

**STAR
WARS**
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK



SO YOU
WANT TO
BE A JEDI?

AN ORIGINAL RETELLING OF *STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*

BY *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR **ADAM GIDWITZ**

Disney

LUCASFILM

P R E S S

Los Angeles • New York

CHAPTER ONE



YOU GAZE OUT over the field of white.

It is winter on the planet Hoth. It is always winter on Hoth. I mean, they have a summer. That's when the temperature crawls up to about 10 degrees below freezing. It's lovely.

It is not summer, though. It's winter, and the snow stands so deep you could lose a small child in it.

You're wearing a jacket of thick synthetic fiber, a vest on top of that, a hood, and goggles. That's the uniform of the rebels when they're out on patrol here on Hoth, riding their great Hothian tauntauns. (Those are large lizards that walk on their back feet. You know that, because you're Luke Skywalker, right? But I'm just reminding you.) All your gear

doesn't insulate you from the cold, though. It is bitter and insidious. It creeps through every crack in your shell and burrows down to your bones.

Off in the distance, a meteor crashes into the snow. You squint at it. The wind whips and cracks over the ice.

"Echo Three to Echo Seven. Han, old buddy, do you read me?"

Silence. Then a crackle of static. "Loud and clear, kid. What's up?" That's Han Solo's voice. You know Han Solo, of course. But I'll just remind you: he's a space pirate, a smuggler, a scoundrel, and somewhere between your big brother and your best friend.

"I've finished my circle," you say. "I don't pick up any life readings."

Han's voice breaks through again. "There isn't enough life on this ice cube to fill a refrigerator. The sensors are placed. I'm going back."

You shiver against the wicked wind. "Right. See you soon. There's a meteorite that just hit nearby. I'm going to check it out. It won't take long."

It won't take long. Famous last words.

For it is then, just as you sign off with Han Solo, that a wampa hits you.

It rears up out of nowhere, a giant gorilla-polar-bear-abominable-snow-man-like creature. You see its tiny eyes and enormous, grinning mouth—for just an instant.

Because then its paw makes contact with your face, and your head snaps back, and the vertebrae in your neck crackle like noisemakers, and your ears are peeling like the bells in a church.

And you are in the air, flying.

Then you hit the snow.

You lie there.

Freezing.

Maybe dying.

Your tauntaun screams.

You die.

Almost.

LESSON ALPHA α :

A JEDI SHOULD KNOW HOW TO COUNT

Okay. It's time for your first test.

Close your eyes.

Wait, not yet. You've got to read the instructions first.

In a moment, you're going to close your eyes. Then you're going to count, slowly, to ten.

As you're counting, try not to think about anything except the numbers.

Okay, do it now.

Did it?

Did other thoughts come into your head while you were counting? Probably. Thoughts like, "What does this have to do with being a Jedi?" and "Why is this guy so weird?" That's okay. Don't stress it.

But whenever you have a minute of quiet for the rest of today, try this again. And see if you can think *only* of the numbers. Sometimes it helps to breathe in and out on each number.

What does this have to do with being a Jedi?

A lot.

I'll explain later.

And why am I so weird?

There is no explanation for that.

CHAPTER TWO



REBEL TROOPS—soldiers, engineers, space pilots—hustle to and fro across the main hangar of the rebel base on Hoth.

Han Solo stalks past, ignoring them, brushing snow from his gear.

They've been on the planet for weeks now, rebuilding their base. The Empire chased them from their last one, but they will persevere. They will continue to fight the vast and mighty Empire—and particularly the Emperor, who seems driven by the dark side itself.

Some background: the Emperor was once Senator Palpatine, of the Galactic Republic, the first government to bring lasting peace to the warring peoples of the galaxy. But Palpatine manipulated

the system, gaining influence and power, until he was able to steer the Republic away from democracy and toward dictatorship—his dictatorship. During his rise to power, he ordered the execution of every Jedi. That included the Padawans, young Jedi-in-training, as well.

From there, the Empire, under Palpatine's direction, set out to subdue any planet in the galaxy that did not accept his rule. Subdue, in this case, meant enslave, decimate, or entirely destroy.

So this rebel army on Hoth is the last armed resistance to the Emperor in the galaxy. Small as it is, there's nobody else.

Han Solo peers across the hangar. Chewbacca, his longtime first mate, fiddles with the mechanics on their ship, the *Millennium Falcon*. Chewbacca is a Wookiee, which means that he's shaped like a man, but taller, and he's entirely covered with long brown hair. He looks approximately like a barber-shop's floor that has stood up and is now fixing a spaceship.

Two droids pass in front of Han. The first is short and squat like a fancy trash can. He is R2-D2, the bravest service droid that Han's ever met. The second looks like the Tin Man tricked out in gold. He is C-3PO, the most cowardly, busybody protocol droid that Han has ever met. At least, that's Han's opinion.

Han is going to miss this place. The energy. The commitment to the cause. The dumb courage in the face of impossible odds. An Imperial battle station had recently destroyed an entire planet. With one shot. Han saw the debris—just bits of rock, floating in the void. You can't fight power like that.

But you can try. And this ragtag bunch of soldiers and droids, bless their foolish hearts and motherboards, are trying.

But not Han. Not anymore.

He's leaving tonight. No time for teary good-byes. No mushy stuff.

There is, though, one person that he wants to say good-bye to.

He finds her in the command center. She is pushing buttons and barking orders into a comlink device. She looks angry. Han likes her like that.

Her name is Leia, and she is the princess of that planet the Empire destroyed with a single shot. She was on the Imperial battle station, being forced to watch. Now, she is among the leaders of the Rebellion. You can understand why.

Her brown eyes flash at the various panels and readouts. Her long brown hair is tied up in braids at the side of her head.

At first, Han studiously ignores her. He goes over to General Rieekan, commander of the base, who is poring over the security readouts. Like security readouts are going to help when the Empire shows up.

“General,” Han says. “I’m sorry, but I can’t stay here anymore.”

The general looks up at Han from his readouts, gray eyes peering from under gray eyebrows. “I’m

sorry to hear that.” He says it like it’s a question.

Han suddenly feels a bit sheepish. “Well, there’s a price on my head. If I don’t pay off Jabba the Hutt, I’m a dead man.”

Behind Han, the princess punches some numbers into the computer. Really hard.

“You know Jabba?” Han continues. “Big, fat, ugly? Lives on Tatooine? He’s no big shakes, but he knows how to shoot you in the back from halfway across the galaxy when he wants to.”

The general nods sympathetically. “A death mark’s not an easy thing to live with. You’re a good fighter, Solo. I hate to lose you.” He goes back to reading his security reports.

Han shrugs, thanks him, turns away. Toward Leia. She is punching buttons like they did something to her. He slides up beside her and whispers, “Well, your highness, I guess this is it.”

“Yeah. I guess so.” She mashes buttons some more. Poor buttons.

Han watches her. She refuses to look at him. He rolls his eyes. “Well, don’t get all mushy on me,” he snaps. No response. He stalks off.

I am going to skip this next part, as it does indeed get kind of mushy. I will, in fact, skip all the mushy parts of the story to follow. They are neither appropriate nor relevant to a young Jedi-in-training.

All you need to know now is that Leia runs after Han, and they have an argument in which it becomes very clear that Han and Leia kind of love each other, and kind of hate each other.

When they are just at the very peak of this argument, and both are red-faced and bothered, a high and grating voice interrupts them. “Excuse me, sir!” It is C-3PO. The golden Tin Man. “Sir, oh, sir!” He sounds like a British butler with his underwear in a twist.

“Buzz off,” Han replies. It’s not clear whether he’s talking to Leia or the golden droid.

“But, sir, I’m meant to report to you that Master Luke hasn’t returned yet.”

Han stops.

Leia looks at C-3PO, and then, accusingly, at Han. “He didn’t come back with you?”

Han ignores her.

C-3PO continues: “He *may* have come in the south entrance, sir, but—”

“What do you mean he *may* have come in? He *may* have? *Find out!*”

Han turns to Leia and shrugs as if to say, “What can you do with these droids?”

She rolls her eyes and stalks off.

A few minutes later, Han Solo is staring out at the driving snow. The sky is a heavy gray.

“The light is fading, sir,” a rebel lieutenant reports. “The temperature is dropping rapidly.”

Han nods. “That’s right. And my friend is out there.”

Behind Han, Chewbacca is howling—Wookiees don’t talk so much as make noises somewhere between a dog and an opera singer.

A series of beeps emanate from R2-D2. “Sir,” C-3PO says, translating, “R2 is reporting that the odds of Luke surviving out there are roughly 725 to 1.”

Leia, standing behind them all, turns away.

Han zips up his coat and fixes his fur-lined hood tightly over his head.

“Sir,” says the rebel lieutenant. “Your tauntaun won’t make it past the first marker.”

Han fixes his goggles over his eyes and climbs up on the uneasy beast. He steadies the creature, rubbing its scaly neck and whispering into its ear hole. Finally, he turns back to the lieutenant and replies, “Then I guess I’ll see you all in hell.”

LESSON BETA β:

JEDI HAVE TO BREATHE, TOO

Second lesson. Ready?

This time, you're going to do the same thing as before, but someone else is going to count for you. Get whoever is nearby. When you close your eyes, they should silently start to count to ten. When they get to ten, have them gently tap you on the shoulder. If you have a watch or a phone that will time you, feel free to use that.

This time, when your eyes are closed, try not to have any thoughts. Just feel the air come in your nose and out of your nose. Be aware of every single breath. In and out.

Go ahead: meditate.

Did you have any thoughts, my young student? It's not easy to still your mind, is it? It took me many years before I could quiet my mind through meditation. But keep trying. It is the first step on the path of the Force.

CHAPTER THREE



YOU GROAN. Your head is pounding. Your eyes feel like they've been shut with staples.

Slowly, you force them open.

You blink, and blink again. A wampa is devouring your tauntaun—*while sitting on the ceiling*. Can wampas sit on ceilings? Your temples throb.

You black out again.

Later, you wake up. The tauntaun is almost entirely eaten. The wampa, its white fur caked with blood, is no longer sitting on the ceiling. It is sitting on the floor, and you are hanging upside down. Maybe you were hanging upside down all along.

You peer up at your feet. They are trapped in ice on the ceiling. You yank at them. They do not budge.

You try to lift your body up to them, but you are too heavy, too woozy.

You stare at the blood-covered wampa. What will it eat when it's finished eating the tauntaun?

Never mind. Stupid question.

You look over the cave again, trying to ignore the wampa gnawing on your tauntaun's bones. Which is not easy.

You look past the beast.

You don't see what you're looking for.

You look behind you.

Nope.

Finally, you examine the area around you.

There it is. Half buried in snow.

Your lightsaber.

No blaster. That's probably somewhere out in the middle of a snowfield, petrifying until the end of this planet's ice age.

But that's okay. You prefer the lightsaber anyway.

It's not that far from you, so you reach for it, your arm straining in its socket, fingers grasping

at the air, as if they could drag you closer. But they can't. You exhale, and let your body go limp.

The wampa is now gnawing on the tauntaun's enormous thigh bone, slurping and sucking at the supple sinews.

You look back at the lightsaber. Then you think of Old Ben. Obi-Wan Kenobi. The man who gave you the lightsaber. The man who turned your father into one of the greatest Jedi Knights of all time. The man who began to train you—before he was killed by Darth Vader. Darth Vader, the Emperor's right hand. Darth Vader, who killed your father.

You stop your mind from wandering. You focus on the lightsaber. You know what Old Ben would tell you to do.

Close your eyes. Count to ten, letting the thoughts clear from your mind. Breathe in and out. In and out. Until your mind is as empty and bright as a snowfield on a clear morning. Until you can feel everything around you. As if everything in the room has a physical shape on the field of your

mind. You feel the great, hot wampa. You feel the smooth, sticky bones of the tauntaun. Then closer. The mound of snow. The lightsaber.

You touch it, in your mind. You reach out your hand. You do not strain. You just reach. You hold the lightsaber in your mind. And then, from the snowbank, the lightsaber jumps to your hand.

You open your eyes. There it is. Actually in your hand.

And there is the wampa, standing in front of you, staring at you, perplexed. And furious.

You ignite the lightsaber.

Its blade is silvery-blue. It hums, burning against the darkness. It is as serene and as powerful as the Force itself. And dangerous. Holding a lightsaber feels dangerous. At least, it does to you.

Though, right now, it's more dangerous to that blood-soaked wampa standing in front of you.

You swing the lightsaber at the ice holding your feet. You hit the ground just as the wampa lunges at you—

And its arm goes twirling across the cave.

The wampa staggers back, staring. The lightsaber is so sharp, so hot, that it has cauterized the wound. There is no blood. But there is no arm either. The great beast is in pain. And now it is afraid of you. Very afraid.

Keeping your eyes trained on the savage ice beast, your lightsaber raised high, you slowly back out of the cave.

LESSON GAMMA γ :

REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMETHING— WITH YOUR MIND

You probably think that your next test will be trying to move something with your thoughts.

Yeah, we're not going to try that.

Yet.

I mean, you can give it a go. But don't be discouraged if you fail. Moving stuff with your mind is a *wee bit* difficult.

No, for this test, I want you to close your eyes—not yet—and breathe. It might help you to count to ten at first. Then just focus on your breath. Once you've been focusing on your breath for a while, I want you to feel what's around you. Not with your hands—with your mind. Explore the objects of the room. Your eyes should still be closed. Don't try to *remember* what's around you. Just *feel* it. Start with what you're sitting on, then anything that's in contact with your body. Work outward. What's touching those things? Feel their shapes in your mind.

Finally, I want you to focus on something near you, but that you are not touching. Trace it with your mind. Feel its shape.

Reach out. Touch it. Open your eyes.

Were you right? Was it where you thought it was? Did it look like you thought it did?

If not, don't worry. Just try it again. Remember, the most important thing is to feel everything around you. The guessing part at the end is just for fun.
