

Undiscovered Stars

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Undiscovered Stars

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Summary

Just how far out in the Unknown Regions was he, Lando wondered, that they didn't use hyperdrives?

Notes

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AN: While TNG and later shows just handwaved translation issues for the most part (I assume the communicators everyone wore were doing the translating?) in TOS and ENT and DIS they had Universal Translators that were hand-held devices.

AN2: There is no way that the Star Wars galaxy is a spiral. Here is [a map of the old Legends EU](#), and here is [the current map](#) which is largely similar. Even if you assume (as I tend to) that there actually are as many stars on the Galactic West side of the Core as on the Galactic East (they just aren't marked because, idk, they're not important and/or just not connected to either the Republic or the Empire, the distribution of planets doesn't look anything like a spiral. The GFFA is [120k light years in diameter](#). The Milky Way is [somewhere between 170k lightyears and 200k lightyears](#).

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Lando studied his cards nonchalantly. Actual paper cards, no holograms or randomizers or any other technology than ink and paper. It was quaint, and he couldn't decide if he liked it or not. On the one hand, it meant it would be harder to find someone who had palmed a hidden card, as you couldn't scan for a power source. On the other hand, there were no computer components to be sliced. It made it both easier and harder to cheat at the same time. He took a sip of his drink as cover for looking at his fellow players.

Nothing had changed in the last few minutes. All near-Humans, none of any species he recognized. Nor any culture or language he recognized, either. Thank the Force they had *excellent* translation technology, in the form of small devices that were easily tucked in a pocket. (Though, curiously, they didn't have protocol droids. Or astromech droids. Or any other droids at all.) As the game progressed, Lando listened more than he spoke, drank as little as he could get away with, and prayed that his hosts' social cues were as familiar as they seemed to be.

He'd never flown this blind in all his life. Even when he was a teen first starting out as a gambler and small-time con artist, he'd known the score.

He'd known how the world worked, both the public face of the Empire and the dirty secrets in the shadows. He'd known where the gaps and sore spots and blind spots were and how to exploit them. He'd known sabaac backwards and forwards, known the odds of every combination, known how to cheat and when not to (and how to spot people trying to cheat *him*). He'd known who the major players were, who was dangerous and who only talked a big game. He'd known who would be an easy target, and who to never cross under any circumstances. It's how he'd made good, how he'd made allies, and it had saved his life more than once.

Here, he knew *nothing*. He had no allies, no place to go, and no way to get anywhere.

The door of the tavern opened, and most people glanced over to see who had walked in. Lando was careful to show no more (or less) interest in the newcomer than anyone else. It was a light-skinned human—or near-human—in a gold shirt and black pants.

"I'm Captain James T. Kirk, of the Federation Starship *Enterprise*," the newcomer said. "I'm looking for either a communications device I can use, or a ride back to Federation space. I can't pay up front, but the Federation will compensate you for your time and equipment usage."

Nobody responded, and people turned back to their conversations. Lando turned his attention back to his cards. Figuring out odds was difficult when you were new to the game, and the fact that he was still learning to read the number symbols on the cards didn't help.

"What's a Starfleet type doing out *here*?" the green-skinned man across the table from Lando said with a scowl. None of Lando's partners had offered their names at the start of the game, so Lando hadn't offered his, either. "They charted this area *ages* ago, and they have no allies in this part of the quadrant."

The blue woman with the bumpy forehead shrugged. "They are like small, annoying pets who turn up underfoot when they are least wanted. Who knows? They'll pay to get their officer back, but not *well*. Not well enough to bother with."

"What do you expect from people who don't use money?" the green man said.

"Might be worth helping him out just to get rid of him," said the dark-brown-skinned man with earlobes that dangled below his shoulders. "They're so sanctimonious. Bad for business."

"You can, if you like," said the green man.

"What about you?" the blue woman said to Lando. "You're Human, aren't you? From the Federation?"

"Human, yes," Lando said. "Not from the Federation."

"Didn't know there were Humans outside of the Federation," the brown man said.

"Are we going to play, or what?" complained the furry woman with a tail.

After a few more hands, Lando bowed out while he was ahead. He'd won a little, enough to keep him in food and docking fees for the next few days at least, and he didn't want to push his luck. He was stuck in a completely foreign place with no contacts and a ship with a broken hyperdrive; he had no place to go if he made enemies or his luck turned sour. Better to keep his winnings modest and spread out over different games.

Lando left the tavern and headed for the docks, pulling his cape closed in front to keep out the evening chill. Should he find the other human, what was his name? Kirk? It had been something of a relief to see a species he recognized, and a human might know how to get back to the known regions from ... wherever it was they were. On the other hand, Lando wasn't a chauvinist; he was fine with aliens, and would be fine with never seeing another human being again. This place was strange but they'd never even *heard* of the Empire and didn't seem to have a local equivalent, or any power half as nasty. There was a lot to be said for a world in which the Empire didn't exist.

In the end, Lando didn't have to decide; the other human found *him*.

"Hello," Kirk said, popping up out of a side street. "I'm Captain James Kirk of the Federation Starship *Enterprise*—"

"I heard your offer back in the tavern," Lando said. "I'm Lando Calrissian."

"I thought, as the only human in the area, you would be my best bet at someone who could contact my ship for me," Kirk said.

Either Humans really *were* only found in this "Federation" of his, or Kirk was a human chauvinist. Or both. "Sorry," Lando said smoothly. "I'm not from around here. I'd never even *heard* of your 'Federation' before you walked into the tavern this evening."

"Really?" Kirk said, tilting his head and frowning. "Where are you from, if you don't mind my asking?" He sounded a bit bewildered.

"Socorro," Lando said, "it's near Herdessa."

"And where is Herdessa?"

Obviously Lando was further from known space than he thought. "It's on the rimward side of the Corellian Run's Mid-Rim segment."

"And what's the Corellian Run?"

Lando stopped dead in his tracks. "It's the second most important hyperroute in the galaxy, after the Perlemian Trade Route."

"And a hyperroute is?"

Just how far out in the Unknown Regions *was* he, that they didn't use hyperdrives? Lando shook his head. "Look, I have no idea where we are in relation to *any* place I know. I was in hyperspace, and there was a loud bang and my ship started shaking and we dropped out of hyper somewhere my navicomputer didn't recognize. Which shouldn't be possible, considering I was in the Core regions near Corellia. Nobody here speaks any language I know or knows about any planet I recognize, their technology is completely different."

Kirk studied him. "You know," he said, "*Enterprise* is an exploratory vessel. We do a lot of mapping and scientific research. I have some of the finest scientists and engineers in the Federation in my crew. We could probably help you figure out what happened and how to get back to your home from here."

Lando raised an eyebrow. "And what would that cost me?" he asked.

"Nothing," Kirk said with some surprise.

Lando remembered the green card player saying they didn't have money. He'd assumed it meant the Federation was *poor*, but had they meant it had a non-monetary economy? Some systems had such things, but he'd never heard of a majority-human system without *some* form of cash.

He wondered how *that* worked.

"We'd help a traveler in distress no matter what," Kirk said, studying him. "But considering we'd need to exchange astrocartographic data at the very least, if not details of your—evidently unknown to us—propulsion system, assisting you would be *well* worth our time and effort."

Lando relaxed his muscles and smiled. He wasn't sure he believed that, and he was uneasy with being so vulnerable. But while he couldn't afford to be naïve or credulous, he'd *also* learned long ago that charm was a lot more likely to get you out of a tight situation than suspicion was. "That's a very generous offer," he said, although it did beg the question of whether *he* should charge *them* for access to his ship's data and hyperdrive. "Unfortunately, it would be contingent upon *reaching* your ship ... and my communications systems don't interface with any of the ships here." Landing on this planet with no way of communicating with anybody before he'd set down had *not* been his idea of a good time. Though it might make a good story to tell, after the memory faded of his white-knuckled fear at being shot down by the ships they'd sent out to intercept him.

"What flight capabilities does your ship have?" Kirk asked.

"Fully functional, as best I can tell without a proper hyperdrive mechanic to check it out," Lando said. "But it's a small pleasure-cruiser, designed for travelling the main runs. It can't do the calculations for any trip that's not on a known hyper run, *with* beacons." He shrugged. "If I could leave the planet, I probably already would have—they're not too fond of strangers, here. Especially ones that show up unannounced."

"Yes, I've noticed," Kirk said. "My shuttle was disabled by an ion storm, and I was left stranded between systems with life support failing. The Garphonese picked me up and brought me here to Garphon V, and dumped me in the foreigners' section of the spaceport with only the clothes on my back. My shuttle's still floating in space where they picked me up."

"So, not much use at the moment," Lando said.

"No, but *Enterprise* will find it, and I left a message in the shuttle's computer—they'll know where to find me." This was said with supreme confidence, and Lando detected no hint of doubt in the man's voice or body language. His people were coming for him.

Lando had seen people that certain who turned out to be wrong, but ... not many. And Kirk was the best shot he had of getting off this rock, whether or not he decided to go back to the Empire. "I'd offer you a place to stay aboard my ship until your people come for you," Lando said, "but ..."

"... but the unrelated adults cohabitating is one of the few things the Garphonese ban in the foreign section of the port," Kirk finished for him. "I know, it's why I didn't ask. The Garphonese aren't too happy with the Federation right now—*Enterprise* is here as a neutral party to host a trade summit for the local planets, and Garphon V is heavily isolationist. I'd rather not do anything to irritate them any more than our presence does already, if possible—it might impact the talks."

"From the talk in the bar, I thought the Federation didn't have any interests in this area," Lando said.

"We don't," Kirk replied. "We have no allies or enemies in the area, all habitable empty planets are already claimed by local groups, and there are no resources here that we can't get just as easily somewhere else. Which makes us ideal neutral arbiters."

"I see," Lando said. Nobody was really *that* neutral, but ... even so, it was so far out of his frame of reference he didn't know what to think. No planet or government in the Empire could afford to be neutral about anything, or even pretend to be. You were on the Empire's side, or you were destroyed. And even if there was some minor dispute too insignificant for the Empire's notice, everybody had their own problems. Nobody had the time or attention to get involved in someone *else's* disputes, unless they were getting something out of it.

Still, Kirk seemed to sincerely believe what he was saying. Either he was crazy, or he was a fool, or Lando's people-reading skills didn't apply to Federation cultures ... or he was telling the truth.

"I'll figure something out," Kirk said. "It's not that cold, and it's not going to rain. Sleeping in an alley for a few days won't kill me; I've survived worse."

"So have I," Lando said, "but that doesn't mean it's ideal." He studied Kirk up and down. What the hell. He'd done crazier things. "I might be willing to help you out, if your people can help as much as you say they can."

"How so?" Kirk asked.

Lando shrugged. "If we get married by Garphonese rites, then you can stay aboard my ship with me. You'd have your own cabin, of course, if you wanted, but if you'd be interested in exercising your marital rights and joining me in *my* cabin, well," he looked Kirk up and down slowly, and smirked. "I certainly wouldn't object, Captain Kirk."

"That's a very ... permanent solution to a temporary problem, Mr. Calrissian," Kirk said.

"It's only as permanent as our stay on this planet, which I certainly *hope* won't be long," Lando said. "It's not as if they'll be sending Citizen Information Update Files to the Bureau of Vital Statistics of the Galactic Empire—they've never even *heard* of the Empire." And even if they had, quite a lot of planets on the fringes of the Empire just didn't register their citizens, and hadn't even back in Republic days.

"Starfleet will recognize the marriage, because they don't want to offend the Garphonese during the talks," Kirk said. "We won't be able to simply pretend it never happened." He cocked his head. "On the *other* hand, once the talks are over, divorce is quick and easy under Federation law." He looked Lando up and down with a smirk of his own. "And moving in with you would certainly make the time pass more ... enjoyably, until *Enterprise* gets here. I think I'll take you up on that offer, Mr. Calrissian."

"Please, call me Lando."

"And I'm Jim," Kirk said. He extended his hand, and Lando took it, kissed it, and wrapped it around his arm.

"Shall we see if the registry office is still open, Jim?" Lando asked.

Having Jim around made things much easier for Lando. The Garphonese relaxed, a bit; he gathered single people with no clan or family made them uneasy. And while Lando was careful not to relax *too* much—he was still in a *very* strange place, with a person whose bona fides he had no way of checking—Jim was kind, generous, good in bed, and happy to explain anything Lando wanted to know. Including details on most of the species that passed through the port taverns, which proved quite helpful to Lando as he gambled to get the money for their food and other supplies. And Jim wasn't bad at card games, either, though he professed to prefer strategy games.

It was nice to have a partner, however temporary.

Lando was woken out of a dead sleep by what sounded like an astromech droid's chirp. "What?" he said blearily, looking around the cabin. No droids had miraculously appeared while they'd been asleep.

Jim wriggled his arm out from underneath Lando and sat up. "That's my communicator, can you reach it?"

Lando reached over to the nightstand, picked up the little device Jim kept within arms reach at all times, and handed it over.

"Kirk here," Jim said.

"*Captain, this is the Enterprise,*" came a warm female voice. "*It's good to hear your voice.*"

Lando got out of bed and started getting dressed.

Jim watched him with appreciation. "It's good to hear you too, Lieutenant. I take it you found my shuttlecraft?"

"*Yes, sir, Mister Scott is already starting to repair it. Are you ready to be beamed aboard?*"

"Not quite. Actually, patch me through to Commander Spock."

There was a pause. "*Spock here.*"

"I'm glad you've found us, Spock."

"*Us, captain?*"

"I've met someone. A human who claims never to have heard of the Federation, who has a ship with a propulsion system unlike any I've ever seen before, with a ship's database of star maps that don't match any systems I'm familiar with. He's stranded here and is willing to trade access to his ship for help finding a way home. And he was kind enough to let me stay with him on his ship while we waited for *Enterprise* to get here."

There was a pause. "*The Garphonese have strict laws about unrelated and unmarried adults cohabiting.*" Spock's voice was dubious.

"Yes," Jim said, drawing the word out a little, "we did have to get married."

There was another pause. "*I see.*"

"I'm sure you and Scotty and your teams will have a lot of fun crawling all over this ship," Jim said. "I'm in it right now; it should be just possible to fit it in the shuttle bay, but you may have to rearrange the shuttle parking. Give us a few minutes and we'll take off to meet you."

"*I look forward to seeing the ship, captain,*" Spock said. "*And to meeting your new husband.*"

"I've told him all about you, Mister Spock," Jim said. "We'll see you in a bit. Kirk out." He flipped his communicator shut and flashed Lando a smile. "Well! This has been about as relaxing and fun as being stranded could possibly be. Thank you for your hospitality."

"It's been my pleasure," Lando said honestly. He'd miss Jim, when they parted ways. But that wouldn't be for a while, and there was no reason to dwell on bad things before they happened.

Lando's ship did—barely—fit in the *Enterprise's* shuttle bay, and for once he was glad he'd lost the *Millenium Falcon*, because there was no way she could have squeezed in.

Commander Spock, Jim's executive officer, was waiting for them when they came through the hangar doors, with several others in Starfleet's odd color-block uniforms.

Jim raised his eyes. "Ah, Mister Spock," he said. "You didn't need to give us a welcoming party."

His voice was jovial but, Lando noted, there was a note of warning in it.

"The crew is always happier when you are safely aboard, sir," Mister Spock said.

"And no doubt curious about my partner," Jim said. "This is Lando Calrissian, who was kind enough to help me out and make my stay on Garphon V much more pleasant than it would otherwise have been. Lando, this is Commander Spock, Doctor McCoy, Commander Montgomery Scott, Lieutenant Sulu, Lieutenant Uhura, and Yeoman Rand."

"A pleasure to meet you all," Lando said.

"Scotty, I'm sure you'll be intrigued by his ship," Jim said. "It has an interstellar drive I've never heard of, a 'hyper drive.' But something went wrong, and now Lando is stranded so far from home his star charts don't match anything in the area. He'd like our help to figure out how to get home."

"It'd be my pleasure to take a look at it," Scott said. "I wrote a paper about the *theory* of hyper travel at the Academy and what sort of engine would be needed for it, and I cannae wait to see whether I was anywhere close."

"How can your charts not match anything?" Sulu asked. "Even this far from Earth or any human-inhabited space, the brighter stars are still visible."

Lando shrugged. "I'd never heard of Earth or the Federation before I was stranded here. Nor any of the other planets Jim has mentioned since we met. Or any of the planets I heard people mention on Garphon V."

"Can I ask what language you're speaking?" Uhura asked. "Your translator automatically uploaded its new language files to our computer, and it's not even *close* to any human language in our data banks."

"It's called Basic, and it's the standard universal language used throughout the known galaxy, where I'm from," Lando said.

"I can see you will all have much to talk about with Mister Calrissian and much enjoyment going over his ship and its databanks," Jim said, breaking into the flow of questions. "Which leaves me to wonder why *you* are here, Bones."

The doctor shrugged. "Besides wanting to make sure you were healthy with my own two eyes, I wanted to meet the spouse," he said. "And invite him round to my quarters tonight for drinks. I'd like to get to know him, and I have some stories he might like to hear about you."

"*Bones*," Jim said with a pained smile, "you know this isn't intended to be permanent, just until we're done with negotiations and have found a way for Lando to go home."

Doctor McCoy raised his eyebrows. "You never can tell, with marriage. Mine was supposed to be life-long, and only lasted a few years. I got friends who married on a short-term contract, and they've been together for almost fifty years now. I promise I won't tell your hubby any of the *really* good stories until you've been together at least a year, if it makes you feel better."

"A year, eh?" Lando said. "An incentive to stick around."

Jim looked at him, but didn't comment. Instead, he turned to his executive officer. "Spock, anything interesting happen while I was away?"

"Nothing beyond your craft going missing," Spock said. "We have retrieved it, and now that you are aboard we are setting course for the conference rendezvous point. There have been a few minor alterations to the proposed schedule and agenda, but nothing of importance."

"Excellent!" Jim said. "I will go take a look at those updates." He turned to the yeoman. "Yeoman, please see that Lando's things are taken to my quarters." They'd decided to share quarters at least until after the conference was over. Lando could always retreat back to his ship if he wanted to, but it was better to maintain appearances. And Lando didn't like sleeping alone when he didn't have to.

"Yes, sir," she said. "Welcome back, I'm glad you're okay."

"Thank you," Jim said. He turned to Lando. "Lando, I leave you in Spock's capable hands."

There wasn't really all *that* much for Lando to do, once he'd let the *Enterprise* officers and crew into his ship and shown them around. He wasn't an engineer, he wasn't a navigator, he wasn't a linguist; those were jobs he paid other people or droids to do. Scotty had decreed that before they touched the *actual* engines, they should study any manuals he had available. And, of course, the navigational data and the language data was also on computer. So Lando showed them the different systems, and watched as they patched their equipment in and downloaded the ship's databases, and answered questions.

"You know, I don't think these star charts are even from our *galaxy*," Sulu said thoughtfully. He kept looking from his tricorder to the navigational readouts.

Lando had mostly been zoning out in the co-pilot's chair, but *that* caught his attention. "That can't be right."

"Fascinating," Spock said. He and Scotty were studying the ship's status readouts and discussing physics in the back of the cockpit. "What data do you have?"

"Even if he was from the far edge of the Delta or Gamma quadrants, the galactic core should be the same," Sulu said. "No culture we know of has sent ships or drones *through* the core to the other side, but we know enough about it that our projections of what it looks like from the other side should be fairly decent. But this ... this is nothing like what it should be. And I'll need the computer to check, given such a bare-bones chart as this is but ... I think this is an elliptical galaxy, not a spiral."

"Of course it's elliptical," Lando said.

Everyone turned to stare at him. Even Uhura, who was crammed into the corner listening to something over her earbud.

"Mister Calrissian," Spock said, "the galaxy we are currently inhabiting is not an ellipse, but a spiral."

Lando thought back to his astrology classes at school. "*Technically* it's still a spiral," Lando said, "but it's old enough that the arms are not really distinct enough to matter, when it comes to travel. Stars are less dense in the boundary areas between one spiral and the next, but the

difference isn't *that* big." Certainly, it had never been something he needed to pay much attention to as an adult.

Sulu was shaking his head. "There's no *technically* about the Milky Way," he said. "Our galaxy is *definitely* a spiral. You travel between the arms, and you're going to go a long way without seeing much of anything."

"There must be some mis-translation or terminology confusion," Lando said, shoving down a feeling of growing dread. "I can't be in a different *galaxy*, that would have taken hundreds of years of travel, and I was thrown out of hyperspace in a matter of seconds. It was stretching the bounds of probability for me to have been thrown into Wild Space or the Unknown Regions."

"Let's go somewhere we can project our own galaxy, and see if it looks like you expect," Sulu said.

Lando stared at the holographic display of the galaxy rotating in three dimensions in front of him, and tried desperately to make it cohere to the map he knew. But he couldn't. The arms were far too distinct; there was no way *any* of the five major hyperspace routes would have had such regularly-spaced major ports if the galaxy looked like the *Enterprise's* computer said it did. And even *after* making sure that the concept of light-years was being translated accurately, the diameter was fifty light-years too big.

His first thought was that this was some sort of con, a trick or a trap. But what could anyone have to gain by it? He was nobody, a small-time gambler who tried to keep his head low and out of larger galactic affairs. He had no information or money or connections worth the scale of the operation that would have been necessary to fake this ship, much less Garphon V and all the ships and people he'd seen there. Sith hells, nothing he had would be worth a *tenth* of what this would have cost to stage. And nobody who had this kind of resources to burn would bother. If the Empire wanted something from him, they would demand it, and torture him if he refused. The Hutts might have the resources, but it was split up between different cartel leaders, and besides, they'd start by trying to buy what they wanted. They wouldn't be able to imagine a culture without money.

"If I'm in another *galaxy*," he said at last, "how did I get here?"

Spock shrugged. "My first guess would be a wormhole. Wormholes are extremely rare, but they are unpredictable and transient and can span vast distances, and even different times. I am not familiar enough with the physics of hyperspace to know if it is possible for one to open *inside* hyperspace. But, if it is possible, and a wormhole opened briefly within the hyperlane as your ship passed through, it would explain your experience. Unfortunately, your ship does not possess sensors of a type to perceive unusual stellar phenomena, so we may never know for certain."

"If wormholes are so unpredictable and transient, how would I get back?" Lando asked.

"I do not know that it would be possible," Spock said. "Most wormholes last for only a few hours, and there is some evidence that the longer the distance, the shorter the lifespan."

"We can't divert from the conference, but we could certainly send out a shuttle to check if it's still there," Sulu said.

"I would appreciate that," Lando said.

Spock nodded. "I will speak to the captain about it."

"Thank you," Lando said.

He didn't know why he was so devastated. He'd been toying with the notion of staying here, permanently out of the Empire's reach! And it wasn't like he had any close friends or family to leave behind. He wiped a hand over his face.

"Come, laddie," Scotty said, clapping his shoulder. "You look like you could use a good stiff drink."

"Yeah," Lando said.

Lando was perfectly capable of finding his husband's quarters by himself, but he was oddly touched when Jim came to collect him from Scotty's quarters.

"You know, technically alcohol is not allowed on Starfleet vessels except for diplomatic gatherings," Jim said, when they were in the turbolift. "But if anybody asks, Doctor McCoy will say it was medicinal, treatment for shock."

"Okay," Lando said. He wasn't drunk, because he didn't like drinking to excess, but between the alcohol and the shock he felt like he was floating and the world was very far away.

"The shuttle should reach the spot you emerged sometime during the ship's night," Jim said. "We'll know if there's any trace of a wormhole—or any other rift in the space-time continuum—by morning tomorrow. Early afternoon, at the latest, depending on how much there is to study in the survey area."

"Okay," Lando said. He couldn't think of anything more to say than that, and he couldn't bring himself to care about what he looked like or sounded like. Jim would understand, and if he didn't, well. Lando could deal with that tomorrow.

When they got to Jim's quarters, Lando was a little surprised that they were virtually identical to Scotty's: a small room with a desk and chair and communications console, another small room with a bed and built-in dresser, a bathroom shared with another officer.

Jim told him to sit in the desk chair and grabbed the other chair from the bedroom. "Can I get you something to drink?" he asked. "Water? Coffee? Tea? Hot chocolate? Juice?"

Lando didn't think he'd drunk enough to have to worry about a hangover in the morning. "Whatever you're having will be fine." Water was presumably the same, but he didn't know what sort of tea and juice they'd have, and who knew what drinks the translator was parsing as 'coffee' and 'hot chocolate.' They couldn't be the drinks he was familiar with, though; not in another galaxy.

Yet the mug Jim placed in his hands was recognizably the same drink Lando was familiar with. "If this is another galaxy, how come you have hot chocolate?"

Jim shrugged. "Maybe it got to your galaxy the same way Humans did."

"How do you know it isn't the other way around, that Humans came from my galaxy to yours?" Lando asked.

"Because Earth has fossils of our evolutionary ancestors going back millions of years," Jim said. "And Humans share over 98% of our DNA with other animals and plants native to Earth. You've already told me that where you're from, you don't know what planet Humans originated on."

Lando had nothing to say to that.

"I'm sorry that you probably won't get to go home," Jim said.

Lando wasn't sure what to say. "I haven't had a home to speak of for ... a very long time. I didn't even know for sure I wanted to go back. I thought, if your Federation was half as good a place as you said it was, it would be a thousand times better than the Empire. I don't know why I'm taking this so hard." He shook his head. "I don't even know for sure yet that I *can't* get back to my galaxy." He stopped himself from saying anything more. He must be drunker than he thought, to be so unguarded.

Jim reached over and took his hand. "Even if you didn't have much to lose, it's still not easy to be so completely unmoored. And it's one thing to choose the unknown. It's quite another to be forced into it. But whatever happens, you'll make it through. You can stay here on the *Enterprise* at least until we get back to Federation space, and we have programs to help you adapt. And we're *not* the Empire. Nobody goes hungry or homeless. You'd be fine even if you *didn't* have me in your corner."

Lando tried to say respond in kind, and found he couldn't. "I'm sorry, but I can't think right now."

"Of course," Jim said, squeezing his hand. "I'm sorry, of course you need time. Do you want to talk about something else, or do you want time to yourself?"

"I don't want to talk at all, or do anything that requires thinking," Lando said.

"Do you want me to make myself scarce for a while?"

Lando shook his head. "If I wanted to be alone, I would have gone to my ship. But you don't have to sit here with me; you can work, or listen to music, or something."

"All right," Jim said. He put on some music and got out a book, moving his chair closer to Lando's as he did so. He rested the hand not holding the book on Lando's arm.

That night, as they lay entwined in bed, Jim gently rubbed his hand up and down Lando's side. There was nothing sexual about it, just human contact.

It was ... nice.

Yeoman Rand found them the next morning after breakfast with a report. Jim took it and glanced over it, and Lando could see from his face it wasn't good.

"I'm sorry," Jim said. "They found where you came through, all right, and it was definitely a wormhole from the traces it left behind. But the wormhole itself is long gone."

Lando nodded. "I'd been thinking about staying, anyway; and I've started over before." He felt less numb than he had been the night before; sleep and a good meal had helped. But it still felt like there was a pane of transparisteel between him and the world.

"You're taking this remarkably well," Jim said.

"Crying about it won't change it," Lando said. "It could be worse. I'm not in any danger, and I have my basic needs met at least for now." He paused. "If I'm going to be staying here, I need to start thinking longer term."

"I see no reason to divorce any time soon," Jim said. "The Federation provides for refugees, but Starfleet dependents get citizenship if they aren't already, and some other perks."

Lando paused. "That's ... very generous, Jim. But I don't want to impose. Or overstay my welcome." Or be dependent on his husband's gratitude, he thought but didn't say. He wasn't in top form, but trying to shape his words to their usual smooth charm helped him feel a little bit more normal.

"You helped me out when I needed it," Jim said. "Now I can return the favor. It's not exactly a hardship being married to you."

"What would that entail?" Lando asked. "What would the expectations be?"

Jim shrugged. "You'd get a residence on any Federation world or starbase you wanted; I'm from Earth, but you could go anywhere. Being a

refugee gets you legal residency, a housing allotment, and your basic needs met. Being my spouse would give you all that, plus the right to apply for citizenship immediately, which would give you more stability and protections. As my spouse, you'd also have the right to live in Starfleet housing for command officers and the right to use Starfleet ships to travel within the Federation. There are some other things, Yeoman Rand can get you the information."

In all that, Jim hadn't answered Lando's question. "And what would be expected of *me*?"

Jim shrugged. "Meet me for a good time when I have shore leave near wherever you set up residence?" he said, as if it were a question. "Keep me updated on how you're doing and what's new back home? Oh, and not offending any admirals or ambassadors." He paused. "You're not obligated to stay married to me, if you don't want, I just thought it would be easier for you to have someone, so you weren't completely alone. And I like you a great deal."

"I feel the same," Lando said. In any other situation, he would have been more charming with a lover; 'like' was far too tepid to be flattering to either of them. But he'd never been *married* before; never seriously contemplated a long-term relationship. He was very attracted to Jim, and liked him very much; but he didn't know if he felt the sort of things most people expected to build a marriage on.

Besides. He didn't *have* to be charming or coax Jim into giving him what he wanted. Jim had given more than he would have thought to ask for, without any prompting at all. Lando *could* be honest, without having to be afraid; without having to shape his words to charm his listener into doing what he wanted. It was a little frightening, to be honest; but also freeing.

"I'm not in any hurry to get divorced, and I'd be more than happy to continue our relationship on those terms," Lando said. He paused. Start as he meant to go on, with honesty. "But I don't want to be dependent on you or anyone, if I can help it."

"Fair enough," Jim said. "Go on." His body language was open and easy; Lando wasn't offending or angering him or putting him on the defensive. In the Empire it wasn't unknown for cruel or abusive people to marry those who needed their connections. Lando had been fairly sure Jim wasn't like that, but it was good to have confirmation.

"My ship is the one thing of true value that I have," Lando said. "Especially given that your people value technology and don't have a hyperdrive. That gives me something to bargain with. I won't be letting your crew aboard my ship until I can come to some sort of agreement with your government about proper compensation for examining it."

Jim nodded. "Obviously, I wouldn't be the one making those decisions," he said. "But I can connect you with the people who can make those decisions."

"Thank you," Lando said.

Lando spent the next two days researching. Reading about the Federation was ... very odd. He knew better than to fully trust what a government said about itself. (If you listened to Imperial propaganda, the Empire was a paragon of justice and mercy.) Except ... he kept finding examples of the Federation or its member planets admitting to making mistakes and apologizing for them.

Historical accounts of injustices where the planet in question admitted what had happened, and listed the steps they'd taken to ensure that it wouldn't happen again. Current events botched or mishandled, with analyses of what went wrong and proposed solutions.

Lando wasn't quite sure what to make of it. He'd judged the Federation by Jim and his officers. He'd known it must be a decent place, to have allowed someone like Jim into such a position of power. Jim could never have survived the political cesspool that was the Imperial Navy.

This was ... this was far beyond what he'd imagined.

The Sentient Rights section of their constitution was too good to be true; he couldn't imagine that they *actually* gave every person in their territory housing, food, medical care, and freedom to travel. And the restrictions on police power over people were almost impossibly naïve. Yet here, too, the failures of the system were openly discussed—and condemned, apologized for, and solutions implemented.

If even a *fraction* of that was real, he didn't need Jim's help. Hell, if even a fraction of it were true, he wouldn't need the value of whatever deal he could make for selling the Federation his ship. He wouldn't need to grift to survive; he wouldn't need to worry about charming people to stay safe. He wouldn't need to use people to prevent them using him.

If even the tiniest fraction of what the Federation believed of itself was true, he wouldn't need to be afraid. Of anything.

Lando couldn't remember a time when he hadn't been at least a *little* bit afraid. Of getting caught, of failing, of coming to the Empire's attention, of *something*.

Lando sat back in his chair—Jim's chair, really; in Jim's quarters, but his for now—and shook his head. He couldn't believe what he was reading, but there was no point speculating too much at this point; he'd know soon enough.

But if it was real. If even the *tiniest* bit of it was real ... he'd be set for life.

He wouldn't need Jim to take care of him while he got on his feet; the Federation would do that for him regardless of whether he was an officer's spouse. Hell, if the documents were right, the Federation would take care of him whether or not he *ever* got on his feet. He wouldn't need Jim's offer of staying married.

Which left him with a question he wasn't quite sure how to answer: did he *want* to stay married to Jim?

How long had it been since he'd made a major decision based on what he *wanted*, rather than on what he *needed* or what would keep him safe or get in a mark's good graces?

Lando couldn't remember.

The delegates arriving was at least a distraction. Lando had nothing to do with the talks, of course, but there was a reception the first evening and Lando was going to be there as Jim's spouse, to reassure the Garphonese.

He wore his finest suit, and took special care styling his hair. People in the Federation wore more cosmetics than they did in the Empire, but Lando didn't really have any and Jim's cosmetics certainly wouldn't suit his complexion, so he went without. None of the delegates were human, and they might not be able to tell.

"You look very nice," Jim said, when he ducked back into his—their—quarters to change into his dress uniform.

"Thank you," Lando said. "So do you." He eyed Jim appreciatively as he tugged off his regular tunic.

Jim laughed. "Thank you," he said with a bow. He tossed the tunic in the laundry hamper and pulled out a much nicer one. It was green with gold trim, and colored badges over the left breast. "But we'll have to save that for later," he said as he shrugged on the tunic and fastened it.

The reception itself was like a hundred other parties Lando had been to: good food, good drinks, and flattering people who thought too highly of themselves. Lando enjoyed the game, moving from one group of delegates to another, encouraging them to mingle and think well of the Federation and one another.

"You are very good at this, Mister Calrissian," Commander Spock noted as the delegates started to leave. "If I did not know otherwise, I would think you were a diplomat."

Lando laughed. "No, not a diplomat, Mister Spock, but I've always found that charm and knowing more about people than they know about you makes life easier than just about anything else you can do."

"We are fortunate you are using your talent on our behalf," Spock said. "Thank you."

"Oh, I'm enjoying myself," Lando said. "It's nice to have something I know how to do."

"I'm glad to hear that." Lando turned to find Jim had come up behind him. "Wish I could have you sitting in on the talks," Jim said. "I can see why they wanted a neutral arbiter. We may be here for some time. But, for tonight at least, we're done."

The Garphonese had all gone back to their quarters, but Lando took Jim's hand anyways as they said their good-byes and left the reception.

"You seem frustrated," Lando observed.

Jim sighed. "Diplomacy is necessary and good, and I believe we can be of real help here to the people of this sector. But I joined Starfleet to explore, not to be cooped up in a boardroom listening to bureaucrats bicker. I'll be glad when we're done and on to our next mission. What about you? Do you like to travel?"

"I've spent most of my life travelling," Lando said, "but not because I wanted to. I don't dislike it, but I wouldn't mind staying in one place for a while either. As for how long we're here in particular," he shrugged, "I've got nowhere else to be. And besides, it will give us time to get to know one another better."

"Are you considering my offer?" Jim asked as they entered their quarters.

"To stay married?" Lando said. "I am. This isn't anything I imagined when I proposed two weeks ago, but ... I think we'd do well together."

"So do I," Jim said.

"We're doing this all out of order," Lando said. "And I don't want to rush into anything, but ..."

"It's a bit late for *that*, don't you think?" Jim said. He raised their joined hands and kissed Lando's hand. "We can always get divorced later if it doesn't work out. But somehow, I don't think we'll need to."

His optimism and hope were infectious. Lando smiled, and allowed himself to be swept along with it. "Maybe you're right."

By the time *Enterprise* got back to Federation space, Lando had figured out a great many things. He had a good idea of what a fair price would be for his ship and its databanks, and a short list of planets and stations to consider moving to. He'd figured out what parts of the Federation's current fashions he liked. He hadn't figured out what he was going to *do* with himself—nobody in the Federation *needed* a job, but most had a profession or did some sort of work anyway, and Lando knew he wouldn't be happy just sitting around twiddling his thumbs. But *that* decision would be better made after Lando had had time to get established and scope out the options. Lando had spent hours—days—poring over *Enterprise's* databanks and news articles and chatting with crewmembers.

But one decision was fairly easy to make, and the more time he had to settle into it, the better he felt about it. He and Jim were staying together.

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