

# Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 1 Episode 19: To Be Continued

April 14, 2020 · 55:29



## Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 00:00

(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 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.

(Music)

## Chapter 1: To Be Continued – 00:33

**Ethan Vincent**

Well, Brian, this is it.

**Brian Crecente**

Is it?

**Ethan Vincent**

Well, no, but it was going to be our last episode of Bits N' Bricks.

**Brian Crecente**

Right, but then we got some really great news. And that came thanks to a lot of really great support from listeners and fans of the show, both inside the LEGO Group, and among its legions of builders, creators and players.

**Ethan Vincent**

That's right and just last month, we got official word from the LEGO Group that due to popular demand Bits N' Bricks is ... you know ...

**Brian Crecente**

-to be continued?

**Ethan Vincent**

Yes, exactly. Yes. More about that later, but what that means is that in this episode we're going to talk about our favorite bits – you know, Bits N' Bricks – from season one, but also talk about where the show might be going, you know, in the future.

**Brian Crecente**

Most importantly, we're going to be doing that with just a few of the people who have worked so hard to make these episodes what they are.

**Ethan Vincent**

That's right. Joining us this week is Ronny, Nannan, and Dave. We'll hear more about them later.

**Brian Crecente**

But before we start, some stats from stat's guy.

(Lively music plays)

## **Chapter 2: Stats Guy – 01:40**

**Ben Unguren**

Hi! I'm Ben Unguren. I'm usually the disclaimer dude, but today I guess I'm also the stat's guy. OK, so anyways, here are the stats: 120 interviews were conducted prior to the creation of the Bits N' Bricks podcast. 80 interviews were conducted for the podcast. Weekends worked since winter of 2020: All of them. Every. Single. One. 1.68 terabytes of storage for all the audio recordings and files. 1.1 million mp3 downloads to date. 86,000 YouTube views, and that's if you're into watching audio. Most common YouTube comment not related to the actual YouTube episode – when is *LEGO Star Wars™: The Skywalker Saga* going to come out? And yeah, we still don't know the answer. Number of really good episodes that were amazing, but not released: two. Total number of words – 172,076, and that just includes the features and transcripts, not the summaries. Total Bits N' Bricks podcast running time – 16 hours, 37 minutes.

## Chapter 3: Conversation with the Bits N' Bricks Team – Part I – 03:00

**Ethan Vincent**

Well, those were some fun stats to hear. I always enjoy just hearing the vast amount of things that the podcast has accomplished. And that was really cool. Besides the fact that I love Ben Unguren's voice and the humor he brings to the show. We have a great thing here going today, Brian, right? We've got a room full of participants right now, who have helped us on the podcast and been a huge part of making sure this gets out the door and happens. I'm going to just kind of roll call here and we'll go through and introduce everyone. Let's start with Ronny. Tell us what you do on the podcast, and yeah, a little bit about yourself.

**Ronny Scherer**

Sure. My name is Ronny Scherer. I'm the producer of Bits N' Bricks: season one. And in my day job I lead the LEGO Games Asia Pacific and China team out of Singapore.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yes. And that's so fun that you say your day job because it seems sometimes like Bits N' Bricks is a day job and could be your full time job sometimes, too.

**Brian Crecente**

His day job is working for the LEGO Group, but his, I guess what? Midnight till three in the morning job is Bits N' Bricks (laughs).

**Ethan Vincent**

That's right. But Ronny, not only does he not sleep much, but of course you lead a whole team and help create LEGO games, which is amazing.

**Ronny Scherer**

I think during daylight savings, we had like a stretch of 15 timezones on the production team of Bits N' Bricks, so yeah, it's been a pretty around the clock kind of project, as far as I'm concerned.

**Ethan Vincent**

Next up, Nannan. Do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do?

**Nannan Li**

Sure. I'm Nannan, and I am the Associate Product lead at LEGO Games team, part of Ronny's team. I'm sitting in China, Shanghai, and I'm also very happy to be part of this podcast production.

**Ethan Vincent**

We are happy too, Nannan, because I don't think we could get it even submitted to the LEGO Group without your help, so that's always really good that you're on board and helping us.

**Nannan Li**

Part of my service.

**Brian Crecente**

And she helps quite a bit with the graphics.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yes, anytime we need some help on that she's quick. Very fast.

**Nannan Li**

Thanks.

**Ethan Vincent**

Next up, we've got Dave. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your role.

**Dave Tach**

Hi, I'm Dave Tach. I'm the new guy. I just got here a few weeks ago to sort of help land season one as, I think I'm also a producer, I think that's what we decided. So I just do a bunch of stuff behind the scenes to get the episodes up, to get the text up, all of that kind of stuff.

**Ethan Vincent**

Exactly, and I like that you have a new guy as a title. That's very fun.

**Brian Crecente**

Just don't ever wear a red shirt.

**Ronny Scherer**

I just want to add that Dave has been an excellent Padawan, and he is graduating as a Jedi. You know, this week he's gonna take over. And moving forward.

**Ethan Vincent**

It's very exciting.

**Dave Tach**

I very much appreciate the *Star Wars*.

**Brian Crecente**

I like that we made both the *Star Wars* and Star Trek reference. So you get all the stars.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yes, the stars are aligned. Well, that's our brief intro. Obviously, there's a few other people involved that aren't on the recording today. We've got Manuel Lindinger in Austria, who also does some of our graphic and helps with the YouTube. We've got Dan Carlisle, who does the audio engineering. So after the episodes been kind of roughed in, he goes through and does his audio magic. And then we also have Peter Priemer, who's helped a lot on the engineering end right at the beginning of the podcast, as well as all the music, so the Bits N' Bricks theme and all that stuff he composes. And he's got this cool setup, Brian, I don't know if I've told you that, but he's got like three or four or five different synthesizers in his house. And he just jumps on those and creates the music, and it's it's pretty cool to see him do that. And I think it's in his office not his house, so that was a little misspoke.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, and Patricia Pascale does the transcripts-

**Ethan Vincent**

That's right.

**Brian Crecente**

-if you have been reading those.

**Ronny Scherer**

Yeah and, Ethan, don't forget the entire LEGO team that supported us as well, including Jacob Bredvig Larsen, Anders Weien and Liam Stevenson that's helping us on the weekly releases. Alice Carter, Sarah Wind Christiansen, and Mark Hamill from Golin helping us with all the day-to-day communications and with the media and the community. Sherlock Zhao, who actually does the release of the podcast into the cloud, he took over from Anders Tankred Holm that helped us recently on recording as well on some episodes while he was on leave. And Giovanna Rossin, who is our internal communications person who helps us on our intranet updates and things like that. And finally, but not least, our great friends at the LEGO Group archives and the LEGO Idea House - Tine Froberg Mortensen and Kristian Reimer Hauge - that's sort of an instrumental in the early parts of the development of the podcast.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah. And I was about to say, that's easy for you to say, Ronny (chuckles). Those are some complex names.

**Ethan Vincent**

It's crazy how many people have been helping us with this. And we'll be adding a an extensive credit list at the end, so please listen to the very end and you'll get lots of names this time. It's going to be fun.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah. Well, so yeah, we started this process, this sort of dive, into the history of the LEGO Group and video games, way back in 2019. And I think it started with Ronny actually sending me a message on LinkedIn. I had just left Variety as the video games' editor over there, and he reached out to see if I was interested in exploring the history of LEGO video games. And at the time, I thought it was very ironic because I had been, to put it nicely asking, but to put it bluntly, harassing Ronny for years-

**Ethan Vincent**

(Chuckles) that's right.

**Brian Crecente**

-to try to get him to let me write a big feature about the history of LEGO video games. And he kept saying, "No, now's not the time." And so when he finally came to me, I was like, oh, man, really? Because I had to write back to him and say, "I'm sorry, Ronny, but I don't have a place to publish the story anymore."

**Ronny Scherer**

So, Brian, did you get that itch scratched?

**Brian Crecente**

Yes, I did.

(Laughing)

**Ethan Vincent**

Several times over.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, but it's funny because, I didn't realize - and you told me you wanted something internal. I look back at that now and I think about, obviously, you can turn anything into a feature story. It doesn't matter how big the topic is you're writing about. But boy, would it

have, I think not done it justice for me to write just a single feature about the 25-year history of LEGO video games.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah. And that's the one rabbit hole, too, that I found that we kind of went down here, Brian, is as we started listening to the pre-interviews you were conducting, and as we dove into some of the things we were unearthing, both of us were saying, "Gosh, this doesn't – this isn't a quick article. This is not a little short film or a 20-minute tribute to the LEGO games." But we've got a book and a novel, right?

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, I mean, we spent about a year I think, essentially doing interviews, recording those interviews. Unfortunately, while recording those interviews, at the time, we hadn't thought about a podcast, so I was taking notes dutifully on my mechanical keyboard, which means it sounded like someone was jackhammering (laughs) during the interviews. But all of that was saved and sent to the archives – the LEGO Group's archives – for posterity for history.

**Ethan Vincent**

And also, quite frankly, for research. So when those are transcribed, and you just had these pageful of insights and knowledge and conversations with game creators, former LEGO Group employees, partners, all kinds of people. Super helpful to see that on black and white and kind of put things together and put dates together and timelines. I remember you creating this huge timeline, Brian–

**Brian Crecente**

–Oh yeah–

**Ethan Vincent**

–where it was just showing us like how everything got started, and it ended up looking kind of like the the corkboard on A Beautiful Mind when you were done. Like I was very amused by just how quickly it got out of hand.

**Brian Crecente**

I really actually wanted to create (and I still want to create) a sort of serial killer corkboard, where it's shows the connections between every game, like who worked on what, and create this massive tree. But so far, yeah, all I've really created was a really, really long timeline that has a lot of entries in it.

**Ethan Vincent**

You would make a great serial killer. I could see that.

**Brian Crecente**

Oh, thanks. Thank you. A smiling serial killer.

**Ronny Scherer**

And we had that really nice long timeline converted into a snake-like timeline, Brian. I remember we had one of your friends or former colleagues helping us out making this amazing graphic that sort of showed some of the highlights of the games over the past 25 years.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, and that actually ran when we we launched Bits N' Bricks. We had, fortunately, I think Ethan and I were delighted to discover that the LEGO Group was so behind the project that they actually put a page up on the website, the official website, dedicated to the podcast, which includes the transcripts, features, summaries, the actual podcasts and this wonderful timeline that was created.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah. And it's kind of remarkable we're now an episode 19. This is episode 19. And there were some internal episodes, there's all kinds of things we did to ramp up, including some episodes that never aired. But it's really crazy to think about all the things that took place before the actual first podcast aired. Quite a few things happened first, right Ronny?

**Ronny Scherer**

It did indeed. So when I think back on the summer, when I first sort of got back in touch with the both of you, we had no idea what we were doing. We knew that the 25th anniversary was coming up, but we had no idea if there was anything interesting to talk about. And that sort of kicked off that first research phase. And as that was developing, we started to think about all the wonderful stories that we were picking up in the interviews and what we could do with them. And maybe, Brian, you remember what the initial ideas were that we had in mind?

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, I think they sort of boiled down to two bigger ideas – one from me, and one from Ethan. I bet you could guess whose idea was whose. There was one idea for a book. And there was another idea for a documentary.(laughs)

**Ethan Vincent**

That's right, yeah. And both were very ambitious and also really did want to lay out, I guess, the chronology and the details and the insights from the game – one visually, one in the written form. And that's kind of how we started.



**Ronny Scherer**

And we actually produced a really nice trailer that we will not be able to release to the public because it's so full of things that are inappropriate for public release.

(Laughter)

**Ronny Scherer**

But it was really cool. So you know, some people that are listening may get the privilege to watch it at some point. Actually a little bit of the silver lining with COVID-19, if we jump fast forward a little bit to, I believe it was May of 2020, so roughly half a year before the anniversary, we realized that we had all this great content, and let's deep dive into it, sort of a live event, which turned out to be sort of a podcast but as a live event for LEGO Group employees. And for me at least, that's what stands out as that's when we sort of thought, "Hey, maybe we can turn this into something more produced rather than doing it as a live event. Maybe it can be like more like a podcast that's less stressful to perform, rather than doing it in front of a live audience," which I remember was a little bit anxiety-provoking for me at least.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, I can't imagine being in front of a live audience right now. But with Nannan and Dave here I want to jump in and kind of talk a little bit about the creation, what it takes to create a podcast. Dave, what has been your perception of kind of what's needed to get a podcast off the ground and to be able to find that balance? Yeah, tell me. So much.

**Dave Tach**

So much. Yeah. I mean, what you hear on the end, as a listener, and I listen to a lot of podcasts, is the product of a ton of work. This is more, you know, Bits N' Bricks is more than a podcast where people are just sitting around talking. It's the result of interviews, and then those interviews become the thing that everybody hears, but then there's also a written component from Brian. We have transcripts up so that you can read along with what you're listening to, if you wanted to, or search for information on the internet. And my job, broadly speaking, is to figure out how all of that stuff works, make sure it's in working order, make sure it's correct, make sure it conforms to many of the LEGO Group's guidelines, and present it so that nobody else has to think about this ever, right? You just get to listen to a podcast or read things.

**Ethan Vincent**

Exactly. Like the experience should be. Very ambitious we've got these documentary features that we kind of lean on, I don't know, storytelling from the documentary world that were also very ambitious, right? So we'd have sometimes up to 10 voices in a podcast, and we'd have to interweave them narratively, and let them tell their stories. And so that

was quite involved, both from the editorial aspect, as well as the research end and the recording end, right, Brian?

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And I think another important point is, while we're doing this, we're having to – there are, obviously, as we talked about, a lot of other people involved, and we have to have images and everything has to go through checks. Nannan is very involved with handing some of that stuff off. Nannan, I'm curious, how is it that you got, I was gonna say roped into, but how is it that you were so lucky that you were able to help out with these podcasts?

### **Nannan Li**

Yeah, and myself, I am a podcast listener, and I listen to a lot of podcasts, but being part of the production team and the producer and helping produce the actual content it's far beyond my imagination. And first of all, is as you guys already talked about, we are doing a documentary podcast and this is far more deep and lot of researchers and desk work than just sitting and chat or free chatting. And on the other hand, because in our podcast we are really keen to put the best quality – only the best is good enough – to our audiences and players and LEGO brick fans, the lovers, and so we have to make sure that all this goes through the right channel, and including our internal social channels and a bit of the marketing strategy and the PR stuff behind it. So all of this has to be planned exactly, synced well in terms of timing, quality and tone of voice and imagery and it all coming to a package and we have to release on a weekly basis. And this is a really ambitious and a great effort.

### **Ronny Scherer**

Nannan, I'm curious, what is your first memory of Bits N' Bricks?

### **Nannan Li**

It's the logo. We spent, yeah, we spent, I don't know, like more than 10 iterations on how we make this logo look good and [that] it represents the essence, the spirit of having physical and digital play experience and bend it into the LEGO bricks. And also, we have to make sure it works on sizes and pixelations, colors, all correct. That was like, OK, we – as myself, as a designer, and I couldn't imagine like how much effort and iterations we put on just creating the logo and an icon.

### **Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, that took quite some time and I remember working with Manuel Lindinger and you very specifically, right, Nannan, to get it right because not only did we have a brick on there, which is always kind of nerve-racking to represent. But we wanted to convey that digital idea that we're actually talking about LEGO digital and digital play and those things.

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah, and I'll say that, so Milena Nieto was the graphic designer who created this timeline. And I know that, Nannan, you worked very closely with her. That was quite an undertaking. So this timeline, it obviously is, the timeline itself was an undertaking, but there had to be an icon created for each of the 20, I think, six games on there. And all of those had to go through checks, Nannan had to make sure that they looked good, but also that they comported to what the LEGO Group expected in terms of the different trademarks. There's Warner Brothers, and there's TT Games. So that was, I'm curious, Nannan, what was that like for you working with Milena and creating this timeline?

### **Nannan Li**

Yeah, that has been, yeah, I have to put a lot of effort on doing the desk research on finding all the right, the correct visuals and key artworks for all these titles. And I mean, unfortunately, we didn't do a really great job on documenting all this old stuff. I guess that's why we're doing this right now for the podcast. So it's a bit of a shame to see. We had all these great titles and all these great games, but it was almost impossible, difficult to find any internal archives. So now I have to rely a lot on Google and Wikipedia, and to dig, for digging to the old assets. And thanks for all the fans on contributing all the footage, and actually, a lot of them ended up on eBay. And all these covers, still seems like available or popular on eBay, so that helped me a lot on grabbing all these assets and putting that into the timeline and working with the graphic designer. And of course, yeah, there were so many different iterations. And we just have to make it all right. And this checking on details, trademarks, it went just like rounds of iterations.

### **Ronny Scherer**

It's a really good point, I remember in the very early stages of the project, when we were thinking about why we were doing this, this whole idea of preserving LEGO games in a more structured way. We have this amazing internal archive, with the LEGO Group archives and LEGO Idea House, where you can see anything that was produced since the dawn of the company, basically. And when we got into the research phase of the project, it really dawned on me that we have been so bad at doing this for our digital heritage. And, this was just the, you know, the 25th anniversary was just a perfect excuse or opportunity to make up for that. And I think we really, really making strides to do that to your point, Nannan.

(Bits N' Bricks techno music)

## Chapter 4: Bits N' Bricks Outtakes N' Bloopers – 22:51

Ethan Vincent

And now for something completely different. A little listen, back into the archives of the creation of Bits N' Bricks, and some of the things that went wrong.

(Beep)

Brian Crecente

I am now recording. Do you hear that noise?

(Weird noise)

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, I do.

(Ethan makes noise)

Ethan Vincent

Something like that, right.

Brian Crecente

Yeah. Oh, hold on a second. Let me go. I think it's my vacuum cleaner, though. I have a robot vacuum cleaner. And I think it's stuck on something. It's right above my office. That's hilarious.

(Beep)

Brian Crecente

Yeah, so Builders Journey. Oh my God. I'm not gonna keep saying "Yeah, so."

(Beep)

Brian Crecente

So me, then you, then Lund. OK, here we go. Ready?

Ethan Vincent

Ready.

**Brian Crecente**

So, so (sighs). I'm not gonna say "so!"

(Beep)

**Ethan Vincent**

So let's see how we react au naturale.

**Karsten Lund**

So we asked him so what do you think of the story in the game and he was like, story?

(Laughter)

**Brian Crecente**

I love that quote.

**Ethan Vincent**

Me too. Story. Story?

(Beep)

**Brian Crecente**

Dammit, I started chewing gum. I had to take the gum out of my mouth I just put it in because I wasn't paying attention.

(Beep)

**Brian Crecente**

And then in 2019, they're obviously developing the game, but then this failed start, essentially cuts deep into that progress that they had that they had made.

(Laughter)

**Brian Crecente**

That was terrible.

**Ethan Vincent**

That ending was really funny.

(Beep)

(Bits N' Bricks techno music continues)

## Chapter 5: Conversation with Bits N' Bricks Team – Part II – 24:20

### Brian Crecente

So yeah, we've done 19 – well, this will be 19 episodes of Bits N' Bricks. And in most of those episodes, Ethan and I try to sort of wrap things up with our own thoughts about the particular topic that we're dealing with. We never hear from anybody else. And also I think, I can't speak for Ethan, but I bet you he feels the same way. I bet that, like myself, Ethan has a lot of opinions of sort of the bigger picture, like things that we've – takeaways we've had. So I'll start with a single thought that I have. And that is, I have been so impressed that the LEGO Group has been so willing to be so forthright, and so transparent, with the good and the bad, and the mistakes and the successes, because I think you cannot get a full picture of something and you can't learn if you bury the mistakes. And I think the fact that the LEGO Group is so willing to discuss these things and make them public is not only admirable, but I think it's the right thing to do, and it's going to help everybody in the long run. So that's my insight.

### Ronny Scherer

Can I add to that because it really reminds me of my own motivation for getting involved in this and investing as much time in it as we have done, which is, there is a quote actually, when we were sort of thinking about what is the quote that we most appreciate about the whole episode, or the whole season? And I think for me, it's less about the specific quotes and more about what did we learn, and what are the sort of favorite moments? And I think for me, one of my favorite moments was this sort of eureka moment, when I recall back to my very early days. Just after I joined the LEGO Group, I went to the LEGO Idea House that we just talked about at length. And one of the things that I was presented to was this quote from Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, the second generation owner of the LEGO Group. And he had, on his 70th birthday, this amazing quote that just stuck with me and was a big inspiration for the podcast, which is, "When we know the past, we can better understand the present. When we understand the present, we're better equipped to meet the future." And I just think it fits so well with what you just said, that we as a company are really – we have that spirit of we need to learn from our mistakes. We need to make mistakes to progress. Like, if you don't cross the line, you won't know where the line is. So that kind of entrepreneurial attitude that is – all the generations of the LEGO Group owner-family has shown and that we're talking about on the podcast more broadly as well. I think that is so true, and such a big part of our culture. And I'm super proud and happy that we're able to contribute to that in the sort of digital era.

### **Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, and I think to what's really remarkable, as we're kind of going through and talking about all the findings and all the insights we've gained personally from the podcast. For me, it was not only the factual stuff that's packed in, in learning about, "Hey, when did this idea start? And when did the studio actually get started to create this game? And who was involved? And how did that happen?" But on top of that, there's this incredible first-person account with a voice behind it. For example, you know, Tom Stone, or Ryan Seabury, from LEGO Universe. Tom Stone talking about TT Games, and you hear the emotion and the insights, and the feelings that are related to it, right? So as Tom Stone's telling us how he pitched *LEGO Star Wars: The Video Game*, and he wasn't getting far with distribution, he was kind of getting a little desperate and saying like, "Wait a minute. This is a great idea. Why isn't this taking?" It's just so fascinating to hear that from a first-person voice, including people like Ryan Seabury, or Scott Brown, who were involved with LEGO Universe, and just how they felt when certain things happened, and that they had a microphone to really voice those things. I was just really delighted about how some of those things really came together magically in a listening experience that I think does something to you when you hear how someone was feeling at the time. I'm all about that, because I kind of come from the documentary world, but there's just something really nice about that component, and I think those insights sink a little deeper, because there's a person behind it, who felt a certain way at that time and point when the game kind of came out. So that to me was a huge insight.

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah, I mean, I think it's important. and I think that a big part of doing the podcast the way we do it. A lot of these stories have been told, or at least some of them have been told, but to hear them directly from the people who were there, I think is so important, because for history's sake, there's a difference between just a story that says, "Tom Stone put it all on the line when he was trying to get Giant Interactive off the ground, and boy, was it hard." But then to have him actually say that and like you said, Ethan, hear the emotion in his voice, and him talking about how he got chills and goosebumps on his neck when he first saw the very first working version of the beta or early beta prototype of *LEGO Star Wars*. Like, I think there's a massive difference there and knowing that hopefully, that has been captured forever.

### **Ronny Scherer**

Yeah, and you can sort of imagine that moment where he looks his wife in the eyes and says, "Honey, we're gonna bet the farm." It was literally a farm that they were working from – the farmhouse. Yeah, very powerful.

### **Brian Crecente**

I'm sure everybody, I'd like to think everybody has favorite episodes. I'd love to hear from different people. Dave, do you have a particular episode or quote or ... ?

**Dave Tach**

Sure, it's top of mind, I think in part because we just finished putting it together, but the final episode of season one about the fabled history sort of ties every theme we've been talking about and every theme in really every episode together, and it goes back to what we were talking about earlier, where there's this willingness for people to be honest, right? This is a podcast that doesn't, well doesn't have to be honest, right? It could just be a podcast about how great everything always is. But there are always people showing up and talking about the good things they did, but also the mistakes they made along the way. And one of the, I think, the most interesting themes that runs through all of season one, and the 25-year history of the LEGO Group and games is figuring out what works, figuring out the transition, if it really is a transition, or if it's just another aspect of how to use the LEGO bricks digitally, right? And there's a lot of honesty. When folks who were in charge, at points, talk about what sort of seems obvious in hindsight, but wasn't necessarily at the time.

**Ethan Vincent**

Nannan I'm curious about which episode you particularly connected with.

**Nannan Li**

Yeah. My favorite ones are what I called the LEGO Universe trilogies. And these are three, constant three weeks of continuous telling the creation and the ups and downs of LEGO Universe, one of our greatest MMO games. And with, especially with the additional footage and the remaster of the soundtrack that was really, really astonishing. And what I really get from the story, of course, is despite all the great success and failures, despite all this, even after all these years, the people who worked on the project, they really talk about the details and remember this so vividly. That really showed that they put great passion and love and the belief, dedication to the projects they worked on. And I think that is really, really touching for me.

**Brian Crecente**

That's great.

**Ethan Vincent**

Awesome. Yeah, I felt the same way like the LEGO Universe trilogy, to me is so close, like almost too close to my heart. And some of it has to do with the fact that I did the behind the scenes documentary, and I have a lot of material to pull from, but also just kind of how it came together. And there was a definitely a lot of blood, sweat and tears and having Ronny involved who was deeply involved. That was just, man, that was a monster. I know both Brian and I felt really relieved when we are done with them-

**Brian Crecente**

Oh my gosh, yeah.



**Ethan Vincent**

–but it was also very cathartic because it did provide an opportunity to look at something that maybe was hard to look at, you know?

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah. You know, it's interesting with LEGO Universe, Ronny was obviously directly involved: He was working on the project. Ethan, you were involved in that you were creating, I think you created some videos, and I think sort of a – would you call it a mini-documentary? But you were doing a lot of shooting there, basically.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, the idea was to put together a really big documentary at the end, which is kind of what we started with at Bits N' Bricks, but as the project evolved, there was different marketing needs to have various stories told throughout, and so we kind of broke it up. And then obviously, before we were going to be ambitious enough to like tell the full story, I got wind of how the project was probably not going to survive. And so one of the hardest assignments was creating a history piece at the end where it says, "Hey, we're closing LEGO Universe. Can you create a video and kind of make that be OK for everyone?"

**Brian Crecente**

Yikes. Yeah.

**Ethan Vincent**

Which was a really hard assignment. But I think in the end, it kind of turned out to be like, – it's gonna be OK – messaging to a lot of the fans. So it turned out to be a really cool video and I'm glad that that happened at the very end. Ronny, what is your favorite episode because I would also venture to say it's probably the LEGO Universe ones, but I don't know, you probably – maybe that was too close for comfort.

**Ronny Scherer**

No, it was very cleansing, and it was amazing to – we've worked on this for a while, and I've been in touch with the team all these years since we split up. We have a Facebook group where we sort of connect on a regular basis. So I was just really looking forward to be able to sort of celebrating the things that we did achieve and that we did learn from it. And once it was out, everyone just came back and was so appreciative. And like you have this thing that you're working on, thinking about for months. This one took a long time from the initial inception to actual production, where we were thinking about it, started a little bit, put it on hold, started a little bit, and then we went all in and did the trilogy. But yeah, so the reaction from Scott, Ryan, Peter, lots of other people on the team, that were rightfully surprised, that we celebrated the 10th anniversary of LEGO Universe as part of the 25th anniversary of all LEGO games. I think the fans as well just amazing feedback, just lots of positive feedback and love and interest in things that had not necessarily been as clearly

documented in public before. So that is clearly a highlight, but it also – that episode also brought out a number of themes that we have seen across multiple efforts. And so when I think about Scott Brown, I also think about Arthur Parsons when we did the TT episode. Those, of course, overlap in terms of time as well. They were kind of happening in parallel. But they both talk about this incredible effort, and how hard it is to make games and how you invest yourself and your life and your family for a while to create this thing that's not physical, it's all imagination in the cloud today. And once you shut it down, it's gone. Ryan was sort of reflecting on that. But it takes years of your life to actually get it over that threshold and out in the public. So I said, I think we've seen that from many of the teams like the degree of commitment and passion and talent that it takes to pull something off like an MMO that is ultra complex. I thought that was really interesting that LEGO Universe was sort of almost like a summary of a lot of lessons learned in other episodes, because it was so big and complex, and by itself.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, and you were very ambitious on doing all kinds of things with that release, so it wasn't just two episodes from the podcast, but you remastered the soundtrack with Richard Dekkard and Brian Tyler. Then you also rereleased and remastered all the videos that I had created, and they were all kind of launched all at the same time, and there was just this like this massive output to remind us again, I think, of LEGO Universe, and rightly so it being 10 years and 10 year anniversary. But yeah, pretty amazing that you were that ambitious, Ronny.

**Ronny Scherer**

And the part of that was that we had been very actually good at documenting and preserving a lot of things between you, Ethan, and the LEGO Group. We had so much material on LEGO Universe. We even have an internal server that still runs, so it's quite well documented compared to, I would say, most other things.

**Brian Crecente**

Wait a minute. Did I just hear you say you have an internal server? Is the game still live?

**Ronny Scherer**

I've not played it myself recently, but yeah, I assume is still trekking along.

**Brian Crecente**

What? How did we not hear that? (laughs)

**Ethan Vincent**

Someone's playing it in a basement somewhere, just every night when they want to, right? They'll just put on their slippers, go down and play.

**Brian Crecente**

I had no idea. How did that not come across when we spent what? Months researching LEGO Universe?

**Ethan Vincent**

Well we did cover Dark Flame and that is kind of like the external, I guess, keeping it alive.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah! I had no idea. Yeah.

**Ronny Scherer**

The Dark Flame team knows about this as well. And they're very eager to come visit and have a look at it.

**Brian Crecente**

That's cool, so it's like a little microcosm. It's almost as if a planet were dying and you went in and scooped up like a little bit of the planet, a little bit of the wildlife, and then put it on your shelf somewhere and kept it alive.

(Laughter)

**Ronny Scherer**

We kept all the DNA, and yeah, we can reproduce it at some point in the future, like we have all the source code and assets and everything like that, and that just made those three episodes easier to produce I think, because we had written a lot, recorded a lot. We did a project with the International Center for the History of Electronic Games in Rochester, New York. They helped us, actually we went through a process with the Danish Royal Library and them to figure out how do we preserve an MMO. There wasn't really any technology or tools or anything that was sort of obvious to do that. So we ended up doing a lot of video recording. And that video recording ended up being the base of the music video that we did for the soundtrack. So we had all this amazing footage of every part of the game. And, of course, Manuel did a more than excellent job in just compiling it all, mixed with fan recordings as well, and lots of other internal videos that hadn't seen a day of life yet. And we just crammed it all into that one-hour music video. And so now it's out, it's shared and for everyone to enjoy. So, you know, LEGO Universe was a big, big effort, but totally worth it.

**Brian Crecente**

Ethan, what was your favorite episode? There are obviously a lot to choose from, but which one did you like the most?

### **Ethan Vincent**

I would say for me, it really was also a little bit LEGO Universe, but also SPU Darwin. And I think that just was really colored for me by the fact that I got to meet Alex and Claude and spent substantial amount of time with them in Switzerland and get to know them really well. Just two great guys, very personable, and very transparent, very open about that time. And also my conversation with Julian, I just felt like that was kind of like the first out of the gate, enthusiastic, exuberant kind of team that was like, "Let's do this! Let's bring LEGO bricks into the digital space!" And that to me was was really exciting to meet them. And as we started talking, just that same enthusiasm kind of surfacing, same with Bjarne when I met with him, and he showed me some of his first models he created and actually the model that was responsible for him being able to join the LEGO Group, and, man, I'll tell you what that was a really, really fun aspect of putting this podcast together. And I'm looking forward to putting a little something visually together for that as well. But that to me is one of my favorite episodes, just because all those people involved and how great they were.

### **Ronny Scherer**

I really enjoyed that one as well because it was part of the history that I had not been able to dig into. I think I've told you this before, but maybe for our listeners, when I was hired into the LEGO Group, that was just off the back of shutting down Darwin, and it was kind of, "Yeah, don't ask about that." So the attitude was there's not much to learn from there.

### **Ethan Vincent**

It was a curse word, right?

### **Ronny Scherer**

It was like, yeah, don't go there. We're moving forward. So I really enjoyed learning about it, and it's also a little bit like it came full circle, because Darwin was the first story that we told in what became the podcast. Like, that first live event, going back to that, that's where we started. And we almost finished the first season with that. So I'm so happy.

### **Brian Crecente**

I love that during our research, when I was calling and conducting all these interviews, the fact that I sort of stumbled across this by – and we included this in the podcast – but I'm talking to somebody about LEGO Friends and she's like, "Wait a minute. Have you heard of SPU Darwin?" And I'm like, "What?" And then going back and tracking down all those people and interviewing them for the archive was really interesting. And just finding out all this amazing history. I think we even got a hold of copies of the newsletter and the video. And so there was a lot of stuff that obviously we didn't use in the podcast, but it helped shape the podcast.

**Ronny Scherer**

But you know what? I think this is a great transition to talk about the future because I do think we have one more Darwin episode in the can, which is when we can get a conversation with Dandi.

**Brian Crecente**

If it ever happens.

**Ronny Scherer**

We need to reopen that box, so this is an invitation to Dandi. Please, please reach out.

**Brian Crecente**

Before we did, I would like to mention my favorite episode.

**Ethan Vincent**

Please.

**Brian Crecente**

I think, I mean, I love all of them. The ones that I liked the most are the ones where I feel like we're revealing something that people have never heard of before or a facet. And I think all of them feature that to some degree, but the ones that really, really dug into that, Minecraft was one of them where I think probably nobody realized, that for a while, Mojang and Notch – the people who created or the person who created Minecraft in his studio – were working directly with the LEGO Group to create something that combined LEGO bricks with Minecraft, and I think that episode is fascinating on many levels, both the fact that it existed, but also getting insight directly from someone at Mojang about why that sort of fell apart, I think was an interesting sort of cautionary tale. But I think even more interesting to me was our fluid play episode, which may not sound like perhaps the most interesting if you just go by the title, but this was an episode where we not only traced the evolving history of how the LEGO Group has spent so much time trying to figure out how physical and digital play can intersect, but also we were able to talk to people about a bunch of different creations including the Kid Pad. And the Kid Pad story I think is amazing. It also includes one of my favorite quotes, which involves pig's feet? Was it pig's feet?

**Ethan Vincent**

Pig's feet. Yep.

**Ronny Scherer**

Yeah.

**Brian Crecente**

And like, that's such a great anecdote, and such a great sort of anecdote for game development, about sometimes you have to kill the pig. So you have to go back – if you haven't heard this episode, go listen to it, because it's amazing and it has this great little anecdote about game development and the fact that sometimes things don't go your way.

**Ethan Vincent**

John Sakalowsky was talking to us about that, who was just really recalling – I love that too, Brian. I love that quote. And yeah, if you haven't listened to that, it's a great one.

**Ronny Scherer**

Can I just add another fun moment? Tara Wike perfectly reproducing the sound of Chewbacca pulling off minifigures' arms.

**Brian Crecente**

Oh my gosh, that sounds great.

**Ronny Scherer**

She was like a pro foley artist, so maybe you can insert that right here.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, I will.

**Tara Wike**

I just wanted to keep pulling the arms off of things and playing Chewbacca, because you could like–

(Popping noise)

**Tara Wike**

–pop the arms off. I just thought that was hilarious.

**Brian Crecente**

Wait, did you just make that sound effect that quickly?

**Tara Wike**

I did. Yes. Yeah.

**Ethan Vincent**

I need to hear that again.

(Popping noise)

**Tara Wike**

Yeah. You know, there are certain things you need to learn how to do as a toy designer. You have to prove yourself.

**Ethan Vincent**

She had so much energy, too, talking about the minifig, it's so funny, because that topic, just came to life for me too, Brian, I don't know how it was for you, but that also seemed like an episode like, "OK, we're going to do a whole episode talking about that. Boy, did that just go by that hour of interview with her" and she was just so full of energy.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, it's funny: I think she is in one of only two episodes where we had just one guest. I think that's right. And the other was about Friends and about gendered play, which I think was also a really – it was a great topic to discuss, and we had a great person on speaking about it. But it's unusual. We don't usually do that. And that says a lot about Tara's ability to answer good questions, but also tell some great stories.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah. So, Dave, you talked about concepts and ideas, but is there an episode that you like? That you're like, that's my favorite episode?

**Dave Tach**

Oh man, it's so hard to choose. Maybe, I'm with you, Ethan, with Darwin, in part because selfishly, it was the first episode I worked on. But it's so emblematic of what folks in the LEGO Group do, which is, they have these ideas, and they try them and whether – unfortunately, there's not a super happy ending with SPU Darwin, but it did plant the seeds for what came later, right? The ark of the season, the ark of the story here is, that they knew that there was something valuable, but part of the story is trying to figure it out over a long period of time. And it's not even, I don't know, it's almost like they invented some things too early, except that those things are valuable, right? I think the regret there, that everybody expressed in the episode, is that there wasn't an absolutely direct through line to the next thing. But it's so neat to be able to look back and to hear from the people who were there who had the right ideas, and who were essentially validated in the end, because the future is neither digital nor physical. It's both. And that is part of–

**Ronny Scherer**

It's phigital (laughs).

**Dave Tach**

-There you go. And that's - right? - that's part of what Darwin's story is: How did we get from there to here? And the story's not done. It's not written. We're in the middle of it.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, so true.

**Brian Crecente**

That's very cool.

**Ronny Scherer**

Absolutely.

## Chapter 6: Special Announcement – 49:23

**Brian Crecente**

Speaking of being in the middle of things, I think we should leave this to Ronny to announce. There's a little announcement that we can make.

(Drumroll sound effect)

**Ronny Scherer**

I am so happy to announce that we are continuing Bits N' Bricks until the end of the year to sort of complete the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the first LEGO video game.

(Clapping and cheering sound effects)

**Ronny Scherer**

So what we agreed as a team is that we're going to continue making content as long as someone is willing to listen and as long as we have stories to tell. And yeah, so we'll be kicking off season two in a short while.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah. And the idea of continuing the podcast I think came from all of us realizing towards the end that man, there's so much more to talk about. I remember creating this sheet, and Brian did, kind of an overview of everything we haven't talked about. And I think it stretched over like two pages, two-and-a-half pages, just kind of this incredible list of things we haven't covered, right, Brian?



**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, and the fans out there, the people who've been listening to the podcast have been asking for us to look at different topics. We don't want to make any promises, because we're still in the process of developing them. But I can say some of the things that we're looking at (and no promise again) but we may do episodes on, include things like Rock Raiders, and like Bionicles, and Loco, and Racers and a lot of the historic stuff that we've heard so many people say they want to hear more about. So we're listening to you, and we're hoping to deliver on some of those things.

**Ethan Vincent**

That's right, Brian. And I guess the idea here is that we are going to be doing this kind of seasonal release, and kind of ending maybe after the end of this 25-year celebration, something like that, right, Ronny?

**Ronny Scherer**

Yeah, before New Year's we expect to wrap up with a final episode.

**Ethan Vincent**

It better be good.

**Ronny Scherer**

It's gonna be amazing.

**Ethan Vincent**

OK.

**Dave Tach**

No pressure.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, and I think the idea is we'll break it up into seasons. Right now we're thinking it'll be we'll do a season two, three, and four, and sort of spread them out. But all that is sort of evolving right now. But stay tuned. And we'll definitely let you know when we're coming back. It won't be a long break, but we are going to take a little bit of a break before we get straight into season two. And again, we'll let everybody know when season two is coming.

**Ronny Scherer**

And should we tease a little bit what the kickoff of season two will be or should we keep that as a surprise?

**Brian Crecente**

I think we should keep it as a surprise for now.

**Ronny Scherer**

Nice. Anticipation.

**Nannan Li**

Stay tuned, and keep on playing!

**Brian Crecente**

I think one thing we should mention is, please continue to send your emails to us. And we are also looking into perhaps creating a system where people can even leave voicemails for us that we might use in an episode. So if that does happen, we'll get the word out, and we'll let you know how to do that.

**Ethan Vincent**

Excellent.

**Brian Crecente**

Well, thank you, everybody here on this podcast: Dave, and Nannan, and Ronny, and of course, Ethan. And thank you listeners for spending a little bit of time with us as we talk about and reminisce a little bit about the first season of Bits N' Bricks, and please come back and listen to Bits N' Bricks season two, and send us your emails, and your tweets and your Facebook messages and your TikToks and all the other things I can't think of. That would be great.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yes, thanks, everyone. And we'll see you season two. Thank you.

**Brian Crecente**

Goodbye.

**Nannan Li**

Thank you.

**Ethan Vincent**

Goodbye.

**Ronny Scherer**

Thanks for having us. Listen to you soon.

**Dave Tach**

Look forward to your TikToks. (laughs)

(Laughter)

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, that's right. I want to see Brian's TikToks, they're gonna be so annoying.

**Brian Crecente**

Yes – wait a minute! Should we should we stop recording?

**Ethan Vincent**

Yes. Let's stop.

**Brian Crecente**

OK. I want LEGO brick TikToks.

(Postscript music)

## **Bits N' Bricks: Extended Credits – 53:23**

**Ethan Vincent**

And now for an extended credit reading. Bits N' Bricks is brought to you by LEGO Games. Your hosts are Brian Crecente and Ethan Vincent. Executive Producer: Ronny Scherer. Producer: Dave Tach. Associate Producer: Nannan Li. Writing: Brian Crecente. Episode editing and sound design: Ethan Vincent. Visual Design and graphics Manuel Lindinger, Milena Nieto, Nannan Li. Transcription: Patricia Pascale. Audio engineering by Peter Priemer, Dan Carlisle. Music by Henrik Lindstrand, Peter Priemer, Brian Tyler, and foundermusic.com. From the LEGO.com team Jacob Bredvig Larsen, Anders Weien. YouTube and social media within the LEGO Group: Liam Stevenson, Kev Smyth. Communications, media and public relations: Edgaras Racinkas, Alice Carter, Sarah Wind Christiansen, Ryan Greenwood, Giovanna Devoraes Rossin, Sarah Schofield, Ulla Lundhus, Roar Trangbæk. Mark Hamill and Tom Glover from Golin. Release management and telemetrics: Sherlock Zhao, Anders Tankred Holm. Legal support: Melanie Raubeson and Megan Langley Grainger. Procurement: Lone Koch. From the LEGO Group archives: Tine Froberg Mortensen. From the LEGO Idea House: Kristian Reimer Hauge.

And finally, a big thank you to Sean McEvoy, the entire LEGO Games team and our families for their undying, invaluable support. And, of course, all of our guests from season one. For comments, questions, suggestions, input and opinions, write us at [bitsnbricks@LEGO.com](mailto:bitsnbricks@LEGO.com).

That's bits, the letter N, bricks@LEGO.com. And, as always, well, it's time for a little break and to relax, but not too long. So stay tuned for the next season of Bits N' Bricks.

Nannan Li

Very, very, very good experience. First time being on a podcast.

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