

Video

'Jedi' Theft Raises New U.K. Piracy Fears

By PETER JONES

LONDON—Despite stringent security precautions, a copy of the movie "Return Of The Jedi" was stolen from a holiday resort cinema here in what police believe was the first organized burglary by video pirates.

Britain's video industry now fears a marketplace flood of illicit copies, recalling how pirates sliced huge profits out of the hit science fiction movie "E.T." last year.

The film copy was seized from the Classic Cinema in Hastings, on the south coast, sometime between the evening of June 17 and the following morning. Thieves broke down a door into the cinema, then forced their way into the projection room. The film was on a single three-foot-wide reel, weighing around 50 pounds.

But now 20th Century-Fox, pro-

ducers of "Return Of The Jedi"—the fastest grossing film in U.S. cinema history, and the third in the "Star Wars" series—is planning to launch private prosecutions against any home video users who handle pirate cassette copies. This is the first such warning formally handed out by a manufacturer to Britain's estimated 3.4 million VCR owners.

Says an official Fox statement: "What the public has to understand is that there are no legal video copies of this film in existence anywhere in the world. If any member of the public, or any video retailer, accepts a copy of this film, then he'd be handling stolen goods and engaging in a conspiracy to defraud. And these are offenses punishable by imprisonment."

Film company chiefs are convinced "organized crime racketeers" were involved in setting up the burglary, which, according to the cin-

ema manager, showed a great deal of "know-how." He adds: "They were obviously professionals. These guys are bleeding our industry dry."

Says one video company executive: "This time the public and the dealers can't claim ignorance of the criminal elements involved."

That there are no legitimate cassettes in existence makes prosecution that much easier. A Law Society spokesman here says: "In these cases, it has to be proved that a person found in possession of such a copy knew it was produced from a stolen or illegal source."

The launch of the movie here has been surrounded by extremely elaborate security. It has been showing to packed houses in three major West End showcase cinemas, plus selected provincial centers. The single copy brought in to London for the June 2 premiere was given a fake title in transit.

Twentieth Century-Fox won't say whether other copies of the film could have been snatched or copied in other European territories. But it is believed that there are slight changes in all the film copies produced, so that it would be possible to tell easily enough whether an illicit cassette was, for example, copied from the film stolen from Hastings.

In the past, most pirated cassettes came from films "temporarily removed" or "borrowed" from the halls in which they are featured. They are quickly copied and returned before the loss is even noted.

But the "Return Of The Jedi" raid is seen as much more significant and sinister. With high-speed copying machines available, pirate copies could be distributed nationwide inside a week or so.



KIDDIE TITLES—Ben Tenn, vice president, retail sales for Walt Disney Home Video, discusses the current "All-Star Animation Sale" in front of a retail display at CES.

Music Monitor

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• **Styx & Stones:** The "Kilroy Was Here" tour by Styx was captured on film (with eight cameras) by Jerry Kramer & Associates. The resulting one-hour program will air on Showtime and MTV. It combines conceptual footage with dance, dialog and performance.

• **In the Limelight:** Limelight America, a two-month-old company composed of Bruce Gowers, Simon Fields, Julian Temple and others, has taped "Haven't We Been Here Before" for Styx, "This Time" for Bryan Adams, "Pale Shelter" for Tears For Fears, and "Hot Girls In Love" for Loverboy, all directed by Steve Barron. In addition, Don Letts directed "What's The Matter With You" for Coati Mundi and Julian Temple directed Mitch Ryder's "When You Were Mine."

• **In Concert:** Nocturne Inc. of San Francisco produced a 90-minute special for Sammy Hagar, with Mike Anger directing. Don Smith performed audio engineering duties, assisted by Dave Marcus of Eureka

Teleproduction Center in San Carlos, Calif.

• **HBOOnly:** Daryl Hall & John Oates also pacted with HBO for a concert special, their first for pay-tv. Taped at the Montreal Forum in March, "Daryl Hall & John Oates In Concert" premiered May 20 and features selections from the duo's LP "H2O." Producer was Danny O'Donovan, director Mike Mansfield.

• **Parallel Lines:** Parallel Communications of New York has completed two video clips for Atlantic recording artists Kix, "Body Talk" and "Cool Kids." For CBS' Unipop, "Let's Make Majek" was taped at an 18th-century castle in upstate New York. Principals are Jon Small and Jay Dubin.

• **Wealthy:** John Jopson of BLTV recently directed a video for Shawn Phillips' song "Share The Wealth." The clip was shot in Los Angeles and produced by Kevin Meagher. Post-production took place at Utopia Video Studios. **LAURA FOTI**

New On The Charts



"48 HRS."

Paramount Home Video—4

When Paramount Home Video's "Star Trek II" debuted on the Billboard sales chart last November at number 7, it set a record. Now the same company tops its own record by three spaces. What does all this prove? The continued viability of the \$39.95 price point for sale titles, and the phenomenal popularity of Eddie Murphy, making his film debut here. (It is also worth noting that "High Road To China," in which another popular television star, Tom Selleck, breaks into the movies, debuted at the same number as the previous record. And "High Road" also lists for \$39.95.)

Nick Nolte co-stars with Murphy in "48 Hrs.," an action-packed comedy. The two make up a cop-and-criminal investigative team.

This feature is designed to spotlight titles making their debut on Billboard's Videocassette Top 40.

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