

**STAR
WARS**
A N E W H O P E



THE PRINCESS,
THE SCOUNDREL,
AND THE
FARM BOY

AN ORIGINAL RETELLING OF *STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE*

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INTRODUCTION



THIS STORY BEGINS as so many do: a long, long time ago . . . in a place far beyond the glittering stars you see in your night sky.

In the time of the Old Republic, hundreds of star systems lived together in peace and prosperity, protected by an ancient order of warriors, the Jedi. But a tide of darkness swept through the galaxy, as unstoppable as it was terrifying, wiping out even the most powerful fighters. Now an evil empire rules the stars, slowly extinguishing the last traces of light and hope in its crushing grip.

Despite the odds, a spark of rebellion lives on. Having won their first victory against the Empire, the Rebels turn their attention to reports of a

weapon powerful enough to destroy planets—and obliterate any last hope for freedom.

But, as you well know, heroes emerge from the most unlikely places, at the most unexpected times. This is a story of destiny. Of being in the wrong place at the right time. Of courage. And, yes, of a force more powerful than imagination.

But it is also the story of a princess, a scoundrel, and a farm boy. No, there's so much more to them than that. Perhaps they will surprise you. Perhaps they will surprise themselves.

Perhaps they are the heroes the galaxy has needed all along.

THE _____
PRINCESS
_____ 

CHAPTER ONE



LEIA WASN'T THE GIRL they thought she was. That girl might have seen this plan through successfully. The crew of the *Tantive IV* thought Senator Leia Organa would be able to get them untangled from the net she'd flown them straight into. But her plan had gone wrong—so, so wrong. There wasn't any way out, any way to save them. She had let them down, and now there was only one hope for completing her mission.

Leia had never been inside the access corridors on the ship. They were meant for droids and technicians to get around without being trampled underfoot by the crew. Her heart thundered in time with her boots as she ran, and she was sure she'd never find the labor pool. The dull metal

corridors and paths were lit by only a few crimson lights, and parts of it were so tight she barely managed to squeeze through without ripping her dress. Blast it—of every color under every sun, why had she chosen to wear *white*? She stood out in the darkness like a reactor core. An easy target.

Was it really that much colder in there, or was her mind playing tricks again?

A deafening blast roared through the silence, rattling the ship down to its metal bones. Leia gasped as she was thrown against a wall of circuits and pipes. The screams of blaster rifles and heavy marching steps thundered in her ears, muffling the screams and shouts of the men and women trying to hold off the invasion. They'd been boarded. And it sounded like the fight was raging right over her head.

Leia ran harder, until her lungs burned. *This is my fault*, she thought, tears stinging her eyes. *I told Father this was my mission. I just wanted him to be proud of me.* She had only wanted to help the Rebellion. Why did the crew have to lose their lives to save others'?

Her father hadn't wanted her to accept the mission; she had seen it on his face as he told her, "I don't doubt your capabilities, not even for a moment. Taking on all these responsibilities . . . they've shaped you into a glittering star. You are remarkable. But this is too dangerous, Leia."

Leia had fought to control her temper. A star. In other words, something beautiful. Something to be admired from a distance. The simpering princess her aunts had tried to force her to become her whole life. Someone who would ignore the calls of a rebellion desperate for help in stealing information.

She loved them with her whole heart, even when she felt like flipping the table over during her aunts' ruthless etiquette lessons and running away to join a galactic circus just so she wouldn't have to hear another lesson about the differences between a soup spoon and a dessert spoon. One day, yes, she would be queen of Alderaan like her mother before her, but that day was far off and there was more to being a fair ruler than learning the correct way to

wave to her people. Her aunts had fought both Leia and her father on her joining the Galactic Senate. They would rather have seen her in her chambers twirling her hair and daydreaming about which sniveling prince to marry than in a Senate box trying to bring about real change and reform.

The press was even worse, claiming she was a “princess playing dress-up” and not a real diplomat and politician. They saw the image her aunts had crafted for her, not the person her father had trained her to become. No matter how many times she traveled the length of the galaxy to bring attention and aid to the suffering, still—*still*—the media refused to look past her label of “princess.” One time she’d been holding an orphaned baby Wookiee, walking through a village the Imperial forces had burned to embers and ash, and the first question she’d taken from the reporters from the Central Systems was, who designed the outfit you’re wearing?

Not, why are we here? Not, what can the galaxy do to help?

The only thing Leia had successfully managed to do in her time in the Senate was irritate the Emperor like a sunburn that refused to fade. She'd gone into the chamber ready to fight anyone who stood in her way, and what she'd seen there had surprised her more than knocking heads with an opponent would have: no one seemed to care. Or at least no one wanted to test the Emperor's patience. She didn't understand how *anyone* could sit still in the Senate knowing about the crimes being committed in the Outer Rim.

Imperial interrogation camps. The execution of supposed traitors in cold blood. Whole cities destroyed in what Darth Vader called "purifications." Apparently, planets needed to be purified of any ideas resembling democracy. Or hope.

It made her sick. She could still smell the charred remains of buildings and lives. See the newly orphaned children lined up to be . . . what? Sold as labor to the highest bidder? Sent to the spice mines of Kessel? Every time Leia had tried to

demand answers in the Senate chamber, she'd been reprimanded, silenced. She wanted to shout, shake them, force her colleagues to see what she saw. But they refused. Some told her to go back home, to enjoy palace life. Leia realized it didn't matter what she said, or how loudly she shouted. No one was listening.

So when Leia first learned of the Rebellion, she had all but jumped at the chance to be part of it—to be recognized for what she could do, not who she was. To actually *help* the galaxy. This was her chance to prove herself, and she thought her father would understand that, if nothing else.

Stealing top-secret plans from the Empire *was* a risk, but being dismissed as a twinkling ball of gas had only made her more determined. The mission should have been simple. All they needed to do was intercept a transmission about a new battle station the Empire was rumored to be building.

But the system had been swarming with Imperials. They'd caught on to Leia's bogus tale

about her ship's breaking down, but the cover had helped her stall long enough to download the technical plans for something code-named "Death Star." Despite the Rebels' efforts to lose the Imperials in the jump to hyperspace, the hulking Star Destroyer had caught up to them. And Leia knew, the moment the ship identified itself as the *Devastator*, there would be no escape.

It was Darth Vader's ship.

She ran harder, ducking through shadows and bursts of warm steam. Her hand tightened around the data card as she made a sharp turn. Then something silver caught her eye.

A droid. An astromech droid, even. Thank the stars. Her plan actually had a chance of working.

The droid looked like an R2 unit. Its squat cylindrical body was topped with a dome-shaped head and panels of rich blue. A single indicator glowed red, then blue as the droid rolled by.

"Droid!" Leia called, tucking herself into a dark alcove. "Droid! Come here!"

The head swiveled toward her, letting out a friendly, questioning chirp. The droid rolled toward her on three legs, and Leia knelt down so she was level with it.

As much as she hated to admit it—and she hated it *a lot*—Leia was grateful her aunts had spent years drilling her on public speaking so that, as princess and someday queen, she could give speeches without embarrassing herself. She had to get the message right on the first try. There simply wasn't time to redo it. Leia closed her eyes a moment, steadying herself with deep breaths the way her aunts had shown her.

When she spoke, she was proud of how clear and careful the words were. “Voice override, actuating code Epsilon Actual. Switch to holographic recording mode. Acknowledge, Artoo.”

The droid beeped in reply. Good enough.

Leia stood upright and stepped back. “Begin recording . . . now.” She cleared her throat, taking the regal tone her aunts loved, the one she'd

sharpened like a knife in the Senate. “General Kenobi, years ago you served my father in the Clone Wars. Now he begs you to help him in his struggles against the Empire. I regret that I am unable to present my father’s request to you in person, but my ship has fallen under attack and I’m afraid my mission to bring you to Alderaan has failed.”

Admitting she failed made the words taste bitter in her mouth. Though she and the crew of the *Tantive IV* had downloaded the information and made the jump to Tatooine, she wouldn’t be able to complete the second part of the mission. Her father had requested that she seek out an old friend, one General Kenobi, because, in his own words, “a war demanded warriors” to fight. A legendary Jedi Knight, Kenobi had gone into secret exile on the remote desert planet to avoid the deadly purge that had wiped out his order.

Leia pressed on. “I have placed information vital to the survival of the Rebellion into the memory system of this Artoo unit. My father will know

how to retrieve it. You *must* see this droid safely to Alderaan. This is our most desperate hour. Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope."

Leia paused, wishing she felt more relieved than she did at having completed the message. But it was only the first step of one last, desperate mission, and she hated placing such valuable intelligence in the hands of a droid that didn't even possess hands.

"End recording. Artoo unit, you will deliver that message and the information I am about to upload to Obi-Wan Kenobi and him alone. He is located on the planet beneath us in the vicinity of the standardized coordinates alpha one-seven-three-three, mu nine-zero-zero-three-three, first quadrant."

The droid rocked side to side on its back two legs, beeping in acknowledgment.

"Artoo? Artoo-Detoo! Where are you?"

Leia spun, looking for the source of the voice. She squinted, just barely making out the gold humanoid form of a protocol droid.

“Artoo!”

It was only then that Leia realized how quiet it had become. The firing and shouting had stopped, and some terrible part of her suspected it was because there was no one left from the *Tantive IV* to keep fighting. The crew’s battle was over.

Hers was only beginning.

Leia’s hands flew over the droid, inserting the data card. “Take an escape pod in the stern cluster and eject. Deliver this message and information at *any* cost. Understood?”

The R2 unit whistled another affirmative. Leia placed her hand on its smooth, round head and closed her eyes. *Please let this work. . . .*

“Good luck, little droid.”

The image of the planet below them floated to the front of her mind. Tatooine’s endless sand dunes gave it a beautiful warm glow, like an eternal sunrise. She could see it now, as the droid rolled away, how he would struggle to navigate with the

sand in his gears. But he could do it. She squeezed her hands into fists at her sides, pushing down the fear. Leia had faith.

“Artoo-Detoo, at last!” the protocol droid cried. “I’ve been looking all over for you!”

Leia drew her hood up over her head, carefully sliding her blaster out of its hidden holster. There was a way out for her; there had to be. Leia, like her father, refused to accept impossible odds. She just needed time to think. A safe place to hide. As the sounds and voices of the droids disappeared, new ones echoed over to her. Precise, sharp steps. The clicking of armor. Low voices.

Stormtroopers.

Leia pressed back farther into the shadows, squeezing her gun to keep her hand from shaking. She was all the droid had now. There was still time to create enough of a distraction for it to reach an escape pod and blast down to the planet’s surface. But, stars, she couldn’t get her heart to slow down. Her breathing sounded loud to her own ears. It

wouldn't be her first time in a firefight—it wouldn't even be her first firefight that *month*—but there was so much at stake. She couldn't let all the lives lost that day be for nothing.

She *was* afraid. That the mission would be a failure. That the *Devastator* would blast the droid's escape pod into a trillion pieces. That she'd never return to Alderaan. That the Rebellion would be demolished. That she'd never see her father or mother again.

But fear was a useless emotion. She needed to fight, and the only way she knew how to burn through her fear was to summon her anger.

All she had to do was think of the Emperor's sickly eyes. His cackling laugh that crept all over her skin like freezing fingers.

Leia had met the evil old toad for the first time just after she'd been elected as Alderaan's senator. Her father was to present her to the Emperor on Coruscant, with all the newly elected officials. While her aunts had spent the days leading up to

the trip debating her hairstyle and which dress she should wear, Leia had spent that time listing out her grievances. The things she'd be fighting to change. She wanted to tell the Emperor to his face. She was the youngest senator ever elected to the Imperial Senate, and she was going to make an impression—fire off a warning shot at the start of what was going to be a long war for the good of the galaxy. It didn't matter to her if she made some enemies in the process.

But as she had walked up to the black throne, the old man had lifted his head, revealing the deathly pale, wrinkled skin of his face. His eyes had seemed to glow, piercing right through her. The words lodged in her throat, and a cold sweat broke out on her neck. Leia barely heard her father say her name, barely felt the hand he placed on her back to guide her forward. Her aunts had drilled manners and protocol into her so deeply, she caught herself automatically dropping into a curtsy—a *curtsy!*—before she could stop herself.

“It will be nice,” the Emperor croaked, a smirk twisting his bloodless lips, “to have such a pretty face in the Senate.”

And that had been it. To him, she’d been nothing more than the pretty little princess playing dress-up with the adults. And Leia hadn’t been able to summon a single word to protest it. Just thinking about it made bile rise in her throat.

There. That was better. A steady, warm flush of anger flooded her system. Her focus sharpened, homing in on the stormtroopers stepping into the corridor through a nearby hatch.

“Search every passageway and compartment,” the leader ordered. “You two, check behind those power conduits.”

Of all the rotten luck—the pipe behind her released a hiss of steam and rattled loudly, making one of the stormtroopers turn back around.

“Wait. I thought I saw something—”

Blasted white dress, Leia thought, aiming her gun.

“There she is! Set your weapons to stun!”

Leia wasn't about to set *her* blaster to stun. She fired, hitting the stormtrooper out in front. He let out a sharp cry as he crashed to the ground.

“Watch it! She's armed! Fire!”

The firing would draw even more attention. She'd have to run, find better cover to hold them off just a little longer.

But the moment Leia turned her back, it felt like she'd been tackled from behind by a Star Destroyer. The hit from the stun bolt took all the feeling from her legs, sending her slamming forward against the rough grating under her feet.

A thousand sparks of light burst in Leia's eyes, momentarily blinding her.

Move! she ordered herself, even as helplessness rolled through her. *You're not done yet!*

“She'll be all right,” she heard the first stormtrooper say. “Inform Lord Vader we have a prisoner.”

CHAPTER TWO



SENSATION FLOODED back into Leia's numb arms and legs as she was hauled onto her feet. It felt like she'd been filled with sand. Her first few steps were stumbles, as the whole galaxy seemed to wobble around her. The stormtroopers surrounded her, snapping binders over her wrists.

They thought they could take her prisoner? *Her?* Leia knew she hadn't held much weight with the other senators, but she was well aware that the public cared about her. Any whisper of mistreatment would set the holonet on fire. Was that a risk the Emperor was willing to take?

She sincerely hoped not.

"H-how dare you!" she seethed, her lips still numb from the crackling electricity of the stun

bolt. Even though it felt like her head was underwater, Leia twisted around, throwing her elbow back and kicking at the nearest stormtrooper's knee. In retaliation, the soldiers jostled her from all sides, shoving her forward when she refused to move. Leia knew she was caught, but she wasn't going to be a passive captive.

The main corridor of the ship was almost blindingly bright after the dark interior passageways. Smoke from the battle choked the air. Every time Leia drew in a breath, her lungs burned with the sharp ozone stench left behind by blaster bolts.

And everywhere there were bodies.

They'd been left where they'd fallen, their wounds and lifeless expressions turning Leia's stomach violently. She didn't want to see that. Those were her people, and she'd marched them to their deaths. There was no way to fix that, no way to make it better. Leia forced herself to look, to remember. She'd need to tell their families . . . she'd need to . . . to . . .

My fault, she thought, my fault . . . Leia the senator, even Leia the princess, could justify their deaths as a necessary sacrifice, but Leia the human was having a hard time swallowing a scream.

Darth Vader stood at the end of the hallway, his towering height and wide shoulders almost blocking the hole the Imperials had blown through the doors to get into the *Tantive IV*. Stormtroopers swarmed around him, their armor clicking like the exoskeletons of insects. As the Emperor's right hand, Darth Vader stood out in sharp contrast. His armor, flowing cape, and helmet were as black as the scorch marks on the walls.

And at his feet was the crumpled form of Captain Antilles. Leia could hear the loud wheeze of Vader's breathing as the stormtroopers dragged her forward but couldn't detect any sign that the captain was alive.

Even him? Leia had been sure—or at least had hoped—they'd keep the captain alive for questioning. She'd banked on having his silent, steady support.

Her chest seized with the shock of it, the pain. Her thoughts blanked out, overrun by anguish and fury.

Captain Antilles had been an extraordinary leader; he'd broken through countless Imperial blockades to get supplies to the Rebellion. And the crew had been so young, too—so much life wasted in a matter of minutes. She couldn't stand it. *The war will go on without me*, Captain Antilles had said. *It won't without you*. But in that moment, it all seemed impossible.

I'm sorry, she thought. *I'm so sorry*.

Civilian Leia was at a loss, but she felt some part of her click into place as she faced Darth Vader. Senator Leia Organa had dealt with him before. She could face him again. She could use the ice that flooded her veins to steel herself in his presence.

Leia straightened up, threw her shoulders back, hid her fear. But it was never easy to come face to face with a living nightmare. Especially when it towered over her. When its hot, moist breath fanned across her face as it leaned toward her.

“Darth Vader. I should have known.” Leia poured every ounce of the hate she felt into her voice. “Only you could be so bold. The Imperial Senate will not sit still for this. When they hear you’ve attacked a diplomatic—”

“Don’t play games with me, Your Highness. You weren’t on any mercy mission this time. You passed directly through a restricted system!” Not for the first time, Leia thought he must have intentionally programmed his voice to be deep and rumbling, like a thunderstorm. No normal man could sound half as terrifying. “Several transmissions were beamed to this ship by Rebel spies. I want to know what happened to the plans they sent you.”

Leia tried to ignore the way her heart was galloping in her chest. The little droid would have to be away by now, shooting down to the planet, out of Vader’s reach. She had outmaneuvered him, maybe for the first time ever, and knowing that made it easier to keep her cool. “I don’t know what you’re

talking about. I'm a member of the Imperial Senate on a diplomatic mission."

"You're part of the Rebel Alliance and a traitor!" he roared, swinging around to a nearby stormtrooper. "Take her away!"

At his command, the stormtroopers pushed her toward the hole they'd blown through the door of the *Tantive IV*. Leia strained her ears, trying to catch what an Imperial officer was reporting to Vader. She caught only a few words: *We must be careful. . . . The people adore her. . . . Rebels . . . princess . . . plans . . .*

Blast it—Vader knew exactly what information they'd downloaded. The Rebellion and all its members—including her father—were in more danger than ever, and it tore at her heart to know that it was her fault for letting the ship, the crew, and herself fall into the Empire's net. As Leia left her battered ship for what she knew would be the last time, she could only hope she'd given that little droid enough of a chance to save them all.

CHAPTER THREE



ONE OF THE MANY dangers of being born royal—aside from death by boredom during her aunts’ lessons—was the constant threat of abduction. As her mother was the queen of Alderaan and her father the queen’s consort, to say they were wealthy and powerful was a vast understatement. When the seediest cretins came crawling out of the darkest corners of the galaxy looking for victims, Leia was a natural target for their greed. So despite feeling there was something terribly unladylike about throwing large, sweaty men around on wrestling mats, her aunts agreed with her parents that self-defense needed to become part of her relentless princess training once she turned sixteen.

Leia had loved the rush that feeling physically strong had given her; it was the same buzzing sensation she felt every time she did something useful for the Rebellion. Plus, the self-defense lessons had their unexpected uses. For instance, being able to punch a dummy made it easier to turn around later in the afternoon and learn ten different ways to curtsy without kicking her aunts in the shins. And a single piece of advice from her instructor had saved her life a hundred times over: *pay attention*.

Leia kept her mind clear and focused on the moment, her eyes open and scanning the Star Destroyer and every Imperial soldier around her. They had brought the *Tantive IV* into a hangar bay that was mostly deserted—of course. Leia was still a member of the Senate, and Vader would do everything in his vast power to hush up this incident. Including, if she had to guess, destroying her ship and blaming her “unfortunate death” on some kind of mechanical malfunction.

Her stomach clenched, twisted into knots. No,

they hadn't killed her on the spot, but Leia was certain it had nothing to do with her being a senator or a princess and everything to do with the answers Vader thought he could get out of her.

What would happen after he realized she'd give him nothing about the Rebellion? Leia would willingly jump out of an airlock into the freezing vacuum of space before she would betray her father and the people she'd come to think of as comrades.

She had to get out—get the *truth* out. If she could just get down to Tatooine and find the droid and General Kenobi, she could still salvage the mission. And, if nothing else, she could tell her father she was still alive. Leia burned with the need to prove she hadn't failed him or the Rebellion completely. She would never let herself wallow in the helplessness the Senate had tried to drown her in. There was still too much to do.

The Star Destroyer's interior was exactly like the regime it served: cold and ruthlessly efficient. It was all sleek lines, everything in pure white or black.

There was no gray in the Emperor's world. There was *us* and there was *them*. There was *his way* or *no way* at all.

Leia was hustled into a narrow silver tube of an elevator that shot her and her escorts up to a walkway at breakneck speed. She leaned around the broad shoulders and shining armor of the stormtroopers, trying to dodge their grips to see what was below. A series of hangars, as it turned out. Each wide, echoing chamber featured impossibly tall ceilings and enormous metal doors to draw ships inside.

You could fit the entire population of some planets in here, Leia thought, shocked at their size. She saw sparks spraying up as engineers worked to repair ships, droids hauling in heavy pieces of machinery no man could have ever lifted, and assembled lines of troops drilling in formations.

Compared with the others, the hangar they'd towed the *Tantive IV* into was smaller, but already swarming with stormtroopers and Imperial officers. It was the third hangar they passed that caught

and held Leia's attention. There were two shuttles docked below, with only a single crew moving carts of supplies toward them.

Someone's prepping for a trip, she thought. Her mind worked at lightspeed, and she saw her escape plan unfold as clearly as if the Emperor himself had rolled out a carpet for her. *Yes*—a small thrill of victory raced through her. She could work with that. Her spirits lightened for the first time in hours, and she felt the crushing pressure lift off her chest. The shuttles would be fueled. And the shuttles were outfitted with weapons. She could blast her way out, and by the time they realized what was happening, she'd be through Tatooine's atmosphere.

Take that! she wanted to shout to the other senators. She was about to prove exactly what she was capable of when given the opportunity to *try*. Her membership in the Rebellion still felt new, too fresh. She'd needed the mission to show them her dedication and how far she'd go for them if only they'd give her the support to get there. This—the story of her

escape under Vader's nose—would solidify her bond with them that much more. No one—not the media, not her aunts, not even her father—would be able to deny that she was a fighter and deserved to have her voice heard.

If I don't get shot out of the sky first, she thought. No—she could do it. She'd had years of flight training. And, well, there were all those dunes to hide in. Let's see how Vader liked getting gritty sand in sensitive places in his armor.

She found her chance as two of her escorts broke away, heading into a nearby command room—if she had to guess, to begin processing her into the detention block. Leia allowed the others to push her into yet another elevator. The doors had barely shut when she swung her bound hands toward the control panel with a *thwack*, causing the car to jerk to a stop. The stormtroopers next to her were thrown off balance, giving her the chance to swipe one of their blasters and fire.

“Stop—!”

Too late for that, laser brain, Leia thought, glancing down at their stunned forms. Neither of them had the key to her binders. She reached up to pull one of the dozens of pins out of her hair and went to work jamming the electronic lock. Like the binders mattered. She could fly herself out of there blind, deaf, and with both arms and legs bound behind her back.

The second the elevator door hissed open, Leia slipped out and scanned the empty hall. She turned back and fired a shot at the elevator’s control panel. The doors shrieked in protest, jamming over and over on one of the stormtroopers’ feet. Leia blew a stray piece of hair out of her eyes in a huff of annoyance as she kicked the foot back into the car. The elevator door slammed shut.

Leia kept to the edge of the corridor, hanging back a few steps from the hangar’s entrance. The air on the ship was dry and freezing cold, but Leia felt

damp with sweat. Pulse fluttering, she watched the engineers step through the hangar door together, speaking quietly. They turned, heading away from her.

Leia was still clutching the stolen blaster as she slipped inside and made a run for the shuttle. The boarding ramp was down—her mind sorted through the dangers quickly, like she was flicking through a stack of sabacc cards.

If no one was on board, she could just *go*.

If someone was on board, she'd need to stun him, but she could use him as a hostage. Stars, her aunts would have expired on the spot hearing *that* unprincesslike thought.

Two or three people inside would pose somewhat more of a challenge—the thought slid to a halt at the same moment her feet did.

Standing at the top of the shuttle's boarding ramp, hands on his hips, as solid and large as any of Alderaan's mountains, was Darth Vader.