

“Anything that can go wrong,

will go wrong.”

# “Author Meets Mr. Murphy”

A funny story about game inventing and selling

by Fred Horn

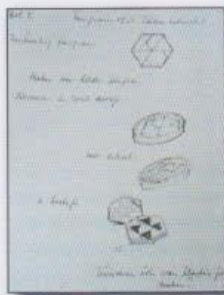
## Introduction

S ometime back in 1987 a friend of mine, owner of an advertising agency, told me an ‘account’ of his wanted a game and asked me, knowing my involvement with games, “Are you interested?”

Of course I was and so we soon had an appointment at the account’s office which turned out to be a part of the firm ICI Holland B.V..

For their 60th anniversary they wanted something special next and in relation to their playful portfolio presentation ‘TASTBARE COMMUNICATIE’ (tangible communication). Their own PR department was also present at the meeting and asked for what possibilities my friend’s agency could offer. He introduced me and I started to explain that there was a wide range of possibilities available for games, but time after time I was interrupted by these two PR men and women know-it-alls who tried to teach me complete rubbish about how to invent games.

Were it not for my friend, I would have picked up my belongings, waved ‘goodbye,’ never returning again. But instead, almost bursting with rage, I let it pass and continued to explain what I had in mind for their game. In the end, I made some ‘sketches’ which we left for them. My friend asked me to start thinking about some of my suggestions and one of these



was a hexagonal Tangram (shown at left). To my great surprise, as I thought I had messed up my friend’s ‘account,’ he phoned me about a week later, told me I had done a great job and they wanted an execution of 5 of the games I had presented.

## Realization

His agency now took over and they made a nice presentation of all 5 options:



In the meantime I had visited the ICI plant to learn more about their products. I was sent home with complete documentation and a bag full of product samples. This turned out to be important because, via my friend’s agency, they had informed me the game must also use as many of their products as possible! That was a completely new revelation to me and a not so easy task to realize given these new constraints, thus we again had to meet with the two PR wackos.

One thing was easy, they had decided “to go for the Tangram!” After an hour with these two, I was again !@%\$#! and ready to go! They had only offered us bone-headed suggestions on what to do with the new constraints of using all of the ICI products, and now my friend got angry as well, told them to shush up, and asked me what solutions I had in mind.

Because the bulk of their products were manufactured from ‘plastics’ and transparent PVC, I suggested a box be made out of a transparent (round) pipe. The tangram itself would be constructed out of transparent ‘bricks,’ and as a ‘fill-in’ inside the box around the tangram, a stack of all kinds of their products could be made out of “plastic” leaves. We all agreed and I promised my friend to design complete instructions on how this could be made. He could then present this to ICI with the financial consequences of the project.

## Presentation

Within the month, my friend and I were summoned to have an immediate meeting with the highest boss of ICI Holland B.V.. The ‘top guy’ was mad as dogs about what had happened with the game and they blamed it all on us. With the money invested, only 100 games had been produced for an internal price far higher than 100 guilder. And all that just for some extra fun for their 60th anniversary!

Not impressed by all of this and wearing my best suit, the first thing I asked of course was: “Can I see the manufactured game?” That took some time, but a sample was unearthed and placed on the table. The package was opened and out came a complete surprise! A nice hexagonal plastic box, but far from what I had designed and worked out for the manufacturer. That was the moment I had to think of Mr. Murphy! In his “Law” he states: “Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong,” and here I was, meeting Mr. Murphy.

**Were it not for my friend, I would have picked up my belongings, waved ‘goodbye,’ never returning again.**

Not impressed by the ‘Boss’ and completely ‘flabbergasted’ about what was presented on the table I said, “But this is not what I invented nor designed for manufacturing!” The ‘Boss’ was also not impressed and asked for the “Chief of the Workshop,” who stated, after entering the room, “This is exactly what I asked to produce.”

My friend opened his case and showed the Chief what I had drawn and the instructions I had given for its production. Completely confused, the Chief produced my first ‘sketch’ and looking at these two PR loonies said to the ‘Boss,’ “That’s all they gave me” and left the room. I will say the Chief and his men did a great job looking at the product, but it was easy to understand were the money had gone!

All of the ‘Boss’s’ anger now turned to these two poor PR nutcases, but there was more trouble in the air. At the top they had >>