



## The Minifig: A Cult Object (I)

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Maybe because I started to play with LEGO® when I was 6 years old (in 1980), I am unable to imagine LEGO without minifigures. According to the company, it is the second most important design in the history of LEGO, after the brick itself (although I believe that at the moment it surpasses the brick as our collaborator Arqu medes so brilliantly showed in his last Desmontados).

The minifig has become a cult object and there are now many people who collect them by theme, for their beauty or their scarcity.

In this article I want to focus on the minifigs that are object of desire for many collectors, because they exist in limited numbers or because they are simply outside the established sales circuits.

### Promotional minifigs

In the article on polybags (see HispaBrick Magazine 015) I introduced the subject of these minifigs, as they tend to come in a small plastic bag, as promotional sets.

The craziness started in 2007 when someone in marketing (with a cruel strain) thought up the idea of randomly adding a chrome-gold C-3PO to 10,000 Star Wars sets to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the first film. This promotion was available only in the USA, causing considerable angry reactions from fans in other parts of the world. The minifig instantly turned into a much desired object by thousands of LEGO and/or Star Wars® fans around the world. There are reports of fans with electronic scales, searching for boxes that weighed a little more to find the much sought after treasure. The prices in the secondary market are scandalous as the minifig is currently being sold around 370€.





The character in question is the famous protocol droid who appears in all 6 films with a gold coloured chroming. As the chroming process was carried out with the minifig assembled, if you lift its arms you can see the colour of the unchromed plastic. This, however, does not make the minifig less interesting.

In 2009 the alarms went off again, when the promotion was repeated, this time with a chrome Darth Vader (actually it is black metallic paint), again in the USA. It is Vox Populi that this second minifig had a wider distribution, reaching other countries through local offices and rumour has it that production was considerably more extensive than the theoretical 10,000 units. As a matter of fact, on the C-3PO gab you can read: "Congratulations You have found 1 of 10000 Limited Edition LEGO® C-3POs!" This is not the case with the Darth Vader which makes it hard to know how many were produced. Anyway, the prices on the secondary market are much lower, which appears to indicate there are many more available.

In 2010 someone at LEGO appears to have learned it was not a done thing to play with the feelings of fans around the world and the two minifigs that were available that year were distributed much more extensively. The White Bobba Fett and the Chrome Stormtrooper could be obtained by spending a certain amount in selected shops. The Chrome Stormtrooper had already appeared in 2009 as a magnet to commemorate the 10th anniversary of LEGO Star Wars™, but either because of the packaging or because of the price, collectors prefer the 2010 polybag, even though in principle it is the same minifig.



Finally, in 2011, the distribution of exclusive Star Wars minifigs became universal (at least in part). The Shop at Home promotion "May, the 4th" offered the possibility of getting an exclusive minifig, spending 55€ on Star Wars products. In 2011 there was the Shadow ARF Trooper, in 2012 the TC-14 and in 2013, the Han Solo (Hoth).

For now I'm only talking about Star Wars minifigs, but there have been more... In 2012 the Super Heroes theme from Marvel and DC Universe was launched, and as many will know, the variety of characters is enormous, which means LEGO has a lot of aces up its sleeve in its battle to prevent avid collectors from ever completing their collections ;

This first year brought the Hulk minifig, an exclusive of Shop at Home. As opposed to the extremely muscled version in set #6868, in this promotional bag hulk appears at minifig scale. In 2013 there was one exclusive minifig: Jor-El™, Superman's father and one of the main characters in the new film about this superhero (The Man of Steel).

In addition to promotion related to licenses, there have been others related to "core" LEGO products. Two examples are the MAX minifig, the LEGO Club mascot, and the LEGO Universe Astronaut. The first can be obtained registering a child for the LEGO Club at a LEGO Store, LEGOLAND or LEGOLAND Discovery Center. The second was obtained by pre-ordering the LEGO Universe game.

In 2013 there was a curious novelty. The toy store chain R, originally from Denmark, and present in Germany, Finland, Norway and Sweden distributed an exclusive minifig





representing the mascot from its logo. The most curious (and alarming) thing is that this minifig does not only have exclusive decoration, but a new piece that was specifically made for it: the hat. In addition, the BR logo is printed on it. Is this the beginning of minifigs à la carte starting at a certain volume?

Another recent the pack with 3 minifigs, a limited edition of 500 that is made for each inauguration of a LEGO® Store around the world. These are three more or less common minifigs onto which the name of the town and the year of inauguration is printed. The packaging is standard, but has an exclusive and different front for each store on which the serial number of the pack appears also.

#### Exclusive Minifigs from Books

It was a pleasant surprise and the start of many products that include a LEGO minifig as a gift. In 2009, Dorling Kindersley Ltd. (DK) published the book LEGO Star Wars™: The Visual Dictionary. The book reviews all the LEGO Star Wars sets to date. When the information about the book became available the surprise was it includes a previously unreleased minifig: Luke Skywalker Celebration. It is the reproduction of Luke Skywalker in the last scene of Episode IV, in which Princess Leia gives Luke and Han Solo a medal for destroying the Death Star. The minifig comes on the cover of the book in a special container.



After this first book, it is usual to find minifigs in DK books about LEGO. For example, in the LEGO Star Wars Character Encyclopedia the minifig is Han Solo Celebration, which matches the Luke Skywalker minifig from the previous book.

The world of Harry Potter follows the same lead. The book LEGO Harry Potter Characters of the Magical World contains a Harry Potter minifig in party costume. LEGO Harry Potter Building the Magical World includes another version of the main character of the saga, Harry Potter Yule Ball Attendee, which is a special dress for the Yule Ball, an event which is celebrated in the Triwizard tournament.

The Superheroes don't escape this trend either and the book LEGO DC Universe Super Heroes: Batman Visual Dictionary contains the Batman Electro Suit, a Batman with a special suit that allows you to solve part of the Batman video game.

So far we have talked about licensed minifigs, but in more general themes LEGO also has exclusive minifigs, like the LEGO NinjaGO Character Encyclopedia which comes with a Green Ninja ZX, or the LEGO Minifigures Character Encyclopedia, the book that reviews the 10 first Collectible minifig series, which adds a toy soldier to the 161 available minifigs (including Mr. Gold).

During the last quarter of 2013, DK published a new book, dedicated to the history of the minifig, which will include no less than 3 minifigs.

#### Exclusive minifigs from video games

Another fashion that emerged recently, maybe as a result of the launch of LEGO universe, is offering minifigs for pre-ordering a LEGO video game. In 2012 there were numerous examples, like Lex Luthor (30164) with the game LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes. Another example is the Elrond minifig (5000202) with the pre-order of the game LEGO Lord of the Rings, or Chase McCain (5000281) with the game LEGO CITY Undercover.

The thing is that in order to get the minifig you need to spend money on a video game you may not be interested in or which, even if you have a video console, is not for the platform you use. For example, the game LEGO CITY Undercover is only available for the NINTENDO platform. Imagine the headache I get each time I see one of those minifigs, as I only have a Sony PSP for which no new games are developed.

#### Exclusive Minifigs from Films

Not only are video games a source of minifigs. Last year the film LEGO Star Wars "The Padawan Menace" was released on DVD and Blu-Ray, and the Blu-Ray version came with an exclusive minifig of Han Solo as a child. I can tell you I was particularly annoyed the minifig comes only with the Blu-Ray version as many people don't own this kind of device (yes, it may sound unbelievable, but there are still people in the world without a game console...). It is a shame you need to buy a Blue-Ray you are never going to watch just to get a minifig. After this first movie there have been two more: LEGO Star Wars "The Empire Strikes Out" and LEGO Batman: The Movie. With the first one you get a new version of Darth Vader with a celebration medal. This figure is linked to the contents of the film. With the other one, although it is a Batman film, the minifig is Clark Kent, the secret identity of Superman.

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