Mark Turner - “How to Identify a Rebel Invasion in Your Death Stars”

Mark Turner wants to help your twin moons of Tattoine avoid going to the Dark Side.

December 31, 2021 By Justin Birckbichler

Welcome to the Band of Ballers! In this series on ABSOT, I’m turning over control to some other ballsy testicular cancer survivors and patients who have inspired me with their work in advocacy and awareness during and after their diagnosis. This month’s feature is all about Mark Turner, who filmed a Star Wars PSA about testicular self exams. Enjoy!

So there I was sitting in the ultrasound waiting room, watching a seemingly endless stream of beautiful, 20-something-year-old, female nurses call out the next patient’s name. A bit about me before we go further. I’m a 37-year-old Englishman living in Perth Australia. I have an incredibly supportive wife, Heather, and two boys aged 7 and 3. With an Engineering background, I work for the Natural Gas company here in Western Australia, managing a number of field based teams and office staff including our Call Centre and Control Room.

Despite all these great things in my life, in the waiting room, my usual bravado and cockiness was crumbling by the second.

Righty was not all right

Over the last few days I’d found that my right testicle had become swollen and hard. After consulting Dr. Google, the big ‘C’ was on my mind, as was my mortality, my family, my sex life. Now my only concern was which one of these nurses I was going to have to drop trou’ in front of.

As I slunk back further in my chair, head in my hands, anxiety taking hold, I heard a booming deep voice announce my name. There stood a 6’4” burly Aussie man mountain ready to scan my boys. I have never been so relieved.

After a brief introduction he talked me through how the ultrasound worked and after getting over the strange sensation of warm jelly being applied to my testicles, the scan began. It didn’t take long before he ‘unofficially’ gave me the bad news…It was indeed cancer.

“Are you sure?” I asked as if he could possibly be mistaken.

“Mate, I scan 20 pairs of testicles a week and only see this a handful of times a year, it’s cancer. You’ll probably be having him out before the end of the week,” he replied.

“20 pairs of testicles a week?” I blurted “That sounds like a pretty shit job!”

“Yeah well it could be worse…I could have ball cancer.”

And there it was, the first laugh I’d had regarding my cancer journey, and it felt good.

Humour in the face of adversity

Within two days I was on the operating table saying goodbye to Righty. In April I went through adjuvant chemo. Whilst the initial diagnosis was hard, I quickly leant on humour as a coping mechanism, and have used it for pretty much my entire cancer journey. From telling friends and family that my diagnosis was “pretty nuts” to reassuring my wife that she needn’t worry because “I’ve got the balls to fight cancer,” joking about the seriousness of the situation I found myself in just kind of worked.

It wasn’t all for me though. I noticed that my male friends and colleagues were particularly awkward when I began telling them my situation. After all, I wasn’t simply talking about sports or discussing the latest episode of The Mandalorian. I found that by cracking a joke I also broke the tension, and after a bit of banter back and forth, I quickly learnt that not only do my friends have a particularly cruel sense of humour, but they also knew very little about their own health.

Questions like “How did you know something was up?” and “What did it feel like?” were soon followed by “What are they supposed to feel like?”

It’s not that I can judge. Before my diagnosis I hadn’t regularly checked my testicles. I knew it was something I was supposed to do once a month, but all the information I’d seen had been so serious, and I was so guarded in reply. I wanted men like me to know the importance of checking their balls. If the serious method wasn’t working, maybe a humorous approach just might.

Taking action

After testing the boundaries of polite conversation with Uber drivers, waiters, and supermarket cashiers, I realised that talking to random men about my testicles wasn’t going to spread awareness as quickly as I’d hoped…nor was it particularly welcome! (Editor’s Note: This is a great way to spread awareness on a small level, but also be asked to leave a store quickly. Trust me on this one.)

So in between the boredom of my surgery recovery and waiting for my first dose of chemo, I hatched a plan. As an avid cosplayer and Star Wars fan, I had some entertaining items at my disposal. With the help of some buddies I’d pulled together a plethora of bad puns, dad jokes, and ball gags. I quickly found myself standing in my Stormtrooper armour, holding a pair of Death Star Christmas tree ornaments, filming “How to identify a Rebel Invasion in your Death Stars—a Public

Safety Announcement from the Galactic Empire."

I posted the video during April's Testicular Cancer Awareness Month and the reaction was overwhelming. Apparently having a Stormtrooper tell you to check your nuts resonates with men aged 15 to 45, which is quite handy seeing as that's the age group most affected.

Whilst having a video "go viral" is fun, the thing that I was most proud of was the discussions the video started. Reddit was full of comments from people that enjoyed the humour, but stayed to ask questions or seek advice. A few guys have even sought medical attention after seeing the video.

The journey isn't over

Now well on the road to recovery, in a strange way I've found the hardest part of my journey has been the survivor's guilt. I was lucky in the fact that I sought medical attention pretty much immediately and caught the cancer at Stage I. On top of that, I don't particularly need my balls' core function anymore. I have two wonderful boys and as such I'd already had a vasectomy two years prior to my diagnosis.

During my treatment I've met people far younger than me, facing a far harsher diagnosis than me. And as I've got more involved in the community I've spoken with the guys who've had cancer spread beyond their testicles. It hurts.

So I've decided the best thing to do is to make the most out of a bad situation. I've made it my mission to normalise the conversations we have around men's health. After all, if women can talk about breast exams and pap smears, why can't we talk about our nuts?

Joking starts the conversation

An immature joke here or there isn't the most grown up way to start the conversation, but at least it does start the conversation.

In addition to this I've recently joined the wonderful folks at Movember to become a Testicular Cancer Guide, and I'm looking forward to helping other similarly effected men through their own cancer journey.

I look forward to continuing to spread my own quirky sense of humour on a topic that is now so important to me, but I will acknowledge that humour is not for everyone. My incredibly talented but extremely serious surgeon certainly didn't appreciate me asking if a prosthetic testicle comes with built-in GPS tracking for the wife or a hand warmer for me.

You can't win them all I guess.

Be sure to connect with Mark by visiting him at Pooper Troopers (@poopertroopers2020) Instagram photos and videos and on TikTok.

Know someone (or even yourself!) who is supporting TC awareness and would be willing to share their story? Drop their name, contact, and why they should be featured into this Google Form and I'll reach out to them and/or you!

This post originally appeared on A Ballsy Sense of Tumor on August 4, 2021. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/mark-turner-identify-rebel-invasion-death-stars