

The LEGO® game console from another reality

An exploration of perhaps the LEGO Group's most unusual creation unearths a captivating tale that includes a group of reality-questioning fanatics, the LEGO Group's first and only (and very odd) gaming console, and a Power Rangers-like television show from the man behind multiple TV hits.

Some believe that the Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension toy line was either a byproduct of a failing LEGO Group, or perhaps one cause of the company's near bankruptcy.



But back in the late '90s, a faction within the company was enamored with the idea of creating a new toy line that still delivered the creativity of construction, but without the tubes and studs of a LEGO brick.

The company asked a concept development team to come up with a more organic approach to building without LEGO bricks. Project Genesis, as it was known in the beginning, was more like action figures and toy animals than a construction set.

The design was meant to expand the idea of building beyond the brick, specifically more organic things. Some of those early concepts included creatures that could be built by interchanging plastic body parts.

The building approach found in those creations, called LEGO Beings, was married to the idea of creating a new line of LEGO action figures, and that turned into LEGO Galidor.

Niels Milan Pedersen, who has now been a designer at the LEGO Group for more than 40 years, was one of the core team of designers assigned to the project when it first started to take shape.

"At this point in the LEGO Group's history, some were worried that the normal LEGO brick might be a little out of fashion," he said. "It sounds odd to say that now, but that was the feeling in those days: that it might be a little too old fashioned."

While Pedersen and the rest of the designers were working on the physical models that would become the first wave of Galidor toys, the LEGO Group had another interesting idea up its sleeve. Not content with simply rolling out its own take on an action figure tied to a television show and video game, the company wanted to include some cutting-edge tech in the toys as well.

The Kek Powerizer had arms and legs that could be popped out and replaced and even came with two heads. But, unlike the other figures, it had an LCD screen built into its back.

It was essentially a mini LEGO game console with an LCD about the size of a Nintendo Switch game card that came pre-loaded with 22 games.

While there are three buttons beneath the screen, the games were all actually played by tilting the entire figure in different directions and rotating his arms and legs.

The figure also had a speaker and microphone built into it, which allowed it to receive hidden audio signals from the television show and video games, which would either trigger sounds from the figure, or could even be used to load or activate games.

Lau Kierstein, who was brought in to help design the toy, said that the team wanted gameplay that was different than what you'd find on a traditional console or handheld.

"It was important for us that it was a part of the play and not something you did on the side, like you could do with a Game Boy or something similar," he said. "And that's why we embedded all these different types of sensors, so it became an integrated play experience, and not something you did separately."

While designers and engineers were hard at work on the toys for the upcoming launch of Galidor, the LEGO Group needed something that would bring everything together – an

overarching story that would breathe life into the toys, the video games, and drive what they hoped would be a massive new original television show.

That's where they turned to Tom Lynch, whose career in the world of tween shows was blossoming in early 2000. His history included *Night Tracks*, *Kids Incorporated*, and *Caitlin's Way*.

Lynch said the LEGO Group came to him asking for a show that would work with the toy line they were creating.

When Lynch brought the concept back to the Lego Group, they loved it and put Tom's group in touch with the character designers for the Galidor toy line.

The world that grew out of that collaboration was built around this concept of two teens, Nick Bluetooth and Allegra Zane, traveling to another dimension in a spacecraft nicknamed the Egg, to do battle with Gorm and his evil sidekicks. The two are aided by a robot named Jens, an anthropomorphic frog named Euripides, and a small bespectacled furry blue warrior named Nepol. Importantly, while Allegra uses her exceptional karate to take on the bad guys, Nick has the ability to glinch, which basically transforms his human arms or legs for the limbs of aliens or machines and uses their abilities against them.

It was an original and fascinating idea that seemed to fit in well with the zeitgeist of the moment, one influenced heavily by shows like *Legends of the Hidden Temple*, *The Secret World of Alex Mack*, and *Power Rangers*.

Production on the show started in early 2000, with Tom, the cast, and the crew shooting all 26 episodes for the first two seasons. The plan was to launch the half-hour episodes starting Feb. 9, 2002 on YTV in Canada and Fox Kids in the United States.

As production began on that first wave of 15 or so toys, Lynch was deep into the production on the first two TV seasons, and the LEGO Group started looking at other ways to market the new property.

One of the ideas the company had was to create a website for Galidor before it was officially revealed. Instead of promoting the show or toys, though, the website was designed to be a sort of game in itself.

Gabriel Walsh was brought on as the producer for the interactive experience that the team dreamed up. The idea was to turn the website into a sort of hunting ground for clues. People arriving at the site would feel like they had dropped into the world of Galidor, blurring – in a way – the line between fiction and fact.

At the time, the approach was a new form of marketing tied to something known as alternate reality games, or ARGs.

After the ARG went live, Walsh was researching how well his creation was received online by looking through links to the Galidor site from external websites, when he traipsed into what he calls a "very strange experience."

"One of the final mentions of the site was a link from a very strange message board," he said. "They had many, many threads about how phase three had begun and that they were getting ready to begin their travel into the alternate dimension. And that somehow, that all this stuff was not as fake as I thought it was."

Unwittingly, Walsh had stumbled from a LEGO Group-sanctioned alternate reality game, to one of the world's first ARGs ever created: Ong's Hat.

Ong's Hat was created in the late '80s as a living art project, one that was designed to play loose with the lines between its fictional narrative and reality. In the story of Ong's Hat, a group of scientists in Ong's Hat, New Jersey are experimenting with ways to travel to another dimension.

As the fiction grew, some fans of the literature and website began to believe that the fantasy was reality and then started to harass its creator – who posed as a researcher into the fiction.

The creator, Joseph Matheny, had to eventually pull the plug on his creation after these overzealous fans began to show up at his house, and he started to worry that they may become dangerous.

But ironically, Matheny's revelation that the whole thing was a work of fiction was something that the Ong's Hat true believers didn't believe. It was, for some of them, a very real series of events, and there was a way to travel to other dimensions using a vehicle called the Egg.

Enter Galidor.

Around when Matheny was working to convince everyone that Ong's Hat wasn't a big conspiracy about transdimensional travel, the Galidor website popped up telling a story about a doctor traveling to another dimension in a device called the Egg.

And the LEGO Group's Walsh decided to use the very vehicle that had given life to Ong's Hat to create his own shadowy world tied to strikingly similar fiction.

It caused a lot of confusion for a lot of people and almost resulted in a lawsuit.

Not long after contacting the folks at Ong's Hat, Walsh caught word that there was a threatened lawsuit in the works against the creators of Galidor, by the creator of Ong's Hat.

Matheny said he contacted the LEGO Group about the similarities between his work and the show. It turns out that, years before, he shopped the story around to a number of producers and networks as a potential kid's show, but no one seemed interested. But then Galidor popped up. Both, Matheny noted, have a central figure from New Jersey named Nick, both involve transdimensional travel, and both have a vehicle called the Egg.

Matheny said he thinks that the idea from his show somehow found its way into Galidor, and so he reached out to point that out. He declined to say what happened, but he said he never filed the lawsuit.

Ironically, Matheny's goal was to embed his fiction into culture in a way that would make it hard to extract his storytelling from what did and didn't happen – to essentially create something that felt like folklore, something that had been around forever and belonged to no one.

Lynch, for his part, said he never heard about the threatened lawsuit, but that shows are often sued by people who believe their ideas were swiped.

As all of this was happening, though, the television show, the toys, and the video games were all marching steadfastly toward a February 2002 launch.

Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension was meant to be a technical marvel, a live-action show empowered by deft costuming, over-the-top practical effects, CGI, and green-screening, all enriched by subtle audio technology that brought toys to life in the homes of the children watching.

But that's not exactly what happened.

When the toy designers and video game developers saw the first couple of episodes before it aired, they were thoroughly unimpressed.

Pedersen said the LEGO Group designers were disappointed because the show seemed to feature actors in rubber suits. Nick Ferguson, who worked on the PC version of the Galidor game, said the developers wondered if the effects still needed to be finalized.

Meanwhile, show creator Lynch was getting a different sort of bad news.

The channel on which Galidor was going to run was sold, and the new owners didn't seem as invested in promoting the soon-to-run show.

When it did hit, some of the reviews were lackluster at best, and soon the show started getting moved around in the programming schedule – a very bad sign.

Lynch planned to return and shoot the next seasons after a break. Instead, after the final episode of the second season aired in August 2002, everything came to a halt.

The toy line was meant to have a game developed by Tiertex Design Studios for the Game Boy Advance, and then another game for Windows PC, PlayStation 2, and GameCube developed by Asylum Entertainment. Both were to be published by Electronic Arts.

The GBA game hit in 2002, but the Asylum-developed version never launched. Well, not really.

Ferguson joined the team working on the game as the producer a bit after the studio landed the project. He said the team knew they wanted to create a fast, action-packed platformer that would incorporate some of the special abilities tied to the Kek Powerizer.

The GBA had a mixed critical reception. Asylum's game was initially scheduled for a release in early 2003, but it was pushed back to a September 2003 release at the E3 video game expo that year.

Ferguson traveled to E3, not to promote the in-development game, which would have been typical, but to meet with folks about future project for Asylum after Galidor.

Just before the show started, Ferguson swung by a LEGO toy store and was surprised to find all of the Galidor toys deeply discounted, seemingly on clearance.

"There was literally a big bargain bin, and it was filled with Galidor merchandise," he said. "I think that was the point for me personally, where I thought, 'Yeah, this isn't good' because we were still wrapping up the game at that point."

The team was in the final stages of localization for other regions and quality assurance. There had been already a sense that Galidor wasn't the success everyone expected it would be and that they just needed to get the game done. Still, walking into that LEGO store happy, if not enthused, to be wrapping up a LEGO game and seeing the deep discounts was like being kicked when you were already down, Ferguson said.

About two months later, the game was canceled. To this day, Ferguson doesn't know exactly why, though he can guess. He said the team was called into a meeting and told that the game was shuttered and that everyone was laid off.

But to seemingly everyone's surprise, the game – never actually completed by the developer – still found its way onto store shelves, published by Focus Multimedia and ValuSoft in Europe and North America.

Galidor wasn't just a flop. It's a toy line that received an enormous amount of blame for things that went wrong at the LEGO Group. Business experts, fans, and even some LEGO Group employees have listed Galidor as one of, if not the worst creation of the company in its long and storied history.

Some have even said it contributed to the problems that almost bankrupted the company. One LEGO designer called Galidor the worst product to come out of the LEGO Group's shaky '90s and early 2000s.

The well-regarded book *Brick by Brick: How LEGO Rewrote the Rules of Innovation and Conquered the Global Toy Industry* called Galidor an expensive, abysmal failure that made the mistake of competing against another LEGO Group product: BIONICLE®.

But time has been much more kind to Galidor. Today there are many fans of the odd mix-and-match action figures, including not a few LEGO Group designers.

Speaking with those directly connected to the project, no one sees it as the abysmal failure described in *Brick by Brick*.

"I still get a little offended by that," Pedersen said. "The product was OK. Actually, here in the development department, we have quite a few people who are still very big-time fans of Galidor figures. It's quite a lot fun.

"You will always be told this was a failure. But I'm still not ashamed to say I worked with Galidor. It's OK for me to admit that."

Explore more...

In order of appearance:

[Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension](#) – Brickset

[Kek Powerizer](#) – Brickipedia

[Tom Lynch](#) – Official website

[Night Tracks-](#) YouTube

[Kids Incorporated](#) – YouTube

[Alternate Reality Games](#) – Wikipedia

[Ong's Hat](#) – Weird N.J.

[Jorge Luis Borges](#) – Wikipedia

[Power Rangers](#) – Official website

[Tiertex Design Studios](#) – Wikipedia

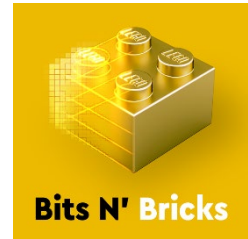
[Asylum Entertainment](#) – Official website

[Focus Multimedia](#) – Wikipedia

Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 3 Episode 37: The Surreal History of the LEGO Galidor TV Show, Game Console, and Action Figures

October 13, 2021 • 1:12:47



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 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.

(Bits N' Bricks Season 3 theme music)

Brian Crecente

Hey there, Ethan. How are you this morning?

Ethan Vincent

I'm doing great. I'm excited. Excited because we're wrapping up Season 3, our penultimate season, with a really amazing story.

Brian Crecente

We are! Now let me ask you a question.

Ethan Vincent

Yes.

Brian Crecente

What does a ghost town in New Jersey, author Philip K. Dick, action figures, Power Rangers, and rubber suits all have in common?

Ethan Vincent

Good one. Galidor!

Brian Crecente

Yes! You're right! And that LEGO Group toy line from 2002, bolstered by a quirky television show, is what we're talking about today. The toy's history includes a dive into alternate reality gaming, a PC game that was canceled but still got published, and the LEGO Group's one-and-only video game console, found in the back of a talking robot action figure.

Ethan Vincent

If you've never seen the show or played with these strange brickless toys, you're going to be in for quite a ride. Actually, even if you have, we probably still have some amazing surprises to reveal. So let's do this.

Chapter 1: Project Genesis and Action Figures – 02:22

Brian Crecente

We've talked a bit about the LEGO Group's infamous decline and near bankruptcy in previous episodes, but in a nutshell, the company posted its first ever loss in 1998 and laid off about 1,000 employees. That decline continued through 2004, when Jørgen Vig Knudstorp became the CEO of the LEGO Group. In discussing how the company found itself on the brink of bankruptcy, there were a number of missteps. Some say that among those contributing factors was the somewhat infamous Galidor line of toys.

Ethan Vincent

For those of you unaware, Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension was a toy line launched in 2002 alongside a television show and video games. The toys didn't feature any of the familiar studs and tubes that make up the iconic LEGO brick. In fact, at first blush, they look like typical, albeit rather bulky, action figures. There were a couple of humans, a couple of robots, and some aliens. While it wasn't clear from the box they came in, the toys actually did share a bit of DNA with traditional LEGO toys. You could yank their arms and legs and sometimes heads off and switch them with each other.

Brian Crecente

The out-of-the-box design for Galidor all started with a strange request internally. The company asked a concept development team to come up with a more organic approach to building, one that wouldn't include any bricks. Project Genesis, as it was known in the beginning, was more similar to action figures and toy animals than it was a construction set. Instead of interlocking bricks, the design was meant to open up the idea of building to things beyond the bricks, specifically more organic things. Some of those early concepts included creatures that could be built by interchanging plastic body parts. The building approach found in those creations, called the LEGO Beings, was married to the idea of creating a new line of LEGO action figures, and that turned into LEGO Galidor. Niels Milan Pedersen, who is now been a designer at the LEGO Group for more than 40 years, was one of the core team of designers assigned to the project when it first started to take shape.

Niels Milan Pedersen

It was a little out of our normal LEGO product line. Well, there wouldn't be that many studs and knobs on the things, and it was also this that it was more or less big figure. So we had to find out a lot of new ways to make connection parts for the elements. They were very different from what we normally make also because they were in a bigger scale. Yeah, it was very new to us to make. It was because it was they were trying to approach this action figure market, so to say, and we were a little unsure how that would go because we were more accustomed to another sort of customers, maybe a little younger customers, and also because this really would challenge the fantasy and the imaginations of the kids we were going to make the things for. So in many ways, it was quite unfamiliar, but also very exciting to start up on. And also because we were told that this was going to be really big, we were going to make this television series and a lot of stuff which we had never tried before, so they really put a lot of effort into it and really had big expectations for the thing.

Ethan Vincent

While Niels and the other designers were initially skeptical of the idea, once they started hosting playtesting for the figures, they found children enjoyed playing with them, specifically, once a child was told they could mix and match the body parts, they really got into the concept. It was also a fun challenge for Niels and the team who had all spent their careers at the company working within the challenges of creating objects using the

traditional look and feel of the LEGO brick. To compensate for the lack of tubes and studs, the team looked at the company's existing Technic™ line, which was used in the creation of BIONICLE® figures. They were also given sketches from which to build, though the process was different than what they were used to, Niels said.

Niels Milan Pedersen

We had to try to think quite different because normally, for example, if we were making some animal creatures styled normally in LEGO bricks, we would add in some angles and, you know, this square or not so organic design to the thing to make it fit more to the LEGO figure and the normal LEGO bricks. We were quite freed of those normal restrictions and were actually told to do it much more organic, so to speak, and as alien as possible for many of the creatures we were going to make. So it was quite different. As we say, normally we ought to be able to sculpt whatever people want us to sculpt, so yeah, we would be in for it.

Brian Crecente

These new toys brought with them another challenge. Because they were so unique to the LEGO Group and its existing line of toys, the company had to create a lot more unique molds for the manufacturing process than they normally would. This led to another first Niels said. The company ended up outsourcing that work to China, where that task could be done much faster. As the work continued, there was a lot of attention being paid to this new sort of play system. A big part of those interested in Galidor, and toys like it, was a group within the company that felt that the LEGO brick needed to be updated to keep up with the times.

Niels Milan Pedersen

At this point in the LEGO Group's history, especially marketing, was worried that the normal LEGO brick might be a little out of fashion. It sounds odd to say that now, but that was the feeling in those days, then the market was going in other direction. That was why they actually put so much effort and so much energy into this new action figure thing – also because they thought this is a way where we can connect the new medias – television series and some of the new computer gaming, or whatever. It was a way to try to get more into the future toy lines because it was also the LEGO brick was considered a little too old-fashioned at this point. There was a general feeling, not among us who actually worked with the bricks, but I think especially the marketing thought that, yeah, we need something new and different.

Chapter 2: Kek Powerizer – 09:20

Ethan Vincent

While Niels and the rest of the designers were working on the physical models that would become the first wave of Galidor toys, the LEGO Group had another interesting idea up its sleeve. Not content with simply rolling out its own take on action figures tied to a television show and video game, the company wanted to include some cutting edge tech in the toys as well. Lau Kierstein, an engineer who specialized in acoustics, was hired on specifically to work on the features that would be built into one Galidor toy: the Kek Powerizer. Like the other figures, the Kek Powerizer had arms and legs that could be popped out and replaced, and even came with two heads, but unlike the other figures, it had an LCD screen built into its back.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, Ethan, and this is where things get really weird. The Kek Powerizer was essentially a mini LEGO game console. That LCD screen, about the size of a Nintendo Switch game card, let kids play 22 different games that were preloaded into the figure. While there are three buttons beneath the screen, the games were all actually played by tilting the entire figure in different directions and rotating his arms and legs.

Ethan Vincent

Brian, that doesn't sound like it's quite as fun as the Game Boy.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, as a collector of handheld game systems – and I definitely put this in that category – I have to say this is by far the most challenging system I've ever played with. You have to really move this Powerizer around to get him to recognize that you're tilting him, and rotating the arms and legs can be hard to do while also watching that sort of small LCD screen. Also, these arms and legs can kind of pop out of their sockets if you get too excited when you're playing the game. So for instance, if you're playing the swimming race game that comes with the Powerizer, you need to rotate these arms to get him to swim, and you need to do it quickly. But if you play like hover glider, you need to tilt the entire Powerizer to guide the ship on the display, and then rotate the arms to fend off incoming enemies. It's a lot.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, it sounds like a lot, you got to really be coordinated. But that's not all you can do with the Powerizer, right?

(Excerpt from Galidor Kek Powerizer commercial:

Narrator: "The Kek Powerizer communicates with the Galidor TV series, Galidor.com, Galidor Games on Game Boy Advance, Playstation 2, PC CD-ROM, and GameCube.")

Brian Crecente

Not only can you swap out the heads, which changes what the figure does and what's displayed on the LCD, the figure also interacts with both the video games and the television show.

(Galidor Kek Powerizer commercial continues:
Narrator: "Every dimension needs a hero.")

Ethan Vincent

And that's where Lau comes in.

Lau Kierstein

In the Galidor project, it was very important to link the action figure to a TV series. And it was the concept or the intention to do that very literally, so the TV series should get a response out of the toy, basically. So that was the overall brief I had when I was hired in: that we need to do some kind of interaction between the TV series and the action figure. I thought it was a challenging task, but on the same page, I also thought it was very interesting, and I thought it could potentially be very innovative task to be part of, so I was actually very excited about being assigned to this.

Ethan Vincent

Lau was hired because of his work on something called psychoacoustics, which is basically about how sound can affect you emotionally. So for instance, if you hear a mosquito in a tent, and it sounds much louder than it is, well, it's because your brain amplifies the sound to make you aware of it. The idea Lau and the LEGO Group had was to use this same sort of acoustic trick to mask the sound of computer code being transmitted from a television show to your listening action figure.

Lau Kierstein

The way it works is that in the TV show – and I was actually sitting in Canada, doing the production of the TV show together with the sound engineers of the TV shows – and the way it works that at certain period of time we looked at the audio tracks. And we did, actually now it's getting a little bit technical, but we did a frequency analysis of the track, and we find areas where it was actually possible to hide some audio coding. It's almost like morsing, but just very, very fast, and you're not able to pick it up by the human ear. But we actually put them in in certain positions. So we sent a command and we sent a timestamp, and the action figure will receive that message. And at a certain point in the TV show it will actually respond to what was going on.

(Galidor Kek Powerizer commercial continues:
Narrator: "Receive signals from the Galidor TV show.")

Lau Kierstein

So for example, if there was a discussion between two characters in the TV show, suddenly the Kek Powerizer will respond to what was going on at the right time.

(Galidor Kek Powerizer commercial continues:
Kek Pwerizer: "Try to escape now.")

Lau Kierstein

So he became a 3D dimension watching the show because he was actually getting alive. And it was amazing to see the the kids' response to it, we did a lot of kid tests with this. So it was really magic and surprising for the kids.

(Galidor Kek Powerizer commercial continues:
Kek Pwerizer: "Take the controls.")

Ethan Vincent

The Kek Powerizer has a speaker and microphone built into it. Along with all those sensors and the LCD screen we talked about. It was also preprogrammed with a 450 word vocabulary, 85 animations, and 56 sound effects. So instead of adding new dialogue to the figure to match the show, the designers would just look at the show and what was being said, and then add in the proper audio cue to trigger an appropriate, though sometimes generic, response from the toy.

Lau Kierstein

Exactly. They had this standard library of voices that they can do.

(Galidor Kek Powerizer commercial excerpts:
Kek Powerizer: "Right into my trap;" "Try to escape now;" "Gorm activated...Gorm: I'm ready")

Lau Kierstein

We actually also had it in a way that we could actually transfer small files. It took longer time because the bandwidth of our communication was very, very low, but we had some memory, free memory for more unique sound effects and lines, and we used that from time to time. We basically, instead of sending a command, we were actually sending a small audio file through the audio spectrum. That's pretty cool. But it was smallest file, it was like two seconds files, audio files, three seconds audio files in that range because it took much longer time to transmit those files instead of just commands and timestamps.

Brian Crecente

The team was also responsible for deciding to add not just those audio responses, but the LCD and gameplay abilities, Lau said.

Lau Kierstein

It was important for us that the electronic should not just be there just to be there. It should underline the theme of the Galidor universe. And we thought having a screen to be able to play some minigames with the action figure was actually a very nice and neat way to underline the whole theme. And it will give us some extra ingredients in the play with the kids to actually be a small story starters. So we had, I remember we had a lot of small different minigames. Flying around was one of them. So we added some sound, some display images, and a little bit of gaming, so small game mechanics that was actually able for the kids to imagine that the Kek Powerizer was actually flying. So, you know, using all these different small minigames as story starters was actually a great concept for bringing the kids into this universe. It was important for us that it was, you know, a part of the play and not something you did on the side like you could do with a Game Boy or something similar. And that's why we embedded all these different type of sensors. So it became an integrated play experience and not something you did separately. And that's why we added a tilt sensor so we can actually see how the action figure was orientated. We had rotation sensors in the arms. And we were using the arms for different actions in the games. And we also had a sensor in the torso that could detect which type of head there was on. So we actually had a bad guy and a good guy head that could be swapped. And the action figure will react differently, whether it was the good guy or the bad guy that was in, and that was all things that we thought was important to have an integrated interactive experience instead of something that was just a Game Boy on the side, if you like.

(Tune break)

Brian Crecente

The team decided early on that they didn't want to simply add a gamepad to the action figure beneath the screen, because it wouldn't fit in with the greater theme of Galidor, which is what led to all of those motion sensors. To get kids more involved with the TV show and traditional video games, they could use both of those to unlock special minigames on their action figure. This was done through the same system that directed the figure to say specific things. So these hidden audio codes would blast out, that would unlock a minigame built into the figure that might be tied specifically to the week's TV episode. So for instance, maybe a show with a strong water theme would unlock the diving minigame in the Kek Powerizer. The action figure could also communicate with other Kek Powerizers as well using that same audio transmission system.

Chapter 3: Tom Lynch and the Galidor TV Show – 19:17

Ethan Vincent

While designers and engineers were hard at work on the toys for the upcoming launch of Galidor, the LEGO Group needed something that would bring all of these things together, an overarching story that would breathe life into the toys, the video games, and drive what they hoped would be a massive new original TV show. So the company turned to Tom Lynch. Tom got his start in television in the '70s, working on rock 'n' roll shows and then music videos. In 1983, he created a show called Night Tracks, a late night take on MTV Music Videos produced for TBS. That, and the birth of his first son, led to the creation of Kids Incorporated, a children's show built around the concept of a band performing at a local music club. Its popularity helped launch not just Tom's career in the world of tween shows, but also careers of a variety of actors and musicians, including Fergie, Mario Lopez, Jennifer Love Hewitt, and Martika. Tom would go on to create more than 20 series in the young teen television genre. In early 2000, he was in the midst of producing Caitlin's Way, and Just Deal when the LEGO Group came knocking. They asked Tom and his production company to come up with an idea for a show that would work with Galidor. And so he set about creating a new universe.

Tom Lynch

It's the dream of every creator. Somebody likes your idea and now you got to make sure it's really good. You don't screw it up. That time where somebody is interested in your next idea, or it's a dream of me, or somebody is actually excited about something, and then you go away and you have to fill it out. Because I do know that in a room, I can portray a room and I can get a room excited, but it comes down to what's on the page. What are we really doing here? And for me, that's very much, eight hours a day, 10 hours a day of thinking of the show, looking at other resource materials, I went through a lot of kind of fantasy art. This one started with me as a visual sensibility. Like what was going to be the visual aesthetic? And then secondarily is what is the character that I want to tell a story about, and I had to create Nick. It just occurred to me Nick Bluetooth that's a very funny name. I don't even know if Bluetooth existed back then (laughs). I'm not too sure where that came from, but it was basically a hero's journey, very much a Joseph Campbell hero's journey, and I think he got locked into another dimension. So it started with character story, visual aesthetic, and you just live with those things for weeks. I had had a team that I trusted at that point creatively that would say this has been done before, or this is good, or this is weak. And you put this all together in a presentation, which would include some artwork to get the tone of what you want visually. It would include detailed breakdowns of characters, what their journey is over each season, and it would include the tone of it, comedic versus action adventure. And I think I had laid out five seasons, 100 episodes. I think I kind of knew the general arcs of what was going to happen with it. And then you take that and present it.

Brian Crecente

When Tom brought the concept back to the LEGO Group, they loved it and put Tom's group in touch with the character designers for the Galidor toy line. The world that grew out of that collaboration was built around this concept of two teens, Nick Bluetooth and Allegra Zane, traveling to another dimension in a spacecraft, nicknamed the Egg, to do battle with Gorm and his evil sidekicks. The two are aided by a robot named Jens, an anthropomorphic frog named Euripides, and a small, bespectacled, furry, blue warrior named Nepol. Importantly, while Allegra uses her exceptional karate to take on the bad guys, Nick has the ability to glinch, which basically transforms his human arms or legs into the limbs of aliens or machines, and allows him to use their abilities against them. It was an original and fascinating idea that seemed to fit in well with the zeitgeist of the moment, one influenced heavily by shows like Legends of the Hidden Temple, The Secret World of Alex Mack, and Power Rangers. Bringing the Galidor characters to life in a science fiction universe though, was not going to be cheap. But Tom said that the LEGO Group was willing to make the investment to create something that, in his words, simply didn't exist in television.

Tom Lynch

So we get to do the TV show, and we go to Montreal to do it. There's studios up there, there's facilities up there, there's things that we want to work with. And in order to get kind of what was in my head, we had to use green screen so we could create the stunt work, we could create the – we could have people flying, we could have that kind of stuff. We could have great landscapes in the worlds behind this with it. Then we had 3D CG so these characters could actually move, and the villains could attack, and ships could come in and all that kind of stuff, could walk around, you know, I think his spaceship could walk around, it was four claws that could move around and all that. Then we had prosthetics, because on some of the close-up work we'd have to put in these arms of the different creatures or legs, we'd have to do inserts and close-ups of that. I mean animatronic, that was more animatronic we would have to build. This show had a lot of physical action explosions so we have, what we call hard effects, which are the dirt bombs going off and things drop, and live actors would have to work in that whole lineup. So sometimes you'd have four or five layers of different effects for one shot. And in writing it, it was really easy and wonderful. In executing it, it was, oh, man, I'm in trouble here (laughs), how are we going to do this? And that's where this gentleman Alan Best, who was a – I kept meeting with people who kept telling me you can't do this, you can't do this. And I knew I could do it. My experience at the Secret World of Alex Mack, I remember going up to – I had this vision of what this young girl would do. She would change to this kind of liquid creature and move around that was certainly inspired by The Abyss from James Cameron. So, ILM did those effects, so I went up to Industrial Light and Magic, you know, I thought I was a big shot. I'm a little 30-year-old show creator, 33-year-old show creator, I'm going up to Industrial Light and Magic and I meet with the team up there, "I want to do this and this, and this is how this is going to go," and they're all, "Great, no problem, we got it, we got it, that's interesting, it hasn't been done, great." The price for them to do a three-second

effect was literally the budget of the entire show. So I was like, OK, so I went up there, this very kind of, I wouldn't say cocky, I would say enthusiastic (laughs), all things were possible. And I got back home, and I had already sold the show Alex Mack, and they're expecting it to air, we're in production. I'm like, "Oh my God, I don't know how to do this." So, we had to find a way to do it. And we did. We did a bunch of computer rendering, we rented a house that we put in 20 computers, we had a person who knew how to do it, and we just locked them up in there and rendered it. And so I knew if I could think it that I could accomplish it. And Alan was my partner in that definitely. He would come and say, "Tommy, you don't want to do this shot, because that's going to take too much. But if we did this shot here, you'd get the same effect, and we get to combine it with this." He had an incredible, incredible technical ability, and the gift of not shortchanging the creative. He really understood what a script was, and what these characters were and the emotion was. So every time we rehearsed a scene, and I would rehearse the scenes weeks in advance so he could go off and figure out how to make them. And that's what we did. And we did all of this we had, I think, the company was we had probably 50 animators in a room, and there were just a huge rendering farm at that time.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

Production on the show started in early 2000 with Tom, the cast, and the crew shooting all 26 episodes for the first two seasons. The plan was to launch the half-hour episode starting February 9th, 2002 on YTV in Canada and Fox Kids in the United States.

Chapter 4: An Interactive Website and Alternate Reality Games – 27:14

Ethan Vincent

As production began on the first wave of 15 or so toys, and Tom was deep into the production of those first two seasons of television shows, the LEGO Group started looking at other ways it might market the new property. One of the ideas the company had was to create a website for Galidor before it was officially revealed. Instead of promoting the show or toys, though, the website was designed to be a sort of game in itself. Gabriel Walsh was brought on as a producer for this interactive experience the team dreamed up. He explained what the experience looked like when someone wandered onto the page.

Gabriel Walsh

The idea that we had was that you would go to just like a normal, you know, coming soon type page with some graphics. And suddenly the graphics would start to shake and all of a sudden a full screen Flash environment sort of popped up and took over. And it was like

logging into an old sort of terminal. And when, as it logged in – and, you know, kind of green on black – the characters would sort of begin to swirl and turn into the LEGO minifigure typeface that was sort of floating around. And you could interact with this character via the command prompt, and sort of like read about this scientist's adventures in transdimensional travel.

(Excerpt from Galidor TV Show, Episode 1, "Identity":

Nick Bluethooth: "Who's supposed to be here?"

Jens: "A great warrior is coming with the map to free Galidor and the entire dimension.")

Gabriel Walsh

So the idea was that you really didn't know what was happening. You maybe thought for a minute that this was real, and only after, you know, a few minutes where you sort of looked around, were you able to determine that it was a promotion.

Brian Crecente

The idea was that visitors could dig out nuggets of backstory by exploring the website and typing commands into this command prompt, turning the browsers into a sort of investigator as they tried to piece together what ended up being some of the lore of the fictional world of Galidor. The approach was, at the time, a new form of marketing tied to something known as alternate reality games, or ARGs.

Gabriel Walsh

An alternate reality game was a way of doing, almost like a treasure hunt, that took place both in the real world and online. And the idea was that, you know, you were trying to piece together disparate clues and find the narrative out for yourself. Those types of experiences, because they were so intertwined with viral marketing campaigns, you know, became pretty cliché pretty fast. But in general, there are some magical experiences that, you know, like the best and things like that way back in the day, that people kind of viewed as sort of life changing (chuckles). But yeah, but after, you know, enough of those and it becomes pretty, pretty silly.

Ethan Vincent

The idea for creating the ARG website came to Gabriel after he received a bit of very open-ended advice from Tom Lynch, who was visiting the offices to discuss Galidor and its promotion.

Gabriel Walsh

He came into the New York office (chuckles). He was kind of like what you'd imagine a Hollywood type guy to be if you're, you know, looking through a very clichéd set of reading glasses there. And he came over to me and he was like, "I don't care what you do,

kid just make it magic." And so that was the visual direction I was given. Yeah, so I tried to make something that felt magical.

Ethan Vincent

As Gabriel set about creating this magical experience for the website, he designed a story with two or three updates that was filled with things like newspaper clippings, plans for the transdimensional craft called the Egg, and information about what happened to the father of the show's lead character. Ultimately, visitors discovered that the father, Dr. Bluetooth, had gone to an alternate dimension and left his son behind. They also were given a bit of a pseudoscience lesson about traveling to other dimensions. The website went live with the alternate reality game in late 2001, about four or five months before the show started airing, and wrapped up as the show launched when the main Galidor website went live. And after the ARG went live, Gabriel was researching how well his creation was being received online by looking through links to the Galidor site from external websites when he traipsed into what he calls a very strange experience.

Gabriel Walsh

(Laughs) Yes, so, this is yeah, oh gosh, one of the final mentions of the site, refer links to the site, was on a very strange message boards. I don't recall the title of it, but essentially, they had like many, many threads about how this site was indicating that phase three had begun. And that they were getting ready to begin their travel into the alternate dimension, and that somehow, all this stuff was not as fake as I thought it was.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

Unwittingly, Gabriel had stumbled from the LEGO Group sanctioned ARG, to one of the world's first alternate reality games ever created.

Chapter 5: Ong's Hat – 32:49

Brian Crecente

It's time to try and explain Gabriel's odd discovery and its surprising connection to Galidor. It all circles around an early alternate reality game called Ong's Hat, but instead of me trying to explain it to you, we're going to have the creator walk you through it.

Joseph Matheny

OK, my name is Joseph Matheny. My relationship to Ong's Hat is, I guess you'd say, the creator of the project. The project started in the late '80s as a cross media experiment in storytelling. And then it evolved along with the, basically, network computer BBS culture, and then further into the internet connected culture, when internet became kind of a

publicly accessible thing outside of universities and military institutions. Yeah, so it eventually evolved into what, I guess now, is known as transmedia.

Brian Crecente

OK, this is a bit of a ride, bear with us. First, a little background: Before ad agencies were using alternate reality games to launch video games and music albums, there were a dedicated group of creators, artists, writers, creative thinkers who loved the idea of creating these living, breathing bits of fiction that sometimes deliberately blurred the lines between reality and fantasy, sometimes even taking readers with them. Joseph and a couple of his pals were among that group. They'd like the idea of creating something that had a sense of magic and fantasy, and then trying to inject it into reality.

Ethan Vincent

In the case of Joseph and his friends, that was Ong's Hat, which, like most ARGs wasn't really a book or an online story, or really any one single thing. It was a bunch of things creatively planted in the world in an attempt to make it part of the cultural zeitgeist. And what became known as Ong's Hat started in 1989. Joseph tells us that the first thing published in connection with Ong's Hat was actually a pamphlet that was presented by its creator as something he just stumbled upon, not made. This actually existed as a physical item that was copied and passed around between friends. It looked like a book catalog, but was really setting the groundwork for what was to come. Eventually, that passed-around-fictional-prop found its way onto the early internet, via the website, Boing Boing.

Joseph Matheny

It started out as a print Zine back in the early 90s -

Brian Crecente

Here's Joseph Matheny again.

Joseph Matheny

- and then followed that with another piece that I did in around '94. By that time, I was like just really focusing on the online part of the project. This was very early in online, so none of those guys were on bulletin board systems. Nobody was on internet. So I just kind of took it over with everybody's agreement, I said, "I'm gonna keep going with this project, I have a vision for it, I think it's gonna be something I can do with Interactive Media, electronic art" and all of those people, you know, were not familiar with any of the techniques or the methodology, or even the philosophy behind that. And they just went, "OK, then it's yours." And it just went from there.

Brian Crecente

Joseph tells us he and his friends had all of these interesting political and cultural ideas that they wanted to get people to talk about, but they wanted to introduce them in a way that

was a bit more compelling than the norm. So they decided to try and deliver their ideas via sci fi narrative. They were also big fans of Jorge Luis Borges, a literary giant from Argentina and one of the fathers of the magic realism movement. Borges' stories often played around with the notion of reality and surrealism, and the trio of friends wanted to do the same thing but in a more technologically advanced way. Some of the group were inspired to do this to see how it would spread across the different forms of media in an age when networking and the internet was just starting to take significant route in society. Others liked the idea of seeing if they could retro actively create a piece of folklore that felt like it had always been there, despite being in fact something new. While the story was told across pamphlets, embedded clues and short stories, there was a plot.

Ethan Vincent

Joseph said that their fictional story was actually based on a nugget of truth. He said that a group of Princeton professors created a fictional mathematician who lived in Ong's Hat, New Jersey. They used this pseudonym whenever they wanted to publish ideas or concepts they worried would lead them to losing tenure. Joseph and his friends loved the idea of this and ran with it in creating their ever-evolving narrative.

Joseph Matheny

When we got our hands on it, it became: there was a bunch of scientists who were hanging out in Ong's Hat, disenfranchised with academic life, who ran into some mystics, who also had some of the same ideas, and were looking into some of the same outcomes that the scientists were trying to achieve, only they were coming at it from a mystical perspective, and the scientists, being good scientists, realized that you shouldn't discard something just because it's mystical in origin. And so this hybrid science mysticism school was born in Ong's Hat known as the Ashram, and they started studying how can we travel between dimensions using a hybrid of mysticism, and science? And so what they discover is that somewhere out there using the Everett, Wheeler, Graham theory of multiple infinite dimensions, that everything that could happen does happen in some dimension somewhere. And so, one of the dimensions there's an earth that has every form of flora and fauna that's ever been, with the exception of humans. So you've got a pristine, untouched pure Eden, basically wilderness, that doesn't have humans, has never seen the effect of humans, and doesn't feel the effect of humans, and these people find this and realize this is the place to go and start a new civilization, and so they disappear. They don't come back. They leave behind the documents so that you, the reader, the participant in this game, if you put the clues together you'll be able to either build a device, or several of you can build the device, and then you can go join them in this great Edenic wilderness (laughs). So in essence, it becomes a treasure hunt with an impossible goal (laughs).

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

Now, while Joseph was one of the creators of the Ong's Hat ARG, the nature of all these sorts of creations means you're not really supposed to have a creator. It's all facts. So instead, Joseph inserted himself into the fiction of this sort of game by saying he was just another person researching the story surrounding Ong's Hat, the sort of Ong's Hat anthropologist. And it worked. Perhaps too well. Soon, people were tracking Joseph down, trying to find out what he knew about a piece of fiction he co-created, but that they felt was very much real.

Joseph Matheny

So I had people showing up at my house, camping out on my lawn, trying to break into my back door, becoming confrontational. Some of these people like were extremely unhinged, you know, so I had family in the house at the time, and I became very concerned. There's like, two people I had to walk off my property at gunpoint. So yeah, it became – I mean, that's not a lifestyle anybody should have to live. And anything they could do to harass me, they they tried to do, and some of them did. And so it just became very, very exhausting (laughs), that's the word. Yeah, and so that's when I realized that I needed to conclude this project. And then, I just, in 2001 I just came out and made a statement and said, "We're not doing this anymore. If you weren't aware, this was an experimental art project. If you don't get that, I'm sorry, but we're not going to facilitate this bad behavior anymore." I mean it got outlandish, the behavior. So yeah, I just couldn't handle it anymore. It was not in my range of vision to think that somebody would. I mean, you know, obviously, I'm not so stupid as to think like, there's not like, one in a million people that thinks that Harry Potter is real, you know what I mean? There are people like that out there, right? But they're by and far very thin margin of the whole. So it really wasn't even in my thought process if I knew I really need to be careful that, you know, that people aren't taking too seriously. It just wasn't in my range. It's like, I didn't even think about it. I didn't think I had to think about it.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

But ironically, Joseph's revelation that the whole thing was a work of fiction was the only thing that the Ong's Hat true believers didn't believe. It was, for some of them, a very real series of events, and there was a way to travel to other dimensions using the Egg.

Brian Crecente

Enter Galidor. About when Joseph is working hard to convince everyone that Ong's Hat isn't a big conspiracy about transdimensional travel, a website pops up about a doctor traveling to another dimension in a device called the Egg. And the LEGO Group's Gabriel decides to use the very vehicle that had given life to Ong's Hat to create his own shadowy world tied to, seemingly, the same fiction. It caused a lot of confusion for a lot of people, to say the least. Gabriel, for his part, stumbled across a pocket of hardcore Ong's Hat

believers, who had themselves stumbled across his own fictional world of Galidor, and they certainly noticed the similarities. Gabriel, though, was bewildered when he started to dig into Ong's Hat, initially unaware of its fictional background. He even reached out to some of the forum goers who were more than happy to respond.

Gabriel Walsh

The message back from them was from someone named like Pale Horse and Rider or something like that. I've yet to know who that actually is. And they were like, "You should really stop and think about what you're doing. Take a look at everything that you've said and think about it." And so (laughs) this sort of like quasi-mystical, you know, like, not non-answer about why the thing that I thought I had come up with all by myself, especially the character's name was something like Aeon or Ion or something, that I thought I had come up with myself was actually part of their mythology.

Ethan Vincent

Gabriel says he was particularly jarred by the message and discovery because he had just finished reading a book by Philip K. Dick about alternate realities and the nature of what is and isn't real.

Gabriel Walsh

One of the things I remember in the books is that the characters were looking for signs that their reality was actually, sort of like, that there was another reality, and our reality is flawed and isn't the true one. But they would watch TV, and at one point, I believe a Burger King commercial, overlapped with a children's cartoon, and it spelled the words King Felix in the broadcast just for a second, and the characters in the book thought this was a sign reinforcing that there's another reality. And so, because I had just read this, I was like, kind of, I guess a little my pumps were primed for even this to be something that made the least bit of sense. But yeah, they were thinking that because the stories had overlapped, and because there was eerie similarity, even down to character names, that this was somehow a sign that there was another dimension to travel to, and they should be gearing up and getting ready to go.

(Excerpt from Galidor Kek Powerizer commercial:

Nick Bluetooth: "I used to wonder what my life was about until this weird map and flying Egg took my friend Allegra and me to a place called the Outer Dimension. That's where I met Jens, Euripides, and Nepol, who were waiting for me to come and defeat the evil Gorm. To do that, I've got to find the pieces to this key that'll unlock the kingdom of Galidor. Thankfully, I got my glinch to help defend us against Gorm's cronies. I'm Nick Bluetooth, and our mission: free Galidor and save the outer dimension."

Narrator: "Watch Galidor Saturdays and Sundays on ABC Family.")

Ethan Vincent

There was perhaps an explanation for all of this. Not long after making contact with the folks at Ong's Hat, Gabriel caught word that there was a threatened lawsuit in the works against the creators of Galidor by the creators of Ong's Hat. Joseph said he contacted the LEGO Group about the similarities between his work and the show. It turns out that years before, Joseph had shopped the story around to a number of producers and networks as a potential kid show, but no one seemed interested. But then Galidor popped up. Both works, he noted, have a central figure from New Jersey named Nick, both involve transdimensional travel, and both have a vehicle called the Egg. Joseph said he thinks that the idea from Ong's Hat somehow found its way into Galidor. And so he reached out to the LEGO Group to point that out. He declined to say what happened but tells us he never filed the lawsuit.

Brian Crecente

Ironically, Joseph's goal was to embed his fiction into culture in a way that would make it hard to extract his storytelling from what did and didn't actually happen, to essentially create something that felt like folklore that had been around forever and belong to no one. Tom, for his part, said he never heard about the threatened lawsuit, but that shows are often sued by people who believe their ideas were swiped. As all this was happening though, the television show, the toys, and the video games were all marching steadfastly toward a February 2002 launch.

(Tune break)

Chapter 6: Initial Reception – 46:55

Ethan Vincent

Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension was meant to be a technical marvel, a live action show empowered by deft costuming, over-the-top practical effects, CGI and green screening, all them enriched by subtle audio technology that brought toys to life in the homes of all of the children watching. But that's not exactly what happened.

Niels Milan Pedersen

I still remember we looked at each other and said, "Ehh, this is not good." (Chuckles)

Ethan Vincent

That's Niels Milan Pedersen talking about the designer's reaction to the show. It turns out that not everyone was a big fan of the look of the show. Niels and the designers said they didn't get a chance to see the show until it was very close to launching. He and a group of 150 people from the LEGO Group went to an auditorium and watched the first two episodes. When the lights went up, the room was mostly quiet.

Niels Milan Pedersen

Well, the first reaction, in the start, it, well, it looked good, but then it was mostly when we first saw one of the figures. It was this green, little toad-looking creature, I actually made him.

(Excerpt from Galidor TV Show, Season 1, Episode 2, "Euripides, Please":
Jens: "Allegra, it is my honor to introduce to you the arch philosopher of the Royal Court of Galidor ... Euripides.")

Niels Milan Pedersen

It was the first time we saw him and it was this man in a rubber suit. It really looked liked some of those old horror movies from the 50s. We really felt that, "Oh, this is not, this is not what we expected." Of course there wasn't CGI and those things wasn't as good in those days, but those men in rubber suits that looked absolutely awful.

(Excerpt from Galidor TV Show, Season 1, Episode 2, "Euripides, Please":
Euripides: "So, where is our young warrior?"
Allegra: "Didn't he find us up here?"
Euripides: "No.")

Niels Milan Pedersen

I was personally very disappointed when I saw him, I have to say (chuckles). And that was also what the other guys said. There was figures and also the robotic figure. I think he was called Jens. He didn't look like a robot at all. He looked like, yeah, a guy in a rubber suit, it was not – because at this point, of course, we were also used to the first *Star Wars*TM movies. So we had hoped that it would be a little in that league. It certainly wasn't.

Brian Crecente

Niels' immediate concern was the toy line he and others at the LEGO Group were working on. While they knew it was a very different sort of toy for the company, they felt they had created something that kids could enjoy playing with, but they also hoped that the show wouldn't hurt the toys' chances.

Niels Milan Pedersen

They really tried to sell them as those action figures and didn't. On the boxes they don't encourage the kids to take the figures apart and build new figures. You can build whatever you want with this, you can mix the thing and use it as a figure-building system. We really thought, yeah, they will show that and as long as they show that we'll be OK, because we have seen that the kids actually loved the thing when we had test, but the problem was that they actually never showed that on the boxes. It was out of our hands. But I think that we had talked about that the TV shows would mostly be shown in the U.S., and if they still tried to sell it as building figure system, we might be able because, at this point, where

they were going to launch the first batch of the series, we already had been working on the next of the coming years' launches. And they were very strong. We had some really, really great figures, people who see them – we still have prototypes here – and people who come and see them says, "Wow, we would have loved them on the market." So we still thought that, yeah, we have a good product. So if we're selling it right, it can be good. And then this TV series, well, let's forget about them and then try to sell it as a building figure system.

Ethan Vincent

Meanwhile, Tom was getting a different sort of bad news.

Tom Lynch

It was horrible. It was horrible. I remember the day the event turned. We were finishing up the show, like we probably had another month of shooting or two months, or maybe just a month shooting. And I'll never forget I'm in Montreal, it's cold as can be, and we're in the soundstage areas where the soundstage is all around us, like you know, three, six, nine deep, and what we call the alleyway, which is the space between soundstages, I looked down the alleyway I'm just taking a walk thinking of what's next whatever problem to put out, and I see Rich Ross and Gary Marsh, and there might have been a third people. Rich was president of Disney Channels, Gary was Executive VP, and they're walking down the corridor, is walking down the alleyway and we're outside, I go, and I've known both of them they're both fine men and I consider them friends, I said, "Hey, guys, what's up? What are you guys doing here? They go, "We just bought the Family Channel." I go, oh man, because, now this is just my mind, them buying the Family Channel, they bought for Power Rangers because Power Rangers was making 150 or 200 million a year in licensing at that time, if not more, and my brain immediately went to, oh my God, what are they going to promote? The Power Rangers or Galidor the new product? And I just remember it felt like I was – I just felt horrible. I just felt horrible, because, and I'm not saying anybody else ever said this, but in my mind I'm going, "Why wouldn't Disney put all their promotional money into shows they own wholly instead of shows they own part of, and they only own part of Galidor." That was a tough day. That was a tough day for me.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

To make matters worse, when the show launched, the reaction among critics was not so good.

Tom Lynch

We had some good reviews, we had some people confused, we had a little muddled – muddled wouldn't have been the word but it had been like, "Wait, this kid is in another dimension. How'd he get there? What's going to happen?" When I did The Journey of Allen

Strange, which was an alien kid left behind and he was African American, the reviews for that were: This is breakthrough television. When I did Alex Mack, which featured a girl superhero: This has changed kid's television. When I did Kids Incorporated: Nothing like this has been on television. I mean, those were the reviews I was used to getting, right? And these reviews came out and they were, I will say that they were lukewarm, to good, to a couple great. It was – it was challenging.

Brian Crecente

Tom blames the lackluster reception on that last minute channel purchase, which he believes led to less marketing push for his new show. On top of that, the toys simply weren't selling. Then the show started getting moved around in the programming schedule, something that Tom said is always a very bad sign. His expectations were that he'd be taken two or three months after wrapping production on those first two seasons, and then come back to start shooting the next seasons. Instead, after the final episode of season two aired in August 2002, everything came to a crashing halt.

Chapter 7: The Video Game – 54:24

Ethan Vincent

So, Brian, we are deep into our podcast right now, and we haven't even talked about the video games yet.

Brian Crecente

That's true.

Ethan Vincent

And there's a reason for that. Like much of the story of Galidor, there's a lot going on here. The toy line was meant to have a game developed by Tiertex Design Studios for the Game Boy Advance, and then another game for Windows PC, PlayStation 2, and GameCube, developed by Asylum Entertainment. Both were to be published by Electronic Arts. The GBA game hit in 2002.

Brian Crecente

And, you know, I recently was playing through it. It's a surprisingly fun little action platformer that has you fighting your way across the screen as Nick glinching different appendages to take on enemies and solve puzzles. But the other version, the one developed by Asylum, never launched. Well, I mean, not really. Nick Ferguson joined the team working on that game as a producer a bit after the studio landed the project.

Nick Ferguson

So the LEGO Group were very clear that they wanted a quite traditional platformer. So it was, you know, intended for younger audience. The kind of games that we referenced were games, like the original Rayman, and Crash Bandicoot, so kind of linear platformers where, you know, there wasn't a huge amount of exploration, it was really about getting from A to B, kind of point to point. But it would be a journey that took you through the interesting, exciting kind of environments that was the universe of Galidor. So, that was the kind of inspiration was –we're gonna make a fast-paced platformer. And I can remember one conversation with one of the producers from the LEGO Group who was kind of asking, you know, "How fast is this game?" And we weren't sure. And, you know, I think in the end, it was like, "It's 200 miles an hour." We wanted it to be a fast paced game, like, you know, how fast is Sonic, I don't know, 160 miles an hour maybe. This is gonna be 200 miles an hour. So I think there was this idea that you were going to be rushing, you know, through these environments, and I remember there was a lot of focus as well on on vistas. You know, we wanted to have a very clear channel for the player to kind of go down. We wanted to try and emphasize kind of, you know, have good background or kind of show the kind of exciting environment that this world was taking place in.

Ethan Vincent

The team also had to incorporate the special abilities of that Kek Powerizer toy, designed by Lau at the LEGO Group to use hidden audio signals to interact with things.

Nick Ferguson

So we were given WAV files, I think, which we're effectively kind of white noise that triggered the Kek Powerizer –

(Kek Powerizer Toy Sound effects:
Kek Powerizer: "Activate telescope.")

Nick Ferguson

– either embedded in existing sound effects or they were played alongside existing sound effects in the game to trigger the voice at certain point.

(Kek Powerizer Toy Sound effects:
Kek Powerizer: "I have the answer. Ask me a question.")

Nick Ferguson

In the original design documentation you could have the head of Gorm, who is the kind of bad guy in the Galidor universe, or you could have the head of Jens, who was one of the main character Nicholas Bluetooth's allies. And the idea was that that Kek Powerizer would say different things depending whether Gorm or Jens' head was in it. So if, you know, if Nick Bluetooth kind of ran out of energy, Jens would go, "Oh, no, Nick", and if Gorm's head

was in there, you know, he'd kind of celebrate and go, "Oh, you know, the Outer Dimension is mine." (Sound effects) That was kind of the idea. So there were various triggers, and then there were also some games that you could unlock –

(Kek Powerizer Toy Sound effects:
Kek Powerizer: "Dive in." Sound effects.)

Nick Ferguson

– built into the Kek Powerizer itself, so I think we were allocated two or three games, which were, the intention was they'd be unlocked based on the amount of Qoikum that you'd picked up in the game, which was kind of one of the resources that the players were collecting as they kind of traversed through the levels.

(Kek Powerizer Toy Sound effects:
Kek Powerizer: "I must return to my lair.")

Ethan Vincent

Like the LEGO Group toy designers, the folks at Asylum were also given an early look at the television show. And like the designers, they weren't exactly blown away by what they saw.

Nick Ferguson

We all sat in a meeting room and watched the first episode. And, you know, I think, on the one hand, OK, now we know what these characters look like, and, you know, we have an idea what's going on. But I think there was also a feeling of, you know, it wasn't the greatest show we'd ever seen, and, you know, maybe there are questions like, "Are the effects final? Is this what it's going to look like?" And you know, I think the LEGO Group guys put a brave face on it. But it wasn't like, "Oh, great, we're working on the most like, amazing game for the most amazing TV show ever."

(Music break)

Ethan Vincent

But, of course, that didn't impact the development of the game. Asylum continued their work on the title. The GBA game hit in October 2002, to a mixed reception from critics. Asylum's game was initially scheduled for release in early 2003, but it was pushed back to a September 2003 release at the E3 video game expo that year. Nick traveled to E3, not to promote the in-development game, which would have been typical, but to meet with folks about future projects for Asylum post-Galidor.

Nick Ferguson

And I can remember going to Disneyland just before the E3 properly started, kind of the day before E3 actually opened up, and we went into a LEGO store there, and we could see all the Galidor figures in the store and they're all discounted heavily. And in fact, I think you would get a Galidor figure for free with any purchase over \$30. So we thought, wow – there was literally a big bargain bin in their little store filled with Galidor merchandise. And, you know, I think that was a point, for me personally, where I thought, yeah, this, you know, this isn't good, because we were still wrapping up the game at that point. But I was very aware that there was a whole bunch of people back at the studio working away. And part of me thought maybe I should send this picture to some people. And then the part of me that won was like, I don't think anybody needs to see that when they're working hard trying to get the game finished.

Brian Crecente

The team was in the final stages of localization for other regions and quality assurance. There was already a sense that Galidor wasn't the success everyone expected it would be and that they just needed to get the game done. But still, walking into the LEGO store happy, if not enthused, to be wrapping up a LEGO game was like being kicked when you were already down, Nick said.

Nick Ferguson

It was disappointing, but I didn't think it was really telling us anything we didn't already know. It was just kind of, you know, suddenly it was kind of there in front of us. You know, we spent a lot of time in a studio in North London, and now we're kind of out in the wild on the other side of the world and seeing it play out, so it was disheartening. But, you know, I think, to be honest with you, everyone on the team was kind of looking forward to moving on to something else. We were kind of committed to getting the game done and moving on. So, yeah, it was disappointing, but, you know, it didn't end up being the game that I think we'd all hoped and dreamed it would be. Unfortunately.

(Tune break)

Brian Crecente

About two months later, the game was canceled. To this day, Nick doesn't know exactly why, though he can guess. He said the team were all called into a meeting and told that the game was shuttered and that everyone was laid off. But to seemingly everyone's surprise, the game, never actually completed by the developer, still found its way on the store shelves published by Focus Multimedia and ValuSoft in Europe and North America. It wasn't until 2006 that Nick heard that the game he worked on and saw canceled was actually published.

Nick Ferguson

I was bemused. I think I felt, well it's nice that the game's out and I guess people are getting to see it. But for me, honestly, it kind of, I should say it felt a bit like running into an ex-girlfriend, you know, a party that you haven't seen for five years. It was like, "Oh, it's nice. Things are going well, you know, you're out there living your life. You know, that's nice." This was probably my reaction.

Chapter 8: Conclusion – 01:02:25

Ethan Vincent

Galidor wasn't just a flop. It's a toy line that has received an enormous amount of blame for things that went wrong at the LEGO Group. Business experts, fans and even some LEGO Group employees have listed Galidor as one of, if not the, worst creation of the company in its long and storied history. Some have even said it contributed to the problems that almost bankrupted the company. One LEGO designer called Galidor the worst product to come out of the LEGO Group's shaky '90s and early 2000s. The well-regarded book *Brick by Brick: How LEGO Rewrote the Rules of Innovation and Conquered the Global Toy Industry*, called Galidor an expensive, abysmal failure that made the mistake of competing against another LEGO Group product – BIONICLE.

Brian Crecente

But time has been much more kind to Galidor. Today, there are quite a number of fans of the odd mix and match action figures, including, not a few LEGO Group designers. Speaking with those directly connected to the project, no one sees it as the abysmal failure described in *Brick by Brick*. In fact, producer Tom Lynch seemed surprised to hear that his show and the toy it helped to pitch to kids had such a harsh reaction.

Tom Lynch

Ouch. Ouch. God. That's not good. That's not good.

Brian Crecente

But he also feels like there are lessons to be learned from the endeavor.

Tom Lynch

Absolutely, I think that technologically you always have to push forward. For me, I have to make sure the story's worthy of the technology instead of the other way around. You know, it's easy to lay technology and do all these big things on it, but there better be a story holding its core. And the LEGO Group obviously probably learned what kind of toys they need to make or don't make.

(Excerpt from Galidor TV Show, Season 1, Episode 16, "Escape from Kek":

Allegra: "I just had the creepiest feeling."

Nick: "Yeah. Why do I have the feeling someone's watching us?")

Ethan Vincent

On the toy side, the people directly involved with designing the Galidor figures and tech-packed Kek Powerizer remain proud of the work they did. Lau said in his mind what the team created with the Powerizer was the LEGO Group's first and only game console, one that used the sort of physical movement controls made popular years later by the Nintendo Wii.

Lau Kierstein

I was extremely proud of what we have done. I thought it did exactly what it's supposed to do supporting the play theme, making the story starters for the kids to kickstart different physical place. For me, it's always been important doing product development that you will encourage the users to use it in an interactive way and not being passive. And I thought we did that. Of course, there were areas where we can probably have done it much better. I'm pretty sure it was kind of a pioneering product, because we actually put a lot of new stuff in there. We both have the acoustical communication with the TV show. On top of that, we have all the minigames and all the audio feedback and the display feedbacks. And looking back, maybe for some users, it was too much. We were actually touching new ground in many different areas in one product. And that was fun, but probably also too much maybe for some users.

(Tune break)

Lau Kierstein

To be honest, I still feel that the Galidor action figure building system had a lot of play value. At that time, I actually had kids myself at that target age group, and they just loved it and played a lot. That was, for a period of time, that was the favorite toy they had. I think it might had a better chance if it was not linked so much to all the characters of the TV show but had a more generic characters, because the building system and the way that you can combine and build all these different kinds of characters, it actually quite fast. I think that play value, I still believe, had a lot of potential.

Ethan Vincent

Reflecting back today on that show from nearly 20 years ago, Tom said he's still proud of what he and his team created.

Tom Lynch

I think I've created 20 series that have gone on the air in this genre. And they're – I love them all. What I don't think I ever did with any of my shows was repeat something that

somebody else did. I wasn't derivative, and so you love it for that. I love it for the experience. I felt pain that it wasn't a hit, you know, as I said earlier, because the LEGO Group put a big trust in me. The owner of the LEGO Group flew out with the CFO to Montreal on his way to somewhere and stopped and spent a day on set. I mean this guy is running the largest industry in Denmark, and he came out and he was just so lovely. He was so lovely a man, a gentleman. And that's the part that hurts is letting people down. Creatively, I have no shame in my game. We did stuff that wasn't done on television. We did things that a lot of shows now probably, not directly taking from Galidor, but going, "Oh yeah, let's combine all these different techniques." You know, in the effects world you all know what everybody else is doing. When Jim Cameron was shooting Avatar, which was, you know, secret and locked down, all that, everybody knew that he had this new system, I didn't know technically what it was, where he could shoot against a green screen and see the backgrounds and see the actors. You know, the information just travels because effects people are a small community and they go from place to place. So, I'm sure it was talked about as either Tommy's great adventure or folly, one of the two.

Brian Crecente

Ultimately, while Galidor wasn't well received at the time, it did go on to impact the LEGO Group. In terms of design, the figure's system for connecting limbs remains in use today on a number of different toy lines. And of course, there was a big lesson learned from Galidor and that period of time at the company.

Niels Milan Pedersen

The LEGO Group realized that, OK, maybe we should stick more to the classic LEGO system.

Ethan Vincent

This is Niels speaking.

Niels Milan Pedersen

I think it was part of that we ended up getting the success we have now that was that we had had that experience with Galidor. And somebody in management and marketing, they learned a good lesson there. Quite a lot have said that "Why didn't you continue that? It was quite good." But we will always have this added question: "Why didn't you use it with bricks – together with bricks?" Many people saw it the same way that we actually wanted it to be seen. And actually here in the development department we have quite a few people who are still big time fan of Galidor figures and try to buy up – they actually, some of them, might even have had the prices going up because they have bought so many of the Galidor figures. And I have to say that they claim that us who made it are sort of their heroes, because they like it quite a lot. It's quite fun. So you will always be told this was a failure, but in the same sentence, they will say, but the figures was good. So yeah,

I'm not ashamed to tell that I, yeah, I worked with Galidor (chuckles). It's OK for me to admit that.

(Postscript music begins then abruptly stops with a record scratch)

Chapter 9: Season Break Announcement – 01:10:08

Ethan Vincent

Alright, hold the music, hold the music again.

Brian Crecente

You know, Ethan, I have to tell you, I'm a little worried.

Ethan Vincent

Hm, what's going on?

Brian Crecente

Well, I mean, I'm an audiophile, a little bit of an audiophile. And I – you seem to be going through a lot of records. You're scratching them up.

Ethan Vincent

(Laughs) That's right. I am. I am. I apologize for doing that, but we do have to mention that this is the final episode of Season 3. Can you believe that, Brian? Three seasons!

Brian Crecente

I know. As weird as this sounds, it actually makes me a little sad –

Ethan Vincent

Yeah.

Brian Crecente

– that we're coming to the end of the year, which will be the end of, at least this 25-year anniversary celebration.

Ethan Vincent

That's right. We have one more season we're looking forward to. You and I've already kind of outlined exactly what that's going to be, and we're excited for many, many more fun games to be mentioned. But yeah, this will give us, how long of a break before we're back?

Brian Crecente

We have three weeks, we have a three-week break, and we'll be back with a new episode for Season 4, our first one of Season 4 on November 3. That season is going to run up until almost the last day of the year.

Ethan Vincent

Nice.

Brian Crecente

There'll be nine episodes –

Ethan Vincent

Good.

Brian Crecente

– and we can't tell you what those episodes are yet. We're always worried that something will happen.

Ethan Vincent

(Laughs) And something does happen.

Brian Crecente

It often happens!

Ethan Vincent

But they all are filled with these great stories that are going to give you even more insight into what the LEGO Group has done for 25 years in creating amazing video games. So tune in, stick with us, and we'll be back in three weeks.

(Postscript music)

Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 01:11:37

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 Galidor TV series and video games. We'd like to thank our participants: Nick Ferguson, Lau Kierstein, Tom Lynch, Joseph Matheny, Niels Milan Pedersen, and Gabriel Walsh. We'd also like to thank the entire LEGO Games team. For questions and comments, write us at 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.

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