

# Brick-Busters

## Who you gonna call?

By Hispabrick Magazine

Pictures Brick-Busters

**HM:** Could you explain what tasks you perform for the community?

**BB:** Mainly administering a database of screenshots of swiped MOCs, which serves as witness to the problem. It is a place where any LEGO® fan can come and post a MOC that has been swiped, so that the Rightful Owner may be made aware.

**HM:** How and when did you come up with this idea?

**BB:** While noticing a very obvious swipe of Nannan's Charon placed onto the LEGO Universe creation lab by someone other than Nannan himself, a look at a few more pages turned up several more suspected swipes. Then, the Pirates 'vs' Ninjas creation challenge had a MOC that was very familiar. Sure enough, it was DARKspawn's Ninja MOC titled, "Mizu Megami Ichidou" that had been swiped! The 13-year-old user who had uploaded it also had an Iron Man MOC and a nice flying craft on his pages. I submitted a Request for Removal in the comments box of the user's page, along with a link to the Flickr page of Darkspawn's Ninja MOC. His MOC was removed from that page by LEGO Mods right away. It took a few more days for it to be removed from the special LU News page about the Pirates 'vs' Ninjas building challenge; apparently the News area of LU is maintained by LEGOUiverseMaster.

So many other swiped MOCs became apparent to me that I had to create a bookmark folder on my computer. Although placing comments with links to the Rightful Owners resulted in removals, it began to feel like sand sifting through my fingers. There is a never-ending supply of wonderful MOCs on the Internet. There needs to be documentation of the problem.

Of course I am not, by any measure, the first to spy swiped MOCs. Many well-known AFOLs have been sending e-mails to LEGO to ask for MOC removals. Yet, that is not documented. It is also not the procedure they wish to have in place; e-mails to LEGO customer support are a burden through that channel, whereas comments placed directly onto the page of the swiper makes it far easier for LEGO.com Moderators to deal with the problem. They can verify and take action without embarrassing the swiper, because they don't make Request for Removal comments with links public on the page.

After sharing my own findings to the web master of BrickBuildr, Mike Huffman, and receiving his replied opinion of this indeed being an issue, I joined Flickr. There I saw a few scattered topics on the problem, along with some screenshots. I decided to create a group -- a database to host these screenshots -- even if only for the swipes I found, because I had found so many! Once the group was formed May 3rd, several FOLs joined to post their screenshots of swiped MOCs in the photo-pool. It was a very busy month!

**HM:** What steps do you take when you suspect a picture has been 'stolen'?

**BB:** Screenshot is first and foremost, because it is evidence. Sure, a comment can just be placed onto the page for removal, yet it has born out time after time that most of the swipers do it more than once. Having proof they have swiped helps establish which swipers are repeat offenders.

Then the screenshot of the "suspected" swipe is posted, along with a Link to that specific page online where it

appears. Initially this group was set up to deal with the LU pages, yet it has also helped FOLs get their MOCs removed from swipers' pages on Flickr, MOCpages, Brickshelf, and even a few blogs.

Brick-Busters' photo-pool of screenshots utilizes the eyes of the greater LEGO® community to help identify the Rightful Owner of a swiped MOC. Once a positive match has been made, a link to the "original" MOC photo online gets posted. Then the Rightful Owner is notified -- usually by a comment posted onto their photostream, with a link to the screenshot on the Brick-Busters photo-pool. Ideally it is best for the Rightful Owner to know about the swipe for several reasons: Usually they are not aware of the swipe; it is best for them to request removal; this may prompt him/her to watermark their MOC photos to deter further stealing; and hopefully Brick-Busters gains a new member to help curb this problem.

**HM:** How many people are involved in this project?

**BB:** We now have over 200 members. The photo-pool is public, so we do get tips of MOCs' origins from all the LEGO community online. It is very much a "group effort" at Brick-Busters, and has also served in fans making some new acquaintances.

**HM:** How much time do you dedicate to this task?

**BB:** It varies depending on the amount of activity; if someone finds a significant amount of swipes and needs me to screenshot them, then it can be an hour a day. My computer has gotten used to going into "screenshot mode" and I seem to have developed a groove of the process. Anyone is free to add a screenshot to the group; since many of our members don't have Pro accounts and only have 200 slots for their own MOCs on their own streams, I offered up my account space.

**HM:** How much time passes until the admins of a site act on your information?

**BB:** My first Request for Removal took only a day. Then, it seemed to take 3-4 days after the group got busy; the increase in volume of submitted comments may be a reason. Now it usually takes less than 24 hours during the work week. We have had a few come down in less than four hours. It really depends on the moderation on the site where the swiper has posted.

**HM:** What is the usual reaction of the 'victim' when you inform them that someone has stolen their pictures?

**BB:** The usual reaction is anger buffered by amusement. Many AFOLs seem to be struck with an emotion of flattery, yet at the same time, that of having their intellectual property violated.

**HM:** How many pictures have you rescued until now?

**BB:** Oh, gosh ... let me see: Our photo-pool contains 328 screenshots at the moment. No doubt there have been many others never screenshot, yet silently removed from a swiper's page online. That is good too. Although it doesn't really help in building up an accurate snapshot of the problem overall. Certainly the goal is to get MOCs returned to the Rightful Owner, by its image not being claimed by another person -- yet until more is done to prevent, it will continue to be a problem. There is no delusion that we can wipe it out 100% -- stealing is as old as mankind, right? Yet, it is also about helping the younger generation of LEGO fans realize it isn't just about slapping up a "cool" MOC they've "found" on the Internet so they can gain prizes, or admiration, or comments to pump up their ego. LEGO is supposed to inspire creative thought, imagination, mirror the real world, and possibly develop problem-solving ideas. This process needs to be genuine.

Using techniques that other fans have used, or getting an idea from another fan's MOC, to then create your own is absolutely not the same as stealing. That is the way of LEGO building. However, merely "right-clicking" to download a photo of someone else's MOC and uploading it online as your own -- even going so far as to concoct a story about it, and boldly replying to comments about it, without hesitation -- is disturbing to me.

**HM:** Tell us about a case that has particularly drawn your attention.

**BB:** We had a repeat swiper from LEGO Universe pages turn up on Flickr, who had also swiped from a LEGO fan there -- even going so far as to enter that MOC in a contest as his own! The sad part is that particular MOC he swiped had already won a contest on a AFOL fan site. He had also swiped images off MOCpages. One MOC he had uploaded to LU pages happened to be a very detailed MOC owned by a former LEGO Ambassador! A Brick-Busters member noticed the swiper in a fan site's chat room and asked him about the swipes, then forwarded the info on to our group. He took down one swipe and concocted a story blaming his cousin for the swipe. Then he joined Brick-Busters -- which is the first time I ever had to ban someone. He continues to swipe on a smaller scale. Although on LEGO.com his age says 19, he said he is 16 in that chat room, yet his actions and writing skills appear to be those on par with an 11-year-old.



Contrary to what many AFOLs think of as the age of swipers to be 8 years old -- statistically, the age is more in the 12-14 range. For me personally, I find that very concerning. Age 13 is old enough to realize ramifications of one's actions. Perhaps it is due to the developmental plateau of that age, or perhaps lack of parental involvement.

**HM:** Have you ever had any contact with the 'guilty' party?

**BB:** Mainly the one repeat swiper I already mentioned as having to be banned from Brick~Busters, whose comments blaming his cousin came through to my account's e-mail via a comment on a screenshot. I did not ever engage in dialogue with him via personal private messages. That is not my intent. That would serve no purpose because it would not be documented publicly. My advice to any FOL would be to not engage a swiper in a personal private conversation -- instead, allow the image-hosting site's admin to deal with their set procedure of removing a stolen image. Also, I don't use the word plagiarism because the meaning of that word really deals more with the written-word-idea, such as a story, a book, a script. Whichever word you use: swiped, stolen, or pirated -- it's good to be aware. I hope the readers of HispaBrick take this information to heart, for the future of LEGO® fan integrity.

~LegoMyMamma■