

The Shadow of the Players

In one of the tales which make up the series of the *Mabinogion*, two enemy kings play chess while in a nearby valley their respective armies battle and destroy each other. Messengers arrive with reports of the battle; the kings do not seem to hear them and, bent over the silver chessboard, they move the gold pieces. Gradually it becomes apparent that the vicissitudes of the battle follow the vicissitudes of the game. Toward dusk, one of the kings overturns the board because he has been checkmated, and presently a blood-spattered horseman comes to tell him: 'Your army is in flight. You have lost the kingdom.'

—EDWIN MORGAN