



Jim's Life

A novel by Jason Matthews

Sample - Chess with Iggy

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Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it. - Confucius

One evening, Jim came from the hall and saw Iggy sitting in the corner of his room. Across from Iggy sat the image of a similar robotic unit. Between them was a holographic chess board with large pieces. Iggy stared at the board and shook his head in frustration.

"Good game," Iggy said reluctantly. "I resign." He tipped over the king.

"Thank you," the more feminine unit said.

"Two out of three?" Iggy asked. He looked over as Jim came into the room. "Hello, Jim. I'll put this away."

"No, wait," Jim said, walking closer to the board. "What is this?"

"Chess? Of course, you wouldn't remember if you had seen it. Come to think of it, I'm not sure if the old you would have recognized it either. Well, it's an ancient game and a good one."

"Hello," Jim addressed the other unit.

Surprised by the greeting, she replied, "Hi."

"This is my friend, Silva. She lives in Sydney. We like to play when neither of us is too busy."

"Hello, Silva."

"Hello."

"Can I watch?"

Iggy was surprised by the question. He couldn't remember ever being asked permission for anything. "Yes, of course. You may watch as long as you like."

Jim knelt down to examine the chessboard. Its large pieces fascinated him. Depictions of horsemen, soldiers, a king and a queen. All pieces poised for war. An eerie glow surrounded the board. Each side lined up and contained the same built-up energy within the pieces. Jim knew by then that others didn't see energy like he did.

During the opening moves the board changed quickly as the units traded turns and placed pieces in

new spots. Jim was intrigued by not only the moves but by the energy of the board and pieces. With each turn the colors and patterns changed subtly, captivating him. Some pieces became brighter while others dimmed in intensity, and these things changed as the game went on. The energy of the sides also fluctuated. Some areas lit up in fluidity, and others dimmed down in stagnation.

"The pieces, what do they do?" Jim asked.

"It's more of a question of how do they move," Iggy answered.

Iggy placed a bishop a few squares diagonally. Silva countered with a pawn. Iggy moved a knight then Silva a knight.

Jim was amazed how promptly the units moved and how beautiful the whole board was becoming, as if the pieces were a work of art in progress. "Would you teach me sometime?"

"Of course," Iggy said. "But I must warn you. Silva and I have one of the best programs ever developed. No humans play against us."

"I don't mind," Jim said.

Iggy reevaluated the choices he had been considering. He moved his other bishop. Silva counted with a new pawn. Now they were well into the middle game and the pace slowed. Every few seconds the units moved a piece.

Jim was especially drawn to certain pieces glowing vibrantly, much more than they had at the start. And it was always a different piece depending on whose turn it was. Often the ones that glowed the brightest were the pieces moved by the units but not always. Sometimes Iggy looked as if he might choose one that shone brightly but then picked another. Jim sensed these pieces were asking to be moved given the state of the game.

"Our games often end in a draw," Silva admitted. "We have the same program. Good for draws, I suppose."

"But not always," Iggy added. "The beauty of this game is its countless ways to move. Technically speaking, a human could beat us."

Silva said, "We calculate billions of possibilities in seconds. An unfair advantage. Plus we don't forget past thoughts, something humans often do."

Jim touched the bishop during Silva's turn. "This one wants to move," he said.

"This one?" she asked. "To where?"

Jim pointed. "To that spot."

"How do you know?" Iggy asked. "You don't even know the ways it can move, do you?"

Jim shrugged. "No. Can it move to there?"

Iggy observed the choice. "A bit unconventional, but perhaps."

Silva humored the boy and moved the piece.

Iggy muttered, "We won't count the results of this game then."

"It's okay," Silva said. "A chance for you to get even."

"Very well. I gratefully accept."

Jim watched Iggy ignore a radiating knight that wanted to respond. Instead he chose a pawn that confronted the bishop's path. Jim noticed one of Silva's pieces glowing even brighter. "Oh, this one next," he said, pointing to her pawn in the back.

"Okay." Silva obliged him.

"Hmm," Iggy mentioned. "Not what I would have expected but not a bad move." Iggy countered with a pawn of his own.

Jim surveyed the board. One of her knights beamed with excitement. "Can this one move to here?"

"It can," Iggy said, "but it would be unwise. You'd be trading a knight for a pawn. Really not a wise choice."

"But it wants to," Jim pleaded.

"Very well," Silva said, offering the trade. Iggy accepted it delightfully and took the knight.

"Then this one here."

Silva obliged the boy and studied the moves. "I do see some possibilities."

"You know," Iggy said. "That is sort of interesting. Could it be beginner's luck? Let me think about

this."

Iggy ignored a glowing pawn and countered with a knight.

"This one to there," Jim instructed. Silva moved her queen.

"Check," she said.

Iggy hunkered in and took much longer to decide his next move. Jim watched spellbound as the unit vacillated over two choices. One piece, Iggy's rook, was shimmering to be moved. It would be sacrificing itself to a trade with a bishop, a move that no chess player would be fond of but a sacrifice that would enable the game to continue for much longer. The other piece, the king moving one square over, meant a slow but sure death. Jim saw the king's color change to a dark gray and shrink in size, begging not to be moved.

After a minute Iggy moved the king.

Silva saw what was happening. She saw the brilliance of the last few moves and determined where Jim was heading. Jim looked at the board and saw her lead pawn grow bright yellow and expand twice its size. She asked, "Is this the one you'd recommend?"

"Yes!"

She moved it and announced, "Nine moves from checkmate, depending on your choices, of course."

Iggy sunk even lower and studied his options. Jim saw his side turn gray. There were no moves that could truly save him. Then Iggy realized something.

He stared at Jim and asked, "How did you do that?"

Jim shrugged. "I just moved the pieces that wanted to."

"How did you know they wanted to?"

"They told me."

"They did?"

Iggy leaned closer to the board. He turned his head this way and that to sense any tiny shouts from the pieces. He adjusted his sight lenses to try and see them in a new light.

"Amazing," Silva added. "And you've never seen a chessboard?"

"No, but I like it. Especially this one. It's so powerful." Jim pointed to the queen.

"How can this be?" Iggy asked. "Beginner's luck? The odds are astronomical."

"How did the pieces tell you which one to move?" Silva asked.

"The energy gets brighter."

"They glow?"

"Yes, sort of."

"And you can see this?"

Jim answered self-consciously, "Yes."

"How?" Iggy wondered. "How is that possible?"

"They show me," Jim added.

"Yes, Jim, I realize that. But this is quite miraculous. If what you say is true, then there is another conscious entity at play here. Perhaps it is from the game itself. Perhaps it is something collective coming from Silva and me. Perhaps something else altogether." Iggy looked to Silva. "Thoughts?"

"We can dismiss a subconscious creation on our part, unless you think we have a subconscious."

"Well," Iggy said, becoming prouder by the moment. "If it's not coming from us, then it's not coming from the board either. How would its subconscious be any more existent than ours? That scenario would only leave an outside force, which to me seems the most unlikely. I'd estimate, perhaps eighty percent chance, the energies Jim can see are a direct result of the sum total of subconscious energy coming from you, me, Jim and the game itself."

Silva added, "If true, then another case for our subconscious."

"And if true, then perhaps all matter contains consciousness. Fascinating."

Iggy turned to Jim with a new admiration.

Jim agreed. "What you said feels right."

"I have to get back," Silva said, snapping Iggy from his thought. Her image started to fade.

"Tell the others," Iggy insisted. She nodded as she faded out.

"She's a good friend," Jim said.
Iggy sat speechless, just staring at Jim.

(End of current sample)

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