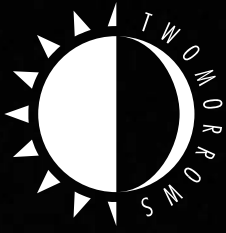


The Magazine for LEGO® Enthusiasts of All Ages!



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in the US

Brick Journal

Issue 14 • April 2011

people • building • community

**LEGO® Animation:
Behind the Scenes
with David Pagano**

**PLUS
Instructions
Builder Profiles
AND MORE!**



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Contents

From the Editor 2

Brick Animation

Behind the Scenes of LEGO® Studios..... 3

The LEGO Studios MovieMaking

Contest: Ten Years Later 7

How to Animate: An Introduction 10

Brick Filming the Bible 14

Bricks on Film: An Abridged History 19

Putting the Bricks in Motion 22

Inside MindGame Studios:

An Interview with Zach Macias..... 26

Event Report: The Brick Film Booth

at LEGO Fanwelt 2010..... 29

Playing Nice with Garrett Barati..... 32

Stop With the Clickety Clacking:

Behind the Scenes with Spastik Chuwawa..... 36

Building

You Can Build it:

Animation Puppet..... 39

Building *Blade Runner's* Spinner..... 46

You Can Build it:

The Lost World Filming Setup 50

Minifig Customization 101: Purist Customization 56

Harry Potter Set Review: Diagon Alley 59

Talking about Minifigures..... 62

Community

Touristbot..... 68

Jesper Jørgen: Train Layout 70

A Brick for Small Children..... 72

From the Designer's Desk..... 74

Not Quite LEGO:

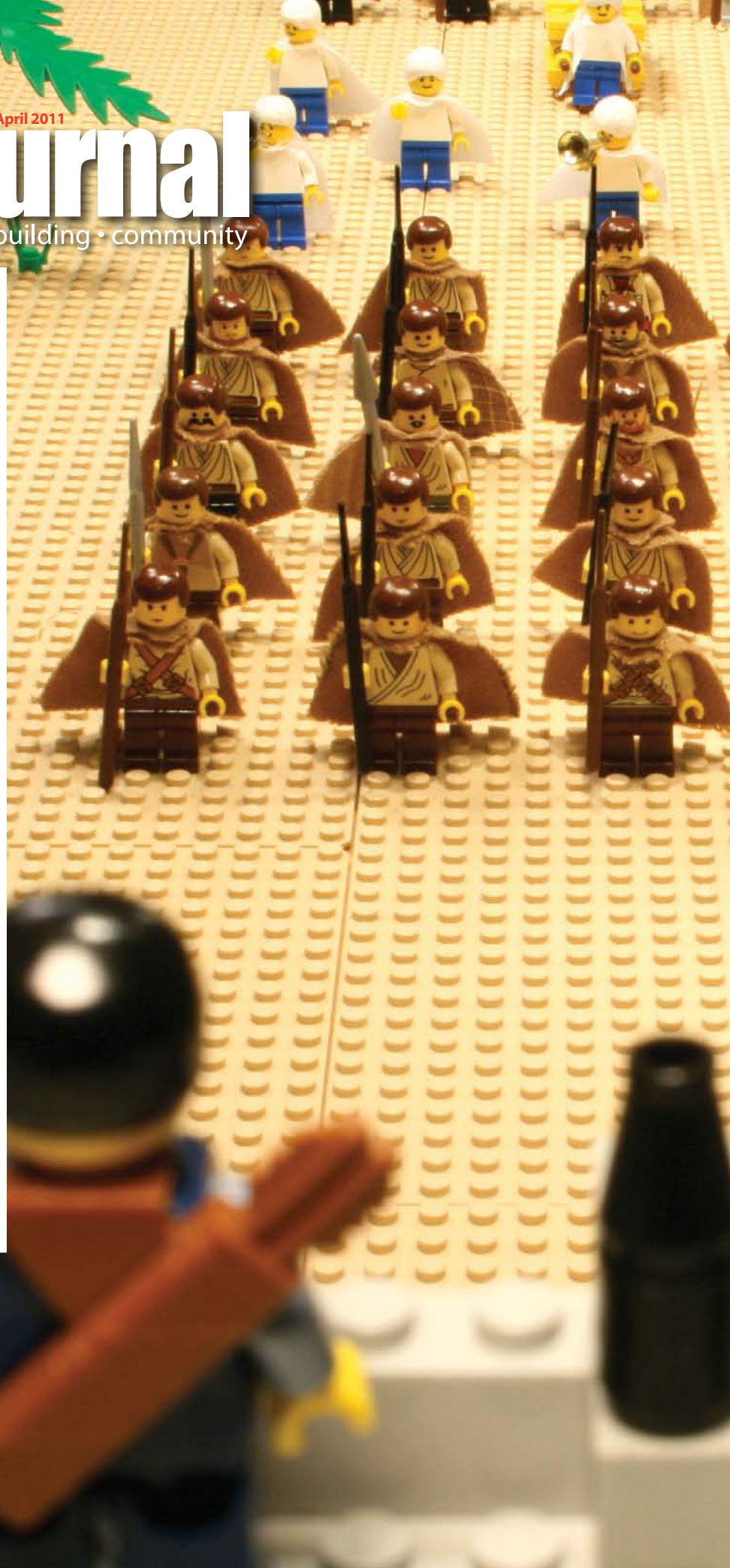
Xevoz: The Original HERO Factory!..... 75

Community Ads 78

Last Word 79

AFOLs..... 80

*This Page: A scene from Shatterpoint Entertainment's
JERICHO: The Promise Fulfilled.*



April 2011

Issue 14

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Many thanks to the websites who have served as mirrors for BrickJournal:

www.LUGNET.com, www.Brickshelf.com, www.peeron.com, www.brickmodder.net, www.rustyclank.com

About the Cover:

David Pagano setting up a camera shot.

Corrections:

In Issue 13, the theater used for BrickFlix was and is the Carolina Theater.

BrickCon was also mistakenly listed as Brickcon.

Many apologies for the errors.



From the Editor:

Five years ago, I started *BrickJournal* with the mission to report on the growing LEGO fan community and also the company. At that time, I had been in the hobby for about five years, and from participating in conventions and online contacts, I had what I thought was a good general understanding of the community.

I was wrong.

In the time that I have gone to events and reported on people and things,

I found that the more I explored I knew less and less. There were some areas that I knew very little of, and I thought, how could I talk about those areas?

The solution is what you see here. I have contacted some experts in areas I want spotlighted in the magazine. This issue has a section edited by David Pagano, brick animator! He's gathered features on the brick animation community, giving us a glimpse at an otherwise low-profile group of people.

It's been exciting to me reading the articles. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did!

Joe Meno
Editor

P.S. Have ideas or comments? Drop me a line at admin@brickjournal.com. I'm open to suggestions and comments and will do my best to reply.

P.P.S...Yes, *BrickJournal* has a website — www.brickjournal.com! Twitter? Yep, there too - <http://twitter.com/brickjournal>. Facebook? Yup - <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=58728699914&ref=mf>. Or you can scan the bottom codes with aQR reader!

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Glossary

AFOL (Adult Fan of LEGO)

NLSO (Non-LEGO Significant Other)

MOC (My Own Creation)

TLG (The LEGO Group)

BURP (Big Ugly Rock Piece)

LURP (Little Ugly Rock Piece)

POOP (Pieces—that can be or should be made—Of Other Pieces)

SNOT (Studs Not on Top)

LUG (LEGO Users Group)

LTC (LEGO Train Club)

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BrickJournal and its staff would like to thank the LDraw community for the software it makes available to the community, which we use to make all of the instructions and renderings in this magazine. We would especially like to thank Kevin Clague for his continued upgrades of the LPub tool that is a part of the LDraw suite. For more information, please visit <http://www.ldraw.org>.



The cast of the LEGO® Studios Steven Spielberg MovieMaker Set: (top) Director, (bottom, left to right) Res-Q 3, Cameraman, Pilot, Female Assistant, Grip, and Female.

BrickJournal: Hi there! Let's start with introductions: who are you; how long have you been with TLG; what's your job title there; and what was your role on LEGO Studios?

Hans Henrik Sidenius: I work as a Model Designer in PMD. I have been working at LEGO since 1996. I was a part of the DESIGN TEAM that developed the LEGO STUDIOS sets, and I designed the following sets: #1349 Steven Spielberg Movie Maker Set, #1353 Car Stunt Studio, #1382 Scary Laboratory, and #1381 Vampire's Crypt.

Lars Nyengaard: Senior Director, LEGO Education; working with Machines and Mechanisms, LEGO MINDSTORMS and LEGO Education WeDo, among other things. At the time of LEGO Studios, I was Marketing Director: heading up the LEGO Studios project, liaising with development partners such as Steven Spielberg and Universal Studios.

John Sahlertz: Director. Working as project manager in Markets and Product with novelty launches. Responsible for people, timing, finance, and quality in the projects where I'm project manager. At the time Studios was developed, I had the same role.

Daniel W. Mathiasen: Manager of Creative Software in LEGO Digital: working on products that allow kids to build and share their stories, as well as virtual building toys. On LEGO Studios, I was the technical producer.

Steen Sig Andersen: Model Designer. I have been working for the LEGO Company for more than 25 years. Through the years I have been involved in many different projects, both as model

Behind the Scenes of



It's been over a decade since the introduction of LEGO Studios, the play theme that set many kids on the road to filmmaking. BrickJournal caught up with a few of the minds behind the Studios line, and here's what they had to say!

Article by David Pagano



The crew behind the LEGO® Studios sets: (top, left to right) Daniel W. Mathiasen, Torben Damgaard Rasmussen, Lars Nyengaard, John Sahlertz (bottom, left to right) Steen Sig Andersen, Hans Henrik Sidenius. Photo by Eik Thyrsted Brandsgård.

builder and developer of new elements. In LEGO Studios, my task was to design some of the new elements.

Do any of you have a background in filmmaking or animation?

Daniel: As far as I recall, no one on the LEGO team had a background in filmmaking — there were team members with a background in liberal arts.

Hans Henrik: Right — no one had any background in filmmaking. In 1997, LEGO designer Rick Siegrist made a visit to Disney Studios in the U.S. He later built up the first “movie” concept models and presented the idea. When we later started up the LEGO Studios project, the team did a inspiration trip to London and Manchester. At the Museum of the Moving Image, we had a tour “behind the scenes,” explored how to do a movie, and explored the history of movie making.

When Studios was being introduced, web video was still in its infancy, and YouTube was five years off. Where did the concept for “LEGO Studios” come from?

Daniel: This was a time when the toy industry was trying to find its footing in a world of new media and technologies. TLG was of course in the midst of it, with LEGO Mindstorms and the early LEGO Media titles. This, combined with the inspiration from the brick films community, made the conceptual leap very easy. We were, however, faced with the challenge that the concept had many facets where partners were needed. Steven

Spielberg, Pinnacle Systems, and Spite Your Face productions were some of the most visible partners who helped make this happen. For TLG, it was fairly new ground working with so many partners.

Lars: We know that children love to role play with LEGO themes and we wanted to make LEGO Studios an enabler for them to capture and share their role play and stories. A very simple idea — and then we thought that introducing simple movie making tips and tricks would be fun and inspiring. So we included a small book on movie making and storytelling. Again, the idea was to use the LEGO themes and LEGO bricks already played with by the kid.

How did the partnership with Steven Spielberg come about?

Lars: We thought about who would be the most inspiring person to work with — and Steven Spielberg topped the list. I basically called his office a few times, and found out that they had thoughts about making moviemaking accessible to kids — just as we wanted to do with LEGO Studios. Fortunately, Steven Spielberg decided to join our project instead of developing his own project.

Did Mr. Spielberg have a lot of input into how the theme was developed?

Lars: Steven Spielberg had lots of input. He gave us a lot of inspiration in regards to a film set and props that kids would like. On the other hand, he acknowledged our competences in making child relevant software, hardware, LEGO sets, etc.

Were there any specific films or animations you watched for reference or inspiration?

Daniel: Of course — a lot of movies were referenced and discussed, and a few references can be found in the product.

Hans Henrik: The Design Team watched a lot of movies as inspiration, all the way from old western movies up to the latest action movies from that period. In the early concept phase, we then built up “Scenes” — models — to see what worked out the best. We tried to see the models as a prop in a studio, and focused on the action and play, so that the kids could use it to create a small movie.

Where did the concept to include film crew minifigures in each of the sets come from?

Hans Henrik: We wanted to put the kids in the director’s seat and let them explore and learn how to do a movie — but also to let the kid BE the hero of the movie. So it became a mix of minifigures that went into the sets: people in front and behind the camera. The full movie packet.

John: One of the thoughts was, if the child “just” wants to play with the bricks, he or she should of course have a crew, as in the real world.

Daniel: So basically giving the kids their own studio to play with, it was really a two-fold experience — build/record your movie, and play with the studio.

In addition to the normal play factor, the sets in this line also had to be easily filmable. What kind of testing was done with the Studios sets once they were designed?

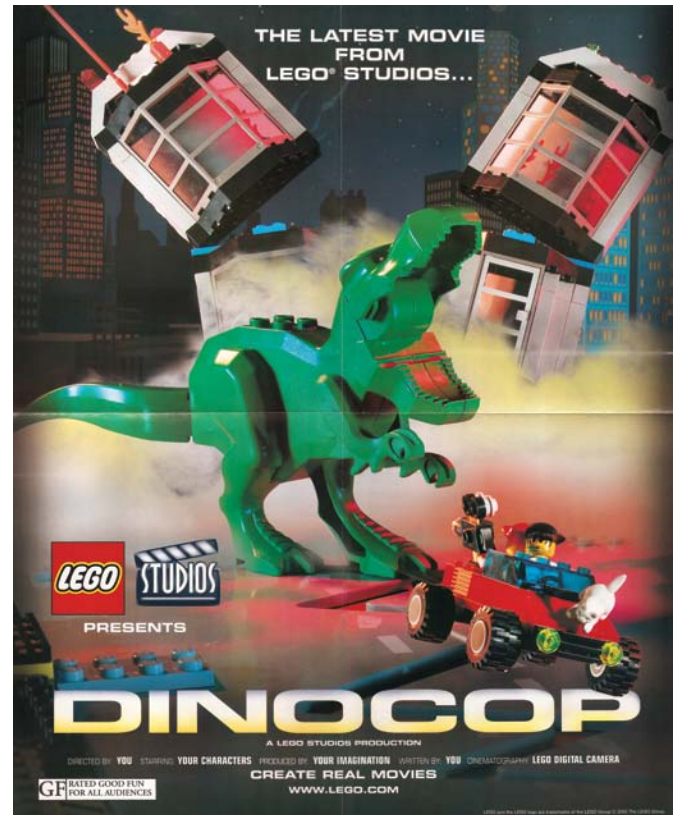
Daniel: We always test with kids, and being a technology product, [Studios] also went through extensive testing of the software and the hardware, as well as the standard LEGO quality assurance — and a fair bit of movies were recorded by the designers in Billund and California.

Steen: As I remember, there were two special elements we had a hard fight with: the vertical and horizontal lattice column. We had a clear idea about how it should look, but to find a solution so it was strong enough, and at the same time could be molded in one piece, took several loops and lot of prototypes, together with the engineers. Another element that was specially made for LEGO Studios was the sliding turntable, on which the camera could be placed. So you could make some very nice camera movements in your movie.

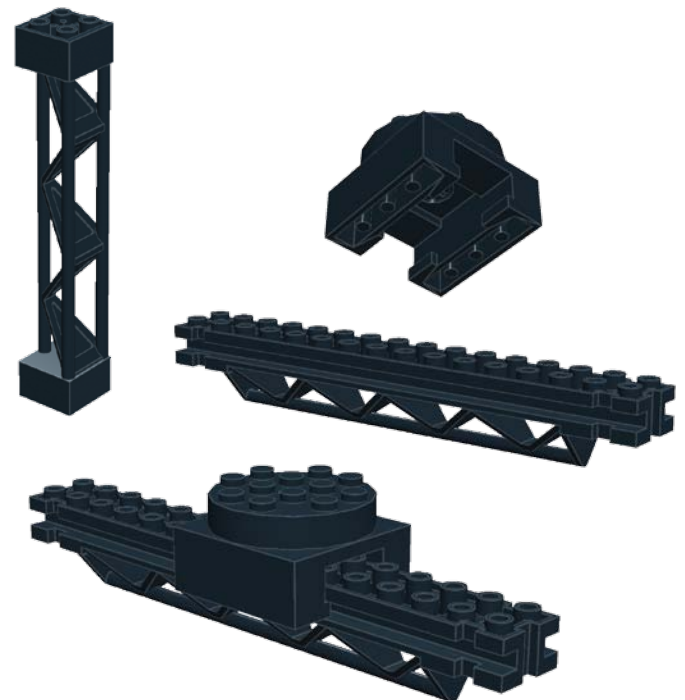
Hans Henrik: In the early concept phase, we did tests to see if the kids understood the concept. Later, we tested the play and functionality in the specific models to see if the kids found them cool, and had fun playing. Then followed the more detailed tests, where we looked into the actual build of the model to see if it would suit the specific age mark. When the first version of the software arrived, we tested that together with the camera. Were the kids able to handle the functions in the software? Did they understand the click buttons? Everything was tested in detail to make sure that the kids would get a cool play and cool “how to do a movie” experience.

Were there any Studios sub-themes (like the movie monsters) that never saw the light of day?

Daniel: We had a box that was cancelled prior to launch, in the second year — since we did not feel we were able to make the play experience fit with TLG values.



An ad for the LEGO Studios set, done as a movie poster for an actual film done by the LEGO Group. Dinocop was one of several official LEGO short films to promote the LEGO Studios line.

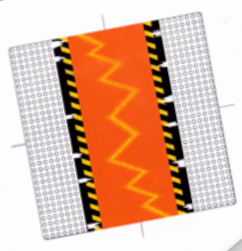


LEGO elements first used in the LEGO Studios sets.

LEGO Studios 2002: Monster Movies



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Top: A "casting sheet" of the LEGO Studios figures in the 2002 series of sets, themed to monster movies.

Above: An early test molding of the earthquake plates in the first LEGO Studios set. It was built in the early concept phases to test tolerances and earthquake functionality. Underneath is an early concept product brief that shows the deco area on the bottom baseplate in the set.

John: No — We work with the models and decided early that the one we launched was the best. We also had a very tight timeline.

Hans Henrik: In the very early concept phase, we had different suggestions and specific movies that we wanted to work with. But the models we built would require a license agreement with big Hollywood companies, and that was a road that we did not want to take. So like John said, we took our "own road" and decided very early what to go ahead with.

How do you feel about the fact that now, almost ten years later, young filmmakers are still pushing the envelope with LEGO stop-motion? Many of them, after all, got their start with the #1349 Steven Spielberg MovieMaker set.

Daniel: It is amazingly motivating for me personally, and it makes me proud of having been a little part of the team behind the product!

Lars: A year ago I saw an old PC in a school, and was told it was not thrown out because it was the only one that could run LEGO Studios. Maybe we should make a Windows 7 update?

John: It is fantastic and makes me proud. It was also a great product.

Hans Henrik: That is so cool. Looking back, LEGO Studios was a great product and it makes me very proud. It was a very cool and unique product line, because we managed to get the digital camera out and added the extra "how to do a movie" aspect to a "normal" LEGO theme. I still use the LEGO Studios digital camera on my home computer!

What would you like to see the LEGO Group do in relation to animation and stop-motion in the future? Do you think we'll see a return of LEGO Studios?

Daniel: Storytelling and LEGO play goes hand in hand. Give a kid two minifigs and a story starts to evolve; taking a camera and recording that story seems so straightforward, and I'm very happy to see all the movies being created and uploaded to the brick movie sites and YouTube. TLG continues to search for a formula; today, there is a licensed product on the market to empower the kids to create stop-motion movies. Also, for another way of telling a story, try visiting <http://City.LEGO.com/Comicbuilder>

Lars: Daniel is spot on! LEGO Studios represents a great concept of moviemaking for kids.

John: Agreed.

Hans Henrik: Do I see a return of LEGO Studios?... yeah, I do. I have seen so many kids have fun with the products, and seen the joy in creating a small movie clip. BUILD-PLAY-RECORD-SHOW... that is hours of fun for the kids, and goes hand in hand with the LEGO values. It is now almost 10 years ago that we developed and designed the models. If we decided to do a remake, we would have to re-think how to execute the LEGO models/digital software. Back to the building desk... let's see, how would a new LEGO Studios model look... YES, I HAVE A NEW IDEA!

And we'd love to see that idea! Thanks for taking the time to talk with us!



To coincide with the release of the Studios sets in 2000, North American LEGO fans were challenged to create their own original short films and submit them to the “LEGO Studios MovieMaking Contest.” Semi-finalists were chosen in three age categories, and were flown out to New York City for a red carpet premiere at Planet Hollywood. Finalists were to be chosen at this premiere, and would then move onto an international competition.

I was one of the semi-finalists, and despite the fact that I *lived* in New York City at the time, attending the LEGO MovieMaking Awards ceremony was a blast. As a fledgling animator, it was one of the first times I began to see filmmaking as something I could potentially turn into a career.

Included with the LEGO prize package was a contact list for all the semi-finalists, so that we could potentially stay in touch after the fact. Ancient e-mail services notwithstanding, I recently tried getting in touch with my fellow semi-finalists again — 10 years after the fact — to see if they had any interesting stories or memories to share. Here are two of them...

Caleb Kester was one of the semi-finalists in the 11-13 age category. He is currently a Senior at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, where he majors in Computer Information Systems, and double-minors in Multimedia and Business.

My film, *Western Trouble*, was produced in one weekend. I found the LEGO MovieMaker Set on sale at the store, and so I bought it. The deadline for the contest was one week away, so the Saturday before the deadline, I turned into a movie producer. I spent all day Saturday filming stop-motion

The LEGO Studios MovieMaking Contest: Ten Years Later

Article by David Pagano with Caleb Kester and Eric Stirpe

Above: A ten-years-younger David Pagano steps out of a limo at the LEGO Studios Movie Making Awards ceremony, held at Planet Hollywood, New York City

Opposite page: The Certificate of Achievement received by each semi-finalist in the contest. The “Director’s Award” given to finalists appears in the top right-hand corner of the certificate.

animation with my LEGO western film set. I had a vague idea for a script, and so I flew by my creativity and imagination to create the film. It was my first film, so there were a lot of rough spots. Looking back, I can see that I wasn't used to how fast the frames per second were, and I wish I would have slowed down my animations. Regardless, everything I did felt very fluid and I put a lot of effort into smooth animations.

Regarding my "red carpet premiere": When I arrived at the red carpet premiere, it was an honor to be treated like a Hollywood star. I was able to talk with the other semi-finalists and just enjoy the time. Nothing too remarkable happened, though; I wasn't one of the finalists, but it was an unforgettable time.

Post-movie-competition: I created a few more movies after this. My main focus was working on slowing down the animations and adding voice-over. *Western Trouble* was a short, 34-second clip. I later made a Bionicle movie that was in the 3-4 minute range and had a simple voice-over. I used a better quality camera and worked on perfecting the little things. During college, I took a Video Production class where I learned the basics to making a movie. Besides that though, I've been mostly focused on Computer Science and Web Design.

Even though I've moved on from making LEGO movies, they still hold a special place in my heart, and someday I hope to return to the scene and make another movie.

You can see more of Caleb's design work at <http://www.calebkester.com>

Eric Stirpe was 12 years old when he entered his film ALIEN HUNTER into the LEGO MovieMaking Contest. Eric's animated passion has carried over into adulthood, as he is currently studying animation at the University of Southern California.

I had already been making stop-motion movies with LEGOs for quite a few years before the LEGO MovieMaking contest: I started at the age of 7, when I read about how *Wallace and Gromit* was made. I was 12 when the LEGO Studios sets came out, and it seemed far too perfect. I was amazed at how easy the LEGO MovieMaker software made everything; suddenly I could add music, sound, and special effects to my films with almost no effort, and I began to explore new techniques. I remember reading about the contest in *LEGO Magazine* the fall after the MovieMaker kit came out, and knew I had to enter. I spent days thinking about various ideas, before I finally settled on using the figures and sets from the LIFE ON MARS sets (which had just come out) to inspire my story.



Certificate of Achievement

This is to certify that

is an awesome young moviemaker.



I spent the next two months animating every day in the basement, building increasingly elaborate sets and lighting setups to create my film *AL, ALIEN HUNTER*. Looking back on it, the plot was silly and very childish, but I couldn't have been prouder at the time. Disaster struck three days before the deadline, when my family's computer crashed and I lost everything. I was devastated and thought I wouldn't be able to enter, but my dad managed to recover the movie in bits and pieces, which I edited back together to create the final film (which clocked in at around 5 minutes).

I remember being shocked when I got a phone call from LEGO not even three days after I had sent in my entry. It was a woman who was calling to inform me that I had been chosen as a finalist for the North American division of the contest — I was utterly floored. I hung up the phone and, in a state of shock, told my family, who all started jumping around the room like crazy people.

Living in Rhode Island, we were too close to warrant being flown to NYC (where the finals were held), so LEGO instead sent a limo to pick up me and my family from my house and drive us to New York. It was probably one of the most glamorous moments of my young life, and I felt like the coolest LEGO nerd around.

Memories of the actual red carpet premiere are blurry, because I was a sweating bundle of nerves the whole time. I remember meeting the other contestants in my age bracket and being so scared — I wanted to win so much. When I was informed that I had won, and the host handed me that amazing trophy, I couldn't even believe it. I'm sure there are still pictures of me somewhere, grinning like an idiot holding that thing. I held that trophy in my lap the whole drive back, and it still remains in a place of honor in my parents' house.

I used my prize money from the contest to buy my first 3D computer animation software package, which I proceeded to teach myself. I guess you could say it helped kick off my career as an animated filmmaker.

Ten years later, I am now 22 years old and enrolled in my senior year at the University of Southern California, where I study animation in their illustrious film school. I'm currently working on my animation thesis, a 4-and-a-half minute computer animated film made using the Maya software package. I'm interning at Illumination Entertainment Studios right now (the studio responsible for this past summer's *Despicable Me*) and am hopefully poised to break into the industry once I graduate.

I don't animate with LEGOs anymore, but I still keep some of the minifigs that I used to make *AL, ALIEN HUNTER* with me to remind me of where I got my start. Animation is still my passion, and in many ways I thank LEGO for helping me get here. Without those amazing little blocks, I never would've been able to make that first movie, back when I was 7 years old. **b**

You can view a selection of Eric's work at <http://www.ericstirpe.com>, and his thesis production blog can be found at <http://stirpe.tumblr.com>

Enter the
LEGO STUDIOS
Movie Making Contest
entries must be received by March 31, 2001
You Could Win...

A trip for four to Hollywood to attend the Backyard National Children's Film Festival where your movie will be shown and entered for the Global LEGO Studios Movie Making Award! The three Global Award winners will receive a trip to a 2001 Hollywood Premiere!

A Director's Award made out of LEGO bricks!

Plus other unique LEGO Studios prizes!

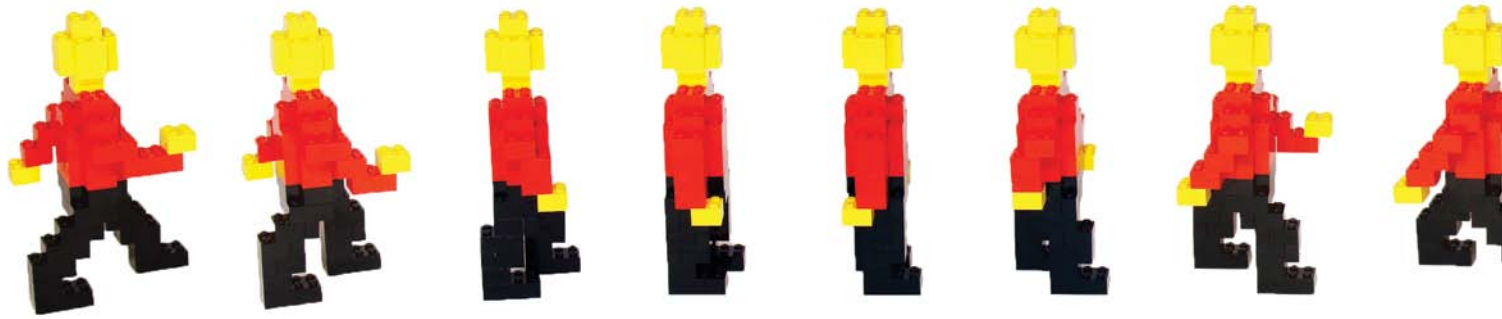
All entrants will receive a LEGO Certificate of Achievement.

Look for entry forms and official rules at retail stores in November and December 2000

Backyard National Children's Film Festival®

Open to U.S. residents ages 8-18. Void where prohibited. Visit www.lego.com for more details. © 2000 The LEGO Group.

A promotional sidebar from *LEGO Mania Magazine* touted the LEGO Studios Movie Making Contest.



How to Animate: An Introduction

*Article and Photography
by David M. Pickett*

Welcome! You're about to enter an exciting new world — a world where inanimate objects come to life, where your toys can move and talk, and above all, a world where anything is possible. Welcome to the world of stop-motion animation!

In case you're not familiar, stop-motion animation is an animation technique where physical objects are repeatedly moved and photographed in tiny increments. When these photographs are played back in rapid succession it gives the illusion that the objects move on their own. This technique has a long history in the motion picture industry, with *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) being a prime example. With digital cameras becoming cheaper and more sophisticated every year, the technology required to create these animations is now widely available. You probably have everything you need to make one sitting in your house right now.

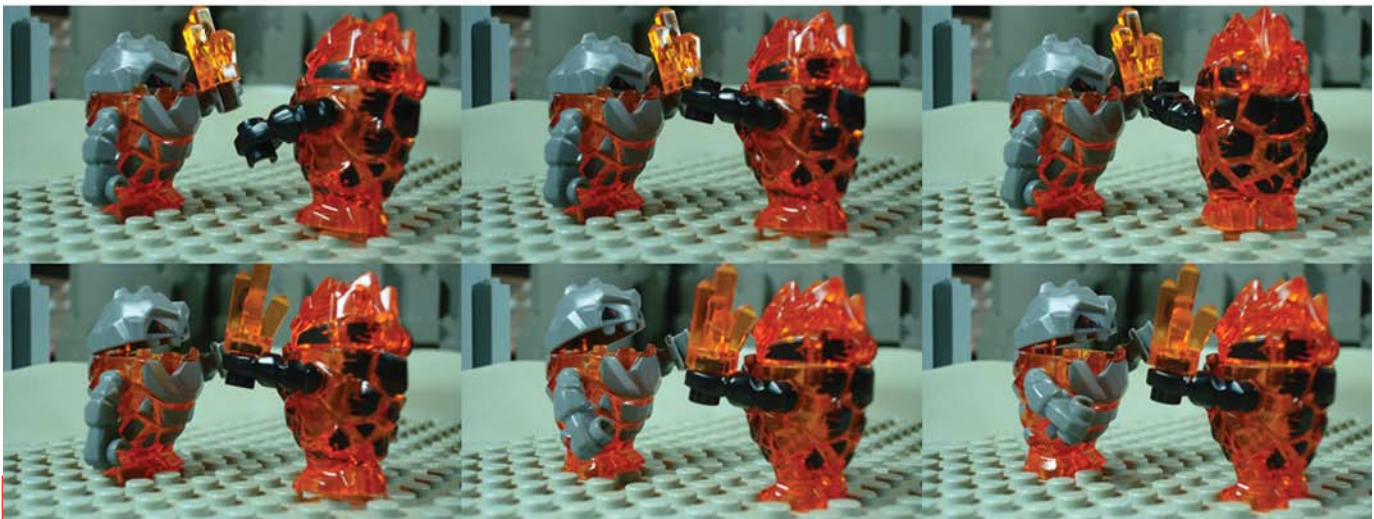
Just as there are a wide range of LEGO building techniques, from simple studs-up construction to mind-bending SNOT techniques, the art of stop-motion has simple foundations and complex heights. This article will teach you the basic skills needed to make your first animation and give you a quick glimpse at some advanced techniques. I'll be illustrating the examples with my medium of choice, LEGO bricks, but the techniques here apply to all kinds of stop-motion animation.

Making Your First Animation

The three most important things you need to make a stop-motion animation are a camera, something interesting to animate, and lots of patience. As a LEGO maniac, you probably have the last two covered, so I'll focus on the camera.

Choosing the right camera is one of the most important choices you'll make while animating. Your camera affects everything from the animating process to the look of the final product. The factors that go into choosing the right camera could fill an article on their own; there are trade-offs between simplicity, flexibility, price, picture quality, and more. For your first animation, just use a camera you are comfortable with. This could be a simple point and shoot camera, a fancy DSLR, a digital camcorder, a webcam, or even a camera phone. If it takes pictures, you can animate with it. Here are a few things to consider when choosing a camera:

- **Manual settings** – The more you can control the better your animation will look. The most important manual controls are focus, exposure, and white balance.
- **Remote control** – Ideally you should take pictures using a remote control or through a computer capture program. This will prevent you from touching the camera and accidentally moving it around during your shot.
- **Macro focus** – Many cameras have a macro mode that lets you focus on objects that are only a few inches away from the lens. This is vital when your subjects are small objects like LEGO minifigs.
- **Power supply** – Make sure your camera has good battery life (or even better, an AC adapter), and if possible disable any power saving auto-shut-off functions. One of the most frustrating things that can happen while animating is your camera shutting off in the middle of your big scene.





Now that you've picked out a camera, it's time to set up your animating studio. Pick a flat, stable surface that you will be comfortable sitting at for long periods. Tables or desks are great, but I have also animated on kitchen counters, dressers, and directly on the floor when circumstances required it. Using a baseplate and some loose LEGO bricks, build a cradle for your camera. It doesn't have to be fancy, just something that will keep the camera in place while you animate. If you have a couple small desk lamps, those will work perfectly for lighting your scene, but you can also get good results with regular size lamps or overhead light fixtures.

Now comes the most important part: building your first scene. You might have grand visions for an epic space battle between robots and cybernetically enhanced monkeys or a dozen cheerleaders doing a complex acrobatic routine, but it's best to start with one or two characters performing simple actions and work your way up from there. I often build my sets while looking at them through my camera. That way I know I get exactly the look I want and don't waste time building something the camera won't see. Once you've got your scene looking exactly the way you want, secure anything that won't be moving (the camera cradle, the set, etc.) in place with masking tape. You're ready to animate!

Here are some essential animating supplies you should have on hand:

- Masking tape – Holds things in place and doesn't leave a residue
- Putty/ "Sticky Tack" – Lets pieces stay in place without being directly connected. This lets minifigs climb walls, pick up basketballs and has a million other uses.
- A toothpick – Perfect for turning minifig hands without moving anything else.
- Loose bricks - Especially small plates (1 x 1 rounds and jumpers), hinges, and turntables. These are great for keeping track of the location of your characters and letting them bend and rotate more freely.

The idea behind stop-motion animation is very simple. You arrange everything in front of the camera, take a picture, move things a small amount to simulate motion, take another picture, and repeat. Before you take the first picture, it's a good idea to move your characters around in front of the camera to map out the path of motions in your head. Move everything to the starting position and take the first picture. Now move the character(s) a little bit along their motion path(s) and take another picture. Repeat this process until you've reached the end. Congratulations! You've just animated your first scene!

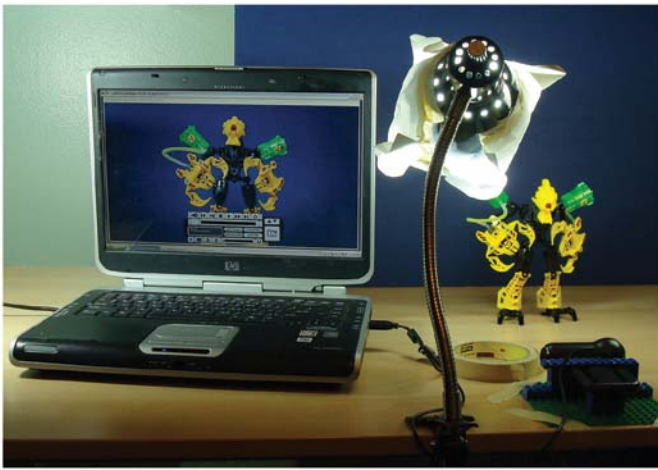


You don't need complicated equipment or a huge budget to make a great animation. Desk lamps such as these can be purchased at Target for about \$10 each. I use daylight balanced compact fluorescent bulbs because they bring out the colors of LEGO bricks the best. I cover them with scrap paper to diffuse the light. Posterboard makes a great inexpensive backdrop. Masking tape is perfect for securing your set and camera in place.



It's important to keep your camera stable while you animate, otherwise your finished animation will be shaky. Using a baseplate and a few basic bricks you can easily build a "cradle" to keep your camera in place.

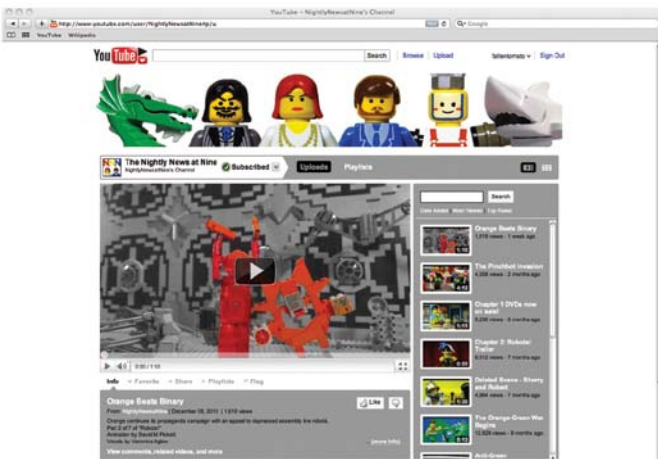




Using a camera connected to a computer running stop-motion animation software gives you unparalleled control over your animation. Features like onion skinning, which allows you to see multiple frames of animation at a time, allow you to gauge how much to move your character for the smoothest animation and real-time playback lets you preview your animation at any time. The set-up pictured here uses a Logitech QuickCam Pro 9000 connected to a PC running the free Helium Frog Animator software.



Don't limit yourself to minifigs. The balljoints of Bionicle and Hero Factory characters make them great, expressive subjects for animation.



Once your video is complete you're going to want to share it with your friends and family — YouTube is ideal for this. There are also online communities devoted to animation with LEGO bricks. These are great place to get technical feedback on your animation and figure out how to make your next one even better. My favorites are: Bricks in Motion and the Eurobricks Brickflicks and Comics forum.

Software, Frame Rates, and Beyond

Now that you've completed a scene, you're probably buzzing with questions like: How tiny should the movements be in between pictures? How can I put things back in exactly the same place after I accidentally knock everything over? How do I watch my animation? Why is there so much flickering light? How do I add sound to it?

These are all good questions and answering them fully would take several more articles. Let's start with the most important one: how to view the animation you just made and turn it into a video you can share with your friends and family. The answer to this question depends on what type of camera you used to animate. If you shot it on your iPhone using an app like iMotion (\$0.99) or using a webcam controlled by a stop-motion animation software like Helium Frog Animator (PC - free) or FramebyFrame (Mac - free) then you should already be able to watch and export it. If you took a series of pictures using a standard digital camera you will need to move those files to your computer and then use a program like VirtualDub (PC - free) or Framed (Mac - free) to compile the series of images into a video file.

At this point in the process, you will have to choose a frame rate. Frame rate indicates how many times the picture changes per second; it is measured in Frames Per Second (FPS). The higher your frame rate, the smoother the animation will be. However, a higher frame rate also means you will also need to make smaller movements between pictures and take more pictures for the same length finished product. Most things you see on television or at the movie theater are usually 24 or 30 FPS. However, you are probably realizing that 30 frames per second of finished animation is a huge number. Don't worry, you can achieve smooth animation at 15 or 10 FPS, and even 5 FPS can be impressive. My earliest animations were about 4 FPS and it's only been in the past few years that I've worked my way up to 15 FPS. Try playing your animation back at a few different framerates to see how they differ.

So now you have a single, silent video clip. That's an accomplishment in and of itself, but for your epic animation masterpiece you're going to want to string lots of clips together in sequence and synchronize them with music and dialogue. To do that, you'll need video editing software. Some computers come with video editing software already installed (Windows Movie Maker and iMovie) and there are lots of other options from freeware (Avidemux) to professional software used by filmmakers (Avid or Final Cut Pro). Non-linear editors offer the great amount of freedom when arranging your clips, but can be overwhelming if you've never done editing before. My advice, as with animating, is to start small, simple and cheap.

For sound recording, you can use Audacity (Mac and PC) which is both free and robust. If your computer has an internal microphone, that will probably suffice, or you can buy a decent USB microphone for around \$20.

Advanced Techniques

Once you've mastered the basics of animating, you're going to want to use more complicated techniques, like animating crowds, making objects fly, syncing character's movement to audio, and compositing multiple shots together. Here's a quick glimpse at some of techniques that will take your animations to the next level.

Masking

If you want something to fly, jump, or otherwise float above the ground, you could:

- 1) Hold it at the edge of the frame with your fingers
- 2) Use thin transparent thread to hold it like a marionette
- 3) For the most professional look, use masking

Masking involves a lot of extra work; for every frame where an object is off the ground, you need to take two pictures. First you need to build a brace. The brace is a bunch of LEGO bricks that will hold the floating object in place and which will be erased from the final animation. For every frame where the floating object appears, you will need to take one picture with the brace and object present and one frame without them. In post-production, you will need to layer these two pictures in photo editing software (GIMP - free) and erase the brace from the top picture so the background of the second picture shows through. This process is very time consuming, but the results are unparalleled.



This prison breakout involves 30+ individual prisoners. It is the most time consuming scene I've ever animated and it's only three seconds long.

Animating Groups

Animating many characters at once greatly increases both the time it takes to set up each frame, and the chance that you'll forget to move something. When animating solo, I find it helpful to animate characters in the same order every time. For instance, I will start on the right side of the frame and work my way left, animating each character in turn. Crowd scenes are a great place to have friends and family members help out. Animating together is fun, and having each animator responsible for a character or two makes it easier to focus.




ROBOphelia spins around and goes up and down in cycles. These two cycles combine to create a complex movement pattern.

Animation Cycles

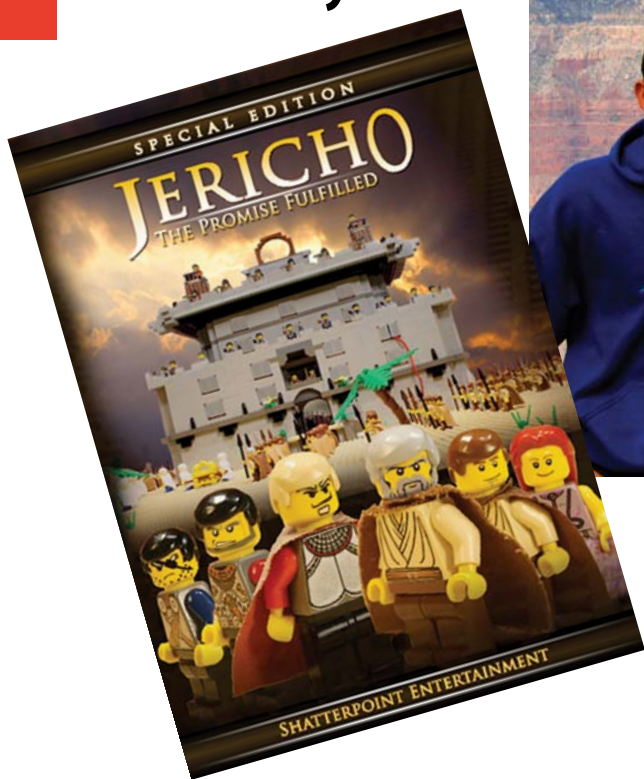
There are many places in the real world where an action gets performed repetitively (a person walking, a ball bouncing, a machine whirring, waves crashing, etc.). To recreate these actions in animation, it is helpful to establish an animation cycle, a series of set positions that you repeat in sequence over and over. Cycles are very useful, but also can become tedious, don't be afraid to let your characters break out of them occasionally.

I hope this article has given you inspiration for your own animations. In order to illustrate these techniques, I have made a few animations using the equipment and programs mentioned in this article. You can view them on my website at: <http://www.davidmpickett.com/how-to/>

I look forward to seeing your creations come to life! 



You can jump to David's webpage by scanning this QR code!



Brick Filming the Bible

Above: The DVD art to "JERICHO: The Promise Fulfilled."

Above Right: The Rondina Family (left to right): Anthony, Mark, Wendy and Jessica.

"JERICHO: The Promise Fulfilled" is a brick film that has an unusual honor: a listing in the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.org). The film has been shown in film festivals and garnered praise and awards throughout the US.

The movie was the effort of the Rondina family, and BrickJournal was able to talk to them about their work and the movie. The interview, much like the movie, has a few surprises, so read on!

*Article by Joe Meno
Photos by the Rondina Family*

Inspirations

BrickJournal: The entire family is the film company, so who does what?

Mark Rondina: We all are involved in every aspect of the film. Some of us have stronger talents in certain areas than others. We try to let those who have their strength and talents oversee that area of the project.

Jessica's talents range from writing and web design to animation and coaching actors.

Anthony's strengths are in the area of post-production. Some examples include: editing, green screening, graphic design, etc.

Wendy and I are involved with the overall production end of things, like marketing, event planning, and logistics. Oh yeah, Jessica and Anthony graciously allowed us to fund their projects also.

When did the idea of animation with LEGO minifigs and bricks start?

Anthony Rondina: Well it all started as a high school project. At the end of our ancient history class we had to spend 40 hours on something we learned that year. Seeing as how we had no actors or video cameras, we looked to the next best thing: 16 years worth of collecting LEGO bricks. Making a brick-film was something I've always wanted to do and this was the perfect opportunity for it!

How did you decide to use brick animation? Why not drawn animation or live action?

Jessica Rondina: We've always loved exploring creativity through our LEGO bricks and animating them just seemed like the logical next step. As far as hand-drawn animation—we're still at the stick-figure stage. (As you'll see with our storyboards.) And live action is a medium we are just now starting to break into. We see ourselves very much as accidental filmmakers.

This all came from just trying to get an “A” in an honors course humanities class.

Who were the LEGO builders before filming?

Wendy Rondina: Anthony has always been our LEGO nut. When we started to homeschool, we noticed that he could do his classes better if they involved the LEGO blocks. We used them for math, writing, and storytelling, as well as other subjects. That is why it was so natural to complete his high school ancient history assignment using bricks and minifigs. For the ancient history project, the kids chose to tell the story of the Ten Plagues of Egypt!

Filming

What is your studio setup?

Jessica: A bedroom, a sturdy table, lights, craft supplies, and Anthony’s entire collection of LEGO sets. We designed our studio to offset some problems we faced in our previous films, specifically:

Set Shaking: We wanted to make it look like a real world where gravity has its correct pull keeping the land in its rightful place. This is hard to do when you have a crawlspace under you instead of firm concrete. We attached clamps to the LEGO baseboards and minimized any and all walking around the set — this way the tripod wouldn’t move or accidentally get kicked.

Flickering: In our first film, we noticed that we had a large amount of flickering, where the lighting seemed inconsistent in each picture. To eliminate that problem, we turned off the overhead fan, covered all the windows with thick flannel bed sheets, closed the door, wore dark colored clothes, and made sure all computer monitors were kept under the table. Was all that overkill? Not really. Blacking out the windows allowed us to animate any scene at anytime of the day (or over the course of multiple days) and dimming the monitor reduced the chance of extraneous light being reflected off my clothes.

What do you use to film?

Jessica: The camera we used was a Canon Digital Rebel XTi. It’s a 10.1 megapixel camera that has the capability for interchangeable lenses. The standard 18-55mm lens it came with was used to shoot the wide scenes (like the marching around Jericho) and medium tight scenes (as seen in the King’s palace). The 100mm Macro lens was used for all the close ups on both the characters and props they were interacting with.

We did not use any stop-motion software to produce *JERICHO*. The computer in the studio was only used to play CDs and DVDs to help pass the time. During animation, the only “onion skinning” capability we had was advancing each picture in the 2.5” LCD screen that was imbedded into the XTi. You can imagine how much “fun” that was when shooting the Matrix scene.

Explain the filming process and maybe a timeline of how you produce a film: how long it takes to write, then film, then add sound and post production.

Anthony: The first thing we did was start in prayer. We wanted to make absolutely sure this was something God wanted us to do and would bless. Then we got into the research and outlining process. Depending on the length and depth of a film this part can either be a very long or very short process.

Once we had to script nailed down and all the pre-production out of the way, it was time to begin filming; here’s where our jobs split. We would shoot and edit the film simultaneously.



Editing and building for the movie.

Once Jess would finish a shot, she’d give me her memory card and I would then import the footage, add facial animation, compositing, green-screening etc.

Once the shot was finished it would get exported to the final sequence in Final Cut Pro. Apple’s FCP is what I used to add the sound effects, dialogue, and everything else to make the shot come alive.

What makes brick animation so enjoyable? What really drives you nuts about it?

Jessica: LEGO bricks have always been in our home and were a huge part of our childhood growing up. We were homeschooled and used our bricks in a lot of school projects — which is exactly what led us to where we are today.

What is so neat about this type of animation is its accessibility. We get so excited talking with others about their brick films, seeing their productions and brainstorming together on future projects. It’s something pretty much anyone can do; yet it definitely takes a level of commitment and determination.

The thing that intrigues us most about stop-motion is its complex simplicity. CGI is fun to watch, but there is no limit to its abilities and thus perfect animation is expected; the wonder of CGI is becoming more and more commonplace.

The fascination about stop-motion lies in the limitations of its subject. Whether it’s with clay, bricks, or rocks, our belief is suspended as we watch these inanimate objects come to life. We get excited when a common object does something extraordinary. Then we forward it on to all our friends.

How do you keep track of movement with figures, especially crowd scenes?

Jessica: Good question. I work on one minifig at a time. For example, when the Israelites made their way to cross the Jordan River, I would begin at the front of the crowd and then move from right to left. I'd use one of those long, see thru, yellow, blaster/laser pieces to keep the place of the minifig I was working on. I really liked using that laser thing because it was long, thin, and only occupied 1 stud.

The only hard part was remembering which figure had their legs in which position. Animating a minifig walking is not difficult. However, animating 50+ figures all walking at different steps and/or speeds can be hard to keep track of. I had to keep referring to the LCD screen to make sure no one was leading with his or her right foot the whole time.

Those scenes actually were some of the longest to shoot. One crowd shot actually took over 3 days to animate. Ironically, those also are among the shortest clips in the film.

Do you storyboard every sequence?

Jessica: Yes. You don't want to animate something that doesn't make it past the cutting room floor. Also, you don't have to be an amazing artist to draw good storyboards. (As you can see in the picture.) Storyboards are tremendous tools to help you plan out your shots.

Anthony: Basically a storyboard is a cartoon drawing of each shot in the film placed chronologically so you can see how the

film will play out. This part is extremely important for any film as it saves a ton of time!

Jessica: Don't let the name intimidate you. "Storyboards" can be beautiful, big project boards like the ones you see in the "Behind the Scenes" portions of mega movies. But they don't have to be that intense or elaborate. We just drew squares on blank paper and plotted what we wanted inside each box.

What have been some technical challenges you have to deal with with brick animation?

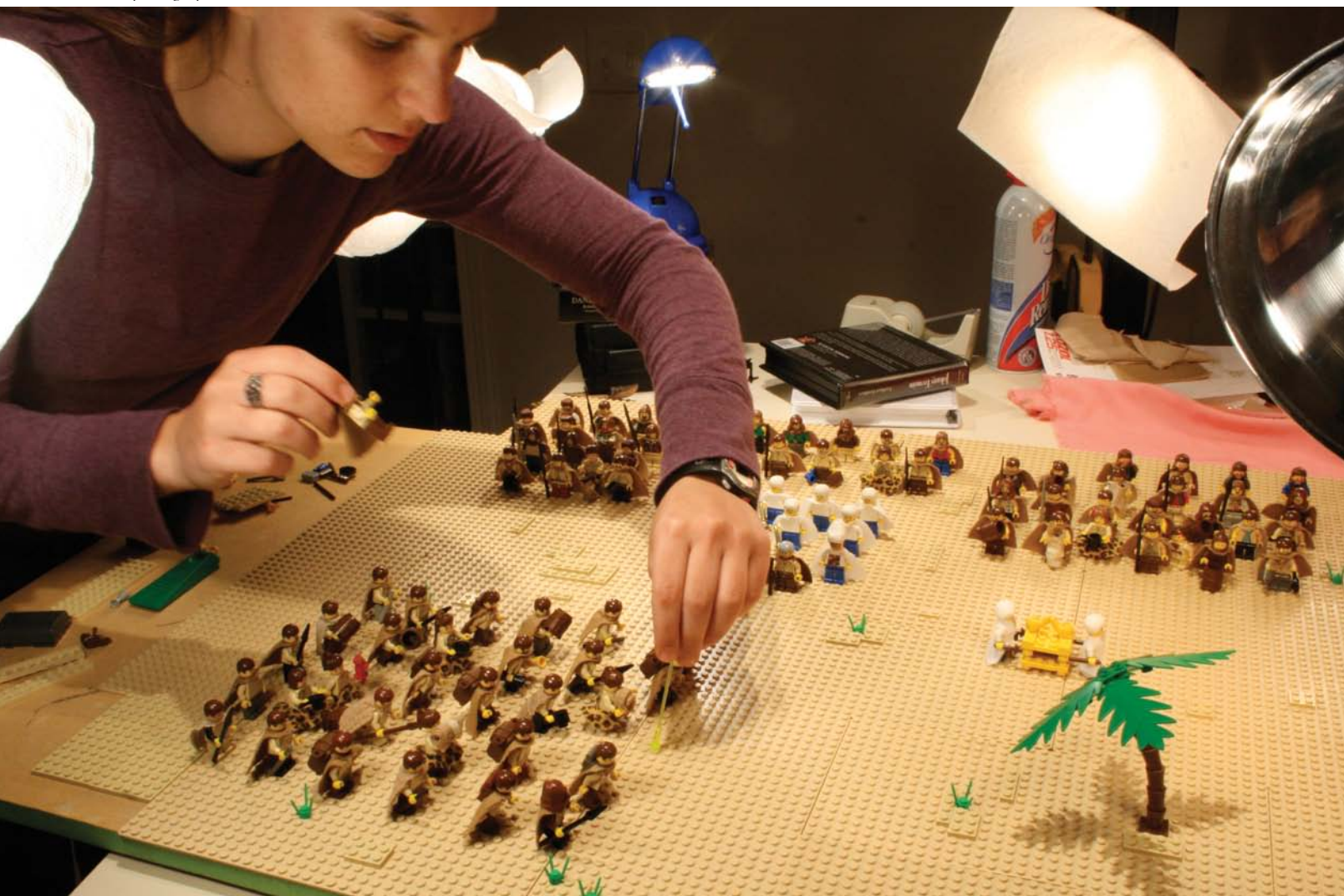
Jessica: Bricks melting when they're too close to the lights, improvising when there's a minifig shortage, not freaking out when pictures get deleted. True, this might not be a "technical challenge," but growing in patience was a challenge in and of itself. This film took over 18 months to complete.

Anthony: Two words — **Facial Animation.** This was by far the hardest, yet most gratifying decision we had to make. We've seen other films where they had facial animation, but it was overlaid onto a single image and felt very stiff. Deciding to have an animated face tracked onto an animated body was monumental because we'd never done anything that ambitious before.

How do you find voice talent for your movies?

Anthony: My sister and I are both speech and debate coaches and have competed on the national level multiple times in high school. Since we didn't know any "professional" actors we could draw from, what better than to use our very own students! This was a blast and we think they did a terrific job!

Jessica photographs a crowd scene.





Some of the storyboards used for "JERICOH."

How did you get a musical score for JERICOH?

Anthony: Musical scoring is not a talent that God has blessed us with. That's why we're so thankful God put Dan Vitco of Gemstone Music in our path. He's worked for Nickelodeon and *Sesame Street* and is an extremely powerful musician. He fell right in line with our project and his score carried the film in ways we couldn't possibly have done by ourselves. We highly recommend him! You can hear/see more of his work at: www.gemstonemusic.org.

Showtime

Where did you start showing?

Wendy: Our "movie nights" at churches and schools started with a "Premiere" of *JERICOH: The Promise Fulfilled*. We wanted to honor the kids that helped make *JERICOH* come to life with their voices. We were hoping for a few people to come encourage these voice actors. We were blessed with having 200 people in attendance! From that event many people wanted to book *JERICOH* at their facilities. That was exhilarating and humbling at the same time.

What was your first award?

Wendy: The first award came in the form of "Best Animation" from the Cape Fear International Film Festival. We were also awarded "Best Children's Movie" Bronze Award from ICVM—International Christian Visual Media.

Where have you shown your movies?

Mark: The most recent locations have been conferences, churches, and schools in the southeast region. I would have to say the most enjoyable showing was at a film festival called "Projecting Hope" in Charlotte, NC. The festival showcased area film artists in a real theater!! To see it in there—on the big screen—in front of a sold out audience was just an awesome experience!

We also have shown the movie at some major film festivals such as ICVM, the Charlotte Film Festival, Regent University's Film Festival (where we won the Storytellers Award), and the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival. We will be showing at Sabaoth Film Festival in Milan, Italy in March.



Working on another sequence.



Anthony editing a sequence.



Working on a set...



The resulting shot.



Anthony coaches the voice talent.

The Next Act

You are planning to make another movie. What do you have in mind?

Anthony: We've joked about making the book of Revelation into a film. Actually, while we're still in the marketing phase for *JERICHO*, we're beginning preparations to make our next production. Right now we're working on a "How-to" stop-animation series for filmmakers and are looking to collaborate with students from around the world. If your readers would like to be a part of our next project, we'd strongly encourage them to head on over to our website and click the link on "Movies."

While it's a blast to make films, we need a solid fan base and budget to make our next productions. We're excited about the opportunity to make more films, but at the present time, we need to get the word out to as many people as we can about *JERICHO* so we can produce more films.

How many more movies do you want to do?

Anthony: I'd personally love to do as many as possible!

Jessica: Ditto.

Any advice for budding moviemakers?

Mark & Wendy: Use what have around you, as well as what you know. Our family likes to tell stories and had tons of little plastic bricks. Be willing to put your all into it and be open to the people that are available to help you. God can open doors that you don't even know exist! Before you know it, people like Joe will call you for an interview!

Jessica: Never despise small beginnings — David had to kill a lion before he got to face Goliath. Keep practicing. Celebrate your films. Try something new in each film.

Anthony: Be patient and rely on God. Filmmaking is a monumental undertaking and you need to prepare yourself for it. Find a good story and tell it! **b**



You can jump to the movie webpage by scanning this QR code!

Bricks on Film: An Abridged History

Compiled by David Pagano

LEGO animation has been gracing screens since long before the advent of YouTube. Here's a look at some of the more notable entries and events in the evolution of "motion brick-tures"...

1984 AND EARLIER

Promotional LEGO TV spots feature stop-motion speed building of sets, as well as other animated effects.

1985

4-and-a-half years of production begins on *The Magic Portal* — a 16-minute, 16mm animated film created by Lindsey Fleay. *The Magic Portal* is widely considered to be the first LEGO fan film ever made.

Link: <http://www.rakrent.com/mp/index.htm>



LEGO

SPORT CHAMPIONS

Educational, Stimulating, Creative, Fun!

Award winning animation from the LEGO® Group

1987

LEGO Sport Champions, produced by Vianco Studio in Budapest, Hungary, features seven sport-themed shorts with expansive sets and expressive characters — all built from LEGO bricks. (The same shorts have also been released as *LEGO Stories*, *LEGO Action Fun*, and *Sport News: the Olympic LEGO Games*.)

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/user/LEGOsports>

Edward and Friends, a series of 5-minute animated shorts based on the Fabuland product line, is produced by the LEGO Group and FilmFair in London.

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGFFmCu6mTc>

1989

Bricks Unlimited, produced by LEGO Audiovisuals in Billund, describes to employees the manufacturing process behind LEGO products — complete with a brick-built stop-motion narrator.

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rt620ztAf4>

1995

"The LEGO Movie" is created by Animagica as a proof-of-concept for computer-generated LEGO animation.

Link: <http://blog.fullframestudios.ch/?p=120>

2000

"The LEGO Maniac's Coolest Home Video Contest" is held as part of the LEGO Club Kidvention at LEGOLAND California.

The "LEGO Studios" play theme is introduced. Featuring "The LEGO & Steven Spielberg MovieMaker Set", this line allows kids to shoot and edit their own films with a LEGO USB camera and software.

2001

"Monty Python and the Holy Grail in LEGO" is commissioned by Python Pictures and the LEGO Group for the *Holy Grail* DVD. The short is animated by Spite Your Face Productions, who would go on to produce *The Han Solo Affair* and *Spider Man: The Peril of Doc Ock* for LEGO as well.

Link: <http://www.spiteyourface.com/python.php>

"The LEGO Studios MovieMaking Contest" is held, complete with a red-carpet awards ceremony at Planet Hollywood, NYC.

2002

Director Michel Gondry uses LEGO bricks to animate a pixellated music video for The White Stripes' "Fell in Love With a Girl".

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q27BfBkRHbs>



Jag vill att
DU SKA KOMMA
LÖRDAG 13 OKTOBER
KI 13.00 - ca 15.30
till
**Sveriges första
LEGOFILMS-
FESTIVAL**

BRICKFILMS FESTIVAL 02

Folkan
Örnsköldsvik

Inträde
40:-

Åldersgräns
13 år

<http://brickfilmsfestivalen.se>

Välkommen!



2003

Bionicle: Mask of Light is produced by Creative Capers Entertainment and the LEGO Group, and is the first in a series of four computer-animated direct-to-DVD Bionicle features.

2007

The first-ever LEGO animation fan festival in Northern Europe is held in a 300-seat theater in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden. The festival features screenings of more than 20 independent shorts, as well as hands-on demo stations where attendees can try LEGO animation for themselves.

A segment about the online LEGO animation community is produced for *i-CAUGHT*, an ABC miniseries about the rising simplicity of video technology and the fascinating ways in which it can be used.

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP-nodc6QmY>

2007 (continued)

The Wall Street Journal features a front-page article about LEGO animation, with input from Michael Green, Joshua Leasure, Robinson Wood, Nathan Wells, and others.

Link: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB119161384425050432.html>

2008

The LEGO minifigure celebrates its 30th birthday with the "Go Miniman Go!" campaign. The LEGO Group and Gizmodo promote the occasion with, among other things, a computer-generated 3D LEGO film and an animation contest.

Link: www.gominimango.com

The LEGO Group, in conjunction with the Nicktoons Network Animation Festival, holds the "Built by Me!" animation contest. The grand prize winner receives \$25,000 to create an all-new LEGO animated film for Nickelodeon.

2009

Six stop-motion shorts, commissioned by the LEGO Group and animated by Paganomation, herald the return of LEGO Space Police.

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/user/Paganomation#grid/user/39748E6581A9584B>

2009 (continued)

Warner Bros. announces plans for a feature-length LEGO theatrical film, a mix of live-action and animation.

Link: <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118007162?refCatId=13>


2010

The LEGO Club Show premieres on LEGOclub.com, YouTube, and Comcast On-Demand cable. The show was created in-house at LEGO by Roger Cameron and Scott Decoteau, and features animation by Jared Eberhardt, David Pagano, Patrick Boivin, and Garrett Barati.

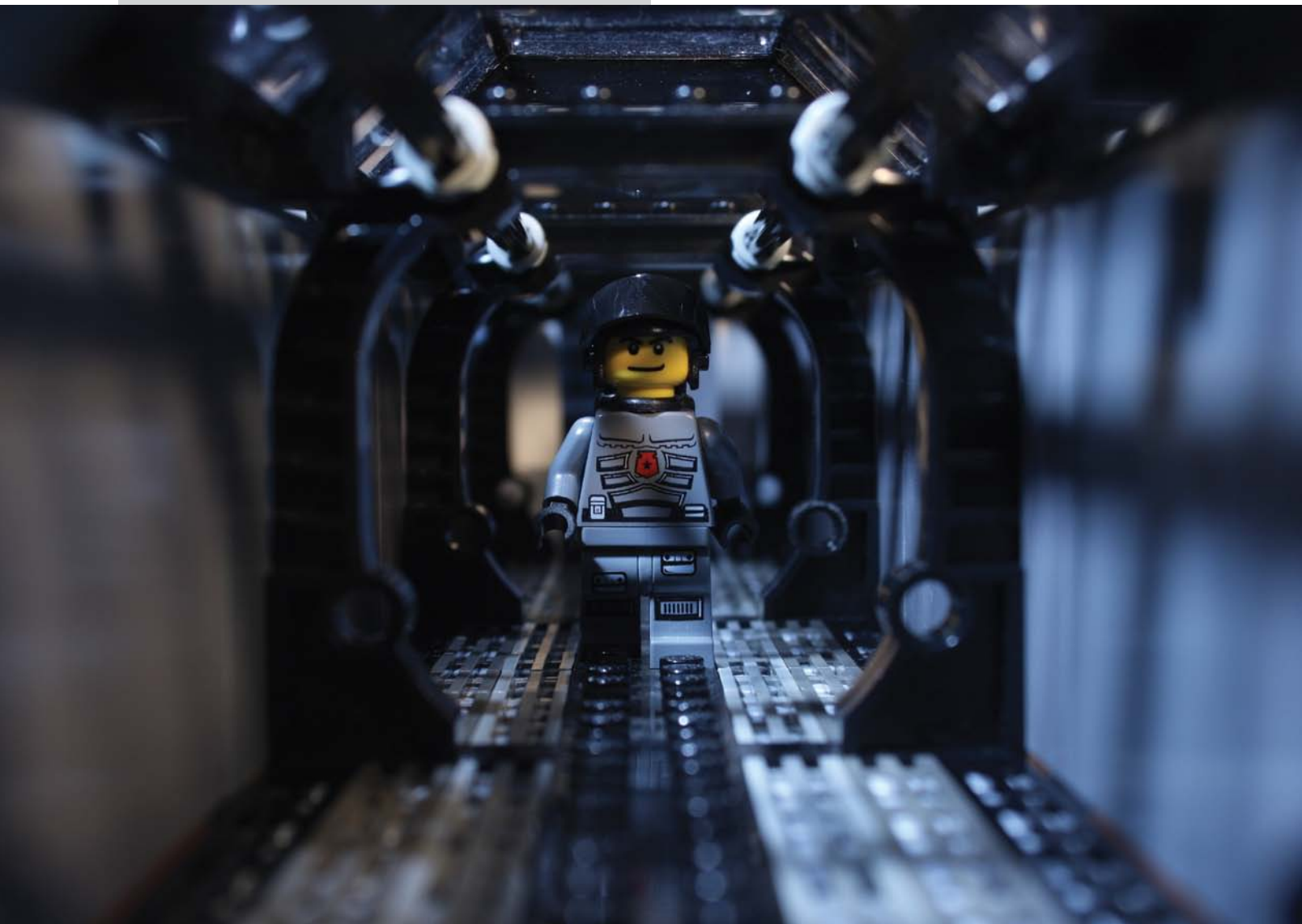
Link: <http://club.lego.com/en-us/videos/default.aspx>

The first annual BrickFlix Film Festival is held in Raleigh, NC, as part of the BrickMagic LEGO convention.

Link: <http://www.brickflix.org>

The Fastest and Funniest LEGO Star Wars Story Ever Told, animated by Garrett Barati, is released in conjunction with the 30th anniversary of *The Empire Strikes Back*. 

Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0z_TU4Gw5o



Community

Putting the



Article by Philip Heinrich

On January 2nd, 2010, animators from around the world logged on to BricksInMotion.com to begin work for the seventh Twenty-four Hour Animation Contest. More than sixty of them completed entries, rising to the challenge to create a brick film in less than 24 hours. This is just one example of the passion this worldwide, online community has for filmmaking.

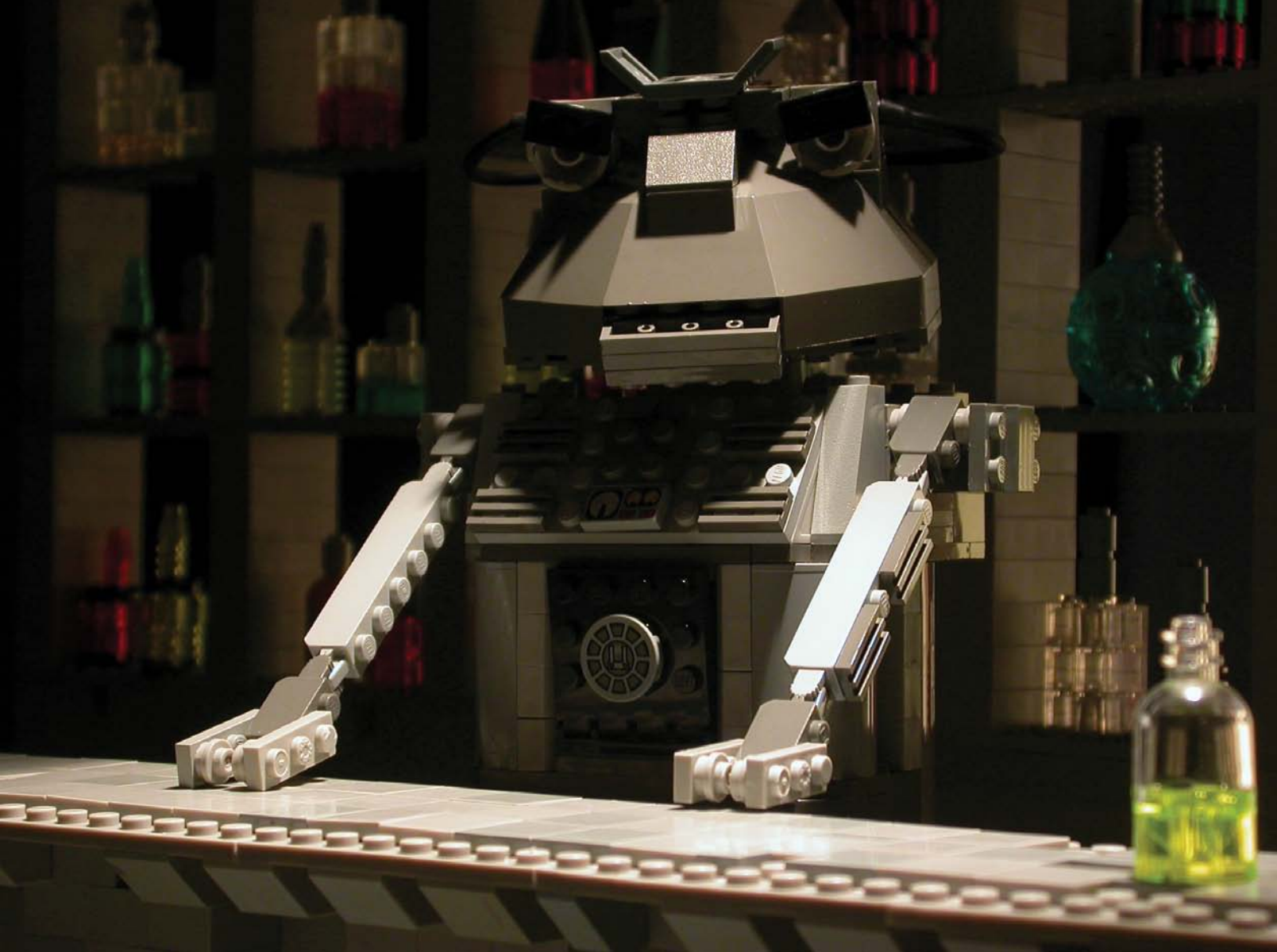
HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The online community for “brick filming,” the art of making stop-motion films with LEGO products, began in 2000, shortly after the release of the LEGO Studios line, which included equipment and software for making stop-motion films.

YouTube would not be around for another five years, and for some time, the brick animation community was the largest online community devoted to stop-motion animation of any kind. Internet video was still in its infancy, and without in-browser viewing technology, the community relied on file hosting services or personal websites to host their video files.

Nevertheless, the community had an active forum, with new films being posted daily. Contests fueled the fire and motivated members to push the limits of what had previously been done in the





medium. Many animators upgraded to better cameras and software as new webcams continued to surpass their predecessors in affordability and image quality. Directors wrote tutorials and helped each other hone their filmmaking skills by providing each other with feedback.

Today, the community continues to grow, and YouTube has allowed for a flood of new, often younger, filmmakers to share their work with the world more easily. We've all seen some of the "Star Wars" and "Batman" LEGO videos that have become so popular on YouTube; but for some, the hobby goes far beyond creating short, funny animations.

PLASTIC CINEMA

The limitations of the medium have not prevented some animators from attempting dramatic films with layers of meaning. From Robinson Wood's adaptation of *Frankenstein* to Nick Maniatis's *Good Company*, a loose retelling of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, LEGO movies are crafted on a serious, artistic level by many members of the community.

In 2009, the winner of BricksInMotion.com's annual animation contest was Nikolas Jaeger, whose film *The River* was inspired by the styles of directors such as Werner Herzog and Terrence Malick.

"I'd love to see more brick films that are non-narrative, or at least aren't bound to a plot in the traditional sense," Jaeger said. "I think brick filmmakers should be more aware of the medium they work in. I don't mean making allegorical or self-aware films, but simply thinking a lot about the constraints and possibilities of filming bricks and not people."

Opposite page, top: Jack Darter, the hard-boiled detective from Heinrich's Unrenewable.

Middle and bottom: Chanting natives and a tribal chief from The River by Nikolas Jaeger.

Above: The cantankerous robot bartender from Marc Beurteaux's ROBOTA.

Even films that don't take a fully serious approach to their material can have a tremendous amount of work put into creating an arresting atmosphere and setting. Marc Beurteaux's short film *ROBOTA* is such an example, telling the story of a handicapped robot as she travels through a dreary cityscape of the future.

Of course, artistic merit isn't restricted to films that attempt to be "serious"—given the whimsical nature of the medium, many films are experimental or comedic. In 2010 BricksInMotion.com held an "Avant-Garde" themed animation contest, and throughout the community animators are beginning to see the online, digital nature of the medium as something to be embraced.

One such example is James Morr, whose comedic films, which are generally no more than a few minutes in length, push the boundaries of what has been done with LEGO animation.

"He actually does things that nobody has tried before, like a choose-your-own-adventure film using YouTube's video annotation system," Jaeger said, referring to Morr's *Ronald Has A Spider On His Head: An Interactive Mis-Adventure!*, in which the viewer must decide Ronald's fate.

In some cases, animators such as David Pagano, Beurteaux, Morr, and others have even gone beyond using minifigures, instead constructing their own, larger scale characters and environments with bricks. This highlights one of the empowering elements of the medium: with the right bricks and building skills, you can create all kinds of spectacular visuals that would be difficult to achieve in other mediums.

ROOM TO BUILD

The community, however, is always looking to grow. Though there has been an influx of young animators from YouTube, the older, more experienced and devoted animators tend to produce the best films the community has to offer.

Below: The wheelchair-bound protagonist of Marc Beurteaux's ROBOTA.



BRICKSINMOTION.COM PRESENTS BiM 2011:



TALES OF YORE

Logo for the 2011 BricksInMotion.com animation contest.

BricksInMotion.com recently announced its 2011 contest, "TOY: Tales Of Yore" – a history-themed animation contest, which will run through July of this year. Sponsors include Dragon Stop Motion, developer one of the foremost stop-motion animation applications available.


Ultimately, though, this community goes far beyond a website or a forum. Some have gone on to pursue careers in filmmaking and other media professionally, and many current members aspire to do the same.

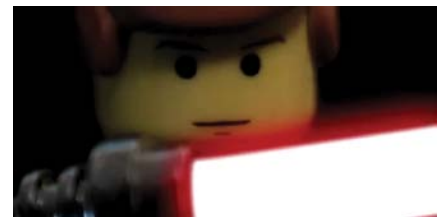
Jay Silver, who works as an animation director and has worked on several television shows including *Poko*, began his experience in animation through brick filming. His short films *The Gauntlet* and *Rise of the Empire* were early classics for the community.

"As a springboard to a career in animation, brick filming provides a terrific entry point," Silver said. "I made *The Gauntlet* and *Rise of the Empire* and it was on the strength of those that I was offered a job doing stop-motion."

Silver still makes brick films when he can find time, and recommends the hobby to budding filmmakers. "It's a good hobby for developing patience, self-motivation and skills like planning, time management and organization in addition to filmmaking and animation," Silver said.

Past triumphs aside, there is always room for new talent in the community. "People are always innovating and bringing new ways to use LEGO to the table," said Aaron Bulger, a long-time AFOL and BricksInMotion.com member. "Try it, you'll like it."

And, as Jay Silver pointed out, "Who's played with minifigs and not imagined them speaking, running around and actually interacting with the world that's been created for them?" 



Above: Stills from Jay Silver's Rise of the Empire Star Wars fan film.



You can see films and more by going to www.BricksInMotion.com or by scanning this QR code!

Community

Inside MindGame Studios: An Interview with Zach Macias

Article by Will Jennings

Photography courtesy of Zach Macias

When I was first asked to write an article for BrickJournal on a popular brick filmmaker, I immediately thought of Zach Macias, better known as MindGame Studios. Zach is only 19, and has been creating brick films for over five years. This is how it all started out...



BrickJournal: Hey Zach! So, when did you first start animating and what got you into brick filming business?

Zach Macias: I first got started animating back in the summer of 2004. I was hanging out with a good friend of mine and we were bored one day, so he suggested that we make a film. He went into his house and retrieved a video camera, some chess pieces, and an old stuffed animal, and introduced me to stop-motion animation.

Months later, I was browsing around the Internet when I stumbled across a video promoting the recently-released *Spider-Man 2*. It was a LEGO® stop-motion film titled *Spider-Man: The Peril of Doc-Ock*, created by Spite Your Face Productions. I was absolutely enthralled by it. I watched it multiple times just to admire the quality of the animation, the sets, digital effects, etc... I then began to think to myself, "Hey, I got a bunch of old LEGO stuff from years ago; maybe I could do something like that...?" And that's pretty much what got me started in brick filming.

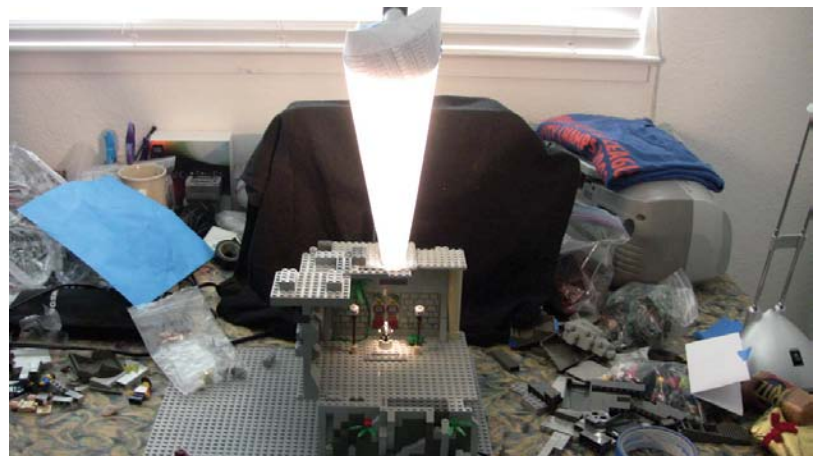
So what was your first brick film?

My first official film was a short called *The Door and Beyond*, released in March of that year. It was a parody of another popular brick film called *About a Door*, created by the user Holgor. In short (and without spoiling the film), *About a Door* is about a group of people who encounter a doorway on the street with a sign next to it saying "Do Not Open This Door," and they deliberate about whether or not to open it (I believe the film can be found on Archive.org, and I do highly recommend it, it's great). It had achieved a cult-like status in the community to the point where many users created their own parody films that revealed what they thought was behind the door. I decided to hop onto that bandwagon and *The Door and Beyond* was born.

(Note: Zach's film, The Door and Beyond, can be viewed on YouTube, and has over 155,000 views.)

Left: Animation in progress on Zach's film 'Stranger than Fishin'.

Bottom Left and below: On the set of 'Treasure Hunter'. Note the lamp and paper setup used to achieve a unique lighting scheme.



How long have you been a LEGO fan?

I've been collecting LEGO since I was little. I have an older brother, so I inherited a lot of his old Castle and Space sets, and for a while I did some of my own collecting (I remember buying Harry Potter sets, Johnny Thunder sets, and Ninja sets). As I got older, I sort of stopped playing with LEGO bricks and put them away in my closet for a few years, before I rediscovered them when I started brick filming. But these days, I only really use my LEGO stuff for brick filming purposes; I rarely actually build with them just for the sake of building. So I guess I'm probably not a very good LEGO "fan," haha.

So what gave you the idea of creating your own animated dynamic duo, Ben & Andy?

When I first got into brick filming, the concept of "dynamic duos" was very popular. Some of the more popular/influential ones when I first started were OldScratch's Mike & Geoff, KG's Kevin & Mr. Tater, Quakefilmdave's Ralph & Rupert, and, of course, Blunty's Steve & Dave. Dynamic duos, it seemed, had a lot of comic potential when you had them play off each other, so Ben & Andy was my attempt to follow in their footsteps.

However, I don't think I've utilized Ben & Andy to their full potential. Personally (and it could just be directorial self-criticism), I don't think I've developed them well as characters, which probably explains why I haven't made a film with them in a while. I do have a few ideas for them, though, so Ben & Andy might return at some point in the future.

Do you plan to pursue animation as a full-time career?

As far as future jobs go, I'd like to do something in the film industry in general, animation or live-action. I always sort of saw myself eventually going into live-action filmmaking, but animation has been so good to me in the last few years that I think it would be incredibly unwise of me to not even consider it as a potential career.

What's been great about stop-motion, though, is that I think it's given me some insight into what goes into making a live-action film. Unlike other forms of animation done on paper or on the computer, stop-motion involves the manipulation of physical characters in front of an actual camera. Techniques in lighting and cinematography are just as applicable in stop-motion as they are in live-action (though on a much larger scale for the latter). So if I were to try to go into live-action filmmaking, I think brick filming has prepared me enough so that the transition might be far less jarring than if I did 2D or CGI animation.

How long did it take for you to make one of your most popular and iconic films, *Back to School Nightmare*, from pre- to post-production?

Back to School Nightmare was an entry into the second Twenty-Four Hour Animation Contest (THAC 2) on Brickfilms.com, so everything from pre-production to final render was completed in under 24 hours. If I remember correctly, it was the longest I spent on a twenty-four hour contest film to date (I think I used 22 of the 24 allotted hours), and I ended up placing 2nd in the contest.



101 Ways a Minifig Can Fail at Life



Gears of Solace



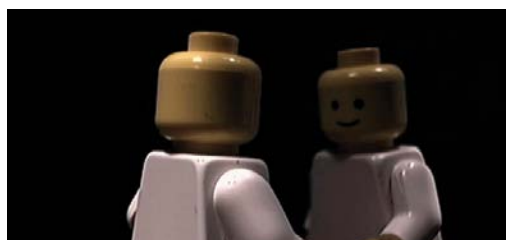
The Profession



Dane Cook Gets Sacrificed to the Sun Gods by a Mayan Priest



Stranger than Fishin'



Mirrored Perspective



A few of the items used to create the custom sound effects in *Stranger than Fishin'*.



As is often the case with brick films, the portions of this set on *Treasure Hunter* that aren't seen on camera have been built up with a random assortment of bricks.



Another thing not generally seen on camera: the fallout from the making of *Treasure Hunter*, scattered across Zach's shooting area.

You can jump to Zach's website by scanning this QR code!



Three years ago, you created a channel with Nathan Wells called *MindGameOneBrick*. You two have been planning a collaborative film called "*Dear Cousin*" for about three years. So far you have only released one trailer; any news on this film and its possible release date?

Haha, oh yeah... that channel. At this point, consider the *Dear Cousin* project long dead (It's actually been dead for a couple of years). Whatever Nate and I could produce at this point would not justify the time it's been in "production." Also, the joke we were basing the film on is several years outdated, so it wouldn't even be funny or relevant anymore.

The original concept of the film was a parody of the popular "Dead Sister" sketch on *Saturday Night Live*. *Dear Cousin* would have pretty much been an adaptation of that sketch, set to Ben & Andy and Alex & Derrick. Due to lack of time to work on it and eventual loss of interest, the project pretty much fell through and we both moved on to other things. If there's one thing that I learned from the experience, it's never to release a trailer until you're absolutely sure you're going to follow through with the film.

What are some of your favorite brick films, and why?

There's a long list of brick films that I could mention, and I'd probably be forgetting several as it is. To name off a few, one of my all time favorite brick films is a film called *Good Company: Redux* by Nick Maniatis (hali9 on YouTube). It's one of the few films I've ever seen that establishes its atmosphere so well; it makes me completely forget that I'm watching a film animated in LEGO. The story is one of the most richly complex I've seen in a brick film (possibly in any medium), and features excellent ensemble voice acting and set design. Another one of my favorites is called *Cognizance* by a user named Cometgreen. There is such a level of emotion and nuance in this film that I didn't believe was possible for static-faced minifigures to convey. Coupled with beautiful cinematography and an excellent choice of music, in my opinion, it's one of the top five brick films ever made.

Some of my other favorites include *Hit & Run* (hali9), *Frankenstein* (Nosniborus), *America: Outlawed* (cannedgravy), *Twelve Bucks* (Rob Weychart), *The Letter* (JamesFM), *The Citizen of the Year* (watsonfilms), *The Magic Portal* (Lindsey Fleay), *Unrenewable* (SmeagolStudios), *The Adventures of Crispy Cheeser* (istillgotyourback on YouTube), *The Gauntlet* (Jay Silver, zirkusaffe3 on YouTube), *Gunship Down* (xxx fancypantsxxx), *Days of Our Pizza* (Keshen8), *Robota* (Marc Berteaux), *The New Neighbor* (Studioepsilon), *Chase of Horror* (frugyfish), *The White Ninja* (Blunty), *Dane Cook Gets Slapped By A Hobo With A Fish* (SpastikChuwawa), and several others that I'm probably forgetting right now.

Well, that's a wrap, Zach! It's been an absolute pleasure talking to you!

It was my pleasure to be interviewed by you guys. Thank you, Will, and thank you *BrickJournal* for having me as an interviewee! 

Zach's YouTube channel can be found at www.youtube.com/ZachMG, or you can visit his website at <http://www.mindgamestudios.com>



Event Report:

The Brick Film Booth at LEGO® Fanwelt 2010

Mission: Boosting up Imagination With Brick Filmmaking!

*Article by Steffen Troeger
Photography by Steffen Troeger
and Piet Wenzel*

"We're shooting a movie — it's about an alien invasion on a farm!" the two boys at the table enthusiastically told me. They are busy at work on a little LEGO® film set, with a camera, a lamp, and a laptop.

"Is it easy to make your own film with LEGO bricks?" I ask. "Yes!" the first boy says. "And it's really fun! All you have to do is press 'enter', take a lot of pictures, and all of this will later become the movie!" The second boy adds, "But you need patience, too. If you're too fast, the figures topple over and you'll have to animate the scene over again." He turns back to the set, moving the alien vehicle a tiny bit. "Wait!" the first boy shouts. "First, I have to delete some pictures, because the camera was too close..." *Click!*

A similar scene is happening at a nearby table: two girls appear to be in deep concentration as they move a little car and minifig, and take a picture. They then giggle to each other as they watch a preview of their animation. The girls are sisters, and they're fascinated by how easy it is to bring their scene to life. It is pretty amazing, too, considering that only a few minutes earlier, neither girl had any idea how LEGO animation worked.

But now, everyone can see — and hear — how much fun it is for them. "Sure, we'd like to do this on our own at home!" the older girl says. "I want to make a story about shopping... or, something that happens on a long car trip..." "Or a burglary!" "Yes! Thrilling things!" The girls nod in agreement, and smile. *Click!*

Above and below: Children animating at LEGO Fanwelt.





Top: Elke Rathmacher shows kids how to use animation software at the LEGO Fanwelt 2010 brick film booth.

Above: Piet Wenzel (foreground left) and Matthias Oly (foreground middle) explain LEGO animation to curious attendees.

I think it's safe to say that, when getting up that morning, none of these children imagined that by the afternoon, they'd be making their very own animated movies — with just their imaginations, two hands, and a few clicks!

All of this happened amidst tons of really cool LEGO creations at the huge German MOC-exhibition, "LEGO Fanwelt 2010", which took place last November at the Trade Show Center in Cologne, Germany. The four-day event featured thousands of custom-made buildings, cars, trucks, train displays, marbletracks, NXT-Sessions, space, moon, and "Star Wars" landscapes. There was a stage for live LEGO action, a playground, and a building area with a road show hosted by TLG itself. Nearly everything that can be made out of bricks is shown by over 200 German and European AFOLs at LEGO Fanwelt — it really is a world of LEGO.

This was the second year for this big LEGO fan event — and a second opportunity to promote the spirit and fun of LEGO animation with a brick film-themed booth! And, for the second year, everything was once again fun, and a big success.

The AFOL and hobbyist part of LEGO Fanwelt was planned by the German LEGO Club, MBFR. The sisters Elke and Ulrike Rathmacher are members of this club, as well as brick filmmakers. Together, they built two big wooden boxes, called "trickboxes," with lights, cameras, laptops, and backdrops.

People interested in LEGO animation were able to try making an animated film with bricks in a free 2-hour animation workshop held by the sisters. The workshops were so well-liked by both parents and children alike, and it was sad when we had to tell people on Saturday and Sunday, "Sorry, but all the workshops are overcrowded!"

But, over the four days of LEGO Fanwelt, a lot of youngsters also got their first look into the magic of animation at the brick film booth: learning how stop-motion animation is made, and what's needed to start animating. After a little theoretical rollout, they quickly played and recorded their stories in front of the camera with figures, vehicles, and props.


The trade show was at its most crowded on the weekend. But, with the help of many LEGO animators from all over Germany (and even Switzerland), we were able to manage the rush. We patiently answered all questions (the main ones being "How is it made? And "What software is needed?"), gave helpful Internet links, explained the main ideas behind animation, and went over all the necessary equipment. "I absolutely think a few more brick filmmakers were born just now," animator Piet Wenzel told me at the event, "but judging by my voice and vocal chords, it feels like I talked to a hundred thousand!"

(I'd say more like half that amount was watching and lingering along the booth at LEGO Fanwelt. But even talking to hundreds of them will sure give you a deeper voice... could be good for the voice of the bad guy in a future film!)

A few of the very interested parents and children (those who got turned away from the sisters' workshops) were allowed to test animation directly on our extra laptops behind the fence of the booth. I think all of these people were satisfied. So were we! Brick filmmaker Max Zachner noted, "It's mostly children between 10 and 15 years old, although the parents are more interested in what we tell theoretically. The kids just stand beside and watch. But I expect that the kids later will try and do [animation] at home."

Sure enough, we often were able to see the same glimmering shine inside parents' and children's eyes, as they stood in front of the animation sets and watched LEGO movies on the monitors. Family after family was infected by the charm of combining LEGO bricks and stop-motion animation. Astonished open mouths appeared on the youngsters' faces, while their parents' brains were deep in thought about what cool stuff could be done with their children's bricks. I'd like to think that those families are now making an animated LEGO film together at home. Imagine! Click and action!

Thanks to the organizers of LEGO Fanwelt, and also to German LEGO animators Matthias Oly, Piet Wenzel, Mario Baumgartner, Max Zachner, and Markus Engel, who really did a great job at the brick film booth, explaining what animation is all about.

Mission accomplished. *Click!* What's next? 

Below: Steffen Troeger documents the animators-in-training at the brick film booth.





Playing Nice with Garrett Barati

Article by Garrett Barati

Photography by Garrett Barati and MT Mulligan

Known best for shorts like Play Nice and The Fastest and Funniest LEGO Star Wars Story Ever Told, Garrett Barati is quickly becoming a name synonymous with fun, dynamic (yet professional) LEGO animation. BrickJournal checked in with Garrett to get the story on how he got into brick filmmaking, and where he'd like to go with it.



Preliminary stills from two of Garrett's commissioned LEGO shorts: (top) "Let's GO LEGO" music video for the LEGO Club Show episode 5.2, (bottom) Promotional animation for the LEGO Space Police "Catch the Crooks!" Contest.

Well first off, thanks to *BrickJournal*, Joe Meno and David Pagano for inviting me to tell my story. It's an honor to be involved with such an active community of LEGO fans and such a special issue of the magazine! To most of you who have no idea who I am, let me tell you a little about myself...

I am a 36-year-old video professional and visual artist with a degree in Computer Animation. I was raised all over the country as an army brat, but now reside in Los Angeles. I have been dreaming of working with LEGO for most of my life, but focused most of my efforts on traditional employment. My first real gig out of school was with Will Vinton Studios as a Storyboard Artist on "The PJs" and "Gary & Mike." It was an amazing studio with fantastic talent that really got me more interested in stop-motion in general. However, when the dotcoms went bust and reality TV took over, I found myself employed in desktop publishing. I was hating it, and knew I really wanted to work with LEGO somehow!

My love of the brick started literally before memory! My family visited the theme park in Denmark when I was about 4, where I received my first kit. Until I was about 12, all I ever got for birthday or Christmas were LEGO kits (even when I wanted something else!) Then I discovered girls and got rid of all my toys around 13. At 19, I realized what a huge mistake I had made and started building a new collection.

So there I was, in my late 20s, trying to figure out a way to "play with LEGOs" for a living! I started honing my skills, working on larger environments and sculptural techniques such as blended spheres. I had also had personal breakthroughs on humanoid armatures that I always felt would be great for animation. Out of nowhere, this preparation paid off when I heard about the first LEGOLAND California Master Builder Search in 2004.



I was in Georgia at the time, so I made the drive and was selected as a regional finalist out of Charlotte. The final competition took place in Carlsbad, where I ultimately choked! But I got to meet some great people, especially Nathan Sawaya, who has gone on to some fantastic accomplishments! At the same time, there was a wonderful journalist from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Christine Van Dusen, who was traveling with me working on a story that eventually got front page coverage!

I was down but not out, and the newspaper exposure led to an amazing experience with the Tifton Museum of Arts & Heritage in Tifton, Georgia. They had me come out and present a one man display, conduct workshops with kids as part of an Artist-in-Residence and execute a 4' x 6' community mosaic project (thanks to Eric Harshbarger, LEGO mosaic software genius for translating my art!) However, this still wasn't a career, so my video experience led me back out to the west coast, where I worked in live-event video production.

Because I was touring and freelancing, I also had days or weeks off where my LEGO hobby could bloom. I began to get interested in LEGO stop-motion, and completed a few tests. Feeling confident I could bring something to the table, I finally started an experimental short, *Mad Creation*, in 2007. I was only able to get raw animation for the first act completed before I saw, completely by chance, that LEGO was sponsoring a stop-motion competition as part of the 2008 Nicktoons Network Animation Festival. I couldn't believe my luck, again with preparation and opportunity!

You've got to understand: when I say "bring something to the table," that is a huge compliment to the fantastic art out there in the community! Websites Brickshelf and MOCpages for building, and Brickfilms and BricksInMotion for animation, have really raised the bar as people share ideas and techniques. There is a wealth of talent out there! I knew the competition would be good, especially since there was a huge \$25k purse! I really wanted to bring all the elements of good LEGO stop-



Top of previous and current page: stills from "The Fastest Funniest LEGO Star Wars Story Ever Told."
 Above: Garrett's studio workspace in a 'transitory' state during the making of the short.

motion together for what would be my very first completed brick film. I wanted efficient yet impressive sets, with mosaic backdrops if possible, armature animation and minifig action, automatic construction, and replacement animation. Those come to mind as the fundamentals, along with lighting and composition. I've tried to stick with those principles since.

Anyway, somehow those efforts paid off and I was ecstatic to find out I'd won the grand prize! Part of the deal was to complete a follow up short for Nicktoons using SpongeBob, which is a really fun IP (intellectual property). We'd had a couple of false starts though, and I had a very busy touring schedule, but when they finally offered such a catchy holiday song I was pretty thrilled! So a storied year later I delivered the LEGO SpongeBob music video for "Don't Be a Jerk, It's Christmas!" I had no idea though if I would ever hear from LEGO again, since most of my contact had been with Nicktoons.

Things really changed when the team from LEGO Club TV contacted me about working on an incredible *Star Wars* short. Ultimately, things went so well that LEGO has been keeping me fairly busy, and I have transitioned into a career in my new garage studio creating brick animations! Over the last year, I produced visuals for *The Fastest & Funniest LEGO Star Wars Story Ever Told*, the *Let's Go LEGO* music video for the LEGO Club Show (Episode 5.2), a *Space Police* series for the "Catch the Crooks" Building Contest, an *Adventures of Max* tie-in for LEGO Universe, and a new project that is keeping me very busy...

So all I can say is follow your dreams, kids! Persistence and dedication, talent and timing, never give up hope — sounds cliché, but it really applies sometimes! Thanks so much to all my friends and family for all their support over the years! 🧱

BrickJournal Exclusive:

Behind the Scenes of "The Fastest and Funniest LEGO Star Wars Story Ever Told!"

After the SpongeBob animation, I was hoping to work with LEGO again, so I was thrilled and honored when they contacted me to produce all the sets and animation for this special *Star Wars* short. They provided the script, kits and bulk bricks I requested. They also completed all post-production and computer-generated effects. Others created all the audio and sound design. Everyone did a great job, and it was truly a collaborative effort! Of course, LEGO and *Star Wars* seem perfect together anyways...

Most of this work, however, was completed all alone in my bedroom on a 3' x 3' table! I felt an incredible pressure to not only live up to the quality they wanted (akin to Spite Your Face Productions' *The Han Solo Affair*), but also to give a faithful visual homage to the inspirational trilogy while representing the beloved LEGO brand. I worked a staggering number of hours trying to get everything done within the three-month deadline. I am also a relatively inexperienced brick filmmaker with some ambitious ideas, so there was much to learn, including an all

new HD hardware system (special thanks to Matrox for providing a stellar MXO2le for HD capture and encoding)! My roommates were kind enough to assemble many of the kits for me, and tolerated completed sets, kits, and bags of bricks stacked all around the living and dining rooms waiting for a turn in my bedroom studio.

Those late nights paid off though, and the detailed sets, attention to lighting, and video backdrops were combining for very compelling imagery. I had a rough voice-over to work with, but it was still amazing to see the final work on "May the Fourth" with all effects and audio. Of course, the primary gags were fun, but the incidental animation I created combined with the ad-libbed "voice-under," came together with the sound design and score to create something just fantastic!

Notable techniques include on-set lighting effects shot in preparation of CG effects added later, such as the lightsaber duel and Emperor's lightning.

Originally, there were plans to use

Below: the Cantina and other Tatooine sets waiting to be filmed.





Above: Garrett's original sunset mosaic for the Lars' homestead set.

Below: A glimpse at Garrett's shooting studio for the Hoth segment.

mosaic backgrounds where possible and green screen for others. However, due to production limitations and quality concerns rear projection was used for almost all the sky and space backgrounds — literally, an HDTV used as a backdrop, creating fantastic complementary lighting and reflections. The brick-splotions were all created via down-shot optical illusion. Scariest “how am I going to do that?” sequence for me: X-wing splashing into the Dagobah swamp! I am particularly proud of the Jabba’s Palace and Emperor’s Throne sets. Most of those original sets are much smaller than they look, nor are they quite as “finished” as they appear. Some rely on camera angle to even look complete! Best unexpected production choice: electric guitar theme!

What an incredible debut for me with LEGO! What an amazing online response! I only hope I can do even better in the future... :)

Did I mention that literally everything and I mean *everything* in *Star Wars* is round! Just think about that for a minute! :-)



You can see Garrett's work at www.gbarati.com or you can jump to Garrett's webpage by scanning this QR code!



Stop With the Clickity-Clacking: Behind the Scenes with Spastik Chuwawa

Article and Photography by James Morr

LEGO was a prominent fixture in my household growing up, and stop-motion animation has always fascinated me, so combining the two felt like a match made in nerd heaven. To give you some insight into what goes into the making of one of my brick films, I'll show you the process of creating my film *CLACK*.



Writing

Growing up in the '90s, my inspirations are culled from an ADD hodge-podge of obscure pop-culture references, cartoons, films, video games, and TV shows. I have no shortage of ideas, which can be a problem at times — like deciding on what to make first, and whether my idea is actually, you know, "good."

Sometimes, real life can provide the most absurd comedic material imaginable. *CLACK* was inspired by an actual event my brother saw while at a burger joint in my town. The afro-popping was all me, however.



Voice-Acting

This tends to be the most straightforward process for me when making a film. I ALWAYS record the dialogue first before animating a single frame of animation (except when I don't).

Set-Building

A large part of why I love brick filming is that it can really let your imagination run wild, in a way that live action film can't really do due to budget/time constraints. Want to have an aerial dogfight in your film between Darth Vader and an elephant with a jetpack? Just build it and shoot it.

I regularly browse Brickshelf and Flickr for building techniques I can utilize (steal) and use for the sets in my films. Sometimes a cool MOC I find can even give me a new idea for a film. When building a set, I like to strike a decent balance between what looks good on camera and what's really practical. A set with lots of SNOT and a roof may look cool, but if it seems like animating a minifig breakdancing in it will be more trouble than it's worth, I look for a more convenient solution.

CLACK's set took several days to build, and is based off the shopping center where the actual events took place. I used Google Streetview for a reference.

Animation

For a while, I thought my brick films were getting a little too stagnant in terms of animation. So I've been trying to incorporate new animation and building techniques into each of my new films to varying degrees.

Lately, I've been challenging myself more creatively, in terms of both animation and storytelling techniques. After coming up with an idea, I first approach it with the mindset of a "normal" brick filmer (hoighty-toighty, much?), and then come up with ways to shake it up a bit. For instance, my film "\$100" would've been kind of boring to animate if I had used regular ol' minifigs, so I opted for some really clunky, big figurines instead. Why not, you know?

CLACK utilizes a couple tricks I used for my previous films "Snob on a Pogo Stick" and "Ssssss" — specifically, the "spring" and "noodle arm" techniques. I used the springy legs (1 x 1 round plates to make legs) to give the woman in *CLACK* a really ridiculous skip/walk cycle, and the wavy noodle arms for when she "clickity-clacks" at the end.



Editing/Post-Production

I use Sony Vegas as my primary editing software. Any additional effects/compositing work that's needed (anything from lightsaber FX to fixing light flicker) is done in Adobe After Effects.

When the visuals are locked down, I begin sound editing. When that's done with, I export the film and put it up on YouTube.

And then I rinse, and repeat ad infinitum. Ahhh yeah. 📺

To see *CLACK* and other films from Spastik Chuwawa, visit <http://www.youtube.com/SpastikChuwawa>



You can see Spastik Chuwawa's gallery by scanning this QR code!



The titular Spastik Chuwawa

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You Can Build It: Animation Puppet

Model by David Pagano

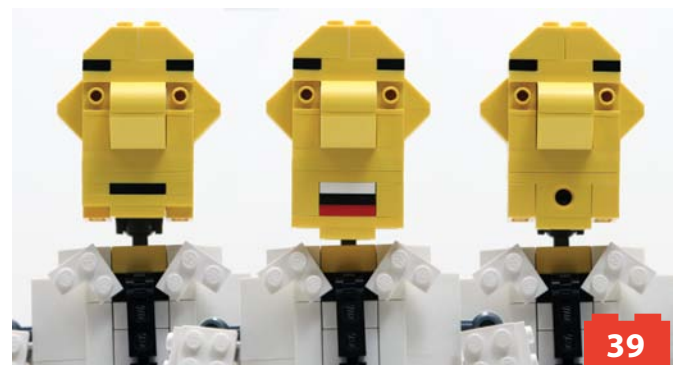
People tend to use minifigures as the main actors in their LEGO films, but I am continuously fascinated by the possibilities inherent in building my own characters brick by brick.

To that end, this charming fellow is what I call a LEGO animation puppet. He's a refined version of the rig I started experimenting with when I made my film "Playback" in 2008. Back then, I was trying to make do with hiding a lot of Bionicle parts behind regular bricks and plates. I was overjoyed when ball-and-socket joints with studs started popping up in Exo-Force and Power Miners sets. Now we just need them in an assortment of colors...

Anyway, this puppet is about 11.5" tall, and he's got 20 points of articulation (23 if you count his tie). His mouth is built to be removable, and can be replaced with different mouth shapes if you feel ambitious enough for lip-synching (see the inset photo). He can also be made to blink by placing a couple of 1 x 1 yellow tiles over his eyes for a frame or two.

I purposefully designed this particular character with a bald head and plain clothes; that way, you can customize him to your heart's content. Does he need glasses? A giant sword? A pompadour? I'll leave that up to you. Have fun! 

Building








Parts List




#	Part	Description	Color
2	3666.dat	Plate 1 x 6	Black
2	6636.dat	Tile 1 x 6	Black
4	3040b.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 1	Black
4	3004.dat	Brick 1 x 2	Black
1	32001.dat	Technic Plate 2 x 6 with Holes	Black
2	32174.dat	Technic Connector 2 x 3 with Ball Socket	Black
1	63868.dat	Plate 1 x 2 with Clip Horizontal on End	Black
1	49673.dat	Plate 1 x 1 with Tooth	Black
2	3068b.dat	Tile 2 x 2 with Groove	Black
2	60478.dat	Plate 1 x 2 with Handle on End	Black
1	3794.dat	Plate 1 x 2 with 1 Stud	Black
4	32062.dat	Technic Axle 2 Notched	Black
1	3623.dat	Plate 1 x 3	Black
1	2555.dat	Tile 1 x 1 with Clip	Black
1	32556.dat	Technic Pin Long	Black
2	3020.dat	Plate 2 x 4	Black
4	85984.dat	Slope Brick 31 1 x 2 x 0.667	Black
3	3022.dat	Plate 2 x 2	Black
7	3023.dat	Plate 1 x 2	Black
2	3024.dat	Plate 1 x 1	Black
2	6069.dat	Wedge 4 x 4 Triple	Black
1	3001.dat	Brick 2 x 4	Green
2	3002.dat	Brick 2 x 3	Green
1	3023.dat	Plate 1 x 2	Green
1	3701.dat	Technic Brick 1 x 4 with Holes	Green
1	3010.dat	Brick 1 x 4	Green
2	32062.dat	Technic Axle 2 Notched	Red
2	203.dat	Technic Ball Joint	Light Gray
1	3709b.dat	Technic Plate 2 x 4 with Holes	Light Gray
4	32064b.dat	Technic Brick 1 x 2 with Axlehole Type 2	Dark Gray
7	57909.dat	Brick 2 x 2 with Ball Joint and Axlehole	Dark Gray
2	3069b.dat	Tile 1 x 2 with Groove	Dark Gray
1	4871.dat	Slope Brick 45 4 x 2 Double Inverted with Open Center	Dark Gray
1	57908.dat	Brick 2 x 2 with Two Ball Joints	Dark Gray
2	3031.dat	Plate 4 x 4	Dark Gray
2	4859.dat	Wing 3 x 4 with 1 x 2 Cutout without Stud Notches	Dark Gray
8	44728.dat	Bracket 1 x 2 - 2 x 2	Dark Gray
9	3020.dat	Plate 2 x 4	Dark Gray
12	3021.dat	Plate 2 x 3	Dark Gray
6	3022.dat	Plate 2 x 2	Dark Gray
14	3023.dat	Plate 1 x 2	Dark Gray
9	62712.dat	Brick 2 x 2 with Ball Socket and Axlehole	Dark Gray
2	3665.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 1 Inverted	Yellow
2	3815c01.dat	Minifig Hips and Legs (Complete)	Yellow




#	Part	Description	Color
2	3069b.dat	Tile 1 x 2 with Groove	Yellow
1	3001.dat	Brick 2 x 4	Yellow
2	2420.dat	Plate 2 x 2 Corner	Yellow
1	3003.dat	Brick 2 x 2	Yellow
2	3040b.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 1	Yellow
4	3004.dat	Brick 1 x 2	Yellow
6	3005.dat	Brick 1 x 1	Yellow
2	30039.dat	Tile 1 x 1 with Groove	Yellow
2	4070.dat	Brick 1 x 1 with Headlight	Yellow
6	3794.dat	Plate 1 x 2 with 1 Stud	Yellow
1	6215.dat	Brick 2 x 3 with Curved Top	Yellow
2	3622.dat	Brick 1 x 3	Yellow
2	3623.dat	Plate 1 x 3	Yellow
3	3710.dat	Plate 1 x 4	Yellow
1	44728.dat	Bracket 1 x 2 - 2 x 2	Yellow
4	3020.dat	Plate 2 x 4	Yellow
2	2357.dat	Brick 2 x 2 Corner	Yellow
2	3037.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 4	Yellow
9	3023.dat	Plate 1 x 2	Yellow
1	3660.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 2 Inverted	Yellow
6	3024.dat	Plate 1 x 1	Yellow
2	6541.dat	Technic Brick 1 x 1 with Hole	Yellow
2	3747b.dat	Slope Brick 33 3 x 2 Inverted with Ribs between Studs	White
2	32064b.dat	Technic Brick 1 x 2 with Axlehole Type 2	White
2	3665.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 1 Inverted	White
2	3069b.dat	Tile 1 x 2 with Groove	White
2	6636.dat	Tile 1 x 6	White
4	3001.dat	Brick 2 x 4	White
2	2420.dat	Plate 2 x 2 Corner	White
4	2436.dat	Bracket 1 x 2 - 1 x 4	White
1	3003.dat	Brick 2 x 2	White
4	3040b.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 1	White
6	3004.dat	Brick 1 x 2	White
1	3894.dat	Technic Brick 1 x 6 with Holes	White
4	3068b.dat	Tile 2 x 2 with Groove	White
2	3794.dat	Plate 1 x 2 with 1 Stud	White
2	3622.dat	Brick 1 x 3	White
4	3298.dat	Slope Brick 33 3 x 2	White
3	3034.dat	Plate 2 x 8	White
4	44728.dat	Bracket 1 x 2 - 2 x 2	White
8	3020.dat	Plate 2 x 4	White
6	3021.dat	Plate 2 x 3	White
2	3022.dat	Plate 2 x 2	White
2	3700.dat	Technic Brick 1 x 2 with Hole	White
2	3023.dat	Plate 1 x 2	White
6	3660.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 2 Inverted	White
4	3039.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 2	White
2	3010.dat	Brick 1 x 4	White




Head and Neck




1  3x 




2  1x  2x 





3  1x  2x 





4  2x  1x 





5  2x  1x 



6  2x  1x 





7  1x  1x 



8  2x  2x  2x 

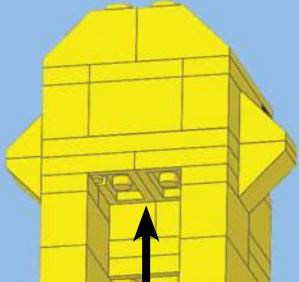
9  2x  1x  1x 



10  2x  2x  1x 



11  1x 




12  2x  2x  1x 


13  2x 



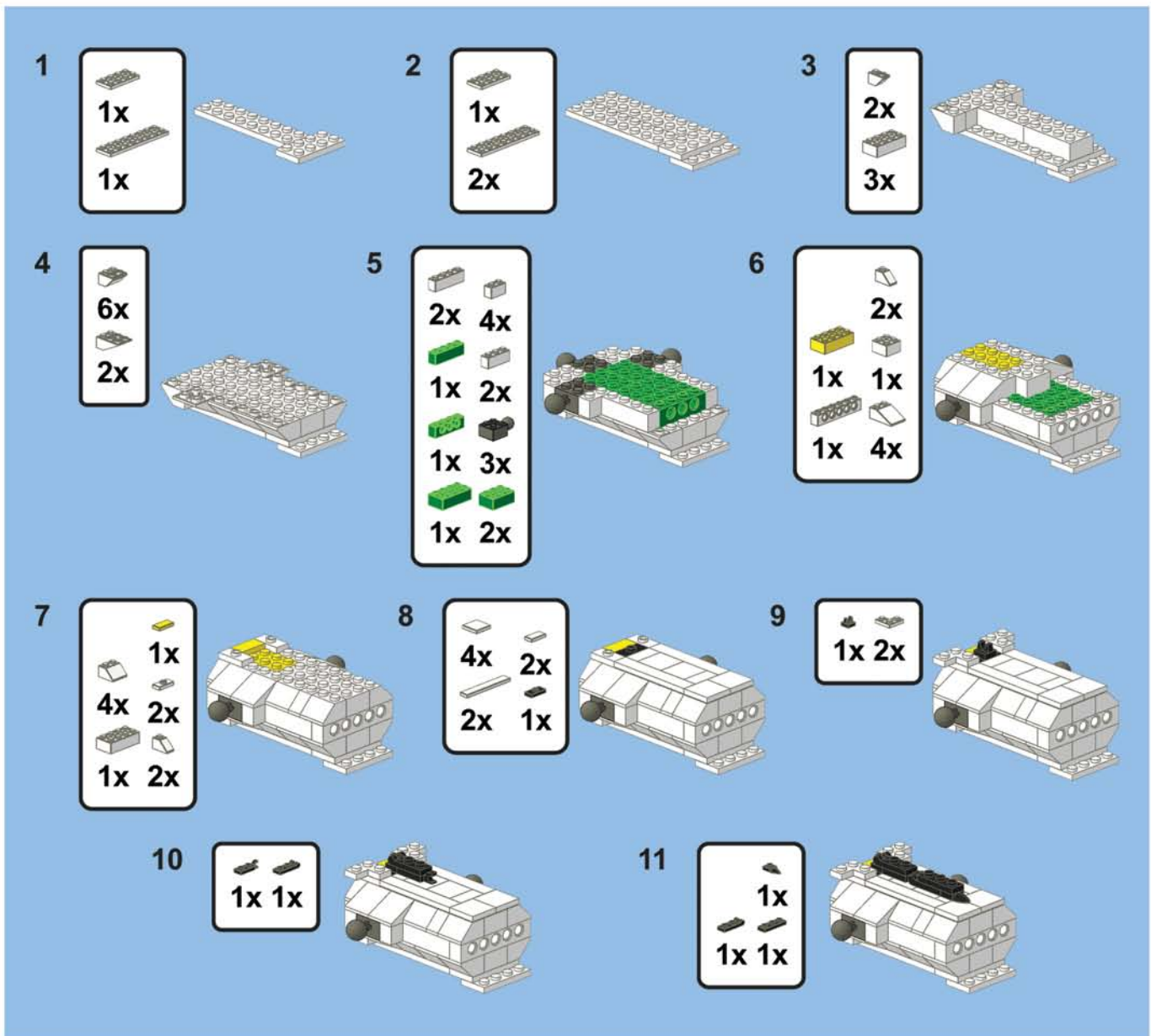
1  1x  2

2  1x  3

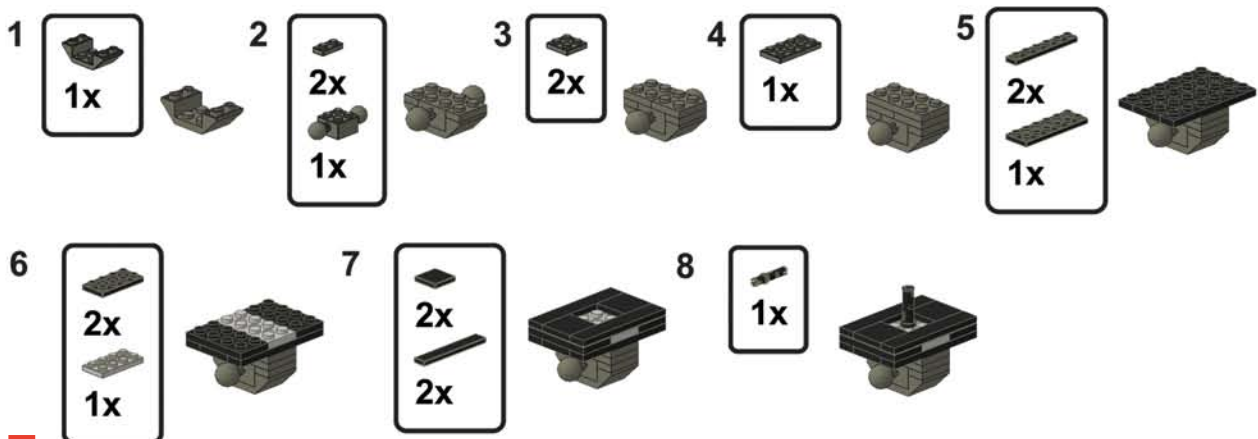
3  1x  1x 



Torso

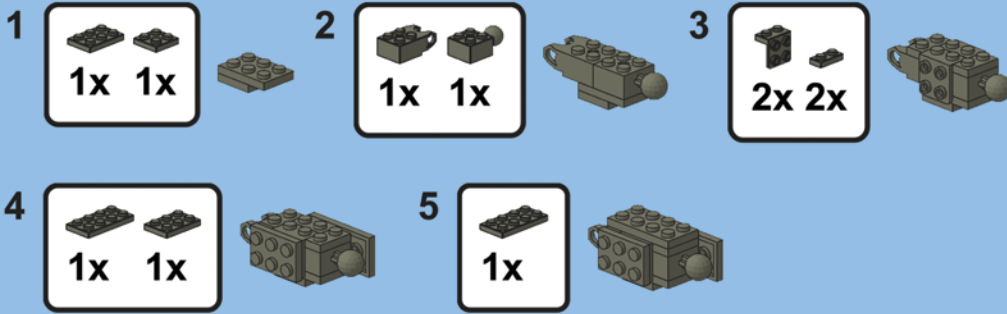


Waist

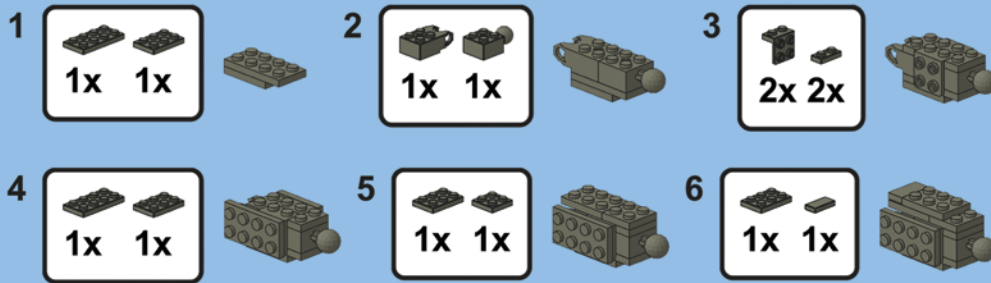


Right Leg

Upper

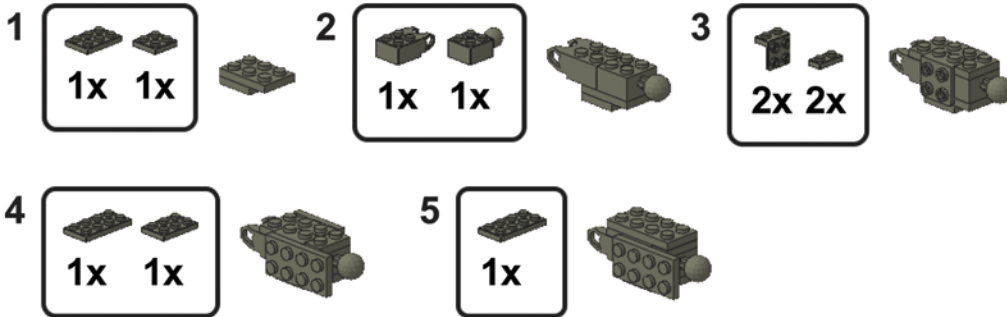


Lower

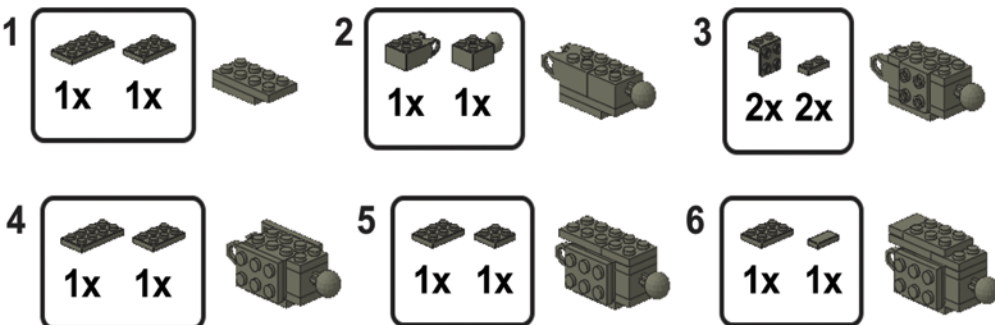


Left Leg

Upper



Lower



Feet

1. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

2. 2x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

3. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 2x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

4. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

5. 1x Technic Pin, 1x Technic Pin, 1x Technic Pin

6. 1x Technic Pin

7. 1x Technic Pin, 1x Technic Pin, 1x Technic Pin

8. 1x Technic Pin, 1x Technic Pin, 1x Technic Pin

2X

Upper Arm

1. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

2. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

3. 2x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

4. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 2x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic Pin

5. 1x Technic Pin

2X

Lower Arm

1. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

2. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

3. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

4. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 2x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

5. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

2X

Left Hand

1. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole

2. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole



3. 2x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole



4. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole



5. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole



6. 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole, 1x Technic 1/2 Brick with Pinhole



Right Hand



1  1x 

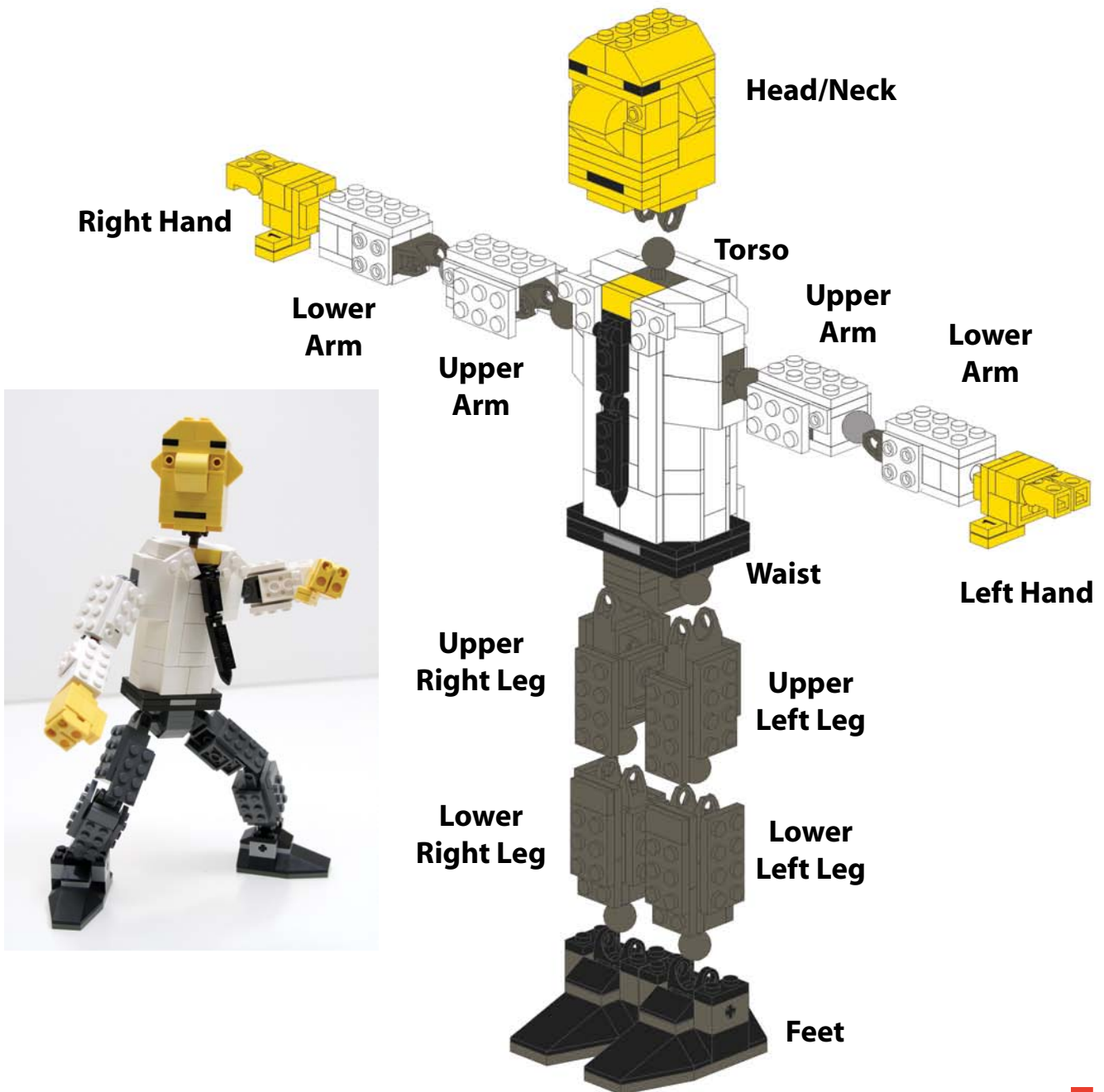
2  1x 1x 

3  2x 

4  1x 1x 

5  1x 1x 1x 

6  1x 1x 





Building *Blade Runner's* Spinner

Article and Photography
by Jordan Schwartz

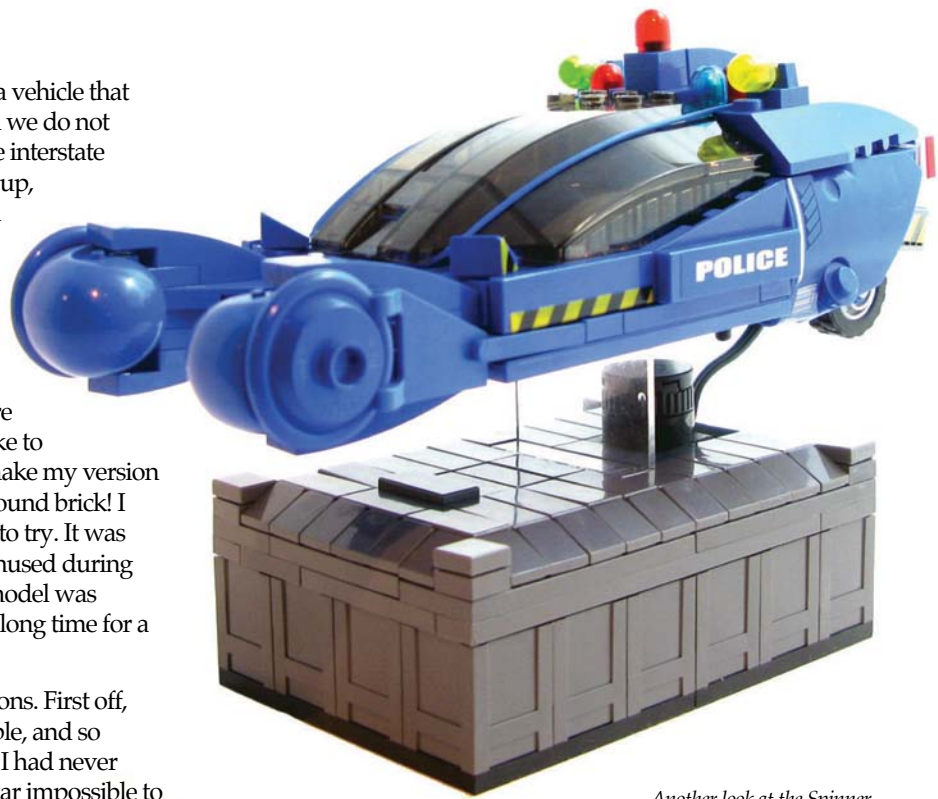
Los Angeles, 2019. Four rogue replicants are loose. Through the miserable, neon-lit streets and alleys goes Rick Deckard to hunt them down. This is, of course, the premise of what is arguably one of the greatest sci-fi films of all time — *Blade Runner*. What makes *Blade Runner* a cult classic? The concept? The acting? The music? Or perhaps the design? I think most critics would agree all of these components molded together are responsible. I know for a fact, though, that the reason the film is one of my personal favorites is because of the work of conceptual designer and visual futurist Syd Mead. Mead's design career spans an impressive 50 years, and his concepts can be seen in such films as *Aliens*, *Short Circuit* and *TRON*. But perhaps his most recognizable creation is the Spinner, from *Blade Runner*.

Mead describes the Spinner as an “aerodyne” — a vehicle that pushes air downward to lift itself. And although we do not have such extraordinary cars hovering down the interstate now, watching the Spinner slowly spin as it lifts up, exhaust discharging from its undercarriage with the sparkling music of Vangelis beeping in the background, gives us hope for the future. The Spinner is one of those rare, realistic concepts that makes you think “what if?”

Naturally, this vehicle has been built many times with LEGO elements — and trust me, there are some very impressive versions out there. I like to build subjects not usually built in LEGO, so to make my version different, I included official LEGO lights and a sound brick! I have not seen this done before, so it made sense to try. It was the most important factor in keeping myself enthused during the building process — especially because this model was constructed over the course of a month: a rather long time for a rather small creation, I’d say.

This was a challenging build for three main reasons. First off, I was dead-set on making it as accurate as possible, and so that urge introduced me to a couple of elements I had never worked with before... elements that are darn-near impossible to incorporate into a system creation. Secondly, I wanted to include lights and sound, which opened up a whole slew of design issues, some of which I was not able to solve in the end. And the third and last issue was the windscreen — yes, the windscreen was a whole problem in and of itself.

The two unfamiliar elements I eluded to above is the smooth, short TECHNIC panel fairing [left and right; parts #87080 and #87086 on BrickLink] and the TECHNIC figure helmet [#2715 on BrickLink.] The panels were slightly easier to work with than the helmet, considering they have pin holes in them; these were worked into the back of the vehicle, just behind the “POLICE” decals. Luckily, these elements are not only the perfect shape, but also quite thin — this allowed for me to snugly stick the rear wheels behind them. The TECHNIC figure helmets are used in the forward wheel housing prongs [no, there are no wheels in them, unfortunately!] The construction of these two sections actually fascinates me as I look back on them; in retrospect, sometimes I will think to myself “that’s the best I could come up with?” because the designs seem messy, but I still cannot think of a more efficient way to include the helmets — after all, there are no pin holes or studs on them! Please refer to the photograph of the section exploded. You will notice, from top to bottom, there is a 1 x 2 finger hinge plate, a 1 x 1 round plate w/ hole with a cut piece of hose in it. Attached to that hose is a 1 x 1 clip — this is critical, because it is upside down: this clip changes the direction of the studs to allow the bottom 1 x 4 curved slope to be upside down as well. Next, the helmet is wedged in there — it is a nice, tight “connection.” And lastly, I used a 3 x 3 dish [minifig utensil], with a 2 x 2 trapezoid flag attached. Please note how this entire section attaches to the main body of the vehicle from the photographs.



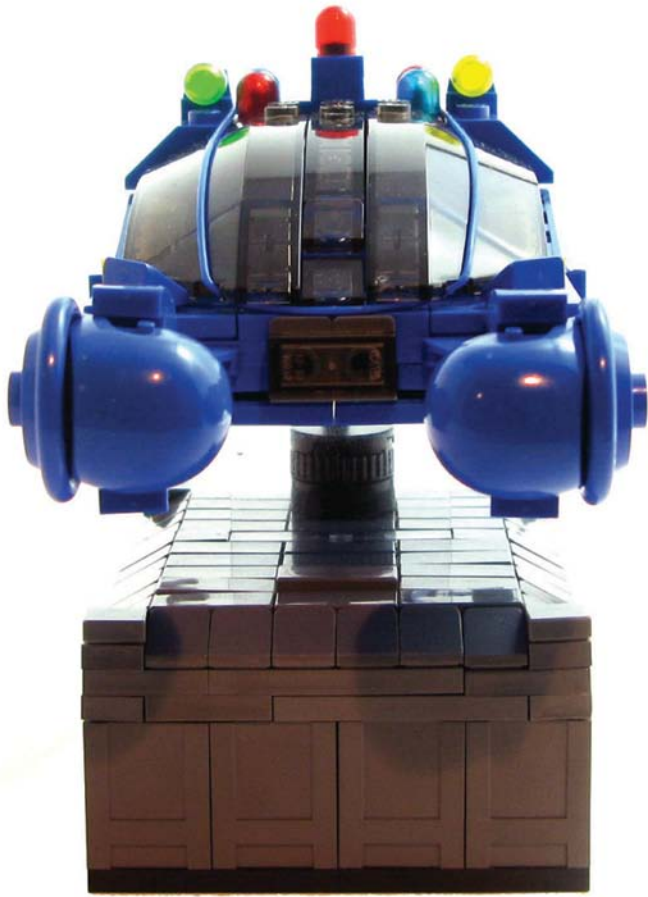
Another look at the Spinner.



A closer look at the construction of the front wheel assembly.



A rear view of the Spinner.



I utilized two black 1 x 4 light bricks [#4771 on BrickLink] — each of these elements has two lights on top. By switching their direction on the wire plate [or by switching the direction of the wire plate on the battery box], you can change how the lights work — they can either blink, or stay constantly lit. Of course, I wanted them to blink. Incorporating these light bricks was difficult because it is essentially like sticking a bulky 2 x 4 in the middle of a highly complex maze of elements. And then add a 2 x 2 electric plate [to which the wire is attached] — that is a lot of valuable space being taken up!

I desperately wanted to put the sound brick [#4774c01 on BrickLink] in the Spinner itself, but there was literally no room. Therefore, it can be found on the base; I stuck a 2 x 2 round tile with a fan pattern on top so it blends in with the base to look like a rooftop chimney of some sort. This element produces two different police siren noises. [Pressing in the raised 1 x 2 tile on the base turns on this sound brick and the lights simultaneously.]




Various views of the Spinner, including a look at the bottom and wire location on the bottom.



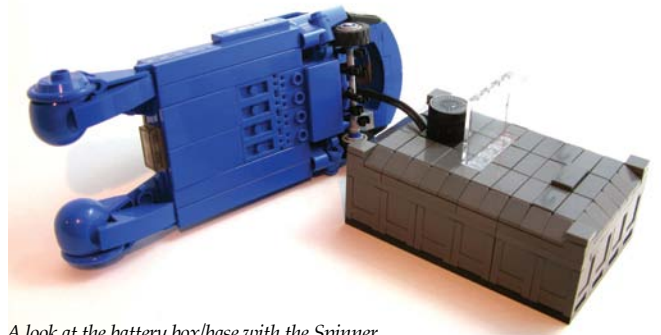


The windscreen situation was a rather unfortunate one. Why? Because trans-black 8 x 3 x 2 open wedges were literally the only solution. I combed the Internet LEGO databases for a better solution, but one simply does not exist. That is not to say it does not work — it works splendidly, actually. My problem with the windscreen is that almost every other LEGO Spinner uses it. I suppose I was just being stubborn! Though, to add a little of my own style to it, a blue elastic band is wrapped over it. I have used LEGO elastic bands structurally and aesthetically before, and I fully stand behind them. They can add just the right detail where other elements dare not go!

And, for good measure, I built a set of minifigures of the main characters from *Blade Runner*, including Gaff, Dr. Eldon Tyrell, Rachel, Deckard, Leon, Pris, Roy and Zhora.

In summation, the Spinner was just begging for me to build it; I like to think that this model shows that determination, plus a lot of tedious work, can yield an interesting [and in this case, interactive] creation. I think I've done a man's job, sir... 

Jordan is now an intern at the LEGO Group, and will be writing about his adventures there in upcoming issues of BrickJournal. His website is www.brickstud.com, and footage of his Spinner can be found on Youtube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWOPTAP4wfo>



A look at the battery box/base with the Spinner.



The protagonists of Blade Runner, from left to right: Gaff, Tyrell, Rachel, and Deckard.



You can jump to Youtube footage of Jordan's Spinner by scanning this QR code!



You can jump to Jordan's website by scanning this QR code!



The replicants, from left to right: Leon, Pris, Roy, and Zhora.

You Can Build It

MINI Model

Lost World Filming Setup

Design and Instructions
by Christopher Deck




Hello everybody! I am glad to join this fantastic issue of *BrickJournal*. What does one associate with the term “movie”? I guess that’s different for everyone of us, and that’s what made the choice for a proper mini modelling build so tricky this time. Quite often it’s just the opening scene of a particular movie, but these are difficult to miniaturize.

The setup presented to you here is the rebuild of a hopefully memorable in-movie-scene from *Lost World* (or *Jurassic Park II*) directed by Steven Spielberg (novel by Michael Crichton). It’s the Tyrannosaurus attack on the research trailer of the rescue team around Dr. Ian Malcolm. The scene is quite scary, and thus has a potential to be reminded, and features a suitable object to be miniaturized.

The three-wide trailer combination features all necessary details like spotlights, bumper bar, skirting protection, reinforced windows, and working tow coupling. The cockpit also reveals compact SNOT techniques to enable the use of 1 x 1 slopes as windscreen without any gap to the frame. The baby tyrannosaurus is suitable to play the attackers.

I hope you’ll be having as much fun with this little scene as I had while building it. With that I am done for this time. I wish you happy building, and see you next time!

Yours, Christopher. 

Parts List

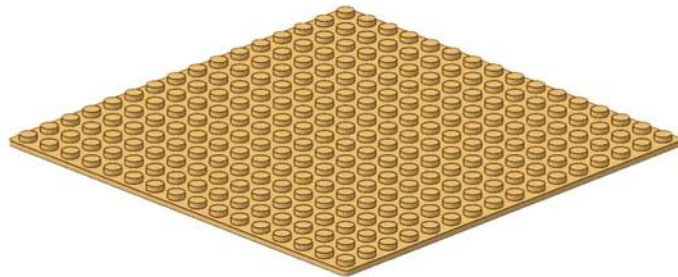
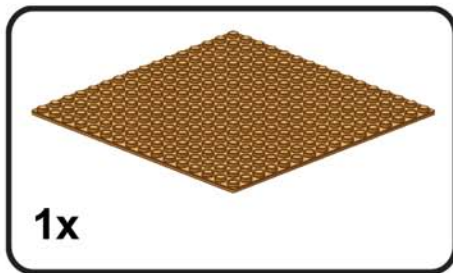
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2	4733.dat	Brick 1 x 1 with Studs on Four Sides	Black
2	4592.dat	Hinge Control Stick Base	Black
3	4593.dat	Hinge Control Stick	Black
1	30031.dat	Minifig Handlebars	Black
1	4349.dat	Minifig Loudhailer	Black
1	3005.dat	Brick 1 x 1	Black
4	30374.dat	Bar 4L Light Sabre Blade	Black
1	2429.dat	Hinge Plate 1 x 4 Base	Black
1	4070.dat	Brick 1 x 1 with Headlight	Black
2	30359a.dat	Bar 1 x 8 with Brick 1 x 2 Curved Top End	Black
1	3069bp0a.dat	Tile 1 x 2 with Partial White Stripes Pattern	Black
1	4263.dat	Technic Plate 1 x 4 with Holes	Black
1	30148.dat	Minifig Camera Movie	Black
1	41334.dat	Minifig Hat Knit Cap	Black
10	2555.dat	Tile 1 x 1 with Clip	Black
1	6019.dat	Plate 1 x 1 with Clip Horizontal	Black

#	Part	Description	Color
9	2540.dat	Plate 1 x 2 with Handle	Black
2	3960.dat	Dish 4 x 4 Inverted	Black
8	2412b.dat	Tile 1 x 2 Grille with Groove	Black
1	3815c01.dat	Minifig Hips and Legs (Complete)	Blue
1	973p73.dat	Minifig Torso with Vest with Patch Pockets Pattern	Green
2	30464.dat	Animal Dinosaur Tyrannosaurus Rex Baby	Green
1	4485.dat	Minifig Cap	Red
1	973p13.dat	Minifig Torso with Straight Zipper Jacket Pattern	Red
1	973p7h.dat	Minifig Torso with Jacket, Pink Shirt, Ring on Necklace Pattern	Light Blue
29	4727.dat	Plant Flower 2 x 2 Leaves	Bright Green
1	4592.dat	Hinge Control Stick Base	Yellow
3	3626bp05.dat	Minifig Head with Standard Grin and Eyebrows Pattern	Yellow
2	6141.dat	Plate 1 x 1 Round	White
1	3068bp87.dat	Tile 2 x 2 with Black “7” Pattern	White
2	4079.dat	Minifig Seat 2 x 2	White
1	3070bpc2.dat	Tile 1 x 1 with Computer Display Pattern	White

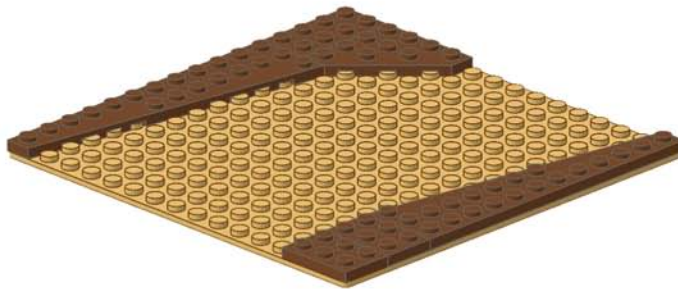
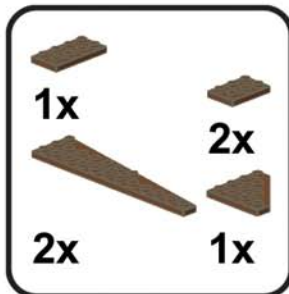
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4	3024.dat	Plate 1 x 1	Trans Red
2	4740.dat	Dish 2 x 2 Inverted	Trans Neon Green
4	3024.dat	Plate 1 x 1	Trans Yellow
4	3004.dat	Brick 1 x 2	Trans Clear
3	3005.dat	Brick 1 x 1	Trans Clear
3	54200.dat	Slope Brick 31 1 x 1 x 2/3	Trans Clear
19	4070.dat	Brick 1 x 1 with Headlight	Trans Clear
2	47397.dat	Wing 3 x 12 Left	Reddish Brown
1	3815c02.dat	Minifig Hips and Legs (Complete)	Reddish Brown
1	3020.dat	Plate 2 x 4	Reddish Brown
2	3021.dat	Plate 2 x 3	Reddish Brown
1	6093a.dat	Minifig Hair Ponytail	Reddish Brown
1	30503.dat	Plate 4 x 4 without Corner	Reddish Brown
1	3069bp02.dat	Tile 1 x 2 with Tape Reels Pattern	Light Gray
4	3040b.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 1	Light Gray
4	3040a.dat	Slope Brick 45 2 x 1 without Center Stud	Light Gray
1	3032.dat	Plate 4 x 6	Light Gray
1	3035.dat	Plate 4 x 8	Light Gray
4	3022.dat	Plate 2 x 2	Light Gray
12	3023.dat	Plate 1 x 2	Light Gray
1	2921.dat	Brick 1 x 1 with Handle	Dark Gray

#	Part	Description	Color
1	3815c01.dat	Minifig Hips and Legs (Complete)	Dark Gray
2	3666.dat	Plate 1 x 6	Dark Gray
5	3069b.dat	Tile 1 x 2 with Groove	Dark Gray
1	6190.dat	Bar 1 x 3	Dark Gray
1	6583.dat	Plate 1 x 6 with Train Wagon End	Dark Gray
6	3005.dat	Brick 1 x 1	Dark Gray
1	30039.dat	Tile 1 x 1 with Groove	Dark Gray
3	4070.dat	Brick 1 x 1 with Headlight	Dark Gray
3	3794.dat	Plate 1 x 2 with 1 Stud	Dark Gray
1	30383.dat	Hinge Plate 1 x 2 Locking with Single Finger On Top	Dark Gray
10	3070b.dat	Tile 1 x 1 with Groove	Dark Gray
12	3623.dat	Plate 1 x 3	Dark Gray
8	2555.dat	Tile 1 x 1 with Clip	Dark Gray
4	3710.dat	Plate 1 x 4	Dark Gray
1	6019.dat	Plate 1 x 1 with Clip Horizontal	Dark Gray
9	3021.dat	Plate 2 x 3	Dark Gray
5	3023.dat	Plate 1 x 2	Dark Gray
10	4081b.dat	Plate 1 x 1 with Clip Light Type 2	Dark Gray
1	30553.dat	Hinge Arm Locking with Dual Finger and Axlehole	Dark Gray
4	3024.dat	Plate 1 x 1	Dark Gray

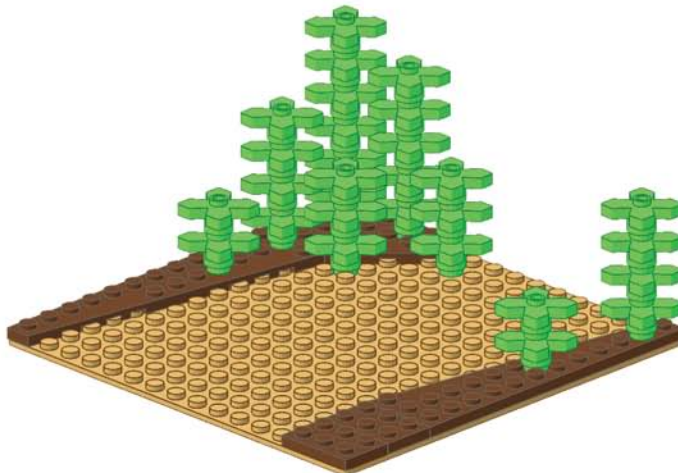
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1

- 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 3x 2x [3x 2-hole Technic Technonuts]

2

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3

- 1x 2x [1x 2-hole Technic Technonut]
- 4x 1x [4x 1-hole Technic Pin]

4

- 6x [6x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 1x 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]

5

- 5x [5x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 1x 2x 1x [1x 2-hole Technic Technonut]

6

- 8x [8x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 3x 2x [3x 2-hole Technic Technonut]

7

- 4x 2x [4x 2-hole Technic Technonut]
- 1x 1x 3x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]

8

- 3x [3x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 1x 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]

9

- 3x 1x [3x 1-hole Technic Pin]

10

- 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]

11

- 6x [6x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 2x 2x [2x 2-hole Technic Technonut]

12

- 1x 2x [1x 2-hole Technic Technonut]
- 1x 4x [1x 4-hole Technic Technonut]

1

- 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 2x 1x [2x 1-hole Technic Pin]

2

- 3x [3x 1-hole Technic Pin]

3

- 2x [2x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 1x 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 1x 1x [1x 1-hole Technic Pin]

4

- 1x 4x [1x 4-hole Technic Technonut]

5

- 2x 2x [2x 2-hole Technic Technonut]

6

- 8x 4x [8x 4-hole Technic Technonut]

7

- 2x 2x [2x 2-hole Technic Technonut]
- 1x 4x [1x 4-hole Technic Technonut]

8

- 4x [4x 1-hole Technic Pin]
- 2x [2x 1-hole Technic Pin]
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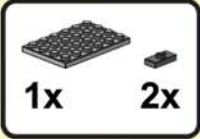


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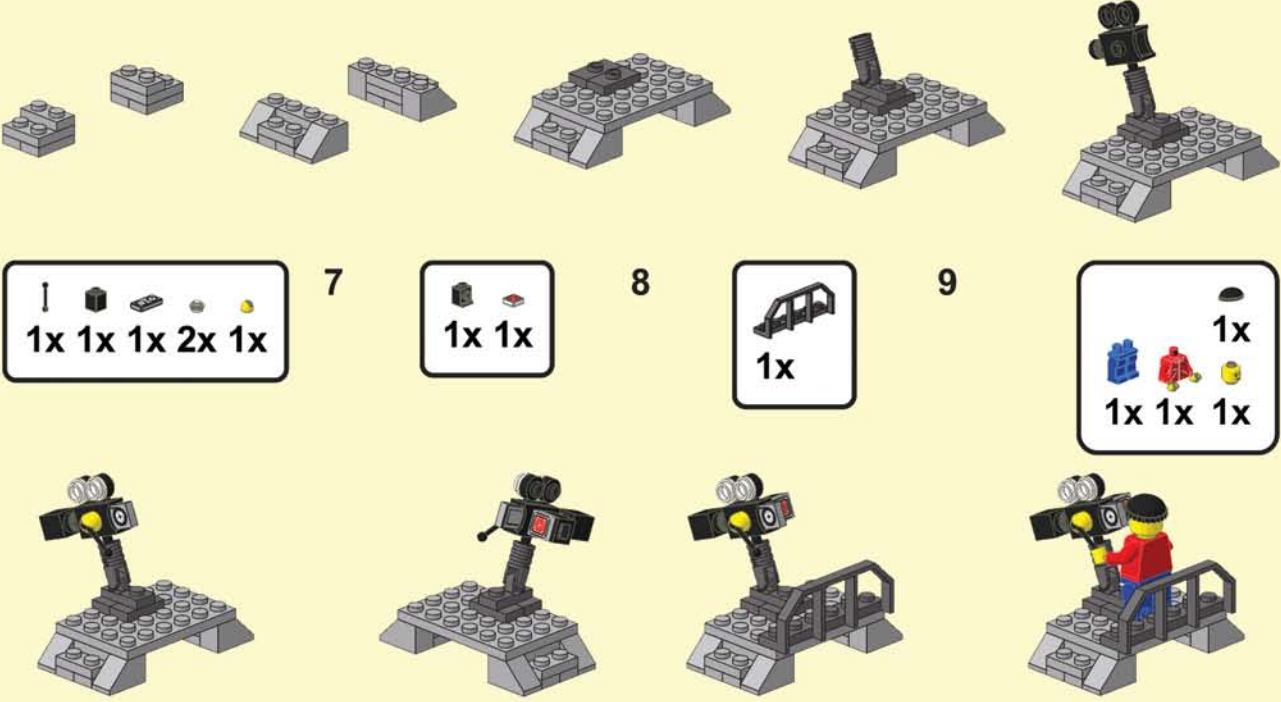
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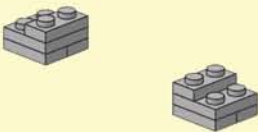
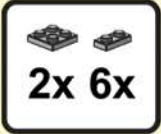
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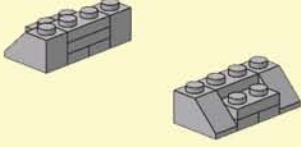
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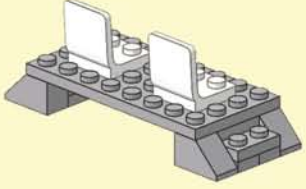
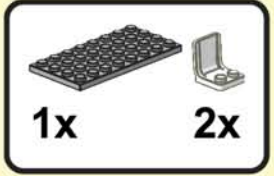
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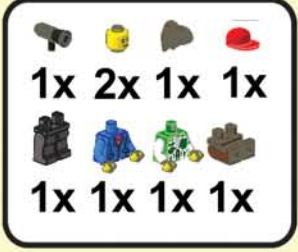
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Minifig Customization 101: Purist Customization

Article by Jared K. Burks

Purist customization can be simple and elegant as well as complex and innovative. To begin any discussion of purist customizing, we have to start by asking ourselves just *what* is customizing. In previous design articles, we have examined minifigures supplied by the LEGO Group, which is important as it is what starts our definition of a figure and where customizing starts. So you need to determine just what it means to customize a minifigure. Where does customization begin? Can you merely switch out the accessory, change the hair or hat, or alter the figure's leg color? This is a question that only the customizer can really decide. How much impact does it really make? Changing a leg color, for example, could be very impactful if the right color was used, like flesh or yellow. The way I define customization requires a vision, much like a sentence requires a complete thought. When you have a vision of a custom figure and proceed through a process of executing that vision to find or create the combination of parts needed to create that custom figure, you have customized and created something new. Merely switching parts around isn't really customizing in my mind. As one last justification, when you sit to build something out of bricks, do you merely start randomly sticking bricks together or do you have an idea, no matter how vague, of what you want to build before you start trying to build it. A custom figure should be no different. *You need to know what you are building before you attempt to build it.*

Now that we have come to an understanding of what customizing is, let us define purist customization. Simply put, this is assembling figures using entire LEGO derived elements: nothing purchased from an aftermarket producer, scratch-built, sculpted, decaled, painted, or sanded, only those entirely made from the palette of parts, designs, and elements that LEGO has produced and given us. This sounds pretty easy, and it is honestly where many of the customizers started, but it can be quite challenging and creative. For this article, I am going to break purist customization into three categories; traditional, non-traditional, and brick.

Traditional

Traditional customization is the most limited as it limits builders to using Minifigure parts. If it wasn't designed by LEGO to use with a minifigure, you can't use it. These parts are readily found in the Bricklink catalog categories with Minifig in the title (body part, body wear, head, head modified, headgear, headgear accessories, legs assembly, shield, torso, torso assembly, utensil, and weapon). This will limit what you can create; however, there are thousands, if not millions, of different figures you can create using the palette that LEGO has supplied. Just remember you cannot alter any of the parts.

Historical Figure Contest

The best reference source for this technique is the Historical Minifigure Contest I hosted a few years ago (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/kaminoan/sets/72157602244759515/>). This contest produced brilliant figures by all age range of participants. This technique doesn't always require the creative stretch that some customizers use; simple and elegant approaches can create brilliant figures. If purist

*Traditional Purist Figure - Norm Abram.
Photo and figure by John Arnst.*



customization is for you, the primary skill set is an indepth knowledge of the LEGO figure catalog. The best resource for this knowledge is the Bricklink catalog. There are thousands of minifigure parts, so finding out about all of them is difficult, however this variety allows for millions of combinations speaking to the volumes of figures you can create. The Bricklink catalog will also allow you to also see how LEGO originally used the elements.

Non-Traditional

Non-traditional customization opens the door to any LEGO element; however, the bulk of the figure is still created using minifigure elements. You will be completely surprised how people can incorporate and use LEGO elements in minifigure customization. Aliens, robots, and very odd minifigures are all possible when you mix bricks, especially when using bricks in conjunction with *Star Wars* Robot and Exoforce themes' elements. All is possible with a bit of imagination and various bricks and other small parts. The figures can even look very stylish when some purists get a hold of the right LEGO elements. Non-traditional customization allows for some real ingenuity. Long before we had Ackbar, some customizers figured out ways to create great likeness of Ackbar using LEGO elements.

Non-traditional and Brick Figures: (from left) Historical Grenadier, Jean-Baptiste, Napoleon, Black Watch, Napoleon on Horseback. Photos and Figures by Gaetano "Tanotrooper" Dooms.



Traditional and Non-Traditional Figures: Santa 3000 Ground Crew (Engineered Reindeer) and Mission Control Crew (Elves). Photos and Figures by Matt Sailors.



*Non-traditional Figure: Roman
Photo and figure by Jordan "SirNadroj" Schwartz.*

*Non-Traditional Figure: High School Girl.
Photos and Figures by Moko.*

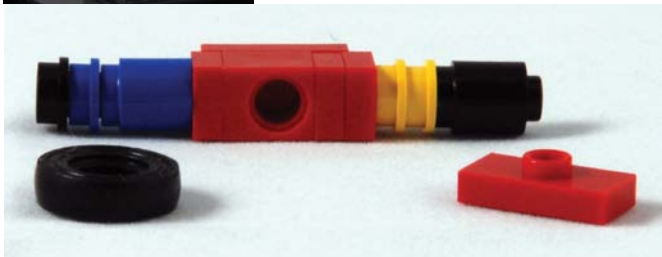




Traditional, Non-Traditional, and Brick Figures: Star Wars Bounty Hunters. Photos and Figures by Christopher Deck.



Brick Figure: Toy Soldier. Photos and Figure by Matt Sailors.



Brick Figure: Robby the Robot. Photos and Figure by Matt Sailors.



You can go to Jared's webpage by scanning this QR code!



Jared's website is www.fineclonier.com

Brick Figure: Robby the Robot. Photos and Figure by Matt Sailors.



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Minifig Customization 101 – The Customizing Accessory Gray Market!



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LEGO® Harry Potter Set Review: Diagon Alley

Review by Jennifer Joy Poole
 Art provided by the LEGO Group,
 with photography by Joe Meno

As the resident Harry Potter fan for BrickJournal, Jennifer Joy Poole has been reviewing the recent Harry Potter sets. Building and displaying LEGO® scenes from all seven Harry Potter books for some time, JenniferJoy is very familiar with the ins and outs of the Harry Potter world. Here she takes a look at the new set from LEGO Direct, Diagon Alley.

I am blessed as a huge Harry Potter fan to be able to review the new Diagon Alley set — it is worth every penny. The design is better than previous sets; the stability is better; there are newly created parts; and the overall look is very professional. The buildings are complex to build. I loved it, but I know children would need their parents to build the set for them. The age range on the box of 14+ is accurate.

The set is made up of three buildings and a few outside elements. The outside elements seem to be the best way to tie the three buildings into a whole, which is a busy wizarding shopping center. There is a display for wizard hats. To any HP fan, that signals the acknowledgment of Madam Malkin's robe shop. There are cauldrons stacked together for the cauldron shop, and a display of owls as well as a bat. At first, I thought it was the Owl Emporium but coupled with the sign "Owls, Bats, Cats" that could only be the Magical Menagerie. Even Fred and George were indicative of their shop, Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, just down the road. The posters on the sides of the buildings were a nice touch. With the wanted posters and missing persons signs on the buildings, it did not bode well for the wizarding world. All of these elements gave the feeling of a tightly packed center of commerce and a sense of unease, which was exactly right.

Figures

I must say the creation of the Weasley twins for this set is wonderful... and overdue. Characters that are such a part of Harry Potter are needed in minifig form and I applaud the LEGO Group for including them. The dual head designs are great for changing expression as well as identifying one from the other if desired. The inclusion of Lucius Malfoy and Fenrir Greyback in Borgin & Burke's is dead on. The masked face and bared teeth were also well done. However, I might have included Draco instead of Lucius for timeframe continuity. (Lucius was in jail when Ollivander's was raided.) The goblins for the bank only had their torsos altered a little since the last time the figures were released. The double expressions on Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Ollivander's heads add to the characters' quality and make them more real and Hagrid with his pink umbrella just warmed my heart.

Buildings

Building One is Ollivander's wand shop, which is a grand design. The curvature of the windows gained by using a series of hinges and plates is a unique design element. The only problem is each set of windows are only anchored in two places on 1 x 2 bricks or plates. That means that in the process of moving the building to another location, the windows can fall off.

There is an awning on the side of the building where there is no window. From a Harry Potter fan point of view, the buildings are smack up against each other, sometimes sharing walls. As a result, the windowless sides downstairs makes a lot of sense, but the awning does not.

I loved the use of the brown whips to add a decorative element to the shelving unit upstairs. The bottles upstairs threw me for a moment and I decided they must contain the elements for making the wands. The gold detailing throughout the shop does catch the eye very well, but the shop was supposed to be very shabby. As a fan, the inside looks too polished. Wands are neatly on shelves that can be easily gotten to. The truth is wand boxes were from floor to ceiling making the shop cramped. Also there is the problem of scale in regards to the wands. The piece used for the wands are 4 studs long; the boxes in the shop are 1 x 2. I love the detail of the wand boxes, but would have loved to see them the proper scale.

The exploding desk element is a little weird to me. It's always hard to tell when in the books we are with the most recent sets. I've come to the conclusion that this was an element added to re-enact Ollivander's kidnapping.

Building Two is Borgin & Burke's. This shop is actually in Knockturn Alley, which is just off Diagon Alley. I feel I would be remiss not to at least mention that fact. Now to the important stuff... I feel this building is a masterpiece. Everything in it makes sense. The vanishing cabinet is consistent with the other sets. The floo network is infinitely better than the one seen in the Burrow set. It was where it was supposed to be in the shop. Also, the new mechanism for using the floo network is so much more on point. Being able to turn the top chimney to make the floo work just tickled me. While there is not much in the shop proper, the skeleton in the window gives it the right look.

The introduction of new parts and new colors was wonderful to see. First of all, the glow-in-the-dark plates have finally come out of the racing theme and into a building set. The new rounded awning was beautiful. While I saw this piece used in the Harry Potter LEGO game I have never seen it in an actual set before. The half-tube used for the floo network and the arch on the roof introduced each part in a new color.

The design elements are amazing. The color palette is dark and reflects the feeling of Knockturn Alley in a wonderful way. The effort that went into the domed tower on the roof was inspired. The same hinge system is used on the front windows and the expanded version to make the domed roof was just awesome. The technic pieces added a bit more of a visual effect than I even thought possible. All of these well designed elements made a scary shop into something visually pleasing.

Finally, Building Three is Gringott's Bank. Gringott's is not an easy building to visually represent. Very little is said about the building's outside appearance other than it was a towering white marble building with white marble stairs and bronze doors. The stairs would have been nice, but not very functional. The red carpet at the front door gives the visual cue of Gringott's lavishness. I believe that



Ollivander's shop, with Ollivander at his desk (top) and the interior (above left).



Borgin and Burke's, with rotating floo mechanism (left).




making it slightly taller than the other two buildings would have shown its grandness.

The small detail work on the outside adds to the feeling of opulence. The walls appear to be carved and the pillars in the front are a throwback to the pillars in the *Harry Potter* movies. The method of getting the pillars to lean was a wonderful detail. They make a lot more sense than the pillars leaning one way on the first floor and the other way on the second the way it is depicted in the movies. The pillars also introduce the modified round 2 x 2 brick as a new part. The lines give it this etched quality that is so essential in some forms of architecture — someone out there has always wanted to make the Parthenon and now they can! One other nice touch is the fact the whole model can fold in to make a solid looking building.

On the inside, the feeling of the building being huge is well done. However, I do need to nit-pick at this point. I understand that banks need vaults, but the vault placement seemed very wrong. In Gringotts, there is a huge number of goblins at their desks in the front. There are several doors leading off to vaults, but they aren't in the bank proper, like a human bank. The vaults are deep underground, carved out of the rock below. I have no idea how you would indicate that, but I personally would have left out the vault. There was a Gringotts vault set that was created in the earlier series. I would probably combine the sets. Also, no self respecting Goblin would have allowed portraits of wizards to hang prominently in the bank. I am certain these are the LEGO versions of the set's designers, who I take my hat off to. I would have suggested to at least make the images with pointy ears so they don't just look so out of place. Lastly, I would have loved to see the warning poem or at least a part of it on the inside of the bank. Even if it was only a sticker that said, "Enter, stranger, but take heed, of what awaits the sin of greed." That would have been enough to make this feel right inside. Ultimately, though, the inside of Gringotts is what a playset needs to be, so the goal was accomplished.

Overall

The set as a whole impressed me more than I can say. Yes, there will be things I will add to or change to make it more HP friendly, but that is me. To everyone else, I am sure they will be overwhelmed with the details used and the quality of buildings. 

You can order this set at the LEGO website:

<http://shop.lego.com/product/?p=10217&icmp=COHomeShopUS10217>



Gringott's, with interior (above) and goblin desk (below left).
Center and right below: Some of the signs and printed tiles in the set.



The LEGO Group



Above and following pages: Series 4 Collectible Minifigures

Talking about Minifigures

Article by Jason Burnett
(Jas Brick)

Art Provided by the LEGO Group
In an exclusive interview, BrickJournal talks to the person behind the LEGO Collectible Minifigures!



BrickJournal: Thank you for sparing the time to be interviewed, could you tell us a bit about yourself, who you are? Where you are from? And how long you have worked for TLG?

No problem. I'm Matthew Ashton, Senior Creative Director of LEGO® Playthemes and IPs (Intellectual Properties). I am originally from a teeny place called the Wirral, in the UK (near Chester and Liverpool) but have been based in Denmark for the past ten years working for the LEGO Group. I studied Fashion/Textile Design with Business Studies at the University of Brighton, and was originally hired in to work on LEGO Clikits, as stylist, colorist and illustrator of the Clikits Girl Characters.

You are currently the Lead Designer for the Collectible Minifig Series (CMS), but what other projects have you been involved with previously and how does designing CMS differ from these?

As Creative Director, I oversee the design development of many different lines, all of which contain LEGO Minifigures in one form or another. I have looked after a number of our own grown lines from LEGO Aqua Raiders, Castle, Agents, Space Police, Power Miners, Kingdoms, and Pirates, as well as all the LEGO system products we do based on TV shows and movies (Intellectual Properties - IPs) (i.e., LEGO Star Wars, SpongeBob, Toy Story, Prince of Persia, Indiana Jones and more recently the last launch of Harry Potter and the up-and-coming Pirates of the Caribbean range).

LEGO Minifigure Collectibles project is like a breath of fresh air, and probably my favorite line to be involved in. We get to have so much fun with this line and do all the silly little things that we would never have the opportunity to do in any other range. Having said that, it is also extremely hard work for something that must look relatively simple from the outside. This project, at times has been extremely complicated due to logistics, sourcing routes, forecasting, and all the technical details that go into a line like this. Just the fact that we were selling products in foil bags, on clip strips and display stands required entirely new ways of thinking and working, as the LEGO Group haven't really done these things before. Everyone has really had to pull together to make this project happen, and it is something we feel extremely proud to have achieved.

I imagine that designing sixteen very distinct minifig characters for each series takes a considerable amount of effort, do you do this alone? Or are you supported by a team of people? If so could you let us know who they are and what roles they have?

I have an excellent team of designers working on this line together, and to be honest, they are the ones that do all the hard, detailed work to bring these characters to market.

Laurence Dawes, and now Tara Wike, have overseen the day to day development of the line and have also been heavily involved in executing many of the minifigures accessories; they focus mainly on all the handheld items, and more geometric headgear pieces.

Gitte Thorsen, Niels Milan, and Stewart Whitehead use their excellent hand-sculpting skills to develop our more organic head-pieces, accessories, and wigs, etc.

Last, but not least is the fabulous Michael Patton, the graphic designer on the team, who illustrates the character's decals and facial expressions, bringing the figures to life.

Have you been involved with this line from the start, and, if so, could you give us a little background on how the original concept of a collectable product line of minifigures came about?

Yes, I have been involved since day one, and have really had to dig my heels in to get this project through. To be honest, this is a concept that has bounced around the organization for years; I even remember ten years ago I presented this idea as a junior designer (and I probably wasn't the first) and I was pretty much laughed out of the presentation by a certain marketing person (who shall remain nameless... but he is now eating his words! ;)). Reflecting on this now, I appreciate the timing was not at all right back then, so it was definitely the right decision.

There were many years when the LEGO Group were not putting enough focus on minifigures, and they were almost seen as secondary to the bricks — kind of more of an accessory. It has taken many years for us to rebuild the LEGO Minifigure as a true icon and increase its popularity across the world.

To achieve this, we have really had to refocus on creating consistent and appealing minifigure designs, and increasing their presence and importance within products. We are now at a stage where Minifigures are super cool again, a real emotional hook and in many cases a kid's entry point to LEGO products. I also think that the way we have executed TV commercials, comics, and our video games has also played a huge part in the kids perception of Minifigures as that has really brought these figures to life. Our little square blocky characters are now seen to be brimming with personality, character, emotion, and fun.

So all in all, the timing of this concept was the most crucial thing, if it had been launched a few years back, then we would definitely not be seeing the same success that we are now.

When it came to the concept itself, we knew exactly the sort of characters we wanted to do, but it was figuring out the best way to sell them was the tricky bit. Surprise Bags was pretty much the best and only option that would work for us to sell the types of characters we wanted. If we had done sets where consumers could choose which characters they wanted, this would have meant that we would have had to have made a much narrower selection of characters. All characters would have to perform equally well and pretty much be guaranteed sellers and safe bets, which would have completely ruled out anything like a cheerleader for example. This option could have also been an absolute logistic and forecasting nightmare and with a high risk of some products being left on shelf, not performing.

Luckily, through testing, we found and proved that the concept of "surprise" bags was extremely appealing to kids and a perfect reward gift or impulse buy for parents. Kids wanted the minifigures much more when they were packed like this; it made them feel like the figures were rarer — like little treasures and the kind of adrenaline rush and suspense of not knowing what they would get really excited the kids. It also made them want characters that they would otherwise not be particularly interested in to complete the set, so the range of characters we could execute was much broader.

The goal of collecting an entire series leads to a real sense of pride and achievement for the kids. This also really helps create more hype and buzz around the product. Kids talk about the products more, show off which ones they have got, talk about which ones they need and this can, in many instances, lead to kids swapping them like trading cards.

So we were onto a win-win situation!

Could you describe the key stages involved in the design process of the CMS: where do you start (i.e. are you given or have to develop a list of possible characters) and where do you hand over responsibility and consider your task complete?

I basically work with the team to establish the mix of characters within each launch to make sure we have a good balance of figures that will appeal to all our different LEGO consumers. We have developed a formula to get the mix right, which has been refined series by series. Initially, we did test the concept with kids to define which sort of characters they would be after, and then mixed them up with the types of characters that adult fans would appreciate (these are generally not the same). Establishing the mix, we gather reference material and inspiration from the different sources, and then I sketch up a quick image of an iconic version of that character.

Once the range is determined, we look into which new elements need to be developed, go through a series of meetings to ensure we have the budget to develop all the new molds we need, and then divide new elements





up amongst the team to either be sculpted or drawn up and developed in collaboration with our team of engineers.

While the new pieces are developed, colors and graphics are discussed and briefed so Michael can start work on bringing the characters to life.

Throughout the process I have to check in meetings with the team, to guide the art direction of the elements and graphics, and to check everything is going according to plan.

Not only are the designers responsible for creative side of the development, there are also a lot of specifications and documents that have to be completed for hand over to our production teams.

I am really only touching on the tip of the iceberg here, as there are so many processes and tasks that go on during the development that I can't mention everything, but as you can imagine elements need to be "systemized and measured", packaging and poster layouts need to be briefed and approved, everything needs to be costed, products have to be tested for quality and safety... the list is ongoing.

Each CMS has minifigs from a variety of different genres or themes; are these in any way used to determine the viability of new main play themes? Or are these mainly to increase the flexibility of those that already exist? For example, series 1 through 3 have now given us Cowboys and Indians that could almost allow for a sub-theme of Wild West... or is this a test to see whether the old TLG theme in this genre could be revived?

Not really... what we have wanted to do is really just introduce a whole host of characters that aren't and may never be available in any other line... differentiation is the key to this concept.

There are some characters that are just so appealing, cute, or funny in themselves, but they may not necessarily lend themselves to something that would make a great building sets, the circus characters, for example. Yes, a Clown or a Ringmaster may make cute collectible characters, but as a theme, Circus is a little too niche to justify launching a whole range of building toys around it.

Some characters are in the assortment to expand on existing themes like LEGO City, with new everyday characters; others are there as army builders, like Spartans and Elves etc, and others are there for their sheer novelty factor... like Gorilla man or Mime Artist, to add a little humor to the line.

But all in all, we want all the characters to be inspiring in themselves, and spark of consumers imaginations, so kids and adults can rush to their LEGO bins and start creating new environments and vehicles for these new characters that they have never owned before: "I have just got to create a prehistoric world for my caveman... or a silly car for my clown!"

This doesn't mean that some of these characters or similar characters will not wind up in a playset or themes later on, but it is definitely not our intention as a starting point; we are developing what is right for this range first and foremost. However, any insights we do learn along the way can of course be beneficial to future developments or concepts.

Aside from the core target market of children have you been surprised at the level of enthusiasm for these minifigs that has been evident in the AFOL community?

No... lol! We kind of expected it, and also purposely targeted it! It has to be said the response has been phenomenal, so we are extremely happy and grateful for the support and enthusiasm, but also the reassurance that, yes, we have been doing our jobs properly! ;)

We have really worked extremely hard to get some characters into this assortment that would really appeal to you guys, and to be honest it has probably been one of the more difficult aspects of this project... the amount of presentations that I have been in where characters like the Cheerleader have been questioned, and we have really had to fight to keep them in there. You can imagine my delight when I saw she was the Fan No.1 favorite on the Eurobricks pole, so it was well worth the battle and to be able to do a nice smug "I told you so" to the doubters! ;)

So thank you so much for backing us. We really, really appreciate it!

Like most AFOLs, the number of new parts and accessories within the CMS has been a huge boon. What, if any, consideration has been given to this aspect within the design process?

We have really looked into what accessories are really essential to help make the characters both super appealing and super iconic. We also have to balance out how many real "novelty" elements are developed for one specific purpose... i.e. the Clown's Horn in series 1... with elements that can be used for multiple characters... like the Skater or the Nurse's wig... as well as trying to re-use existing elements in new colours or different clever ways.





Since the initial release of Series 1, AFOLs have gone to great efforts to achieve the accolade of NPU (Nice Parts Usage) when combining different aspects of these minifigs in new and interesting ways. Have you had much exposure to how the online community has adapted your designs and has anything you have seen surprised you?

We love keeping an eye on what you guys are up to with all the stuff we develop; the Eurobricks Minifigure Vignette competitions are awesome, where fans build the characters and accessories into funny little scenarios. There are so many cool things I can't think of a specific example, but I can assure you there is plenty more characters and pieces on the way, that you are going to have a lot of fun with!

On average, how long does it take to design a series of minifigs, and is it true that the designs for a number of series are ready quite some time in advance of official release?

Oh that is a bit of a tricky one to answer... Once the project has been given the green light and all the frames have been agreed, then the design process itself is probably around 2 to 3 months per series for the actual characters, and they kind of overlap one series into the next. But then there are the production approval processes and all the packaging stuff to attend to as well.

And yes the designs are well underway! We are currently working on Series 6, 7, and 8

and all characters are locked on those collections. Series 6 is completed from a design perspective and we are cracking on with the elements and decos for Series 7 as we speak. So to illustrate how far ahead we are, we are working on Series 7 as Series 3 is just hitting retail shelves.

At this time, we are currently in the grip of Series 3 madness with early releases being snapped up before the official release in January 2011. Series 4 images have been released and even now people are speculating on the contents of Series 5 and 6... do you realize the monster you have created?! But seriously, have the designs for these been developed and if so to what level?

He he! We love the monster we have created... and we love the enthusiasm you guys have for finding out what is coming next. It is great hearing your reactions and seeing the poles when you see the little guys for the first time!

As mentioned earlier, up to series 8 is locked as far as characters are concerned... and no, I am not going to give anything away! Yes, there are characters we have spotted on certain wish lists; yes, there are characters you are going to be expecting, along with several surprises that you won't have seen coming!

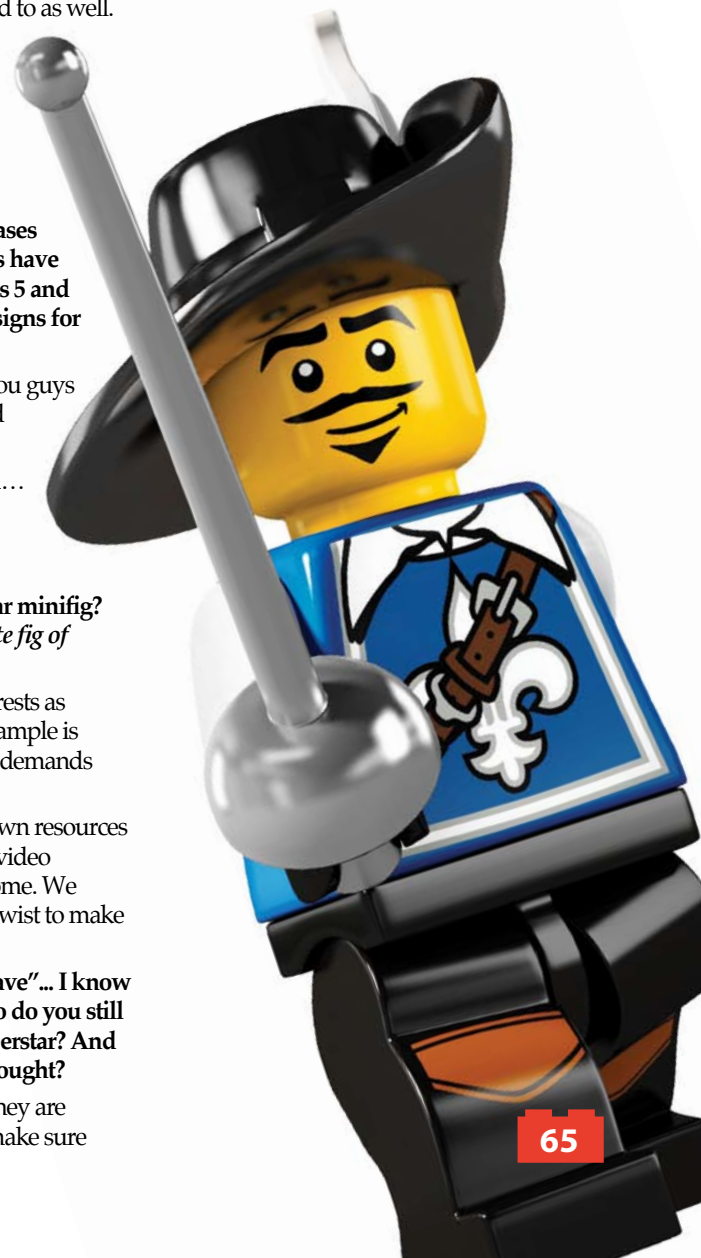
Could you share some of the sources of inspiration used to create a particular minifig? (perhaps focus on the inspiration / design steps involved in particular favourite fig of yours)

We draw on different sources of inspiration and we all have our own key interests as well that help us bring different ideas and inspiration to the table. Niels, for example is our history guru, whereas I'm the more fashionable member of the team — who demands complete creative control over all things girly!

So we each have our own little specialist field or passion and draw from our own resources and knowledge. There is a lot of searching the Internet, Google-ing, YouTube video watching, and also bringing in products, books, photos, or magazines from home. We basically aim to make everything as iconic as possible with a nice little LEGO twist to make sure it has its own little bit of uniqueness and charm.

Each of the Series has had one or more universally acclaimed as the "must have"... I know you must design each fig to be equally attractive to the consumer, but even so do you still get that feeling when you are working on a design that it will be the true superstar? And if so have you ever found that another design was more popular than you thought?

We do aim to have our little super stars and you will be able to spot them, as they are generally the ones used in the foreground on the packaging! But we want to make sure



You can go to Jason's blog here:
<http://jasbrick.wordpress.com/> or
scanning the QR code!



there is someone in there for everyone, and a really nice balance, which is great to see that there are also disagreements within the community on who is best; it shows we are catering for different consumers.

It is also funny when we are designing the characters, as we all have our own favourites and we don't agree. Some characters also really blossom as they are developed; a figure that could be perceived as a bit too generic or boring is given a cheeky little expression and a glint in his eye and then everyone loves him!

Over the last few years it is my opinion that minifig design within the main play themes has developed dramatically. Don't get me wrong, I have always loved the aesthetic and design of the minifig; however, we seem to have had the benefit of new ideas and maybe new technology. Do you agree, and is this anything to do with the focus on minifigs that the CMS represents?

Minifigures in general have been one of my main focus areas from the minute I started working on Playthemes. They were something I had loved so much as child, and I was becoming extremely frustrated watching them kind of being neglected from the sidelines, while I was working on Klikits.

When I was transferred to Playthemes, it was one of my main missions to sort them out and get them back on track. Minifigure wigs, accessories, and graphics were all over the place and extremely inconsistent, their facial expressions were all mean, grumpy and aggressive, which I felt really needed to be addressed. Everything else in LEGO was so neat and precise and perfect and the design direction on minifigures had not been kept under control.

I set about cleaning all of that up with the design team and started to make sure we were given enough money and resources to put more effort into making them more appealing and attractive. This has culminated this year in the development of a Minifigure Styleguide (for internal use only) that sets down rules and guidelines on every aspect of designing a minifigure, how it should look in any media, and how they should be communicated, animated, illustrated, etc. moving forward.


The attention to detail and execution of the minifigures has been emphasized across all themes in recent years. I just think it is probably much more evident in the collectible series, as this is the first time consumers have ever seen minifigures and their accessories in such a wide variety and huge abundance.

I know that a lot of designers include elements within designs that have personal significance to them or make "in-jokes". There are rumours that this is the case with the CMS, would you care to comment ;-)?

There are one or two... all the designers have pretty much got their names or initials somewhere on one of the minifigures; The Cheerleader is my baby, and a complete favorite of mine so the M on her top stands for Matthew; Laurence's surname "Dawes" appears on the Nurse's clipboard; the G.T on the lifeguard's swimsuit is for Gitte Thorsen; and PA770 on the Demolition Dummies license plate is for "Patto," Michael Patton's nickname. There are a few other characters based on friends, family members, and colleagues. A very good Canadian friend of mine will be appearing in a series coming to a store near you sometime soon, so keep your eyes peeled for that one!

The format of blind packaging is well established in other collectible markets (i.e., trading cards), however, it was a surprise to many that the minifigs would be sold in this way. Many have found ways around this (barcode and identification marking crib sheets), but do you feel that this aspect of the product is important?

As mentioned earlier, the surprise packaging has been fundamentally crucial to this project. If we hadn't sold the line in this way, there would be no Magicians, Lifeguards, Cheerleaders, Disco Dancers, Mariachis, Mime Artists etc.

I am prepared to give you one sneaky little clue to one of my favorite up and coming characters... our little caveman friend from Series 1, may be getting a little female counterpart sometime soon! ;) 





Bricks by the Bay 2011



"Creative Combinations"
March 25-27, 2011
Santa Clara, California



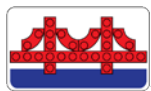
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Touristbot

Article by Jon Lazar

Photography by Jon Lazar
and Joe Meno

Touristbot
by Jon, 35
White Plains, New York
Since you've been spending the day taking pictures of Lego, why not let a MOC take a picture of

When deciding to attend BrickFair, I decided I needed to build a new piece. With my convention experience, I knew about how people react to different LEGO sculptures and how thousands of pictures appear after each convention, so I felt that it would only be fair if the LEGO model I built took pictures of the attendees. So the concept for Touristbot was born.

The high concept of Touristbot was a MINDSTORMS robot that could drive around and take pictures. Knowing the crowds of previous conventions I had attended, I knew Touristbot would not be able to wander the floor for most of Brickfair, but perhaps there would be opportunity at some of the slower times or other future use.


As I began construction on the robot and the framework began to come together, the need to give Touristbot a friendlier visage became obvious as the structure took shape. Adding arms and a head made from Bionicle parts gave him a more human look, but it didn't quite have the look I wanted. It wasn't until I found clothes from Build-A-Bear Workshop that it took on the humorous look that would attract attention amongst the other robots on display. Veering from the gray and white color scheme of MINDSTORMS NXT with a bucket hat, sunglasses, and a bright Hawaiian shirt, the clothes gave Touristbot a unique and humorous look.

The addition of the more human look also received a more utilitarian usage by making the arms part of the mechanism. Touristbot's right arm would become the trigger for taking pictures. This became the most complex part of the entire robot design. Going through multiple revisions as I worked out different ways to trigger the camera, none of them seemed to work. By focusing on pushing down on the button, the arm grew, but none of the mechanisms would work, and the rare ones that did would not work in multiple succession. It wasn't until I used a worm gear and gear box that I discovered it could drag an angled Technic piece across the top of the camera and trigger the shutter button.

Originally, Touristbot was going to take pictures on its own at regular intervals. When looking at the unused arm, it seemed a bit vestigial and I gave it a button to give it a fuller look. This button then was given the ability to trigger the camera in addition to the timer. This one little change completely altered the usability of Touristbot by adding user interaction to its process.

When Touristbot arrived at Brickfair, people weren't quite sure what to make of it. They just saw camera flashes going off every few minutes while they were setting up their MOCs. It wasn't until kids started checking it out that it began to garner interest. Over the course of three days, children lined up to press the button and have Touristbot take a silly picture of them. After three days and almost 2000 pictures, Touristbot bid his adoring fans good-bye, but continued to reach out to them from beyond Washington, D.C.

Touristbot gained an online presence and fanbase on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/touristbot>) and Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/touristbot/>) to share the pictures with after the event. By garnering interest, Touristbot was asked to attend other events, like EventCamp, LEGO Fun at Lyndhurst Manor, and NYC FIRST Robotics Competition. Touristbot became able to reach out to people outside the events through social media and help promote not only itself, but the events as well.

Touristbot gave a MOC eye view of Brickfair and let attendees see what it was like from the perspective of a LEGO sculpture. Part MINDSTORMS, part art piece, and part social media, Touristbot reaches out beyond the table and engages people in unique ways by turning the tables on them. 



Some construction photos of Touristbot, including the shutter button 'finger' seen in the bottom photo.



You can see Touristbot's Flickr gallery by scanning this QR code!



Jesper Jørgen

is an Advertising Photographer who has worked with LEGO® products for Advance agency since 1984.

The Train image was built and shot in July 1996 on 5"x7" film and printed in 1997.

Set:

The set was built on wood plates painted with a sponge in four different grey tones, with mountains built in Oasis (green foam material used for flower decoration), then painted in grey / blue tones. The set used three different sizes of small stones (used in aquariums)

Lighting:

Approximately 50 small theater tungsten spots were mounted above, 1 big indirect flash mounted in the ceiling of studio with blue filter, 6 flash mounted from behind through a white 10x20 feet diffusion silk, 1 flash softbox 4x8 feet from camera.

No computers were used on this image.

Question from Jesper:

Can you count how many minifigures are in this layout? 

*Setbuilding and Photo: Jesper Jørgen
Agency: Advance
AD: Alex Stougaard*





A Brick for Small Children

Article by Kristian Hauge, LEGO Idea House

Photography by Megan Rothrock

When the LEGO Group launched the LEGO® DUPLO® brick in 1969, it wasn't the first time the LEGO Group created a large plastic brick intended for small children.

In 1950, a year after the LEGO Group launched the first Automatic Binding Bricks, they launched a product called LEGO Plastic-Building bricks. These bricks were much bigger than the Automatic Binding Bricks and were intended for children aged 1-5 years. The bricks were marketed as "the perfect bricks for kindergartens."



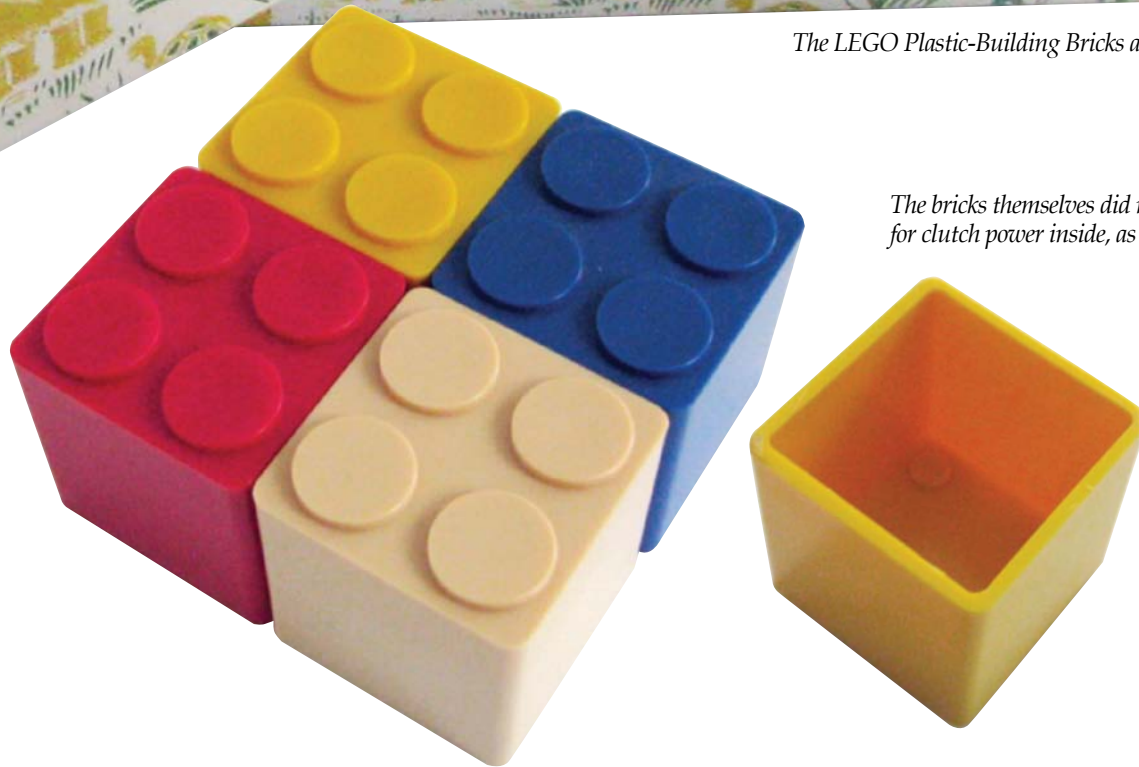
Well-known boy

To further illustrate the target group, there was a picture of a small boy playing with the bricks on the packaging. The boy isn't just a random selected model; it is LEGO founder Ole Kirk Kristiansen's grandson and current owner of the LEGO Group, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen. During his childhood, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen modeled on several LEGO boxes from the 1950s and 60s, however the picture on the LEGO Plastic-Building bricks is the very first time he was shown on the packaging of a LEGO product.

A very young builder!



The LEGO Plastic-Building Bricks as they were packaged.



The bricks themselves did not have the tubes for clutch power inside, as seen below.

No immediate success

The larger Plastic-Building bricks were produced from 1950-55. The fact that the bricks were produced for only six years suggests that the product never really caught on with the consumers at the time. Maybe one of the reasons can be found in the fact that the Plastic-Building brick couldn't be combined with the smaller Automatic Binding Bricks or its successor from 1953, the LEGO brick. Gone but not forgotten, in 1969 the concept was revised and the LEGO Group made sure that the ability to combine larger building bricks with the LEGO brick would be possible. The LEGO DUPLO Brick was born! This characteristic was one of the many reasons for the huge success of the LEGO DUPLO brick. **b**



Not Quite LEGO

It's time for another edition of "Not Quite LEGO" –the column that takes a look at some of the other toys out there that are "not quite LEGO." No, we're not talking about MegaBlocs, but about other toys that are sometimes similar to LEGO, or may be of interest to LEGO fans in general!



Xevoz was a unique action figure line created by Hasbro in 2004 that has been called "The greatest action figure line nobody knew about." These figures might be of interest to fans of Bionicle and Hero Factory because, like Bionicle and Hero Factory, it lets you build the figure. Rather than giving you generic building pieces, like Bionicle, it gives you various body pieces, based on the STIKFAS figure body (see *BrickJournal* #7 for my article on STIKFAS). By using the general STIKFAS body design, but at a larger scale, made the figures more durable than a STIKFAS figure (which were at times quite fragile) and incredibly poseable. The interesting part was that each set gave you many extra pieces so you could make a choice of how to put the figure together and not just extra weapons and accessories, but extra arms, legs, and even heads. Because you could also combine with parts from other figures, customization choices were virtually unlimited. Every figure also came with a sticker sheet to allow further customization. Most figures even came with a humorous "Gag Piece" as an option to be used on the figure, such as a snowman or teddy bear head, or accessories like a hockey stick, guitar, or an oversized magnet and even a "Kick Me" sign.

Xevoz: The Original Hero Factory!

*Article and Photography
by Greg Hyland*



Game tumbler.

Another interesting thing about this toy line was that it wasn't just trying to be an action figure line, but also a battle game. Each figure came with pieces that represented each weapon or ability the figure would have, the pieces were to be put together to create a specialized "tumbler." Each player rolled their tumbler, like a dice, and determined if they scored a "hit" against the other figure. If you scored a hit, then a piece of the losing figure has a piece taken off until they had no pieces left — making

games turn out very much like the Black Knight "It's just a flesh wound" scene from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*! Some larger sets even came with cardboard game maps, which gave various figures extra game bonuses.

However, collectors and fans of the line were more interested in the customization and design factor of the figures, rather than the playability of the game.

Originally, the figures characters were divided into six "Species," such as "Neo-Sapiens" (Humans), "Meta-Beasts" (Animals), "Sectoids" (Insects), "Hyperfurries" (Elementals), "Biomechas" (Cyborgs), and "Unnaturals" (Undead monsters). Later came two more Species, "Reptosaurs" (Dragons/Dinosaurs) and "Arcasters" (Sorcerers). However, only one Reptosaur and Arcaster figure was made for the fourth wave before the line was cancelled.

Neo-Sapiens included some of the more generic figures of the line, with figures that looked like generic "Space Marine-type" figures (In fact, I've come across some eBay dealers that have listed some of these figures as *Halo* figures!). Later on, these groups "diversified" more with figures like ninjas, cowboys, and even a superhero.

Meta-Beasts were "Were-Beast" type figures, with wolves, jaguars, eagles, and, my favorite, a gorilla! The Sectoids were similar to the Meta-Beasts, but using insect designs like spiders and scorpions. The usually had body parts that allowed for six or eight arms or legs.

The Hyperfurries group was comprised of figures made of fire, ice, or even electricity. A standout design element of this group was the use of transparent plastic to make the limbs or accessories. While these figures looked great, the one drawback was sometimes the transparent plastic was a little more brittle and tended to break a little more easily.

Biomechas were a group of well-armed robots. The standout figure of this group was a larger robot that (somewhat awkwardly) "transformed" into a car!

In my opinion, the best figures of the entire Xevoz line were the Unnaturals. Originally this group was mostly variations on a skeleton body, but later on used other monsters, such as vampires, mummies, and even a well-armed phantom. If you like monster action figures, then some of these figures alone are worth adding to your collection!



Neo-Sapiens.



Meta-Beasts.




Unnaturals.



Biomechas.



Hyperfurries.

The Xevoz line lasted four waves of figures; however, the fourth line was only released in 2005 in Asia and on-line retailers in North America. Despite a cult-following and larger-than-expected on-line sales, there are seemingly no plans to bring the Xevoz line back. Details that a fifth and sixth line of over a dozen new figures was planned came out when design artwork found its way on-line. Finished figures prototypes are said to exist in the offices of the STIKFAS Headquarters in Singapore. But limited retail interest (Toys R Us was often the only store to carry these figures) and the fact they weren't based on an existing property or had any spin-off movies or TV shows, doomed this line to fade away. Still, thanks to places like eBay, someone interested in collecting these figures can still find them, and at often a reasonable price. 

The Top Five Xevoz Figures You SHOULD have!

There were 30 different Xevoz figures made, but here's my list of the top five:

Inferno Fury (*right*)

Inferno Fury is a fire elemental issued as a Deluxe Figure from Xevoz Wave 1. Comprised mostly of red and orange translucent plastic parts, the figure used a few opaque pieces, including ingeniously designed upper body rings that look as if they are floating around the figure. Inferno Fury comes with optional heads (including a large flaming eye-ball!), wings, hands, weapons, and even a fiery forearm projectile-firing missile launcher (the kinda sort of standard for action figures).



Thunder Shaman (*right*)

A gorilla! That alone should be enough of a reason for this figure! But if you needed another reason, it might be that one of its weapons is a banana peel.



Franken'punker (*right*)

As much as I love gorillas, I love Frankenstein's Monster, which is really what this Wave 4 figure is. I'm glad that this figure was added to, in a way, go along with the vampire (Hemo Goblin), werewolf (Moon Stalker), and mummy (Crypt Curse) figures from earlier waves to create the Xevoz group of classic monsters. The addition of a guitar and an optional skull head with bolts arranged like a mohawk makes this character the Franken-punker.



Tomb Wraith (*below*)

Tomb Wraith is a fiery winged skeleton released as a Basic figure in Wave 2. It reuses the standard skeleton body that was seen in two Wave 1 figures. But in my opinion, you can't have too many skeleton figures!



Iron Spectre (*below*)

Using transparent green to represent the phantom body, and tough looking black and red armor, Iron Spectre is possibly my favorite figure from the line. This figure also came exclusively with a "Transporter" case — a plastic carrying case that holds figures and parts, and folds open to be a "battle arena" of sorts. The case included a built-in device that spins the game tumblers for you (a function both interesting and lame all at the same time!)



Community Ads

As a service to the LEGO Fan community, we are now providing advertising to community-specific vendors. Those interested in advertising here can contact Joe Meno for rates at admin@brickjournal.com, title: BrickJournal Advertising,




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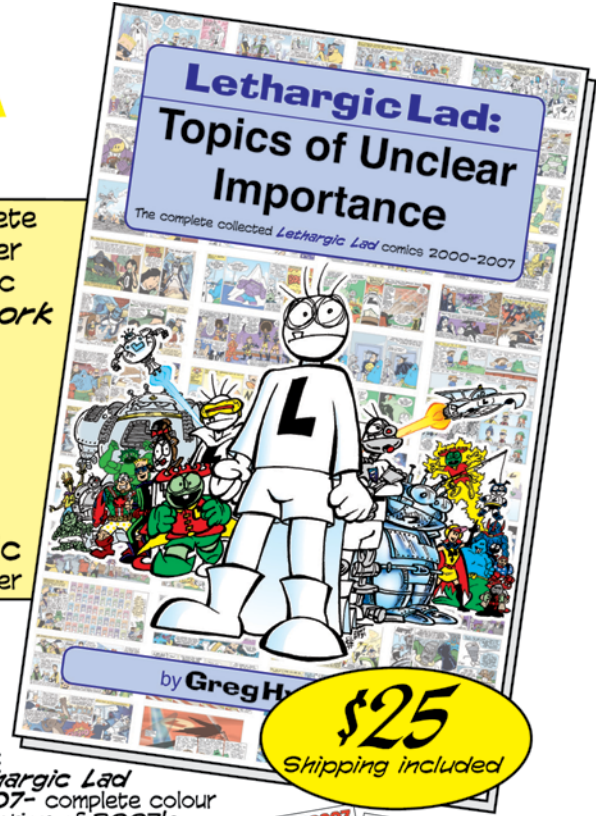
Hey Kids! Comics!

by *Greg (AFOLs) Hyland*

Lethargic Lad: Topics of Unclear Importance is a complete collection of seven years of Lethargic Lad comics! Presenting over 350 strips from the lethargiclad.com website and all the Lethargic Lad three-page comics that originally appeared in the pages of *Dork Tower* comics.

"Greg just gets it right: the situations, the ongoing storylines, the characterizations, the understated but gut-busting payoffs... Fans of the Lad are fans for life!"

-John Kovalic
Dork Tower



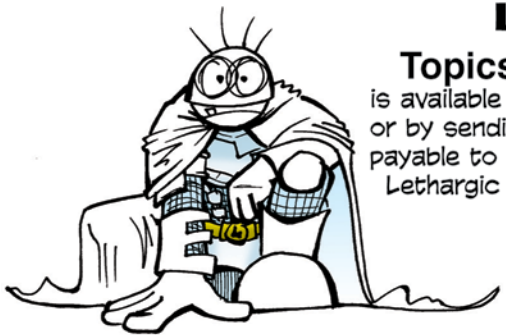
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Lethargic Lad: Topics of Unclear Importance

is available exclusively at www.lethargiclad.com or by sending check or money order made payable to "Greg Hyland" to:

Lethargic Lad: Topics of Unclear Importance
 60 East Ave. N.
 Hamilton, Ontario
 Canada
 L8L 5H5



I don't know how Joe Meno does six of these a year.

Actually, putting together this issue was similar to making a film. As with my animation work, I thought about the things I'd want to see in a *BrickJournal* animation issue — who I'd want brought on board, what sorts of content I'd find fascinating, and how best to strike a balance between entertainment, education, and fun.

Another similarity to filmmaking can be found in the way that *BrickJournal* is a collaborative effort. I have to give a big thank-you to everyone who contributed their time, thoughts, and images to the articles you've just read. This magazine just wouldn't be what it is without the community behind it.

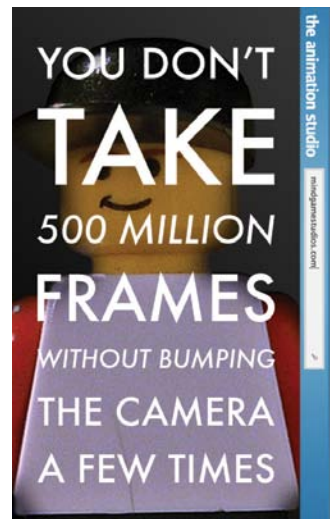
It's both exciting and challenging to stay on top of all things LEGO animation (a personal mission of mine). Our stop-motion coterie is relatively young and unassuming, and we exist slightly outside of the AFOL spectrum — heck, the majority of LEGO animators aren't even "A"'s yet. But there's no go-to source that can document our history quite the way *BrickJournal* can, so it's neat that this issue now serves as a snapshot of brick film history... the first of many, perhaps?

To that end, I have to extend my thanks and appreciation to Joe Meno, for basically giving me a blank canvas with which to present the world of LEGO animation to you. I hope you're as inspired by these talented folks as I am. And if you decide to try making a film because of it, be sure to send a link my way!

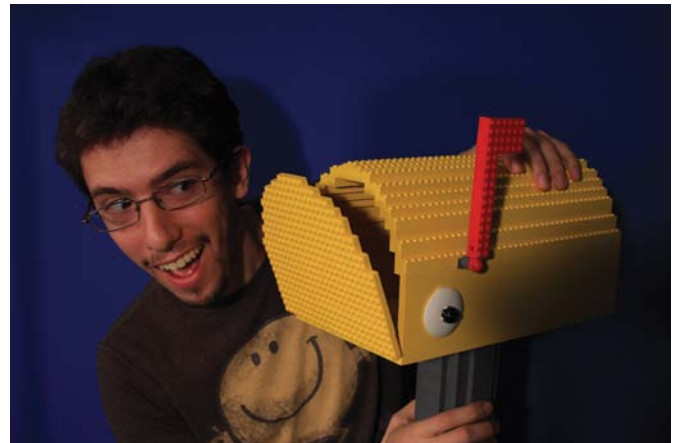
Thanks also to all my friends and family, for their constant and unending support and patience. You guys give me honest feedback, keep me sane, and most importantly, help me sort bricks. You're the ones I do this for.

...I believe this is the part where I say, "til next issue, later!"

- David Pagano
contact@paganomation.com



Last Word



An advertisement for "Kaminoan's Fine Clonier Decals" from the website www.fineclonier.com. The background is a blue, futuristic, industrial setting. In the foreground, five LEGO minifigures are displayed, each with custom decal designs. From left to right: a red and white figure, a purple and black figure, a tan figure holding a glowing pink lightsaber, a red and white robot-like figure, and a grey and black figure. The text "KAMINOAN'S FINE CLONIER DECALS" is prominently displayed in large, stylized white letters across the top. Below the figures, the text reads "Kaminoan's Fine Clonier. For all your minifig decal customization needs."



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Focuses on the new **LEGO ARCHITECTURE** line, with a look at the new sets designed by **ADAM REED TUCKER**, plus interviews with other architectural builders, including **SPENCER REZKALLA**. Also, behind the scenes on the creation of **POWER MINERS** and the **GRAND CAROUSEL**, a **LEGO BATTLESHIP** over 20 feet long, reports from **LEGO** events worldwide, and more!

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BrickJournal goes undersea with looks at the creation of **LEGO's** new **ATLANTIS SETS**, plus a spotlight on a fan-created underwater theme, **THE SEA MONKEYS**, with builder **FELIX GRECO**! Also, a report on the **LEGO WORLD** convention in the Netherlands, **BUILDER SPOTLIGHTS**, **INSTRUCTIONS** and ways to **CUSTOMIZE MINIFIGURES**, **LEGO HISTORY**, and more!

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A look at school sculptures by **NATHAN SAWAYA**, builder **MARCOS BESSA's** creations, **ANGUS MACLANE's** **CubeDudes**, a **Nepali Diorama** by **JORDAN SCHWARTZ**, instructions to build a school bus for your **LEGO** town, minifigure customizations, how a **POWER MINERS** model became one for **ATLANTIS**, building standards, and much more!

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Discover the world of stop-motion **LEGO FILMS**, with brickfilmer **DAVID PAGANO** and others spotlighting LEGO filmmaking, the history of the medium and its community, interviews with the makers of the films seen on the **LEGO CLUB SHOW** and **LEGO.com**, and instructions on how to film and build puppets for brick flicks! Plus how to customize minifigures, event reports, step-by-step building instructions, and more!

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Looks at the **LEGO MECHA** genre of building, especially in Japan! Feature editor **NATHAN BRYAN** spotlights mecha builders such as **SAITO YOSHIKAZU**, **TAKAYUKI TORII**, **SUKYU** and others! Also, a talk with **BRIAN COOPER** and **MARK NEUMANN** about their mecha creations, mecha building instructions by **SAITO YOSHIKAZU**, our regular columns on minifigure customization, building, event reports, and more!

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Focuses on **STEAMPUNK!** Feature editor **GUY HIMBER** gives a tour with a look at his work, **DAVE DeGOBBI**'s, **NATHAN PROUDLOVE**'s, and others! There's also a look at the history of LEGO Steampunk building, as well as instructions for a Steampunk plane by **ROD GILLIES!** Plus our regular columns on minifigure customization, building tips, event reports, our step-by-step "You Can Build It" instructions, and much more!

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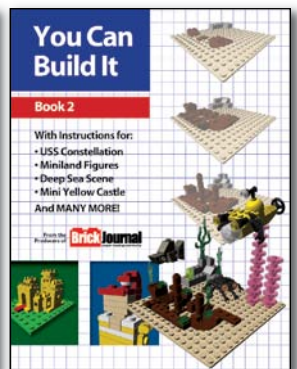
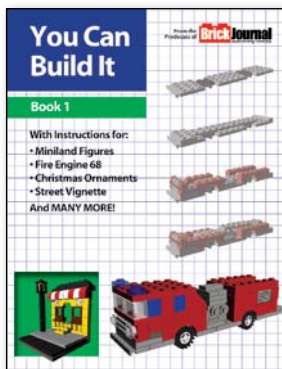
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