

Boba Fett Blues

by John Gorman

So you want to know my earliest realization that I was just another boob consumer? Trace it back to my Star Wars Action figure days. Fish out the collapsible C3PO from a war-torn pile of crummy Jawas and Storm Troopers, no they're all out of Snaggletooth again, but don't fret there's another Woolworth over by Fresh Pond Road if I could finagle my mom into a ride over there. The tough part was getting an advance on my already advanced allowance.

The thing was, if you clipped off enough of those coupons from the back of the action figure packages you could get a really nifty *limited edition* something or another. Feast your eyes on Boba Fett, the badass bounty hunter, puppet-strings of Jabba the Hutt. I was way psyched to be the first kid on the block with the hot new toy, especially since I'd read all about the missile that shot from Boba Fett's backpack-launcher.

I played hooky in anticipation of the special delivery. Why waste a whole day through ho-hum math classes and those retarded fire drills when Boba Fett could be hiding in my mailbox? Mom's deal was that if I stayed home I had to clean my room, take out the garbage, and other crap like that. In return, she promised to write my teacher a phony baloney sick note. She was quid pro quo all the way.

The big day finally came, but when I tore apart the package, my action figure didn't have a launchable missile. It stuck there welded in place, without any buttons or levers to fire it out. I had to see for myself if it was possible to tweak the design to suit my bounty-hunting appetite. Equipped with a pair of pliers I fished out from under the kitchen sink, I went to work. Dislodging the missile was tricky. I started off gently and soon swung into a rhythm whereby my half-cranks turned into roundhouse yanks that finally stripped the ammo clean off Boba Fett's back. It left me with a weird numbing feeling. Maybe neuter was more like it. It's hard to say. As I sat there

with the red, bean-sized missile in the pinch of my hand I just didn't feel like gluing the stupid thing back on.

My buddy Kenji, the only other spoiled brat I knew who got everything he whined about, told me some dickweed from Oshkosh messed up his cornea blasting Boba Fett missiles off his front porch and that was why all the second batch figures were shipped neutralized. Kenji also mentioned that the puny Boba Fett was nothing compared to the new line (if you'll pardon the pun) that was being launched, scheduled to hit the stores for the holidays. According to him the new line would be as tall as Rom the Spaceknight. This brawnier Boba Fett would fill the void of the inferior one loafing under my bed.

In the meantime Rom posed as my scab Boba Fett, until the bathtub incident whereupon the better part of his foot was caught and snapped off in the drain. Mom nursed Rom's foot with the gauze she used to bandage my hands when I hurt myself digging around for baseballs behind the old ball field. The rejuvenated Rom met his ultimate demise outside the fourth floor window of the boy's bathroom at my school. The parachute never opened.

When Kenji popped in the original Stars Wars on his Betamax, we made some startling discoveries: 1) it was Han Solo, not Luke who killed Greedo — Kenji liked to call him Guido; 2) upon closer inspection it did look like Princess Leia had an armpit-sniffing fetish after she and Luke swung to safety by way of Luke's trusty grappling hook. 3) Jabba the Hutt had already made his first appearance despite Kenji's insistence that it was Return of the Jedi where the tub-of-slob made his debut.

In their own right each of these were fascinating discoveries, but what bugged me, after catching Empire Strikes Back, was that Bosk, another mail-away bounty hunter, also had a nothing part. What was up with Kenner and their whole peddling enterprise gassing up kids' hopes, getting us all psyched up to covet their action figures when they took away the best features (AKA Boba Fett's missile-launcher)? And more importantly why were they pawing off these bit part bounty hunters? They didn't have any of the characters from the

cantina, not a single one, though Kenji and I wrote numerous letters lobbying for them — to Kenner, the Star Wars Fan Club for Midgets, George Lukas, Obi-Won Kenobi, whoever. Our only reply smacked pomposity. *Wait until the droid factory hits the shelves so you smart asses can build whatever figures you want.* O.K. so maybe they didn't add that last part, but the sentiment was implied by the persnickety little ink-stamped signature on the bottom of the form letter.

We didn't want more figures for the heck of it. We wanted to preserve the real-world integrity of Star Wars. Sure we had imagination, but it was cool to have Hammerhead and Walrus Man to spice up our battles.

One day Kenji and I got into a fight because he thought I took his Luke Skywalker light saber, a very jaundiced weapon with part of the tip spliced off. I'd lost mine some weeks earlier and had inserted a colored toothpick into the aperture underneath Skywalker's wrist.

"I didn't take your stinking light saber," I said, "If you don't believe me, here, take the toothpick. You should clean your teeth."

That's just how I said it. Of course, it didn't go over well and that's when he called me a grub.

"Not only are you a moocher," he said, "But a copy cat too. You always want what I have."

At that moment, I was furious and hurt by the assessment. My integrity, manhood, and friendship were insulted. An only child tends to blast a floodlight inward when the looker only needs a flicker. I took it to heart. Later on when his mom offered us a plate of Oreos and two tall glasses of milk he apologized.

"Forget it. I was only messing with you," he said.

The thing is that little squabble did mess with my head. I could take punches, noogies, and the occasional pile-driver, but it hurt more that he thought, even for that moment, I'd stoop so low and steal his figure. It wasn't the Jedi way.

I don't really know when something loses luster. The cherished toy underneath the Christmas tree has a short half-life and simple, honest, malicious words leave permanent marks. To this day, I have

a sweet spot reserved for Star Wars, though I wonder what's at stake when I trade figures on Ebay. What stories belong to the Han Solos, Darth Vaders, and Chewbaccas? Did two buddies have a break-up? Who were the bullies, the nerds, and all the others who played with them? These things I consider when making trades. Playing with another kid's old figures slips me into a forbidden past.

Kenji and I stayed somewhat friends, saw each other now and then when we played ball, burnt ants, and honed our joystick waggling skills. We shied away from action figures. Maybe I keep up with the Star Wars studs because I'm trying to make up for lost time. Maybe I haven't grown up.

