

A Time for a Board-Game Rematch

What was will be again, what happened will happen again.
- Ecclesiastes 1

A recent family gathering offered time for a board game with my brother and, as history would have it, a rematch that underscores the Bible verse. *What was will be again...* Facing the strong possibility, if not certainty, of losing again, I accepted the rematch (with some prodding); and learned that history does have a way of repeating itself – if just in the simple play of a board game.

This particular gathering was my brother's 50th birthday; and on this day, he treated us to a fine meal in the upper room of a stylish restaurant, *The Classic on Noble*. Having visited this establishment on a prior outing, my brother was fulfilling an expressed plan to partake in the impressive upstairs with perhaps a round of chess in the company of family. In the fulfillment of his plan, my part was to dine across the table and to compete across the chessboard – the later of which I would have preferred to omit save only that another did not step forward to accept the dubious honor.



Both my recollection and my record of past performance in board games have been far from glorious, and especially when the opponent was my brother. The games of *Risk*, *Stratego*, and *Battleship* are just a few of the arsenal of “war games” for which my army (or otherwise military) would be reduced to a small country, a few worthless scouts, or the PT boat. In this inevitable outcome was the expected sense of loss, but not without some intermixed complement of an older brother's attention and time. In my recollection was the willingness to accept the losses because the board game was not so much about winning or losing as much as about the opportunity or experience. Oh yes, I may have savored and sought a victory – because one victory would have brought more humiliation on him than that for all my losses – but there must have been other reasons for committing myself to this predictable result. Perhaps this most recent rematch is a time to which these other reasons can be defined...or at least discovered in the smoke of battle.

Having completed the fine meal, we moved from the table to the board in an adjoining war room. For reasons already described, my eagerness to accept the challenge would not even measure-up to power of a pawn. Flashes of former defeats raced through my mind as we set-up our opposing forces and, having limited my offensive to one basic strategy of uncalculated advancement, I was quick to exploit my most powerful piece for the cause.

While giving some pause for each move, I soon realized that my brother was pre-occupied with his iPhone. Apparently sizing-up the degree of my strategy or general worthiness of the competition, he took liberty to check on football scores among his other Web enabled interests. If I was already threatened by the past outcomes of these games, the realization of his diversion to multi-task was the final straw.

Committed to the cause however, I advanced my queen to the interior of developing forces with the primary intent of earning some respect – or at the least, his momentary attention to the board and the battle at-hand. Looking at his reaction, the advance seemed to have rendered the desired effect as he found himself in a one-time check. Murmuring the score of the football game with some apparent satisfaction, he finally took undivided command of the interior with a defense countermove. My queen, committed to a compromising position, took flight to the flank – where she would remain indefinitely.

Leading up to this exhibition, several comments had been about my brothers' son – his prowess at the board that often if not continuously wrought a superior level of play. Not accustom to such losses – at least on a frequent basis – my brother seemed almost obsessed and beleaguered by the notion that one had emerged among our ranks to best him. To my further disadvantage, these recent developments on his home-front may have led to a level of fury – a kind of beast that, though hurt, was roaming the countryside in search of something to eat. Ally this appetite with the current standing of the football game and what you get is the dual effect of redemption-in-the-rough and confidence-by-collegiate-association. With this perceived combination of resolve, I could only count the minutes until the inevitable; still, I could let my mind distract from my strategy.

With my queen held firmly in the flank and the iPhone returned to its holster, his interior began forming for battle with troop movements occurring at center and to the far right. My moment of offensive glory behind me, the prudent course would be one of defense – bracing for an apparent surge. At the same time, I could not casually forego a

second offense and let his developing momentum overtake the illusionary sense of advantage (having struck the first blow); hence, I would make some gallant but unsuccessful, single-piece movements as available to the remaining of my force. Of course, such an undersized offensive proved ineffective as each piece was air-lifted from the board to a holding area behind his army.

In keeping with the turn of the battle below, my brother's expressions seem to vacillate between impatience and annoyance – both of which could suggest that victory was eminent though lacking the needed challenge to gratify his appetite. Unlike poker – for which I am even less capable than in chess – such expressions cannot be misread as a ploy but rather the authentic game face. A few moves later with my king in jeopardy, the expression had settled as had the figurative smoke of the battle; and with a moment of verbal exchange, we got up and went on our way.

I thought about the nice evening, his 50th birthday, and the game of chess; and obviously found some reason to write about the game – past, present and possibly the future. If we should have the opportunity to play again (and again), I will probably do it; for in these games comes the return of our past to meet the present. Yes, I do not fair well in board games against my brother, but it's not about winning or even wanting to win – it's about time together to rekindle those experiences that may have lied dormant for some time. To think of these games includes other members of my family too – some of which have passed-on though leaving valued memories of like kind.

A Time for a Board Game is really not about the details and outcome of a game but the deeper and lasting relationships that find time to reconvene and recollect. When the smoke of the battle lifts – or when the game is over – what is left is the meaningful essence of a relationship. The game alone seems rather meaningless – and particularly if the opponent is heavily favored to win...and to win again! But if playing the game leads to some continuance of this relationship in good standing, what should stop us from committing ourselves (or our forces) to the cause? Let the pieces fall (or be air lifted) where they may, but at the end of the day, find satisfaction in this relationship that last beyond games, winning and the task at hand.