

Return of Han

by [Jason Byassee](#) in the [August 19, 2015](#) issue



In a trailer for the new *Star Wars* movie, a Harrison Ford who is 30 years older than the Han Solo of my childhood emerges from his ship, the *Millennium Falcon*, alongside his sidekick Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew). With gun drawn but a cocky smile on his face, Han growls, “Chewie—we’re home,” just before Chewbacca’s signature roar.

I can’t remember when I’ve been so excited.

Trailers have always been marketing tools for films, but now they’re often art in their own right. With only 90 seconds and multiple screens open at once, they had better demand attention. The trailer for *The Force Awakens*, due out in December, delivers delight and nostalgia in equal measure. Fans disappointed with the series reboot in the early 2000s (“George Lucas raped my childhood” was one of the more garish blog memes) have been salivating over these trailers like the geeks we are. Ford, Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker, and Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia reprise characters last seen in 1983 in *Return of the Jedi*. “Everything’s changed and yet nothing has changed,” says one of the movie’s makers in a promotional film.

Ford was rumored to have resisted a return to the original cast. He believed that the original films were overrated and that Han’s character was superficial. But at Comic Con, a sci-fi convention, the audience greeted Ford like the church does a born-again convert or the father a prodigal son. He was asked how it felt to be playing this character again in his sixties. “It felt ridiculous,” he said to general laughter. In 1977 there was no Comic Con to provide a venue for the actor who plays Han Solo to say

what it's like to play him again. And there was no way to deliver these kinds of moments right onto the computer in my pocket, where I can like them, share them, and show them to others. I almost got out my action figures.

The directing work of J. J. Abrams is one reason to be excited about this new effort. He has already been successful with two *Star Trek* films that capture the joy and delight of the original, campy *Star Trek* with cool new special effects. He promises to return *Star Wars* to its more tactile, less CG-altered origins. Abrams is making actual models and costumes again. He's having fun, which means the audience might have fun too.

For those of us for whom *Star Wars* has narrated a part of our lives, the trailers touch on our memories while showing that they'll do something genuinely new. I watched the original *Star Wars* so many times on VHS that I could type out the script verbatim on my pre-Commodore 64 typewriter. I knew every line and gesture. So did the movie's new makers, who like Abrams were once inspired by scholastic attention to the minutia of these iconic films.

But the key to a successful retread is a hybrid of old and new. These characters can't just be on screen again. We can watch the old movies for that. They have to present something new and something worthy of the love we have for the old. Rumors abound about the story line for *The Force Awakens*. My favorite is that twins have been born to Han and Leia since the last installment: one good, one bad. And what's new has to be faithful to the old. Aristotle said a good story has to turn out surprisingly, but seem inevitable in the end.

The previews hold out this hope. I've found myself playing these clips for my kids, on whom I will spend \$10 a head at the actual movie. I do it with a passion that surprises me. I religiously pause and explain, pause and explain. And the kids are interested, perhaps because they sense that this is my script. This is the movie that scintillated and delighted me when I was their age.

St. Augustine once told a man named Deogratias that the content was not as important as the desire of the teacher. Anyone who's had an excellent teacher would agree. It is their passion that most deeply instructs.

So I'm passing *Star Wars* on to the next generation. For good or for ill, these stories are embedded in my and my generation's mythology, and it appears the same will be true for my children.