

Building a brand

Writer/ animator John Derevlany opens up about his unique working relationship with Lego that spawned the TV series and mythology behind its hit multiplatform IP Legends of CHiMA

Who Ever since he can remember, John Derevlany (*Endangered Species*, *Wayside*) has been obsessed with Lego. He loved it as a kid and his passion for the iconic brick building toy continued into adulthood as the California-based animator's career took flight.

Derevlany spoke with *Kidscreen* about how he turned his obsession into an actual job with Lego—namely crafting the TV series and co-creating the mythology for hit boys property Lego Legends of CHiMA. He also talks about the process of developing stories for the immersive and original toy-based fantasy adventure brand and his long-term plans to enhance stories by incorporating 3D printing elements.



How did you seal the deal with Lego to become the co-creator of Legends of CHiMA?

I had heard they were looking to develop a new project, so I met with them at Kidscreen Summit in 2011. One of the things I showed them was a video I made of myself as an animated Lego minifigure who asks to work on their next big project. I was going to animate my whole resumé, but I thought they might think I was crazy. In the end, the position came down to me and someone else, and I think the video helped cinch it for me.

Legends of CHiMA season three just debuted. You've also co-created the mythology for the toys. Where do the ideas come from for such an expansive world?

A lot of the ideas come from kids in focus groups. Initially, Lego knew the concept had something to do with humanoid animals fighting each other. Kids said they loved the idea and liked a lion as the hero and a crocodile as the bad guy. From there it was like, go! The great thing about Lego is they brought me in really early in the development, so I got to work with the toy creators and the artists and illustrators. I was writing the characters, themes and mythology at the same time they were developing the toys. We worked hard to create a story and a narrative that worked with the toys. I had to create a world where they all make sense.

How did you develop story ideas for the videogames?

In addition to mapping out story arcs for the seasons, we also mapped out about 50 transmedia ideas that didn't fit directly into the series. The game for Nintendo 3DS and Sony PlayStation Vita came from one of those ideas, and the concept for the online game was based on a character that only shows up in one episode. The interesting thing about Chima is the entire narrative is almost designed like a game, partly so it works in these other formats.

Lego's unique sense of storytelling appeals to adults and kids. Do you approach Chima the same way?

I write kids shows as you would write an adult show. There are some really sophisticated things that I'm surprised ended up in the series, like discussions about spiritual beliefs and politics. I hope some of it sinks in with kids. My scripts are also more visual-based than

dialog-based. We try for as few lines of dialogue as possible, but sometimes I still end up with 150 to 200 lines in a half-hour episode.

What's next for you?

One of my long-term goals is to develop stories for shows that can be continued or enhanced by downloading a 3D-printable file. The infrastructure isn't there yet, but we're in this great period where a couple of people in a room can create a pretty high-quality animated show with their laptops. And in a few years, those same two people will be able to produce and distribute toys by selling downloads directly to kids. —Jeremy Dickson

Know your audience

By Jim Benton



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