

CHAPTER 3

Secret Skills That Look Lucky

A Monopoly game can be a lot like golf. You can play well for several hours, then make one little mistake and lose it all. Any golfer knows that it's the little things which separate a real pro from a good amateur. The professional manages to avoid making those critical little mistakes. The same thing distinguishes the Monopoly expert from the Monopoly novice.

We used to play with a friend who wasn't a very good Monopoly player. Sure, he knew the basics and some of the advanced concepts, but he just couldn't win in a serious game. One Saturday night, five of us (including this friend) sat down to a game. Since the rest of us were all college tournament Monopoly players, we decided that we'd give our amateur friend a handicap. We could have given him more cash or some properties at the start of the game, but someone came up with a better idea. Why not give our friend (call him Andy Amateur) an advantage which would be only as good as he could make it? We decided to give Andy the right to require any player (including Andy himself) to roll the dice again if Andy didn't like the number that was rolled originally. He could do this up to three times in the game.

At first, Andy was not overly pleased with the handicap. He wanted to know how his slight influence over the number on the dice for only three turns out of an entire game could amount to much of anything. Nevertheless, he accepted the offer, and play began. It wasn't long before Andy emerged as the victor, the first and only time that he ever beat us. What happened?

Andy used his three turns wisely. He waited until he

and several other players owned complete color groups. Then, all at once, Andy invested every last penny in his Yellow group. Soon, a poor guy named Marshall came around the board. He was sitting on Kentucky Avenue (which is five, six, and eight spaces before the Yellow group). He rolled a nine.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "I missed those Yellows. It's a good thing too. I couldn't have afforded those rents!"

"Roll again," said Andy, and Marshall did. This time he wasn't so lucky. He rolled an eight and went bankrupt on Marvin Gardens. So Andy disposed of Marshall.

The next time Andy used one of his privileges was with Florence. She owned Boardwalk and Park Place with hotels, and Andy landed on Chance. He drew the "Advance to Boardwalk" card, and Florence was all smiles. Andy decided it would be a good idea to roll again, and he missed the deadly Chance square.

The final time Andy used his "small advantage" was when one of us (we're too proud to tell you which one) landed on Florence's Boardwalk. He couldn't come close to raising the \$2000 rent and appealed to Andy for help. "Andy, be a pal. Please make me roll the dice again."

"Sure," said Andy. "As long as you give me that Red property that I've needed for a while."

"You're a thief, but I need that chance to miss Florence's Boardwalk. Here's the Red property—you now own all three of them!"

So Andy used up his third "Roll again!" privilege, and sure enough, the unluckier of the authors managed to miss Boardwalk. Unfortunately, we both went bankrupt five minutes later on Andy's well-developed Red group, which "Mr. X" was forced to help Andy complete.

We, the other players, were fools for offering Andy such a tremendous advantage. Monopoly is a delicate balance, and even a slight alteration of the probabilities can give one player an insurmountable lead over his opponents. Similarly, a single missed opportunity can ruin a player's chances for winning. A good player pays close

attention to all the little things which can make the difference in the outcome of a game.

Here are some tips on how to make the little things work for you. Some of them are obvious, while some are rather subtle. One of the fastest ways to improve your chances of winning 100% of the time is to stop making the little mistakes explained here.

Always be aware of which token belongs to which player, where your own token is, and where your opponents' tokens are. If you always pay close attention to the game, this is natural. In the chapters ahead, the importance of position and its relationship to timing and building will be explained. Knowing where the pieces are will also help you keep your opponents from miscounting the number of spaces they move and accidentally missing your hotels.

Always know which properties have yet to be bought from the Bank. Only a careless player exclaims, "You mean the property that I landed on two turns ago was still unowned! I was so sure that you owned it that I even paid you \$20 rent!"

Keep an eye on how much cash and which properties your different opponents own. An exact knowledge of who has which properties is often essential. Sometimes an opponent will think he owns a property when in fact he doesn't. This illusion can be so strong that the opponent might even try to build houses on a color group which is not completely his! This actually happened in the Eastern Regional Championships in 1973.

In the same way, watch out for an opponent who has two properties of one color group and mortgages one of them. This little trick can make it appear to the casual player that he owns only one property of that color group. Remember, the title deed card of a mortgaged property is always turned face down, and the color of that property is hidden. It is always a smart play to keep track of which properties your opponents have mortgaged. The chance that you will make a mistake which

can benefit your opponent should always be minimized.

Whenever you pay or collect money, always check that the correct amount is being transferred. Often, mistakes of hundreds of dollars will go unnoticed. These mistakes can rarely be corrected unless they are discovered right away. Don't let yourself pay for three houses when only two are put on your properties. There are plenty of useful places to put your money—don't throw it down the drain. On the other side of the coin, if your opponent is in a hurry to give you \$500 when he owes you only \$50 . . . well, it's a lot to ask of some people, but being honest and returning the extra \$450 pays off in good will and a reputation for honesty later on. Monopoly teaches us to accept favorable errors gracefully (like the Community Chest card which reads "Bank Error in Your Favor"), but never at the expense of another opponent.

One of the easiest money mistakes to commit is confusing \$10 and \$100 bills. Don't laugh, often a player will pay a \$100 bill and two \$1 bills for a \$12 rent. There have been games where a player, knowing that one of his opponents constantly confused the two bills, made sure that opponent kept plenty of tens and hundreds on hand, and he asked for all his smaller rents in \$10 bills. This is cutthroat to the point of poor sportsmanship. Win because of your own strength, not because of your opponent's petty visual weakness.

Do not forget to collect any money owed you, especially your Go salary. Many players are in such a hurry to move that they forget to ask for their money. Don't fall into the habit of asking for your Go money three turns after you pass. This will certainly win you no friends.

Make your opponents put their houses up neatly to avoid confusion as to which property has three houses and which has only two. When in doubt, demand that—since it is your opponent's fault that he didn't arrange his houses neatly—you should have to pay only the lower rent. He will straighten his houses up surprisingly quickly.

When you draw the Chance card which says "Make General Repairs on All Your Property. For Each House, Pay . . .," be sure to count only your *own* houses and hotels. Don't hurt yourself any more than you have to. For that matter, read all Chance and Community Chest cards carefully. If it says "Advance Token to the Nearest Railroad," you can, and you *should*, buy that Railroad if it is unowned. In fact, whenever you draw a card which directs you to move your token to a property, you may buy that property if it is unowned, whether or not the card says you may.

Try to remember the general order of the Chance cards. These cards often send you places where you may not want to go, and are therefore a dangerous uncontrollable variable. However, after the original shuffle before the game, the cards always rotate *in the same order*. It's a good idea to make a mental note of which cards come before the "Advance Token to Boardwalk" and "Advance to Illinois Avenue" cards as the deck is run through for the first time. The knowledge that a crucial card is coming up next can be the clue that makes or breaks you.

Make sure that your doubles work for you. In many cases, especially early in the game, rolling doubles is a big advantage. Don't ever forget to roll again—you roll doubles only once out of every six turns! An easy way to remember to roll again is to announce aloud that doubles have been rolled whenever they appear. Calling your opponents' attention to the doubles ensures that someone will remind you to complete your turn and roll again.

Later in the game, it is an advantage to be in Jail, so most players will choose to wait until they roll doubles to get out. They can remain there for only two turns, however, and must move the number they roll on their third turn, whether or not it is doubles. Always keep a careful count of how many turns your opponents have spent in Jail. Every time they elect to stay, that is another turn that they could have been paying the rent at your hotels.

All of these things which may seem trivial when considered separately are important factors when taken together. It is true that there is not much skill involved in remembering to roll again whenever you throw doubles or in keeping your \$10 and \$100 bills separate, but your chances of winning are greatly improved if you pay attention to the game and follow these hints. Small precautions like these, when combined with powerful concepts, can add up to certain victory. However, a skillful player pays attention to all of the finer points as well as to the major strategies. Skillful wheeling and dealing are inadequate to make up for sloppiness and inattentiveness.

CHAPTER 3 SUMMARY

- I. The slightest edge.
- II. Pay attention to position.
- VI. Watch which properties are unowned.
- III. Watch your opponents' money and mortgaged properties.
- IV. Pay the right rents.
- V. Keep \$10 and \$100 bills separate.
- VII. Don't forget your Go money.
- VIII. Keep the houses built neatly.
- IX. Make repairs on only your property.
- X. Know the general order of the Chance cards.
- XI. Roll again whenever you get doubles.
- XII. No life sentences.
- XIII. The little things make a big difference.

CHAPTER 4

The Crucial Houses

How Mediterranean Avenue Can Be More Valuable Than Boardwalk

In a Monopoly game, just as in the real world, certain commodities react to the laws of *supply and demand*. For instance, if you wanted to sell a property in a private auction, the price which that property would command would depend on the demand for that property. In Monopoly, if it were a property which would complete a color group for another player, then that player would probably be willing to offer a high price for it. Since the supply of properties is limited (28), a property often has a "true value" which is well above its purchase price. The true value of any property changes from turn to turn, depending on what are commonly known as *market conditions*.

There are two conditions which determine the value of any commodity in a supply-and-demand situation:

1. *Its usefulness to you.* The fourth Railroad is most useful, and therefore most valuable, for a player with the other three Railroads.

2. *The desire of another player to use that commodity against you.* In a competitive game, a player will often buy what appears to be a worthless property, just to keep his opponent from getting it. The best defense is a good offense!

This chapter will consider how these principles of supply and demand apply to a crucial factor in every Monopoly game—*the houses*. The official rules restrict the supply of houses to 32. In addition, once color groups are completed, the demand for those houses is constantly high. Because of this restricted supply and

high demand, the true value of a house is determined by the conditions described above.

But there are other factors in the official rules on housing which make this a very special type of supply-and-demand situation. Those factors are:

1. *The price of a house varies, depending on the color group for which it is bought.* A house on the Dark Blue group costs \$200, whereas a house on the Purple group costs only \$50.

2. *All houses, no matter what their purchase price, are taken from the same limited supply of 32 houses.*

3. *In case of a housing shortage, the available houses are auctioned off, one by one, and sold to the highest bidder.*

4. *A hotel is the equivalent of five houses, but ownership of a hotel does not directly change the supply of 32 houses.*

5. *When houses (or hotels) are sold back to the Bank, they must be sold in reverse of the order in which they were built.* This is the official Parker Brothers rule, and is often overlooked by many players. As you will see, it has many important implications.

6. *When houses (or hotels) are sold back to the Bank, they are sold for half their purchase price.*

With these factors in mind, we are ready to examine the strategies which can be applied to the housing market.

As any Monopoly player knows, the more houses that are built on a property, the higher the rent that can be collected from that property. Furthermore, a cheap color group with many houses collects more rent than an expensive color group with no houses. Finally, in every game of Monopoly, houses are built on color groups sooner or later (in skillful games, sooner!). These three points, taken together, lead logically to the first principle of housing manipulation:

IF THERE ARE NO HOUSES AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE, ANY COLOR GROUP WHICH DOES

NOT ALREADY HAVE HOUSES IS TEMPORARILY WORTHLESS. This principle is the basis for all housing shortage strategies.

Chapter 1 introduced the concept of a "critical level" of houses—the level of three houses on each property in a color group. The addition of the third house causes the rents to double, or even triple. Clearly, a color group which is not at the critical level is no match for a color group which is developed to that level, except in the most extreme instances. For this reason, the second principle of housing manipulation is necessary:

IF THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH HOUSES AVAILABLE TO DEVELOP A COLOR GROUP TO THE CRITICAL LEVEL, THEN THAT COLOR GROUP IS WORTH VERY LITTLE AT THAT MOMENT. This principle can be used as an important guide to your strategies of play. An expert has as his goal to develop all his color groups, one at a time, to the critical level while doing all in his power to prevent his opponents from developing their color groups to the critical level. Housing shortage strategies are designed to help him achieve that goal.

Because of the limited housing supply, it is obvious that if a house is sitting on a property which you own, it is "out of circulation" and is one less house which your opponent can build on his own color group. If there are plenty of houses available in the Bank, this fact is insignificant. But if you purchase the last two houses from the Bank for \$100 and put them on Mediterranean Avenue and Baltic Avenue, you have stopped your opponents from doing any further building; perhaps you have even kept them from reaching the critical level on their color groups. The value of those houses is much greater than the mere increase in rents on Mediterranean and Baltic. The second condition of supply and demand shows that the true value of those houses is determined by how much damage they *could* have done if your opponents had had the opportunity to use them.

Here is a simple example (with rents given):

* * *

<i>Mr. Expert</i>	<i>Bob Boardwalker</i>
Mediterranean	Park Place
3 houses: \$90	2 houses: \$500
Baltic	Boardwalk
3 houses: \$180	2 houses: \$600

There are other color groups developed around the board, and the Bank has only two houses left for sale. Mr. Expert has several hundred dollars, but Bob Boardwalker has only \$100. Mr. Expert buys the last two houses for \$50 each (Bob doesn't have enough money to buy them at \$200 each), and the situation looks like this:

<i>Mr. Expert</i>	<i>Bob Boardwalker</i>
Mediterranean	Park Place
4 houses: \$160	2 houses: \$500
Baltic	Boardwalk
4 houses: \$320	2 houses: \$600

By his \$100 investment, Mr. Expert has done two things. He has increased the rent on his properties, and more importantly, he has made certain that unless someone sells houses back to the Bank, Bob will not be able to buy the additional house on each property which he needs to reach the critical level. To appreciate how important this second accomplishment is, look at what would have happened if Mr. Expert had let Bob accumulate some money and buy those two houses:

BEFORE

<i>Mr. Expert</i>	<i>Bob Boardwalker</i>
Mediterranean	Park Place
3 houses: \$90	2 houses: \$500
Baltic	Boardwalk
3 houses: \$180	2 houses: \$600

AFTER

<i>Mr. Expert</i>	<i>Bob Boardwalker</i>
Mediterranean	Park Place
3 houses: \$90	3 houses: \$1100
Baltic	Boardwalk
3 houses: \$180	3 houses: \$1400

Before, Mr. Expert might have been able to afford a land on Boardwalk or Park Place. Now, by refusing to invest the \$100 to "soak up" the last two houses, he has allowed the rents on the Dark Blue group to more than double! He has, by his inaction, *permitted* Bob to reach the critical level. A land on Park Place or Boardwalk now would be fatal. The process of soaking up houses would have saved his life. The true value of those last two houses was not the \$100 which he could have paid for them, but closer to five or six times that amount.

More than the importance of soaking up can be learned from this example. The element of timing is also a vital housing principle. Suppose that Mr. Expert had decided to soak up the houses, but to wait several turns to do so. Assume further that during that waiting period Bob Boardwalker passes Go and collects some other rents, giving him the \$400 which he needs to buy those houses. Now it is not so easy for Mr. Expert to soak up houses. Since Bob wants the houses too, the players want more than the Bank has available to sell, and the Bank must hold an auction for the two available houses. Bob must legally start the bidding at \$200 for each house, since that is the minimum amount he is permitted to pay. This means that if Mr. Expert wants to soak up those houses, he must bid more than Bob, or over \$200 for each house! Even if he has the money, Mr. Expert must ask himself how valuable that house-soaking power is, since he will be putting those houses on Mediterranean and Baltic, places from which it will take a long time to recover his investment. His delay has cost him dearly!

It is not unusual in this sort of situation for the owner of a cheaper color group to find himself forced to sit by

helplessly, unable to try to outbid the owners of higher-priced color groups in a housing shortage. In general:

OWNERS OF EXPENSIVE COLOR GROUPS OFTEN HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN HOUSING AUCTIONS, AS THEIR HIGHER MINIMUM PRICE FOR HOUSES CAN TAKE THE AUCTION FAR OUT OF THE RANGE OF PRICES WHICH THE OWNERS OF CHEAPER COLOR GROUPS COULD PROFITABLY AFFORD.

The rule for the timing of house-soaking is:

Don't be a mouse. Soak up the house.

After understanding the importance of the housing market, it is time to explore the way in which this market relates to the role of hotels in a Monopoly game and the way the rules concerning hotels can affect your housing strategies.

According to the official rules, a player may build a hotel only after he has four houses on each property of a complete color group. In fact, he must actually erect those houses first, and then return them to the Bank to receive the hotel. This procedural technicality has far-reaching consequences for the player who understands how to exploit it.

The direct implication of this requirement is:

NO PLAYER MAY BUILD HOTELS UNLESS THERE ARE ENOUGH HOUSES AVAILABLE TO FIRST PUT FOUR ON EACH PROPERTY IN THE COLOR GROUP. A PLAYER MAY NOT "BYPASS" A HOUSING SHORTAGE BY BUILDING HOTELS.

For example, if you own the Orange group and already have two houses on each property, the correct procedure for building hotels would be:

1. Compute how many houses are necessary for you to reach the level of four houses on each property ($2 + 2 + 2 = 6$).

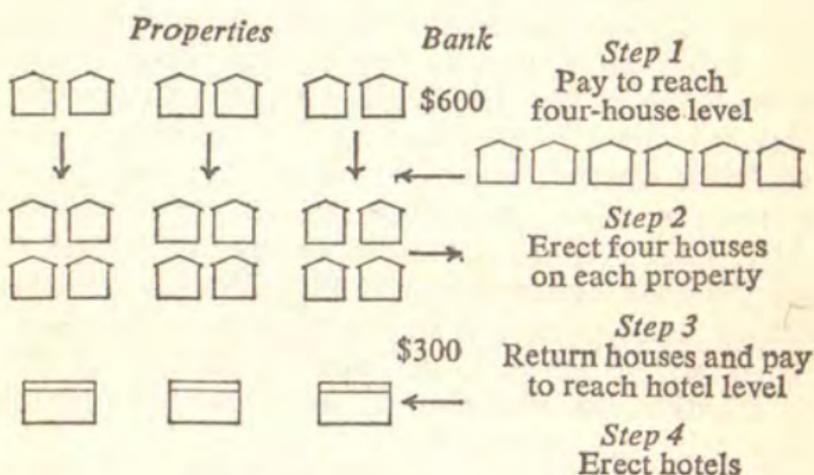
2. Buy those houses and erect them on your properties (houses are \$100 each, and $6 \times \$100 = \600).

3. Return to the Bank four houses and \$100 for *each*

hotel you wish to buy. In this case, that would cost an additional \$300.

4. Place the hotels on your properties.

Why take the trouble to erect four houses on each property if you're only going to return them to the Bank two seconds later? If the Bank has plenty of houses, it's really not necessary to go through the motions of buying the houses and returning them. But if there are not enough houses to complete Step 2, then a player may not go on to Step 3, and he cannot build hotels.



HOTEL BUILDING

The correct four-step procedure for building from the two-house level to the hotel level on the Orange group.

Furthermore, the technical procedure for building will be very important later when we discuss the correct procedure for *selling* hotels back to the Bank.

The limit of 32 houses, when considered together with the "reverse-order" rule mentioned in the list of six factors given earlier in this chapter, has important strategic implications regarding hotels. The reverse-order rule states that a player may sell his hotels either *all at once* or *one house at a time* (one hotel equals five houses), *in reverse of the manner in which they were erected*. If he sells *only one house from each property*, he can absorb four houses on each property—his hotels

turn into four houses each. By doing this, he can put a tremendous drain on the housing supply and prevent other players from developing to the critical level. By breaking down his hotels, a player can often dry up the housing market at any time he wishes!

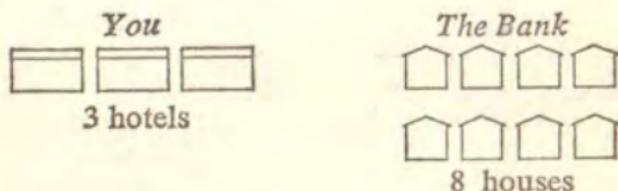
Furthermore, a player can break his hotels down in this manner, even if other players want to buy those houses. The housing shortage rule says that a housing shortage exists if two or more players wish to *buy* more houses than are available. The key word here is "buy." If you own a hotel, you have already bought four houses in order to reach the hotel level. This is especially clear if you followed the precise step-by-step procedure when you built the hotels. In selling a hotel, you are clearly *reclaiming* those houses and have a priority over any player who wants to buy them for the first time. You are not forced to bid in an auction against players who wish to buy, since you are not buying—you are selling! Otherwise, a hotel owner would be placed in the absurd position of being required to *pay* money to the Bank in order to *sell* his hotels to the Bank. To avoid this ridiculous situation, we recognize the hotel owner's rights to a "priority of breakdown":

A PLAYER WHO IS "BREAKING DOWN" A HOTEL TO FOUR HOUSES HAS PRIORITY OVER ANY PLAYERS WHO WISHES TO BUY THOSE HOUSES. Mr. Expert will immediately perceive the power of the priority of breakdown. A player could build hotels on a cheap color group and wait patiently until his opponents were ready to build to the critical level on their own color group. Then, BOOM! He could break his hotels down to four houses on each property, collect half the purchase price of the "fifth houses" from the Bank, and deprive his opponents of those desperately needed houses. If they then attempted to build straight to hotels, he could cite the appropriate rules which demonstrate that this sort of "bypassing" is illegal. You can be sure that there will be a lot of screaming and yelling when players realize that Mr. Ex-

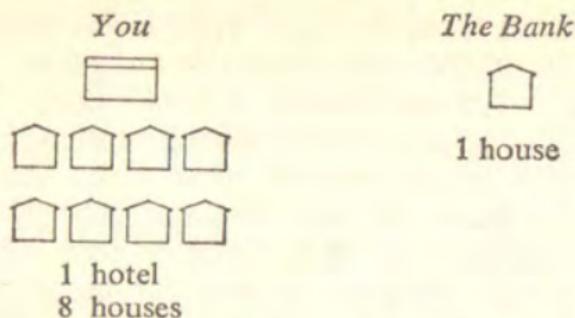
pert has beaten them through his superior knowledge of the intricacies of the rules, but rules are rules.

One final word on priority of breakdown. The question sometimes arises of what would happen if two players, each with hotels, wanted to soak up the last four houses in the Bank. In this case, standard procedure is to have an auction for each block of four houses. The player who bids the most money for the right of first breakdown may then break down one hotel. The auction continues until all of the Bank's lots of four houses have been sold.

The reverse-order rule has still another implication, one which can be even more devastating than the first. This delicate loophole actually makes it a risk to buy hotels at all!

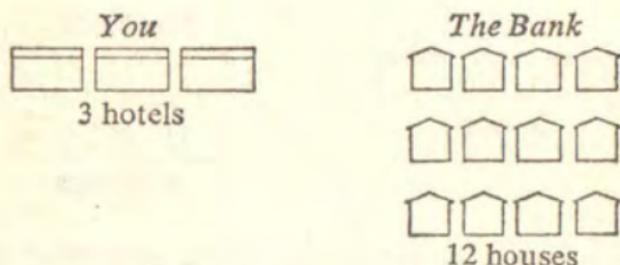


The reverse-order rule states that you must sell your hotels in reverse of the manner in which you put them up. In this chapter, the exact manner in which hotels were erected was discussed. Let's try to reverse that order in this position. In Step 3, it was required that to buy a hotel you return four houses to the Bank with enough money to pay for a "fifth house." To reverse this, you must return your hotels to the Bank one at a time and receive four houses for each one. This works fine for the first two hotels. But then you reach this position:

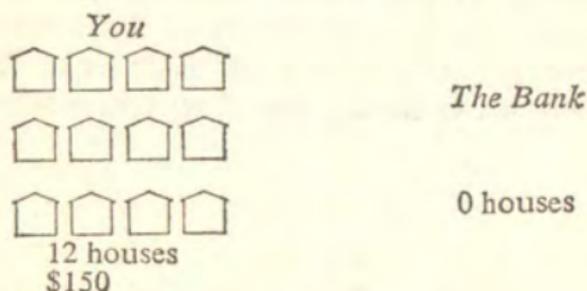


The Bank can't return four houses to you for your last hotel, so you can't break it down any further. You're stuck! If you wanted to sell the hotels, you would have to sell them *in their entirety*.

Let's examine the same position, only this time, let's give the Bank 12 houses, as follows:



Now, you can complete the reversal of Step 3 and return all your hotels to the Bank, receiving \$150 (\$50 for each returned hotel), and reaching the following position:



Since you have successfully completed the reversal of Step 3 in the building process, you may now continue to

sell houses one by one, in reverse of the manner in which you built them. By selling three more houses (one from each property), you will receive an additional \$150 and achieve your desired final position:



The only difference between the two positions is the number of houses in the Bank. In the first example, all three hotels would have to be sold for half price; in the second example, you could sell exactly as many houses as you need to. Being forced to sell three hotels for half price involves a tremendous financial loss.

This is called the "hotel trap." The reason for the name is clear. If a player has hotels on his properties during a housing shortage, he is trapped into keeping his hotels if he wants to avoid major financial loss. While the housing shortage remains in effect (or as long as fewer than 12 houses are in the Bank), he may not raise cash by selling his buildings unless he wishes to sell all of his hotels, in their entirety.

Although hotels provide higher rents than do four houses, hotel owners run the risk of being trapped. It's an all-or-nothing situation, and when you're forced to sell for half price, it's a situation which is financially unacceptable to the experienced player. The difference in rent between four houses and a hotel is in many cases insufficient to compensate for the added risk.

If a player always stops at four houses and never succumbs to the temptation to build hotels, he will never be caught in the hotel trap and will always be able to raise money gradually by selling one house at a time. He has no worries about turning hotels into four houses, since

he always has those four houses to begin with. In addition, a player who never builds hotels will never have to go through the problems of logically explaining the reasons for the doctrine of priority of breakdown to his opponents. Finally, he can always flood the housing market with houses whenever he finds it necessary, by building as many hotels as he sees fit. (Of course, he will do this only when he needs to put the houses on his other color groups and is sure that he has enough money to control most of the houses which he releases.)

So the general rule for hotels is:

DO NOT BUILD HOTELS ON A COLOR GROUP UNLESS YOU ARE SURE THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO BREAK THOSE HOTELS DOWN TO FOUR HOUSES EACH WHENEVER THE NEED MIGHT ARISE.

What are the tactical implications of the housing rules which you can use to your advantage in the very next game you play?

1. Build to the critical level and keep your opponents from doing so.

2. Make sure that you reach the critical level on one color group before you start to develop the next one.

3. Tie up as many houses as possible, even if only to keep your opponents from getting them.

4. If you build hotels, keep a close eye on the housing market, and if there is *any* danger of the development of a housing shortage, *break down to four houses immediately*. (If there is a fight over the houses which you are soaking up, explain the doctrine of priority of breakdown.)

5. If your opponents have built hotels and they are low on cash, it is a good idea to buy enough houses to make it impossible for them to gradually sell their hotels. In effect, you are setting the hotel trap for your opponents. This can turn a lost game into a winning one.

6. Never let your opponents bypass a housing shortage by building illegally to hotels.

7. If you need to make houses available for use on another color group, do so by building *up* to hotels. This will release houses from those properties. Also be sure that you have enough money to control the houses which you release. Your opponents may want those houses too, and force an auction.

By use of the fine points in the housing rules and a knowledge of the factors which influence the behavior of the housing market, an informed player obtains a powerful edge over his less knowledgeable opponents. No amount of luck can change what the rules say, and you've got the rules in the palm of your hand.

CHAPTER 4 SUMMARY

- I. True value determined by:
 - A. Usefulness to you.
 - B. Usefulness to other players.
- II. Six special features of the housing situation.
- III. Color groups are worthless without houses.
- IV. Soaking up.
- V. Timing.
- VI. Advantages of expensive color groups in auctions.
- VII. You can't bypass a housing shortage.
- VIII. Priority of breakdown.
- IX. The hotel trap.
- X. Tactical tips.