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Brian Mary/Daily Nebraskan

Great toys of the past

The coolest toys on earth are never the most expensive. When my parents demanded a Christmas list from me, I'd just rip the comic book novelty page out of the latest issue of "Conan the Barbarian"

Charles Lieurance

— x-ray specs, soap that turned your hands black, pepper gum, etc. — the whole page came to about \$19 plus postage and handling. But, invariably, I

received something three times as expensive and three times less entertaining.

Now, of course, I understand that putting joy buzzers and pepper gum into the hands of a child who was already three steps from reform school would have been a major tactical error on my parent's part.

The best toys were always the ones that trusted you. The ones that plugged in, lit up or heated up; flew or launched projectiles. You gotta love a toymaker that allows you to play with things like that. Because children are basically

evil. Here's a list of some of the most trusting and entertaining toys available since 1965 or so.

1. Mattel Time Machine. This is my all-time favorite. What the manufacturer is giving you here is a hotplate. I liked having a small metal disk that heated up to about 400 degrees in my own room. The premise of the toy was simple, though it seemed miraculous in the old days. You got this hot plate with a clear plastic dome over it. You got your plastic cubes in all different colors. You put the plastic cubes on the hot plate and they unfolded into hideous monsters from another time. Then, while the dinosaur was still soft, you put him into a little compression chamber at the base of the hot plate and turned it into a cube again.

What the toy company was trusting you not to do: Burn yourself, of course. Also, they were trusting you not to remove the metal hot plate disk, keep the wires attached to the bottom, shove the main unit your sister's bed and put the disk under her fitted sheet, cover the wires leading up to it with frilly bedding and turn the disk on right around bedtime. This way you could turn your sister into a hideous monster from another time. The Time Machine was also great for melting Barbie dolls.

2. Sea Monkeys: Sea Monkeys never worked but the premise was exciting. The ads for them in the comic books made it look like they grew up to be Ward, June, Wally and the Beav in seahorse costumes. They were invariably flushed down the toilet. After all, they were only brine shrimp. At least that's what the cynics said. No matter how much care you gave your Sea Monkeys, no matter how much extra Sea Monkey food you purchased, or how long you watched the tiny amorphous translucent mass lay on the bottom of the Sea Monkey aquarium/gymnasium, they never even remotely resembled the comic book pictures.

But the faithful knew these were not just brine shrimp. The faithful know that one of the greatest menaces to human kind since killer bees or tarantulas transported in banana crates is brewing in the sewers of America. Under every manhole is a Sea Monkey, fully grown, with arms and legs and a vaguely humanoid face, waiting for the invasion of the world.

3. Operational Robots: You know, the kind that walks and spits sparks, with a blinking psychedelic chest panel. There were many brands and many varieties and most of them were pretty cool. Eventually your parents got tired of buying batteries and watching it march across the breakfast table and spit sparks at them while they sluggishly ate oatmeal.

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