

# MARK STRIKES BACK



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



here had been a tear in the fabric of the cosmos. *Hans Solo* was dead. *Luke Skywalker*, missing. *Princess Leia*, transcended. *The Dark Forces* had been unleashed and were on the rampage, threatening all in their wake. But their arrogance would inevitably lead to their downfall...

*“When all seems lost, turn inwards you must. The Force grows strongest when the challenge is greatest. The time of the Peaceful Warrior, upon us it is!” Master Yoda*

*It had long been told, in Wookiee legend, that at the passing of The Great Tear, time would turn in on itself and the war with The Dark Forces would migrate to other dimensions. Chewbacca, recalling the words of Master Yoda, declined the invitation from Chalmun's offspring to remain in the Cantina as Gatekeeper - someone else could keep out the non-drinking droids!*

*He had a Jedi Master to find...*

The cruise-ship was headed for the Caribbean with *Mark David Corns* and his mother, *Linda*, on-board. One of many escapes to far-away places and warmer climes that they took annually, though the first of that year. A natural explorer, Mark enjoyed travelling and thought cruising was a lovely way to see the world. An avid storyteller, he enjoyed sharing memories of previous adventures. He was deep in conversation with a fellow passenger as *Chewbacca* arrived on deck, attempting to hide his bulk behind a pillar. Maybe it was Mark's time spent surrounded by other actors wearing strange costumes or just his open-heartedness, but Mark barely missed a beat as he continued with his tale. His audience-of-one (an elderly woman from Dorset) new to cruising and a little nervous if truth be told, stopped momentarily to glance at the hairy arrival. The on-board entertainment was *not* as expected!

*“You were saying?” she said. “I like going to far away places – it's the history and culture. And people are so welcoming. Norway is my favourite place. We've been there maybe five or six times. There are mountains, waterfalls, glaciers... spectacular scenery!*

*The people are lovely, speak good English. I quite liked Fiji too. I joined in actually with a dance group once. The other passengers and these three dancing girls and boys. That was quite good...*” A low burbling growl came from behind the pillar. Mark could tell that the new stranger was eaves-dropping and was secretly pleased when the woman passenger was 'called away', tutting and fussing as she headed for the bar. Mark wandered out on deck thinking to see if the stranger followed. He was intrigued somehow. Undoubtedly his mum would be tracking him down soon, but until then... Leaning against the railings, Mark turned as the stranger arrived alongside him. There was no-one else on deck. Maybe, like his mother, the other passengers were settling themselves in their cabins. Like him, glad to leave the usual routines behind them. Mark lived in a shared house with two other guys and although he didn't mind a bit of cooking and cleaning, it was always good to get away.

The stranger mirrored Mark's gaze as he looked out to sea. Despite his other-worldly appearance, Mark felt a certain camaraderie with this hairy chap and soon was allowing his thoughts of home to drift on the ocean waves. Lines from his current production, which he would be returning to after the cruise, flitted in and out of his mind. He chuckled to himself. *“Of all the cruise-ships in all the world...”*

He recalled how it had been his form teacher at Bideford College who had first got him into theatre. A production of *Bugsy Malone*. Just being asked, *“Would you like to be in it?”* had built his confidence.

*“OK. I'll go along,”* he had said and ended up playing the cameo role of Baby Face. *Oh! What A Lovely War* followed. *Joan Littlewood's* play. Twice! Once at school in 1989 where he played a Russian and a German soldier and then in 1997 with his mum in *Bideford Theatre Company*, playing both German and French soldier this time. In the trenches...

There was that low burble again, encouraging him to share his thoughts.

*“I'm in Beauty and The Beast when we get back. The Beast's manservant, Pierre! Maybe I should practice my lines on you?”* He laughed. Mark felt surprisingly confident in the stranger's presence. Not like *Pierre* at all. *“He's a bit timid and there are quite a lot of lines to say in the second half of the show. I have to talk to the audience as well as the other characters on stage. I haven't always talked to the audience before, so I'm a little bit nervous.”*

*Chewbacca* nodded slowly, dipping his head to one side, encouraging Mark to continue.

It was the *Wookiee* way to observe and he was beginning to see why he had been drawn to this place, this person, at this time. *“For the last eleven years I've sung Elton John's song, 'Can you feel the love' when we go on the cruises. Will be to about 400 people. I'm not nervous then. Once I get up there... I get into my stride. I can sing the song. It's the same with acting. I always like musicals or plays with songs in. But it's a bit different speaking to the audience. I've written the exact words in the right order. I'll stumble over the words... not be nervous.”*

He looked away at the vast expanse of water. Living at Westward Ho! the sea was no stranger to him. But the ocean was something else. It's familiarity held him. Safe. Like a song. *“Sometimes I think that the best bit of being on stage is being at home! Learning the words. You have to look at the script, learn the words. I remember everyone else's words. I do. Not every word, but most of them... I like being completely different characters. It's not always easy to do. I've had to overcome nerves. Try and be confident...”*

He smiled.

*“Someone must have said to me once, 'There is no try. Only do.' I can't remember who it was, but it's stuck with me always.”* Chewbacca nodded his great hairy head in recognition, growling quietly to himself...

A wave crashed over the railings, sending spray onto the both of them. Leaping backwards, but not soon enough, they knocked into each other, dripping salty water, laughing and burbling. A shared moment between new friends. *“It's my life. Acting and singing. Getting inside the character. It's difficult sometimes to portray a character. But you just have to say your lines and BE that character...”*

Mark thought a moment longer. *“I suppose I'll do plays and productions, or something for the rest of my time. It all depends on what comes up...”* Chewbacca burbled knowingly as they both looked out at the ocean. There was no rush.

What was *most* important, was that he had found the one he was looking for.

*“We are what we grow beyond. The challenge that is, of all Jedi Masters.”* Yoda