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GO! SHOPPING: PART TWO

Grab a board game and let good times roll

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"Do people still play board games?"

As gadget adviser, I get that question every now and then. The answer is always, "Yup, and they're more fun than ever."

In the last five years, games have become more colorful, better made and more attractively packaged. All of that adds to the desire to pull them out again and again—but only if they're fun. Strategy games, which involve less luck and more thinking than the typical trivia and roll-a-die-and-move games, lead the resurgence. Party games are back, too, with friends sharing the kind of deep belly laugh that brushed aluminum gadgets just can't inspire.

So unplug the TV, shut off the iPod and grab the kids. We tested a number of games to come up with 10 cool board games you might not have heard of that will have families and friends laughing, thinking and spending more time together.

Some games can be found at select Barnes & Noble bookstores. All can be ordered online.

Zing!

3-5 players (ages 10+)

\$19

www.simplyfun.com

Object: Each tile has a word, and each player plays a tile to form a sentence. Write on wipe-off tiles to fill in gaps. Score points for tiles used. When the game is done, everyone has created a story. Entertaining and thought-provoking.

Pick Two Deluxe

3-6 players (ages 8+)

\$15.95

www.tahdahgames.com

Object: Use your lettered tiles to spell words, and when a player uses all his or her tiles, he or she yells, "Pick two," and everyone grabs two more tiles. Be the first to get rid of your tiles in this fast-moving old favorite that's now back in circulation.

Twisted Fish

3-6 players (ages 10+)

\$10

www.mcneillbrighterminds.com

Object: This variation on the card game Go Fish enthralled our adult playtesters for nearly an hour, so it's a great game for families. Win by collecting five fish of the same type and color from your opponents. Play one of eight Zinger cards to prevent others from taking your card, look at an opponent's cards or other rule-bending tricks. The game's color, humor and Zingers make it a worthy alternative to the familiar card game.

Quelf

3-8 players (ages 12+)

\$29.95

www.wiggitybang.com

Object: If you don't mind looking silly in front of your friends, you'll laugh till you cry while playing Quelf. Read each card aloud (unless it's a "Classified Card," which you'll read to yourself), then do what the card says. For instance, "You must pretend your seat is a toilet for the remainder of the game. Every time a player pays a penalty, you must flush the imaginary toilet and vocally make a 'gurgling and flushing' sound." Or our judges' favorite: "Write a haiku about your armpits. Recite the haiku to your opponents."

Bubble Brain

4-8 players (ages 10+)

\$30

www.patchproducts.com or 800-524-4263

Object: Pick one of the 300 silly pictures; then, everyone writes a caption for it. Correctly guess who wrote what caption. It's like "Balderdash," but "Bubble Brain" comes with stickers shaped like thought bubbles, so you can apply them to your family pictures for an even funnier game.

The New Yorker Cartoon Caption Game

3-6 players (ages 12+)

\$34.95

www.cartoonbank.com

Object: Match wits with the cartoonists from the New Yorker. Each card has a cartoon from the magazine, but you supply the caption. Correctly guess who wrote what caption or have your caption voted the funniest. Hearing what your friends come up with is hilarious.

Naq

4-9 players or teams (ages 10+)

\$37.90 or two payments of

\$19.99

www.naqqames.com

Object: Make up your own general-knowledge trivia questions and score big when half the players know the answer and the other half don't. Now, everybody's a trivia expert, and everybody stays involved in the game, no matter whose turn it is. People who don't know pop culture and people who were not yet born in the '80s can have a great time together.

The Irish Rhyming Game

3-6 (ages 8+)

\$23.99

www.shopirish.com

Object: Roll a die, flip a card and pronounce words that rhyme with the word on the card--the number of rhymes equals the number that appears on the die--before the 30-second timer runs out. The game brought lots of laughter from our test groups, and one tester suggested adding a die to increase the challenge: Could you come up with 12 rhymes for "leather"?

GiftTrap

3-8 players (ages 8+)

\$39.99

www.gifttrap.com

Object: Would your best friend rather have a beautiful silver and gold tiara or a personal flying machine? In this fun-filled conversation-starter, secretly pick the gifts you'd like to give and you'd like to get. Score points for giving--and getting--great surprise gifts, and lose points for giving lousy ones. Even after the game is over, expect a lot of, "That was the perfect gift! You know me so well!" Or, "Why on Earth would you think I'd ever want a train ride as a gift?!"

Ringgz

2-4 players (ages 8+)

\$29.95

www.blueorangegames.com

Object: This game won't have you shouting out answers; instead you'll be quietly plotting strategy. Place rings on each spot. The player with the largest ring on a spot wins that territory. The player with the most territories at the end of the game wins. Should you limit your opponents' moves, or should you concentrate on getting the most spots? This spin on "Gobblet" uses colorful wooden pieces to transform an ordinary board into a near-artwork each time you play.

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