

Reading THE GAME, the original, by Neil Strauss

The Red Quest | 6 January, 2022 | by The Red Quest

[THE GAME](#), the classic memoir, is still a fun read, maybe because, at the expense of truthfulness, it follows a very classic structure, in which the hero (Neil) gets an almost literal “call to action” or “call to adventure,” meets helpers (Mystery) as well as challengers and temptations (bad chicks, liars, also Mystery), undergoes severe challenges on his quest, descends into the abyss, atones, and finally returns bequeath us with the game. What’s it most missing? [In my view, regular readers will not be surprised to learn, non-monogamy](#)... these guys want to sleep around but haven’t figured out how to structure their relationships and lives to enable women to be congruent and consistent with that desire. Much of the silly drama in THE GAME could be resolved or lessened through a non-monogamy structure, though I also think most of the guys described lack the maturity or intellectual framework to put it into practice.

Mystery has a problem when he sleeps with some chick, and then “she e-mailed Mystery’s girlfriend, Patricia, and told her about her boyfriend’s extracurricular activities. The fallout nearly destroyed his relationship, and in the process taught him that there was a downside to being a pickup artist: getting caught.” Solution, tell the chicks you’re into non-monogamy, make them part of that structure, help the [threesomes](#) flow.

When I first read THE GAME, I thought, “Cool, a guide to sleeping with more chicks, more effectively.” Now I read it and think, “There are things these guys get, but they are immature and miss so much.”

Not only immature, but dysfunctional. The ideas around non-monogamy weren’t sufficiently part of the world at that time for the PUAs of that era to have encountered them. There’s a podcast somewhere with [Krauser](#) in which he talks about how the early days of pickup were like the early days of MMA: people tried all sorts of stuff, but very quickly figured out what was effective and what wasn’t. In MMA, it was jiu-jitsu, in particular. In pickup, early pickup guys focused mostly on outer game (routines, peacocking, these sorts of things), and then Red Pill guys came along and said guys should focus on “inner game” (confidence, life development, etc.). Naturally there’s [a synthesis between outer and inner: it’s not either-or](#). To the extent I thought about “non-monogamy” at all in the ‘00s, it might have been as the weird hippie free-love communes that were tried in the ‘60s and ‘70s. The modern intellectual and institutional infrastructure for contemporary non-monogamy hadn’t yet been built (I’m arguably [a builder of those](#)).

So that idea of non-monogamy is missing in THE GAME, and we’ll come back to other omissions later. In THE GAME, Strauss has a hilariously childish backrub threesome routine... it came from a weak frame that said he had to trick chicks in threesomes. I understand where he was coming from, and I understand how he’d be tempted to use such things given the state of knowledge back then, but there are better ways, better frames, and better inner game. Neil goes on his quest, comes back, and game skills are then given to everyone else... here is the “call” part of the monomyth,

It was never my intention to change my personality or walk through the world under an assumed identity. In fact, I was happy with myself and my life. That is, until an innocent phone call (it always starts with an innocent phone call) led me on a journey into one of the oddest and most exciting underground communities that, in more than a dozen years of journalism, I have ever come across. The call was from Jeremie Ruby-Strauss (no relation), a book editor who had stumbled across a document on the Internet called the layguide, short for The How-to-Lay-Girls Guide.

This leads him to learn game, write about the game, and write the book... the quest doesn’t originate

inside him: it's from outside, like the classic call to adventure. Completely with the "growth of the hero" and "obstacles encountered" and all the other story beats anyone who's read screenwriting books will be familiar with. I wonder if what Neil describes happened, or what happened, happened like he *says* it did. I don't think so, but you can and should still learn from *THE GAME*, and the book is still fun to read, in part because of its drama... this post is not about "how *THE GAME* sucks." It doesn't, but I see things I didn't, and a downside of hewing to the monomyth is likely the sacrifice of something like or approaching full honesty. You'll see his extremely implausible descriptions of going to Belgrade and Eastern Europe, and the stories therein. Neil is also leaving out or deemphasizing many of the flubbed approaches.

The other thing you'll notice is the number of other guys he meets and interacts with. Those guys talk to other guys. By the time Strauss began his game journey, he was *already* a successful journalist, and a celebrity journalist... not some average joe, working as a retail manager or whatever. Those many guys Strauss meets? They talk, and word has filtered out that a lot of his game isn't merely running the Cube or talking to girls about C versus U shaped smiles... it's talking about his celebrity friends and network, celebrity being LA culture's obsession. If these dudes have this big ass house in the Hollywood Hills, throwing massive parties all the time, celebs are stopping by constantly (in some cases living there, like Courtney Love), Neil has a huge social circle full of celebrity friends, then he learns pick up, starts bringing these girls back and bangin em out, *is* he doing what an average guy is? Maybe... or maybe a lot of his game, which he leaves out, is talking about how he's cool with Britney Spears. He's spinning a story that may omit important parts. Omit structural components of a building, and it will fall over. Many guys have started pickup coaching businesses, only to discover a huge number of the prospective clients are very far from being able to communicate with other humans, let alone pick up attractive women.

Neil might have been cool with Britney, but in *THE GAME*, there's also a story about Ross Jeffries making a deal about Neil bringing him to a party, which Neil does, and Ross sniffs Carmen Electra's butt and embarrasses the shit out of Neil, and Neil justifiably never brings Jeffries to a party again. There are other allusions to things like this happening, the PUAs being losers who lack social tact and being loose cannons, who Neil can't bring around higher status people. Their lack of social grace and knowledge shows through.

Another question I have: Neil sleeps with all these chicks, then what, they just vanish into thin air? Is he a pure one-and-done guy? If so, he should say more about that... if not, what happens to them? It's always seemed inefficient and cold to me to do pure one-night stands. What's going on with all these chicks? At one point he says he's dating ten women, all of whom know he's dating other women. Where's he get the time and logistics to do this in any sort of meaningful way? Most of those women presumably drop off when they find better boyfriends, right? Or do they not? There's a lot missing in this story, which winds up focusing on the drama among the men.

Another thing missing: at the end, Neil thinks he's stepping off the game carousel to be with this rock chick he barely knows. Has game not taught him that most immediately intense relationships with random chicks, don't work out? His doesn't, which is more extra-textual knowledge. It may be true that most relationships don't work out, but he's basing his supposed relationship with this woman on a few days: anyone with any amount of experience knows you're not going to know within a few dates, however intense those dates may be, whether the chick is good for the long term.

Neil begins with Jeremie Ruby-Strauss, who issues the call, and Neil says he is thinking about his buddy Dustin, who he calls a natural. He thinks, "It wasn't too late to be Dustin, to become what every woman wants—not what she says she wants, but what she really wants, deep inside, beyond her social programming, where her fantasies and daydreams lie." Dustin contrasts with Neil: Dustin is a natural,

starts sex early, continues it vigorously, lives the life Neil wishes he had. As a foil, Dustin goes from being this hypersexual beast, to being some kind of monk-Rabbi thing in Israel, just as Neil is getting good with chicks. The two paths contrast. In Neil's description, Dustin has what Neil doesn't, and Neil is frustrated because "The reason I was here—the reason Sweater and Extramask were also here—was that our parents and our friends had failed us. They had never given us the tools we needed to become fully effective social beings. Now, decades later, it was time to acquire them." He's got a point, here, and I'm still surprised that game knowledge has spread further, a point I describe in [*Most guys don't care much about getting laid, I hypothesize*](#).

As Neil moves into the pickup world, its gurus are revealed not to be who he imagines them to be... "I'd assumed that the great Mystery would have girls lined up every night of the week and a wait-list of sargers eager to take him out clubbing. Instead, he was stagnating at home. His father was sick. His mother was overburdened. And his sister was separating from her husband." Mystery achieves high highs, but also hits many low lows. His journey, and the journey of all the guys who eventually inhabit "Project Hollywood" reminds me of a weakness of game as often described by guys online: the more full and substantive the guy really is, the stronger his relationships will tend to be, and the higher the quality of the women he'll be able to attract and retain overall. Maybe "attract" and "retain" are inversely related for Neil. A lot of higher-quality women may enjoy a guy who is doing cold reads and magic tricks for them, maybe have a fling with him, but sticking around... the higher-quality ones will often not. I'm speaking to quality here beyond pure hotness. There's nothing wrong with chasing hot chicks at the expense of the chick's other potential qualities, I've done that, but it's useful to think about what one might be trading off in doing so.

The text of THE GAME is the same as it was all those years ago, but I've changed so much that my reactions to it are very different. I don't know everything, by any means, but I'm also like, "Dudes, there are smarter ways to achieve the ends you all seem to want." Then again, they all seem to have the goal of "sleep with as many hot chicks as possible." The problem is, you achieve it, and then... what? By and large the chicks leave, if there isn't some larger social / sexual / economic / meaning structure. Strauss gets this, somewhat: Project Hollywood can be an answer. But the guys involved in Project Hollywood are so ineffective, immature, and foolish that only broken women stick around. Build with degenerates, and get degeneracy. The women who stick around the guys depicted in THE GAME are mental, like "Katya", the woman Mystery has a thing for, and who I think he marries. Mystery himself, as depicted here, is an emotional wreck, random, impulsive, etc. etc., so he finds women who are consistent with what he's putting out. Katya is hot, but a drunk attention addict and coke hooverer.

The guys doing all this shit are super abnormal, so we shouldn't be surprised that much of what happens is consistent with personality abnormality. I'm peculiar compared to normal people, but I am so normal and well-adjusted compared to pretty much every single person depicted in THE GAME... or Strauss is heightening their weirdness for literary effects.

I think I thought this the first time around, but my overwhelmingly strong response this time is that the emotionally put-together and stable [*female friends*](#), none of them would go for any of these, or, if they did, it'd be for like a one-nighter, maybe one-weeker max. Substantive women aren't likely to spend a lot of time with these guys, if any. Ofc, weak, emotionally disturbed, emotionally unbalanced, poorly developed, possible mental disorder women... they can still be hot! Plenty of em are hot and fuck great. And smart chicks will go along with a guy with game for a while, to figure out who he is and such... but if he's not got substance behind him, they won't stick around. The tricks aren't really tricks, they're offers, and the smarter, put-together chicks aren't going to stay with all-flash guys.

That said, I don't want to sound too critical. Neil understands much... "I went out with Grimble,

Twotimer, and Ross Jeffries nearly every night and, chunk by chunk, learned a new way to interact. Women are sick of generic guys asking the same generic questions: “So where are you from? ... What do you do for work?” With our patterns, gimmicks, and routines, we were barroom heroes, saving the female of the species from certain ennui.” He’s right, chicks are bored, men are the solution. “In life, people tend to wait for good things to come to them. And by waiting, they miss out. Usually, what you wish for doesn’t fall in your lap.” Yup. “Like Andy Dick, my biggest fear is being bored or boring. Weekend nights weren’t made for sitting around watching videos from Blockbuster [“Blockbuster” was the Netflix of its day].” I don’t think one’s greatest fear should be being bored... the extinction of the human race would be much worse... but he’s got a point here, too, although one problem with chicks is that a lot of them, maybe most, are boring except for their pu**ies. Lots of techniques for not being boring, like, “If you describe anything with enthusiasm and congruence, people will want to try it.” He has a line, “Hang out with us, we’re more fun than your friends” that’s good, if delivered properly. Delivery is often what it’s about, not precisely what’s said.

There are lots and lots of great lines in THE GAME. But it’s also about dysfunctional people who do manage to get laid, but at high seeming cost. At some point, many of us, maybe most, get here...

We tried every position we could twist into, some more successfully than others. When Jessica I asked me to come in her mouth, I obliged. She spit the wad into Jessica II’s mouth, and they started making out passionately. It was the sexiest moment of my entire life.

But afterward I felt empty and alone. I didn’t care about them. All I really had was a memory and a story. Every girl in my life could disappear and never call me again, and I wouldn’t have cared.

And then... what?

None of this is to say game doesn’t work, it can and does: but it *is* to say that someone pitching something, doesn’t make it true... Neil is leaving things out, but the book is still good overall, and he’s won the writing game. I’ve been encouraged to write a true memoir, and I’ve been reluctant to, partially because my journey hasn’t had some of the peaks, valleys, and drama of someone like Neil’s journey. If you remember Tucker Max, same era as Strauss, same thing... [he made up at least one of “his” famous stories](#) (minute 8:15 at the link). Once you launch, no one cares. Tucker Max is busy spreading misinformation about vital healthcare issues today... he doesn’t effectively separate out fantasy from reality... but he is a showman. People forget, mostly.

THE GAME is an inspiration for my own writing, and I’ve [written the free book](#) to fill in those gaps. But reading THE GAME now, I realize I’ve moved past it in many ways, and the dysfunction mentioned above seems highlighted. The situation is analogous to what women must feel watching *Sex and the City* (SatC): [as I wrote here](#), women in their teens or 20s see SatC as hot women glamorously tooling men for money, sex, passion, and attention in glittery Manhattan. Older women realize those women are chasing a fool’s mate: they’re in their 30s and still single, as their biological clocks tick down and with them their prospects for marrying and having a family. The second half of their lives will likely wind up being an abyss (that likelihood is one of many reasons why the new version of SatC works so poorly). The interpretation of a work depends on the person interpreting. I’m now... much older than I was the first time I read THE GAME, and that shows in my current reading of it.

THE GAME and SatC are part of a larger pattern: Oliver Stone has said that *Wall Street* was meant to be a cautionary tale about greed. Instead, a generation of guys looked at it as an aspirational template for getting rich and went into finance. Aaron Sorkin has said THE SOCIAL NETWORK was meant to be a cautionary tale about... greed (again). Instead, a generation of guys looked at it as an aspirational

template for getting rich and went into tech. Young Red Quest looked at THE GAME as an aspirational template for getting laid. And it was that, to a degree. I'd lacked the life experience necessary to properly recognize dysfunctional people, and back then I focused more on getting laid with hot chicks, rather than focusing on longer-term interactions with higher quality chicks (many of whom are also hot, and who will avoid dysfunctional guys).

In THE GAME, Mystery is rejected by a woman he'd slept with, Carly, I think, who has a BF, and I'm mentally screaming at the page, "You guys need consensual non-mono..." it'd be the next level of their game... the guys involved are all weird enough to embrace it, too... I like how Strauss says only one of the PUAs (Papa?) seems normal enough to introduce to friends / normal people... reading this now, too, I see that there's got to be some severe selection bias, in the girls who're attracted to these guys... but, "Nobody had understood the potential of this whole pickup community, the bonding power of dudes talking about chicks.... We were ready to infect the world like a disease." Feel kinda similarly about non-mono, cause some people get it, but it's still mostly misunderstood. They were ready to evolve non-mono thinking, like Archimedes was close to discovering calculus prior to his death... but they didn't.

"Although Katya was bisexual, Mystery still wasn't getting threesomes. He made the same mistake every time: He pushed too hard. He needed to follow Rick H.'s advice and make the experience her fantasy, not his." Some problems are eternal, and xbtusd has been writing posts about how to correctly navigate these needs and desires. For all this, Neil says, "But the truth is that the fantasy is often better than the reality. I had just learned that lesson. Most men eventually learn that lesson." Fairly accurate. Also, the problem is time horizon. If you optimize for the next 24 – 168 hours, then yeah, hot teens, strippers, porn stars, whatever, they're all great. But if you optimize for the next 24 – 168 hours over the next several years, you don't amount to much. At the same time, at some point one's ability to sleep with those chicks eventually decreases.

Plus, they may be great for sex, but are often not good for other things. I've slept with girls good for sex and not other things, and the trick is keeping them at an appropriate distance. It's fun to ride tigers but you don't want one as a pet. Context is this, where Strauss says, not wildly inaccurately, "Most appalling to women is the male obsession with strippers, porn stars, and teenage girls. It is abhorrent because it threatens a woman's reality. If all men really desire a woman like that, then where does that leave her marriage and happily-ever-after fantasies? She's doomed to live them with a man who really wants that Victoria's Secret model or the neighbor's daughter or that dominatrix in the videos he hides in his closet. As a woman ages, an eighteen-year-old girl will always be eighteen. Love is dashed on the rocks in the face of the possibility that a man doesn't want a person but a body." It's true, but, also, guys who optimize for the short-term hot chick, where do they wind up? Not in good places, over a long enough time horizon. Most of us need a period of f**king around to come out the other side, which is about community and relationships,

Strip away the community bond and the seduction business interests that united us, and what was left? Six guys chasing after a limited subset of available women. Wars have been fought, world leaders shot, and tragedies wrought by males claiming territorial rights over the opposite sex. Perhaps we'd just been too blind to see that Project Hollywood was doomed from the start by the very pursuit that had brought it together.

Not much unites them, in the end. They can't form structures larger than their individual interests. That is what non-monogamy, at its best can do. That is what xbtusd and I have been writing about, that no one else, to my knowledge, has been.

There's much wit and wisdom in THE GAME, but read it skeptically... I don't know how I first read it... I was too green, then, to judge it properly... experience has cured and gnarled me into someone who sees

past the flash this time. A magician can see another magician's tricks more readily than the audience. I see Neil's tricks thoroughly this time, having operated some of them. I still enjoy them, don't get me wrong, but they're visible to me, in a way they weren't before, but the only way to see the trick is via experience.



