

Let the (Regency) Games Begin!

Snapdragon

*Characters played this exciting game in Sabrina Jeffries's "When Sparks Fly," her novella, which appeared in the *Snowy Night with a Stranger* anthology, inspired by characters from the author's *The School for Heiresses* series.

Snapdragon is a crazy holiday game they used to play in the Regency, where partygoers fished raisins out of a bowl of burning brandy. Brandy that is set afire! You put your fingers into the flames to snatch raisins. Don't ask me why our ancestors found that entertaining, but apparently they enjoyed it so much that they even had a song to go with it. Sabrina Jeffries, her husband and a friend experimented with the game to see if it was as dangerous as it sounded. It turned out that our ancestors weren't so crazy after all. They used shallow bowls to make it easy to snatch the raisins and although the low blue flame seemed to put off lots of heat, the fire wasn't deep and the brandy wasn't that hot. Despite some sore fingers from repetitive play, it's easy to see how people might find it amusing to fight for the raisins. Have fun and be careful when you and your guests play this exciting, wild, daring and noisy game!

Want to learn more about Snapdragon?

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snap-dragon_\(game\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snap-dragon_(game))

<http://www.schooloftheseasons.com/snapdragon.html>

Bullet Pudding

During the Regency, sometimes known as "Jane Austen's era," people played parlor games during Christmas and 12th Night celebrations. Click here to read Jane Austen's niece's letter to her friend, Miss Dorothy Chapman, about playing her favorite parlor game—Bullet Pudding—at Godmersham Park.

While this parlor game is easy to replicate, get ready for a mess! The host should pour a sack of flour into a large dish, creating a flour mountain that peaks at the top. Then the host will place a bullet (or marble) on top of the peak. Each guest will take a turn slicing into the flour peak with a butter knife. After making the cut, the bullet will fall into the flour, and the person whose turn it is has to retrieve the bullet from the flour using only her mouth. No hands allowed! The spectacle is one to behold, but be careful of laughing too hard—you don't want to inhale flour into your nose!

<http://austenonly.com/2010/01/06/jane-austen-and-christmas-parlour-games-for-the-season-and-twelfth-night/>

Forfeits

In this popular game that's been around for centuries, players each put a piece of clothing, jewelry or other personal belonging into a pile on the floor. These are the "forfeits." One person is chosen to be the judge or the "crier of the forfeits"—normally a pretty young lass—and another player holds the forfeits over the judge's head.

Since the judge begins by sitting in front of the pile with her back turned, she cannot see what is being held overhead. As the bauble is held over the judge's head, the other players chant:

"Heavy, heavy hangs over thy head.
What shall the owner do to redeem the forfeit?"

Then the judge (without looking up) commands the owner to do some act or stunt in order to get back the property. The stunt could be anything—singing a song, dancing a jig, yawning until someone else yawns, crawl on all fours and bark like a dog, etc. Oftentimes the penalty for getting a forfeit back involved giving a kiss to a bashful partygoer. Imagine the possibilities!

Of course, the judge and the person who is holding up the forfeit also have articles in the pile, and they must act out a command in order to get them back, too!

Here are a few links about this fun game—one about how the game was played in the 19th century and the second containing ideas for a modern version of the game:

http://www.avictorian.com/christmas_festivities.html

<http://partyforfeits.com/>

Hot Cockles

Although Hot Cockles is not played much anymore, it was an extremely popular game at Victorian Christmas parties. In this game, one player sits down in a chair, and another player, who is blindfolded, kneels and places his/her head in the sitter's lap. The kneeler places an open hand on his/her back, with palm turned upward. Then other players take turns striking the kneeler's hand, and the kneeler must guess who has struck the blow. Hot Cockles was one of several traditional games in which someone has to guess who has hit or touched them, and it also existed as a street and playground game, no doubt played more robustly there than in the Victorian drawing-room. Part of the game's popularity was that when played in mixed company, it allowed some mild flirtation. The game can claim some considerable antiquity, being referred to by name as early as 1549 and 1590, and an illustration from a 14th-century manuscript, printed by Strutt, appears to take the game back even further in time.

This link shows an oil painting image of party-goers playing a game of Hot Cockles:

<http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.32684.html>.