

HispaBrick Magazine® Staff: Antonio Bellón (a.k.a. Legotron)

By HispaBrick Magazine®

Images by Legotron



Hi. I am Antonio (Legotron). I'm a physicist and an electrical engineer, but I work as a software developer. I live in Getxo, a town in the North of Spain. My favourite LEGO® themes are Star Wars, Castle and military vehicles from WWII.

HBM: How and when did you start participating in HispaBrick Magazine®?

AB: I have participated from the first issue. Carlos, one of the founders, got in touch with me in 2008 with the idea of creating a magazine. I liked the idea, but since I was already very busy with other things, I only offered to collaborate writing some articles, since I did not have any experience editing or producing magazines. As more issues came out, in addition to writing my own articles I started to correct and translate materials and in time I became part of the staff. For practical purposes, you could say I have been with the magazine from the start.

HBM: What are your responsibilities in the magazine?

AB: That depends on the time I have available. Right now, I write articles, especially with relation to MILS, I help with the graphics, translation from English to Spanish and corrections. I also look after statistics and download control. In some issues I have had more time and specifically when Carlos left I took over the layout work.

HBM: Had you done any of these things before?

AB: No. I had collaborated correcting articles about history, but was nothing compared to what it means to edit a magazine. It is not just the layout; you need to write articles that can be understood easily, correct and translate them - that is a lot of work and not at all easy.

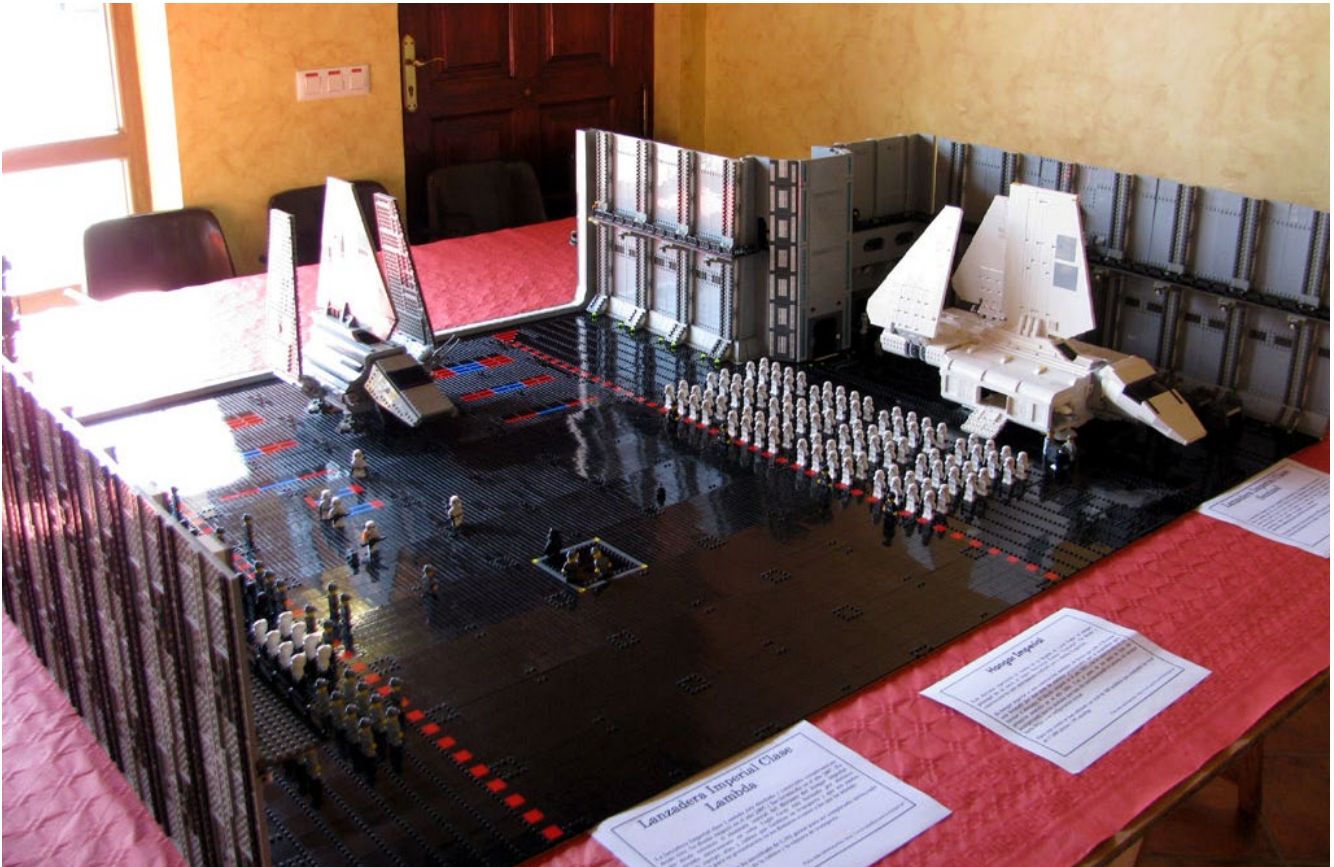
HBM: Did you need to learn how to use the tools for any of those tasks?

AB: Fortunately I already knew how to use Photoshop, which came in handy, on the one hand for the graphics and on the other for editing many pictures - the equipment and lighting conditions under which many pictures are made are not ideal and the pictures we receive sometimes need some work. I also needed to learn how to use Scribus, the software we initially used for the layout work. Scribus is a single user software, which meant a single person needed to do the layout of the whole magazine in both languages. Fortunately Lluís figured out how to do the layout with InDesign in such a way that several people can work on it at the same time, but I have not had the time to help with this new format.

HBM: Talking about all the tasks that are carried out in the magazine, what are the ones you like the most? And the least?

AB: I know what I like least: public relations. I am really bad at that. Thank goodness the team has Lluís, Jetro and Jose for those tasks.

I don't like translating much either, as that takes up a lot of time.



What I like best is writing my own articles, which can be hard, because need to have something to write about and then know how to put it into words. When you have the time it is quite entertaining. Another thing I also like collaborating with the graphics, maps or editing images.

HBM: Are there any tasks you would like to do but haven't had a chance to work on yet?

AB: Hmmm, I don't know. I think I have done most of them. I would love to be able to create a comic strip like the ones Jesús (Arqu_medes) makes. That is something I don't know how to do and it could add a lot to the magazine. Being able to add a couple of cartoons or fun drawings to the magazine would make it just that little bit more friendly.

HBM: What do you think of the rest of the people who make up the staff of the magazine?

AB: They are the real reason the magazine is still alive. If it weren't for their commitment and the time and energy they have put into it over the years, the magazine would have ceased to exist a long time ago. Anyone who sees how we plan and organise the work might think something like that can't possibly work and wouldn't last long, but we've been here for ten years now... It is clear that our work on the magazine is firmly based on our friendship, and to an important degree, the success of the magazine comes from the fact that each one of us does what needs to be done, without discussion, simply because together we have decided this is what we want to do. If we had to spend days or weeks discussing what to put into the magazine and what not and in what order it would be impossible to make it work year after year. All our opinions have the same weight, but most importantly we never try to impose our own criteria on the rest of the staff.

Once again I need to mention Carlos, who, for many years has been at the helm of this endeavour and has been the driving

force for all of us. He put up with for many years and it was a great loss when he left the magazine.

HBM: Many people don't know how much work it takes to create a free fan magazine. Does it really take that much work to get each issue published?

AB: The worst part of it is that of the three issues we publish each year, two coincide with our events which means we are preparing the event and working on the magazine at the same time. Sometimes after we finish the magazine and the event we need to disconnect from it all and it takes an effort to get back into gear. We need a couple of weeks rest before we continue the work. We start off lightly and in the end it always turns into a race to get everything done. It is easy to think that if we were 100% concentrated from the start we wouldn't be so swamped at the end, but then it would stop being a hobby and become an obligation. Those breaks are important and in my case those are the periods when I build most, since I completely disconnect from my other obligations and just enjoy building.

It is hard and tiresome work to get the magazine published, but we do it because we like it and we can't put too much strain on the team or more of us would end up leaving. As the team that makes the magazine has become smaller the size of the magazine has become bigger. In addition to the work on the magazine we write our own contributions. It isn't always easy to get your thoughts out on a piece of paper. And when you contact someone and ask them to send you an article it takes time to coordinate everything, make sure the article is well structured and has sufficient quality for the magazine, request pictures, ask for things to be modified if they are unclear, etc. Sometimes you program an article for an issue and you run out of space, because there are already too many pages in the magazine, or there is another article on a very similar subject in the same issue. When you have everything you need to check it again to get it ready for translation. The first full layout

is done in Spanish and then we do English and Croatian and we take care to make sure the translations match up page by page. When everything is ready sometimes we realise the pages are not correctly numbered or some pictures are blurry. We have even forgotten to include an article that planned and ready. At other times we have had to remove some content to make space for a last minute addition that took up more space than we anticipated.

HBM: Of all the criticism and praise you receive, what has most surprised you or drawn your attention?

AB: The nicest thing is seeing that people enjoy the magazine and encourage us to keep on making it, and recognise all the work that is involved.

There has been criticism, especially at the beginning, that has helped us to improve the content and layout of the magazine.

However, there are times when the criticism is absurd because it insists on improving the look of the magazine or on improving things that would make it more commercial, because some compare it to "professional" magazines. At those times you think: you get over 100 pages of content, ad-free, in a language that is not our own and on top of everything it is free... why would we want to be more commercial? We are not perfect and sometimes mistakes slip into the magazine, but this is a fan-made magazine and the important thing is showing all those things that are related to this universe of LEGO® constructions which we as fans find interesting.

HBM: It's been ten years since the first issue. How do you see the evolution of the magazine since then?

AB: I believe that as far as the content and the format is concerned, the evolution has been very important and significant. The first issues didn't have a very high graphical standard and included pictures that were low quality. The format was contained a lot of wasted space with large fonts and a lot of white space. Over time we have improved and now it is nicer to look at and we have more content.

As for the spirit of the magazine, I believe we are still on the same path we set out on when we started. As a matter of fact we have received offers to use the magazine to promote certain stores, but we have always refused this squarely. We want this to be a magazine made by AFOLs who show off their own creations or interview other AFOLs, or review LEGO® sets. Ultimately it is all about talking about LEGO® constructions and everything related to LEGO®.

HBM: It all started as a local format designed to preserve and publicize MOCs by Spanish AFOLs, and now the magazine is published in three languages and read all over the world. What do you think has caused this evolution?

AB: I don't know. The truth is, it started out as a magazine that was full of the cliches and stereotypes that were common in Spain at the time, and at the beginning the magazine was Spanish only. It was only at the third issue that we had an English version and that meant a big leap forward, even though some of our first translations were quite bad! But from the very first issue there were people from different countries interested in the magazine. As a matter of fact, one of the recurring requests we get is for a translation into English of our first two issues!

The reason for this evolution may be the fact that we wanted to tell things from the point of view of the fan, with the kind of language every AFOL uses, focussing on LEGO® instead of on creating the perfect article. Another reason might be the content. We don't have fixed quotas for each theme - this % for Technic, that % for City, etc. We simply include everything we find of interest in each issue.

Also, the fact that we have collaborators from all over the world opens up doors since each time someone collaborates in the magazine they encourage members of their LUG to have a look at the magazine to read their article and then they end up reading all of it.

HBM: After ten years you are still going strong. Have you ever thought there wouldn't be a next issue?

AB: To be honest, there have been several times when we have come close to calling it quits. After all this is something we do on a voluntary basis. When certain key people left our team that has seriously reduced our work capacity. La marcha de personas clave del equipo han mermado muy seriamente nuestra capacidad de trabajo. In the end we have solved this redistributing the work and that of course means everyone needs to do a little more. This was especially true when Carlos left - who was in charge of the layout of magazine for the longest time. There was another critical moment when I was in charge of the layout. At one point I was overloaded. It coincided with a period in which I had a lot of work and I couldn't continue working on the magazine so I had to hand over the layout task to my colleagues. Thanks to the efforts of Lluís, Jose and Jetro we managed to publish the magazine. That is teamwork!

HBM: What do you believe are the best qualities of the magazine?

AB: In my opinion it is that we are still a magazine made by fans. After all we are the ones "forcing" ourselves to make it and and who decide what we put in it. We do not depend on other people who could demand things, because we are a free magazine so no one can limit our capacity to decide. That allows us to plan the content according to our own criteria, and even to delay a publishing date if we don't have enough time to finish it by the date we initially set.



In addition, since we decide what articles from our collaborators will be included in the magazine we don't have a commercial bias. We like to include the kind of article we find interesting as AFOLs or that attract our attention. On the other hand, since there is no "monetary compensation", most of the article proposals we receive for the magazine are from AFOLs who are really interested in collaborating with the magazine and getting an audience for their creations. You can really notice that in the articles as they are oriented towards describing constructions and not towards getting votes on LEGO® ideas.

HBM: What would you like to improve in the magazine?

AB: The time I can dedicate to each issue. In general, I believe the magazine is quite good, considering how small our team is and that it is made by a bunch of LEGO® fans. What I hate most is seeing how much work the rest of the team puts into the magazine and not being able to dedicate more time to improving the magazine.

HBM: You always mention in the magazine that its continuity is possible thanks to the collaboration of those who send in articles. Is that really such an important factor?

AB: Absolutely! It is fundamental! If we had to generate all the content of the magazine we would have run out of ideas and topics to talk about a long time. We would be repeating the same things over and over again and our readers would tie of the magazine.

Collaborators bring in new and very varied subjects. Their articles are really interesting and discuss things we would have never imagined were related to the LEGO® hobby. LEGO® is much more than the constructions that are made with it. There are people doing therapy with it, or art, who have made it their job, or who simply collect. But all of that is relevant to the magazine! Also, we get to know the people who work for the company, their points of view, meaning we cover a wide variety of aspects related to the LEGO® hobby.

It also allows us to get to know some of the constructions that have amazed us in close-up, because their creators show them to us and that is a real privilege.

HBM: Of course there are also regular collaborators. What can you say about them?

AB: The work of our regular contributors is also very important. They help us to translate, writing tutorials, comic strips... They are to be credited, because they help us to keep this project going. Without their help the magazine would have disappeared a long time ago. A big thanks to all of you!

HBM: You have also written articles and done interviews with people from the LEGO® company. How do you see your relationship with the company?

AB: The relationship with the LEGO® company are the responsibility of Jetro and especially Lluís, so I think they are in the best position to answer this question. There is no doubt the relationship is cordial and that we get help obtaining the materials we need for the magazine: interviews with managers and employees and participation as a recognised Fan Media in activities LEGO® organise, like the inauguration of the LEGO® House.

Our magazine is exclusively dedicated to discussing all things LEGO®, so it is important to keep this good relationship.

HBM: As the motto of the magazine says, it is a magazine made by fans. So in addition to making the magazine you also like to build with LEGO®. What are your favourite LEGO® themes?

AB: To be honest I have always been centered on the themes I liked when I was little. I came out of my dark ages thanks to Star Wars, although rather than building sets, what I really liked was build my own models and dioramas. As a matter of fact, the first constructions I showed at a LEGO® exhibition in 2005 were mi Star Wars MOCs. Later on I started to add medieval constructions, another one of my "passions" from youth.

Finally, I started Panzerbricks, with military vehicles from the Second World War - as a child I used to build scale models of those vehicles. It was Panzerbricks that led me to develop the MILS system, because I needed to be able to change the scenery for my constructions and I thought it was too much work to build them up from scratch each time I wanted to take a new picture.

HBM: Is there any theme or set you would like LEGO® to make?

AB: Ha, ha, ha... I think I am the least appropriate person to ask that question. I would like so many things I don't even know where to start.

Rather than a particular theme, I would probably like to see more generic sets. I tend to buy individual parts rather than sets and the LEGO® catalogue strikes me as boring. There are many themes that are completely focussed on the minifigs and there is little of interest for an AFOL like me. I do love minifigs! I would like to see sets with constructions like the modulars of the Medieval Market in different themes, especially in the classical themes like the West, Classic Space, Pirates, etc.

HBM: Is there life beyond the magazine and building with LEGO®?

AB: Obviously my family takes up a prominent spot and my job takes up a lot of time too. I believe it is important not to be centered just on building with LEGO® and the magazine, so it doesn't become a burden. That is why, a few years ago I became a member of the 501st Legion (Spanish Garrison), whom I greet with these lines! I participate in charity events with them as well as in parades, under the orders of Lord Vader, and it is an incredible experience!

There is not much more, because I would need a 30-hour day to fit in more things

HBM: Do you think you will still be making the magazine in another ten years?

AB: If the magazine continues in the format it is in now and I have time for it, I hope so!

HBM: Throughout these ten years there must have been many anecdotes. Could you share some?

AB: There have been many. I remember we mixed up the magazines and we put the Spanish edition up for download in English. I remember one occasion when we confused the download links for the different language editions and we got a flood of messages from people saying the magazine was in the wrong language.

On occasion we have had issues coordinating articles and two



people ended up working on the same task for an article, or we forgot to include an article after all the work it takes to write and translate it

We once had a cyberattack on our server. I triangulated the origin and found out we were under attack from a Chinese army base. In less than 30 minutes we had 35.000 download requests for the same issue. I had to take it down to avoid collapsing our website.

We have received very interesting emails too. People have requested a (paid) job with the magazine and have even placed orders for LEGO® sets, thinking we also make the sets.

But the best anecdotes are from our encounters - not online, but at events. We have had some good laughs. I remember an

occasion when we were invited to leave a place because we were laughing too much - and that was in bar with a stand-up comedian! I don't remember a single meeting at which we haven't had more than one laughing fit.

HBM: Finally, what would you like to see in the magazine?

AB: What I would like to see most is the entire original team from the magazine. The ones that have left are sorely missed as each of them brought their own imprint to the magazine.

As for LEGO® constructions, something I would really like to see is the return of the classic themes, but the real ones and not the surrogates we see appearing occasionally.

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