

BRICK FIX

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Thirty Years of Space

By James Shields

The year was 1979, and I had just had my ninth birthday party, a slightly unfortunate event, for while enjoyable, my birthday that year fell very close to Easter, so somebody had the bright idea that Easter Sunday would be a good day to hold a party, so you can guess what I received in abundance. I don't think I got any Lego for my birthday – my parents thought I was too old for Lego by then, and felt I should pursue sensible hobbies like trains, and the party took place around my large HO scale layout..

So my Legoless birthday out of the way, on a trip to a toy shop soon after, I managed to get hold of that year's Lego catalogue. My attention was quickly drawn to the page entitled Legoland Space, and was thrilled by everything it contained. Unfortunately none of the

sets had reached Irish shops yet, I'd have to wait for the summer for that, so I contented myself by going home and making my own versions of the models from the parts I had, which required a certain suspension of disbelief as I only had a couple of minifigs and they were distinctly unspacey.

I first got my hands on set 885, a single seater speeder. Even though the set only contained about twelve parts, it was one of the best sets I ever got. I must have made a hundred different ships out of it, with the help of the rest of my Lego collection. That little red spaceman went on many different adventures, exploring alien worlds build in blue and red and white (but very little green). He was soon joined by a couple of others, though I never got the big sets I would have liked because my parents



still thought I was too old.

Over the next few years the Lego space range diversified. First we got yellow and blue and black spacemen (still no green), and Futuron, Blacktron and the many other lines. But for me that little red spaceman will always hold the fondest memories. Happy birthday Legoland Space!

Neo Classic Space

By James Shields

It's not every day that you set up a website by accident, but that's more or less what happened with Neo Classic Space.

It began when a good friend, Pete Reid, came across an interesting piece of Duplo, and managed to combine it with regular Lego to make a space ship. He happened to use the colour scheme of the 1979 space sets, now referred to as Classic Space. Pretty soon a bunch of us jumped on the bandwagon, building classic space themed ships of our own.

One of the conventions we established was giving our ships LL numbers. This was simply a continuation of the original sets, LL918 through LL928. Pete's remodelled Galaxy Explorer became LL-497, after the US set number of the original. As the number of ships grew, it became more difficult to check if a number was available. Someone proposed using a Flickr group, while someone else suggested a website.

This got me thinking. I checked, and the domain name neoclassicspace.com was available, which I thought sounded pretty cool (I'm easily amused), so I registered it. In an evening I had a quick website thrown together, with a blog, a registry of ships, and a gallery. We started adding more ships, even trying to bring in work that people outside our little group had done. And pretty soon we had something we thought might be worth sharing with the world.

So the question of how to launch it on the world was mooted. A number of ideas were tossed around, then it occurred to me that since Legoland Space first appeared in 1979, 2009 would be the thirtieth anniversary. I checked with Phil Travis, archivist extraordinere, when exactly in

1979 Legoland Space would have first come out. He sent me back scans of the Lego club magazine where it was announced. Officially Easter, but back then the new sets always appeared in March.

It seemed a perfect match: launch the new site and celebrate the old sets. And what better way to do it than by getting a bunch of fantastic builders to build great new models celebrating classic space. Better still, to do it by presenting a new model every day in March. That's one for every year of the Lego space era and maybe something special for the end.

We had what seemed like loads of time, so I set about emailing all my favourite Lego builders. Inviting them to take part. I must have sent over a hundred emails to builders of all types around the world. The time evaporated worryingly quickly, but responses gradually trickled in, and lots of people were just as excited as I was about the project. Unsurprisingly, the best response came from space builders, but I also asked a number of Lego fans who don't usually build space models to give it a go and see what they could come up with. Before too long, we had

our thirty builders. Well, we actually had a little bit more than that, because something always happens and not everyone makes it to the finish line. At times it felt a lot like organising a science fiction convention.

March kicked off, and some friendly bloggers gave us some free publicity, and over the launch weekend we were getting about 2,500 visitors per day, though it settled down to about a thousand per day for the remainder of the month. The response from the adult Lego community was also fantastic, with dozens of Classic Space themed models appearing on web galleries and blogs.

Although we have a few challenges with people not having their models ready in time, leading to some last minute changes to the running order, and some latecomers getting promoted to the schedule, we managed to get a model on the site every day. We also added many other models as "bonus" entries, so most days had at least two entries.

There were many surprises during the month, such as the emergence of the Ugokin. These orange and green aliens seem to have a grudge against the classic space guys, though no one is quite sure why. They were created by Nnenn (a mysterious American builder), but several other people added their own versions, and I expect we haven't seen the last of them.

Another accident was the proliferation of set box images. Although fake set boxes have been around for years, they seem to have really taken off for Neo Classic Space. I never asked people to create them, but after a couple of the early builders produced them, almost everyone was doing it. And who wouldn't when the classic set boxes look so good?

Now that the month is over, I expect things to settle down to a more gentle pace, but I'm sure we haven't seen the last of Neo Classic Space.



<http://www.neoclassicspace.com>

Child of the Sixties

By Gary Davis

I was a child of the Sixties. I've had to give my age away in order to explain my passion for both Lego and Thunderbirds.

In the Sixties, childhood was very different to today—there were no computer games, no internet, only three TV channels and no way to record TV programmes. Thunderbirds was first broadcast in the London region at Christmas in 1965 and was the most exciting thing I had ever seen. I already had some basic Lego and making vehicles from Thunderbirds was my favourite pastime. But soon after, my parents bought me the white and blue Lego railway set I soon started using



the straight rails and 2x8 sleeper plates to create girder structures, like bridges. The combination of Lego and Thunderbirds was magical. My once-a-week fix of Thunderbirds provided all the stimulus I needed to replicate all the exciting scenes from the show in Lego.

With a careful, 'Jenga' type technique, I could replicate the slow disintegration of engineering structures that typified the suspense in many Thunderbirds episodes like "Brink of Disaster". In this episode a helijet crashes into a bridge, severely damaging it just before the arrival of a monorail train carrying Jeff Tracy, Brains and Tin-Tin. Our heroes' train is stuck on the bridge and the weight is too much for the damaged bridge structure. International Rescue is on



the way, but will they get there in time?

My representation spanned from the dining table to the mantle piece and the Lego structure would twist and waiver with the occasional piece falling away. Of course, my Lincoln Thunderbird 2

model made it there just in time and lifted-off part of the train, just as the entire structure plummeted to the carpet, hundreds of feet below. This was always accompanied by multiple simulated explosions causing bits of Lego to fly to all corners of the room, destined for Mum's Hoover or to be trod on by Dad's unslipped feet. I'm ashamed to say that some of the more dramatic explosions actually broke the Lego pieces!

I must have recreated that scene, and many others from Thunderbirds, dozens of times without getting bored once. You try telling the kids of today that, and they won't believe you!

My First LEGO Memory

By Angela Handley

My first Lego memory, in fact one of my earliest memories of play of any sort, is the great anticipation of saving pocket money for three or four weeks and then being escorted to the toy shop to choose my very own, brand new Fabuland® figure. It wasn't long before I had a whole village on the go, and dozens of complicated plotlines involving gardening, shopping and burglary ensued. Having a jail to put the bad guys in was just the coolest thing ever! The ingenious combination of imaginative play and construction skills was a big hit with my brother and I, and I imagine my parents were pretty pleased with the developmental benefits too.

Lego satisfied me like few others things could. For a long time my poor mother used to put me to bed and then go and build a new Lego scene, so that there would be something fun in the morning before school.

As time went by my interests turned to more complicated building projects, and my brother's airport set and passenger jet were definitely favourites. I am still entranced by the remarkable details like proper miniature suitcases that figures could really carry, the little Shell® petrol pumps, and the tiny coffee cups. Ah, the irate passengers with heavy suitcases, and lazy pilots taking extended coffee breaks – joyous! It was soon regularly used with the space set to fly passengers directly to the Moon. First class of course, with artificial

gravity. The airline even provided spacesuit helmets for post-landing exploration.

It strikes me now that it's amazing what a grasp we have on life from such an early age, and how little our values really change. I still idealise the Fabuland® lifestyle of a country cottage home, gardening, and biking to the local shop for bread. I still want the bad burglars to be caught in the act and locked up by gruff policemen who are smart enough to know immediately what punishment to impose. I even knew back then that airlines shouldn't keep



passengers waiting too long (and perhaps that pilots shouldn't have too much coffee, heh). We don't really change; we just start playing it out for real. Now if only I could get my mother to build me a fabulous new house overnight...

Fabuland® Housewives

Police arrive at the scene of a terrible accident

Barney: This is disgusting. There are entrails everywhere.

Lucas: They look like feathers to me.

Barney: Ernest was white, wasn't he? If

they were feathers, they'd be white, right?

Lucas: Was he white? I thought his head was white, his chest was red and his legs were yellow.

Barney: Wait, are these our clothes or our bodies?

Lucas: They're our bodies, moron.

Barney: Are you sure?

Lucas: Have you ever been able to change your 'clothes'?

I recently discovered the tongue-in-cheek humour of Fabuland® Housewives at BrickZone.net, and I'm hooked. I've already finished season one which featured corruption, betrayal, arson and murder. The depiction of the gory scenes with little Lego pieces is hilarious. There's one particular scene where the victim is pictured lying dead in the bath with an electric radio which has been thrown into the tub. I laughed so hard. The site also has cast biographies, and a sneak peak behind the scenes into each of the houses featured in the series. It's definitely worth a look.

Here's the blurb for season two:

Join Lily Lamb and her friends, family and neighbors on Histeria Lane. Her neighbor Betsy Bunny has recently encountered a mysterious stranger who may have secret connections to her family's past. Her brother-in-law, Payton Pig has a dangerous drinking problem due to his recent break-up with Police Chief Brody Bulldog. Her friend Gavin Gorilla is facing a mysterious mental illness that makes him very paranoid and his partner Gregor Goat is struggling to cope.

Two and a Half Weeks...

...of living the LEGO life

by James Shields

A strange feeling of apprehension comes over me as I speed down the motorway. I feel sure I've forgotten something. Or maybe it's just that I left it too late to pack up my stuff and have only had a couple of hours of sleep. Well, I already know I've forgotten something – the SatNav I thoughtfully borrowed for the trip is still sitting on my kitchen table.

Passport – have I got my passport? I reach behind me and fumble in the side pocket of my bag – it's still there from my last trip away. I relax a little as the car glides into the Dublin port tunnel. There's an outrageous fee for taking my car through it during what is nominally the morning rush hour, but I'm on holidays, so it's worth it.

I arrive at the ferry port, expecting security checks have probably been beefed up in these days of vigilance and terror. However, after quoting my booking reference I'm given a card to stick in my windscreen and waved almost directly onto the ferry. That's it, no ID or name checks. No sniffer dogs or fingertip searches. Let's hope their trust in us is well placed. Fortunately I have three and a half hours to snooze on the ferry.

Arriving in Wales, the drive down to London is pretty uneventful, though Google Maps' estimate of five and a half hours doesn't factor in Friday afternoon traffic. Or stopping off a couple of times for lunch and to stretch my legs. I call Alastair on one of the stop-offs and we realise I'm not far from Milton Keynes – and resist the temptation to sneak in to the Lego store there and steal a bag from the kit for tomorrow's speed build. For the last leg I could really have done with the SatNav, but after pulling in a couple of times I finally phone Alastair and discover I'm just around the corner.

Alastair and Helen, my hosts for the first few days greet me warmly. Al, the current UK Lego ambassador, clearly takes his ambassadorial duties very seriously and goes out of his way to make me feel at home. We decide that it would be safest to take anything that would be visible out of my car, which means carting several boxes of models up to their apartment on the top floor. After we have a bite to eat, we set about comparing models and I marvel at some of his creations. I set up my viaduct across his living room. He shows off his latest creation, a mosaic of the TV presenter Alan Titmarsh, made for his recent appearance on the show of the same name. He seems unsure whether to be proud or ashamed of it. I know what he means – though technically it's excellent, with great use of the Lego colour palette, it wouldn't have been my first choice of subject matter. After a few hours pleasant chatting, I acquaint myself with their folding bed and we turn in for the night.

Saturday morning sees us up early, and off to the Bluewater shopping centre, where we bump into Douglas Idle and Ian Greig, our partners in crime for the Death Star speed build competition. The set is already set out

for us on the table. It's a huge box, with four smaller boxes containing all the parts. The manual is spiralbound, making it easy to lay flat, but being a single huge book, limits the opportunities for splitting up tasks. Although the shop say they would be happy for us to separate pages, we call the Brighton team who confirm they won't be doing this, so we leave it intact.

As the clock ticks 9:30, we tear open the boxes and start ripping bags. The plan was to sort first, then build. Unfortunately one small table doesn't give us a lot of room to play with. And the table height was not good for our backs. Still, we cracked on and slowly the build progressed. We soon realised our original estimate of three hours was a little off. Quite a lot off, actually. Around 14:00 we heard that the Brighton team had finished. Unfortunately we still had the better part of a hundred pages of the manual still to go. Our eventual time of 5 hours 50 minutes wasn't very impressive, and we all had stiff backs, but everyone seemed to be glad they took part. It was quite an interesting build as unlike some large models there was very little repetition, and we all had a turn at being the main builder. Unfortunately the single manual didn't make it easy to work on more than one section at a time, so we didn't really get the full benefit of having four people.

After that, Ian and Andrew (Doctor Sinister) went back to Al's for some Pizza and more Lego chat. We were all a bit shattered for the endurance test that was the speed build, so after a while they headed home and we spent the rest of the evening relaxing.

Sunday morning started lazily, as Sunday mornings are supposed to start. Eventually Al suggested that it might be a nice idea to go out and do something, and he proposed we visit the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch railway, an interesting little railway that runs tiny steam locomotives. There was some argument about whether it's the smallest public railway or the largest miniature railway in the world, but it seemed like a nice idea in any case, so we headed off to find it.

After missing the turn for Dymchurch station, we found ourselves in St Mary's bay and located the tiny railway station. There were no staff there, but a sign on the wall told us to pay at our destination. The train arrived, though it was quite full so Al and Helen ended up in one carriage while I was in another. I got chatting with an older gentleman and his daughter who seemed to be enjoying the trip, and we held each others cameras to take photos of each other. The trip provided that wonderful mix of sound and smell you always get when travelling by steam, but there was something quite eerie about being so close to people's back gardens, like we were intruding into their lives to an extent you don't quite feel with a full size railway.

At the end of the railway, we enjoy the

local fish and chips. The fish was superb, though I felt the chips could have been a little crisper, and the peas were a colour that reminded me of the colour blue Lego bricks turn when you leave them in the sun. We then went up the old lighthouse, which was quite interesting, and the view from the top was stunning, though a strong breeze meant we didn't stay up there too long. There was also a nuclear power station there, though slightly disappointing, its visitor centre was closed (even though we didn't intend to visit it). After a quick stroll we headed back to the catch the last train back to the car.

On Monday, Al and Helen had to work, so I spent the morning fiddling with one of the models I hadn't had a chance to finish before leaving Ireland (there were several), a scaled up version of the classic space baseplate. I had spent months gathering hundreds of old grey slopes to have enough to complete it, though even after that I had to stretch them a little with plates and tiles. I was quite happy with the finished effect, though, and it will hopefully go down well at STEAM.

That afternoon, I take a trip over to Douglas, who was nominally only twenty minutes away, though I think I picked a bad route and it took me a little longer. We spent some time looking at his fabulous Bley Brick Road project, and tried out my tram on his tracks. I get a nasty feeling that it's going to clip the kerb as it goes around the corners, and might need some last minute modifications. It all seemed to look nice, though.

Back at Al's, I began packing up my stuff, ready to depart after a fun few days. I'm going to meet up with one of my non-Lego loving friends, Liam. Liam's ex-fiancé had given him a Lego Mindstorms set that he'd never got around to trying out, and when they broke up he no longer wanted it, so I bought it off him. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to get the RCX to work. I suspect it's fixable, but haven't got around to doing anything about it. In the meantime, Liam felt bad about it, and found out that the son of one of his clients used to be into Lego and had a lot of it in the basement, including (he thought) an RCX. The client had been intending to give the Lego to a school, but he arranged for us to have a rummage through it and find the RCX, and maybe see if there was anything else of interest if we left a donation he could give to the schools.

So we arrived at this client's house and he led us down to the basement, and there we found seven large plastic crates full of bricks. It's a shame my car was already quite full, as I would have been quite happy to make him an offer for the lot. There was a lot of nice stuff, including old castle, pirate and western, as well as train and monorail, though I couldn't find the track for either of the latter two. I also found quite a lot of Technic motors and the errant RCX. I put the parts of interest in a box and a carrier bag

and we headed back to Liam's, slightly sad at what we'd left behind, though hopefully we'll have another opportunity to go back for the rest.

Tuesday rolls around, and Liam gets called out to a training meeting, which is a shame since he normally works from home and I had been looking forward to distracting him. I spend a lazy morning catching up with email and fiddle with trying to pack things a bit more efficiently. That is until the front door blows shut, leaving me stuck outside until Liam gets home. I head to the supermarket to get some supplies. When I get back, Liam has arrived and is wondering where I am. He has also noticed I have a flat tyre.

I set about changing the tyre. Unfortunately, the last garage I've had it seem to have been a bit trigger happy with



the bolt fastening thingy and the wheel nuts won't budge. After several attempts to loosen them, I have no choice but to call the AA, who fortunately arrive quite quickly, and soon everything is ship shape apart from the flat in the back. I head off to Richard's, several hours later than planned. When I arrive, Gillian has laid out a wonderful chicken dish for me. I apologise for being so late and after dinner and desert we sit up chatting until it is time to retire.

Wednesday morning sees us loading many boxes into Richard's car, which he has removed the seats from to turn into a small van. We set off towards Harwich, retracing a fair bit of the route I'd taken from Liam's the day before. After we roll onto the ferry and get settled for the voyage. It's a much longer crossing than the Irish sea, but fortunately we have a cabin so we can get a proper night's sleep. I spend a while exploring the decks and watching the English coast fade into the distance.

It's noon by the time our tyres touch Danish tarmac, and it only takes an hour to reach Skærbæk town. We find the centre where the event takes place, and go to find out about our accommodation. Soon we have the key to our cabin, and we go to check it out. It's quite comfortable with two bedrooms and some mattresses in the loft. As the bedrooms look almost identical to the cabin we had on the ferry, we decide to take the loft. We are on our own for that night, but other fans will be joining us the next day.

After exploring the town (it doesn't take very long), we head to the supermarket to get some food supplies. That evening we find the local pizza takeaway and spend a while trying to decipher the Danish words. We figured out quite a bit, but I can't believe we didn't figure out "ocs" was beef.

On Friday morning, I finish off a little moonbase for my crater plate, and come up with something I'm quite pleased with. We then went over to the hall where everything is being set up and immediately bump into Christian and Casper, who happen to also be Brickish members. They point us in the direction of Jan, who gives us our badges, and we find our tables. It's a bit of a trek to ferry our models over from the chalet on foot, but it seems pointless to load them back into the car for such a short trip, so we make several trips carrying boxes over.

Impressive things start appearing around the hall as the afternoon progresses, and I'm somewhat relieved to find I'm not the only one who left it to the last minute to finish things off – several people are still building their models in situ. I won't go into the models detail, as that's not what the event was really about, but there was lots on show, including a massive Empire State building, a stunning German castle, town and train layouts, a nice collection of scaled-up Olympic minifigs, a huge moonbase, and a great ball contraption (GBC). There are plenty of photos on these pages and more on-line.

But this event is more about people than models, and we spent lots of time chatting with other AFOLs from around Europe and the world. The models give us something to talk about, and it's very interesting to see the slightly different approaches that other groups take. It's very easy to get stuck into a rut of doing things only one way, so it's always worth checking what we can learn.

I set up my models – my big viaduct running across the back of the table, with my crater plate, railway station and a small piece of Tatooine lined up in front. They look a little lonely, as they are all intended to be part of the larger collaborations at STEAM.

After nipping back to the cottage for Richard's excellent spaghetti bolognese, it was on to the party hut, where Jan is on duty behind the bar. I feel that when Jan is buying beer for Lego fans, it would be rude not to drink it. There were an impressive collection of languages to be heard during the night, and a lot of multi-lingual toasts: Prost! Cheers! Sláinte! A good bit of drinking and chatting later I head back to our cottage to find Lasse has been building a Vestas windmill while I was out. I asked him how shocked would I be at the price he paid for it.

"It's not mine," he replied. "It belongs to a Vestas employee. Unfortunately she wants it back so she and her daughter can play with it together."

He didn't think it would be very likely that she would go for my suggestion of offering an equivalent weight of Belville in exchange.

Saturday is another beautiful sunny day. After fiddling with another incomplete model (based on the pet shop my sister runs), and being confounded by my limited supply of corner slopes, I head over to the hall. There's a lot of last minute building going on as people frantically try to finish things before the public display opens at 11.

I find Richard in the kids' play area. He has found a vast number of 1x2x2 dark blue bricks and is attempting to turn them into a Tardis. Not so easy when you've only got one brick type, I bemoan by short sighted failure to bring an Irish flag, and set about finding

bricks to build one. Having done that I decide to have a go at building the words "Brick.IE", the new Irish AFOL group in brick. Having done that, I do "brickish.org" too. When Richard finished his Tardis, he goes on to build a union flag. I have to wonder what proportion of the play tables ended up in AFOL displays. At least there still seemed to be plenty of bricks for the kids.

Soon the official opening ceremony takes place. It's mostly in Danish, but at least the main information gets repeated in English. The speaker claims eleven countries are represented, which sounds a little low to me. A steady trickle of visitors start to make their way in.

The building tables prove popular, and lots of interesting models are built by both big and little kids. There's a competition for kids' models to be judged later in the afternoon. There are also draws of attendee tickets for Lego sets at regular intervals. I would have liked a little more interaction between visitors and AFOLs, but there seemed to be little inclination to add questions. I did try to stand nearby the display, but there was nothing obviously connecting me to the display, which could have been an off-putting factor. Richard did a live build of his 6-scale train wagon, which built up a small crowd of onlookers, but once it was complete people drifted off again.

During the afternoon there was a team build of the Taj Mahal set, with a team that included Brickish member Christian. They knocked over an hour off the previous record, completing it in 1 hour 46 minutes. Among the onlookers was the designer of the set. There were quite a few set designers and other Lego employees present. I got chatting with Mark Stafford, a designer from the UK, and his partner, Megan, who were really nice to get to know. They had some great models on display, including Mark's steampunk Naboo fighter, and Megan's jewellery boxes that opened out into little dioramas.

Once the public had departed it was time for the evening activities. There was a very nice dinner laid on. Being a Lego fan dinner we had games and activities between courses. There was a twenty question quiz that I knew fair few answers for, but was stuck on a few. However, there was nothing in the rules that said we weren't allowed to cheat, so I somewhat blatantly got hold of the remaining answers, including texting Pete for one. Unfortunately I still got two wrong.

We were each given a little bag of about a dozen crappy parts and told to make something out of them. My little robot left a little to be desired, but Lasse's little bird went on to be one of the winners. Later we had a team building competition, where we were given a box of basic bricks and told to make something with them. As we had lots of colours, we thought a peacock would be a good idea, and we set about dividing the task, with different team members building body, head, wings and tail. Somehow we ended up with two sets of legs, which is just as well as the slender, elegant ones were too fragile so we abandoned them for the stouter ones. It looked rather good if I do say so, even if Casper, who was MC for the night, thought it was a blue turkey. The children who were present were given the job of judging the competition, and they selected our peacock, and we selected mini Ollie key-rings for our prizes.



During the course of the evening I had mentioned to Melody that I thought the number of countries mentioned at the opening ceremony was grossly under-represented, so she had gone off and made a list of people's nationalities, and came up with fifteen. As she read out the list, the countries representatives gave a loud cheer. I think the fewer attendees a country had the louder they cheered, so I felt I had to make a good effort when Ireland was called.

The evening finished with an auction, which Casper ran brilliantly. Too often fan auctioneers will drag them on too long to squeeze every penny from the bidders. This can be counter productive when people lose interest and stop bidding or even leave the room. Fortunately Casper kept things moving swiftly, and didn't entertain complaints from people who were too slow about getting their bid in. I bought a few quite nice sets at fairly reasonable prices, and a bag of rare bricks. The highlight had to be some promotional airline sticker sheets that Casper bid a seemingly insane amount of money for. When all was done we headed back to the party hut, where there seemed to be a lot of languages being spoken. I swear, after a few beers Danish was starting to make sense. Or perhaps it was German.

Sunday morning saw me walking into the town centre to use a bank machine so I could pay for my auction purchases. Back in the hall, I settled up with Casper and happened to learn he was still looking for volunteers for the afternoon's speed building competition. I put my name down. And what were we building? Another Death Star.

So we all lined up for the build – seven of us. At the last moment we were told, "Oh, by the way, it's okay to dismantle the instruction book." This was a big help, at least in theory. While most of us sorted parts, one person divided the manual into sections that could be built independently. People then picked up sections of the manual and assembled those in teams of two. However that only really worked for the first half of the build, as towards the end there's a lot that only involves the main model. So we adopted a new strategy of each taking a page, finding all the parts for that page, and pre-assembling any sub models, and adding it to a long line snaking around the floor for the main builders. This got the time down to three and three quarter hours. I think there's scope for reducing it a lot further, especially if we'd done a little more planning and had a person keeping track of the instructions, as we kept losing bits.

By this stage the public show had ended

and people were tidying up to go home. I set about packing up my models, and had packed away my bridge and railway station and had just taken the back wall off the crater when disaster struck... my moon base was demolished by a crashing flying saucer! The thrower of the Frisbee came over looking very sorry for himself. We picked up all the pieces, but I thought the best thing to do was stick them in a bag for reassembly later from reference photographs.

Back at the Chalet, Richard was preparing the last of his spaghetti bolognese. We'd invited Christian and our American friends joined us and we all had a very pleasant time. Later we headed over to another hut that was having a "barbecue". I even put on my Hawaiian shirt for the occasion. Unfortunately the rain had come and it was a bit of a washout. They did have some very nice Lego branded picnic umbrellas, which we coveted. After sitting around not quite following a conversation that was mostly in German, and enjoying some very nice ice lollies, we headed back to our cabin.

We had an early start on Monday, as we headed north towards Billund. Richard's SatNav was now behaving itself, and guided us through the twists and turns along the route, which was all single carriage-way. Despite getting stuck behind a couple of tractors, they all turned off fairly quickly and we arrived in plenty of time, and located the car park we were meeting in. Casper then took us into the staff shop and gave us the usual "personal use only" warning. This was followed by a frenzied hour by buying, and a lot of people built up large stacks of sets and accessories. I was particularly interested in promotional items that can't be got elsewhere, and was very pleased with my minifig tie. Richard's car a little heavier, we headed for lunch. It's probably best not to say too much, just suffice to say you haven't lived until you've experienced Restaurant Billund.

Jan showed us around the Lego museum in the afternoon, with the help of the wonderful Irma, who told me a lot I didn't know about the early history of the company. We were then taken down to the vault in small groups. It is a truly beautiful place, containing a copy of every set Lego have ever made. We were told not to touch, but I couldn't resist laying a finger on the box of a 928 Galaxy Explorer, just to feel its energy.

Outside the museum, Jan was taking a select few on a tour of the factory. As I've been on it before, I thought it only fair to leave the places for people who haven't. We bumped into Megan, who was free for the afternoon, and offered to hang out for a while. She showed us around her and Mark's house and introduced us to their dog, who was the inspiration for the "Bandit" driller set from the Mars Mission series (the set really does look like their dog). We then popped into Legoland for a quick stroll around MiniLand. We were going to go to the only decent restaurant in Billund until we discovered it doesn't open on Mondays, so with Mark, Megan and an Irish designer called Daire we set off to find the best burger in Europe in a nearby town. We had a fascinating conversation about how to get a job designing sets, the naming of parts,

and the best burgers in Europe.

After that was the trip back to England, which was more or less like the trip to Denmark in reverse. We got back to find Gillian was feeling rather poorly, so Richard had a lot of fatherly and husbandly duties to catch up on. I found a nearby tyre place to get my spare fixed, repacked my car. An hour or so later I was in Portsmouth to visit Ed and Annie.

Ed has been busy. For the last six months he's been beavering away on the HMS Hood, a twenty foot model of the famous WWII battleship. He takes me to his dining room where the ship's middle dominates the table. I doubt they've had any formal dinner parties for a while. We continue to his office. The stern section is taking up most of his desk, leaving the printer unplugged in the corner. "So it looks like you're about done," I rather optimistically comment. "Well... not quite," replies Ed. We continue up to the Lego room where the bow sits in a distinctly unfinished state. The front quarter looks very impressive, anchor holes and all, but behind that a framework of multi-coloured technic beams tells a different story. But not to worry, he still has two days to get it finished.

We head back down and order pizza for dinner. Annie has also been busy building Annie's, a hair salon for Doug Idle's Cafe Corner Compatible street. It's also looking splendid, and possibly a little more complete than the hood.

"I'm sorry I'm not going to be able to entertain you much for the next couple of days," says Ed, "but you can see I've a bit to do."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" I innocently ask.

Ed ponders for a moment. "Well, maybe."

I grab some plates and start applying them to the hull, trying to follow the pattern Ed has laid out, before covering them with the final layer of tiles. The scheme he's worked out gives a very finely sculpted effect. I'm not as good at it as Ed, and at first I forget that as the hull comes out as it goes up, I don't need to keep the plates going all the way back to the frame, so in one place I end up with a massive slab about fifteen plates thick. Still, slowly it progresses, although I did screw up in a couple of places by getting the plating out of step with the frame so it all pulls it self apart and I had to backtrack to the mistake and do it all again. Late on Thursday night, we finally finish the plating.

Friday morning comes around, and Ed is still finishing off the deck. There's not so much I can do to help him here, so I head downstairs and finish off my pet shop and rebuild the lunar base. I then do some repacking of the car. I have to try to squeeze in the boxes containing Ralph's planes, so I debox some of the sets I've brought back from Denmark. After several hours of fiddling, we squeeze everything in between the back of my car and Ed's roofbox. The back window is completely blocked at this stage. Ed's car is interesting. An estate he bought specifically to fit the hood, he's built a custom shelf and put one middle and one end section on each level, with only a couple of centimetres to spare.

We stop off in Southampton for Ralph and head for Swindon – via a half hour tailback on the M3. After successfully

navigating about a thousand roundabouts, I'm amused to see how gingerly Ed takes the speed bumps on the way into the Steam museum.

We park up and start unloading, which unfortunately means taking everything out of the car to get at the stuff underneath, then putting the stuff that's not on display back in. I have things for a several different collaborative efforts that are spread around the two halls. The biggest are my bridge and railway station, for the viaduct display in Caerphilly Hall, the smaller one. The classic space time line was also there, and I was glad to have some volunteers to assemble my monorail, and keep an eye on it for most of the weekend. Back in the main hall, I assemble my pet shop for Doug Idle's Bley Brick Road, my crater plate for Pete's classic space project, and my "Cheddar Monk Temple" for the Mos Eisley display.

Nine o'clock rolls around, and the museum staff start looking sternly at us, so we realise it's time to call it a night. We head back to our hotel, and realise it's been quite a few hours since lunchtime, so we head over to the nearby Beefeater restaurant where I have a burger. Perhaps not the best in Europe, but definitely fills a gap.

Afterwards I join a fairly large group in the bar, who are all trying to get a word in edgeways with James Sutton. Jan is present and a very pleasant conversation follows. It's perhaps a little too late and I've had a little too much to drink when I eventually get to bed. I try not to disturb Ralph who I'm sharing the room with, but I suspect I fail miserably.

There's no possibility of a lie-in on Saturday, however, as there's still a lot of set-up to do. We arrive before 8am to find people already frantically at work. I discover my bridge is a little short. Fortunately Warren has some spare rories that I use to raise it up by two bricks by creating a rocky outcrop. A bigger problem is that we seem to have underestimated the length of Warren's bridge by a bit, so David throws together an extra section of his bridge. Somehow it seems to work. Sort of.

Every thing's more or less ready, so I run to catch the end of Jan and Tormod's keynote speech. I catch a bit about Lego Universe, which looks very interesting, and if it's anything like Lego Star Wars will be lots of fun. My only worry was that some of the concept art didn't seem to have much Lego involved. The highlight has to have been the Lego set they revealed for next year, of a medieval town scene, very reminiscent of the famous Guarded Inn of old. I shall have to start saving.

I then received a call from Ronald, a Dutch fan living in Ireland who had come over for the weekend. He was having difficulty finding the museum, and I quickly discovered he'd taken a wrong turn. Fortunately I was able to hand him over to someone with local knowledge who was able to talk him in.

Before we knew it, crowds of people were flooding in, and everyone focussed on keeping things running smoothly and keeping little fingers off the models, and answering any questions people had. The day progressed well. I tried out my tram on Doug's tram tracks. I needed to move a couple of plates back to stop it getting caught on the kerb, but once I did that it ran like a dream.

Several of us wandered over to the outlet centre at lunch time, and I had a folded pizza. We hurried back, as it had been very busy when we left. And it still was, the crowds never really diminished until close to closing time. It was great to hear people, especially children, oohing and aahing over the models. Ed's battleship was naturally a favourite, as was Yvonne's hospital, but everything looked very professional and was extremely well received. Again, I won't go into detail as there was so much to see and the photographs tell so much more than I could write here.

There were several interactive aspects that proved immensely popular. In particular the giant mosaic build, which gradually built up as the day progressed, until they realised they needed to keep some of it for day two. There were also various building projects such as R2D2 and C3PO. Finally there were virtual building workshops run by James Sutton, which seemed to be very popular. James ran a special one for the exhibitors who hadn't had a chance to get to them during the day, which I found very informative, learning quite a few new things in a short time.

Back at the hotel we got ourselves organised for dinner. We had groups booked into two restaurants, but I discovered that I hadn't actually ended up on either list, presumably as I hadn't been watching the Brickish forum as closely as I should have on our travels. I went along to the Indian as it seemed more likely they would be able to take extras, which fortunately they were. Rather than try to organise forty separate dishes, we just sat there and let them bring us food, and I have to say that was a great way to do it, as I ended up with about eight different dishes on my plate, and they were all excellent. You'd think by this stage I'd have run out of Lego topics of conversation to talk about, but clearly I'm a hopeless case, and after several more hours of Lego chat, we settled our bill and headed back to the hotel where we gathered at the bar to talk about Lego.

Fortunately we didn't stay up quite so late, and with no set-up, didn't have to be up quite so early the next day. Sunday saw us rise in time for a leisurely breakfast, and wandering over to the museum for about a quarter to ten. Unfortunately I must have conveyed the impression that I knew where I was going, and Steven Marshall dutifully followed me as I took a couple of wrong turns and had to backtrack. Fortunately I got us there in the end. At about five to ten I popped out to my car and saw a huge line of people queueing up outside – in the rain! It was going to be another busy day.

And it was. The crowds just kept coming. I was at the viaduct layout for a good portion of the day, and people took great interest in what we were doing, and we had a lot of very interesting questions. There were quite a few people of Irish origin who passed through and recognised my black and orange liveried train. One child had even brought his own train, and asked if we'd mind if he ran it on the layout. Of course we were happy to oblige him, and it was a joy to see his little face

light up.

At last year's STEAM, the GWR railcar in the museum had caught my attention, and I thought it would be really interesting in Lego. I built one and was keen to get a photo of it next to the real thing. I was also delighted to run it on the big GWLTC layout, next to several iconic Great Western locos. It happened dean had built a branch line bay platform that fitted it perfectly.

As with Saturday, the crowds didn't thin till late afternoon. I gather it was one of the museum's busiest weekends ever, so major kudos to us. Then it was time to take everything apart and pack it into boxes, and hope that everyone's property went home with them. Again I was rushing between the halls trying to get all my stuff back together. The really interesting part was getting it all into my car. Somehow I'd forgotten to allow for the various sets and things I'd arranged to receive from people at STEAM. A small crowd built up to watch as Ronald and I tried to cram everything in. Ronald was motivated by the fact I was giving him a lift back to Ireland, so needed the room in the passenger seat. Eventually it all squeezed in, and the doors closed, so we hit the motorway.

Neither of us had eaten for hours, so we stopped around Birmingham, which apparently wasn't a very good choice as the only viable option for food was Burger King, which Ronald described as "Not as bad as I remember." We arrived at the ferry port just after midnight, and after I remembered which ferry I was taking, we got in the line to wait for the check-in to open. There was not much of interest to report on the crossing, as we did our best to find the lease uncomfortable chairs we could and tried to get some sleep. After dropping Ronald off, I headed for home and climbed into bed just as most people were on their way to work on a Monday morning.

So that was my Lego holiday. It was great to meet so many people in such a short space of time. I'm really grateful to all the people who put me up and made me feel welcome along the way, Lego fandom is a fantastic community, and there are lots of very friendly and welcoming people. If you can get to Skærbæk at least once in your life, I highly recommend it, as it's one of the best events for meeting Lego fans from all over the world. Steam is almost a must-attend event for UK fans, I'm sure it will have more international representation in future years. It seems to be growing rapidly. I don't know if the museum will be able to fit us all next year.

A great holiday for a Lego fan!



LOOPHOLE

By Doctor Sinister

22:00 Hours

The first fingers of night crept across the sky, and Stevens shivered in the cold wind as his old gnarled fingers fought to close the rusty padlock into its closed position.

Rattling the door of the shop to ensure it was tightly secured, he looked up and down the empty grey street. Empty that is aside from **her**.

The tall woman in the grey pinstripe suit stood just a few doors up from Stevens' Off-Licence, brushing non-existent specks of dust from her lapel. Her piercing eyes seemed to stare right through Stevens as he fiddled with the bolts on the door. He gave a heavy sigh and hobbled over to where she was stood.

"You're **sure** this will work?"

She looked down her nose at him, barely hiding her contempt. "Relax Mr Stevens, it will be just fine. We've made certain commitments to you in the Contract. And this isn't exactly the first time we've tried the system out."

"Really? And did it work all the times before?"

"The results were...satisfactory. But that's none of your concern, we've given you a trial period at a knockdown price, as stipulated in the Contract. You should be happy that your premises will now be secure."

"And you're sure this is entirely legal?"

"The current loophole in Tabletown law **MAKES** it legal Mr Stevens. This is all outlined in our Contract. No-one can stop you from taking every measure to protect your shop. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to head to the monitoring station."

As if on cue, a black van pulled up to the kerb and without looking, the woman slid open the door and entered the rear of the vehicle. With wheels spinning furiously, and the smell of burning rubber, the van departed as swiftly as it had come.

Stevens headed home, it was out of his hands now.

01:00 Hours

Taylor scanned the street for activity but as usual, there was none. There never was much going on these days. The credit crunch hadn't affected the Tabletown economy as much as the rest of the world, but people were still saving their pennies and generally staying at home, and that meant the night-times were his to do as he pleased.

He sidled up the row of shops, trying to stay out of sight as much as possible in case some late night

revellers turned up unexpectedly, but no-one did.

Reaching the off-licence door, he slid the backpack from his shoulders and removed a heavy crowbar from inside. Casting furtive looks up and down the street one last time, he swiftly and violently smashed the padlock from the door and levered the bolts. Ha! This place got easier to break into every time – old man Stevens wasn't even trying any more.

Once inside, he removed a torch from the backpack and located the alarm control box on the wall – which he smashed into hundreds of pieces. With a pair of insulated pliers, he snipped the wires leading into the box just in case. It might not stop an alarm going off somewhere at the local Police station, but it would give him time, not to mention peace and quiet here in the shop to do as he pleased. And what pleased him right now was to clean out the till and then relieve Stevens of some of his Vod...

Taylor paused. Had he imagined something or had there just been an odd noise, over by the back of the shop? Near the rear door? He flicked the torch off and raised the crowbar.

He stood there for a minute, breathing shallow, eyes straining to get used to the light, ears twitching, listening for the slightest sound.

Nothing. Nothing save for an odd red glow. Hmm...probably just a streetlight reflecting off of something...

Slowly lowering the crowbar, he turned back to the counter.

Ten seconds later, his shattered lifeless torso lay bleeding against a rack of wine. Red lights swept over the body as a huge...something...hovered across the tiled floor, twin plasma cannon still smoking from the violent discharge of energy.

01:30 Hours

Stevens stared in horror at the carnage that had been wrought in his shop. The walls were spattered with blood and splashes of wine. Shattered glass made



it hazardous to walk inside the store and there was a distinct smell of ozone in the air. The flashing lights of Police cars were visible outside in the street, but the Police weren't coming in. A smart man in a black suit was talking to them on the pavement, showing them some paperwork.

She was there of course, directing two other men in white medical tunics who were loading what was left of the thief's body onto a stretcher. And hovering a few feet away as more black-suited technicians examined it, "stood" the Robot.

Eight feet tall, managing somehow to be both insectoid and skeletal in appearance, the Robot hovered a few inches from the floor, emitting a very slight buzzing noise every time it moved. With two bulging glowing red "eyes" atop what Stevens assumed to be its head, the Robot somehow managed to emit an air of arrogance about it.

"Yes, yes, this is excellent. You see Mr Stevens? Just what we promised you in the Contract and nothing less." She was beaming with glee, probably the first time Stevens had seen any kind of emotion on her normally stoical features.

"But, but my shop has been completely destroyed...my stock..."

The woman walked over to the robot, patting it on the torso with an almost motherly pride. "Oh, nothing the insurance company can't fix I'm sure – not our liability though I'm afraid, it's in the Contract. Now then, I've got to take care of some things right now, so I'll be in touch in the morning to discuss the instalment plan for payment of the equipment."

"**Payment?** But I already paid! A trial period you said! And look what happened... I can't afford to..."

"A trial period I said, yes that's true, but as stipulated in the Contract, the equipment is now used – it's soiled goods I'm afraid. In more ways than one" She wiped a speck of congealed blood from one of the Robot's plasma cannon. "Yes, yes, now you'll have to buy it from us. It's all in the Contract." She turned to the two medics who had strapped the corpse to the stretcher and stood awaiting instructions. "Secure the body and prepare the brain for transplant". The medics wheeled the stretcher from the shop as a new chill went down Stevens' spine.

"What? What did you say?"

The woman turned and smiled at him. "Oh I know, I doubt they'll be able to salvage the brain after this time, but you never know. After all, where do you think the brain for this one came from?" She patted the hovering Robot, almost affectionately, and followed the stretcher out of the store and into the darkness of the night.

Stevens looked up at the Robot which stared back at him implacably with its glowing red eyes and shuddered.