

I Beat Myself at Chess (revised)

by Matt DeVirgiliis

There we sat, myself and I, at a small folding table in the middle of the lab beside the main, l-shaped workbench. The lab was empty - always was - except for the two of us. My life's work was scattered across every table. The computers hummed and the fluorescent lights buzzed. It wasn't as organized as I usually kept it, but my focus was centered on the rooks, queens, and kings in front of me. It was my move. I moved my black rook over three spaces. Then my life's work spoke.

"You know, what you've done is highly controversial?" I asked from across the board. I made a move — white pawn up two spaces.

I peered around the empty lab, taking stock of all the investments — the technology, the supplies, the freezer; it all cost so much. Then I looked at the outcome. I looked at myself sitting there, planning my next move, my index finger and thumb scratching my cheek. "It was worth it," I said.

"What's it like outside?" I asked.

"Not sure," I said, "I haven't left the lab in a few months. I have almost everything I need to survive down here." I made a move — black bishop across four spaces.

"So why'd you do it?" I asked. "Cure cancer? Paralysis? MS?"

Again, I peered around the room, filled with its machines and computers and microscopes, and chemicals. The fluorescent lights did half their job; there were a lot of dark, cold spaces. Magazines, journals, and notebooks were stacked fifty and sixty issues high, creating moveable and immovable walls. In all of that stuff, that rubbish - the records of my life - there was not one instance of a personal life, an outside life. I noticed this myself, and I know I noticed it from across the table.

“No family? I asked and moved the white King.

“Mom passed away two years ago and dad passed when I was a teenager,” I said. “How about you?” I moved my black pawn up a space.

I laughed as I moved one of my white knights and picked up a black pawn. “I’ve got what you’ve got, just none of the experiences.”

“You’re beating me though,” I said. I had only captured four of his white pieces; he had nine of my black pieces. I moved one of my pawns forward a space.

“You gave me life. You haven’t helped me live. So, why’d you really do it?” I asked again and moved a white queen to the right one space.

“Like I said, I have almost everything I need to survive here. I need someone to play chess with,” I said. I moved my black knight over two and up one, and then I watched myself make a move — white knight, up and over to the left.

“Checkmate,” I said. “I win.”

“I guess we do,” I replied. “Let’s play again.”

