

Short Story

Death By Scrabble

By : Charlie Fish

It's a hot day and I hate my wife. We're playing Scrabble. That's how bad it is. I'm 42 years old, it's a blistering hot Sunday afternoon and all I can think of to do with my life is to play Scrabble. I should be out, doing exercise, spending money, meeting people. I don't think I've spoken to anyone except my wife since Thursday morning. On Thursday morning I spoke to the milkman. My letters are crap. I play, appropriately, BEGIN. With the N on the little pink star. Twenty-two points. I watch my wife's smug expression as she rearranges her letters. Clack, clack, clack. I hate her. If she wasn't around, I'd be doing something interesting right now. I'd be climbing a Mount Kilimanjaro. I'd be strolling in the latest Hollywood blockbuster. I'd be sailing the Vendee Globe on a 60-foot clipper called the New Horizons - I don't know, but I'd be doing something. She plays JINXED, with the J on a double-letter score. 30 points. She's beating me already. Maybe I should kill her. If only I had a D, then I could play MURDER. That would be a sign. That would be permission. I start chewing on my U. It's a bad habit, I know. All the letters are frayed. I play WARMER for 22 points, mainly so I can keep chewing on my U. As I'm picking new letters from the bag, I find myself thinking - the letters will tell me what to do. If they spell out KILL, or STAB, or her name, or anything, I'll do it right now. I'll finish her off. My rack spells MIHZPA. Plus the U in my mouth. Damn. The heat of the sun is pushing at me through the window. I can hear buzzing insects outside. I hope they're not bees. My cousin Harold swallowed a bee when he was nine, his throat swelled up and he died. I hope that if they are bees, they fly into my wife's throat. msptrack She plays SWEATIER, using all her letters. 24 points plus a 50 point bonus. If it wasn't too hot to move I would strangle her right now. I am getting sweated. It needs to rain, to clear the air. As soon as that thought crosses my mind, I find a good word. HUMID on a double-word score, using the D of JINXED. The U makes a little splash of saliva when I put it down. Another 22 points. I hope she has lousy letters. She tells me she has lousy letters. For some reason, I hate her more. She plays FAN, with the F on a double-letter, and gets up to fill the kettle and turn on the air conditioning. It's the hottest day for ten years and my wife is turning on the kettle. This is why I hate my wife. I play ZAPS, with the Z doubled, and she gets a static shock off the air conditioning unit. I find this remarkably satisfying. She sits back with a heavy sigh and starts fiddling with her letters again. Clack clack. Clack clack. I feel a terrible rage build up inside me. Some inner poison slowly spreading through my limbs, and when it gets to my fingertips I am going to jump out of my chair, spilling the Scrabble tiles over the floor, and I am going to start hitting her again and again and again. The rage gets to my fingertips and passes. My heart is beating. I'm sweating. I think my face actually twitches. Then I sigh, deeply, and sit back into my chair. The kettle starts whistling. As the whistle builds it makes me feel hotter. She plays READY on a double-word for 18 points, then goes to pour herself a cup of tea. No I do not want one. I steal a blank tile from the letter

bag when she's not looking, and throw back a V from my rack. She gives me a suspicious look. She sits back down with her cup of tea, making a cup-ringing on the table, as I play an 8-letter word: CHEATING, using the A of READY. 64 points, including the 50-point bonus, which means I'm beating her now. She asks me if I cheated. I really, really hate her. She plays IGNORE on the triple-word for 21 points. The score is 153 to her, 155 to me. The steam rising from her cup of tea makes me feel hotter. I try to make murderous words with the letters on my rack, but the best I can do is SLEEP. My wife sleeps all the time. She slept through an argument our next-door neighbours had that resulted in a broken door, a smashed TV and a Telenovela Lala doll with all the stuffing coming out. And then she bitched at me for being moody the next day from lack of sleep. If only there was some way for me to get rid of her. I spot a chance to use all my letters. EXPLODES, using the X of JINXED. 72 points. That'll show her. As I put the last letter down, there is a deafening bang and the air conditioning unit fails. My heart is racing, but not from the shock of the bang. I don't believe it - but it can't be a coincidence. The letters made it happen. I played the word EXPLODES, and it happened - the air conditioning unit exploded. And before, I played the word CHEATING when I cheated. And ZAP when my wife got the electric shock. The words are coming true. The letters are choosing their future. The whole game is - JINXED. My wife plays SIGN, with the N on a triple-letter, for 10 points. I have to test this. I have to play something and see if it happens. Something unlikely, to prove that the letters are making it happen. My rack is ABQYFWE. That doesn't leave me with a lot of options. I start frantically chewing on the B. I play FLY, using the L of EXPLODES. I sit back in my chair and close my eyes, waiting for the sensation of rising up from my chair. Waiting to fly. Stupid. I open my eyes, and there's a fly. An insect, buzzing around above the Scrabble board, surfing the thermals from the tepid cup of tea. That proves nothing. The fly could have been there anyway. I need to play something unambiguous. Something that cannot be misinterpreted. Something absolute and final. Something terminal. Something murderous. My wife plays CAUTION, using a blank tile for the N, 18 points. My rack is AQWUEJK, plus the B in my mouth. I am aware by the power of the words, and frustrated that I cannot wield it. Maybe I should cheat again, and pick out the letters I need to spell SLASH or SLAY. Then it hits me. The perfect word. A powerful, dangerous, terrible word. I play QUAKE for 19 points. I wonder if the strength of the quake will be proportionate to how many points it scored. I can feel the trembling energy of potential in my veins. I am commanding fate. I am manipulating destiny. My wife plays DEATH for 34 points, just as the room starts to shake. I gasp with surprise and vindication - and the B that I was chewing on gets lodged in my throat. I try to cough. My face goes red, then blue. My throat swells. I draw blood clawing at my neck. The earthquake builds to a climax. I fall to the floor. My wife just sits there, watching.

National & International News

India's exports doing quite well in comparison to other emerging markets: RBI Gov

**New Delhi, March 13:** RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan has said, Indian exports are doing quite well as compared to other emerging markets. Addressing the first Ramnath Goenka Memorial Lecture in New Delhi yesterday, Mr Rajan said, even though Indian trade has been slowing, the slowdown is

similar to what has been happening elsewhere, with a significant portion due to a fall in commodity prices and a smaller share due to a fall in trade volumes. India's exports have been falling continuously since December 2014. It has dipped for a 14th month in a row, down 13.6 per cent in January

to 21 billion US dollars due to fall in shipments of petroleum and engineering goods. The RBI Governor said, the shipments can only be increased by raising productivity, improving infrastructure and simplifying regulations, which is in the domain of the government. He brushed

aside the contention that exchange rate is impacting exports. He said, the orderly movement of exchange rate can be maintained by good policies that ensure macroeconomic stability, stable capital flows and encouragement to foreign investors through policies like 'Make in India'.

Chinese Army spotted along LoC in Pak-occupied Kashmir

**Pti Srinagar, March 13:** After frequent incursions in Ladakh area, Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops have been spotted at forward posts along the Line of Control (LoC) on the Pakistani side of Kashmir, ringing alarm bells in the security grid. The Army has spotted presence of senior PLA officials at the forward posts opposite Nowgam sector in North Kashmir after which some intercepts of Pakistani army officers suggested that the Chinese troops have come to create some infrastructure along the LoC, sources in the know of developments said today. Army has officially maintained complete silence on the issue but have been constantly updating various intelligence agencies about the presence of PLA troops along the Line of Control, the sources said. The PLA troops were first spotted

in the later part of the last year and ever since their presence was witnessed opposite Tangdhar sector as well. In this area, Chinese government-owned China Gezhouba Group Company Limited has been building a Jhelum-Neelum 970 MW Hydel power project. The hydel project is being built in response to India's Kishanganga power project being built in Bandipore of North Kashmir. The Indian project is designed to divert water from the Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin and will have an installed capacity of 330 MW. Construction on the project began in 2007 and is expected to be complete this year. The intercepts also suggested that Chinese PLA would be digging some tunnels in Leepa Valley, located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), to build an all-weather road which will serve as an alternate route to reach

Karakoram Highway. The visit by PLA officials is seen by experts as part of Beijing's 46 billion dollar China-Pakistan-Economic Corridor (CPEC) under which Gwadar port in Karachi is linked to Chinese Xinjiang province through Karakoram highway, an area under illegal occupation of China. As the CPEC project was given final shape, India had last year registered its protest against the presence of Chinese troops in Gilgit and Baltistan, an area in PoK, saying that it was unacceptable to India. In the meantime, some of the experts in the nation's security grid have been giving serious thoughts to the presence of PLA in close proximity with Pakistani army officials. Chinese officials have maintained that CPEC was an economical package to link Asia with Eurasia.

Srikanth Kondapalli, Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, who has been part of think-tank on Indian policy towards China, feels that the over growing presence of Chinese PLA was a cause of worry for India. "What we know is that China is going to raise three divisions of its PLA under a local name in PoK that will guard the Chinese interests in occupied Kashmir. One needs to understand the game plan of Beijing," he said. Reports emerging from PoK were suggesting that PLA under a local name will establish a security wing in the PoK so that India does not protest. The new three divisions, around 30,000 men, will be deployed in and around the installations built by the Chinese firms, the sources said, adding this way Beijing can also justify its presence along the LoC in northern part of Kashmir.

At Least 17 Militants Killed In Southern Yemen: Reports

**Reuters Aden, March 13:** Air strikes killed at least 17 suspected al-Qaeda militants overnight in a restive district in the southern Yemeni port city of Aden, witnesses, medics and a security official said today. The air strikes hit al-Mansoura district, a stronghold for militants and an area which has witnessed several attacks against local security officials since the Saudi-led coalition retook Aden last July from the Iran-allied Houthi militia. The sources said at least 20 civilians and militants were wounded as well as three members of the security forces. The strikes targeted the militants who were sitting atop vehicles and one of the strikes hit a local government building. Intermittent clashes were still going on, they said. A security official said the strikes, thought to have been carried out by the Saudi-led coalition, were the "second stage" of freeing al-

Mansoura from militants. There was no immediate comment from the Saudi-led coalition on the strikes. They come a day after forces loyal to Yemen's president broke a siege by the Houthis around Taiz. Yemen's third biggest city, about 200 km (124 miles) northwest of Aden. Yemen's embattled government has been forced out of the capital Sanaa by the Houthi rebels and is now based in Aden but struggles to impose its authority even there. The southern city has gone from being one of the world's busiest ports as a former hub of the British empire to a backwater, and then in recent months, a conflict zone. A Saudi-led coalition began a military campaign a year ago to prevent the Houthis from taking complete control of Yemen.

24 Daesh insurgents killed in Afghan military operation

**ANI Kabul, Mar.13:** At least 24 Daesh insurgents were killed in military operations in Achin district of eastern Nangarhar province, the security forces in a statement on Sunday. The operation was launched by Afghan Army's 201 Selab Military

Corps in Achin district few weeks ago. The statement said that most parts of the district have been cleared of insurgents but the operation is ongoing, reports Tolo news. The statement, however, did not report details of casualties among the security forces.

Two AQIS militants killed in encounter in Pak

**ANI Karachi, Mar.13:** Two suspected militants belonging to Al Qaeda in the Indian Sub-Continent (AQIS) were killed in an encounter by the counter-terrorism department of the city police in Quaidabad area of Khushab district. The encounter took place yesterday when the CTDF personnel with the help from an intelligence agency conducted the

raid on a militant hideout and the ensuing battle started. A senior police officer confirmed that the killed militants belonged to AQIS and described those killed as high value target, reports Dawn. AQIS is an Islamist militant organization, which aims to fight the governments of Pakistan, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh in order to establish an Islamic State.

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Kanhaiya supports Irom Sharmila movement .....

**AMWJU:** Apparently JNU is being targeted. Why do you think this is? **Kanhaiya:** The government is not only targeting JNU. There is a series of attacks on different institutions. It started from FTII to Ambedkar Pariyal Study Centre in Chennai, to Hyderabad Central University. Then JNU, then Alighar Muslim University and now Allahabad Central University is under attack. So this is not the question of only JNU. There is a series of attacks by the government, by the MHRD Minister in the internal affairs of the University system. So I think it is largely an attack on the autonomy of Universities of this country. **AMWJU:** JNU students have been awarded by the Sharmila Fellowship Committee of JNU and Irom Sharmila has also expressed solidarity with you and the JNU movement... **Kanhaiya:** Yes, yes, Actually, this has been the character of JNU. This is the legacy of JNU. The JNU campus is full of support posters for Sharmila's movement. Principally, most organizations except a few, oppose the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, AFSPA. In fact, there is a unity between

different kinds of movement which is happening in this country. JNU student have been given the Sharmila Fellowship, we welcome this. **AMWJU:** Have you demonstrated your solidarity in Sharmila? **Kanhaiya:** JNU had done some programmes in support of Sharmila and against AFSPA. Usually we do solidarity meetings, March and sometimes movie screenings. That type of movement we do. When she came to Delhi, we participated in her demonstrations. Unfortunately I've not personally met her. **AMWJU:** Some of the media have painted the JNU at anti-national... **Kanhaiya:** Yes, this is a highly condemnable act of some notorious media houses. This word is highly irrelevant now. What is anti-national? There is a charge of sedition on us students but sedition is not anti-national. There is difference between sedition and anti-national. Actually this is a political move of RSS and BJP to malign institution like JNU, to curb the movements taking place in all universities in the country and JNU is coordinating or to some extent leading the protest. That's why

they are trying to suppress the entire institution. **AMWJU:** Post the recent JNU incident and the tag of anti-national, the students particularly the ones of northeast are harbouring fear psychosis while going out of campus. What have to say to these students to allay the fear? **Kanhaiya:** You see, there is no alternative to struggle. If there is suppression, we have got to fight it out. There is popular slogan in JNU, 'operation is your privilege, protest is our right'. So we will protest. **AMWJU:** Your appeal to northeast and particularly students of Manipur? **Kanhaiya:** I want to ask one thing precisely to the citizens in the northeast. There are some perceptions; some racial profiling by the 'mainland India' but JNU always confront that kind of idea. We always stand against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. We always stand for the human rights, fundamental rights of the common masses. So please join our movement, save JNU, save the nation.

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