

A Brief History and Tactical Analysis of Lawn Bowling

Timmy Timkins fought through the torrent of students who, summoned by the inaudible noontime call of a thousand silent watches and wallclocks, rushed out of the school library toward the common grounds where lunch was being served. Once inside the library, Timmy hastened to the elevator, called it, boarded it, signified with a firm button press his destination (level eight), and watched the now emptying lobby as the silver doors slid shut before him.

All the while his thoughts dwelled on Professor James Urwick, with whom he had spent his last class that morning. It had been a very interesting lecture.

There could be no doubt: the man was brilliant. His lectures were of an eccentric and colloquial nature such that most of his class could not follow him, and those who could were given to expansive revelations that simultaneously enhanced and obscured their understanding of the topic at hand. Timmy couldn't help but clearly recall the beginning of that day's class.

"Notice the interesting correlation," the professor had begun in a booming voice without even the slightest prelude, before even all the students had taken their seats. "Between certain physiological effects produced in the human body during coition, and those produced in situations of Threat—the so-called 'Fight-or-Flight' state."

A good number of the students shifted uneasily in their seats. The class they were in had nothing to do with human biology. It was an obscure elective entitled "A Brief History and Tactical Analysis of Lawn Bowling." Professor Urwick continued.

"Both are characterized by elevated heart rate and blood pressure, as well as advanced respiration, noticeable pupil dilation, and increased muscle tension."

The class sat silent. Timmy Timkins leaned forward in his seat.

"In essence, in each given situation, similar processes are taking place within the body, which give rise to similar physiological sensations, though these processes are caused by two seemingly very different environments. Which gives one pause to think."

Professor Urwick trailed off, gazing absently into the midst of his attentive pupils as though not seeing any of them. One student raised his hand.

"Professor, was it necessary for me to bring my sweatshorts?"

Professor James Urwick gave him a befuddled gaze before pushing his spectacles up onto the bridge of his nose and continuing.

"When animals and, specifically, humans engage in sexual intercourse, certain—*ahem*—physiological changes are accrued as a result of intimacy with another

consensual partner; whereas, in the case of a so-called fight-or-flight response, these physiological changes are the result of an intimate encounter of a very different nature. Danger. Peril. A threat to the individual's general health or well-being."

The professor paused to let these words sink in before continuing.

"And since it is natural to assume that the Threat or Peril is perceptually fashioned in such a way by the human psyche as to almost always take the form of an Aggressor (and whether that Aggressor is real or perceived), one must necessarily correlate what we might call the Fight-or-Flight Scenario with the often poetically lauded Reciprocal Dance of Love.

"In other words, Fucking," added the professor, as if the notion had just occurred to him. Various whispers were heard through the small auditorium.

"In both cases, we have two separate entities entwined in a complex ballet, each stepping to the time and rhythm of intricate schema: the approach of nemesis/lover, the initial perception and measurement of threat, the tightening of muscle and emergence of goose pimples, the quickening of breath and heart and dilation of pupils, and the sudden need to give vociferous report. Cries of ecstasy and cries of terror sound so similar, don't you think? It gives one pause to think."

The entire class was now dumbfounded. Professor Urwick seemed not to notice at all. He was lost in thought again, a blank stare on his face. The silence continued for nearly a full minute, until finally a confused student raised her hand.

"Professor? But what in the world does all this have to do with lawn bowling?"

If Professor Urwick's strange and (though not unusual) sudden deviance had been brought on by magic, then suddenly the spell of that magic was broken. The professor's face twitched, and he seemed suddenly very impatient.

"I," he declared. "Am simply constructing a sophisticated metaphor by which you all will be edified in both your knowledge and application of strategic principles in the discipline we will be studying.

"Fear of victory is no less common a crutch than fear of defeat. For some, lawn bowling is a hobby, a pastime, recreational masturbation. For others, it is a competition, a sport, the flexing and yearning of ambition. You must engage your opponent with the ferocity of one whose life has been threatened; and simultaneously you must embrace your opponent with the love one only reserves for intimate fickity-fick. As I have explained, these two states are one and the same, across the whole plane of human cognizance, all the way from the basest of drives of instinct to the most sophisticated mental trigonometry and applied physics one uses in lawn bowling."

The professor paused. He let a small fart, then began again.

"Lawn bowling, as you all know, is a terribly great and important pastime, not only in the history of humanity, but also in the history of the universe. In fact, one core group of early metaphysicists in 500 BC proposed a creation theory in which a nameless god-like being cast the various planets out into their celestial orbits much in the same way the lawn bowler casts the bowls out onto the green. I needn't be so pedantic as to tell you what was the *jack*, in this case."

"That's the little white ball that you try and hit," whispered one student to another.

"What *was* the jack?" another girl asked, before she had barely raised her hand. The professor sighed deeply and continued.

“The jack, of course, was theorized to be the sun. This aforementioned nameless god-like being was actually quite nasty, and was ashamed and angered with the planets he had created.

“Yes, so the story goes he created the planets one by one, in the infinity of space and time, and being unsatisfied with his work he decided to create the sun, which burned hotly and would incinerate anything cast into its fiery sphere. However, the infinity of space and time being very infinite and long and unending and, at times, very dull, this nameless god-like being decided to at least amuse himself somewhat. He set the sun a good distance away from himself and began casting the planets with an easy underhand toss, letting them bounce roll on the soft fabric of space and time—much as the lawn bowler casts the bowls over the green—with his ultimate goal being to hit the sun and destroy the planets he had cast. However, after a time, frustrated with his ineptitude, the nameless god-like being gave up and stalked off, leaving the solar system as we know it behind. So the theory went.

“Which of course explains the age old inquiry: ‘What if God had been a better lawn bowler?’”

Professor Urwick seemed quite satisfied with himself. He smiled in a bemused way and continued.

“Of course our brief historical survey of lawn bowling does not stop there. Many ancient cultures have incorporated some form or other of what today is now referred to as the Quintessential English Sport. Crude games involving the casting of stones were common in many. A proto-form of true lawn bowling, known simple as “Bocce” spread throughout the European theatre during Caesarian rule.

“In fact, there is one historical anecdote in which Caesar himself was rumored to have been a dedicated ‘Bocce’ player, and had modeled in his private gardens a bowling green to mirror the European theatre of conquest, with different regions and cities designated by various shrubs, depressions, trees, or jacks, and would whimsically cast the bowls out to see which area he ought to conquer next.

“Which of course explains the age old inquiry: ‘What if Caesar had been a better lawn bowler?’”

An uneasy silence fell on the class. Professor Urwick continued, unabated.

“Another well-publicized and somewhat substantially validated historical account tells of Sir Francis Drake, who, being in the midst of a rather heated match of lawn bowling in Plymouth when he learned that the Spanish Armada had been sighted off the English Coast, simply replied, ‘There is plenty of time to win the game and thrash the Spaniards too’.

“Which of course explains the age old inquiry: ‘What if Sir Francis Drake had been a *worse* lawn bowler?’”

The professor let the question linger. He walked over to his desk and pulled a banana from the topmost drawer, which he peeled and subsequently devoured with considerable relish, all the while in silence. This took the better part of three minutes. Finally, he said:

“Class dismissed.”

The class had left for lunch.

There were so many ideas now bouncing around in his head that Timmy Timkins felt he was having difficulty analyzing them all. He thought this as he stepped from the library elevator onto the eighth floor.

The library was an impressive building. Looking something like an enormous upside-down Venetian vase, it had a futuristic form. It had some fifteen different levels. The elevators shot straight up the middle of the building. After the first few floors, each floor got larger and larger. Huge windows overlooked the entire campus. One could walk the circumference of each floor, seeing the scenery for miles around. The eighth level was special. It was reserved as the quietest floor in the library. Not even whispering was permitted, and it was there that students would go for intense study.

The floor was deserted today. Timmy walked to the outermost windowed wall and sat down at a desk. From here, looking up from his schoolbooks, he could see the campus stretching away to the eucalyptus groves at its perimeter, and then further on to the roads and freeways and miniscule automobiles moving in lines made slow by distance. The sun was warm and streamed into the tinted glass of the window. It was quite pleasant, peaceful, and extremely quiet.

There were so many ideas still bouncing around in his head that Timmy Timkins could make nothing out of them at all. He was only impressed with Professor James Urwick's lecture, and how he had so seamlessly linked together concepts that—plucked from their own contexts—seemed only absurd together. He was simultaneously enlightened and befuddled.

“There are a lot of books in here,” thought Timmy, looking at the walls and shelves chock full of various library material. “There are a lot of words in those books, and those words describe concepts, and I bet if you tried hard enough you could link every single one of those concepts together as seamlessly as Professor Urwick did with lawn bowling and all those other things in that lecture. After all, it's all just words.”

Suddenly, there was a great rushing sound. One of the nearby bookcases shifted over with a metallic clunk, revealing there in the floor a man-sized hole, which emitted an icy white fog that crept out over the library floor. Another whirring sound occurred and somebody began rising out of the hole as if standing on a platform. It was Professor James Urwick, except that instead of his normal pleated pants and neat sweater he was wearing a spaceman's suit.

“I couldn't help overhearing your thoughts, Timmy,” said Professor Urwick, who was unsuccessfully attempting to wipe a bead of perspiration from the inner surface of his glass spaceman's visor with a gloved hand. “And what you're thinking about, that's exactly what we're trying to do.”

“Wha—what do you mean, Professor Urwick?”

“Call me Spaceman Samson. That's my intergalactic moniker. And yes, we (and I mean by *we* the Intergalactic Scholars League, or IgSL) are now in the very laborious and dangerous process of trying to do just what you were thinking about only a moment before.”

“What? What do you mean? That thought I had about combining all the ideas?”

“Yes, exactly,” said Spaceman Samson. “IgSL has been at it for a very long time. That is, we've been cataloguing and storing every idea ever mentioned or thought of and then combining and relating all the ideas to one another, in the ever furious pursuit of The

One Idea. Of course it is a great deal more complicated than this, and we have impressive supercomputers that compress all the data.”

“Yes, yes! I see!” said Timmy. “They’re all related aren’t they? Who’d have thought that Julius Caesar and Lawn Bowling and the Spanish Armada were all related.”

“But they are!” declared Spaceman Samson. “And there’s more. Only I don’t have much time to explain. You see, this library is the heart of our operation, but we are all in terrible peril right now. The IgSL has to move headquarters... right away! What an operation it’s been! Space freighters and transport ships shuttling data and mainframes for the past forty-seven hours. It’s a race against time, Timmy! The Malvoelians have discovered the secret location of our operation and they are currently en route to destroy us!”

“This library is your base?” asked Timmy.

“Yes,” said Spaceman Samson. “That tube I just came from goes deep into the heart of the ground, wherein may be found the subterranean facilities we use to compile the data. The Malvoelians are an ancient alien race who have forever rallied themselves against The One Idea. As we speak they are streaking through space toward the planet Earth, their Doom Zappers ever bent on destruction and obliteration of knowledge.”

“Wow!” cried Timmy.

“Yes,” agreed Spaceman Samson. “Here, take this laser sword and follow me. We have to escape before the Malvoelians get here.”

Timmy took the laser sword and, leaving his books and backpack behind, walked over to the shiny floor surface where the bookcase had been moved. There had appeared there a second hole, man-sized like the first, with a blinking platform at its mouth. Following Spaceman Samson, Timmy stepped onto his platform and felt a hollowness in the pit of his stomach as the ground rose up to meet him and suddenly he was dropping swiftly through a steel tube into the heart of the library and, as he now knew it, IgSL headquarters.

Suddenly the tube walls around him turned lucid crystal, and he realized he was streaking ever downward now through a gigantic subterranean cavern, perhaps miles and miles in diameter. Below he could see the ground, which was paved a dull gray and over which people streamed like ants as loading vehicles lifted crates into impressive-looking space ships.

Before he knew it, the tube ride was over, and he was standing in the midst of the melee. Each of the workers was wearing a spacesuit nearly identical to Spaceman Samson’s. The spacesuits bore the IgSL crest on the left breast. Every so often an automated voice spoke out over the vast but well-lit expanse of the cavern, paging various persons or urging the workers ever onward in haste.

Someone grabbed his elbow, and Timmy turned to see Spaceman Samson.

“Quick Timmy! This way. I’ve got to quickly get you to IgSL Registry for a suit and a Transo-pass.”

They rushed for what seemed an eternity over the bleak gray expanse, until finally they came to an official building with the IgSL crest over its doorway and the words “Registry and Personnel” emblazoned on the side.

They were about to enter the door when a great shaking rose in the ground. Timmy could hardly keep his feet. A concussive explosion hit the air and great boulders began to fall from the cavern ceiling.

“Oh no! We’re too late!” cried Spaceman Samson. “The Malvoelians have breached the Main Chamber! Their Doom Zappers must’ve gone subterranean! Form an assault! Form an assault!”

Timmy did not have to think. He seized his laser sword from his pocket and the thing glowed to life instantly. He rallied behind the other spacesuited figures and they began a determined march across the cavern. Red alarm lights sprang out from wailing sirens in the stone walls. The frenzy of activity around them had increased.

“Quick, ho!” cried Spaceman Samson. “There they are, coming out of that hole in the cavern wall! Attack!”

It was vicious battle. The Malvoelians swarmed them, and the fighting was frenzied. Timmy Timkins swung his laser sword and parried deftly. Several minutes into the fray, he saw Spaceman Samson take a hit of Doom Zap straight through his abdomen and crumple to the pavement with blood gurgling from his mouth and nose.

“Keep fighting!” he managed to yell to those who could hear, before he died. “Keep fighting. For The One Idea!”

Timmy’s arms and wrists burned with the repeated violent clashing and vibrating blur, and as he sliced through wave after wave of Malvoelians, he began to tire. They kept pouring out of the hole they had created in the cavern wall, blurbling some unintelligible, brutish alien language that filled all the members of the assault force with fear. As Timmy’s comrades fell around him, he began to realize that they would all be overwhelmed in the end.

It came quickly. He was the last one left. The Malvoelians had formed a circle around him, all chattering in that terrible language of theirs, screeching and roaring and clicking like cockroaches. One of them approached him. He swung his laser sword with a last bit of strength he had, but was easily disarmed.

“Rrrrbok gorggl-zeeem?” asked the Malvoelian.

“I don’t understand you,” said Timmy, breathless.

Another Malvoelian said something else to him. Timmy just shook his head.

“*Parlez vous francais?*” said another one.

“Huh?” gasped Timmy, shaking his head.

The Malvoelian looked at him, then tried again.

“English. You speak English?”

“Yes. Yes! I speak English!” cried Timmy.

There arose a murmur from the crowd around him.

“Fascinating!” murmured the Malvoelian. Then it raised its Doom Zapper and blasted Timmy clean through the thorax. Timmy’s heart flew backwards and slipped along the smooth pavement like an overlarge, peeled grape. He collapsed and died, but not before one small thought passed through his head.

What if God had been a better lawn bowler?