

PLAYING THE GAME

A Short

written by

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INT. KITCHEN - APARTMENT - EVENING

A white porcelain mug is set under the spout of a coffee Kuerig. We see a hand fill a reusable Kuerig pod with coffee grinds, set it into the coffee maker, and set it to the second largest mug size.

Coffee begins to squeeze into the mug.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - APARTMENT - SAME TIME

A laptop, decorated in an abundance of colorful, pop-culture based stickers, is thrown open and turned on. A google search bar is already open for use.

"Twitter" is typed into the search bar.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Chess pieces spill out over the slick, black coffee table. A young man (BLACK) with severe bed head, wearing only a rugged t-shirt and sweatpants, unfolds a scratched, walnut-colored board. He sets it on the table.

"RAMBLE ON" by Led Zeppelin begins to play over what we see

A single, dimmed lamp lights the room with a slight, blueish glow coming from the TV. Fox News plays softly in the background.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Another young man (WHITE) sits at a desk laptop. He has headphones in his ears, likely listening to the song we currently hear.

He's on twitter, retweeting what look like more left-leaning tweets and articles from MSNBC, CNN, and other friends.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - APARTMENT - SAME TIME

BLACK sets each piece on the board delicately, lining them all to be perfect. He adjust a couple to look more centered.

It's perfect. He smiles.

He looks at the TV screen filled with the news. His smile begins to settle down and lower.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - APARTMENT - SAME TIME

WHITE remains focused on his laptop screen. He's typing, something, likely a tweet.

Black calls from the other room.

BLACK (O.S.)

Dude.

No response. WHITE can't hear hime through his headphones.

BLACK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Dude...

Still nothing.

BLACK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Dude!

WHITE finally notices the call. He takes out one of his earbuds, eyes still on his laptop screen.

"RAMBLE ON" sharply turns soft over the background. It begins to fade out completely.

WHITE

Yeah.

BLACK (O.S.)

I got a game set. Wanna play?

WHITE hesitates.

WHITE

Um... yeah. Just one sec.

He types his statement into his laptop and closes it shut.

INT. LIVING ROOM - APARTMENT - SAME TIME

BLACK lifts from his seat, set behind the white pieces, and walks to the kitchen.

WHITE enters the living room just as BLACK exits. He stops in his tracks at the sight of what's on the TV. He ignores it, shakes his head, and takes a seat behind the White pieces, as BLACK did before.

WHITE calls to BLACK in the kitchen.

WHITE

You know, I was reading in this book-

Black pops his head out of the kitchen, sticking half of his body into the living room.

BLACK

Yeah?

WHITE

Did you know that Donald Rumsfeld was the youngest and oldest secretary of defense recorded in US history. Chief of staff between that.

BLACK

Why are you reading a book about Donald Rumsfeld?

WHITE

Dick Cheney wasn't that far behind- I mean in terms of being a young Chief of Staff, but...

BLACK

Why are you reading a book about Dick Cheney?

WHITE

It was about the Iraq War, actually.

BLACK

And those two's experience in the White House, I'm guessing, was... what- 30 years before the Iraq War?

WHITE

Thick Book.

BLACK

Hm.

WHITE

Dick Cheney doesn't have any military experience.

BLACK

Okay.

WHITE

And he was secretary of defense, at what... 40?

BLACK

Okay.

WHITE

I don't understand- that doesn't- wouldn't it make sense for an appointed Secretary of Defense to have experience within the... "defense?"

BLACK

Like military?

WHITE

Yeah.

BLACK

Not really.

WHITE

Why not?

BLACK

If that were instated as a requirement, the same would have to be done for the President. He's literally the "Commander in-"

WHITE

Okay, okay. Yep, you're right. I was being an idiot. Sorry.

BLACK attempts to return to the kitchen.

WHITE (CONT'D)

I'm playing white.

BLACK stops and turns back.

BLACK
You were white last time, we
switch.

WHITE
You played white last time.

BLACK
No I didn't. I played white last
week.

WHITE
So? That was-

BLACK
We play a game everyday.

WHITE
Why does it matter what you are?

BLACK
Basic chess knowledge, black has
immediate disadvantages.

WHITE
Exactly.

BLACK
Dude...

WHITE
I promise you, that you were-

BLACK
You know what, forget it. I don't
care. Make your first move, I'm
getting my coffee.

BLACK exits to the kitchen.

WHITE examines the boards. You can hear the faint voices from
the news on the television.

White moves: Queen pawn to d4.

BLACK sits with a clam sigh at his seat of the game. He takes
a look at the board and WHITE's move. He sips his coffee.

WHITE
There was a protest today.

BLACK
(mid-sip)
Where?

He moves: Knight to f5.

WHITE
Cleveland.

BLACK points at the TV.

BLACK
Funny, they're not talking about
it.

WHITE
Okay.

BLACK
What was it about?

WHITE
Notice what network you're
watching.

We see focus in on the TV with BLACK. It's, weirdly, Fox
News.

WHITE (CONT'D)
You wanna guess what it was about?

White moves: King pawn to c4.

BLACK looks back at the board.

BLACK
What were the sides?

WHITE
There weren't any sides.

BLACK
There are always sides.

Black moves: pawn to g6.

WHITE
Right and wrong?

White moves: Pawn to g3.

BLACK
Sure.

Black moves: pawn to c6.

WHITE

Maybe if you kept yourself updated
you wouldn't sound so dry about it.

White moves: bishop to g2.

Beat. BLACK looks up at WHITE. WHITE is too focused on his
move to notice.

BLACK

Dude, come on...

WHITE looks up and notices BLACK's stare.

WHITE

What?

Black moves: pawn to d5.

BLACK

I don't want to have this
conversation.

WHITE

Why?

BLACK

I don't want to have it with my
roommate.

WHITE looks back at the board.

WHITE

Why? I don't even know what your
politics are?

He moves: pawn takes pawn at d5.

BLACK

"What my-?" look, things can get
dicey and I don't want to end the
week having to find a new place to
live.

(he sighs)

I'm not open to talking that right
now. Okay?

Black moves: Pawn trades pawn at d5, again.

WHITE

Why?

White moves: Knight to c3.

BLACK
Jesus- I'm playing chess.

WHITE
So am I, and you have the news on?

BLACK
I'm multitasking.

Black moves: Bishop to g7.

WHITE
Wouldn't having the news on be a
signal that you're open to a
political conversation?

White moves: pawn to e3

BLACK
Maybe I just want to listen to it.

Black castles.

WHITE
Then listen to me.

BLACK
I want to listen to something that
isn't burrowed in the echoey ass of
Jake Tapper.

WHITE
Actually I think I'm burrowed in
the ass of Wolf Blitzer. It's
warmer.

BLACK
Play your turn.

White moves: knight to e2.

WHITE
And at least I'm not caverning
myself under the gooch of Sean
Hannity.

BLACK
Can you tell me what's wrong with
Sean Hannity?

Black moves: knight to c6.

WHITE

Would you like for me to refer back to events of today?

BLACK

Play your turn first, please.

He does: White castles.

WHITE

There. Fox's entire rhetoric is an instigator of violence-

BLACK focuses on the board.

BLACK

I thought we were talking about Hannity.

WHITE

Lies and violent words beget violent emotions beget violent actions. It's like a ladder that no matter how careful you climb it will just punch you in the face, and earn a million dollar pay stub doing so.

BLACK

I'm guessing there was violence at that protest based on the amount of times you said violence.

Black moves: pawn to b6.

WHITE

Sure, you can say that.

White moves: pawn to b3.

BLACK

Who started it?

Black moves: Bishop a6.

WHITE

What?

White moves: Bishop a3.

BLACK

Who started it? The fight?

Black moves: Rook to e8.

WHITE

I mean-

BLACK

Follow-up question, is this a "protest" that we're referring to... or a riot?

WHITE

"Protest" and "Riot" isn't as simple as "black and white."

White moves: Queen to d2.

BLACK

Yes it is.

Black moves: Pawn to e5

WHITE

No it isn't.

White moves: Pawn takes pawn at e5.

BLACK

The word "riot" is literally definable by a Webster's dictionary: "a violent disturbance of the peace by a crowd"

Black moves: Knight takes pawn at e5.

WHITE

It's not as simple as that.

BLACK

"-an impressively large or varied display of something."

WHITE

That statement is incredibly broad.

White moves: Rook on f to d1.

BLACK

"-to take part in a violent public disturbance."

Black moves: Knight to d3.

WHITE

Okay, did you prepare for this conversation, or do you weirdly have those definitions memorized.

BLACK
Who started the riot?

WHITE
Everything started that riot.

White moves: Queen to c2.

BLACK
Now THAT is a broad statement. And you admitted it was a riot.

Black moves: Knight takes pawn at f2.

WHITE
If a man in full armor were to beat you with a stick made from the same wood as an MLB baseball bat, you wouldn't flee or fight back?

White moves: King takes knight at f2. He's vulnerable.

BLACK
If you were a cop and being rushed by a mob of people with intention of hurting you, you wouldn't fight back?

WHITE
Peaceful protests don't intend to hurt cops?

BLACK
Because, "Fuck all-" or... "death to all pigs" sounds like you want to gift them with a basket of flowers, huh?

WHITE
That's not what-?! Ugh! They're complex human beings too, we understand that?

BLACK
I thought they were pigs, and who's "we?"

WHITE
Are you trying to play devil's advocate or are you just trying to piss me off?

BLACK
I'm trying to play chess.

WHITE
Then make a move.

BLACK
Fine.

He does: Knight to g4.

BLACK (CONT'D)
Check.

WHITE
(to himself)
Fuck.

Beat.

WHITE (CONT'D)
Do you know how many American's are
still medically uninsured?

BLACK
So the riot was about health care.

WHITE
30 million-

BLACK
Weird. I thought it'd be about...
something else.

WHITE
Did you hear me?

White moves: King to g1.

WHITE (CONT'D)
30 million.

BLACK
31 million- I didn't know you could
have riots about health care.

WHITE
If there are riots due to Michigan
State winning against Ohio State,
then there can be riots about
anything. Wanna know the difference
between those two occasions?

BLACK
Sure.

WHITE

Which one of them was a group of frat boys burning couches in the street and which was a group of democrats speaking out for the insured safety of proper healthcare?

BLACK

That wasn't very imaginative-

WHITE

Follow up question- which one ended with police macing and beating innocent people with clubs?

(slight pause)

By the way, only one of them can be right.

BLACK

I see your point.

WHITE

So what's yours again?

BLACK

I didn't have one, you were busy talking about 30 million uninsured Americans.

WHITE

30 million people.

BLACK

31 million.

Black moves: Knight takes pawn at e3.

WHITE

Fuck you- and yet we have laws like the Affordable Care act to continue protecting these people-

BLACK

If there're 31 million **un**insured I don't know how much protecting it's doing-

WHITE

-protecting these people, and yet the republican party masterbates to the idea of eviscerating it off the history books.

BLACK
They haven't yet.

White moves: Queen to d2, out of the knights reach. BLACK examines the board.

WHITE
They have control of the senate.

BLACK
Congress gets gridlocked more often than not.

WHITE
What I'm trying to say is that eventually they'll find a way.

BLACK
How?

WHITE
I don't know, somehow? And what are they doing it for?

BLACK
Budget affordability?

Black moves: Knight takes bishop at g2.

WHITE
No! Tax cuts and lower premiums for the billionaire friends they play golf with at Pebble Beach.

White moves: King takes knight at g2.

BLACK
That's not why they hate it.

He moves: pawn to d4. A very small move. It confuses WHITE, to where he almost loses sight of their conversation.

WHITE
Okay... fine, why then?

BLACK
Well-

WHITE
Why?

BLACK
Well if you'd let me-

WHITE
Do you even know?

BLACK
I know what gaslighting is, do you?

WHITE
Yes.

BLACK
Can you recognize it?

Pause. WHITE can't. He looks down at the board.

BLACK (CONT'D)
The Affordable Care Act has no assurance for the protection of the health care plans that 92 percent of Americans already have.

WHITE
92 percent including those under the act, by the way.

WHITE finally moves again: Knight takes pawn at d4.

BLACK
Do you know that?

WHITE
I'm assuming.

BLACK
Okay... fine. ACA at the core of it's idea is socialized-

WHITE
It's not a socialist act-

BLACK
It is socialized, based in socialist ideals. Say I worked for a... book manufacturing company, okay? And that job not only provides me with standard benefits, but it also provides me with health insurance.

WHITE
I don't need for you to talk down to me on how health insurance works-

Black moves: Bishop to b7.

BLACK

Check. Your company not only provides you, but your family, with a fuckin-A plan: shorter wait times, faster/cheaper access to medication, helpful doctors, etc., etc.

WHITE

I said stop talking like- I understand how-

BLACK

Say, with a socialized system, your fuckin-A grade system- which cares for your entire family by the way - say that gets down graded. There is no variety of A-Grade, B-Grade, or even C-grade plans- EVERYONE has B grade. It's equal and manages to be affordable by your taxes, because remember you're the one getting taxed up the ass the most. You got a good salary, right? There are some people who don't, so ummmm... fuck you, right? How would that make you feel?

WHITE

I'm trying to think about my move, stop.

BLACK

It'd make you feel cheated? Republican's feel cheated, because that's not what capitalism promised- that's not how it works.

WHITE moves to get his king out of the way: King to f1.

WHITE

That's capitalism's fault, not health-

BLACK

Is it? Do you even know what the good parts of the Affordable Care Act are? Have you even read it? Or are you just speaking out of Jake Tapper's ass again?

Pause. BLACK moves: Queen to d7

BLACK (CONT'D)

Oh wait, I'm sorry. Wolf Bliter's.
My mistake.

White finally snaps.

WHITE

Fuck off! And fuck you! I'm done! I
yield the fucking game.

WHITE tips over his king in submission. He stands and begins
to storm out of the room. Though, just as he makes the
exiting door:

BLACK

Wait!

WHITE stops in his tracks and turns to Black.

WHITE

What?

BLACK

Put your king back up.

WHITE

Why?

BLACK

I want to see how this plays out,
I'm not done.

WHITE

I'm done, I yielded. I don't want
to-

BLACK

Sit down.

BEAT. WHITE does what BLACK asks.

White moves: Queen to F2.

BLACK (CONT'D)

Do you know any of the good parts
of the Affordable Care Act?

WHITE

I said, I didn't want to-

Black moves: Queen to H3.

BLACK

Check. I'm asking, do you know? Are you able to tell them to me?

Pause. WHITE doesn't respond he stares at the board, thinking of anything he could possibly do to block a checkmate.

BLACK (CONT'D)

Okay... Are you able to tell me, one, it makes denial of premiums based on pre-existing conditions against the law, two, it allows people to remain on a secure, family plan post college, 'till 26-

WHITE

I knew that.

White moves: King to g1.

BLACK

Good. Three, it offers free preventive screenings. And, four, since applicable, it has covered over 20 million new Americans and put the uninsured percentage at an all-time low. Are you able to tell me about that, or can you tell me it's just "good?"

Pause.

Black moves: Rook to e1.

BLACK (CONT'D)

Check- back on the topic of the protest, are you able to tell me the amount of times the national guard has been deployed by the government, warranted or not, post the death of George Floyd? The answer, 55 times. Answer this piece of trivia: What's the likely rate that a black male will get unlawfully shot by the police in comparison to whites? 2.5 times more, and the rate is rising. Can you tell me how much money in insurance claims has been fucked from property damage as a result of riots in the past year? 1 to 2 billion, giving the last record in the LA riots of 92 a big ol' kick to the dick.

(MORE)

BLACK (CONT'D)

But can you also tell me about the number of psychiatric doctors who're begging the government to fund their studies in police behavior, and promise that if the "pigs" demilitarize and eradicate "abrasive tactics" maybe innocent people, especially people of color, wouldn't get shot in streets like rats.

Pause. No response from WHITE.

White moves instead: Rook takes rook at e1.

BLACK (CONT'D)

Can you tell me any of this? Or will you just continue to scream in my ear, "Liberal, good! Conservative, bad!"

Still no response from WHITE he's speechless.

Black moves: Bishop takes knight at d4.

BLACK (CONT'D)

Conservatives don't make up a majority of the population, and I don't think they ever will. They just know how to play the game. You know what I mean?

WHITE

No.

BLACK

Democrats are not only made up of the majority, but the variety. They've got a greater range of voices to care for and ideals to coddle. Republicans? I could probably count their demographics with one hand.

WHITE

So?

White moves: Queen takes bishop at d4.

Beat. BLACK sees this chance.

BLACK

It's easier for them to get everybody on the same page.

(MORE)

BLACK (CONT'D)

And while the democrats are too busy fighting amongst themselves over PR issues, slightly offensive jokes at a press briefing, and begging Gen. X to remember to vote, Republicans are sprinting away with the fucking store. Do you want my honest opinion of why republican people don't like the ACA? It has nothing to do with anything I told you. It's because all their party had to do was tell their wealthy educated voters that it raises their taxes, and tell the poor and less educated that it was named after a black guy. Fear and free money. It's that easy for them, and what do we get for it? Less funds into education, risking the safety of minority rights, influx in guns on the street, and continuing the poverty cycle and mass incarcerations in POC neighborhoods. Remember when Marty McFly came back to hill valley and that bully, Biff, fucked up the entire town? Yeah, that's your result.

(breath)

But don't worry, in the meantime, democrats were finally able to agree on what the minority leader's twitter bio should be without hurting anyone's feelings and we were able to tweet at all republicans that they're bigots and racists... "power move!"

(slight pause)

I am tired of democrats getting delayed in doing the right thing, because they're too busy coddling and having to play teacher to young people on how government actually works, most of whom say they "hate politics" anyway. We shouldn't be lowering ourselves to our lowest denominator, we should be rising them up. They're smarter than that and shit gets done that way.

(MORE)

BLACK (CONT'D)

So, the next time you want to ramble on to me like your some "angel" or "Einstein" of progressive politics, do yourself a favor: recognize your side's rights and wrongs, recognize their side's rights and wrongs, keep your eyes open, get that chip off your shoulder, and play the fucking game like an adult.

Black Queen to G2.

BLACK (CONT'D)

Checkmate. Now we're done talking.

WHITE can only stare at the board. BLACK stands and leaves the room, silently.

CUT TO BLACK.

END