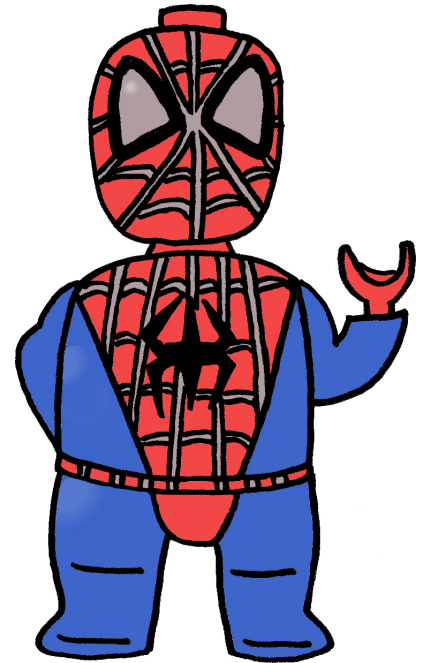


“Holy Bricks, Batman! Superheroes and villains in LEGO®”

One of the main characteristics of LEGO® sets, apart from their creativity and the ability to combine them in infinite ways, is their collectible nature.

Text by Vrykolakas and Satanspoet

Images by Vrykolakas, Satanspoet, LEGO® System A/S and their respective owners where noted



Many children have spent hours and hours looking at LEGO® catalogues making plans for the future which generally ended in something along the lines of: “Someday I will have them all”. And many readers probably will be smiling right now as they remember being one of those children. Now that they have grown up and achieved an economic independence, they can get a little closer to that dream. In the universe of superhero comics something similar happens: all the fans are looking forward to completing their collection some day and adding new merchandise from their favourite series to their shelves.

With the arrival of Hollywood’s blockbusting superhero movies (and the following merchandising invasion), LEGO® decided to jump on the same wagon and create some superhero lines, which of course perfectly satisfied the collecting hunger from both groups.

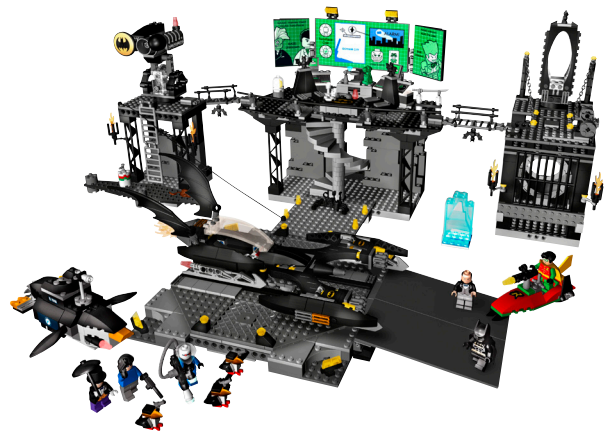
One of the best known superheroes of all time, as well as one of the oldest (created by Bob Kane in 1939) is Batman.

With irregular success through the several decades of his existence, Batman lived his golden age back in the late eighties and early nineties, catapulted to fame thanks to the hard work of many authors and Warner Brother’s blockbuster movies which led to the “Batmania” and its never ending licensed merchandising invasion. More recently, in 2005, Batman broke records yet again thanks to Christopher Nolan’s new movie saga. This time, LEGO® was one of the brands that decided to create products based on the character. Between 2006 and 2008, thirteen sets were designed. Instead of recreating any specific scene from the movies or the comics, they simply display situations and scenes the caped crusader usually gets involved in.

Before analysing the Batman sets, we have to highlight the most wanted item among the collectors: the minifigs. With exclusive heads, torsos and accessories, the minifigs of Batman and his foes are reaching higher prices everyday, and ever since the sets got out of production many people are after them. Several of these minifigs are even more expensive than many Star Wars minifigs.

The Batman sets can be classified in two groups: Dioramas and Vehicles.

There are only two Diorama sets, but they contain the highest amount of pieces out of all the Batman sets. First we have ‘**The Batcave: The Penguin and Mr Freeze’s Invasion™ (7783)**, in which we can build Batman’s secret headquarters being invaded by two of his most well-known enemies. With 1075 pieces, it soon became one of the most wanted sets by collectors. Within the set we can find many elements straight out of the comics like the supercomputers used by Bruce Wayne to fight crime, several traps and defence mechanisms and some vehicles, such as the Bat-Blade, the Penguin’s submarine and Robin’s jet-ski. It also features many other details that fans will appreciate, like the Joker’s fingerprints, or one of his bombs placed in an urn for analysis.



The second of the Diorama sets is ‘**Arkham Asylum™ (7785)**, the famous institution for the criminally insane, the one Batman’s enemies keep escaping from time and again. The set consists of some of the creepy buildings that belong to the complex, with cells prepared to contain the supervillain’s powers, surveillance towers and the main gate. We have to highlight the vehicles included in it as well, like Arkham’s ambulance, the Bat-Glider and Nightwing’s motorbike.

The second group of sets consists several vehicles in which

the heroes pursue the villains by sea, land or air. There is a total of ten sets:

'The Batman Dragster: Catwoman Pursuit™' (7779) is a small set with less than 100 pieces. Batman drives a stylized dragster (which can't be turned, by the way) equipped with a missile launcher and a machine gun for chasing Catwoman, who drives a motorbike customized with feline motifs.

'The Batboat: Hunt for Killer Croc™' (7780): A medium size set, with 188 pieces, in which Killer Croc flees on board of a small airboat (just like the typical boats from the Everglades in Florida). The Bat-Boat, which is bigger, is a two-engine boat that can be operated simultaneously by pushing a lever. Armed with missiles, it also includes a small zodiac for one minifig.

'The Batmobile: Two-Face's Escape™' (7781): This set of nearly 400 pieces introduces another well-known foe, Harvey Dent, a.k.a. Two Face. His vehicle is a bank van, half white half grey, just like the dual personality of his owner. It has an eject device to launch a minifig into the air. It also contains the Batmobile. It is a fair recreation of Batman's most famous means of transport, which includes, among other things, a secret rear compartment for placing gadgets and weapons.

'The Batwing: The Joker's Aerial Assault™' (7782): Batman's best aerial set consists of 523 pieces. It is a rather big set, and once the Batwing is fully built, it takes a lot of space. As expected, the wings can be moved to reveal secret weapons and pressing the tail of the ship launches a missile. The Joker's helicopter, in purple and green, includes a rope ladder, compartments to hide weapons and a bomb drop mechanism (made using a minifig head with an evil smile).

'The Batcopter: The Chase for the Scarecrow™' (7786): The second one of the aerial sets, with almost 300 pieces, introduces the Scarecrow in an interesting vintage biplane (reminiscent of the Adventurers sets) loaded with containers full of his fear gas (and some funny Halloween bombs, which are minifig pumpkin heads). The Batcopter is a flying arsenal full of missiles and guns, with a secret compartment behind the pilot's seat to place even more weapons.

'The Bat-Tank: The Riddler and Bane's Hideout™' (7787): This is another big one with 645 pieces. Even though there is no evidence that a Bat-Tank ever existed, here we find a solid vehicle that includes a complex movement mechanism based on Technic pieces. The set also includes Bane's sidecar, a jet-pack for the Riddler and a gate with security towers as part of a small diorama.

'The Batbuggy: The Escape of Mr. Freeze™' (7784) is the humblest of the Batman's sets with only 76 pieces. It contains two vehicles. Mr. Freeze appears in a small convertible with a deposit attached to his freezing gun. Batman drives a buggy with a rather ostentatious rear wing releasing a Bionicle flame. The weapon on Batman's vehicle is a harpoon launcher.

'Robin's Scuba Jet: Attack of the Penguin™' (7885): With 206 pieces, it's a bigger and better version of the same vehicle that is featured in the Batcave set. The Penguin's submarine, being 22 studs long, includes two propellers, big and small torpedoes and a periscope. Robin's scuba jet is a little cheery ship in green, red and yellow without any offensive power (but supposedly fast).

'The Batcycle: Harley Quinn's Hammer Truck™' (7886): Another set featuring a pair of vehicles, and containing 267 pieces. Harley Quinn's off-roader looks huge in comparison

to Batman's motorbike. The off-roader is decorated with the cheerful colours of the driver, and its main characteristic is a giant hammer that can be moved left and right. If we take a closer look at the vehicle we can see some more funny details, like the "I love Joker" license plate or a big red button that says "Hit me!". The motorbike has a compact and sturdy design that - yep, you guessed it right - also includes missiles to be fired.

'The Bat-Tumbler: Joker's Ice Cream Surprise™' (7888): The best of the vehicle sets if you ask any of the lucky owners. Its 449 pieces reveal two wonderful vehicles. The Joker's Ice Cream van hides a lethal surprise: If you open the back doors and press the giant ice cream on the roof, a missile is launched. As a curious note, the van has the same colours as its cousin from set 7639, The Camper. The Tumbler is the same vehicle shown in the Batman Begins movie, true to the model that could be seen on screen. It presents an impressive and menacing aspect, with a control panel and a steering wheel, apart from the obvious missiles.



Lastly, we have a little jewel that doesn't fit either of the two categories: **'The Batmobile UCS™' (7784)**. It is a reproduction of the famous vehicle, full of details and built with nothing less than 1045 pieces. We have to highlight the mechanism that links the steering wheel to the Batman symbol on the hood and makes it open when you steer, or the gold-coloured parts for the hubcaps.

One thing to mention is that since these sets are out of production, it has become more and more difficult to find them, and nowadays there is a big second hand market in which these sets reach three to four times their original price.

The success of LEGO®'s version of Batman increased thanks to the video game by TT Games, the developer responsible for the LEGO Star Wars™ and LEGO Indiana Jones™ games. Its great success drew many people without any previous LEGO® experience into the world of our beloved toy bricks.

Another superhero with his own LEGO® version is Spider-Man™. The license was probably obtained from Columbia Pictures™ as it featured sets tied to the Spider-Man 1 and 2 movies. There were twelve sets that hit the market between 2002 and 2004. After that, Mega Blocks® acquired the rights through Marvel Enterprises® and released toys based on the movies as well as some other characters such as Captain America, Hulk or X-Men.

In 2002, the first Spider-Man™ based sets appear under the LEGO Studios® line. The idea was to release several sets recreating the filming process as if it were some sort of "making of". The sets that hit the shelves were **'Green Goblin™' (1374)** with 50 pieces and **'Spider-Man Action Studio™' (1376)**, a set with 228 pieces. As a bit of trivia, there was talk about a third set under the name of **'Wrestling Scene™' (1375)**, but it was never released. The set was planned to be a wrestling

fight scene being shot. There were even pictures from the set, but it never came out on sale.

In 2003, LEGO Studios® disappeared, so Spider-Man got his own line. In that year LEGO® released three sets: The first one, **'Spider-Man's first chase™' (4850)** with 180 pieces recreates the first pursuit of Peter Parker as Spider-Man™.

The next one is **'The origins™' (4851)**, a set with 195 pieces in which we can relive the two key scenes from the movie: When Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson visit Columbia University's gene lab and Parker gets bitten by a genetically modified spider, responsible for his transformation into Spider-Man after giving him super abilities. It also recreates Norman Osborn's transformation into the Green Goblin, after he tests some experiments on himself trying to keep a military contract and avoid the bankruptcy of his enterprise, Oscorp

The last one is the 345 pieces set **'The final showdown™' (4852)**, which represents the final scene of the movie in which the Green Goblin captures Mary Jane and a wagon from Roosevelt Island Tramway full of children on Queensborough Bridge. Spider-Man has to use all his resources to save Mary Jane and the children at the same time from certain death.

In 2004, the last year of the LEGO®/Spider-Man™ contract, seven sets appeared, two of them belonging to the LEGO 4+® line. A thing worth mentioning is that the minifigs that came with these Spider-Man 2 sets already came in flesh instead of the classic yellow. Also, not all the sets recreate scenes from the movie.

'Spider-Man's Street Chase™' (4853), containing 61 pieces and not based on any movie scene, recreates a simple diamond robbery, with one of the two thieves fleeing on a skateboard.

'Doc Ock's Bank Robbery™' (4854), with its 132 pieces recreates the moment in which Dr. Octopus tries to rob the bank in which Peter Parker and his Aunt May are at that moment. Dr. Octopus takes Aunt May as a hostage and Spider-Man goes to the rescue.

'Spider-Man's Train Rescue™' (4855). This set of 262 pieces is based on the fight between Spider-Man and Dr. Octopus. After the latter destroys the brakes of the train, Spider-Man is forced to stop the now out of control train before it reaches the end of the railway.

'Doc Ock's Hideout™' (4856), the most complete Spider-Man set released, with 445 pieces, recreates the old abandoned warehouse in the docks where Dr. Octopus continues his fusion experiment and holds Mary Jane captive.

'Doc Ock's Fusion Lab™' (4857) is a set with 201 pieces. During the sustainable fusion experiment held by scientist Otto Octavius, something goes wrong. The tentacles created for the experiment merge with the scientist's spine. He is later carried to a hospital for their removal. This is the origin of the villain we know as Dr. Octopus.

In the LEGO 4+® line, meant for children of 4 (and over) by featuring bigger pieces and figures, LEGO® released two Spider-Man™ sets: **'Doc Ock's Crime Spree™' (4858)** and **'Doc Ock's Cafe Attack™' (4860)**.

After 2004, LEGO® lost the Spider-Man™ license and the line disappeared. That is one of the reasons why nowadays the superhero related sets are so hard to find and end up with really high prices.

Something regrettable is that unlike other LEGO® licenses (Star Wars™, Harry Potter™, Batman™, Indiana Jones™) we never had the chance to enjoy a LEGO® Spider-Man™ video game.

Before finishing, we want to draw some attention to a growing phenomenon: the customization of minifigs in order to create superheroes that don't have their own official LEGO® version (and probably never will). On the Internet there are many amateur artists who upload pictures of their creations, reproducing dozens of comic superheroes and villains. Many of them just combine official pieces, but some apply custom decals on the minifig heads and/or torsos and even create their own custom pieces.

This fact highlights the great compatibility between LEGO®



and the superhero fandom, something not very well explored until now. Many fans would be really happy to add some sets based on their favourite ninth art characters.

Now just letting our minds go crazy, let's think about the possible future of superheroes in LEGO®. With the last news of Christopher Nolan directing a possible new Batman project scripted by David S. Goyer, perhaps LEGO® might release new sets based on the movie again.

And continuing with the speculation...The Walt Disney

Company® bought the Marvel Entertainment® brand in 2009, acquiring the rights of nearly 5000 characters from the comic world. In 2010, thanks to the Disney Consumer Products® license acquired by LEGO®, we get to enjoy lines based on 'Toy Story', 'Cars' and the 'Prince of Persia' movie. A fourth Spider-Man movie is planned, along with some other Marvel superheroes movies, like Thor, Captain America, The Fantastic 4, etc..., so who knows what the future will bring us? The possibilities are out there...

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