

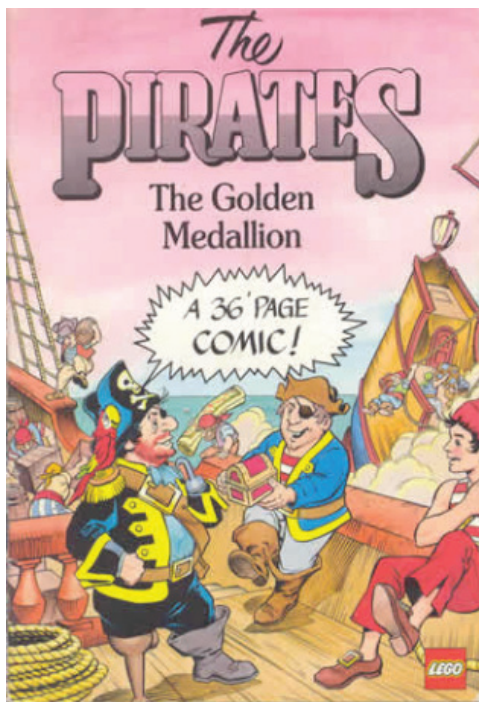
# LEGO® PIRATES HISTORY

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Images by Kristijan Vuletin and LEGO® System A/S

It was the year of the Snake in the Chinese zodiac, the year when Game Boy was introduced, it was the year of the first Simpsons episode, and the first Seinfeld episode... it was 1989. As we watched Tim Burton's Batman in cinemas and listened to the new Cher song 'If I could turn back time', LEGO® introduced something magical that would take us across the ocean, where only a compass and our imagination can take us – they introduced the Pirates theme.

It was a completely new theme, after the Town, Castle and Space themes; a theme that brought us the first LEGO® versions of firearms and the first minifigures with non-standard smiley faces. That same year LEGO® even introduced a comic book called 'The Golden Medallion' to give some background story for the first sets.



## THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE... ISLANDER?

The pirates were one of the two original opposing sides of the theme – the 'bad guys' we could say – and on the other side we had the Imperial soldiers – the 'good guys'. In 1994 a third 'neutral' side was introduced – the islanders. They have been



known to have both pirate and Imperial prisoners.

Unlike the Imperial soldiers, the pirates did not change over time, but were expanded with new sets added through the years. The Imperials on the other hand experienced some 'radical' changes. The soldiers actually went 'backwards' through time – from 'redcoats' (based on British soldiers) and 'bluecoats' (based on French soldiers) to the Imperial Armada (based on the Spanish Armada).

## IMPERIALS THROUGH THE YEARS

Imperial soldiers 1989-1991, and again in 2015  
Imperial guards 1992-1996, and again in 2009  
Imperial Armada 1996-1997

The initial run of the Pirates theme was from 1989 to 1997.

**Wave 1** – 1989.

**Wave 2** – 1991.-1993.

**Wave 3** – 1996.-1997.

- A couple of re-released sets in 2001 and in 2002. It would take another seven years for LEGO® to resurrect the theme.

**Wave 4** – 2009.

**Wave 5** – 2015.

- 2011 and 2017 – Pirates of the Caribbean sets – not officially a part of the Pirate theme.

At the very beginning, in 1989, LEGO® gave us what in our humble opinion is one of the greatest pirate ships that would ever sail the brick seas – the 6285 Black Seas Barracuda, and her captain Roger Redbeard! She was the one that set the standard, the one that every other ship is always being compared to. There is something really appealing about her that we cannot really describe. Is it her overall look, the



perfectly balanced combination of colours or just the fact that she is the first pirate ship to be released in the theme? Hard to tell, but it remains a real visual treat to this day.

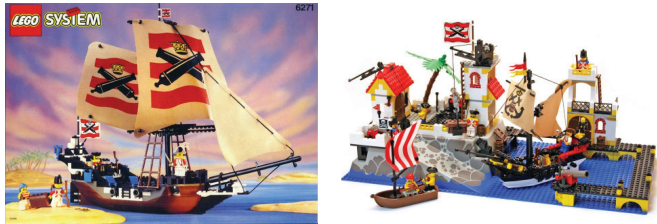
Other sets that 'stood out' in Wave 1 were 6270 Forbidden Island on the pirate side, and 6276 Eldorado Fortress and 6274 Caribbean Clipper on the Imperial side.



Well, the pirates won the 'best ship' award in 1989, but the Forbidden Island was kind of small for all the treasure and prisoners... or maybe rum? LEGO® knew back then that if you wanted a real blockbuster, you had better bring it in 3D. So, in



the beginning of the second wave, 6273 Rock Island Refuge came with a raised baseplate. Captain Redbeard really knew how to live the good life; he had it all: the Black Sea Barracuda



to conquer the seas and now a perfect little island on which to lock up his prisoners.

In 1992 the Imperials would 'upgrade' their ship and island. The biggest sets in the theme were 6271 Imperial Flagship and 6277 Imperial Trading Post. In 1993, the Black Seas Barracuda was replaced with the 6286 Skull's Eye Schooner.



Unlike the Barracuda with its four spots for cannons, the Skull's Eye Schooner had eight while the number of cannons remained the same – just four. This ship, however, had a mechanism for rotating the cannons from one side to the other. And speaking of cannons, an interesting detail with the 6268 Renegade Runner pirate ship from 1993 is that the US version of this set had cannons which were non-functional - they couldn't shoot - but they still had nice details, while the European version had no such details yet were fully functional.

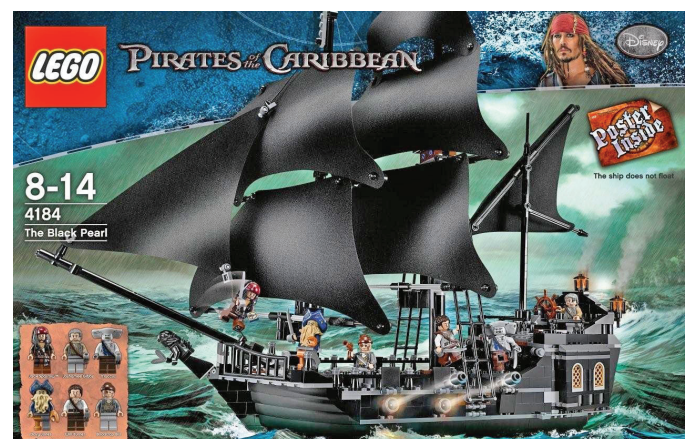
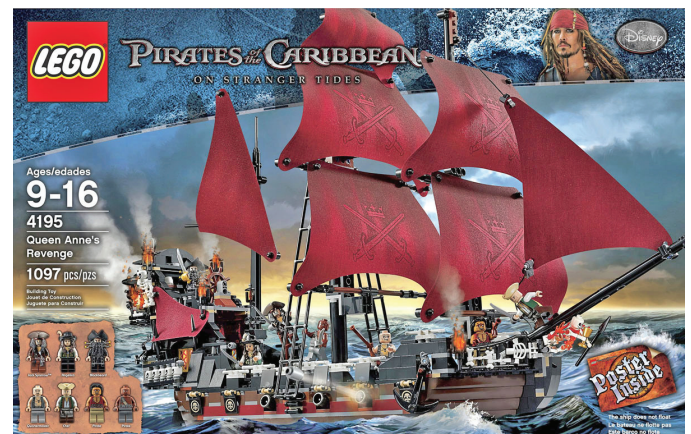
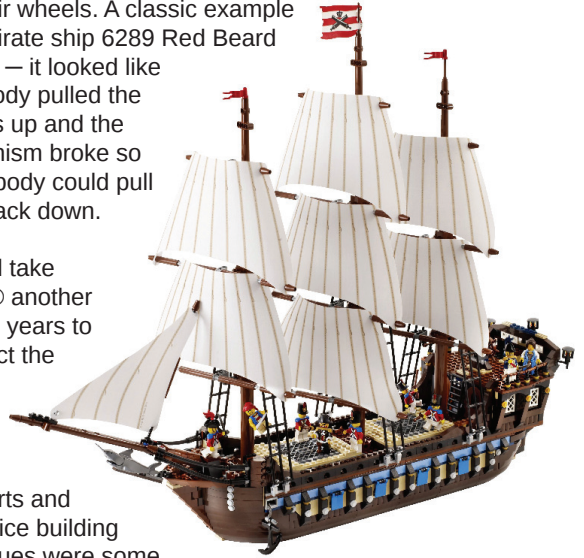
The islanders were introduced in 1994 as a third and 'neutral' side, as mentioned earlier. They were based on the natives of the Pacific islands. The biggest islanders set was 6278 Enchanted Island (the only islanders set to be re-sold again in 2001).



After the amazing opening of the Pirates theme in 1989, and then the excellent first two waves of sets, came the third wave. This was something that most Pirates lovers would like to forget. Everything was downsized, including both ships and islands. The colours in some sets looked like they were chosen randomly and even the cannons lost their wheels. A classic example is the pirate ship 6289 Red Beard Runner – it looked like somebody pulled the curtains up and the mechanism broke so that nobody could pull them back down.

It would take LEGO® another thirteen years to resurrect the Pirates theme. Fresh ideas, new parts and some nice building techniques were some

of the characteristics of wave four. Unlike the previous wave, the colours didn't burn the retinas in your eyes. Looking back at the sets of wave three was like looking at your old pictures, from back when you thought the mullet haircut was a good choice. Some of the best and biggest sets of this wave





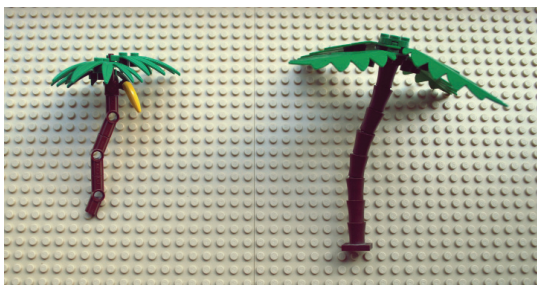


were 6242 Soldiers' Fort, 6241 Loot Island and of course a new pirate ship: 6243 Brickbeard's Bounty. Although 300+ pieces less than the famous Barracuda, it still looked very attractive, and nothing seemed to be 'missing'. And then, like a cherry on top of the pirate cake, came the biggest ship that LEGO® ever produced – the 10210 Imperial Flagship.

But not even this piece of art managed to keep the theme going; it would take another six years to reboot it. Again, luckily for us the movie blockbuster 'Pirates of the Caribbean' came out and we did then get our 'shot' of pirates-themed sets, though under a different name, of course.

The last of the Pirates of the Caribbean ships came just a few months ago – the Silent Mary. Kind of a spooky name if you ask us, or we've just watched too many horror movies. But this name fits the ship perfectly. Spooky lookin', hollow hull, lots of cannons (non-functional unfortunately), and a very nice colour scheme. You could say we liked it at first sight.

But let's get back to the official theme. The year 2015 was when LEGO® brought us the (currently) most recent line-up of the theme. Some familiar faces were on that Brick Bounty ship: a captain that looks a lot like Captain Redbeard, with some familiar enemies on the other side – bluecoats. Back to the roots I guess – trying to win us back with some nostalgia, aren't you LEGO? Well, it worked. We don't know whether it's because of the familiar faces or just that the sets were nice in general.



Why did we say "nice in general"? Well, some things really bothered us. For example, the biggest set of the year (within the Pirates theme, of course) was 70413 The Brick Bounty. Although it looks nice overall, when you look at it closely some things on the ship look like the build is still in progress or some things are simply... missing (only two cannons in the hull but four spots for them, almost no space for a minifig to walk on the sides of the ship, the back of the ship lacking details, etc.).

Other sets have no such defects but there is one detail in them we wish was different – the palm tree. We simply cannot get used to the Technic version.

All in all, not a bad pirate year. You have to be grateful for the fact that the theme lives on, but on the other hand, some things could have been better.

We have seen how pirates have evolved through the years – there have been some ups and downs. We had a magnificent start with a couple of classics, then some years when maybe even LEGO® did not know where to go. LEGO® had some rough years in the late 90s, and you could say that this was reflected in the Pirates theme very much. When LEGO® recovered as a company, the Pirates were back, along with fresh new parts, building techniques and, most importantly, fresh ideas.

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