

Interview: Brotherhood Workshop

By HispaBrick Magazine®

Pictures by Brotherhood Workshop

Fans of LEGO® and LOTR have been surprised by the appearance of a series of stop-motion videos with original story lines and a sense of humour that have not been able to eclipse the quality of the productions. Today we talk with one of the creators of these little gems of the seventh art.

HBM: For starters, tell us how the Brotherhood Workshop started

BW: I started animating with LEGOs when I was 11 years old. After doing so for 2 years, I moved onto claymation, which I continued doing up through college. My thesis project at Biola University was a 30 minute claymation fantasy epic called "Rise of the Zerad" (I will probably end up posting the film as a webseries to my youtube channel sometime this year). The film won several awards and screened at multiple film festivals, but never really took off like I had hoped. So for several years, I had to put aside stop-motion animation in order to find a job to support myself. Shortly after graduating from college, I got a job as a video editor for an agency called Contexture International. The office had a great community and great projects to work on, but nothing that really met my creative desires, and particularly my desire to animate. After working there for two years, I knew it was time for a change. I decided that I would try a different route with my animations. Rather than focusing on a single massive project for years at a time, like I had done in the past, I would focus on short,

funny, animations that would get me noticed in the youtube community. My coworkers and my boss were very supportive and let me set up an animation studio in an unused corner and gave me free access to all the film equipment that I needed. I still had to work full time to support myself, but I spent my off hours creating simple LEGO videos, hoping to get my stop-motion career off the ground. And that's where it all started.

HBM: How many people make up BW and what are their tasks?

BW: It's hard to say exactly how many people are involved and what their rolls are because I have had so many friends that have helped out on different levels. At the moment I would say the core members are as follows:

- Myself (Kevin Ulrich), Director and Animator
- Brian Ulrich, Sound Designer (but he will be doing some writing for some upcoming videos)
- CJ Ulrich, who does visual effects
- Rick Cortez, who also does visual effects
- David Ulrich, who designs and builds my custom models

And of course I have other friends who help out with brainstorming sessions and moral support, and bringing me lunch on the weekends when I'm working hard. Thanks Torry!



De izquierda a derecha: Kevin, CJ, Brian, David y Eric



HBM: How did you learn to make stop motion?

BW: By doing it. Plain and simple. Never had a class. Never had a mentor. Never watched a tutorial. Just up and did it. Was awful at first. Got better over 13 years.

HBM: What kind of programs do you use?

BW: I use Final Cut Pro 7 for the video and audio editing. Dragonframe for image capture. Adobe After Effects for the VFX.

HBM: How much time and effort is needed to create a video?

BW: It very much depends on the complexity of the video in question. But on average I would say around 50 hours for a 1 minute video.

HBM: Have you developed any special techniques or tricks to do a better job?

BW: Oh yes. Far too many and too complicated to describe here.

HBM: Where do you get your inspiration? Are all the ideas yours or do you receive advice and ideas from other people?

BW: The Lord of the Rings™ movies themselves have been the source of most of my inspiration. But I have many brainstorming sessions with my friends and coworkers to help come up with the jokes.

HBM: Do you work from a tight script or do you develop the ideas while making the video?



BW: The idea develops as I go along. I have a starting point and a punchline in mind, but the details I make up as I go.

HBM: What do you find most difficult when making a video?

BW: Moving lots of characters at the same time. That is the worst. Especially when you get up to twenty or thirty character in frame at the same time.

HBM: Have you made any non-LEGO® films? Is there any difference between working with LEGO and with other media?

BW: Yes, I have done both claymation and live action films. And yes there is a HUGE difference. LEGOs are far more easy and fun to work with. However, it is limiting because LEGOs aren't well suited for darker themes or more serious subject matters. You have to maintain a humorous, tongue in cheek approach or else your work ends up feeling pretty melodramatic.

HBM: Have you been criticized for using non-LEGO elements? Do you think it improves your videos or would it be possible to do everything in landscapes that were 100% LEGO?

BW: Not that I'm aware of. I think it really helps the "flavor" of the video to use more realistic elements, especially rocks and trees and such. It gives the video a gritty, more believable feel. And that is what LEGO has been doing in their packaging for years, showing the featured set in a non-LEGO setting. So I feel it is totally consistent with the brand and look they have had for years.

HBM: In addition to LOTR is there any theme you are tempted to make a video about?



BW: Oh yes. Lots. The reasons I have specifically targeted Lord of the Rings are threefold:

1. The sets were brand new and popular.
2. The Hobbit movies coming out would drive views to my videos.
3. I'm kind of a Tolkien fanatic.

However, now that I have an established youtube channel, I may start branching out to other genres. Batman™ and Harry Potter™ are the strongest candidates.

HBM: Do you have any plans for a longer film?

BW: Oooohhh yes. My friends and I are working on a screenplay for a Claymation feature we would like to one day

produce. But we will need major funding for that. Until then, short videos it is!

HBM: Have any minifigs been hurt while filming?

BW: Yes sadly. Some have clay residue that will never fully go away. Others have joints so loosened they won't keep their position anymore. But hey, it's worth it.

HBM: Do you have some advice for people who want to start making stop motion videos?

BW: Just do it and don't stop. You may not be very good at first, but experience is the best teacher there is.
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