

# Pillars of the community: Hoth Bricks

By HispaBrick Magazine®

Hoth Brick has become one of the preferred sites for the LEGO® community to get fresh news about their favourite hobby. We interviewed William Bonhomme to find out more about Hoth Bricks. He has been the person behind the blog since 2010, and has been responsible for updating it with fresh news these last 5 years.



**HispaBrick Magazine:** How did the idea of Hoth Bricks come about and what was its original purpose?

**William Bonhomme:** Like every LEGO® fan, when I came back to the hobby, I was checking online if I could find others like me. I quickly figured out that most of the content available was in english. Not that I cannot read and understand english, but I was disappointed to see that there was a very few french blogs available.

In the same time, I was boring my wife with my LEGO stories. She is not into the hobby, and frankly speaking I can understand how boring it can be to be harassed on a daily basis with LEGO considerations.

She told me to try to find others fans like me to share my hobby matters. I explained to her that the community was mainly english-language based. She answered : "Why don't you run your own blog then? This way you will find other french speaking people to share with." She was right. I did what she say.

With the help of Google and first visitors spreading the word, the Hoth Bricks readership grew significantly and quickly. There was a demand for a proper french language news website. A lot of young fans do not understand english enough to spend their time trying to understand what other websites talk about. So instead of leaving them watching pictures, I tried to propose an opportunity to interact with the content in their own native language.

**HBM:** To what degree has that goal been fulfilled?

**WB:** There was no "goal" when I decided to create Hoth Bricks. The main idea was to produce localized content for the french language readership and if possible to generate interactions with readers and visitors. This has been achieved.

I am not a "forum" guy. I don't want to spend my time reloading topics, answering to people because they are right or wrong, and participate in endless, and sometimes pointless, arguments. On the other hand, I like to react to fresh news, and to read other people reactions to the same fresh news. Then we move on to the next information and discuss again.

To post a comment on the blog you don't need to go through some complicated registration process and you can express your opinion anonymously or not in seconds. Fighting spam, bad behavior and such things is done automatically in the background, users do not have to bother about that, it's not their business.

Hoth Bricks is also a place where everyone can have his own opinion on the products and on the brand. One can disagree, express a different opinion or criticize something without being banned because what he says is not within some defined "policy".

**HBM:** Why did you call it Hoth Bricks?

**WB:** Since the very beginning, I searched for a name for the blog. But I quickly understood that it was not possible to use the word "LEGO" and that the brand is actively fighting the use of this word in websites names. So I did like everybody else, I planned to use

the word "Bricks" and to combine it with something else. First idea was actually "Hot Bricks". As the blog was supposed to be heavily focused on LEGO® Star Wars™ products and news, I then tried to be more original than that and I realized that Hot / Hoth would be a nice idea. I know that most of the visitors don't get it, but Star Wars fans do, and it's enough to make me happy about it.

**HBM:** Hoth Bricks began as a French language blog, but now it has many non French speaking followers. Did you expect such success? In your opinion, what is the key for having Hoth Bricks become a reference blog in the AFOL Community?

**WB:** Well, the average LEGO fans has its bookmarks: We all have a few websites where we go every day to check what's new. Many foreign visitors added Hoth Bricks to their bookmark just because they know that once in a while I can have a bit of news that is fresh and not seen everywhere else. It's not every second day, but when it happens, I am always happy to provide something fresh, doing my part to give LEGO® fans their daily dose of news. Being a reference or not is not important to me. I just try to maintain a high level of trustability on the subjects I deal with with by cross-checking sources and references, rumors, etc... Today, the LEGO® world is full of false rumors, wishes becoming truth when they transit from one forum to another, etc... I always try to stay close to the current situation: A rumor is a rumor, a fact is a fact.

The average LEGO fan is spending a lot of fan browsing the internet to find some news. If I am a part of this online cruise for some of them, it's cool!

**HBM:** Hoth Bricks is a one person project, how do you combine the hard work of running Hoth Bricks with you real life job and family?

**WB:** I am lucky to work from home for my "real" job. That gives me enough spare time to take care of the blog(s). Working from home forces you to be well organized because professional and private life are permanently mixed.

Working on the blog(s) is a part of this daily schedule. I always keep an eye on what's happening here and

there in the LEGO world during my day (or night) time. If it's worth it, I now have all the tools that help minimize the time needed to relay an information while it's fresh.

**HBM:** How much time do you spend to keep Hoth Bricks running?

**WB:** It really depends on many factors. The period of the year is for example critical here: Toy Fairs and conventions always bring a significant amount of fresh informations so it's time consuming to process them. But globally, I would say I am always close with what's happening in the LEGO world. It's all mixed up with my pro and family time. let's say that Hoth Bricks eats a few hours of my day time.

**HBM:** Why did you create all those separate blogs (Brick Heroes, Springfield Bricks, Jurassic Bricks ...)?



**WB:** This is one question that many people ask me all the time. The answer is quite simple: Hoth Bricks was originally focused on the Star Wars products before becoming a more generic media. When LEGO came up with the Super Heroes range, I thought it would also attract people who are not LEGO fans in the first place. There are a lot of comics fans who collect various toys related to Marvel & DC Comics universes. So I decided to give Super Heroes their own space not to bother casual fans with all the other LEGO news.

Same logic applies to The Lord of the Rings / The Hobbit, The Simpsons or Jurassic World topics. I would say it works as expected. Many visitors come just to stay informed about the toys produced by LEGO related to their favorite universe. With these dedicated blogs, they can focus on what's really

interesting for them without being distracted by all the other LEGO® stuff which can be sometimes boring as it is really too specialized for the casual fan.

**HBM:** How do you see the future of Hoth Bricks?

**WB:** I don't have any big plans for Hoth Bricks. It's a blog and it will remain a blog. Growing the active community around it is the only goal here. And it takes time to grow a real loyal community if you don't want to spam forums, facebook groups, Reddit and other sources to promote your website just for traffic and affiliate revenues.

The real value of the blog is its community not the content. The content is here only to generate discussions between fans. All LEGO fan sites report the same content at the same time and I am not writing to satisfy some personal ambition or to be "someone" on the scene, I do it to share with other french language fans and get their point of view on every subject.

I am not planning to make a living from the blog either. This is not my job, I do it because I like to do it, and if someday I feel bored or visitors stop to come and discuss, I will stop.

**HBM:** A website like Hoth Bricks must cost money. How is it funded?

**WB:** Over the years, with more and more people following the blog, it indeed started to cost more and more: I had to switch hosting companies to get the best service possible and to adapt the server capacity to be able to handle the growing traffic. Even a simple blog based on free tools like Wordpress needs money to run: Quality hosting is not cheap. That's why I use affiliate programs. They help to minimize the costs.

But because I also have a real salary from a real job not related with LEGO products, I am not relying on the affiliate profit generated on the blog. I use the remaining money to fund contest prizes, print promotional material and goodies to promote the blog in real physical events I attend, etc... I even support some charities with this money, but this is more a

personal matter and I don't feel the need to talk much about it.

**HBM:** What is your relationship with TLG?

**WB:** Well, I cannot say I don't have any relationship with LEGO. I am part of their LUG Ambassador program but nothing more than that. I went on The Inside Tour but I paid my ticket to get there.

Here in France, I never had a proper contact with the local LEGO office. LEGO France does not care much about what I do, they obviously don't need me to sell their products and public relations agencies are more focused on Youtube stars or so-called "Geek" websites to promote the brand. But, hey who cares?

I feel it is like it should be: I do want to keep a certain level of independence and freedom of speech. Being too close from the brand just forces you to comply to any of their request about your content. It's some sort of censorship, or call it what you want?

**HBM:** Have you had problems with TLG due to any news leaks?

**WB:** Every second day now, I run into trouble because of the "leaks". From one side, LEGO CEE Team tries politely to contain the leaks by advising LUGs to refrain to publish all those pictures and informations. On the other side, the lawyers working for TLG are harassing me with legal threats, contacting our hosting company, asking facebook to delete some content, etc...

It becomes really difficult to produce content which is not a press release or a shopping tip today. And while we were all forced not to mention Star Wars Episode VII new sets during all summer thanks to an embargo decided by LEGO and Disney, other websites were talking about those new products every day. LEGO fans had to go somewhere else to get news. We all looked stupid.

Anyway, it's obvious that Disney decides everything here: LEGO is always claiming that they do not want to jeopardize their partnership with Disney to justify their actions towards leaks. But most of those leaks

indeed come from LEGO®: Reseller catalogue scans are available everywhere, LEGO server is full of pictures and informations supposed to be top-secret but easily accessible, etc...

It's not my job to control the leaks, if the information is available, it's because LEGO did not do their job to contain it. I just report. I am not responsible for the mistakes of the 1st toy manufacturer in the world. And threatening to sue me does not help.

LEGO® fans love leaks, early informations, previews, etc... They feed their love for LEGO through those exclusive informations. They don't care about most of the public relations stuff.

**HBM:** During these years of following the LEGO community, what do you think are the main changes that have occurred in the AFOL community?

**WB:** Well, I think that some members of this community have trouble accepting that being an AFOL is not "exclusive" to them anymore. During the last years, contents like video games and movies based on the LEGO products have generated more and more LEGO fans.

It's like the "Geek" title : People who use to proudly call themselves geeks, for whatever reason it was, have to admit that the geek culture is everywhere now. Being a geek or an AFOL is not anymore something that is limited to some specific type of people.

That being said, I am happy to see more and more adults being involved in the hobby. Being an AFOL is not an achievement though, it's often a self-attributed title to feel like being a part of something. But many fans are not active on the internet LEGO scene, they have their own clubs, their own small local community where they have fun with real friends.

By the way, I also dislike the term AFOL because it mainly means being a fan of LEGO (as a brand). I love LEGO products, that does not mean that I feel the same for the company that produces them ;-).

Over the years, I also have a feeling that the

community is growing, but the new "members" are oftenly more like collectors than builders. Look at flickr, it used to be a nice place to find beautiful MOCs, now it's like Instagram : Every second guy takes pictures of his minifigures in various environment and that's it..

**HBM:** Have you done any activities in "real life" (events, exhibitions) related to Hoth Bricks? Can you explain them?

**WB:** Every year, I attend a few conventions I like in France. It helps me to keep a physical contact with friends and members of the Hoth Bricks community. I go there as a regular visitor, and I am available to discuss with whoever wants to.

It's always good time there, and I can meet all those LEGO fans who build incredible things. They are the core of the LEGO fandom and it's always good to meet the last people who promote through their art the real concept of the LEGO product: Use your imagination and create.

**HBM:** Can you talk about any interesting anecdotes related to Hoth Bricks?

**WB:** There are many stories to tell, some of them are not so funny after all, because of all the haters wandering on the internet and hiding behind their keyboard.

But there is a strange story: I did publish a small piece about working for LEGO, where to apply, how to find job adverts, etc... Since then and thanks to Google, I receive every second day some emails from people who want to work there, explaining me why they are good candidates, detailing their resume, etc... I always feel sorry for them as they reached the wrong person. This shows the power of Google : People just click on the first result, without even reading what's behind.

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