CASINO

CONFIDENTIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALLISON SHORE

You are a Programming Manager with a large software company, heading a five-person team that writes computer games. There are six other programming managers in your division—Scott, John, Otto, Denis, Miguel, and Eric—each heading his own programming team. All seven of you report to Jamie Jackson, the Vice President for Programming.

You have loved your job ever since you joined the company three years ago as a part-time programmer. You work hard, and your boss Jamie has always been impressed with your work. Last year you were promoted to manager and given your own team to head. Being in management has changed your life for the better. Your new responsibilities still require long hours, but at least you have more control over your schedule; you've gone from sleepless nights programming, drinking Coke, and eating Doritos to running every morning and working out at the company's fitness club. You feel healthy and empowered by your new exercise regime, and the extra money has let you upgrade your wardrobe. You've switched from baggy jeans and t-shirts to skirts and stylish clothing.

All seven teams in your division create computer games—everything from high-testosterone war games like "Galactik Karnage" to complex mystery games like "Enigma Island" to kid's games like "Learn to Count Your Animal Friends." You recently finished "Uh Oh. . .Trouble!," a program designed to teach children when and how to contact the police or fire department. These were challenging and colorful, but not where your heart is. The adult games are considered the hot projects for a number of reasons. Games for adults are more closely related to the company's other products (financial spreadsheets and word processing programs), which means their marketing is usually more extensive and successful. In addition, the market for educational games is smaller and the profit margins thinner, so the teams that make them get less attention and compensation. Until recently, your team worked exclusively on educational games for small children.

That all changed three months ago. At the annual division retreat, Jamie, you, and the other managers had a brainstorming session to generate ideas for new programs. You suggested that the company's online gaming products should expand beyond first-person shooter games to use the first-person experience in a different context that didn't focus on the traditional avenues of police, criminal, or military operations. The group was definitely excited about your idea, and after kicking it around for a while, everyone agreed that an online full-service casino would be a smash hit. Most existing online casino games' graphics are very simple and usually include the player's hand of cards dealt on a static view of a tabletop. This new game would have realistic-looking graphics and would allow players to use the controls to "walk around" a virtual casino, interact with dealers, cocktail waitresses, and other players, sit down and play a few rounds at any table they choose, maybe take a break to watch a Vegas-style show, and in essence simulate the experience of going to a real casino.

You couldn't really come out and say that it should be yours, because there's an official rule in the division that ideas developed in brainstorming sessions belong to the group as a whole. Over protest from the other

programming managers, Jamie gave you the project. Several complained that you weren't qualified because you'd never gambled; others simply sought the project for themselves.

You and your team have worked day and night for three months on this project. You've played more poker, Keno, and blackjack—with real cards and with the computer—than any healthy person should. In fact, the stress and long hours have taken a toll on your whole team. Two of your subordinates quit in the middle of the project, only adding to the pressure on you. Bill left the company altogether because his wife took ill and he needed to look after his family. Another programmer, Bruce, transferred to a different department where the hours were easier. Their absence made it even tougher on everyone else. Tempers ran short. At times you took out your frustration on the team when they didn't get the program working right. Still, it was worth the effort. You know Casino is the best program in the company's R&D pool. You were always considered a star programmer, and Casino is better than anything you've worked on before.

Last week you finally completed a prototype and circulated it to the other managers for their comments. You anxiously anticipated the verdict from your peers. Their responses were shocking. Phrases like "not competitive enough—this is for wimps," "too cutsie," "simplistic," and "boring, boring, boring" were scribbled in the comments section of the questionnaire. One evaluation said "Casino is totally unrealistic. It'll never draw online subscribers. Where are the smoky rooms, the dancing girls, the hub-bub and noise of Vegas? No one will pay to play this a second time."

You were hurt—and angry. You feel like the other programming managers treated your product unfairly. Worse, they violated the division's most basic reviewing rule: to judge what the buyers want, not what the programmers think is entertaining.

A lot of the comments totally missed the mark. When the project was assigned the other managers sent you their ideas on how Casino should work, most of the ideas were silly ("have winning gamblers get free drinks from buxom waitresses"), but some you thought had merit ("be sure that the casino is realistic"). To find out what "realistic" really meant, you contacted the marketing department and asked them to research the gambling industry in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Their studies confirmed your intuitions. "Family-style" entertainment has become the buzzword in the casino world. Attractions like the Excalibur and the Luxor in Las Vegas are testimony to this new thinking. The days of cigar smoke and scantily-clad cocktail waitresses are numbered. The big money is in providing a more wholesome gambling environment.

You are concerned about the feedback at another level as well. You've long felt uneasy as the only female manager, particularly around a couple of your colleagues. When your team was working on International GeoGraphic, a program to teach geography to young children, you suggested that each country have a different cartoon character to give the child a tour of their homeland. One of your programmers, Bruce, designed a topless woman to represent Mali. He argued that if National Geographic could show how people actually looked, so should you. You tried to explain that something like that would generate terrible publicity and embarrass the company, but he steadfastly refused to listen to reason. In the end you were forced to pull rank and tell him to change it despite his protests.

You were also surprised when, a month ago, you accidentally discovered a notice that someone had left on the photocopier, inviting all of the other managers—but not you—to a weekly poker game. When you asked Eric why you weren't invited, he said that he didn't know you played. You tried to be friendly and said, "I've been spending a lot of time at it, and I've gotten pretty good." He looked surprised and suggested that in any event you probably wouldn't appreciate the "atmosphere." The conversation ended

there. You remained uninvited.

You feel like there's a lot of subtle discrimination going on. Although you've never raised the concern, you've wondered why your team had only been assigned kids products before getting the Casino account. You've been unable to discern any guiding principle that explains that pattern. To top it all off, you recently learned from one of the secretaries that all of the other managers are making more money than you are. When you were promoted your salary rose to $67,000. The other managers all make at least $74,000. Scott makes $82,000.

A few weeks ago you got a call from a headhunter with an offer from a rival company—one that works exclusively on games for children—to manage their programming division. The opportunity to run your own division was tempting, but you turned it down because you were so satisfied with your job. Now you're not sure you made the right choice. You've heard that the division manager job the headhunter spoke to you about is still open, and you're motivated to follow up on it now.

You are getting increasingly frustrated with Jamie. Despite all the long hours and innovative aspects of Casino, Jamie has not given you a single word of encouragement. In fact, since the evaluations were sent back, Jamie hasn't said more than "hello" in the halls and seems intent on avoiding you. You have really been struggling with managing your team in the last three months. Sometimes you wonder if you are up to it. Instead of support you get neglect—or worse.

Yesterday you found out from one of your own programmers that another manager, Scott, has his team revamping the Casino prototype. You are apparently being left out of the decision-making process on your own project. You don't believe in avoiding conflict and are furious that Jamie hasn't had the courage to talk to you directly about this.

Jamie finally asked you to stop by this afternoon to talk about Casino. It won't be an easy conversation. Until recently, you liked your job. Jamie hired you and has been very fair about promoting you. That doesn't change Jamie's recent behavior. And why should you stay in a job where you aren't treated with simple human respect, especially when a management job is available elsewhere?

Prepare for your meeting with Jamie.