

LEGO® Legacy: Heroes Unboxed is a Minifig Nostalgia Machine

LEGO® Legacy: Heroes Unboxed isn't just a fun, team-based tactical role-playing game. It's also a powerful nostalgia machine packed with a surprising amount of minifig and theme set facts, history, and minutely detailed models.

The game actually started without a core gameplay mechanic or even a genre. Instead, it was born out of a desire by developer Gameloft Toronto to create an experience that tapped into the love and memories that the adult fans of LEGO community has for minifigures.



In many ways, the game's development and even what it delivers can be broken up into two distinct parts: The strategy role-playing game where players battle using a team of five minifigs that they construct, and the deep historical examination and portrayal of not just the game's minifigures but even some classic LEGO theme sets.

The examination of the LEGO Group's storied history started with visits to the LEGO Group's own massive archives in Billund, Denmark.

"Let me tell you, if you want to see a grown man cry, put them in the LEGO archives," said Gameloft Toronto design director Ryan Hill, who was among those who made the trip to Billund. "It just is bound to happen. You know, you just start seeing all the old LEGO toys from your childhood in the flesh, in sealed boxes built in front of your very eyes, and you're like, 'Oh my God, I remember this!' Even the obscure sets that like only you would know. They're all there. Right? Like, I saw the whole batch of BIONICLES, and I lost my mind. It totally brought me back."

Brian Cook, lead producer at Gameloft Toronto, said the trip wasn't just emotional. It also helped to underscore the value of nostalgia for LEGO toys.

"What became interesting for us was, every time we brought someone new onto the team, and we said, 'We're going to make a LEGO game,' their eyes lit up, and you could tell they were having an emotional response to it," he said. "And so we started realizing we needed to dig into those. And so what we quickly found was, everybody had a story about a set that they either had that they love, but usually it was about the set that somebody else had, or they had looked at in the window, and they really wanted it."

While those trips to Billund were instrumental in fleshing out the core concepts behind the game, they came after early development was underway.

Work on LEGO Legacy: Minifigures Unboxed started as summer gave way to early fall in 2016. The two companies had already been discussing working together on a possible project, but that project hadn't taken shape yet. That's where Brian Cook came in, brought on to lead an early team that would focus on prototyping ideas.

"We actually went through about a year and a half of prototyping R&D, where we pitched a bunch of different games, what we thought would be interesting," Cook said. "And I think we went through three distinct games."

Most of the debate was centered around things like how much to appeal to adult fans versus ensuring the game is child-friendly, as well as how a game might honor these two distinct groups of potential players.

The studio settled on the team RPG approach in late 2018. The decision to create a team-focused, strategy RPG came after examining the sorts of games that were doing well in the mobile game space and identifying which ones they thought would work well for unearthing and playing with a deep roster of characters.

The studio also felt it was important to figure out a way to reconnect with adults who are in what the LEGO Group sometimes refers to as the dark ages – the period of time between a childhood spent playing with LEGO bricks and an adult rediscovering that love.

They found a perfect example of what they were hoping to achieve in The LEGO Movie.

"We were like, 'Oh my God!' when that movie came out, 'this is what we've been trying to do,'" Hill said. "It was really inspirational for us. So we were trying to capture that and really figure out what it was that was going to pull these older players back into LEGO toys."

As one part of the team worked on the game design and mechanics, others focused on how best to deliver that nostalgia that they knew fans would love.

One result: The group incorporated a bunch of fun facts about each figure and set. They also wanted to let players see the creations in detail, up close – and in the case of the theme sets, actually watch them being built in real-time in 3D.

To ensure they got everything perfect, they needed the original sets to recreate them. But it turns out that, while the LEGO Group has archives of every set and minifig ever made, they don't have sets to spare.

So Søren Vejgaard, the LEGO Group product lead on the game, set about on his own internet dig.

"We actually bought every single set and every single minifigure inside the game and delivered them to Gameloft," he said. "That way, they had them for reference when they were animating a minifigure or they were building a set. They always had the physical set or minifigure as a reference."

The result is a game that captures these sets and minifigs in a historically accurate way. Take, for instance, the 1978 police officer minifig found in the game. He didn't have a printed decal on his torso when he was originally released. It was a sticker.

"If you look inside the game, he's wearing a sticker. It's not printed on his torso," Vejgaard said. "They did these beautiful animations where you see the sets being built when you unlock them. And they sort of show all the things that you might not remember about those sets, like, you know, that there was like a trapdoor in this build, actually hidden somewhere. And, you know, you don't remember that. But when you see that animation play, it plays out, you suddenly have that flashback to when you build the kit."

The game launched in 2020 and found a strong fan base waiting to play it.

Since its release, the folks at Gameloft have focused on adding new sets, events, and minifigures – including the Ghostbusters™. And it seems that – as predicted – the real draw of the game is the nostalgia people have for those wonderful LEGO toys.

Explore more...

In order of appearance:

[LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed trailer](#) - YouTube

[LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed](#) - Official website

[Gameloft](#) - Official website

[LEGO Minifigures](#) - LEGO Minifigures Don't Have Knees

[The LEGO Movie trailer](#) - YouTube

[Ghostbusters LEGO products](#) - Official website

[Ghostbusters crossing the streams](#) - YouTube

Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 3 Episode 30: The Legacy of LEGO® Legacy: Heroes Unboxed

August 25, 2021 · 37:19



Prologue – 00:00

Announcer

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

Announcer

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

Studio Engineer

Yeah, that was great, Ben. We got it.

Announcer

Alright. On with the show.

Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 00:39

(Child's voice announcing Bits N' Bricks)

Ethan Vincent

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

Brian Crecente

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

(Season 3 Bits N' Bricks theme music)

(Excerpt from LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed trailer)

Brian Crecente

Ethan, dude, have you seen this trailer?

Ethan Vincent

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I love this one. It's the launch trailer for LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed. And yeah, of course, I've seen it. I think it came out, like, over a year ago or so, Brian, right?

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, I've been a little behind on some of these newer LEGO games hitting. This trailer, though, I think is so much fun because it does this great job of capturing everything I love about the LEGO minifig.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, we should probably explain to our listeners what's happening in the trailer. You can hear all kinds of sound effects right now. Maybe give us a rundown here, Brian.

Brian Crecente

Sure. It's basically just a big mash up of minifigs plucked from the 40-year or so history of those little tiny figures fighting with each other and, you know, it really looks amazing. So for instance, in the trailer, you've got the hiker tossing a fried egg at a zombie who then belches out this green cloud of smoke. And you also have all these other minifigs. There's Willa the Witch, there's Lord Garmadon, Hot Dog Man, and they're all fighting it out with these bizarre and funny attacks like exploding microwaves and a massive LEGO baby chick.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, that's right, I mean, it's a pretty great trailer, and this mobile game was developed by Gameloft.

Chapter 1: Nostalgia – 02:36

Brian Crecente

That's right, and I bet most people have guessed by now that LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed is also the topic of this week's show. This is a game that strives to capture the essence of the minifig by giving players direct access to some of the nearly 600 figs created over the years.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, and it's a game that sort of started backwards. Where most video games start with the game mechanic and work from there, it sounds like the folks at Gameloft Toronto started with the premise delivering an experience that would tap into the love and

nostalgia the adult fans of LEGO community has for many figures, and then they came up with the mechanics.

Brian Crecente

You know, in many ways it feels like this game's development, and even what it delivers, can kind of be broken up into two distinct parts. On the one hand, you have the strategy role-playing game that has you doing battle with your constructed team of five minifigs. But on the other, you have this deep historical examination, a portrayal of not just the game's minifigures, but even some classic LEGO theme sets. And the research for this game started with visits to The LEGO Group's own massive archives in Billund, Denmark.

(Brief tune plays)

Ryan Hill

Oh, that was huge.

Brian Crecente

This is Ryan Hill, Design Director at Gameloft, Toronto.

Ryan Hill

And yeah, we checked out the archives and like, let me tell you, if you want to see a grown man cry, put them in the LEGO archives. It just is like bound to happen. You know, you just kind of like start seeing all the old LEGO bricks from your childhood, in the flesh, in sealed boxes, built in front of your very eyes, and you're like, "Oh my God, like, I remember this set, oh God!" Like, even just like the obscure sets that only you would know. They're all there, right, like I saw the whole batch of like BIONICLES and I lost my mind. It like totally brought me back. But yeah, I mean, going to Billund and seeing, you know, the archives and also getting to walk through and see everything in the LEGO system from the early days all the way up to like the latest sets was just kind of a surreal experience. And it was just awesome seeing like the work environment that they have there, like, you know, obviously you have some rooms that are more, you know, like office-y and meeting room, but then you walk into like the Ninjago area and there's like four billion sets everywhere and action figures all over the place, you know, oh my God, my inner childhood is exploding right now. And you can see that everyone there has really connected with it as well, like it's just par for the course. Brian cook,

Ethan Vincent

Brian Cook, Lead Producer at Gameloft, Toronto explored those archives as well.

Brian Cook

I'm trying not to get choked up here. It's a really interesting process. If I give it to you just sort of like the non-emotional version, the first trip happened, a few people came back with

sort of this nostalgia thing, which is emotional already. And then we did the research. So I remember the first couple of months, finding every website you can, You know, like, what are the top 100 LEGO sets of all time? And, you know, what are all the minifigures? And us discovering the whole world that sort of surrounds LEGO products that you're not aware of as sort of, as someone who loved LEGO bricks once upon a time, but may not still be engaged with it as much. That's sort of the logical way it came about. But what became interesting for us was every time we brought someone new onto the team, and we said we're going to make a LEGO game, their eyes lit up, and you could tell they were having an emotional response to it. And so what we quickly found was: Everybody had a story about a set that they either had that they loved, but usually it was about a set that somebody else had, or they had looked at in the window and they really wanted it. And so we started realizing we needed to dig into those.

(Brief tune)

Ethan Vincent

The team dug so deep into this research, Cook said, that they could actually pinpoint a person's age by the sets they played with as a kid!

Brian Cook

We used to have this thing where someone would come on and we'd be like, "Hey, what's your favorite set?" and they'd tell us and we'd be like, "Oh, you're 37" or, you know, something, or "You were born between these years," because our research had shown that like your most receptive time to LEGO, I think was the ages something like six to twelve was when the – I think we surveyed 5,000 Gameloft employees or something – that's when people sort of connected very strongly. And so what ended up happening for us was just sort of a natural sort of amalgamation of the two. You know, sort of the what exists, and then also, as we were doing that, seeing people have emotional attachments, and it started to become really obvious what was going to be important to people.

Ethan Vincent

And for Brian Cook, it was his second visit where he got the full tour that he started to experience that powerful nostalgia.

Brian Cook

So I went in there and I started, you know, you're touching the boxes and "Oh, I remember this!" And I mean, I would be lying if I say I didn't have a tear in my eye as I was going through some of it. And it would be interesting as somebody else would find something that was relevant to them, and they'd want to close the aisle you're in because they were trying to get to the thing that they wanted to see. And obviously, that wasn't possible. So there was this sort of jockeying around trying to get as much time as you possibly could with the sets that were associated with you. It was also interesting in the LEGO Ideas

House, there's sort of a, there's a tour of that sort of the chronological history of LEGO sets. And it was interesting to see where their eyes sort of perk up, and they go, "Oh, that's me. I know that thing." And that's when their memories start. It's kind of like you hear this thing where if you hear a song from way back when, and then it triggers these memories, that was happening for everybody on the trip.

Ethan Vincent

Søren Vejgaard, The LEGO Group product lead on the game, said the Gameloft team's experience is very typical for visitors.

Søren Vejgaard

It's always fun taking people down to the LEGO vault. And of course, Gameloft, when they visited, were down there as well. So there are sort of, you know, two key moments. So the one is seeing people, you know, finding the sets from their childhood, either the ones they owned or the ones they really wanted. So that's sort of the first moment. The second one is sort of them realizing, you know, finding the dark ages, just, "I never knew that LEGO brand did this." So sort of finding the time between, you know, they grew out of the LEGO brand, but then they sort of rediscovered it again, just finding out all the LEGO toys that happened in between that period. Those two moments are just pure gold.

Brian Crecente

While those trips to Billund were instrumental in fleshing out the core concepts behind the game, they came after early development was already underway.

Chapter 2: Hunting for Rare LEGO® Sets – 09:06

Brian Crecente

OK, we need to pause things for a second here to talk about something amazing that Ethan and I discovered while researching this episode.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, this is great. This is something I really love. Go for it.

Brian Crecente

So during the process of researching history of minifigs and old LEGO theme sets for the game, Gameloft decided they wanted to incorporate a bunch of fun facts about each figure and set.

Ethan Vincent

They also wanted to let you see the creations in detail, up close, and in the case of theme sets, actually watch them being built in real time, in 3D. But to ensure they got everything

perfect, they needed the original sets to recreate them. And this is where things get pretty amazing.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, so remember, they, you know, you can't just look at a completed set and know how it was built. So what Gameloft did was reach out to Søren over at The LEGO Group to request these old sets, but while the company has this amazing archive of every set ever released, what they don't have, are sets to spare.

Ethan Vincent

And this kind of comes as a surprise, you know, to maybe some people who think that, you know, doesn't The LEGO Group just have this immense collection, this kind of endless supply of LEGO sets that they can just pull from the shelves? Well, no, they actually don't. You know, they can just send out these old sets and minifigures from 40 years ago to every game developer who asks and request them.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, exactly. So instead, Søren goes on his own internet dig.

Søren Vejgaard

Because that was the only way of finding out exactly how the sets were built, which bricks was used where, because you can't really just use the box image, or an image of the old set. You actually have to know each individual piece and how they were placed. So yeah, finding all the old build instructions, and then creating the sets from that was one of the factors. And then there's a lot of sites out there where you can actually purchase old LEGO sets. So we at The LEGO Group actually bought every single set and every single minifigure inside the game, and delivered that to Gameloft so they had that for reference when they are animating a minifigure or they were building a set, they always had the physical set or minifigure as a reference. So it's actually, once you know the process, it's actually easier than you think. There are sites out there, sites like BrickLink, you can create your own store and sell LEGO toys, down to full sets to individual bricks to minifigures. And through the site, you can browse through, you know, you can just search for a minifigure that you really want. And then you can see the different stores that sells that very minifigure and the price. That took some time. It was the task. And I mean, some of the minifigures are really easy to find. Some of them you can find like, you know, one guy is selling 100 of these minifigures. Why he got so many I don't know, but sometimes that was the case. And other times you would just find, you know, there's only five of this minifigure for sale. Usually they could be in various, you know, different states. So some of them would be completely scratched up or cape would be torn or whatnot. But honestly, we actually, we didn't care that much about them. I mean, this was a game that was meant to hit on nostalgia. If a minifigure had a scratch from kids playing with it, it was just like, you know, that's what this character is now.

Ethan Vincent

The result is a game that captures these sets and minifigs in a historically accurate way.

Søren Vejgaard

Gameloft has put a lot of focus on those details, I think. So something like the police officer from 1978 didn't actually have a printed decal on his torso. That was actually a sticker. And if you look inside the game, he's wearing a sticker, it's not printed on his torso. They did these beautiful animations where you see the sets being built when you unlock them. And they sort of show all the things that you might not remember about those sets, like you know, that there was a trapdoor in this build actually hidden somewhere, and you don't remember that, but when you see the animation play, it plays out, you suddenly have that flashback to when you built the exact same kit.

Brian Crecente

I love the idea of some collector somewhere getting an order in from eBay for this old LEGO theme set. And then, you know, they're putting it in their box, they wrap it up, they get to the point where they're doing the shipping address, and they see that they're sending this theme set back to the LEGO headquarters. It must have blown their minds!

Ethan Vincent

I know! This idea of this collector, this person who loves anything that has to do with The LEGO Group and LEGO bricks, to be packing it up and sending it to LEGO headquarters. I'm sure he was like, "Wait, what - what am I doing?"

Brian Crecente

They're going back home.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, they're going back home.

(Laughing)

Ethan Vincent

I think that's just a fun image, for sure. But yeah, we should get back to LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed.

Chapter 3: Prototype Development at Gameloft – 14:03

Brian Crecente

So work on the game started as summer gave way to early fall in 2016. The two companies had already been discussing working together on a possible project, but that project hadn't yet really taken shape. That's where Brian Cook came in. He was brought on to lead an early team that would focus on some of the prototype ideas.

Brian Cook

So we actually went through about a year and a half of prototyping, R&D, where we, you know, we pitched a bunch of different games, what we thought would be interesting, and I think we went through probably like three distinct games. The conversations that were coming up were things like: as a LEGO fan and as an adult gamer because the mobile space, while it's certainly child friendly, or we try to keep it child friendly, is a little bit more targeted to older players. It was sort of how do we honor the two of those together? So, we were looking at, you know, can we make a game with building in it? What is it that appeals about LEGO bricks to that older group? And in the end, we settled on nostalgia as a big piece for us. And I think honestly, it's a little bit self-centered, but that's because we, as we were making it, we were just in love with the LEGO bricks and all of our LEGO memories. And so that was awesome. And then we also sort of settled on collecting, and this idea that, as I get older and I'm still wanting to experience LEGO products, this idea that you know, like, "Oh, you know, I love them, I bring them home, and I build them. And there's a level of creativity. And then typically I don't break them apart and put them into a bin. I put them on a shelf and I display them with pride." And so after all of those prototypes, in the end, I think it was late 2018, I guess, we settled on the team RPG that ended up becoming a LEGO Legacy. And yeah, that was sort of the gestation period, if you will.

Ethan Vincent

At the heart of their original idea was crafting a game aimed at the adult fans of LEGO community and finding, essentially, a mechanism for delivering a deep sense of LEGO brick-fueled nostalgia to players.

Søren Vejgaard

There was a long loop of concepts and prototypes and ideas going back and forth.

Ethan Vincent

This is Søren Vejgaard speaking.

Søren Vejgaard

And Gameloft trying to get, you know, under the skin of what LEGO were in the gaming space, and what it made sense to do. They came to this conclusion that doing something for the LEGO adults, because we're good at doing games for kids, and we're good at doing games for families, but doing a mobile game that was just meant to appeal to the adult audience, that was the space that they saw that we're missing something.

Ethan Vincent

The studio settled on a team focused strategy RPG as the genre after examining the sort of games that were doing well in the mobile game space, and identifying which ones they thought would work well for unearthing and playing with the deep roster of characters.

Brian Cook

If you're getting in the sort of the mobile space, there are a number of different, what we sometimes call metas, which is a bit of a misnomer, but it's kind of what we're talking about these days. But one of the big ones is about character collecting or collecting in general. Obviously, the collecting angle from The LEGO Group perspective or the products historically makes perfect sense, but on the game side, if you look at a lot of games, they kind of boil down to a few different things like: Are you there to build power? Are you there for, you know, there's a number of different motivations to move forward. And one of the ones that we sort of had some expertise on in the Toronto studio, and also one of the ones that we sort of liked the most is collecting in general. And then we started looking at, well, if I'm going to get you to collect all of these LEGO minifigures, what's something that we think would be sort of interesting? And so we did a bunch of market research on sort of the demographics of adult LEGO buyers, and the demographics of different game genres, and what sort of made sense. And, you know, to be honest things that we also enjoyed. And one of the things we found was this character collection RPG really sort of stood out because it gave you a chance to have a lot of characters, highlight differences between them, and also they sort of naturally fell into groups, which really worked because one of the things we wanted to do – and it was sort of a catchphrase around the studio, and certainly on our team – was we wanted to celebrate LEGO bricks through the ages. So this idea that, you know, are you a City fan or a Pirates fan, or that sort of thing.

Brian Crecente

For Ryan Hill, another important element of the game and the research that went into it was determining how best to reconnect with adults who are in, what The LEGO Group sometimes refers to as, the Dark Ages.

Ethan Vincent

(Chuckles) Nice.

Brian Crecente

The period of time between a childhood spent playing with LEGO bricks and an adult rediscovering that love.

Ryan Hill

So it was this balance of trying to find that charm from your childhood, but sort of mixed with that sort of adult theme. And *The LEGO Movie* was honestly the perfect example of this. We were like, "Oh my God!" when that movie came out, we're like, "This, this is what we've been trying to do!" So it was really inspirational for us because it was, again, it was like, you know, sometimes you get those more jokes for the adults that go over the kids' heads and it's like, you know, you get that little sensible chuckle to yourself. So we were trying to capture that and really like figure out what it was that was going to pull these older players back into LEGO toys, and at the time, and still kind of to this day, like this mid-core RPG five-versus-five character collection game effectively, was really popular, right? Still kind of is, and it's got the big players like *Star Wars*™ and Marvel and Disney. Because of that, the target demographic there very much matched up with who are kind of older LEGO fans were. So that was kind of the main reason that we started looking down that road, and then just because the game itself we were really, really trying to focus, not only on the sets, but also celebrating the minifigures. I mean, there's so many unique minifigures over the years, and that really played nicely into the character collection aspect of those games, because then we got to build hundreds and hundreds of minifigures for people to play with and mix and match and discover new teams and all that sort of stuff. So that was really where we're like, "OK, I think there's some big, big, big possibilities here to kind of bring this into that market." And again, aim for adults to get them hooked on LEGO bricks.

(Tune interlude)

Chapter 4: From First Playable to Final Release – 20:18

Brian Crecente

In May 2018, after about a year-and-a-half of prototyping, the team at Gameloft created its first playable. Søren Vejgaard said that first playable was a very stripped down version of the final game with no final artwork and the gameplay presented in a world of grey boxes. But importantly, you could get an idea of what the core of the game was meant to be when it launched two years later. It was a far cry from those early prototypes, which were trying to do something that didn't exist in the market, sort of trying to deliver a completely new experience. One prototype, for instance, was a blend of a runner and a strategy title, where players were asked to quickly select the correct character to progress through the game. Now, while The LEGO Group kept regular check-ins with Gameloft, for the most part they tried to let the studio find its own way.

Søren Vejgaard

Yeah, we were involved in a lot of that, but it was Gameloft driving it and really getting this under the skin.

Brian Crecente

This is Søren Vejgaard speaking.

Søren Vejgaard

Again, it was a lot of Gameloft doing their own surveys, the fan sites, so some of them you can see what people will want. So you can see the minifigure that people sort of have on their wish list, even the very old ones. So also the data we could use is get a picture of what people really remembered from their childhood. All that was a help. Of course, we had a long period where the game was in soft launch. So when you're developing the game, you don't really know how actually users will react and where they're going to spend their time, so they're going to, you know, what level they're going to find really difficult and which level they're gonna find really easy. So I think we spent half a year, if not more than that, in soft launch, just learning more about how the players reacted to the game, getting feedback from them through various channels. So actually, that was probably a really good phase of just getting real players involved, getting the first players in and hearing their thoughts, getting their feedback on the game, and that in fact, that sort of affected the direction of the game a lot. And of course, everybody had a say in what they wanted to see of minifigures and sets in the game.

Brian Crecente

So the game launched in 2020, Ethan, and it found this strong fanbase waiting to play it. And you know, since its release, the folks at Gameloft have focused on adding new sets, events, and minifigures, including – and these are absolutely my favorite – the Ghostbusters. They're so cool. And it seems that, as predicted, the real draw of the game is that nostalgia people have for these wonderful LEGO toys.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, I mean, incorporating nostalgia into a game isn't as easy as it sounds, right? First, there's a challenge of finding the history, the trivia, the actual pieces of LEGO history you want to include in the game.

Brian Crecente

Right, yeah.

Ethan Vincent

Then there's an issue of, you know, how to do that? You know, how does that work, Brian? How do you create this kind of sense of nostalgia?

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, like you said, it's really complicated, and they've found a bunch of ways to incorporate it in the game. So, for instance, you can learn that Pirate Princess Argenta only appears in the 2015 Treasure Island sets, where she is referred to only as the "pirate queen." I did air quotes. You couldn't see that. (Laughs) And then you can also find out that pieces of her build actually came from the LEGO Fortune Teller minifig. You can for instance, I found out that Nya has been released 34 times across all LEGO sets, mystery bags, and other products.

Ethan Vincent

See, it's just a list of trivia that you have to string together somehow, and then make it fun. And I think that's the real challenge. You know, after you unlock a set, you can explore its trivia too and watch it being built, piece-by-piece, in an animation that can be paused, rewound, and fast-forwarded. It's really cool when you look at that app.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, I mean, I think that one of the things I love is, we heard this a little earlier, but there's this idea that, when you're watching the build, sometimes you might see things that you didn't even know existed in the build like a little hidden trapdoor or a little Easter egg, so that's really cool.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah. And just having that control to be like, "Wait, I want to go back and look at that while it's being built in real time." It's really fun. And I think they really nailed that. And, you know, there are also more subtle ways the team tapped into the nostalgia of LEGO theme sets and minifigure ownership. And some of that, you know, was driven by a lesson the team learned during their visit to Billund. And I know Brian Cook told us about that.

Brian Crecente

Yeah.

Brian Cook

It's one of those things that's a little bit hard to capture in a game. You know, a game is a collection of systems and code and art and things like that, but you sort of have to find the soul of the game. And for a long time we'd been talking about the fact that the soul of the game was nostalgia. But it wasn't really until we went there and sort of felt it that we were able to wrap the game in that. So if I give you a good example, you know, if before I'd gone, I would have told you, "Well, my nostalgia is that I like the Space Guy." But afterwards, when we came back, you know, we were then talking about, "Well, how do we animate their moves?" And, you know, it was sort of like, "What do you mean? Of course, when I was a kid, those air tanks were backpacks, or was a jet pack. And I would play with it like this." So it became this thing where that nostalgia turned into the way that we built

the game. And the way that if you look at the environments in the game, they all have a double sort of layer where like, it's in LEGO brick, but it's also in the real world. And so it became a thing about, you know, like, "Oh, where did I play with LEGO bricks? And what would I have done?" So everything we did, we tried to sort of think about how we, as 8-year-olds, would have been playing with this and try to bring that into the game.

Ethan Vincent

So, Brian, when you look at these backgrounds in the game, you know, they're sort of hidden in plain sight. It isn't until you start kind of looking around in the game that you begin to notice that, behind the bustling minifig world of Piptown, there's actually a real room with a window, boxes, shelves, none of which are made out of LEGO bricks.

Brian Crecente

Yeah. Yeah.

Ethan Vincent

And you know, if you dig a little bit deeper – and you know, Brian Cook tells us about that – the game's meta storyline may start to come a bit into focus.

Brian Cook

It's mostly a backdrop. And by that, what we try to do is all of this sort of the vignettes, sort of the areas, they're supposed to look like a house that have been overrun by LEGO bricks. So like, you know, the idea of being – at 13 years old, you stopped being there, and the LEGO bricks and the LEGO minifigures started to do their own thing. However, there is one character in the whole game who isn't an official LEGO minifigure. And we called him Rorrim Retsim, which is Mister Mirror backwards, because the idea is that he's you as an adult. And his idea is that – his whole, like – spoilers! – his whole thing is he's trying to sell the LEGO toys on eBay. And so, you'll even notice that one of our levels is an iPad, or something, you know, something like that. And so this idea is, what's the correct way to reengage with this passion as an adult. And obviously, the LEGO minifigures in the game, the protagonists are saying, "No, you know, like, we're still viable, and we're still fun. And, you know, we behave the way we behave." And the antagonists are saying, "No, like, you know, put away your childish things," and we wanted to sort of celebrate that idea that, no, like, you should still keep playing. It's still great, and it's still fun.

Chapter 5: The Voice of Batlord – 27:49

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, Ethan, I really love how Brian Cook talks about this and about the fact that, you know, obviously, the team was deeply impacted by the nostalgia, and the nostalgia they felt was sort of reflected straight back into the game, like that example of

the space minifig and the jetpack. All of the developers had their own sort of favorite sets and minifigs and did their best to incorporate their own memories of play into the game. That includes things like putting, you know, tiny little fingerprints on the king's shiny sword or hiding elements in secret places in the sets. Most of the voices – and I really love this – most of the voices of the minifigs were also created by the development team, and Ryan Hill provided the voice for his absolute favorite minifig as a child, the Bat Lord.

Ryan Hill

It's one of my crowning achievements in my own mind. Just again, reconnecting with your childhood. If I got to tell my 10-year-old self that one day you would be voicing Bat Lord, I would have lost my mind. And it was a really cathartic experience, getting to do the ultimate move for him with the big scream and yell in the office was pretty fun, I'm not gonna lie.

(Excerpt from LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed.)

Ryan Hill

We actually – we sort of had a session where we have like a signup sheet and we had all the minifigures in the game, and we sort of did a call to action to the team of like, "Hey, who wants to do voices for minifigures?" Because like, you know, we don't actually have to say words. We can just do like grunts and yells and, you know, victory noises and angry noises. So naturally, a lot of the people on the team were, like, really into the idea. You know, we also had voice actors and various other studios. And I know like, we were also working with some other professional ones at certain points. But yeah, so we had a whole bunch that were sort of on the table and up for grabs. So, naturally, I jumped on Bat Lord immediately. But yeah, there's a few other that are definitely voiced by a few other people on the team. Jester Gogo is also voiced by someone from the team. That one was amazing to listen to in the office as it was getting recorded. So yeah, there's a good chunk of the minifigures in the game that are voiced by the development team.

(Short musical interlude)

Chapter 6: Crossing the Streams – 30:12

Ethan Vincent

The care of the team showed in the game's creation is clear, and the nostalgia really makes it sing. But Søren points out that it was challenging to find the right approaches. You know, doing nostalgia wrong can quickly start to feel like a cliché.

Søren Vejgaard

We didn't want to have that feeling of, you know, being something from the past.

Ethan Vincent

This is Søren Vejgaard speaking.

Søren Vejgaard

We wanted to be new while also being something people had a fond memory of. The tagline that Gameloft started to use was "Celebrate LEGO Through the Ages." So that was their sort of vision for what this game was meant to complete. But it's that question of how do you do that that kept coming up? And how do you do it in a respectful way? So the worst thing that could happen was for anybody to go like, "You know, this is not how I remember this minifigure. That's not what, you know, this minifigure would never do that." So yeah, really have them be true to the LEGO brand and to people's memories at the same time.

Ethan Vincent

So, Brian, you've been playing the game for quite a bit, which is cool. And, you know, a LEGO video game that has nostalgia as, you know, the main kind of driving force sounds just like a potent formula. What is the game like?

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, it is a surprisingly powerful concept put into action. It's so easy to see that this game is sort of two things in one. I probably visit Piptown, which is the setting for this game, once a day. And you know, first thing I do is I check in on all the different ways I can unlock new minifigs and sets and advance them. And there are a bunch of modes that allow you to do that. So there's campaigns, events, quests, and there's even a player-versus-player arena. And while those modes sound like they may all be different, really, you're doing the same thing and every one of them. And essentially, what that means is you have to go through, choose five minifigs to make up a team and then have them do battle with the enemies. And the battle itself is turn-based, so the fight goes back and forth between you and whoever you happen to be fighting. And each minifig in your team gets its own turn. So when it's your turn, when it's your turn to choose what you're going to do, you have to select which of the other minifigs – the enemy minifigs – you're going to attack, and then figure out what move you're going to use against them.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, I mean, it's such a rich, full game. If you think about these, you know, 70 minifigures, each one of them they have their own sounds, their own animations, their own attacks. And you know, quite frankly, you have to invest the time to kind of get to know them a little bit. This is not kind of a dive in quick, play a little bit game, but you do have to kind of invest some time to get to know all of these things. But I just found that aspect of how they've loaded and packed this with so many variables was quite amazing.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, the best thing about this game is just how inventive the developers were in coming up with attacks. Because, as you mentioned, each of these minifigures are distinct. It's not like they have the same attack for every single minifig the same animation. So for instance, think about the police officer minifig, you know, they can't, this is a LEGO game, so they can't really just have them unload a gun on an enemy.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah.

Brian Crecente

So instead they had to come up with some other way to figure out how they can make him attack things. And in this case, one of his attacks is him issuing a ticket or putting up a barricade. The Chicken Suit Guy has this thing called the Wings of Fury attack where he sort of spins around. So each of these minifigs – and you remember there's 70 of them – have five attacks, which include a sort of super attack that is completely over the top. Now, I sort of stopped manually controlling the battles early on, because it can feel a little repetitious, but I think that the developers knew that because they actually have an option in the battle that you can press, it looks like a little play button, and it automates the battle. So, you know, when a battle starts I just tap that button, and I kind of just watch it because, you know, they're hilarious.

Ethan Vincent

(Chuckles) OK, so part one is basically going through the quests and these challenges and the main story campaign by fighting people, but there's also a second half or another half of the game. What is that, Brian? How would you describe that?

Brian Crecente

Well, that's the, you know, that's where the nostalgia comes in. That's just checking things out. So when you launch the game, one of the really cool things is if you just leave it running, just leave it sitting there and you don't choose any options, you'll start to see your minifigs sort of walking around Piptown. And if you want, you can also pop in and really examine your collection up close so, you know, I can tap on the heroes button, choose a minifig, it brings it up, the figure itself beautifully rendered in 3D, and I can sort of spin that minifigure around and really look at him or her, and then I can read the trivia I've unlocked. I could go to those sets. I can build and unbuild them. And because of this, the game sort of gets you invested in this level of examination. Another thing it really does, which I think is very cool, is it makes you start to really think about how you want to combine these different minifigs into a team, because if you get a bunch of like-minded minifigs, let's say five pirates, you then end up getting this bonus during your gameplay.

Ethan Vincent

Tell me a little bit more about those bonuses, Brian.

Brian Crecente

Well, for instance, there are five minifigs – well, I guess four minifigs and Slimer – from the Ghostbusters set, so if you get them all into one team, you can do the one thing that Egon Spengler told everybody never ever to do: You can cross the streams.

Ethan Vincent

Cross the streams? Excuse me, Egon. You said crossing the streams was bad.

Brian Crecente

Not necessarily, there's definitely a very slim chance we'll survive.

(Excerpt from LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed)

(Postscript music)

Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 36:09

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 game LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed. We'd like to thank our participants: Brian Cook, Ryan Hill, and Søren Vejgaard. 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.

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

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