

Toys put a twinkle in everyone's eyes!

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Kids today don't realize just how wonderful they have it.

Today's modern marvels of science and imagination appeal to all ages. Being a Baby Boomer, I now have a few bucks to explore some hobbies and collect things that simply didn't exist 40 years ago.

As a young boy, my choices were limited to Hot Wheels, more Hot Wheels, Lego and the odd model kit. There were no DVDs, video games or radio-controlled anything to keep us occupied.

I have never been more excited than I am today, and on a regular basis I'm that giggly kid on Christmas morning. My eyes widen and my heart races every time I come across a new toy or collectible. Like a teen hopped up on candy, my hands shake as I "complete my purchase" on eBay or PayPal. Mind you, this happens on a regular basis, especially when those "new releases" hit the Internet.

I remember as a kid saying to myself that if I only had tiny, pre-painted, detailed planes, space ships or creatures, I'd be in toy Heaven. Well, I first discovered Japanese Gashapon (candy toys) about 15 years ago and managed to amass a collection of roughly 300 of these miniature planes, tanks and battleships. I once had the patience to assemble model kits, but no longer. These ready-made models can be enjoyed right out of the box!

Some nights, my wife glances over at me on the sofa and sees me conducting mock space battles, or piloting fictitious craft through the cosmos that surround me and my faux leather surroundings.

I just smile back.

Right about now, most of us are in the Christmas shopping mode.

I have two teenagers (my wife says I make 3) so they're not really into toys per se. My 11-year-old is in between toys, watching [YouTube videos](#), gadgets and makeup. My oldest watches classic movies and collects sentimental knick-knacks.

They all humor me in my boyish passions.

And thanks to toymakers such as Hasbro, this Christmas will be a massively enjoyable one, indeed. It seems comic book heroes and Star Wars dominates the market once again.

From Disney themed products and My Little Pony, to Sesame Street, games, Trolls and FurReal Friends, there is really something for every girl and boy on your list.

As I mentioned, toys today are at such a high level they're guaranteed to please. And they run the gamut from educational and interactive to totally imaginative. Board games are the same too, and some role-playing tabletop games, like Dungeons and Dragons (<https://dnd.wizards.com/products/tabletop-games/rpg-products>) have been around since the 70s and are still going strong today.

In my case, I came across a couple of amazing collectibles from Hasbro. They're not really toys at all, but movie prop quality items that can be displayed or gently "played with."

The Star Wars The Black Series Kylo Ren Force FX Deluxe Lightsaber is simply amazing. Any Star Wars fan would be over the moon with this gizmo. It's heavy, detailed, finely crafted and the light and sound effects are just brilliant. You actually feel like a Star Wars character wielding this thing around in the dimly lit living room (yes I admit it). While it retails for more than \$200, it's

well worth it for something of this caliber.

Hasbro also created the iconic Marvel Legends Captain America full-size shield. The plastic version is pretty neat and this thing is so legendary it deserves to be prominently displayed in a man cave or office wall. Of course, if you want to play with it, that's your choice ??it seems quite durable. This is also what I'd call a collectible and it's dubbed a "premium role play item."

Hasbro does make a mind-blowing 75th anniversary shield in metal, but this bad boy is quite rare and costly. Still, for the affluent fan, I'd highly recommend it.

Advanced technology has made radio controlled toys smaller and more responsive. Again, The Force Awakens r/c BB-8 is another fantastic item. It rolls in any direction; is ideal for any age and is also "movie-accurate."

Nerf remains ever-popular and they're coming up with some great weapons for boys and girls alike. It's picked as among the top 10 toys this year. Who doesn't like beaming their sibling with a soft dart? Let them loose in the basement or garage and they'll have fun for hours in mock search-and-destroy missions.

The Rival Khaos MXVI-4000 Blaster is one of the newest entries, and it's a beast that's sure to please. It's motorized and can fire 40 soft rounds. I can see this appealing to kids, teens and adults.

BMO Senior Toys and Leisure Analyst Gerrick Johnson expects toys sales to experience a fifth consecutive year of growth in 2016, marking the third consecutive year of above-average growth.

"The trend of families coming together is contributing to a strong holiday season for toy sales, especially in board games and construction," said Johnson. "As better entertainment-related toys are being created, we are seeing the fifth consecutive year of toy sales growth and the third consecutive year of above average growth."

A fairly robust economy here, and anticipated growth in the U.S. seem to be painting a rosy picture.

The toy industry is benefitting from strong innovation, and better entertainment-related toys. The trend is also towards family-based activities.

Running around with a Star Wars lightsaber may not be considered a family activity, but a happy daddy makes for some wide-eyed holiday cheer!

For parents, I?urge them to explore the toy offerings this year, which encourage your kids to engage in stress-relieving play time.

While you're at it, pick up something for yourself and re-awaken that inner child.

In today's times, nothing is more important than playing with your kids, or acting like a kid! Enjoy these times!