

# STAR BACK IN BLACK WARS

Is a change of scale just what Star Wars figures needed?

Bild Lilli, a German line of dolls inspired by a cartoon strip and primarily marketed to adults as gag gifts, began production in 1955 and were available in two sizes: 7½ inches, and a taller, 1/6th scale version that stood 11½ inches tall. The larger Lilli dolls were the inspiration for Barbie (both in size and design), which began production in 1959. Hasbro removed the stigma that dolls were for girls by inventing the term "action figures" and attaching it to their 1964 G.I. Joe toy line, which used the same 1/6 scale (now referred to as simply "playscale"). Other toy manufacturers since have experimented with various sizes and scales. In the early 1970s the Mego Corporation began producing 8" dolls,

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but it was Takara Toys whose experimentation with 3-3/4" Microman figures, along with Fisher Price's line of Adventure People toys, that inspired Kenner to go with that scale. The overwhelming success of Kenner's *Star Wars* action figure line turned the 3¾" action figure into an industry standard that is still being used today.

There are many advantages to 3¾" scale figures. They're less expensive to manufacture than larger ones, and take up less shelf space in retail stores. It's also easier to build playsets and vehicles to accommodate 3¾" figures (a 1/6 scale Millennium Falcon would be roughly 30 feet in length). Also, as those of us know who spent our younger years torturing rebel spies in an attempt to get them to talk, those smaller figures are pretty resilient. The disadvantage to the scale is that smaller figures, at least historically, contained less articulation and detail. At that size, it can also be difficult to capture an actor's likeness. All it takes is one ever-so-slight miscalculation to end up with a figure that will forever be referred to as "Monkey-Faced Leia."

Over the past few years in the 3¾" size we've seen *Star Wars: Saga Legends*, *Star Wars: Clone Wars*, *Star Wars: Movie Heroes*, *Star Wars: 30th Anniversary Collection*, *Star Wars: Legacy Collection*, and *Star Wars: Vintage Collection* (new-style figures on old-style cards). The combination of releasing the same figures *ad nauseum* across multiple lines has made it confusing (not to mention expensive) for collectors to follow.

In 2013, Hasbro announced their new line of *Star Wars* Black Series figures. Black Series figures come in two scales: the ever-present 3¾" size, and a new and larger 6-inch size. The figures retail for \$9.99 and \$19.99 respectively and focus on detail and articulation. The 3¾" Black Series figures have a "been there, done that" feeling to me, especially considering the fact that many of them are simply retooled and repainted versions of figures previously released in the Vintage Collection line, but the 6" figures are brand new and have definitely captured my attention with their levels of detail and articulation.



While the 3¾" scale is great for toys, it's not so great for serious collectors. The 12" line of figures have never had the articulation they deserved and have historically ended up unopened on the shelves of collectors rather than the hands of children. Filling the market gap for a slightly larger and more detailed action figure that can still be played with was the goal of Hasbro's new line of 6-inch *Star Wars* Black Series figures.

With an MSRP of \$19.99 per figure, the market for the new line of 6" Black figures is no secret. "Our focus here is the adult collector, the dad," said Derryl DePriest, Hasbro's vice-president of boys marketing, in a 2013 interview with USA Today. "We know they have their own generation of youngsters they like to share the adventure with. [The 6" figures] can be something for dad, and the 3¾" world can be something for the kids to share."



Figures in the 6-inch Black Series have been released in multiple waves, four figures at a time. The first wave, released in early 2013, featured Luke Skywalker (X-Wing Pilot), R2-D2, Darth Maul, and an Imperial Sandtrooper.

I was impressed from the moment I opened Figure 01 in the series, Luke in his orange X-Wing Pilot jumpsuit. The level of detail in the figure is amazing. Every detail, from the pinstripes on Luke's helmet and the sections of the chest box to the silver code cylinders in his left shoulder pocket are there. The figure comes with three accessories: a blaster, Luke's flight helmet (which is removable), and a lightsaber. The blade of the lightsaber can be removed, in case you simply want to hang the hilt from the small hook on Luke's belt. The figure is also highly poseable, with articulation points at the head, shoulders, elbows, wrists, torso, hips, thighs, calves, and ankles. Want to pose Luke holding his lightsaber with two hands? You can do that. Want to pose him with a blaster in his hand and one foot resting on his helmet? You can do that, too.

Luke, like all the 6-inch Black Series figures, came in a resealable box. The figures and their accessories must merely be popped out of vacuum-formed sheets of plastic to be opened. This is a *great* selling point for collectors, who often fret over whether or not to open figures (or buy two, one to open and one to save). The black boxes these figures ship in can easily be opened and stored without destroying them.

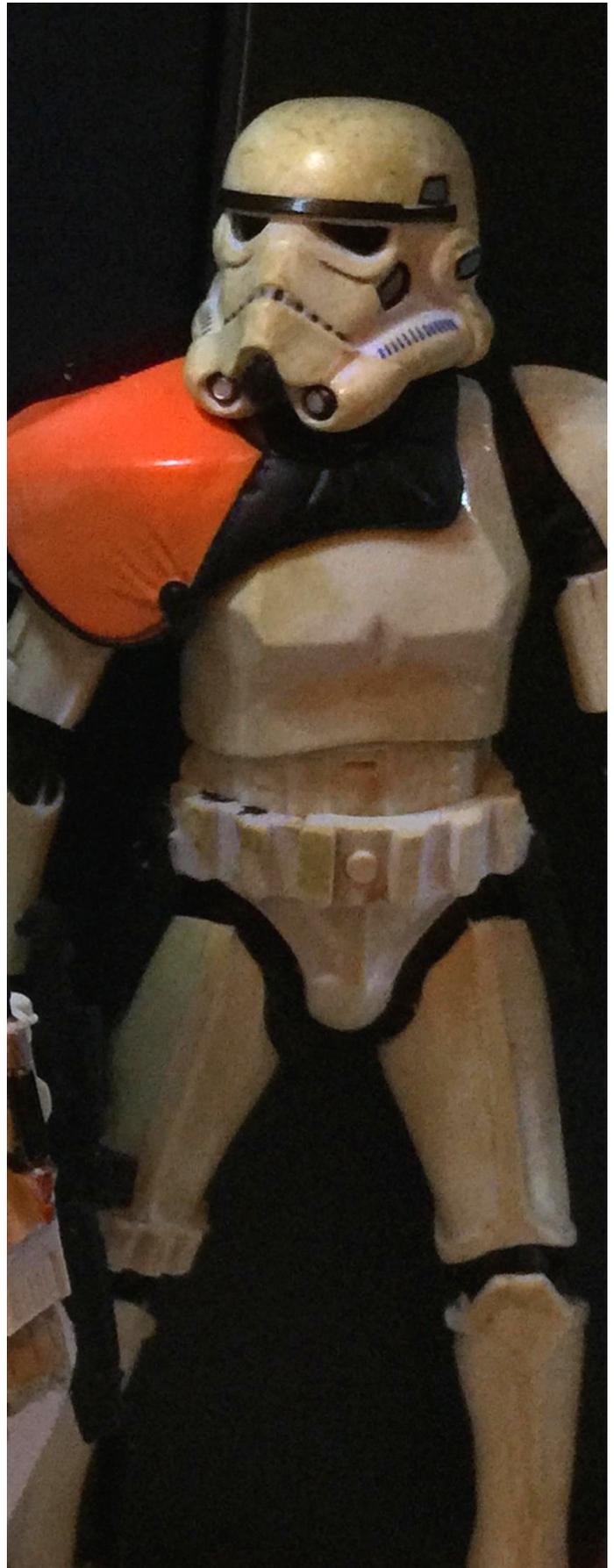


Believe it or not, the Luke figure is actually on the *low* side when it comes to accessories. The Darth Maul figure not only ships with two lightsabers and a pair of binoculars, but also an additional head (one comes with a sculpted hood, the other, without). R2-D2 comes with a removable blue panel on his head where Luke's lightsaber hilt or a periscope (both included) can be inserted. R2 also comes with those silly external "leg rockets" seen in the prequels. In fact, a minor problem with the line is the pile of spare accessories I'm accumulating at a rapid rate. In a pile next to my 6" figures, I have a small pile of extra hands, belts, an arsenal of weapons, and at least two spare heads.

Hasbro originally announced that the 6" figure line would contain eight figures, but if there's one thing I know about collecting *Star Wars* figures for 37 years, it's that if you buy them, they'll make more -- and they have. I currently own 18 figures, and I'm still missing a few of the exclusives.

Because the toy line is so new, there are a lot of gaping holes in the figures currently being offered. For example, of the figures currently available, there are three Lukes (X-Wing Pilot, Bespin, and Jabba's Palace) and three nearly identical troopers (one Stormtrooper along with two different Sandtroopers), and yet there's no C-3P0 or vintage Obi-Wan yet. Along with those troopers, there's also a Clone Trooper, two Boba Fetts (one in all-white "prototype" armor), Greedo, Darth Maul, and Darth Vader. Han, Chewie, Princess Leia (in her skiff outfit of course) and prequel versions of Obi-Wan and Anakin round out the list of good guys. Additionally, two larger packages have been released: Jabba the Hutt, and a Biker Scout who comes with a speeder bike.

It wouldn't be *Star Wars* without exclusive figures, and the 6-inch line is no exception. Along with the aforementioned prototype Boba Fett (available exclusively at Walgreens), there have been two San Diego Comic-Con exclusives (Jabba's Throne Room, and Boba Fett with Han Solo in Carbonite), one Toys 'R Us exclusive (Cantina





Showdown Playset), and one Target exclusive, the Imperial Shadow Squadron which comes with a Shadow Scout, Shadow Stormtrooper Commander, and Speeder Bike, all in black. My biggest complaint about most of these exclusives is that they contain duplicate figures. The Cantina Showdown Playset comes with Han and Greedo (both available off the shelf) with a cantina booth added. The Boba Fett included in the SDCC two-pack is essentially identical to the one available off the shelf, as is Jabba from the Throne Room set (which comes with Salacious Crumb). As a collector, most of these sets make me feel as if Hasbro is forcing me to double-dip just to collect them all.

If there's any downside to the 6-inch line, it's that not all of them stand up well. I've had to lean several of the figures up against the back of my shelves to keep them from falling over. The worst seems to be Darth Maul, whose sculpted cape and double bladed lightsaber ensure that any disturbance in the Force (or simply walking past the bookcase too quickly) will send him onto his backside.



Websites are reporting that the next wave of will include such figures as Bossk, Imperial TIE Pilot, Han Solo in Stormtrooper disguise, and Yoda. With no C-3P0, Obi-Wan, Jawas, Sandpeople or Lando on the list, it looks like we can expect more 6" figures for years to come.

And once we buy all of those, Hasbro might actually make that 30-foot Millennium Falcon, too.