

GAMES MANAGERS PLAY

BY ROY.
W. WALTERS

The psychological school of "Transactional Psychology" has determined that people interact by playing games with one another . . . some of them deadly serious games, all with unwritten but identifiable rules, defined roles and defined responses for the various players. Certain kinds of people play certain kinds of games, depending on their personalities and experiences. Thus, define the salient features of an individual's personality and situation, and it may be predicted what sort of games he or she will play. Define the game, and the personality types and situation of the players may be predicted.

Let's examine the games that managers play to while away the time, to stay relatively sane, to advance themselves, to protect themselves, to cover their weaknesses, to stay comfortable and to merely cope.

Individual Games

Tough Young Tiger (TYT): The

two main varieties of this game are Tough Young Tiger, Informal and Formal Situation. The central role is played by younger people — younger than their opponents. Thus their chronological age may run anywhere from 22 to 64, although the TYT role is usually played by persons under 35.

The only requirements for the secondary-role players are to be older than the TYT (Tough Young Tiger) and at the time the game is played, not quite as angry about things. If the secondary players are as angry as the TYT, then the game changes to another game called "*Everything's Gone to Hell*," and it isn't nearly as much fun — at least for the TYT.

The "Informal TYT" is the most common variety of TYT, since it is less dangerous for the central player. In this variety, the TYT and one or more secondary players are in an informal atmosphere — lunch, rest room, before or after meetings, or at an out-of-city conference. It goes something like this:

TYT: Everybody keeps saying old Slaptrap was a bright guy, but

that must have been 30 years ago. He's hurting the outfit — just sitting around and getting in the way, and stopping any good ideas that come along. We oughta fire him.

SP (Secondary Player): You should have seen him in the old days. We didn't have jet-jobs in the old days — we were just lucky to have jobs. I was supporting my wife's folks, my. . . .

TYT: OK, maybe he was great, but times are different. It's a new ball game. It's guys like him who are getting us in trouble, and keeping us from moving ahead. We oughta fire him.

SP: Well, he came up with the Slaptrap Program, the first real approach to the. . . .

TYT: OK, so maybe retire him with a Class "C". But you know something? Until we Get Tough and Sharpen Up, we're not going to have the right people in this outfit who'll Get Us Out of This Mess. Did you read the Chief's talk? Well, do we mean it or not? The younger guys read the Chief's stuff and then they see a guy like Slaptrap, and they think it's all a bunch

of crap. We oughta fire him.

SP: Things were different, in the old days. If a guy didn't produce, zip, out in the street. I remember a guy who. . . .

TYT: (muttering) We oughta fire him.

Formal Type — This is less frequently played, because of greater risk — it's pretty messy to sit in a meeting with old Slaptrap, or to send him a memo, and tell him he should be fired, especially if, as is usually the case, he's two to three levels above the TYT.

So the hostility object in Formal TYT is some kind of *Them* — another department, another staff group, a regulatory body, the union, a competitor, an ad agency, etc. It sounds like this:

TYT: I haven't said anything up to now, but isn't it about time somebody was telling these people the Facts of Life? It's time we stopped playing footsie and got down to Fundamentals. Are we running this outfit or are they?

SP: Well, we certainly. . . .

TYT: Damn right. I'm all for getting along with everybody, but there are times when a man has to Stand Up and Be Counted. They won't respect us, if we're a bunch of *!-* doormats — and we'll be letting the outfit down, too. We're simply gonna have to tell them the Facts of Life.

SP: Who's going to do it?

TYT: I'd love to do it, but I'm not high-up enough — yet — to make Them really sit up and listen. Slaptrap is in the spot to do it (wry smile), but that isn't the way he does things, I'm afraid. So we'll probably just sit and take it — as usual.

Faithful Old Dog. This game is played by an older man in the title role, with secondary roles being filled by younger peers or bosses. It is sometimes played in meetings, where it is called *Cynical Old Dog Tray*, but more often in man-to-man confrontations that involve a request for the FOD to do some work. Then it goes like this:

FOD: (sitting behind his desk, reading the sports page in the morning paper) Well, come in and

set a spell. I was just checking to see if the City Hall story got in the paper.

SP: City Hall story? Wasn't that last week?

FOD: Gosh, I guess you're right. Get to my age and you start to forget things. Course I've seen so many City Hall Hassles they're all starting to sound alike. Back in the '30s — about the time you were just starting school — we went through this same mess we're in now.

SP: Yeah, I guess so. I got this letter from. . . .

FOD: Letters, schmatters. The way we write letters you'd think we were in the post-office business, instead of — business.

SP: Yeah, you would at that. This letter is from Slaptrap, asking us to. . . .

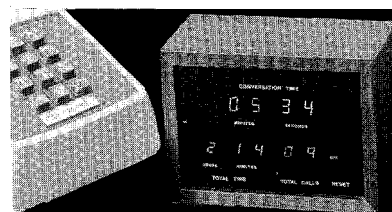
FOD: Slaptrap, eh? We started together, did you know that? Always dressed like a dude, and played pretty fast with the girlies, I'll tell you. Everybody knew he'd go places — wasn't too heavy on brains, but he knew how to dress and to say the right thing to the right people at the right time, you know what I mean? Real smart operator. Well, he worked for what he got, and I guess he's happy. I'm not saying the company made a mistake, mind you — it takes all kinds, and he always did know how to handle himself. But there's something to say for being able to get up to *my* age, and know you never did anything that hurt anybody. You'll know what I mean, in a few years.

SP: Yeah, I'm sure I will. Well, Slaptrap has asked us to look into the Fribish Study, and come up with a. . . .

FOD: Heard about that study. We tried that back in '46. It's still right here, in my filing cabinets. It sounded like a good deal. But we spent thousands on it and finally it just petered out.

SP: Well, apparently we are going to try it again. Maybe things are different now. Anyway, if you'll put together the statistics and get one of your people to. . . .

FOD: Sure, anything you say, Ralph. Glad to help out — sure you know that. But maybe you'll want



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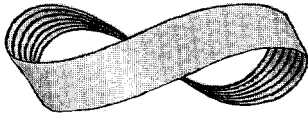
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to give this thing to young Arm-buster. He's still trying to make his mark, you know, and this would *Give Him a Little Visibility*. I'm not going anyplace, now — we both know that. And besides, I've been over the same road back in '46. This would give him a *Wonderful Developmental Opportunity*. And it'd give you a chance to see what he can do. (Takes two pills) There — that's better.

SP: You got your trouble back?

FOD: No, not real bad. When you get my age, you gotta expect these things.

SP: Well, maybe you're right about Armbuster. . . . Hope you're feeling better.

FOD: Now don't worry about me, boy. And close the door on the way out, will you? Forgot my sweater this morning.

The Rough-Hewn Engineer.

This is an extremely popular game in a technical business, for obvious reasons. It is usually played at interdepartmental meetings, or in encounters between engineers and nonengineering staff people. (A current accounting department variant is the SMOOTH-HONED COMPUTER EXPERT game. A marketing department variant is the CUSTOMER-LOVING CONSULTANT game. In all cases, moral karate blows are applied by a gruff Will Rogers type to jaded staff people who have lost sight of basics! The RHE is *always* gruff and blunt, even if he's a Rhodes Scholar with a strong interest in French Renaissance literature. He can't be anything else. It goes something like this:

Staff Type: . . . So the thrust of the study would seem to indicate that. . . .

RHE: Did you say "bust"? Are they admittin' their whole study is a bust?

ST: No — haha — I said, I believe, "thrust".

RHE: Well, that's another breed of cat. Although when I was back in engineering school, "thrust" was a rocketry term. And to be frank, I think this study might more likely be a bust. Oh, it's probably fine, but let's face it — with the problems this business faces today,

we've got all we can do to keep plugging away at Our Basic Problems. Frankly, I don't see that this study will earn us one thin dime.

ST: Actually, this study goes right to the heart of the earnings problem. The socio-economic milieu in which we. . . .

RHE: The social-atomic *what?* You'll have to translate that for a dumb engineer — if I can't play it on my slide rule, I just don't hear it. It took me three weeks to read *Fanny Hill*, just readin' the best parts twice. But I'll tell you this — all your social-atomics won't clean up the pricing confusion or get customers to buy more of our products. Now why don't you go back and do us a study on that? Or give us a program that will convince our people they're simply going to have to Do More Work With Less People?

Bright Young Man. This has always been a popular game, and deserves to be called a "standard." As the name implies, it is for the younger players. But there are cases of men playing this game past age 40, and even alternating between BYM and FOD from day to day, much to the confusion of their associates. From this it may be predicted that BYM players frequently become FOD players, in the due course of time.

It is of some interest to note that since the introduction of the BYMDP (Bright Young Man Development Program) there are more TYT players than BYM types. And heaven only knows where *that* will lead.

The secondary role in the BYM game is almost always played by the BYM's boss or some other superior. It starts like this:

Boss: How're things going?

BYM: Great, simply great. You know, I was reading the Chief's latest talk last night — you had a chance to get to it yet?

Boss: Sure, sure. Why of course. It certainly was, er — firm — wasn't it? At least I thought it was.

BYM: Challenging was the word I thought of, when I finally put it down about 3 a.m. this morning. Challenging!! The future of this business is incredibly challenging.

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I only hope that I can learn fast enough.

Boss: Well, that's sort of, uh, challenging itself, isn't it?

BYM: I think you've hit the nail right on the head, Ralph. Oh, I mean Mr. Slaptrap.

Boss: Ralph, Ralph.

BYM: Right, Ralph. Oh by the way, Ralph, I finally pulled together a full report on the Frebisher problem. 'fraid it might be a little long — about 496 pages — but I did a full T&M study, a differential cost analysis applying the new Dietzel equations, and then summed up my findings and recommendations succinctly in a 23-page addendum. It'll be on your desk this Friday evening. I've already told one of my friends on the division staff about it, and they're looking forward to your reactions. I've got the feeling that our whole pricing problem hinges on what we do about this Frebisher thing. And what with the Corporation Headquarters team coming out to see us Monday, we'll be in fine shape to

really get them off our back, Ralph.

Boss: Friday evening, huh?

BYM: Right, Ralph.

Boss: Oooh.

Sneaky S.O.B. This game may be played by a man anywhere in the organization, but it is a special favorite of a certain kind of staff person. Staff work, with its hazily defined areas of responsibility and its requirements for lateral coordination, makes for many delightful games of SSOB, and develops some incredibly creative players.

It may go like this:

SSOB: (smiling cryptically) Armbuster just asked me to lunch. Can you come along?

SP: (glances at calendar pad) Sure, I guess so.

SSOB: I had a drink with Slaptrap last night after work. He had just finished reading the Frebisher report. (Smiles grimly) He figured Armbuster might be calling me.

SP: Oh?

SSOB: So listen — play dumb at lunch.

SP: That'll be easy — I don't know what you're driving at.

SSOB: (smiles grimly and cryptically) Read the Frebisher report before we have lunch. You'll get the message. If Armbuster thinks we're going to play fall guy on this one, he's crazy. Keep this under your hat, but I helped Frebisher — on the sly — to think out the report. Armbuster won't get *this* monkey off his back.

SP: (puzzled) I looked through the Frebisher thing last night. It's all about the Cranarap reporting procedure. What's that got to do with us here in Warehousing Maintenance?

SSOB: (smiles significantly, grimly and cryptically) That Armbuster is a sneaky S.O.B.

Honest Yeoman. This game is the opposite of *Sneaky S.O.B.* and it is clearly related to *Rough-Hewn Engineer*. It is probably the best defensive ploy against the game of

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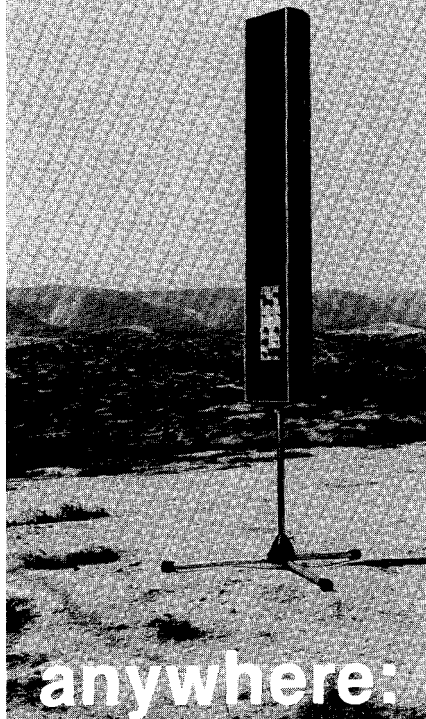
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SSOB, for a SSOB can't believe anyone is *really* an *Honest Yeoman*, and figures the *HY* is actually a talented SSOB player — which in truth, he sometimes is. A typical exchange can make this clear:

SSOB: (smiling cryptically) Read the Frebisher report yet?

HY: (with manly indignation) You're damn right I have.

SSOB: (smugly) Sort of puts the old monkey on *your* back, doesn't it?

HY: I don't care whose back. We've let the (Customer, Company) down. But by God, if I have anything to say about it, my group is going to clean this thing up.

SSOB: (suspiciously) *Your* group?

HY: Damn right. With this kind of thing going on it's time someone took *The Bull By The Horns* — and as far as I'm concerned, we're the boys for the job. Let the Chips Fall Where They May.

SSOB: Now wait a minute. . . .

HY: We've all waited long enough. I've got Slaptrap's go-ahead to form a task force.

SSOB: (alarmed) A task force? Whose group will head it up?

HY: I couldn't care less. As long as it does the job. But Slaptrap seemed to feel it should be my outfit.

SSOB: Oh! (to himself) Why you sneaky S.O.B.

Manly Sniveler. This game is related to *Bright Young Man*, but it is played by managers of all ages. The difference lies in both tone and goal, for the *MS* wants love and sympathy even more than promotion. The game of *Manly Sniveler* is best played in person, in front of one's boss, where hunched shoulders, moist eyes, brave little trembles around the mouth, and soulful sighs may be employed, but memos may also be used effectively. Here's a sample of a *Manly Sniveler* memo:

Mr. Slaptrap:

Attached please find the 2nd draft of the Frebisher report. I was awfully pleased my gang could beat the deadline by two days, especially considering the fact that we are short two gals and four guys, and the unfortunate nervous breakdown of my steno, who came in three times from the hospital to get this thing out.

But I wouldn't be doing my job, if I didn't point out the *tone* of the request of Mr. Frebisher's people. We are certainly all working for the same objective — good service from the customer's *point of view*. And I imagine that Mr. Frebisher's group is almost as busy as we are, some of the time, despite the fact they have so many people. But I do hope for the sake of my gang that they can give us a little more time on the next job, and more of a feeling of a team spirit — especially considering the fact that they have three more electric typewriters than we do, as well as more calculators, bigger offices on the shady side of the building, and they are closer to the rest rooms.

So here's the Frebisher job. All of us are certainly looking forward to being with our families tonight, and good home-cooked meals for a change. Our last batch of vouchers are attached for your signature. I took the whole gang out to La Maison Riche last night to let them know how much you and I appreciate all their extra work, so although the voucher might look a little high, it's little enough for such swell team spirit.

M.S.

There exists another category of games that permit bosses to demonstrate their authority. The psychological muscle flexation is a must. Bosses must protect their positions. All levels are included.

I'm The Boss - Don't Question Me. This game is always played with subordinates and flourishes most under *The Game Of Crisis*. Here bosses have to protect themselves against the crises and their greatest refuge is the rule book:

I'm The Boss - Don't Question Me: In this situation we always use emergency routine #14.

Subordinate: But I don't believe that #14 covers this case.

ITB - DQM: Are you questioning my years of experience?

Subordinate: No Sir — I just thought that the conditions were different.

ITB - DQM: The rule book is clear — I want it done that way.

Subordinate: Yes Sir — You're the boss.

This game clearly stacks the deck. If anything goes wrong, the boss has two outs. Either the routine was at fault or the subordinate gave the boss the wrong set of data from which he made his decision.

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Underlings Do Servitude. In this game the objective is for the boss to communicate the facts about the long hard road he has traversed to get to his present position. Again the game is only played with subordinates:

Young Subordinate: Boss, I'd sure like to get a crack at that analysis job in connection with the Frebisher report.

UDS: How long have you been on your present work, Snively?

YS: About one year now.

UDS: Son (great fatherly emphasis), let me tell you about my career in this organization. I learned from the ground up. That way I knew. I spent many years at "learning-type" jobs and eventually I was given an opportunity to show what I could really do.

YS: I know, sir (emphasis) but I believe I've learned enough to tackle that job now. (Here YS risks identification as a TYT).

UDS: Son (with more emphasis), I hear that you're coming along just fine. But you must learn to exercise patience. Everything comes to him who waits. Let's get together again in about a year and see where you stand at that time. In the meantime, keep plugging.

Group Games

Much of the boredom of bureaucratic work derives not so much from the work itself — at least on the managerial level — (although much managerial work is stupid and dull) as it does from the personal discontents, anxieties and chaotic cravings of the people themselves. Thus the importance of group games, and their place in relieving the tensions of individual boredom. The essence of group games is their essential inanity. And also their universal nature. Here are a few of them.

The Game of Crisis. This game begins in an organizational unit when a piece of *Verbal Crisis Data* is introduced by a *Crisis Monger*. Most groups have at least one person who is *Crisis Prone*, and thus plays the role of *Crisis Monger*. The *Crisis Monger* may be at any level in the group. When he heads the group, the game of crisis is played with fatiguing regularity. If

he — or she — is at a lower level, the *Crisis Monger* must then introduce the proper *Crisis Data* in the *Proper Climate*.

"The Proper Crisis Data" is usually the first ambiguous word foretelling a symbolic event expected to occur in the relatively distant future. Further, it is almost invariably an anticipated act on the part of an organization, *outside* the business, rather than an act of God or Nature — or even man. Thus a flood, typhoon or earthquake is not *Crisis Data*, but rather a simple emergency — and we tend to be pretty good at handling simple emergencies, although they don't have the dramatic value of a *crisis*.

It should be pointed out, however, that a simple emergency may be used by certain players to play *Crisis*. A staff group in charge of, say paper-clip accounting, could use a flood as *Crisis Data* and immediately start playing a fully satisfying *Game of Crisis*. In point of fact, few groups can resist playing *Crisis* during an emergency, no matter how completely they may be uninvolved in it.

"The Proper Crisis Climate" occurs during those dog days when there are no office pools, no recent announcements of pregnancy and/or engagement, no holidays coming up within a period of 10 calendar days, no personnel shifts pending, or new vice presidential appointments and when the weather has been foul for three straight days.

The game may begin like this:

Crisis Monger: You see the TWX on the City Hall's Frebisher report?

SP: How in the hell would I see a TWX? I don't even get the company magazine regularly.

CM: (grimly) Well, get a hold of this one. This will really Put our Fanny in the Mixmaster.

SP: What's it all about?

CM: That's the whole trouble with it. It's so complex we can't explain it easily . . . I can see what the newspapers will do with it. My Gosh!

SP: Well, what's it all about, exactly?

CM: Well, to my thinking, I be-

lieve it's so obvious that this is all part of the Major Cost Study, Executive Order 14925, the Domestic Telegraph Investigation, the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, the Denver Plan, the Dred Scott Decision, the Communications Satellite Act of 1962, the McCulloch vs. Maryland Decision, the Quartering Act, the N.L.R.B. ruling in the Chicken-Little Case. It's Big!

SP: My God, well, er, should we be doing something? I mean here in our group?

CM: I've alerted Slaptrap. He's scurrying around, let me tell you. He went white when I told him the implications of this thing.

SP: Should I plan on staying overnight, or something? It's PTA night, and I finally promised Portia I'd . . .

CM: Well, there's no need pushing the panic button . . . I've asked my girl to stay over, and I'm going to stick around myself for a little while, anyway. You go on home and I'll call you if this thing takes off. (slipping in a bit of Sniveling Manager)

SP: (hopefully) Maybe I shouldn't go to PTA at a time like this.

CM: Go ahead — no use losing our heads. We'll be living with this can of worms for a long time. (grimly) God knows where it will end.

SP: I wonder what this will mean to us here in Recreational Planning?

CM: God knows — but I can guess. Glad I got in a week of my vacation. You run along home, and I'll call if this thing blows up.

SP: Well, if you think it's really OK. Guess I'd better call Armbuster first, though.

CM: Good idea. I've already phoned Scrivener and Verbose. Boy, this really shook them up, after they got the Big Picture.

The Game of Move-the-Top. This game is played by two or more players who of necessity must be from one to five levels below the men whose jobs and persons they are moving about in the game. If they are talking about people below them in the organiza-

tion, the game is called *Developmental Opportunity*. If they are talking about their peers, the game is called *Move-'Em-Nail-'Em-Serves-'Em-Right*.

All three games are extremely popular, but *Move-the-Top* presents the players with numerous opportunities for advancing inside information (i.e., Common Gossip), psychological insight (i.e., Cliches and Oversimplifications Pertaining to Human Nature), and the comfortable posture of managerial expertise and wisdom. In *Move-the-Top* there's also the satisfying element of an old game we all played as children, the game of *See-Daddy-Bleed*. In short, *Move-the-Top* is fun. It can start like this:

Top Mover: Did you hear old Power's talk at the Chamber?

SP: Yeah. My God he's looking old.

TM: Yeah, and sick. The guy next to me at lunch — an outsider — didn't say anything, but he was being polite.

FOD: Power and I started together, have I ever told you that? He always drank and played hard. Gets to you eventually.

TM: The way he looks stacks up with a few things I've been hearing around. Armbuster's trip out here, for example. What was Armbuster doing out here? I mean *really* doing?

FOD: Well, with all the trouble we're having with some of our results maybe he was here on that. They don't let you go without chewing on you, even when it's nobody's fault. And let's face it — things are going to get worse before they get better. You just can't keep squeezing people like we're doing.

(Note: At this point *Move-the-Top* could deteriorate into the game of *Everything's Going to Hell*, or the game of *Things Aren't Like They Used to Be, If They Were*. This is a critical juncture of the game.)

TM: Well, it's more than Armbuster's trip. He wouldn't get Power's job, anyway, he's too old. It sounds crazy, but I think Slaptrap could get the nod.

SP: Slaptrap? He doesn't have what They're looking for for the

top spots. His people practically have to tie his shoes for him.

FOD: Don't kid yourselves — we knew Slaptrap Was Going Places years ago. A real operator, you know what I mean? I knew a guy got in his way once, and. . .

TM: OK, not Slaptrap. But if it isn't, I bet that Toughknuckles has a chance.

SP: Yeah, and then They could move Fangfighter over and open up a juicy spot for Smuthoily. But then I wonder who'd get *his* job?

FOD: His replacement will probably graduate this summer. They're getting younger every year. Supply will have to stock diapers for us, the way it's going.

TM: But if they brought Rockefeller up, Highbounder could slide over, and. . .

FOD: Let's face it — if Power does get bounced, Corporate Headquarters will come up with some kid we've never heard of. Look at. . .

TM: Or Swelkidde could be brought back from Corporate Headquarters — how long has he been back there, two-three years? — he could take Neetly's job, they could swing Nockneeser over, and etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. A game of *Move-the-Top* ends only when all players run out of names and exotic combinations.

The Game of Conference. This is such an old favorite that it needs little exposition. Actually, it is not just a game but a whole family of games. There's the *Wifey Goes & So Does The Budget*, an example of a game frequently played after an evening game of *I'm Tired of Staying Home and Eating Kraft Dinners*. Then there's the game of *Sick Hangover*, and *Hide-in-the-Back and Eat Sen-Sen* in which all pale conferees rush to get quiet back-row conference seats — sort of a Musical Chairs with head pounding instead of music.

During the Conference game, several entertaining side games may be played, such as *Previously Prepared 20 Penetrating Questions*, and *Defend The Operating Department*. After the game, *52 Handout Material Pickup* is popular.

If Conference is played out of state, popular postconference games include *Cigarette Smuggler* and *Rum Runner*, as well as *Entertain the Stewardess* and *Lie to Your Seatmate*. A popular game for waiting around O'Hare Airport is *Still Water, No Moving*.

Once back at your office, postconference games include *Vanishing Advance*, in which an advance has disappeared rapidly over a short period of time. The game of *Voucher* is invariably played without the proper receipts — or perhaps without any receipts at all — leading to games for the whole family such as *Cancel the Stock Plan* or *Extend the Bank Loan* — both of which are played with a surly wife as your opponent.

The game of *Voucher* has rules demanding that a game of *Eat Up the Drinks* be played, which sometimes leads to 12 or 13 meals being listed, if not ingested in solid form. But the rules clearly state: "Do Not Pass GO or AUDITOR: Do Not Collect \$200 for Drinks."

A game of *Report Back the Conference* is fun if one can get someone to play — it's easier to route the 52 handout materials than to dig up enough players.

All of these games contain Eric Berne's adult, parent and child roles. There are numerous instances of crossed transactions, changed roles and bifurcated behaviors. Underlying all these games is survival in the organization, regardless of its size. Being able to identify the specific game being played will enable any player to determine which role he or she wishes to play.

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