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## Prof shares top Christmas learning gifts

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It's a digital life - just check any Christmas wish list. Adding some educational content for kids may be a challenge but Toby Donaldson, a computing science senior lecturer at SFU Surrey, can usually find a way. Here are some of his top picks this season:

Reiner Knizia's Ra (board game ~\$40; iPhone/iPad app: ~\$5)

<http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/12/ra>

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ra-designed-by-reiner-knizia/id400213892?mt=8>

In this beautiful game for 2-5 players (1-5 players on the iPhone/iPad), players score points by collecting sets of matching tiles. Tiles are collected through a series of auctions, and you are only allowed to win a small number of auctions.

Figuring out when to buy and when not to buy is tremendous fun. The iPhone/iPad versions are excellent computerized versions of the board game, with stunning graphics and very good game play.

Minecraft (downloadable PC game; ~\$14)

<http://www.minecraft.net/>

This one is a bit tough to explain since it is so original. When the game starts, you are dropped into a huge often beautiful, randomly generated landscape and you must dig deep into the earth to mine resources. You need to build a shelter to survive the first few nights.

The deeper you dig, the more valuable and dangerous things appear. Everything in the game's world --- from the clouds to you to the flowers --- is made from cubical blocks. You really have to see it to understand it: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaMTedT6P0I> is a fan-made video.

Picross 3D (Nintendo DS; ~\$20)

<http://www.picross3d.com/>

Keeping with the theme of cubes, this is a very clever puzzle game where you must remove blocks to reveal a 3D sculpture. The rules are simple, and the controls make the game a lot of fun to play.

Buckyballs (desk toy; ~\$30)

<http://www.getbuckyballs.com/>

216 small but super-strong spherical magnets that can be arranged in lots of different patterns.

Super Meat Boy (PC/Mac/Linux/XBOX/Wii; ~\$20)

<http://store.steampowered.com/app/40800/>

Tired of easy games where the main character is not a slab of meat? Then you might like Super Meat Boy, a hilarious and extremely challenging platform-jumping game.

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