

Heir to the Jedi: Star Wars

By Kevin Hearne

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A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. . . .

A thrilling new adventure set between *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and—for the first time ever—written entirely from Luke Skywalker’s first-person point of view.

Luke Skywalker’s game-changing destruction of the Death Star has made him not only a hero of the Rebel Alliance but a valuable asset in the ongoing battle against the Empire. Though he’s a long way from mastering the power of the Force, there’s no denying his phenomenal skills as a pilot—and in the eyes of Rebel leaders Princess Leia Organa and Admiral Ackbar, there’s no one better qualified to carry out a daring rescue mission crucial to the Alliance cause.

A brilliant alien cryptographer renowned for her ability to breach even the most advanced communications systems is being detained by Imperial agents determined to exploit her exceptional talents for the Empire’s purposes. But the prospective spy’s sympathies lie with the Rebels, and she’s willing to join their effort in exchange for being reunited with her family. It’s an opportunity to gain a critical edge against the Empire that’s too precious to pass up. It’s also a job that demands the element of surprise. So Luke and the ever-resourceful droid R2-D2 swap their trusty X-wing fighter for a sleek space yacht piloted by brash recruit Nakari Kelen, daughter of a biotech mogul, who’s got a score of her own to settle with the Empire.

Challenged by ruthless Imperial bodyguards, death-dealing enemy battleships, merciless bounty hunters, and monstrous brain-eating parasites, Luke plunges head-on into a high-stakes espionage operation that will push his abilities as a Rebel fighter and would-be Jedi to the limit. If ever he needed the wisdom of Obi-Wan Kenobi to shepherd him through danger, it’s now. But Luke will have to rely on himself, his friends, and his own burgeoning relationship with the Force to survive.

Praise for *Heir to the Jedi*

“Utterly compelling . . . [The novel] plants readers in Luke Skywalker’s boots in the early days of his heroism, during the weeks after he blew up the Death

Star.”—**New York Daily News**

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“A must-read for fans . . . I left with a much closer understanding of who Luke Skywalker is, and an even deeper admiration for the character. All things are connected in the Force, and I feel more connected to Luke after reading *Heir to the Jedi*.”—**Comicbook.com**

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Kevin Hearne is the author of *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, an urban fantasy series from Del Rey. He lives with his wife, daughter, and doggies in Colorado.

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CHAPTER 1

There’s no one around to answer all my questions now that Ben’s gone. It’s a stark fact that reasserts itself each time I wonder what I’m supposed to do now. That brown robe he wore might as well have been made of pure mystery; he clothed himself in it and then left nothing else behind on the Death Star. I know Han likes to scoff at the idea of the Force, but when a man’s body simply disappears at the touch of a lightsaber, that’s more than “simple tricks and nonsense.”

And I know the Force is real. I’ve felt it.

I still feel it, actually, but I think it’s like knowing there’s something hidden in the sand while you’re skimming above it. You see ripples on the surface, hints that something is moving down there—maybe something small, maybe something huge—living a completely different life out of your sight. And going after it to see what’s underneath the surface might be safe and rewarding, or it might be the last thing you ever do. I need someone to tell me when to dive into those ripples and when to back off.

I thought I heard Ben’s voice a couple of times during the Battle of Yavin, but I’m wondering now if that really happened. Maybe I only thought it did; maybe that was my subconscious speaking to me—a kind of wishful thinking. He’s been silent since, and I don’t feel I can talk to anyone else about the Force. My confidants at this point consist of one blue-and-white astromech droid.

Han and Chewie are off somewhere trying to earn enough credits to pay off Jabba the Hutt. They lost all their reward money from the Battle of Yavin and they're back to being broke and desperate—the galaxy should beware.

Leia is cloistered with the leaders of the Alliance in the fleet, which is currently hiding in the Sujimis sector around an ice planet no one has paid any attention to since the Clone Wars. Not that she would want to hear about my worries any more than I would like to speak them. She has much more important things to do than to waste time putting a bandage on my insecurities. Threepio is with her, no doubt feeling unappreciated for his predictions of imminent doom in over six million forms of communication. That leaves Artoo and me free to run an errand for Admiral Ackbar.

I've been dispatched to Rodia in an effort to open a secret supply line to the Alliance. I'm not supposed to call it smuggling—Ackbar has serious issues with the very concept, but the truth is the Alliance can't operate without it. Since the Empire is trying to shut down our lines of supply in the Outer Rim by going after smugglers' dens, and the established black markets in the Core are a bit too risky for us to employ, we have to look for other sources to exploit. Rodia is under Imperial control, but Leia suggested that the Chekkoo clan on the Betu continent might be open to working with us. She said they despise the ruling Chattza clan and are highly skilled at manufacturing weapons, armor, and other hardware we could use to fight the Empire. Leia was betting they'd defy the Empire to spite the Chattza clan, and we stood to benefit. Mon Mothma was unsure of the idea, but Ackbar surprised everyone and weighed in with Leia, and that decided it.

I don't know what it is about Ackbar that tends to quash arguments. He has a kind of moist charisma, I guess, that no one wants to challenge. I know I don't want to dispute him, anyway.

Once it was agreed, I volunteered for the mission, and they loaned me a beautiful personal yacht to fly in. My X-wing would set off all kinds of alarms if I dared to enter Rodian space in it, but a small transport with minimal weapons would be no big deal. Both Artoo and I whistled when we first saw it in the docking bay of the Promise, one of the Alliance's frigates. It was less of a yacht and more of a showpiece.

Painted a metallic red and trimmed in silver, the cockpit and living quarters of the ship sat forward and the wings swept back in an unbroken arc, like a half-moon thinking about going crescent. The rear end looked a bit like someone had taken a bite out of a cookie, and it was packed with big sublight engines, jammers, sensor arrays, and shield generators. The power was all invisible from the front or the sides—it spoke of luxury and decadence—but the back told anyone pursuing that they wouldn't be keeping up for very long. It was built for speed and quite possibly spying while doing its best to look like a rich person's pleasure craft.

"Nice, isn't she?" a voice said, causing me to tear my eyes away. "That's the Desert Jewel. You fly her safely, now." The speaker was a tall woman with dark skin and a cascade of tightly curled ringlets framing a narrow face. She gave me a friendly smile and I smiled back.

"Is she yours?" I asked.

"Yep! Well, I guess I should say she's my father's. But both his ship and his daughter are at the disposal of the Alliance now. Just got here last week." She extended a hand. "Nakari Kelen. Glad to meet you."

"Kelen?" I said, taking her hand and shaking it. She had a strong grip, and I tilted my head to the side as I connected her name and the ship's to a memory. "Any relation to the Kelen Biolabs on Pasher?"

Her eyes widened. “Yes! Fayet Kelen is my father. Are you from Pasher?”

“No, I’m from Tatooine.”

“Ah, another desert planet. So you understand all about my fascination with ships and how they can take me far away from home.”

“Yeah, I understand that very well. I’m Luke Skywalker.”

“Oh, I know who you are,” she said, finally letting her hand slip from mine. “They told me you’d be taking my ship out for some kind of spooky mission, but no one told me you hailed from Tatooine.”

“Ha. It’s not really spooky. Kind of a boring business trip, in fact, but this looks like it will prevent any Imperials from thinking I’m with the Alliance.”

“I should hope so. My baby’s classy and elegant and ill disposed to rebellion.”

“Hey, speaking of ill disposed, mind if I ask you something?”

Nakari nodded once, inviting me to proceed.

“I’ve always wondered why your dad chose Pasher for his biolabs. You’d think a jungle planet would be better suited simply because there’s more actual biology there.”

She shrugged. “He started small and local. The poison and glands of sandstone scorpions and spine spiders turned out to have medical applications.” She chuckled her chin at the Desert Jewel. “Very profitable applications.”

“I’ll say.”

“What did you do on Tatooine?”

“Moisture farming. Spectacularly dull. Some weeks were so boring that I actually looked forward to going into Tosche Station to pick up some .??. power converters. Huh!”

“What?”

“I just remembered I never did pick up my last shipment. Wonder if they’re still there.”

“We all have unfinished business, don’t we?” That was an unexpected turn to the conversation, and I wondered what she meant by it. I wondered why she was there at all, frankly. The comfortably wealthy rarely stir themselves to get involved in rebellions. But I had to admit she wasn’t dressed like the privileged child of a biotech magnate. She wore desert camo fatigues tucked into thick-soled brown boots, a blaster strapped to her left hip, and what looked like a compact slug rifle strapped to her back, held in place by a leather band crossing diagonally across her torso.

I flicked a finger at the rifle. “You hunt sandstone scorpions with that?”

“Yep. Can’t use a blaster on them. Their armor deflects heat too well.”

“I’d heard that.”

“And since so many people are wearing blaster armor these days, a throwback weapon that punches through it is surprisingly effective if you know how to shoot one.”

“Hunt anything else?”

“Of course. I’ve been to Tatooine, actually, and bagged a krayt dragon there. Its pearls paid for the upgrades on the Jewel. She’s still Dad’s ship, but I’ve modified her quite a bit, and I hope to have the credits soon to buy her from him outright. Come on, I’ll show you.”

Both of us were grinning and I was excited, happy to have found someone with a similar background way out here in an icy part of the galaxy. I couldn’t speak for Nakari, but meeting someone with shared experience filled up a measure of its emptiness for me, especially since she clearly understood why ships are important: They take you away from the deserts, even if it’s just for a little while, allowing you to think that maybe you won’t shrivel and waste away there, emotionally and physically. Not that the rest of the galaxy is any more friendly than the dunes. My old friend Biggs, for example, loved to fly as much as I did, and he escaped Tatooine only to die in the Battle of Yavin. I miss him and wonder sometimes if he would have done anything differently if he’d known he’d never set foot on a planet again once he climbed into that X-wing. I console myself with the guess that he would have gone anyway, that the cause was worth dying for and the risk acceptable, but I suppose I’ll never know for sure. The Empire didn’t fall and the rebellion continues, and all I can do is hope the next mission will prove to be the one that topples the Emperor somehow and validates my friend’s sacrifice.

A walk-up loading ramp into the Desert Jewel put us in the narrow corridor behind the cockpit. Unfortunately the ramp was also the floor and with it down we couldn’t move forward—?a clear shortcoming in design—so we had to close it and leave poor Artoo on the hangar deck before we could enter the cockpit.

Nakari pointed to hatches on either side of the corridor. “Galley and head on the left, bunks and maintenance access on the right,” she said. “Your droid can plug in there. There’s a lot of emergency supplies, too, survival gear that comes in handy when I’m scouting planets for Dad. Breathing masks and an inflatable raft and suchlike. The bunks are kind of basic, sorry to say. I spent all my credits on speed and spoofs.”

“A wise investment,” I assured her. “Can’t enjoy any kind of bunk, much less a luxurious one, if you can’t survive a panicked flight from a Star Destroyer.”

She sawed a finger back and forth between our heads. “Yes! Yes. We are thinking alike here. This is good, because I want to see my ship again.”

“I’d—” I stopped cold because I almost said I’d like to see you again as an unconscious reply, but fortunately realized in time that she might misinterpret that as an incredibly inept pass at her. I finished with, “—think that would be good for both of us,” and hoped she didn’t notice the awkward pause.

“Indeed.” She waved me forward. “After you.”

“Thanks.” Five steps brought me into the cockpit, where I slid into the seat on the left side. Nakari rested a hand on the back of my seat and used the other to point at the banks of instruments. “She’s got top-of-the-line jammers and sensors from Sullust, a holodisplay here, which is kind of low-end because I’d rather have

these high-end deflector shields, and twin sublight engines on either side that will shoot you through space faster than an X-wing. Oh, and she's got a point-eight hyperdrive for the long hauls."

"Wow. Any weapons?"

"One laser cannon hidden underneath where I'm standing. You activate it right there, and a targeting display pops up."

I winced. "Just one cannon?"

"She's built to run and keep you alive until you jump out of trouble. Best not to get into any trouble."

"Got it."

"Good." She clapped me on the shoulder. "Be safe, Luke."

I turned in my seat, surprised that the tour was over so quickly. "Hey, thanks. What will you be doing in the meantime?"

She opened the boarding ramp and then jerked a thumb at the rifle stock behind her shoulder. "I'm training some of the soldiers in sharpshooting. Heading dirtside to shoot frozentargets on Orto Plutonia. I'll be plenty busy." Her eyes flicked down to the hangar deck, where something made her smile. "I think your droid is ready to come aboard."

"Is he in your way?"

"A bit."

She began to descend, and I called after her as she disappeared from view. "Sorry! He'll move."

Artoo rolled up a few moments later, and I found the button that would secure the ramp behind him. He chirped and sounded impatient with me, but as usual I couldn't understand him. "You can jack in to the right," I said, and he scooted in there while continuing his electronic scolding.

We had to navigate several different hyperspace lanes to get to Rodia from the Sujimis sector and I was getting used to the way the Jewel handled, so our trip probably took more time than strictly necessary. Fortunately, we weren't in a hurry and I enjoyed every minute of it. The Jewel was sheer pleasure to fly; the cockpit was quiet, unlike the high-pitched electronic whine of my X-wing.

Artoo successfully installed a program into the Jewel's computer that would translate his digital beeps into readable language. His words streamed on the holodisplay that Nakari had pointed out to me, and I kept the ship's intercom on so that he could hear my words.

"Artoo, take us to Llanic, will you? We need to stop there to see if we can find someone to smuggle for us if the deal in Rodia works out."

Situated at the intersection of the Llanic Spice Route and the Triellus Trade Route, Llanic bustled with smugglers and other ne'er-do-wells in a way that might have moved Ben Kenobi to call it a "wretched hive of scum and villainy," even if it was not quite as wretched as Mos Eisley. Plenty of illicit credits flew

through there, and because of that the Empire kept a watch on it. Leia had given me a briefing, warning me that Moff Abran Balfour patrolled the spice route often, and he represented the nearest Imperial presence to the current location of the Alliance fleet. I was not supposed to give him the idea that perhaps the fleet was somewhere in his sector.

I was expecting a lively screen full of contacts when I entered the system, but perhaps not quite so lively as it proved to be. One of Moff Balfour's Star Destroyers showed up immediately, though it was too far away to pull me in with a tractor beam or engage in any meaningful way. Flying much closer to me were two TIE fighters, pursuing a ship that didn't appear able to put up much resistance. They were firing on it, and its shields were holding for the time being, but I doubted that would continue for much longer, especially since it was slower than the TIEs. I imagined there would be unidentified rattling noises on the ship, not indicating anything dire, just a general statement of decrepitude and imminent destruction. Didn't seem like a fair fight to me, but I wasn't going to make it my problem until I realized the ship was of Kupohan manufacture. The Kupohans had helped the Alliance in the past, and might do so again.

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