

LEGO® Universe: Death of a Dream

LEGO® Universe launched after five years of development but was turned off less than two years after going live.

The \$125 million investment in a LEGO brick-themed massively multiplayer online game failed for a number of complex reasons, according to the LEGO Group and those who worked on the game. They included the management machinations of the developer's holding company, unfortunate timing, a lack of focus, and the LEGO Group's own impatience with the game's success.



That failure, though, did lead to a number of important lessons for the LEGO Group, which it still makes use of today.

In 2008, two years after starting development on the game – and under pressure to personally cover the expanding payroll of a blossoming staff – the owners of NetDevil decided to sell the company to Gazillion Entertainment.

Ryan Seabury, creative director on the game, said he wasn't very happy about the sale but understood why it happened. He also held out hopes that Gazillion would bring in some industry veterans to provide support and new oversight on different facets of the project.

Unfortunately, the sale led to a number of major issues that both bogged down the already slow development and eroded trust between the employees and the new owners. Mark Hansen, senior director with the LEGO Group working on the game, called the new ownership a nightmare.

"This is the most disastrous decision the LEGO Group ever could have made," he said. "It was just horrible from day one. It left management into daily chaos for me, [NetDevil co-founder and president] Scott Brown, Ryan Seaberry, and [NetDevil co-founder and art director] Peter Grundy; us four that were trying to leave everybody else to be creative with the game, but to take on all of the organizational impacts that we were taking."

Fortunately, at the same time, the LEGO Group decided to build up a team of its employees in Colorado to be closer to NetDevil, allowing the company to be more responsive as development proceeded. So, while NetDevil management continued to bang heads with Gazillion, the work on the game actually started to speed up, and the game began to come into better focus.

These were moments the developers still remember – like bringing the minifigure to life, introducing a Diablo-esque approach to character abilities, and finally settling on the game's core.

That lost epiphany came after Seabury and a small team flew out to Manchester to meet with the TT Games studio and founder Jon Burton about the game, said Seabury.

"He looked at it and said, '... you're calling this LEGO Universe, but it doesn't feel as big as what you're calling it,'" Seabury said. "And I thought that was a really salient point. I'm like, Yeah, wow, that's good. Because, you know, we get so close to the grind, figuring out the details of what's going on in the game and the interactions and the content that's there. And sometimes it's hard to take that step back and just look at it from just a plain point of view."

That's what led to the backstory of a planet, home to the imagination Nexus, blowing apart and creating chunks of playable worlds scattered across the universe, Seabury said.

As work on the game proceeded, and the studio released first a limited Alpha, then an Alpha, and a Beta; some at the studio and the LEGO Group couldn't help notice the sudden, seemingly meteoric rise of a very similar game. A game about constructing, destruction in a world of building blocks: Minecraft.

But where LEGO Universe had one of the most famous toy brands in history behind it and a team in the hundreds, Minecraft started as the work of one person using cubes of rock, sand, and grass.

In October 2010, LEGO Universe officially launched almost exactly five years after NetDevil signed on to create the game. While the studio was delighted with the release, the relationship between NetDevil and Gazillion had deteriorated to the point of being untenable to some, including Ryan Seabury.

"There were more than a few heated phone calls I had with people, and it really started making me unhappy actually to be a part of that," Seabury said. "They were asking me to do things I wasn't comfortable doing as a leader. The tension really was getting pretty bad between leadership there.

Eventually, unable to deal with the daily stress and mismanagement, Grundy, Brown, and Seabury all left.

Seabury handed in his resignation before the game launched on October 26, 2010. Brown left in the month after the game launched. Both went on to start End Games Entertainment. Grundy left in January 2011 to join them.

Soon after the departure of the founders, the LEGO Group started investigating how it could buy back rights to the game and parts of the NetDevil studio from Gazillion. The sale to the LEGO Group went through in February 2011 but brought with it some significant changes to NetDevil, which was renamed Play Well Studios. Shortly after the acquisition, the LEGO Group laid off about 20 of the 100 or so employees working on the LEGO Universe project, throwing those who remained in a bit of disarray.

About six months after the game's launch and about two months after the studio purchase, the LEGO Group started discussing what changes should be made to the game to try and improve the chances of its success over time.

The game's launch wasn't very strong commercially, and while it continued to grow, it wasn't growing fast enough for an impatient LEGO Group. The initial ambitious goal was for the game to hit 180,000 subscribers by the full launch, with continued growth through the following years. Instead, the game launched with 14,000 preorders. That number grew to between 30,000 and 40,000 monthly subscriptions and then sort of plateaued.

To combat the slowed growth, the company decided to shift the game to free-to-play. They started giving the game away as a digital download (stopping the sale of the boxed copy for \$40 each). While players could try early sections of the game, to continue playing they'd need to pay a monthly fee. The change boosted player numbers dramatically, with the game hitting 2.3 million registered players and just about 100,000 subscribers.

But soon, that growth, too, flattened out.

In September 2011, the LEGO Universe got its first major marketing push from the LEGO Group with the addition of characters and elements from the popular Ninjago line. Nearing the one-year anniversary of the game's release, it finally felt like LEGO Universe was starting to hit its stride.

Unfortunately, it was too late.

As the first anniversary of the game came and went, things were not looking good financially for LEGO Universe. While the game was finally starting to show some signs of long-term life, its cost and a changing of the guard at the LEGO Group meant it was unlikely to survive.

In November of 2011, the LEGO Group officially announced its decision to close LEGO Universe. The company said it would be closing the game on January 31, 2012. While the game had more than two point three million players, not enough of them were paying subscribers.

When the game was shut down, the LEGO Group laid off 115 employees from Play Well Studios and some LEGO Group employees who handled marketing for the game in Billund, Denmark.

That same month, Minecraft officially launched, boasting 241 million log-ins daily and more than 4 million copies sold.

In retrospect, there seems to be a number of things that contributed to LEGO Universe's ultimate demise:

Chief among them was an inherent lack of patience, confidence, and an understanding that transforming the LEGO Group's business model and truly embracing digital play as a new pillar of the brand would take time – much longer than the one or two years it allowed LEGO Universe.

Throughout the project, a lot of new disciplines, processes, and capabilities were discovered and learned as the project evolved, but they were never matured and perfected to the same degree as the LEGO Group's 89-year physical toy business.

Other issues included the long pre-production of the game, the unexpectedly high cost of developing and maintaining child safety protocols for an open-ended building title, and the lackluster marketing support from the LEGO Group.

The requirement for a high-end gaming PC was a poor fit for a market that had shifted suddenly away from boxed products purchased in retail stores to free games on Facebook and mobile devices, funded by advertising and micro-transactions, and didn't seem to take children's safety and privacy as seriously as the LEGO Group felt necessary.

Those deeply involved in the game's development each had their own take on why the game ultimately didn't survive much past its launch.

Hansen felt it never got the sort of full-throated support from the top that a project of its size needed to survive. Seabury said he felt the game was doing well but that its costs were a bit out of control for things like hosting and child safety. Also, he didn't think it was making enough money for the LEGO Group.

Ronny Scherer, a director of development on the game for the LEGO Group, calls it the opportunity cost of keeping the game alive.

"Bluntly speaking, that was one of the challenges," he said. "We saw everything we touched with the physical LEGO bricks turn into gold. There was this massive demand and interest in our brand from the physical perspective. And so you need to look at the opportunity cost, like, do we spend the time, money, and effort on these things that when

we touch them, they're instant cash? Or do we build this other new and complex business that's totally foreign to us but will be a great business in the long term?"

About six years after the game's closure, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, who is now the executive chairman of the LEGO Brand Group and was the CEO of the LEGO Group during the development of LEGO Universe, said that in retrospect, it was a mistake for the company to shut down the game when it did. Looking at the tremendous successes of Minecraft and Roblox, now two of the biggest games in the world, he said he realized that LEGO Universe could have probably grown into something not just successful but amazing.

"I consider this one of my greatest fiascos: that we weren't persistent," he said in that 2018 interview. "It was obvious that something digital had to happen with the LEGO Group."

From the LEGO Group's perspective, that investment in and support of LEGO Universe led to more than simply the game itself; it also proved rich in lessons for the company. Scherer was adamant that the LEGO Group's significant investment would lead to, at least, lessons for future LEGO game-makers and leaders within and outside the company.

Where others retreated from the project to recover from the stress of having such a monumental effort so quickly shut down, Scherer set about documenting that work for future generations. That included speaking with the Royal Library in Denmark and the National Archive of Electronic Games at The Strong in Rochester, New York, about the best methods for archiving and documenting online games.

And despite the decision to close LEGO Universe – although at a different level – the LEGO Group's interest and investment in online games continued. As part of its digital play efforts, safe, social and creative play online remains a big area of interest for the LEGO Group to this day.

Games whose roots could arguably be traced back to LEGO Universe include titles like LEGO Legends of Chima Online – which was based on a relatively new theme that was initially destined to be added to LEGO Universe, LEGO Minifigures Online, and even LEGO Worlds.

While the years and money invested in the game ended up helping the LEGO Group learn valuable lessons in the space, the impact of the prolonged development and sudden closure of the game and studio behind it wasn't so positive. Seabury found the triple hit of leaving the studio he helped to build up, the decision to shut down the game, and the studio shuttering a hard one to deal with on a personal level.

"It really became a part of you," he said. "And to have it sort of just stop is pretty jarring. I was feeling pretty down about myself, and all my self-value is sort of tied to that achievement, and then to have LEGO Universe – this thing I was super proud of – just gone, was a pretty big hit. I didn't really realize the impact it had on me for probably a good year. I had to really separate my self-identity, self-value, mental framework from my work which in my first 30, 35 years of life was in inexorably tied together."

Brown, too, was deeply impacted by the closing.

"It was devastating," he said. "I don't have a better word than that. It was devastating. Because we thought we had built something that was going to be a game for decades."

And not just because the game shut down or even because of the closure of the studio. But also because of the impact it had on the people behind the game, including Brown himself.

"I miss these people dearly," he said. "I loved going into work every day. I truly loved it. And you miss it horribly. It's a reminder of what could have been. It was the greatest, the greatest times. I remember seeing kids crying when they were shutting the game down. That's not a failure. Those kids loved it."

Explore more...

In order of appearance

[NetDevil](#) – Website

[Gazillion](#) – Kotaku

[Secrets of LEGO Universe](#) – Podcast

[LEGO Universe Theme Sets](#) – LEGO Ideas

[LEGO Universe](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Universe Official 10th Anniversary Videos](#) – YouTube

[jemessterV2's LEGO Universe Play-through Videos](#) – YouTube

[Gorfunblot's LEGO Universe Properties Montage #1](#) – YouTube

[Gorfunblot's LEGO Universe Properties Montage #2](#) – YouTube

[titanicpiano14 Performs Elephant Encampment from the LEGO Universe \(Original Game Soundtrack\)](#) – YouTube

[Fan-created LEGO Universe Nexus Temple](#) – YouTube

[Darkflame Universe](#) – Fan-created LEGO Universe server

[LEGO Universe concept art](#) – Jim Stigall, Jerry Meyer, Brett Nienburg. Dave Kang, Kyle Wheeler, Richard Tran, Peter Coene, Nate Storm, and Mike Rayhawk

[LEGO Universe concept art](#) – Mike Rayhawk

Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 1 Episode 13: LEGO® Universe: Death of a Dream

March 3, 2021 · 1:26:11



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.

Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 00:40

(Introduction music to Bits N' Bricks)

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 and 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 continues)

Ethan Vincent

Today, we continue our exploration of the LEGO Group's single biggest gaming effort - LEGO Universe. And as you may recall, in part one, we walked through how it was that the LEGO Group went from essentially disbanding its video game efforts in 2004, to bringing on a Colorado studio two years later, to develop the most ambitious video game in its history.

(Music "The Maelstrom (A Powerful Darkness on the Horizon)" track from the LEGO Universe Original Game Soundtrack by Brian Tyler)

Chapter 1: The Gazillion Years – 01:35

Ethan Vincent

With NetDevil on board the studio and the LEGO Group spent nearly the next two years struggling to clearly define what the game would be. As the headcount at the studio rose, the founders finally felt the need to reach out to outside investors, and in July 2008, Gazillion Entertainment purchased the studio. While the deal seemed to coincide with the game coming into focus, things quickly took a turn for the worst.

Brian Crecente

So the idea from the NetDevil side was that Gazillion would come in to help stabilize the financing and business side of its work with the LEGO Group, taking some of the pressure off the three owners when it came to things like payroll and other sort of daily business decisions. The first sign that Gazillion's ownership of NetDevil might actually run into some hurdles came almost immediately after the deal was struck. The LEGO Group's Mark Hansen came into the initial meeting with Gazillion and essentially laid down the law about how things were going to work.

Ethan Vincent

While the initial awkwardness of the meeting quickly passed, issues with Gazillion started to crop up. The new owners came in and added a number of oversight policies that included things like more diligent tracking of work hours, having to log in and out of a corporate network, reduced bonuses, and cut 401k matching - essentially pension funds. Then Gazillion started taking control of some of the administrative aspects of the project, said senior director Mark Hansen of the LEGO Group who oversaw the development of the game.

Mark Hansen

This is the most disastrous decision the LEGO Group ever could have made. And really, I don't know, I think about a lot how I could have turned that another way. Because now here's this Gazillion-investored game. And so it left management, which should have been a

creative development game into daily chaos for me, Scott Brown, Ryan Seabury, and Peter Grundy, as for that we're trying to leave everybody else to be creative with a game, but to take on all of the organizational impacts that we were taking. And literally when you took Ryan Seabury, and Scott, you know, the three main guys to do the game, out of NetDevil, it killed it, and it killed it really fast.

Ryan Seabury

It was unfortunate because as time went on, there were a few points where Gazillion leadership kind of tried to adjust some costs here or there

Ethan Vincent

This is Ryan Seabury.

Ryan Seabury

or maybe direct us to not quite be honest with the staff about, I don't know, benefits or something like that.

And so things that were just sort of ethically at odds with me that kind of kept building up over the years. And as time went on, more and more, I just got firmer, I guess with saying like, LEGO Universe is not touchable (inaudible). And if you want to keep messing with it, then I'm out. The relationship did not go well after (scoffs) the initial purchase, I'll just say that.

Brian Crecente

So despite that turmoil that was going on during those years, Hansen said the team did manage to keep their heads down and keep working on the project. And with most of the pre production behind them, work on the game was really starting to come a bit more into focus, though not without other problems. Some other higher-ups at the LEGO Group thought that the sale to Gazillion would bring a bit more discipline to the project, which had been running behind and until just before the sale of the company seemed to, on some levels at least, unfocused.

(Music)

Chapter 2: Finding the LEGO DNA – 05:04

Ethan Vincent

Around the same time that the sale went through, this is the summer of 2008, a team from the LEGO Group's headquarters in Denmark moved to Colorado with their families to

provide a higher level of support and ensure shorter and faster feedback loops. Among them was Ronny Scherer. And at the time, he was a LEGO Group director, whose mandate was to build a publishing team for the game that would provide design guidance and brand stewardship. Scherer built up a team of about 50, focused just on things like customer insights, telemetrics, and quality assurance and control. And within a year, half a dozen digital pioneers from the LEGO Group had relocated and were on site to offer their support.

Ronny Scherer

If we are developing something truly unique, and truly something that represents the LEGO brick DNA -

Ethan Vincent

This is Ronny Scherer speaking.

Ronny Scherer

-I think there needs to be a super close collaboration with someone who intimately understands the ins and outs and the strengths and the DNA of the LEGO idea. Of course, some people grow up being fans and understand it pretty easily. But for most people, there's a lot of sort of intricate details around the LEGO idea and the LEGO building system and how we present our property that is not easily detected with the naked eye. And it's only when you really start to get involved in it, you realize like the technical implications and challenges that comes along with that. So I think that part is critical.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, this LEGO DNA thing that Ronny's talking about, is super critical. And it did help kick off, I think, a period of development that moved the game well into active production, and for many at NetDevil and you know, those on the development team, for them the game's development during that time had many bright moments and many, you know, moments of innovation and epiphany. I remember Peter Grundy telling me just how excited he was to see the LEGO brick and the iconic minifigure come to life.

Peter Grundy

It was emotional to be honest with you. We had done some animations before of LEGO bricks moving around just like, you know, very mechanical robotic because that's what the mechanics of a LEGO minifig does. And the first time I got an inkling of this was when one of our concept artists Jim Stigall did a drawing of one of our heroes. And it's this minifigure jumping up in the air with an arched back pushing a sword up into the air and it was like, "Oh, look, we can actually bend the brick. Look, we can actually bend the legs and not where they're jointed, but bend them when they do something like really expressive." And

just seeing one of those minifigs running around and jumping up in the air and spinning and twisting and distorting, it was like, it's alive, the LEGO minifigure is now alive.

(Music "Nimbus Plaza" track from
the LEGO Universe Original Game Soundtrack by Brian Tyler)

Brian Crecente

Grundy also recalls how the studio settled on the idea of introducing a Diablo-like feel to the game that used a character's inventory of weapons and tools to help shape their actions and abilities. Seabury said there were always fires and problems to solve, something pretty typical in active game development. He said that whiteboards had taken over half of the office, and that they had actually created this mammoth 300-page design document that, it turned out, they really didn't need. Lead producer Chris Sherland describes the nature of creating a massively multiplayer online game and the flexibility required.

Chris Sherland

An MMO is so complex as far as integrated systems that you have to make decisions about the way systems interface to each other, that actually has an effect back on to the design. And what happens is, the game shows you what it needs to be, right? You have this big design, it's a big book that says LEGO Universe will be this thing. Well, eventually, at the end of the day, that was a great thing to launch you and it was a great thing to get everybody inspired, but once you put that down and you start building it, and you start playing it, it sort of becomes what it's supposed to be. And it's much more valuable. I mean, it's good to have the design doc there to drive you and keep you on target. But the game has this organic way of saying, 'I'm not going to be that. I refuse to be that, and I really want to be this' and then you just have to do it, you have to allow it and build it and go sort of help it become what it's supposed to be.

Brian Crecente

A major moment in the development came as the studio, having worked out the technology, staffed up to meet the demands of this major undertaking, and sold the company to sort of stabilize financing, finally settled on the game's core concept.

Ryan Seabury

So, four explorers are scouring the galaxy looking for this mysterious source of pure imagination called the Imagination Nexus-

Ethan Vincent

This is Ryan Seabury speaking.

Ryan Seabury

-They find it, but something goes wrong when they find it, and they end up corrupting it and turns into the Maelstrom, which is a dark, chaotic force of destructive energy, that's now been unleashed across the universe. It shatters the original world that they found it on, so now these world chunks are all over the place. And they basically summon all the rest of the minifigures from all walks of life across the universe to come help protect the last remaining bits of the pure imagination and restore it to its former glory, and at the same time, protect and defend the from the Maelstrom spreading out further into the universe and trying to push it back through using creativity and their special abilities that they can gain through joining the Nexus Force that the the original explorers created.

Ethan Vincent

So what Ryan Seabury here quickly kind of rattles off describing the core narrative of LEGO Universe was a process that stretched over a substantial amount of time and many iterations. And in addition to creating the gameplay around the main story of LEGO Universe, NetDevil was asked to accommodate an additional mandate from the LEGO Group.

Scott Brown

From day one, the LEGO Group said, this game is about the community.

Ethan Vincent

This is Scott Brown from an interview back in 2008.

Scott Brown

The community needs to be involved, the community has to be a part of this game. What we heard as developers was: community-created content usually equals crap, right? And so we were terrified by this thought, we're like, "how in the world are we going to make a game that's high quality, but if users can make anything they want." And I think real quickly, the LEGO Group proved to us that their users are different.

Brian Crecente

The term "users" here that Scott Brown is using, of course, isn't really users in the classic sense. Instead, it's these sort of incredibly talented and dedicated fans, from the adult fans of LEGO community, who came to this project with their vast knowledge and skill set related to all things, LEGO bricks. So to tap into this pool of talented fan creators, the studio set up this LEGO Universe Partner program, or LUPs. And Peter Grundy talks us through how that worked here.

Peter Grundy

As a development team, one of the things you push for very early on is a good suite of development tools. Those tools right now have become real robust. So robust, in fact, that our editing tool, Happy Flower, has now been put in the hands of the LUP community. So not only is NetDevil on this journey of not just placing objects, but creating all of the zones and the gameplay, but now the LUP community is at that same position and they're moving along with us, creating all of their content for LEGO Universe as well.

Brian Crecente

Programmer Randall Furino, who helped create this tool called Happy Flower and instructed the LUPs on how to use it at their second meeting in late 2008, was very frank and open with Ethan when he spoke with him back then, about the reality of letting LEGO brand enthusiasts really create something within the game.

Randall Furino

This was about as close to the best case as was expected - I mean, I was scared, you know, I mean, there's a lot of untested systems, a lot of brand new stuff, brand new servers, brand new computers, I'm really proud of the way everything held up, you know, it really came out well. Whether we're going to give them the ability to touch the code...I dunno, I don't want to say anything on camera because, I don't know, I don't want to be misquoted later, if I say, "yeah, we're gonna give it all you get everything, you can touch it, you can play with it, you can make the world everything that you want it to be." Well, yeah, we're gonna say that they can do that, and in a way they can. But are we gonna let them touch the code to do that? Probably not. We're gonna give them a system that will let them make the world as they want it, as they imagine it, everything that they can do. Everything that we can do, they can do. But, you know, we got to hold some stuff back. Because as soon as we give them access to that stuff, they're more likely to break the universe. It's a tough balance, you know, I don't know how it's all gonna be achieved in the end. But I think for me, the biggest challenge is giving everybody everything they want, without giving them too much.

Ethan Vincent

So this is an interesting time. This is 2008. And Randall Furino is basically saying, "Uhh, I don't know if we're gonna give, you know, the LUPs, the code. I thought that was very amusing. But, you know, obviously, for these dedicated volunteers, you know, there was there was disappointment. And that soon set in and they realized that, you know, this idea of creating worlds was somewhat restricted. And they were only kind of building in these little virtual playgrounds, and not in the actual game. You know, another thing that made it really complicated was that this new installed tool came with just several technical challenges, the biggest being that many of their creations were reset or deleted when the tool was updated. And for other LUPs, hardware updates on their laptops could render the tool useless. Basically, if they updated drivers and so forth. So, NetDevil in the LEGO Group

kind of had to make a decision, you know, and they remained firm with their resolve to fully integrate the adult fans of LEGO community. And the following year, in 2009, dedicated LUP producer's Philip Schlagel and Brian Johnson were brought on board to kind of help oversee the collaboration between NetDevil and the LUP program.

Brian Johnson

We currently have about 40 LUPs that have come in from all around the world.

Ethan Vincent

This is Brian Johnson speaking.

Brian Johnson

And this is a big step for us for the LUP program, because we're handing out laptops to all these people to give them the ability to create in the LEGO Universe. Because of the hardware profiles and the software profiles prior to this, they didn't have that opportunity. And so now, they're actually being liberated and given the freedom to have the possibility to create and keep their content in the game. Right now we're kind of letting them be as open-ended as possible, and hopefully pare back those ideas to get something possible and in the timeframe that we have.

Brian Crecente

The LUP program continued throughout the development of LEGO Universe. To address the concerns the NetDevil team had with the allowing the LUP teams to tinker with code on the live servers, NetDevil dedicated engineer and designer resources to work with each of the six LUP teams. Over the lifetime of the project, the LUP teams, which had now been renamed the World Builder League, created a total of four worlds in the game. Additionally the LUP team members, created a whole host of player properties in the hopes of inspiring young creators as they came into the game to sort of make their own interesting creations.

(Audio of LEGO Universe kids testing)

Ethan Vincent

So that's what it kind of sounded like, Brian, when kids were brought into NetDevil, and when they were shown the game, and you know, have this kind of mirror on the side you can look through. I don't know if you still remember that. But it's basically, you know, the option they had to watch kids play and really, you know, gain insights and knowledge. And this is something that happened from the very beginning, you know, NetDevil and the LEGO Group, just set it up. And I remember Ryan telling us about these 14 local families surrounding Louisville in Colorado, and they would come in regularly. And you know, as the game evolved and progressed, other sessions of kid-testing were conducted in places like Hamburg, Germany as well.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, Brian Johnson was also assigned to actually accompany and oversee some of these outcomes. And so he witnessed the successes firsthand in the sort of new and exciting ways.

(Child's voice - inaudible)

Brian Johnson

And we gave these kids these tests and they would come in and they'd be having a blast, and then all of a sudden, they would get to the back of the game or sort of the first bad guy showed up he's like, I think they were called Stromlings or something at the time, and that was where like, their enthusiasm went through the roof, like all of a sudden, it was just, "give me a sword, let me go attack those guys." And like these triggers just went off. And this...it really sent the game moving from this world of, you know, sunny, fun and play to this world of sort of competing light and dark. Because the the kids wanted to battle they were just like, "give me a sword." In fact, I think I remember, it was in that one, that the test that we were in one of the kids was playing. And I think he peed his pants (laughs) in the kid-test. And his mom came in and is like, "what's up?" and the kid was like, "I thought if I left they wouldn't let me back in." You know, I just was dying. I think for a while looking through like one of those glass things going, "Something strange is going on with his kid. I don't understand." So that's when like, you know, you have something triggering people, right? Like he wouldn't leave the room. He was willing to suffer this humiliation.

Brian Crecente

Wow. Yeah. That's no good. So the team also continued to work on optimizing the graphics and dealing with the fact that a single brick could have as many as 50,000 polygons in it. And that there could be 2000 bricks on the screen at a time, that's obviously a lot of polygons. This quickly led to major issues with minimum spec requirements for a computer. At one point, the NetDevil developers asked the LEGO Group if they could just not include the tiny little LEGO trademark on each and every stud on a brick, which was an early requirement by the company. But that request ended up resulting in numerous debates about brand compliance. Eventually, the LEGO Group gave in for the lower spec PCs, but not without exploring every option first.

(Tune)

Ethan Vincent

While work on creating a feature called properties which were these you know spaces for kids and people to build their own creations and LEGO Universe proceeded, some of the development team began to focus on how to make these creations more complex and bring them to life. With the help of the playful invention company in Montreal, the team added a system called behaviors.

Scott Brown

Based on, you know, all the research the LEGO Group's done over the years in terms of user-created programs.

Ethan Vincent

This is Scott Brown speaking from an interview back in 2010.

Scott Brown

Based on all of those learnings, the LEGO Group had a language they called WEDO and so we worked with the creators of that, to implement that into our game. And so there's a programming language that basically looks like puzzle pieces. And you can plop down all kinds of things like; when I get near something, when something hears this word, when I get hit, you know any of those things. And then you can say, do all these different things like, break apart, or, you know, play this animation, or do this sound or shake around or turn sideways. There's just so many possibilities. And what I really can't wait to see is what are people going to do with this really powerful language? You know, what kind of games are they going to make inside of LEGO Universe, and I can't wait to see like, which of those come to the top, and kids are off playing that. I'm real proud of the content we made. But I'll be most proud of the fact that we made something that allowed people to make stuff we never imagined possible.

Ethan Vincent

As the marketing slogan, Bring your Creations to Life, was becoming more and more a reality within the game, NetDevil set out to work on adding a rich soundscape. Much of which we actually covered in our recent podcast.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, if you're interested in that we did a deep dive in a previous podcast, so definitely listen in on that. But to summarize, a major highlight for the team was the ability to draw big names to the project. Among those was composer Brian Tyler, who would go on later to work on Charlie's Angels, Ready or Not, a few of the Marvel Universe movies and television shows like Magnum PI and Hawaii Five O. And he came in to create the game's iconic music. We also, you know, heard from actor Patrick Stewart in our last podcast who was brought in to be the voice of the game's narrator.

Ethan Vincent

That's right. And in addition to kind of overseeing the soundtrack recording, senior audio director Richard Dekkard was in charge of the monumental task of adding, in the ballpark of six to seven thousand sound effects into the game. A huge undertaking.

Brian Crecente

So in January 2009, TT Games visited NetDevil to look over what the team was working on and see if they could lend any of their own expertise. TT Games' *LEGO Star Wars: The Video Game*, which had launched back in 2005, had sold 3.3 million copies in its first year, and hit nearly 7 million by the summer of 2009.

Ethan Vincent

That's right, and a month after that visit, the LEGO Group and NetDevil officially announced that LEGO Universe was being delayed. And at the time, Mark Hansen told the press that the delay into 2010 would afford NetDevil the time to continue its work on the original concept, and potentially add in new ideas. And so in March 2009, the studio locked in its game vision, the studio now 100 strong, finally knew where it was headed. And now it was just about getting there. A month later, a contingent of NetDevil developers visited TT Games' studio in Manchester to discuss the game. And Ryan talked to us a little bit about that back in an interview in 2010.

Ryan Seabury

We actually started talking to the guys from Traveller's Tales games. And one of the points they made, I think it was Jon Burton from there, he said, he came out, he looked at a build of the game, and you know, we kind of talked about where we were going. And he said, "You know, you're calling this thing LEGO Universe," and at the time, our design was a flat base-plate world, it was kind of this unique planet, if you will, there was a flat planet, right, we kind of thought it would be a funny joke to have a flat planet out there. And so all the different zones we were planning were built on this planet. And then we were gonna keep expanding over the edge of the planet, maybe even go to the bottom side of it, things like that. But he looked at it and said, "You know, this kind of looks like...it's just like a city that's on this base-plate, right? And it's like, you're calling this LEGO Universe. It doesn't feel as big as what you're calling it." And that was just a comment that he made, right? And I thought that was a really salient point, I'm like, "Yeah, wow that's good," because, you know, we get so close to the grind, figuring out the details of what's going on in the game and interactions and the content that's there that sometimes it's hard to take that step back and just look at it from just a plain point-of-view, not how would a kid perceive this if they've been playing *LEGO Star Wars* on the console, and then they hear about LEGO Universe, and it's perceived to be, you know, a smaller area or something, so we really had to crank it up a bit at that point.

Ethan Vincent

While work progressed on the game, the studio was surprised to see another title, one that was designed to drop players into a blocky open-world of construction and destruction, suddenly start to garner attention from game journalists, developers and players alike - Minecraft. The creation of one person and initially only playable on a website was officially on the scene. And though it was largely unnoticed by mainstream gamers, it didn't escape

the notice of NetDevil. Both Lisbeth Valther, executive vice president at the LEGO Group, and NetDevil co founder, Peter Grundy, talked to us about that.

Lisbeth Valther

Yeah, the first time I saw Minecraft, I felt this is the game we should have developed (laughs) I really felt that way. And in some ways, I felt like we had we had done it the wrong way. We were trying to do everything at the same time instead of just focusing on what we set out to do, but then, yeah, that was my thought.

Peter Grundy

You know, midway towards the end, people started to see Minecraft and realize, "Oh, boy, we could have made it so much easier and simpler if we'd have just done it with one brick."

Ethan Vincent

Isn't that interesting?

Peter Grundy

Yeah, I mean, Minecraft's such an incredible, just vehicle for creativity. I mean, I still play it with my kids today, right? Like it's a never-ending sandbox of creativity.

(Music)

Chapter 3: NetDevil Founders Depart – 26:00

Brian Crecente

Over the preceding months NetDevil first released a limited alpha of its game, then an alpha and a beta. Minecraft, meanwhile, plodded along with its tiny development team releasing its alpha a month after LEGO Universe's beta. In October 2010, LEGO Universe officially launched, almost exactly five years after NetDevil signed on to create the game. While the studio was delighted with the release, the relationship between NetDevil and Gazillion had deteriorated to the point of being untenable to some, including Ryan Seabury.

Ryan Seabury

There were more than a few heated phone calls I had with people. And that really started, you know, making me unhappy, actually, to be a part of that. I didn't want to...they were asking me to do things I wasn't comfortable doing as a leader, and I just wouldn't. So the tension really was getting pretty bad between leadership there and I think Scott...I'm sure more than I ever know, ran a lot of interference there to keep them off my back.

Brian Crecente

Hansen said the LEGO Group allowing the studio to be sold to Gazillion turned into a nightmare. From his perspective, Gazillion purchased the studio to take it over, cut costs, and then turn around and sell it to a bigger company like Disney. The result was internal conflict on almost a daily basis, he said. Those conflicts began to turn into a desire, he thought, to drive certain people out of the studio, including Seabury, who was essentially heading up the creative side of development on the game. He said the result was that Scott Brown and Hansen spent a bulk of their time dealing with what Hansen called, bullying, by Gazillion. Seabury, he said, was being picked on by the company to be pushed out. And Grundy was simply burning out, Hansen said.

Mark Hansen

The LEGO Group allowed it to be sold. And it just turned into a nightmare from that point on. And it showed because just how much conflict they brought in just on a daily basis, and wanting to wash out, I mean, very key people of creativity, because they spoke up or they said something bad about one of them or...I'm just like, really? I mean, being childish here. You got creative people, and you're trying to get rid of them. And one of them was Ryan Seabury. I mean, literally, it's just like, it was like they're trying to build this wedge between us and NetDevil and it just failed them, time after time after time. You know, it was just very, very bad. And I think the support I got to handle that relationship from back in Denmark was zero.

Ethan Vincent

Eventually unable to deal with the daily stress and mismanagement, Grundy, Brown and Seabury all left. Seabury handed in his resignation before the game launched on October 26, 2010. And Brown left in the month after the game launched. Both went on to start End Games Entertainment, and Peter Grundy left in January 2011 to join them.

Scott Brown

It wasn't long after the game launched-

Ethan Vincent

This is Scott Brown speaking.

Scott Brown

-that my relationship with Gazillion became untenable. I just had a bunch of ideas about how I wanted NetDevil to grow and change. And it just was one of the hardest decisions I've ever made. But even in hindsight, as much as I wish it didn't happen, for me my mental state at the time it had to. It was, you know, it's the relationship that's over but you're trying to keep it going anyway and it just wasn't a fit. We were, sadly we were just oil and

water - kind of how I thought about running a company and how they thought about it were just not the same approaches.

Mark Hansen

I got to credit the team though and NetDevil, those guys, that's how much passion they had for the LEGO project.

Ethan Vincent

This is Mark Hansen speaking again.

Mark Hansen

Because I really tried to keep my head down and keeping out of that. And with what an employer was doing back to them was just kind of shameful.

(Music "LEGO Universe" track from
the LEGO Universe Original Game Soundtrack by Brian Tyler)

Chapter 4: LEGO Universe Goes Live – 29:54

(Sounds from LEGO Universe's launch party)

Ronny Scherer

We have a whole roomful of executives-

Ethan Vincent

This is Ronny Scherer talking.

(Sounds of party and countdown)

Ronny Scherer

-all the designers, all the artists, QA staff... just waiting, and then-

(Launch party sounds)

Ronny Scherer

-the red ribbon was cut, people were in the game and...wow.

Scott Brown

This morning at eight-0-eight-0-eight we launched LEGO Universe.

Ethan Vincent

This is Scott Brown speaking.

Scott Brown

So we brought everybody in a room, we had a string quartet here, fired up the servers had speeches, we were live with Billund, and we kicked this off.

Ryan Seabury

I just drove into work this morning and it was like an incredible sunrise. And when I got here, the sun was actually shining just on the studio. So it's kind of like this nice auspicious start to the day, right? A new day for LEGO Universe. So yeah, it's really exciting. You know, it's a culmination of hundreds of people's effort. Everybody's got their own little piece of LEGO Universe. We actually launched a living breathing world today, so that's, you know, you don't get this every day.

Ethan Vincent

So, Scott, I remember on launch day of LEGO Universe, Ryan talking about the sun rising on NetDevil and kind of with, you know, tears in his eyes clearly touched, saying how proud he was that, you know, the game launched and it was this living, breathing world, and I was just wondering was there at all this kind of weird moment between you guys, you know, realizing that Ryan was no longer part of NetDevil? And, you know, these kind of joint efforts in creating the game were over?

Scott Brown

Yeah, I think we went through all that probably a little bit earlier. Like, I mean, truly, the day that it launched was just euphoria. There wasn't really room for any other emotion right then. When things had gone, sort of sour between us and our parent company, to the point where it was very difficult for us to work. That was a very strange time, for sure. It was both happy and sad, maybe in the way like a parent seeing their child go off to college, or some kind of this thing I've made is kind of off on its own now and it's no longer mine to sort of mold and shape. So yeah, it was...there was some bitter sweetness, certainly, but the day of launch was all about the launch, and we were all...it was just hugs and high fives.

Mark Hansen

(inaudible) is that a big project like this. It's all of you. And it's all of us all year long together on daily basis.

Ethan Vincent

This is Mark Hansen, right after the launch of LEGO Universe, addressing the entire team.

Mark Hansen

As again, how we listen to each other's ideas, we don't listen to each other's ideas, we don't bring a project alive. And it's just so important that we all listen to each other. And, you know what? we're just starting. So we need more ideas, we need to keep this game going for 10 years...and I want my 3 million subscribers... (laughter)

Ethan Vincent

Man, you know, hearing that again, what that was like, Brian, where Mark Hansen and really is laying out this vision. That's a 10-year vision, you know, looking into the future. It's really crazy, and I remember him in a recent interview with us telling, you know, this feeling he also had at the same time, which was somewhat of a distance to the LEGO Group, and I thought that was really interesting. And here he is talking about that.

Mark Hansen

You know, that was five years. November, if we launched in November 2nd, it would have been five years to the date. Because November 2nd, 2005, we visited NetDevil. Just the emotion of that, of just how many hours, and how close we got, and just the trials and tribulations we had. And we still got to launch of an MMO It was really a moment of, we showed you guys we could get here. And the LEGO Group, I think the people back at the LEGO Group headquarters, the only ones that really cared on that day was Henrik [Taudorf Lorensen] and Lisbeth [Valther].

Lisbeth Valther

Well, I had a little bit of a mixed feeling.

Ethan Vincent

This is Lisbeth Valther speaking.

Lisbeth Valther

I guess when you develop a game for such a long time it becomes your baby and whether the baby is exactly as you wanted it or not, it's your baby, right? So I really felt, in certain ways, quite happy about the game. And it felt that we had come some way. I was, you know, quite aware that it wasn't the game that I had thought we were going to develop. But I also sort of listened to a lot of my colleagues within the LEGO Group, who felt that we had, you know, the direction that we had taken, which was less of a building community game, and more of a play-theme-like game with the stories and different plays within the game. That was all what some of my LEGO Group colleagues wanted. And I just had this feeling that maybe, maybe I wasn't right. And maybe I was wrong about creating this building community. And maybe in the game world, you needed something that is much more directed, if you want. I felt that we had a good game, I still felt and I remember talking to the team about, okay, so, you know, now we launch it, but we still need to develop it, and there was quite a lot of development plans about creating these building

universes. So you could get those communities within the game, as not as part of the launch but later on, as we moved on, and I felt that we could make this game, the right game if we just had time.

(Music)

Chapter 5: LEGO Play Well Studios – 35:52

Brian Crecente

So now it had been almost exactly five years since Mark Hansen and his small team first visited NetDevil as a potential developer for the game. While the owners at Gazillion were also excited about the launch, there was a sense of anger growing as well, Hansen said. With the creative lead of the game, the head of the studio, and the founders all leaving within months of each other, the LEGO Group realized that it had to take a proactive step to salvage what was quickly becoming a problem at the studio.

Ethan Vincent

And talks started almost immediately after the departure of the founders about the idea of the LEGO Group buying NetDevil from Gazillion Entertainment. And Gazillion, at that point, you know, seemed open to the idea. Hansen said that nobody at the studio wanted to work with the owners anymore, so Gazillion felt they had to sell. The contract the company had with the LEGO Group, also officially ended with the launch of the game. So there was a big question in general about the future of their relationship.

Ryan Seabury

You know, in January of 2011, I guess, yeah then I started hearing bits and pieces from people that were still there-

Ethan Vincent

This is Ryan Seabury again.

Ryan Seabury

-certainly still in communication with Scott and Peter a fair bit, and I don't remember the exact moment or anything when I heard any bits of news. But I got the general impression that that's the way things were heading that things were kind of coming to a head between the LEGO Group and Gazillion, and that the LEGO Group was thinking about just buying out the team, in essence, that was responsible for LEGO Universe, which I was happy about, I thought that was a good decision for the moment, given where things were at. I thought the team would do better in that situation. So I was happy to hear that the LEGO Group was making that move.

Brian Crecente

Were you...how cognizant were you of that move? And when that happened, did you think, hey, maybe I can get back involved? Or like, what was your reaction to the news that it was...that Gazillion was actually essentially leaving the building.

Scott Brown

I was ecstatic for the LEGO team, ecstatic for them.

Ethan Vincent

This is Scott Brown speaking.

Scott Brown

What I'd seen from the LEGO Group and the people who worked for the LEGO Group had told me is, they're one of the greatest companies in the world to work for. And so I was ecstatic for the people there to go have this new sort of lease on life with this amazing company.

Brian Crecente

Did you get involved at all in what happened after that in that short window? You talk a little bit about, you know, talking with Mark [Hansen]. It sounds like basically you were in the background trying to help them figure out a way to keep this going.

Scott Brown

I tried everything I could do. I thought I had an arrangement with the LEGO Group that I was going to go work on the project after I left. And shortly before I left, I found out that Gazillion and the LEGO Group had come to an agreement that it would be wrong for me to go work for the LEGO Group. I never got the reasoning or why they would even agree to that, but they did, and so, sadly, I knew I had no future with the LEGO Group. So yeah, even once it sold, there was there was no path back for me.

Brian Crecente

The sale to the LEGO Group went through in February 2011, but brought with it some significant changes to NetDevil. The deal included the studio itself, which was renamed to Play Well Studios, as well as all rights to the LEGO Universe game. Shortly after the acquisition, the LEGO Group laid off about 20 of the 100 or so employees at the studio, throwing those who remained in a bit of a disarray. About six months after the game's launch, and about two months after the studio purchase, the LEGO Group started discussing what changes should be made to the game to try and improve the chances of its success over time, Valther said.

Lisbeth Valther

I think from the launch date everybody said, okay, it's fine, it'll take some time, and it'll grow slowly. And we also, you know, came up with quite a lot of paying users, I think actually, in the MMO world, in a way quite successful with with a number of paying subscribers we actually had with the game. But over time, it seemed like, you know, but this is not performing on par with *LEGO Star Wars: The Video Game* or anything like that. And then that's also what happens within the LEGO Group, you know, sort of slow successes don't really exist, because either you hit it big time, just immediately, or not. So quite, I guess six months down the line or something like that discussions came, you know, what can we do differently?

Brian Crecente

The game's launch wasn't very strong, and while it continued to grow, it wasn't growing fast enough for an impatient LEGO Group. The initial goal was for the game to hit 180,000 people by the full launch, with continued growth through the following years. Instead, the game launched with 14,000 pre orders. That number grew between 30 and 40,000, monthly subscriptions and then sort of plateaued.

(Commercial for LEGO Universe)

Ethan Vincent

So the company looked at ways to quickly improve the player numbers. And in June, the company announced a major change to its business model for the game. LEGO Universe launched as an on-disk-game in a box that sold for 40 bucks. And starting in August, the game would be made available for free via digital download, no need to buy the game upfront, or even go to a store to get it.

(LEGO Universe commercial continues)

Ethan Vincent

This was kind of a new thing at the time, and the physical retail PC game which had by then dropped to \$20 would be discontinued permanently. The game would now generate all of its revenue from monthly subscriptions, player could access a few adventure zones and one-player property area for as long as they wanted to, but to get to the rest of the game, at the time, I think it was around 15 adventure zones and five player property areas, they'd have to sign up for a \$10 a month pass or pay \$50 for six months, or \$90 for a year.
Ethan Vincent

But, publicly at least, the LEGO Group continued to say they remained committed to the digital space and LEGO Universe. The change boosted player-numbers dramatically. With the game hitting 2.3 million registered players, and just about 100,000 subscribers.

Scott Brown

I don't feel that a game at that time-

Ethan Vincent

This is Scott Brown speaking.

Scott Brown

-to have over 100,000 subscribers. I'm not sure how many other games even pulled that off. I think it might, you might be able to count it on one hand, at the time, right? So you know, we were successful. We just weren't millions of subscribers, right? But I always felt crossing even that 100,000 barrier was a great thing. I don't like to think of what we did is was failing or missing the mark. It was just, we were selling a subscription game in a non-subscription world. And even then, we were selling it better than most anyone else at the time.

(Music "Darkling Battle" track from
the LEGO Universe Original Game Soundtrack by Brian Tyler)

Brian Crecente

Unfortunately, that strong growth quickly flattened for a number of reasons. The game required a fairly beefy computer to run. The signup process wasn't very streamlined, and some on the team, felt that the game simply didn't have enough to offer to convince people it was worth paying a monthly fee to play. And as every other social creative online game, LEGO Universe needed a critical mass of players in order to sustain itself. That hadn't come true just yet. In September 2011, the LEGO Universe got its first major marketing push from the LEGO Group with the addition of characters and elements from the new and popular Ninjago line. According to a new plotline woven into the fabric of the game, a Ninjago monastery was being attacked by a skeleton horde on a new area in the game, and it's up to the players to thwart the attack. The area also added some new challenges. At this point, the game had more than 100 missions and a level cap of 45 for its players. Nearing the one-year anniversary of the game's release, it finally felt like LEGO Universe was starting to hit its stride, said Brian Johnson.

Brian Johnson

It always feels like just when you figured out how to put the awesome there, like the plug gets pulled. And I really feel like right when...I mean, we had the big Ninjago levels coming out, which was super...like right as we fell into stride where it was like, alright, now we can run, not jog. That's when it was like, all right, this whole thing is closing down. And I obviously didn't see that...the number side of it, so I wasn't sure how much they were in this whole thing was costing. But it was like, I wish we could have started where we ended

because we were a finely oiled machine when they got rid of it, and we were trying to figure out how to make that machine work the entire time we were there.

Brian Crecente

Unfortunately, it was too late.

(Dramatic music)

Chapter 7: LEGO Universe Game Play – 45:04

Brian Crecente

So you know, we've been spending a lot of time talking about the development of the game and all the people involved and the impact on those people. But I think it's important for us to take a moment now to talk about the game itself. There were a lot of people who really loved LEGO Universe when it came out. I remember, in fact, visiting the studios with my son and he really loved the game. We spent a lot of time playing with it when it came out. It had a lot of neat ideas. There were there were a bunch of worlds that you could explore, things like Avant Gardens and Nimbus Station and the Pet Cove and the Gnarled Forest, all those places there. I know you liked some of the factions, Ethan.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, yeah, the factions were cool. But it was this idea that you could pick at the very beginning, you know which group you wanted to belong to. And, you were part of the Nexus Force. There were, you know, there's Assembly, Venture Leagues, Sentinels, Paradox, and it would kind of give you a different kind of minifigure to explore LEGO Universe. Brian, do you remember which faction you and Tristan kind of picked?

Brian Crecente

Yeah, I think we were in the Sentinels, I think that's right. I think because they had they had the knight and we really like those.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, you know what's interesting, Brian, too, is I was going back looking at all the developers and everyone involved. And there was quite a list of, you know, individuals who had kids around our age during that time. You know, Ryan Seabury, Chris Sherland, Brian Johnson, you, me, Ronny, we all had kind of kids in similar ages, and they were all playing LEGO Universe at the time, which was really cool.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, and I think it's cool. One of the things I really liked about the game was I'm a big fan of Diablo and I love that they sort of took the idea, I think, that Diablo used where instead of worrying about sort of leveling up and changing your character, it was about the sort of equipment that you had.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah.

Brian Crecente

And it gave you this sense of wanting to go out and find new equipment and sort of build out your character, not based on their personal skill sets, as much as based on like, what sort of things and what they look like. I thought that was a really neat feature.

Ethan Vincent

Totally. And it's impossible to talk about everything that the game, you know, had in there, but there are mini games, there's just exploring you could go on to, and of course they had properties. And one of the things that I thought was interesting and thinking about properties is if you compare that maybe to, you know, some of the other games that you can play today like Fortnite, the properties were really just meant for you to build and create, and it was kind of isolated from the gameplay. And I kind of wondered sometimes, like, why is that? And the more I looked into, the more I think about it, too, and how the LEGO Group set that up. It was really there to just create and not be distracted by gameplay, you know?

Brian Crecente

And the creations were amazing.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah.

Brian Crecente

Like there were some people who were just making...like a lot of things, I think when you open the doors to creators, to fan creators, it's like before you know it, they're creating these things that you didn't even realize can be created in the game.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, and it was set up in a cool way too where it was like modular building. You know, very detailed building, you can kind of pick the level of difficulty and complexity you wanted to engage with when it came to, you know, building on your property.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, and let's not forget that you could also have pets.

Ethan Vincent

Yes.

Brian Crecente

Very important addition.

Ethan Vincent

Now you're big pet guy. So did you have a pet there?

Brian Crecente

You know, I don't think I did actually. Maybe it's because I have so many pets in real life I thought it'd be nice to be somewhere without pets (laughs).

Ethan Vincent

Yes. Have a little break. I get that. Yes, totally. Ronny Scherer. I remember him talking to me about, you know, these powerful connections that the game seemed to build with fans from both the LEGO theme sets, but also the growing world of LEGO Universe.

Ronny Scherer

I think LEGO Universe expressed the LEGO brand and the LEGO idea much stronger than what TT Games had been able to accomplish within their formula. And I can only praise those guys for what they've done over the years, but they chose a certain path. And I think LEGO Universe was a different path. And so I think that was a much, much stronger expression of the LEGO brand, as in customization, as in building, as in sharing and creating. When I think about some of my most fond memories about the game, it was, you know, playing with my own kids growing up. It was their first MMO. I got to, I can't remember how, but I came across this boy and his father, who were sort of pioneering podcasts back then. It was a show called, The Secrets of LEGO Universe. I think it's still available on Apple's podcast store. I was just like, that was everything I dreamed of, like someone really taking it to heart, someone really playing it, and just talking out loud while playing it with his father. And his dad was super engaged as well.

(Excerpt from The Secrets of LEGO Universe podcast)

Morgan Walz

Hey everybody! Welcome to the Secrets of LEGO Universe podcast...episode 4, is it?

Jonathan Walz

Episode 5 actually.

Morgan Walz

Oooh, Yeah. I cannot wait to do all sorts of Ninja stuff.

Jonathan Walz

Yeah if you haven't seen the announcements it says, Crux Prime is the largest of the chunks to form by Crux's explosion...

Ronny Scherer

And then the last memory, that still breaks my heart, was those last hours being in the game with the community. And those last minutes, where everyone was sort of gathered together in the plaza and sort of saying the last goodbyes, and then it was off, just like that...that was sort of that whole sort of, you know, emotional element that confirmed that, you know, MMOs are super powerful, and we should not stop trying. LEGO Universe was just the first attempt in trying to achieve this. And I think for Danny [Bergmann] and myself, who are still around and was involved in it. I think that is, for both of us, that is what's carrying us forward to this day. You know, we are trying to get back to that, because there was something magical. And we should never give up on that, because it is there, and it's pure, it's beautiful, it's creative. It's such a great representation of the LEGO brand.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, it's amazing the reaction you get from people online, when you mention LEGO Universe, there's just such a strong reaction. So many people grew up playing this game and love the game. In fact, there are a group of people who loved it so much that they've actually gone about in essentially recreating it, they built up a private server for the LEGO Universe, it's called the Dark Flame Universe. And Neal Spellman and a group of other people, basically, from the year after it was closed, started building this server out, and in 2017, launched this alpha test. And, you know, got it up. It's not officially sanctioned by the LEGO Group, but I think there's a little communication back and forth about that. I think it's important to remember, games like this aren't like your typical video game. This isn't like a game you go and play and beat. This is a world. And it's a life experience. And you begin to feel like it's your home. And so when someone suddenly comes in and says, "Oh, we're turning your home off," it has a very deep emotional impact, I think on some people.

Ryan Seabury

Yeah, I do occasionally, every so often, I'll get an email from some fan out there that's now, you know, an adult and working in the real world-

Ethan Vincent

This is Ryan Seabury speaking.

Ryan Seabury

-something along the lines of, you know, just want to let you know LEGO Universe is so cool to me as a kid and I'm so bummed, and they'll send me like a model that they built in real life that was inspired by some scene in LEGO Universe. And that's always super cool, right? To get some feedback from someone that you actually like, touched someone's head out there and gave them a super positive memory from their childhood, right? Like that's...ultimately at the end of the day that's why I'm a game developer, right? It's like, I want to get into people's heads and create memories and experiences that they will look back at and cherish, right? Like that's, in my mind, the way you live forever, right? Is to create these memories for people that are meaningful and fun, and so...yeah, it's really cool to know that people are still out there pursuing and chasing that dream, and then like the Dark Flame guys is a great example, right? Like, I'm sure they're putting in countless hours of effort to make that happen. And it's just, it's awesome to see that that passion still exists.

(Music "Monument Approach" track from
the LEGO Universe Original Game Soundtrack by Brian Tyler)

Ethan Vincent

As the first anniversary for the game came in went, things were not looking good financially for LEGO Universe. While the game was finally starting to show some signs of long term life, its costs and a changing of the guard at the LEGO Group meant it was unlikely to survive. And Lisbeth Valther, longtime champion of the game, of course, was on her way out at the company. And she said she had a good sense that the game wouldn't survive the new direction the company was headed.

Ethan Vincent

Was it hard for you when LEGO Universe closed?

Lisbeth Valther

It was. Yes, it was. I actually...but I actually left the LEGO Group. I think when I left the LEGO Group, the end of 2011, before it finally closed. So just before the game was closed, I had a meeting with them, I think in November, where I said goodbye to the team, and it was handed over to another LEGO Group...I think LEGO Group vice president [Poul Schou]. But I think even at that time, some people at least, could foresee that this game would probably not survive in the new LEGO portfolio.

Ethan Vincent

Do you think if you would have stuck around it would have survived?

Lisbeth Valther

I'm not sure because I think the way that the LEGO Group works is you need to be successful from the start. It's quite difficult to come back from something that hasn't lived up to expectations. Yeah, I think it would have been difficult to convince people that there was something worth fighting for.

Brian Crecente

Now looking back on this, do you feel like the LEGO Group should have continued to invest in it and hope that in sort of long tail of the game, it would have been successful? Or do you think they made the right decision and closing it down when they did?

Lisbeth Valther

It's a difficult question to answer. I think actually, what I probably think would be...would have been the right thing to do was maybe to close the game, but then to use the engine to create a smaller game with more of community feel maybe, because I'm not sure you would...it would have to be a long, slow turn, like turning the Titanic, in order to make the game exactly the game that we set out to do. And I think there was too much, you could say luggage, in terms of investments in quite a lot of story development as well, that potentially wouldn't really have needed to be there if you were to create the community game.

(Music "Brick Annex" track from
the LEGO Universe Original Game Soundtrack by Brian Tyler)

Brian Crecente

A big factor in the decision to kill the game, according to Hansen, was driven by the overall cost of development coupled with the cost of continuing to support it. Another factor, according to Ronny Scherer was the explicit opportunity cost of keeping the game alive. At the time, the LEGO Group's physical sets were exploding in popularity, and investing energy and resources into anything that wasn't delivering at the same level was a hard argument to make.

Ronny Scherer

The LEGO Group at that time had completely recovered from the financial crisis back in 2004. So there are all these other opportunities in front of us as a company. And that actually, you know, bluntly speaking, that challenge is still with us, like we are looking at everything we touch with the physical LEGO bricks turn into gold. And so there is this massive demand and interest in our brand from the physical perspective. So you need to look at the opportunity cost, like do we, you know, spend time money effort on these things that, you know, we touch them and they're instant cash? Or do we build this other business that's totally foreign to us, but will be a great business in the long term? And so I think that was around back then as well.

(Music)

Brian Crecente

So in November of 2011, the LEGO Group officially announced its decision to close LEGO Universe. The company said that it would be closing the game on January 31, 2012. While the game had more than 2.3 million players, not enough of them were paying subscribers. Unfortunately, news of the closing of the game came with news that the LEGO Group was closing down Play Well Studios in Colorado, and the marketing functions for the game in Billund, Denmark, laying off 115 employees. Valther left the LEGO Group that same month. Perhaps not coincidentally, the same month that the LEGO Group decided internally to kill off LEGO Universe, another much more popular building game was officially launched. That's right - Minecraft. While Minecraft didn't get its full launch until November 18, 2011, the game was pulling in unheard of numbers. By launch, the game was getting more than 241 million logins daily, and more than 4 million people had already purchased the game.

Chapter 8: LEGO Universe Post Mortem – 59:10

Ethan Vincent

In retrospect, there seems to be a number of things that contributed to LEGO Universe's ultimate demise: lack of patience, confidence, and an understanding that transforming the LEGO Group's business model, and truly embracing digital play as a new pillar of the brand, would take time, much longer than the one or two years it allowed LEGO Universe. Throughout the project, a lot of new disciplines, processes and capabilities were discovered and learned as the project evolved, but they were never mature enough and perfected to the same degree as the LEGO Group's 89-year physical toy business. Other issues included the long pre production of the game, the unexpectedly high cost of developing and maintaining child-safety protocols for an open-ended building title, and the lackluster marketing support from the LEGO Group.

Brian Crecente

That's right, Ethan. And while the lack of any established theme sets in the game early on was mentioned as a potential key issue by some former team members. Others pointed out that working with big toy franchises such as LEGO Ninjago, or LEGO Legends of Chima, and even LEGO *Star Wars* could become a double-edged sword. On the one side, those titles bring with them a much bigger audience quickly. But on the other side, the complexity and dependencies to the physical product supply chain and retail stores and external licensing partners, were very difficult to navigate due to the uncertainty built-in risk and change in schedule of a game that was trying to innovate on so many different parameters at once. Also, there's the issue of the the actual hardware needed. The requirement for this high-end gaming PC was actually a pretty bad fit for a market that had shifted suddenly away from boxed products purchased in retail stores, to free games on Facebook and mobile

devices, which were being funded by advertising and microtransactions, and didn't seem to take children's safety and privacy as seriously as the LEGO Group felt necessary. Those deeply involved in the game's development each had their own take on why the game ultimately didn't survive much past its launch.

Mark Hansen

I think it came out at the perfect time.

Ethan Vincent

This is Mark Hansen speaking.

Mark Hansen

If it had the marketing behind it, it would have done very well. I think that inside support for the game is what killed it. I mean, it's classic. It's what's written in every management book, they...you know, you get back what you put into it. They did not put top management on a very large investment project. It did not have the eyes of that person.

Ethan Vincent

So you launch in October 2010. And you want it to grow and develop.

Mark Hansen

Yeah.

Ethan Vincent

So the game needed to last.

Mark Hansen

Exactly.

Ethan Vincent

You know, at least a year and it didn't.

Mark Hansen

But that's where the number crunchers come in. So about four months after that is when all the transition us and the Excel sheets come out, right? Oh, well, if we do this, we charge this and we do that and this people come in, but there was never a big marketing fund to it. And there wasn't any synergy thought about doing it. And that's what happened is they didn't let the people who created the game, manage the game.

(Music "Venture Base" track from
the LEGO Universe Original Game Soundtrack by Brian Tyler)

Ethan Vincent

Was LEGO universe too late or too early?

Chris Sherland

I would say, you know, I think the answer is both.

Ethan Vincent

This is Chris Sherland.

Chris Sherland

If we had waited another six to eight months, and said, okay, we do want to get a little more content out, let's hammer out a business model that makes sense. I don't know, there's a lot of, you know, sort of swirling around about Jesper [Vilstrup] and Mark Hansen and the separation from Gazillion, and the the amount of money that LEGO Group had put into it, and was that ever going to get a return? But all that being put aside, if we had waited and come out eight months later with a free-to-play model that was fairly robust, I could posit that LEGO Universe could still be around, with the other idea that, you know, maybe we could have got our stuff together and launched a little earlier, I think we would have been able to create a runway, even with a subscription model, that would have helped start to buy down that production cost that had been creating a lot of pressure on the LEGO side to sort of see some return. And by the time Lisbeth [Valther], and other folks who were, you know, sort of had that project as a beloved attachment. When those folks left, we were also sort of open to much more of the stormy seas. So I feel like, you know, launching when Lisbeth was still on the project, and when we can still sort of, you know, use that shielding and build some runway of revenue, I think it would have lasted as well. So I think the answer is both: it should have launched earlier, and it should have launched later.

Ethan Vincent

Peter Grundy said he, Scott Brown, and Ryan Seabury had actually discussed together what they could do to salvage the situation.

Peter Grundy

Once me and Scott and Ryan were completely out of the picture. I can't tell you the amount of stories and conversations we had afterwards about like, "Well, can we buy it back? And what can we do? Like, let's just make it a sandbox because Minecraft was working, let's just take some of the mechanics of...and just do...these lots of..." We went through multiple user scenarios with a lot of different people of like, what we could

possibly do to maintain it because you don't have a product that has a million people and it not be successful. Like that's unheard of in an MMO. And with the IP. So we...yes, there were a multitude of different scenarios that we had discussed and talked about (chuckles) even to this day, I still have some conversations with Scott and Ryan about it.

Brian Crecente

Boy, man, that would have been really interesting if the three of them had managed to take control of the game and keep it running. But you know, it's interesting, because despite this massive investment, \$125 million roughly, the LEGO Group left the project feeling like, wow, they didn't have a game, at least they had some lessons they learned, right?

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, yeah, totally. And Ronny Scherer, to me, is like a shining example here because instead of, you know, just being completely crushed by this new announcement that his, kind of baby, was over, he set out to start, you know, documenting and archiving and kind of thinking about how to basically preserve this, but also learn from it. And I remember him telling us about, you know, submitting to the Royal Library in Denmark and the National Archive of Electronic Games at The Strong in Rochester, New York, and kind of discussing with them best methods for archiving and documenting online games.

Ronny Scherer

Like even if you think about our conversations about the history of LEGO games since 1995 and forward, there is definitely a pattern of history repeating itself at times. And, so I find that both very sobering, but also very concerning, in a way. When I look back at LEGO Universe, we were trying to do everything day one. And part of it, of course, was in order to protect the brand, it had to be at a certain quality level, it had to be safe. There was a lot of things where we sort of had a checklist and said it has to be this, and this, and this, and this. And I think we overdid some of that. I know for sure we overinvested in some of it. I would like to think that we had gotten better at that by making LEGO Universe. I think we're better at experimenting on a smaller scale, and then, of course, we are doing some tentpoles once in a while where we are taking a bigger risk, and we are building something bigger as a starting point, because that's the kind of brand we are. But I think it's being balanced better now with things that we're doing quick and dirty, and just to learn from it and iterate on it, rather than try to create the whole thing upfront.

Ethan Vincent

Despite this decision to close LEGO Universe, it's not like the LEGO Group, kind of threw making video games away. I mean, they continue to make video games, and to this day they do, and this digital play effort that they do, you know, both social and creative play online is still like one of the big interests they have. So it wasn't a shutdown that meant not continuing games at all, you know??

Brian Crecente

Yeah, and what I think is fascinating is that there are actually games that sort of sprung out of the LEGO Universe effort after that game was shut down. So for instance, LEGO Legends of Chima online, which at the time was based on this relatively new theme, that funny enough, that theme set was going to be added to LEGO Universe had the game been around. So that game came out. And then you had LEGO Minifigures online, and even the game LEGO Worlds, which we've talked about before.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, and around six years after the game's closure, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, who is now the executive chairman of the LEGO Brand Group and was the CEO of the LEGO Group during the development of LEGO Universe. He said in an interview in late 2018, in a Danish newspaper, I think called, Jyllands-Posten, and I thought this was really interesting, Brian, because he said that in retrospect, it was a mistake for the company to shut down the game when it did, looking at the tremendous success of Minecraft and Roblox, now two of the biggest games in the world, he said, he realized that LEGO Universe could have probably grown into something, not just successful, but amazing. And I remember reading this one excerpt and it said, "I consider this one of my greatest fiascos that we weren't persistent. It was obvious that something digital had to happen with the LEGO brand".

Brian Crecente

Wow. Yeah.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah. And obviously, I mean, this is before like The LEGO Movie, this is before a lot of the the massive hits that came following LEGO Universe that all played in this digital realm, you know? So it's really interesting to look at those timelines and also to see, you know, what vision was being met or not met here.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, and I think it's super healthy that the leadership of the company and the company itself is so reflective and, you know, sort of looking back at its own history and willing to realize that maybe some missteps were made.

Ethan Vincent

Totally, but still, you know, the closure of that epic and ambitious game LEGO Universe, definitely came with a lot of pain and heartache and those who had invested years of their lives with that game, had to come to terms with its death.

Ryan Seabury

2013 was a pretty tough year for me personally.

Ethan Vincent

This is Ryan Seabury speaking.

Ryan Seabury

So sort of unrelated to LEGO Universe, I was going through therapy, and some of those personal growth and development practices. And I think, actually through that, I kind of uncovered just how important LEGO Universe really was to me, and that that was actually a pretty big piece of my mental health picture, in 2012, and 2013, which I have no doubt, it was true for a lot of people on that team, you know, so many of us were so invested in that and had put so much of our life into it, and so much of our, just mental focus into it, you know, that it really became a part of you, right? And to have it just sort of just stop, is pretty jarring. So yeah, that took a little work through, it was kind of a revelation that came up, again sort of sideways, as those types of things do when you get into some deeper therapy. But I was feeling pretty down about like just myself, and all my self-value is sort of tied to achievement. And then to have LEGO Universe, this like thing I was super proud of just (poof) gone, was a pretty big hit, and I didn't really realize the impact it had on me for probably a good year. But now, you know, looking back, and after going through that therapy experience, I can see very clearly like, how much that sort of created a self-dialog for me that was like, "Every project I've ever worked on in those 10 years at NetDevil, doesn't exist anymore, right? Like all those MMOs are out of service." And that is, just as a creative person is a really tough pill to swallow. Like, if you're a bad artist, or a bad musician or whatever, like generally your works survives, right? Like, you know at least experience it still - you can go play your song when you want to, or look at your crappy paintings, you know, just to give a sort of metaphor example, right? But as an MMO developer, if your game doesn't run anymore, it doesn't exist, like other than YouTube videos and callbacks, like that, like, you just...you can't play the game anymore. You have to, at least for me, I had to really separate my self-identity, self-value, mental framework from my work, you know, where I had to go through that experience again, and put five years into a project, I don't think I would have the same devastating sort of mental health toll that I took on LEGO Universe when it shut down. But yeah, that was, that was tough.

(Music)

Richard Dekkard

I was pissed-

Ethan Vincent

This is senior audio director and producer Richard Dekkard speaking.

Richard Dekkard

-the game was good, liked and doing well. And it was, it was cut short. And this had happened to me multiple times with multiple games I've worked on. And these companies, they set, you know, they make a spreadsheet of what something is supposed to perform like, and then they tell everybody that's what it's going to do, and then when it doesn't do that, exactly by x day, decisions get made. And I get that, but at the same time, you've got to give things space to grow, a runway to, you know, sort of become. You can't schedule excellence, I guess is the way I would say it. And the game was growing and it was building and it was well-received.

Brian Tyler

Yeah, that was hard.

Ethan Vincent

This is composer Brian Tyler speaking.

Brian Tyler

I really believed in it, you know, and it was so cool, the community was great, I loved it. My team loved it. If you're emotionally tied to it, you know, because you love it, it's kind of crushing, you know? It's like closing down your favorite park or something, you know, and so, you know, it's like, "Nope, can't come in anymore." And so that was really tough you know, and even moreso why like, you know, that I wanted the music to live on because there's such sense memories. You hear, if you haven't played that in a long time and you hear whatever...Nexus Tower or whatever, you immediately...you are there and you can...it's the joy of, not just, you know, hearing the music, but the joy of nostalgically jumping back into the world. There's nothing like it, your brain transports you like, no other form of memory, even more than visual. And so like, yeah, it was it was heartbreaking, you know, when it stopped. For sure.

(Music)

Scott Brown

It was devastating. I don't have a better word than that. It was it was devastating-

Ethan Vincent

This is Scott Brown speaking.

Scott Brown

-because we thought we had built something that was going to be a game for, you know, decades. Like there's no end of LEGO bricks, right? There's always a new set, there's always a new story. There's always a new place to go. But I'm proud of what we did, and I

mean, as everybody's heard now, like what we had to overcome to build it was a lot and we did it! (chuckles) And it was a, you know, it's hard to make a game that's fun, and that people love. It doesn't happen very often, right? Like, honestly, what percentage of games succeed? And so I felt like we succeeded at that. Like, I remember seeing kids crying when they were shutting the game down. That's not a failure, right? Those kids loved it.

Brian Crecente

So, you know, we talked a lot about these people who devoted so much of their lives to building this game that we thought it was important to kind of give you a sense of, where at least three of those people are now, obviously the creators of, sort of the founders of NetDevil and the three leads of LEGO Universe. So in the years following the launch, and then the closure of the game, that trio of creators who were so instrumental in overseeing the creation of the game, managed to continue to work together on new projects for a while. So, Scott Brown, Ryan Seabury, and Peter Grundy went on to set up a new studio called End Games Entertainment. Their first title was a space-based multiplayer online battle arena game called Vorp!. And it even featured music by Richard Dekkard, who also obviously had worked on the LEGO Universe. Unfortunately, that studio folded in 2012. Grundy is currently the art director of Boulder, Colorado-based Circadence, a computer and network security company. Seabury founded Good Luck, Have Fun, an independent development and consulting label that specializes in mobile web and desktop game and non-game development. And Brown went on to found Wyrabyte, a small studio that focuses on online games.

Ethan Vincent

And both you and I were able to follow up with Scott Brown, after part one of the episode of LEGO Universe aired. And it was poignant. And touching to hear his response to the whole podcast.

Scott Brown

Listening to the podcast was emotional: happy and sad. I miss these people dearly. Like that's the hardest part, right? It was just...you know, you always try to kind of put the band back together or whatever, right? But, it was a great team, and you know, and I loved going into work every day. Like I truly loved it. And it was, yeah, it never matched it again. And you miss it. Horribly. And, you know, it's a reminder of like, kind of what could have been, right? But yeah, I mean, also just full of joy. Like it was, it was the greatest. The greatest times.

(Music)

Chapter 9: Conclusions – 01:18:49

Ethan Vincent

You know, Brian, you could do, just as easily, a "where are they now?" with the over 450 kind of employees and contractors and everyone that worked on LEGO Universe. It was such a massive and amazing game, and interestingly enough, I don't see it as such a failure. I mean, it you know, obviously when the game was shut down, it was sad and you know, many were affected by it. But what is so interesting is this possibility to look at it and to see all the great things of that game and to embrace that and not be afraid to to be confident about those things were working. In general, I think video games are this kind of emotional archive and this receptacle of memories and associations, and I definitely have tons of those with this game. As I was able to play it with my son, and able to see my kids just having a fun time with this, both my son and daughter would, you know, trade off and they would have like certain play times they're able to play and would do different things in the universe. I know Liam, back then my oldest son, he was really into the kind of combat aspect and the exploring, and I remember Anouk, my daughter, being super into the pets and the creation, and just some of the fun building aspects of the game. And those things were truly missed. I mean, both of my kids were like, super bummed when that happened. But I've learned so much in working with the LEGO Group on this game. And one of the things that I think I've really learned is seeing how to deal with something that failed and understanding it in the light of history and embracing it and moving on, but also finding ways to use those failures, to continue with confidence. I see that in our common friend Ronny Scherer, I see that in the attitude of the LEGO Games team, and I just am so kind of grateful that we have this history to look back on, however painful might be not to have the game around today.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, I mean, it is such a tremendous thing. I think, again, it's so easy to look at the byproduct at the game. And what you're actually looking at when you look at that, is sort of the tip of an iceberg. And unfortunately, that metaphor sort of holds out when it comes to how it affected in the short term, how it affected the launch of the game and it's, you know, not doing well. But you look at the way this game came to life. And it's so easy to trace its roots back to when the LEGO Group had sort of decided to shutter the Darwin project and stop investing in that. And then you look at, you know, the research they were doing that led to LEGO Digital Designer, and it encompasses that and I think it even touches on things like the tremendous success that TT Games had with titles like *Star Wars*, LEGO *Star Wars*, the same year that LEGO Universe started development, the LEGO Group was sort of enraptured with the successes they were seeing through TT Games. And then, five years later, they're still in the throes of this and Minecraft is bubbling up. So there's a lot of history here and a lot of things that could have gone different ways, but I think ultimately, it's a lesson that is learned on the back of hard work and, most importantly, on the fact that the LEGO Group and its many talented creators and thinkers,

were willing to invest the time and the money and the resources into trying to create something that is rarely done well. And that is a video game that is fun to play, that is online, that allows people to share creations and is safe for children. That's a really hard thing to do and that they were willing to attempt to do that. And in failing, realized that they could still take lessons from that and take those lessons and use them to fuel future efforts, I think is very telling about the approach the LEGO Group takes to everything it creates. It can never be good enough, it has to be perfect. And I think that is the lesson I take away from this: that while the LEGO Group maybe ultimately didn't succeed with LEGO Universe, on some level, there was success because they found a way to take all of that investment and turn it into future products.

Ethan Vincent

So, Brian, we've done three full podcasts covering LEGO Universe, and that alone, is a lot to go through just for your ears, but for your eyes, there's also a feast out there as well. If you go to the LEGO Gaming YouTube channel, you can see and watch a full continuous hour and twelve minute-long LEGO Universe (Original Game Soundtrack) video, that basically features gameplay, early development concepts, you know, artwork and some behind-the-scenes and, you know, a teammate of mine and good friend Manuel Lindinger, he was able to create this, you know, just amazing and astounding collection, pulling from all these treasures and putting it into this really beautiful video that features the music. And another kind of poignant gesture here as well, Brian, is this extensive mind-blowing, I think around 570 names, credit roll at the end of this soundtrack and it's basically featuring everyone who worked on the game and if you just listen to that last title, I think it's called New Worlds, you will see this incredible list of people who contributed to LEGO Universe, so there's just a ton out there, Brian, and obviously a lot to go through, reminisce, and not forget, you know the amazing world of LEGO Universe.

Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 01:25:03

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. Music by Brian Tyler from the remastered, original game soundtrack of LEGO Universe. Additional music by Peter Priemer, Founder Music, and Henrik Lindstrand, from the award-winning game LEGO Builder's Journey, which you can play on Apple Arcade today.

We'd like to thank our participants: Scott Brown, Richard Dekkard, Randall Furino, Peter Grundy, Mark Hansen, Brian Johnson, Ronny Scherer, Ryan Seabury, Chris Sherland, Brian Tyler, and Lisbeth Valther. We'd also like to acknowledge the entire LEGO Games team.

For questions and comments, write us at bitsnbricks@LEGO.com. And as always, stay tuned for more episodes of Bits N' Bricks.

LEGO, the LEGO logo, DUPLO, the Brick and Knob configurations, and the Minifigure are trademarks of the LEGO Group. © 2021 The LEGO Group.

All other trademarks and copyrights are the property of their respective owners. All rights reserved.