

Star Wars: Elegy

Too Little, Too Late

What if Han Solo didn't survive the Carbon Freezing process...? Part I

By Andrew Gilbertson

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A change of heart... too little, too late, thought Leia Organa as she watched Lando Calrissian's life rapidly dwindling under a Wookiee's strangling grip.

She'd seen in his eyes the hurt, the pain as he'd announced Han Solo's death to the assembled audience of the carbon freezing chamber. Seen his glance at the cold, unsympathetic masks of a Sith and a Bounty Hunter who cared only in how this impacted the bottom line of their respective plans; his anger and revulsion at what he had helped to accomplish. She'd seen, in that moment, through the torrent of hot, bitter tears, that Lando had never intended for things to go this far. That he hadn't meant for any of this to happen. that he was, perhaps, deep down, a good man.

Yet because of his betrayal, the man she loved was dead. And so she made no move to stop Chewbacca as he crushed the life out of the hapless baron-administrator who had sought to repay his misdeeds by freeing him... as if a lifetime of good deeds could ever come close to restitution for the death of Han Solo.

Leia had not given voice to her rage in the carbon freezing chamber. She had not ranted and screamed, railed and wailed, carried on in bitter anguish over the loss of her beloved... though every fiber of her being cried out to express her anguish and horror, though every inch of her soul demanded that she cry out, to curse the inhuman monsters that had taken everything from her, that had destroyed all that was good in her life... she had stood there amongst the hissing steam and milling Ugnaughts, stoic and unmoving, letting nothing, save a torrent of tears, to betray her emotions.

She would not give Darth Vader that pleasure twice in one lifetime.

She would not let Darth Vader see that he had hurt her more deeply than she knew that she could be hurt... again.

She would not

So instead, she bottled up her rage, her hatred, her misery, and her sorrow... and saved them for Lando Calrissian. And when his gasping, choking, rasping apologies finally gave way to a splintering crack, the small measure of regret that lodged itself somewhere near the back of her throat was quickly lost in the rising bile of her remembered fury; the rage which rose in wave upon wave within her heart. She looked down at the lifeless body as Chewbacca stepped away from it... and she was *glad*.

Leia was willing to admit, she was not the best pilot in the galaxy. She had always had a knack, an instinct for picking things up quickly that she couldn't explain... but in real-world experience, she was simply lacking. And yet, as Chewie ascended the elevated platform somewhere in the Falcon's belly to rescue Luke, dangling from a vein underneath Cloud City, the controls were hers alone.

How she wished Han was here! He'd have stubbornly insisted she was only imagining Luke's voice in her head, she knew, but he would have relented and turned the Falcon around. It was his way; he loved Luke like a brother, whether he'd ever admit it or not-

Leia blinked back tears once again; now of course, he'd never admit it. He couldn't. Han was lost to them all, forever.

Chewbacca's roar told her that he had Luke; it was time to move. She shoved the control sticks forward and felt the Falcon surge beneath her as it blasted away from Cloud City at full speed. She hoped the Empire would blast it to scrap, she mused, as the 'city in the clouds' dwindled behind her; it was a place of misery and horror now. Han was gone; taken by Boba Fett in hopes that even a corpse would be enough to appease Jabba the Hutt. Leia would track him, try to recover Han's body, she knew... but she wouldn't have the support of the rest of the Rebellion. The Rogues might fly to free Han Solo, had he been captured- the commandos might strike, the strategists plan- but there had been too many left

behind, never recovered, for the Alliance to invest that much in recovering a body. Whatever Leia did, she and Chewie would do alone.

The sensor suite squalled for her attention, warning of incoming TIE fighters. Leia wrenched the Falcon into a furious evasive maneuver and was rewarded by the spattering jolts of weapon impacts on the hull.

'*It's not fair!*' she could picture Han shouting. Or more likely '*It's not my fault!*'

The Falcon rocked again.

"Hurry, Chewie!" she shouted into the comm link. "I need your help up here!"

The Falcon continued to buck and weave as her best evasive maneuvers proved insufficient against the Imperial fighters' accuracy. Why couldn't they have the same instructors that taught Stormtroopers how to shoot train their pilots?

It seemed to Leia that the Falcon was moving more sluggishly, moaning and creaking with each hit, as if it had lost the will to live with the death of its master.

The cockpit door wooshed open and Chewbacca charged into the room; Leia surrendered the controls with a sigh of relief.

"If you need me, I'll be in the belly gun."

Leia didn't even bother with a headset; as soon as she was in the seat her targeting computer was cycling up. In another half of a second she squeezed the triggers, the rage and sorrow and pain of a broken soul flowing into her; she welcomed it, embraced the pain, let her rage fuel her as she thumbed the triggers. This was her release. Here, she finally allowed herself to vent the fiery torrent of emotions and pain roiling within her.

A TIE fighter instantly exploded.

Leia blinked in surprise, momentarily stunned. She hadn't even been *aiming* yet; she'd squeezed the trigger before she'd finished settling into her seat. And yet somehow, she'd just... known where to aim. And as she watched the former TIE fighter expanding outwards in a fiery cloud, a first strike back and the Empire that had taken her home and her love, it felt good. She thought of Vader, of everything he stood for- of Tarkin, and the debris of Alderaan, of Han, dead and frozen in a permanent expression of horrified anguish that mirrored her own heart. The rage rose again, and she fired.

Another TIE fighter died.

Leia screamed her terrible, furious hurt and held down the trigger, sweeping crimson bolts across the sky. It seemed too paltry, too pathetic a display to capture the depths of her grief, but it was all she had. Fighter after fighter blossomed in bright, flaming death.

It was only at Chewbacca's query over the comm. that she realized that all of the fighters had been destroyed; probably had been for some time. The atmosphere of Bespin had receded to the blackness of space; the planet shrank away behind them, while before them...

Vader.

The *Executor* blocked their path.

"What do you mean, the Hyperdrive damage was exacerbated by the TIE fighters?" C-3PO fussed in the

main cabin as Leia passed through on her way back to the cockpit. "The Hyperdrive was already repaired at Cloud City- and you haven't fixed *me* yet, Artoo!"

the protocol droid's complaints were cut off as the cockpit door closed; Leia sat beside Chewbacca in the co-pilot's station. The Wookiee was flying what evasive he could against the *Executor's* main turbolaser batteries while entering in the final calculations from the Navicomputer. He moaned, worriedly.

Leia heard his concern about the hits the Falcon had taken on it's way to rescue Luke; his concern that he was not back in the engine room repairing the damage- before he gripped the Hyperspace levers, Leia already knew that they would fail.

A second later, the Falcon rocked, gently, as a tractor beam locked on to them.

Darth Vader was pulling them in.

Leia and Chewie exchanged a glance, and looked back in the direction where Luke now lay, in a delirium, in the Falcon's medical bay. Chewie growled a gentle but firm affirmation. His life debt was Leia's now, no matter what came next.

Leia knew only rage.

After all of this, after all that he had taken from her, Vader was not yet finished?

The maw of the *Executor's* hanger bay grew larger in the viewport.

Fine. Let him take them on board, then. Leia was already committed to the Dark Side. Whether she knew it in her mind or only in the depths of her heart, she knew that vengeance was all that was left for her. She would find Vader. And she would kill him. Or he would have to kill her. There was no other choice.