



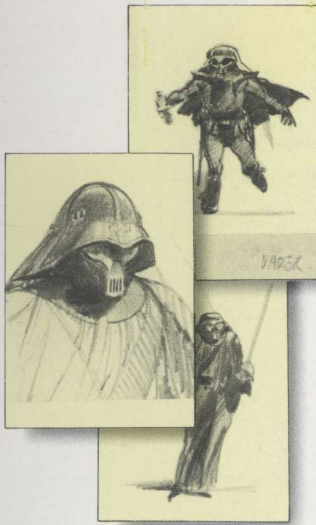
# STAR WARS:

FROM CONCEPT TO SCREEN TO COLLECTIBLE

STAR

WAR.

..... FROM .....▶ CONCEPT ..... TO .....▶ SCREEN ..... TO .....▶ COLLECTIBLE

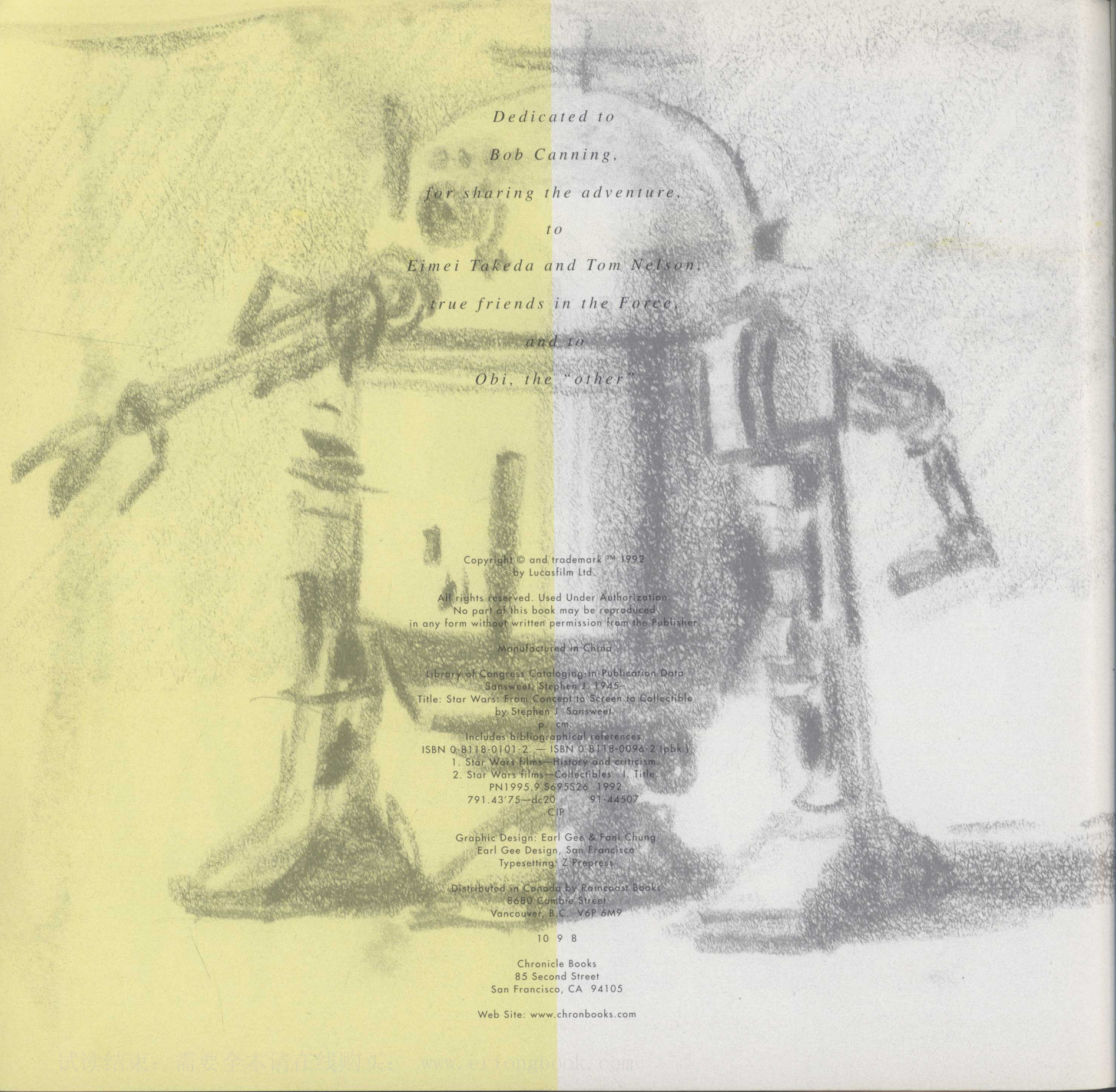


BY STEPHEN J. SANSWEET

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE ESSIG

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS BY DAVID TUCKER

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*Dedicated to  
Bob Canning,  
for sharing the adventure,  
to  
Eimei Takeda and Tom Nelson,  
true friends in the Force,  
and to  
Obi, the "other"*

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# A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

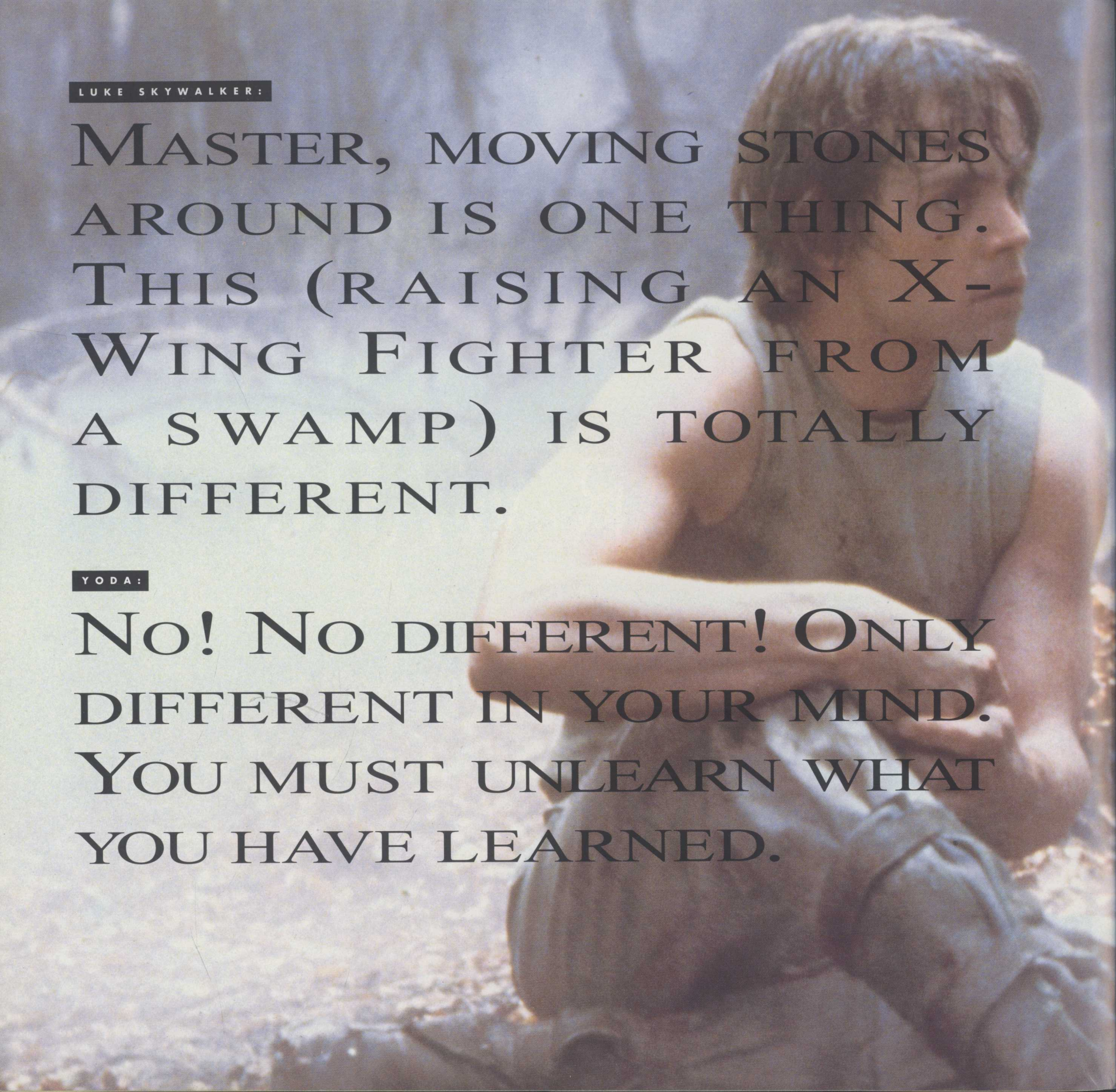
A Saturday afternoon in May, the backlot of 20th Century Fox Film Corp., a special invitation to see a new movie by George Lucas.... Something clicked. No, something *seismic* happened to me that day, for it was the start of a passion bordering on obsession that has occupied fully one-third of my life. Though there have been learned dissertations written about *Star Wars*, the real key to understanding it and its two sequels lies in one word: fun. That and the excitement of seeing unbounded energy and creativity pouring out of the screen. Let's not analyze it too deeply; let's just enjoy it. ★ That enjoyment, and a floor in my house filled with *Star Wars* merchandise and memorabilia, is what ultimately led to this book. But the shaping of the idea and the encouragement to proceed came from LucasArts Licensing's Lucy Wilson, one of George Lucas's longest and most loyal employees. She greased the wheels at Skywalker Ranch and provided full and complete access to the correspondence and photo archives that were so important to this book. ★ George Lucas was also generous with his time and recollections, despite a busy schedule. A tip of the hat, also, to his assistant, Jane Bay. ★ Thanks go to my new friends at Skywalker for their help. They include Kathleen Scanlon, Sue Rostoni, Julia Russo, Teresa Padilla, and Rachel Milstein in licensing and Don Bies, the story-filled prop archivist. I was also aided by photo librarians Halina Krukowski at Skywalker and Kerry Nordquist at Industrial Light & Magic. ★ The people at Kenner Products in Cincinnati were a huge help, but none more so than designer Mark Boudreaux. His infectious enthusiasm and days of work rummaging through his personal archives, finding and gathering material that was believed lost forever, and setting up a photo shoot were invaluable. We were both amazed to discover that his transcribed interview covered sixty pages—single spaced. Thanks also to Kenner's Jim Kipling for helping open the doors. ★ I was assisted by two excellent photographers, old friend Steve Essig in California and Kenner's David Tucker in Ohio. Other photography came from Kenner and Lucasfilm archives. Also assisting was Bobbie Cutler, who had the thankless job of transcribing some forty hours of taped interviews. And thanks to Randy Shilts for his gracious hospitality while I did my research in Northern California. ★ A special thanks to my colleagues in the Los Angeles news bureau of *The Wall Street Journal*, who had to cope with my somewhat erratic schedule, particularly my able assistant, Inga Loy, and my patient deputy, Roy Harris. ★ Lastly, my gratitude goes out to all the friends—both here and abroad—whom I've met in the last fifteen years, buying, selling, trading, or just talking about the world of *Star Wars*. I'll save a place for you in line in 1997!

*A rare, early in-house premium:  
George Lucas ordered several  
hundred of these engraved Lucite  
stars to give out to members of the  
Lucasfilm team at a company  
premiere of Star Wars in Marin  
County, California.*



STAR WARS




A young Luke Skywalker is shown from the waist up, sitting on a large, light-colored rock. He is wearing a light-colored, sleeveless tunic and dark pants. He has short, brown hair and is looking off to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a misty, swampy landscape with trees and water, typical of the planet Dagobah. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an overcast day.

LUKE SKYWALKER:

MASTER, MOVING STONES  
AROUND IS ONE THING.  
THIS (RAISING AN X-  
WING FIGHTER FROM  
A SWAMP) IS TOTALLY  
DIFFERENT.

YODA:

NO! NO DIFFERENT! ONLY  
DIFFERENT IN YOUR MIND.  
YOU MUST UNLEARN WHAT  
YOU HAVE LEARNED.



LUKE:

ALL RIGHT, I'LL GIVE IT  
A TRY.



YODA:

NO! TRY NOT. DO. OR  
DO NOT. THERE IS NO TRY.

—THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

C H A P T E R

OUT OF  
AGONY,  
ECSTASY

**G**eorge Lucas was in agony.  Nothing about making this film was easy, but staring at the blank pile of blue lined paper in front of him—knowing that he had to make these script revisions, and soon—caused his mind to drift into the fantasy world he was trying to create.  As tens of millions of people would find out just two years later, it was a strange world that Lucas was conjuring up: one that existed in a long-ago past, yet had all the trappings of the future; one that was far, far away, yet populated with



R.119

kindly aunts and properly gruff uncles as well as under-the-bed creatures and villains from a child's darkest nightmares.

⚡ Lucas took a sip of lukewarm coffee from his cup and mused, "Gee, wouldn't it be fun to have a Wookiee mug?" In 1975, a coffee mug sculpted in the likeness of an eight-foot-tall, two-hundred-year-old furry Wookiee named Chewbacca seemed about as far from reality as the possibility that *The Star Wars* and its two sequels would become three of the most popular motion pictures of all time. ⚡ Yet George Lucas, filmmaker, was about to become George Lucas, merchandiser par excellence, although that was about the furthest thing from his mind. For what Lucas was tweaking that day in the writing room of his Marin County, California, office was not only the script to a watershed film, but the beginning of a worldwide phenomenon. *The Star Wars*, soon to lose its initial

*Chewbacca was, in some ways, patterned after George Lucas's dog, Indiana.*



BELOW:

*A Chewbacca tankard and an R2-D2 cookie jar are the two items that George Lucas mused about while writing the script for Star Wars.*



article but none of its fun and excitement, swept up audiences from Kansas City to Kuala Lumpur. While filmmaking is probably the most collaborative of arts, it took even more teamwork than usual to turn the denizens of the *Star Wars* universe into some of the most widely recognized cultural icons of the late twentieth century.

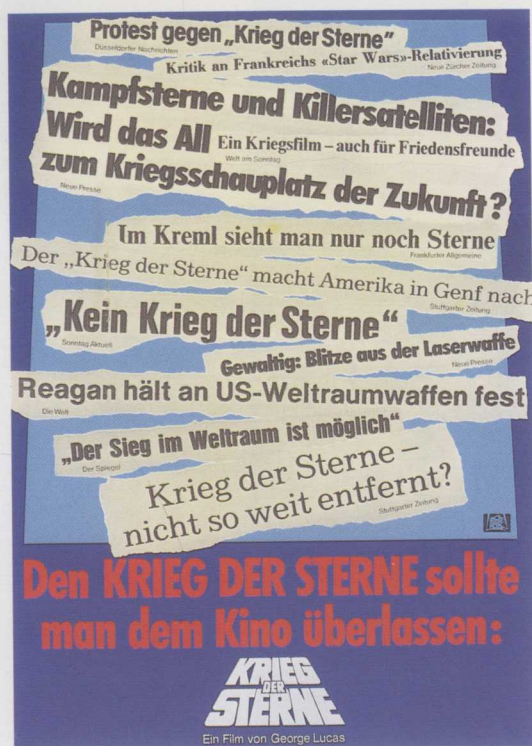
⚡ For the films themselves, Lucas gathered and challenged an unlikely team of industrial designers and engineers, welders, and oceanography majors to help him create a realistic-looking world that had existed only in his imagination. But where other filmmakers previously had succeeded in creating fantasy environments on screen, Lucas went beyond them to the real world. With the help of such people as an admitted "science fiction freak," a college senior, and a toy industry legend who went with his gut reaction even though he thought the film would fade away in two months,



Kenner couldn't get many toys out for the Christmas of 1977, so it sold an "empty box," an Early Bird Certificate Package with a cardboard stage, some decals, and a mail-in offer for four figures. The figures, also shown, arrived about two months later.

the world of *Star Wars* got translated into such things as toys, T-shirts, bubble bath lotion, and even marshmallow candies that fed a near-insatiable worldwide demand to own a tangible piece of the fantasy. ⚡ While *Star Wars* toys didn't start filling the shelves until early 1978, the cry for them was so great during the 1977 Christmas season that Kenner Products decided to sell what

even its then president concedes were basically "empty boxes" with a promise to deliver some small action figures within a few months. It worked. Thousands of Early Bird Certificate Kits were sold for up to \$16 each. Today, collectors pay \$200 or more for a sealed kit and the follow-up package of four action figures. ⚡ The films' major characters became instantly recognizable.



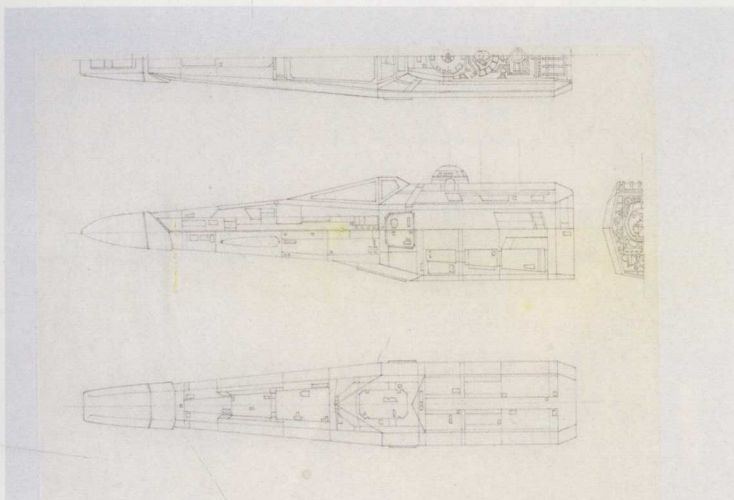
*The 20th Century Fox distributor in Berlin did a version of this poster with each film's logo. It features headlines about the Reagan Administration's Strategic Defense Initiative, which had been dubbed Star Wars. It urges that Star Wars be kept only on the cinema screen.*

Editorial cartoonists found in the menacing Darth Vader an ideal new way to portray the Soviet Union as an "Evil Empire," and later Yoda as the font of all wisdom and ethics. Parodies of the fussy golden robot, C-3PO, and his stalwart companion, R2-D2, found their way into everything from *Mad* magazine to X-rated takeoffs. And although Lucas still hates the comparison, President Ronald Reagan's grandiose and futuristic Strategic Defense Initiative was dubbed the *Star Wars* defense by critics and the media, certainly helping the language of the films become part of everyday life.

⚡ The impact of *Star Wars* can be measured in many ways. On strictly a bottom-line basis, the three films themselves collected a total of about \$1.3 billion worldwide at the box office and millions more through video sales and rentals. Merchandise sales have added up to more than \$2.5 billion. In today's dollars, the films' footprints might translate into as much as \$6 billion to \$7 billion. To boot, *Star Wars* jump-started the slow-growing licensing business and was responsible for the now-taken-for-granted licensing of major movies for products ranging from novels and trading cards to toys and clothing. In fact, according to the trade publication, *The Licensing Letter*, prior to the release of *Star Wars* in May 1977, consumers worldwide spent less than \$5 billion a year for licensed merchandise. By 1990 that figure had topped \$66 billion.

⚡ As for filmmaking itself, *Star Wars* ushered in a new era in films—entertainment filled with glorious special effects and strong story lines. When the giant Star Destroyer thundered over the heads of audiences after *Star Wars*' now-famous opening crawl, Lucas not only grabbed the youngsters at whom he was aiming his myth, but also awoke childhood memories in countless adults.

⚡ Aside from introducing the most astounding and realistic



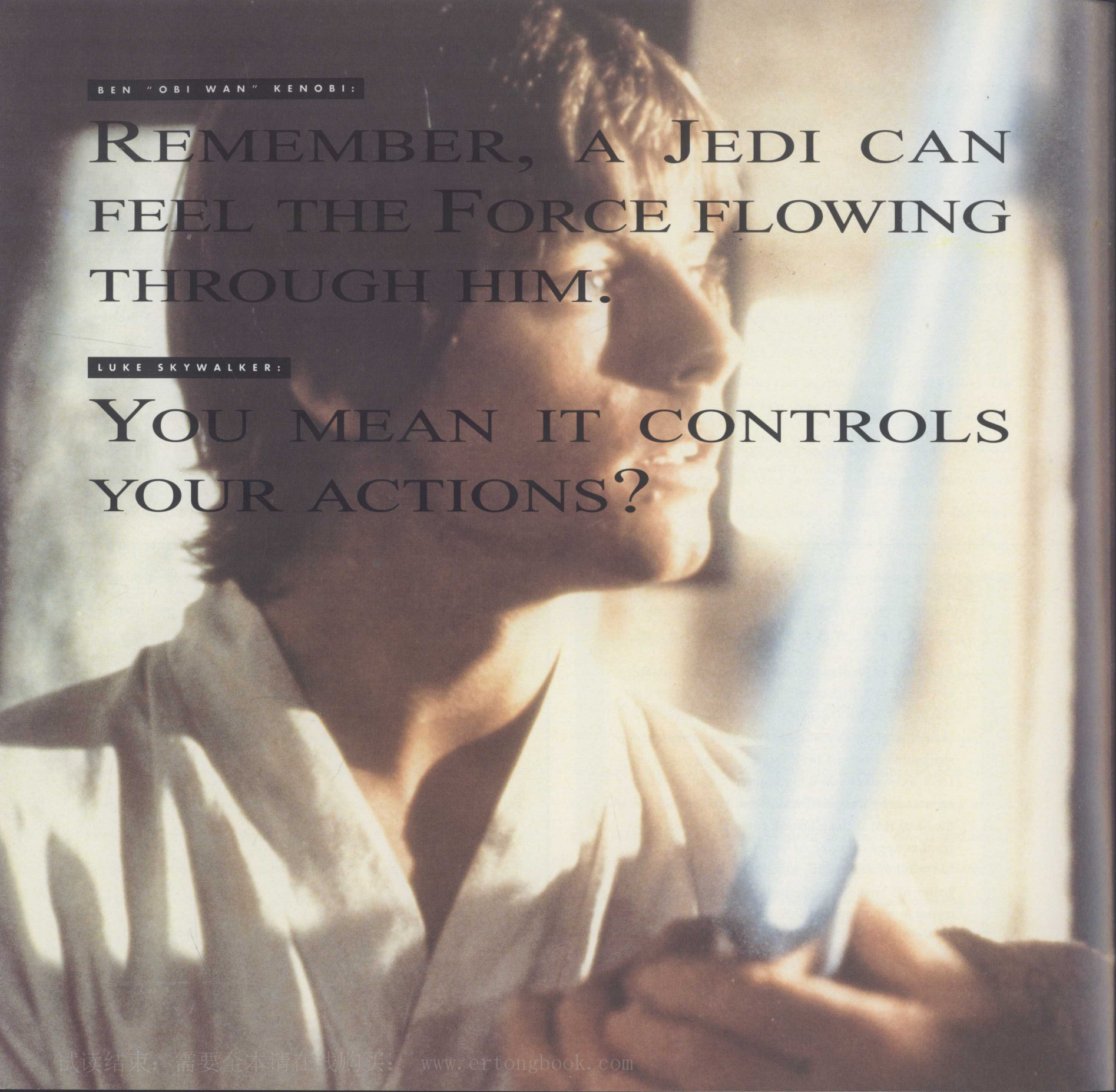
*This is where it all began:  
Jack Farrah's pattern based on  
Jim Swearingen's drawing layout  
for Kenner's first Star Wars  
vehicle, the X-Wing Fighter.*

## ➤ STAR WARS FACTOID ◀

In March 1978, Beverly Hills, California, patent attorney Peter Eicher sent 20th Century Fox Film Corp. a "VERY URGENT" letter. He informed studio lawyers that the federal government had suspended a request for a foreign design patent on Luke Skywalker's X-Wing Fighter "until a review requested by both NASA and the Air Force, ... on the basis that the application contains subject matter that appears to be of interest to the National Security..." The KGB, it seems, would have been better off spending a Saturday at the flicks than trying to snoop around U.S. defense plants.

alien characters, props, and vehicles, *Star Wars* ushered in a new era of visual effects. New ways of filming with computer-controlled cameras were devised, and special printing techniques for the film—allowing two dozen or more different elements to be added to one frame—were pushed to the limits. As well, *Star Wars* was one of the first feature films to make important use of then-emerging computer graphics techniques. ⚡ The *Star Wars* phenomenon had its Dark Side too. The film spawned mindless imitations in which loud and off-kilter special effects were the stars, and good writing and plot were ignored. It also led to a glut of teenage exploitation films that attempted—usually unsuccessfully—to strive for the new blockbuster status of selling \$100 million of tickets at the box office. ⚡ How did it all come together? How did *Star Wars* go from an idea in the mind of a young filmmaker to beautifully rendered paintings, then to props so realistic that the government delayed granting one a design patent on the grounds of "national security," and finally to toys with such jaw-breaking names as "Darth Vader's Star Destroyer Action Playset"? Rarely in the recent annals of popular culture has there been such a fortuitous interaction between thinkers and doers, artists and builders, and marketers and merchandisers. ⚡ Creativity, easy to admire, is hard to fully explain. The timing certainly was right in the arenas of both film and merchandising. Lucas, who originally wanted to do a new Flash Gordon film with the spirit of the Saturday matinee serials he saw as a child in Modesto, California, was a master synthesizer with the mythic vision to get the ball rolling. But to pull it all off, to make the kind of mark it did, *Star Wars* had to have something else going for it. Was it just plain dumb luck? Or was it... the Force?





BEN "OBI WAN" KENOBI:

REMEMBER, A JEDI CAN  
FEEL THE FORCE FLOWING  
THROUGH HIM.

LUKE SKYWALKER:

YOU MEAN IT CONTROLS  
YOUR ACTIONS?