



Sets with an App

text and images by lluisgib

In 2019 several sets of different lines have been launched that need a mobile app for their functionality or to increase gameplay. Our colleague Jetro has written several articles on our blog about those related to Technic or robotics. In this article we will make a small analysis of two more general theme sets that use an app.

Hidden Side

Hidden Side has been the great novelty of 2019 in terms of the link between the brick and the digital world. A collection of sets has been released with a theme that could be defined as Terror, Halloween or Fantasy, which can be played in the real world, with the figures and features of the sets, and at the same time you can expand the game by downloading an app with which you must catch ghosts.



Although it is not the intention of this article, first I will talk a little bit about the set we are going to analyze the app with later. We have built the largest set, the 70425 - Newbury Haunted High School. A nice building that reproduces a haunted school. Without going into the process of construction, it is a very attractive set with a remarkable level of detail, both outside and inside the building.



A characteristic of these sets is that they have a hidden "monster" part, which can be made to appear through some mechanisms. This is part of the "Hidden Side" concept since you can have the model on display without these accessories being seen, or with them being part of the scene.



There are also some complements of the mini-figures that are part of this hidden side of the set, although in this case we must add them manually. The set includes 8 mini-figures with new moulds and torsal decorations. The new moulds correspond to the hair and hoodies of some minifigures and some of their accessories. There is also a ghost dog, with double moulding, with a transparent body part.

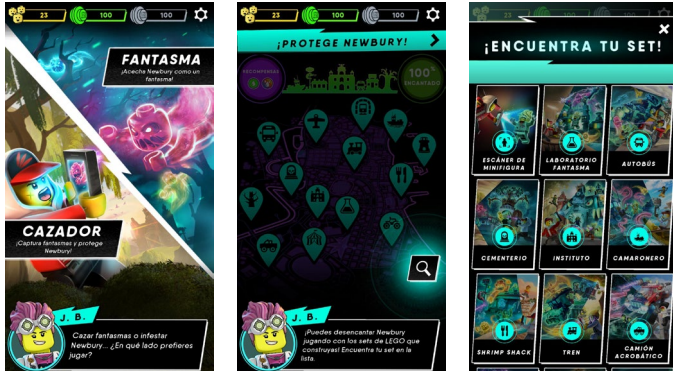
But let's talk about the app. First of all, and I think this is something that can be frustrating for many parents, and that will limit the use of the app quite a bit, are the features that the mobile needs in order for the app to work. At home we have top-of-the-line mobiles that are a couple of years old and are not compatible. We also have a mid-range mobile that is 1 year old and not compatible either. I understand that to make augmented reality you need a certain processor power, but when you find that your device is not compatible it can stop you from buying the set. Perhaps LEGO® should think about a "lite" version of the app with less functionality but that allows you to play with any smartphone.



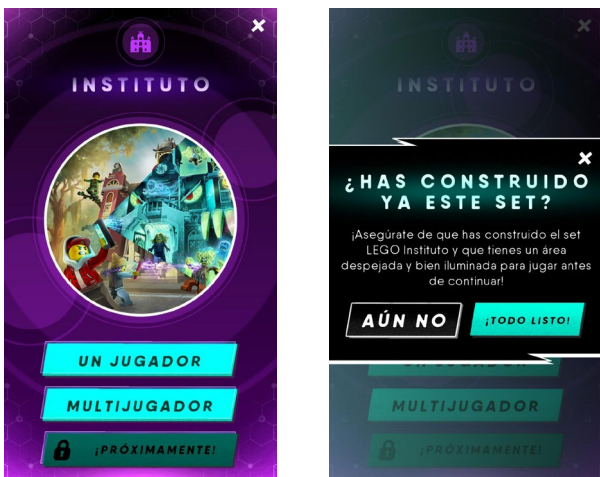
I finally used my mother's iPhone 8, in which I installed the app without any problem and was able to make a first test. We press to start the app. While it loads, there is a funny progress bar, made with 3 ghosts.

Once it has loaded, we find a first menu that allows us to choose if we want to be a hunter or a ghost. This way we can choose which side we want to play on. In this case we have decided to play as hunters (The screenshots in the app are made with the english version).

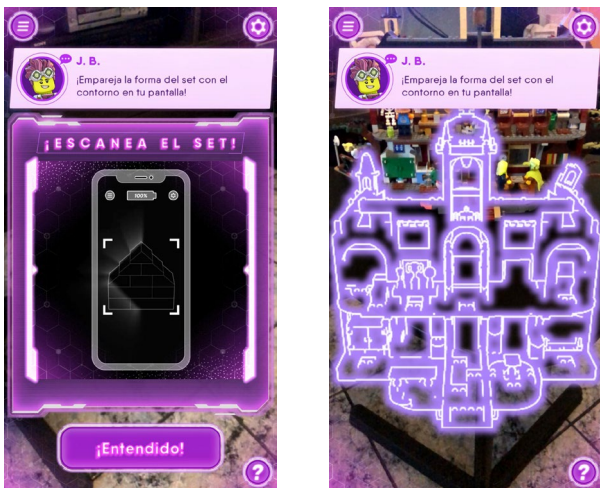
Now we've chosen which side we want to play on. The next step is to choose which set we are going to play with. We have to press the magnifying glass and choose the set from the list. In our case it will be the school.



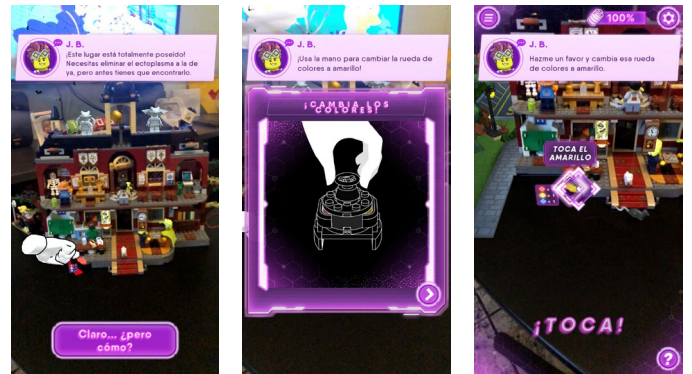
We will choose whether we will play alone or with more players. For this test we will choose "One Player". There is an icon that says "Coming soon" which makes me think that it will be possible to play online. The app also asks us if we have built the set, and gives us some tips on where to place the set to play.



Now begins the part where we interact with the set. First of all we have to scan the silhouette of the set. To do this, a blueprint of the set is shown on the screen so that we can match it with our set.



When the app recognizes the set, the game starts. Messages will appear to guide you on how to proceed to play.



Location of the color wheel

How to choose the color of the wheel

The game guides you step by step Here you are asked to play on the yellow color of the wheel



Looking for Ectoplasm

Ectoplasm detected. You have to touch the screen

Attack!



As the "fight" against the ghosts progresses, our energy level goes down or up

Minifigures also play an important role in the game. First you have to recognize them

You have to place the figure where the app asks you to



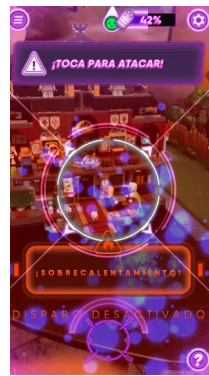
Scanning of the figure

Scanned figure

Recognized figure. Now we play with this character "Gary Átrico". On the right side there is an arrow that indicates where the next ghost is



Ghosts attack you. You have to press the screen to shoot



If you shoot too fast, the gun overheats and stops shooting

I must admit that the app works very smoothly, and that's why a high performance phone is necessary. I've only made an introduction to the game as I don't have the right phone to test it further. Anyway, the app guides you through what to do at all times, and what I've been able to check out is pretty fun. If we put the app together with a very complete, detailed, elaborated set with some quite interesting figures, we can conclude that it is worth investing in a set that will not only give us the physical experience of the bricks, but also a fun virtual experience.

Disney Train and Station

An unexpected set that arouses passions among Disney fans and train fans alike. This is a reproduction of the Disneyland California train and its station.

In this case the set contains 5 mini-figures. Four of them are variations of existing figures, namely Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Chip and Chop.

Mickey acts as a locomotive driver and is dressed in a classic steam engine driver outfit.

Minnie is the passenger of the train, and she wears one of her typical red suits with white dots that we have seen so much in Disney comics.

Chip and chop are the stationmasters and porter. Chip is dressed in a navy blue suit with a blazer, a very elegant outfit. Chop is dressed in navy blue pants and vest. In both figures you can see the pocket watch chain.



But the great novelty of this set is a mini-figure that many of us wondered why it was not in either of the two mini-figure collections. It's Goofy. He is dressed in his typical outfit: blue pants with darning, orange sweater with a yellow vest on top and his classic green hat.



The train consists of a steam engine, a tender and two passenger cars. The steam engine is beautiful, with its functional rods and many boiler details. You have to take into account that it is an amusement park train, so the aesthetics are a bit "juniorized". Anyway, it is very beautiful.

The tender is a little higher than the real train, since it has to integrate the battery box / Bluetooth receiver. With the new Powered Up system, in which no separate infrared receiver is needed, the model is much more compact and with less wiring. The engine is located just below the tender, which makes it the traction element.



The train includes two carriages. The first is a panoramic car that has the seats arranged in a parallel orientation to the track, so that passengers can observe the details of the park without having to turn their heads. The roof can be opened so that the figures can be introduced without any problem.



The second car has a more classic design. It's a closed cafeteria car. It is well lit inside as it has many windows, and has doors on both sides to access the access platforms and a balcony/viewpoint.

If we look at the interior, we see a design set in the 19th century, with wooden chairs upholstered in velvet and a tea set.



The station is not an accessory. It's a complete building both outside and inside. Its construction is very detailed and it takes longer to build than the train. You can see in the photos the amount of pieces needed, for example, to decorate the corners of the building, or for the ceilings.



The interior doesn't come up short. It has all the details in each of its rooms.



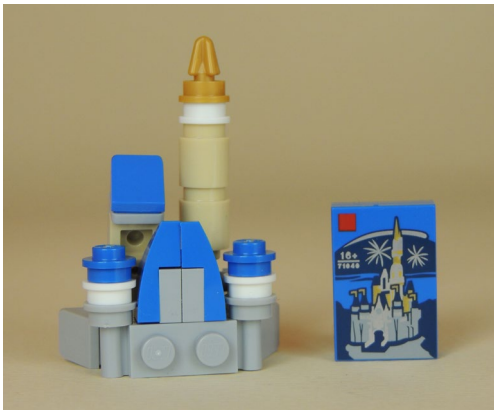
We see nano-scale reproductions of Disneyland trains. Above them are the pictures of those trains. There's also the ticket office with the table of prices for the tickets.



On the other side is the waiting room, with many accessories, such as a scale to weigh suitcases and goods, a bucket for umbrellas, a lamp and a bench to sit and wait for the train. On the upper floor there is a small rest room, I imagine for the stationmaster, where he can quietly drink tea sitting in his armchair.

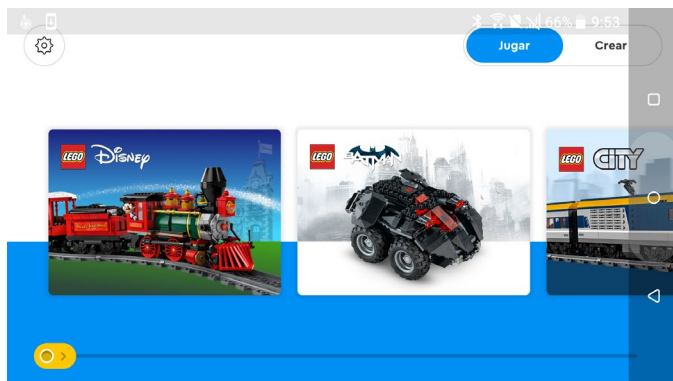


There's a very LEGO® detail. It is the nano-scale reproduction of the Disney Castle set and its corresponding box.

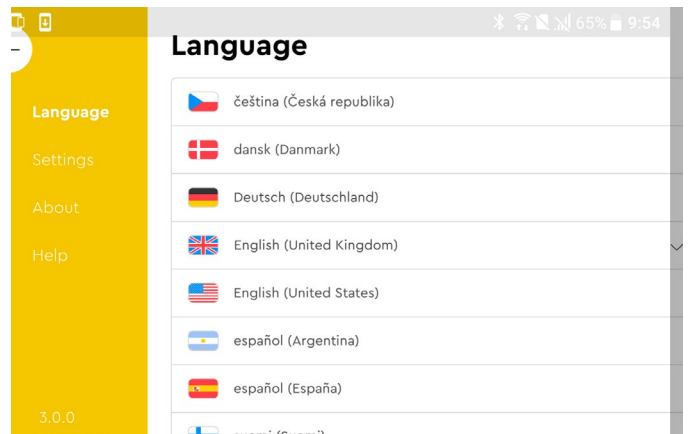


But let's go to the app, which is what this article is about. In this case the app "Powered Up" can be used on any phone with Bluetooth Low Energy and the device specifications required (check the minimum specifications required).

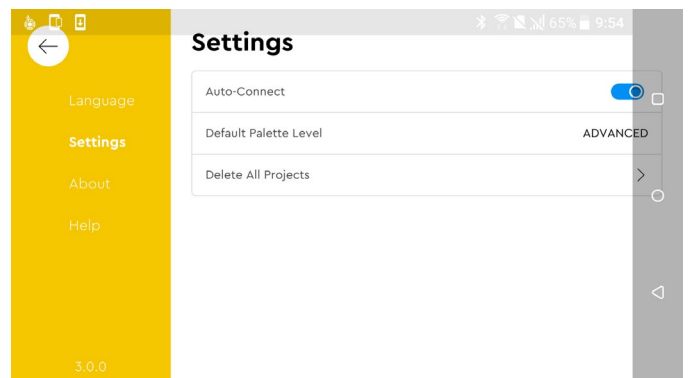
When starting the app, we can choose if we want to use it for the Disney Train, for the CITY trains or for the Batmobile. I understand that as more sets are released with Powered Up, icons will be added.



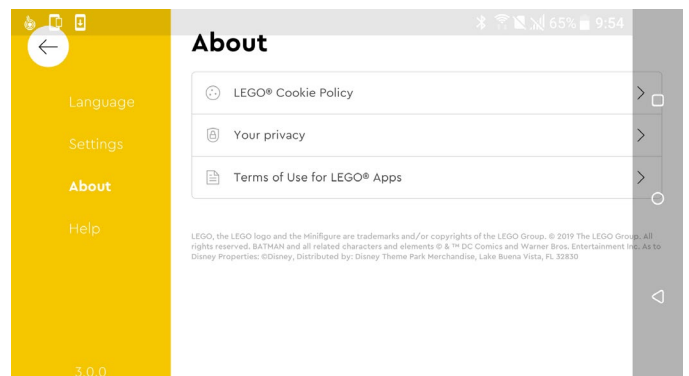
The app allows us some configuration, like the language.



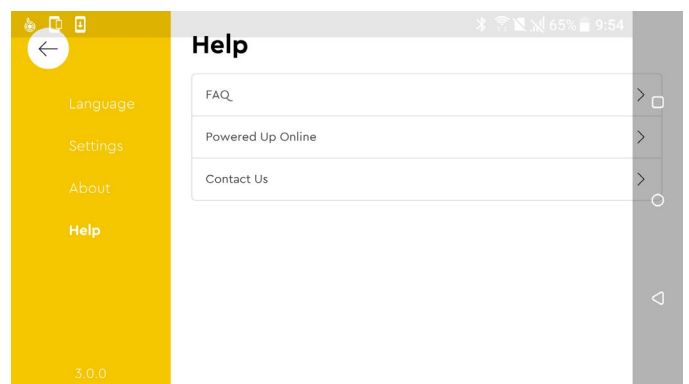
Some parameters such as auto-connect.



Application information.

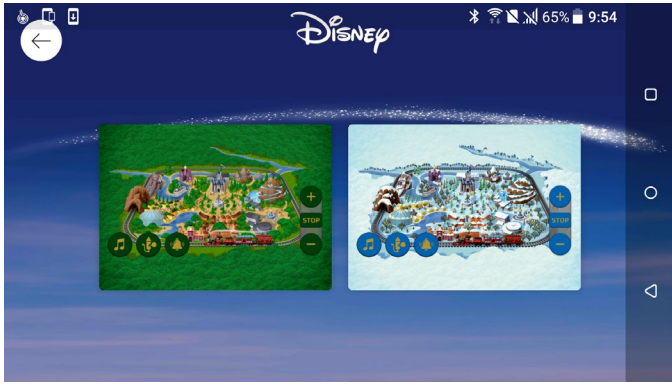


Or the help menu.

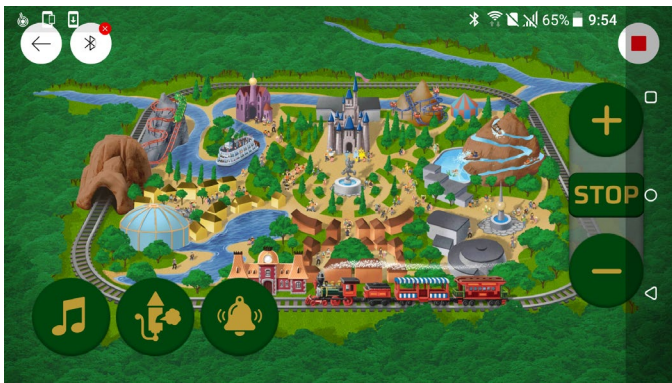


Returning to the main screen, we enter the Disney Train menu and it lets us choose between 2 skins:

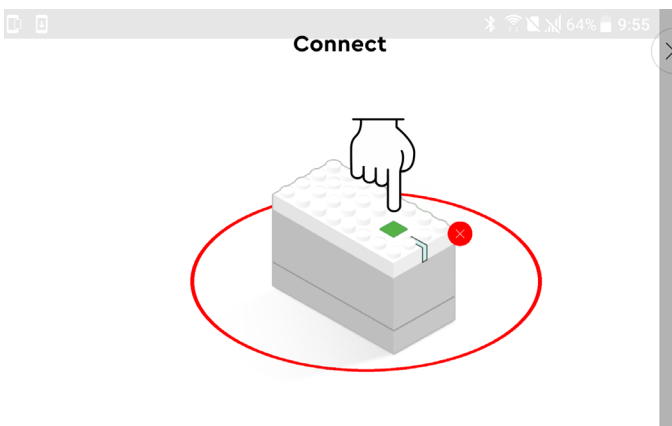
- Summer
- Winter



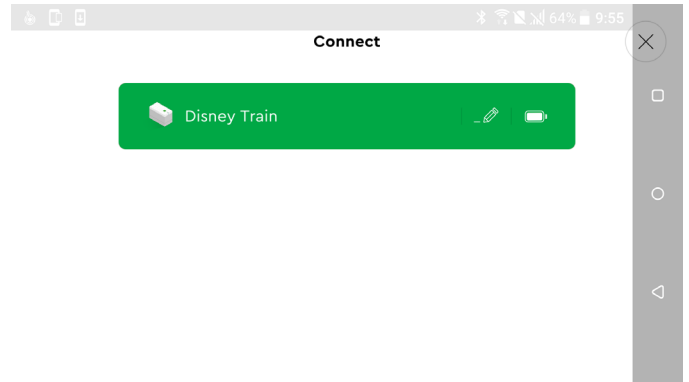
Once inside one of the skins, we have three buttons at the top, from left to right: Exit, Bluetooth Settings and Emergency Stop (Stop engine and sound). At the bottom left there are buttons for the sound: On/Off, Whistle and Bell. On the right we have the speed control, with 10 steps per direction. There are also sounds related to the acceleration or braking of the train.



If the Bluetooth Hub is not connected, we can press the Bluetooth configuration, where we will find a small guide on how to turn it on.



Once connected, a screen appears with the name of the Hub, which we can change, and the battery level.



This app is very simple, but enough to control the train. Apart from the design of the skins, the functionalities are the same in both cases. The set comes without a physical remote control, so I understand that the app will always have support and that in a few years there will be no problem to find it in the app stores and be able to use the train. It's also worth going to Shop at Home and buying a loose remote, to avoid any future scare.

Conclusions

The physical and digital worlds are becoming increasingly connected, and these are two examples of how LEGO® wants to adapt to the times, but without losing the essence of the brick as it did in the past. I don't think this is a threat to the purists.

The sets analysed are a fun constructive challenge. Very detailed and with many complements that make them unique. Without the use of apps, they are already worth it. I am concerned about the use of apps in the future. We know how the world of smartphones is and how they evolve and become obsolete at a worrying speed. I understand that LEGO® has taken that into account and that we won't suffer in the future, especially when it comes to bluetooth control.

We thank LEGO® SYSTEMS A/S for providing the sets for analysis. The opinions expressed in this article are solely mine. #

