

Ten-year-old Avery Green dreads going to Hebrew School. It's long, it's boring, and it has nothing to do with Star Wars, science, or football – his favorite things in the universe. But everything changes when a mysterious new rabbi shows up. Could Rabbi Bob be an actual Jedi master? Avery is determined to find out.



[www.pjourway.org](http://www.pjourway.org)

# **GOING ROGUE**

## **(at Hebrew School)**

**CASEY BRETON**



Green  
Bean  
Books

# CHAPTER

# 1

There are three things I'm really into. Been into them all my life, and probably always will. I'm like a loyal dog that way.

Number One: Star Wars. Believe me when I say that I'm a walking, talking Star Wars encyclopedia. I've seen every Star Wars movie 400 times. Okay, so maybe not 400 exactly. But pretty close. I've also read every book related to Star Wars. Plus, I've written my own. It's called *My Life as an Ewok: A True Story*. I'm also working on a script for the next Star Wars episode which, as it turns out, is not as easy as it sounds. I've been hammering away at it for the past three weeks and it's still not finished. I have a little Yoda figurine who sits on my desk when I write, and whenever I get stuck I look at him.

He just kind of sits there and looks back at me.

We look at each other, in silence.

Sometimes, more words come to me and I keep writing.

## *Going Rogue (at Hebrew School)*

But mostly I just get hungry, call it a day, and get a snack.

People ask me what I love most about Star Wars. And my answer is: Everything. Obviously. I mean, what is there not to love? It has insane amounts of action *in space*, amazing special effects, and the weirdest, best creatures in the entire known universe. And, good versus evil. Can't forget about that. You got your good guys and your bad guys and there they are duking it out *in space*. You never have to scratch your head wondering who to root for in Star Wars. It's the good guys. It's like having an ultimate favorite galactic team that you always want to win, and their arch-nemesis team that you always want defeated. Can't get any better than that.

Number Two: Science. There's a very good chance that when I grow up, I'll be a scientist. That's because I want to know the answers to *everything*.

I haven't decided which area of science I'll end up in, though.

I could see getting into robotics. Robots are crazy cool. Or maybe chemistry. I built a science lab in my basement where I do experiments, like making things explode and mixing random liquids to make terrible-smelling potions.

My best so far is Potion #17: mouthwash, hot sauce, and the liquid from a can of tuna fish. Even our scrappy dog, Champ, had to leave the room when I brewed that one, and she likes to eat trash for fun.

But most likely I'll be an astrophysicist. Because, really, is there anything more awesome than the universe?

Number Three: Good ol' American football. Can't get enough of it. During football season, I watch every game I possibly can from one of my two designated spots—far left side of the couch if my team, the Patriots, are not playing; far right if they are. You know, so that everything goes *right* for them. There are no exceptions to this rule. If for some strange reason the right side of the couch spontaneously combusted and the Patriots were just about to play, I'd sit on top of the smoldering couch ashes on the right side and watch the game.

I keep a notebook and a pencil in my backpack and draw out football plays every day during lunch. At six plays per lunch period, five days a week, and forty weeks in the school year, times two years (been doing it since third grade), that's roughly 2,400 plays—and a lot of notebooks. I figure this will come in handy in case I want to have a side career as a coach for the National Football League. Not that I haven't considered being a player. It's just that I'm scrawny, which is great for darting in between players and being fast on the field during recess, but kind of risky when you get to the professional level. I know a lot about concussions.

This is because my parents lecture me about concussions every time I bring up the subject of me playing in the East Bay Football League, which happens to be one of my number one dreams.

I know all about the East Bay Football League. This is because there are a bunch of kids at school in the league and I'm an ace eavesdropper. I secretly listen in when

*Going Rogue (at Hebrew School)*

they're talking about their games and coaches and players and what drills they run during practice and, well, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't crazy jealous. Also, I'm not blind. I see them all wearing their EBFL jerseys, which basically look exactly like real NFL jerseys. The kind I don't have because they cost beaucoup bucks. Also, I pass by the EBFL games and practices four times every week. Which feels like torture.

"Why can't you just stick to flag football?" my parents ask. "It's so much safer." They say this because they don't understand.

Don't get me wrong. I like flag football. I like it a lot. But when you get to be my age, and you've been playing flag football for as long as I have, you start to crave something a little more. Like wearing a real uniform, with a real helmet, and actually tackling real players instead of just grabbing the flags out of their belt.

"Are you saying the players in flag football aren't real?" Mom asks. I find this question extremely annoying, because she knows the answer.

"And all this time I was sure they were real," Dad says sarcastically.

"Everyone knows they're not," I reply, just to throw them for a loop. "They're holograms."

"Point for Avery," Dad says, and draws an imaginary tally mark in the air.

"Must you encourage his snarkiness?" Mom snaps at him. Then she turns to me. "And the answer is no. Besides,

you wouldn't be able to play anyway," she reminds me. "You have Hebrew school on Tuesdays and Sundays."

Which brings me to the one thing I am really, really *not* into. Hebrew school. I've been going ever since kindergarten. It wasn't so bad back then. Probably because back then I didn't know any better. But now I do. And it's starting back up next week after one whole, perfect, entire summer without it.

The reason Hebrew school is at the top of my "anti" list is because, the way I see it, Hebrew school is a dream-crusher that goes totally against all the things I'm really into.

Case in point: Nothing about Hebrew school has anything—anything!—to do with Star Wars. In fact, last year I invented a little game for myself to confirm this unfortunate fact by answering Hebrew school questions with Star Wars references, and noting my teacher's response.

HST (Hebrew School Teacher): Who remembers King Ahasuerus's evil aide from the story of Purim?

Me: Darth Maul.

HST: (*Takes a long inhale through her nose and a long exhale through her mouth. I think it's her way of not killing me. It seems to work.*) Not quite. Anyone else?

Me, again: Haman.

HST: (*Sighs with relief.*) Thank you, Avery. Yes. Haman.

Me: But it might as well have been Darth Maul.

*Going Rogue (at Hebrew School)*

I mean, really, what's the difference between the two? Both served as the right-hand man to a crummy emperor, both wielded incredible power, both used that power to master evil, and both tortured anyone who didn't agree with their beliefs.

HST: Interesting point, but ...

Me: And both had gnarly mangled faces behind their creepy masks and used red lightsabers.

HST: (*Blank stare.*)

See what I mean? Star Wars and Hebrew school. It's like mouth wash, hot sauce, and tuna fish liquid. People seem to find the mixture offensive.

Same thing with science and Hebrew school.

Here's the thing: Grown-ups are always telling kids how important school is, how we need to pay attention and work hard in school. Okay. Fine. I get it. I pay attention. I work hard. I don't *love* school, but it's better than being a moisture farmer on Tatooine, like Luke Skywalker was when he was my age.

My favorite subject in school is, obviously, science. (I've been told recess is not a subject, and in PE we're learning ballroom dance which all the mothers think is fabulous but which I argue is not a sport, and therefore PE is no longer my other favorite subject.) Although my science teacher won't let us explode things ("not appropriate," she tells me), we *have* learned some pretty amazing stuff in science.



The Big Bang. One word: Whoa.

Dinosaurs. Bring it. Especially the dilophosaurus, which would make an excellent Star Wars creature.

Evolution. Example: My parents say I eat like a Neanderthal. I say better than a *Homo heidelbergensis*.

All good stuff, right?

But then I go to Hebrew school and it's like I'm in some weird parallel universe where none of the things I'm really into even exist.

My HST tells us that God created the universe in six days.

"What about the Big Bang?" I ask.

She smiles a little nervously and says, "Well, that's also true."

"Also true?" I ask. "How?"

She closes her eyes and rubs her forehead like she suddenly got a headache. "Honey, that's a conversation for another time, okay?"

That "another time" hasn't come yet.

"Were there dinosaurs on Noah's Ark?"

"Ummm." She scrunches up her nose and taps her chin. "I don't believe so," she says.

"Did Adam and Eve also evolve from early primates?" I ask.

"Ooh, interesting question. But how about we put that one on the back burner for now?"

I'm afraid everything on the back burner is going to burn.

And, to make it all worse, not only do I have to go to *extra*

*Going Rogue (at Hebrew School)*

school twice a week to learn things that go totally against what I'm into, I'll never be able to convince my parents to let me play in the East Bay Football League because practice is on Tuesdays at 4:00 and games are played on Sunday mornings—the exact and precise days and times of Hebrew school.

Coincidence?

I think not.

I believe my Hebrew school teachers have devised a master plan to ruin my life.

Over the years, I've tried just about everything to get out of Hebrew school.

Pretending to be sick.

Sneaking out the back door of the synagogue and hiding in the creepy alley. The mangy mice and I had a pretty intense stare down. Eventually, they won and I had to sneak back in.

I even signed up to be in the spelling club at my regular school just because their meetings conflicted perfectly with Hebrew school. But my parents didn't fall for it. "Aren't you the kid who argued that learning how to spell has been a waste of time ever since the invention of spell check on computers?" they reminded me.

"Why do I even have to go to Hebrew school?"

I've only asked this question about a million times.

And they've given me about a million answers. Only problem is, none of their answers add up. Here is a sample of their attempts:

"I had to go to Hebrew school. You have to go to Hebrew school. It's tradition."

To which I reply, "Did you know that rabbis used to swing chickens over their heads on Yom Kippur to erase their sins, and that some still do? That's also a tradition."

After a long moment of silence, my mom says, "No, I didn't know that."

"How do you know which traditions to keep, then? Do you think we should still whip chickens around our heads, for tradition's sake?"

"Nice try, Avery. But you're still going to Hebrew school."

They give me speeches about famous Jewish people, like Albert Einstein and Sandy Koufax. "Hebrew school will teach you to be proud to be Jewish," Mom says.

Dad says, "Hebrew school will give you a chance to make friends with other Jewish kids."

"What difference does it make if my friends are Jewish or not?" I remind him that it's not nice to choose friends based on how they look, or their religion, or anything other than who they are inside and how they treat others.

He kisses my forehead and calls me a *mensch*. "Maybe you'll learn what the word *mensch* means in Hebrew school," he laughs.

"First of all, *mensch* is Yiddish, Dad, not Hebrew. And second of all, I already know that *mensch* means a good kid because Bubs taught me." Bubs is short for *bubbe*, which means grandma in Yiddish.

He suggests that maybe Bubs should be a teacher at my

*Going Rogue (at Hebrew School)*

Hebrew school, which I think is not a half-bad idea. At least she appreciates Star Wars.

I like Bubs a lot. She teaches me the secrets of making the world's best chicken soup and funny words in Yiddish that she learned from *her* grandmother. Words like *plotz*, which is my favorite. I teach her all the best plays in football. So with the new Hebrew school year looming on the horizon—just thinking about it makes me want to *plotz*!—I ask her the question without an answer.

“Bubs, why do Mom and Dad make me go to Hebrew school?”

“You’re a smart boy to ask such a good question,” she says. A very promising start, I think. She puts her arm around me and gives me a warm squeeze. “The answer is simple.”

Yes, finally! A good, simple answer from a reliable source.

“Because you’re the next generation in a long chain. A link between the past and the future.”

I’ll admit, it sounds cool. Like something Yoda might say. But honestly, it really doesn’t make that much sense. I think Bubs can see that I don’t totally get what she means.

She pats my hand and says, “Don’t worry, *bubeleh*. When you’re my age, you’ll understand.”

The problem is that I’m sixty-four years away from being her age. And by the time I get to her age, she won’t even be that age anymore. Plus, I’ll be done with Hebrew school—if it hasn’t killed me—so I don’t see how this is helpful to me right now.

I explain to Mom and Dad that I’ve already wasted 400

days of my life sitting inside that stuffy old synagogue learning nothing.

They say education is never a waste. They tell me not to be so dramatic. They tell me to look on the bright side.

“What bright side?”

“After your bar mitzvah, you’ll never have to go to Hebrew school again.”

If that’s the bright side, I’m afraid to know what the dark side looks like.

First of all, my bar mitzvah is not for another three years. *That’s three more years of my life.* That’s practically as long as it takes a space probe to reach Saturn.

I think I’d rather give that a try.

Second of all, a bar mitzvah sounds like torture. Here’s what a bar mitzvah is: Some poor kid has to get dressed up in fancy clothes and stand in front of the whole congregation with everyone staring at him while he chants a bunch of prayers in Hebrew and gives a speech about everything he learned about being Jewish in wonderful Hebrew school.

I hate wearing fancy clothes.

I hate people staring at me.

I don’t like chanting prayers, especially in a language I barely understand.

The only speeches I like giving are on the subjects of Star Wars, science, and football.

I’m pretty sure I haven’t learned anything about being Jewish.

*Going Rogue (at Hebrew School)*

I don't think Hebrew school is wonderful. Saying it would make me a liar.

And every time I lie my face turns bright red. Which is super embarrassing.

My parents remind me about the party afterwards. "Doesn't that part sound fun?" they ask.

"Not more fun than playing in the East Bay Football League," I explain. "Which I'll never be able to do because of Hebrew school." I look at them for a long time, then add, "You know what it's like to have a dream crushed?"

"Oh, honestly, Avery," Mom says in her very frustrated voice. She walks away.

"Bring out the violins," Dad says. He walks away.

Here's the thing. Grown-ups are always telling kids, *If you work hard enough, you can achieve anything*. But I have my doubts. Because I've been working crazy hard to get *out* of Hebrew school and *in* to the East Bay Football League, and neither one has happened.

Yet.