trees. And some higher mountains a long ways away. And this ocean. But no villages. Sorry." He looked over at Chewie, and noted his friend's fur was coming out in huge clumps. Already the Wookiee looked like he had a case of mange.

"I could have told you that," Vader said.

"Why didn't you?"

"I thought I did."

"Maybe there are villages beyond the mountains," Luke suggested as he surreptitiously scooted over to sit closer to Mara. The redhead glared and moved further away.

"There are no villages beyond the mountains, beyond the ocean, or anywhere else on this planet," Vader intoned.

"How in the hell do you know that?" Han snapped at the strange man. "Do you think you're clairvoyant?"

"I have knowledge you will never understand."

"If you're so knowledgeable, maybe you can explain why you took this trip in the first place?"

"It was the will of the Force."

"The will of the *what*?" Han asked, noticing Mrs. Vader trying to discreetly stop her husband from speaking by punching him in his side.

A sudden gust of wind blew sand in Mrs. Vader's face, sticking to her pasty white makeup. "The Force," Vader repeated. "You wouldn't understand."

"I understand perfectly!" Mrs. Vader yelled, standing up and whacking her spouse on top of his helmet with her handbag. "You just ruined my makeup! How dare you!" She stomped off down the beach.

Vader quickly stood and ran after her. "Lovely! Lovely! I didn't mean it...forgive me!"

"What was that all about?" Han asked in wide-eyed wonder as he watched the bizarre pair leave. Why would Mrs. Vader blame her husband for the wind blowing sand in her face?

"I read about the Force in one of my classes," Leia said informatively. "It's some ancient religion that no one practices anymore."

"I can't sit in the sun," Mara moaned as she studied her forearm. "I'll get freckles. Redheads get freckles when they sit in the sun."

"Like that hair color is natural," Leia muttered under her breath.

"We could go find a nice tree to sit under," Luke suggested to Mara.

"That's actually a good idea," Mara said as she stood. "Except for the 'we' part." With that, she headed off to find some shade.

"I think she loves me," Luke said with a dreamy smile as he watched her trounce away.

"How could you?" Padme sobbed, refusing to face Anakin.

"I said I was sorry! What do you want me to do?" He quickly gathered up his cloak and offered her the material.

"Oh, Anakin!" she cried, taking the cape and blowing her nose loudly. "I'm just so upset. First we miss our cruise! Then we get stuck on that disgusting ship, and crash on some backwater planet! Not to *mention* our son! The sand was just the last straw."

"I understand, my lovely. Truly I do. Our son wants to become a ...a *pastry* chef. The very idea makes me want to blow up Alderaan just to prevent *that* from happening."

"Why didn't they adopt him? Why did they let him keep our last name?"

"I don't know, my lovely, I just don't know. I'll have to ask his *uncle* that question right before I kill him."

"Obi-Wan promised! He *promised* that he'd find our babies a good home. How is a mud hut in the middle of a desert a good home, I ask you? Some kind of friend he turned out to be. I should have known better since he was your friend, not mine." She blew her nose again before handing the cape back to her husband.

Vader sighed. "Maybe we just should have kept them."

"Don't even say that!" Padme yelled back. "You know what that would have done to our social life? Can you see me raising twins?" Mrs. Vader shuddered, thinking about the horrors of having to hire all those nannies and nurses. "But Obi-Wan promised!"

"Hopefully, wherever she is, our daughter turned out better than our son."

"I guess we'll have to figure out how to build some shelter," Han commented as he watched Luke run after Mara toward the trees. "We can't sleep on the *Falcon*." He looked up at his ship in despair.

"Can I share your blanket tonight, Captain?" Leia asked, pressing up close to his side. "We'll probably need to share supplies, you know. Maybe even body heat."

Han backed away from the girl. "If you don't stop -" He got no further. A bright flash shot overhead, followed by a blast of wind and a high pitched roar. Everyone stopped and watched as the object crashed into the trees off in the distance, sending a puff of smoke trailing up into the sky.

"What was that?" Leia asked.

A meteorite? Chewie barked out.

"No...." Han said as his brain untangled what his eyes just saw. "It looked like an escape pod."

An escape pod? Now what are the odds of someone crashing on this uncharted system only a few time-parts after we did?

"Pretty slim, partner."

"Oh! My! Goddess!" Mara shrieked as she jumped to her feet. "What else is going to happen to me today? That ... that thing could have crashed right into me! Look how close it was!"

"Well," Luke said, pausing to look out over the trees. "It wasn't really *that* close."

"Not close? Not close? It came all the way from the sky, farmboy! How much closer should it have crashed to me before you would qualify it as *close*?"

"I guess if you put it that way....."

Han, Chewie and Leia walked over to the trees. "So, is anyone interested in finding out what that was?" Han asked.

"Don't you want to check it out?" Luke asked.

"No way, kid. Me and Chewie already had our exercise for the day. It's someone else's turn."

"Luke and I will go check out the object," Vader hissed from behind Solo, causing him to jump in surprise.

"Would you please not sneak up on me?"

"I do not sneak."

"Actually, dear, you do have a tendency to sneak," Mrs. Vader said.

"Fine!" Vader threw up his gloved hands. "I'm a sneak! Does that make everyone happy?"

"Makes me happy," Han commented. "How about you, pal? Does that make you happy?"

If I were any happier, I'd start molting, Chewie woofed.

"It looks like you *are* molting," Mara remarked as more fur floated away on the breeze.

I don't have to take this! Chewie howled. *It's not my fault I shed when I get scared!* He stalked back toward the ship, a cloud of hair following in his wake.

"I hope you're happy, Mara Jade, the *famous* actress," Han snapped. "Now you made the Wookiee get upset. You have no idea how long it takes me to calm Chewie down when he's upset."

"Like I care."

"ENOUGH!" Vader shouted. "Luke! You will come with me! The rest of you will get our clothes and supplies off the ship, and make a shelter for the night. Do not forget to get my case off your ship, Solo. Move it! Now!"

"Yes, sir!" Han and Luke yelled simultaneously.

The Millionaire Sith and the young man headed off into the forest.

"Man, I didn't think it crashed this far away," Luke complained as he trudged through the forest, following Mr. Vader as he slashed the foliage away with his saber. "Are you sure we're headed in the right direction?"

Vader spun around to face Luke, sticking his finger in the boy's face. "I have *already* told you, at least two dozen times, that I am CERTAIN we are headed in the right direction! If you ask me that *one* more time..." He trailed off, leaving his threat unspoken.

"Geez. Sorry." Luke replied, not sounding the least bit sorry. "Where did you get that neat light stick thing anyway?"

"It is not called a light *stick*! It is called a lightsaber."

"Oh. Okay. Can I play with it for a while now?"

"No, you may not."

"Why do you wear that black helmet and that uniform with all those buttons on it?"

"The buttons are controls, to regulate temperature and such."

"Such? What's 'such'? You mean like when you have to.... you know..... use the refresher? That would be neat.... never having to use the refresher. Sometimes those public refreshers are really disgusting. I remember one time I used one in Mos Eisley - "

"I use the refresher," Vader growled out, interrupting Luke's story. "Stop asking me questions." He returned to his slashing at the underbrush.

Luke followed behind. "It must take you a long time to get all that stuff off just to.... you know.... use the refresher."

"Shut up with the refresher."

"How do you eat?"

"What?"

"With that helmet? How do you eat? Or do you just smash the food up and stick it in one of those little holes in the face mask? Or do you grind it up in a food processor until it's liquid and suck it up through a straw?"

"SHUT UP!"

"Golly... you sure do yell a lot."

Vader did not speak for long moments. Finally he said, "What made you decide you wanted to become.... a.... *pastry* chef?" It was hard even getting the question verbalized.

"Oh... I don't know. I hate being a moisture farmer. It's so drying on the skin. If I don't leave Tatooine, my face will look like the Emperor's when I'm thirty."

"There are many professions besides being a farmer or a..... *pastry* chef."

"I like baking," Luke answered cheerfully. "Aunt Beru lets me help her in the kitchen all the time. Plus, it keeps me away from Uncle Owen. Uncle yells a lot. Kinda like you."

"Have they ever told you about your parents?"

"Nah. I asked once, but Uncle Owen told me I was lucky they gave me up. I guess both my parents are certifiable space cases."

"WHAT?" Vader turned back to Luke. "Your uncle told you that?"

"Uhhh... yeah," Luke said, stepping backwards to avoid Mr. Vader's wrath. "Why? What's the problem?"

"Problem? No problem." Vader turned and kept walking, thinking about how sweet revenge would be when he caught up to Owen Lars.

"What's in this case?" Han asked as he and Chewie hauled the reinforced box that belonged to Mr. Vader off the *Falcon* and over to the growing stack of suitcases and boxes under the trees.

"Oh, that's just my dear Anakin's important flimsies, and some credit chips. You know... silly stuff he can't live without."

"He hauls this many credit chips with him wherever he goes?"

"Of course. Anakin says you can't put all your nuts in the same hollow log. You must spread things out - for emergency purposes."

Chewie looked down at his patchy chest with bits of bare skin showing. *If this keeps up, I will need clothes.*

"A hairless male Wookiee?" Leia asked, grinning. "That sounds interesting."

"Miss Leia!" Padme replied, shocked. "Your father would be appalled to hear you speak like that."

"Of all the people... I have to get stranded with a bunch of uptight prudes," Leia said with a sigh.

"I am not a prude," Mara said. "It's just that I like my men handsome and rich. I don't see any possibilities among the losers here."

"My Anakin is very handsome," Padme told Mara. "But you can't have him."

"Handsome?" Mara laughed. "Then why is he hiding under that mask?"

"Listen, ladies, I hate to interrupt this little gossip session but we have to start putting up some shelter," Han inserted into the conversation. "I have two emergency tents that hold four people each. So Chewie and me will put one up, and you women can put up the other one."

"I don't know how to put up a tent!" Mrs. Vader exclaimed. "I've never been camping in my life. Camping is for the common folk. It's just so.... primitive."

"I'm not ruining my nails," Mara added, folding her arms across her chest and daring Han to say anything.

"Who is going to sleep in each tent?" Leia asked. "I think Mr. and Mrs. Vader and Luke and Mara should share one tent. I'll share with you, Captain."

"That sounds fine to me," Mara said. "I'm not sleeping anywhere near that Wookiee."

"No," Mrs. Vader shook her head, thinking about her son. "Mara and Leia will share a tent with me. The four men can sleep in the other one."

"NO!" Leia cried out. "That is totally unacceptable!"

"I agree," Han said, thinking about smashing into the same tent as Chewie *and* Mr. Vader. He'd never get any sleep. "I think Mr. Vader can be in the same tent as the women. He can sleep against the wall, with his wife between him and the girls."

How about the three women and the Wookiee in the same tent? Chewie woofed out his suggestion.

"In your dreams, pal."

"Here it is," Vader said as they came upon the crashed and smoking escape pod. "It looks like it is in one piece - barely."

"You open it up," Luke said. "I don't want to see anything dead."

Vader sighed. Taking his lightsaber, he sliced open the hatch and stuck his head inside.

"What's in there?" Luke asked, nervously rubbing his hands together. "If there's something dead in there, I'm going to lose it."

"Droids. Two powered-down droids." Vader reached over and flipped a switch on the back of the tall droid.

"We're doooooommmed," the refined voice screamed. Then he turned his glowing eyes to Vader. "How did you get inside our escape pod? I'm afraid you'll have to leave immediately.... we don't have any room to spare."

"You have already landed," Vader hissed, grabbing the droid and pulling him out. Then he pushed out the astromech droid as well.

Luke bent over and turned it on. "Vreeeoopp."

"That's okay, little guy," Luke told the droid. "We'll take care of you." Luke looked at Vader. "I know all about droids. Uncle Owen made me repair them all the time."

"At least he taught you something worthwhile," Vader returned.

"My name is C-3PO," the golden droid said by way of introduction. "I am a Chaperone, Series 3, Party Obstacle droid, and I am programmed to discern the ten million forms of what humans consider a good time. My programming instructs me to put a stop to those good times. You may call me Threepio, for short."

Artoo gave a loud whistle.

"Oh yes. This is R2-D2. He is programmed to do laundry, vacuum floors and give unwanted advise. Humans have a tendency to just ignore him."

Artoo gave a raspberry in Threepio's direction.

"How did you end up on this system?" Luke asked, much to Vader's dismay.

"Well, it's like this, sir. I am the personal droid of Princess Leia -"

"Leia's a princess?" Luke interrupted.

"Yes. She didn't tell you?"

"No."

"I can't imagine why not," Vader remarked sarcastically.

"Anyway, being the personal droids of the Princess, our job is to make sure she stays out of trouble. Let me tell you that is one impossible task! So once she ran away on that old ship, we were obligated to follow. We certainly weren't expecting a space storm!"

"By any chance, did you manage to get off a distress signal?" Vader questioned.

"Distress signal? I suppose, thinking back on it, that we should have taken the time to do that. However, in our defense, getting to the escape pod was quite a challenge, with the ship breaking up and all. It's lucky we're still in one piece!"

"Yes, we are all lucky." Vader said morosely.

Han pounded the last stake in the ground, happy that the two tents were finally up. Mara and Mrs. Vader sat watching under a tree, occasionally offering worthless advice, while Miss Leia had kept busy handing Han his tools, frequently running her fingers through his hair and down his back. It was a very distracting way to put up tents.

"There," he said, stepping back to admire his work. "All finished. Of course, we could have been done twice as fast if everyone would have helped."

"I helped," Leia whispered. "Now you can repay my kindness by helping me."

"Helping you do what?" Han asked, his eyes narrowing suspiciously.

"Why, this..." Leia flung her arms around his neck, pulling him down and kissing him.

"Mistress Leia!" Threepio called out as he exited the forest. "Thank the Maker you're alive!"

Leia's eyes grew wide in shock and she jumped back from Solo. "Nooo....." She turned to the mechanical voice. "It can't be! NOOOOOO!!!" With that, she ran screaming toward the pounding surf at a supernatural speed.

"Oh dear," Threepio said. "I do believe I shocked her by my unexpected appearance."

"It seems she is planning to drown herself," Vader commented as the young woman splashed into the water.

"Oh....goodness me!" Threepio exclaimed. "I can't swim!"

"Neither can I," Vader commented. "My metal clothes are too heavy."

"And my makeup will get totally ruined," Mrs. Vader said.

"I'm from Tatooine," Luke pointed out. "We don't have water."

My fur will never dry out.

"Don't look at me," Mara told the group.

All eyes turned to Solo. "That's just swell, isn't it? What else am I expected to do?" He stomped off toward the water.

Yanking off his boots and throwing aside his gun rig, Han jumped into the water and swam in strong fast strokes until he reached the floundering woman. Grabbing her around the waist, he turned and awkwardly kicked back toward shore. "Just relax, and let me do all the work," he instructed.

"I can't tell you how long I've waited to hear those words, Captain," Leia spluttered out from the foam. She twisted her torso until she was facing him, kissing his neck and cheek.

"Watch where you put your hands!" Han snapped, trying to hurry.

"My hero," she breathed into his ear, nibbling at his earlobe. "I'll be forever in debt to you for saving me."

Finally, Han felt sand beneath his feet, and he dragged himself toward the beach, carrying Leia. The rest of the group stood just back from the water's edge, waiting until Leia was deposited at their feet. She quickly stood up, facing Threepio.

"How dare you follow me!" she screamed at the droid. "I hate you! You've ruined my life!" She stalked back toward the tents.

"But I am only doing my job!" Threepio protested as he spun around and followed her.

Two weeks later.....

"I can't believe we've been marooned for two weeks already! It feels like two years," Mara complained to her ever-present companion, Luke Skywalker. "I can't keep my nails looking nice if I have to keep doing all this manual labor." She stepped over to Luke in

her red high heels that matched the red silky dress she was wearing and handed him some dripping clothes.

"This isn't so hard," Luke replied cheerfully, as he hung the wet clothes over a laundry rope to allow them to dry. "Artoo is the one working the hardest." He looked over at the little droid - a vine was wrapped around a bucket and looped back over around Artoo's 'head', and the little droid rotated back and forth. This created a motion that foamed up the soap and washed the clothes. "It's amazing how Leia made soap out of fish fat and some roots."

"Leia, Leia, Leia!" Mara cried out, checking to make sure her sparkling green gown was hanging correctly on the line. "If you think she's so great, why don't you go hang around her?"

"Mara, I think *you're* the greatest," Luke gushed. "You're the best actress in the galaxy. And the most beautiful woman in a million light years."

"That's true, but I feel useless," she said with a sigh. "The only thing I can do is entertain, and now I can't even do that."

"Sure you can! I'll build you a stage, and we can put on a play!" Luke said enthusiastically. "You can direct, and star.... and sing.... and everything! I'll do all the manual labor to get the stage set up!"

"You'd do that? For me?"

"Why not? The huts are all built... and I can't help with trying to fix the ship. I know because I've tried. Chewie keeps barking orders at me, and I can't understand anything he says. Han just tells me Chewie wants to pull my arms out of their sockets for getting in the way."

"Thank you, Luke!" Mara flung her arms around the young man and kissed his cheek.

"No problem!" he replied happily, putting his fingers on the spot she had kissed. "Just let me go take my kakannut cream pie out of the oven, and I'll get started right away."

"Only a few more shovels, and we should be able to tip it over," Han told Chewie as they hauled yet another bucket of sand away from the *Falcon*.

You've been saying that for days. Every time we think we're close, more sand caves into the hole. I hate sand. I can't get it out of my fur, and it makes me itch.

"At least you stopped shedding."

That is one small good thing, Chewie agreed.

"Hey, there!" Leia called out as she walked toward them. "Do you like my new outfit?"

She spun around to show them a pair of very short white shorts, and a sleeveless midriff top, a knot tied under her chest to show a great deal of skin.

"Wow!" Han said. "Where did you come up with that? I thought you only had long white dresses."

"Not anymore. I cut them all up and made a bunch of these outfits. Threepio will have a fit when he sees them," she snickered. A week ago, she'd asked Mara if she could use some of the redhead's many dresses, and was thoroughly rebuffed. Sharing a hut with the actress was not something Leia was enjoying, and the Princess frequently attempted to foist Threepio off on Mara as revenge. This was something that should have annoyed the actress - except for the fact Mara enjoyed ordering the droid around like he was her personal slave.

"You're just in time to watch us pull the ship back to her belly," Han said, indicating the teetering freighter.

Leia frowned and looked down into the moat surrounding the ship. It was fairly deep, and filled with water halfway down. "Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"Of course I'm sure," Han replied indignantly. "You're not the only one with brains, ya know." He turned to his partner. "Chewie! You got those vines tied around the *Falcon*?"

Tight as I can make them, came the Wookiee's reply.

"Watch this," Han said to Leia with a wink, then moved to the far side of the ship. Han and Chewie each grabbed one end of a vine and started pulling. And pulling. And they pulled some more. They were just about to give up when the ship started swaying. "There!" Han yelled over to Leia. "I told you it'd work!"

Just then, the ship toppled over - the wrong direction. The *Falcon* lay belly up like a pathetic, upside down sea turtle.

"No! NO!" Han yelled, kicking sand with his boot.

"Apparently, the soft sand and the water gave way under the cockpit during the rocking motion, sliding the ship the opposite direction," Leia yelled back. "Simple physics."

Han stalked back to the Princess. "Now I'll never get it back the way it should be."

"That's okay," Leia said soothingly as she patted his arm. "I'll comfort you anytime, big guy."

At least the pointy things are unburied, Chewie added with a loud guffaw.

"Have a piece of pie, darling," Mrs. Vader said as she slid some of the delicious, creamy dessert to her husband.

"Where are all the fools?"

"They're busy. You can take off the helmet."

Vader removed his mask, running his fingers through his thick, curly blond hair. He took a mouthful of pie. "Wonderful. Too bad our son is the one that made it."

"I don't think Luke becoming a pastry chef is such a bad idea. It's a nice, safe occupation. And he seems to be good at it, too."

"Perhaps," Anakin replied, stuffing more into his mouth. "At least he likes girls. Even if it's the wrong one."

"Wrong one?"

"Why can't he like the brunette?"

"Miss Leia? That girl has one thing on her mind, and I'm rather glad Luke is more interested in Mara," Padme answered. "At least she isn't giving him the time of day."

Anakin sighed. "Perhaps you're right. But then, you're always right, my lovely."

"Anakin?"

"Yes?"

"Why can't you leave the helmet off now? There are no investors chasing you here."

The Millionaire Sith grinned broadly. "My lovely. The three young people are terrified of me, and Solo and the Wookiee are pretty intimidated, too. I like it that way."

"You are so bad, Anakin," Padme said with a laugh.

"I know. I know," he said as he polished off his pie, trying not to think about the fact that Luke was the one baking them.

"A play? What'dya mean, we gotta put on a play?" Han roared at the young man. "If we're the idiots in the play, who's supposedly watching? What's the point?"

"Mara is bored," he answered. "She wants to do this. It doesn't matter if there's an audience."

"She wouldn't be bored if she did some work around here, instead of washing her hair and putting on nail polish every ten minutes!"

"Shh! She'll hear you," Luke said, lowering his voice. "If we do this, she'll feel like part of the group. Then she'll start pitching in with other things."

"Yeah," Han said with a snort. "I know exactly what *other* things you want from her."

"I do not!" Luke replied indignantly. "Mara is a goddess. I would never want anything more than friendship from her."

"Fine, then. You go put on a play with the goddess. I'll take a pass - thanks anyways."

"Han.... I'm warning you. If you don't cooperate, I'll...."

"You'll what?" Han asked.

"You'll be sorry. I'll stop baking pies. "

Han's jaw dropped. "All right, you ... you blackmailer!"

Luke grinned in triumph. The pies won every time.

"Why do I have to play the scullery maid?" Leia cried out, holding a ratty gray wig. "I want to be your sorority sister, or something."

"There aren't any sorority sisters in this play," Mara explained with strained patience. "You can just pull the curtain open and closed if that makes you happier."

Leia threw the wig at Mara, hitting her square in the face. "Take your stupid play, and your stupid wig and stuff it." She slammed out the thin wooden door and headed off into the forest.

Mara rolled her eyes dramatically and looked at the ceiling. "Being the director *and* the star is such a chore!"

After hiking a distance, Leia sat down with her back against a tree. Before long, her thoughts drifted to Solo, as they always did. *Maybe he'd like me better if I was a redhead..... maybe he doesn't like brunettes....*

A kakannut fell out of the tree and bounced off Leia's head.

"This is a waste of time," Vader complained as he held up a script. "Tell me again why we are doing this?"

"Because Mara wants us to," Padme replied, memorizing her lines.

"But it's a musical! I can't sing! And I certainly can't dance, especially wearing this helmet."

"All we have to do is try, dear. Mara will only look all the better if we look bad. And if we look bad, that will make her feel good."

"I don't care how she feels."

"Now, darling," Padme laid her hand on his sleeve. "Quit complaining. We all have to work together if we ever want to leave this planet."

"How, pray tell, is this helping get us off the planet?"

"Don't ask so many questions, dear. It's time to go to rehearsal."

"All you have to do is keep the light pointed at the stage, Threepio," Luke instructed the droid, as he adjusted the glass tube pulled from the insides of the *Falcon*, over the strenuous objections of the Captain.

"But there is fire inside this thing! What if something melts? Like my circuits?"

"You won't melt, Threepio. Trust me."

"I'm sure this must be forbidden somewhere in my programming. Let me process for a moment.....'plays'..... no..... I can't find anything in my programming that claims 'plays' qualify as a good time."

"See? So you can participate. No problem."

"I suppose," Threepio conceded reluctantly. "I guess my job isn't as bad as Artoo's...." He looked over at the little droid who was attached to the heavy stage curtain with a vine - his little wheels spinning as he tried to tug the curtain open. Threepio threw up his hands in dismay as the curtain won the war - pulling the little droid up and swinging him helplessly in the air.

"Rrreeebbbbeeee....."

"Get down from there immediately!" Threepio called up to the little droid. "Do you always have to be the comedian, Artoo?"

"I guess Miss Leia really isn't going to come," Padme commented as they all stood around on the stage holding scripts.

"She's just a spoiled brat, that's all," Mara said with a snort.

"You ought to know," Han remarked under his breath.

"What did you just say?"

"I said -"

A voice carried to the stage, singing a raunchy song off key. Leia stumbled into the light, wearing a red wig and one of Mara's glittering gowns. "Hello, my fans and admirers!" she called out breathlessly.

"Get out of my dress!" Mara shrieked at Leia. "I told you they're mine!"

"Whatever are you talking about? These dresses are mine!" Leia replied with a confused look on her face.

Mara stomped off the stage and over to the Princess. "You are a thief and a liar! Now go get out of my dress!"

"They're not your dresses! They're mine!" Leia insisted. "Why are *you* dressed like *me*?"

"What are you talking about?" Mara spun around to face the stage, looking at Solo.

"What is she talking about?"

"You're asking me?" Han asked, pointing at his chest. "How would I know? I think you're *all* crazy."

"Something is obviously wrong with the dear girl," Mrs. Vader said as she hurried over to Leia. "What's the matter, honey?"

"Nothing's wrong," Leia answered. "I don't know what everyone is talking about. I'm Mara Jade. The famous actress."

"Oh dear," Threepio cried out. "I do believe Miss Leia is malfunctioning."

"She'll be malfunctioning when I get through with her," Mara hissed through clenched teeth.

"I think you're right, Threepio," Mrs. Vader said, noting a welt on Leia's head. "She appears to have suffered some type of concussion. Perhaps you should take her back to her hut."

"No!" Leia said, backing up. "I'm not going anywhere with that metal man. I'll only go with my husband."

"Your husband?" Mara asked, eyes wide.

"Yes, my husband." Leia looked up at the stage, where the three men and the Wookiee stood looking down. "Come, Han dearest. Let's go home."

"Me?" Han asked, his voice rising in pitch. "You think I'm your husband?"

"I think maybe you should just humor her, Solo," Vader whispered. "We don't want her to snap and try and drown herself again."

Han glared at the Sith. He sincerely doubted Miss Leia ever had any intentions of actually drowning herself. "I think she's already snapped, so why do I have to humor her? Why am I the one having to do all this.... bantha poo? 'Hike a mountain, Han!' 'Pitch the tents, Han!' 'Swim out and rescue Miss Leia, Han!' Now I have to pretend to be her husband? It's not fair!"

"You think it's unfair to you?" Mara snapped out. "What about me? She's wearing my dress!"

Just take her back to the hut, Han. We'll figure out what's the matter later, Chewie woofed quietly.

Throwing his script on the floor, Han jumped off the stage. "Come on, Miss Le - err... Mara."

Leia grabbed Solo's arm tightly. "I'm coming, my handsome prince."

As they headed to Leia's hut, Threepio called out worriedly, "Don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

"She's ruining my play!" Mara said as she watched Leia and Han leave. "It's just so unfair. I think she's doing this deliberately."

"As soon as Leia remembers who she is, the play will be able to go on," Luke reassured Mara. "Let's just practice in the meantime."

"Good idea," Mrs. Vader said, climbing back on stage. "We have this lovely duet, dear. It's called... 'Fly Me to the Stars!'"

"And you get to dance, too!" Luke said excitedly.

"This just keeps getting better and better," Vader said in despair as his wife started twirling around the stage and singing at the top of her lungs.

"FLY MEEEE TO THE ST...TARSSSS...."

"Oh Han!" Leia cried out as they entered the hut. "This is just so quaint! Did you book this room far in advance?"

"Book it?"

"Obviously, this is a vacation resort. We certainly wouldn't live here."

"Listen, Le - err... Mara. We need to get something straight. I'm not your husband."

"You are just so... silly! Of course you are." Leia threw her arms around Han's neck. "Let's make love. I'm feeling very frisky, dear."

"You're always feeling frisky," Han said as he tried to get her arms from around his neck.

Leia giggled, pulling him toward the cot. "What's wrong? Are you feeling neglected? I can fix that."

"I don't know why you think we're married... but I'm not sleeping with you."

"I don't want to sleep, either, silly!" Leia said with a laugh, as she started to unbutton his shirt.

"Stop it!" Han growled, buttoning it back up.

"You hate me!" Leia said suddenly breaking into tears. "I don't understand what I've done!"

"I don't hate you," Han quickly replied. "It's just that...."

"What?"

"Uh.... I'm not feeling well. Yeah, that's it. I'm sick. So we shouldn't.... uh..."

"Okay, I understand," Leia answered. "Can we just cuddle then?"

"Cuddle?"

Leia plopped down on the cot, patting the straw stuffed mattress. "Cuddle."

Sighing, Han sat down. "Fine, then. We'll cuddle. But that's all."

"Sounds good to me," Leia replied coyly.

Next Day

"She's the worst actress I've ever seen," Vader commented as he watched Leia prance around the stage. "And she sings like a drunken gungan." It was possible Leia was even worse than Padme, and that was saying quite a bit.

Maybe lightning will strike us and we will all be put out of our misery, Chewie commented as he looked up at the darkening sky, holding his paws over his ears. *My hearing is too sensitive to endure this torture.*

"Maybe it will just strike Miss Leia," Mara answered, frowning at the stage. "I can't direct her - she's too incompetent! She's ignoring everything I tell her. She's ruining my play."

Han rubbed his eyes. He'd barely slept at all throughout the night, and he had suspected Leia hadn't been sleeping, either, even though her eyes had been shut. He also knew the only reason Leia had 'behaved' was because Threepio had been staring through the window at them the entire night. "How do you understand Chewie?" Han asked with a huge yawn.

"My first agent was a Wookiee," Mara informed him. "I had to fire her after she tore the arms off of a Bith that gave me a bad review."

"Oh," Han said, not really caring about Mara's past agents. Leia understood Chewie, too, but that was only because she had studied many different languages in her all-girl school.

Rain started pelting down in large drops. "Miss Leia," Threepio called out. "Perhaps you should stop practicing now. Lightning and rain can be quite dangerous to my well being."

"My name is not Miss Leia! Quit calling me that. I need to rehearse - what's a few raindrops?" With that, she started kicking her leg up, attempting to practice a dance step. Her heel caught on the dress, and a loud ripping sound filtered from the stage.

"My dress!" Mara yelled. "She just tore my dress!"

"It's *my* dress!" Leia shouted back, flouncing off the stage in a huff and heading toward her hut.

"Mara, just calm down," Luke admonished. "I can fix your dress." He looked proudly at Mr. Vader. "I was the one that helped Leia make shorts and tops out of her dresses. Aunt Beru taught me how to sew, too."

"Of course she did," Vader said with a sigh.

Glaring, Mara shouted at the stage. "Mr. and Mrs. Vader - why don't you try your dance number?"

"I am going to Force-choke all these fools," Vader hissed under his breath.

"Now, dear.... just do what we've been practicing," Padme told him, grabbing his hand and spinning around. Vader made a clumsy attempt to follow behind, slipping on the wet stage and crashing off the edge.

"Are you alright, dear?" Mrs. Vader asked, peering at her husband who was laying flat on his back, arms splayed and his cape flared out on the ground.

"My Lovely? Are we making Mara feel good yet?" Vader gasped.

"You people are total hacks!" Mara yelled, snatching all the scripts from their startled hands. "I'm not putting my professional reputation on the line with you amateurs!" She stalked over to the fire and tossed the scripts in, watching in satisfaction as they ignited and burned.

"Damn. I'm so disappointed," Han commented dryly.

Chewie walked by Leia's hut, uncertain what he was hearing. Was she sobbing? *Miss Leia?* he knocked on the wobbly door.

"Yes?"

Are you okay?

"Come in, Chewie," she answered.

He walked into her hut. She certainly looked okay, having removed the wig and was even wearing her own clothes. *Are you feeling better?*

"I've never felt better in my life!" she answered, laughing. "I just have a bump on my head when a kakannut hit me on top of my head. Good thing kakannuts are fairly soft. But when that happened, it gave me a great idea."

I don't understand.

"Has Mara given up on the play yet?"

Yes.

"Then my amnesia act worked," Leia said with a wink. "I guess I'm a better actress than what Mara thinks I am."

You are a genius, Miss Leia.

"I know."

One Month later.....

"Hi, Han," Luke called out in his ever cheerful voice. "What are you and Chewie doing?"

"Trying to figure out how to pull the *Falcon* out to sea."

"Why would you want to do that?"

"If I can get it floating, then Chewie and me can flip it back upright. Then we'll pull it back to shore," Han explained.

"That sounds, uh ... kinda hard," Luke said, not actually saying 'dumb' or 'impossible', which was what he was thinking. "Are you sure it will work?"

"Of course I'm sure! Why does everyone keep questioning my plans?" Han replied, irritated.

Luke shrugged. "I don't know. Sorry."

"What do you want anyway, kid? It'd better not be another stupid idea like putting on a play."

"Nah," Luke shook his head. "The play *was* pretty bad. But Mara looked wonderful up on the stage."

Han shook his head, then stopped and looked over to the top of the mountains. "What's that?" he asked, pointing.

Luke followed his finger. "It looks like smoke."

"A forest fire?"

"I don't know.... there's nothing on Tatooine to burn, so I've never seen a big fire."

Chewie came running out of the trees, heading toward the men. *HAN!*

"Now what?" Han asked, exasperated.

Little creatures came down from the mountain and kidnapped Miss Leia and Mara!

"What!?"

*I said - *

"I heard you the first time!"

Then why did you ask me what I said?

"Come on, kid," Han said as they took off toward the camp.

"They came out of nowhere!" Padme exclaimed. "Short, little furry guys with big eyes and ears and pointy sticks! Before I could even invite them to lunch, they grabbed the girls and ran off!"

"And they tied me up with vines!" Threepio cried out. "I just keep losing Mistress Leia, over and over!"

"Where were you when this happened?" Han asked Mr. Vader.

"I was.....um...." Anakin trailed off, embarrassed.

"You were using the out-fresher, weren't you?" Luke crowed, pleased with his deductive reasoning. "I *knew* it took a long time to use the refresher with all that armor."

"How come you didn't know those creatures were here? Didn't you tell us there were no sentient beings on this planet?" Han questioned the Millionaire Sith.

"I have my doubts those creatures qualify as sentient and I do not have to stand here defending myself! Besides, where was your Wookiee?" Vader shot back at Han.

I was in the forest gathering vines. Once I have enough, I can weave a large net and then I can hunt for real meat. Wookiees cannot live on pie and fish alone! I hate fish, and my fangs will rot and fall out from eating all that disgusting pie!

"Luke's pies are not disgusting," Vader argued, wondering why he felt the need to defend Luke's pies.

"He thinks my pies are disgusting?" Luke asked, feeling hurt.

"You understand Chewie, too?" Han questioned Vader, astounded that they'd been here six weeks, and just now he found out that Vader understood Chewie.

"The Force."

"I'm sorry I asked."

"Excuse me," Padme said. "But we still have the problem of the missing girls."

"And there seems to be a big fire somewhere up on the mountaintop," Luke added.

That is not a fire, Chewie said. *I noticed that smoke when I was collecting vines.*

"What is it, then?" Han asked.

A steaming volcano. It appears that it is about to blow its top.

"A volcano!" Han exclaimed.

"A VOLCANO?" Luke yelled. "We need to get away from here! Fast!"

"We can't run away and leave the girls," Padme told them.

"Why not?" Han asked. "I think we should take a vote."

"I vote for leaving them behind," Vader intoned.

"Me, too," Han added. "How about you, pal?"

I think they're kind of cute.....

"Chewie!"

"Anakin!" Padme admonished. "You will change your vote, immediately!"

"Yes, lovely. I vote we rescue the girls."

"I vote for a rescue, too," Luke said in agreement.

"Do I get a vote?" Threepio questioned.

"No," Han and Vader said at the same time.

You lose, Han.

"No kidding."

"What do you think they want with us?" Leia whispered over her shoulder. She was tied up against a tree, with Mara on the opposite side of the tree, also trussed up.

Mara looked over at all the little fuzzy creatures, wearing hides and shaking spears as they danced around a fire. "I was in a holo-show like this once," she said. "The natives kidnapped a beautiful woman to sacrifice her to their angry spirit god. Of course, I played the beautiful woman."

"If that's true, hopefully they'll find your red hair more attractive than my brown hair."

"You wish. I'm sure they'll be more interested in an unsullied Princess than a galaxy-wise actress."

"Unsullied? You mean....."

"Yes. Someone pure and untouched."

"Damn!" Leia groaned. "This is all Solo's fault."

"We cannot just all run off and leave Mrs. Vader alone," Vader argued. "Who knows what other dangers lurk about."

"Lurk about? No one talks like that. And besides, why *don't* you know? I thought you knew everything!" Han taunted.

"Do not mock me, Captain!" Vader growled.

"Do not mock me, Captain" Han repeated, lowering his voice and giving a decent impersonation of Mr. Vader.

Vader took a menacing step toward Solo.

"Anakin, dearest, please don't threaten people. It's not nice," Padme said gently.

"I didn't get to be a millionaire by being nice."

"I'll stay behind with Mrs. Vader," Threepio volunteered.

"That makes me feel so much better," Vader hissed sarcastically.

"I have an idea," Luke told the group. "Why can't Chewie stay here with Mrs. Vader and the droids?"

"What about the volcano?" Threepio asked worriedly.

Yes. What about the volcano? Chewie barked in agreement. *Let's not forget about the volcano.*

"Pack up some supplies and move down the beach, away from the volcano," Han suggested. "If you head south and stay near the water, we'll be able to find you after we rescue the girls."

Vader nodded. "That is actually a good idea, Solo. Quite amazing."

"Quite amazing!" Han repeated in the same mocking voice as he headed toward the forest.

Leia and Mara watched as the little hairy beings drank out of a gourd and whistled through long wooden tubes they held up to their lips. "Is that supposed to be music?" Mara asked. "It's worse than listening to *your* singing."

"Thanks," Leia snapped. "Actually, this is some type of religious ceremony. These beings are actually Ewoks."

"Ewoks? What in the galaxy are Ewoks?"

"Ewoks are now natives of Endor," Leia said, putting on her professor voice. "There are scholars that believe at one time Ewoks were the most advanced species in the galaxy."

"You're kidding."

"No, I'm not kidding. Ewoks were thought to be highly advanced, although the planet they lived on became uninhabitable due to their primary going nova. Once the Ewok scientists determined the destruction of their planet was imminent, they poured their entire wealth into creating spaceships."

"So that's how they got to Endor?"

"Yes. Unfortunately, the spaceships were not equipped with hyperdrives, so the voyage was incredibly long - generations lived on the ships, and most of them failed to reach any system that could support life. Scholars believe that one Ewok vessel actually crashed on Endor, killing most of the inhabitants of the spaceship. So that's why they lost their scientific knowledge. I would surmise that another ship must have crashed on this planet, and these are the descendants." Leia finished her speech and waited for a response. None was forthcoming. "Mara?"

"What? Oh..... I fell asleep there for a little while."

"Very funny."

"Listening to your explanation was worse than listening to the music."

"I hope they choose you to sacrifice to their angry spirit gods."

The three men hacked their way through the underbrush as they climbed the side of the volcano, following Mr. Vader. "We are approaching the village," Vader told the men.

"A village, huh? Sounds pretty sentient to me," Han said.

Vader whipped around, the lightsaber humming inches from Solo's chest. "You are trying my patience, Captain."

"Mr. Vader," Luke said, chewing his lip. "Please don't kill Han. I'll pass out if I see a dead body."

"Apologize to me, Captain."

"For what?" Han asked indignantly.

"Just apologize, Han," Luke whispered out of the side of his mouth. "Please? I can already feel the kakannut pie starting to come back up."

"Okay.... I'm sorry you were wrong, and that there really are sentient beings on this system."

Suddenly, Han was thrown backwards, rolling down the steep hill they had just climbed. "Hey! What the hell....."

"Apologize," Mr. Vader hissed.

"You'd better apologize, Han," Luke yelled down the hill nervously.

Crashing down through the thorny underbrush, Solo finally grabbed a bush, stopping his tumble. Hauling himself back up the hill, he glared at the man in black. "How did you do that?"

"I think you know."

"Oh. The stupid Force."

Vader lifted his hand and Han felt another push, although not quite as strong. Quickly he grabbed hold of a sapling. "I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"For" Vader prompted.

"I don't know what for!" The Force push became harder and Han had a difficult time holding the tree. "Okay! Okay! I'm sorry for..... uh... mocking you?"

"That is acceptable... barely," Vader said as he turned and continued up the hill. It was going to do his heart good to see the Corellian try and drag his ship out to sea and try and tip it upright. Even if Solo was successful, which Vader thought was highly unlikely, the Millionaire Sith had every intention of making sure something went wrong, anyway.

"Hurry! Hurry!" Threepio called out. "We don't need all that stuff."

"Threepio," Padme said with great patience. "Just because you don't wear clothes, doesn't mean the rest of us can do without."

Speak for yourself, Chewie muttered as he hauled the boxes onto a makeshift sled.

"What did he say?" Padme questioned the droid.

"He said we should hurry."

"Breepppbuuu."

"Now, what's his problem?" Padme asked, pointing at Artoo.

"Just ignore him. I do."

"BBBRREEBBOOPP."

"Threepio!"

"Oh, he just wants to know why that guy over there is staring at us."

Slowly, Chewie and Padme turned to look where Artoo was indicating, and were startled to see a humanoid dressed in gray and green armor and a helmet with a 'T' shaped visor. He was holding a long pole with a net on the end.

"Who are you?" Padme said in surprise.

"My name is Sir Lord Robartto Fett, the greatest butterfly hunter that has ever lived. But you can call me Sir Lord Boba."

"Sir Lord Boba?" Mrs. Vader asked, surprised. "My name is Mrs. Padme Vader, and this is Chewbacca. The droids are Threepio and Artoo."

"You haven't seen any rare Razorhutt butterflies buzzing about, have you?"

"I don't think so....." Padme replied politely. "What do they look like? Don't butterflies flutter?"

"Not these butterflies! Ugly as a hutt, they are. And those wings! Deadly sharp, those bloody wings," Boba said. "Why do you think I'm wearing this armor?"

How did this man get on this planet? Chewie woofed. *Does he have a ship? Can he rescue us?*

"Those are very good questions, Chewbacca," Threepio said primly. "I shall endeavor to find this out. Sir Lord Boba...."

Boba started wandering off swinging his net and muttering something that sounded like, "here little butterfly.... here little butterfly..."

"How rude!" Threepio exclaimed.

"Sir Lord Boba!" Padme called out.

He turned around. "Who are you?"

"Padme Vader."

"Oh, yes. Have you seen any rare Razorhutt butterflies around here?"

"Actually, I might have. Perhaps we can have some tea and discuss it."

"Tea? Tea sounds like a jolly good idea! Why didn't you say you had tea?"

"Mrs. Vader! We don't have time for tea! The volcano is about to explode!" Threepio cried out.

"Nonsense. There's always time for tea."

The Ewoks pushed and prodded the two women up a long series of wooden steps, leading them ever closer to the steaming top of the mountain. Eventually, they stopped near the edge of the pit, looking down at the bubbling red lava lake that reached to the far side of the peak. Long corded ropes were strung up, looped through wooden wheels and stretched all the way across the boiling caldron then back again, with a rickety wooden cage attached to the ropes. The cage was now sitting on the ground, near another group of excited Ewoks, the door wide open. The Ewoks stuck their spears at the women, forcing them toward the cage.

"It appears they think two sacrifices are better than one," Leia commented to Mara.

"I guess so," Mara grumbled. "I doubt the little idiots can tell who the pure one is."

"It's probably your overwhelming beauty," Leia said with a snort. "It outweighed everything else."

"I'm sure that's true," Mara nodded, looking down at her glittery blue gown and matching high heels. "I am rather awe inspiring."

The Ewoks pushed the girls into the cage, banged the door closed and tied it shut. Then a group of Ewoks got on one side and pushed until the cage tipped and started to fall. Soon it was swinging by the ropes, over the lava.

"Oh, goddesses!" Mara screamed. "We should have just blown up in the space storm! This lava pit is the... pits! It's hot! And it smells like rotten eggs!"

"Calm down," Leia said firmly.

"Calm? How can you be calm?"

"It's extremely unlikely the pain will last for more than a second once we hit the lava."

"Like you would know!" Eyes wide, Mara grasped onto the bars and watched as the little Ewoks tugged the ropes, moving the cage further and further away from the edge, until it hung in the center of the lava pit. Mara collapsed to her knees, looking skyward. "I'll be a good girl if you let me live.... I promise!" she prayed aloud. "I'll do my fair share! I'll stop being so vain! I'll donate my credits to charity! I'll teach little girls how to properly put on lipstick, foundation and blush so they never, ever, wear their makeup like Mrs. Vader!"

As they climbed the steep, rocky mountain at a different angle from the wooden steps the Ewoks had built and climbed, Luke saw the problem first. "Look!" he pointed over to the wooden platform. Then he saw the cage. "The girls! We're too late!"

Vader took in the scene. A large group of short, primitive beings stood on the volcano's edge, watching the small cage swinging back and forth in the center of the pit. The beings were busy working with the ropes, and Vader surmised they were slowly lowering the

cage toward the lava below. "It must be quite warm inside that cage by now," he remarked thoughtfully.

"We have to do something!" Luke yelled, looking at Han.

"Like what? Do you see how many of those creatures are over there? It looks like about two hundred of 'em. Even if we all had blasters, which we don't.... all they'll do once we try something is cut the ropes, and wham! Down it plunges. The spoiled brats become instant boiled brats."

"We just can't sit here and watch them die!" Luke protested. "I'll try rescuing them myself, then!"

"Do or do not, there is no try," Vader told Luke.

"What the hell does *that* mean?" Han snapped.

Ignoring Solo, Vader told Luke, "You must do exactly as I tell you. Now listen carefully....."

Boba Fett, the butterfly hunter, opened a book and passed it over to Mrs. Vader. "There. That is the elusive Razorhutt butterfly."

Padme looked at the page. The butterfly's sharp wings were gray and mottled with a greenish cast, the body of the insect was a disgusting gray worm with a huge, drooling mouth with long fangs, sharp talons at the end of stubby legs and red glowing eyes. "Why would you want to catch this butterfly? It's truly..... revolting."

"Because no one ever has," Fett told her in a whisper, whipping his head around as though the butterfly might be eavesdropping. "I will be the first. If I survive the encounter, that is."

"Why would you not survive?"

"The Razorhutt is a carnivore...it eats flesh. Also, its fangs are deadly poisonous."

"A poisonous butterfly that eats flesh?" Threepio said nervously. "The poison wouldn't, by any chance, corrode metal - would it?"

Ask him if he has a ship, Chewie told Threepio.

"Yes! Do you have a ship, Sir Lord Boba?" Threepio asked.

"How would I have arrived if I didn't have a ship?" Fett asked, puzzled.

"Is it large enough to take us with you?" Padme questioned.

"Once I find my butterfly, I will take you with me," Fett answered. "If there's room, of course."

"Is your ship small?"

"No. It's quite large. However, since the butterfly is over eight feet long, not counting the cage, space may be a problem." Fett stood up. "Now I must continue my hunt. Thank you kindly for the tea, Mrs. Vader."

"You're welcome," she answered, slightly puzzled. The man had not taken off his helmet to take even one sip of the tea, although he had poured it into a container attached to his belt. "Perhaps we can come with you, since we are planning on moving camp to the south, anyway."

No! Chewie argued quickly. *I absolutely do *not* wish to find a poisonous, eight foot long, carnivorous butterfly with razor sharp wings!*

"Me, either," Threepio concurred. "Perhaps Sir Lord Boba should head due north."

"I will welcome your company, madam," Fett said with a bow. He wandered down to the beach, heading south. "Here little butterfly....."

This is another bad idea, Chewie moaned as he watched Mrs. Vader follow the man.

"Are you ready?" Luke whispered to Han as he nervously held the weapon Mr. Vader had instructed him to use.

"This isn't going to work," Han whispered back.

"Why didn't you say so?"

"I did."

Luke frowned at the older man. "Then stay here.... I'll handle it."

"Not likely. Besides, do you even know how to use that light stick?"

"It's called a lightsaber, and it doesn't look too hard to turn on." Luke looked down at the silver tube. "I hope I don't drop it in the lava... Mr. Vader will kill me."

Sighing, Han moved into a crouch. "Let's go get this over with. You first, kid."

Igniting Mr. Vader's red lightsaber, Luke ran out from behind the boulders screaming at the top of his lungs and slashing the saber over his head. Han followed, firing his blaster over the heads of the small beings that were standing near the ropes, being careful not to actually hit anything, especially the ropes. The small, furry creatures jumped in surprise and started running away from the insane humans - at least until the one with the biggest headdress shouted and jumped up and down at his comrades. Reluctantly, the short creatures turned around and headed back, throwing their spears in Han and Luke's direction.

"What do they think they're doing?" Mara asked Leia as she tried to hang onto the roof of the cage, glancing to the edge of the pit and seeing Luke and Solo running and screaming toward the Ewoks. "They look like they got into some spice."

"It seems they are attempting some type of a rescue, although it does look pretty poorly planned." Leia looked up at Mara. "You do realize that the top of the cage is only five feet from the bottom of the cage, and you'll only survive a fraction of a second longer when we hit the lava."

"I'll take any fraction I can get," she replied as her blue high heel fell off and clattered down through the bars. "Dang it! Now I dropped my designer pump into the lava!"

The Wookiee trudged after the strange hunter and Mrs. Vader, pulling the large sled. Behind the sled Threepio and Artoo followed, looking around worriedly for any giant butterfly that might appear.

"What makes you think the butterfly is on this system?" Padme asked Boba.

"You never know where those rare butterflies are hiding," was his cryptic reply.

"Do you know where this system is located? We were caught in a space storm and lost all navigational equipment before we crash landed."

"It's in the Unknown Regions."

Padme frowned at the man. "I already know that! I was thinking you might provide us with a bit more detail."

"Details!" Fett yelled loudly, shaking his fist at the sky. "Death is in the details!"

"I do wish Sir Lord Boba would quit talking about death and poisonous creatures," Threepio told Artoo. "It's quite distressing."

"Vreereeppee."

"I can't help it if sand is getting in your wheels!"

"Brooopp."

Be quiet, before I throw you both in the ocean! Chewie roared over his shoulder at the droids.

"Our minds are like oceans....a big, endless ocean... full of salt and seaweed," Fett told Padme, who was nodding very sincerely at him. He stopped walking and stared at her. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Padme. Padme Vader."

"Have you seen any Razorhutt butterflies buzzing around?"

"Yes, Sir Lord Boba, I do believe I have," she replied, looking up in the sky at the biggest, ugliest, butterfly she'd ever seen.

"Duck!" yelled Threepio.

Everyone hit the sand and covered their heads, except for Sir Lord Boba and Artoo.

"That's no duck!" Boba shouted. "My beauty! Come to me, my beauty!" Fett ran off, following the butterfly into the forest as it swooped toward the mountains.

Chewie raised his head, spitting sand out of his mouth as he watched the hunter run off.
Good riddance.... that's all I've got to say about that!

"I really think we should follow him," Padme said as she watched him run away. "He might need our help, the poor man."

"Follow him?" Threepio repeated. "Me?"

"Well, maybe not you, Threepio. You'd probably only slow us down. Chewie and I will go after Sir Lord Boba. You can wait here."

"Thank the Maker!"

I know I certainly am, Chewie muttered sarcastically.

Han flicked his blaster to the stun setting as the furry beings moved closer and closer.
"The odds that one of those spears are gonna hit us are getting pretty high, Luke!"

"Whatever you do, don't let the creatures cut the rope!" Luke yelled back.

Just then, one of the Ewoks hacked the rope holding the cage, sending the box tumbling toward the bubbling lava.

"AHHHH!!!" Mara and Leia both screamed as the cage plummeted down.

"Mara! Noooo!" Luke yelled as he watched in shock. The cage only dropped a few feet. Suddenly an invisible power gripped the box, lifting it up and away from the lava.
"Wha....?"

"Now how in the seven hells is that happening?" Han asked, rather surprised himself, looking up to see if a ship had the cage in a tractor beam.

"It must be Mr. Vader, using his Force power!"

If that were the case, Han had to admit he was impressed. They watched as the cage gracefully floated closer and closer. The furry creatures stopped throwing spears and also watched, wide-eyed and fearful. The leader started chattering loudly and the Ewoks turned and ran down the mountain, quickly disappearing into the forest below. The cage

had almost reached safety when a large gray creature swooped down out of the sky, grasping the cage in its claws and lifting the box up and away over the treetops.

"Mara! Nooooo!" Luke yelled as he watched in shock

The girls stared back at the rapidly retreating volcano, and looked down, noting they were very high in the air.

"W...what.... just happened?" Mara stuttered out, looking up at the huge winged beast that now had them in its clutches.

"Actually, I have no idea," Leia admitted. "Technically, we should be dead."

"What's that thing?" Mara asked, pointing at the drooling butterfly and trying to avoid the slobber as it dripped into the cage. "Geez, talk about needing a breath mint.... it stinks worse than the lava pit!"

"It's either a butterfly, or some species of moth. I'd have to get closer to tell."

"I have a feeling we're both going to get a lot closer."

"Mara!" Luke sank to his knees. "I loved you! Why did this have to happen? Why you, of all people? We could have gotten married and had thirteen kids. Why? WHY? WHY!?"

"Thirteen?" Han asked. "Why thirteen?"

"A baker's dozen," Luke answered in a tone that implied Han was incredibly dense, then looked back at the disappearing cage. "MARA!!! WHY?????"

"SHUT UP!" Vader thundered out as he approached the two men. "You are embarrassing me!"

"Embarrassing you?" Luke asked, looking at the Sith and sniffing.

"Stand up and pull yourself together! No son of mine is going to start blubbing!" Vader reached down his gloved hand to Luke.

"Son? What are you talking about?"

"YOU ARE MY SON! What part of SON don't you understand?"

Luke stood up. "But your last name is Vader, and mine is Skywalker. This is just so confusing."

"My last name is Skywalker," Vader hissed out, trying to be patient. "I use Vader to avoid any.... business entanglements when I travel."

"Is Mrs. Vader my mummy?"

"Yes."

"So why did I grow up on Tatooine?" Luke asked, getting mad. "I could have grown up rich and spoiled. Everyone wants to grow up rich and spoiled."

"When you and your sister were born -"

"SISTER? I have a sister, too? I suppose you *kept* her! That's so unfair!"

"We did not keep her!"

"What happened to her?" Luke asked.

"Do we really have time for all this?" Han interrupted.

"Solo is again right, as much as I hate to admit it. We will discuss this later."

Glaring at the Sith, Luke said, "Oh.... we'll be discussing this alright.. *pops!*" Then he headed off in the direction of the butterfly.

Vader looked down at the lava pit. "I hope we have time to find the girls before this thing erupts."

"Do you think this will help?" Han asked, pulling a thermal detonator out of his pocket.

"Where did you get that?"

"I had a few onboard the *Falcon*," Han said with a grin. "It was kinda hard to find them with the ship upside down, but I figured they might come in handy some day."

Nodding, Vader took the detonator, set the timer, and using the Force threw it into the middle of the lava pit. Vader and Han hit the ground as the bomb exploded. A huge BURP echoed from the volcano, and the lava slowly began swirling like a giant flushed toilet, disappearing into the mountain.

"You have earned yourself a reprieve, Solo," Vader said as he stood up and headed after Luke.

The Wookiee and Padme hurried to keep up with the frantic pace of Sir Lord Boba as he chased the butterfly toward the mountain. It was rather difficult, especially since Padme kept tripping on her long gowns.

*We are heading *toward* the volcano,* Chewie grouched. *Han told us to move *away* from the volcano!*

"What are you saying, dear? I'm afraid I can't understand you."

"Here little butterfly! Here butterfly!" Fett called out, allowing them to locate the hunter through the thick woods.

"Chewbacca," Padme explained as she took his paw and pulled him toward the man's voice. "Try to understand..... Sir Lord Boba may be our way off this planet. We can't lose him!"

I would like to lose all of you. Permanently.

"I still can't understand you, Chewbacca."

That's probably a good thing.

The butterfly headed south and dragged the cage into a large cave, depositing it in a corner. Then the butterfly hopped over to the opposite wall, tenderly cooing at a pile of squirming larva. Each gray caterpillar was about four feet long and almost as wide, with red eyes and big drooling mouths, although they lacked wings and legs.

"Now what?" Mara asked worriedly.

"I'd have to guess the butterfly intends to feed us to her babies."

Mara slid down the side of the cage and sat. "Swell. Do you have any plans to escape?"

"Give me your hair clip," Leia said, pointing to a glittering bauble in the redhead's hair.

Quickly Mara removed it, handed it to Leia, and watched as she worked at the leather ties of the cage.

"Hurry," Mara whispered. "But try not to bend the clip."

Leia just glared at the actress and kept working. Finally the leather knot loosened and Leia pulled the strap away from the door. "Now we just have to sneak out before the butterfly sees us."

The butterfly turned around, its red eyes glowing in the dim cave, hissing as it bared its fangs.

"Quick!" Luke prodded the two tired men. "It went in that cave!"

"Are you sure we should go in there?" Han asked. "We're probably too late."

"Of course we should! Shouldn't we, daddy?"

"Do not call me 'daddy'," Vader grouched out, then addressed Solo. "Unfortunately, the girls are still alive. And if you ask me how I know one more time, I will have to kill you."

Biting his tongue, Han followed Luke up yet another steep incline, this time to a cave.

They had almost reached the entrance when loud thuds came from inside the cave, followed by a huge screech. A few seconds later, the large gray butterfly buzzed past, its eyes wide and fearful. Drawing his blaster, Han took a quick aim and shot the ugly thing - it crashed loudly into the foliage below. Then Han and Vader hurried after Luke into the cave.

Leia and Mara stood side by side, holding a large rock in each hand. "There was no way in the galaxy some dumb butterfly was going to feed us to worms," Mara growled out.

Leia dropped the rocks and ran over to Han, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him. "My hero! You just never get tired of rescuing me, do you?"

"You look like you had things pretty much under control," Han commented as he watched Vader take his lightsaber and start cutting the larva in half. Smelly green ooze seeped out as the caterpillars wiggled and died.

"Here comes the pie!" Luke yelled, running out of the cave.

Sir Lord Boba watched in shock as the Razorhutt butterfly crashed into the ground at his feet, giving a quick shudder before it died. "MY BABY!" Fett screamed. "Someone shot my baby!"

Since that's a blaster shot, I'd say the odds are pretty good Han did it. Good for Han, Chewie woofed happily.

"What did you say?" Padme asked the Wookiee, then turned away since a repeat wouldn't matter. "I'm so terribly sorry, Sir Lord Boba." She looked at the ugly butterfly and repressed the urge to gag.

Fett was on his knees, tenderly holding the spongy gray head of the butterfly. "I was so close! I would have been famous! I would have been rich!"

"Well... I truly am sorry. But the good news is, it appears the volcano has stopped steaming, so we won't die in a huge lava blast after all."

Sir Lord Boba wasn't listening - he was too busy sobbing over the dead butterfly.

As they made their way down the hill, Vader suddenly held up his hand. "What is that noise? It sounds like more blubbering."

"My foot hurts!" Mara moaned. "I can't walk wearing just one shoe. It makes me all uneven."

"I'll carry you," Luke quickly volunteered.

"You'd do that? For me?" Mara asked with a small smile. "You are just so sweet, Luke."

"No problem," Luke said with a grin. He clumsily picked her up and began staggering down the hillside.

"Will you carry me, too?" Leia asked Han.

Han frowned suspiciously at Leia. "What's wrong with you?"

"I think I must have sprained my ankle," she said, hobbling a few steps to show how badly her ankle hurt.

"It looks fine to me," Han argued, looking down at her feet.

"Did anyone hear me?" Vader asked loudly. "I said.... it sounds like someone is nearby, and they are crying. It could be Padme!"

The gang followed the speedy Sith until they came to a small clearing. Padme and Chewie stood to one side, watching a strange armored man holding the dead butterfly and crying hysterically.

"Lovely! My lovely! Are you alright?" Vader called out.

"Yes, dear. I see you rescued the girls," Padme said, nodding in approval. Then she walked over to Fett. "Sir Lord Boba? Could you please get up now? I'd like you to meet my husband."

Fett stood up, and bowed deeply. "I'm glad to meet you... whoever you are."

"Anakin Vader. Padme's husband."

"Who is Padme?" Fett asked.

"I'm Padme," Padme said. "And this is Miss Leia, and Captain Han Solo. And over there is Mara Jade and Luke Skywalker."

Luke quickly put Mara down. "Mummy!" he cried out, running into Padme's arms. "I've missed you!"

"Mummy?" Padme looked pointedly over Luke's shoulder at Anakin.

Vader sighed. "I told him, lovely. He seems to have readily accepted us."

"You told him?" Padme asked, stunned, as she patted Luke on the back. "Why would you do that?"

"He was about to cry! I couldn't allow that.... it's bad enough he bakes and sews!"

Luke spun around, facing Vader. "You're just jealous that you can't bake!"

"I am not!"

"You are too! Take it back!"

"I will not - "

"Anakin!" Padme yelled. "Apologize to our son. His pies are wonderful, and it's sweet he can sew. He'll make some lady a wonderful husband...someday."

"I'm sorry, Luke."

Luke grinned triumphantly and looked over at Mara. "Did you hear my ma? She says I'll make you a wonderful husband."

"I heard her," Mara said, then looked at Padme and pointed at Fett. "What's this freak's name?"

"This is Sir Lord Boba Fett, the galaxy's greatest butterfly hunter."

"Hey!" Han said, frowning. "There's *another* sentient being on this planet! I think the Force is a bunch of poodoo."

"Someone needs to bury my butterfly!" Fett cried out. "She deserves a decent burial!"

"Solo, you and the Wookiee can bury the butterfly, since you're the one that killed it," Vader said. "Come Padme, let's return to camp."

"Come Sir Lord Boba, they will take care of it," Padme said gently, pulling his arm.

Luke picked Mara back up and followed behind the Vaders and Fett.

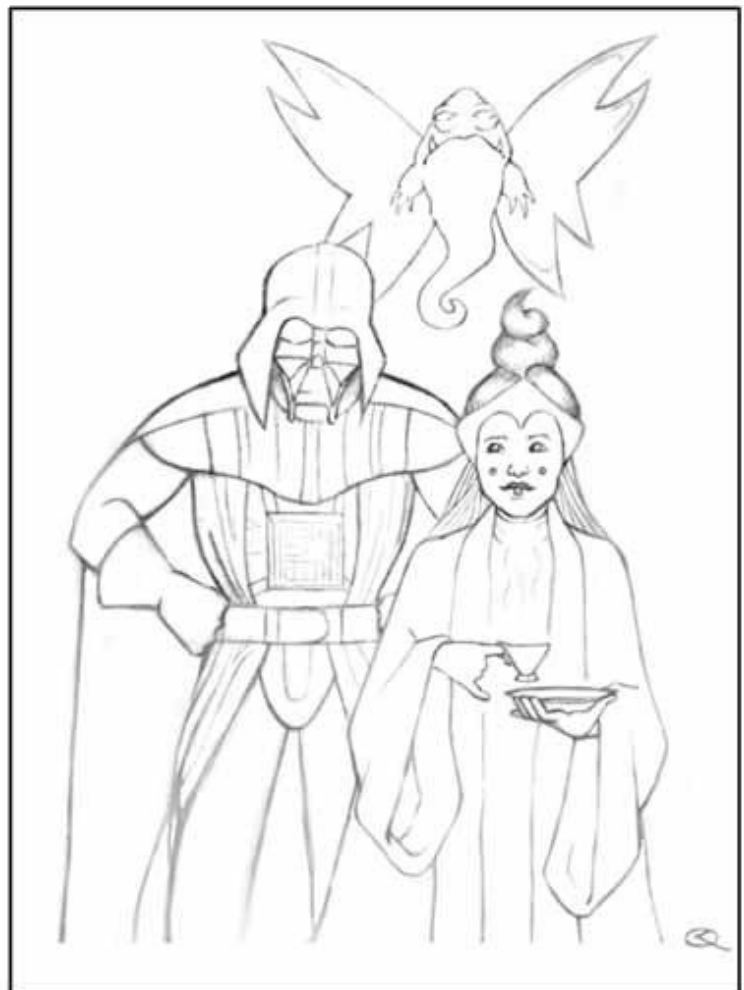
Leia looked at Han. "Come to my cabin tonight, and I'll give you a big reward," she whispered before heading down the hill before the others got too far away.

Han looked at Chewie. "How are we gonna bury this thing? We don't have shovels with us."

Fry it with your blaster. No one will ever be the wiser.

The next morning.....

The group sat around the table eating their fish soup breakfast.



"Someone should wake up Sir Lord Boba so he can eat, too," Padme suggested.

"I'll go wake him," Threepio answered and hurried off to where Fett had pitched his tent.

Threepio hurried back to the table, waving a flimsy. "Oh dear! I do believe Sir Lord Boba has left us! There was only this note where the tent had been!"

"Let me read that," Luke said, grabbing the flimsy away from the droid, and reading it aloud.

"Dear Humans, and etc.

My butterfly hunt is over, since you killed my only hope

*for fame and fortune. I hope you stay marooned forever on
this planet.*

Best Regards,

Sir Lord Robartto Fett, Galaxy's Greatest Butterfly Hunter.

PS. Thank you for the tea."

"Maybe if we hurry, we could still catch up with him," Mara said, standing up. "I'll convince him how sorry we are."

The castaways looked up as a ship that resembled an old shoe passed overhead, then turned and headed to space.

"I'd say it's too late," Han remarked.

"This is all your fault, Solo!" Mara yelled as she stomped away.

"My fault?"

*Well, you *did* kill the butterfly,* Chewie woofed out of the side of his mouth.

Two months later.....

Padme and Vader stood watching as Luke, Han and Chewie latched large log rafts to either side of the *Falcon*, and using cut down trees as rollers, pushed the ship toward the ocean. Leia and Mara were further away, yelling out encouragement or insults - Padme was too far away to tell which. "Dear?"

"Yes?"

"Why don't you just use the Force to flip the ship upright? This just doesn't appear that Solo's plan is going to work."

"And spoil my fun watching this disaster? Surely you jest."

"Anakin! That's just plain mean," Padme admonished her husband. "If the ship sinks, we'll never get off this planet."

"Solo doesn't have the parts to fix it anyway, so I don't see what it matters. Besides, it's best we stay here for, oh, five years I'd say."

"Five years!?! Why would you want to stay marooned for five years?" Mrs. Vader questioned Mr. Vader.

"That's when the statute of limitations runs out," he admitted reluctantly.

"What did you do?"

"I ... well.... I sort of have an arrest warrant out for me for insider trading," Vader said slowly. "But if they don't serve me for five years, I'm free and clear. And your name might have been on some of those deals, lovely."

"WHAT? But.... but what about our wealth? Won't the authorities confiscate all our credits and houses and jewelry..."

"I've hidden the vast majority of our credits, and our artwork. Why do you think that heavy suitcase is so important to me? It's not credits it holds, but the codes to all my hidden bank accounts throughout the galaxy. As far as those baubles you wear, those are only copies, my lovely - the real items have been hidden away for years. Houses are easily replaced. So you see, it's in our best interests to hide out here for a bit, don't you agree?"

Padme sighed. "I suppose."

"Besides, staying here will keep Luke away from becoming a pastry chef. So it takes care of two problems at the same time," he pointed out.

"Luke would make a good pastry chef," Padme argued, looking over at Leia and Mara. "Five years. I don't know if we can keep these young people away from each other that long."

"Why would we want to do that? Mara is growing on me and if Luke hooks up with her, he'd never have time to bake," Vader said thoughtfully. "Managing a big star's career sounds like a much better job to me, anyway."

"What about Miss Leia? Pretty soon, she's going to wear down Captain Solo. I really don't want to become this planet's only midwife."

Vader laughed. "Solo... tied for life to a bossy, know-it-all, Princess? It couldn't happen to a better man."

"Anakin, you are so bad."

"That's why you love me, lovely."

"Okay!" Han yelled over to Chewie and Luke. "We're almost at the water! Only a few more feet, and it'll start floating."

Tell me again how you think this will work, Chewie woofed.

"Once she's in deep enough water, we unlatch one of the rafts," Han said. "Then we pull the ropes that we've tied to the top of the ship until she comes up on the other side. Then, quick like, we strap the raft back on, and pull her back to shore. Easy!"

"Easy?" Luke questioned, shaking his head. "It sounds hard to me!"

"Nah.... everything is lighter when it's under water. It'll work - just you wait and see!"

"I'll be waiting," Luke muttered under his breath.

"What's that?" Mara asked as they watched the *Falcon* float out to sea.

"What?" Leia asked.

"That big, dark band right across the horizon of the ocean?"

Leia shaded her eyes and looked carefully. "That appears to be a very large storm. Perhaps even a hurricane."

"A hurricane? I saw one of those on the holo-news once. Everyone's hair was flying every which way, and it looked very messy! Hurricanes are not good for appearances."

"No - not good. I'll go tell the boys, and you go inform Mr. and Mrs. Vader."

"That can't be!" Han yelled over to Miss Leia as he stood waist deep in water. "I don't have time to deal with a krethin' storm!"

I doubt the storm cares, Chewie commented, looking down unhappily at his wet fur. *I hate water.*

"Well.... we'll just have to hurry, then," Han said, tugging at the ropes and climbing onto one of the rafts. "Get up to the other side and start paddling out to sea."

Luke and Chewie climbed up on the raft and started paddling, pulling the *Falcon* slowly out. "That storm looks pretty nasty, Han. I think maybe we should just wait and do this later."

"No way," Han argued. "The ship is already floating, and I'm not leaving her out here during a storm. Besides, that thing is a long ways off."

Luke just shook his head and kept paddling. "If I drown, this will be all your fault, Han. And don't forget, my maw and paw will be really ticked if you get me killed."

"You won't drown!" Han shouted over to Luke. "Haven't you been paying attention to your swimming lessons?"

"I try. But Mara wearing a bikini is distracting."

You're telling me, Chewie barked in agreement.

"Just pack up the clothes and breakable items, Threepio," Mrs. Vader instructed. "The huts are replaceable."

"And make sure you take my money chest," Vader hissed out. "We'll head up to that cave where the butterfly lived and wait out the storm."

"What about the boys?" Leia asked, looking out past the trees and the wide strip of sand, to the tiny object floating out in the water.

"I will wait for them," Vader instructed. "You ladies will take the droids and head up with our things to the cave."

"Sounds good to me," Mara said, nodding. "I just hope those worms have dried up by now."

"I'm not designed as a porter droid!" Threepio whined as the women piled more cases onto his back. "My servos can't take this type of load - I'll pop a circuit!"

"Quit complaining," Mara snapped as she strapped another suitcase on his back.

Vader headed down the beach and watched as the two men and the Wookiee frantically unstrapped the left raft and moved away as the *Falcon* sank down, held now by only the raft on the right. The waves were getting higher and the sky growing darker. Amused, the millionaire folded his arms across his chest and watched. After a great deal of pulling, the ship finally emerged, right side up, and they hurriedly strapped the second raft back to the side of the ship, climbed back onboard, and started paddling back to shore. The waves actually helped move them toward shore much faster than they had paddled out, and soon they were approaching the beach. *He's actually done it*, Vader thought in amazement. The *Falcon* was right side up, and they were close to beating the storm.

Without any interference from the Sith, a very large wave swelled, swamping the ship and the two men and Chewie. The vines snapped, setting the rafts free. The *Falcon* went nose up for a brief moment before disappearing beneath the surf. The frustrated curses of a Corellian could be heard, even over the wind and the waves.

Vader shook his head. Reaching out with the Force, he pulled the floundering men and Wookiee to safety.

"My ship!!" Han sobbed as Chewie pulled him ashore. Turning to the water, he dropped to his knees. "My ship!!"

"Great Force," Vader grouched. "Now someone else is blubbering."

The storm raged on throughout the night and most of the next day. Finally in the late afternoon it let up and the ragged group staggered out of the cave and down the hill to where their camp had been.

"It's all gone," Padme said sadly. "Now we'll have to start all over building huts."

"We will?" Han snapped out. "I don't recall anyone building huts but me an' Chewie an' Luke. Everyone else just sat around on their backsides and gave us orders."

"You will not talk to my wife in that tone, Solo!" Vader growled out threateningly.

"I want my own hut this time," Leia told the men. "Mara has too many clothes, and they take up too much space."

"My clothes take up too much space? What about all your stupid science projects?" Mara shot back.

"Look at the bright side, Han," Luke said cheerfully. "Now that we have experience, we'll make them a lot better this time. And faster, too!"

"If you don't stop being so cheerful all the time, I'm gonna have Chewie bury you up to your neck in sand!" Han yelled out, stomping off down toward the beach. He had only gone a few steps when he noticed a large object laying in the sand. "The *Falcon*!" Han shouted, running toward his ship as the rest hurried behind him.

It soon became apparent the ship had washed back up onto the beach during the storm - upside down. Han dropped back to his knees and stared in disbelief.

At least it's not underwater anymore, Chewie pointed out helpfully.

One month later.....

"Those," Han yelled, pointing up to Chewie, who had climbed high up in a kakannut tree. "Cut those. They're nice and big."

Chewie hacked at the large leaves, and they tumbled to the ground where Luke and Han gathered them up for use as thatching on the roofs of their huts.

"I think these new huts will weather storms much better than the old ones," Luke said, bending over and picking up the leaves. "I told you we'd build them better the second time around."

"Yeah, yeah....you told me," Han said. "Luke?"

"Yes?"

"Who is that walking down the hill, coming toward us?"

Luke turned and looked at the springy man with broad shoulders and brown hair. He was being followed closely by a shiny round ball about the size of a man's head, hovering about five feet in the air. "I haven't got a clue."

"How many other people are on this system that your father isn't telling us about?"

"Maybe he just got here," Luke said, defending Vader.

"Let's go ask," Han suggested. "Hey! You there!"

The man gave a startled leap in the air, his eyes wide with surprise. Seeing Han and Luke, he suddenly took off, running away as fast as he could. The orb turned and followed behind him. It was only after he tripped and fell that Solo and Skywalker finally caught the man, grabbing him by the shirt and dragging him to his feet.

"Why the heck are you running away from us?" Han gasped out.

"Y..you're not suppose to be here!" the man stuttered.

"We sure would like *not* to be here," Luke told him. "We've been stranded for almost five months on this planet. How long have you been here? What's your name?"

"My name is Wes Janson," the man answered reluctantly. "I've only been here a week."

Luke pointed at the floating orb, which had also stopped. It was bobbing up and down - it looked like a giant silver eyeball. "What's *that* thing?"

"That thing is an AR-VRD 2000 - an audio and visual recording droid. Arvred is holo-recording my every move."

"It's recording you? Why?"

"What about a ship? Do you have a ship?" Han interrupted, not caring about the droid. "Can you get us off this krethin' system?"

"No.... I don't *exactly* have a ship."

"Then how did you get here?"

"I was dropped off."

Han and Luke exchanged puzzled looks. "Dropped off?" Han asked. "By who? Why?"

Wes mumbled something under his breath neither Luke nor Han understood. "What?" Luke asked.

"I said.... I was dropped off on this planet to compete in a contest."

"A contest? What type of contest?" Luke prodded.

"If I stay alone on a deserted system for six weeks, I win a prize in a contest called 'Survive in the Unknown Regions'. That's why the droid is following me. But you're not supposed to be here! No one is suppose to be here. I can't win if there are other people here... it's against the rules. Calrissian, the show's producer, will be furious with me. I had to sign a contract saying I wouldn't accept any outside help!"

"What kind of prize?" Han questioned.

Janson looked away, frowning as he tried to decide what to say. "Credits. A million credits." He looked back at them, angry. "You're ruining my chance to win!"

"It's a big planet," Han said with a shrug. "Just go somewhere else and win your prize. But when they come pick you up, you have to take us back with you."

"I can't do that! Don't you see? When they look at the recording and find out I'm not alone, I'll forfeit my million!"

"My old man is a millionaire," Luke said with a grin. "He'll give you your million anyway. Maybe even two or three extra, just for rescuing us!"

"You think?" Wes said, getting a glint in his eyes. "That would be great! I don't care where I get my credits from - as long as I get them."

"Are you sure offering Vader's stash is a good idea, kid? The guy doesn't seem like the generous sort."

"It's my money too! I'm his son, and what's his is mine."

"If you say so," Han said dubiously.

Later...

"This is just terrible, my lovely," Vader whispered to his wife as they watched Mara and Leia competing for Wes's attention.

"I agree!" Padme said with a nod. "I thought Mara was starting to like Luke, and look how she's flirting with that boy!"

"She's only flirting because he's her ticket off this planet," Vader said sullenly. "Lovely, we have to do something."

"I agree!" Padme repeated firmly. "Luke is so much better looking than Wes."

"I'm not talking about Mara," Vader said. "We must find a way to get rid of Janson without letting him disclose we are on this system. I'm not about to go to prison."

"Prison!?" Padme said, shocked. "I couldn't bear prison..... I hear those celebrity types are very hard to get along with."

"Don't you worry. I'll think of something."

"I wish we'd never brought Wes back with us," Luke grumbled as the two men watched Janson tell jokes and flex his muscles for the girls. "I hate him."

Han grinned over at Luke. It would have done his heart good to see the kid in a mood other than perpetually cheerful, except for one small detail - it was bothering him to see Leia flirting with Wes, too. But Han was not about to admit that to anyone. "Aw, kid... you're just jealous. If you want to impress Mara, I'll let you in on a little secret about women."

"What?" Luke asked eagerly.

"You have to challenge Janson to a duel," Han said as he leaned toward Luke and lowered his voice to a whisper. "When you show Mara what a big, strong man you are, she'll forget all about Janson. But whatever you do, make her think it was your idea."

"You think so?"

"Would I lie to you?"

"Hello," Threepio said primly to the floating droid. "My name is C-3PO, and this is R2-D2. What is your designation?"

The orb spun to face the two droids, blinking its photoreceptor once before humming away without a reply.

"How rude!" Threepio declared. "He could have told us his name!"

"Reeroowp."

"Well, I don't care if he doesn't have speech capabilities! I don't like him one bit. He looks too nosy."

"Veerreeoopp."

"I am well aware of the fact he doesn't have a nose, either!" Threepio said, bending toward Artoo. He pounded the little droid on his dome. "You're rude, too!"

One week later...

Luke stood up at the dinner table, holding up his cup. "To Mara Jade," he began his toast. "The most beautiful woman in all the galaxy!"

"Here, here!" Wes said, standing up and tipping his cup to Mara.

"What am I?" Leia snapped. "Chopped bantha burger?"

I think you're cute as a little snow bumshee, Chewie said to Leia with a toothy grin.

"What's a snow bumshee?" Leia questioned suspiciously.

"I hereby declare that Mara Jade is *my* woman," Luke continued, ignoring Leia and Chewie's remarks. "And I challenge you, Wes Janson, to a duel!"

Wes looked at Luke in surprise. "A what?!"

Padme nudged Anakin, concern showing in her brown eyes. "Anakin.....our son is being foolish. Do something."

"What would you suggest I do?" Vader asked tiredly. "Force choke some sense into his head? I think it's far too late for that, lovely. The suns of Tatooine have fried his brains beyond repair."

Mara stood up as well. "What in the seven hells of Corellia are you talking about, Skywalker? I am NOT your woman!"

"Once I win the fight for your hand, you will be," Luke said with a smile, glancing over at Han who was nodding his encouragement.

"I'm not fighting you!" Wes declared.

"Ha! I win! Stay away from Mara."

"I'm not afraid of you, farmboy. What kind of duel are you talking about?"

"A pie eating contest!" Luke said as inspiration struck. Han groaned and thudded his forehead onto the table.

"Pie eating?" Wes questioned.

"Yes! Kakannut cream pies! I will bake twenty of them, and whoever eats their ten the fastest, wins!"

"Not a problem! I can eat pies faster than you any day of the week!"

Threepio looked over at Artoo and Arvred. The two little droids were busy communicating with each other by coded light flashes. The golden droid was becoming worried. Artoo had always been his best friend, and now along comes this interloper. He'd have to do something - and fast - if he wanted to save his friendship with Artoo.

Evening....

Luke knocked quietly at the door of Leia's hut. Now that they'd rebuilt the houses, each person had their own hut, except of course for Mr. and Mrs. Vader. Threepio answered the door. "Yes?"

"Could I speak to Leia?"

"Alone? I do not think that is appropriate, seeing as you are an unattached male and she is an unattached female."

"Let him in, Threepio," Leia called out. "You don't have to worry about Luke - he's only interested in *Maaarra*."

Reluctantly, the droid stepped aside, allowing Luke to enter. Leia sat at a small table, mixing various plants and powders as she worked away. "What are you doing?" Luke asked.

"Running science experiments," she answered without looking up. "There are so many wonderful plants on this system - you wouldn't believe all the things I've already come up with."

"That's sort of what I want to talk to you about," Luke whispered. "I need something from you."

Leia looked up. "What do you need?"

"Does Threepio have to stay?" Luke said, inclining his head to the droid.

"Threepio, go find Artoo or something," Leia ordered the droid.

"I know when I'm not welcome," the droid muttered as he left the hut.

"Now what do you need?"

"Can you concoct something for me?"

"Like what?"

"Oh..... you know, some, uh, laxative type stuff."

Leia's eyes got wide with understanding. "Luke! That's terrible!"

"Can you do it?"

"Of course. But if I scratch your back, you'll have to scratch mine," she said with a wicked smile.

Threepio tapped Chewie politely on the shoulder. "Chewbacca, sir? May I ask for your assistance?"

What do you want?

Chewie growled out.

"I would like you to help me do something... well, actually get rid of something, if you would be so kind as to agree to help me."

What do you want to get rid of?

"Arvred, to be exact."

Later.....

"Chewie?" Luke asked, looking around to make certain no one was near. "Can I ask you for a favor?"

Chewie nodded, not bothering to say anything since Luke wouldn't understand anyway. It seemed he was very popular today.

"I need your help with finding a few small plants....."

That night....

Arvred was floating quietly, waiting for Wes to wake up. When the large net fell over him, the poor little droid never had a chance.

The next morning....

Now what do you want me to do with it?

Chewie asked, holding the net with the little recording droid. Threepio followed the Wookiee and Luke into the forest.

"Could we bury him in a hole somewhere?" Threepio suggested. "And put a large rock over it?"

"Threepio," Luke said with a laugh. "I can't believe you're jealous."

"I am not jealous! This little eyeball is a sneak, that's all," Threepio insisted.



Perhaps I should just dismantle it.

"And commit droidicide?" Threepio asked, shocked. "I should think not! I just want him imprisoned - for spying on humans and stealing best friends."

What plants are we looking for? Chewie woofed at Luke.

Threepio interpreted for Luke as he unfolded a flimsy with two drawings. "This plant.... is for....err...helping blockages."

"Are you having problems, Master Luke?" Threepio asked in concern.

"You might say that. And this other plant is something Leia needs."

For what?

Luke hesitated after listening to Threepio translate. "She says it has a chemical in it that makes men.... uh..... eager."

Chewie threw his head back and howled with laughter.

Afternoon...the next day.

Ten pies were lined up on each side of the table, and Luke was already sitting on his side of the table, holding his fork and waiting for his opponent. Wes Janson came out of the hut he'd been sharing with Luke, a large bib tied around his neck. "Has anyone seen Arvred?"

"Arvred?" Threepio looked around nervously. "No. No one has seen Arvred. Have we? No.... I'd have to say that no one has seen Arvrid around lately. Have you seen Arvred, Artoo?"

Artoo gave a negative beep. "No... Artoo hasn't seen him, either," Threepio added unnecessarily.

Wes sat down opposite Luke. "That's odd. He never leaves my side. I hope he didn't get lost or something."

"Are we here to discuss your droid, or to duel?" Luke asked shortly, glancing at Leia. She smiled sweetly at him and winked.

"This is just so stupid," Mara moaned. "A pie eating contest? What makes you think I'll be attracted to a man just because he can eat pies fast?"

"Perhaps they will both choke on the pies, and you won't have to worry about it," Vader told her.

"Anakin!" Padme said, shocked. "That's our son!"

"Don't remind me."

"Okay!" Han announced loudly. "On the count of three, you will start eating. The entire pie has to be eaten, and the bowl licked clean before you can move on to the next pie. And leaving the table and upchucking is not allowed. The first man to finish, wins the hand of the fair lady. Ready? One. Two. THREE!"

Wes and Luke began shoveling in huge mouthfuls of pie. It ran down their chins and fell back onto the plate as they scooped and swallowed. Leia, Han and Chewie yelled loud encouragement to Luke.

"This is gross," Mara said, wrinkling up her nose.

The contest went fork for fork until the very last pie. Then Luke starting slowing down - after all, nine pies *was* a lot of pies. Wes shoveled in the last mouthful, licking his plate clean and holding it up in triumph while Luke was still downing the last three bites. "Ha!! I win!" Janson shouted, jumping up and running around the table with his fists in the air. "I win! I win! I....ughh!" Wes clutched his abdomen, his face changing from joy to pain. "Uggghh!! My guts! My guts!" he yelled as he rushed to the out-fresher.

"Men are so disgusting," Mara commented as she walked away.

"Mara! Wait up!" Luke yelled as he followed her, looking back over his shoulder and adding, "Han, this is all your fault!"

*I think she really likes Luke *much* better now,* Chewie woofed sarcastically.

"I've seen quite enough," Vader hissed out, taking Padme's arm. "Come, my lovely."

As the Vaders headed off to their hut, Leia sidled up to Han. "You look thirsty," she purred quietly. "Have some special punch I made, just for you."

"Sure," Han said as he distractedly took the cup. "I'd better go check on Luke."

Leia frowned as she watched Han head off, still holding the cup. Chewie walked up next to Leia. *That concoction won't hurt Han, will it?*

"Don't worry," Leia said with a smile. "It will just help me win his *affections*."

You should give some to Mara, so Luke could win her 'affections'.

Miss Leia laughed. "It only works on males."

Too bad for Luke.

"I think Mara hates me, Han," Luke said dejectedly as he slumped on the ground and leaned up against a tree. "I've made things worse."

"Nah. You just got to give her time. She'll come around - trust me." Han handed Luke the cup. "Here, have something to wash down all that pie."

Luke took the cup and gulped down the juice. "That's good. Thanks, Han. I needed that."

"Anytime, kid. Anytime."

Late that night.....

"Ohhhhh.....my GUTS!" Wes moaned loudly from the out-fresher, where he'd been for seven hours. "I THINK I'M DYING!"

"Hurry up, Janson," Han shouted back. "Some other people might need to use the refresher tonight, ya know!"

"MARA!!!" Luke screamed from outside the actress's hut. "I LOVE YOU!! I NEED YOU!!! I WANT YOU!!!"

"Go AWAY, Skywalker! I swear I'm going to KILL you!" Mara was heard yelling back at the young man dancing around outside her hut, a wild look plastered on his face.

Leia could be heard sobbing from her own hut, crying out, "What's wrong with *me*? Do I look like a Hutt? WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH SOLO?"

Threepio hurried past the Vaders' window, following the astromech droid. "Artoo! I'm telling you.... I have no clue where Arvred hovered off to! It's not my fault...."

Padme rolled over on her side and looked at Anakin, who was laying on his back without his mask, staring at the ceiling. "How long is this racket going to go on?"

"I have no idea," Anakin said with a sigh. "Luke seems to have lost his mind."

"Do you think he ate too many kakannut pies?"

"I think the boy *is* a kakannut, if you ask me."

The next morning.....

"Miss Leia!" Threepio called out, waving a flimsy as the group sat tiredly around the breakfast table, having gotten very little sleep the night before. "Mr. Janson is gone! And he left a note, too!"

"Another note?" Padme asked.

"Give me that," Leia said, snatching the note from the droid.

"You people are crazy! You tried to poison me with that lousy pie! I hope you rot on this planet!"

*Ten million credits wouldn't be enough to take
you back with me!*

Wes J.

PS. And you killed my droid, too, didn't you?"

"We're not real popular with the visitors on this system, are we?" Han asked.

"My pie is not lousy," Luke protested with a yawn.

The shuttle landed on the surface, and Wes Janson ran out of the trees, waving his arms frantically. "Quick! Open up the hatch!"

The hatch lowered and he rushed inside, his face bright red. Lando Calrissian, holo-entertainment producer, came around the corner. "What's the matter? You've only been here a little over two weeks... you were supposed to be here six weeks! You do realize, by using your emergency transmitter to have us pick you up, you've forfeited your million."

Wes thrust the small transmitter he'd kept hidden from the castaways into Calrissian's hands. "I don't care! They killed my droid! They tried killing *me* - with PIE!"

"Pie?" Lando questioned, starting to wonder about Janson's mental state. So much for those pre-game contestant psychology tests. "Who are 'they'?" Lando had heard stories about people imagining other people when they were left totally alone... but after only two weeks?

"Crazy people! We have to leave! Hurry! Hurry!" Janson shouted, as he ran further inside the shuttle. "Shut the hatch, before it's too late!"

Calrissian closed the hatch and followed behind Janson. "I think it's too late for that, Janson," Lando muttered under his breath. "Your hull has already been breached."

Three months later.....

"You can't do this!" the tall blond man protested loudly. "I'm royalty! You are going to be sorry when I'm in charge of things!"

The guards were not impressed, grabbing the handsome man by the arms and tossing him unceremoniously onto the beach. The hatch slammed shut and the engines fired up, forcing the furious man to back away and watch helplessly as the Hapan transport lifted off and gracefully flew away.

The group sat around the table eating fish stew for dinner. Suddenly, Chewie stood up and threw his bowl as far as he could, watching in satisfaction as the contents splattered on the ground. *I hate fish! I hate roots! I hate kakannuts!*

Han sighed. "Sit down, Chewie. You do this once a week, and we're getting tired of it."

"I'm tired of all of you," Mara grouched. "Eight lousy months! If we don't get rescued pretty soon, I'm not going to have a career left! Do you know how fast the public forgets its stars?"

"I have no idea," Han replied. "But I wish I could forget you. I'm getting tired of hearing you whine all the time."

"Don't talk to Mara like that!" Luke said, standing up and glaring at Han. "You don't even like girls!"

"I like *women* just fine, kid! But you're right - all we have are whiney girls stranded with us."

"I'm not whiney, and I'm a woman, Solo!" Leia shouted across the table. "I think Luke's right.... you don't even like *women*!"

"Please, children!" Padme said firmly. "It doesn't do any good to argue. I know we're all a bit tired of each other, but we're all we have, so we must learn to get along!"

"I am not a child!" Mara yelled at Padme.

"Do not yell at my wife!" Vader roared, standing up as well. "You people are not *children*... you are *babies*!"

A tall man with flowing, long blond locks staggered into the camp. "Help me..." he gasped as he collapsed to his knees, holding his hands out in a pleading gesture. "Help me....water.... please...."

"Dear me," Padme said, hurrying over to the man. "Where did you come from?"

"Are you an angel?" he asked, looking up at Mrs. Vader.

"No....my name is Padme Vader, and this is my husband, Anakin," she said as Vader stalked over to the kneeling man. "The others are Captain Solo, Miss Leia and her two droids, Chewbacca, Luke and Mara."

"Who are you?" Vader hissed at the finely dressed man. *Where do all these annoying people come from, anyway?*

"My name is Prince Isolder, of Hapes," he gulped out.

"A prince?" Leia asked, looking down at the man. He *was* quite handsome, and if Han wouldn't cooperate, maybe this man would. "You're a *real* prince?"

"So you're rich?" Mara questioned.

"Great," Luke muttered. "More competition."

"Yes, I'm a real prince. Unfortunately, I've been banished by my mumsie, the Queen."

"Oh," Mara said, rolling her eyes. "Another loser. Just my luck."

"How long have you been here, dear?" Padme asked gently as she handed him a cup of water.

"Three hours! Three hellish hours!" He gulped the water down quickly. "I thought I was going to die of heat prostration," Isolder moaned.

"An entire *three* hours?" Vader snarled sarcastically, pulling Isolder to his feet. "Get a hold of yourself, man. It's not even hot today!"

"Now, dear," Padme said. "I'm sure Isolder is unaccustomed to such hardships." She looked over at the Prince. "Forgive my husband. We've all been a bit on edge, lately."

Prince Isolder looked over the camp site. "It's not much, but I suppose it will do..."

"Do for what?" Luke asked.

"As my new kingdom, of course. I'm royalty - therefore, I hereby declare myself the king of this place. And since I'm royalty, you are hereby my servants."

"I'm not serving anyone, goldie locks," Mara huffed. "I'm Mara Jade, the famous actress! People fawn over *me*, pal, not the other way around."

"I don't care who you are," Han grumbled in agreement. "There is no way you're bossing me around."

"Me, either," Vader agreed.

"Oh...no..." Isolder gasped out, putting his hand on his forehead. "I think.... I think I'm passing out." He fell into a careful heap on the ground.

"Prince...err... King?" Padme called out in concern. She looked at the others, putting her hands on her hips. "There you go!"

"What do you mean, lovely?"

"The poor man needs to be in charge, that's all! The least we could do is humor him.... he was a prince not that long ago, after all."

"Who cares?" Han said with a shrug.

*Not me," Chewie woofed out.

Padme stomped her foot down on the ground. "He's our guest! And as such, we will treat him like he wants to be treated."

"You're kidding, right?" Mara asked. "I'm not pretending to be his servant!"

"Mara, dear, you *are* an actress. So just act like a servant."

"You will all do as my wife wants!" Vader roared. "Or face my lightsaber!"

Isolder groaned and opened one eye. He rolled over and sat up, looking woozy. "So. Are we all in agreement, then? I'm the King of this planet?" he asked with a pleased grin.

"Sure," Luke said. "You can be king."

"What's the name of this forsaken little piece of..... heaven?" the new King asked.

"We haven't given it a name," Leia answered.

"Fine," Isolder said, getting up and dusting off his pants. "As my official first act, I hereby declare this planet to be called, 'Isolder.'"

"What a surprise," Han said.

"Also, I will need a throne. Build one immediately," he ordered as he headed off in the direction of the Vaders' hut.

"Where do you think you are going?" Vader asked, reaching out with the Force and tripping Isolder.

The new King looked around for the object that tripped him, then got up, pointing at the Vaders' hut. "That hut is the largest. I will have to make do - temporarily. At least until you build me a bigger one - a *much* bigger one, of course. You can start with ten rooms, and then add on as I need them."

"It's just temporary, dear," Padme said, patting her hand on Anakin's arm.

That night...

A tapping sound woke Luke up. "Yes?"

"Luke? It's Mara. Can I come in?"

I think I've died and gone to heaven.... "Y..yes?"

Mara quickly entered the hut, shutting the door behind her. "Luke, we've got to get rid of that Prince."

"But mamma says - "

"Your mother is too darn nice! Isolder has got to go." She lowered her voice. "He's already ordered me to come to his room for the night! And I've had to give up my cabin and share again with Leia, so Mr. and Mrs. Vader could have a place to sleep. It's just too much, I'm telling you!"

"He ... he ordered you to his room?"

"Yes!"

Luke jumped out of bed. "I'm going to defend your honor!" He looked down, blushing as he realized he was only wearing his shorts.

Mara gave a smile that did not reach her eyes. "I have a better idea....." She leaned over and whispered in his ear.

Luke pulled back, shocked. "You're going to do *what?*"

"He won't even know what hit him," Mara grinned. She sat down on Luke's cot, patting the mattress invitingly. "Now, come here, farmboy. I'd much rather share a room with you than with Miss Leia, any day."

If this was a dream, Luke hoped he never woke up.

Han, we must find a way to make Isolder leave, Chewie woofed. *I do not like him.*

"Me either, pal," Han agreed. "Did you see the way Leia was looking at him?"

Leia?

Chewie snickered.

"What's so funny?"

You like her. Quit denying it.

"Fine, I like her - does that make you happy?" Han looked out the window, frowning. "She sure deserves better than that jerky prince."

Chewie woofed in laughter. *I have an idea....*

"Anakin?"

"Yes, lovely?"

"Do you like Prince Isolder?"

"He's a pompous idiot." Anakin looked over at Padme, who was rubbing cream all over her face. "Why are you humoring him?"

Padme turned and smiled at her husband. "Did you see the expression on Han's face when Isolder showed up? Pure jealousy. And Mara is finally getting a chance to see what a sweet boy Luke is, when you compare him to the 'Isolders' of the galaxy."

"You are very conniving, lovely. I'm proud of you."

"Thank you, dear. Coming from you, that's quite a compliment."

The next morning.....

"You did not show up last night, Mara Jade," King Isolder admonished, looking down from his wooden throne.

"Sorry," she said, smiling sweetly up at him. "I spent the night with Luke, instead."

"Luke!" Padme said, eyes wide. "Is that true?"

"Yes," Luke mumbled, looking embarrassed and proud.

"Congratulations, son!" Vader roared out, slapping him on the back so hard he nearly fell over. "I knew you had it in you!" Vader glanced over at his wife and noted she looked very smug.

"He certainly does," Mara said, laughing and taking his arm possessively. "Luke's my man now."

Isolder just looked annoyed. He turned his attention to Leia, who was glaring at Mara and Luke. "Then tonight, Miss Leia will come to my hut!" he proclaimed.

Leia stepped forward, and a big smile appeared on her face. "My full name is Princess Leia Organa of Alderaan and I, for one, will be thrilled to go to your hut!" Leia smirked at Han, who was silently fuming at her.

"Princess Leia Organa?" Isolder asked, surprised. "Mother contacted your father, Prince Organa, and tried to arrange a marriage between the two of us a short while back. Except we found out you'd disappeared..... and then Prince Bail told us about that *other* thing, you know.... so we had to call the whole thing off."

"Other thing?" Leia asked sharply. "What *other* thing?"

"I'm a real prince," Isolder said, puffing out his chest. "And as such, I can only marry a real princess. You don't qualify. But you can be my concubine instead, so that should be enough to make you happy."

"What are you talking about? I'm a *real* princess!" she protested, getting mad at this fool prince.

"No you're not. You're adopted. Your father said so."

"ADOPTED?" Leia yelled. "I'm not adopted! You're a big, fat liar!"

"I am not fat! This is all muscle!"

"Ha!" Mara said, pointing at Leia. "You're not royalty after all.... I'm not a bit surprised!"

"Well... you're a lousy actress!" Leia yelled at Mara.

"I'm not a lousy actress! Tell her, Luke," Mara turned and looked at Luke.

"Mara's the best actress in the galaxy," he supplied quickly, much to Mara's delight.

"He's lying!" Leia repeated, looking at Padme.

"I'm sure Luke feels that Mara is an excellent actress," Padme said firmly. "As well as feeling many other things by now."

"I don't mean *Luke*!" Leia shouted back. "I'm talking about Prince Solderhead from Hades!"

"Hey!" Isolder said, miffed. "I think you're insulting me!" He looked over at a flustered Threepio. "That was an insult, right?"

Artoo had rolled up, quietly listening to the argument. Finally, Artoo gave a long series of beeps and twitters, rocking back and forth on his little feet.

"Miss Leia?" Threepio said tentatively. "May I say something?"

"What do you want?" she snapped at the droid.

"Artoo, apparently, is confirming what Prince Isolder just said.... you are indeed adopted."

"Why didn't he say something before?" Leia asked.

Artoo beeped a bit more. "He says he was sworn to secrecy...don't blame me, Miss Leia!" Threepio said, annoyed. "I don't have any idea why your father would trust Artoo more than he'd trust me!"

"I guess we have something in common, Leia," Luke said cheerfully. "My folks gave me up, too. Except now they've found me again, so we're one big happy family. Pa Skywalker, Ma Skywalker, and little old me, Luke-boy Skywalker, with his new intended, Mara Jade, the Famous and Beautiful Actress." Luke gave Mara a big hug, which she returned as she stuck her tongue out at Leia.

Artoo started hooting loudly, nearly tipping himself over in his excitement.

"Now what's wrong with that little short circuit?" Leia groused, looking at the droid.

"Miss Leia?" Threepio said softly, leaning forward. "Artoo says your real last name, before you were adopted, was Skywalker, too."

Leia fainted.

"Now look what you've done, Artoo!" Threepio said, hitting the little droid on top of his dome.

Han was elected to carry Leia back to her hut, while the others just stood around in shock.

"Anakin," Padme said to her husband. "Just think! Miss Leia is our daughter! We ended up stranded with both of our children! Isn't that amazing?"

"Does this mean I have to share my inheritance?" Luke complained. "I don't think that's right..... she already has lots of money, seeing how she grew up a rich *Princess*, and I had to grow up a poor *dirt farmer* on Tatooine! Mara and I deserve lots of money, don't we, sweetums?"

"Yes, Lukie." Mara giggled and kissed his cheek. "Lots and lots."

"I think it's probably the will of the Force we ended up missing our cruise, lovely," Vader said thoughtfully. "Look how much good has come from it."

"You are so right," Padme said, nodding. "This truly was a fateful trip."

"I want some attention here!" Isolder shouted over all the talking. "I'm the King!" Isolder said, flipping his hair back over his shoulders as he looked in a mirror. "And a very good looking King, I might add. I need a crown." He patted the top of his head. "Someone needs to make me a crown! You can use that gold droid for the metal."

"I think I'd better go chaperone Miss Leia," Threepio said, backing away fearfully. "It isn't good she's alone with Captain Solo." He turned and shuffled quickly away.

"What's that?" Isolder said, frowning as a strange object floated out of the deep woods, heading in his direction. It was covered with moss and dirt, and made an odd humming noise as it bobbed unsteadily.

It's the EYEBALL OF DOOM! Chewie roared. *Run everyone! RUN!*

"Eyeball of Doom?" Vader asked, turning to look at the round object.

"I've never heard of the Eyeball of Doom," Padme said.

"Well, *someone* better kill it!" Isolder shouted.

It can't be killed! It's pure EVIL! Chewie yelled, throwing his arms up and running around in circles. *Everyone needs to run away from here, forever! Head in different directions, so we confuse it!*

"Why is that Wookiee running around in circles?" Isolder questioned. "Does he have rabies? I'm allergic to rabies."

"Maybe he has fleas," Padme suggested.

"Then just keep him away from me. I'm allergic to fleas, too," Isolder said.

Vader held up his fingers and shot Force-lightning at the object, which immediately sizzled and crashed to the ground, silent and still.

"VREEEPPPOOP!" Artoo hurried over to the orb. "Reeroorerr!"

Luke ran over and looked down. "That's not an Eyeball of Doom. That's Arvred. Although he is pretty doomed *now*, I'd say."

Artoo started making little beeping noises, which sounded suspiciously like crying, while Luke patted him on his 'head'.

*I guess Force-lightning *can* kill the Eyeball of Doom,* Chewie grumbled under his breath, disappointed that his big plan failed.

Mara smiled at Chewie. "Don't worry - I have an idea, too." She stepped forward, drawing out a lightsaber with a designer jewel-encrusted hilt from her beaded handbag, and turning on the bright pink blade. "Isolder, I have news for you. I work part-time neutering the rivals of Palpatine."

"You do?" Padme asked in surprise. "Goodness me, what else are we going to find out today?"

"Hey, it pays good," she said with a shrug. "Do you know that actresses are washed up and forgotten by the time they hit thirty-five? It's so sexist - men actors aren't considered washed-up until they hit sixty!"

"I'll never think you're washed up, Mara," Luke said sincerely.

"I know, Luke," Mara replied, then continued explaining. "So, besides being Mara Jade, Famous Actress, I'm also Mara Jade, Emperor's Hand. That's my official Imperial job title, in case you're wondering - just don't ask me what 'Hand' means - it's sort of ambiguous, like the title Human Resource Director. All I know is Palpatine hates it when men flirt with his wives, so my job is to permanently outsource certain parts of their anatomy."

"That talent might come in very handy right about now," Vader said.

"Hey! I'll bet that's what it means," Luke said with a grin. "You're very handy!"

"Yes, I am," Mara said, slowly stalking toward Isolder.

"Are you threatening me? I'm royalty!" Isolder said, getting nervous. "I hereby declare threatening and insulting the King a crime. Someone needs to arrest that woman!"

Vader drew his own lightsaber out of his belt and turned it on as he walked toward the pretty man. "I *strongly* suggest, King Isolder, that you abscond your throne and move yourself to the opposite side of this planet."

The second lightsaber convinced him. The Prince jumped off his throne and ran - very, very fast - as Vader, Luke, Mara and Chewie chased him across the beach. Isolder splashed into the surf and swam out to sea. They watched until the Prince was nothing more than a small speck in the ocean.

And don't come back! Chewie yelled loudly, as they turned and walked back to the camp.

"Han?" Leia asked as her eyes fluttered open. "You're here."

Solo looked down at the Princess, laying in her cot. "Of course. I'm sorry you're not a real princess, honey."

"Honey? That's so... sweet. You've never called me 'honey' before." She held her arms out to him. "Comfort me?"

Han gave Leia his lopsided smile, leaned over and was just about to kiss her when Threepio came crashing into the hut.

"Oh, no you don't!" Threepio said firmly, shaking his forefinger at the Princess. "This definitely qualifies as a 'good time', and as your Chaperone Droid, I forbid this type of activity!"

Han stood up, putting his arm around the droid's shoulders while ignoring Leia's look of despair. "You're right, Threepio. This is something we humans consider a 'good time'. So I guess I'd better leave, right?"

"That would be considered polite," Threepio replied.

"Dammit, Threepio, I've never been called 'polite' in my entire life. You had to go and insult me, didn't you?"

"Insult you? But Captain Solo, being called polite is not considered an ins -"

Han flicked the 'off switch' at the back of Threepio's neck, and the golden droid's eyes went dark. Han leered at Leia. "I guess you're gonna lose more than just your tiara today, sweetheart."

Everyone could hear Leia shouting, "*THANK THE FORCE!! FINALLY!!*"

Evening....

"It appears both of our children have found their soul mates," Padme said as she watched the full moon rise up over the horizon of the ocean. "This planet is very nice. I think five years will go by very fast."

"I told you it was the will of the Force that we were stranded here," Vader said, nodding and putting his arm around his wife. "Pretty soon, Luke will forget all about becoming a pastry chef. And that Corellian may be just what Leia needs to settle her hormones down."

"I feel very lucky, Anakin."

"Padme?"

"Yes?"

"Can I get lucky tonight, too?"

"Absolutely."

Chewie watched as Padme and Vader disappeared into their hut. Luke and Mara had spent the day in Luke's hut, and Han still had not emerged from Leia's hut. *This is not fair!* he yelled, shaking his fist at the evening sky. *There aren't enough women to go around!*

He sat down in the sand near the upside down *Falcon* and threw a handful of sand at the water. Artoo rolled up next to the Wookiee, cooing gently in consolation. *Do you think *maybe* the next arrival will be a female Wookiee?*

Chewie woofed sadly to the little droid, as he watched a shooting star in the clear night sky.

AND THAT IS THE TALE OF OUR
CASTAWAYS....

THEY'RE HERE FOR A LONG, LONG
TIME.....

THEY'LL HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST
OF THINGS.....

IT'S AN UPHILL CLIMB!

THE END?!

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