

FUN AND GAMES

Winning isn't everything it's the only thing. Vince Lombardi

The game isn't over till it's over. Yogi Berra

The chess board is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair, just and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance. Thomas Henry Huxley

Increased means and increased leisure are the two civilizers of man. Benjamin Disraeli

Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. Thorstein Veblen

I am a business man. My specialties are essentially toys and games. I have been fascinated with both for as long as I can remember. On the brainy side, I particularly enjoy crossword puzzles, chess and card games such as bridge, blackjack and poker. On the physical side I love tennis, both as a participant and as a spectator. I appreciate the skills involved in other sports such as golf, baseball, football, soccer, hockey and basketball and I follow the leagues involved acidulously. My toys are all sorts of electronic gadgetry such as the most up-to-date computers, robots, communication devices, esoteric photographic equipment as well as the latest in kitchen appliances. The latter provides me with the means to indulge in one of my favorite hobbies, cooking, one of the few activities where I try to be creative.

I have had enormous success with my business activities if measured by the profits my company has gained. The only virtue in the money I have made is the freedom to search for new interesting products and in some cases to actually try to invent something innovative and exciting. I confess I am not very good at it. I have a talent for spotting individuals who have a superb imagination, allowing them to come up with fabulously exciting new games and toys. They are given all the freedom they require to give free rein to their imaginations. While they have not always come up with ideas that proved to be a commercial success, even such were exhilarating.

I spend most of my time in marketing, playing with my new toys and games or daydreaming, something I can afford to do since I am the sole owner of my company. Inducements to my inventive employees consist of very handsome remuneration, all the freedom they require, and an open door policy that allows them to bounce their ideas off me, something I really appreciate. It is because of this openness that the following bizarre series of events occurred. One must appreciate that my so-called employees are all somewhat out of the ordinary and are all capable of unexpected actions and visitations.

I was in my office late one evening, going over the mundane task of reviewing the books when Igor, a very strange genius, suddenly waltzed in. He had a habit of showing up at the oddest times.

"Hi Boss" he pronounced with a fatuous grin. I was always bemused to be called by that appellation since I felt that these characters were my employers and that I was there on sufferance. "I have a great idea." I was not surprised, since he always came to me with the same opening. The trouble was that he usually did have a fabulous notion which nearly always caught me unawares.

"Boss! We now have computers that are so powerful that not even the world's greatest chess master can beat them. Since they have become miniaturized, why don't we implant one in humanized robots, which we are in the process of developing for mass manufacturing. Thus the purchase price would allow the major market to indulge in this new toy. If we can accomplish this, I predict that we would make a fortune. However that would just be the beginning.

Let us take this a few further steps. If what I propose is successful, there is no reason why we cannot extend our robots' capabilities to all games both mental and physical. All humans would have to face the challenge posed by our automatons. It would be an impossible task for anyone to best them in any game. Every mental game, such as chess, checkers, sudaku, riddles, etc. would be a snap. With physical games such as golf they would always hit a golf ball with unerring accuracy for at least 325 yards unless the pin were placed a smaller distance than it usually is with a par three hole. In cases like that a hole in one would occur or at the very least a birdie. As a baseball pitcher the robot would pitch the ball with such velocity that no hitter could possibly make contact with it. In other words every batter would strike out. As a hitter the robot would never fail to make contact and always hit a home run. These abilities could easily be extended to other games such as hockey, basketball, soccer, football, tennis, lacrosse, with no end to it."

I immediately gave the go ahead. As Igor predicted, the market consumed the new toy with an appetite we had never before experienced. We made a fortune. However our success was short lived. It quickly became apparent to the public that they had no chance of ever winning in any endeavor against the robots. The reaction was not only that our sales slumped to zero but that the consuming public came down with a case of severe depression magnified by an inferiority complex that led to a populace that either could not or would not make any effort to accomplish anything. In other words the human race sank into a state of such torpor that there was danger of it becoming extinct.

I was at a loss as to how the situation could be altered for the better. In desperation I called a meeting of my eccentric brain trust. Again it was Igor who came up with, what appeared to be, a viable response.

"Boss! Why did you not raise this problem with us before? The solution is easy. All we have to do is reprogram the robots so that, while they will still represent a challenge with anyone competing with them, they will play to slightly below the level of their human competitor. We made sure that they are receptive to reprogramming by the use of specific high frequency radio signals which will reach them no matter their location. I further suggest that since they are capable of emulating just about any human activity including all forms of human productivity, they also be programmed to replace all human

economic and political activity, allowing humans the freedom to enjoy their lives as leisure or simply as they wish.”

Once again I gave the go ahead. What I did not realize was that my geniuses together with others that I did not know had come to regard the robots as their toys. Actually, this had been planned by them from the start. Since no humans were involved in the production of goods and services and in governance, it appeared that the robots were in total control. In reality the robots were simply behaving as they had been programmed. A small group of inventive geniuses now had total power and there was nothing I could do about it. A new ruling class and an aristocracy had emerged. It consisted of geniuses of all types, both creative and analytical. While they ruled benevolently, humanity had become as placid as sheep. It could not last.

Since they interbred frequently, the rulers’ offspring more often than not turned out to be brainless and cruel with a invidious sense of their superiority, leading to horrific acts. They often felt that they could do whatever they wished. Their treatment of the so called common folk was unspeakable. The result was social turmoil that led to violent revolution which in turn resulted in a radical leadership that ended up by breeding its own brand of horror.

“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose. The more things change the more they remain the same.”

The preceding was extracted from one of my ancestors’ diary. It was he who founded the family fortune that has allowed me to be part of the current governing elite despite having no special talent or ability. It seems that life is a game after all and humanity its toys. The only question is, ‘Who is playing the game?’

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