



# LEGO: A Love Story

*Jonathan Bender*

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## LEGO: A Love Story Jonathan Bender

**An adult LEGO fan's dual quest: to build with bricks and build a family** There are 62 LEGO bricks for every person in the world, and at age 30, Jonathan Bender realized that he didn't have a single one of them. While reconsidering his childhood dream of becoming a master model builder for The LEGO Group, he discovers the men and women who are skewing the averages with collections of hundreds of thousands of LEGO bricks. What is it about the ubiquitous, brightly colored toys that makes them so hard for everyone to put down?

In search of answers and adventure, Jonathan Bender sets out to explore the quirky world of adult fans of LEGO (AFOLs) while becoming a builder himself. As he participates in challenges at fan conventions, searches for the largest private collection in the United States, and visits LEGO headquarters (where he was allowed into the top secret set vault), he finds his LEGO journey twinned with a second creative endeavor—to have a child. His two worlds intertwine as he awaits the outcome: Will he win a build competition or bring a new fan of LEGO into the world? Like every really good love story, this one has surprises—and a happy ending.

Explores the world of adult fans of LEGO, from rediscovering the childhood joys of building with LEGO to evaluating LEGO's place in culture and art

Takes an inside look at LEGO conventions, community taboos, and build challenges and goes behind-the-scenes at LEGO headquarters and LEGOLAND

Tells a warm and personal story about the attempt to build with LEGO and build a family

Whether you're an avid LEGO freak or a onetime fan who now shares LEGO bricks with your children, this book will appeal to the inner builder in you and reignite a love for all things LEGO.

## LEGO: A Love Story Details

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Author : Jonathan Bender

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# From Reader Review **LEGO: A Love Story** for online ebook

## **Brittany says**

Another audiobook finished courtesy of my recent slew of weekends driving to Boston- and a non-fiction piece, no less! I definitely found myself zoning out throughout various parts of the book, but this is overall an informative glimpse into both the history of Lego (never Legos, the reader/listener learns quickly) and modern Lego culture. The author's personal Lego history provides many poignant anecdotes that color the story in a most pleasing manner.

Bender also weaves in his personal trials such as his wife's repeated attempts to get pregnant, and it's very evident how Lego bricks are a stress reliever, therapy, and an escape for him, but also a social tool and a true love. His wife builds with him, and Bender draws parallels between their individual personalities and communication styles and their complementary building styles.

The author's occasionally self-deprecating tone and lack of self-confidence in his building abilities, especially creative free-building ones, definitely resonated with me on a personal level, and I found myself mentally encouraging him on several occasions.

Overall, a solid book, evoking lots of childhood memories and even awe at Lego's business model, which seems to basically boil down to brick perfection and compatibility. I'm motivated to go dig out the boxes in my parents' basement, and eternally grateful for a mother who kept such childhood treasures.

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## **Mirrani says**

Holy cow, was this a wondrous find for me! Talk about reliving your childhood dreams of building! The premise behind this book does for the reader exactly what it did for the author: it makes you want to pull out your old Lego sets and start creating again!

There is more to Lego than stacking bricks together and this book has it all. The author visits where Lego bricks are made, travels to conventions and the Toy and Plastic Brick Museum, and talks with other Adult Fans of Lego (AFOLs), all while documenting his own journey into the rediscovery of being an AFOL himself and taking his readers along for the ride. I always thought of myself as a casual builder who was somewhat interested in the toy, but this book had me turning pages faster than I have ever turned pages and left me wondering if I am really a serious fan at heart. I suddenly wanted to start building with any set I could get my hands on, so beware! Collecting Lego sets is an expensive passtime, as this book clearly states in the examples of AFOLs that the author visits with.

There is a secondary story wrapped up in all of this Lego learning, which is about the author himself. It is partly his rediscovery of building and his acceptance of allowing himself to become part of the Lego fandom and partly his desire to bring his renewed love of bricks to a future child. This format made reading even more enjoyable. There were times I actually felt as if I were experiencing the pressure of my first building contest at a convention or seeing a museum piece for the first time. The storytelling gave the fact finding aspect a purpose within the work of exploration and by the end I felt as if I had actually parted with a friend. You may not be an AFOL when you start reading this book, but you will be a lot closer to it once you finish.

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## Phillip says

Underrated, 4.25 stars, Goodreads reviewers are way too nitpicky!

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## Craig says

At the age of 40, I had never owned a Lego brick, so I am not the typical AFOL (adult fan of Lego) by any means. I have recently been drawn to the little things and have more than a passing interest in them (I believe "sudden crazy obsession" may have come from my wife's mouth once or twice. I'm intrigued by their history, their uses, building by set or by MOC ("my own creation"). And when I am obsessed with (errr... interested in...) something, I seek out books about them. I found myself starting with this one because the narrative also started with someone who was coming to Lego somewhat fresh. (Bender had Lego blocks as a child, but never as an adult...)

Anyone that knows me (or looks at my reading lists here on goodreads) knows that I am a person of extremes. I go "full literary" and act (read) like an adult, but I also fill much of my time with comics and novels about the things I loved as a kid. So, to say that I understand what an AFOL goes through coming back to Lego is, I think, a fair thing to say.

Maybe it has just been a long time since I have "let my geek flag wave," but the disdain and shame that Bender felt coming back to toys as an adult was interesting to me. I guess I've been lucky to have been surrounded in my life quite often with friends who were both savagely intelligent and had a toy room at their home (usually there weren't children in the equation).

That reluctance makes for an interesting journey, though, into the world of Lego.

This isn't a life changing book. If you're already a full-blown Lego fan, there are probably much better choices out there. But if you are just intrigued by the little bricks or if you know someone who is an AFOL and you would like to know more about how they may have gotten there or what they do, then this book is for you.

My current interest lies in the creative aspect of Lego, the way that collectors often build their own narrative as they incorporate sets into their collections. (I suppose, as a writer, that it makes sense that is what I would be drawn to about the toy...) This book doesn't really go into that at all. If anyone out there has a recommendation of books I should look into that dives into that realm more deeply, I'm definitely interested.

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## William says

LEGO: A Love Story is about more than just the enjoyment of LEGO bricks, sets, etc. It's also a brief history of The LEGO Group, the family that started and still runs the company, and about the growing love of the author and his wife as they were trying to start a family.

It is, however, firstly, about LEGO and specifically about Adult Fans of LEGO, AFOLs (pronounced a-fall or a-foal, probably based on the pronunciation of the person that introduced one to the term). Jonathan

Bender, the author, chronicles his journey of becoming aware of the attraction of LEGO bricks to himself as an adult, first quietly and then proudly. He also describes the process of including his wife in the journey and their mutual process of trying to begin a family, at first struggling with infertility issues and then (plot spoiler) their joy of expecting and welcoming their first child. (I'll let you make that discovery with them.) This is a very enjoyable book, perhaps more so because I am definitely an AFOL, but also because I am enjoying the process of watching my grandkids revel in LEGO themselves. Happy building!

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## **Karenzielinski says**

Lego, through the eyes of a thirty something rekindled fan, fits right in with our Lego summer!

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## **George says**

Writer Jonathan Bender's journey into the world of Adult Fans of LEGO (AFOLs) takes him across the U.S. to conventions, a museum, LEGOLand California, and the North American headquarters of LEGO itself, not to mention over to Denmark for a visit to the world headquarters where he's treated to a behind-the-scenes tour that apparently would cost us normal folks \$1700. As a disclaimer, I'll start by saying that I probably enjoyed this book because of the various connections I shared with the writer -- like him, I've just turned 30, am expecting a child, love LEGO, have a wife who won't play Monopoly with me any more, and grew up in Connecticut (in the town right next to the home of LEGO's North American headquarters, actually, and it's one of my schoolmates whose father worked at LEGO who taught me that "LEGOs" is not a word, which is a most unfortunate pet peeve to have, since so many people use it). I suspect that those connections allowed me to overlook the book's flaws -- it's overly repetitive, for example, both in themes and in its habit of repeating definitions and explanations. I would have liked more pictures, as his descriptions sometimes just didn't feel adequate. The exploration of the AFOL subculture is fascinating, although I felt the book could have been better structured and he could have dug deeper a few times. All in all, it was a decent book, but one which will only appeal to a limited number of people, and, unfortunately, I don't think I know any of those people.

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## **Nathaniel says**

I really enjoyed this book. The author rediscovers his love of building and becomes a full-fledged, card-carrying adult fan of Lego (AFOL). But I think that's because, like the author, I am a former Lego junkie who makes lame Star Wars jokes, went to law school, takes pictures with my wife by smushing our heads together and holding the camera at arm's length, and has a wife who refuses to play Monopoly with me because she accuses me of conspiring with her siblings (I maintain that I'm just good at Monopoly). I think the only annoying part was that our building abilities were so different. For example, the whole first part of the book the author complained about getting bricks apart. He first used his teeth, then grew out his fingernails. I sat thinking that he could just use the Lego brick unsticker (it looks like a bottle opener). By about page 100, he learned of such an apparatus. I'm not sure which of us is more pathetic based on that example, now that I think about it. Either way, this book made me want to convince my parents not to divide the two twenty gallon tubs of Lego bricks in their basement between me and my brother. I need to come up with a plan (other than having children) that gets me 100% of the bricks now. Sadly, that wasn't explained in the book. I'm going to need to start thinking. Or use a Jedi mind trick...

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## Justin says

In *Lego: A Love Story*, Jonathan Bender takes an insider's look at the phenomenon of adult fans of Lego (AFOL). Part journal, part investigative reporting, *Lego: A Love Story* follows Bender's return to the iconic building bricks so many of us enjoyed as children while at the same time offering a history of the product and company as well as a fascinating look at what goes on in this very dedicated community. From Lego conventions to internet groups to sites that meticulously catalog, value and resell individual bricks (never Legos, mind you), Bender covers every aspect of this unique community, and does so in a completely accessible manner.

I was surprised at how much I enjoyed this book. I played with Lego as a kid, but can't see myself in the AFOL role. I have my own obsessions and geek credentials though, so I can relate to Bender's passion for his hobby. His enthusiasm, not to mention some wry and self-deprecating comments, add a personal touch that makes *Lego: A Love Story* more enjoyable than an outsider's dispassionate take on the phenomenon. I think he dropped the ball a bit with the pregnancy subtext, waiting so long to bring up the infertility aspect that it seemed awkward. Still, as a relatively new father I can certainly relate to the desire to have a shared interest with your child.

*Lego: A Love Story* is an enjoyable and fascinating book that should appeal to anyone who has ever built a Lego set at some point, and/or anyone who has a passion for a particular hobby. There are some universal themes that you'll recognize here, and you'll definitely learn more than you thought possible about Lego.

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## Quinn Rollins says

My librarian sister, always looking to reinforce my geeky tendencies, recommended this book to me as it came across her desk. The e-mail said simply, "you might want to check this out." The book it linked to was Jonathan Bender's 2010 memoir, *LEGO: A Love Story*. Telling the story of an Adult Fan of LEGO who emerges from his Dark Ages to reembrace the plastic bricks he once loved, the 270 page hardcover is better-written and more entertaining than I thought it would be. It's also a book that I'm kicking myself for not writing myself.

Jonathan Bender is a journalist who played with LEGO as a kid, and then, like most of us, packed them all up when he reached his teenage years and pretty much forgot about them. He got married, and then, around the time he turned thirty, was researching Adult Fans of LEGO for an assignment, and got sucked back in. It started innocently enough, with Bender pulling his old bricks out of storage and picking up his brother-in-law's besides. He figured if he was going to be writing about these people, he needed a common language, and started doing more research online, and gaining more practical experience building himself. In the process of learning more about AFOLs, Bender travels to LEGO conventions and displays, and even makes a pilgrimage to Billund, Denmark, home of the bricks. HE scores interviews with LEGO Master Builders, rabid fans, and model designers, and discovers that many of them are a lot like him. And me.

Bender's interviews and statistics accrue into a large mass of information both trivial and fascinating about LEGO. The history of the company, starting with small wooden toys and growing to become one of the longest-lasting and largest toy companies in the world. Some of the facts I loved were the ratio of female to

male minifigs (1: 18), and the number of LEGO piece per human on the planet (62). I enjoyed seeing the author's growth as a LEGO builder—he takes pictures of his creations as he progresses from building a “camel” over and over to cars to airplanes to a zombie-hunting school bus. Playing with LEGO isn't something that you're just born with, and unlike riding a bicycle, there's a creativity that comes with building that can indeed be forgotten.

Alongside the LEGO story is a much more intimate story, the story of Jonathan and his wife, Kate. They're having difficulty conceiving, and having children's toys in a childless house is like a cruel reminder of what they can't have. Having many friends who have been in the same situation, I winced at some of the struggles Jonathan and Kate went through, and admired his skill at including such a personal story in a book about toys. I was also a little jealous at how he's able to convert Kate into being an Adult Fan of LEGO—a builder—herself. Very sneaky, and well done, sir.

There's a lot of humor and some self-deprecation in this book, but Bender never takes the easy shot of making fun of these grownups who are obsessed with toys. He's able to delineate the difference between overgrown children or childishness and these people who have found a fountain of creativity in these toys. Just because they're playing with toys doesn't mean they're not adults, and Bender even finds the seedier side of the Adult Fans of LEGO with a chapter that explores some rather disturbing builds.

Bender does a good job of explaining the sometimes thick jargon that comes with LEGO, but it could still come across as fannish and obsessive for non-fans. The humanity that he brings to the book elevates it above just being a book about LEGO, and would probably keep non-fans reading.

If you used to love LEGO, but you've grown out of it, this book is one that will show you what else is happening out there. If you're an Adult Fan of LEGO yourself, you'll kick yourself for not writing this. I enjoyed every page of this book. It's well-written, entertaining and informative, and more moving than I expected. You should read LEGO: A Love Story.

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### **aaron says**

this is a memoir from the journalist jonathan bender which chronicles his life through about a year of his rediscovery of lego building. on his journey he discovers the life of afols (adult fans of lego), mocs (my own creations), and other acronyms pertinent to the wonderful building apparatus. while he is making this journey of self-discovery and meeting people in the world of lego he is also forced to go through issues at home as he and his wife kate have been trying to get pregnant. what follows is a journey and a love story that like all good love stories has a wonderful ending.

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### **L.J. Garcia says**

"Seeing the tower after all those years made me realize that still do love LEGO." ~ Jonathan Bender

I have never found a book that truly describes my inner kid. Jonathan Bender truly has a way of weaving a story together that brings back so many memories. All builders who continue to, or used to build with LEGO will find this book very easy to relate to. In a way, Bender's writing style takes the form of a diary where the reader accompanies him on a journey from his former self as a kid, to the LEGO building adult fanatic he



became. The plot: become a LEGO builder once again. The story travels across a plain of humorous, serious, informative, and inspiring events that Bender experienced as he sought after the legendary relic that amplifies the imagination.

By the time I turned 13, I had lost all interest in LEGO and had my LEGO bins moved to the garage for storage. It was a period of time that Bender describes as the Dark Ages. The term "Dark Ages" references the period of time where most kids stop playing with LEGO... not to be confused with the Anglo-Saxon invasion of England, or the Battle of Hastings. Fortunately, I came out of the Dark Ages and now build frequently. Jonathan Bender's story connected with me in a way that I will always remember. As a 17 year old boy, I will forever use the word "play" instead of "hang" as a result. I would most certainly recommend this book to any human ever that has built with LEGO. A five-star book indeed.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have a new LEGO Star Wars Imperial Shuttle that I must build.

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### **Will says**

A neat little book that awakened an infectious passion for my long lost LEGO days. Although the writing was a little clunky at times, I would still call it an unlikely page turner even if I did catch myself rolling my eyes every second chapter or so.

I couldn't help but notice the overwhelming similarity in writing style and biographical asides between Jonathan Bender and A J Jacobs of The Know It All fame.

Recommended IF YOU ALREADY LOVED LEGO.

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### **Robin says**

Where is the love? Bender does not for one minute convince this reader that he enjoys Lego.

After p. 220, he starts to have fun. It's not enough.

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### **Gphalen says**

A really great read the world needs more play time to ease itself from all the tensions in it.

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