

# PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE: June 2002

*SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE CONSULTANTS,  
AND MANAGERS.*

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## **PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE:**

***SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE CONSULTANTS, AND MANAGERS.***

### ***Mission***

To increase and improve the use of interactive, experiential strategies to improve human performance in an effective, efficient, and enjoyable way.

### ***Editorial Roster***

Editor: Sivasailam (Thiagi) Thiagarajan

Assistant Editor: Raja Thiagarajan

Managing Editor: Brenda Mullin

Editorial Advisory Board: Andrew Kimball, David Gouthro, Diane Dormant, Julie England,

Kat Koppett, Les Lauber, Matt Richter, Steve Sugar, and <type your name here>

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### ***Feedback Request***

Thiagi believes in practicing what he preaches. This is an interactive newsletter, so interact already! Send us your feedback, sarcastic remarks, and gratuitous advice through email to [thiagi@thiagi.com](mailto:thiagi@thiagi.com) . Thanks!

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*Editorial*

## **Anniversary**

This issue of *Play for Performance* marks the beginning of the second year of online publication. (Before that I wrote a printed newsletter [*Thiagi GameLetter*] that was published by Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer.)

When I decided to publish an online newsletter, many friends predicted that I'd get tired of it within a few months. Now, 12 months later, they are curious about why I am continuing to do this.

Why? Because—

- I enjoy designing interactive strategies and sharing them with others.
- I like hearing from people around the world that they are reading—and playing—this stuff.
- 31 readers have demonstrated their belief in the value of *PFP* by sending me money.

My friends are now convinced that I am neurotic enough to persist in this behavior for a long, long time.

Thank you for your support.

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*Featured Game*

## **BULLET SLIDES**

*Production simulations* involve the design and development of a product. Different teams compete with each other to create the best product. The activity begins with teams receiving specifications for the final product along with an evaluation checklist. Teams may also have access to training sessions, job aids, reference materials, sample products, and expert consultants. Final products from different teams are evaluated by outside experts, end users, and peers on a variety of relevant dimensions.

For more details about production simulations as an interactive tool, check the [January 2002 issue](#) of *PFP*.

BULLET SLIDES is an example of a production simulation. It deals with the design of effective slides with software programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint®. This activity was created in response to the agony, boredom, and vertigo of staring at thousands of cute slides in hundreds of conference presentations.

### ***Purpose***

To review and revise a set of bullet slides to improve their effectiveness.

### ***Facilitators***

**Judges.** You will need two or three judges to evaluate the teams' products. These judges should be familiar with the [Bullet Slides Checklist](#).

**Statistician.** This person will be helpful during the evaluation phase to collect rating cards from participants and to compute the average rating for each slide set.

### ***Participants***

6 to 30

### ***Entry Level***

Participants should be familiar with the use of Microsoft PowerPoint® (or whatever program you use to make bullet slides).

### ***Time***

2 hours or more. (Time required for the evaluation phase will depend on the number of teams participating in this activity.)

### ***Equipment***

- A laptop computer for each team. (Each computer should have Microsoft PowerPoint® installed and [Bullet Slides.ppt](#), a file with 12 sample bullet slides.)
- LCD Projector for projecting slides from the laptop computers
- Screen
- Timer
- Whistle

### ***Handouts And Index Cards***

- *Bullet Slides Checklist*, one copy for each participant
- *Product Specifications*, one copy for each team
- *Paper copies of the 12 sample slides*, one copy for each team
- A packet of index cards for use as rating cards during evaluation

### ***Room Setup***

Provide tables and chairs for each team. Place the screen and the LCD projector in front of the room. Place a table (and chairs) for the judges to permit easy viewing of the screen.

### ***Flow***

**Organize teams.** Divide participants into two or more teams of approximately equal numbers. Each team should have three to seven members.

**Equip and brief teams.** Make sure that each team has a laptop computer with Microsoft PowerPoint® and *Bullet Slides.ppt* installed on it. Explain that trainers, managers, consultants, and salespeople frequently use electronic slides that contain a heading and a list of items. This type of slide, called a *bullet slide*, is a powerful communication tool that is frequently abused. The objective of this production simulation is to review and revise a set of bullet slides to improve their effectiveness.

**Present product specifications.** Distribute copies of the *Bullet Slides Checklist* to each participant. Explain that the 18 items in this checklist are designed to ensure the creation of effective bullet slides. This checklist will be used both as a learning resource and as an evaluation tool. Also distribute handout copies of the 12 bullet slides to be reviewed and revised. Explain that each computer has a file (*Bullet Slides.ppt*) that contains these bullet slides. Distribute copies of the *Product Specifications* to each team and explain that each team is required to complete the task (of selecting and revising six of the slides) during the next hour.

**Provide learning resources.** Explain that participants have three learning resources: their previous experience with bullet charts, the checklist, and 5 minutes of consulting time with you. Any team may make use of your consulting services on a first-come-first-served basis. Each team has only one chance to consult with you and the consulting session must not exceed 5 minutes. Encourage teams to begin working on their production activity and come up

with important questions before consulting with you.

**Conduct the training session.** Emphasize that the most important learning resource is the *Bullet Slides Checklist*. To demonstrate its use, project the first sample bullet slide and ask participants to review it by using the items from the checklist. Point out that each sample slide may violate one or more of the checklist items. Invite participants to critique the slide and suggest suitable revisions. Make sure that the critique is related to the checklist items. Ask probing questions to ensure that participants recognize that the slide violates Checklist Item 13 with its long list of bulleted items. The most appropriate revision is to split the slide into two separate slides, each containing four items.

**Provide consulting services.** Start a timer and announce the hour-long review and revision period. Circulate among the teams and observe their activities without interfering. If any team asks for consulting help, time your interaction. Keep referring back to the checklist as you answer questions and provide suggestions.

**Conclude the review and revision period.** At the end of the 1-hour period, blow a whistle and announce the conclusion of the production activity. Ask each team to bring its laptop computer to the front of the room. (Alternatively, teams may simply copy their file to a floppy and bring the floppy to the front of the room.)

**Explain the evaluation procedure.** Each set of six bullet slides will be evaluated by two groups, both using the same checklist as the rating instrument. Introduce your panel of judges and seat them at their table. In addition to this panel, explain that each slide set will be individually evaluated by members of all teams, except the team that produced the slide set. At the end of each slide set, individual participants will summarize their evaluation on a 10-point scale, where 10 indicates the highest quality.

**Conduct the evaluation.** Project each set of slides, pausing for about 15 seconds after each slide. At the end of each set, collect the rating cards from team members (other than the team that produced the slide set) and give them to your statistician for computing the average rating. (Let the judges keep their rating cards.)

**Announce the results.** After all slide sets have been displayed, ask each judge to briefly comment on the quality of the revisions in general and announce the rating for each set. After judges' reports, announce the average peer rating received by each set of slides.

**Debrief participants.** Discuss major learning points with participants. Remember that the

main focus of this activity is the production of bullet slides and not teamwork or interpersonal skills. Use the following types of questions to encourage participant discussions:

- What criteria did you use to select the six slides to revise?
- Which checklist item do you frequently violate in preparing bullet slides?
- Which item is most frequently violated by other presenters?
- Which checklist item is likely to produce the most dramatic impact?
- Which checklist items were easy to apply? Which items were difficult to apply?
- Was there a major difference between peer ratings and the judges' ratings? If so, what was the reason for this difference?
- Would you add any other items to the checklist? Would you remove any item?

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### *Handout 1*

## **Bullet Slides Checklist**

1. **Avoid crunching.** Leave wide margins and plenty of blank space.
2. **Position the title.** Place the title on the top one-sixth of the transparency.
3. **Capitalize the title.** Begin each word in the title with a capital letter.
4. **Don't repeat.** If the same word is repeated in all bulleted items, make it a part of the title or the subtitle.
5. **Use sans-serif.** Use a sans-serif font (example: Arial or Helvetica).
6. **Avoid ransom notes.** Do not use too many different fonts. Stick to a single font.
7. **Print big.** Use at least 24-point font size.
8. **Don't shout.** Avoid typing any title, item, or word in ALL CAPS.



9. **Be consistent.** Use the same font and same bullet symbol throughout.
10. **Shrink the bullet.** Make sure that the size of the bullet is the same as the font size (or slightly smaller).
11. **Use numbers.** Replace bullets with numbers if you want to emphasize the sequence or compare different items with each other.
12. **Use few words.** Use tight phrases instead of complete sentences.
13. **Don't exceed six.** Make sure that the bullet list does not contain more than six items. Make sure that no item has more than six words.
14. **Don't exceed two.** Do not use more than two levels of bullets.
15. **Keep items parallel.** Make sure that all items in the list have the same structure. (For example, they all begin with a verb.)
16. **Wrap words.** Make sure no bullet item exceeds two lines. Use a hanging indent style for the second line.
17. **Omit periods.** Do not put a period at the end of the items on the list.
18. **Prevent motion sickness.** Don't use unnecessary animation (for example: flying bullets and building the slide one item at a time.)

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*Handout 2*

## **Production Specifications**

1. Carefully review the set of 12 sample slides. Use the [\*Bullet Slides Checklist\*](#) to help you in this review process.
2. Select any six slides from the sample set to revise. Select those slides for which the revisions will result in the most dramatic improvement.
3. Revise these slides using Microsoft PowerPoint®. Make sure that your revisions do not

violate any of the other checklist items.

4. Create a new PowerPoint® document called *revised.ppt* with the six revised slides.
5. Remember that you have 1 hour to complete this task.

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*Handout 3*

## Paper Copies of the 12 Slides

[PDF Version](#) (requires Adobe Acrobat).

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*Guest Gamer*

*This column features interviews with outstanding designers and users of interactive experiential activities. Our guest this month is Joshua Reid, who had been an actor for 5 years before starting his own theater company in Wollongong, Australia. Recently, Joshua has designed training games specifically for the personal development of employees in large companies to implement his philosophy that people who feel good about themselves produce good results. Joshua uses skills and principles from his acting background to create entertaining games that educate and inform, resulting in greater retention of knowledge. Among his other achievements, Joshua has trained in 10 different countries.*

## An Interview with Joshua Reid

***Thiagi: Joshua, what's your specialty area?***

**Joshua Reid:** The area I specialize in now is using games to develop employees in a holistic personal development program. Companies often proclaim that it is their people who make the company—without wondering whether they should capitalize on their employees' business skills or people skills. Business skills are important—but we all know it takes employees who feel good about themselves to perform effectively. The games I have designed come as a 3-

hour package that includes a mystery scenario with accelerated learning techniques. Participants take away skills and attitudes that are applied at home and in the workplace.

***Thiagi: How did you get into designing and using games?***

**Joshua Reid:** I started using training games when I was traveling with a team of actors performing educational dramas in schools around Australia. We expanded our horizons by taking the program to schools in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and North Borneo. We used drama-based games to communicate important learning points such as sharing, working with others, not throwing stones, and studying effectively. We used the same techniques to communicate the same messages to adults, but we called them by different names. For example, while in India we presented these programs at several major hotels.

***Thiagi: What advice do you have to newcomers to the field of training games?***

**Joshua Reid:** When you design games, make them fun and informative. Select a specific type of game, decide on a theme, consider your audience, determine the available time, and then combine everything together.

When you conduct games, don't overdo it. If you are introducing games in a training program, start with a brief 5-minute activity. If this goes down well, try something a bit longer the next time. Learn to crawl before you can walk.

When you are trying to gain acceptance for games, use evidence from your own experience combined with other people's research. For example, I have learned more about geography from playing WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? and more about history from playing AGE OF EMPIRES than I ever learned from any school or business course that I have taken.

***Thiagi: What do you think is the most important characteristic of effective facilitators and participants?***

**Joshua Reid:** Two of the most important characteristics of a facilitator are a sense of humor and the ability to communicate effectively. A good facilitator also needs the ability to understand complex problems and to present them to learners in a simple way.

An ideal participant is someone without an attitude. This type of participant is willing to give a game a go and is open enough to learn something from it.

***Thiagi: What are some of the things that you dislike in facilitators and participants?***

**Joshua Reid:** I dislike facilitators giving out too many candies. Most people enjoy a small reward when they achieve something worthwhile. Sometimes facilitators give out a reward for anything and everything. People feel they are being babied if they are rewarded for something that was no effort to them.

A lot of people are turned off role-play games because they have had bad experiences in the past where facilitators have called two of the group to come out and do the role-play in front of the class. I have made this mistake myself. Coming from an acting background, I love performing in front of people and assumed that everyone else would feel the same. Since typical participants get embarrassed easily, when I do role-play activities I break the group into small teams of two or three, and ask everyone to conduct their role-plays simultaneously. Later the entire group is reunited to discuss the outcomes.

I dislike participants who refer to games as "experimental" learning methods. My response is always, "It's not experimental if you know that it works!"

***Thiagi: What are your favorite games?***

**Joshua Reid:** Golf. Actually, it's the driving range that I enjoy the most. I get a bucket of 100 balls and I try to hit each one the very best that I can. If a ball flies off to the far left, or dribbles along the ground, or goes behind me I don't get upset or depressed. I don't believe there is any such thing as failure. Each golf ball that I hit badly is simply another step towards hitting a perfect shot every time.

I also like the computer game AGE OF EMPIRES. This game can take weeks to play and teaches excellent organizational strategy.

***Thiagi: Do you have any book recommendations?***

**Joshua Reid:** *The Learning Revolution* by Gordon Dryden and Jeannette Vos. This is an excellent summary of today's best learning methods from around the world. I am currently reading this book again in order to incorporate the different alternative learning methods into my games.

I also recommend John C. Maxwell's *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Most of us are involved in training leaders to some degree or other. This book helps us understand and analyze the intangible concept of leadership.

***Thiagi: What is your prediction about the future of games?***

**Joshua Reid:** In the future, games will be incorporated into all learning institutions, from pre-school to universities, not just in the workplace. We will use technology much, much more. Highly realistic virtual reality games will replace those conducted by live facilitators. Individual players will be able to plug into their virtual reality internet station and play on-line with other players from all around the world. Language differences will not be a barrier because of electronic translators will recognize and process voice inputs. The number of years spent in traditional schooling will be greatly decreased through an application of accelerated learning techniques.

***Thiagi: What final recommendation do you have?***

**Joshua Reid:** I'd also like to see increased use of games in teacher-and-lecture orientated environments such as schools, universities, and churches. These institutions have good intentions and good content, but they are still not communicating their message in an effective way. A lot of people will benefit immensely if these institutions would incorporate games into their regular learning programs.

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***Metaphorical Simulation Game*****TOP DOG  
by Joshua Reid**

© 2002 by Joshua Reid

This game incorporates themes of leadership, teamwork, and motivation. TOP DOG is a simple game that can be used as a warm-up or a cool-down. I adapted the game from a children's game that I played in primary schools around Australia. This version is designed for corporate participants. The themes are the same as the children's version, but we call them by different names.

***Time***

15 minutes (less with smaller groups)

## ***Flow***

**Brief participants.** Explain that the object of the game is to become the *Top Dog*, the most important person in the group. At the end of the game, there will be only one winner. During the game, participants must gather different categories of information.

**Explain group formation.** During the game, you will call out different numbers. Participants should stop whatever they are doing, form small groups of that number, and be seated in these groups. Any participant who is not in a group of the specified size should remain standing.

**Call out information categories.** Make up your own categories or use this list:

- Exchange business cards.
- Exchange phone numbers.
- Locate everyone who was born in the same month as yourself.
- Locate everyone who has milk in her coffee.

**Specify the group size.** In the midst of each information activity, call out a number. Participants must organize themselves into groups of that size and sit down in their newly-formed groups. During the first couple of times, call out an evenly divisible number. For example, if you have 10 participants, *five* or *two* would be good. Later, call out numbers that will leave a few participants stranded. In our example, *three* will leave one participant outside the groups.

**Eliminate slower participants.** Ask participants who did not join groups of the specified size to sit in a special area called "Department of No Importance".

**Continue the process.** Keep supplying information categories and group sizes until there is only one participant left. If you end up with two participants, conduct a *Sudden Death* contest. Keep asking trivia questions of each participant alternatively. The first person to give an incorrect answer is eliminated. The other participant is now declared to be the *Top Dog*.

**Debrief the activity.** Interview the *Top Dog* with questions that are designed to point out that the people who didn't make it are now in one big team together, while the *Top Dog* is all alone. Here are some sample questions that you may use during this interview:

- How does it feel to be the winner?
- How did you get to the top?
- How do you feel about the people you had to eliminate to get to the top?
- What are you going to do now that you are the winner?
- Who are you going to ask for help? You cannot use the members of the group, because they are too busy doing things that are not important.

Have fun with these interview questions, but don't push the point too harshly. They will get this point anyway: It's only lonely at the top if you haven't taken anyone with you.

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*Facilitation Tip*

## Queuing

When you ask an open-ended question in a team meeting, you might have several people answering at once. Alternatively, if you have a polite team, many hands may go up at the same time.

In situations like this, the most assertive participant may shout out her response drowning out other responses. Following this, you comment on this response and other people comment on your comment, and before you know it, the discussion goes off in a new direction, with everybody having forgotten the other participants who wanted to respond to your original question.

To prevent such hijacking of the discussion, you may want to use the *stacking* or *queuing* strategy. When several participants attempt to answer your question at the same time, you can say something to the effect, "I'd like to hear Allan's comments. Immediately after that, I'd like to listen to Brenda, then Chuck, and then Diane," recognizing and listing participants who raised their hands or appeared eager to answer.

After specifying the queue order, you listen to the response from the first participant. Then, without commenting on it, you ask the second person for her response. You continue this

process until you have called upon all participants from the queue. Some of the later participants may tell you that their response has already been given earlier. Others may begin commenting on one of the earlier responses. Prevent this by saying, "Let's listen to all responses before commenting on any of them."

After everyone in your queue has responded, give your comments. Identify similarities and differences among the responses. Give appropriate feedback. Continue with probing and clarifying questions.

As a facilitation strategy, queuing results in more inclusive discussions.

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*Event Alert*

## **SAGSET/ISAGA Conference 2002**

### ***Bare Facts***

**Conference theme:** Interactive Learning through Gaming and Simulation

**Sponsors:** SAGSET and ISAGA

**Location:** Edinburgh, Scotland

**Dates:** August 26-30, 2002.

**Registration fee:** UK£385 (approximately US\$560 as of May 31 2002).

**Web site:** [http://www.eds.napier.ac.uk/isaga\\_sagset/](http://www.eds.napier.ac.uk/isaga_sagset/) .

### ***Details***

The Society for the Advancement of Games and Simulations in Education and Training (SAGSET) and the International Simulation and Gaming Association (ISAGA) are jointly conducting a conference on Interactive Learning through Gaming and Simulation. The conference will be held at the Merchiston Campus of Napier University in Edinburgh, Scotland. The conference will begin registration at 4:00 PM and a reception at 7:30 PM on Monday August 26. During the next four days (Tuesday to Friday), conference sessions will begin at



9:15 AM. The conference will end at 2:00 PM on Friday August 30.

### ***Keynotes***

This conference features four keynote speakers:

On Tuesday, **Thiagi** (that's me) will conduct an interactive session, *61 Ways To Skin a Cat: Interactive Experiential Strategies*.

On Wednesday, **Elysebeth Leigh** will present a keynote session *What is Expected of the Facilitator of "Open" Simulations* to explore the skills, capabilities, and personal profiles required for effectively facilitating complex open-ended simulations. Elysebeth is past president of ISAGA 2000 and the co-author of two recent books, *Learning Through Fun and Games* and *Fun & Games for Workplace Learning* (both published by McGraw Hill, Sydney).

On Thursday, **Morry van Ments** will present a keynote session *Magic, Illusion, and Trickery*. Morry is president of SAGSET and has written two books on role-playing and debriefing. He has held a variety of jobs, including BBC studio manager, RAF training officer, work study engineer, research scientist, and Industrial Liaison Officer.

On Friday, **Benita Cox** will present a light-hearted keynote summary of the conference *Have We Interacted and Have We Learned?* She will reflect on what has been achieved, lessons learnt during the past few days, and highlight areas for future research. Benita is a Reader in Operations Research at Imperial College, London and the current chair of SAGSET.

### ***Other Sessions***

Several sessions and workshops will be held during each day of the conference. (My colleague Andy Kimball and I will be conducting four workshops.) All conference activities will be focused on the following five sub-themes:

- Facilitation and debriefing
- Effective use of communication in IT in supporting interactive learning
- Concept of interactive learning in specific discipline areas such as Business, Social Sciences, Technology, and the Arts
- The role of interactive learning in nurturing transferable and employability skills in education and training

- Interactive learning approaches which support people with special learning needs in schools, colleges, and adult learning situations

### ***And That's Not All...***

To encourage taking in the sights of Edinburgh and nearby locations in Scotland, Wednesday afternoon will be free of conference sessions and offer an optional walking tour, city coach tour, or a trip to Glenkinchie Distillery or Traquair House.

The Edinburgh Festival will be taking place during the period of the Conference. All participants will be sent a program and an evening will be kept free for those who wish to sample some of the events.

The conference social program will include the conference dinner and ceilidh and a civic reception to give participants a flavor of Scottish culture.

Mark your calendar. See you in Edinburgh.

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### *Puzzle*

## **An Electronic Puzzle**

Here's a puzzle format that is based on the children's game of HANGMAN (and the TV game show, *Wheel of Fortune*®). You can create the puzzle as a set of PowerPoint® slides and use it with large audiences as a final review activity.

Let's pretend that you are a member of the audience and that I had just completed a presentation on strategies for improving human performance. Here's my puzzle presentation.

*Let's work on an interactive puzzle to recall an important principle related to playfulness as a performance intervention.*

*Here's a set of blank tiles that represent a summary statement about playfulness:*

									.					

If you think you can fill in the blanks with the correct letters, please stand up. If you solve the puzzle at this stage, you win 100 points.

\* \* \*

Since nobody's standing up, I am going to simplify the puzzle by revealing two letters. Here's same puzzle with the two letters E and T shown at all locations they occur.

T			E			E								
T												T		
									T					
T														
	E								.					

If you think you can fill the rest of the blanks with correct letters, please stand up. If you solve the puzzle at this stage, you win 80 points.

\* \* \*

Let's go on to the next round. I am going to reveal two more letters—I and N—in every location they occur:

T			E			E		I						
T		I	N					I				T		
		N				I			T					
T		I	N											
	E		I						.					

If you think you can fill the rest of the blanks with correct letters, please stand up. If you solve the puzzle correctly at this stage, you win 60 points.

\* \* \*

For the benefit of the rest of us, let me reveal two more letters, S and A:

T	A		E		S	E		I			S		
T		I	N		S			I			T		
	A	N				I			T				
T		I	N		S								
S	E		I			S			.				

If you think you can fill the rest of the blanks, please stand up. If you solve the puzzle at this stage, you win 50 points.

\* \* \*

Most of you have solved most of the puzzle, except for a couple of pesky little letters. Let me help you by revealing two more letters, R and L:

T	A		E		S	E	R	I			S		
T		I	N		S		L	I			T	L	
	A	N			L	I			T				
T		I	N		S								
S	E	R	I			S	L		.				

If you have solved the puzzle at this stage, please stand up. You win 40 points.

\* \* \*

I am sure that all of you have solved the puzzle. Just for the sake of feedback, let me display the correct answer:

T	A	K	E		S	E	R	I	O	U	S		
T	H	I	N	G	S		L	I	G	H	T	L	Y
	A	N	D		L	I	G	H	T				
T	H	I	N	G	S								
S	E	R	I	O	U	S	L	Y	.				

**Your Turn**

Now that you have vicariously experienced a large-audience interactive puzzle, how about

designing one of your own. Let me know what you come up with.

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*Contest Results*

## **Short-Short Stories**

The April *PFP* contest invited participants to write a short-short story about change.

This was one of our popular contests. We received several excellent stories that moved, surprised, shocked, and worried us. Every story provided us with insights. The stories came from readers around the world. Marty Cielens sent a story from Australia and Alexei Gartinski, from Switzerland. We don't know where Eileen Graham is from, but she sounds (or reads) British.

It is nice to know that Roberta Allen's 5-minute *Fast Fiction* approach encourages people to tell their stories.

We wanted to declare everybody winners and award them all the prize. But our accountant would not approve. So reluctantly, we decided that Alexei should be the winner.

Congratulations, Alexei. Please visit our online store at

[http://www.thiagi.com/Merchant2/merchant.mv?Screen=SFNT&Store\\_Code=WBTI](http://www.thiagi.com/Merchant2/merchant.mv?Screen=SFNT&Store_Code=WBTI) and select \$50 worth of any of our products.

\* \* \*

### ***The Dandelion's Revenge***

*By Jacqueline Y. Williams*

The previous fall had been a blur of activity, and as I stared at my once beautiful garden, it showed. Dandelions had taken over, their white beards drifting in the breeze. This spring was going to be a challenge. Because the flowers had already gone to seed, any attempt to remove the bearded offenders would only prove to spread the seeds.

My neighbor had an idea; "We used to take a match to them. The seeds burn right up."

At first, I laughed but then thought, "It might be worth a try." I found some matches, struck the head, and set the flame to a tuft of white. Sizzle. The clump of nasty seeds was gone.

After I had used an entire box of matches, it became clear that I needed more firepower. I found the barbecue lighter and, feeling fairly triumphant, set about destroying my enemy. My husband had to prove his male prowess and quickly used his blowtorch to finish off the other half of the garden as the sun began to set.

I went to bed that night confident that I could easily regain control of my garden. After work the next day, I went out to begin my dandelion dig. The sight of my garden full of white whiskers stopped me short. All the yellow blooms had gone to seed overnight.

After a moment of dismay, I found the blowtorch and started the task again. That summer I had my best garden ever.

\* \* \*

## ***Change***

*By Dave Piltz*

It was five o'clock, work had finally ended for most. Fred was mentally gearing up for a long night of work ahead. As his thoughts drifted, feelings of being overwhelmed took over and those all too familiar questions began entering his conscious mind.

"What if it doesn't work?" "What if I don't try?" Thoughts and questions continued to race in Fred's mind.

As he focused on the scene outside his office window he asked himself, "How did I get in this situation? What did I do to deserve this?"

Of course the answers didn't come easily. Fred knew what happened, he knew why he deserved this at least on some spiritual level.

As Fred pondered, he realized he shouldn't be looking at the negative but the positive. He knew his present opportunity was like none other, the experience was (and is) great. It's just that darn 15 percent that Fred detested. Everyone that knew Fred heard him say over and over again; "I love 85 percent of what I do."

Before he knew it, he started saying out loud; "I just can't stop keep thinking of what it was

like before ... Before this all started.”

Fred began looking off in the distance thinking the uncertainty was killing him. *What could I have said differently? What could I have done differently?*

Perhaps, tomorrow the doctor's report will be hopeful.

\* \* \*

## ***The Shadow***

*By Alexei Gartinski*

She was sitting on the seashore looking at the waves. The sun was going down just in front of her. There was no one around. The wind was blowing a bit. The sand was touching her bare feet. No one.

She looked back and saw something moving towards her. The shadow. Strangely quiet. Just moving entirely on its own. There was no sound, just this shadow of absolutely nothing slowly coming closer ...

She was a bit surprised to see that she was not scared this time. The shadow came closer, covered her feet and gradually took the shape of her own shadow. She followed it with her eyes, waited until it firmly stuck back to her feet, and only then she got up and started moving.

“Thanks for being back, Change”, said she. “Now I can go home.”

She stood up and went away. Change silently followed. The sun went down the horizon. Change started fading away until it finally disappeared and left the girl on her own again. Never mind, she'll be back tomorrow.

\* \* \*

## ***The Strange Word***

*By Alexei Gartinski*

Everything around him was changing all the time. Colors, faces, people, absolutely everything. Today he would have looked at the plant in front of him: it would be green. Tomorrow—if he were the same plant, of course—it would be red, or yellow, or purple. Or in most cases it

would be another plant, or a dog, or even a cat. Or it could be absolutely anything you could imagine. Or anything that you couldn't.

It was not an easy life. Life with nothing fixed, with no points of reference, nothing to hold on. He could never tell what he was going to see tomorrow, or whether what he would see will make any sense. Every day he had to start everything from scratch, re-invent everything, do everything differently. It couldn't be otherwise, since the world around him was different every time he got up in the morning. But what a beautiful world that was!

Then one day he woke up and didn't believe his eyes. The pink plant that stood in front of his desk yesterday was exactly the same! It was the same plant, and it was pink as before! He spent an hour examining it and couldn't find the slightest difference from the plant he saw the day before. He tried everything he could: closing his eyes, moving around, staying still, running away and coming back. Everything in vain: The plant remained exactly the same.

He was so shocked that it took him a while to notice that not only the plant, but everything else around him stayed exactly as it was before! And when a terrifying thought—that it may remain like that forever—started creeping into his mind, with a sudden scream of horror he realized what the strange word that he could never understand actually meant.

*Change* means when everything remains exactly the same!

\* \* \*

### ***Loose Change***

*By Jane Bradley*

Ed Miller always walked with his head down. He got in this habit when he was a kid during the great depression. Ed had a knack for finding loose change, mostly pennies, but occasionally he found a nickel or a dime. When was lucky enough to find silver change, he would give it to his mother to help out the family. Ed collected the pennies in a jar under his bed until the jar was full, then he would carefully roll the pennies in paper cylinders and put them inside an old shoebox on the floor of his closet.

The penny rolls accumulated in his closet, year after year. When Ed was eighteen he fell in love and got married. His wife appreciated many things about Ed but she was annoyed by his habit of collecting loose change.



"I can't have these shoeboxes all over my house taking up so much space."

Ed gathered up the boxes and piled them up against the back wall of the garage.

After some time Ed and his wife had children. When Ed's kids grew up they were very embarrassed by their father. He had developed a permanent curve in his neck from looking down all the time. He could no longer hold his head up straight, even if he wanted to. They hated to go to town with him and they tried to stay as far away from him as they could.

Eventually, Ed's kids grew up and moved far away. They had little desire to visit the small town where everyone regarded their father as a bit strange. After all, they had careers in business and they were moving up the corporate ladder.

Ed's wife had a difficult time taking care of him in his old age. The curvature in his spine affected his balance and he fell a lot. This worried her. She called the children. "We need to move closer to you. I can't take care of Dad by myself anymore."

The children came with their children, a rental truck, and their list of conditions.

"The assisted living facility has no storage," they said. "We will have to take the pennies to the bank."

Ed was quiet. His grandson said, "What's the matter, grandpa?" Ed replied, "I was saving those pennies for you."

Ed's children were impatient. "Dad," they said, "You can cash the pennies in at the bank or deposit the money right into an account for the children."

Ed took his grandchildren out to the garage. Against the back wall were rows of shoeboxes, each labeled with dates. 1929 - 1936, 1936 - 1938, 1938 - 1940, and so on.

"Grandpa, you sure have a lot of pennies," they said.

"I don't even know how many I have. I've lost count. But I can tell you a little something about each penny in there. I can tell you which ones I plucked right off the middle of the sidewalk in the brightness of the sun and I can tell you which ones I had to wiggle out of the grass after seeing just the slightest glimmer of copper in the dirt."

The grandchildren begged their parents to take the coins. They pleaded with them. They whined, threatened, and basically annoyed them enough to say, "All right, if you want to take

the stupid, worthless coins, go ahead.”

The kids carried the shoeboxes to the U-Haul and relayed them to the back of the truck. When all the household furniture and clothes were loaded on, the kids went inside the empty house to say good-bye to their grandparents.

They promised their grandfather they would keep all of his pennies for him while he was in his new home. They knew some change was worth saving.

\* \* \*

### ***Daydream***

*By Marty Cielens*

I stood in the turret, arms resting on its rim, reflecting on the dusty taste of the dry, tropical day in my mouth, wondering at what I could barely sense. Was this me, or just a small mass of displaced air cocooned in the steel and alloys squatting well north of friends, familiarities, and softer times? Despair was always at the edge of everything, dancing in and out, making small forays into the thin shell of daydreams.

When was it?

*Yesterday*, I thought, *perhaps an age ago*. Was it for a minute an hour, a day? It seemed as if the guns would never stop firing. The low scrub hardly murmured as ammunition slashed its entrails; small puffs of dust the only evidence of that surreal onslaught. We just kept on firing—no one sure just why.

In the silence that followed, we sat and stared across the low blue-red bush. Then they came: old men, women and children, arms aloft; walking mutely towards us. It's as if they had simply crouched in amongst the death and waited—untouched until the lunacy abated.

\* \* \*

### ***The Puncture***

*By Eileen Graham*

It was cold and wet, the car swerved as it hit a pothole in the road and as she felt the steering pull to the left, she knew she had a puncture

She pulled into the curbside and got out to look at the tire. It was flat. She thought about driving to the next garage but didn't know how far that would be.

As she stood looking at the car, another vehicle drew up and the driver leaned over and asked her if she needed any help. She could hear the warning bells in her head. She could hear her husband telling her to be careful but help was here and it seemed silly to turn it away. He got out of the car and offered to change the wheel for her. It seemed churlish to say no, so she agreed, opened the trunk to get the spare wheel and the tools he needed, and then she held the umbrella over him while he changed the wheel.

He finished the job and put the punctured tire back in the trunk. She offered to buy him a drink for his trouble. They arranged to meet at the next pub, about a mile up the road. They met in the bar and she bought the drinks. He kissed her and whispered he thought he was going to be late for their meeting until he saw her car parked by the side of the road. The room was booked. He would see her upstairs in ten minutes.

She felt her pulse quicken and her stomach turn over. She was meeting her lover and nothing else mattered.

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*Online Game Shell*

## **MATRIX**

Here's a new online game shell called MATRIX.

When you play a MATRIX game, this is what the game display looks like:



You see a 3 x 3 table with different labels for rows and columns. In the sample game, NATIONS OF THE WORLD, the columns are labeled *Major City*, *Language*, and *Continent* and the rows are labeled *Switzerland*, *Afghanistan*, and *India*. Below the table, in the middle of the screen, you see an answer slot with a word or a phrase. In the sample game, this slot contains *Kandahar*.

Your job is to drag the answer and drop it in the most appropriate box in the table. Since *Kandahar* is a major city in *Afghanistan*, you drop it in the middle box of the left column at the intersection of *Major City* and *Afghanistan*.

If your response is correct, the answer stays where you dropped it. You hear a pleasant tone and your score increases. (We will let you find out what happens if your answer is incorrect.) The answer box now contains a new word or phrase.

At the beginning of the game, the timer at the bottom right of the screen starts counting down. During the game, you repeat the process of dragging and dropping each new answer in the appropriate box. When you correctly fill the entire table, you win the game with a score of 100. (We will let you find out what happens if you run out time before completing the task.)

When the game ends, you are invited to play again. When you click the mouse button, you see a new table. The columns and rows may contain new headings (such as *Albania* or *Portugal* and *Capital* or *Currency*). You play the game repeatedly, with different 3 x 3 tables (related to the same content) challenging you every time you play.

I recently finished play-testing MATRIX in the USA, Australia, and Singapore and made some improvements. Judging from player reactions, MATRIX is quite an addictive online game.

See for yourself. Try [NATIONS OF THE WORLD](#) or [FACTS ABOUT US STATES](#). (Your browser must support Macromedia Flash in order to play these games.)

### ***The Game Design Procedure***

MATRIX is an effective game shell for organizing and reviewing information along two dimensions (which form the columns and rows). To design a game, you create a table with different columns and rows. For example, we used these six columns for the NATIONS OF THE WORLD game:

1. Continent
2. Capital
3. Language
4. Neighbor
5. Major City
6. Currency

We used these five rows for the same game:

1. India
2. Afghanistan
3. Albania
4. Portugal
5. Switzerland

Our game design task was to complete the table with correct entries for each of the 30 (6 x 5) boxes. It is acceptable for the same entry to be repeated for more than one box. For example, Europe is the continent for Portugal, Albania, and Switzerland.

Once we have created the game table, the rest is automatic. My friend Brandon Carson has developed a computer program that digests your table and converts it into a MATRIX game, ready for online play.

### ***Your Turn***

Would you like to design a MATRIX game that we can make available online? Check out [this month's contest](#).

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### *Contest*

*Every month, we challenge our readers with an exciting contest. The winner will receive a \$50 gift certificate toward the purchase of any book or game from Workshops by Thiagi, Inc.*

## **Make a MATRIX**

Did you read the piece on the online game shell, MATRIX? Did you try your hand at playing the game? Did you read the section about the game design procedure?

Here's a challenge for you: Select a training topic and come up with a game table as described in the article. Send this table to us (with a suitable name for the game) and we will create a ready-to-play online game.

Your game table should have at least four rows and columns and not more than 10 rows and columns. Send your table to us. (Please either send an EXCEL spreadsheet or a text file with tab-separated values.) If we judge your entry to be the best one, you win a \$50 gift certificate.

### ***The Rules***

- Your entry will be judged on quantity of items as well as quality.
- Mail your contest entry to Thiagi, 4423 East Trailridge Road, Bloomington, IN 47408-

9633, or email it with "Contest 205" on the subject line to [thiagi@thiagi.com](mailto:thiagi@thiagi.com), or FAX it to 812/332-5701.

- Include your name and email address with your entry.
- The decision of our judges is final.
- We reserve the right to award no prize if we receive no entries of adequate quality.
- Results will be announced in a future issue of *PFP*. All entries become the property of *Play for Performance*. (Of course, you will get full credit.)
- Deadline for the contest is 11:59 PM EST, June 30, 2002. All items must be *received* by the deadline. (Keep this in mind if you send your entry by postal mail.)

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*Pithy Saying*

## Good To Great

***A good facilitator answers all questions. A great facilitator questions all answers.***

Just to give you some practice in being a great facilitator, how would you question this pithy saying?

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