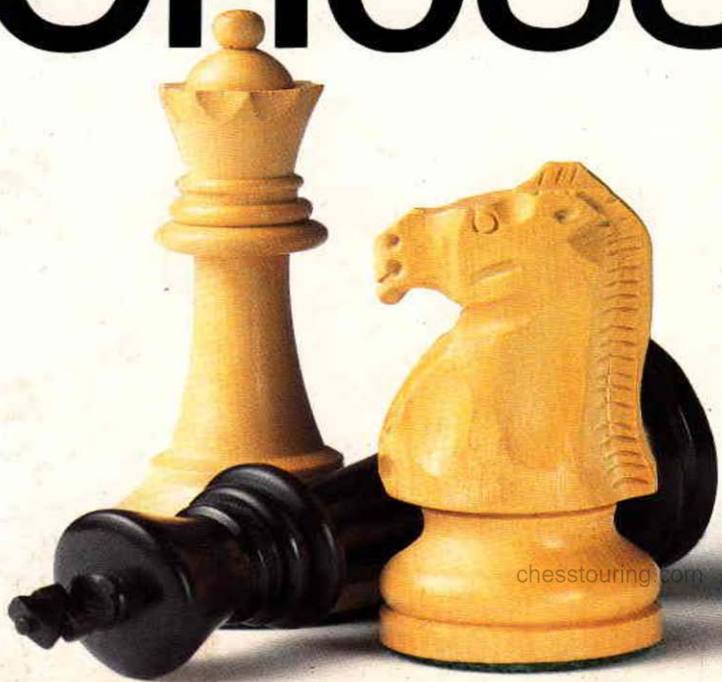


Bluff your way in Chess



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BLUFF YOUR WAY IN CHESS

B. W. MALPASS



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INTRODUCTION

Let us be quite clear that it is not necessary for the chess bluffer actually to know how to play the game. Indeed, die-hard bluffers of the old school would argue vehemently that to learn to play would be tantamount to cheating, and anyone caught doing it should be asked to resign. (There is in fact no club or other organization from which to resign but this is the sort of symbolic gesture dear to the heart of the true-blue practitioner.)

Whether you play or not, it is vital that you avoid getting all fouled up in the mere mechanics of the game. Concentrate on chess's rich, colourful vocabulary and its impoverished, colourful players. Take, for example, the old-time master **O'Kelly de Galway**. It is totally unnecessary for you to be familiar with his style of play, his tournament record, or even his Elo rating (*q.v.*). All you need to know is that there was a chess player who rejoiced in the name of O'Kelly de Galway and that he was not Irish but Belgian.

If you are still of a mind to give your all for your art and insist on learning the moves, so be it, but you won't learn from this book.

There are three ways to go about it, none of which comes close to being taught to play at the age of four by a fond parent, but that may not be terribly practicable for many readers. It can have drawbacks too, particularly if the infant starts thrashing the parent by the age of six, which often leads to an outbreak of deep depression followed by excessive drinking and the eventual break-up of the whole family.

More practically, the alternatives are to:-

i) read a book. If you have joined the non-reading classes, get a video.

ii) buy a chess computer. They often come with instruction modes and can be set at a number of different levels of playing strength. You should always choose one just better than your own. This is not so good for the ego but you do learn. Chess computers have many advantages over a human teacher. They let you take back disastrous moves. They are very patient, particularly useful if you are a bit slow on the uptake. They never get bored and insist on going out for a pizza, and above all they never gloat, a failing regrettably common to humans.

iii) join a chess club. You may not know of one off hand, but seek and ye shall definitely find, for there is always a chess club. Even if your country should have the misfortune to be riven by civil war, the streets awash with armed insurrectionists, curfews rigidly enforced, the chess club will still be found in regular session.

You may be up country, lost in some tropical rainforest, but listen to the jungle drums with an educated ear and you will find that they are saying that the chess club has been switched to Thursday night in the chief's hut, bring your own beer.

The average chess club is more like an encounter group for those sharing an affliction. Chess players are addicts and need their regular fix.

When you do find your nearest club you will be warmly welcomed, if only because with your arrival someone there will no longer be the worst player in the place – at least for a while. This particular syndrome does wonders for recruitment.

THE GAME

Chess is what is technically called a war game, so any military terminology you can work into your conversation can be expected to go down well. After all, the board itself is all rank and file, neatly arranged to run east-west and north-south respectively.

Look profound as you remind people that chess was the compulsory mind-game for the officers of the mighty Red Army, but have an answer ready in case of the acid rejoinder that it didn't seem to do them much good. Or comment on the number of military dictators, such as Fidel Castro, who have delighted in being filmed playing chess in full battle dress.

You can also insert any of your favourite military maxims, modified where necessary, such as, 'Strategy is simple but not easy.' If you have difficulty with that one, consider taking up a different field of bluffing. Or restrict yourself to applying to chess the remark of Stonewall Jackson, who defined the secret of success in warfare as being 'firstest with the mostest'.

Sidings

Chess is a game for two people only, *mano a mano*, the concept of doubles being unknown in serious play. There is a strange variant called 'consultation' chess in which there may be two or more people a side. This had a value in years gone by because it allowed wealthy patrons or pushy royalty to form a partnership with a real master (*q.v.*) to play a similar uneasy alliance. Of course it was the expert who called the shots but his partners got some vicarious glory.

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Nowadays it is done only as a gimmick.

In major matches the participants have seconds but this is quite different. These worthies, usually first rank players themselves, help their principals to prepare by analyzing the opponent's games, seeking any weakness that might be exploited by their man. They can also help during adjournments but it is strictly forbidden for them to provide any assistance or collusion during play, not even the sending in of humanitarian aid in the shape of a large gin and tonic if things are looking black.

The two sides are called Black and White despite the pieces frequently being every other colour under the sun. Red and green used to be popular and even today would be a very sound choice if one's opponent happened to be colour blind.

The most compelling explanation as to why by convention the two sides are always referred to as Black and White is that it is much more convenient to say, 'White' than the cumbersome, 'the side which by long-standing custom and practice makes the first move'.

The right to move first is important because it confers a small but definite advantage, although with best play Black will always be able to nullify it (a process called 'equalization') and force a draw.

It is a sobering thought, one which paradoxically can drive strong men to drink, that no matter how brilliantly one side plays, he can only win if his opponent makes an error. The same applies to other games, of course, but chess differs in that it can take several years' exhaustive post-game analysis to establish what the mistake was.

And then, like as not, further dissection will show that what was thought to have been a slip-up was nothing of the sort and the true culprit lay elsewhere.

There are a variety of rituals by which players decide who should be White but the commonest is for one of them to pick up two pawns of opposite colours and conceal them in two clenched fists behind his back. He then presents them to his opponent, who chooses one. If he picks a black one, the wise man will ask to see the contents of the other fist to make sure it isn't black too. It has been said, probably apocryphally, that the reason White gets the first move is that in days of old black was felt to be the luckier colour so White was given first go in compensation.

The outward and visible object of the game is to capture the opponent's king, or to be absolutely precise to render the capture unavoidable. This process is called 'checkmate' (a corruption of the Persian 'Shah mat' – 'The king is dead'), or often simply 'mate'. You, as you set up the pieces for another game, could cheerfully carol 'Zen de bad shah' ('Long live the king'). But there is a hidden agenda. Any chess player worth his salt wants to crush his opponent, destroy his will, demolish his ego, and generally do unto him that which if translated into physical terms would get him clapped into gaol without the option.

The Draw

A game can be declared a draw (which scores half a point to each side) by repetition of moves leading to the same position occurring three times, or by fifty moves being made without any pieces being exchanged or pawns moved, or by agreement between the players.

There are certain niceties to be observed in the last case. We refer to the delicate use of the eyebrow in offering a draw. The real master can do it by raising one eyebrow one millimetre. This is not for the beginner, for two eyebrows or two millimetres can mean that you believe your opponent's position to be so irrevocably compromised that you are amazed he is insulting you by failing to resign.

Draws can be the most dreary of games, where both players start to remember there is something good on television, and shake hands after the most perfunctory charade. Or they can be the most thrilling, with the sides slugging each other into exhaustion until neither has either the material (*q.v.*) or the energy left to have any hope of forcing a win.

The draw is frequently offered by the player who has just realised that he is in a lost position but hopes the penny hasn't yet dropped with his opponent. Less often, a player may offer a draw when in a winning position. Here the commonest reason is urgent hormonal distraction.

Phases

Like the moon, chess has phases, one of which can drive you mad. You should be aware that chess's phases are three in number and being loosely defined are easier to recognise than describe. They are called the **opening**, the **middle game**, and the **end game**, and each has its own extensive literature.

Whole books are written not simply about the openings in general but about individual ones. (Or even variations of individual ones.) A well-played opening

can confer a crushing advantage, so any master worthy of mention is a walking encyclopaedia of every opening ever devised, although life is too short for any of them to claim to be an authority on more than a handful.

If the pattern is largely set by White's first few moves it is an Opening, whereas if it is characterised by Black's responses it is a Defence.

Both are often named after their inventor, e.g. **Réti's Opening**, **Alekhine's Defence**, or have a national flavour as in the **English Opening** or the **Dutch Defence**. Place names figure prominently, and this can get out of hand so that the whole thing starting to read like a travelogue, e.g. there is the 'Scheveningen Variation' of the **Sicilian Defence**.

Broadly speaking, openings fall into two categories, open and closed. This is not open as in prison, or closed as in mind, but rather an indication of whether the encounter is (a) free-flowing and adventurous, the sort that would be played with a gay laugh if laughing, and particularly sniggering, were not frowned on, or (b) slow and solemn with lots of close-to-the-chest, hugger-mugger manoeuvring.

There are also half-open openings. But oddly no half-closed ones.

There are many similarities between chess and ballroom dancing. For example, strict attention to tempo is vital in both. But more to the point, it takes two to tango.

You, as White, may wish to play a nice familiar Ruy Lopez, but your opponent can refuse to cooperate and burst off into a **Pirc Defence** or other such oddity. If that happens, it is no use pouting. Improvise. Flexibility is as important a characteristic of the chess player as it is of the ballroom dancer.

Sometimes virtue is rewarded and you get your own way in the end, because it is possible for one opening to metamorphose into another by a process called 'transposition'.

The cavaliers of chess regard the opening rather as old-time tennis players viewed the serve, simply a means of starting the rally, not the fearsome weapon in its own right that it has become.

The opening eventually fades imperceptibly into the middle game and this in turn gives way to the end game, unless of course one of the participants succeeds in finishing his opponent off before they get that far.

The middle game is the most popular with club players, particularly the younger element, because it is here that talent and flair flourish, rather than experience and swotting. It is no coincidence that the little chess titbits that appear daily in the broadsheets invariably feature a middle game position.

Most chess players hate the end game and will go to any lengths to finish the game before it arrives. This is ruthlessly exploited in chess clubs by rheumy-eyed old codgers who have developed over the years a repertoire of nasty openings which invariably allow them to develop a superior position. They then simplify so ruthlessly by swapping pieces that the opening merges into the end game without going through the middle bit at all.

They emerge with a slight advantage which their vast experience, and their opponent's distaste for this phase of the game, generally allows them to convert into a win. The opponent, recognising what is in store for him if the end game is reached, often plays into the oldster's hands by launching a suicidal sacrificial attack in a desperate attempt to thwart fate.

Notation

One of the reasons the literature of chess is so vast is that it is easy to record the moves in written form, so anyone interested can access and study virtually any game ever played. This may take place while the game is actually in progress on another continent, via electronic communication, or centuries after the death of the two players.

All it takes is a suitable system for recording a game of chess in alphanumeric, i.e. letters, numbers, and other odd symbols. There are several to choose from but it is the algebraic version that shows signs of becoming, like the English language, generally accepted as a sort of lingua franca.

It may not have the concision of the algebraic, and can be more ambiguous, but it does have a rolling grandiloquence that the algebraic cannot match. And anyone wishing to study many of the classic books about chess will need to be able to follow it.

The algebraic is often thought of as a Johnny-come-lately, but in fact it is venerable, having been invented by the Arabs, (who else?), in the 9th century. Its adherents point to its simplicity as the reason for its spread but the bluffer, noting the French name lurking behind the bland acronym of FIDE, the game's governing body, will opine darkly that it is all due to Gallic Anglophobia.

It must be admitted that algebraic notation, being nothing more than a tarted-up form of grid reference, is child's play to anyone who has ever read a map. So if you can find your way unaided from Penge to Ashby-de-la-Zouche, you will have no difficulty following a chess game described using it. Nevertheless, our penchant for the dear departed descriptive

lingers.

Black's 'Pawn to king four,' isn't said any more. 'e5', may not sing, but it means the same thing.

You should draw attention to the symbols O O and O O O, common to both systems, pointing out this is not the old riddle about the title of *Man and Superman*. It is how the long-winded 'castles king or queen side respectively' are represented.

There are several other obscure notations, such as the control, correspondence, figurine, Forsyth, and Gringmuth versions. But if you don't like these, feel free to make up one of your own.

The Gambit

One of the many chess terms that have passed into the language is 'gambit'. In a gambit, one player sacrifices or offers up to his opponent a pawn, or even a piece, in the opening in the interests of gaining time and space on the board. The idea of course is eventually to regain the material and do your opponent a very severe mischief into the bargain, yea unto checkmate if all goes according to plan.

Sometimes when you play a gambit, your wretched opponent may decline the material you offer, choosing instead to follow some devious scheme of his own. Note that in chess there is no equivalent of huffing in draughts whereby if the opponent declines to take an offered draughtsman you can legally swipe his man in retribution.

Many aficionados, especially attack-minded club players, feel that chess's lack of huffing is the only

defect in an otherwise flawless conception.

Counter-gambits are what you call a gambit when Black tries it. Do not confuse The Gambit with The Gambia, which is a small country in West Africa where ospreys go for their holidays.

Correspondence Chess

This may be a concept unique to chess. Because chess moves can be written succinctly and unambiguously, it is not necessary for the two players to be present on either side of the same board. For that matter they need never actually meet. Moves can be exchanged by telephone, letter, bottles cast into the sea, semaphore, morse code, carrier pigeon, computer network, or runners carrying messages in forked sticks. The whole thing is in danger of being ruined, like so many other things, by the invention of the odious fax.

Considerable trust in an opponent's sense of fair play is needed of course. You have to rely on his not cheating by invoking the aid of a hired hand with a astronomic Elo, or worse still in this day and age, a high-powered chess computer.

If there were any skulduggery of that sort, doubtless not many moves would elapse before the opponent detected the fine Italian hand of a superior performer on the other side.

Perhaps the most charming medium is a match played via the annual exchange of Christmas cards. If the match lasts for, say, forty moves, the whole thing will take eighty years. You could always bequeath the position, along with the family silver, to your heir, but it could have real snags. It is bad enough to inherit a tax bill, but to come into a botched Queen's Gambit

would be very hard to bear. (*I leave to my son John twenty thousand a year and my position as Black against my old adversary. I send my love and the advice not to let the swine establish a knight on e5 under any circumstances.*)

Correspondence chess has its own organization, its own extensive literature, its own stars, and basically the more conventional form of the game can go hang as far as they are concerned. Devotees feel that the cut and thrust of over-the-board play is for others of a less sensitive nature than theirs. In the correspondence game, there is time to explore the highways and byways, to smell the flowers, and generally to allow the creative faculties full rein.

If anyone ever tells you he is playing a correspondence game against **Capablanca** (*q.v.*) with the aid of a ouija board, edge quietly towards the nearest exit.

Match Play

Confusingly, a match may be between individual players, clubs, or countries. Contests between two players are pretty straightforward, and may be best of so many games, or first to so many wins. Matches between clubs would be quite enjoyable were it not for the inevitable presence of captains. The problem is that alone among the participants the captains take the whole thing seriously. They pick the team; generally in a way that causes infinite confusion and resentment, and then they compound the felony by allocating the chosen boards (in principle, the strongest player takes board 1 and so on) in such a way as to irritate the maximum number.

What is more, even when play starts they continue to cause trouble. Instead of concentrating on their own games, captains rush round the room between moves uttering low moans or excited cries depending on the situation they find in their team-mates' games.

Some captains of our acquaintance are not above sidling up and whispering as one is concentrating, 'We only need a draw from you to win the match.' They normally say this seconds after you have launched a hair-raising sacrificial attack, leading to play so complex that it often seems impossible for either side to avoid defeat. If you do happen to win you are dressed down for being irresponsible and placing your own selfish pleasure above the needs of the team. A veil should be drawn over what happens if you lose.

A feature of chess matches between individual grandmasters is homework, also known as home preparation. With the rapid growth in the sheer number of tournaments and individual games played by today's top players compared with their predecessors of even twenty or thirty years ago, and the advent of instantaneous communication, chess theory, especially in the opening, has expanded by leaps and bounds. It has become inescapable for serious players to devote time and resources to preparing for games, both in tournaments and even more so in matches.

The appropriate military saying here is, 'Train hard, fight easy.' Consider the alternative World Championship between **Kasparov** and **Short** in 1993. The 5th game of the match lasted 18 moves and Short, playing Black, took 11 minutes over them. What is more, he was rarely at the board, making his move almost instantly and getting up to walk round

or retiring to the rest room just off the stage.

Kasparov, playing White and supposedly therefore with the initiative, took 89 minutes of the most intense effort, his mighty brow developing ridges upon its furrows in the face of the innovations Short produced, before managing to get a position sufficiently level for him to offer a draw and have it accepted.

Clearly, the analysis done by Short and his seconds prior to the game had been so thorough that Short had never had to stray from his homework. Afterwards, Kasparov ruefully remarked that he had now played five games to his opponent's four.

As if to show that in chess, as in politics, a week is a long time, the 9th game opened in identical fashion to the 5th, with Short repeating the moves of his earlier analysis. But then Kasparov suddenly turned the tables by introducing innovations of his own, born of the midnight oil burnt by his team.

This time it was the Champion who made every move quickly and confidently, taking only 3 minutes for his first 13 moves, while Short had to concentrate mightily and rapidly fell over an hour behind on the clock. Despite all the cerebation, Short eventually drifted into a lost position and suffered another defeat, getting so mentally fatigued that he actually missed a chance to draw late on in the game after the Champion had made one uncharacteristically inaccurate move.

You might well ask why, suspecting an ambush, players don't avoid the trap by deviating from the suspect line early. Actually, some do. **Fischer** (*q.v.*) was adept at negating Russian opponents' homework by playing some unexpected move early in the piece. But, often, the victim accepts the challenge out of

some code of honour, saying in effect, 'Show me!'

In Russia, they take homework to extremes. Kasparov himself used to have a henchman whose task it was to collect, either before a match or sometimes even during a game after an adjournment, suggestions and ideas that would flood in from the myriad players in that vast country. He would sift and collate them before presenting them to the Champion and his team for possible use against the opponent. It must be daunting to feel that you are playing the whole of Russia.

The World Championship

This is the *ne plus ultra* of all matches and is played nowadays under strict FIDE rules, although sometimes the Marquess of Queensbury's would seem more appropriate.

The first generally recognised, albeit self-proclaimed, World Champion was the Austrian **Steinitz**, who defeated Polish-born **Zukertort**, in 1886. Steinitz claimed to have held the title since 1866. The rather odd confusion, which of course makes the subject manna from heaven for the bluffer, stems from the lack at that time of official governing bodies, proper rules, etc.

Confusion reigned once again in 1993 when Kasparov and Short, exasperated by what they saw as FIDE's gross incompetence in seeking bids for venue and purse for their eagerly awaited match, refused to play under its auspices and set up their own Professional Chess Association to run it.

FIDE's perhaps inevitable response was to strip both Champion and Challenger of their rankings and

stage its own 'official' championship.

There is a lot of sympathy for Kasparov and Short's stand, but most wish they had stayed in FIDE and fought for reforms from within.

There is a World Championship Cycle which must be clearly distinguished from the World Cycle Championships. The cycle takes 3 years and meanders through zonals, interzonals, and Candidates' matches to select a challenger for the reigning champion. After fighting his way through this lot, the challenger is often too knackered to put up much of a fight in the final.

This system is fair but not as entertaining as the old one when the title was virtually the Champion's property.

Tournament Play

Tournaments are graded strictly according to playing strength to make sure that the contestants are reasonably evenly matched. There are a variety of types, of which the round-robin and the Swiss are the most common.

A lengthy tournament is draining not only mentally but physically. It is common for players to lose a stone in weight in the course of one. Top players train hard to get fit beforehand. Sadly it doesn't work the other way round. You get fit to play chess, not by playing it, so don't throw away the exercise bike just yet.

Handicapping

Various ways have been devised to enable two players of very different strength to enjoy a game of chess on

equal terms, but they all have snags. The stronger player may let the weaker have more time in which to play his moves, but there is nothing to stop the better player thinking when it is his opponent's move.

The better player may play several opponents at the same time, but this is only of use if there happen to be several other players around at the time willing to cooperate.

Alternatively, the stronger may play blindfold, i.e. without having sight of the board but simply being told his opponent's moves. This is only practicable if the stronger player is a real expert, as the vast majority of players cannot conduct a complete game in their heads.

Perhaps the fairest method is for the stronger player to concede the material odds, i.e. to start the game missing one or more pawns or pieces. The snag with that is that it immediately takes the weaker player into uncharted waters as far as the opening is concerned which can confuse him totally.

None of these seem to show much ingenuity, and as your contribution, you might like to suggest that:

- a) the stronger player be made to wear a personal stereo playing Iron Maiden tapes at full volume.
- b) the stronger player have electrodes attached to various bits of his anatomy, with the weaker able to control the voltage and duration of occasional zaps.
- c) the stronger player be made to take a swig of scotch every time he makes a move. In the case of many experts this would make no discernible difference. And of course the weaker player might well be so envious that his concentration would suffer.

Problems

Chess problems are artificially composed positions that often bear little resemblance to anything that might arise in a real game. Indeed, sometimes the problem starting position is impossible to arrive at in actual play, although this would be regarded as not the done thing in some quarters.

Normally, the problem is to demonstrate how one side checkmates the other in a set number of moves but there are all manner of weird and wonderful variants on this basic theme. Some devoted composers and solvers of chess problems never actually play the game proper at all, and there is such an extensive literature devoted to problems that they don't need to.

Puzzles

You can scornfully dismiss chess puzzles, which are totally different to problems, being in essence nothing but mathematical conundrums which happen to make use of chess men and moves.

Time Limits

In normal tournament or match play, 40 moves have to be made in the first two hours and 20 in the next hour. Often players will spend so long thinking early in the game, especially if confronted by some novelty in the opening, that they get into desperate time trouble as the first control approaches. Not infrequently, both players are affected and this results in one of the most entertaining and least edifying sights in chess –

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the time scramble, in which the two move and bang the clock (*q.v.*) almost instantaneously to prevent the small 'flag' on their own clock from falling. Whoever fails to do so 'loses on time'.

Young chess players are often advised that if they see a good move they should not make it immediately but look for a better one. This well-meaning but misguided counsel has been responsible for many games being lost on time.

Some very strong players have had a complete blind spot about time, the best example being the German grandmaster **Sämisch**. This worthy once lost on time all his thirteen games in a tournament but even that pales beside his feat in one game of spending 45 minutes over his first move when he was playing White. Sämisch was the sort of chap who was responsible for the introduction of the dreaded chess clock in the first place.

As if chess isn't difficult enough, there is a variant called 'rapid' chess in which each player is given a reduced time, typically half an hour, to complete the entire game. Rapid chess is pedestrian compared to 'blitz' or 'lightning' chess in which only 5 seconds is allowed for each move, or perhaps 5 minutes for the entire game. The thinking rates of the participants are among the fastest known to medical science, being approached elsewhere in nature only by those of adulterous couples on hearing the unexpected sound of the returning husband's latch-key in the front door.

Astonishingly, play at this furious pace often produces games of real quality, even containing theoretical innovations.

The strongest players are usually, although not invariably, the best at quick play, which is not

surprising because it is precisely their ability to calculate accurately at speed that contributes to their superiority in normal play.

Rapid chess games are increasingly used as tie-breakers in regular play, in which role they are clearly superior to penalty shoot-outs.

THE PLAYERS

If you favour sub-Hegelian profundities, try intoning wisely that the only thing which can be said of the typical chess player is that there is no such thing as the typical chess player. They come in all shapes and sizes, all ages, sexes, colours, creeds, occupations and preoccupations. You cannot reliably recognise a chess player from his appearance unless and until he whips out a pocket chess computer at the most unlikely moment and becomes instantly engrossed with it to the exclusion of all else.

That said, it does seem to us that chess players are rather hairier than most and tend toward the Oxfam school of haute couture. Perhaps mathematics figures quite frequently in their backgrounds too. On the other hand there have been many world-class players who could not check the number of cigarettes in a packet of 20 without removing their shoes and socks.

Conversely, many mathematical wizards cannot play chess for toffee. Albert Einstein was a good example. Chess players also seem to be good linguists although that may be no more than a consequence of the itinerant nature of the professional chess player's existence. Only one thing is certain; like policemen chess players are getting younger and younger.

Prodigies

Chess is one of the activities of humankind that does seem to lend itself to the child prodigy, rather like mathematics and music. Some, like Mozart, burn themselves out at an early age, but most go on to great things.

Nowadays, there are a growing number of such infant wonders in chess, including one Briton, **Luke McShane**, who at nine is stronger than Nigel Short at the same age and already being talked of as a future World Champion, which does him no favours. Without doing a detailed statistical analysis, which heaven forbid, it seems to us that it is the rule rather than the exception for top players to develop great playing strength very early.

You can provoke lively discussion over the port and cigars by remarking that although chess is riddled with prodigies, there seem to be no *idiot savants* of chess, in contrast to music, calculation, and art.

Day Jobs

Chess players often combine their skill at the board with other abilities. There have been fine chess players who were also international footballers, engineers, mathematicians, musicians, actors, artists, historians, chemists, epidemiologists, lawyers, diplomats, doctors, industrial psychologists, economists, tycoons and entrepreneurs. But more often extreme talent at chess goes hand in hand with a total inability to come in out of the rain.

One of the greatest natural geniuses of the game, the American **Paul Morphy** (*q.v.*), failed at every-

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thing he ever tried his hand at outside chess. It may be our imagination but it does seem that quite a few chess maestros down the years have gone that way.

Chess players' alter egos may not always be desirable. Masters have been or are fools, ghouls, gamblers, rambler, hustlers, rustlers, boozers, losers, drunks, skunks, junkies, flunkies, swordsters, fraudsters, humpers, scrumpers, bikers, pikers, bankers, wankers, bonkers, plonkers, cross-dressers, loss-assessors, dossers and tossers. Not to mention layabouts, racists, misogynists, politicians, traitors, quislings and deadbeats – often two or more of these in combination with an entry from the list of creditable occupations above.

People can become obsessed with chess to the exclusion of all else. For example, the painter Marcel Duchamps gave up art for chess, but then of course he was French. Not all players are so badly afflicted. Some can endure as many as seven or eight chessless hours before the onset of withdrawal symptoms, which are too harrowing to go into here.

Hopeless chess-junkies sometimes try valiantly to break their addiction. But beware of placing your trust in a psychoanalyst. One unfortunate did that and immediately recognised the shrink as the man he had played on board three in a chess match the previous week. They wound up playing blitz until his hour was up and he got charged full rate too.

Ratings

Anybody who is anybody in chess has an Elo rating – a numerical measure of playing strength. Amazingly, Elo is not an acronym (although any number of those

can readily be devised even without resorting to 'leg over'), but derives from the name of the system's inventor, Professor Arpad Elo. It is calculated from a statistical analysis of the player's tournament results.

Until recently, the rating of 2785 achieved by **Fischer** before he had his snit in 1972 was the highest on record. But records are made to be broken and **Kasparov** has now edged through the 2800 barrier.

The system has the dubious advantage that it can be applied retrospectively, so the ratings of famous players of the past can be computed. This enables chess buffs to indulge in the fascinating but futile pastime, common to all sports and games, of speculating about how today's greats would have fared against heroes of the past.

Of course, any serious bluffer will not need telling that the availability of Elo ratings, with their questionable air of arithmetic accuracy, categorically does not enable you to say with any certainty whether one player would have beaten another in a hypothetical encounter. All a Champion can do is to beat whoever is around at the time. So despite the fact that Morphy's rating was a 'mere' 2690, many knowledgeable judges believe that in his prime he would have defeated any other player in history.

And you will find takers for **Capablanca** (2765), **Emmanuel Lasker** (2745), and **Alekhine** (2735), as well as the more obvious **Kasparov** and **Fischer**.

The popularity of this harmless distraction may explain the number of attempts that have been made over the years to produce comparative ratings. Some early ones had promisingly potty names, such as the Ingo System, but until the redoubtable Professor Elo obliged in 1960 none were deemed acceptable. His system received the ultimate accolade of acceptance

by FIDE in 1970 and the ratings lists now produced twice yearly are more eagerly and anxiously awaited than Finals results or the Oscar nominations.

Anyone in chess will hold forth at great length on all the drawbacks and iniquities of the Elo system and in the next breath will quote their own (assuming they have one) and others' ratings at you till the cows come home.

CHESS HISTORY

This is a happy hunting ground for the bluffer because the history of chess is confused, with hard fact noticeable by its absence.

Point out that the essential thing about chess is that unlike Scrabble or Monopoly, or any number of splendid board games, no-one ever sat down and invented it. Over the centuries chess, like Topsy, just grewed, and this enabled it to develop a unique richness and complexity. Draughts, which the Americans refer to as checkers because of their well known blind spot about spelling, has its devotees but to the chess player its play has a certain sameness and an overdependence on tactics.

The oriental game of Go, under a variety of names, is held by some to be more convoluted than chess, but to western eyes chess is more beautiful than the austere and ascetic Go, with its spare 'stones' instead of pieces. Chess is certainly more dramatic and spectacular, with one side or the other able to conjure veritable bolts of lightning from a clear blue sky, whereas Go is an exercise in gradual encirclement and slow strangulation.

Some scholars believe that games which were clearly the precursors of chess were around 5,000 years ago but a truly recognisable game dates only from about the 7th century in India. It was called *chaturanga*, which is confusing as most people think that is a type of choo-choo. The original game was rather slow and cumbersome and changes were made in the late 15th century to speed things up. The biggest single transformation has been in the queen, who had a sex change, having originally been a general.

Who is Good at Chess

Most of the beneficial changes that produced the modern game were the work of the Italians, so by definition they were the first superpower of chess as we know it. Chess's first superstar was the 16th century Spanish priest **Ruy Lopez de Segura**.

The French were the next to get into the act with the rise of **Philidor**, far and away the strongest player of the 18th century, and he was followed by **Deschappelles**, **La Bourdonnais**, and **Saint Amant**.

A century of French domination was only ended when the Englishman **Staunton** (*q.v*) beat Saint Amant in a famous away match in Paris in 1843. Staunton was undoubtedly the finest player of his time but he stuck out like a petunia in an onion patch, for the other British players of the 19th century, all of whose names began with 'B', had shortcomings. **Barnes** was so fat he could barely reach the board, **Bird** was erratic, **Blackburne** needed frequent fortification, **Boden** never gave up working for the railways, **Buckle** quit early to concentrate on his work as an historian, **Burn** preferred the stock market as a broker to

starvation as a chess player, and De Vere (real name **Brown**) was congenitally indolent.

The victory of **Anderssen** in the great London tournament of 1851 heralded 70 years ascendancy of German-speaking virtuosi, apart from two brief years in the late 1850s when American Paul Morphy hit the chess world like a bombshell. He was positively incandescent for a while but suffered burn-out, leaving the field to the Germans and Austrians until the arrival, from Cuba of all unlikely places, of the immortal **Capablanca**. He and the Franco-Russian **Alekhine** ruled the roost in the years between the wars, apart from the interregnum of the Dutch amateur **Euwe**.

After the war, the Russians took over, producing an incredible run of brilliant players. Apart from World Champions **Botvinnik**, **Tal** (*q.v.*), **Petrosian**, **Spassky**, **Smyslov**, **Kasparov**, and **Karpov** (*q.v.*), they boasted many others of almost that standard, e.g. **Belyavsky**, **Boleslavsky**, **Polugayevsky**, **Bronstein**, **Ehlvest**, **Geller**, **Psakhis**, **Salov**, **Sokolov**, and **Yusupov**. Even after the Soviet Union centrifuged, member countries like Russia itself continue to form numbers 1-4 in the world.

America has always had good players, home grown and imported, but they have often retired early for no good reason, e.g. Morphy and Fischer. Others did have good reason, like **Fine** who preferred being a practising psychoanalyst, though after 15 years at the top in chess one would have thought he'd had enough of nut cases; and **Pillsbury**, who contracted syphilis in St. Petersburg and died young of it, demonstrating that he for one was not obsessed solely with chess.

Amazingly, little Iceland, ultima Thule, produces a stream of strong players from a population roughly that of Plymouth, showing presumably that chess is

the second most popular way of whiling away those interminable Arctic nights.

Schooling

It is the tendency of chess players to form schools. Unlike card schools, whose members are united only in the desire to clean each other out, the chess variety are groups of players who develop a particular philosophy and strategy of play.

Sometimes, as in the case of the redoubtable Philidor, the school consists of just one influential individual. But the one to home in on is the hypermodern school, which naturally is as old as the hills, in this case roughly the 1920s.

Its adherents, among whom you can mention in alphabetical order **Breyer**, **Grünfeld**, **Nimzowitsch**, **Réti**, and **Tartakower**, rejected earlier 'classical' notions about the value of occupying the centre, preferring instead to bring pressure to bear upon it. The hypermoderns were more concerned with getting recognition for the beauty of their ideas rather than actually winning chess games.

Clearly this would not have made them good latter-day football managers, and didn't get them too far in chess. None of them came within spitting distance of the World Championship, with the possible exception of Nimzowitsch, despite almost an embarrassment of talent and creativity. They strove to be masters of the daring paradox, such as Breyer's 'After the first move, 1. P-K4, White's game is in the last throes.'

The hypermoderns were colourful, Bohemian, and had a tendency to die young. What more could you ask for?

The Future

Chess now attracts so much media attention that the top players can become rich and famous. This will surely end its image as an intellectual pastime for the privileged.

Computer programmes now compete against other such in a Chess Computer Olympics, and against human players. A good computer uncannily mimics human masters, even to the extent of being press-sensitive.

There is some evidence that as the rate at which the computer can consider possible positions passed through a critical value, around three-quarters of a million per second, its play changed not only in degree but also in kind. This, you can vouchsafe sagely, may well be related to some fundamental characteristic of the game, hitherto unsuspected. Say that with enough assurance and people may even believe you.

It is already possible to buy a free-standing chess computer capable of defeating all but the top one or two per cent of the world's chess players. But the big question is, of course, how long will it be before computers can demolish the best.

Try to look confident as you assert that though silicon sorcerers like **Deep Thought** and **Deep Blue**, can compete on equal terms with strong grandmasters, there is still hope. A Kasparov should always be able to use the amazing ability of the human mind in making strategic judgements to triumph over the mechanical marvel, which is obliged simply to calculate.

For despite the rising speed at which possible positions can be evaluated by a sophisticated chip

(with or without vinegar), the sheer immensity of the number of moves in a chess game might just give a Kasparov the edge in a match, though the occasional individual game will be lost. For the chess computer never blunders, while Kasparov, despite all the evidence to the contrary, is only human.

And what of future world champions? As a bluffer you will be expected to speculate knowledgeably about that thorny question. Quite a good sighting shot is to venture that of course they may have to kill off Kasparov before the discussion becomes anything but hypothetical.

With a sad shake of your head, you can regretfully rule out **Judith Polgar** (*q.v.*) on the grounds that, as the first of her kind, she is unlikely to make the supreme breakthrough herself. But what she has already accomplished will remove some deeply entrenched mental blocks in womankind.

A popular choice among the cognoscenti, viz. **Gata Kamsky**, the young Russian who defected to the U.S.A. not long before the walls fell down, may be rejected if only because his timing is so bad. Look quizzical as you mention bright young British grandmasters **Adams** and **Sadler** and decline to rule them out as challengers in four or five years time if they can raise their game that elusive extra notch.

But dismiss the claims of **Joel Lautier**, winner of the Junior World Championship in 1988, on the good and sufficient grounds that he is French.

Plump instead for **Vasily Ivanchuk**, a youngish Ukrainian who has a stratospheric Elo, is still improving, and what is more important has exactly the right sort of name. Or **Viswanathan Anand**, the Indian grandmaster of the same vintage who seems to have the knack of producing it when it matters.

WHO'S WHO IN CHESS

Alexander Alekhine (1892-1946)

As befits a Russian name, the pronunciation of Alekhine must be heavily palatalised, that is well chewed before being spat out. It is best rendered as 'Alyekeen' and only attracts full marks if you can work in a velar fricative of the sort found in Scottish words like 'loch' to introduce the final syllable. The emphasis is, fittingly, on the 'keen' for Alekhine was a chess fanatic.

He was born a wealthy aristocrat, but the Russian revolution deprived him of both status and fortune. He flirted with careers in the law and on the stage before settling for full-time chess.

During a life devoted not to truth through joy but triumph through chess his motto was 'Anything goes', and he embraced whichever political ideology or woman happened to be expedient. As a result, in his time he was a card-carrying communist, a Nazi collaborator, Frenchman, and bigamist.

Of these, by common consent, his taking French citizenship was the most reprehensible. To be born French may be accounted ill luck, but to enter into it voluntarily is depravity of a high order, and the fact that he had both kippered and pickled his brain with tobacco and alcohol by the time he did the deed is little excuse.

He decided early on that he would become World Champion and to that end perfected a style that involved subtly playing on his opponents' strong points. He would invite them to indulge to the point of mounting the high wire to show off. Alekhine would then cut the rope. Even the defence named

after him, which he didn't in fact invent but certainly perfected, consisted of a bizarre series of moves by Black's king's knight which would rightly be condemned in any elementary chess primer. The defence would often mesmerise the wretched opponent into overextending himself by pushing pawns in pursuit of the decoy knight so that he could then be picked off in a withering counter-attack. It was the chess equivalent of hormone weedkiller, stimulating White into such a frenzy of development that he would outgrow his own strength and collapse.

Alekhine spent years planning to take the World title from its owner, the 'invincible' Capablanca. The hardest part was meeting the great Cuban's main criterion for an acceptable challenger – the possession of a sponsor willing to put up \$10,000, a considerable sum in those days.

Finally, like many another of his kindred, he sought solace in the Argentine and there found wealthy backers able to stump up the necessary, and was all set. Unlike previous contenders, he didn't fear the Champion, having lavished his superb analytical skills on a painstaking study of Capablanca's game, and identifying some unsuspected chinks in the Cuban's apparently impregnable armour. Nor did he need the services of a sports psychologist to psyche him up for the contest.

Indeed, such was the resentment, loathing and jealousy he felt for the champion that he was more in need of someone to sponge him down from time to time with ice-water.

The match was staged in Buenos Aires in 1927 and was the longest on record at that time. After some difficulties early on, which Alekhine put down to toothache, he hit on the winning strategy of alter-

nately boring his opponent with a long series of stupefyingly dull draws, then stunning him with sudden attacks of savage brilliance. Eventually Alekhine won 6-3 and looked certain to reign indefinitely, if only by some nifty footwork in avoiding really dangerous opponents, particularly the wounded Capablanca.

But overconfidence led him to accept a challenge by the Dutchman Max Euwe in 1935. Although the Russian was manifestly the better player, he was undone by a spectacular series of collisions with the vodka bottle, sometimes turning up to play still under the influence. Even Alekhine couldn't surmount that and to his intense fury found himself the ex-World Champion.

He was so shaken by the defeat that he actually went on the wagon and in the return match that he had cunningly made a condition of accepting Euwe's challenge in the first place, he comfortably regained the title.

While resident in France he spent some time studying law at the Sorbonne, eventually awarding himself a doctorate of which that great university had no knowledge. He was still in France when the Germans overran it and it was then that he collaborated treacherously with the Nazis, publishing a series of venomous articles attacking the Jewish influence in chess. He even managed ingeniously to get at Capa while he was at it. He became a pariah and after the war, broken in mind, body, and bank balance he succumbed to a seizure in Portugal.

And yet the man's contribution to chess had been immense. He left a legacy of a torrent of games so beautiful that even after all these years, the enthusiast playing them over doesn't know whether to laugh

or cry. And beyond that, there is the unavoidable fact that before his advent chess had been pronounced to be finished by some of its most eminent practitioners. The great Lasker, surrounded knee-deep by players more intent on avoiding defeat than going for victory, forecast the game's imminent death by drawing. Others agreed, and various suggestions were made for revitalizing it by introducing a bigger board and new types of piece. Even the idea of 3-dimensional chess was seriously advanced.

But it was none of these, nor the provocative meanderings of the hypermodern school that saved the day. Rather it was the sustained brilliance of Alekhine's play in his great years which showed the problem to lie with the players rather than the instrument, the singer not the song.

Alekhine was a cat lover, sometimes even taking his favourite mog to tournaments, and often wearing to his matches a lucky sweater with a cat knitted into the front design. As one defeated opponent said philosophically after their game, 'I knew I was in trouble when he showed up wearing that damned animal.'

Florencio Campomanes (1927)

Philippino former chess player and president of FIDE since 1982. It has been an uneasy period since Campo, as he is unaffectionately known throughout chess, specialises in self-inflicted wounds.

He is best known through his televised press conferences, which make Fred Karno's Circus seem like a miracle of tight organization.

When Kasparov and Short raised two fingers to FIDE he promptly announced an 'official' match for

the title between the last two men whom Short had soundly defeated on his way to the final, **Karpov** and the Dutchman, **Timman**.

The credibility of this contest was vanishingly low to start with and worse was to come as preparations were rushed through to upstage the 'alternative' version by beating it to the start line. Florencio's Folly was to be played in two halves, the first in Holland, the second in Oman, and these two countries were to provide the prize fund too.

All too soon the Dutch were confessing that they couldn't raise their share. Then the Omanis backed out of their commitment to provide the back half of this pantomime horse. This was all revealed by Campo in a statement heavily interspersed with sighs so heart-rending that any silent-screen heroine would have killed for them. One can only admire Mr Campomanes dogged determination in the face of adversity.

The second half of the 'official' event was finally perpetrated in Jakarta. It is believed that Karpov won.

José Raoul Capablanca y Graupera (1888-1942)

Capa, as you should always refer to him, was born into a wealthy family in Cuba, the son of a Spanish cavalry officer.

He was one of those irritating child prodigies who was never even taught the game, picking it up when still in nappies by a process of osmosis whilst watching others play. The first indication these super-prodigies give of their abilities comes normally when

seated on the knee of a fond parent watching him play. They remove the dummy from their mouths long enough to pipe in a childish treble, 'No, dimwit, not the bishop, the rook! Rook to king 8 check wins the house.' This of course attracts widespread admiration and affection.

Capa was brilliant but bone idle, never deigning to open a chess book to study opening theory. This was a characteristic he extended to his sponsored studies in chemical engineering at Columbia University, where he did so little work that he was ejected with ignominy. During the time he should have been devoting to his studies he had spent a deal of time at the famous New York Chess Club and had become well enough known for **Frank Marshall**, a world-class American master, to offer him a match, confident of defeating the young man without breaking sweat and thereby earning a little easy money.

Capa comprehensively demolished him by the astonishing score of 8-1. To his eternal credit, Marshall later demanded that the organizers of a top-rank tournament held in San Sebastian in 1911 invite the inexperienced Capa, who duly won his first major international tournament easing up, one of only two players in the history of chess to do so.

Later that year, emboldened by his success, Capa challenged the World Champion, Emmanuel Lasker, who had been on the throne so long no-one could remember clearly a time when he wasn't on top. Unfortunately, the canny Lasker, as was customary for the incumbent in those days, set onerous conditions for the match. Capa was provoked into being so rude in reply the title-holder was able to duck the challenge, claiming that Capa wanted to pick a fight not play a chess match.

In 1913, Capa was appointed to the Cuban diplomatic service, a sinecure whose only duties were to travel the world bringing some welcome publicity to his native land through his chess. This was an appointment made in heaven, for Capa was urbane, and charming enough to fetch ducks off water. He coupled dark Latin good looks with startling blue eyes, a combination that had a devastating effect upon women, who took to attending his tournaments in unprecedented numbers.

He was, unusually for a top player of that vintage, a non-smoker and claimed that alcohol never touched his lips, which probably meant he drank champagne through a straw. For like any self-respecting Spaniard, Capa was a party animal who would travel any distance to attend a decent orgy. His idea of rigorous preparation for a demanding match was to ensure that he was in bed by dawn on the day of the game.

Despite this, with youth on his side, he was entering his greatest period, a time when he lost so few games, suffering only a single defeat in one decade, that he gained a reputation for invincibility.

In 1921, Capa challenged Lasker again for the world crown and this time, unable to duck any longer, the old champion tried cunningly to resign in the challenger's favour, but the public were not having that and at last a match was played, in Havana, for what was then a record purse. Capa was soon ahead with four wins and no losses, amid the normal large number of draws, and Lasker then quit pleading ill-health, which sounded like a lame excuse to avoid further punishment but had the merit of being true.

The aura of invincibility surrounding Capa continued to grow but finally his overweening vanity (he once defined false modesty as the only true conceit)

led to his downfall when he took the formidable Alekhine too lightly and was defeated in their world title match of 1927.

Unfortunately, Capa could never raise the funds for a return match and in truth, although he continued to play successfully in tournaments, the spark had gone. Ultimately, Capa may have been overconfident and over-reliant on his innate ability, but before the bubble burst he brought to the game, in a way that no other has done before or since, a lucidity and deceptive simplicity.

The average player, going over the moves of a game of someone like the mysterious Nimzowitsch, usually winds up baffled by the strange manoeuvring, whereas a study of one of Capa's masterpieces leaves the spurious impression that, damnit, the game is easy, an impression that normally lasts only until the next competitive match.

It is regrettable that it was the disarming simplicity of Capa's risk-averse approach, and the overwhelming success it brought him, that had the odd effect of persuading many people, wrongly, that the richest seams of chess might be worked out.

Appropriately, his end came when he suffered a stroke whilst kibitzing at the New York Chess Club. He died the following day.

Capa was the third World Champion in a row to die in New York, following his two predecessors Steinitz and Lasker. There must have been profound relief in the New York Chess Club when the next in line, Alekhine, broke the sequence by popping off in Portugal, or it would have started to look like the elephants' graveyard and no Champion would have gone near the place.

Max Euwe (1901-1981)

A genial Dutchman who won the World Championship despite the disadvantages of being a thoroughly nice guy and remaining a true amateur (he was a Professor of Mathematics) throughout his long playing career. Normally, you know you are pronouncing Dutch names correctly only when you strain your throat, but this one is easy; it rhymes with 'server'.

Robert J. Fischer (1943)

Anybody who is born in Brooklyn has every right to be a mite tetchy. But as Bobby got older he got worse. If the cerebral chess can be likened to the physical tennis, Bobby Fischer is the John McEnroe of the chess board. Fischer would probably rather say, with quiet pride, that McEnroe is the Fischer of the sphairistike court.

He was, inevitably, a child prodigy, who honed his prodigious talent with a dedicated adherence to the game to the exclusion of all else. He quit school at 16, reasoning that he was unlikely to learn anything more there that could in any way help his chess. He won the U.S. Championship for the first time at 14 and was a grandmaster a year later, the youngest person at that time to achieve that exalted ranking. He seemed on course to become the youngest ever World Champion too, but two things prevented that.

The first was the Russian domination of world chess, something that had been brought about by the Kremlin's pouring into the game whatever money and resources were needed to attract the best young talent. This was done to demonstrate the superiority

of the Soviet political system and was so successful that the Russians were not about to give it up lightly, even to the extent of rigging qualifying tournaments by 'arranging' the results of games between Soviet players to suit their own ends.

The second was Fischer's own fierce desire for recognition both for chess as a whole and more importantly for himself. He bitterly resented what he saw as a Communist plot to ensure the continuation of the Russian monopoly of the world title. Also his demands regarding monetary rewards, perks, venues, playing conditions, and anything else his ego could dream up, irritated the organizers of world chess beyond measure. But despite that irritation, they often complied with Fischer's demands because his explosive behaviour made him a tremendous drawing card.

And he delivered too. He was quite capable of walking out of a tournament because of some imagined slight, but if he stuck around he could inflict crushing defeats on world-class opponents. As he did to **Taimonov**, the Russian grandmaster, and **Bent Larsen** the formidable Dane, both by the unheard-of score of 6-0, in the Candidates' tournament of 1970.

This competition is the final hurdle challengers must clear to qualify to play the incumbent World Champion, and after next administering a drubbing to Tigran Petrosian, the Russian former World Champion, Fischer was ready to take on the mighty Boris Spassky.

But of course, Fischer being Fischer, the fun was only just beginning. There followed manoeuvres so byzantine, demands so outrageous, insults so cutting, and brinkmanship so vertiginous that it often seemed utterly impossible that the match would take place at

all. But take place it did, in Reykjavik in 1972, and after further alarms and excursions Fischer emerged as World Champion by the comfortable margin of 12½-8½.

There seemed no reason why he should not dominate the world of chess for years to come but again he was driven by some inner demon to hit the self-destruct button. He attempted to impose upon FIDE demands for changes to the rules governing the conduct of the World Championship that were so extraordinary, even by Fischer's own very high standards, that eventually he was stripped of the title.

Now, at the height of his remarkable powers, enjoying unprecedented fame and earning capacity he, like Achilles before him, retired to his tent and began a marathon sulk, refusing all offers to come out and play.

During this time he took up residence in California, natural home of the world's individualists, reportedly living in a succession of flop-houses, existing on junk food, reading comic books, hiding behind a bright red beard and exercising his predilection for right-wing politics and ultra-fundamentalist religious beliefs.

For twenty long years he refused all blandishments and spurned so many tempting offers to return to the board that the world was totally flabbergasted when in 1992 he suddenly accepted an offer from a Yugoslav banker to play a money-match against his old adversary Boris Spassky.

It would have been fitting if the combative Fischer had played the match at the front line, clad in tin helmet and flak jacket, wielding his king's bishop like a Kalashnikov, and roaring redundant insults.

Disappointingly, it actually took place partly in Sveti Stefan, partly in Belgrade, both relatively

peaceful, at least until Fischer turned up.

Showing flashes of his legendary gift for public relations, he demanded to play behind glass screens and refused to accredit any journalists who wouldn't recognise his match as being for the world championship, no matter what FIDE, Kasparov, etc. might think to the contrary. He easily defeated Spassky who had been so demoralised by his thrashing at Fischer's hands in 1972 that he had been reduced to taking up residence in France, where he embraced the good life as only an emigré Russian can.

Given this extraordinary catalogue of oddball behaviour, it would be easy to reach the wrong conclusion. But consider this. The purse in his unofficial bash in the Balkans was \$5 million, of which he trousered over \$3 million. In 1993 the breakaway World Championship match between Kasparov and Short attracted a prize fund of £1.7 million, or about \$2.6 million, and the 'official' one almost ended up being played neither for love nor money.

Fischer's often outrageous conduct was never aimed at unsettling his opponents to whom he was scrupulously well-behaved. For he believed that if he could obtain perfect conditions to permit him to play his best chess, the opposition would automatically be taken care of.

Fischer's Elo rating may have been slightly surpassed by Kasparov's, but we have a sneaking suspicion he is chairman of the board and in head-to-head play would have beaten anyone.

It is said that Fischer once defined creativity as the ability to discern the connections between apparently unconnected frames of reference. This elliptic utterance obviously has some relevance to chess or Fischer would have disowned rather than discerned it.

Anatoly Karpov (1951)

A Russian super-genius who, unfortunately for him, comes ahead of Kasparov only in the alphabet. He inherited the World Championship in 1975 when Fischer defaulted, and for a while this led to his being underestimated. Any frustration this may have caused him he took out on the rest of the world's grandmasters, becoming the Action-man of chess for a decade in which he carried all before him in a string of high-powered tournament victories.

He dominates purely by the power of the mind for his appearance is against him. He could have modelled for the original 7 stone weakling and has lank, dark hair, hyperthyroid eyes and an expression more often encountered on a fishmonger's slab than across the chess board. His voice, high, thin and reedy, does not strike terror into the opposition either.

Karpov is the only man to have a plus score against Kasparov.

Gary Kasparov (1963)

Azerbaijani superstar who is the youngest ever to win the World Championship, prising the title out of the limpet-like grasp of Karpov in 1985 despite the best efforts of FIDE. He truly has it all. He attacks like Tal, defends like Lasker and talks like Bilko. He speaks in tongues and can negotiate a contract in any language you care to mention.

He is the very model of a modern major grandmaster, travelling the world with a retinue rivalling that of a medieval monarch. His retainers include personal trainers of the sort one wouldn't wish to encounter in

a dark alley, and a man whose only discernible function is to open doors for the great man lest he should damage his mating hand.

Kasparov plays such awesome and yet error-free chess that there has been speculation that he might be a chess-robot with an intergalactic Elo, sent by advanced aliens to inculcate a little humility into Earthlings. This is clearly ridiculous as no advanced life-form would ever make a robot that hairy.

'Kazza', whose role model is Alekhine, has let it be known modestly that when he has fianchettoed his last bishop he would not refuse the Presidency of Russia.

Raymond Keene (1948)

Chess is one game which is not played 'according to Hoyle', but increasingly it is played according to Keene. For Edmond Hoyle, the 18th century British lawyer, and first person to realise that the only reliable way to make money from games of chance is to write books telling others how to play them, concentrated on card and dice games. He did write a treatise on chess very late in life but it is little-known.

The same cannot be said of Ray Keene, known widely as 'The Penguin' because of an enduring affection for business lunches, and the nearest thing to a latterday reincarnation of Hoyle. An entry in the *Guinness Book of Records* cannot be long in coming for Keene's tally of chess books written is over 70 and counting.

Keene was and is a terrific player in his own right, the second Englishman to attain the rank of grand-

master. But nowadays it is as author, chess columnist, television commentator, administrator and organizer, that he spends the bulk of his time.

Today, if ever the ubiquitous Keene feels the need to stop his chess playing faculties from atrophying he will casually slaughter a couple of dozen innocents in a simultaneous exhibition.

Viktor Korchnoi (1931)

Korchnoi is one of the top 10 chess players of all time, despite never having won the world title. It was his bad luck to come into his prime late, just when the younger and even more formidable Karpov was at his best. He has always been the centre of controversy and can spot a conspiracy at a 100 paces through the fog of a crowded chess hall. A voluble man, known as the Leningrad Lip, he kicked against the pricks in 1976 by defecting to Switzerland.

Unfortunately, his family were not allowed to leave until much later and understandably this sometimes seemed to be occupying him more than his chess. He played Karpov for the title twice, a case of the darling of the Soviet establishment against the traitor to the system and non-person.

Despite all the other things he had on his mind, Korchnoi ran Karpov desperately close in the first encounter, losing by only one game. By the time of their next encounter in 1981 he was over the hill and lost convincingly, but at least the Soviet authorities, sensing that he was no longer a threat, let his wife and son leave to join him in the West.

Emmanuel Lasker (1868-1941)

It is a rule of chess that it is a young man's game, particularly in its higher reaches, but the German-Jewish Lasker was the exception to the rule.

Not only did he reign as World Champion for 27 years, by far the longest undisputed tenure, but even in his mid-50s he could still win major tournaments, ahead of the likes of Alekhine and Capablanca. He was still playing at the top level with distinction as late as 1936, although this was out of necessity since he and his wife lost all their worldly goods when they were driven out of their home in 1933.

He had a lot to lose, for Lasker, disturbed by the number of chess masters who died in poverty, especially his predecessor Steinitz, was the first chess player to demand and get large fees, in addition to which he married an heiress.

He founded no school, but he was the greatest street-fighter of them all, who never knew when he was beaten and could defend a losing position like a cornered rat.

He delighted in getting away from the well-trodden path in his games so as to negate his opponents' pre-match preparation and bring the game down to a trial of talent and willpower. He was so successful at this that many seriously believed that he must be using hypnosis, a belief the wily Lasker probably never went to too much trouble to dispel.

He is high in any list of the top ten masters of all time and is our own personal favourite, not just for his fighting qualities in this supreme war game, but because he found time to make genuine and significant contributions in his day job as a mathematician.

Philip Marlowe

The fictional character, created by Raymond Chandler as the toughest and most hard-boiled private eye of them all, illustrates that the knowledge that a man plays chess tells you something about him in a way ten pages of detailed character delineation cannot.

Marlowe may have gone down the meanest streets in the whole genre in his pursuit of an honest dollar; he may have drunk too much; and he may have occasionally undertaken work that involved being pursued down endless hotel corridors by naked men shouting, 'I'll buy the negatives'.

But as soon as Chandler cunningly lets drop the fact that Marlowe keeps a chess board permanently set up with a position from some famous master game, or a difficult chess problem to tinker with in odd moments, you know instantly and beyond a peradventure that he drinks to forget; that he only does divorce work when the bailiffs are halfway out of the office door with the filing cabinets because of unpaid rent; that the violence is never gratuitous; and that beneath that slightly sleazy exterior lies a heart of gold, a steely intellect, and a rugged if dented integrity.

Tony Miles (1955)

Winner of the World Junior Championship and the first English grandmaster under FIDE rules. Always a bit of a rebel on and off the board, he once agreed a draw with his opponent without a move being made. He became remarkably hirsute, got disenchanted with the UK and went to live in the USA, which country he represented. Being first at anything is never easy.

Paul Morphy (1837-1884)

The name Morphy looks like the ultimate Irishism, a failed attempt to spell Murphy. It is fact deliberate. On their way from their ancestral home in Ireland to Morphy's birthplace in New Orleans, Morphy's ancestors tarried a while in Spain. The locals couldn't pronounce Murphy so they obligingly changed it to Morphy before moving on to the new world.

Morphy was a superprodigy in the Capablanca mould but, unusually, chess was never the be-all and end-all for him. In his late teens he went to college and graduated in law *summa cum laude*, but being still under 21 he was unable to start to practise. Instead he went through world chess like the grim reaper, dominating the game with a burst of concentrated brilliance the like of which has not been seen before or since.

Whilst remaining a true amateur, he comprehensively thrashed everyone of note in chess, except Staunton who had retired and could never quite get up the nerve to return and face the demon. Like Philidor before him, Morphy took to playing simultaneous blindfold matches or conceding the odds of pawn and move in order to get a game, and still won.

But in two years it was all over. Becoming bored with chess, or more accurately with those who were obsessed with it to the exclusion of all else, he returned home and gave up serious chess, which he insisted was only a game. This led many chess aficionados to believe that he was mad.

He attempted, not once but repeatedly, to start a law practice but such had been his celebrity as a chess player that no-one would take him seriously as a lawyer. Worse, the outbreak of the American Civil

War deprived him of the family fortune.

Over a period of time, Morphy descended into recurring bouts of genuine, certifiable, barking madness, a sad end to a phenomenon of the human intellect.

Judith Polgar (1976)

One of three Hungarian sisters (all chess masters) taught by their psychologist father who believed chess genius could be inculcated. Their education included 5 hours daily chess instruction and appears to prove that in chess at least nurture is just as important as nature. Polgar became the youngest-ever grandmaster of either sex, displacing Fischer from the record books.

Ferociously competitive, she refuses to participate in women's tournaments, dismissing them as sexist. There is talk of her taking on Fischer in a big-money match following his emergence from exile. Put yourself down for front-row seats and fire-proof garments.

Samuel H. Reshevsky (1911-1992)

A Pole who became an American citizen, Sammy learned to play chess at four, was a master at nine and the first child chess prodigy to experience the horrors of media hype. He astounded the world with his juvenile feats at the board, not only by defeating strong experienced players but in taking on up to seventy-five opponents at a time in simultaneous exhibitions.

He actually left the game in his late teens with the laudable intention of getting a proper education but something went badly wrong because he became an

accountant. He went back to chess and won the U.S. Championship so many times they practically gave it to him in perpetuity.

Although he never quite made it to the status of World Champion, he remained a feared tournament player almost to the doors of the funeral parlour.

Understandably perhaps, he was a graduate of the Bobby Fischer School of Charm.

Nigel Short (1965)

The finest player the U.K. has produced. This is a remarkable achievement when you consider that he has little going for him. Quite apart from hailing from Bolton – splendid place but not an obvious hot-bed of chess excellence – his name somehow doesn't ring true as a top chess player. And his appearance fits him more to play Adrian Mole than contest the World Championship.

But contest it he did, against the menacing Kasparov in 1993. Despite excellent pre-match preparation and some terrific over-the-board moves, every time he had his illustrious opponent on the ropes, Short seemed to freeze, as though appalled at his own temerity.

The match ended after 20 of the scheduled 24 games had been played, with Kasparov uncatchable, leading 12½ to 7½. Short is young enough to try again but he will need to try something new to lessen his apparent diffidence.

Yet it is hard to see what more he can do along those lines. In his youth, he formed part of a band called Pelvic Thrust. He has even married a Greek lady, a drama therapist no less, although he has stopped short of taking her name. And he psyches himself up by telling everyone at every opportunity

just how much he dislikes Kasparov. The trouble is he says it as if announcing that he is just off to the launderette.

Our suggestion would be to try punk dressing, like the other virtuoso Nigel (Kennedy not Mansell). And a spot of deed pollery might be useful, something along the lines of Nikita Kurzov. Well, it works for ballet dancers.

One thing Short tried which did seem to have an effect was to gain the support of naturalised American grandmaster **Kavalek**. Kavalek was his guide, mentor, adviser, and second and did seem to have geed him up during the difficult path to the final, but he abandoned ship soon after the final itself started, for reasons still not clear.

And of course, Short has problems with the chess establishment to bother his mind. Surprisingly, it was the mild-mannered Nigel rather than the imperious Kasparov who finally lost patience with FIDE before the match, and suggested to the Champion that they go it alone. Most chess-freaks wish them well, if only because they promised and delivered fighting chess, free of the succession of tactical draws that marked all previous matches.

Howard Staunton (approx. 1810 to exactly 1874)

The finest English player of his day who had the misfortune to be the best in the world before the World Championship was invented. He pioneered sponsorship, and founded the country's first magazine devoted to chess.

To this day, what you need for serious play at any level is a Staunton chess set. This is widely believed to have been designed by the great man himself, but

you can score heavily by revealing modestly that it was actually the work of a Nathaniel Cook. Cook was a journalist and a craftsman, but clearly no marketing man, unlike Staunton who simply endorsed the product. You can always recognise a Staunton set by the knights, which were fashioned after the most famous and beautiful horses in the history of art – the classic Greek horses of the Elgin marbles. It is perhaps as well that Staunton it was who gave his name to the design. It wouldn't be the same somehow to go into a shop and ask for a Cook set.

After he finished with chess, Staunton was not content to loiter palely on the periphery, but became a noted Shakespearean scholar.

Sultan Khan (1905-1966)

Either of these names considered separately signifies a type of oriental potentate, but the possessor of the two in combination was a small, mild-mannered, illiterate peasant from the Punjab who happened to be one of the greatest 'naturals' in chess history. He came to England in 1929 as faithful Indian companion to Colonel Nawab Sir Umar Hayat Khan, equerry to George V, and enthusiastic amateur chess player. Sir Umar had discovered Sultan Khan's talent, fostered it and shepherded him to the status of Champion of All India.

Now the master thought it might be amusing to turn the servant loose on European chess. Sultan Khan made an immediate and considerable impact despite having virtually no knowledge of opening theory, and being plagued by illness. In addition to the recurring bouts of malaria he brought with him, the British climate badly afflicted him with almost

constant colds. He turned up at tournaments so often swathed in bandages that many folk formed the mistaken impression that this was the normal garb of Punjabis. He won the British Championship and took many famous scalps in tournament games, including that of Capablanca himself.

It is possible that his opponents were more concerned with steering well clear to avoid catching something quite dreadful, but nevertheless his results were astonishing.

Then his mentor, possibly irritated by his protégé's failure to win the World Championship in short order, whisked him back to the sub-continent where he passed the rest of his days living serenely on a small farm.

Mikhail Tal (1936-1992)

A Latvian who was unusual in not showing early signs of chess prowess. He stood out among the flood of identikit grandmasters produced by the Soviet Union after the second world war as the supreme attacking genius and beat the brainy Botvinnik for the World Championship in 1960 in one of the great upsets.

He took every conceivable precaution against reaching old age, abusing a naturally frail constitution with smoking and drinking on a heroic scale. If he had looked after himself and ever worked at the game, he could have been one of the pantheon of chess gods. But then he wouldn't have been Tal.

Whether he has a headstone we do not know, but if he does it should bear the immortal lines: Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. If the booze don't get you, the ciggies must.

GLOSSARY

Back row (or rank) mating – The chess equivalent of the sucker punch where an opponent exploits some weakness on the back rank to inflict a surprise checkmate. It is little consolation to the victim to know that at one time or another virtually every player has fallen for it.

Bare king – One left alone without any men, rather than the emperor with no clothes.

Board – The battlefield on which the chess men wage war. The only trap for the unwary is to ensure each player has a black square on the left end of the rank nearest him. Say to yourself, 'White on the right', and you can't go wrong.

Chess clock – Devilish invention allowing control of the time permitted to each player. It is two-faced, unlike most chess players. After making your move, you bang the knob above your face, which stops your clock and starts your opponent's.

Chess set – a) the select group that plays the game, b) a board and thirty-two men, consisting of sixteen pieces and sixteen pawns. Severely chastise anyone who makes the common mistake of confusing pieces and men, for this is as much a solecism as failing to distinguish officers from other ranks in the army.

Combinations – Cunning plans which lead by a forced series of moves to mate or gain of material, the means by which a strategic advantage is con-

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verted into something more tangible. They generally involve a sacrifice. The best ones arrive without warning, like railway trains.

FIDE – The governing body of world chess, pronounced appropriately in view of its manic desire to extract money from all and sundry, as ‘fee day’. It actually stands for Fédération Internationale des Échecs, but at one time or another it has appeared willing to stand for almost anything, especially if Bobby Fischer was calling the shots.

Hanging piece – One that is left undefended. A hanging bishop sounds bad enough, but thank heavens none of the pieces is a judge.

Hustler – Expert who haunts gatherings of chess adherents, challenging all comers for side stakes. The preferred version is rapid chess as he can fit in more pigeons that way.

Jadoube – The two little words you must say before adjusting the position on the board of any men whose misalignment on their squares might be annoying your tidy little mind. Please note that this only works in chess and not in the real world.

Kibitzer – An onlooker of the sort that cannot resist offering unwanted advice to the participants. Particularly prevalent at chess and bridge events. In a civilised society the Council would send round a man to deal with them.

King – The most important piece by definition since his unavoidable loss ends the game. There is a

close similarity between chess kings and the real ones of olden days. Both cower at the rear during the heat of battle and only emerge to take a personal hand in the fighting after all the big boys have fallen, leaving just the poor defenceless pawns or infantrymen to be gleefully mopped up.

Knight – Piece once described by chess enthusiast's non-playing girlfriend as 'the darling little horsey ones'. The knight has the strangest move in the game, leaping over friend and foe alike. If its perambulations are plotted they bear a striking resemblance to the mathematical phenomenon of the drunkard's walk.

Living chess – Chess played on a giant board with strangely attired people acting as pawns and pieces. Occasionally, the knights are represented by real mounted horses, in which case the human pawns are equipped with shovels. It is said that one master playing such a game so strongly fancied the lady acting as his queen that his play eventually revolved solely around keeping her on the board until the end of the game at whatever cost in order that he would have the chance to plight his troth.

Master – Chess hotshot of ill-defined playing strength. Other categories, such as grandmaster or international master, are subject to more precise criteria. There are also correspondence masters, problem masters, and women masters.

Material – Everything on the chess board but the two kings. Misnomer for 'matériel', the correct term for the equipment of an army.

Olympics – Common name for the biennial FIDE World Team Championships.

Pawn – The least valuable man on the board and the most frequently sacrificed, hence the use of the term in everyday language. Its name originates in the Arab word for a footslogger. Philidor held that the pawn is the soul of chess, but the average pawn, if it could speak, would probably venture the opinion that the arsehole of chess would be a better description. Uniquely, the pawn can only move forward, and is obliged to plod doggedly towards the enemy guns, cursing the knowledge that he is expendable. However, two things keep these infantryman going. First, in the same way that a cat can look at a king, a pawn can sometimes take a queen. Second, if a pawn should successfully run the gauntlet and reach the opponent's back rank, he can be swapped for any piece its owner wishes, normally of course a queen, since the lady is far and away the most powerful individual. As a rule, this happens if at all in the end game and the arrival of a new queen swiftly settles the issue. However, in freak cases, three, four or even more queens may be present at the same time. In the close confines of the chess board this is like the German Grand Fleet manoeuvring on the Serpentine.

Poisoned pawn – Normally White's queen's knight pawn, left undefended in the hope that one's opponent will waste time in greedily gobbling the offering, thereby exposing himself to a counter-attack. Most often refers to a variation in the Sicilian defence. Not to be confused with the poisoned prawn, although both can be fatal if swallowed.

Prepared variation – The chess equivalent of the secret weapon or Q-ship. It is an innovation dreamed up in private, often aimed at tripping an opponent in his favourite opening. Sometimes it is kept on ice until the opportune moment occurs. The American master Frank Marshall devised a fiendish counter-attack to the Ruy Lopez which he sat on for ten years until the opportunity presented itself to unleash it on the ‘invincible’ Capablanca. The normally unflappable Capa had to work like a galley slave to keep finding just the right move over the board, but he did so brilliantly and eventually Marshall’s attack burned itself out and Capa won the game.

Professional – Player who legitimises his obsession. There is no stigma attached to being a chess pro and normally not a lot of money either. Amateurs play paid players without compromising their own status. You can always spot the amateurs – they are the ones who look well off.

Resignation – The sign that defeat is inevitable. Bucking the modern trend, the player never takes early retirement, or gets declared redundant.

Rook – To rob someone blind. Germane to chess since the rook is the normal assassin’s weapon in the dreaded back rank mate (*q.v.*). The reason why a chess rook is distinctly uncorvine in appearance is that the word derives from *rukḥ*, Persian for a chariot.

Sacrifice – To give up material for non-philanthropic reasons. There are several sorts. For example, a

sound sacrifice is one whose refutation your opponent fails to spot. An unsound sacrifice is one that turns out to have a fatal flaw. A non-sound sacrifice is missing the chess club to take your children to a rock concert. A positional sacrifice is one made in order to get some rather vague advantage of a long-term nature, or giving up your seat on the train. To sacrifice the house is to throw everything but the kitchen sink at your opponent. The most spectacular example is the queen sacrifice, something every player dreams about, from rabbit to World Champion. Some timber shifters, on finally achieving one, retire on the spot, believing life has no more to offer.

Sealed move – What happens at an adjournment should play be stopped by air-raid sirens, the church hall being needed for choir practice, or a certain number of hours having elapsed without a result. The player whose turn it is puts his intended move in a sealed envelope and gives it to the arbiter for safe-keeping. No matter how many better ones he may have thought of meantime, when play is resumed he is committed to make that move.

Simultaneous display (or 'simul') – An exhibition in which an expert takes on several players, moving about to play his moves in the various games. Exceptionally, over 200 opponents at a time have been faced by the really proficient exponents. Masters charge each opponent, so it can be a nice little earner. Some people sniff that the master always has the white pieces. What do they want, blood? There is a fiendish variant of this form of mental torture in which the master also plays

blindfold and the American grandmaster Pillsbury once took on over twenty very strong opponents this way. It is believed he later walked on water for an encore.

Strip chess – A variant of mixed chess in which the participants remove one article of clothing every time they lose a pawn, and two for each piece. It exists only in our fevered imaginings at the moment but demonstration games can be arranged for suitable interested parties. (Please send recent photograph.)

Swindle – Trap set by a player in a lost position. The more smug the opponent looks, the more satisfying the successful swindle. Frank Marshall dug more of these tiger-traps of the chess board than anyone else in history and was disgustingly proud of the fact.

Timber shifter – A chess duffer. Chess sets are commonly made of wood.

Zeitnot – Universally used odd-sounding German expression for time trouble.

Zugzwang – The chess equivalent of standing on a one-legged stool with a noose around your neck: you are all right as long as you don't make a move. In chess, the player who is zugzwang is fine at first sight, but on closer inspection it is his move and whichever one he chooses leads to instant disaster.

THE AUTHOR

B. W. Malpass was taught to play chess at the age of four by his father, who left home to join the Royal Navy shortly afterwards. His first steps in bluffing took place on the bus on the way home from school. He and a chess-playing friend would try to impress their fellow passengers by playing convincing but spurious games of blindfold chess.

They would call out the moves loudly to make sure everyone got the message, and there was a great deal of brow knitting and head scratching to illustrate the intensity of the mental effort involved in playing without the aid of board or men.

It came to an abrupt end during a particularly realistic demonstration, when a miner on his way home from his shift paused as he left the bus and addressed the pair: 'Tha' last three moves were illegal, lad. And 'yon's – (nodding to the friend who was already going beet-red) – 'yon's were bloody impossible. If you two are chess players, I'm Greta Garbo.' It was game, set, and match to the horny-handed son of toil, who exited whistling.

Mercifully, B.W. Malpass retired from competitive chess many years ago and greets all questions about his Elo rating with hysterical laughter, so his playing strength remains a mystery. He did perfect the defensive role of the domestic cat in chess. His chess computer, like him, could use new batteries.

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