

Is There Demand Even for Copies Of Collectibles?

By JAMES BARRON

HOLLYWOOD-CRAZED collectors have long been willing to pay handsomely for original props like Dorothy's red shoes. But reproductions of collectibles?

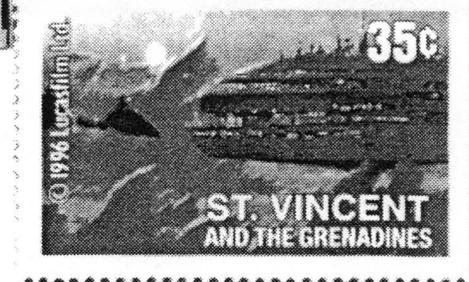
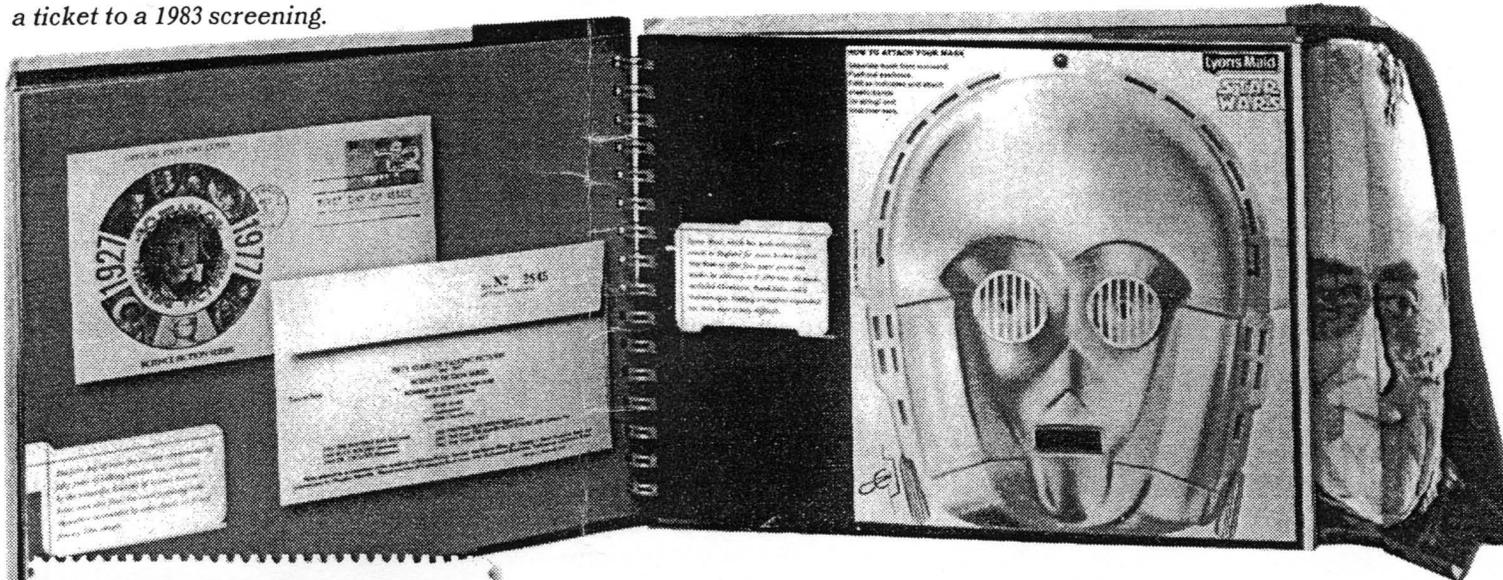
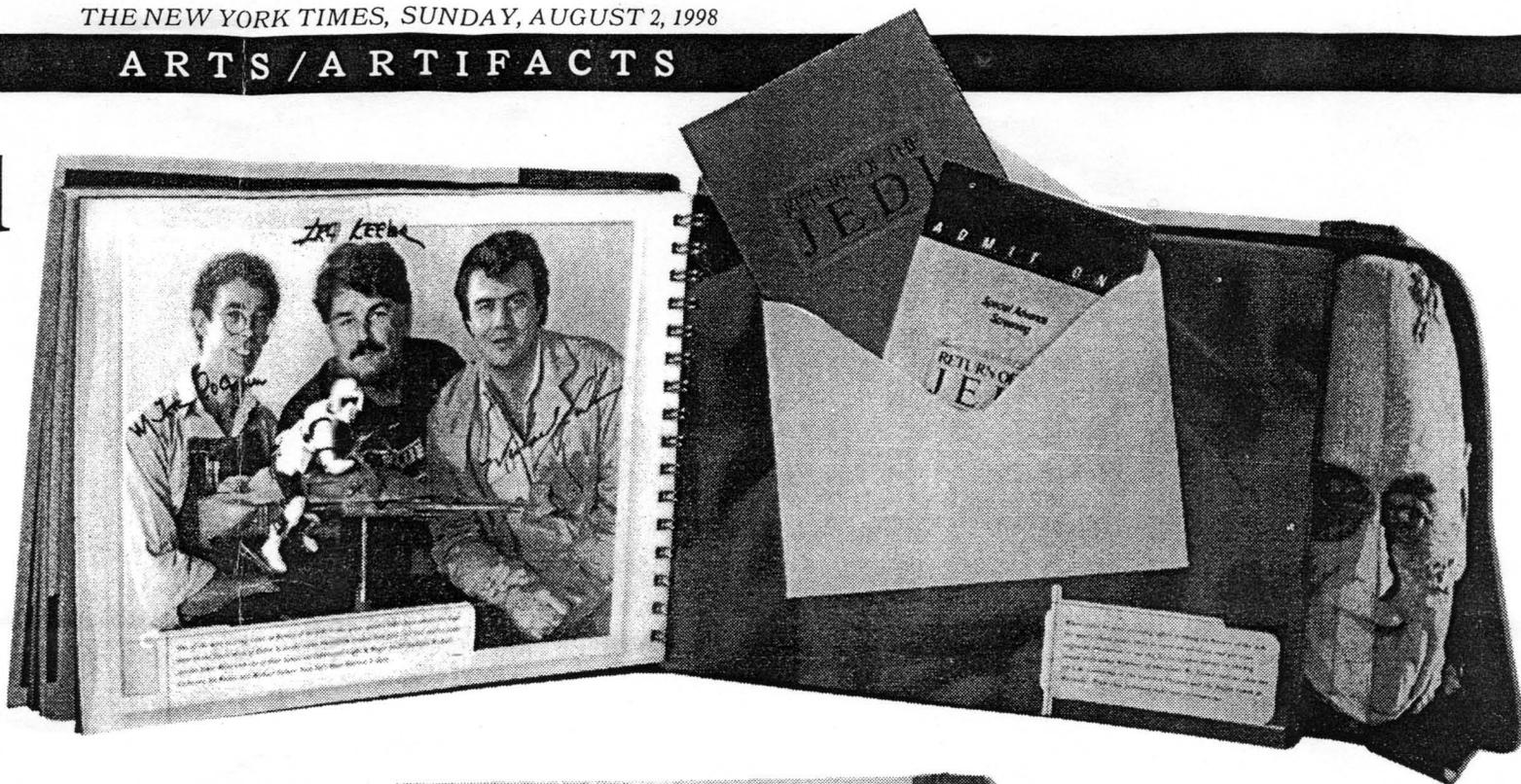
Chronicle Books, a medium-sized San Francisco publishing house, is betting that there is a market out there for such items, and somewhat closer to earth than the Tatooine desert. Chronicle has just issued "Star Wars Scrapbook: The Essential Collection," by Stephen J. Sansweet, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal who is revered by other collectors for having one of the world's most extensive holdings of "Star Wars" memorabilia.

"Star Wars Scrapbook" (\$35) contains a newly printed reproduction of a ticket to a 1983 screening of "Return of the Jedi," the third film in the "Star Wars" trilogy. The ticket slips out of an envelope that has been glued to a page in the scrapbook. There are also silver stickers that were given away in Japan and a C-3PO mask that was distributed in England.

Mr. Sansweet is unusual in an age when publishing houses want their authors on every talk show: Chronicle said he has an arrangement with Lucasfilm Ltd. that prevents him from talking about "Star Wars Scrapbook," which ranges from Ralph McQuarrie's original poster ("The Star Wars") to Australian potato chips that came with Techno Tazos in each bag. "You needed 50 different Tazos for a complete set," Mr. Sansweet writes, confessing to a chip-buying frenzy.

But "Star Wars Scrapbook" is not the only book that Chronicle is publishing. "Star Wars: The Art of Ralph McQuarrie" contains a monograph about the sketch artist who translated the producer George Lucas's ideas into the sketches that convinced the board of 20th Century Fox to give the project the green light. "I was like the people at Fox and other people working on the first film, of course," Mr. McQuarrie said. "They all felt we were into something that might not make money," adding that he, too, felt the film was so quirky that he would never see it on the screen.

A NEW ENTERPRISE Pages from "Star Wars Scrapbook: The Essential Collection," by Stephen J. Sansweet, owner of one of the largest collections of memorabilia from the film. The book includes a copy of a ticket to a 1983 screening.



From "Star Wars Scrapbook" / Chronicle Books; Photographs by Naum Kazhdan / The New York Times

MEMORIES A stamp issued to commemorate the "Star Wars" series.

"I'd love to be able to give you all sorts of lore about 'Star Wars' collecting," Mr. McQuarrie said, "but I don't have a 'Star Wars' collection. I haven't been what you'd call a fan, really. I just received a poster a fan wanted me to sign, and it was one I hadn't seen before. They don't tell me what

The market for original items from 'Star Wars' has become legendary. Now a publisher is trying to cash in on reproductions of the originals.

they're going to do with the images I created."

How "Star Wars" spawned a cottage industry in collectibles is by now something of a legend in Hollywood. Mr. Lucas was supposed to be working on the script. But, as Mr. Sansweet put it in his book, Mr. Lucas was procrastinating. And sipping coffee. Instead of writing dialogue, he scribbled a note about an idea that had more to do with earthbound collectors than with his bizarre little universe of odd-looking aliens, robots with strange-sounding names and something as mysterious as "the force."

"Star Wars" is considered the first film

with tie-ins that captivated collectors. Mr. Sansweet writes that the demand for "Star Wars" toys — now prized by collectors and worth as much as \$5,000 in original packaging — was so great during the 1977 Christmas season that the manufacturer "decided to sell what even its president concedes were basically 'empty boxes' with a promise to deliver some small action figures within a few months." But those items cost \$2 to \$3, double or triple the price of the first "Star Wars" collectible, a \$1 T-shirt with the prophetic inscription, "Star Wars Corporation Poster #1." Only 1,000 were printed; they sold poorly then, but

today they go for \$400 apiece.

So how hot is the market for "Star Wars" collectibles? Jason Joiner, a British collector who is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for his 26,000-item "Star Wars" collection, says there are two categories: "old" collectibles, which were distributed when the films were first released, and "new" ones issued for the re-releases. "The new market is booming," he said. "The old collectibles, which came out in '77, boomed until they launched the figures again. They've been in a bit of a slump."

REPRODUCTIONS seem to be doing better. Peter Siegel, an owner of Gotta Have It, a Manhattan gallery, prizes one of Yoda, which sold for \$250 in the 1970's. In the 1980's a catalogue company sold reproductions of those originals for \$900. Mr. Siegel has a reproduction. "I've been offered as much as \$3,000 for it," he said. "It's not for sale."

What collectors want most, real "Star Wars" props, are locked away in Lucasfilm warehouses. "I've never found an actual prop used in a 'Star Wars' movie that checked out to be real," Mr. Siegel said. "There are reproductions out there. They sold reproduction copies of the X-wing fighter and light sabers. They display beautifully, they sell for \$300 to \$500 but they weren't in the movie. If you had an actual prop used in the movie, one of the actual light sabers, you could probably go to six figures."

But real props are out there. David Elkouby, a California collector, has one. Well, only a piece of one — C-3PO's backside. He will say only that it came from a collection in private hands. "They worked on the film years and years ago," he said. "A lot of stuff was being thrown away, and they held onto that one piece." □