Brian Emfinger Celebrates Star Wars Day by Exploring Lucasfilm's Patent Portfolio

Happy Star Wars Day, and May the 4th be with you!

Banner Witcoff's Brian Emfinger is celebrating by exploring the patent portfolio of Lucasfilm, Ltd., which holds a number of design and utility patents going back to the early 1980s.

Lucasfilm's first patent—a design patent—was for a toy figurine of Boba Fett, who made his debut during the maligned but cult-classic Star Wars Holiday Special that aired on November 17, 1978 (more than a year before his appearance in The Empire Strikes Back). U.S. Design Patent No. D264,109 was filed on August 13, 1979 (a few months shy of the one-year statutory bar date) and issued on April 27, 1982. The patent shows the Boba Fett design from a variety of perspectives and is an accurate representation of the subsequent figure released by Kenner as part of its first ever mail-in promotion (four proofs of purchase required).

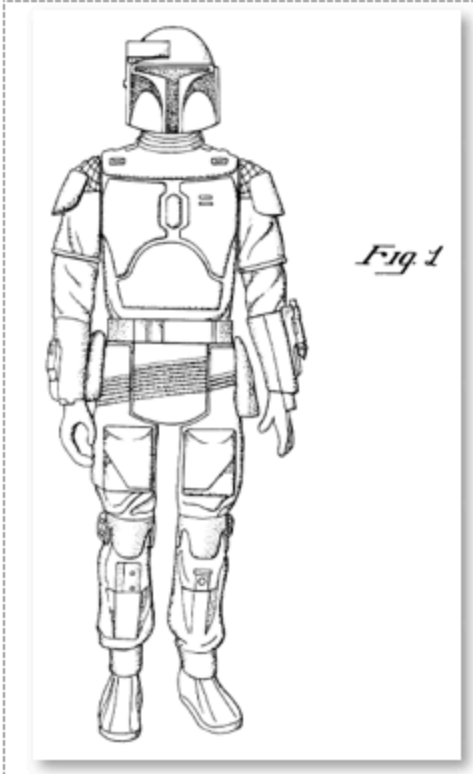


Fig. 1 of US D264,109



Kenner's 1980 Boba Fett Figure[1]

Fun tidbits about the Boba Fett design include:

- Besides George Lucas, other named inventors include Ralph McQuarrie (who created a number of concept paintings commissioned by Lucas to help pitch his movie to studios) and Joe Johnston (who began his career as a concept artist for the original Star Wars and directed family favorite Honey, I Shrunk the Kids)
- Prior art to the Boba Fett design included Zee Action Toys' "Metal-Man" diecast action figures[2]

Between 1979 and 1982, Lucasfilm filed design patents for a number of named and unnamed characters that would eventually appear in The Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi plus many of the familiar droids, ships, and vehicles for toys that Star Wars fans would come to enjoy. Familiar faces such as IG-88, Yoda, Bossk, Dengar, Bib Fortuna, Jabba the Hutt, and more were all protected by design patents. Although my personal favorites have always been the members of the Max Rebo Band: Sy Snootles (US D277213), Droopy McCool (US D277,303), and Max Rebo himself (US D277,883).



Fig. 2 of US D277213



Fig. 2 of US D277,303

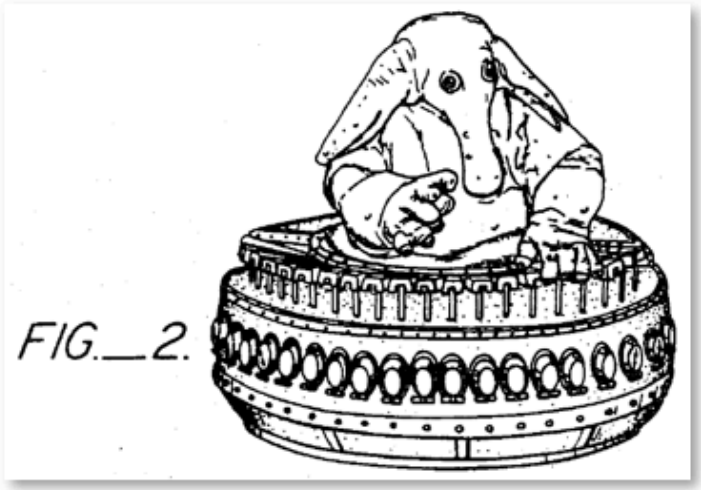


Fig. 1 of US D277,883

Astute observers might recognize that favorites from the original trilogy are conspicuously absent from Lucasfilm's design patent portfolio. The reason? Most likely their appearance in the original Star Wars from 1977 resulted in any designs entering the public domain before the value of design patent protection was appreciated. I also could not find any design patent for Emperor Palpatine. Perhaps a deliberate decision so as not to spoil any revelations in the upcoming movies?

Fun Fact

As seen on some of Lucasfilm's early design patents, George W. Lucas is a "Jr." like another one of his character creations with whom he also shares the same middle name—Dr. Henry Walton "Indiana" Jones Jr.

Lucasfilm acquired its first utility patent, US 4497023, in 1985 for a "Linked List of Timed and Untimed Commands" by inventor James A. Moorer. The patent is directed to improved techniques for audio processing such as mixing, sound effects, and synthesizing. The invention utilized a hardware-implemented linked list to store computer-originated timed commands and operator-originated untimed commands in order to address, among other things, audible clicks/pops and shifts within a musical note that occurred in prior art systems which were unable to timely process data update commands from asynchronous, real-time user input. The patent claimed an elegant

solution: inserting timed commands into a linked list of commands for execution and inserting untimed commands in the list ahead of the timed commands for execution first.

Lucasfilm’s patent program took a hiatus between 1993 and 2007. Since 2008, however, Lucasfilm has consistently filed and received patent protection for technologies related to film, animation, and video game production. Its patent portfolio currently includes over 300 patent assets.

[1] https://vintageactionfigures.com/boba-fett-star-wars.html
[2] https://bugeyedmonster.com/zee-toys-metal-man/

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