

For Real: the Game of Urban Survival is a fun and imaginative way to explore the world of inner city life. Within it you will examine: 1) school and the value of an education to one whose opportunities are minimal and whose needs are great, 2) crime, drugs and violence, 3) the role and purpose of gangs, 4) the functions of various organizations and places within the urban community (i.e., churches, cultural centers, barber shops), 5) police-citizens relations, 6) (un)employment and welfare, 7) sex (both safe and unsafe), 8) personal factors (street knowledge, strength, verbal skills, etc.), and 9) that ever present random element that either reorients or disorients one's life.

To play:

- a) *select a goal:*
 - 1) be the first to go around the board and survive;
 - 2) make the most money; or,
 - 3) develop the neighborhood by eliminating crackhouses and bars as well as creating businesses and cashing in on ideas/inventions.

- b) *move around the board:*
 - 1) walk, or
 - 2) ride the subway.

- c) *perform specific tasks relevant to different spaces on the board:*
 - 1) go to school,
 - 2) buy/sell/avoid drugs
 - 3) hang out with friends
 - 4) create and invest in ideas and inventions
 - 5) go to work
 - 6) go dancing at a nightclub
 - 7) interact with police
 - 8) go shopping
 - 9) go to church
 - 10) go to the barber
 - 11) and much more

- d) *balance the following characteristics:*
 - 1) life – your overall health
 - 2) sanity – your overall mental stability
 - 3) strength – your stamina and ability to fight
 - 4) charisma – your charm and capacity to influence people
 - 5) book knowledge – your overall intelligence in terms of the law, politics and economics
 - 6) street knowledge – your ability to understand the basic dynamics of **“For Real”**.

Background

“**For Real: the Game of Urban Survival**,” was initially born in response to two factors. First, my teaching several youth in a cultural center in Houston, Texas were unable to follow the dynamics that effected their lives, and second, an accumulation of information that I had compiled over several years about different interrelated processes that effect people in American cities. Although I am a professor of political science – specializing in Comparative Politics, I have many interests in urban life. I wanted to capture all these dynamics and challenge someone to balance them all simultaneously.

The rules of the game were created by myself, Dannielle Roberts and Juliet Seignious. These rules were later modified and refined as we played earlier versions of the game with different groups of people around the country (of varied age groups as well as ethnic backgrounds). Dannielle Roberts, a professional graphic artist, provided the design for the board, the rule book, the card and all graphic elements of the game. Michael Ray Charles, artist and Professor of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, is developing the art for the board and the characters (as yet unavailable).

Objectives

To play “**for Real**” one of three goals can be selected. Each illustrates a different facet of the game.

First, acknowledging the current realities of urban life, one can play to be the first player to go all the way around the board. Negotiating the board, three different neighborhoods, this basic level of play provides a general introduction to the game’s dynamics, rules, and, at the same time, highlights the general day-to-day encounters that people have within any city. Indeed, one of the most important objectives of the game is to move away from the fantasy-like nature of games and toward a simulation that better assists people in more fully understanding their own lives while having fun doing it.

Second, one can play to make as much money as possible. This allows someone to figure out the different factors involved with making money within “**for Real**.” Primarily, this involves income generated from specific jobs, including both illicit drug related enterprises as well as “licit” entrepreneurial ventures (i.e., ideas and inventions).

Third, one can play to “develop” the neighborhood (i.e., rid the community of crackhouses, bars, and lots – replacing them with cultural centers, nightclubs, houses or small manufacturing companies). This level incorporates the lessons learned within the previous two by compelling individuals to move around the board and generate capital. This level further adds on the dimension of “development” directly addressing what that entails and then living within the outcome of that effort.

Getting Started and Playing

To begin the game, each player selects a character piece. In total, there 6 to choose from: 3 men, 3 women, 2 African-American, 2 Whites, and 2 Latinos. The number of players for each game can range from 1 to 6. The only difference is perhaps the amount of dialogue that takes place.

Next, each player selects a career. The eight careers to choose from include:

- 1) a business person;*
- 2) a sports figure;*
- 3) a police officer;
- 4) a religious figure;
- 5) an entertainer;*
- 6) a beautician;
- 7) a teacher; and,
- 8) a criminal.*

Only those with an asterisk are currently available within the game. These careers become relevant for each player must perform different tasks, specific to their particular profession. Additionally, each player receives benefits/sanctions befitting their specific job. In other words, each career has positive and negative experiences associated with them. A roll of the die determines whether or not players start off the game employed or in search of work.

This simplification of choice in terms of careers is meant to focus individuals on the stereotypical careers offered to them and to highlight in some detail what each career involves. For example, athletes make a significant amount of money (when they go professional), but their careers are short.

Following the selection of career, each player must roll a die and identify their characters personality type. Specifically, this includes:

- 1) life points – your overall health
- 2) sanity points – your overall mental stability
- 3) strength points – your stamina and ability to fight
- 4) charisma point – your charm and capacity to influence people
- 5) book knowledge points – your overall intelligence in terms of the law, politics and economics
- 7) street knowledge points – your ability to understand the basic dynamics of “**for Real**”.

Throughout the game one must continually monitor changes within these characteristics as well as attempt to improve upon those areas that are deficient. Failure to do so could result in increased difficulties (for example, if life points reach “0” the character dies).

Success in improving characteristics, however, results in improving one's chances of success.

After rolling the die to see who goes first, the first player moves his/her character. Moving the appropriate number of spaces, the designated character will either perform some task (spend money, confront a drug situation, go to church, etc.) or they will have to roll to see what happens on an "Outcome" sheet that is provided with the game. In total, there are 20 different types of game spaces: 7 involving the performance of some task and 13 involving rolling the die.

After a player has performed whatever task is necessary, they have several options:

- 1) they can "challenge" another player, in which they attempt to take money, property or life points;
- 2) they can "buy" a particular good (i.e., food, drugs, property, condoms);
- 3) they can "sell" a particular good that they possess (i.e., drugs, property);
- 4) they can "start an idea/invention" in which case they attempt to create a marketable product;
- 5) they can "invest in an idea/invention" where they move the idea/invention towards a point where they can cash it in; or,
- 6) they can do nothing.

Outcomes

The outcomes of each game tend to vary with the objectives selected. From the basic objective of simply getting around the board, we expect someone to learn how to navigate around "**for Real**"; i.e., how to move, understand the available options, the spaces, etc.

From the more advanced level of making money, we expect the players to learn some basic survival skills (i.e., what to do about the drug trade, how to use one's friends, what to do about the police and the law, what to do about making money). Additionally, when engaged on this level, the players should also come to learn the importance of education (through its impact on obtaining work, the amount of pay one receives, and the ability to avoid problems with the police).

From the last level of "developing" the neighborhood, several lessons may be learned. First, the players are expected to incorporate the knowledge gained from the previous two levels: moving around the board, surviving "**for Real**", and making money. Second, they should learn about the vigilance required in the pursuit of development itself. Indeed, once a crackhouse goes down, it is very easy for one to go back up. Third, they should learn about how difficult it is to be "positive" and "progressive" within an environment fraught with numerous complex difficulties.

Market

Although young children (between the ages of 13 and 16) seem to have good aptitude for picking up, playing the game and extracting from it the various lessons expected, we feel that many of the subtleties within it might be lost if the players were too young. Additionally, the conversation that generally emerges from playing the game seem to effect the level of play as well as the lessons learned from it. For these reasons, we believe that the ideal target audience would be young people between the ages of 13 and 35. However, the game is sufficiently sophisticated that an adult market might also be tapped. It should be noted, interest would likely cross a wide variety of ethnic groups as well as political, economic and social backgrounds.

The game has significant potential over different markets. Not only would it appeal to the “Generation X” or “hip-hop” generation, but it would also appeal to a significantly diverse group of individuals who have an interest in urban life. Additionally, we see a strong educational component to the game. While many people enjoy it for its interesting dynamics, we also feel that it will assist a larger number of people in understanding the numerous issues identified at the outset. This latter point increases the marketability of the game, for its distribution need not be restricted to hobby shops and game stores. We see no reason that it could not be incorporated into the curriculum of educational facilities.

We further believe that the game may lend itself to development in the form of CD-ROM as well. Given the large number of variations that can take place within one game as well as within different games, the interactive as well as extended play features appear to fit this medium quite well.

As one of my subfields is econometrics, I know that the sample of cases we have drawn upon to make these suggestions is not comprehensive. We have taken great care, however, to randomly select individuals (across various ethnic and economic categories) to play the game. This response has been uniformly positive.