

How Harry Potter™ and an amazing demo led to LEGO® *Star Wars*™: The Video Game

"When the team shared with me that very first LEGO® *Star Wars*™ demo, that's probably the seminal key moment in my career. The hairs on the back of my neck just stood up, and I just knew we had something remarkable and special."

Tom Stone, the recently retired co-founder and managing director of TT Games, was among a number of key people who spoke with LEGO podcast Bits N' Bricks recently in a wide-ranging series of interviews about the birth of LEGO *Star Wars*: The Video Game, the creation of TT Games, and the studio's growth, evolution, and future.

The interviews include insight into key moments in the history of TT Games and its approach to LEGO video games, which soon became a standard of excellence for family-friendly games and – for a time – the LEGO Group's core approach to game development.

The inspiration for the LEGO *Star Wars* video game came from a number of places. The first spark came before Tom Stone was even at the LEGO Group. He said his work at Electronic Arts on an early Harry Potter™ game helped him realize just how underserved the children's market was for video games.

Later, when Stone and Jonathan Smith were working at the LEGO Group on games, the two worked together to try and decipher what a LEGO game could and should be.

Around 2003, the duo approached developer Traveller's Tale to work on a new game based on the Knight's Kingdom LEGO theme set.

Jon Burton, the studio's founder, said they decided to take on the project because a contract for another game had fallen through. There was no expectation that this LEGO game would sell well.

But then Stone had a change of heart about basing the game on Knight's Kingdom. He too was worried it wouldn't sell well.

"It just occurred to me that, you know, if you were a Jedi Knight™ and you had control with the force over a pile of LEGO bricks, what could you do with that?" he said. "And that was really the starting point for thinking that *Star Wars* and LEGO would actually make a really good video game."

Tom Stone managed to convince LucasArts to let the game use the *Star Wars* IP with the help of a powerful demo, Stone said. But then they ran into a much bigger problem.

Right around when all of this was going on, the LEGO Group as a whole was going through some tough times, and the company decided to refocus its business back on the core brick experience. That meant cutting things like apparel, theme parks, and the video games division.

So, Stone decided to try and rescue the still-in-development game from the LEGO Group.

To do that, he had to form a small, independent studio with the help of a silent partner and a couple of people at the LEGO Group. He also had to convince the LEGO Group he had the money to fund the rest of the game's development. That meant he had to put his house on the line. In return, he asked for the LEGO Group to give him the exclusive right to make LEGO games for a period of time.

Fortunately, he succeeded, and his newly founded Giant Interactive was soon overseeing the production of LEGO *Star Wars*.

"The LEGO team that I was negotiating with were incredibly supportive, fantastic to work with," he said. "I never had a moment's hesitation that, you know, once we'd agreed to terms, I could then make a start and not be fearful that they would change their mind or anything else like that."

Once the game was finished, Stone and the rest of the team ran into another significant problem: No one seemed to want to publish the game.

THQ, Activision, and Electronic Arts all turned down a chance to publish the game. Fortunately, Eidos and Ubisoft were interested, and Giant decided to team up with Eidos on that first game.

When it hit in 2005, it quickly became a commercial and critical success. It was so successful that Burton acquired Giant Interactive and merged it with his studio to form TT Games.

The run of LEGO *Star Wars* games – which hit in 2005, 2006, and 2007 – was so popular that LucasArts approached TT Games to ask them if they could use the same treatment to create a LEGO Indiana Jones game. They wanted a game that could go live alongside the new movie in 2008, Stone said.

The success of the *Star Wars* games also attracted the attention of Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, first to discuss creating a Batman™ game, but then to acquire TT Games.

Martin Tremblay, who was the president of Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment at the time, said it was an easy decision because TT Games were breaking records. He added that Kevin Tsujihara, who was the CEO and chairman of Warner Bros. Entertainment at the time, also saw that there was a lot of potential for TT Games at the company. He added that TT Games was one of the key pillars of helping to build up Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment at the time.

"They were bringing a huge amount of revenue per year and numbers of units," he said. "I mean, every single game was selling five, six million units at the beginning, which was unbelievable."

Over the next six years, TT Games created 14 games based on some of the biggest fictional properties in history, including Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, and Marvel.

That period – from about 2008 to about 2014 – was seen by many as a sort of golden era for the studio. It was also a time that helped to revitalize video games inside the LEGO Group.

"They have allowed a lot of folks in our leadership team, within the LEGO Group, to really understand the value of video games," said LEGO Group's Darryl Kelley, who worked with TT Games from 2008's LEGO Batman through to LEGO City Undercover in 2013."

It was around 2014 or so that the LEGO Group began to notice a drop in sales of some games and critics began to say the games were becoming formulaic.

Both TT Games strategic manager Jonathan Smith and Arthur Parsons, head of design at the studio, said that wasn't the case.

"We wince at the suggestion there is a formula and that there was ever a point where any of these games was made without imagination or spirit or a desire to do something new and to innovate or to take the games forward," Smith said.

Added Parsons: "We've made a lot of LEGO games, and I get that some people might think there's a formula. There really isn't. The formula is – work really, really hard to make the best game you can to really bring that IP to life in a way that's never been done before. And that's it, end of chat – put a game in a box, make sure people enjoy it."

But LEGO Group's Philip James said the dip in sales did lead the company to reexamine the number of games coming out from TT Games in such a short period. That, mixed with a desire to expand the breadth of experiences created by the studio, kicked off a new era that seemed to be about pushing game concepts further than ever before.

In 2015, LEGO Dimensions hit, thrusting LEGO video games into the thick of the toys-to-life genre. And in 2017, the company released LEGO Worlds, which dropped players into a world made entirely of bricks that could be pulled apart and put back together.

While the studio did continue its work on some traditional titles, like LEGO Jurassic World and LEGO The Incredibles, the pace began to slow a bit.

Last year marked the first year in the company's history that it didn't release a video game.

Instead, Smith said, they were focusing on building out what many believe will be a new studio masterpiece: *LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*.

"We know that what we're doing is building up anticipation for the results of what will have been an unprecedented investment and effort that's been made to create what will

be our biggest and best ever LEGO game with LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*," he said.

Parsons believes the game will become the "flag-bearer for a new era of LEGO video games."

And the LEGO Group's Philip James said that nothing is more important than the Skywalker Saga for the company right now.

Explore more...

In order of appearance

[Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone](#) - Wikipedia entry

[LEGO Knight's Kingdom](#) - Wikipedia entry

[LucasArts](#) - Wikipedia entry

[Giant Interactive](#) - Gamasutra article

[Traveller's Tales](#) - Wikipedia

[TT Games](#) - TT Games official website

[LEGO Star Wars: The Video Game](#) - Moby Games

[LEGO Dimensions](#) - Wikipedia entry

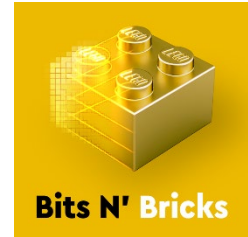
[LEGO Worlds](#) - Steam

[LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga](#) - *Star Wars* official website

Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 1 Episode 9: TT Games

February 3, 2021 · 1:08:04



Prologue – 00:00

Announcer

Please note that this episode of Bits N' Bricks contains instances of misuse of the LEGO® trademark, which must always be used as an adjective and never a noun. As a reminder, it is never appropriate to refer to the company that designs and produces LEGO brand products as LEGO, rather the correct name for the company overall is the LEGO Group.

Announcer

I hope that was severe enough. Was it severe enough?

Studio Engineer

Yeah, that was great then. We got it.

Announcer

Alright. On with the show.

Tom Stone

When the team shared with me that very first LEGO *Star Wars* demo, that's probably the seminal key moment in my career. The hairs on the back of my neck just stood up and I just knew we had something remarkable and special.

Arthur Parsons

And pretty much everyone wanted to work with us. We used to sit there and go, Wouldn't it be great if? Excitement, I guess. And be able to work with those IPs is phenomenal.

Darryl Kelley

I think TT Games being the solid partner that they've been and the experts in what they do has allowed a lot of folks in our leadership team within the LEGO Group to really understand the value of gaming.

(Introduction)

Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 01:29

Ethan Vincent

Welcome to Bits N' Bricks, a podcast about all things, LEGO games. I'm Ethan Vincent-

Brian Crecente

- and I'm Brian Crecente. Together we look back at the rich 25-year history of LEGO games, chat with early developers, as well as seasoned studios who have all tackled the creation of video games for one of the most popular and respected toy companies in the world - the LEGO Group.

(Introduction music)

Ethan Vincent

All right, Brian, here we are another episode of Bits N' Bricks. And today it's exciting. We get to talk about something we both love, a game we both love - LEGO *Star Wars* and TT Games.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, TT Games. I think that there are people out there who maybe think that every game ever made by the LEGO Group or for the LEGO Group was essentially a TT game, which isn't true, but like, that's the impact that they've had.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, totally. I mean, it's become kind of synonymous with LEGO video games, and it has to do with that early 2005 hit that both you and I played with our sons. It's a huge deal. I remember exactly what that was like to load that up and to get started and just how cool it was to see the LEGO minifig and all the *Star Wars* stuff kind of work hand-in-hand. It was pretty exciting.

(LEGO *Star Wars* video game commercial)

Ethan Vincent

Let's dive straight into the history here, Brian. Tell me a little bit about TT Games and the development towards LEGO *Star Wars* and...man, there's a lot to talk about.

Brian Crecente

There is, yeah. So as we both have said, TT Games is sort of integral to the history of LEGO video games. And to understand that we really have to look at this big picture and how *Star Wars* came about. So LEGO video games have been around for about 25 years now. The concept of the LEGO video game has been around obviously even longer, but it

wouldn't be too surprising for some people to think that LEGO video games actually started a decade later and are the product of this single studio. That's the impact I think that LEGO *Star Wars: The Video Game* has had on developer TT Games, on the LEGO Group, and on the first *Star Wars* franchise and also, on so many iconic make-believe worlds and on video games themselves. It's so profound. I think that it really isn't surprising that on some level it dulls almost all other LEGO game creations by its sheer brilliance. While the LEGO Group has seen many successes over the past quarter of a century, in the realm of video games, none I think can really compare it to the attention and adoration created by LEGO *Star Wars* and the dozens of games that followed that creation.

Chapter 1: LEGO Interactive – 04:50

Ethan Vincent

And I think as with most great successes, the success of TT Games and its long line of titles was the result of many things; timing, wisdom, the right approach from the right creators at the right time. I mean it all comes together, you know? But in some ways an important part of that success, which was fueled by the tremendous success of that first 2005 LEGO *Star Wars* game, can be traced back to Tom Stone and some inspiration he found while working on a game at Electronic Arts.

Tom Stone

The last game that I worked on at Electronic Arts was the first Harry Potter game that came into the studio that I was running. And for the first time we asked young gamers to come in and play the game. We had done very little consumer testing or focus group testing. So we had lots of youngsters come into the studio and I was amazed at how smart, how dextrous, how savvy and intuitive these young gamers were. And I learned a lot from that, I actually thought, you know, there's a whole market here that's just underserved. Most of the kids' games that were being produced at that time, developed and produced at that time, weren't very good. And it just stuck in the back of my brain as I saw these kids playing these games. We just thought this is a really underserved market.

Ethan Vincent

I love how Tom Stone talks about these games. So he's talking about this idea of this massive underserved market still floating around in the back of his mind. And Tom Stone was then approached by the LEGO Group, which hired him to work on games for the company. But when he arrived, he discovered that video games seemed to be more about marketing the company's toys, than creating lasting experiences that could stand on their own. And Stone said he spent the next few years building out a new game team, tweaking the company's business model, and reaching out to new developers around the world, right, Brian?

Brian Crecente

Yeah. Jonathan Smith, who co-founded Giant Interactive with Tom Stone and would go on to head-up production at TT Games, said that one of the big directions at LEGO Group at the time he worked there alongside Stone, was also trying to sort of decipher what a LEGO game could and should be.

Jonathan Smith

The question being asked was what could a new kind of LEGO game be? We had some titles in development with external groups and we started up some more over those couple of years at LEGO Interactive, including the second in the LEGO Creator Harry Potter series - Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. And this was a year when Bionicle was really breaking through as such a great franchise. The LEGO Company were thinking and working very hard to create experiences and entertainment outside of the core plastic offerings with TV shows and movies. They were working on Galidor and launching Galidor as a true transmedia event that combined toys with TV, with video games. And while the brick-building experience in LEGO Creator was obviously a core to the meaning of the brand and unique and valuable, Tom was asking the question from a video games perspective, what else should we be to bring the idea of LEGO as an empowering creative space for children to let their imagination run free - to life as a video game, a compelling, relevant, exciting, cool video game for people who play video games who knew what good video games were, what could that be? And that was the question we were set to answering, and did so by drawing upon a very wide breadth, a very deep expertise across LEGO Company and through some of their academic partners as well.

Brian Crecente

So during those few years, the LEGO Group released a number of really memorable games, but Stone still felt like none of them were good enough to be the sort of breakthrough hits that he had envisioned. So now we're looking at around 2003, the LEGO Group starts looking at creating a new game and they're going to base it on Knight's Kingdom, which is one of the theme sets that they were coming out with, these are sort of the plastic LEGO bricks that they would release. And so they started talking to a group of developers at a studio called Traveller's Tales, according to Smith.

Jonathan Smith

Knight's Kingdom was their next big franchise development and launch. So it was very natural being part of LEGO Company at the time, that we'd want to try and find a video game experience that could support, reinforce and grow that franchise. So, yes, we were looking for developers to work on a Knight's Kingdom game in parallel with the consideration for what are LEGO video game should be. And we talked to Traveller's Tales initially about a Knight's Kingdom game.

Brian Crecente

We weren't able to talk to Traveller's Tales founder, Jon Burton, for this podcast, but I did have this sort of great email exchange with him. He noted that the main reason the company decided to take on this Knight's Kingdom project, was because a previous non-LEGO Group title at Traveller's Tales, this game called Haven: Call of the King, had sold so poorly that the sequel that they had planned on working on was actually canceled. And the studio found themselves in this position where they needed some sort of game to work on to replace it.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah. And Arthur Parsons now head of design at TT Games, was a designer at Traveller's Tales when the initial Knight's Kingdom pitch came in. The studio was already well-known for its work on several outside IPs and family-friendly titles like Toy Story and a Bug's Life. So it seemed like a good match with the LEGO Group. Parsons said when Tom Stone and Jonathan Smith were coming to discuss Knight's Kingdom, he was working on the studio's other title, which in general is viewed as the moneymakers of the two. But everyone in the studio was aware of the LEGO Group's early pitches.

Arthur Parsons

This is the old office, there was no meeting rooms, it was just open-plan like a barn. You imagine an old English barn in the countryside. So meetings kind of happened openly in front of everybody. I remember seeing strange men come into the building and I remember the discussion being - it was actually about Knight's Kingdom. I don't know if you remember the Knight's Kingdom range. It was obviously, yeah, people talking about it. It was exciting because, you know, we've all got grown up playing with LEGO bricks and there was a buzz in the air.

Ethan Vincent

And that buzz in the air that Arthur Parsons is talking about at Traveller's Tales on account of those meetings with the LEGO Group would continue, but Tom Stone noted that working internally on Knight's Kingdom was problematic because many at the LEGO Group in 2002 saw video games as a vehicle to sell more LEGO bricks and they didn't see video games as a piece of entertainment in their own right. Struggling with that notion that Knight's Kingdom may not be the best way to have a breakout hit, Stone started to become convinced that a specific external franchise might be the best way to go.

Tom Stone

And so I think in 2003, I said, we need a bigger canvas to write a statement about LEGO Games upon. I mean, it just occurred to me that, you know, if you were a Jedi Knight and you had control with the force over a pile of LEGO bricks, what could you do with that? And that was really the starting point for thinking that *Star Wars* and LEGO would actually make a really good video game.

(Music)

Brian Crecente

So you have this amazing idea that Tom Stone comes up with, this idea of piecing together LEGO Games with Traveller's Tales and the *Star Wars* franchise to make this product that he is convinced will be the breakout hit he's been looking for. And so the team is sort of diligently working on this with Traveller's Tales on this kind of early concept. But unfortunately, this is all going on when the rest of the LEGO Group was struggling. Both Tom Stone and Johnathan Smith tell us that the LEGO Group was going through some tough times in that period in the early two thousands. And in reaction to that, the company begins to sort of refocus on its core brick experience. And so what that means is they start cutting back on investments in things like apparel and like the theme parks, and unfortunately also video games. At the time, Smith tells us LEGO Interactive and its video game division was clearly viewed as this sort of peripheral to the core business.

Jonathan Smith

Within LEGO Interactive we were clearly a peripheral business to the long-standing LEGO Company, commercial activity of making wonderful products out of plastic in boxes and shipping them out to retailers across the world. So our plan for a growth in the portfolio of LEGO Games for the investments that we'd need to make with multiple different developers to support that, ran into conflict with that strategy at that time, which meant that Tom needed to find another way to bring those games to life.

Brian Crecente

So this other way is seeing through the lens of history seems like this caper almost. What it means is that Tom Stone has to go out, form a small, independent studio on his own and with the help of a partner, a silent partner, and a couple other people at the LEGO Group. And then he has to convince the LEGO Group that he and his partners have the money to fund a game that they're going to make. Then he has to win over the rights from the LEGO Group to make a LEGO game. And then he has to convince the LEGO Group to let him and his partners take the work that they'd already done at the LEGO Group, started at Traveller's Tales, and bring it with them so that Traveller's Tales can continue their work and continue developing the game.

Tom Stone

They believed the vision we had was the right vision for LEGO Company-

Ethan Vincent

Tom Stone speaking here.

Tom Stone

- thank goodness. And you know, I'll always thank them deeply for believing in us. So one of the things I had to prove to LEGO Company was that I had an amount of money that would pay for the development, pay for the marketing, pay for the cost of goods. The LEGO team that I was negotiating with were incredibly supportive, fantastic to work with. I never had a moment's hesitation that, you know, once we'd agreed terms, I could then make a start and not fearful that they would change their mind or anything else like that.

Ethan Vincent

Fortunately, Tom Stone had already won over LucasArts with an early demo that was created while he was still working at LEGO Interactive. That demo was a vertical slice of the title that showed off the introduction of *Star Wars*, all in LEGO brick form. And it was a demo that encapsulated all of the ideals of what would become the TT Games franchise later on. Stone talked to us about the demo's creation and some of its core ingredients.

Tom Stone

I spoke with the team at Traveller's Tales again and said, it'd be great if we could make a demo of this. So we went up and we gave them the brief, as to the sort of game that we were looking for. So we were looking for things like social play, you know, which we felt was really important for these young gamers. We didn't want them to just be sitting on their own in their bedrooms just playing these games on their own. We felt that being able to play a game with your brother or sister or, you know, with your dad or your mum would be a really cool thing to have. So that was included as part of the brief, we wanted the game to be accessible. So not too intimidating, you know, sometimes when you pick a controller up and within the first 20 seconds you're either killed or you just find it really too tough, the game's too hard to play. So we wanted it to be accessible. So that was another element. We obviously, because it's a LEGO game, we have to have the element of construction and deconstruction. Like how would deconstruction be if you had a lightsaber slashing it through a pile of LEGO or something constructed of LEGO, what would that look like? And then there was the whole imagination piece, so if you had a game that was, you know, you had no creative straight jacket at all, you could have complete freedom to be able to do anything you wanted to, what would that look like? And I think, you know, the opening sequence of LEGO *Star Wars* is when the music plays and the chairs dance on their own. And it was just, it was things like that, that the development team got in a heartbeat. And so they created the demo. And I have to say that to this day, that's probably the seminal key moment in my career when the team shared with me that very first LEGO *Star Wars* demo. And I just...the hairs on the back of my neck just stood up. And I just knew that we had something remarkable and special, and then tried to convince the rest of the world that we had something that was truly remarkable and special.

(Music)

Chapter 2: Giant Interactive – 19:06

Brian Crecente

You know, it's easy to forget when you talk about game development, how many people, how many ideas, how many long nights are involved in creating a game. Burton tells us that much of those core ideas tied to sort of the foundational work of this game and in turn sort of all the games that came after it, came from people like John Hodgkinson and James Cunliffe and Jeremy Pardon. He said he liked the idea of having a lot of different characters in the game each with their own abilities, because of something that he saw and played on an old ZX Spectrum, this old game called Thunderbirds. And so that's where some of that inspiration came from. So anyway, once the deal was made and Traveller's Tales were deep into development of the game, Giant Interactive still had one really big issue they had to solve. And that was, they needed to find someone who could publish and disseminate their game to retailers around the world.

Tom Stone

We took a trip to Los Angeles and we met with THQ, we met with Activision, and we met with Electronic Arts. We had already previously met with Ubisoft, and we had met with Eidos. I think they were the five publishers that we met with. I then received a phone call from Activision at the time, saying, really enjoyed the demo, but we don't think this game's going to succeed, so we're not, we don't want to be your distribution partner. I got a similar phone call from THQ saying, yeah you know, we think it's like an interesting idea, but we don't think it's that big an idea, so actually we don't want to be your distribution partner. And then because I'd worked for Electronic Arts, I thought, well, they'll be on board. You know, we'd already worked with Electronic Arts and some LEGO stuff. I thought they might be on board. They actually turned me down as well. So at this point I was thinking, Ooh, this could be interesting. So we've got this game that we were working on, developing it, and we're not going to be find a worldwide distribution partner. Anyway, Ubisoft and Eidos actually did say, they both said, we really believe in this and we'd love to work with you on it. And we decided to go with Eidos, part the reason we went with Eidos because they didn't have any other games. And we thought they will give us all their attention. And we think that's really good for this. I didn't want to be fifth on the list at, let's say an Activision or another company. I'd want to be the top of their list. This is the most important game that we're going to release in 2005. And that was true for Eidos - that was their most important worldwide game in 2005. You know, we got attention in Japan, the game was released out over there. It got an incredibly powerful release in Europe, and they did a fantastic job in North America. So that's how that happened.

Ethan Vincent

While they were able to find a publisher eventually, it was touch and go. And for Tom Stone, it was very personal. You know, he had invested a lot of his personal funds and even put his house on the line to get the funding for Giant Interactive. And if they couldn't

find a publisher, or if the game didn't do well, you know, there was a very good chance he would have lost it. But Stone said he kept his spirits up during those dark moments of rejection by going back to watch children test the game as the work continued on it.

Tom Stone

I had young gamers coming into the cottage where we worked and I just listened to their response, their reaction. They were screaming with delight as they were being able to be these Jedi Knights, slicing up the droids and anything made of LEGO, and fighting each other. And they were dropping in and dropping out two-player gameplay. And, I just watched them and thought this game's going to be successful. I just know it. Look at the reaction of these eight-year-old kids who are playing this game. They absolutely love it. Don't care what adults think. These kids love it. And that was proven to be true. And I just, I listened to them rather than listen to the adults if you like.

Brian Crecente

So it turns out that the team at Traveller's Tales and at Giant Interactive, and even at the LEGO Group, were all right. And some of those people who said this wasn't going to succeed were absolutely wrong. *LEGO Star Wars: The Video Game*, hit in 2005 to an overwhelmingly positive response. And it changed the way many viewed, not just LEGO games, but family-friendly games and movie-inspired games and even cooperative games. It took a bit of time though for the success of the game to actually sink in at the studio, Smith said.

Jonathan Smith

I mean, we were very pleased with the initial preview coverage and reviews. We were obviously like delighted with the game. We felt that was the game that we'd hoped for. And we were thrilled at the prospect of continuing to be able to make more games and make more games with Traveller's Tales as well. I don't think we knew that it was going to go as far as it did or as wide as it did. That would have been pure speculation. And we had too much work to do to speculate, (laughs) to keep things going and to move on from there. But, yeah, I think going in, you know, coming out of Christmas that year, I think we were starting to get sales indications and from the sales teams that this was getting traction in the market potentially for the long-term and see some of the money...also see some of the money come back, because there's obviously a lag between the money you invest and then the sales that are taken and the way that that gets passed through the chain. And...starting to feel it, but not thinking about where we would be in 2020, thinking about where we would be in 2006 and how we can get the GameCube version and how we can do more movies, in particular, movies that everyone really, really wanted to do. The original trilogy movies.

(Music)

Chapter 3: TT Games – 25:36

Ethan Vincent

Traveller's Tales founder, Jon Burton, said he believes the game made the LEGO Group, and I'm going to quote this: "Achingly cool, they had double digit growth immediately after we released the first LEGO *Star Wars* game." End of quote. So hearing that and also combined with the success of the game, eventually led to an offer by Burton to buy Giant Interactive, merging the two together in 2005 into TT Games. It also led to two more LEGO *Star Wars* titles in quick succession in 2006 and in 2007, as well as Tom Stone notes - a lot more interest from other companies.

Brian Crecente

Where Tom Stone had to go to LucasArts to pitch the idea of a LEGO *Star Wars* game and even present a demo, the opposite was true after that first game came out. It was LucasArts who actually came to Tom Stone with Indiana Jones. The new movie was hitting in 2008 and the company wanted a LEGO Indiana Jones game to come out alongside it, he said. The game developed essentially at the same time as LEGO Batman, became a chance for Traveller's Tales to prove to the world, and itself, that the popularity of its first three LEGO games wasn't driven solely by the *Star Wars* property, according to Smith.

Jonathan Smith

Once LEGO games starts to become a thing, once people go, Oh, what are you going to do next? And we're asking the same question and the teams ask the same question. And at Traveller's Tales, Jon Burton leading that company is asking the same question and we're having conversations looking further ahead now as we move from LEGO *Star Wars* to, what are we going to do next? What are we going to do? Where do we go from here? This seems to be working. Proving that it can work beyond *Star Wars* is absolutely the next problem to solve. So the steps beyond that are, can we do that with another Lucas property? And we loved LEGO Indiana Jones. And can we do that with a non-Lucas property as well, perhaps? And that's how we then came to meet with initially DC Comics and then Warner Bros. talking about LEGO Batman.

Ethan Vincent

So the end of 2007 and 2008 became a seminal period of time for the company - It released LEGO Indiana Jones: the Original Adventures, LEGO Batman: The Videogame, which would become one of its all-time bestsellers, and the company was purchased by Warner Brothers. That sale, Smith said, was driven by those early Batman talks.

Jonathan Smith

We met DC to talk about LEGO Batman and that went great. We progressed quite quickly there to agreement and development on that game. And through that, the connection was made up - because DC were owned by Warner Bros., to the games group and beyond to

back up through the Warner Bros. hierarchy. And the conversations that we had initially from a partnership point of view, as we looked to sign the license enabling us to work on a LEGO Batman release - LEGO Batman game, were so sort of free flowing and comfortable, that it moved very naturally to a bigger partnership, and ultimately, yeah, a full acquisition.

Brian Crecente

So, from the perspective of Warner Bros., the TT Games deal was sort of a no-brainer, according to Martin Tremblay, who was president of Warner Bros., Interactive Entertainment at the time. We had a chance to speak with him by phone last year. This is when we were doing some of our archival work, so the recording's not great, but he talks a little bit about the deal. And unfortunately you'll hear me typing, so ignore that.

(Laughter)

Martin Tremblay

So the two guys that I was the most involved with back then was obviously Jon and Tom. Those were the two geniuses that bring LEGO to what it became at the time. They've done an amazing job of first doing, for gamer-perspective, an excellent job in quality fun. And the thing that was the combination that made it work so much was the non-threatening appearance of using...to do a shooter, to do a platforming, to do a fighting with a sword and kind of not killing anything but destroying LEGO pieces and stuff like that, in a very humoristic way of doing it. I mean, early on, I would tell you that the entire game industry, when it came out, the first one, saw that thing as a new trend, a new genre at the time. The entire TT Games, they were breaking records...the number of units that were sold all over the first game and very wisely, I would say so that Warner lead by, back then by Kevin Tsujihara, had the visionary of we can make something even bigger than within Warner. And they were...one of the key pillar of building up Warner Bros. Interactive, by the way. I mean, they were bringing a huge amount of revenue per year and numbers of units. I mean, every single game we're selling five...six millions units to begin with at the beginning, which was unbelievable. And among the blockbusters that you can see on core game, because core games were selling, you know, when you were selling six, seven, eight million units, family games were usually trending into 500,000 units to a million and a half units per year, but then they broke the first game just by itself sold 3.5 million units, boom! And everybody was like, Oh my God, what is it? What is it, what is this thing? And that's the reason why I'm telling you from a creative perspective, you know, kind of created a new genre, but also from a publishing perspective. And they found a marketplace that nobody else were in. You know, the movie-based game were yes, funny, but sometimes violent. You know, they were mimicking perfectly *Star Wars* with the *Star Wars* thing, where with LEGO it's so different. You go with LEGO and just by looking at it, and it became funny and accessible to the entire family, without parents being scared about what could happen in video games, which, you know, violence has been always an issue in games.

Brian Crecente

So that deal meant an enormous amount to TT Games. It had such an impact, not just on the games that they could go on to develop, but it could do a lot of things like, among the number of other things, they could move out of the original, the original office, which the team referred to as a barn. And I don't think they were actually exaggerating. I think it may have literally been a barn. And so they were able to move into actual offices in the middle of town. And obviously that helped a lot with just the way everybody felt about working there, according to Arthur Parsons.

Arthur Parsons

I'm almost positive that this was around the time that we moved studios. We started LEGO Batman in the old barn, and I remember finishing LEGO Batman on floor two. So we moved offices in the interim time. And if you think, the old office was cold, no facilities really, nothing to write home about. It was characterful. Yeah, I loved it. I actually genuinely loved working in the old barn, but we went from that to a huge four-story office, and we had all this space and amazing new desks and wow, this is amazing. So the transition to being part of Warner Bros. was amazing because it was almost like a rebirth of the studio, and it was, it was great. All of a sudden, we, rather than just being a developer, that kind of handed stuff off, we got to see and experience the power of a company as big as Warner Bros., that marketing machine, the clout that a huge organization has, to be able to take stuff into people's homes. And yeah, it was an exciting time, which I guess only got better because, you know, if you think, we then very quickly moved into probably what I would consider to be a golden period for TT, where we hit several home runs back-to-back. You know, we had two or three teams working consecutively and, some really exciting times. You know, I look back fondly at those times with those people and those games, you know, between, I guess, 2008 and 2014.

Chapter 4: The Golden Years – 34:49

Ethan Vincent

I love how he talks about that. And Arthur Parsons isn't the only person who refers to those early WBIE days as the golden years, and no wonder. Over the course of the next half dozen years or so, TT Games released nearly 20 games based on the world's most popular franchises. A game design approach that started life with *Star Wars* soon included a library of titles that encompassed, you know, Harry Potter, Pirates of the Caribbean, Lord of the Rings, Marvel, Rock Band, Indiana Jones, and of course, DC. And Parsons called those years phenomenal.

Arthur Parsons

Yeah, the fact that LEGO *Star Wars* was released and did so well and only obviously continues to even to this day. And then Indy came out, and LEGO Indiana Jones did great

and LEGO Batman, like came out, and then probably had a quiet six months and then suddenly was just selling. And we were getting bundled with consoles and we were getting like wrapped in those twin game packs and everything. And it was like, this was like, this was like prime time. And pretty much everyone wanted to work with us. So that was then when you're scratching around going, what would make a great game? And obviously we had an amazing relationship with Warner Bros., but also with Disney and with Lucas. And it's almost that time where you go, we used to sit there and go, wouldn't it be great if? I have to say, like, I had my dreams because I was a massive Harry Potter fan, and I just sat there talking to my boss, just going, can we please make LEGO Harry Potter? Can we please make LEGO Harry Potter? Please, can we make LEGO Harry Potter? And there was a bit of a, you know, one of the things that you may or may not have heard, depending on who you've talked to, there's obviously a bit of a challenge when you're trying to synergize the world's biggest toy company in the LEGO Group. And you're trying to synergize that with trying to make the best video games for a very specific market. Really you want your game and your toys to align in a perfect storm, because we had three teams, we got a decent amount of development time on every game to really push ourselves. And I think that's why that period's great because I think we'd honed our art at that point. You know, there's lots of things we did in terms of trickery to make the games feel new and fresh and exciting, but obviously make best use of the tools and the mechanics and the assets that we had. And the team, you know, at the time everyone was just so bought into the excitement, I guess. And some people might take it for granted now, but you can never take it for granted, being able to work with those IPs is phenomenal.

Ethan Vincent

So yeah, one of the interesting things here is too, Brian, you know, Jonathan Smith he doesn't really like the idea of, you know, splitting the history of TT Games into these eras and, you know, particularly mention of a golden era.

Jonathan Smith

I cannot use the phrase the golden years because we're still there. We're still lucky and privileged and proud to have this gift of making LEGO games. The golden years suggests a time that is past, that those first years of LEGO *Star Wars*, were as beautiful as anyone...a beautiful time as anyone could wish to have. But the time, all the time since then, has been blessed with this gift. And yes, that time that you reference 2008: LEGO Indy, LEGO Batman. 2009, 2010: Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings. And then of course, importantly, LEGO Marvel as well taking I think...what we were able to do in terms of reaching a really mass, mass audience with the world's favorite, most exciting, most dynamic, coolest characters at exactly the right time at a time in the video games industry cycle, where we could be on all platforms and everywhere, that definitely made a mark, but for so many of us who are still at TT 15 years later, you know, this is a continuum.

(Commercial for LEGO video games' movie franchise)

Brian Crecente

LEGO Group's Darryl Kelley worked with TT Games from 2008's LEGO Batman through to LEGO City Undercover in 2013. As a development manager on the LEGO Group side, he helped to make sure the design of the video games lined up with the actual physical toys that the LEGO Group was making. He also had a chance to see firsthand how the studio evolved over the years.

Darryl Kelley

You know, the great thing of working with Tom and Jonathan and Loz and that team, is they always tried to push. They tried to push us a little bit, you know, to kind of get us to a position of maybe out of our comfort zone a little bit, but also keeping, you know, in stride with the times of how games, video games, were being developed and how they were progressing. So you could see how those needs and wants and desires from them, how we needed to apply those internally with our teams to get them to understand it's not just about putting, you know, LEGO brick into a box and packaging it, it's not the same, it's not the same process. It takes a little bit more kind of thinking, it takes a little bit more of out-of-the-box thinking, I should say. So really that relationship over time and getting the teams to kind of work together was something we had to fine tune, but I think we did get there. And it was always a kind of a natural learning process with each individual team. I mean, imagine within the LEGO Group, so if they have not worked on a game with TT Games before, then it's a whole new learning experience for them. You're almost resetting, you're trying to explain to them how we work, how it works, how the video game business works, et cetera. So there was always kind of this, you know, series of laying out the plans and being very coordinated with our process, having regular check-in and meetings so they could see the development, see the progression of their, you know, theme they're ultimately responsible for it within PMD, and seeing how that is being interpreted in the digital, you know, environment. So there was always a learning, always a, you know, a lot of sharing, but I definitely felt that we fine-tuned that process to make it very more streamlined in terms of being able to develop a game or two games, or sometimes even three games, technically, within a singular year, which is pretty amazing, I think in terms of when you think about game development nowadays and some of these AAA titles are years in development.

Brian Crecente

That's interesting, I'm sure you've spent a lot of time, you and your team have spent a lot of time working with TT Games and in that process, you must have gotten a good sense of what makes for a good LEGO game. So what was your sort of takeaway on that? What do you think is a good LEGO game?

Darryl Kelley

I mean, one, there was a point of just general gameplay, you know, we would comment on, you know, if something didn't make sense or if a certain way a puzzle or something just

didn't kind of feel correct, or was too difficult or there was a bug or a QA issue. Those are all the types of things that we would comment on. But beyond that, we would also look at the way that, obviously the LEGO brand was represented. If we saw something that was not correct or was not accurate, or, you know, maybe, you know, kind of pushed a little bit too far in terms of the way the LEGO brand was represented we would ask, obviously for that to be changed. Obviously TT Games would do that very respectfully, but there could be situations where they would push or, you know, have something in there that maybe was just a little bit, you know, sensitive, or we felt that it wasn't appropriate. And based on our audiences and our values for children, so we would potentially have something like that moved.

Ethan Vincent

So Darryl, did you feel like when you found it, when the game was fun, 'cause you talked about the importance of fun, just being a fun kind of play experience, a LEGO play experience, that's fun digitally, was there sometimes this kind of contrast with some of the LEGO rules or LEGO safety precautions or things like that...Were there ever those kind of push and pull kind of moments between you and TT Games, you know, where things were gelling and it was fun to play, but it wasn't maybe what the LEGO Group had wanted?

Darryl Kelley

I would say so. Yes. I remember looking at a couple of builds, where some, you know, kind of maybe some bonus levels or situations were actually created that def went too far. I remember one specific example within the LEGO City Undercover development, we had talked about a bonus activity or just an unlock, where you could actually have the citizens of LEGO City Undercover become zombies, and they wouldn't eat you, but they would just walk around and look like zombies. And it was hysterical and amazing to see, but yes, there was some concern about is this going a little too far? Is that going to scare children? Even though we would have like a zombie and one of our LEGO Minifigures blind packs or things of that nature, but bringing a whole city to life of zombies, maybe was too far. But amazing. I mean, the ideas that TT Games will come up with for these types of, you know, kind of unlocks or side missions were never short of fun. That's for sure.

(Music)

Chapter 5: The Experimental Years – 44:56

Jonathan Smith

We're still living in this story that started back in the early two thousands-

Ethan

This is Jonathan Smith speaking.

Jonathan Smith

-We're still incredibly invested in the future of LEGO games. We have hundreds of people working incredibly hard right now to write the next chapter of that story with LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*, and to look back and sort of segment that or to pick favorites within so many different and diverse achievements of so many different people. It is invidious. I suppose there was a period early on where we were making games on GameCube and Game Boy Advance and PlayStation 2, just the dawn of 360. There was definitely a swell commercially with Wii. We were putting LEGO games onto mobile, PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 4 and 360, and then Xbox One as well, with Harry Potter, and LEGO Marvel. Then we moved into phases where we were trying remarkable things with Dimensions and Worlds and still telling new stories and bringing IP characters to life in new ways and with new features in all the games that followed. So I cannot pick it apart into golden age and silver age or this time, or this time was the favorite. We're still in that story and incredibly lucky to be so.

Brian Crecente

There are people, I think even from the beginning but more so now, who sometimes look at your games and say that they've become formulaic. What is your take on that? Do you feel like there's any truth, any validity to that?

Jonathan Smith

I totally recognize, and actually, we would all recognize that there are points of commonality across many of the games. I think we wince at the suggestion there is a formula and that there was ever a point where any of these games was made without imagination or spirit or a desire to do something new and to innovate or to take the games forward. Everyone at Traveller's Tales, everyone at TT Games like wants to make exciting, interesting new work, wants to bring players and purchases something new and relevant and exciting. And that is how they spend their time. And that's what gets us all up in the morning. So, yes, proudly and honestly, and wholeheartedly, we learn from what we've done. We try to apply it or move away from it mindfully. And, we'll keep on doing that and keep on striking out in new directions, but learning from what we've done in the past.

Arthur Parsons

I would say since 2007, 2008, I think.

Ethan Vincent

Here Arthur Parsons again, also pushing back against that same notion.

Arthur Parsons

As we transitioned into that very first time two games came close together - LEGO Indiana Jones and LEGO Batman. There was mentions or thoughts of there being a LEGO formula. There is a formula, but we like to think of it as a DNA. There's a LEGO DNA. We like to tick

certain boxes. Yeah. Do we do the IP justice? Are we like, are we treating this IP with the most respect we can? Are we getting the most from the IP? Is the game funny? Is the game enjoyable? Is it entertaining? Is the game going to resonate with the audience we want, which is generally 6-12 year-old boys and girls, with a sort of secondary tertiary audience like surpassing that. Does the game warrant people spending money. Is this a great experience? Can people sit on the couch and enjoy this? Are they're going to talk about this in the future? There is also a LEGO formula. Of course there is because guess what? There's a world, there's a LEGO minifigure being brought to life. There's jokes, there's humor. Now we like to think of it as DNA. Some people do and have many times over the years accused or, accused is the wrong word, laid, I guess, some thoughts as to, there's a LEGO formula, or...do you know what? If making games was as easy as a formula or a tombola machine or a lever where you could just output something, it wouldn't be as hard as it is, and it wouldn't be as rewarding as it is. And I think, to really appreciate like how hard it is to make a game, you have to make a game. And of the hundreds of people I work with now, and the hundreds of people I've worked with in the past, they all know just how hard you have to work and just how much passion, enthusiasm, how much you have to give up to make, again we all love it. It's the greatest job on the planet, but It's hard work. And for that to be dismissed as just, there's a LEGO formula, I don't agree with that all. We've made a lot of LEGO games and I get that some people might think there's a formula. There really isn't. The formula is: work really, really hard to make the best game you can to really bring that IP to life in a way that's never been done before. And that's it, end of chat - put a game in a box, make sure people enjoy it.

Brian Crecente

Some at the LEGO Group working with TT Games did start to have some concerns about halfway through the last decade. Philip James, who is now the director of Core Games at the LEGO Group's games team, spent the past six years working alongside the talented team at TT Games. We spoke with him a bit about the studio's evolution and its many eras.

Philip James

You know, whether it was the beginning of the end of the golden age or whether the industry moved on and consumers kind of desires to move on. I think, you know, it's easy to look at what was happening externally in the games industry at that time with the real massive spike in Minecraft's popularity around that time, how that kind of did what those original LEGO games did, which is captured the imagination of kids and families. And I think we always had a desire that that's what we wanted our titles to do. The LEGO Group is kind of unique in some ways in its position in the games industry. I think what we really desire is to get back to having a game version of what the LEGO physical bricks do. And I think those early titles did do that. And I think over that time period, we were seeing titles that were coming out probably thick and fast, an incredible rate sometimes, in terms of titles, I think up to...through sort of '14 and '15, there were points where we were doing three titles a year, it might've been with one that was remastered, but essentially that's a massive output. And I think that there wasn't perhaps enough of an eye on working out

where that kind of style of gameplay needed to go, to get back to the levels it had been at before.

(Music)

Brian Crecente

So that desire to expand the breadth of experiences created by TT Games for the LEGO Group kicked off a new era that seemed to be pushing game concepts further than ever before. In 2015, TT Games tried its hand at toys-to-life, releasing the ambitious LEGO Dimensions, which combined the humor and look of the traditional TT Games, iconic titles with an unbelievably eclectic mix of characters from wildly different franchises. It was a game that allowed Mr. T to stand next to the Wizard of Oz's Dorothy; Doctor Who shoulder-to-shoulder with Scooby Doo. All said, the game actually featured characters in worlds from an astounding 30 different franchises. Just two years later, TT Games released LEGO Worlds, which dropped players into a world made entirely of bricks that could be pulled apart and put back together however the player wanted.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah. I mean, it felt like an era of experimentation that introduced this flood of ideas to TT Games, core concept for game design. And at the same time, the studio continued to work on its more typical games, you know, releasing new titles based on Jurassic Park, Marvel's Avengers, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *The Incredibles* and more, you know, all of it though was leading to what many believe will be TT Games' greatest game to date and a reset of sorts within the studio.

Brian Crecente

So, there has been this amazing history for TT Games in which they've released dozens of titles and always seem to be sort of pushing the envelope on what they create. And then we hit 2020. So 2020 is the first year, since 2005, since *LEGO Star Wars: The Video Game*, came out. It's the first year that TT Games won't be releasing a title, and it's something that Jonathan Smith pointed out to us, and talk to us a little bit about.

Chapter 6: LEGO *Star Wars*: The Skywalker Saga – 54:10

Jonathan Smith

2020 will be the first year, since 2005, that we have not released a brand new LEGO game. And that has an incredible power for us. Like we feel that, we feel that physically, that changes our year materially for those hundreds of people, within the studio in particular, who are used to putting in the work of creating and releasing games, we felt that lack. And the positive side is that we know that what we're doing there is building up anticipation for the results of what will have been an unprecedented investment and effort that's been

made to create what will be our biggest and best ever LEGO game with LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*.

(Simple tune plays).

(Excerpt from LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*)

Brian Crecente

The next LEGO *Star Wars* game is LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*. It's a game that adapts all nine movies and the Skywalker franchise into one massive experience.

(Excerpt from LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*)

Jonathan Smith

LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga* will give players the freedom to play in their LEGO *Star Wars* galaxy across all nine movies from episode one: *The Phantom Menace*, right up to episode nine: *The Rise of Skywalker*. We are, as we have been before, playing with Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, but we're also, as we haven't been before, playing with completely new characters on the biggest ever stage and giving players an experience of traveling across a LEGO *Star Wars* galaxy in a completely new engine with completely new combat mechanics and force mechanics and a camera system and gameplay features and collectibles and unlocks and upgrades that I think shows how we can build on what we've done in the past respect. Many players who are fans of different LEGO games respect their investment and their appreciation of what we've done in the past, but take it somewhere new as well.

(Excerpt from LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*)

(*Star Wars* theme tune plays)

Brian Crecente

Arthur Parsons says that the new game will set a new bar for TT Games and the titles it will make in the future.

Arthur Parsons

Personally, I think that LEGO *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga* is going to mean a new bar. Effectively, it's the flag bearer for a new era of LEGO video games. So for us, definitely at TT Games and I can't wait. Well, I'm going to have to, but I can't wait for people to hear more about them, but I can't wait for people to be able to play LEGO *Star Wars: Skywalker Saga*, and then anything else we make for the rest of our time.

Ethan Vincent

Creating a successful approach to turning the ideal of the LEGO brick and LEGO play into a video game, had a significant impact on both gaming and the LEGO Group, Tom Stone said.

Tom Stone

The point for me is it made LEGO more relevant in the 21st century. It just made LEGO more accessible to the youngsters who were playing video games they'd wanted. Is it possible to have a credible video game, interactive entertainment experience based on LEGO bricks? Yes, it is. As long as you wrap all of the brand values that LEGO possess, you know, the values of construction, deconstruction, imagination, and fun...fun absolutely massively important to the success of those games - that's what makes them accessible that draws you in because you're laughing all the way through the...not all the way through the game, but, you know, you're laughing through the game and it's challenging to the young gamers. They love solving those puzzles and then getting the feedback and the payoff as they go through to the next level. So I would say that, you know, 2005 saw the introduction to the first ever video game, and it saw LEGO Company's fortunes change dramatically, leading to LEGO Company, I think in 2011, 2012, becoming the world's largest toy company. At the same time as we were selling literally tens of millions of these video games. You can't say with absolute certainty that those two things are connected, but that is one very interesting coincidence, that's all I would say.

Darryl Kelley

I think TT Games being the solid partner that they've been and the experts in what they do-

Ethan Vincent

This is Darryl Kelly talking again.

Darryl Kelley

- has allowed a lot of folks in our leadership team, within the LEGO Group, to really understand the value of gaming. You've seen, especially in this year, the growth of video games and how it's just a great, engaging part of our lives. So it's helped our leadership to understand that LEGO and gaming itself, and LEGO gaming, has a place within our portfolio. It brings our experiences to life in a different way outside of our normal play patterns that we've seen with our boxed products. So I definitely think that the two kind of working cohesively and in parallel really kind of enriched the LEGO brand in a way that we never could have thought possible.

Philip James

You know much of what we see is kind of...I think recognizing where their strengths are.

Ethan Vincent

This is Philip James with the LEGO Group speaking.

Philip James

I mean, I think if I look at, what I hope is a partnership and a series of games is moving forward and into a much better space, is recognizing where a partnership is strong and utilizing the strongest parts of it. And I think that comes back to trying to keep those guys where they do their best work, from our point of view, and not expecting them to be a partner that can do everything for us. It's not to say that other things that we're doing are more important than the stuff that we've got coming out. I mean, right now nothing's more important than Skywalker Saga for us. It's just more recognizing where they can be strong, where they can do fantastic work for us, and supporting in the best way we can with that.

(Music)

Chapter 7: Conclusions – 01:01:09

Ethan Vincent

So this episode's been really cool, Brian, as you know, and I know you share the same sentiment here - LEGO *Star Wars* was one of those breakout games for the LEGO Group that really took LEGO video games to that next level. I love the memories I have and playing that game, but I also really love diving into this history, this rich history of this total, what if moment - what if Tom Stone wouldn't have taken this concept further, if he would've just kind of stepped away from the LEGO Group at that time and said, Well, I tried, we weren't able to create what we wanted to and I'm done here. But in collaboration with the LEGO Group, and I'm also super grateful for the LEGO Group saying, Yeah, take our IP, do what you need to do - we've got other problems right now - see if you can make a game - that sounds great, Tom. And he goes out and he does it, you know, obviously putting a huge amount of risk on the line - personally, financially, and kind of having that vision. And I love that description when he talks about the Jedi Knight and this idea of breaking things down and rebuilding it, the core kind of LEGO DNA when it comes to building and creating and doing that in this setting that is so significant to LEGO video games, making it possible. To me, that's just a real highlight. And I'm super excited about the future of TT Games and of course their next release, which I can't wait to play, hopefully again with my son.

(Music)

Brian Crecente

Yeah, there is so much about this franchise, about this history. This...franchise is even the wrong word, it's this sort of rich history of TT Games and the fact that it, in many ways, by

building on the past of the LEGO Group's investment in gaming and by taking with it all of that time, developing a strategy, and trying to analyze what it means to be a LEGO game, and then allowing it to sort of exist outside the grasp of the LEGO Group is such an important thing. It's very easy to overlook the impact that the LEGO Group had on TT Games, not only did they essentially allow this fantastic idea, which had already been sort of incubated and even development had started on it. They allowed it to leave as part of this deal that was made and they created, I guess, a contract that would have given the rights to Tom Stone and his group to make all the LEGO games for the foreseeable future. That's all incredibly important, but I think what's also important is that the LEGO Group continued to be an important integral part of that development. They certainly weren't, you know, the developers, they weren't the day-to-day people, but they were there as stewards of their brand. And I think as we begin to see things start to shift to perhaps a more formulaic approach, it is the LEGO Group that comes in and is pushing TT Games out of its comfort zone and pushing them to try new and unusual things. So TT Games on its own, I think, would have been doing great and making these amazing titles and always doing these iterative improvements on their franchise. But it's the LEGO Group that sort of lights the fire that gets them to do things like LEGO Dimensions and LEGO Worlds. And while those games weren't the biggest successes, I think that's the sort of stuff that needs to happen in a studio for it to continue to grow. And, you know, ultimately what you're left with is a set of games, a sort of library of titles created in collaboration with the LEGO Group and TT Games that are in many ways, at least the way I view them, as sort of memory makers. I like, as you mentioned, Ethan, I have such fond memories of playing through these movies with my son as he grew up. The very first introduction my son had to *Star Wars* and to *Indiana Jones* wasn't through the movies or TV shows or cartoons or toys, it was through the LEGO video games. And that's what got him interested in the movies and interested in those imaginary worlds. And that those memories will always be tied to the experience he had with me, you know, laughing and giggling our way through these games, is something that can never be overstated.

(Soft tune plays)

Brian Crecente

What we're left with is a company that has re-imagined a way for franchises and imaginary worlds to come to life in a way that families can experience them together and create these sort of lasting memories. And I think that we're going to continue to see that. I think that while things have shifted a little bit for the LEGO Group and for TT Games, the future is going to extend for quite a while for the creations made by TT Games, and, you know, I look forward to the sort of titles that they continue to focus on. If for no other reason then, there are so few experiences out there that can be deeply appreciated by a parent and their child.

Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 01:07:05

Ethan Vincent

Bits N' Bricks is made possible by LEGO Games. Our producer is Ronny Scherer. Your hosts are Brian Crecente and Ethan Vincent. Episode producing and editing by Ethan Vincent. Writing by Brian Crecente. Mixing and sound design by Dan Carlisle. Original music by Peter Priemer, foundermusic.com and Henrik Lindstrand from the award-winning LEGO Builder's Journey which you can play on Apple Arcade today.

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