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I spy with my little eye something better to do

Don't park yourself in front of the telly after the Christmas lunch when the web offers a host of games for all the family

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It's the same routine every year for most people. Once you have opened the presents, eaten the turkey and polished off the mince pies, it's time to slump in front of Christmas Day television.

But it wasn't always like this. Traditionally the festive season was a time when families got together, talked, laughed and played games. And while some people would rather chew on a sixpence than endure a round of charades with Great-aunt Nelly, Christmas games can be an enjoyable experience rather than a painful one. In fact the web is bringing the notion of games back into vogue, and you don't have to be a geek to enjoy them.

Alongside web-based games, there are ideas for party games, examples of foreign games such as hnefatafl (a Viking board game) and novel ways to keep the kids amused. Importantly, it also means you need never watch a repeat of Only Fools and Horses again.

Online games

Monopoly used to be a family favourite and you can now take part in a virtual version at www.games.com, along with hundreds of others including Scrabble, bingo and mah-jong. Many are free to download as trials, though there may be a charge for some full versions (no more than £10).

The entertainment section at Channel 4's website (www.channel4.com/entertainment/games) is similarly bursting with festive treats, which are broken down into categories such as arcade, strategy, and word and puzzle. There's also a selection of Christmas-themed challenges, such as Deep Freeze, a platform-based frolic in which you play as an icegun-wielding Santa Claus.

Petrolheads seeking some inspiration should look no further than www.miniclip.com, which claims to be the web's biggest source of online games. Here you can race monster trucks, take part in rallies or even race Formula One cars.

For a more cerebral challenge, which is especially welcome at this time of the year, www.websudoku.com has sudoku grids in varying difficulty levels, from easy to evil. Its How Am I Doing? option even highlights mistakes if you want to cheat.

Party games

If you're struggling to come up with party games then take a peek at the comprehensive list provided by EventWise, the corporate events organiser, at www.eventwise.co.uk/asp/partyanimals.asp. Suggestions include the name game, where each person in a circle has to say the name of a famous person, and the name must start with the first letter of the surname of the previous name mentioned.

Sooner or later, someone always suggests charades. Don't worry if your mind goes blank, because www.charades-ideas.com has ideas to act out in various categories (music, movies, celebrities etc).

Beer chess is a game that needs a big board (think bathroom tiles or beer mats), a lot of beer (one can per piece) and a strong stomach (when a piece is captured, you have to drink it). But the buzz factor, according to www.webtender.com/handbook/games is "extremely high" (though passing out means you lose).

If you know the fictional company that James Bond often claims to work for is Universal Exports, you may have done too many pub quizzes. But others looking for some questions should go to

www.avendano.org/quiz/index.php. It has more than 900 questions in 10 categories, including sport, music and history, all of which can be printed out for quiz masters.

Kids' games

You may be able to make a paper hat out of this newspaper, but could you make an Apache helicopter or the Taj Mahal? Thought not. For that you will need www.papertoys.com, a delightful site offering free paper models of things such as drilling rigs and the Jimi Hendrix guitar.

At www.kids-party.com/games.shtml there are ideas for dozens of children's party games, some of which will keep the grandparents busy too (try to score a penalty in a homemade goal using a balloon, while blindfolded, and after having been spun around three times).

It is one of those sad but true facts that very young children prefer the wrapping to the contents so you might as well indulge them and go to www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/smart/makes where there are instructions for how to make lunar landscapes out of bubble wrap, and chickens out of plastic bags.

Card games

The card site www.pagat.com trumps all others with its huge database of instructions for pretty much every card game going. You can search by name, objective or country of origin (some games, such as poker, are universal, but have you heard of bisca from Brazil?). There are details on other games that require special packs of cards, children's games, and new games such as fotboll, which uses a deck of cards to simulate a football match.

The site of David Parlett, a games inventor (www.davidparlett.co.uk), includes historical card games such as speculation (a game originating from the late 18th century and mentioned by Jane Austen and Charles Dickens in which players auction and trade cards). Of course, you could take it a step further and learn how to perform card tricks at www.card-trick.com.

Board games

What do you mean you are still playing Cluedo? There are thousands of alternatives, including hnefatafl (see tinyurl.com/2lpvjb). Pronounced "nhev-eh-tah-full", this Viking board game is even older than chess, and simulates Norse raids. A perfect way to relax after a day of pillaging.

At www.frugaljourney.com/homemade-board-games, there are links to free games that you can "print and play". These include Bloody Mary, a historical challenge in which you play a courtier in Tudor England.

But for the most fun, why not make your own? At www.wikihow.com/make-your-own-board-game there is advice on choosing a theme (such as a film) and deciding on the rules, as well as actually building it – use Lego, it says, as one way to jazz up the board.

If you really want to get them worried at Hasbro, visit the Board Game Designers Forum (www.bgdf.com/). This informative site contains articles on subjects such as game mechanics and how to get your game published.

The winner of last week's InGear competition for a Nintendo Wii was Lisa Billington from Cradley Heath, West Midlands. Congratulations, and happy Christmas

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