

Star Wars

Corphelion Interlude

by Troy Denning

updated : 11.XI.2006

#####

A flight of cornets hung just beyond the observation dome, their luminous heads arrayed in a ragged double arrow, their long tails striping the dark sky with silver splendor. The largest were visibly creeping across space, and one-a blazing giant with a braided tail that seemed to stretch across half the system-was rapidly swelling to the size of a hubba melon. The panorama was just as advertised, the perfect honeymoon view, and Han Solo could tell by the gabble of three-hundred beings packed onto the small viewing floor that everyone else thought so, too.

At Han's side stood Leia, dressed comfortably but fashionably in a sleeveless doublet and a pair of slinky zoosha pants that Han found especially alluring. Her brown eyes were fixed on the patio below, and on her face, she wore a cordial diplomat's expression that was more mask than smile.

Behind them, a swarm of droning Kubaz spilled out of the turbolift and brushed past, making pointed comments about blocking access to the viewing floor.

"Sorry about this," Han said to Leia. A stop to watch the Corphelion Comets had seemed a romantic way to start their honeymoon-at least until they had discovered that it was the height of the season and every resort on the asteroid was badly overbooked. "I guess the private dome isn't so private, either."

"I don't care, as long as we're here together." Leia took Han's hand and started down a broad set of dark, hardwood stairs. "There's a pair of empty chaises out there in the middle. Once we settle in and order a drink, we won't even notice the noise."

"Sure. A Pink Nebula sounds good." Jostling for elbow space was hardly the romantic way Han had hoped to start their marriage, but things were bound to improve. Around Leia, they usually did. "Maybe the serving droid has earplugs or something."

They were halfway down the staircase when a brilliant starburst of radiance filled the sky. The Solos stopped to look and saw the giant comet splitting into a spectacular set of twins. The crowded patio fell silent.

"Now that's more like it," Han said.

The twins began to drift apart, their tails crossing as one comet angled toward the rest of the Corphelions. The other continued to swell in the darkness above the dome. Finally, when its head had grown to an apparent diameter of more than a meter, a nervous murmur began to build on the patio below.

Leia turned back up the stairs. "Maybe we should go back to the Falcon."

Han caught her arm. "Not so fast." He continued to study the approaching comet-or rather, the darkness around its edges, watching to see how quickly and evenly its head was obscuring the distant stars.

"I thought you wanted to see the Corphelions?"

"Not this close, Han."

"Relax."

As he had hoped, the stars on the comet's lower left were vanishing by the dozens; those on the upper right were disappearing only in twos and threes. "Everything's under control."

"You've said that before," Leia objected. "You're sure we don't need to go back to the Falcon?"

"I'm sure." Han slipped a hand down to the small of her back. "And this time I mean it."

Everything's under control, Sweetheart."

Leia glanced from Han to the approaching comet, then back to Han again. Her expression grew more trusting, and she smiled slyly.

"Okay, Flyboy." She took his arm. "My life is in your hands."

They descended the rest of the stairs arm in arm. The comet had doubled in size during the last few seconds, its tail becoming a fan that curved across a quarter of the dome. A portly Bothan couple rose with their fur standing on end and turned toward the stairs, and that was all it took to send the rest of the crowd scurrying for the evacuation stations inside the asteroid.

Leia pulled Han into a quiet corner and reached up with both hands. As jabbering humans and growling aliens continued to shove up the stairs in a near-stampede, she laced her fingers together behind his neck and stared deep into his eyes.

Han's heart began to beat faster.

"How did you arrange this?" Leia asked.

"Arrange what?" Han was genuinely confused.

Leia gently pulled his head close to her mouth. "The comet." She flicked her tongue along the lobe of his ear, then continued in a sultry voice. "Come on, Flyboy, you can tell me. Did Wedge help you?"

"Wedge? You think Wedge is out there moving comets around?"

Leia gently nibbled his earlobe. It felt warm and . . . well, wonderful. "Lando, then. He has that big asteroid tug, and this is just his style. Grandiose, effective." She glanced over at the now-deserted patio. And just a little bit devious."

"Lando's busy on Nkllon." Han was keeping one eye on the comet. "You know that."

"You wont tell me?" Leia slipped her hands under the hem of his tunic and playfully ran her fingers up his back. "You're sure?"

"Well, I'm..."

Leia dug her fingertips into the flesh behind his shoulders.

"Pretty sure," Han said. "I think."

The comet was the size of an Endorian moon now, and he was begin ning to worry that his pilot's eye had gone weak. The different rates at which the head was obscuring the surrounding stars suggested it was approaching at an angle, but unless the stars on the right stopped disappearing-and soon-the comet would not actually miss the resort.

"Uh, Leia?"

"No-I've changed my mind, Han." Leia lowered her hands and, one arm still wrapped around his waist, turned to look at the sky. "I dont want to know how you arranged this."

"But..."

"Sshhh." Leia touched a finger to his lips. "I just want to look. It makes me wish we could forget everything back on Coruscant and stay here forever."

"You don't say?" The approaching comet was a large as a bantha now. Han glanced toward the empty stairs, trying to estimate how long he could keep his real secret-that he may have miscalculated the comet's trajectory-before they would have to make a mad scramble for the evacuation shelters. "I just might be able to arrange that."

Leia leaned her head against his shoulder. "If only you could.'

"Oh, I could..." The comet grew so bright that its radiance lit the whole dome and there were no stars visible around it at all. Deciding that things were starting to get dangerous, Han pulled Leia out of the corner. "In fact..."

The white spike of an antitail finally appeared in front of the head, and the entire comet began to angle across the dome-away from the resort. Han exhaled in relief, then put on his best lopsided grin and turned to Leia.

Leia looked puzzled. "In fact what, Han?"

"In fact..." Han waited while the comet drifted over their heads to the other side of the dome, then said, "You're going to be really impressed with what I've arranged next."

Leia cocked her brow. "Pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?"

Han nodded. "I have a reason."

The asteroid entered the comet's tail, and billions of tiny dust grains exploded against the resort's particle shield. Space above erupted into a glittering veil of micro-flashes.

"Okay, I'm impressed," Leia said. "Really impressed."

"That was nothing," Han said. "This is what I was talking about."

He drew Leia close and lowered his lips to hers. She pressed herself tight against him and returned the kiss passionately, and that was how they remained until a loud cheer from atop the stairs interrupted them.

Han opened an eye and, finding an audience of two dozen comet watchers leering down at them, broke off the kiss. "Leia?"

"Yes, Han?"

"Maybe we should go back to the Falcon after all."

Leia took his hand and started for the stairs. "Han, I thought you'd never ask."