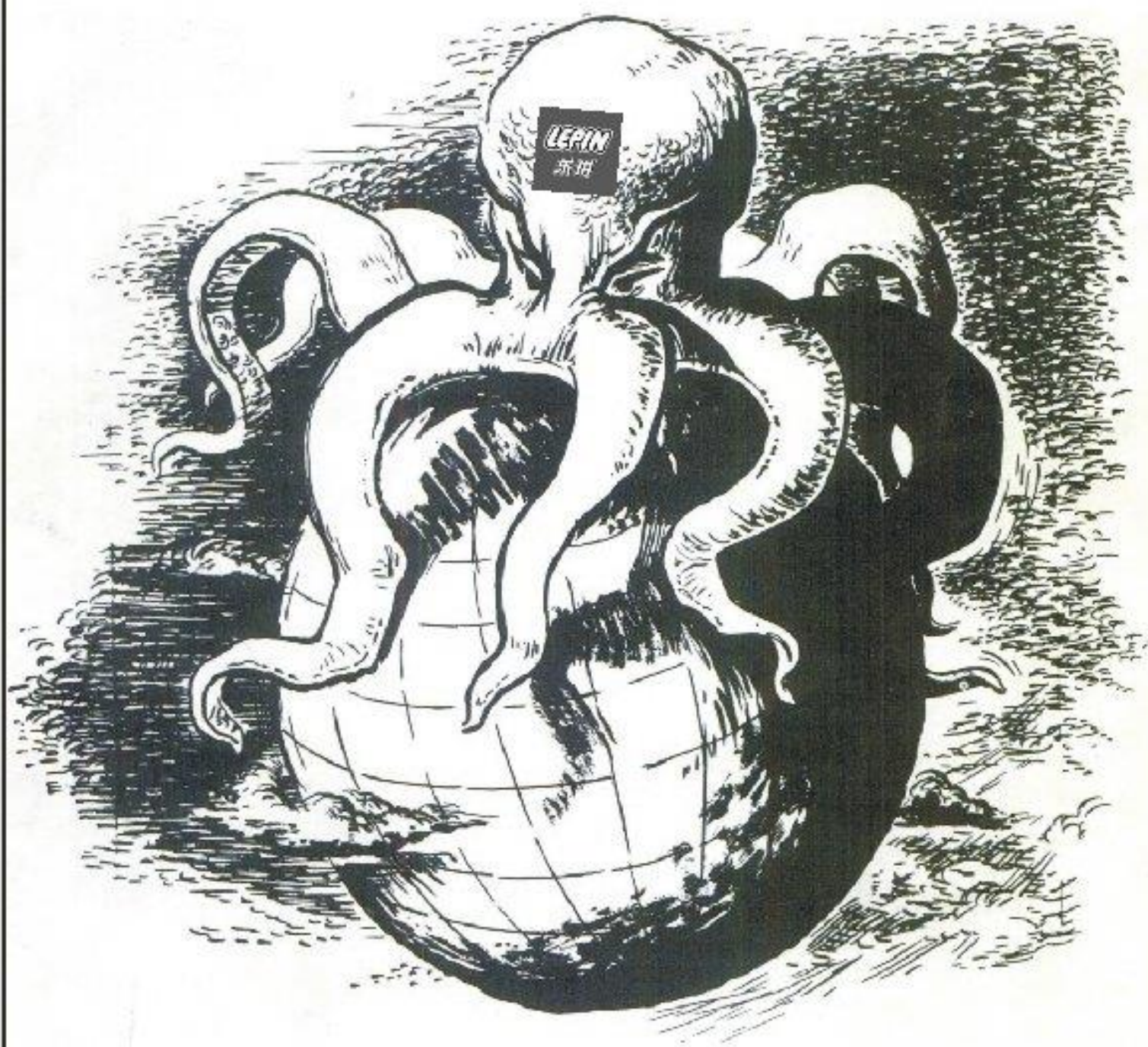


2017

KNOW YOUR COMMUNIST LEGO

COMMUNIST LEGO:
Its Plastic, Aims, and Methods



with apologies to 'International Communism' from 1955



Lepin – Maersk Cargo Train 21006 (Summer 2017)



Lepin. Yeah.

I promise not to be biased. Honest.

Communist Lego had stalled. Over the past year I really couldn't be arsed to review any more clone kits. Almost all had been shite anyway and the world is full of far more interesting stuff to do.

But... then came Lepin. With its evil tentacles grasping the Earth ever tighter, the mighty clone Cthulhu had to be confronted. But what could I add to the huge number of comprehensive internet reviews? UK insight and wit? Ha. Some hope. Then the nurse suggested a write-up would help focus on the annual personality review and if they saw a positive trend I might be allowed metal cutlery again.

No Chinese clone brick company has annoyed AFOLs and Lego itself as much as Lepin. In the past 2 years it has unashamedly stolen the exact design, photographs and instructions of a huge amount of Lego sets. This is sadly nothing new amongst the Chenghai clone brick company community. What **is** new is the reproduction of many large collector kits aimed at adults.

Previous Bare Faced Cheek (BFC) award winners such as BELA and LELE focus on the younger market and have mediocre quality bricks and small part counts. Lepin's professional-looking collector set clones are available for export for about 30-70% of the new Lego price, with the older 'retired' collector sets only about 10% of the second-hand cost. Lepin also not only has a mightily suspiciously fast turnaround on new kits, but has even started to produce stuff based on MOCs ripped off the Lego Ideas website and the internet in general. This is awesomely dishonourable.

But... things get even more murky when it is rumoured that Meizi Model, who own the newly-created MOC-producing Xingbao that pays for new designs, also own... Lepin. Lepin's moulds could have had the name written on the studs, just like Star Diamond, but this isn't the case. Is this laziness, cost cutting, or insurance against a sudden potential change of name in the future caused by successful legal action?

It is obvious that Lepin (or its parent company) has a large high quality manufacturing plant with a huge number of moulds mimicking almost every Lego part and the ability to make them in many colours. This presumably required considerable investment compared to the older more rubbish cloner companies who produce only a small number of shite parts for their own woeful designs. It can be assumed that Lepin has to generate considerable profit to pay back any loans, or whatever "Communism" calls them in the Middle Kingdom. It is also obvious that the team behind Lepin are consummate businessmen, looking at the success of BELA and LELE freeloading off Lego's design skills with near immunity, but building on this with many more targeted sets and reasonable quality parts.

Pure capitalism at its worst, hiding behind an unresponsive legal system?

I've said it before. Communism my arse.

Lepin have not hired any competent set designers or even any competent translators, but appear to employ a group of ex-Unit 61398 veterans¹ to hack all those .ldr files. Judging by an utter lack of any morality, it may also fund a small army of colour-coordinated jump-suited mercenaries to defend its hollowed-out volcano headquarters, a maintenance squad for the escape monorail system, and some waterproof lasers with Selachimorpha attachment belts². So, who's paying for this?

Western collectors.

Lepin is making the whole world guilty, and not everyone cares.

When I (very occasionally) buy a Lego collectors kit, it isn't just a set to be made. It's appreciating the whole design, layout, presentation, and effort gone into making something extraordinary. I want to feel special³. The Lepin Building Experience (LBE) is thus scored on overall enjoyment against a background of recent Lego purchases, an unwillingness to waste precious time, and, to be honest, a lack-lustre morality exercise hijacked by a vaguely hypocritical knee-jerk angry reaction to current worldwide trends towards stupidity, complacency, theft, lying, and random angriness. Because the world needs yet another witless ill-informed moronic rant on the internet.

Judgement may thus be fair. Or overly harsh. Inspiration is from those angry, angry Best Lock firemen. Blame them for teaching me to be cross.

Enjoy.

¹ Or one teenager

² Or maybe not. There might be flying monkeys

³ No sniggering at the back, please

To test out Lepin took some soul searching, as (1) any purchase would feed the vast Chinese anti-Lego war machine, (2) I would go to hell⁴, and (3) the Better Half disapproved. Eventually it was decided to get the 21006 Maersk train set, as the Lego 10219 had been out of production for a few years, was ridiculously inflated in price on eBay⁵, and the rarity of the Maersk colour made the purchase of second-hand parts way out of reach of anyone in Brexit Britain without a knighthood⁶. Existing internet reviews of 21006 had suggested some flaws in the kit, so the likelihood of finding something to angrily write about was raised. OK, it wasn't a collector's kit as such, but it was a 'treat'. The set was duly ordered without box from Hong Kong, and arrived within a week rammed into a small cardboard box marked as \$15 mobile phone spares. The Better Half tutted strongly, so I stared at my feet, mumbled something about journalism, and took it into the spare room to hide.



Lego 10219 and Lepin 21006. Lepin ripped off the photo and rewrote the text on the LHS. Train numbers are put on badly with image software.

The LBE began by finding the set packaged in 34 sealed plastic bags, arranged mostly by part type and colour and not in any assembly order. Although an improvement over most other Chinese cloners (who generally just dump everything into one bag), this gave the daunting task of emptying every single one of the 1234 parts out before starting assembly. Now, I know many, many people relish having thousands of pieces spread out all over the floor and joyfully rise to the challenge of spotting a black 1x2 tile hidden under a pile of road plates. However, as I'm now on a time-limited downhill slide to oblivion I confess I'm not really one of them. To many readers this might seem an overly harsh criticism on the dishonourable lowlife Lepin scumbags, but I promise I'm not being prejudiced⁷. And I wanted the kit to make me feel special. It didn't. Anyway, after careful consideration looking around the cramped spare room, each Lepin bag was cut open and the contents decanted into a grip-seal bag to make the build less messy and vaguely tolerable. This was both annoying and time consuming.



This is what you get in 21006. Stuff on the left repackaged by bored guy in Hong Kong before ramming everything into a box to send to Blighty.

⁴ Other sites of eternal damnation are also available

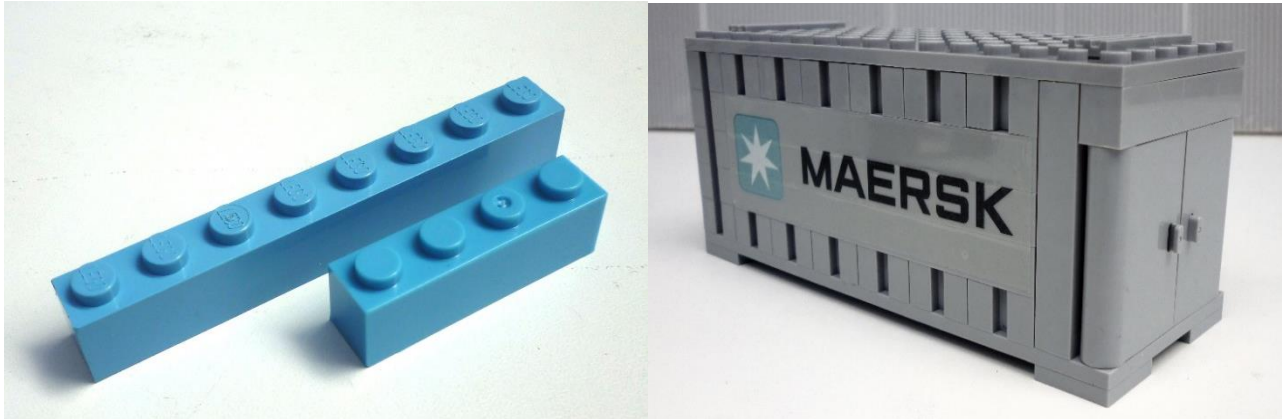
⁵ Other sites of eternal damnation internet selling sites are also available

⁶ I live in hope

⁷ Definitely fake news

The supplied instructions were directly copied from the Lego set and looked very good, although Lepin had stuck the photocopier on 50% so there was only one massive manual instead of two which did at least save on forests and about 1kg in weight. Because of the random Lepin bag contents, the 'empty bag 1' illustration at the start of the instructions was completely pointless and just served to remind me of how much easier and quicker the friendly Lego kit would be to assemble. The sands of time were running lower and lower, and Lepin was speeding it up. Even before making anything, this LBE was not endearing itself.

As expected from numerous reviews, Lepin bricks and plates were found to be of relatively good quality, reasonably comparable to the genuine article and free of mysterious dust or brown organic material so prevalent in many other Chinese cloners' output. Colours were very well matched, with the Maersk blue (for example) marginally denser than Lego. I liked this. The Lepin studs did not have any writing on them, and almost every piece had at least one very obvious moulding hollow on the studs. This immediately betrayed the hooky origin of the set, brightly radiating the associated despicableness and that of the owner to the world. I did not like this.



Lego left and Lepin right. Well, wrong, really. Finished container isn't too bad – probably the only part of the kit that didn't cause me anger.

The minifigs were direct copies of the trademarked Lego figures, and supplied unmade. This was unprofessional and really annoying. The unwelcome assembly did not require immensely strong hands. This was OK. Sort of. There was a correct number of limbs but an incorrect number of left and right. This was hilariously crap. A lot. The supervisor guy drew the short straw as he didn't have to sit down, so he got two right legs. Also supplied with the minifigs was a weapons sprue with the hose nozzle used for the truck door mirror, and, bizarrely, three Star Wars guns. Now, here in the UK railway freight journeys tend to be relatively incident free⁸. Roving bands of highwaymen were mostly eradicated by the 1840s, and ignoring the occasional Great Train Robbery the only real danger today comes from increasingly desperate Southern Rail commuters wondering if to commandeer trucks to attempt escape from Brighton. Presumably a run from Yi Wu is far more eventful, with the constant threat of ambush by Mongol Hordes or Tusken Raiders⁹. The lorry driver got the blaster, the train driver got the rifle for stowage in his cabin, and the supervisor with two right legs and a beard got the 5-foot long laser cannon. He looked happy enough. I wasn't.

I skipped the locomotive and decided to build the two container wagons first to use up some pieces. I elected to begin by assembling each of the wheel sets from the supplied chassis, wheels and metal axle as it should be easy and make me less cross. Uh huh. Big mistake. The fit between the axle and wheel was astoundingly tight, requiring frightening force to push into place. Eventually all the wheel sets were successfully assembled, and in the end a hammer was not required, but it was close. This put me in a foul mood. The rest of the wagons were built with much scrabbling between the 34 bags and mercifully finished without any drama. The piece fit was marginally tighter than Lego and, apart from the studs, almost identical in look, shape, colour and feel. The containers were great, and actually a pleasure to build, except for those tell-tale dimpled studs littering their tops like popped boil scars.



Whole kit with truck, train, containers, mostly correct minifigs, and no morality whatsoever. Tooled up for the Fast and Furious journey ahead.

However, the coupling magnets were utter pants, being so weak as to be unusable. Quite how a company from the world's biggest producer of rare earth metals could have stooped to put such crap magnets in a 'premium' set was unclear, but was probably not to do with any safety regulations and more like some combination of cost cutting, piss-poor testing, and perhaps just pure spite. Because of Lepin's miserably shite quality, there followed a fuming trip to my Lego train spares box to get some precious genuine buffers that actually worked. Lepin were not making me feel special. They were punching me in the face and telling me I was poor.

After some calming whale song and slow breathing exercises, the locomotive was attempted. This would have been a pleasure to build if there weren't still 34 random bags to root around in like one of those cerebrally-draining tasks from the Krypton Factor. Perhaps Lepin is filtering out candidates for state-sponsored codebreaking houses to destroy the decadent Americans and their vassal forces. From my performance they are certainly not going

⁸ And some of this freight is for export. Please buy it. I'm sure we can come to some sort of trade deal

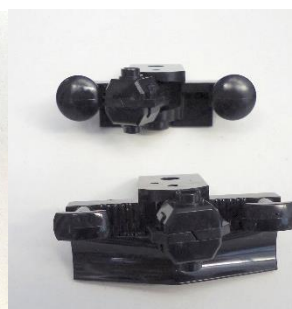
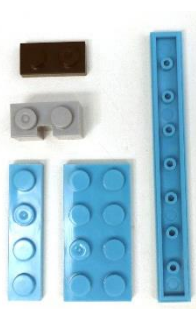
⁹ Even ignoring the prequels

to hire me. Still, apart from many, many wasted minutes trying to find pieces, the GP-38 went together OK enough. Patience-testing niggles included: the long hoses used for handrails having to be cut to size (not too hard to do); the windows having a strange metallic blue tint to them (permanently annoying); and the side engine covers being a little loose (perhaps true in the original set too).



Train quite good except for wheels, axles, magnets, hoses and stickers. Disc stickers OK. Engine is well reproduced but side panels not very stable.

The stickers supplied inside the booklet were luckily bend-free. These were of good enough quality to allow repositioning, but were a dire colour match with the Maersk blue colour. The side numbers for the train were also fairly badly made (Lepin had to change them for its own kit number) and I decided not to use them as they just looked rubbish. The top discs were a very tight fit, but at least their stickers didn't look crap. Also on the positive side printed parts, such as the train control tile, appeared to be excellent quality. However, the Demon of Shite was stalking this build, and these little niggles were not satisfying its insatiable hunger. Oh no...



Printed tiles look excellent. Lepin stud dimples look shite. Magnets completely useless. Considerable spare parts to contaminate any Lego box.

The big problem with the locomotive centred on the wheel bogies. These had three issues: the wheel fit on the technic axles was so stupidly loose they would fall off almost with gravity alone; the clearances between the axles and the side bogie covers were not large enough so they rubbed together and would not run freely; and the milky-white grip bands for the wheels were too large making for poor running even if the wheels went round (which they didn't). I can't speak directly for citizens of East Asia and the US, but us Europeans usually consider vaguely moving wheels important for a train set, and this pants locomotive didn't have them. Special? No. Rubbish? Yes.

Experimentation showed that swapping the technic axles over for the marginally larger genuine Lego versions almost solved the wheel looseness problem, but these then rubbed inside the Lepin holes, so the technic bricks were swapped over for Lego too. The mis-moulded Lepin side wheel covers were brutally attacked with a modelling file until they complied with freeing the technic axles and allowing the train to actually move. Just to rub it in, the Lepin wheels eventually had to be ditched for real Lego as no suitable spare wheel bands could be found. Bloody great.

Of course, the front and rear couplings also had to be changed for Lego as the Lepin versions had shite magnets with almost no attraction. All these replacements required yet more irate searches in my rapidly diminishing Lego railway spare parts box to produce anywhere near a working train set. I was now angrier than a Best Lock fireman, and that's angrily angry.



The lorry with white container. Rear view mirrors fall off if a butterfly flaps its wings in Brazil. Apart from this, not a bad effort. From pilferers.

The lorry was the last item left. A relaxing cup of tea and many chocolate hobnobs were consumed to stop my angry right eye angrily twitching. This was not helped by the finished flawed evil chimera locomotive staring back at me across the spare room with its boil scars mentally popping inside my head. As there were not many parts remaining in the 34 bags the lorry was completed without too much wasted searching time or construction trouble. However, the grab was very poor on the door mirrors, with the left one just falling off if played with even gently. Another cup of tea and the rest of the hobnobs could now not stop the twitching right eye. All the angry, angry Best Lock firemen hid, too scared to come out.

It was noted there was a considerable heap of spare parts at the end of the build, which was surprising considering past experience with almost every other Chinese cloner. It was not clear whether these spares were an insurance against bad packaging counts or included for more LBE. If Lepin had spent the money on better quality wheels, magnets, technic part fit, windows, minifig left legs, and stickers it might have customers willing to bother. I wasn't one of them. Oddly, one of the 34 bags supplied (number 28) was found to be essentially a spares bag anyway, seemingly linked to the Lego set spares count.

So there it was, a completed Lepin Maersk train set.

Was it a pleasurable build experience?

No.

Was it good value?

Only from the rarity of the Maersk Blue bits. The 6 real Lego buffers, 8 wheels, and some technic bits would have been an unpleasant extra cost if they hadn't been in the spare parts box. And having to use these really pissed me off.

Was I happy with the final result?

Sort of, but only because I had put real Lego in it to make it work properly as a train set. Yes, I got some affordable Maersk blue bricks, but the tell-tale stud dimple boil scars will always remind me of what I did last summer.

21006 has infiltrated my very soul, terrifying oaths whispering in my head day and night and no amount of lead or hair shirts can stop it. Morals aside, the thought of having another batch of 3000 unsorted hooky pieces all over the floor is more of a nightmare than a dream¹⁰. I'm not going to pay for another LBE because I didn't enjoy this one. OK, I may now have a competent train set, but the journey to get there was just so bloody annoying.

SUMMARY¹¹

Lepin bring shame on China, and shame on consumers. Lepin has condemned the entire human race to unending damnation. Or something like that.

SUMMARY #2¹²

Reasonably competent flagrant illegal copy, except for crap wheels, useless magnets, odd tinted windows, mismatched sticker colours, and not enough left legs. Company is so inept it fails to realise that working wheels and magnets are fundamental for a train kit that does not piss people off. 21006 had a genuinely real chance of being a cheap (albeit dubiously legal) reasonably good quality alternative to an investor-led outrageously price-inflated retired kit. It missed. How rubbish is that?

Would not buy again.

And stealing is wrong.

Scores	Maersk Train
Quality*	85
Value	80
Fit*	90
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	90
Design	100
Instructions	100
Total	-90*

* all marks deducted twice for being lazy IPR thieves who bring shame on their nation. That's **you**, China.

¹⁰ OK, this is still a fairly poor excuse as many people like scrabbling through Lego pieces, but, hey, this isn't Lego. It's evilness in a plastic shell.

¹¹ Maybe a bit prejudiced

¹² Less prejudiced but far more boring