How LEGO® Harry Potter™ Helped Reshaped LEGO Video Games

The LEGO Harry Potter games didn't just introduce a new way to explore a brickified version of a beloved fantasy world – they also proved to developer TT Games that the studio could branch beyond the traditional action titles that focused on combat and physical confrontation, to create games with a more explorative nature.

It was, for those who worked on the two games, a dream project.

"I think the memories that were made on the two LEGO Harry Potter video games, those three and a half years are probably some of my fondest because it was a prolonged period of time of just being immersed in this amazing world," said Arthur Parsons, who was the game director on both titles. "It's probably my fondest memories."

She was over the moon when he first heard that TT Games would be getting a chance to turn that fiction into a LEGO game or games.

Parsons said he adored the Harry Potter books since the first – Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, also known as Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone – hit in 1997. The books continued for a decade, and his love for them grew. A series of movies just as delightful as the books began in 2001. The film adaptation of The Philosopher's Stone was followed by Chamber of Secrets the following year, Prisoner of Azkaban in 2004, Goblet of Fire in 2005, and Order of the Phoenix in 2007.

Initially the discussions at the studio centered around how exactly to divvy up the source material. There was so much presented in those movies and books – and so much potential in the universe – that the team had to figure out the best way to turn all of that into a game that did the property and its compelling stories justice.

Then the team started looking at the future game through a different lens.

"Do we do one book, one movie at a time?" Parsons asked. "It was a real challenge. And what we actually did was, we actually sat there and thought, 'Let's just put that to one side and think about what the player experience is that we want games to have.'"

The solution was to focus instead on the experience of being a witch or wizard attending Hogwarts™. One of the key problems solved by this approach was that unlike something like *Star Wars*™ – which is packed with iconic adventures that feature good versus evil battles – Harry Potter was a much more narratively driven piece of storytelling. It was, at its heart, the tale of Harry, Ron, and Hermione's journey through adolescence and into adulthood.

That ultimately led the team into creating what would become the games' biggest character: A living, breathing, detailed version of Hogwarts, which also helped turn the game into a massive space where players don't have to rely on combat to have fun.

Once the team knew they were going to make Hogwarts not just the setting, but an integral part of the game's experience, they had to figure out what parts of the school to focus on and, just as challenging, how to depict them.

Ultimately, the team decided to focus on the first four books and movies of Harry Potter for the first game, due for a 2010 release. That decision was driven in part by the movies that were still coming out.

"There's no way you could get all of that stuff into one game," Parsons said. "There's just so much source material. So we just looked at it and thought, 'Let's just split it in half."

There's also a tonal shift in the books and movies around that fifth year at Hogwarts. Harry and his friends are getting older, they're dealing with more personal issues, and the Wizarding World itself is starting to see some pretty dark events looming. All of which meant that year four and Goblet of Fire felt like a natural breaking point for the two games.

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 hit pretty much every platform in the summer of 2010, landing neatly between the theatrical releases of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince in 2009 and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1 in 2010.

After a short holiday break, work started on the sequel: LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5–7, a game that brought forward all of the learnings and general approach of the first game, but also a whole slew of new challenges. Not least of which: the much darker subject matter.

"For anyone that's watched the movies or read the books, there are some areas, some moments, that are incredibly dark," Parsons said. "How are we going to do these

moments? There are some pretty dramatic sort of sequences that that we had to look at and go right, 'What are we going to do here?'

"We can kind of try and make light of it in a way that only we could with the LEGO video games."

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 hit in November 2011, just months after the conclusion of the Harry Potter films with the release of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2.

Like the first LEGO Harry Potter title, it was well received.

Both games were combined for the LEGO Harry Potter Collection which hit in 2018, bringing the games to the PS4, Xbox One, and Nintendo Switch.

Explore more…

In order of appearance:

[Harry Potter books](#) – Wikipedia

[Harry Potter movies](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Harry Potter](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Harry Potter Collection](#) – Official website

[TT Games](#) – Official website

[Wizarding World](#) – Wikipedia

Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 4 Episode 39: LEGO® Harry Potter™ – A Journey Through All Eight Films

Nov. 10, 2021 • 54:44

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, Ben. We got it.

Announcer

Alright. On with the show.

Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 00:39

(Child's voice announcing 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 season 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.

Ethan Vincent

Good morning, Brian.

Brian Crecente

Hey, Ethan. How goes it?

Ethan Vincent

It goes, it goes. I was just thinking about Harry Potter today. Do you realize it's been more than 24 years since the release of that first book, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone?

Brian Crecente

Oof. You know, my son wasn't even, born and I was still in my 20s. Man, that one hurts. You know, I can't believe how long it has been since we all started reading about the Wizarding World and the cursed child. You know, today is actually a pretty special anniversary for Harry Potter. Today is the 20th anniversary of when the first movie, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, hit theaters in the UK and Ireland for previews. It would go on to get a full release just a few days later and make more than a billion dollars.

Ethan Vincent

Man, that's insane. And it was both the movies and the books that helped shape TT Games' take on Harry Potter, when the team there developed LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 and LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7.

Brian Crecente

And that is the subject of today's episode.

Ethan Vincent

Yes, it is. Now before we get started, we should warn you that if you are aware of Harry Potter, but still haven't somehow read the books or seen the movies or played the games, well, this episode is packed with spoilers. So don't listen if you haven't watched, played or read the books. OK, back to the show.

Chapter 1: Early Concepts and Hogwarts™ – 02:32

Brian Crecente

It must be amazing to work at TT Games, not just because you get to help create some of the most endearing family-friendly games in the world, and of course work with LEGO bricks while doing it, but also because you get to really dig into the heart of pop culture.

Ethan Vincent

That's so true. You know, the list of franchises of imaginary worlds that TT Games gets to examine and recreate is staggering. Of course, it all started with *Star Wars*™, an examination which continues to this day, but there's also Indiana Jones, Batman™, Marvel DC, Pirates of the Caribbean –

Brian Crecente

Care-ib-BEE-an?

Ethan Vincent

Cuh-RIB-be-an?

Brian Crecente

Ugh, you know, we keep having this discussion. What's funny is, it's always ,when you look at it on paper. It just looks like we're saying the same thing over and over again.

Ethan Vincent

Anyway, let's get back to it, right? There's also Lord of the Rings, Doctor Who, Scooby-Doo, A-Team, Rock Band, Portal, Jurassic Park. It's a long list,and it's basically everything that matters in the world of pop culture. But for some TT Games, the cherry on top of this wonderful buffet of creativity was indeed Harry Potter.

Brian Crecente

At least that was the case for Arthur Parsons, who worked on most of the LEGO TT Games and was the game director for both LEGO Harry Potter titles. He tells us he was over the moon when he found out that TT Games landed Harry Potter.

Arthur Parsons

My inner child just like leaped up and down. I was so, so excited because it was the game that I'd wanted to do being a massive Harry Potter fan. And yeah, I just stood up, said this is great news, walked out of the room and went and did a little jig down the corridor. I was so, so excited.

Ethan Vincent

Arthur said he adored the Harry Potter books since the first, Philosopher's Stone, hit in 1997. The books continued for a decade, and Arthur's love for them grew. By 2008, the books were joined by just as delightful a series of movies starting in 2001. The film adaptation of Philosopher's Stone was joined by Chamber of Secrets the following year, Prisoner of Azkaban in 2004, Goblet of Fire in 2005, and Order of the Phoenix in 2007.

Arthur Parsons

I think, for me, when you think about LEGO games and what they are, you know, the cooperative aspects, the puzzling, the exploration, the retelling of fantastic stories, Harry Potter, you know, at the time was just ripe for us to be able to play with some amazingly fantastic characters, some obviously fantastical locations and creatures, and all the stories and what Harry Potter brings when you sort of turn it into a LEGO video game, is something completely different to anything we've done before. LEGO *Star Wars*™ was all about retelling those amazing stories through galaxies. LEGO Batman was bringing superheroes to life who are saving Gotham and everything that superheroes bring to the table. LEGO Indiana Jones was very physical, the pickup and play aspects of all the interactions that are in the game and effectively, you know, for want of the better wording, duffing up bad guys. Harry Potter brings something different that it isn't a case of going around duffing up goons, isn't a case of retelling stories in quite the same way. And it's just an exciting challenge. And when you're a fan of something, you just want to play in that space because you know you can do something completely different. And I think that was our starting point, when we had that blank piece of paper that just said LEGO Harry Potter. It's like how do you transform these seven books, and and then obviously, subsequently, the eight movies into a video game? And it was a incredible challenge to just know where to start. And at that point, it would have been a case of like, what do we do? It was a series of like get togethers, myself and a small group of designers, sitting in a room, effectively brainstorming just going, "What can we do? What can we do that's different, and new, faithful, and, more importantly, really exciting?" Because I think the LEGO Company playsets had actually come to an end at the time, and we didn't need to get the game greenlit because I do believe that there were plans to reboot the play materials. It was more a case of getting what we wanted to do with the game greenlit.

Ethan Vincent

Initially, the discussion centered around how exactly to divvy up the source material. There was so much presented in those movies and books, and so much potential in the universe as a whole, the team had to figure out the best way to turn all of that into a game that did the property and it's compelling stories justice. But then the team started looking at that future game through a different lens.

Arthur Parsons

Do we do one book, one movie at a time? It was a real challenge. We actually sat there and thought, let's just put that to one side and think about what the play experience is that we want games to have. And that was when, you know, after sort of a few days of mulling over thoughts and concepts and ideas, where we basically said, "Look: What we should be doing is what the IP does, which is giving you that experience of being a wizard (sounds from gameplay) rather than, say, just create, say, six levels, you know stitch them together with a narrative. Why don't we actually try and bring Hogwarts to life? Why don't we try and bring the Wizarding World to life?" Because at the time, we hadn't done anything like

that, and we always tried to push each game forward to try and make sure it was new and exciting in some way. And we just had this idea of could this game be like almost like a modern incarnation of something like School Days, and it kind of went from there.

Brian Crecente

A key problem solved by this approach was that, unlike something like *Star Wars*™, which is packed with iconic adventures that feature good versus evil battles, Harry Potter was a much more narratively driven piece of storytelling. It was, at its heart, the tale of Harry, Ron and Hermione's journey through adolescence and into adulthood. Turning that into an action game meant taking a very different approach.

Arthur Parsons

Well, there's a constant threat of Voldemort, but there's not a constant threat in terms of, you know, hundreds of storm troopers, or loads of military personnel like in Indiana Jones. It's a different property. So it's actually a really difficult thing to bring to life because the things that we had traded in terms of, you know, go into a room, say, in LEGO Batman and then a load of Joker goons come in or henchmen, and then you'll have like a bit of an action fight sequence, and then you'll puzzle your way to something else. You don't have that because, like Hogwarts is all about the kids effectively going to school. That's what it is – it's a School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And so, you have to sit there and think, "OK, can we maybe make a game that's just the big beat points?" But then you look at some of the big beat points and it may be Harry on his own in a certain situation, or it may be that it's quite a complex story. So, you have to sort of like, I guess distill everything back to, "OK, we're going to have to do something new. There aren't enemies just patrolling around, left, right, and center. There aren't things that we can necessarily lean on. We've got to be really inventive here." And that was where we were like, "What is Harry Potter at its core essence? It is a journey of witches and wizards, learning about who they are and what they can do and being their best versions against this, I guess, overarching evil." And that was when it was like we settled on the fact that, yeah, we're going to have to bring school to life. And we hadn't done anything like this. We hadn't done anything open-world, not to say that LEGO Harry Potter's open-world, but it kind of is. It's those first steps. It's, you're going into a living, breathing school where you see the students from the other houses, you've got lessons that you go, and you're going to have to go to attend, and yeah, it was really exciting when we got to the point of realizing what we wanted to make. And then we had to design it, which, which in itself is a challenge because it's a pretty big school.

Ethan Vincent

That ultimately led the team into creating what would become the game's biggest character: a living, breathing, detailed version of Hogwarts.

Arthur Parsons

Every book follows a similar path of, sort of like, catches up where Harry is at that moment in time and then take some of these journeys to Hogwarts, and then sort of like tees up that year, or that book's kind of endgame, all with sort of like the stitch together, finesse of the wider story arc of the Wizarding World. And so we had to sort of sit there and go, well, actually, in some of these adventures, there may not be a consistent number of things that we would want the player to experience. You know, there isn't necessarily the same number of lessons or the same number of key events or, you know, when Harry, Ron and Hermione are dealing with Buckbeak down at Hagrid's hut, you know, everything's different. And then especially as you go later on when the Wizarding World expands to obviously the London area and Ministry of Magic and everything, so we had to almost build something that was future-proofed. And the way to do that was to have a school that I guess unlocks as you grow through everything from the Philosopher's Stone, Sorcerer's Stone, through to The Deathly Hallows.

Brian Crecente

It also solved the issue of the Harry Potter books not necessarily aligning with the core action of combat found in most action video games. Conflict is often the thing that propels a video game along, but Harry Potter didn't have enough of that. It was a big enough concern initially that the team discussed whether the game would ultimately appeal to the same fans who purchased LEGO *Star Wars*™ and LEGO Indiana Jones.

Arthur Parsons

We did actually have conversations around how is this game going to feel to, effectively, the gamer at the end when they've purchased it and they're playing it when there isn't that sort of ease of, "I'm going to just be able to duff up whoever's near me, or there's a stream of bad guys through every door, or there's a high action sequence like around every corner." First and foremost is like there's no combat. That iconic thing that's been in, you know, LEGO *Star Wars*™, LEGO Batman, LEGO Indiana Jones of being able to do melee combat, being able to use weapons, has gone. And obviously, anyone that knows Harry Potter knows that most spells are actually not offensive spells, you know, there's obviously the Killing Curse, but most spells, I guess, engaging or you know, you've got defensive spells, but then you've got a load of really creative ones, and so, how do you make that game all action? And that was the sort of the worry, I guess, early doors, the worry was, are players going to really engage with this in the same way as they've engaged with the previous LEGO games? But I think as soon as we had an early version of Harry running around with his wand, being able to cast spells and have fun, it's sort of like all of those worries were dispelled because it was suddenly incredibly engaging to be a LEGO brick version of Harry Potter. As Hogwarts came to life, and you could interact with the other students, you could see the various, sort of like, teachers from Hogwarts and interact with those. It became a very early open world game where you're free to explore, and I think that was the beauty of it, or the magic of it. So yeah, you might need to go and follow

Nearly Headless Nick to the next thing that was going to progress the narrative. But if you didn't want to, guess what? You could go and explore the grounds, you could go and sort of fly around on a broomstick. You could just have fun zapping plants and people and making weird stuff have happen. And then we realized, yeah, you don't need combat. This is going to be great as exactly as it is.

Ethan Vincent

The solution was to essentially create a massive play space where people didn't have to rely on combat to have fun.

Arthur Parsons

But yeah, we had that starting point, I think was Gryffindor Common Room, which, obviously in the film is a small room with a number of beds. And we made that fun and exciting. You could zap the bed and it would shake, you could, you know, cast your wand and bring a chest of drawers to life. We had paintings on the wall that were alive just exactly as people would see in the movies and would engage with you and interact with you and everything was suddenly like answered for us as a team was, OK, this is the solution. The solution is the player should be able to interact with everything that's LEGO bricks, and there should be some whimsical, magical reaction, and that way people are going to go round and actually be spending their time exploring, and almost the sort of like exactly what the LEGO Group is about, which is the magic of play. It just became a grand playspace of fun with the narrative always there for you to, sort of like obviously, continue through for those that wanted to progress through the Harry Potter stories.

Ethan Vincent

Once the team knew they were going to make Hogwarts not just the setting, but an integral part of the game's experience, they had to figure out what parts of the school to focus on – and just as challenging, how to depict them. Not everything that the team wanted to put into the game was detailed in the books or movies.

Arthur Parsons

The first thing we had to worry about was the actual layout with Hogwarts because you read the books, you watch the movies, and we had to watch and rewatch, and to be fair, it's not a chore. We love Harry Potter and everyone on the team did so it wasn't a problem, but we were looking and watching to see exactly what the layout was. Where was the toilet corridor? Where was the sort of different common rooms? The staircases?The grounds? Hagrid's hut, you know, the boathouse? Dumbledore's sort of office? Where were all these things sat? Where are they all laid out? And so we kind of broke everything up into the classrooms, the dormitories, you know, the great hall, and got all the locations we wanted, and then we sort of created our own map of what we thought that was, and then kind of mirrored it to the movies, because obviously, all those amazing shots in the movies were, I think it's in the very first movie where they're all arriving by boat, and you get that

lovely shot over the water that kind of sweeps up over Hogwarts. All of those sort of images, we were using those to kind of create our own version of Hogwarts. But then, obviously, because it's a game space, those spaces need to sometimes be exaggerated or distorted slightly so the players are always having fun and the navigation's easy, and you know, even if you're going down to the Quidditch™ pitch, and everything needs to sit right because we didn't want players going on a really long walk anywhere at any point, but it had to feel authentic. So you just suddenly felt, "I am a LEGO minifigure. I'm LEGO Harry Potter running round Hogwarts." And it felt great. At that point it's like, OK, we've got this. We've taken the risk elements away of like, no combat and a whole new structure. And it works. And then yeah, then we just had to, I guess, fill in the blanks, which is, I guess, the next tricky part.

(Tune break)

Chapter 2: LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 – 18:44

Brian Crecente

In practice, LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 tried to deliver an experience that didn't feel like you had to return to a hub, like the cantina found in LEGO *Star Wars*™, to pick a new area to explore. Instead, they wanted the entire Wizarding World to feel like it was a hub. They were essentially trying to design the game to feel like an open world.

Arthur Parsons

What we did was we just unlocked different parts as you progressed through the books, through the movies. And we would at times, depending on where you were in the story, we would maybe have to close an area off or open up a new area. But we wanted it to feel 100% authentic. So if you were in Diagon Alley, you could go into Ollivanders wand shop, you could wander down and see other things that you recognize, you could go into Gringotts Bank, you could go and find your way to Knockturn Alley, which was, you know, again, a really cool thing to add in, and then you could go into Borgin and Burkes, and so the whole thing was a living, breathing hub, I guess. But that also came with tricky parts because, you know, take Diagon Alley for example, there are points in the books, in the movies where things change. You know, you have the Weasley's joke shop which gets sort of put there in film six. So, these things had to also change as the the game sort of like progressed along. And that I think was the real challenge, making sure that at no point was anything not authentic, if that makes sense. It had to be nailed on authenticity to what a Harry Potter fan would want. And at no point were we ever going to get anyone say that we had not done it justice.

Ethan Vincent

John O'Brien, who was the producer of that first game, called the new approach to the game's hub an evolution from previous LEGO games.

John O'Brien

So we haven't really gone as far and as expansive as what we did in Years 1-4 in past LEGO titles, and it felt like an opportunity because the Wizarding World of Harry Potter had magic. We felt as though we could really explore the hope and we could effectively – if you go back to the LEGO *Star Wars*™ games where there was the cantina, this was like a modern day version of a kind of a that, but set within Hogwarts. And it was really Arthur's vision with his set of designers, and obviously with Jon Burton's input as well, to essentially push this expanding Hogwarts hub to be effectively the center, the nucleus of the whole world, for Years 1-4, so that we could essentially build a Hogwarts Castle that would be changing, it would be accessible via certain abilities or certain wizards that you would unlock through the story itself. So essentially, it was about ensuring that we delivered on a Hogwarts that offered the core mechanics and the unlockable characters to offer a great gameplay experience, but at the same time, to still make sure that we kept true, making sure that the castle felt alive to ensure that there was replayability, because that's really, really important for LEGO games, but just to make sure that we got that balance correct in the sense of, we want to create this all-forever, all-living, all-changing Hogwarts, and make sure that would be respectful and true to the world of Harry Potter.

(Tune break)

Brian Crecente

Deborah Crook, lead technical artist on the game, said the decision to build the game without a hub also led to some fairly big technical issues. It was Crook's job to make sure that all of the game set pieces fit together and played seamlessly.

Deborah Crook

It was one of the first games that we'd made that had such a kind of a large, exploratory world, and it radically sort of changed how we ended up sort of structuring our data to help have this world that opened up over time. We had to make a lot of adaptations to how we'd done game previously just so that we could build that, you know, the Hogwarts world and – for one, Hogwarts was a lot of very, you know, small bits all completely linked together to make a big, exploratory space. And the idea that throughout the progress of the entire game, there was bits that were persistent and bits that weren't. And it did mean that we had to do a lot of work on our editors and exporters, just so the thing that we use to get the models out of Maya and into the data that the game engine can read, we had to do a lot of restructuring just to enable that. And, you know, it was something that did bear us in good stead for future games, because it meant that there was much more separation between the environment art and the gameplay, because previously, they were bound

more together. And yeah, it was kind of a challenge to do that because at first the idea was that each of the four years, when you were going around Hogwarts, it would be a completely new set of gameplay, and on top of that being a hell of a lot of work that would also be kind of confusing for people playing through it. So when we made the decision to sort of make it into a more kind of persistent experience, it just meant that we had to do a lot of work with our existing systems to enable that.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

Deborah added that breathing more life into the setting of the game also helped to set it apart from all of the TT titles that came before it.

Deborah Crook

We wanted to make just a lot of the interactions a bit more rich and a bit more detailed because previously they were kind of, you know, there'd be very singular, there'd be either things that blew up or things that did one thing, and we developed a system for kind of packaging little sort of collections of these things together so that, you know, even just something as simple as being able to blow up a pile of books and then re-stack them using magic. And we developed like lots of like an editor that meant that we could sort of package these little things up and then place them around. Yeah, so there was lots of ongoing little things like that, that just meant that we can put more detail into what the interactions and what was going on.

Ethan Vincent

While the team was more focused on making Hogwarts feel alive with activity, they still needed to divvy up all of the source material. Ultimately, the team decided to center their attention around the first four books and movies of Harry Potter for the first game, due for a 2010 release, a decision that was driven in part by the movies that were still coming out.

Arthur Parsons

There's no way you could get all of that stuff into one game. There's just so much source material. And when you look at it and think about it, we had all of the movie reference to work from for quite a number of the movies, you know, five movies, and then obviously, the sixth one as it came out. But the things that happen in Deathly Hallows and the new locations about it, we didn't know what they would look like, or how they would be portrayed, or how those events would necessarily change. And I think just because of the sheer scale of everything, we just looked at it sensibly and thought, "Look: This is like way more than enough content for a game. The sheer amount of time for a Years 1-4 playthrough it's pretty lengthy." So we just looked at it and thought, "Look: Let's just split in half what we're making here, and given there's eight movies, the logical thing to do is just 1-4 and 5-7," because with Deathly Hallows obviously spanning the two movies, and it

was just the logical sort of like marker point in between. And we had already sort of worked everything through for what the scope of everything, in terms of the real estate. It was just a case of, I guess, timing more than anything.

Ethan Vincent

John said that length also played an important role in that decision.

John O'Brien

Years 1-4 offered a great opportunity for, you know, a good length for a video game. It's also kind of like, not so much the halfway point within the books themselves, but essentially, it just it offered a real digestible chunk of the game where we felt we could take enough of the LEGO brick franchise, the LEGO brick world, and look at all of the diverse range of characters that we have inside the Harry Potter universe to create a really compelling set of locations, and also really set of compelling mechanics to bring the synergy of both of those fantastic worlds together, the LEGO brick world as well as the Harry Potter world.

Brian Crecente

There's also a pretty strong tonal shift in the books and movies around the fifth year at Hogwarts. Harry and his friends are getting older, they're dealing with more personal issues, and the Wizarding World itself is starting to see some pretty dark events looming. All of which meant that Year 4 and Goblet of Fire felt like a natural breaking point for the two games.

Arthur Parsons

In terms of how we sort of were to approach the second game, we didn't really know what we were going to sort of like focus on until we'd kind of finished the first, because we wanted to make sure that people were happy with LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4, and really make sure that everyone was like, "This is great. This game really does do the IP justice." And once that game released, and we saw sort of the reviews and how consumers like played it and enjoyed it. It was then a case of looking for the second game to see, is there anything we could make better? And I think we made a few changes to the way that the spells worked and some of the controls, but effectively the second game was like the whole thing was designed early doors. And it was then just a case of ensuring we delivered to the best of our ability as a team.

Ethan Vincent

Once the team nailed down the look and feel of a living and breathing Hogwarts meant to represent the experience of being in the Wizarding World and settled on telling the stories of the first four books, the next step was deciding which specific settings and plot points they had to focus on.

Arthur Parsons

It was all about what are the things that people really enjoy from Harry Potter? And, you know, when I say people, you know, the core team, we were all pretty big Harry Potter fans. It was more a case of just going through and going, "Right. As we look through the movies and the books, and you reread them and you rewatch them, what are the cool moments, you know, the cool moments of learning how to fly a broomstick or learning how to use your wand or just even getting your wand?" There are so many moments in all of the books, in all of the movies, that we did pretty much what we would always do, where we just go through and then come up with a list of things we wanted to do. But also knowing that there were going to be these big set pieces we were going to build to, whether it was, you know, the Chamber of Secrets and the Basilisk, or whether it is, you know, a showdown with Voldemort or anything like that. We just wanted to make sure that we did justice to all of the key moments, and then, I guess padding's the wrong word, but the sort of like, the extra content that's there are all the things that sometimes are kind of skirted over, when people sort of like remember stories that, you know, they might not necessarily remember the fact that the kids go to, like, Honeydukes sweet shop or something, but that's cool, and exciting and interesting, and why wouldn't we allow that? Why wouldn't we focus a little bit of attention on that? Why wouldn't we go to all these extra areas, because guess what? They're really cool. Our, I guess, ambition for both of these games was that critics and gamers alike would sort of sit there and say, "You know, these are the most authentic games based on Harry Potter," which is what, like ultimately, the reviews said, which was super exciting as a development team to read those things.

Brian Crecente

John said, the process of sorting through what to include from the books and films usually started with Arthur and his team, who would dream up the designs, and then shift those designs to the production team for review.

John O'Brien

I remember myself personally having a file, and this file was to essentially ensure that any of the areas where we believe we may need to ask for approval across certain elements, we had to put them forward and make sure that they were happy with it at all times. Sometimes – so we would do that for a paper perspective. Then obviously, you get into game code, and it's sometimes very different to what's on paper. So we would then also set up regular reviews where possible, where we could, to ensure that the content was also reviewed, whether it be via a video clip, or via game code, but essentially, we'd go through that process to ensure that what we were trying to create was true to the fiction.

Ethan Vincent

With each new game, each new franchise that TT brought to life with LEGO bricks and minifigures, they also tried to push forward the idea of what it meant to be a TT Games LEGO title. That meant not just expanding the settings and improving the graphics, but also

adding new and interesting features to the game. For Harry Potter, the team worked on a new mechanic that would allow players to feel like they were free-building in the game to solve puzzles. Deborah said the development team called those moments locomotives.

Deborah Crook

That was developed for Harry Potter, the idea that you'd be able to move using under physics and be able to snap the bricks together, and it was quite a clever system actually, because it used to work out roughly – it would know where the studs would be, because we'd mark it with a particular terrain type, and it would go, well, if you using that then they must be in this position, therefore we can click these together in this position. And then we'd kind of define a plane to move them on. And yeah, that was nice, because it felt a lot more free than the typical building that we'd had in previous games. And the kind of typical building that we'd had in previous games became Leviosa, you know, where you could sort of build it, you know, like the Force would be in *Star Wars*™.

Brian Crecente

John said that nailing that mechanic took a lot of refinement.

John O'Brien

You have to consider the weight of the physical objects inside the world. And also, a lot of things can go wrong with physics just across, you know, multiple aspects in that regard. So we had, I remember one time when we tried to implement that we had flying LEGO bricks right across one side of the level to the other. And that's purely because the physics at that point just wasn't mature in the code base, they hadn't had the refinements at the time. But that's how it came about, a lot of input from, who was then the head of LEGO Games, Jim Cunliffe, John Hodgkinson, who was a key programmer, have been at Traveller's Tales for an awful long time. All of these people, all these programmers worked together, these artists to try and find a system that really worked well. And again, just brought a different ways to play.

Brian Crecente

The team also wanted to capture, not just the Wizarding World writ large, but the way in which author JK Rowling told those stories and gave life to its characters. Capturing Rowling's writing style and the nuance as some of the shifting relationships in it was its own challenge.

Arthur Parsons

I think for anyone that can remember picking up their first Harry Potter book, before you know it you're at the end of the book. And that's nothing to do with the length of the book. It's the fact that you get engrossed in the story, and you get engrossed in this journey of a kid who's effectively getting picked on a little bit. He doesn't really know where he fits. He goes to this witchcraft and wizardry school, which is just this whole new place, full of

wonder. And then you get teed up with like, alright, there's a big bad in this universe. And then you just want to read the next book. And you just want to know more about the stories and the characters and the support characters, whether it is, you know, Cho Chang or whether it is Draco Malfoy, and what are their backstories and why are they how they are? And I think all of that comes out in the books. And so we're there then trying to make sure that that gets told in a LEGO video game where there's no speaking. And you know, there are some complex sort of areas of story, you know, if you think about how the the Black family tree gets explained. To try and do that in a LEGO video game cut scene with no speech is a real challenge, and so we basically made everything visual. The best way for me to describe our approach is, these are books that very quickly have become a staple for kids for years to come. They're the sort of, I don't know, the Enid Blytons, the Roald Dahls of our generation, our era. And, you know, we just wanted to make sure that we delivered a video game experience that everyone would appreciate.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

Another challenge the team ran into was ensuring that the entire game could be played with a friend. In the books and movies, there are plenty of pivotal moments that happen without two main characters present. But the developers wanted to make sure the entire game would be playable with family or friends.

Arthur Parsons

There are definitely moments where Harry is the focus of the narrative. And we had to take ever slight creative liberties. But, you have to. This is a LEGO video game. This is built on drop-in, drop-out co-op gameplay. You can't suddenly, like flash up a message that says, "Hey, player two, sorry, you're gonna have to drop out while while Harry relives his iconic moment." So yeah, we just had to make sure that we, again, we were as authentic as we could be, and just sort of maybe pick up on like, well, actually, who else would be there? Who else was in that vicinity or in that location, or could potentially have been with Harry?

(Tune break)

Brian Crecente

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 hit pretty much every platform in the summer of 2010, landing neatly between the theatrical release of Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince in 2009 and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1 in 2010. Deborah said she has so many fond memories of working on that first title, bringing those books that she and the rest of the team grew to know and love to life.

Deborah Crook

Yeah, I mean, it's always great, to sort of, when you can see it finally coming together, but at the same time it's very difficult because, you know, it's impossible to fix every tiny, minor thing. You know, you can see things that other people will never see, and it's very difficult to play them because you want it to be perfect. And quite often, you know, we'll make it as great as we can, but you'll always see little things that you think, "Oh, if we had only had a bit more time, that would have been great. We could just polish that a bit more." But, you know, you can say that about anything, really. Because quite often, when you're developing, you don't have time to just sit there and play it from start to finish as the audience would, and it's at that point when you do start to sort of just sit down and almost take a step back and start playing it through, as a, you know, someone who's bought it would experience, and it is amazing when you suddenly start playing it that way you think, "Oh gosh, you know, it's quite a rich, detailed thing that we've made." So, yeah. Yeah.

(Tune break)

Chapter 3: LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 – 39:00

Ethan Vincent

After a short holiday break, work started on the sequel, LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7, a game that brought forward all of the learnings and general approach of the first game, but also a whole slew of new challenges, not least of which: the much darker subject matter.

Arthur Parsons

You know, for anyone that's watched the movies, read the books, there are some areas, some moments that are incredibly dark, you know, in just in terms of what's happening, you know, you have things that occur with Dumbledore, the whole backstory of Professor Snape and how he was in love with Lily Potter, his interactions with James Potter, how obviously he is in league with Voldemort to some extent, and how those things sort of are exposed in the books and the movies, and you're there then trying to make a LEGO video game for kids. It's like, how are we going to do these moments? You know, there are some pretty dramatic sort of sequences that we had to look at and go, "Right, what are we going to do here?" You know, you've got Cedric Diggory, who meets his sad demise. We've got to kind of make that lighthearted, and enjoyable and fun, but still authentic, and I think the challenge is how we actually delivered on those moments to ensure that our target audience just had a great game experience. You know, Cedric Diggory has to die, but at the same point, we don't have to dwell on it, we can kind of try and make light of it in a way that only we could with the LEGO video games. And I'd like to think that we did those moments justice, whether it was Cedric or Snape or – you know, there's too many of those moments to mention. You know, I think the end result was terrific, it's just, yeah, lots of sleepless nights and head scratching sometimes trying to make sure that everything was

done tastefully. And, yeah, we just, we basically just carried on. I think, you know, for me, LEGO Harry Potter was an amazing three and a half years of my life. And I look back at it incredibly fondly, you know, fantastic team making two terrific games.

Brian Crecente

While there was a lot of reuse between LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4, and LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7, there was also quite a lot of improvements on the tech used to create the game, said Deborah.

Deborah Crook

Certain things that were developed a bit further, like sort of making it easier to like not have to pick spells so much, you know, it was kind of more immediate. And there was a few more mechanics that came in that were more specifically to do with the later years. But it certainly built on the first game, but then expanded it, you know, there was a bigger hall, but it had the same environments as the first but then also expanded into things like Hogsmeade, and I seem to recall as well, because you were kind of guided through the first game, so you knew where to go by Nearly Headless Nick and his ghost studs, you know, you'd follow him through. And I think in the second game, he'd give you a bit more information about what kind of things you could collect in the area you were in, and things like that.

Ethan Vincent

Part of the effort to make the sequel not just as good as but better than its predecessor, was incorporating new ideas, new gameplay mechanics, and some visually stunning departures from the first game. The Tale of the Three Brothers and how it was delivered, both in the movie and the game stands out in particular.

Arthur Parsons

It's a moment in the movie that is just lovely. It sort of unfurls this, sort of, I guess – this is where Luna Lovegood's dad, Xenophilius, is effectively going to betray Harry. And, you know, that location in itself is just amazing, the Lovegood house, and then you get this beautiful transition watching, I think it's a feather fall into a puddle and then the ripple, and you go through to the journey learning effectively about the sort of death and the Elder Wand and everything else. And at that point, when we saw that, I remember as a team we were like, "OK, like, we have to try and do this." Effectively, we did the same with the legitimacy lessons, were you sort of effectively turning back time. But in this one, it was like, "OK, this is so beautiful as a piece of film work. What can we do that's different?" And that's where we came up with playing the whole thing out in a sort of, I guess, a limbo-esque, 2D gameplay experience, which I think, again, is you don't get to look back very often, but when you look back, it's like, for me, was just the end result was exactly what you set out to do. And really justifies, sort of like, the effort that went into it, because we had to get that seamless approach of you're in a LEGO Harry Potter level, we're going to

then blend you in the cutscene to take you into this sort of monochromatic, like completely different art style universe. And it was great. There was like a little mini team that worked on that sequence, and they just did an amazing job. And anyone that knows the books, knows the movies, when they play that I'd like to think that they all sit there and go, "OK, this game was made by people that love this franchise." This is the only time I personally have gone with a team from one game directly on to the follow up. And I think at that point, because it's so fresh, still everything you're doing, you kind of have to double down your efforts to push things forward. And I think there was so many things that we did in 5-7 because you stacked the books next to each other, I imagine 1-4 and then 5-7. I imagine the 5-7 pile's probably twice as high, if you just literally got the books. There's just a lot more content in there, and so, yeah, we did have to kind of push things a little bit further to try and make sure that we got things – you know, you've got the Battle of Hogwarts, which is, you know, again, that was a real challenge to sort of like, get right. So, yeah, but we would always push ourselves forward.

(Tune break)

Brian Crecente

Of course, as we've talked a little bit about already, the final books and movies of the franchise bring with them a much more adult tale with a much darker tone. The team at TT had to figure out how to make that work while still injecting the studio's trademark humor into the game.

Arthur Parsons

Yeah, Harry Potter is a very unusual, I guess, series of books. You know, you've got those people that, you know, would have got the first Harry Potter book in '97, I think, you know, over the course of the next, I guess, 10 years, those readers will have grown up with Harry Potter, will have grown up with those books, will have grown up with those stories and been on their own journeys. And, I think, tonally there is a significant shift in the books as that audience, that universe, the Wizarding World sort of grew over time. But obviously, from our perspective, we had to remember that LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 could be getting played by, you know, I don't know, let's make up a gamer, little Johnny, age six. Well, guess what? You know, he needs to have the best experience. And again, that's where, you know, the skill of the development team, that I was lucky enough to work with, lies in that they could effectively take these, you know, different tones, the sort of more serious storylines, but still make them fun, and whimsical and rewarding, but still make them authentic. You know, you're not skipping past any of these iconic moments. You know, Snape in the boathouse, or Dumbledore falling from the astronomy tower. These moments are still there. But they're retold in a way that I think only LEGO video games can do. Sort of more lighthearted. You know I remember seeing the cutscenes for the first time on a couple of occasions and, you know, that incredibly sad moment where everyone stands there holding their wands up, I guess, celebrating Dumbledore. And when I saw the cutscene, I can't off the top my head remember what the gag was, but the fact that they

slipped a gag in there was just like, I was just like, I'm not sure that that's right, but then I look back and it's like, that is right, because guess what? It's a super serious moment, but let's remember we're LEGO video games. Were all about fun. So yeah, you slip a gag in. And that, I guess, is where things really, really worked. You know, when you sit and you play those games as you can now, obviously when they're bundled in the collection, they look like they were both crafted at the same time by the same hand, and they're just authentic to Harry Potter. So, you don't even notice that there are these massive tonal changes or – it just feels like an amazing LEGO video game, you know, from the very first bit of year one through to the end of year seven.

(Tune break)

Chapter 4: Conclusion – 48:13

Ethan Vincent

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 hit in November 2011, just months after the conclusion of the Harry Potter films with the release of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2. Like the first LEGO Harry Potter title, it was well received. Both games were combined for the LEGO Harry Potter Collection, which was released on PlayStation 4 as a timed exclusive in 2016, and two years later, in 2018, on Xbox One and Nintendo Switch.

Brian Crecente

The games proved important not just because of their whimsical take on an already whimsical and enormously popular property. The LEGO Harry Potter games also proved to TT Games that the studio could branch out beyond the traditional action titles that focused on combat and physical confrontation, to games with the more explorative nature. Arthur says the studio always tries to take away lessons from games it works on.

Arthur Parsons

I think what it taught us was to trust ourselves, in terms of not being afraid to try new things. Because if you think of like where this LEGO video game series went from that point, LEGO Harry Potter had a living, breathing Hogwarts, like everything was alive. There were people running around. There was this sense of it might be made out of LEGO bricks, but it's real, you know, it's alive. And I think from that point onwards, you know, as a studio we went on to release LEGO Batman 2 with an open world Gotham, LEGO City Undercover with a real open world, LEGO Marvel Super Heroes with a living, breathing New York, and I think what it taught us was we can actually make more expansive, more brilliant games, you know, let's just keep pushing the envelope. And, you know, I think if you do plot your path through LEGO video games, they just grow game on game. And I think that's testament to, I guess, the series and the brilliant people behind the, I guess, the games

themselves, the development teams. They just constantly do the very best job they can on every game that they make.

John O'Brien

I mean, the thing that stands out to me is, it was probably the most enjoyable experience I've had working in games.

Ethan Vincent

This is John O'Brien speaking.

John O'Brien

And, you know, I've been fortunate enough to move on to Sony and work on the LittleBigPlanet franchise for over five years. I worked with Quantic Dream working on a title called Detroit Become Human. And essentially, you know, from the get-go, the LEGO games have always been quite true to my core foundation in gaming. I love platform gaming. I love the LEGO brick world and also really, really enjoy the Harry Potter franchise and everything that that has to offer. And from a personal perspective, it was one of the most enjoyable game developments I've ever had. It was tough. You know, we had times when it was challenging, but the team really made that – Deborah, John Hodgkinson, Jim Cunliffe, Arthur Parsons, Stephen Sharples, Wil Evans – there are just tons and tons and tons of people who pulled together to make the game what it was from what it is today. And yeah, from a personal perspective, it was a great journey. I learned an awful lot, particularly, it kind of put me in the position I am today to be able to work on and influence games the way I do from the position I am now, particularly with it being my first game to produce and having a great relationship with the staff that I work with. I think that was the thing that I'd take away more than anything.

Brian Crecente

And Arthur, whose passion for this particular game was one of the reasons we decided to include it in this podcast, says the game holds a special place in his memories of working at TT Games.

Arthur Parsons

The memories that were made are probably some of my fondest because it was a prolonged period of time – it was three and a half years of just being immersed in this amazing world. And I think as such, because of my sort of affiliation with the fandom and the memories that got made, it's probably my fondest memories, you know. And that's making the game with the amazing people, but also some of the fun stuff that happened outside of it. Not many people can say that they walked a red carpet on a Harry Potter movie release. Like that blew my mind. What also blew my mind was asking Rupert Grint for his autograph but calling him Ron, which, like, was just, I guess a schoolboy error 101. But he was the kindest, like, person when I apologized and just sort of said, "It happens all

the time. Don't worry about it." But yeah, the memories are amazing, just everything about it, being able to obviously visit Leavesden and see how things were being created and being able to transfer them into the game. Working on one of my favorite properties, yeah, it's definitely a mega highlight with, um, I guess of my time working on the LEGO games.

(Postcript music)

Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 53:33

Ethan Vincent

Bits N' Bricks is made possible by LEGO Games. Your hosts are Brian Crecente and Ethan Vincent. Producing by Dave Tach. Our executive producer is Ronny Scherer. Creative direction and editing by Ethan Vincent. Research and writing by Brian Crecente. Art Direction by Nannan Li. Graphics and animations by Manuel Lindinger and Andreas Holzinger. Mixing and sound design by Dan Carlisle. Disclaimer voice is Ben Unguren. Opening's child voice is Milo Vincent. Music by Peter Priemer, foundermusic.com, and excerpts from the LEGO Harry Potter video games. We'd like to thank our participants: Deborah Crook, John O'Brien, and Arthur Parsons. We'd also like to thank the entire LEGO Games' team. For questions and comments write us bitsnbricks@LEGO.com. That's bits, the letter N, then bricks@LEGO.com. And as always, stay tuned for more episodes of Bits N' Bricks.