

Warner builds pic with Lego

Studio to bring playthings to the bigscreen

By MARC GRASER

Movies based on toys couldn't be hotter in Hollywood, with nearly every studio adapting playthings for the bigscreen.

Now count Warner Bros. as one of those studios: WB is toying with plans to develop a movie around Lego and its popular building blocks.

Scribes Dan and Kevin Hageman are penning the script for the family comedy that will mix live action and animation. Warners is keeping the plot tightly under wraps, but it's described as an action adventure set in a Lego world.

Dan Lin, who is shepherding Warner Bros.' "Sherlock Holmes" and exec produced the studio's upcoming family film "Shorts," will produce the movie through his Lin Pictures, which is also behind a "Tom and Jerry" film that will put the feuding animated characters in a live-action setting. The shingle's Stephen Gilchrist serves as co-producer.

Roy Lee will produce through his Vertigo banner, while Jill Wilfert, VP of licensing and entertainment at Lego, will oversee the pic for the toymaker.

Directors and producers in town have attempted to make a Lego movie for years, approaching the Danish toymaker with various ideas, but Lego turned down most of them because it's highly protective of its brand.

To date, Lego has made only a series of direct-to-DVD animated movies based on its Bionicle line.

But the company sparked to Lin and the Hageman brothers' embrace of core values Lego wanted to include in a film, especially "a fun factor, creativity and that imagination has no boundaries," Lin told *Daily Variety*. The film's been in development for more than a year, with the scribes and producers making several trips to Denmark to work with Lego's execs on the concept.



Also helping is the long relationship Warner Bros. has had with Lego over the years. Warner has licensed characters like Batman, Harry Potter and Speed Racer to Lego to integrate into playsets, and through TT Games, the videogame publisher that WB bought in 2007, has produced the popular "Lego Star Wars," "Lego Indiana Jones," "Lego Batman" and, soon, "Lego Rock Band" titles.

The Hageman brothers recently wrote the CG feature "Hotel Transylvania" for Sony Pictures Animation. They also adapted fantasy book "The Lies of Locke Lamora" for Warner Bros. They first landed the attention of Hollywood in 2003, when Steven Spielberg tapped the scribes to pen the drama "Charlie Dills" based on his own idea. Decision to move forward with a Lego movie follows the recent success of "G.I. Joe," which opened in the top spot at the box office over the weekend for Paramount, which also scored this summer with "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen." Both pics are based on Hasbro action figures.

Hasbro and rival Mattel have recently brokered a slew of deals around town to create film adaptations of their most popular toys, including Monopoly, Candyland, Battleship, Stretch Armstrong, View-Master, Max Steel, Hot Wheels and He-Man and the Masters of the Universe.

For the toymakers, a movie is seen as a way to raise awareness around a brand and sell more playthings. For the studios, a toy-based film only makes it easier to promote a pic to audiences given the built-in recognition factor.