Gifts for geeks

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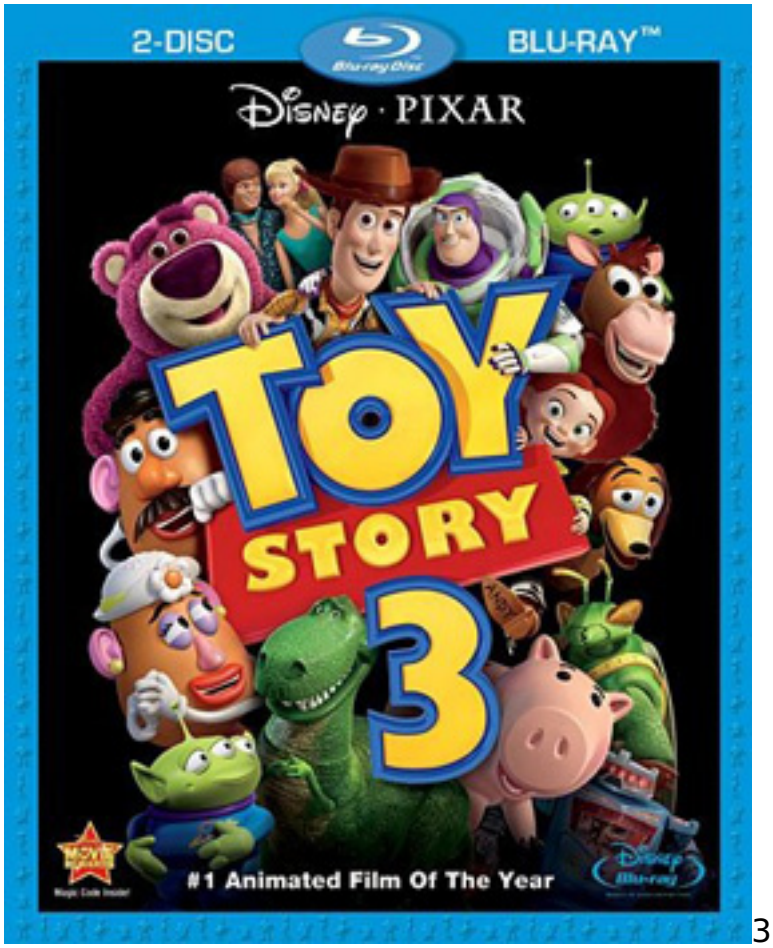
It's that time of year again! No, I'm not talking about Jolly 'Ol Saint Nick, mistletoe, or trees with stars on top. 'Tis the season for giving, but also for spoiling ourselves with the latest gadgets, gizmos, toys, and entertainment. We're never too old to experience the joy of opening presents! And geeks can be notoriously difficult to shop for. If you have a geek on your shopping list, read on. And if you're a member of the fold, read on anyway. You may have missed something!

1) A trip to the 2011 Consumer Electronics Show **[1]**: Every geek needs to experience CES at least once in his/her lifetime—three days of spiffy new TVs, emerging consumer technologies, and booth babes. Life doesn't get much better! Most of the major consumer announcements originate at CES—the VCR (1970), the Camcorder (1981), the CD player (1981), Commodore 64 (1982), the Nintendo Entertainment System (1985), Tetris (1988), the DVD (1996), HDTV (1998), DVR (1999), X-Box (2001), and Blu-ray (2004), to name a few. Microsoft usually keynotes, and all the big players are there. Last year, 3D everything was the name of the game—3D TVs, 3D projectors, 3D gaming peripherals, 3D movies, 3D laptops. This year, expect to see new developments in motion sense technology, more 3D, and possibly an announcement from Verizon about a certain Apple smartphone.

Make sure to check out ECN's coverage of the 2011 Consumer Electronics Show here [2].

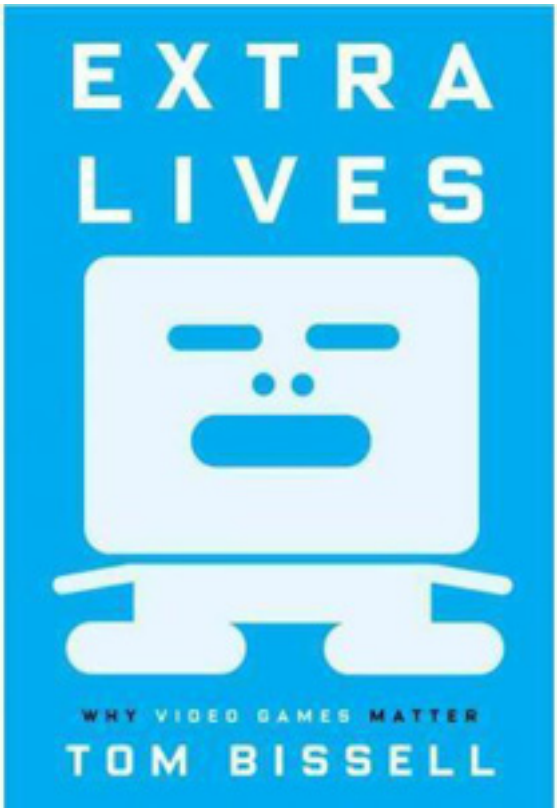
2) Microsoft Kinect **[3]**: In 2006, Nintendo released the Wii [4], introducing motion sense tech to the mass market (and reaping obscene profits). Microsoft's Kinect (formerly known as Project Natal) is the next evolution in this burgeoning technology. Unlike the Wii, Kinect requires no controllers—as the marketing states, "You are the controller." The device combines [5] an "RGB camera, depth sensor, multiarray microphone and custom processor running proprietary software" in order to recognize up to [5] "31 different body parts in any video frame" and 5,000 points on your body [6]. How's it all pan out? I had a chance to demo the Kinect at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), and was thoroughly impressed. Of course, the demo (situated as it was in a controlled environment) belied a key weakness—Kinect needs a lot of space. According to IGN [7], there must be at least "6 feet between the sensor and the player, 6 feet of width, and any objects obstructing a full view of the player, like coffee tables, must be moved." Those with apartments and/or smaller gaming areas might be ill-equipped. But if you can accommodate the Kinect's spatial requirements, it's a great party device.



3) Toy Story 3 [Blu-Ray] **[8]**: "Family friendly" has become a tired cliché, but the Toy Story series has consistently embodied it. And unlike other "family friendly" films, Toy Story isn't just for the

younger members of the family. After all, what self-respecting geek doesn't *still* have a treasure trove of toys? The third entry in the series, Toy Story 3, is the darkest one yet. Andy has grown up and the toys are forced to deal with their increasing obsolescence. The previous two films glossed over this issue—what happens when owners outgrow their toys? But the third film tackles it head-on, and there's plenty of mature themes. In what other "children's film" do you get references to Thomas Jefferson, homosexual implications, and a frank depiction of death and loss? Toy Story 3 is a great film and arguably the best in the series.

4) Motormouse **[9]**: This falls under "novelty gift." Avant Garde Gifts [10] sent me one of these over the summer, and I've been playing with it ever since. Modeled after the Porsche 9-11, the Motormouse is a 2.4 GHz wireless mouse, replete with the standard "plug and forget" USB receiver. Like most wireless mice, installing the Motormouse is simple — insert the USB receiver, and within 5-10 seconds, you should be ready. See our full review here [11].



5) Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter **[12]**: For gamers, this is essential reading. While books like "The First Quarter [13]"and "Game Over: Press Start to Continue [14]" present comprehensive histories, "Extra Lives" is a scholarly discussion of gaming's relevance, its artistic merits, and aesthetic shortcomings. "Extra Lives" is both a convincing argument that gaming constitutes an art form, inasmuch as it criticizes games' paper-thin stories, characterizations, and dialogue. While the author prefers "story-driven games", he bemoans the serious lack of well-written gaming stories. If nothing else, "Extra Lives" will spur some serious debate.

Honorable Mention: Tickets to **Tron: Legacy** [15]: Do I really need to explain Tron's relevance to an audience of geeks? While the original doesn't exactly hold up 28 years later, it was, and is, a landmark film. The sequel looks amazing, and if the visual effects augment the story, rather than the other way around (I'm looking at

you, George Lucas), it should be a worthy follow-up.

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