



RETURN OF THE JEDI



BEWARE THE POWER OF THE DARK SIDE!

AN ORIGINAL RETELLING OF *STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI*

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P R E S S

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CHAPTER ONE



IN WHICH TWO ROBOTS PLOD THROUGH AN ENDLESS DESERT

AN ENDLESS DESERT.

Two robots.
Two robots plodding through an endless desert.

Fear not, reader! It will get better!
But not every story can start with a bang. Or a wampa attack, for that matter.

It's where the story is going that counts, and we've got a big bang coming and an even bigger bang after that and a whole lot of medium-sized explosions, implosions, fireballs, crashes, smashes, lightsaber battles, and evil dark lightning in between.

You may know all about those already. If so, you

know that your patience will be well rewarded once we get through this endless desert.

So, we plod on!

Two robots . . . an endless desert . . . plod, plod, plod . . .

Yes, it really is an endless desert. It fills this whole planet. You might wander around forever and see nothing but sand . . . that is, until someone—or something—pops out from behind a dune and eats you.

But our brave heroes plod on and on under the scorching heat of Tatooine's twin suns. They are droids. Sort of like robots, but better.

One is golden and tall, walking on legs like a man. The other is white and short, with three legs, a bunch of tiny, retractable arms, and a silver dome that spins around so that he can keep an eye on things.

Together they have had many adventures and faced many dangers and now they plod on through this deadly desert without fear or complaint.

Well, perhaps a few complaints.

“We’ll never make it Artoo,” says the tall one, C-3PO*. “Sand is already accumulating in my servomotors and my joints are freezing up!”

“*Beeeep whirr*,” replies the short one, R2-D2, and although we cannot be sure what this means, it has a reassuring sound to it.

“Almost there?” snaps C-3PO. “How can you say that? You have no idea where we are. We’ve been wandering for ages.”

“*Bleeee blip!*”

“Following the road? What road? This is like no road I’ve ever seen.”

It was a road . . . once. Leading through the Dune Sea to a monastery. Though crumbling and near forgotten in these days of landspeeders and

*C-3Po is a protocol droid, a machine designed for light duty in luxurious surroundings. However, he was made on Tatooine many years ago and was specially modified to withstand the planet’s sand and heat. His companion, R2-D2, is an astromech droid, designed to withstand just about everything.

suborbital hoppers, the road still leads to the same place, but that place is no longer a monastery.

In fact, it is quite the opposite. It is the unholiest of all places on this unholy planet . . . the monastery is now the lair of intergalactic crime lord Jabba the Hutt.

At last, the droids pass a rocky outcropping and see Jabba's Palace in the distance. C-3PO's relief circuits barely get warmed up before his self-protection mode kicks in again.

“We’re doomed!”

“*Breeep!*” Again, a reassuring tone from the small droid.

“Of course, I’m worried,” fusses C-3PO*. “And you should be, too. Poor Lando Calrissian never returned from this awful place.”

“*Whirrr.*” A less confident tone this time.

*C-3PO has, in fact, been known to complain too much. But not this time. This time, in fact, he has underestimated the horrors that lie ahead. R2-D2, who knows much, chooses to say little just now.

“If I told you half the things I’ve heard about this Jabba the Hutt, you’d probably short circuit!”

As they enter the shadow of the building, a small creature darts across the road behind them, running fast on its twelve legs. But not fast enough!

That rocky outcropping turns out to be not a rocky outcropping at all, but some sort of desert predator. In an instant, it has cracked open a huge toothy mouth, shot out a long tongue, caught, chomped . . . and gulped down the creature, twelve legs and all.

And now it closes its mouth, settles back into the sand, becomes to all appearances a rocky outcropping again and waits for its next victim.

And, ahead of our robotic heroes, Jabba is waiting, too.

CHAPTER TWO



IN WHICH WE MEET JABBA

JABBA THE HUTT is a giant, evil space slug.

And like a slug, he's rather helpless on his own. Tiny arms, no legs, no armor, no weapons.

Well, he does have one weapon—his mind.

A mind vile and corrupt even by Hutt standards. By the sheer force of his own greed, he has risen to the top—or perhaps the bottom, depending on your point of view.

As the most feared crime lord in the galaxy, he can afford to hire all the help he needs—smugglers, thieves, bounty hunters, and plenty of piglike warriors* to guard his palace.

*After presenting Jabba with the bill for their services, these armorers became Jabba's first prisoners and never escaped the thick walls and cruel traps they themselves had devised.

Just as a slug prefers to hide under a rock, Jabba has chosen a dark, damp place for his palace. The nicer rooms are like a dungeon and the dungeon is . . . unspeakable.

It's a fortress, really. So deep in the dunes that the desert itself is all the defense generally needed. Even so, under Jabba's orders the old monastery was obsessively fortified by master armorers.

Yes, it's the perfect place for this rancid crime lord to slither away and hide, wallowing in his slimy pleasures and chortling over his ill-gotten treasures.

And his newest treasure—for which he had to pay the cunning bounty hunter Boba Fett a medium-sized fortune—is Han Solo.

Solo is well known now as a hero of the Rebel Alliance, but not all that long ago he used his mighty spaceship, the *Millennium Falcon*, for smuggling, not freedom fighting.

He and his copilot, Chewbacca—the great, hairy

Wookiee—ran into some trouble and had to dump their load of “spices.” Unfortunately, these quite illegal goods belonged to Jabba, and the crime lord did not take the news well.

Solo, unable to pay back the price of the spice, paid a different sort of price: captured by the heartless bounty hunter Boba Fett, Solo was encased in a block of carbonite—a process that left him alive but frozen in time.

And there he lies—or, rather, hangs—on Jabba’s wall. His hands reaching out helplessly, his eyes wide with terror, and his mouth stuck in the same scream of pain, Solo will remain like this forever if Jabba has his way.

And Jabba *always* has his way.

He rather likes looking at Solo’s frozen agony. Normally, a victim’s suffering is over all too quickly. But this way Jabba can slowly savor Solo’s pain.

Safe in his dark hole, the slug can fill his belly with forbidden, still-kicking foods, lick his barely

dressed slave dancers, and bask in the worship of his minions, henchmen, servants, and toadies.

And if the wearying work of running a criminal empire ever gets him down, he can turn his terrible orange eyes toward Solo and find new reason to let out one of his stomach-turning giggles.

And when Jabba *really* giggles—really finds something worthy of merriment—even the worst of the criminals who sit at the foot of his throne cower inside.

CHAPTER THREE



IN WHICH THE DROIDS KNOCK AT JABBA'S DOOR

WHO CAN BLAME C-3PO for hesitating at the door of this fearsome building?

“Artoo . . . are you sure this is the right place?”

“Whrrrr.”

“I better knock I suppose.”

He lightly raps his thin metal fingers against the monstrous iron gate, so thick that a Gamorrean battle-ax would be needed to knock properly.

“There doesn’t seem to be anyone here, Artoo. Let’s go back and tell Master Luke.”

“*TEE CHUTA HHAT YUDD!*” screeches a barking metallic voice.

This is not, of course, the voice of R2.

It is instead coming from a speaker attached to an electronic eyeball on the end of a long mechanical arm, which has just popped out of a small hatchway in the door.

The eyeball glares quite rudely at C-3PO.

“Goodness gracious me!” exclaims C-3PO. Then, recalling his programming as a protocol droid and master of six million languages, he introduces himself.

“*Seethreepiowha bo Artoo Detwoowha.*” He points to R2 and the eyeball snakes over to have a look. “*Ey toota odd mischka Jabba du Hutt.*”

Now the eyeball whips back to focus on C-3PO again. It lets out a grating laugh and zips back into the hatchway, which slams shut.

“I don’t think they’re going to let us in, Artoo. We’d better—”

“*Whhrrrr . . .*” begins R2, but he is interrupted by a terrible screech.

The massive door is slowly rising upward, revealing nothing but blackness ahead.

R2 looks at C-3PO. C-3PO looks at R2. And R2 rolls ahead into the gloom.

“Artoo, wait!” pleads C-3PO. “Artoo, I really don’t think we should rush into this!”

But already, somewhere in the walls, the unoiled wheels and gears have reversed and are now closing the great door again.

What choice does C-3PO have? He must rush in, too, or be left out, alone in the endless desert.

So he steps forward into the darkness.

“Oh, Artoo! Artoo, wait for me!” cries C-3PO.

Behind him, the door continues to screech its way down until, with a horrible crash . . .
BOOOOOOMKKKKRRRRRT.

It closes.