

## Great creators of the world: Aaron Newman (Nuju Metru)



By HispaBrick Magazine®

Pictures by Aaron Newman

In this edition we bring to you a young builder known for his fantastic Lord of the Rings creations.

**HispaBrick Magazine:** Name?

**Aaron Newman** (a.k.a. Neju Metru).

**HBM:** Age? Nationality?

**AN:** 20. American.

**HBM:** What do you do normally?

**AN:** I'm a full-time student at the University of California, Los Angeles. I study musical theater. Most of my life revolves around school and school-related projects, but I love finding time to MOC when I'm on academic breaks!

**HBM:** When did you first start building with LEGO®?

**AN:** I've been stacking bricks as long as I can remember... couldn't give you an exact age when I started, but I remember making things out of DUPLO even when I was very young. It didn't take long for me to move on to real LEGO from there. The first LEGO Star Wars products in 1999 definitely contributed to

that transition. I'm a sucker for Star Wars™!

**HBM:** When did you start posting your models online?

**AN:** Let me see if I can figure this out... I've been a member of the online community ever since I joined BZPower in 2008, and I've been MOCing as long as I've been into bricks... According to my oldest-dated MOC photos, I guess I started posting creations of mine in 2009. I've been on Flickr - probably my most successful sharing site - since 2011.



**HBM:** What is the last set you have purchased?

**AN:** Not counting gifts and stuff BZPower sends me to review, I think the last thing I bought for myself was 70231 Crocodile Tribe Pack, and it made its way instantaneously into my parts bins. Most of my LEGO purchases these days are Bricklink orders.

**HBM:** What is your favorite commercial LEGO® building theme?

**AN:** Hard question. BIONICLE will always have a special place in my heart; I've been a huge fan since it began in 2001, and it was my gateway theme onto the LEGO online scene. I still have a closet full of BIONICLE sets, and love to MOC within that system. But I think the winner here for me is LEGO Lord of the Rings. I made a point of buying every single product in that line, and I actually have some of them in plastic display cases over my desk. They're (mostly) excellently designed, superbly detailed sets, and from one of my favorite Intellectual Properties. What's not to love!

**HBM:** What is your favorite theme for building?

**AN:** Medieval fantasy, hands down. Take a look at my recent work; I've now made three "waves" of an imaginary LEGO fantasy theme - "(Not) LEGO Dragon Lands" - and that all comes after having decided to try and make a complete series of LOTR LEGO sets (a project I conceived of, for the record, before TLG announced that they'd be doing the same!). Medieval fantasy has been my genre of choice for a really long time. While I also dabble in Steampunk and BIONICLE, I like to think I've developed a specialization.

**HBM:** What is your favorite LEGO® element and why?

**AN:** How can I choose! There are so many bricks I just adore, and use all the time, and wish I had more of. The first thing that comes to mind are SNOT plates, because I implement those constantly and they allow for some of my favorite shapes. But I couldn't really call those a "favorite..." There are some elements that are just gorgeous, which I consequently implement whenever I can (maybe too often). The trans-apple-green flask. Dark tan viking horns. Minifigure

broadswords. Anything olive green. Mixels joints! A current favorite is definitely the 1x4 spring launcher part, and its various, vibrant ammunition; they're so super-fun and compact that I end up including them all over the place.



**HBM:** Which part would you like LEGO® to produce?

**AN:** Nothing comes to mind immediately, actually. In the middle of building, when I hit a snafu, I'll often be like, "Grr, why doesn't this element exist! Why doesn't this part come in this color!" etc. But looking back from a detached place, I realize that the times when I want a piece to solve a particular problem, but no such piece exists in my inventory, have pushed me to innovate a more creative (and often more elegant) solution to my problem. Discovering how to get around these speed bumps is one of the most rewarding parts of building, for me, and it's why I don't ever see myself working on LDD, where no such problems can ever arise. But if I had to pick a part that I know doesn't exist that I'd really love for a potential upcoming creation, it'd be the 1x4 curved slope in dark purple. That'd be killer!



**HBM:** How many hours do you spend building with LEGO®?

**AN:** When I'm at school (to my sadness!): none. When I'm back with my bricks at home, though, this absence means that I have both the energy and the self-license to really attack my MOCing table! I sit for hours, tinkering and working, and have a blast with it. I lose track of time.

**HBM:** What do your family/friends think about this hobby?

**AN:** My family has always been supportive of my hobby, thank goodness; I mean, it makes me the easiest person ever to buy gifts for! Insofar as friends go, there was definitely a period where I closeted the hobby from my peers because we were all of the age where people don't know better than to make fun of others' interests and idiosyncrasies. But ever since I've been at college, I've been pretty open about my LEGO fandom, and people have actually responded really well to it. They think it's cool when I show them my gallery, or tell them about my LEGO Ideas project.

**HBM:** Do you draw or pre-designs before you start building?

**AN:** Rarely; I prefer to let the bricks I encounter guide the design as it forms. The exception to this was my Minas Tirith model, which - since I had to make substantial Bricklink orders of white elements, and adhere to a pre existing design - I drew some rudimentary blueprints for. More often, I go in with just a basic idea of the kind of thing I'm trying to make (a harbor, a dragon, a ballista) and an idea of the scale I want to realize it in, and then I get started and see how it shapes up from there.



**HBM:** You build models at different scales, which is the more difficult for you to create at?

**AN:** I think it's harder for me to make something small which will satisfy me as thoroughly as a bigger creation in terms of the design. When a model's big, the sheer size of it can gloss over some of the less-than-stellar design choices, or inefficiencies. On a smaller scale, though, these kinds of flaws stand out much more, and are much harder to reconcile without losing integrity elsewhere in the build. Nothing makes me happier than when I succeed with a small design; some of my personal favorite creations have been some of my smallest.

**HBM:** If you had to choose one among all your creations, which one would you choose and why?

**AN:** This is a toughie, too. But I think my favorite creation I've made so far would be the combination of my "(Not) LEGO Dragon Lands" sets "64018 Alchemist Workshop Defense" and "64020 Battle for Myrdoc Tower." I built these two as a single model, and only split the castle into two definite "sets" later on. The fact that they can combine with each other is what makes me proudest... these two creations are modular Gothic castles (and on that point, I'm extremely satisfied with the shapes and sculpting I achieved on these; the level of detail is exactly how I wanted it) that are wholly interchangeable and compatible with one another. Making sure that every single combination of modules was physically possible was a terrific design challenge, and it's one I successfully completed. On top of the modularity, I packed tons of play features and cool





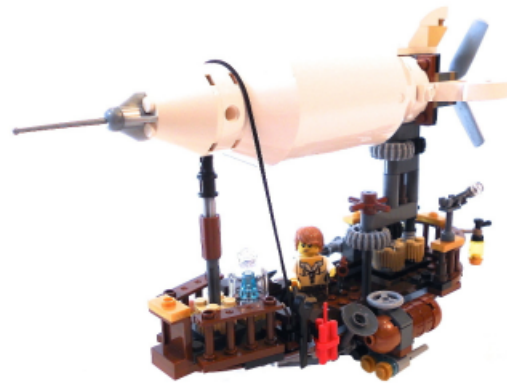
details into the build. I really can't imagine any way I could have executed closer to my vision.

**HBM:** What do you think about the use of non-official parts (stickers, modified parts, non-LEGO® elements ...)?

**AN:** Well, I'd be a terrific hypocrite if I condemned the use of non-official parts, considering all my dragons have custom-cut cloth wings! I personally don't mind the use of non-official elements in builds, if/when there's no LEGO-made solution to the problem that they solve, and as long as they don't upstage the more legitimate brickwork. My personal preferences when building and viewing creations tend to lean more towards purist designs, but to each her/his own.

**HBM:** Many of your constructions are inspired on stories like The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit, almost as if they could have been official sets. Do you think LEGO® could have developed those themes further?

**AN:** Like I said earlier, LEGO Lord of the Rings is my favorite commercial theme. Nothing would make me happier than to get more LOTR sets, I'd buy them all up in a heartbeat! The second wave of the theme felt intermediary, definitely; sets like the Pirate Ship felt like wasted opportunities to produce more iconic/dynamic parts of the film trilogy. I feel like even one more wave - with the right sets and characters - could be enough to give the LOTR theme the kind of closure that its second wave really didn't deliver on.



**HBM:** How do you feel about the fact your rendering of Minas Tirith wasn't selected to become a set despite the fact it got well over 10000 votes on LEGO® Ideas?

**AN:** I was very honored and somewhat baffled that my Minas Tirith made it as far as it did. I never had high hopes for it becoming a product, considering its size and TLG having already made one D2C LOTR set, so the LEGO Ideas rejection didn't come as a terrible shock or disappointment or anything like that. I'm just flattered to have been considered, and grateful to all the people who wanted to see my version of the White City become an official product.

**HBM:** What inspires you to create medieval/fantasy layouts and MOCs?

**AN:** Oftentimes I draw some inspiration from my own past work; I can look at an old creation of mine and think, "wow, I could do that so much better, now," and then I try to, and that's a fun challenge. Sometimes I feel like I'm harping on the same creation ideas for years, pushing to perfect them. The "(Not) LEGO Dragon Lands" project has been encouraging me to come up with new ideas, though. The first thing I do when beginning a new "wave" of these creations is to build a new suite of dragons and a new cast of characters. Once I've tinkered around with minifig parts and the dragons enough, I have a general idea of the characters that'll be inhabiting this wave, who the good guys and bad guys are, what colors I'll be working with, that sort of thing. I divide the figures up into interesting combinations, the "sets" they'll be in, and while playing around with different arrangements I think about what kinds of settings I want to realize. These idea seeds propel me into building the main models.

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