

Are You Willing To Play The Game?

David Fisher

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Its 5:45 a.m., the shower's done, I have one foot on the kitchen floor, and the games begin. Even though my family and I are the home team with the home field advantage, and with no other teams in sight, the game is on. And, to survive and thrive in this simple, multifarious, shifting, sustainable world of family, each of us must bring our A-game.

Our homes are filled with games, and families who are willing to play will flourish within the walls, roof, and floor of the domestic game board. Never a day goes by without give-and-take, fair play, and enduring graceful and intense wins and losses with loved ones, pets, and inanimate objects in the household. Those who aren't willing to play with others play solo and live likewise.

Since its breakfast, I'm hungry and sluggish as I pull pieces of food out of the fridge; a sort of the game, Perfection, in reverse. I place some items on the counter, and one piece usually goes on top of the fridge where it is often found the next day. Some of the pieces are interchangeable since they aren't in the same location as they were the day before. The yogurt jumped from top shelf front to the center of the middle shelf. The sour cream took the yogurt's old slot, and stacked up with the margarine. Raspberry jam keeps to the top shelf rear since I'm the only person who plays that piece.

Unfortunately, the milk jug, which is a door shelf regular, became buried on the large top shelf. That's when I play a round of the 'tile slot game'. I slide the o. j. to the left, pull the marg.- sour cream combo forward, slide forward left a new bowl of boiled eggs which took over the old ketchup spot; this presses hard against the o. j., and forces last night's un-drunk, half filled, totally forgotten glass of leftover milk into a free fall. The mischievous glass plays a little pinball as it bounces off each shelf, spitefully ringing my unstable bell during descent. I slap at it with makeshift hand paddles and verbal epithets, forcing a tilt. Game over.

The next game commences: Hide-and-seek. I look in vain for the sponge in its usual four locations. Just before giving up, I sense that it's hiding in the bottom of the sink as an unenthusiastic ingredient in last night's table scrap vichyssoise. I lift a pan off the bottom and spy a tip of blue, like a marooned whale's fin, feebly flagging my attention. The sponge stays put for fear of touching it; kind of like a hot-potato.

I seek the paper towels, there's only half a scrap left glued onto the role. Next, I search for the napkins, of which two are left; the others always remain hid. I lay them on the spilled milk puddled floor where they settle in like two pigs in mud. I grab the damp stained hand towel that ached to be found, and employ it on each shelf of the fridge. While I finish off the tile game for the milk prize, Fido does her job by licking up the remaining white slick.

This morning I go for some cereal and open the Jenga/Tetris cereal cabinet. Inside, the Banana Nut Crunch is the center piece at the base of the tower of uncertainty. At first I gently pull at the

Banana Nut Crunch box to determine the odds of impending disaster. So what if the Golden Grahams topple into the new opening and the Animal Cracker bag hints at a stampede. I give my box a final yank and slam the door so that only one yak gains freedom. I figure no harm done except that the dog gets a sweet appetizer.

Now it's time to make the coffee. Don't Spill The Beans comes to my sluggish mind as I reach for the coffee bag just beyond the electric tea pot's steam skin peeling feature. As I go through the process of pouring the beans from the bag to the grinder to the tablespoon and into the French press, I only spill about two-and-a-half beans which disappear into the gullet of the four legged vacuum.

My repast commences after a couple more tile moves since I forgot the cream. It's half-time while I eat. There are no games to play during meal time; just eating and reading. Although, underneath the book lies a picture drawn by my son which resembles the typical Etch-A-Sketch drawing. I lift it, rotate it, and shake it for fun, but am ignorant of its subject matter.

Breakfast is over, so I play one last round of fridge Perfection. All the pieces fit, though imperfectly, forcing the next contestant to undoubtedly play the tile game. Then, I make one last cereal Jenga move, slam the cupboard door again, and snicker knowing the next time it's opened, the game of Pick-Up-Sticks will be all set up.

My wife awakens and makes her rounds starting in the kitchen. She feeds the dog, which if human would already be stuffed with floor leftovers, or rather, drop downs. However, using stuffed in the same sentence as dog can only infer taxidermy. Anyways, as the dog chews I delay the inevitable last minute tasks of setting off for work by bringing up topics with my wife that are indigestible bile so early in the morning, especially before a cup of coffee cleans out the pipes and kick starts the blood flow. But, I can't help myself, as did the computer HAL 9000 that played life and death games with humans on the celestial playing field in Space Odyssey.

The verbal chess match begins when I suggest a logical way to make more room in the kitchen cereal cabinet. She counters with an emotional move of the queen and stomps on my proverbial pawn by saying the kitchen's way too small. I have another pawn-like proposal at the ready, but she skips my turn by stating that there's no room for anything; the queen captures again. I feel the weight of my folly press down on my noggin, but since I'm still in the game, I turn loose my knight by shouting that that's not what I meant at all. She lasso's my knight with the queen, topples my center pawns, and has my king in check by proving her point, and skipping the rest of mine. That's when the caffeine reaches the nooks and crannies of my brain, reminding me never to play chess with my wife since she plays with sixteen queens and no other pieces.

The morning games come to an end without any rebuttal from my corner. I enjoy games, but am only truly happy when they are played on a timeless game-board or on the safety of a sanctioned playing field. It's no fun having only lost when the games are over before the day begins.