The Bobby Fischer I Knew

and Other Stories
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By
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and
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From Arnold to Nina Denker, in loving memory

and

From Larry Parr to my parents Lawrence and
the late Irene Parr plus Tai and Christianna
Foreword

The Moves of the People

By Grandmaster Larry Evans
Five-time U.S. Chess Champion

“It’s not the moves of the pieces but of the people that interest me.”—Tim Rice, author of the musical Chess.

Although more books have been written about chess than any other game, there are very few good chess memoirs—and nothing quite like The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories.

Arnold Denker is a superb raconteur and famous grandmaster whose chess career spanned seven decades from Alekhine to Kasparov. He teamed up with former Chess Life editor Larry Parr, a graceful stylist and tireless researcher, to produce this sparkling memoir containing pen portraits of some of the most raucous and colorful figures in 20th century chess. I knew many of them and often catch myself saying, “Yes, they got it just right!”

There is George Treysman’s face “like the death mask of a Mongol warrior.” Or young Bobby Fischer’s habit of never looking up from the board as if “he had perhaps dropped something and was still looking for it.” Or Albert Pinkus, a mild-mannered New York master whose hobby was collecting chess books. Until now, however, I never knew that he was also the Indiana Jones of chess who sought “fame and glory in the darkest regions of South America—places with lazy, muddy rivers and ill-shaven soldiers of fortune who wear white suits and Panama hats, and who travel on tramp steamers into desolate green hells.”

Denker and Parr have a photographic eye for the telling detail; and they possess a gift for sifting among a thousand trivial events to find the one or two that somehow capture the essence of a person’s life. For example, take their treatment of Herman Steiner, “the hot Hollywood hunk of chess.” Herman took me and other young chess
talents under his wing in the 1940s, but I was sufficiently ungrateful to defeat him in a match for the U.S. Championship in 1952. On the set of the movie *Cass Timberlane*, he got away with telling Lana Turner, “Don’t play chess. Sitting at a chess board for hours might make you fat and spoil that perfect figure.” That was Herman. He was a ladykiller.

This work recalls a world now lost: leisurely dinner parties at the Savoy with Max Euwe; elegant evenings at the penthouse of chess patron Maurice Wertheim; carousing at bistros with Alexander Alekhine; long, lazy afternoons at the Manhattan Chess Club with Oscar Tenner, Al Simonson, and so many others who are now faded memories of my chess youth in Manhattan—not to mention the likes of Ossip Bernstein, Salo Flohr and Miguel Najdorf.

**The Damon Runyons of Chess**

Denker and Parr remind me a lot of Damon Runyon as they recreate the lives and foibles of the “guys and dolls” of New York chess. Not only do they chronicle giants like Reuben Fine, Bobby Fischer, Isaac Kashdan and Sammy Reshevsky—all of whom I had the pleasure (and pain) to face across the board—they also describe such peripheral figures as Irving Chernev (the Ripley of chess), who would buttonhole me with a new chess study to solve whenever we encountered each other at a chess club. Or the ratty Norman Whitaker (of Lindbergh-kidnapping infamy). During the U.S. Open in 1946 I asked him to take me to see *The Outlaw* with Jane Russell, a movie considered too racy for minors unless they were accompanied by an adult. He gladly obliged.

There is also plenty of hard chess—about 300 games, many hitherto unpublished, with interesting theoretical ideas that have either been forgotten or neglected in opening manuals. Yet the core of the book is about people Denker knew and often loved. His own life is skilfully intertwined with the funny and sad, tragic and heartwarming fates of men who often dedicated 30, 40, 50, 60 years to the ludicrous task of “cornering a wooden king on a wooden board,” as Stefan Zweig put it in *The Royal Game*.

**A Haunting Memorial**

This book radiates life. So many people in these pages, shades of the past, seem to emerge from the walls to take one last bow. They inevitably step backwards into the walls as their figures recede, for even Denker and Parr cannot indefinitely hold open the door of memory.

Arnold Denker appears to be genuinely fascinated by these
people. He renders their features with a Dickensian precision, and no chess writer ever had a sharper eye for the compelling detail. Unlike so many of his fellow grandmasters, Denker can see beyond the end of his own nose. How fortunate for us that he and his collaborator have the rare gift to tell it like it was.

Larry Evans
Reno, Nevada
April 1995
Introduction

Babbitts and Botvinniks

Not too long ago—oh, just five or six decades back—the Manhattan Chess Club was considered to be the strongest aggregation of chess players in the world. Winning a Manhattan club championship was the equivalent of finishing first in a strong international tournament.

The great men of the Manhattan made up a Who's Who of world chess. They included the likes of Jose Capablanca (who kept an apartment just across the way at 157 West 57th Street) and Isaac Kashdan, Sammy Reshevsky and Reuben Fine, Herman Steiner and Al Simonson, Arthur Dake and Al Horowitz—well, you get the idea.

Unfortunately, Capablanca seldom deigned to play with us Young Turks and usually confined his activities to giving Knight odds to Al Link and Charlie Saxon, two of his old Columbia University cronies. But so what? We got plenty of practice among ourselves, not to mention competition from at least another 20 masters capable of beating any of us on a given day.

With this bursting treasury of talent, it is no wonder that the United States won four Olympiads during the 1930s. Also, it is no wonder that membership in the Manhattan Chess Club was much desired.

Glitterati and Literati

Aside from the chess stars, the general membership of the old Manhattan included many of the glitterati and literati of New Deal era New York. In those days great men walked the aisles between boards and pondered the fate of pawns.

Several of this century’s finest musicians spent their leisure hours shifting wood at the club. Almost all of the great Leopold Auer's most famous students were Manhattan members. These included Eddie Brown, Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz, Leo Kahn, Ivor Karman, Max Rosen and Toscha Seidl. Gregor Piatigorsky, the world-renowned cellist, was also a member and could occasionally be found playing a game with his friend and fellow cellist, Jimmy Liebling.
All of the musicians played a pretty strong game. Louis Persinger, the violinist who taught Yehudi Menuhin, Ruggiero Ricci and Isaac Stern, was strong enough to qualify for the 1944 U.S. Championship. True, he finished last, but that was because, as he explained it, "The boards were out of tune." Here is a hard-fought loss of his against world-class violinist and rated master David Oistrakh:

*Louis Persinger–David Oistrakh*

*Poznan, 1957*

*Double Stonewall*


Sinclair Lewis, the author of several Great American Novels, showed up now and then. Sorry, I can't recall whether he was a Babbitt or a Botvinnik at the board. But I do remember that Morris Schapiro, this nation's leading expert on government bonds and victor in match play over both Charles Jaffe and Oscar Chajes, played risky attacking chess. So, also, did Harold Phillips and Lester Samuels, two prominent attorneys. To provide an idea of the latter's playing strength, this casual club spiefer smashed Herman Steiner in a match in 1931 without the loss of a game.

Still other members included Dr. Albert Pulvermacher, the highly regarded German music critic; Dr. Ely Moschkowitz, who along with his brother, headed the cardiac department at the world famous Mount Sinai Hospital; Arthur Meyer, who gained fame for settling numerous New York labor problems as head of the State Labor Mediation Board, and his brother Leonard Meyer, who headed the long-gone Usona Shirt Company and who once served as president of the Manhattan. On one occasion in January 1938, this very strong amateur also took the shirt right off the back of Emanuel Lasker:

*Emanuel Lasker vs. Leonard Meyer, James Newman, and Robert Willman*

*New York, 1938 (Consultation Simultaneous)*

*Four Knights Opening*


From the world of high finance came the likes of Howard Hoit of the Wall Street firm of Hoit, Rose & Troster. During the Great Depression, Howard gave employment to many of our top players. He was also an enthusiast of the Kingside attack who could beat anyone on a good night.

Paul Little—Howard Hoit
New York, 1941

Nimzoindian Defense


19. ... NxB!
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top masters—the kind of talent he evidenced when employing a combinational theme that the Germans call a nette Doppelwendung.

Howard Hoit—Anonymous
Manhattan Chess Club, 1938

White to move

Howard played 1. Q-K3!, and after Black responded with 1. ... RxP, he replied with the amazing move, 2. QxPch!!!. Black is busted. If 2. ... RxQ, then White wins a piece with 3. RxQch; and if 2. ... KxQ, White finishes with 3. RxRch QxR 4. N-B5ch.


Another Manhattan chess angel was Maurice Wertheim, banker and philanthropist extraordinaire, who served on the War Production Board during World War II as a dollar-a-year man. Investment bankers Jacques Coe, Sidney Kenton and Richard Warburg were also members—as was J. Lessing Rosenwald, chess patron and sponsor of the famous Rosenwald tournaments of the 1950s and 1960s. These competitions served as the U.S. championships of those years.

Four additional luminaries were James Newman, a lawyer, author, mathematician and armaments specialist, who went to Washington in the 1940s to assist in the war effort; E. Schuyler Jackson, a rich amateur who played tournament chess for about 60 years; and the brothers Robert and Rudolph Raubitschek who hit pay dirt in real estate.

No roster of great Manhattanites would be complete without mentioning Henry Atlas, an immigrant from Hungary, who really was kinder and gentler and who never failed to help struggling chess players seeking him out at his cotton emporium. And how many readers remember Felix Kahn of the famous steel family? In a fit of depression after losing a fortune in the Great Crash, Felix jumped from his penthouse at the Majestic Apartments, though not before treating his fellow club members to a great farewell party the previous night. Felix was ever a gent of the beau geste.
Tea Drinkers, Knee Slappers

The Manhattan Chess Club was not merely an intellectual oasis for the rich and famous; it was also a great joint for meeting odd characters. Tea drinkers, knee slappers, Vichy water quaffers, nonagenarian kibitzers, amiable “customers”—the place was filled with fascinating people ranging from the chablis and brie set to the rib and bib bunch to the down and out crowd.

Once I was paired against the master, Alex Simchow, a chain tea drinker. Now, that in itself would not have been so bad. But every time he took a sip, up went his glasses to the top of his head and down went his fingers into a box of sugar cubes, which he placed between his teeth so that the tea would sluice through the sugar on the way to his stomach. After each gulp would come a very soft, satisfied “aah-ah.” It took all of my will power to keep my eyes off this beautifully coordinated operation, which Alex had down to a “T.”

Another piece of good luck was to match wits against a knee slapper, always an interesting breed of chess player. Arthur Lamport, a successful banker, came to the club nearly every afternoon. A most charming man, he sported perfectly coiffed white curls on both sides of a well-oiled scalp. Although Arthur received Knight odds, he was, as the saying goes, a “good customer,” since he invariably lost at 25 cents a game.

Lamport was, however, a tough fighter, and in his excitement at trying to win, he would start slapping his ample thighs with his carefully manicured hands. Slapa-slapa-slapa-slapa-slapa—his hands and thighs would soon be reverberating like a riveting gun throughout the club. When one of the members approached, Arthur invariably stopped and said, “I know, I know!”, before the complainant could utter a word. Fifteen minutes later, the slapa-slapa-slapa-slapa-slapa would start all over again.

Howard Chandler, another outstanding customer, did not use his knee as a pogo stick. This sophisticated man was addicted to Vichy water. He usually came to the club with at least two quarts of the liquid. We played even up for quarters, though I could easily have given him odds. After finishing off a bottle of Vichy, he would let loose with tremendous pear-shaped burps that could have been heard across Yankee Stadium. Following each burp, he smiled and winked at me as if we were sharing some secret. Years later, he confided that Vichy quaffing was his remedy for a weekend of overindulgence.

Any director casting a movie about the Gold Rush of ’49 could have used Old Man Zeckendorf, the Manhattan’s nonagenarian
kibitzer and proud member of the Grand Lodge of the State of New York. Having once won a chess game from Confederate General James Longstreet, this crusty sourdough from the Southwest was a huge man with a head of tousled white hair and plenty of nose and chin. His massive shoulders were stooped, but only slightly and certainly not badly for a man of 90-plus.

Louis Zeckendorf's main ambition was to live to 100, which he failed to fulfill by less than one month, dying in March 1937. He seldom played. His great joy was to bet a quarter on me, sit quietly at the side of the playing table, his huge hands folded over a cane, and watch thoughtfully as the game progressed. When my opponent was about to lose, this Civil War veteran would let out a whoop of delight by announcing, "Busted!", while simultaneously holding out a hand to collect. Of course, he was none too pleased when I lost.

In all the years that Old Man Z. came to the club, I never heard him say anything except "Busted!" Which leads me to wonder if that's what he said when his valet and chauffeur made off with his bond coupons.

And while on the subject of getting busted, I am reminded of the handsome Swede, Buster Horneman, who made a mint in export and import. This amiable amateur would have gladly sold his soul to win just one Rook odds game against Isaac Kashdan. At $10 a game, this mania must have cost him thousands, but he never quit trying. Here is one of their immortal contests in which White removes his Queen Rook.

Isaac Kashdan–Buster Horneman
Manhattan Chess Club, 1930
French Defense


"Busted!"—as Old Man Z. said so often.

14. ... PxB
15. Q-N6ch!! PxQ 16. N-N7, mate

Brilliant masters, famous artists, captains of industry, magnates of Wall Street, life's losers—they were all men of the Manhattan. They made the club great.

Thanks, gentlemen, for the memories.

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financial generosity made this memoir possible.

Finally, a word about the narrative. It is written in the first person from the point of view of Grandmaster Denker even though Larry Parr is the co-author.

Arnold Denker and Larry Parr
New York City
June 15, 1995
I

Men of the Manhattan
Chapter I

Albert Pinkus: The Indiana Jones of Chess

A second later, I was up in panic, heart pounding, eyes staring fearfully into the blackness around. Something was in the hammock with me: some “thing” that crawled. A snake! What else of that size crawled? Any second I expected the strike—it was as if I could feel the creeping numbness, the pain and writhings. I waited, tormented by a frantic mind feeding on its own fears. But nothing happened, and painful seconds lengthened to the proverbial minute of eternity.

And yet it waited. Why? Was it all really a dream? Just a tenderfoot's nightmare? Maybe I had imbibed too freely of jungle-book mystery and stealthy blackness. I became bolder. My hand stole cautiously to the tickling spot, inch by inch. But halfway to its objective, it paused. Strained nerves resisted further progress, and its newfound daring withered under the logic of possibility. There was just a chance, an outside chance, that something was there....

—A Lost World Beckons by Albert Pinkus and Milton Pauley

Albert Pinkus—young American Tal of the 1920s, powerful kingpin of both the Manhattan and Marshall chess clubs, eventual owner of the seventh best won-lost record in U.S. Championship history, intrepid jungle explorer better remembered at New York's Museum of Natural History than by the chess world, and the man whom I call the Indiana Jones of Chess—was spending his first night in the jungles of British Guiana.

The year was 1932. And Al was out to win fame and glory in the darkest regions of South America—in places with lazy, muddy rivers and ill-shaven soldiers of fortune who wear white suits and Panama hats, and who travel on tramp steamers into desolate green hells. Al's mission was to Bring 'Em Back Alive, as in the title of Frank Buck's hit movie of the same year. The "'Em" were rare plants and animals for museums, botanical gardens, zoos and the private
collections of men with the means to pay.

Short, serious and soft-spoken, Al was not a head-turner. His dark, broad and flat Slavic face was as square as a block of granite and looked a lot like the map of current Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Most people probably mistook Al for a conservative, buttoned-down businessman with a penchant for three-piece pin-stripes. Any movie director seeking someone to play a shoe salesman would have cast Al on the spot.

But I knew better. Al was not an accidental tourist in the tropics but a man in whom celestial fire burned. Its flames shot up in his eyes and glinted off his wide, toothy smile. Possessed of what a *New York Times* reporter termed “a quick, sure manner of speech,” Al was described in Raymond Ditmars and William Bridges’ *Snake-Hunters’ Holiday* (1935) as a “solidly built young fellow, muscled like a prizefighter and a demon of energy.”

That got it just right.

**Boy with a Butterfly Net**

Born March 20, 1903, Al Pinkus grew up in a small, third-floor walk-up on West 82nd between Amsterdam and Broadway. A tough neighborhood in those days! Al and his brother Milton found that the price for being budding Tom Swifts interested in chemistry, ham radios and natural science was having to defend themselves against neighborhood toughs.

“I endured the special attention of gangs of hoodlums who fancied any boy with a butterfly net delicious bait,” Al wrote in the autobiographical *A Lost World Beckons*. “We fought with fists, fairly, no chains, clubs, or belts. Never was there two or three against one, and pairings usually gravitated to contenders of equal age and weight. In all justice, our opponents were ‘rough gentlemen,’ though greedy for our subservience.”

Al became an Eagle Scout in 1917, and his early interest in natural science blossomed into deep study. He compiled a notable butterfly collection and was featured in a two-page spread in the old *New York World*. “My mecca,” he wrote, “was the Museum of Natural History, a few convenient blocks from home; the curators there were my heroes. They spun tales of exciting incidents in strange lands with the enviable ease of those who have seen all—my impressionable eyes widening with wonder.”

“Eyes widening with wonder”—that was the man I knew.
Like a Mike Tyson Uppercut

On April 27, 1924, the young and unknown Pinkus sat down to play against Alexander Alekhine in a 26-board blindfold simultaneous. The exhibition, a record-breaking affair, was held shortly following the famous New York International, and Al won his game from the great man as did another unknown, Isaac Kashdan.

The following year, Al came into his own. Indeed, he hit the New York chess scene like a Mike Tyson uppercut. Not only did he sacrifice chess pieces like the young Tal, he won every tournament in sight. From 1925 to 1928, Pinkus outpaced all of the peers in his age group, including Kashdan, Al Horowitz, Sammy Reshevsky, Tony Santasiere and Herman Steiner.

Consider Al's record. In October 1925, he won one of Eddie Dimock's theme tournaments, a particularly strong event played to test the Moller Attack in the Giuoco Piano. He finished ahead of Frank Marshall, Carlos Torre, Santasiere and Steiner. In December came the Albert Hallgarten Tournament in which he scored 9½-2½ to outstrip Kashdan and Steiner. In early 1926, he tallied 4½-1½ to tie with Marshall for top spot in another Dimock event, winning several Wing Gambits in scorching style.

Albert Pinkus—Anthony Santasiere
Dimock Theme Tournament, 1926

Sicilian Defense


At about this point, I always like to quote what John Adams once wrote to Thomas Jefferson: "Our last resource is resignation."
Al became champion of the Marshall Chess Club in 1927, a success that he followed by winning the prestigious Young Masters' Tournament of the same year. He scored 7–3 to finish in front of Kashdan, Santasiere, Erling Tholfsen and other comers.

After which...nothing. Tournament appearances became scarce, and in early 1928, Al tallied an inexplicable 0–6 in a double-round quad in New York. He would not play seriously again until 1939! Here is a power game from his first life in chess, for which he received the Best Game Prize:

Albert Pinkus–Isaac Kashdan
Manhattan C.C. Championship, 1928
Queen's Indian Defense


Street Smarts

Al left chess for a new game, the dizzying lunacy of 1920s Wall Street. Hired by Howard Hoit, a strong club player who was chairman of Hoit, Rose & Troster, Al quickly became the firm's youngest junior partner and, according to Al Horowitz, made $60,000 in 1929. In today's debased dollars, that translates to a cool half mil or more. Not bad—and better than the likes of Kashdan and Horowitz, who worked at the same company. Pinkus had what the boys called "Street smarts."

But then came Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929, a disaster
described by John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Great Crash* as not only "the most devastating day in the history of the New York stock market," but also as "the most devastating day in the history of markets." Share values of some issues plunged from $60 to three dollars—just like that. Brokers with margin calls sticking out of their suit pockets were fished from the Hudson River and quite literally scraped off Wall Street, which became known as "Wailing Wall Street."

Al got caught up in the horror. As a junior partner, he had to help make good the firm's losses, which left him broke and deeply depressed. For the first and probably last time, chess masters employed at the stock market went back to chess in order to make a living. "I returned to chess," Al Horowitz once said about leaving the exchange in 1932, "on the theory that I could win a quarter a game and that a quarter could buy a meal."

As for Pinkus, he took a vacation to British Guiana in early 1932, ostensibly to catch butterflies for New York's Museum of Natural History, but in truth to escape from Wall Street. When the butterfly dodge fizzled, he stayed on to form a business partnership with one Plantagenet Lechmere Guppy, who was the son of the man for whom tiny minnows are named. P.L., as he was called, ran an outfit that supplied rare and expensive fish to the highly successful Empire Tropical Fish Import Company in New York City.

Wrote Al, "What did I know about catching tropical fish? Nothing! But with my pocketbook skinny and my eyes peeled for pay-the-way adventures, I jumped at the chance to become Guppy's partner. Seemingly, fish fanciers had taken the bait and were glad to be hooked, even for fancy prices, and so I agreed to 'bring 'em back alive'—delivery, price, and payment in New York City." Al also contracted to provide snakes and lizards to the Bronx Zoo.

Thus did Al's career as a scientific soldier of fortune begin—and his life as a chess master nearly end. Over the next eight years, Al played in one or two Metropolitan League matches, competed in a couple of Manhattan Chess Club championships and, according to the *British Chess Magazine*, conducted a simultaneous exhibition at the Royal Victoria Institute in Trinidad. That's all.

One of Al's last games from his first career in chess was the following win over Alekhine from a nine-board clock exhibition in which the world champion scored an extraordinary +6 –1 =2 against several of this country's top masters:

**Danger Was Al’s Business**

In his standoff with the “thing” that was no longer moving, Al Pinkus had become immobilized by fear. Sweat rolled from his face, and he labored at breathing air thicker and wetter than any he had known before.

“Whereupon,” wrote Pinkus, “something long and quivery slid across my bare ankle. I jumped, my tensed body a released spring, hitting the wooden floor with a most-painful jar. Madly, I flung off the tangle of netting and raced blindly for the door; instead, my shoulder struck brutally against a wall, sending me sprawling backward to the floor. Groggily, I rose and fled in the opposite direction until my knee stabbed suddenly into something hard and sharp—the pain excruciating! I groped in agony for the aching joint, but instead found the trunk that I hazily recalled was near the door, and I flew straight ahead through a gray-black opening...into the arms of a man, knocking him down.”

The man, Al’s host, was a local missionary named Archer, who then helped our hero search for the “thing,” which turned out to be a foot-long black centipede. “As it scurried on a thousand synchronized legs for the safety of some dark niche,” Al wrote of the deadly insect, “I took aim and threw a shoe, luckily hitting the mark, the ‘thing’s’ remains spattering in a quivering, loathsome muddle of blood and legs.”

Danger was Al’s business. It was a business that included a midnight battle on a jungle trail against the red-eyed, lethal **fer-de-lance**; several hours up a **Mora** tree as hostage from a phalanx of
angry wild pigs just a few feet below; and even a stint as a “general”
directing members of one of his expeditions in a desperate battle
against Brazilian bandits. About which, more anon.

Of course, there were lighter moments—such as the time that Al
arrived in New York with a vast collection of animals for the Saint
Louis and Bronx zoos, but found himself left with an extra giant
anteater and two 20-foot anacondas. Al never tired of telling how he
inveigled a taxi driver to deliver both him and the tropical animals
to his mother’s home, where he hid the creatures in her warm cellar.

And while on the topic of animals, Al would return every year
from the jungles and regale us with hilarious tales about Boswell, a
pet monkey that followed him everywhere. My wife Nina was
charmed by the stories, and during a car trip up north to play in the
1939 New York State Championship, Al promised to bring us back a
monkey from his next journey.

We chess players know that the threat is often worse than the
execution, and for months, I worried that he might actually keep
the promise.

Into “The Lost World”

On September 6, 1938, Al left Georgetown, British Guiana, on the
trip of his life, a six-month expedition to Mount Roraima. Located
along the borders of Venezuela, Brazil and British Guiana, this
nearly inaccessible peak was made famous by Sir Arthur Conan
Doyle in The Lost World and by Hollywood in countless movies as
the home of 65-foot brontosaurus and other beasts a la Jurassic
Park. In reality, the 9,100-foot, red-sandstone table mountain with
its 25-square mile plateau contains a power far mightier than a
thousand prehistoric monsters, for it is the source of the Amazon,
Essequibo and Orinoco rivers.

Al was leader and sole financial backer of a 200-man force, which
was called the “Pinkus-Peberdy Expedition into the Lost World”
(Paul S. Peberdy was the curator of the British Guiana Museum).
Al’s goal in this, his 10th and final foray for flora and fauna, was to
become only the 13th white man to scale Mt. Roraima. For six
months, as the New York Times put it, he “hacked his way through
brush and swamp to collect rare specimens of birds and animals.”

Picking off birds was a specialty of the aborigines. “Experts with
bamboo blow-pipes,” wrote the Times, “the natives would creep
within 10 feet of a sitting bird and with a short, noiseless puff lodge
a dart in its breast.” Al, too, became adept with a blow-pipe, though
I don’t recall my friend ever skewering a sitting chess opponent.
Conditions on the trek were tough. An expedition member moaned, "Nowhere else have I ever seen published an official report of the temperature in the sun, but yesterday it was 156 degrees." As for food, Al loved the "particularly fine meat" of the Laba. "It is a rodent," he wrote, "perhaps the world's largest rat, as big as a small pig. There is a saying that if you eat Laba and drink swamp water, then you will always return to British Guiana."

Or never leave it.

In an old letter on yellowing, parchment-like paper, Al described his Christmas dinner of 1938 in The Lost World. "It consisted," Al scratched in his small, pinched script, "of Breast of Marudi and Wild Pigeon, cooked in cassate (a dark brown sauce made from the poisonous juice of the cassava), raw fried potatoes, rice yams, gravy, N.Y. coffee, yellow crystal sugar and grapefruit." Al further noted that the food was "seasoned" by droppings from diving vampire bats.

No one ever said that being the Indiana Jones of Chess was a lark.

On November 16, after 10 weeks of collecting samples, the Pinkus-Peberdy Expedition reached the cliffs surrounding Mt. Roraima's plateau. "Adjectives," Al wrote of the plateau, "pale before its smooth, perpendicular purple sides, which spout 24 cascading 1,000-foot-high waterfalls that are like open faucets of a bathtub. It was as if a gargantuan hand were squeezing a wet sponge. The roar, even from four miles away, was insistent and pervading. It seemed alive, pulsing, this mountain—certainly not inanimate, truly the Indians' 'Water of Waters."

The expedition to The Lost World made it back to this world—or, if you will, to Georgetown—on March 3, 1939. It became a legendary success. "The material collected," reported the Georgetown Daily Argosy, "numbers over 7,000 specimens of birds, plants, insects, fishes, reptiles, batrachians and land and fresh water mollusca." From this huge collection, Al sent some 700 birds to the University of Michigan and about 300 rare or new flower species (a total of 3,000 specimens) to New York's Botanical Gardens. Hundreds of the more marketable monkeys, sloths, snakes and so on were sold to animal dealers.

After eight years spent slogging through steaming jungles, Al had finally scaled the heights of a profession that he called "scientific adventure." One of his discoveries, a hitherto unknown rubber tree, was named Vochysia pinkusii. A nearly transparent fish with red eyes that Al found in an isolated mountain pool was dubbed the Pinkusis by curators at the Museum of Natural History.

But before all of this fame and glory came a...
Firefight at Night

Having assembled thousands of the above-mentioned specimens, Al needed to pack them back to civilization. Leaving Mt. Roraima on January 22, he set out at the head of a line of march that stretched for miles.

“Not surprisingly,” Al wrote of the six-week, 350-mile return journey to Georgetown, “our pace quickened once the expedition’s feet were pointed homeward. We were already imagining the acclaim of a breathless, waiting world. Indeed, had we not conquered Roraima and left evidence—names and dates of our visit in a stone-protected bottled cache on its peak? We were travelling an easy downhill course, from approximately 9,000 to 2,000 feet.

“But I resisted being caught up in the euphoria. Why? Because we were being followed!!”

The attack on Al’s group came three hours before dawn. Thanks to an agreement signed in advance by the major members of the expedition, Al was the unquestioned leader. His orders were law, and he now worked out a strategy worthy of any general.

“About 3 a.m.,” he wrote, “we heard ominous noises: shrill whistling warnings first from our alert Acawoio Indian scouts, then three quick shots in rapid succession. We jumped up like released springs, weapons of all kinds cocked.

“Everyone glanced in my direction, and I made a quick decision. Rounding up all but a handful of men, I gambled on a frontal attack, not crediting the enemy with a deceptive flanking maneuver; but just in case, I left behind Peberdy and a handful of braves as reserves.

“Quickly instructing my braves to shout at the top of their lungs and to shoot into the air, 25 of us streaked forward shouting like banshees. But we encountered only the sound of barely audible retreating feet. I yelled ‘Back, back,’ pointing toward camp, still concerned about the maneuver being a diversion. I had some difficulty with the more impetuous youngsters. However, they soon saw my reasoning—that it was not cowardice—and followed the orders.

“At camp, our reserves came out of their strategic hiding spots with disappointed faces showing in the wet, gray-streaked dawn.”

New Zion in the Tropics

Shortly after returning from The Lost World, Al became involved through brother Milton in a little-known American effort to create a
haven for fleeing European Jews in the wilderness of British Guiana.

In response to a British offer to donate 42,000 square miles of largely unexplored territory, President Franklin Roosevelt established the British Guiana Commission to the Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. The Commission, using funds provided by Anthony de Rothschild, was to conduct feasibility studies for what I call a New Zion in the Tropics.

At this point, enter Al. The Commission needed to address in detail the suitability of the proffered territory for European settlement, which meant studying the agriculture, natural resources, transportation and climate of the area. As an Old Guiana Hand, Al was contacted by Dr. Joseph Rosen, the Commission’s agricultural expert. “We have had many friendly talks,” Al wrote to his brother on April 6, 1939. “Unofficially, I’m sure the Jews are coming here, but Rosen can tell you more about it. He says that he feels too old now to do the field work, so I guess he will give way to younger men. The plan will be to settle experimental groups (500–1,000) in various places and let them explore the country for the best sites.”

Continued Al, “I am seeing many pitiful sights of Jews going down to French Guiana from here. So far, 14 have come thru, but I’m afraid the plan is a failure. The men are working on a sugar estate for 15 francs a day (45 cents) which hardly can pay for food, and the place is malarial, so in case of sickness they are goners. We have been helping out some refugees who come here. One former diamond polisher got an overseer’s job on an estate. Salary, $33 a month and all expenses paid. I don’t think I ever saw a happier man after we got him the job.”

In May 1939, the Commission submitted its report, which concluded that the territory “undoubtedly possesses potential possibilities that would fully justify the carrying out of a trial settlement project on a substantial...scale.” But the start of World War II four months later ended Jewish emigration from Europe.

**His Second Career in Chess**

By July 1939, Al was in New York selling off his huge collection of flora and fauna. Celebrated in the *New York Times* as the “Ex-Broker Back from Exploring Conan Doyle’s ‘Lost World’” and touted in several newspapers as “that one man in a million who is doing just what he wants to do,” Al planned a new, still more ambitious expedition. “In September,” Al told a *Times* reporter, “I set out for a completely uncharted territory in Central British Guiana. I’m going straight to the Merema Mountain range, and I hope to find even rarer birds and beasts than any I’ve found so far.”
Al never made it. His plans, like the hopes for New Zion, were demolished when Hitler's artillery began pounding Poland on September 1, 1939. In 1940 Al married the former Sereta Tessler, and during World War II, he worked for Lummis, Inc. as a bridge draftsman. In 1945 he returned to Wall Street as a trader of insurance stocks.

Al launched his second career in chess at the 1939 U.S. Open, where in the words of Chess Review, he “made an auspicious re-entry into top-flight tourney play after an absence of many years.” Finishing fourth, he came close to upsetting Reshevsky.

Al Pinkus–Samuel Reshevsky
U.S. Open, 1939
Ruy Lopez


Oversight or provocation? The correct move is 19. ... B-N3.


Santasiere claimed 27. Q-K4?? as a winning try, but he overlooked 27. ... QxB!.

27. ... K-N1 28. NxB NxB 29. K-B1 N-B3 30. RxN R-Q1 

Black draws by squeezing out every drop of counterplay.


White needed to try 36. RxNP.

Further successes followed. Most notably, Al scored very well in four U.S. championships, finishing 4th–5th in 1940, 3rd–4th in 1942, fifth in 1944 and eighth in 1946. His overall record of +35-16=26 is the seventh best in U.S. Championship history. Other successes included winning the Manhattan Chess Club championships of 1941 and 1945. In the latter event, he scored 10-2 to finish ahead of both Kashdan and myself. In August 1946, he won a strong training tournament with a field that included several members of a U.S. national team that met a Soviet squad the following month.

"Le Style est L'Homme Meme"

Never was Georges Buffon's insight that "the style is the man" more true than in the case of Al Pinkus. As a young man, my friend was distinguished by fast speech and unbridled confidence, just as in turn he distinguished himself by derring-do as a stock trader and attacking master. In middle-age, he mellowed noticeably and signed a peace treaty with his earlier ambition, just as in turn this family man began to perform solidly rather than brilliantly as a stock trader and positional master.

For a long time, I blamed the hard winds of life for the apparent dimming of Al's candle—a conventional and probably shallow explanation. You see, Al was by nature and design a Great White Hunter, who was a fish out of water when selling securities and playing chess spare-time in New York. If in the jungle, as Al wrote, "strict adherence to a credo that leaves nothing to chance, unless very calculated" means "staying alive," then the requirements of competition in civil society or over the chess board are far different. Paradoxically, bold adventurers battling nature must exercise supreme caution, while businessmen and chess masters battling the competition must speculate if they are to accumulate.

What saved Al from becoming a chess drone was that along with caution, he also brought to our art a scientist's passion for truth. A session of chess analysis can reveal a lot about a person's character because all pretense is cast aside; and Al, like the philosophers of old who poked through history in futile attempts to explain it, analyzed his beloved Ruy Lopez and other openings to reach firmly grounded conclusions, not to score points. I will never forget the little smile that always lit up his face when after digging deeper and deeper into a position, he finally hit paydirt.

During the 1940s, Al and I became good friends—and rivals. I soon discovered that the outcome of a given game, no matter how important, meant less to him than holding the game up to the light and turning it this way and that during the post-mortem. Take, for example, our game in the 1946 Manhattan Chess Club Champion-
ship, which deprived him of the title and garnered me the brilliancy prize.

On my 10th move, I offered a pawn for no immediate advantage other than rapid development and control of the board. Many masters would have passed on the pawn. But not Al the Scientist, who cheerfully entered into my proposed experiment. After he moved, I noticed that he wrote something on his score sheet. When he left the table, I leaned over to read two words typical of Pinkus: “Show me.” I made my next couple of moves, picked up his score sheet and added the words: “Don’t worry, I will.” We were like two scientists politely disagreeing about the merits of a new discovery.

Arnold Denker–Albert Pinkus
Manhattan C.C. Championship, 1946
Queen’s Gambit Declined


Here’s the pawn sac—a novelty at the time.

10. ... P×P 11. P×P

11. ... N×P

Following this move, Al penned, “Show me.”

12. 0-0! N-B3


And here I wrote, “Don’t worry, I will.” But to be fair to Al, who often lost to me because of a scientific chivalry more practical in a laboratory than in a chess game played under a time limit, here is a superb rapid transit effort in which he batters me brilliantly: Pinkus–Denker (New York, 1948): 1. P-K4 P-QB4 2. N-KB3 N-QB3


I could have won a piece with the routine 19. QxP N-N5 20. B-Q4 Q-B2 21. P-R3, but I discarded the variation in an attempt to create a more artistic finish. A dangerous luxury, though this time around, I got away with it.


If Al's determination to follow the truth occasionally hindered him in over-the-board competition, he could still topple the mighty. At his best, Al played with the disciplined vigor of Bobby Fischer, essaying well-prepared openings and evaluating an advantage with straightforward positional maneuvers and tactics. Many of his wins were model games, and to plagiarize Irving Chernev, he was often "the life of the partie":

Reuben Fine–Albert Pinkus
Marshall vs. Manhattan, Metropolitan League Match, 1941
Queen's Gambit Declined


Nowadays, the preferred move is 5. N-QB3, followed by P-K4.


The move, 14. B-N5, which threatens NxN and BxN followed by R-B1, strikes me as much stronger.

14. ... B-Q3 15. R-B1
Fine is having an off day. He delays too long in playing NxN, with the idea of a further B-N5.


White is swimming. More to the point is either 20. B-R3 or 20. N-Q3.

20. ... P-KB4!

Excellent. Black challenges the center and threatens to open the Bishop file for his Rook.


The threat is ... QPxP, followed by ... QxP.

26. PxBP NxB 27. N-K5 Q-Q3 28. Q-B3 QR-K1


29. P-B4 PxB 30. RxB?

White's last chance was 30. PxP, though it opens his King to attack.

30. ... N-K3 31. R-B2 K-N1!

AI was nothing if not thoroughly careful. He guards against such eventualities as 31. ... N/6xP? 32. RxN/Q4 QxN 33. R/K4-B4 P-Q5 34. Q-B2 or 31. ... N/4xQP 32. N-B7ch RxN 33. RxR. In the latter line, Black cannot play ... N-K7ch because of the pin.

32. B-R3 N/3xP 33. R/1xN NxB 34. RxRch KxB 35. N-Q7ch QxN!

After this fine move, planned long in advance, Black has only a bit of mopping up to do.


Bogus generosity based on having counted out the ending.


picks up both pawns and wins easily.

**Old-Fashioned Sense of the Fitting**

If someone were to ask me what set Al apart from other men I knew, I would cite a trait that remained unchanged throughout his life: An old-fashioned sense of the fitting. I'm not talking about his even-tempered behavior or his invariable grace in defeat. Not at all. I'm talking about his practice of precisely tailoring personal conduct to fit the demands of a situation.

Typical of the man was a little incident near the end of a speed tournament at the Marshall Chess Club in which Al did very well. His son Larry remembers wanting to hang around to savor his father's success and to milk the glorious day for still more fun. But Al said quietly, “Larry, we had our fun, so let's go home”—an example of voluntary self-restraint, a quality on this society's endangered species list. You see, Al knew that a person can get too much of a good thing. Even too much fun. Perhaps that's why I never met anyone who derived more genuine enjoyment from the fun that he did have. “Mirthful” is a word not often used these days, but it perfectly describes Al’s laugh.

Al's great joy and gentleman's obsession was to remove the bindings from rare tournament books and rebind them with the most beautiful gilt covers to be found outside of a medieval monastery. Trips to his home were a treat because we always got around to examining the books and opening them to play over some classic games. The last time I visited him, he had already bound hundreds of books which formed one of the finest libraries in the world.

In today's market this collection would be priceless, and I often wonder what happened to it.

**His Final Years**

During the 1950s, Al continued to play in Manhattan Chess Club championships, though these appearances became less frequent. His final year in chess, so far as I have been able to determine, was 1973, when he competed in the World Open. Here is a game he won in the Greater New York Open of that year.

*Michael Rohde—Albert Pinkus*  
*Greater New York Open, 1973*  
*Ruy Lopez*

Chapter I


The problem with 30. K-N3 is 30. ... Q-R5, mate.

30. ... N-K6dis.ch. 31. K-B3 NxRch 32. RxN RxR 33. QxR Q-B5ch, White resigns

On February 4, 1984, Al Pinkus died from Alzheimer’s Disease at Wyckoff Heights Hospital in Brooklyn. His son Larry says that the disease ground him down inexorably and that he eventually had difficulty remembering to punch his chess clock after moving.

That’s hard to believe about my friend—the young “demon of energy” who was “muscled like a prizefighter.” Yet I must believe it. For so many of the great men of chess I once admired and even loved—Alexander Alekhine, Edward Lasker, dear sweet Oscar Tenner—are gone.

And time, that relentless enemy of remembrance, insatiably drains tangibility from their memory. In the Biblical phrase, the places that knew them shall know them no more; and they, who once seemed so alive and distinct, grow distant and become blurred in the mind’s eye like figures stepping backwards into a mist.

Selected Games

Albert Pinkus: The Master Who Loved Fish

Several of the games in this section appear here either for the first time in print or for the first time beyond the confines of newspaper columns.


Chapter I

33


ALBERT PINKUS–AL SIMONSON (U.S. Championship, 1940): 1. P-K4 P-K4
Q-Q4 NxB 13. N/2xN (These days, 13. NxB is considered to be a bit
better) 13. ... Q-Q2 14. NxB QxN 15. B-K3 Q-B5?! (Reuben Fine later
played the correct 15. ... B-KB4!) 16. Q-Q2 Q-KR5 17. P-KB4 KR-Q1?! 18. P-
33. P-KR3 Q-N3 34. K-R2 P-R3 35. Q-B4 R-KN1 36. R-N3 QxRch 37. QxQ
P-N5 43. PxP PxP 44. P-N4 B-K3 45. K-Q6 P-R4 46. PxPch KxP 47. K-K7 K-
N3 48. N-Q6 B-Q4 49. P-R4 B-N6 50. NxB! Black resigns "Of all the
American masters," wrote Anthony Santasiere when annotating this game,
"Pinkus has the greatest predilection for the Ruy Lopez." This direct and
forceful victory shows why.

ALBERT PINKUS–GEORGE SHAINSWIT (Ventnor City, 1942): 1. P-K4 P-
N-K5 R-B1 13. B-QN3 NxB?! (Questionable; Black ought to have tried either
13. ... N-QR4 or 13. ... N-QN5) 14. PxN N-K1 15. Q-N4 B-QB3 16. KR-
Q1 Q-R4 17. N-Q5! PxN (Forced, for if 17. ... B-Q1, White wins easily after
N-B4 26. P-B6 PxP 27. PxP NxB 28. Q-N5ch, Black resigns Pinkus won the
First Brillianty Prize for this game.

P-B3 B-B4 18. P-QN4 N-B5 19. N-B5 B-N5, White resigns In a larger sense, young
Winston's losing move was 4. N-N5. Pinkus was, after all, one of the all-time leading authorities on the Two Knights Defense. He published several articles on the opening in Chess Review, and Soviet players used his largely uncredited analyses to rewrite important chapters on Two Knights theory. His master-level opponent in this game later wrote to Pinkus, "Apparently, you are still somewhat ahead of the latest theory on the Two
Knights."
Chapter II

Death Be not Proud of Dreams Destroyed

If I were to tell you that a young man's father was an alcoholic who late one night walked off a pier and drowned and that his uneducated mother scrubbed floors and cleaned offices to pay the rent for an ugly little flat in Hell's Kitchen, what would you rate that man's chances in our society?

Right, but as a rare flower may flourish in the desert, so genius sometimes seems to grow in the most barren of soils. For such was the background of Donald MacMurray, the greatest genius whom I ever knew and the possessor of the highest I.Q. recorded in America up to the time of the early 1930s. To this day—50-plus years later—no one has equalled his record of earning a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Chicago and a law degree at prestigious Columbia. Oh, yes, he completed the first degree in 8½ months and the second in a single year!

Donald and I met in our early teens under most unusual circumstances; and that we would later become close friends after a rocky start was even more remarkable. Mac was captain of the De Witt Clinton High School chess team, while I served as captain of Theodore Roosevelt. Both of us were finalists in the New York City Individual Championship, and as luck would have it, our game decided the winner. As White, I was up a piece in a winning position when he played ... P-KN4, attacking my Knight on KB4. As I reached to move the Knight, I inadvertently knocked over my King on KN1. Whereupon, Mac explained to referee Hermann Helms that my lapse could only mean that I was resigning or that I planned to move my King. But the ref, who was known as the Grand Old Man of American Chess, ruled in my favor at once. And Mac resigned.

Later, as we left the Marshall Chess Club together, he explained that even this last variation had not been good enough, though he felt it had been worth a try. As the years passed, we met many times at the Manhattan Chess Club where we were junior members. We played a lot of chess together and even teamed up with two
others to hold Alexander Alekhine to a draw in the world champion's famous simultaneous exhibition on election day, November 8, 1932, at the old Seventh Regiment Armory. The game and an account of the exhibition appear elsewhere in the chapter on Alekhine.

Mac also played another chess immortal, Jose Capablanca, who conducted an exhibition along the same lines as Alekhine's a year earlier at the Armory. The great Cuban seemed to start out well in the game, but Mac and a young Reuben Fine showed some fine endgame technique. Defeating Capablanca was always a notable feat.

Jose Capablanca vs. Donald MacMurray, Reuben Fine et alia
New York Armory Exhibition, 1931
Queen's Gambit Declined


Black falls into an opening trap. We were all strong players, but opening literature was virtually inaccessible back in the early 1930s.

7. BPxP BPxP

Black can do better with 7. ... NxP.


At this point, White is simply winning.


Pointless and ultimately dangerous. The correct plan is 18. K-B1, followed by K-K2 and R-Q2.


22. ... B-N2 23. N-Q4?

Losing still more time. Capablanca was obviously temporizing, hoping to finish off a few more of the 50 simultaneous teams before deciding on what to do next in this "easily won" endgame.


White has an extra pawn in a pared-down endgame, but Black has what looks like an extra King and a winning position!
Chapter II


GM Fine breaks off the game at this point, but several more moves were actually made. Indeed, it is amazing to watch the great Capablanca play on in an utterly lost position.


**Yidel mit dem Fiedel**

Mac and I soon became inseparable; we went all over together. Harrison Weil, one of the wags at the Manhattan, took to calling us “the Gold Dust Twins.” Certainly, my close proximity to a genius had a positive influence on my education. Thanks to “Meckele,” as Donald liked to be called, I learned many Yiddishisms which later came in handy. Mac was such an expert in the language that many took it for granted that he was an Irish Jew. But it was not the case. He used to frequent the Yiddish Theater and learned many Yiddish songs by heart. Once he won a five-dollar bet by proving that he could sing *Yidel mit dem Fiedel* without any coaching. Mac was so poor that he doubtlessly needed the money.

Imagine, therefore, everyone’s surprise when he showed up one day at the Manhattan Chess Club looking every bit the part of Lord Fauntleroy. It was wintertime, and he was wearing an expensive cloth coat with a wide mink collar. His shoes were covered with gray spats, and he smoked a cigarette through a long holder. The whole routine was so unlike him that it created quite a stir until he
explained that he had been legally adopted by the Hollingworths. Professor Harry Hollingworth was chairman of the Psychology Department at Columbia University, and his wife, Leta, held the same rank at Barnard. For them, Donald was a living experiment about which they would later write in their book, You and Heredity. From that day forward, I mostly called him "Pooritzl," which meant "little prince" in the Yiddish that he taught me.

The Best Years of His Life

From the autumn of 1935 to the summer of 1936, the brief period during which Mac completed his schooling at the University of Chicago, I got to see him only on vacations. Then, in June 1936, he came home and married the lovely Evelyn Ehrlich, his childhood sweetheart from the renowned Special Opportunity Class for gifted children at old P.S. 165 up on West 108th and Broadway.

The mid-1930s were the best and happiest years of Mac’s life, though some rather worrying bouts of nausea struck him on occasion. But they passed. And, after all, he was getting offers for his services from all over and being celebrated in New York Times headlines as the young genius who “established a new record for speed in obtaining [his] degree.” He also took pride in moving his mother, Florence, out of Hell’s Kitchen into decent digs at, if memory serves, 219 East 26th Street. The oyster of life appeared to be brimming with pearls.

By then I, too, had gotten married, and the four of us enjoyed some great times together. Mac had a marvelous sense of humor, and he could turn the most mundane activity into a memorable experience through the power of wit and imagination. What a great television evangelist he would have made. He could get people to do almost anything, and what’s more they did not resent doing it. One evening he wanted to go dancing or “stompin’,” as we used to say, at the Savoy Ballroom on Lenox Avenue up in Harlem. We were five couples, and only Mac was even slightly interested in such an expedition. Yet he convinced one and all that this would be a most unusual experience to be treasured for the rest of our lives.

And so it was: We all went, and we all had a great time.

Of course, doing anything with Mac was a delight. He had a rare gift for seeing things from oblique angles—a facility that extended to his original chess style. In the mid-1930s, he scored respectably in several Manhattan club championships, which were at that time stronger than many international tournaments. Among his victims were Isaac Kashdan, this writer (who also played a drawn match with him) and most of the other top American players. At the 1937
U.S. Open in Chicago, he shared third-fourth with George Treysman. Then, at the 1938 U.S. Open held during a sizzling July in Boston, Mac scored an equally hot 10½—½ in what was called the Consolation Masters’ section. In the prelims, he played a couple of bad games and failed to qualify for the Masters’ Final. But take a look at the havoc he created once he woke up. According to Harry Lyman, a master from Boston, Mac “set the room on fire” with this wonderfully baroque brilliancy against Weaver Adams:

Donald MacMurray–Weaver Adams  
U.S. Open, 1938  
English Opening


17. Q-KB1!!

Yes, Mac was a genius.


At the time, the following brilliant game created a sensation because everyone recognized that Caissa had a new genius worshipping at her altar. None of us dreamed then how quickly the goddess and her avatar would be parted.

Al Horowitz–Donald MacMurray  
Manhattan C.C. Championship, 1932-33  
Queen’s Pawn Game

40 The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories


The Summer of ’38

In August of Mac’s final summer, we went upstate with the wives to Cazenovia to play in the New York State Championship, a tournament that I won. The first evening at dinner Meckele complained of his old nausea and of stomach pains when laughing. No one gave it a thought until the next day at lunch when he had to leave the table. There was so much laughter that he could not control the pain. I then asked my good friend, the late Dr. Joseph Platz, who was also competing in the tournament, to examine Mac.

I will never forget what he told me that evening: “He has a cancer in his stomach as large as a grapefruit, and in such a young man it is the same as tossing a match into a dry wheat field.” A little more than three months later—on December 2, 1938, shortly following Mac’s 24th birthday—Dr. Platz’s sad prediction came true.

Mac did not give up on life until the very end. My wife, Nina, visited him almost daily at Doctors Hospital in New York City, and I also dropped by, though less frequently. To watch him waste away and to hear him discuss his bright plans for a destiny denied, was too heartbreaking.

Donald MacMurray never became a grandmaster, but had he lived, I am sure that he would have. He never practiced law, but at the time of his death, he was considering numerous offers. Like a falling star he came to light up our sky for a few moments and then to depart. Those of us fortunate enough to have known him came away rich in memories.

Selected Games

Donald MacMurray: Destiny Denied


Chapter III

Oscar Tenner: A Character if Ever There was One

The great Oscar Tenner was a fixture at the Manhattan Chess Club for close to 30 years. Everyone knew Oscar, and no out-of-towner ever left the club without leaving a small deposit for the pleasure of crossing swords with him. You won’t find Oscar mentioned in The Oxford Companion to Chess or other chess encyclopedias, but he was a memorable character if ever there was one.

In the “good old days”—sneer, if you must—when the club was at the Alamac Hotel on 71st and Broadway, Oscar arrived early each day and sat at “his” table, squinting at Die Stadtszeitung, his favorite newspaper. When someone once foolishly asked why he kept his glasses on his head while reading, he replied, “That way they reflect the newsprint better.” After one of these “witzén” or jokes, he would shake with laughter, displaying a number of missing teeth. That prompted Robert Willman, a many-time champion of the Manhattan, to call him Skeezeix, the famous cartoon child with but two front teeth.

Oscar was an expert on politics. He analyzed the news daily, and there was not an item on foreign affairs that he overlooked while waiting for his “customers” to arrive. “Wissen sie” (“Did you know that...”) would start every conversation, and then he would launch upon a lengthy spiel about the true meaning of the news as he saw it. Oscar missed his vocation. Had he been a bit more fluent in English, Gabriel Heatter, that great radio commentator of the 1930s and 1940s, might have wound up on the Bowery.

One thing was certain where Oscar was concerned. He feared no one. He had supreme confidence, the type that overcomes tragedy and performs miracles. Though he had lost to you a hundred times in a row, he was sure that he would win the next time. And if the game were blitz chess, then his self-assurance had some basis. Oscar played a very strong speed game. Take a look some time at the tournament table of the rapid transit event during the famous 1924 New York International. Oscar made it into the final group where he
tied for second, a point behind Jose Capablanca, whom he drew. He finished ahead of Geza Maroczy and Savielly Tartakower, both of whom he defeated. Here is a sample of Oscar’s form when playing chess at 10 seconds a move:

 Otis Field–Oscar Tenner
 New York, 1923
 Two Knights Defense


Not an ideal idea. Better is 10. P-B3.

10. ... 0-0 11. KN-Q2 B-KN5 12. Q-K1 Q-Q2 13. N-N3

Black’s 12th move was a novelty at the time, and White must respond to the challenge at 10 seconds a move. He might have lasted longer with 13. NxP NxN 14. QxN QR-K1 15. Q-B4 B-K7 16. R-K1 BxP.

13. ... B-B6 14. B-B4


14. ... Q-N5 15. B-N3 N-R4 16. NxN


16. ... N-B5 17. NxKP

And if 17. PxB, Black has the simple 17. ... Q-R6 18. BxN PxP. But now...

17. ... Q-R6!!, White resigns

Mate is unavoidable. Wrote Al Horowitz of this astonishing speed
game, “The spontaneous sacrifices are sound even under the scrutiny of discriminating analysis.”

“You Get Vun”

On occasion during the 1930s, when Oscar was short of customers, he would join us “terrible Turks” at 10-second chess. These sessions had their embarrassing moments because when Oscar lost—and being past his prime, he nearly always did—he had no money to pay up. He would stick his fingers into his vest pockets, swish them around for a moment, and then announce for all to hear, “You get vun.” No matter how many times he lost, he would always go through the same ritual of fumbling through his pockets and announcing, “You get vun.” Whereupon Willman would snidely ask, “Do you have any fish hooks in your pockets?” Someone else might have become angry or unpleasant at this type of razzing, but not Oscar. He accepted it gracefully and even seemed to enjoy it, which was one of the reasons we were all so fond of him.

I especially remember one warm afternoon back in the summer of ’39 at the Old Manhattan. Oscar was up two or three pieces against a favorite “customer.” But this gentleman flouted the chess etiquette of offhand games and continued to shift wood with excruciating deliberation. The game flowed on and on and on. Finally, with his lone king facing a mate in two, the “customer” resigned. “Too late!” Oscar snapped. And drawing himself up with astonishing hauteur, he delivered the coup de grace with a snap, crackle and pop rarely seen at the board. From that point on, the “customer” resigned on time.

Looking back at Oscar’s games, my impression is that he was a very talented player. At one time or another, he defeated most of the leading American masters, including the likes of Isaac Kashdan and Al Horowitz. In his youth, before leaving Germany for America in mid-1922, he knocked off such famous European masters as Fyodor Bogatyrchuk (a future co-champion of the Soviet Union), Karel Hromadka and Karel Treybal. Even in later years he still played the opening on a par with the very best. But from there on, he would relax his grip and expect the position to play itself. Still, as the following theoretically important game demonstrates, he was a road hazard even for the very best:

Geza Maroczy—Oscar Tenner
Manhattan C.C. Championship, 1926
Queen’s Gambit Declined


In his style Oscar belonged to the romantics. He consciously strove for beauty over the board, and no Manhattan Chess Club Championship seemed complete without his winning a brilliancy prize. Unfortunately, he courted complications even in easily won positions. As Al Horowitz once wrote in Chess Review, never for Oscar safety and sanity when risk and foolhardiness would do. In the following game, most masters would have grabbed Black’s Queen at move 21 rather than toss more wood on the sacrificial fire:
Oscar Tenner–Donald MacMurray
Manhattan C.C. Championship, 1933
Ruy Lopez


Oscar figured in a strange episode involving Alexander Alekhine. In My Best Games of Chess, 1908–1923, Alekhine included a 15-move brilliancy against Oscar that can be found in a note to an Alekhine–Teichmann game. Oscar protested and presented convincing evidence that the game quoted by Alekhine was only a post-mortem variation from the real contest, which ended in a draw.
Exhibition Game, Cologne, 1911

King's Gambit Declined


According to Alekhine, the game ended with 10. ... N-K4? 11. NxN BxQ 12. BxPch K-K2 13. BxPch K-B3 14. 0-0ch KxN 15. R-B5, mate. Oscar denied that this line occurred and noted that while Alekhine claimed the game was played at Cologne in 1907, the great Russian first played outside his country at Düsseldorf in 1908. Further, Alekhine definitely visited Cologne in 1911 (Oscar's date for the game). Did Alekhine deliberately concoct the game as he did so many others?


Oscar rightly avoided 14. ... PxP?, when his King will not survive the rigors of 15. 0-0!.

15. NxB QR-K1 16. B-B2 Q-Q3! 17. Q-K3 Q-N3! 18. 0-0

Alekhine was not about to subject himself to 18. QxP? N-B5 19. P-KN3 B-B6.


The game will end in perpetual check after 24. QxRP QxP 25. QxP Q-B4ch.

Oscar was born on April 5, 1880, in Lvov, then the capital of the Austrian-held region of Galicia and now part of Ukraine. His heritage, however, was primarily German, and one can find his name in old Berlin tournament crosstables circa 1910. In 1914, Oscar was battling for the lead in the second master group or "Hauptturnier A" of the Mannheim International when World War I broke out. The players in the top master group included Alexander Alekhine, Milan Vidmar, Rudolf Spielmann, Richard Reti and others. The Russian players were interned at Triberg, and Oscar found himself shuffled off with them. He often told the story about how they made a chess set out of soft bread and later, when food became scarce, ate the pieces. To escape internment, he joined the Austrian army (suffering two slight battle wounds), and many was the time that he demonstrated the infamous goose step during our late-night walks from the Manhattan Chess Club down to the Battery.
"Have You Seen My Little Vun?"

I will never forget the afternoon of March 18, 1930. Oscar arrived at the club flushed with excitement. He had been seeing Edith Bernstein, a middle-aged lady from Berlin, and with America's chess dean Hermann Helms acting as witness, Oscar had taken the final plunge at the Municipal Building that very morning. There were congratulations all around, and in the afternoon Edith came to the club wearing a white blouse and a simple black suit. She looked so radiant, and Oscar was beaming. Later, we all went out for a small celebration thrown by real estate tycoon Robert Raubitschek, a huge man who resembled a pale, blue-eyed walrus.

Oscar and Edith made a love nest for themselves down on East 12th; and some months later, to everyone's surprise, Mrs. T. gave birth to a son, Marcus. From that day on, Oscar would strut into the club, thumbs hooked in his vest pockets and his chest all puffed out. He no longer concerned himself with an analysis of the news. There was only one burning question on his mind, and he asked it of all who ventured near enough: "Have you seen my little vun?"

At age 68, on December 24, 1948, Oscar died in New York's Bellevue Hospital. Chess will never see another character quite like him.

Selected Games

Oscar Tenner: The Master Who Feared No One


The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories

master who feared no one. Against even the greatest, he played with panache even though the result was usually a crash.


N3 41. P-Q7ch K-Q1 42. P-B7, Black resigns

Chapter III


Albert C. "Buddy" Simonson burst onto the New York chess scene like a meteor and then disappeared almost as quickly. But during his short stay, he won many honors as a player, as a problemist and as a member of the victorious U.S. team at the 1933 Folkestone Olympiad. The high point of his career occurred in 1936, when only a final-round defeat prevented him from winning the first modern U.S. Championship. After that setback, his interest in chess seemed to wane. He did well enough in the 1938 and 1940 championships, but his comeback attempt in the 1951 fixture ended catastrophically, when he shared 10th–12th places.

Because that final-round loss in the 1936 championship caused Buddy to seek other, less wholesome competitive outlets and generally played a pernicious part in his later life, here is the dreary game:

Albert Simonson–Samuel Factor
U.S. Championship, 1936
English Opening

These days, the preferred move is 5. B-N5. More than a half century has passed since I first saw this game, but it still remains painful to play through.


13. ... Q-R5ch 14. P-N3 Q-R4 15. Q-Q5ch

Among other things, Black threatens 15. ... B-B6. White is forced to enter a bad endgame.

Buddy buckles. Seeing his championship chances evaporate proves too much for his nerves.


Buddy was a tall, shy young man, ever well-dressed and always with hair neatly slicked down. As was said of Marie Antoinette, there was something both beautiful and unfortunate about him. He seemed like a character out of the pages of Aubrey Beardsley and gave the impression of being perpetually on his way to tea at the Plaza. Maybe it was the umbrella that he carried on his arm or the cut of his clothes. His look smacked of Eton in the 1920s. He was so talented and so bright that he could have been successful at anything he tackled. Had he pursued a career in chess there is no telling how far he would have gone, though the two wins given below are suggestive. The first speaks for itself. The second, featuring a very impressive combination, was played against the man whom many felt to be the world's strongest player at the time. As for Buddy, it was his first serious game in about a decade.

Reuben Fine—Albert Simonson
U.S. Championship, 1936
Queen's Gambit Declined
I. P-Q4 N-KB3 2. P-KN3 P-Q4 3. N-KB3 B-B4 4. B-N2 P-K3 5. 0-0 QN-Q2
6. P-B4 P-B3 7. QN-Q2


White wants eventually to play P-QN5, but this wing demonstration is weaker than Black’s counter on the Kingside.

10. ... B-K2 11. Q-B3 P-KN4!

The normal fate of this move when played by Black is unpleasant. It succeeds here because White has eschewed all action in the center.


Necessary is 14. N-Q3.


17. ... NxP!! 18. PxN?

In Chess Review, Hans Kmoch wrote that Black’s combination was so surprising “that even calm, quick-thinking Reshevsky becomes perplexed and fails to find the best chances.” The only try was 18. PxBP QN-K5 19. NxN NxN 20. BxN B-N5! (this move is better than grabbing the exchange with 20. ... BxR) 21. Q-K3 BxB 22. R-R2 PxNP 23. QxP P-B4, with the decisive threats of ... R-R6 and ... P-N6.

18. ... PxQNP 19. N-N3?

Loses material without any compensation. The best chance was 19. RPxP, though Black still wins with 19. ... BxPch! 20. P-K3 P-


Unfortunately, Buddy had a restless nature that caused him to flit from one thing to another, and he never quite completed anything. No sooner did he master chess than he became bored and went on to something else. First, it was pinochle, then bridge, gin rummy, poker, backgammon—all the great competitive games. In itself, this compulsion for mental competition was okay because Buddy was great at every one of these games. But some mad desire made him gamble with only the very best in each field. Of course, he would lose; and, unfortunately (there's that word again), he remained undaunted. I often claimed that if there had been a decathlon of indoor games, he would have been a shoo-in; instead, he lived according to the Russian proverb that more good swimmers drown than bad ones.

He Solved Only Chess Problems

Buddy's parents were very well off even during the Great Depression. His father was "Simonson" of Simonson's of Fifth Avenue (located back then on 36th Street), which sold wigs and toupees to the movie industry and to the very wealthy. His mother was an Elgin of timepiece fame. Moreover, when Buddy turned 19 in 1933, he inherited the first $25,000—the equivalent of at least a quarter million in today's debased dollars—of many such increments left to him by the Grandpas Elgin. Yet so great were Buddy's debts even at that tender age, that by the time he paid off his creditors, there was little left for himself. Someone else might have been shocked into mending his ways.

Not Buddy. He just sailed along as if nothing had happened. Year after year the gambling continued, without his even acknowledging a problem, let alone confronting it. Chess problems, he could solve; personal problems, no. Once, when loan sharks were threatening to break his legs, he sold an interest in a building that he and his sister owned jointly. At other times, he sold interests in money due him at a future date for about 25 cents on the dollar.

Prior to my marriage, Buddy and I were very close. We met for the first time in 1930 when I was 16, spent much time studying chess, and played blindfolded as we walked the streets. He had a
good sense of humor and laughed easily. But his penchant for practical jokes occasionally made enemies. One afternoon, following a session of 10-second chess with Al Horowitz and Robert Willman, Buddy offered to buy us lunch at his favorite haunt, the old-world Barberry Room. Naturally, we accepted at once. Then, as a seeming afterthought, he remembered that he had only $20 with him, so that if the bill came to more than that, we would have to pay the difference. Since our usual lunch never came to more than 25 cents, we never dreamed that there were places which charged two dollars for bread and butter alone. And that was about all we ate, along with coffee! Al and Willy never forgave him, but in those days, everything he did struck me as hilarious. Those were great years for both of us, and I still remember fondly some of the silly, though interesting things we did after discovering girls.

**Buddy Goes to Work**

The need for money finally prompted Buddy to look for work. In the late 1930s, he founded Mailings, Inc., a pioneer in the field of direct mailing. The company was an instant success, and in March 1939, he married Jane Wessel, his childhood sweetheart.

The marriage didn’t last long. After fabricating all sorts of stories to cover up his gambling, Buddy left on Friday for Philadelphia to close a deal with Curtis Publishing. On Saturday, Jane received a telegram informing her of a snag in the negotiations. Sunday brought still another telegram describing a further delay. When he returned on Monday, his wife was gone, and he had lost the one person he loved. He was truly heartbroken, but his many well-intentioned promises could not win her back.

When World War II broke out, Buddy was drafted. He became Sergeant Simonson and landed up in England. I remember reading about his winning a game in a 1944 Allied Forces chess match that included the likes of Dr. Tartakower and Jacques Mieses. But then I lost track of him completely. Years, then decades rolled by, and one day he called. We had lunch together, and he told me his story.

After getting out of the service, Buddy married an Englishwoman and fathered a lovely young girl. He and his wife separated, and he returned to the States. Then, he married a third time and produced two more children. As was the case earlier, he still smoked in chains, even though he looked pale and coughed constantly. While thus bringing me up to date, Buddy seemed distracted and repeatedly looked around the room as if expecting to see someone at any moment. If only I could have stopped my mind from racing back to that dapper young man I once knew so well, then our reunion would have been more pleasant.
Months later, I received a call from one of his associates. Buddy had died of a cause related to emphysema while visiting San Juan, Puerto Rico. The time was mid-November 1965, and he had just celebrated his 51st birthday. The services were held at All Souls Unitarian up near 80th and Lexington, and as I sat by myself at the funeral of a man whom I had regarded fondly, and as I tried to huddle deeper into my overcoat that chilly New York morning of November 24, all I could think of was...

What a waste.

**Selected Games**

*Al Simonson: The Meteoric Master*


The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories


White resigns


K-B1 23. Q-N6 BxPch 24. K-K1, Black resigns "A sparkling gem"—Anthony Santasiere. By 1951, Simonson could still draw games with Reshevsky in Metropolitan League matches, but this extremely infrequent competitor could no longer take the grind of a tough tournament. After tallying +25 -8 =14 in his first three U.S. championships, he scored only +2 -6 =3 to tie with Pinkus and Milton Hanauer for 10th–12th in this, his final U.S. title event.
Chapter V

The Frightened, Little Rabbit

Abraham Kupchik was a timid, tiny whisper of a man with the saddest eyes and the most disproportionately large nose on a small face that I have ever seen. He was barely five feet tall in his stocking feet and at most 115 pounds. Some wag once remarked that Kupchik and Sammy Reshevsky ought to be matched for the flyweight championship of the chess world.

If chess were nothing more than an analytical science with a pinch of art thrown in, then Kupchik would probably have made it into the pantheon of players. But chess is more than that. And what most people fail to understand is that it is also a sport in which stamina, the power to concentrate for long periods of time, and the personal courage to dare are as important as the disembodied categories of science and art. Moreover, as chess knowledge has become democratized and individual research less essential, the game's animal elements have become progressively more important.

Alas, Abe Kupchik was so lacking in physical substance that he seemed in perpetual danger of becoming the man who was no longer there. Whenever he came to the Manhattan Chess Club, which was usually on weekends, he was always impeccably dressed and well-groomed. Not a single gray hair (he was born in 1892, and I came to know him in the 1930s) was ever out of place, though he had the habit of constantly fluffing his hair with filigree-like fingers. For some reason, these gestures made him look like a Koala bear—an impression that, in retrospect, may have had more to do with his being the only person I ever met who looked sad and worried even when smiling.

Kup Did Not Run Over

Kupchik’s chess was like his personality. A gentle man, whom many club members called “Kuppele” or “Kup,” he was repulsed at the idea of attacking an opponent from the very start. One looks in vain among his games for a short, highly tactical win. Such was not his strategy, which was purely defensive. Kuppele waited for opponents to crack under the strain of banging their pieces against an iron de-
fense, which they did in great numbers. This style, combined with his phenomenally quick sight of the board, was extremely effective in 10-second chess. Until about 1930, he had no equal in this country at the fast game. At the 1926 Lake Hopatcong International, he finished ahead of Jose Capablanca in the lightning event. Kuppele remained a real power at speed chess into the 1940s, finishing third in the 1943 national championship. Here is an example of how fluidly, if not pointedly, he could push pieces:

Abraham Kupchik—Al Horowitz
U.S. Lightning Chess Championship, 1943
Queen’s Pawn Opening


The winner of this game will be the player who proves better at doing absolutely nothing. The idea is to maintain a rhythmic motion of hand-piece-release, hand-piece-release and so on. If one player conceives an idea and interrupts this rhythm, he will surely lose.


Black cannot resist trying to do something and cedes the QB file in the process. Later, he will act on a second idea, and that will prove fatal.


Kuppele was also no slouch at slow chess. His two best results were equal first with Frank Marshall at Lake Hopatcong 1923 and a clear second behind Capablanca (but ahead of Geza Maroczy and Marshall) at the Lake Hopatcong fixture of 1926. He also won the Manhattan Chess Club championship nine times outright and once jointly, and if that is not a record, it ought to be. At the 1935 Warsaw Olympiad, he held down third board, scoring +6 =8. In the U.S. championships of 1936, 1938 and 1940, he always seemed to be finishing about sixth. His victory over Reuben Fine in the 1940 event was vintage, if that is quite the right word, Kupchik:
Abraham Kupchik—Reuben Fine
U.S. Championship, 1940
Sicilian Defense

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A year earlier in the annual Marshall vs. Manhattan Met League match, Fine played 7. ... QPxN 8. QxQch KxQ and won a drawish position. His feverish attempts to beat Kupchik in this game recall General Robert Riley’s words in 1861 to the Missouri state assembly: “No sir! You might as well try to stuff butter in a wildcat with a hot awl.”


Black need only play 15. ... B-Q2, contest the King’s file with ... R-K1 and call it a night.


Instead of this aggressive idea, Black should have played 19. ... Q-B2, keeping the Queen in contact with both sides of the board.


24. ... R-Q3??

Reuben could not abide the idea of fighting for a draw with 24. ... Q-Q3 25. P-R5 Q-B1 26. Q-B4. Kupchik purists may argue that this short game is unrepresentative of their hero’s excruciating style, but they forget that Fine bears total responsibility.

25. BxP R-KB1 26. P-R5!

The threats are PxP and BxB. If Black tries 26. ... BxB, White forces mate with 27. R-K8.

26. ... B-Q2 27. BxPch, Black resigns
Brevity was the sole of it.

In the following little-known game, Kupchik is at his best. I think that he makes numerous moves of which Anatoly Karpov would approve.

*Abraham Kupchik (Manhattan)—Samuel Reshevsky (Marshall)*

*Manhattan vs. Marshall Metropolitan League Match, 1940*

*Four Knights Opening*


If Kuppele was already past his prime in the 1930s, he more than held his own against the best of the 1920s. He outpaced the likes of Oscar Chajes, Charles Jaffe and Edward Lasker; and he posted a small plus against the young Isaac Kashdan. Among Americans, only Frank Marshall cast the Indian sign on him.

Discussing Frank’s edge over Kupchik is instructive not only for understanding our subject but also for grasping the status of chess masters 60 or so years ago. In a phrase, professional chess players were social outcasts in the 1920s and 1930s. Capablanca once noted, accurately and depressingly, that to be a chess player was a sign of a gentleman, but to be a good chess player was a sign of a misspent youth. Hence the half-hearted pursuit of chess by those masters who could see the dead end ahead; hence also Kuppele’s passivity in advancing his own cause in chess.

Kuppele and his family fled Russia and came to America in 1903.
Call it five-and-dime psychologizing if you must, but I have no doubt that the insecurities of his childhood, combined with the unattractive prospects offered by the royal game, explain his essentially negative chess style and retiring personality. GM Andy Soltis has described Kupchik as "super-solid," but even this emphatic American phrase (super bowl, super star, super this and that) fails to capture just how conservative he was. As noted, his hunkering down into a defensive posture was fine in speed contests, but a top grandmaster could usually steamroll such an obstacle in a slow game:

_Abraham Kupchik–Frank Marshall_
Lake Hopatcong, 1923
Queen's Gambit Declined


Kuppele opens lines for his opponent.

7. ... N-B3 8. B-Q2


Every Black move is like a hammer blow against White’s undeveloped position.

18. ... N-K5!

White has no good defense against the threat of ... NxB and ... N-B6ch.


Another Kupchik weakness was that he often played tournament games as if they were speed contests. I always got the impression that he did not wish to keep his opponent waiting. Capablanca described the drawbacks of this approach in Diario de la Marina (March 16, 1913):

It is obvious that young Kupchik does not play as is proper, reflecting upon his moves as would the top player in the world; playing with great rapidity, he tries to win against an opponent who is as strong as he, if not stronger....I believe that, given his age, the young Russian plays very well, but if he is ever to become somebody, it will be necessary for him to think much more.

All of which explains why Kuppele failed to grasp a grand opportunity by grabbing a pawn against Capablanca himself:

Abraham Kupchik—Jose Capablanca
New York, 1916
Queen’s Pawn Game


My departed friend Tony Santasiere once wrote that the Queen’s Gambit was “like a piece of dead flesh kept overlong on ice.” That overstates the case by a mile, but games such as the present one
have always caused me to grind my teeth. George Bernard Shaw’s lament about listening to poorly played music—“Nothing soothes me more after a long and maddening course of piano recitals than to sit and have my teeth drilled”—is my sentiment about playing through boring chess games.

16. \ldots P-K4?

Capablanca overlooks, to use his favorite phrase, a petite combinaison.

17. N-B5?

For goodness sakes. A moment of reflection shows that White could have won at least a pawn by 17. RxB PxB 18. RxB RxB 19. QxB. If Black tries 17. \ldots QRxB, then White wins outright with 18. N-B5, threatening 19. QxN.


The Professional Toll

Chess eventually became only a weekend game for Kupchik. His inability to push forward either chess pieces or himself took its professional toll. An example of how he was an object rather than a subject of other men can be found in a private letter sent by Norbert Lederer to Alexander Alekhine concerning who would play at the famous New York 1924 International. “We have decided, upon my urging recommendation,” wrote Lederer, “not to invite Kupchik and Chajes, since they would just extend the length of the tournament without being able to change anything in the end result.” Considering that Kupchik had a superior record to at least two of the New York participants, he could have made a lot of noise about his exclusion.

Kuppele did not. Indeed, could not. This family man, who had
two children and lived at the far end of Brooklyn, was so timid that if he had a favor to ask he would sort of back into the request rather than speak directly. I will never forget the day that he received a letter from the IRS that required an answer. Instead of coming to the point, he first asked if I had an envelope. When I inquired why he needed an envelope, he talked about sending a letter to someone, etc. etc. Finally, I pried the information out of him, and we got to the point and dispatched the letter. All this worry about sending a letter to the tax man from someone who was by profession an... accountant!

Since his death in 1970, I think now and then of sweet Kuppele. I think of him as he was by the 1960s—an old and fleshy man who wore ancient brown suits two sizes too small. And I wonder what he might have accomplished had he not been such a frightened little rabbit.

Selected Games

\textit{Abraham Kupchik: Attacks Without Danger}

\begin{verbatim}


\end{verbatim}


To paraphrase Dr. Johnson, if Kupchik had attacked often thus, all praise would be superfluous.

Chapter VI

The Incomparable Max

Founded in the late 1870s, the Manhattan Chess Club has always been a gathering point for chess devotees from all walks of life. The highest and sometimes the lowest on the social scale mingle as equals. The only requirement is that a man play chess and conduct himself as befits a gentleman.

During the Great Depression, the Manhattan was an ideal place to relax and forget the day's troubles. After a couple of hours wandering through the maze of combinations afforded by the royal game, one returned to ground zero refreshed and, if one happened upon a “customer,” financially restored. Of the time I now write, a man named Max was the club secretary. He loved chess more than life, and he was happiest when seated at the board and in control. Royalty knew no greater power or joy.

For a period in his life, Max dedicated himself completely to the Manhattan; and the members appreciated and, indeed, loved him for his hard work and human warmth. His was one of man's rarest gifts: to see life in a humorous light and to reflect that light without ever becoming offensive. Max often told stories about club members that delighted his listeners, including many of the guilty parties.

I will never forget his account of how a highly respected elder member, who was known for his propriety, absentmindedly reached for a Bishop in the heat of battle and used it to stir his coffee. A bit later, when preparing to move the missing Bishop, he angrily accused his opponent of removing it from the board. Imagine the “oldest member’s” chagrin, to borrow a phrase from P.G. Wodehouse, when he discovered it resting at the bottom of his coffee cup.

Max was a master at giving odds to weaker players, who because of his wonderful way with people, never resented losing money to him. Many actually sought him out in the belief that they were contributing to his upkeep. Few people knew that Max was a very wealthy man, who while still in his 20s, struck it rich in commodities speculation. He then invested his winnings in real estate, hoping to establish an income that would free him for his favorite hobby. Instead, he hit a second jackpot and sold out for a fortune at the
It was a Saturday morning that we became friends. I arrived at the club unusually early, and only Max was there. Although we knew each other, we had never really talked. I tried to break the ice by showing him a chess problem that had fascinated me since age 13. As soon as I set up the pieces, he shouted, “Reti,” the composer’s name. And we suddenly found ourselves talking like old friends.

Over the next decade, I saw a lot of Max and his wife, Renee, a warm, butterball of a woman. On many occasions, we all dined together. After dinner, Max and I usually stayed up most of the night playing and talking.

Somehow we fell out of contact. The need to earn a living, the time demanded by marriage and children, a subsequent move to the suburbs—it’s the same story for most people. Not until 1975, after retiring to Florida, did I begin to miss the Manhattan Chess Club and my old friends in the Big Apple. And so, I rented a small apartment not far from the club.

**The Real Top Dog**

I had not seen Max for almost 20 years and was totally unprepared for the shock when we came face to face. Or, rather, what was left of his face. After Max was diagnosed as having cancer of the jawbone, the doctors removed it to save his life. His customary buoyancy was gone along with much of the humor and wit. Although still in his 60s, he looked much older. And no wonder. To see a de-boned, wrecked face every morning while shaving would be enough to crush anyone’s spirits.

Yet Max retained a wonderful way of expressing himself, and as he brought me up to date, I forgot about his looks. He seemed to have made peace with himself, and as he later proved over the board, his chess had not suffered. But I was sorely mistaken about Max enjoying internal quiet as I learned at our next get-together.

“My marriage is falling apart,” he confided, “and I cannot see a way to save it. When I first met Renee, there was no one more beautiful. I was so deeply in love that nothing else mattered. She was not as deeply in love, but I made allowances for this shortcoming so long as I did not have to share her. Mind you, we had our differences, but we got along most of the time.”

Max paused and sighed. “During the past year,” he continued, “she has gone completely off the deep end. All she does is primp and fuss over that silly poodle, Bobo. He has replaced me in her
bed, and I've been moved to a room down the hall. When I try to discuss the issue, she says that I'm acting silly. I should have taken a stand right after coming out of the hospital. Now it's too late.”

**Whistle While You Work**

We did not meet again for several weeks. And when we did, Max’s eyes shone brightly, though not with the witty twinkle of yore. They were like two searchlights peering into the distance. His lips quivered almost convulsively. He was clearly in the grip of a great mission and spoke urgently, mopping his face and trying to contain an excitement.

“I have a plan,” he said feverishly, “that will break up this canine conspiracy to wreck my home. On my way here to the club, I pass a pet shop; and I’ve been thinking what would happen if I bought one of those silent dog whistles and blew it occasionally in the wee morning hours. Chances are that Bobo would come charging into my room where I can greet him with a piece of his favorite chocolate. Arnold, you’ve heard about conditioned reflexes and Pavlov’s dog? What do I have to lose? And if nothing else, it will surely upset Renee.”

Max proved a prophet. “The plan is working,” he beamed happily some weeks later. “Renee is so upset that she is even considering a dog psychiatrist for Bobo.”

As the summer months wore on, Max became increasingly pleased with himself. He seemed happy and expectant. Renee was nervous and distraught. The poor woman could not understand why Bobo got up in the middle of the night and dashed from her bedroom as if he had left a steak bone on the 5:15 to Yonkers.

Renee fought back as best she could. After consulting a barkeeper’s wife, whom she came to know while out walking Bobo, she became convinced that “her baby” was possessed by evil spirits. Later, after prayers and poultices applied by the barkeeper’s wife failed utterly, Renee looked for a dog psychiatrist. Finding none, she began to seek advice from everyone she met, no matter how limited the person’s experience or remote his occupation. If sheer inquiry could save Bobo, then the dog had nothing to worry his curly head about.

On one occasion, Renee came to the club to pick up Max and spoke about Bobo’s dilemma. “Can you imagine a big city like New York with no place to take a poor, disturbed animal like my Bobo. They spend millions on literally everything, but nobody gives a hang about a poor dog’s nerves.” Then, turning to Bobo and kneeling down to hug the hound and to tousle the well-coiffed hair
atop his head, she said, “Don’t worry darling-ums, mommy-ums will find someone to help you.”

**Bobo’s Sixth Sense**

Help came quickly. Strolling along Fifth Avenue a few days later, I bumped into Renee and Bobo. She was wearing a large, striking black lace hat that reached to her shoulders. Her dress was lacy black as well, and several strands of pearls were intertwined around her neck like a boa constrictor. Even Bobo had gotten into the spirit of things by wearing a hat similar to Renee’s.

I tipped my hat and remarked on how well they both looked, since it would have been impolite to exclude Bobo. She explained that the reason for the matching outfits was that Max had passed away. The very night of his passing, she had been unable to sleep and as she paced the floor, something drew her to Max’s room. He lay on the floor near the threshold. “Arnold,” she whispered on the busy street, “what do you think he was up to? You could never guess. Can you imagine a man of his age playing with a whistle and eating chocolates in the middle of the night?”

She continued, “When I summoned the doctor, he said that it was not unusual for some aging men to start acting silly. They yearn for their lost youth and make complete fools of themselves by chasing after and blowing whistles at young women. Poor Max, he must have been entering his second childhood.”

“You know,” she concluded, “I should have had more faith in Bobo’s sixth sense. His instincts told him that there was something wrong with Max, and that was why he couldn’t sleep normally. How else can you explain that since Max died, Bobo once again sleeps like a baby?”
No account of chess in the 1930s and 1940s would be complete without mentioning Maurice Wertheim. Like a knight in shining armor who gallops out of a mist, Maurice arrived unexpectedly on the New York chess scene at a moment when there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth. The "world famous Manhattan Chess Club"—as it was called—had been reduced to slumming in the crummy cellar of the Pythian Temple somewhere on West 70th. As a consequence, many of the club's illustrious chess citizens were living solely by their wits because of a customer shortage.

What Damon Runyon wrote about "guys and dolls" also obtained among us chess men during the Great Depression: "Now it comes on the spring...after a long hard winter, and times are very tough indeed, what with the stock market going all to pieces, and banks busting right and left, and the law getting very nasty about this and that, and one thing and another, and many citizens of this town are compelled to do the best they can. There is very little scratch anywhere and along Broadway many citizens are wearing their last year's clothes and have practically nothing to bet on the races or anything else, and it is a condition that will touch anybody's heart."

Including, as it happened, the great heart of Maurice Wertheim, who was a one-in-a-million man for sure. In August 1941, without fear or hesitation, he singlehandedly moved the Manhattan to palatial quarters at 100 Central Park South, on the corner of 6th Avenue and 59th Street. And suddenly, New York's professional chess citizens began to thrive again—this time on gilt-edged customers who had plenty of quarters to lose.

Maurice the Man

Medium in height and not much to look at, Maurice radiated a warmth and confidence that swept up even the gloomiest of us chess Guses. Those ruddy red cheeks, that bristling brown mustache and those ever-friendly brown eyes brimming with enthusiasm energized everyone. I never saw him negative or angry, though a man in his position must have had enemies. I still believe that his sincerity
and positive outlook probably won over even business competitors. As one of his daughters wrote, "MW, as friends and family called him, almost always wanted to be in a position to give activities form and direction, to innovate and create."

That gets it just right. No Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, he!

Born in 1886, Maurice was head of the banking firm of Wertheim & Company, which he founded in 1927. He was a multi-millionaire back when a dollar still had 100 cents. Yet he did not toss around money. He believed that even cultural organizations ought to run on a business basis and that organizations lacking the support of society had no right to exist. Maurice's early experience as a founder and director of the then floundering New York Theatre Guild probably brought this lesson home. In his "1931 Report to the Harvard Class of 1906," he described his hands-on approach. "My chief outside interest during these 25 years," he wrote, "has been the theatre. From the time of graduation until 1919, I was connected with various amateur theatre groups, whose activities culminated in 1919 in the New York Theatre Guild. Ever since its formation, I have been a member of the board of managers and active in its operations. Up to date the organization has produced over 75 plays."

In the early 1930s, Maurice led the cultural battle to stage Eugene O'Neill's controversial, dark and seminal trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Having gotten the Theatre Guild on its feet, Maurice then insisted that the child walk on its own. And for the record, the Guild did just that during his tenure—as did the Manhattan Chess Club.

I think that Maurice was a believer in what we today call "tough love," though he also had a soft side. He was a trustee of the American Wildlife Foundation, and in 1947, this extraordinarily wealthy man donated to the U.S. government his 2,000-acre Long Island shooting preserve, which is now called the Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge and which extends along the Montauk Highway all the way to Great South Bay. "It's an ideal place for migrating ducks to rest," Maurice said shortly after deeding over his property, "or would be if I didn't shoot them."

When looking to relax and go for a swim or to attend to some business for the Cuban Atlantic Sugar Company (of which he was a director), Maurice always repaired to his home on Cuba's Veradero Beach. He also had a passion that bordered on a weakness for salmon fishing. "The salmon," Maurice wrote in *Salmon on the Dry Fly*, a privately published and beautifully produced little book of 500 copies, "is a lordly fish. He is not like your wee trout and knows that the bait cannot escape him. So he takes the fly as he
Maurice kept a house up in Canada on the Gaspe Peninsula and leased the entire Ste. Anne des Monts River just to toss in a line during the peak salmon season of June and July. "Father was a passionate fisherman, so much so that when his first grandchild was born," recalls one of his daughters, "he announced that he had been awake all night figuring out how old he would be when the baby boy could take his first salmon, in order that he could teach him the fine points of the sport." Maurice once wrote about his adventures in the March 1948 issue of *Field & Stream*.

**Maurice the Chess Man**

If movie moguls race cars and media men yachts, bankers go in for high culture. Beginning in 1936 at age 50, Maurice became within two or three years one of the world’s leading collectors of French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Paintings by Degas, Dufy, Gauguin, Manet, Matisse, Monet, Picasso, Renoir, van Gogh and the like graced the walls of his penthouse at 33 East 70th. All told, Maurice purchased 43 paintings, drawings and sculptures, many of which are, as the critic John O’Brien states, “standard points of reference” in art literature. He is talking about such immediately recognizable masterpieces as van Gogh’s “Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin,” Degas’ “The Rehearsal” and “Singer with a Glove,” Renoir’s “Seated Bather” and “Self-Portrait at Thirty-Five,” and Gauguin’s “Poèmes Barbares.” The best book on Maurice’s beloved collection is O’Brien’s *Degas to Matisse: the Maurice Wertheim Collection*.

Still, Maurice loved most the thing that cost him least: correspondence chess. He carried on games all over the world, and one in particular with John J. McCloy, an old banking buddy who became High Commissioner for Germany following World War II. I like to think that as a renowned banker, Maurice enjoyed telling opponents that a check was in the mail. Certainly, he took the games seriously and often discussed them with me in his study, though only those games already concluded. He never permitted comments on games in progress.

Playing under the pseudonym of “A.C. Charles,” Maurice scored well in the old *Chess Review* postal tournaments of the early 1940s. In the Victory Postal Tournament of 1943, he scored +13 –1 =4, good enough to snatch a prize and to earn him a rating of 1430, which was the equivalent of a master rating today. Indeed, future correspondence world champion Hans Berliner was then rated at 1418. Maurice later described his performance in this tournament as the “proudest moment of my chess career.” And as *Chess Review*
The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories

described his postal routine: “Every morning, on his way to Wall Street in a taxi, he played over variations of his games on a pocket chess set. In the evenings, while waiting for dinner guests to arrive, he set up his board and studied his games. Wherever he went, his Postal Chess Album accompanied him. Nothing was permitted to interfere with this fascinating hobby.”

Maurice had a feel for the French Defense and even invented interesting, if dubious ideas. Take, for example, the rare line, 1. P-K4 P-K3 2. P-Q4 P-Q4 3. N-QB3 B-N5 4. P-QR3 BxNch 5. PxP PxP 6. Q-N4 Q-B3!? 7. QxKP. As Black against Bela Rozsa, a many-time champion of Oklahoma, Maurice found the completely new move, 7. ... Q-N3!?, which led to a playable game after 8. B-Q3 (the alternative is 8. Q-B4 QxBP 9. QxP N-QB3 10. B-Q2 [Grandmaster Larry Evans suggests 10. N-K2 here] 10. ... NxP, when Black wins a pawn) 8. ... QxQ 9. BxQ N-KB3 10. B-B3 QN-Q2 11. P-B4?! (Evans believes that 11. B-B4! puts Black’s idea to the test) 11. ... P-K4!.

In the following Queenless middlegame, Maurice outplays a New York master noted for his handling of just this kind of position:

Erich Marchand—Maurice Wertheim
Correspondence, 1943
French Defense

1. P-K4 P-K3 2. P-QR3!!

Back in 1945, this idea seemed bad. Today, it merely seems bizarre.

2. ... P-Q4 3. P-K5 P-QB4 4. P-QN4 P-Q5

White probably expected 4. ... PxP 5. PxP BxP 6. P-QB3 B-moves 7. P-Q4, when the first player has a powerful center at the expense of a pawn.


Black intends to work against White’s backward QBP.

13. N-N5


13. ... N-N3 14. QxQ?!

White wants to double Black’s Queen pawn, but he deprives his own pieces of the natural squares, QB4 and K4. Al Horowitz suggested 14. P-N3 as a better move.

22. ... BxB


Ambitious and bad. White ought to play 40. B-K5, followed by P-Q4 and a King march to the Queenside.

40. ... P-R4! 41. K-B4 PxR 42. KxP N-B3 43. B-N2 N-N5, White resigns

A mopping-up line would be 44. P-Q4 N-Q6 45. B-R1 P-N5 46. K-B3 P-N6 47. K-K3 P-N7, and Black wins. By no means a glowing game, but Maurice turned in a steady positional effort. As Hermann Helms once wrote of Maurice's play, "While not a top ranking player in any sense, he still can give a good tussle to many masters with more experience."

As we came to know each other better, Maurice talked often about his youth. His first marriage was to Alma Morgenthau, a daughter of Henry Morgenthau, Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of the treasury. They produced three girls, the most famous of whom was Barbara Tuchman, a Pulitzer Prize winning historian who wrote such works as The Guns of August and The Proud Tower. After the girls grew up, Maurice and his wife divorced. He later married a tall and beautiful blue-eyed Swedish lady, who was the widow of Gene Seiberling of auto-tire fame. Cecile, who died in 1974, was perfect for Maurice. I think that they were the happiest couple that I ever knew.
One evening after dinner, Maurice told me the story behind his success. First, his father made a lot of money with the United Cigar Manufacturers Company, sent him to Harvard whence he graduated in 1906, and then left him almost half a million dollars. He got into investment banking in 1915 with Hallgarten & Company and became a partner in 1919. There, he studied and mastered the fine art of mergers, striking pay dirt when he convinced two banks that they would be better off as one. Consummated in St. Louis, this merger was his first million-dollar deal. Maurice cried with joy on the train all the way back to New York. Other killings followed.

Strange to say, Maurice was a man of the political left. He served as owner and publisher of The Nation from 1935 to 1937, and his breast fairly burst with an admirable passion for social justice. He never confused being born on third base and reaching home on a single with smacking a home run. As president of the American Jewish Committee in 1941–42, he produced a direct answer to Hitlerism by converting that organization to Zionism. Barbara Tuchman described this achievement as “probably the most difficult and historically the most important action of his career.”

Maurice’s minus side, along with that of The Nation in the 1930s and 1940s, was imagining that Joseph Stalin was merely a tangier and spicier version of an American liberal. Maurice and others like him believed that Stalin was devoted not to mass murder in the tens of millions but to improving upon Jeffersonian liberalism by ushering it into the sunny egalitarian uplands of economic and social democracy. “I feel that no one should miss the present opportunity,” he wrote about a projected trip in the early 1930s to a Soviet Union ravaged by terror and mass famine, “of studying there one of the most interesting experiments in the development of a new social order that has ever been attempted.”

“Interesting?” Good grief. More anon about how this fantastic delusion indirectly helped not only my chess but also my bank account!

**Maurice Makes His Move**

In May 1941, shortly after being elected president of the Manhattan Chess Club, Maurice made his first double-exclam move in chess by bankrolling a U.S. championship match between Al Horowitz, the challenger, and Sammy Reshevsky, the reigning champion since 1936. I’ll never forget the first game of that hard-fought struggle because the site was Maurice’s penthouse, which in its “streamlined modernity,” as one art critic wrote, was without “a sliver or stitch of the antique.” Virtually all of New York’s top players attended, and the crowd numbered at least 150.
Maurice liked being around chess people—no doubt about it. When I won the U. S. Chess Championship in 1944, he went all out and gave a gala party. At least 75 people attended, and never had I seen more champagne and caviar. Not even at the Russian embassy! To top it all off, he presented me with a gold watch and platinum chain inscribed by members of the Manhattan. An unforgettable evening—for anyone.

In the summer of '41, a very strong New York State Championship was held upstate on the campus of Colgate University in Hamilton. The field included the likes of Reshevsky, Reuben Fine, Al Horowitz, Isaac Kashdan and, of course, myself. Maurice wanted to spend a few days kibitzing, and so the four of us—he and Cecile, my wife Nina and I—tossed our golf clubs and tennis rackets into a woody station wagon. With Maurice’s ever-present “man” at the wheel, we set off for what turned out to be a wonderful chess vacation. If memory serves, Fine scored something like 8–2 to finish first. I ended in a tie for 2nd–4th with Sammy and Kash. Maurice loved watching the action (“He couldn’t see a mate through a telescope,” was one of his favorite kibitzes) and got a big kick out of my explaining the chief ideas. He also competed in a lower section, scoring a respectable 6–3.

On numerous occasions, Maurice showed his appreciation for my small services by having Nina and me over for dinner, a highlight of which was getting to savor his great collection of Impressionist paintings. One of my two favorites was Toulouse-Lautrec’s “The Black Countess,” a singularly witty canvas depicting a dark-skinned, elegantly clad lady driving a carriage wildly along a Mediterranean beach near Nice. My other favorite, a much larger painting, was Picasso’s “Mother and Child” from the artist’s Blue Period. It never failed to move me, and in a touching gesture typical of Maurice, he always saw to it that I sat opposite the picture during dinner.

My admiration for “Mother and Child” was not, however, shared by Anne Wertheim, Maurice’s youngest daughter. In a family memoir, Barbara Tuchman describes a tiff between Father and Daughter: “Later, [they] had a mighty battle when she refused to get married under Picasso’s Blue Period painting of a syphilitic mother and infant, which was hung over the fireplace, and he refused to take it down. The family lawyer resolved the deadlock with a diplomatic compromise—a smilax curtain draped over the painting to be removed instantly after the ceremony.”

On May 27, 1950, Maurice Wertheim died suddenly of a heart attack at his estate in Cos Cob, Connecticut. He left his collection of Impressionist works to the Fogg Museum at Harvard. During the 1988 U.S. Open in Boston, I took the opportunity to visit Harvard
and to renew my acquaintance with these old and haunting friends.

To Russia with Love

Maurice spent his life bringing people together, whether they were chess players or international bankers. This talent came to the attention of Franklin Roosevelt, who made Maurice one of his dollar-a-year men on the War Production Board. He quickly became an official goodwill ambassador, conceiving the idea of and signing the checks for the famous U.S.A.–U.S.S.R. match held in Moscow in 1946. Maurice convinced Foggy Bottom that a friendly chess match might help to thaw out the oncoming Cold War, harbingers of which were Stalin’s conquest of Eastern Europe and his frosty treatment of American envoys.

Naive, true. But Maurice was right in one respect: No group ever got a grander reception than that accorded us upon arriving in Moscow. We were drowned in flowers at the airport and treated like royalty, if that is quite the metaphor. At the playing site, the crowds were so huge that the team—flanked by secret police types—had to leave the theater via a side entrance. Still, Maurice’s idea ultimately counted for little because all the good will in the world between the American and Russian peoples amounted to nothing in Stalin’s arithmetic. As Maurice later stated in The New Yorker of August 14, 1948, “I thought it was up to the private citizens of this country to do what they could to support the efforts of the State Department to encourage a relationship with Russia on a basis other than business or war. I’m afraid I didn’t accomplish my purpose in a long-range way, but I did a lot at the moment.”

In retrospect, the chief beneficiary of the Moscow match may have been myself. Not only did I spend several months in Europe sharpening my chess, I also indirectly benefited financially by being in the wrong place at the right time.

The wrong place was a sidewalk cafe in Paris where I was reading catastrophic news in the Herald Tribune. “Billions Lopped Off U.S. Stock Market” screamed a headline. Nina and I had worked hard to save about $20,000, which we invested in stocks. I was sick at heart and decided that the market was no place for a tyro and would get out once I got home. However, the right time turned out to be that very moment because Maurice, with whom we were travelling, suddenly came along and sat down for coffee.

After some hesitation, I worked up the courage to tell Maurice about my dilemma. Without skipping a beat, he replied, “I’ll send my chauffeur for you when we get back, but be sure to bring me your entire portfolio.” He was as good as his word. Not long
afterward, I found myself sitting in his office at 120 Broadway, waiting along with the then mayor of New York. Soon a smiling Maurice stepped out from his private office to lead me inside. Flushed with embarrassment, I stammered, “I believe the mayor was here before me.” To which he replied, “Don’t worry, his business can wait.”

Maurice sat behind a large desk and pored over my holdings. After a while, he looked up and asked, “Who advised you to buy such garbage?” Although his firm never bothered in those days with accounts under $100,000, he personally supervised my portfolio. Before he died a few years later, he got back every penny I lost along with a good deal more. My small account sat at Wertheim & Company after his death until I decided to close it so as not to embarrass the firm any longer.

Maurice Meets Yankele

Only once did Maurice permit Nina and me to take him and his wife to dinner. Knowing their love for French cuisine, I chose my favorite restaurant, La Toque Blanche. We all dined sumptuously, though what I remember best are certain surprises later on. For some reason, we got on to the topic of older players like Oscar Chajes, Charles Jaffe and, of course, Frank Marshall. The subject then shifted to chess institutions on the lower East Side—joints such as the Cafe Royale and the Stuyvesant Chess Club. Maurice said that he had visited neither of them, and then added abruptly, “Let’s leave the ladies to their dessert and coffee. We can be back in half an hour.”

A minute later, Maurice’s chauffeur was driving us to the Stuyvesant down on East 14th. On the way, I got a chance to ask this kindest of powerful men about the source of his understanding of people and their problems. Maurice recalled a seemingly insignificant episode when he was a student at Harvard. A young woman, whom he barely knew, approached him and began to pour out her troubles. As he tried to get away, she followed, telling him that her parents were getting divorced and that she was having problems keeping up with her studies. He must have appeared bored because she said angrily, “The least you can do is listen. You will lose nothing and may gain a great deal in human understanding and stature.” Maurice said that this utterly banal encounter, so microscopic in the macrocosm of massive human suffering, stayed with him and dictated his treatment of people ever after.

The Stuyvesant Chess Club was packed as usual. Yet everyone in the place looked up when we entered. Maurice was immaculately groomed as always, and most of the chess players stared at him as if he were the Messiah. Almost immediately, the proprietor, Jacob
Bernstein, came to greet us. Jacob or "Yankele" was short, fat and almost completely bald, but he owned a smile as big as his chess talent. I introduced him to Maurice, and before you could count three, the two men wandered off, leaving me standing alone.

To my complete surprise, they returned several minutes later, chatting like old friends and sipping hot tea from glasses ensconced in those ornate silver holders that Russians call podstakanniki.

On our way back to La Toque, my curiosity got the better of me. "What were you and Yankele discussing so earnestly?" I asked. "Oh," he replied, "he told me that they played a lot of 'pinochle' up on the second floor, and I told him that my father was considered one of the finest 'pinochle' players in the cigar industry." By "pinochle," Maurice really meant, of course, poker.

And then this captain of international banking and confidant of history-making statesmen began to stare distractedly out of the window of his limousine, saying nothing for several minutes. "You know," he finally spoke up in a thoughtful and faraway voice, "in spite of the squalid quarters, the smoke and the noise, everyone seemed to be having a real good time."
From the 1920s into the late 1940s, the Manhattan Chess Club was more or less run by L. Walter Stephens, a rigid and humorless man whom I once nicknamed "Mr. Faux Pas." He was best known to the American chess public of the period as the perennial tournament director of U. S. championship events.

L. Walter, as he was commonly called, was the kind of person who never got a second look when he passed by on the street. But if you're the kind of reader who wants to get a second look, then riffle through old issues of the New York Times until reaching page 23 of the edition for May 8, 1944. You will find a photograph showing a virile and hirsute young Greek god, elegantly "accoutered" (a buzz word in this story) in a three-piece suit. That's me, impartially described. I am holding a trophy for winning the U.S. Chess Championship and am staring as if I wished to wring the scrawny neck of a dour, bespectacled man of medium height and blotchy, freckled complexion. This man, who was born in 1883, covered impending baldness by parting his hair just above the left ear and plastering it across his narrow dome to the other ear. That's L. Walter, equally impartially described.

For years L. Walter and wife Maude ran the Manhattan Chess Club as if it were the family plantation. The club became their second home. L. Walter, who had once been pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Oceanside, Long Island, was an economics and history teacher at the New York High School of Commerce. Maude was a tall, pencil-thin lady with a weakness for flowered hats as lush and wild as any tropical jungle. She was also the club secretary (from 1942 to 1954) and performed her duties with quiet efficiency in spite of her husband's occasional interference. As for L. Walter, who had held the post of secretary from 1924 to 1941, he somehow assumed the role of club manager. In said capacity and with no clearly defined duties, this zealous tumor from Princeton's Union Theological Seminary managed to get into everything. He directed
tournaments, arranged team matches, set up rules for juniors, talked to delinquents about dues and established a dress code.

Yes, a dress code. L. Walter liked to spend his spare time thinking up rules to drive people nuts—a malignant talent that he doubtlessly honed while serving during World War I as a YMCA chaplain and athletic director at Camp Mills, Long Island.

During most of L. Walter's regime at the Manhattan, juniors were allowed to come to the club only on certain days and at specified times. On one occasion in the 1940s, a future chess great came to the club in his then-customary T-shirt and blue jeans. L. Walter, with foam forming on his lower lip, demanded that the young genius be tossed out at once. "He's breaking my dress code by coming here improperly accoutered," screamed our fearless leader. Fortunately, I garnered the support of a majority of the club's directors, including Walter's wife, to stop him. And forever after, "Mr. Princeton '10," as he sometimes dubbed himself, stared daggers at me whenever I came to the club.

In truth L. Walter was the last person to talk about being "improperly accoutered," for he often sported outfits that would have put Florian Slappey, the "sepia gentleman" of Octavus Roy Cohen fame, to shame. I still recall the St. Patrick's Day when he turned up wearing green suspenders, purple trousers, and an orange shirt with shoes to match. Bob Willman, one of the wags, remarked, "Maude must be selecting his clothes to match her hats."

"You, You... Patzer, You!"

Most of the younger club members barely tolerated L. Walter and told jokes about him too off-color to relate even in these pagan times. But the day that he got Oscar Tenner's dander up was a real lulu. Sad-eyed Oscar was one of the old-timers and a chess professional who married very late in life. He came to the club with his young son on the days that his wife worked. Like most middle-aged men who sire children, he was particularly proud of his handiwork. Indeed, the lad knew how to set up the pieces, and as the youngster went from board to board fingering the men, L. Walter began to see red.

Oscar, who was busy with one of his best customers at the far end of the room, didn't notice what was going on until he heard his "little vun" cry. As L. Walter led the boy by the hand to his father, Oscar rose from his chair, ran to meet them, and spluttered, "Take your hands off my boy you, you... patzer, you!" Greater insult giveth no chess player.

Although Oscar meant to spear only Stephens, he also harpooned
this writer. Now, L. Walter was a fish for sure, but every minnow has his day or tournament as a shark. L. Walter’s tournament was the 1941 Manhattan Chess Club Championship in which he defeated Boris Blumin brilliantly (a game that he later framed) and drew with...

L. Walter Stephens–Arnold Denker
Manhattan C.C. Championship, 1941
Stonewall Opening


At this point, I was probably daydreaming about L. Walter’s numerous tournament debacles, which the wags used to call “slight cases of murder.” Fifteen-move losses were not uncommon for him. Little did I suspect what was in store for me.

Though, to be mercilessly objective, I ought to have. L. Walter knew nothing about opening theory, and the field of positional play was for him terra incognita. Yet as Sherlock Holmes once said of Dr. Watson, L. Walter possessed a certain puckish wit that required caution. In 1908, he was good enough to play first board for a victorious Princeton in the U.S. national collegiate championship. “Princeton owed her success,” stated the British Chess Magazine of February 1909, “chiefly to the individual efforts of her captain, L. Walter Stephens, a graduate of the Brooklyn Boys’ School, who played at the top board and won every game [three] he played.” There is even a picture of a young L. Walter on page 32 of the same issue. That moment was the high point of his chess career until this moment.


To use one of L. Walter’s favorite words, “Gadzooks!” It still hurts.
Wrote H. L. Mencken, "How little it takes to make life unbearable—a pebble in the shoe, a cockroach in the spaghetti, a woman's laugh," and overlooking a move such as 13. NxB!.


After Black's blunder on move 12, White had a won position. This kind of game serves as a reminder to every top master never to say, "I wouldn't lose to this fish in a million years." As the wags used to reply, "How time flies!"

Another of L. Walter's habits was to subject guests to a third-degree briefing. He loved to spell out rules and to pry. That's how he happened to ask the famous Hungarian master, Lajos Steiner, if he played chess. Many of us thought it a mystery why he never asked Jose Capablanca to pay dues.

His One Claim to Fame

Let me lay my cards on the table. I have an interest in overlooking whatever virtue—such as his willingness to endure endless defeats in tournaments—L. Walter may have had. Here's the story.

After scoring 4½–½ in the first five rounds of the 1942 U.S. Championship, I met Sammy Reshevsky in round six. The game featured the maddest time scramble of my career until Sammy's flag fell on move 45 or so. L. Walter rushed up, grabbed the clock from behind, turned it around so that the opponent's dial was on my side, and without the slightest hesitation forfeited...me!

"A near riot," as Isaac Kashdan described it, broke out. When several witnesses tried to reason with L. Walter, he retorted with his now famous query, "Does Kenesaw Mountain Landis ever reverse himself?" And that supremely stupid statement ended all possible discussion. For Judge Landis, the czar of baseball who had been appointed to clean up the sport after the White/Black Sox scandal of 1919, was notorious for never changing a decision. I played the remainder of the tournament, to use Bernard Shaw's memorable image, like a squashed cabbage leaf.

Still, maybe old L. Walter Stephens was cannier than we thought. That statement became, after all, his one claim to fame following his death on September 30, 1948.
Selected Games

L. Walter Stephens: The "Mr. Faux Pas" of Chess


Wrote Hermann Helms in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, "Commanding some of the best form of his college days, when he represented Princeton in the intercollegiate tournaments and cable matches, L. Walter Stephens, secretary of the Manhattan Chess Club, staved off defeat [of his team] by winning the pivotal game from J. Uranga in the league match with the Philidor Chess Club."

Chess Among the Stars
As a youngster, I never dreamed that I would one day see Hollywood. My only contact with Tinsel Town came every Saturday afternoon when the heroes of cliff-hanger serials were saved through assorted miracles. But in 1946 Herman Steiner, beloved by his glamorous Hollywood chess students, performed a miracle of his own: He raised the then unprecedented sum (for chess) of $5,000 to challenge me for the U.S. Championship title that I had won in 1944.

Although our previous results ran heavily in my favor, Herman had sound reasons for believing that he could win. (Or, at least, he was able to convince his backers that I was a stiff.) Herman beat Igor Bondarevsky 1½–½ in the 1945 U.S.A. vs. U.S.S.R. radio match, the single bright spot for the Americans. Then in January 1946, he scored 9–2 to take first place in the strong “Victory” International in London. Among those who trailed were Ossip Bernstein and Savielly Tartakower. No wonder that Herman’s wealthy backers were offering six to five on their star. I immediately telephoned a few friends in New York, and they covered all bets.

Luckily, I did not hesitate in contacting the boys back East because after the first game, the mood of the Hollywood chess crowd changed radically. Hollywood is that way, and I suddenly became an official darling. Here’s why.

Herman Steiner–Arnold Denker
U.S. Championship Match, 1946 (Game 1)
Queen’s Gambit Declined


More precise is 8. Q-B2. The text move allows Black to free his game immediately.

8. ... N-K5!
This move would not be possible if the White Queen were on QB2 because White could simply win a pawn with 9. NxN.

9. B-KB4 QN-B3 10. Q-B2 0-0!


Herman opts for a Kingside demonstration, whereas he ought to try a minority attack with P-QN4, P-QR4 and an eventual P-QN5.


Herman heeds the injunction about never striking at the King unless intending to kill him. In this position, however, he ought to leave the King alone and attend to the Queenside where the game will be decided.


White is still dreaming of attack. Instead, the correct move is 21. R-B1.


The decisive line-opening. White's King Rook will be sorely missed from the real scene of operations.


In the second game, Herman hung a piece on move 13. The final match score in that sunny May of so long ago was 6–4 in my favor, though the reader ought not to shed too many tears for my opponent. His time came in 1948 when he scored 15–4 to win the national championship. And while on the subject of Herman's over-the-board accomplishments, he shared first prize at the 1942 U.S. Open and won that tournament outright in 1946.

But most of us remember not the IM Steiner of Chess. We remember Handsome Herman of Hollywood, a dark and virile hunk of Hungarian humanity who could have passed as a leading man of the silver screen. Arriving in Hollywood from New York in 1932, he wrote a chess column for the Los Angeles Times until his death in
1955 at age 50 from a heart attack. Among his chess students were Humphrey Bogart, Louis Hayward (who played the Saint in movies of the 1940s) and Billy Wilder. For Handsome Herman, Hollywood was heaven. He enjoyed budding starlets, social prestige and an adequate income. Many were the warm Southern California evenings when he frolicked at parties or, as was fitting, pushed chess pieces until dawn. “Herman Steiner and George Koltanowski used to come over to my place,” the late great MGM character actor Fritz Feld recalled recently, “and we would play until six o’clock in the morning.”

**Chess in Old Hollywood**

The perennial problem with writing about Hollywood is to separate, as the phrase goes, the real facts from the reel facts. And the subject of chess in Old Hollywood—the Hollywood of the 1930s–1950s and its studio-bred stars—is no exception.

That there was a large chess following in Old Hollywood may seem surprising at first thought. My theory is that a colony of more or less permanently ensconced actors, writers, producers and directors needed diversions. For these creative people, endowed with fragile egos and questioning minds, the pastimes of businessmen quickly palled. Chess was doubtlessly used to claim intellectual credentials.

Back in 1988, a writer in *Chess Life* compiled a list of Old Hollywood greats who loved the game: Lew Ayres, John Barrymore, Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart, Charles Boyer, Charles Coburn, Jose Ferrer, Katharine Hepburn, Louis Jourdan and John Wayne. To this Oscar-winning cast can be added Nigel Bruce and Basil Rathbone (Dr. Watson and Sherlock Holmes, respectively), Charlie Chaplin, Helmet Dantine, Linda Darnell, Myrna Loy, Mitzi Mayfair, Ray Milland, Margaret Sullavan, Maureen O’Sullivan, Franchot Tone and many more.

Academy Award-winner Milland was an especial chess nut and a strong player. Jimmie Fidler, a gossip columnist of the 1930s and 1940s, once reported, “Unless Ray Milland is suppressed, he will have all Hollywood playing chess in another month or two.”

Still, Milland did not consider chess important enough to mention in his wonderful memoir, *Wide-Eyed in Babylon*; and among Hollywood’s literati and glitterati, Humphrey Bogart’s star burned most brightly over the 64 squares. As Bogart put the matter, he learned chess “in those old shooting galleries, when I was a kid in New York.” He even held Sammy Reshevsky to a draw in a simultaneous at Romanoff’s in Hollywood. A surviving game against
Koltanowski suggests that at his best, he was of expert or master strength. This game has been published many times, and what follows is the lesser-known draw with Reshevsky:

Sammy Reshevsky–Humphrey Bogart
Hollywood, 1956
Two Knights Defense


Anti-theoretical, but bold and not easily refuted.

7. PxP PxN 8. QxN QxQ 9. BxQ B-K2 10. 0-0

White eschews 10. BxN in fear of Black’s Bishops chewing him up in an open position.


Until this move, Black has played energetically. Better is 16. ... N-B5, when the second player may have just enough for the pawn.


24. R-Q1?


Here are two little-known contests in which Bogart is not at his best. The first game against Belgian master Dr. Paul Limbos was played in 1951 on the veranda of the Sabena Hotel in Stanleyville, the Belgian Congo, during the filming of The African Queen.
Dr. Paul Limbos—Humphrey Bogart
Stanleyville, 1951
French Defense


Black had to play 9. ... R-K1 or 9. ... P-KR3.


The correct move is 13. ... N-B3.


Of the next game, Grandmaster Larry Evans notes that Lauren Bacall could have held off her male attacker with 24. ... QxN! 25. RxQ RxR.

Humphrey Bogart—Lauren Bacall
Stanleyville, 1951
Ruy Lopez


Bogie was smitten with Caissa—no doubt about it. Not only did he serve as a director of the U.S. Chess Federation, he also pushed wood at every opportunity, though mainly on movie sets between scenes. Numerous photographs exist of the great man matching wits with the likes of Charles Boyer, Helmet Dantine and, on the set of Casablanca, Sydney Greenstreet.

The games against Greenstreet led to his playing postal chess during World War II with several American servicemen in the South Pacific. Here’s the story as reported by Fidler in a New York Post article of early 1943:

Humphrey Bogart has started an idea that he hopes will be widely accepted. The Warner star is playing long distance chess games by mail with boys in the service. It all started when a private, then stationed in this country, visited the set of Casablanca, still at the Hollywood Theatre when Bogart was playing chess with Sydney Greenstreet between scenes. The private offered to take on Bogart and a keen rivalry
developed. When the soldier was transferred to the South Pacific, he kept up the game by mail. Since starting the game with the soldier, Bogart has taken on several of his buddies by mail, playing simultaneously.

**Toast of the Town**

As I was saying, my life in Hollywood changed for the better after game one of the Steiner match. Billy Wilder took me to lunch at the commissary in Paramount Studios. He was a real chess fan who let people know it. As he wrote to *Chess Review* in 1944, "Just nuts about your magazine, but omigosh what are those three dames doing on your August-September cover? Please, please."

At the commissary, Wilder introduced me to several stars, including Margaret Sullavan and Edward G. Robinson, who played the part of a tough guy by pretending to mow us down with a machine gun. Wilder then threw a lavish party in my honor at legendary Chasen’s Restaurant out on Beverly Boulevard in West Hollywood. What a star-studded evening it turned out to be! And indeed, why not? Founded in 1936 (it closed on April 1, 1995), Chasen’s was one of Old Hollywood’s most stunning glamour spots, along with the similarly vanished Mocambo, Perino’s and Romanoff’s. During Hollywood’s magic quarter century from 1935 to 1960, powerful men and golden women frolicked there many an evening (Bob Hope once rode a horse into the place!). To my eye, these gods and goddesses seemed to glide rather than walk, yet they, who seemed so incredibly vital and alive, are now nearly all dead or, even more tellingly, confined to wheelchairs and imprisoned in the dreams of senility.

Among those in our dinner party were Sullavan and Robinson, plus the likes of Linda Darnell, Louis Hayward, Mitzi Mayfair, Gregory Ratoff and so on. I espied Errol Flynn and Bogie seated at other tables, both devouring thick steaks. And speaking of steaks, although Chasen’s was renowned for its traditional American-style dishes, it served only perfectly marbled, well-aged beef straight from the Argentinean pampas. I selected the specialty of the house, a “hobo steak,” which was a three-inch think *filet mignon* baked in salt and then sliced tableside and sauteed in butter. Never was a steak more tender, sweet and flavorful—each bite augmented by a never ceasing flow of *Veuve Clicquot* champagne and witty badowage. When Billy Wilder noticed that my “hobo steak” was gone, a second order materialized as if from nowhere. The great director must have had a prearranged signal with one of the waiters.

Each of the Hollywood greats in our party gushed over my chess play and promised to invite my wife, Nina, and me out on our free
days. The phone calls never came, which I discovered was typical of Hollywood.

The sole exception was Joe Eisner, a screenwriter whom I knew from New York. He and his wife were most attentive, which did not sit too well with Wilder. “You don’t want to be seen in the company of people who earn only $3,500 a week,” he scolded. “If you intend to make an impression in this town, you better stick with me, Bob Hope and Louis Hayward—people who make at least $10,000 a week or more!” And there I was thinking all along that $200 a week was a fine salary.

One day, the Paramount publicity department asked me to pose with Wallace Beery, whom many believe was the greatest character actor of them all. Beery was on the set for a western—Bad Bascomb, if memory serves—and was wearing a big cowboy hat. On each of his huge thighs sat a scantily clad cowgirl. While the prop men were setting up a chess board and pieces, he hollered at me in his trademark hoarse, raspy voice, “Hey, kid, this game anything like checkers?”

My match with Steiner wore on, and Billy Wilder again invited me to lunch. When I arrived at the studio, he was in his private office with a secretary. As he came out to greet me, there was lipstick on his mouth. Innocently, I mentioned the adornment, and without batting an eyelash, he replied, “Don’t you realize that a genius can do no wrong?” I’m not sure about that, though no one can deny that Wilder was and is a genius. This writer, director, producer made movies ranging from the film noir classic, Double Indemnity, to the sidesplitting comedy, The Seven-Year Itch. And so, we both went to lunch, and the lipstick stayed where it was like a medal of honor.

There came a day when Nina and I made some publicity stills with Bob Hope. He was very friendly all through the snapping until my wife, who once played a small role in a film he made in Long Island City, reminded Hope of an ugly incident in which he treated all of the extras most ungraciously. Of course, he denied everything.

Thanks to Billy Wilder, who was a class act in his roguish way, Nina and I got a graduate school education in Hollywood friendships. We were all at dinner one evening, and there must have been considerable curiosity about the couple occupying the time and table of a Hollywood mega-mogul. As my wife was on her way to the ladies room, she was stopped by Joseph Cotten, who was so memorably murderous as Uncle Charlie in Alfred Hitchcock’s Shadow of a Doubt.

“Nina,” Cotten intoned silkily, “do you remember me?”
Nina had played various radio parts on Orson Welles’ Mercury Theater program. She got to know Agnes Moorehead, Howard da Silva and Welles himself. Cotten was, of course, an illustrious member of the Mercury Theater group, and he exercised his fine memory in recalling my wife. Given that we were with Wilder, he must have thought that Nina was married to an “angel” or a producer. When she said that I was a chess player, he vanished almost instantly.

**Marxism—Hollywood Style**

One of Herman Steiner’s enthusiastic backers was Al Bisno, a generous supporter of chess who later became president of the Manhattan Chess Club. When I arrived for the match, he immediately invited me to his home for some bridge. To my surprise, Chico Marx and George Raft were on hand.

As a bridge player, I wasn’t. My great claim to fame was to have played for a tenth of a cent per point with Al Horowitz, Sammy Reshevsky and occasionally Dr. Emanuel Lasker. This latter worthy, who was a GM at the game, used to climb the walls when I was his partner. Once I had him tugging at his gray tufts of hair and yelling, “Why can’t you just play out the hand simply and not give me a heart attack? Always making with the combinations!”

And so, when Chico and George announced that we were playing for three cents a point with doubling permitted, I went into conference at once with Al Bisno. Big Al told me not to worry on two counts. First, he would back me; and secondly, Raft was such an unbelievably awful player that he always landed up shelling out the dollars. Still better, this famous actor insisted on doubling in order to get even—and lost more money in the process.

Chico Marx was as zany when playing bridge as he was backing up Groucho in the movies. He wore the clothes of an Italian immigrant, cracked one joke after another and leered ludicrously at you with those big pop-eyes. I like to think that he represented Marxism—Hollywood style. Tough guy George Raft, who supposedly had Mafia connections, conducted himself like a gentleman. Well-mannered, gracious, treated us like royalty. My only regret is that I never found a pigeon like him back in New York.

I would not have had to work again.

**A Bogie Battle**

*Humphrey Bogart: Caissa’s Superstar*

Chapter X

The Bobby Fischer I Knew

Bobby Fischer. I first met him in 1952, when he was only nine years old. Bobby was a blond, fair-complexioned, good-looking American boy, who was always dressed in a T-shirt and corduroy pants. When we were introduced, I noticed that he never looked up. I thought that he had, perhaps, dropped something and was still looking for it. But later, when he joined the Manhattan Chess Club, I noticed that he still could not make eye contact. He invariably attracted attention by tugging at my trousers, which was a prelude to a question that also never varied: “Wanna have a game?”

For an as yet undiscovered reason, most great chess players in their early years harbor a burning anger. Bobby was no exception. You could literally see the killer instinct in his eyes—how they flashed with anger and deep-seated hatred when he lost and how they flooded with maniacal glee when he won. In Edward Lasker’s phrase, Bobby played “chess for blood.” Which is to say, for metaphorical blood spilled during the symbolic war of chess. Like many of the indoor Marxmen at our universities, Bobby was a revolutionary and crusader against injustice so long as he did not have to shoot anyone and endure the sickening sight of real blood.

“All psychologists agree,” writes Frank Brady in Bobby Fischer, Profile of a Prodigy, “that chess provides an outlet for hostile impulses in a non-retaliatory situation.” Bobby himself has said that he enjoys most the climactic moment when his opponent’s ego crumbles—when, as he described in My 60 Memorable Games, Grandmaster Arthur Bisguier “slumped and...[his] chest collapsed” after blundering in their game at the 1963 New York Open. Or, for that matter, when it finally dawned on Laszlo Szabo that he would not draw the following “dead draw”:

Laszlo Szabo—Robert J. Fischer
Buenos Aires International, 1970
English Opening


102
After this move, Black will get a pull. Instead, White should try 9. P-N3.

9. ... N-QR4 10. P-K4 B-Q2 11. P-N3 P-QR3 12. R-N1 P-QN4

Black is already calling the tune.


The problem with 20. N/5-B3 is 20. ... N-B5, when Black has a clear advantage. Somewhere around here, Szabo offered a draw.

White can probably hold with 24. N-B4!. The text loses.

29. K-B1 N-B6!

Wrote GM Bisguier in the October 1970 Chess Life, “Just when everyone thought Szabo had achieved an easy drawing position, it turned out he was completely lost. Only the world’s very greatest chess players achieve this kind of thing.” Black can now maneuver his Rooks to the seventh rank, and Fischer soon commits another, to use George Steiner’s phrase, “psychic murder.”

30. R-QB5 R-Q1 31. B-R3

If 31. R-K3, Black has 31. ... R-Q8ch 32. R-K1 R/8-Q7.


**Designer Genes**

Everyone knows that Bobby Fischer had a very difficult childhood. No father, a harried mother, you name it. Many a night, Regina Fischer telephoned me in worry about where Bobby was. She did not understand until too late that chess was his savior because it helped him to dissipate pent up aggression.

Whenever Regina came to the Manhattan Chess Club, Bobby always bolted for the door in embarrassment. Mind you, Bobby was never rowdy. Far from it. He behaved well, but when something happened with which he couldn’t cope, he headed for the hills like a spooked horse. After one such incident, an elderly club director tried the old L. Walter Stephens routine and made an attempt to ban Bobby because he was not “properly accoutered.” This old fuddy-duddy, who imagined that he was still living in the Edwardian era, had his glasses focussed on Bobby’s T-shirt and corduroys.
But as a club director myself and as a former U.S. champion, I had my eye not on Bobby’s blue jeans but on his designer genes and succeeded in reversing this decision.

In my role as a pop psychologist, I have always clung to the simple-minded idea that to understand an adolescent or adult male is to know what came early on. Bobby never had a home life that even remotely served a young boy’s inner needs, and one suspects that the deficiencies he found in his mother were transferred to women in general. Certainly, he was always uneasy in the company of females. To the best of my knowledge, he never had a girl friend until well into adulthood. And considering the handsome hunk that he became, the absence of women must have been his choice. After all, how many females could resist a predatory yet boyish genius? “Bobby’s longish face,” wrote Harry Markey in a memorable description that appeared in Chess Life, “is a vertical composition of bony segments, grouped around the exclamation mark of a long, prominent nose and held in submission by a low forehead. The chin is aggressively stubborn. His boyish looks are emphasized by the carelessly combed hair, parted on the side.”

How many ladies could resist Bobby? Not many, I wager!

**An Angry Chess God Incarnate**

Fischer played to win even when the tournament score no longer demanded it. Moreover, unlike any world champion before him, he played to win as Black against even the most dangerous opposition. And succeeded repeatedly.

I first felt the almost physical impact of Fischer’s will to win in his first U.S. Championship back in 1958. We reached a clearly drawn ending, but Fischer continued to play down to skin and bones. He was so upset over surrendering a half point to someone who had been away from chess for a decade that it just flipped him. He even refused to analyze the game afterwards, which was rare behavior on his part. But two years later in the 1960 U.S. Championship, he threw his arms around me after I defeated his arch-rival Sammy Reshevsky. That was Fischer’s way of saying, “I’m sorry.”

Arnold Denker—Robert J. Fischer
U.S. Championship, 1958
King’s Indian Defense


I spent a good deal of time in the opening, hoping to exploit the awkward position of Black’s Queen Knight. But Fischer more than
held his own.


The only way to save the piece.


A quick look at the position suggests that White is better. But without making any obvious errors, I soon had to play very carefully to hold a draw.


The Black King must be kept out of the center.


Here the game was adjourned. Most masters would agree to draw, but Fischer nearly always played to win until there was not a ghost of a chance to succeed.


My subject is Bobby Fischer as I knew him, and I do not intend to dwell on his achievements beyond providing my reasons for believing him to be clearly the strongest player of all time.

At Fischer's peak in the early 1970s, no one could push pawns and pieces with him for more than a few games. In three candidates' matches played in 1971, Fischer notched up a score of 18½–2½ or nearly 90 percent against super-GMs Bent Larsen and Tigran Petrosian and strong GM Mark Taimanov. One calculation put his performance rating at 2939 for these matches. Against Larsen he played chess at a 3060 clip. Fischer tallied 18½–4½ at the 1970 Palma de Mallorca Interzonal, 15–2 at the 1970 Buenos Aires International, 19–3 at the Herceg Novi Five-Minute World Championship (Mikhail Tal finished a distant second at 14½, followed by Viktor Korchnoi at 14 and Petrosian at 13½), and a preposterous 21½–½ in a strong five-minute event at the Manhattan Chess Club.

At the time, even the Soviet sports establishment was dumb-founded. After Fischer posted two picket fences against Taimanov and Larsen, Sovietsky Sport could only splutter, “A miracle has occurred.” In an interview with Boris Ivkov, Tal called Fischer “the
The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories

greatest genius to have descended from the chessic sky.” Raymond Keene described Fischer as “a kind of angry chess god incarnate... waging total warfare on the chess board.” My friend Miguel Najdorf said that Fischer “simply throws the pieces up in the air, and somehow they land on the right squares!” My dear departed friend Isaac Kashdan opined that “in Fischer’s hands a slight theoretical advantage is as good as being a Queen ahead.”

As for Fischer himself, he seldom had a good word to say about his chess. And that’s to his credit in my book. “I am satisfied with the result,” Fischer observed after winning the Palma Interzonal by 3½ points, “but not with my play.” On another occasion, he won a tournament by two points and regretted not winning it by four.

Fischer strode the chess landscape with the abandon of a famished beast loose among defenseless prey. Not always a pretty sight, but the most compelling vision thus far in chess history.

The Nature of Genius

Bobby’s natural feel for chess reminded me of the gift granted another boy to whom fame came early in life. “When Jascha Heifetz was little more than a baby,” the great cellist Gregor Piatigorsky once told me, “he was finishing up in the bathroom with his father, who carelessly let the toilet seat drop. Still half asleep, the little boy, who was born with perfect pitch, automatically responded, ‘B-flat.'”

I’ve always wondered about the nature of genius. And for that reason and because Bobby was somehow likable, I worked at knowing the lad better. He was most definitely a loner who shunned people outside chess—especially journalists—like medieval peasants avoided lepers. I came to know him as a man of the highest ethical standards. If not parfaitement gentil in his social habits, he was always a knight sans peur et sans reproche in moral matters.

Bobby’s utter unconcern for money is not well known. Most people remember his incessant demands for larger prizes without recalling that he turned down millions of dollars in commercial endorsements after winning the world championship. He sought those larger prizes only because he accepted implicitly the capitalist principle that value is what buyers freely bid. The higher the bid, the greater the worth of one’s calling. Hang the money per se.

Once, when offered $5 million to play a match, he termed the proposal totally inadequate because Muhammed Ali received $10 million for a mere 60 minutes work. Yet when small, poverty-stricken chess organizers labored to create good conditions for masters, Bobby often sent them “thank you” notes. He also gener-
ously contributed tens of thousands of dollars to Garner Ted Armstrong’s Worldwide Church of God. The maids who cleaned his room in Reykjavik, Iceland, during the 1972 world title match can attest to Bobby’s disregard for dollars. According to Fred Cramer, who was with Bobby constantly in those days, the great man left money everywhere—in his pajamas, under pillows, under the bed and so on. “Such scorn of Mammon,” wrote New York Times chess columnist Robert Byrne, “would be difficult to equal for a saint.”

Bobby possessed a high sense of loyalty to friends—so long as they never acted on his behalf without permission. When he was a youngster, I used to take him and my son, Mitch, to see the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden. Bobby enjoyed those treats and never forgot them. Years later, when I asked him to play for the Manhattan Chess Club team against the arch-rival Marshall squad and in the process inquired about his fee, Bobby never hesitated. “I wouldn’t charge you anything,” he said, “because you’re a friend.” Knowing chess professionals all too well, I was stupefied by this reply.

And so, one Saturday evening Bobby sat down to play IM Anthony Saidy in a contest that was later voted by a panel of international judges to be the second-best game in the first half of 1969. During the team match, I spent more time analyzing Bobby’s game than my own effort against Andy Soltis. And for good reason! Bobby played a novel and stunning sacrifice as early as move six. When I told him afterward that the sacrifice seemed sound, he replied with his customary clipped objectivity, “No, it was unsound,” and proceeded to show us why.

Anthony Saidy–Robert J. Fischer
Manhattan vs. Marshall Metropolitan League Match, 1969
English Opening

Fischer finds an original and interesting pawn sacrifice on the sixth move! Moreover, it meets Rudolf Spielmann’s criteria for being a real sacrifice: the consequences are incalculable and the compensation debatable.

7. KPxP 0-0
8. KN-K2?

Bobby pointed out that White ought to play 8. PxP!, leaving Black with a dubious position after 8. ... R-K1 9. P-B4 P-Q3 10. BxN! PxB 11. P-Q4!.

8. ... Q-K1 9. 0-0

If now 9. PxP, Black has 9. ... N-KN5.

9. ... P-Q3 10. N-R4

Putting a Knight on the rim usually invites a trim. But I cannot advise anything better. White's extra pawn is useless, and his Queen pawn is weak. Black clearly has excellent compensation for the button.


Black builds up against the Queen pawn.

17. R-K1 N-B4 18. B-B1 R-R3!

A move that separates the champs from the chumps. At first glance, Black is putting his Rook out of play.


Relentlessly direct. The key to playing great chess is to have the ability to formulate sound plans and the courage to pursue them unblinkingly.


White might be able to hold out a bit longer with 25. PxP R/3xP 26. R/Q1-N1!.

White cracks under the pressure. He had to play 33. B-Q2, though Black still wins after 33. ... R-N3.

33. ... RxN 34. RxB Q-Q8ch 35. K-R2 QxR, White resigns

Let Sleeping Fischers Lie

At the 1963 Western Open in Bay City, Michigan, Bobby became involved in a speed chess marathon with Norbert Leopoldi, a local advertising man and strong master. The two were hard at it by 7 p.m., immediately after round four on the second day of the tournament. Bobby began by offering pawn and move and later upped the odds to pawn and two moves. They continued throughout the night, often doubling and redoubling the stakes. By 9 a.m. the following morning, Bobby was up $3,500.

For Bobby, that was the good news. The bad news was that he had to rush to his morning tournament game without any rest. Still worse, he won that struggle only after a hard endgame grind. By now exhausted, he dropped into a chair to play GM Bisguier in the sixth round:

Arthur Bisguier–Robert J. Fischer
Western Open, 1963
King’s Indian Defense


White enjoys a Queenside space advantage, while Black banks on mate.


Hereabouts Bobby fell asleep at the board, but instead of letting him dream until his flag fell, Bisguier awakened him. Black’s Queenside may be in ruins, but he has chances on the opposite wing if White plays inaccurately.

29. Q-B3 B-B1 30. R-N5 QxP 31. Q-R3 Q-Q1 32. QxP N-B6ch 33. K-R1 Q-B3 34. QxP?

It would have been better to let a sleeping Fischer lie. White had to play 34. R-N2, when his Kingside is secure.

34. ... NxP! 35. KxN!
White should not lose after 35. Q-B4.

35. ... QxPch 36. K-R1 B-N5!, White resigns

There is no defense against ... B-B6ch. A possible finale is 37. N-Q2 QxN 38. Q-B2 B-B6ch 39. K-N1 P-R7, mate.

The Comeback Trial

At about the time that I retired to Florida in the early 1970s, I began sending Bobby opening analysis to help out in his candidates' matches. Of course, he didn't need my advice, but at least I felt good. And, perhaps, I did help to reinforce a conclusion that he had probably already reached: not to repeat a variation of the Taimanov Sicilian that he played in his first match game against Petrosian.

Meanwhile, I started studying chess again with the object of returning to serious competition. Easier said than done. The comeback trail became a comeback trial. Opening knowledge had expanded geometrically, and in the vernacular of the fight racket, my footwork had slowed down. It took me two years to feel a little better about my play, and by that time, Bobby was already world champion, having defeated Boris Spassky in 1972.

Unfortunately, Bobby did not live and play happily ever after. He fell out with many of his friends and surrendered to religious enthusiasms. His good friend Anthony Saidy approached me at one of the Lone Pine tournaments and suggested that I call him. "You're an old friend," Tony said to me, "and I think he'll be glad to hear from you."

Well, why not. I telephoned Bobby that very day, and we began chatting as if it were only yesterday that we spoke. He told me about owning a piece of land in Florida and said that he might come to visit us one day. When I asked him why he was not playing at Lone Pine, he cut short our conversation, though he did take my phone number and promised to call. Bobby's reluctance to answer my question brought to mind the previous evening when Louis Statham, our host at Lone Pine, complained hotly about his lack of cooperation. I committed the serious mistake of arguing that one had to make allowance for genius. To which Statham replied instantly, "I too am a genius—an inventor—and do not want anyone to make allowance for me."

Back in Florida, I got a call from Bobby concerning a legal question about getting his games copyrighted. He suggested that my son Mitch, an attorney, might be able to help. But Mitch wanted no part of it. Still, Bobby continued to call, usually around 2 a.m., and would ask me to call him right back. "You've got more money than
I," he explained. These nocturnal discussions disturbed my wife, but deep inside I hoped to bring him back to chess. Bobby was particularly interested in my comeback difficulties and clearly understood that he would have to play himself into shape. Hence, as he told me, his demand for a long title match.

Bobby's rational approach to getting back in shape convinced me that he would soon play again. Then in 1975, on the occasion of Edward Lasker visiting us to celebrate his 90th birthday with a party and chess tourney, Bobby called for a chat. A surprised Lasker told me that he had been trying to contact Bobby without success. A German company, Deutsches Telefunken, had asked Edward to prevail on Bobby to play one move a week against a consensus of German television viewers. A year earlier, the firm paid Anatoly Karpov $10,000 for such a game, and the company wanted to hire Bobby for an identical sum.

When Bobby next called, I told him about the offer. He seemed quite pleased but added, "See if they'll pay a little more." Flushed with the idea of being the hero who rescued Bobby's professional chess life, I spent the better part of the next few months negotiating with the Telefunken people. Each time that they upped the ante, Bobby's answer was the same, "See if they'll pay a little more." Finally, the company offered $40,000. I thought the sum was just great because it represented $1,000 a week for two minutes work. Bobby, too, seemed pleased.

But—and with Bobby there was always a "but"—I congratulated myself prematurely. For he did a complete about-face. "Do you think they'll pay a million?" he asked. After all of the negotiations and out of sheer frustration, I couldn't speak. The saddest part was that Bobby seemed so reasonable at the start, and suddenly further effort was obviously futile. I neither phoned nor returned phone calls from Bobby until months later when Viktor Korchnoi came to town.

Viktor visited us for a simultaneous exhibition sponsored by the American Savings and Loan of Florida. The simul was a huge success, and Viktor proved compelling in a 30-minute television interview that followed. When we were finally alone, this chess giant spoke of his desire to play a practice match with Bobby. Frankly, I did not encourage him, given my experience. Several months later, however, when Viktor and I were having dinner with Edward Lasker in New York, the subject came up again. I wanted no part of it, but Edward argued that my role would be limited to putting them in touch and leaving the rest to fate. On this basis we walked back to my Manhattan apartment, and I rang up Bobby.

Viktor and Bobby appeared to hit it off nicely. They agreed to
meet in Pasadena the following week. That ended my involvement. According to Viktor, he found himself in Pasadena at the appointed hour standing on a particularly isolated street corner waiting for Bobby. A certain car passed by repeatedly, circling the block. Finally, the vehicle stopped in front of him, and as the rear door opened, he noticed Bobby crouched on the floor beckoning that he enter.

Nothing came of the meeting, just as nothing came of the million dollar match that Svetozar Gligoric assured me would take place in Belgrade in 1978. Nothing also came of the many other proposals advanced by Florencio Campomanes, Miguel Quinteros and Rafael Tudela. They all tried, and they all failed because their efforts were doomed from the start.

My own theory about why Bobby quit chess is based on the notion that chess—or rather his personal chess legend as an incomparable and undefeated genius—means everything to him. It is his *raison d’être*—the single support for a very frail ego. "It does not matter," wrote Robert Byrne at the time Fischer forfeited the FIDE world championship to Karpov, "that Fischer’s fear was a phantasm, that objectively, Karpov would not have stood the slightest chance against Fischer’s genius for the game. What cripples Fischer is his belief that winning a chess game means crushing his opponent’s ego and, consequently, the same psychic damage is in store for him should he lose."

How tragic that Bob Byrne hit the Fischer nail squarely on its head!*

*Bobby Fischer’s return match against Boris Spassky in 1992 embarrasses all of us witless amateur psychologists. There is many a slip between the psychoanalytic lip and the cup of reality.
A game of water chess between Bobby Fischer (left) and five-time U.S. chess champion Larry Evans. Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
A game of power chess. Chess great Mendel Najdorf looks on, while Imelda Marcos gets all the play in this position. Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
At the 1966 Havana Olympiad, Bobby Fischer speaks his mind to Fidel Castro as Viktor Korchnoi (left) looks on. Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
Several of my favorite chess men are pictured here at the 1928 Bradley Beach tournament. Seated (l. to r.): Issac Turover, Samuel Factor, Dr. Norbert Lederer, Edward Lasker and Abraham Kupchik. Standing (l. to r.): Oscar Tenner, Al Horowitz (with no belly and no mustache!), Victor Spark (hotel manager), Herman Helms and Stasch Mlotkowski. Photograph from the American Chess Bulletin.
In December 1931, Reuben Fine (seated) captained the chess team of the College of the City of New York to victory in the national collegiate championship. The squad scored 23 1/2 - 1/2. Standing (l. to r.): Sidney Bernstein, Nathan Beckhardt and Robert Levenstein. Photograph from the *American Chess Bulletin*. 
Here is Al “Buddy” Simonson with fellow Americans at the 1933 Folkestone Olympiad. From left to right: Arthur Dake, Helen Kashdan, Isaac Kashdan, Buddy, Frank Marshall and Reuben Fine. Photograph by Wheeler.
My friend Donald MacMurray (see arrow) died in December, 1938, at age 24. Owner of the highest IQ ever recorded in the United States up to that time, he completed an undergraduate degree at the University of Chicago in only eight months. Among others pictured with him at the 1937 U.S. Open is George Treysman, seated second from the left. Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
Louis Zeckendorf—the Manhattan’s “nonagenarian kibitzer.” On April 6, 1935, his 98th birthday, Old Man Z. took on Oscar Tenner’s “little vun.” Also seated is Louie’s chauffer, who would shortly abscond with the old boy’s bond coupon’s. Standing (l. to r.): Abe Kupchik, unidentified, Mr. Rosenthal (?), Jack Fischer, Julius Helfgott, and Mrs. Edith Tenner. Photograph courtesy of the Manhattan Chess Club.
Alexander Alekhine (left) and Isaac Kashdan play a game for the camera at the 1932 Pasadena International. Standing (l. to r.): J.J. Araiza, Arthur Dake, Reuben Fine, and Sammy Reshevsky. Photo courtesy of Casey Bush.
Tony Santasiere (second from left and smiling) loved nothing more than organizing chummy little master tournaments and gourmet dinner parties at his cozy apartment in the Bronx. Seated on the right of the chessboard is Hermann Helms. Other players (l. to r.): Ted Knorr, Al Boczar and Ted Dunst. The lovely ladies remain unidentified. Photograph courtesy of Hector Rodriguez.
L. Walter Stephens (right), the “Kenesaw Mountain Landis of Chess,” presents Anthony Santasiere with the George Sturgis Trophy for winning the 1945 U.S. Open. Observing the grisly ceremony is Hermann Helms. Photograph courtesy of *Chess Life*. 
With high knobby cheekbones, George Treysman's face resembled the death mask of a Mongol warrior. The single redeeming feature was his eyes. They were deep set, like two black coals resting in a pool of water, and when he laughed they fairly rippled and overflowed until tears streamed down his cheeks. Illustration by W. Guido Castagnoli.
Edward Lasker fiddles with the chess pieces at the old Manhattan, while Gisela Gresser and Maurice Wertheim strike poses. Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
Al Horowitz (left) and wife meet Sherlock Homes (Basil Rathbone, right) and Dr. Watson (Nigel Bruce). Al was out in Hollywood for the 1945 Pan-American Chess Congress, and Holmes and Watson were waiting for their stage set to be sprayed so as to create an authentic London “fog”. Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
Handsome Herman Steiner (second from left) created the Hollywood chess connection. Here Lauren Becall gives him “the look” while Charles Boyer (left) and Humphrey Bogart play a game. Photo by Pat Clark.
Herman Steiner (left center) helps to provide Caissic verisimilitude to a scene from M.G.M.'s *Cass Timberlane*, starring Spencer Tracy (right) and Lana Turner. The man in the middle is George Sidney, one of the great directors from Hollywood's Golden Era. Photo by Harry Matosian.
I call Al Pinkus “the Indiana Jones of Chess.” He was also a great gentleman. Photograph courtesy of Lawrence Pinkus.
Abraham “Kuppele” Kupchick as he appeared in later years. Photograph from Chess Review.
The late and the great Al Horowitz, my buddy. Photograph courtesy of *Chess Life*.
The fascinating and foul Norman Tweed Whitaker, whom I call “Caissa’s conman.” Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
When chess champ Gary Kasparov speaks, Larry Parr (my co-author) and his tape-recorder listen. Grandmaster Maxim Dlugy looks on. Kasparov was in Washington, D.C., to promote a program called “Chess for Drug-free Schools & Crime free streets.” Photograph by Nigel Eddis.
When Kasparov speaks, even former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney (center) and New York Times media biggie William Safire listen. Photograph by Nigel Eddis.
Chapter XI

One-on-One with Kasparov

"One-on-One with Kasparov" was first published in the June 1983 issue of Chess Life, nearly 2½ years before Gary Kasparov won the world chess title from Anatoly Karpov in late 1985. The interview itself occurred still earlier at the 1982 Olympiad in Lucerne, Switzerland. What follows is a slightly expanded and edited version of the original Chess Life article. However, predictions and opinions—both right and wrong—remain unchanged so as to preserve the period flavor of the piece. Obviously, the author got it right about Kasparov becoming world champion; just as obviously, the author got it wrong about Kasparov having a "high regard" for Karpov's character.

I first met Gary Kasparov at the 1980 Olympiad in Malta. Initially, he seemed more mature than his scant 17 years (he was born in April 1963) would suggest, but his energy and enthusiasm were unmistakably those of a teenager.

By the time of our Malta meeting, I had already studied several of Kasparov's early games and was convinced that here was one of the truly great chess talents of all time—a player who at an early age exhibited the brilliance of Alexander Alekhine tempered by the objectivity and endgame genius of Jose Capablanca. And his results showed it: U.S.S.R. junior champion at age 12, participant in the 1978 U.S.S.R. Championship at age 15, winner of the 1979 Banja Luka International at age 16, and a grandmaster and World Junior champion in 1980 at age 17.

Do these results mean that Kasparov's talent exceeds that of Paul Morphy or Bobby Fischer? Hardly. Fischer was U.S. champion by age 14 and a grandmaster at 15. Further, Kasparov had access to knowledge and training unavailable before. But I firmly believe that no other player at so tender an age has shown the same grasp of chess theory, the same depth of imagination in combinative play, and the same mastery of endgame technique.

Where these great talents will lead Kasparov, only time will tell. But I am willing to go out on a limb by suggesting that perhaps by
1984, at the ripe old age of 21, Kasparov will become world cham-
pon.

How does titleholder Anatoly Karpov feel about the threat? I
had a chance to talk with him during a walk at Malta. “Do you
think that Kasparov will be your next challenger?” I asked.

Karpov thought for only a moment. “He is very talented,” the
champion answered, “but the fact that he is very emotional may
prove to be a stumbling block.” This interesting and incisive
comment comes from a player whose keen analytical powers and
evenness of temperament should not be underestimated. However, I
beg to disagree. Great talent is rarely placid, and chess history is
littered with players overwhelmed by bubbling genius.

Two Years Later

I had a chance for a second talk with Kasparov at the 1982
Olympiad in Lucerne, Switzerland. We settled down in a corner of
the huge playing hall, and Kasparov told me how he learned chess at
age six by watching his parents play. His father recognized the lad’s
talent when Gary solved a chess problem that had puzzled both him
and Gary’s mother, Clara. There followed days filled with chess, and
he improved rapidly. By age 10, he was studying with the great
Mikhail Botvinnik.

Would Gary like to emulate Botvinnik’s style? “Not at all!”
Kasparov fiercely exclaimed. He prefers the style of the romantic
Alekhine, his greatest chess hero, to the arid play of Botvinnik. In-
deed, Kasparov has in common with Alekhine a facility for pulling
off finishing combinations that are even more complicated than the
middlegame maneuvers preceding them. He says that his most bril-
liant combination was played against Brazil’s Jaime Sunye-Neto at
the 1981 World Junior Team Championship in Graz, Austria.

Jaime Sunye-Neto–Gary Kasparov
World Junior Team Championship, 1981
If Sunye-Neto had instead played 42. K-R1, Kasparov intended the astonishing line, 42. ... BxP!! 43. PxB R/Q7xP!!! 44. NxR R-N6!!, when there is no defense against the threat of 45. ... RxP, mate. If White moves the Knight, then Black finishes with 45. ... R-N8, mate.

42. ... BxP!! 43. PxB R/Q7xP!! 44. Q-B3!

White finds the best defense. If 44. NxR, Black has 44. ... N-Q7ch; and if 44. QxP, Black scores immediately with 44. ... R-R7 45. N-K2 R/N4-N7.

44. ... R-R7 45. N-K2 K-R2

The threat is 45. ... R/N4-N7.

46. Q-B8!!

Kasparov notes that 46. Q-N4 is a better defense, though Black still wins after 46. ... P-B4 47. Q-N5 (the problem with 47. Q-B8 is 47. ... R-R8ch 48. K-B2 N-Q7!) 47. ... P-B5! 48. Q-N4 N-Q7ch!! 49. QxN R-R8ch 50. K-B2 P-B6!.

46. ... R-R8ch 47. K-B2 N-Q7!, White resigns

Kasparov gives the line, 48. N-N3 R-R7ch 49. K-K1 N-B6ch 50. K-B1 RxB, and says that White's cause is hopeless.

And what about Kasparov's activities outside chess? It turns out that this young man entertains a wide range of interests. He loves almost all sports, and he looks as if he is good at many. His favorite hobby is travelling around the countryside on his motorcycle. And what about girls and marriage? "Girls are wonderful," he confided, "but I have a long time before I can think of marriage."

Kasparov's full schedule at the university, where he specializes in English, does not leave him much spare time. He does manage to do some reading, and his preference is for historical novels.

As for current ambitions, Kasparov says he will be content with playing in the candidates' matches. And if he is lucky enough to meet Karpov in 1984, he will prepare diligently. Kasparov has a high regard for the champion's play as well as for the champion's character. And character, Kasparov believes, is just as important as ability, particularly in a match.

The time seemed right to confront Kasparov with the assessment of him that Karpov offered two years earlier. "Karpov thinks you are very emotional," I said. "He told me so himself in Malta. Won't your emotions hinder you in match play?"

Kasparov's face lit up in its usual mischievous grin. His reply was
brief and to the point. "It is necessary to have emotions," he said.

To the Manner Born

Does Kasparov find it a burden to be a celebrity at such an early age? "Not at all," he claims. "I manage to do all the things that I want to do. And besides, I like people." As we talked, people came up from time to time and asked for his autograph. He never refused and never lost his composure, always appearing courteous and pleasant as if to the manner born.

"Of all your games," I asked, "which are your favorites?" Kasparov astonished me by naming two little-known contests, Alburt-Kasparov and Kasparov-Palatnik, played in 1978 in a qualifying tournament for that year's U.S.S.R. Championship. "But what about your games this year at Bugojno against Najdorf and Petrosian?" I asked. "The game against Petrosian was great. You tied his hands behind his back, started throwing darts and never stopped. It was brilliant! Petrosian never had a chance to get untied." Kasparov laughed delightedly. "Yes," he said, "that's a perfect description."

Gary Kasparov-Tigran Petrosian
Bugojno, 1982
Bogo-Indian Defense


Black wants to exchange a pair of Rooks, but the modest-looking text move stops the idea cold. Kasparov points out that the position is untenable for Black after 17. ... R-Q1 18. Q-B5! QxQ 19. RxRch Q-B1 20. RxQch KxR 21. R-B7.


Writes Kasparov, "The variation 24. ... QxQ 25. RxRch Q-B1 26. RxQch KxR 27. R-B7 does not require any commentary."

Still, I couldn't convince Kasparov that the Petrosian game ought to belong in his personal pantheon. "I have other reasons," he said,
"for preferring the Alburt and Palatnik games. They stand out as turning points in my career." Kasparov was only 15 when the games were played, and he was competing for a chance to move from junior tournaments into the adult world of the U.S.S.R. Championship. Too, the championship qualifier contained some of the best talent in the world. The great David Bronstein, for example, finished in a tie for 29th–47th in the 64-player field. Kasparov tied for first with Igor Ivanov, who now lives in the United States.

After returning from the Olympiad in Switzerland, I reviewed the Alburt and Palatnik games. They exhibit imagination and illustrate Kasparov's tremendous vision. He obviously sees clearly the upshot of complex positions even before they occur. Most of all, the wins over Lev Alburt and Semyon Palatnik show the stamp of an enthusiastic chess spirit that is much like the man himself. Here they are with a few of my notes:

Lev Alburt–Gary Kasparov
Daugavpils, 1978
King's Indian Defense


This interesting pawn sacrifice leads to great complications. Typically, Kasparov wants to wrest the initiative from his opponent as soon as possible.


The position is quite even. White ought to have continued with 25. P-QN3 instead of the weak text move.

25. ... Q-N4 26. R-Q1? Q-KB4!

Once again, Kasparov obtains a strong initiative, and this time there is no stopping him.

The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories


36. ... Q-N8ch

Very accurate. After an immediate 36. ... QxN, White can reach a theoretically drawn position by 37. Q-Q8ch K-N2 38. Q-Q4ch P-B3 (the only move to avoid perpetual check) 39. QxRPch. Hence Kasparov’s ploy to force Alburt’s Queen to KN1.


Another Kasparov finesse. There is only a draw after the hasty advance, 45. ... P-N5?. Thus, 46. PxP PxP 47. K-B2! K-B5 48. P-N3ch! and so on.


Kasparov’s win over Palatnik was the first game of his to gain international recognition. Appearing in Informant No. 26, it was voted sixth best in the volume by a distinguished panel of grandmasters. Perhaps even more telling, it finished first in a poll among readers of the Yugoslav newspaper, Politika Ekspres.

Gary Kasparov—Semyon Palatnik
Daugavpils, 1978
Alekhine’s Defense


The tempting sacrifice, 18. BxNP, is premature because of 18. ... PxB 19. NxP NxP!.


![Chess board diagram]


No position can withstand this kind of battering. White soon swarms over the Black King.


What a shellacking!
I first met Reuben Fine over 60 years ago and first played him in the Junior Masters Tournament of 1930. Although I don’t remember who won our game, I will never forget the first prize in that tournament: a barrel of schmaltz herring. (This unique incentive may explain why Arthur Dake played so well to win the event—the herring being a foretaste of the green grapes that served as his diet during the deep Depression years to come.)

Born in 1914, Reuben was a small, blond, blue-eyed youngster about six months my junior. He seemed cocky and aloof to some people, but I believe that was only a protective facade typical of overly sensitive lads. In fact, he was always ready for a spoof. One memorable evening back in 1932, he showed up at a Marshall Chess Club simultaneous disguised in movie-serial garb as Zu-Ux, a Martian invader. Two “Nubian slaves” stood nearby to protect their “master.” In a sentence, Reuben was a poor boy and a good sport who grew up in the East Bronx, and anyone familiar with social conditions in those precincts during the Great Depression knows what a difficult time he had just to survive.

Young Fine possessed a superior intelligence, graduating from college at the age of 18. We all knew that he was going to make it one way or another. The only questions were when, where, and in what field of endeavor. By the mid-1930s, the field of endeavor appeared to be chess. I regarded him as our best hope to become world champion.

In a period of only 18 months, from June 1936 to December 1937, Fine achieved results in the international arena exceeded among Americans only by Paul Morphy and Bobby Fischer. He took first prize in 10 of 14 tournaments, including a skein of nine firsts in 10 events. In two other tournaments, he finished second. At the super-strong Nottingham 1936 and Semmering-Baden 1937, he went undefeated and finished just below the top both times. He was now repeatedly finishing ahead of Alexander Alekhine. Then, on Reuben’s next visit to Europe, he tied with Paul Keres for first place at AVRO 1938, which was the strongest tournament held until that
time and, for those of us who suspect that FIDE ratings have become outrageously inflated, the strongest tournament ever. “Both his sporting results in the thirties and the sheer quality of his games,” wrote Wolfgang Heidenfeld in *Draw!,* “make...[Fine] one of the outstanding players—possibly the outstanding player of the period.”

Reuben was, then, a great player, but paradoxically, not good enough. During the mad and bad years of the 1930s and 1940s—the era of Stalin, Hitler, Hirohito, and bread lines—no American could hope to make a career in chess unless he were world champion or, at the very least, U.S. champion. Reuben ran up a narrow plus-score against Alekhine but could not arrange a match; and in the U.S. Championships of those years...

**Fine Versus Reshevsky**

If Fine eclipsed Sammy Reshevsky in the international arena and finished ahead of him in several U.S. Opens, he failed to win the U.S. Championship in four attempts, trailing behind Reshevsky in three of them. I must take some responsibility for my good friend’s discomfiture. In the 1936 and 1940 championship fixtures, Sammy defeated me and Fine only drew. If the results had been reversed, Fine would have finished first equal in 1936 and won outright in 1940. Then, in the 1944 U.S. Championship (without Reshevsky), I beat Fine in the decisive encounter.

Although Reshevsky outscored Fine on a number of occasions, I considered the latter the better player because of his greater knowledge and deeper understanding of the game. It showed in his superior international record. Fine lacked only Reshevsky’s bulldog tenacity and singleness of purpose. What Viscount Melbourne said of Lord Macaulay—that he wished he were “as cocksure of anything as Tom Macaulay is of everything”—defined the distinction between Fine and Reshevsky. If Reshevsky’s religious beliefs were so strong that he never doubted anything, Fine questioned everything. That included, I believe, his right to devote so much time to what many people regarded as a frivolous pursuit that contributed little to the well-being of society.

Doubts are always the enemy of blind dedication, which is so essential for aspiring world champions. Unemployed from 1939 to 1941, Fine saw that a future dedicated to chess was bleak at best, and he obeyed the dictates of common sense, returning to school in the mid-1940s and earning a psychology doctorate in 1948 from U.C.L.A. During World War II, he worked first as a translator (Dutch, French, German, Italian, Yiddish, you name it!) and then for the Department of the Navy as part of a team to determine...
where German U-Boats were most likely to surface. Later, he did research in the area of psychological warfare, including a study on kamikaze attacks.

In the field of Freudian psychology, Fine became a giant, serving as an honored visiting professor at his old alma mater, the City College of New York (Class of '32), not to mention stints in the same capacity at the University of Amsterdam, the Lowell Institute of Technology, and the University of Florence in Italy. Founder of the Creative Living Center, located in midtown Manhattan, he authored *The History of Psychoanalysis*, a standard work in the field that was first published in 1979. Among Reuben's 16 non-chess books, important titles include *Freud: a Critical Re-evaluation of his Theories* (1962), *The Healing of the Mind* (1971), *The Development of Freud's Thought* (1973), *The Meaning of Love in Human Experience* (1985), and *The Forgotten Man: Understanding the Male Psyche* (1987).

But as I was saying about Fine and Reshevsky, when playing over their games from the U.S.Opens and the U.S. Championships of the 1930s and 1940s, I noticed a tiny distinction between the two. Fine, who never had trouble focusing his attention in high-profile international events, occasionally lost tactical control of middlegame positions in domestic tournaments, whereas Reshevsky virtually never suffered such accidents. Sammy's bad positions came from poorly played openings. I believe that in American events, Fine often found himself wondering why he was playing chess for pennies and let his mind wander. Take, for example, the following forgotten game against a non-master:

*Albert Roddy–Reuben Fine*

*U.S. Open, 1940*

*Nimzoindian Defense*


This beautiful quiet move forces Black to run for a draw.


Here is a catastrophe—a chessic Hindenburg—against yet another lesser light. The game is from the 1938 U.S. Championship in which Fine finished a half point behind Reshevsky.

*Milton Hanauer–Reuben Fine*

*U.S. Championship, 1938*

*English Opening*


The position is now a reversed Sicilian. Usually, reversed formations are suspect for the second player, but Fine does not lose this game because of the opening.


This move is not up to speed. White should play 19. Q-N4.

24. ... Q-N1??

A stunning lapse of concentration. Black can win at least two pawns with 24. ... B-K4. White is lost after either 25. QxPch KxN 26. P-B4 R/1-K2 or 25. NxP BxQ 26. NQ B-K6ch!. Following the game, Fine explained that he failed to notice the elementary capture, 25. ... KxN.


White’s King is about to become very active, and a more circumspect move is 33. ... K-B3.

34. P-K5 P-B5 35. K-Q4! P-B6!

Black is fighting for a draw.


A better try is 42. ... P-KR4!.

43. N-B8 B-B4?

The last chance to put up a tough fight was 43. ... RxP 44. RxB PxP 45. RxP P-N5 46. PxP RxQNP 47. R-R7!.


An absolutely depressing performance by one of chess history’s strongest grandmasters.

In spite of lapses, Reuben Fine was a great player who compiled a stunning international record. The comparison may not have been
made before, but I think that Fine played a lot like Bobby Fischer. Both were active positional players who possessed universal styles, and both won games in a variety of ways. "My chief objective," Fine once wrote, "was always precision, wherever that would take me." As Savielly Tartakower noted, Fine could make "something out of nothing" a la Capablanca. But he could also play grandiose and risky attacking combinations:

Reuben Fine–Nat Grossman
New York, 1933

1. N-B4?!

The conception is magnificent, the combination dubious.

1. ... NxB 2. NxNP K-N2 3. R-KN1!

That White's sacrifices involve waiting moves rather than checks lifts this idea far above the ordinary.

3. ... Pxn 4. RxPch KxR 5. Q-K6!!

Another elegant quiet move.

5. ... NxP?


Against Mikhail Botvinnik, Fine played a game that reminds me of Fischer's win over Tigran Petrosian in game seven of their 1971 candidates' match. Notice Fine's excellent opening preparation, easy negotiation of complications to achieve relevant positional aims, and final penetration with the Rooks.
The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories
Reuben Fine—Mikhail Botvinnik
AVRO, 1938
French Defense


This move is all part of a prepared variation by Fine.

11. ... N-B3?

That this natural move is shown to lose virtually by force speaks volumes about Fine's feel for positions. He makes beating Botvinnik look easy. The correct move is 11. ... B-Q2, when the game is equal after 12. QxP BxNch 13. QxB BxB 14. N-Q4.


White does not fall for 20. RxP, which permits Black activity.


Black cannot keep White's Rooks off the seventh rank. As Fine points out, a possible line is 31. ... R-R2 32. R-B3 Q-K5 33. N-Q7! K-R1 34. R-B7 R-KN1 35. N-K5.

Dutch Treat

To support himself, Reuben or Ruby, as we called him, began to write chess books. And lots of them. Some of these books such as Basic Chess Endings, Modern Chess Openings (sixth edition) and Dr. Lasker's Chess Career (with Fred Reinfeld) became classics; others suffered the critical ravages of time. Most of his books sold well, and along with Reinfeld, he was the most popular chess writer of his time. A well-deserved popularity, too. He wrote clearly and concisely, and beginners bought his books by the thousands.
For a time, Ruby lived in Holland, serving as Max Euwe's second in the 1937 return match against Alekhine. Ruby became fast friends with Emma Thea Keesing, the daughter of his Dutch publisher. After a brief courtship, they were married on September 1, 1937; and Ruby brought his bride home to Kew Gardens, New York, where according to my old address book they lived at 115-25 84th Avenue.

Emmy was a bright, dark-eyed, dainty beauty with a pixieish sense of humor that made men love her. A former reporter with Amsterdam’s Het Volk, she was a real Dutch treat. My wife, Nina, and I were fond of her, and since the Fines were neighbors, we socialized together. In those days, both my wife and I worked; and I was sort of a big shot by virtue of owning a brand new Plymouth. Price: $540. How natural, therefore, for all of us—sans Emmy, who was a diabetic and decided she could not make the trip—to drive down to the Jersey shore for a weekend at Bradley Beach, where we rented rooms and rushed out to the waiting sand.

The day was beautiful, and Ruby and I soon fell fast asleep on the beach. Suddenly, we were awakened by loud voices coming from the water’s edge. My wife, looking bedraggled, was arguing with a lifeguard. We arrived on the scene just in time to see a policeman load Nina into a paddy wagon. The lifeguard claimed that she swam out beyond the ropes and told him to get lost when he went out to get her. He then tried to tow her back by the hair, and she kicked and cursed at him. And so off Nina went to the police station, where we were told the judge would hold a speedy trial.

Ruby and I dashed back to our rooms, dressed in a flash and arrived at the police station to find Nina playing gin rummy with the chief. The judge was on the way after postponing his weekend hunting trip, and we soon found ourselves in the adjoining courtroom. I acted as my wife’s attorney, and Ruby claimed to represent the New York Times.

The lifeguard told his story, after which I put my “client” on the stand. “Tell me,” I asked, “did you use foul language toward this gentleman when he tried to pull you out of the water?” Innocently, this sweet young thing, who once posed for Charles Dana Gibson, looked at the judge and answered, “Your honor, such language is foreign to my nature.” That might have been enough, but I thought it fitting that Ruby make the final move. “Your honor,” I said, “we have here Mr. Reuben Fine, a staff member of the New York Times, who saw everything. I don’t think it will benefit your fair city if word leaks out that local lifeguards deal so harshly with the public.”

Down came the judge’s gavel with a bang. Case dismissed!
With a Friend Like Me

In the early years of our chess careers, Ruby and I played a match for the then huge sum of $50, which was put up by James Newman. My opponent got off to a flying start by winning the first two games, and all he needed was a third win to finish the match. But there followed two draws, and I won the rest to take the $50.

I think that this match put a hex on Ruby—the same kind of Indian sign that Sammy Reshevsky had on me until I beat him two-zip in a training match for the 1948 world championship tournament. I had a facility for drawing with Ruby and losing to Sammy in U.S. Championships and, in the process, wreaking havoc on the former's career plans. That was why Ruby inscribed my copy of his *Basic Chess Endings* with the request to “Please look this over before playing Reshevsky.”

One moment that I will never forget is when we drove home after I won the 1944 U.S. Championship—in large part because of defeating Ruby in our individual game. “You know,” he said without bitterness, “you’ve always stood in my way.” He was right, and the thought saddened me. The phrase, “With a friend like me,” came to mind.

My wife was genuinely fond of Ruby, and unlike myself, she was in no kind of competition with him. After he and Emmy got divorced in 1944, Nina could not bear to see him so depressed and often invited him to dinner, where she tried to fix him up with dates. He eventually recovered and married Sonya Lebeaux, who bore him his only son, Benjamin.

Sonya figured in a small incident that occurred during my 1946 match in Hollywood against Herman Steiner. One evening, Ruby and his new wife came to see us play. When the game was over, he and I wandered off discussing its manifold and recondite complications, never realizing that we left his wife waiting outside the playing room. Luckily, she was still there when we doubled back some 40 minutes later.

How’s that for a couple of absentminded professors?

On January 25, 1993, Ruby entered St. Luke’s–Roosevelt Medical Center in Manhattan. He had suffered a stroke, and on March 26, he died from pneumonia. The loss of this old friend, an uncrowned world champion if ever there was one, haunts the (very) few of us who remain from the glory days of the 1930s, when the United States, radiant victor in four consecutive Olympiads, ruled the roost of world chess.
Selected Games

_Reuben Fine: Winning Made Easy_


Chapter XII


Nothing is more responsible for the good old days than a bad memory. I know that. But I still say that 1934—the year Adolf Hitler consolidated power, the year Joseph Stalin ordered a law to execute millions of orphaned children cluttering Soviet cities, and the year dry winds stirred up a Dust Bowl in the Middle West—was a great year for American chess. What better way to forget one’s troubles than by playing the royal game?

The Western Open or, as it later became known, the U.S. Open was being held in Chicago at the newly built Lawson YMCA. I travelled to Chicago aboard a Greyhound bus and snared one of the YMCA’s better rooms for a dollar a night. There were some 75-cent rooms, but I always liked going first class. As Evalyn Walsh McLean, a fabulously wealthy Washington socialite of the period, put the matter, “My own preference, generally, is for show.”

Little did I realize that Sammy Reshevsky, the famous Wunderkind of the early 1920s, would also be at the tournament. Although only 22 or 23 at the time, he was emerging from semi-retirement, having devoted the previous few years to studying accounting under the watchful eye of Julius Rosenwald, his benefactor. Lest you fail to recognize this name, Rosenwald was at that time the head of Sears & Roebuck.

Before meeting Sammy in Chicago, I had only seen pictures of him in the American Chess Bulletin—pictures in which he was playing a simultaneous against 20 U.S. congressmen or posing with Edward Lasker and Geza Maroczy. He appeared to be a cute little boy with ringlets, a sailor’s suit and high-button shoes. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I shook hands with a rapidly balding and shy young man who had the most delicate features that I had ever seen. As the tournament draw would have it, we played early on; and I felt sure of victory until Sammy essayed one of his now famous Knight maneuvers. He proved that my optimism was totally unwarranted, and the game ended in a draw.

I did not know then, but learned later, that Sammy handled Knights like David Janowski shifted Bishops or Geza Maroczy
played Queen-and-pawn endgames. He could out-calculate even Alexander Alekhine in the Byzantine intricacies of Knight maneuvers.

Alexander Alekhine–Samuel Reshevsky
Nottingham, 1936
Colle System


Not one of Alekhine's better days. At the time this game was played, it was already known that 9. P-K4! gave White a superior position.


This move cedes a slight pull to Black. The simplest line is 27. R-B5 N/1-K2 28. B-Q2, when the game is about even.


31. ... N-K2

The game ought to be drawn, but a couple of errors by Alekhine combined with perfect play by Reshevsky lead to another conclusion.


Wrote Reshevsky, "A blunder, although not necessarily a fatal one. The proper course was 36. PxPch KxP 37. P-B3."

Alekhine needed to play 49. B-Q4, when Black's win becomes very difficult.


If 53. BxP, Black wins with 53. ... NxB 54. PxN N-B5ch, followed by ... NxP.

53. ... N-B5ch 54. K-B2 N-N5!

"It is fascinating," wrote Reshevsky, "to observe the powerful cooperation of the Knights."


59. ... K-K5 60. P-R4 N-Q6! 61. B-R5 N-N7ch!, White resigns

If 62. K-K1, Black marches in the QNP, beginning with 62. ... N-B5.

Sammy's facility with Knights was no mystery. Indeed, it was an expression of his greatest chess strength—the ability to calculate tactics like an adding machine. "Technically," wrote Reuben Fine in The World's Great Chess Games, "Reshevsky is characterized above all by superb tactical skill....Unlike [Mikhail] Botvinnik he is little concerned with the strategical backbone of the game. What he cares about are tactical combinations, and these he handles to perfection."

Fine's description, which runs counter to the popular notion of Sammy as a positional player, is instantly recognizable to those of us who had to play this pocket-sized computer. The discrepancy between the common and insider views has its source in how Sammy applied his tactical genius. If Mikhail Tal used his talent to attack enemy Kings, Sammy exercised his ingenuity to find unlikely defenses or win difficult endings. His games had the appearance of positional chess but not the substance. The following "positional" game is a case in point—a struggle in which Sammy spends his time not weighing positional abstractions but wending his way through a maze of lengthy exchanging combinations:

Samuel Reshevsky—Gideon Stahlberg
United States vs. Argentina Team Match, 1947
Catalan System
Chapter XIII


14. N-Q3 N-Q3

A rare mirror-image tableau.

15. B-N5 R-K1


Perhaps 23. ... R-B1 offers more resistance.


On 34. ... P-K3, White plays 35. P-R7 PxB 36. R-Q8ch K-B2 37. P-R8=Q.

Bowser on My Trousers

Playing a chess game with Sammy Reshevsky was like trying to shake off a pitbull that clamped its teeth on the leg of your trousers. No matter how you thrashed your leg or chess pieces about, he would not let go. During the 1930s and 1940s, I was +0 –4 against him in U.S. Championship play. No one was tougher on me, and at one time or another, I fought ’em all.

Our game in the 1936 U.S. Championship was typical of what he did to me and, for that matter, to almost everyone else. Before the tournament, Al Horowitz and I worked out some interesting pawn-
sacrifice variations in the Tarrasch Defense, one of which I sprang on Sammy. He could never resist a pawn, trusting in brute calculation to negotiate the hazards. Before long, I had a far superior position, but Sammy did not collapse. He hung tough, held his game together, and put me away with a pretty combination the moment my guard came down. And he did all of this with only seconds on the clock. Such was my admiration for Sammy's performance that I included the loss in *If You Must Play Chess*, a collection of my best games.

_Samuel Reshevsky—Arnold Denker_

_U.S. Championship, 1936_

_Queen's Gambit Declined_


"If you've ever gone fishing and experienced a heavy tug on your line," I wrote in *If You Must Play Chess*, "then you know how I felt."

10. N-QR4 B-B4 11. N-K1


11. ... B-K5 12. BxB

The alternative was to play 12. P-B3, burying the King Bishop.


The best move may be 15. P-QN4.

15. ... N-N4 16. Q-N3?

The logical continuation is 16. P-QN4, if only because Black has no intention of trading Queens.

16. ... Q-Q2 17. B-Q2 KR-K1 18. QR-K1 B-B3 19. N-B4 QR-Q1

Black is beautifully developed, and White is bent double. His Queen Knight does not have a single move. Given that White was also in severe time pressure, he appeared to have an impossible task ahead. But as I wrote about my opponent, "In those days we did not realize that his greatest asset is a diabolical ability to save himself in harrowing time pressure in even the most delicate positions."


Black threatens to force a serious weakening of White's pawn structure by playing 22. ... P-KN3.
22. P-B4

By now, Sammy was whipping out flawless moves while spending no time for reflection.

22. ... B-B2 23. Q-KB3

Sammy sidesteps 23. QxP?? Q-Q4ch 24. R-B3 RxP, and Black wins.

23. ... B-R4 24. R-Q1 Q-B4!

Black intends a powerful invasion at QB7.

25. P-KN4 Q-B7 26. QxN

26. ... QxN?

Instead of this risky capture, the safe 26. ... BxB leads to a winning position after 27. Q-Q3 QxN 28. QxB QxP 29. P-B5 Q-Q4ch.

27. P-B5 RxP 28. B-N5!

Another move played automatically—as if by reflex.

28. ... QR-K1?

Once again, I falter. With 28. ... QxP 29. BxR BxB, Black keeps the initiative with such threats as 30. ... B-B2 and 30. ... Q-Q4ch and 30. ... QxP. I’ve always been able to stand adversity; it’s prosperity that does me in.

29. NxP! R/1-K6 30. BxR RxB

This move loses more quickly than 30. ... PxB 31. N-R5 B-B2 32. N-B6ch K-B1 33. Q-R6ch K-K2 34. N-Q5ch, when White also wins.

31. Q-R6 B-B2 32. N-R5 B-K4 33. P-B6, Black resigns

**Devastatingly Funny**

At the 1942 U.S. Championship, my relations with Sammy hit a
snag because of the funniest and most devastating game that we ever played. We met in round six, when my score stood at 4½–½. Our game was crucial. In the position below, I played 45. ... R-N5:

Sammy Reshevsky–Arnold Denker
U.S. Championship, 1942

Not only can I draw easily with lateral checks, Sammy's flag had fallen. At least 40 to 50 spectators saw it drop. Whereupon, tournament director L. Walter Stephens rushed to our table, picked up the clock from behind, and turned it around so that Sammy's clock was now on my side. He instantly declared me forfeited. I appealed to Sammy, who would only say that he was not the tournament director. Then, along with several spectators, I appealed to Stephens. But to no avail. He announced archly, "Does Kenesaw Mountain Landis ever reverse himself?" The reference was to Judge Landis, the commissioner of baseball installed after the White/Black Sox scandal of 1919, who was renowned for ruling with an iron fist.

In the early part of 1948, a second incident occurred that tested our friendship. Sammy was preparing for the world championship tournament of that year to determine a successor to the deceased Alekhine, and I agreed to a training match on condition that we played no more than three games a week. Sammy stipulated that the games not be published. In game one I caught my opponent in a prepared variation of the Two Knights Defense, weathered a fierce counterattack and hung on to win. Frankly, I astonished myself by breaking Sammy's jinx. The next game was a Gruenfeld Defense in which I flatly outplayed my fearsome opponent. A unique event in the many encounters between us.

I was leading 2–0! At which point, New York Post chess columnist Horace Bigelow published the first game. Although I had absolutely nothing to do with this breach of trust and, for the record, have published neither game to this very day, Sammy blamed me and refused to continue the match. Such behavior on his part was most unusual, as he had hitherto honored all of his commitments. Because Sammy is no longer with us, I feel released from my non-
publication pledge. Here are the two games—the first having never been published in book form and the second appearing in print for the first time ever:

Arnold Denker—Samuel Reshevsky  
Training Match, 1948 (Game I)  
Two Knights Defense


A safe move here is 20. ... BxB. But safety is not the point of this game.

21. P-B4


21. ... N-QN2 22. P-B5 N-N4

Santasiere describes this move as a “profound and brilliant conception.”


If 25. ... PxP, White works up an attack with 26. Q-Q3.


At about this point, both players were in frantic time pressure. Santasiere terms the text “obviously suicidal” and recommends 31. P-R4 with the idea of R-QR3.

31. ... QR-KN1 32. NxP

Typical of the traps that White must avoid is 32. PxB RxB 33. N-B6ch K-R1 34. NxR R-R7ch!.

32. ... BxP 33. NxN B-R5ch 34. N-R3 RxN/N6 35. R-K3 RxR

Is this exchange a mistake? Santasiere thinks so and gives as winning 35. ... R/6xNch 36. K-N1 (if 36. RxR, then Black replies 36. ... BxR 37. BxB RxBch with much the better position) 36. ... B-K5 37. BxR RxB. White’s best chance appears to be 36. BxB 37. Q-R2! B-N7ch 38. KxB RxQch 39. KxR N-Q1.

41. R-Q7 K-N3 42. RxRP!!

White could have won immediately with 42. P-N3.

42. ... N-B5 43. P-R4 RxP

Much more resistant is 43. ... NxNP 44. P-R5 N-Q8 45. B-N6 N-B6 46. P-R6 N-Q4 47. B-Q8 R-K7ch 48. K-B3 RxP 49. R-R8 R-QR7.


I suspect that the final word on the above complex game is far from being said.

Samuel Reshevsky—Arnold Denker
Training Match, 1948 (Game 2)
Gruenfeld Defense


As in Kramer–Najdorf, a game played later in 1948 at the New York International. The correct move is 9. P-Q5 with good prospects for White.

9. ... PxB 10. R-Q1 P-K4!

Also played by Najdorf, who is given credit for this discovery in the textbooks. White is now fighting for a draw.


16. ... B-QB3?!

wins immediately by 21. ... Q-R5ch 22. K-B1 B-N4ch) 21. ... NxR!, and Black won on move 35.


Unfortunately, the scoresheet is indecipherable after move 45.

The second storm in our personal relations passed. Sammy’s chess stature was too immense and the episode too minor for him to remain angry. And while on the subject of Sammy’s stature, both Al Horowitz and Bobby Fischer believed that in a title match, he would have beaten Mikhail Botvinnik during the early and mid-1950s. Wrote Bobby on one occasion, “For a period of ten years—between 1946 and 1956—Reshevsky was probably the best chess player in the world. I feel sure that had he played a match with Botvinnik during that time, he would have won.” As for myself, I cannot say who would have won such a match, but I can say who did win a short match between the two in 1955. Sammy triumphed 2½–1½. Like the great Capablanca, Sammy was lazy, rarely studied openings or prepared for specific opponents; but also like the immortal Cuban, he more than held his own with the giants of the time by relying on his natural gifts—in Sammy’s case, gifts for calculating defensive tactics and endgame variations.

By the time Sammy turned 80 in 1991, he was long past his best years. Yet this seven-time U.S. champion was still the little big man of chess and remained too hot to handle for many players. Just take a look at some of his nice wins from recent events. Or take a look at the following dour squeeze from a half century past. Mind you, it is not one of Sammy’s great technical efforts (for one of those, see his victory over Fischer in the first game of their 1961 match) but a hardscrabble affair that provides a fair idea of what we had to face on a normal day.

Samuel Reshevsky—Vassily Smyslov
Leningrad–Moscow, 1939
Queen’s Gambit Declined

White attacks on the Queen’s wing and will win unless Black stages an equivalent demonstration on the Kingside.


White blunts Black’s attacking hopes.

18. ... Q-R5

This move appears to lose time and permits White a neat maneuver on move 20.

19. Q-Q2 Q-K2 20. Q-KB2! P-B3

If 20. ... QxKP, White has 21. QR-K1.


A maneuver that should force the game in a few moves.

30. ... NxNP 31. BxB RxB 32. N-K6ch RxN 33. PxR R-K2

34. Q-B5?!

White misses a speedy win, 34. RxN! PxR 35. P-Q5 Q-Q3 36. Q-KB5!.


The threat is to win immediately by 49. R-Q1.

Strictly Kosher

Over the years, my wife, Nina, and I grew increasingly fond of Sammy and his wife Norma. We respected Sammy's strong religious feelings, and on many a Saturday, when he was not allowed to use mechanical transport, I walked him home from the Manhattan Chess Club down to his apartment at about 12th and Madison. My wife and I often went to dinner with him and observed how he cross-examined restaurant owners as well as chefs to assure himself that the food would be strictly kosher. During tournaments, he often travelled great distances in order to observe the Jewish Sabbath.

The above, and much more, I have seen. But not until the U.S.A.–U.S.S.R match of 1946 did I watch him starve himself rather than eat unkosher food. We were staying in Stockholm, and had it not been for my wife, I think he might have become very ill. Nina spoke to a hotel maid in Yiddish and managed to strike a responsive chord. Sammy was soon served two hard-boiled eggs, toast and tea—and all in glass dishes. It was the first food he had tasted in nearly three days.

For many people, the strict observation of rituals in their respective churches presents problems. But not for Sammy. Never did I hear him complain about hardships during a tournament. Never did I hear him complain about his lot when Norma became violently ill. He simply accepted the situation and took excellent care of her. If that’s what religion did for Sammy, then more of us ought to give it a chance.

Sammy has gone to his God now, having passed away from a heart attack on April 4, 1992.

Selected Games

Samuel Reshevsky: Winning Made Hard


Chapter XIV

"I Am an Officer of the Czar!"

If you were looking for someone to play the role of a Russian general in “His Imperial Majesty’s Army” and if Emil Jannings or Erich von Stroheim were unavailable, then you could not have done better than hire Alexander Alexandrovich Alekhine. Chess champion of the world from 1927 to 1935 and from 1937 to 1946, he commanded every bit of attention that his imposing name suggests.

By birth the son of a landowning Marshal of Nobility (his father was privy councillor to the conservative Fourth Duma), Alekhine created the impression in his bearing and attitude of royal power progressively collapsing into total decadence. Having arrived in the West in 1921, this dispossessed nobleman was blond in hair and fair in complexion, cruelly handsome, and always ramrod straight—thanks largely to a corset that he was seldom without. Given to wearing suits with striped pants and shirts with old-fashioned wing collars, he looked like a diplomat on his way to present credentials at the Court of St. James.

I got my first peek at Alekhine in 1929 during a simultaneous exhibition that he gave at the Manhattan Chess Club. My good friend Irving Kandel was lucky enough to procure a board and kind enough to let me join him in consultation. I can still see Alekhine’s famous piercing look when approaching a board for the first time. He stared at you as if his eyes were snapping your picture. Months later, when I again played against him in a simul at the Hungaria International Chess Club, he repeated the same procedure, only this time he stopped and said, “Oh, you again.” Both games were drawn.

The following afternoon (or was it the following year?), Alekhine played a 20-board blindfold simultaneous at the Manhattan. Although not a record-setter, it was the greatest such exhibition that I have ever seen or read about. Just imagine, the man played 20 top masters, some in consultation, scored well and produced some beautiful games.

Alekhine’s memory was legendary. Just as those eyes photographed your image and that brain effortlessly conducted huge blindfold exhibitions, so his memory stored all that passed before it.

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My friend Mendel Najdorf claims that during the Margate tournament of 1938, he mentioned to Alekhine that they had crossed swords 11 years earlier in a simultaneous in Warsaw, Poland.

"I won our game," said Najdorf.

"So, you're the one who gave me the Rook," replied the world champion who played blindfolded against Najdorf.

**A Chess Superman**

In 1932, Alekhine returned to New York and stayed for several months. But this time he was no longer the fastidious, yet vibrant powerhouse of 1929. Gone was the regal bearing and that fresh, young and eager look. He smoked incessantly and was careless about dropping ashes on his clothes. Something had happened, and my guess is that chess success and public adulation failed to satisfy his restless nature. In a newspaper interview from 1944, he said, "If, sometime, I write my memoirs—which is very possible—people will realize that chess has been a minor factor in my life. It gave me the opportunity to further an ambition and at the same time convinced me of the futility of the ambition." Or as the composer, Felix Mendelssohn, once observed, "Chess is too earnest for a game; too much of a game to be earnest about."

Alekhine still played great chess, though I noticed a certain nervousness and uncertainty in his manner. He came to the Manhattan daily, played 10-second chess with us Young Turks and would keep us up most of the night because he never wanted to go to bed. During this period, he seemed to have no life other than chess, and that life appeared to be going to pieces.

A chess Superman losing his mental pawns? I don't want to exaggerate Alekhine's breakdown. After all, he remained a colossus. Take, for example, his famous simultaneous exhibition at the old Seventh Regiment Armory on Park and 66th. The event took place on election day, November 8, 1932, and pitted Alekhine against 50 four-man consultation teams made up of most of the top masters on the East Coast. A thousand spectators attended, and the opening ceremonies featured music from a brass band. Play lasted more than 12 hours, beginning at 3:30 p.m. and continuing past 4 a.m. the following morning. Alekhine scored a phenomenal +30 -6 =14, eclipsing Jose Capablanca's total of +28 -6 =16 of the year before. But before Capa-philes lynch me, the other side of the coin is that the Cuban finished his exhibition at midnight or four hours earlier than Alekhine. By midnight, Alekhine had completed only 10 games!

The sharp struggle below shows both the quality of opposition faced by Alekhine and the brute chess strength that he could exert
against it:

*Alexander Alekhine—Donald MacMurray, Arnold Denker et alia*

*New York Armory Exhibition, 1932*

*Queen's Gambit Declined*


White did not play the opening in very distinguished fashion, and Black could have gotten the better game by playing the sensible 15. ... B-K3, followed by ... B-Q4. The point behind the text move is to lock up White's Bishop. But...

16. P-Q5! P-K6?!

Alekhine throws down the gauntlet, and we respond by going for the throat. If 17. BPxP QxPch 18. B-K2 NxP, Black has chances to win.


23. QxQBP

This capture required very careful analysis, but our great opponent proved up to the mark even though playing 49 other games.

23. ... B-Q2

Black cannot play 23. ... QxP because of 24. N-B7ch RxN 25. Q-K8ch.

24. QxR

And now, White must avoid 24. QxB QxP.


That Alekhine could play so well when facing so many other
tough consultation teams amazed us. Both the Manhattan and Marshall chess clubs fielded numerous teams stuffed with masters. Other squads came from the Brooklyn Chess Club, the Flatbush Chess Club, the Hungaria International Chess Club, the Park Avenue Chess Club, the Jewish Morning Journal, the Young Men's Hebrew Association, City College, Columbia University, New York University and so on. Members of the teams included Fritz Brieger, Matthew Green, Milton Hanauer, Donald MacMurray, Jack Moskowitz, Julius Partos, Max Pavey, David Polland, Al Simonson, Rudolph Smirka, Oscar Tenner, this writer and several more masters. A young Paul H. Nitze, who would later gain fame as an arms negotiator, also played.

We are often told that if chess is an art, then Alekhine is the greatest player ever. He studied chess "eight hours a day on principle" and sank himself into what Vladimir Nabokov called its "abyssal depths" as no other grandmaster before him. During the London Congress of 1922, a chess patron took Capablanca and Alekhine to a music hall show. "Capablanca never took his eyes off the chorus," testified the patron later, "and Alekhine never looked up from his pocket chess set." Certainly, Alekhine consciously viewed himself as a chess artist, striving for and achieving aesthetically pleasing effects even in simuls. The following flawed diamond was played in an exhibition at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago:

\[
\text{Alexander Alekhine—Mezirov} \\
\text{Chicago, 1933} \\
\text{Irregular Opening}\]


Alekhine was ever passionately ambitious. But he ought to have doubled Rooks, beginning with 13. R-Q2.


This move is the only chance because after 16. R-K6ch, White gives up too much for the Queen.

16. ... 0-0?

This plausible move permits Alekhine to save himself with an amazing drawing combination. Black wins with 16. ... KxR 17. R-Q1ch N-Q4.

17. R-Q4 Q-K3 18. N-B3 KR-K1

If 18. ... N-N5, White has 19. R-K4.
19. R-K1 N-Q4


Black has no choice.


Analyzing with Alekhine

Alekhine was very nice to me in both personal and chess terms. On numerous occasions, he treated me to dinner, which was no small deal in the days of the Great Depression. One evening, Bert Kadish, a young newspaperman, invited us to a speakeasy housed in a local Democratic Party headquarters. Against the backdrop of a huge American flag that covered an entire wall, we had dinner. Or at least Bert and I did. Alekhine hardly touched his food. Chain smoking the entire time, he polished off two bottles of wine. He loved the grape, and in keeping with my image of a true Cossack, he could hold quite a bit.

Alekhine chose me as his partner in two consultation games against Isaac Kashdan and Richard Warburg (of the banking Warburgs). We won the two games fairly easily, but more importantly, I learned a lot about how the world champion analyzed chess positions. Alekhine taught me to sit on my hands and not to play the first move that came to mind, no matter how good it looked. He examined everything, whipping through an astonishing number of variations. When I offered a suggestion, he took it seriously and ran it through the wringer of detailed analysis. And if my idea survived this logic-crunching, he cheerfully adopted it.

"Analyze, analyze, analyze!" was Alekhine's motto. Moreover, he did not confine himself to logical moves. Any move, no matter how silly it appeared, merited attention. And not infrequently, he discovered sparkling ideas at the end of seemingly awful continuations.

My dear friend Arthur Dake, a great American master of the 1930s, was quite chummy with Alekhine even though Arthur nailed
him repeatedly in rapid transit play. Arthur believes that Alekhine's distrust of intuitive moves and his penchant for analyzing positions to death accounted for his relative weakness in speed games. That makes sense because otherwise there is no explanation for how the vastly talented Alekhine could perform so poorly in this variety of chess.

**An Unhappy Genius**

I am sure that there are plenty of happy geniuses, but Alekhine was not one of them. What I saw was a very unhappy man, who drank prodigiously and smoked constantly and seemed bent on self-destruction.

The excesses that I observed in New York eventually undermined Alekhine's practical chess strength. In 1935 he narrowly lost a title match to Max Euwe, an upset that no one predicted. To appreciate the shock attendant on Alekhine's defeat, one need only examine the great man's tournament and Olympiad record from Kecskemet in 1927 through the Warsaw Olympiad in 1935. He participated in 19 events, playing 224 games. Of this number, he won 151, drew 67 and lost only six. That's about one loss every two years. In a period of nine years, he finished second but once in a tournament.

Alekhine's shock at defeat doubtlessly eclipsed even that of the chess world. He suddenly discovered that he loved the world chess title more than alcohol and tobacco and dropped both vices until after defeating Euwe rather easily in the 1937 return match.

We tend to forget that Alekhine was only 45 when he recovered his title—a man in early middle age. He needed only to keep control of himself to maintain his chess strength for many years to come. But he returned to the bottle with a vengeance, though for a period his results suffered little. As late as 1943, he could shatter tournament fields. I am thinking about his victory at Prague with a score of 17–2, which was 2½ points ahead of Paul Keres.

Shortly thereafter, however, Alekhine collapsed as a chess force. By late 1944, he could barely defeat a Spanish master, Ramon Rey Ardid, in a match; and by 1945, he was routinely drawing and losing games against justifiably obscure Spanish and Portuguese masters. His play was unrecognizable.

On March 24, 1946, at age 53, Alekhine was found dead in a shabby hotel room in Estoril, Portugal. He choked to death on a piece of meat. A police photograph shows a portly, mostly bald *old man*, dressed in an overcoat to keep warm and slumped back in a ratty armchair. Today, while staring at this grisly picture, I try in vain to recognize the man of martial mien whom I once knew so
long ago—the displaced Russian noble who used to pound tables and proclaim in a thick Russian accent, "I am an officer of the czar!"
He paused for just a moment at the top of the stairway leading from
the airplane—and then all six feet four inches of the man came
bounding down the steps with the ease of someone half his age. I
watched in admiration as my 80-year-old friend, still handsome and
still ramrod straight, took long, purposeful strides across the tarmac
to the air terminal.

Dr. Max Euwe, world chess champion from 1935 to 1937, had
just arrived in Atlanta, Georgia, for the 52nd meeting of the FIDE
General Assembly. The time was August 1981.

As Dr. E came through customs, I walked up to him and shook
his hand. Then we embraced. It was a warm and wonderful reunion
with a man I had grown very fond of over the years. A kind and
thoughtful human being, he never permitted himself the luxury of
losing his temper, always weighing every word carefully lest he give
offense.

And while on the subject of words, his own word was his bond.
Once you had it, you could sleep soundly.

As Max and I waited for his luggage and chatted about the latest
news, thoughts from somewhere far back and deep down began to
surface in my mind. Thoughts from what seemed like another age.
Thoughts that had nothing to do with sleek and shiny Atlanta
bathed in warmth and prosperity. Thoughts about early postwar
Europe and all those sad-eyed people in alleyways handing over
their few belongings to furtive, sharp-eyed black marketeers for
food. And, of course, thoughts about my first meeting with Dr. E
shortly before Christmas in the cold, bombed out London of 1945.

An Innocent Abroad

Simply getting to London in December 1945, proved to be a titanic
struggle. It provided me with my first direct confirmation that all
was not shipshape in Europe following six years of war. I had been
invited to play in the annual Hastings fixture over the Christmas and New Year's holidays of 1945–46 and in the London "Victory" International set to start about two weeks later in mid-January, and was desperately attempting to book passage. But to no avail.

Enter Maurice Wertheim, the immensely wealthy investment banker and chess angel, who bankrolled much of American chess during the 1940s. Maurice managed to squeeze me into a berth on the Queen Mary, which was making its final voyage as a troop carrier—a voyage so rough that I clearly remember walking up and down hill on heaving decks in a grim battle to stave off seasickness.

After reaching London, I immediately hooked up with Herman Steiner, the chess teacher of Hollywood stars, who had arrived first aboard one of the old Pan-Am Clippers and who had thoughtfully arranged for our rooms at the four-star Savoy. Parking my bags, I set off wide-eyed through streets filled with the debris of bombed buildings to perform all the chores given me by Mrs. Wertheim, the former wife of Gene Seiberling of auto-tire fame. Many of her aunts and uncles from Sweden, most of them old and frail, had sat out the war in England; and I spent a long day playing the role of Santa Claus by dispensing Mrs. W's much-needed medicines and goodies to her overjoyed relatives.

Back at the hotel, I found the following note from Dr. Euwe: "Would you and Herman be my guests for dinner this evening? Please phone my room if you can make it."

"Make it?" Was he kidding? Nimzovich himself could not have built a blockade that would have kept me from dining with the man who beat Alexander Alekhine.

**Amateur World Champion**

Born in a suburb of Amsterdam on May 20, 1901, Machgielis or Max Euwe played in his first chess tournament at age 10, a one-day event in which he won every game. In 1921, at age 20, he captured the first of his 13 Dutch national titles and drew a match with Geza Maroczy (+2 –2 =8), one of the world's leading grandmasters.

Here, then, was a young comer who would soon be a major contender, right?

Wrong! Max, you see, discovered a positional law of life that every veteran chess master knows all too well: If you expend too many tempos on work and love, then your chess development will lag. Majoring in mathematics at the University of Amsterdam, Max graduated *cum laude* in 1923, took a teaching position in 1924, and earned a doctorate in 1926. Still worse from the chess angle, he
acquired a teaching license in bookkeeping, passed an actuarial examination, took up flying, boxing and swimming, and got married in 1926. He eventually fathered three daughters.

Although Max competed in some 60 tournaments and contested 20 matches during the 1920s, most of these competitions were small, local affairs. He averaged only one strong tournament a year, and he did not garner a major first prize until Hastings 1930–31, when he finished ahead of Jose Capablanca. Instead, Max made it into the pantheon of great masters via the novel route of losing and occasionally drawing matches.

Max’s ploy was to select famous opponents, lose narrowly, and not become a defeatist. Over his Christmas and New Year’s holiday of 1926–27, he lost an exhibition match to Alexander Alekhine (+2 –3 =5); during the Easter break of 1928 and the Christmas–New Year’s vacation of 1928–29, he lost two 10-game matches to Efim Bogolyubov by a single point each. Then, in 1931, he continued his merry ways by dropping a hard-fought match to Capablanca (+0 –2 =8), but the following year he beat Rudolf Spielmann and drew with Salo Flohr.

In adversity, Max flourished. He began to make a mark in top-flight tournament play, thereby becoming a living advertisement for Capablanca’s claim that one learns more through defeat than victory. Following the win at Hastings, he shared second prize at Berne 1932 and Zurich 1934, both times behind Alekhine, and then finished first equal at Hastings 1934–35, ahead of Capablanca and Mikhail Botvinnik.

As the eventful year of 1935 dawned, and after some 15 years in the international arena, Max enjoyed a status among masters roughly equal to that possessed by Alekhine in 1924, after that immortal had also spent a decade and a lustrum in top competition. But there the similarity ended. For Alekhine was a professional and Euwe an amateur. Max’s victory in the Olympic Amateur Championship at The Hague in 1928 was emblematic of the fact that this world amateur champion was also an amateur world champion—the last player who was able to scale the Everest of chess in his spare time.

And not by luck, either!

“The Weakest of World Champions”

Nothing infuriates me more than to hear Max Euwe described as “the weakest of world champions” and as someone who made it to the top only because of Alekhine’s alcoholism. First of all, the lifetime score between these two rivals is only narrowly in Alekhine’s favor, 44–38. In addition, Dr. E, who captured 102 first prizes
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during his tournament career, won a half-dozen match games from Alekhine that have never been surpassed for their sheer wondrous accuracy. Just take a look at game eight of their first match in 1926–27, or game 20 in 1935, or games one, five, 17 and 29 in 1937. The latter game, just like the famous Fischer–Keres Ruy at Curaçao 1962, is one of those rare battles in which Black’s losing move remains unclear to this very day.

Max Euwe–Alexander Alekhine
World Championship Match, 1937 (Game 29)
Queen’s Gambit Declined


"Annotators of this game," wrote Euwe in From My Games, "have been unable to discover precisely which move is the ultimate cause of Black’s downfall. The trail led to the opening, but there they lost their way. The fault probably lies with the text move."

Instead, Euwe recommends 8. ... B-K2.


Wrote Euwe, "Now White obtains a clear advantage, and it is not difficult for him to better his position from move to move. Although Black makes no mistakes his game is always difficult."


White threatens either 26. NxQP or 26. P-N5, followed by 27. NxQP. Therefore, Black sacrifices the exchange.


It is a measure of Euwe’s relentless objectivity that he criticizes this strong move and gives 36. Q-Q7 as “a bit more precise.” Why? Because at move 40, Black could not play ... Q-B2.


For if 41. ... Q-B1, White finishes with 42. R-R8 Q-N5ch 43. K-B1. "[Euwe’s] best game of the whole series"—Alekhine.

There can be no doubt that Dr. E was in Alekhine’s league. But more important than their overall lifetime score and the conduct of
individual games is a crucial fact that has never, so far as I know, been remarked upon: As late as game 56 in the lifetime competition between Alekhine and Euwe, the score was dead even! Only when Alekhine won game seven of their second title match did he go ahead for keeps. Oh yes, Alekhine never won a tournament game as Black against Euwe.

So, while I cannot deny the intellectual validity of making comparisons among the 13 world champions, I can state that it is more enlightening to argue about who is the strongest among these distinguished chess minds than about who is the weakest.

Having said that, let me lay my cards on the chess table: While Max Euwe was a first-class human being whose friendship I treasured, I never warmed up to his style. It seemed dry and uninspired when compared with Alekhine’s danger-is-my-business approach. None of us realized it at the time, but Euwe’s play, for all of its occasional brilliance, was a harbinger of the chess computer. Thus, heaven help the player who launched an ill-prepared attack or even a well-prepared attack against Euwe!

What Fred Reinfeld wrote of the following, seldom-published game applies to a lot of the chess played between these two giants: “In this titanic struggle, Euwe successfully withstands the withering fire of a characteristic Alekhine attack. Although Alekhine ultimately succumbs because he tries to force the game at all costs, this should by no means minimize our appreciation of Euwe’s cool and resourceful defensive play in a very trying position.”

Alexander Alekhine—Max Euwe
Amsterdam, 1936
Four Knights Game


Writes Euwe, “White has now obtained a genuinely promising position; his center is secure, his pieces move comfortably into strong positions and Black has to reckon with the continual possibility of a thrust on the King side.”

16. ... P-KR3 17. N-R3 R-K3

Euwe preferred 17. ... B-N3 to avoid the coming attack, though the text is not necessarily an error.

Euwe's position is difficult but not weak. That's the good news. The bad news is that he will have to face an Alekhine assault against his King.


Euwe states that 27. P-N5 would have "led to an extremely complicated game with possibilities difficult to fathom....Unless White clinches matters speedily with his attack, however—and it might easily fail—he would be faced with a lost ending."

27. ... B-B2 28. P-B4 Q-B2

29. QR-KB1

Black's game is just holding together. Alekhine wants to play 29. NxNP, but Black can refute it decisively with 29. ... RxB! 30. BPxR N-K5!.  

29. ... BxB 30. BPxB N-K5! 31. P-N5!?  

Alekhine tries to keep the attack going. On 31. N-Q6, Black reaches a drawn ending after 31. ... Q-N3 32. NxN QxNch 33. QxQ PxQ 34. R-K1 P-B4. Of course, White would like to play 31. NxRP, but this move is met by 31. ... N-B7ch 32. K-N2 RxN 33. RxN RxPch 34. KxR QxRch.


"Now White's attack is seen to have overshot the mark," writes Euwe. By which he means that the onus of holding a draw has passed from Black to White.

36. P-KR4

This bold move is probably inferior to K-B3 and K-N4.


Alekhine defends ferociously and threatens to force a draw with P-N4 and P-R5.

53. ... P-B4 54. P-N4?

Euwe says that the best defense is 54. P-R5, which would, however, lose in the long run, e.g. 54. ... R-K6 55. P-R6 R-QR8 56. P-R7 K-Q6 57. P-R8 K-Q6 58. P-N4 K-B7 59. P-K5 K-Q7 60. P-KB4 R-K7 61. K-N4 R-Q8ch.


As in so many of their games, Alekhine forced the pace but was met by mathematically perfect defense from Euwe.

**Winning the World Title**

At Zurich 1934, Euwe defeated Alekhine in a brilliancy prize game that ought to have served as a wake-up-and-smell-the-coffee call for the world champion and his fawning critics.

It did not. Alekhine’s record was simply too overwhelming for anyone to give the young Dutchman much chance to win the title match scheduled for late 1935. From Kecskemet in 1927 through the Warsaw Olympiad in 1935, Alekhine competed in 19 events, played 224 games, won 151, drew 67 and lost only six. That’s about one loss every two years. Over a period of nine years, he missed first prize in precisely one tournament.

Yet in Max’s brilliant win at Zurich one sees the reasons for his title victory the following year. Not only did my friend level his score with the champion over their previous 12 encounters, he also conceived a combination that epitomized his tactical acuity. At the time, Alekhine dismissed the brilliancy as a tactical cheapo; later, after regaining the title in 1937 (by a score of 15½-9½), he sang another tune. “Does the general public, do even our friends the critics,” he wrote, “realize that Euwe virtually never made an unsound combination? He may, of course, occasionally fail to take account...of an opponent’s combination, but when he has the initiative in a tactical operation his calculation is...impeccable.”
Max employed his tactical genius not to devise original stratagems *a la* Alekhine but to apply general rules accurately to given positions. "Euwe as [a] strategist," wrote Alekhine, "stands at the opposite pole from where Reti stood. Reti declared in his famous book, *New Ideas in Chess*, that he was interested only in the exceptions; Euwe believes, perhaps a little too much, in the immutability of laws."

All of which means that while Max was not an original player, he was certainly a formidable one—a tactical genius who enforced general positional laws with the rigor of a trained mathematician. In the words of Hans Kmoch, he was "logic personified, a genius of law and order." Study the combination below, consider Alekhine's emotional reaction, read Max's dispassionate commentary given in quotation marks, and stop imagining that he was lucky to defeat Alekhine +9 –8 =13 in their first title match:

**Euwe–Alekhine**

Zurich, 1934

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28. P-K4!
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"The text is severely criticized by Alekhine on the ground that it is based *wholly* on a tactical finesse. This latter consideration is, however, only incidental to the primary *strategic* significance of the text move....The basic point underlying the text is that the player with the greater freedom of action ought to strive to increase his mobility by opening up new lines wherever possible....It is true that at first sight this move seems quite daring and even a contradiction of White's plan of the game, for Black obtains the square Q4 for his pieces, the QP is isolated and there are possibilities of counterplay for Black on the K file....It will therefore be understood that White decided on the text move only after the most searching study of the position."

28. ... NxP

"Alekhine played this move under the impression that his opponent was about to make an oversight. He recommends the alter-
native 28. ... PxP 29. NxKP N-Q4 30. P-N3 P-B3 31. N-Q3 Q-K2. In that event, however, White has a demonstrably won position after 32. QxQ and now 32. ... R/3xQ 33. N/4-B5 R-R2 34. N-K6 winning a Pawn by force."

29. NxB PxB 30. RxP P-B3?

"Too optimistic. Decidedly better was 30. ... N-K2."

31. N-B7!!


31. ... Q-K1


**Dinner at Eight**

After returning to my hotel and receiving Max's invitation to dinner, I went upstairs to dress for the occasion. For dinner was at eight—at the Savoy. And with champagne flowing, what a gala occasion it turned out to be. Here was the great Dr. Max Euwe, about whom
Herman and I had read so much, playing the role of polished raconteur.

In answer to one of our questions, Max said, "Alekhine's weakness was that he could not sit on his hands during a game. He had to be doing something to satisfy his restless imagination and appease his forceful personality. What he did was usually brilliant and frequently surprising, but for me at least, it was not shocking. My practice was to search positions in advance for ideas that Alekhine might employ to upset the status quo. Of course, his ideas were no less strong even when they were predictable."

That evening, I must have listened with mouth agape. And even Herman, my black-haired Magyar friend who usually dominated every occasion by virtue of sheer volume alone, appeared subdued. For once, this child of nature controlled his animal exuberance and could be found guilty of listening. Though, to be sure, not for long, as he soon departed on a date. (Women were everywhere in Herman's life, and I have to admit he had excellent taste.)

As for Dr. Euwe and me, we took an evening stroll and soon got lost in one of those Holmesian London fogs that roll in so suddenly. As we wandered blindly through streets made unrecognizable by the wreckage of war, our conversation got around to the question agitating every chess person just then: What should be done to Alekhine for apparently authoring several anti-Semitic articles in the Nazi press?

Max believed that Alekhine had been drinking heavily at the time and was coerced by a logic of promises and unpleasant possibilities. The unpleasant possibilities did not, however, constitute an excuse. And the late Reuben Fine headed up a successful effort in the United States to pressure the British organizers of the "Victory" International to withdraw their invitation to Alekhine.

About a month after our long walk in the fog, near the end of the "Victory" International, Dr. Euwe was unanimously elected chairman of a players' committee to take up the question of Alekhine's alleged collaboration with the Nazis.

I found myself in anguish. Back in the Depression years of the early 1930s, Alekhine lavished me with kindnesses—free dinners, superb analysis sessions, instructive practice games and so on. He even chose me as his partner in consultation games. This king of chess treated a young, unknown player like a prince. He became my hero and chessic guiding light. And now, I found myself going along with the condemnatory herd, repaying the currency of kindness with the coin of unproved accusation.

To this day, nearly a half century past, I regret that more of us
did not act like a certain officer in De Gaulle's Free French army, whose parents had been murdered in 1911 at Rostov-on-Don in a Ukrainian pogrom. I'm speaking about Dr. Savielly Tartakower, who publicly pleaded Alekhine's case and then, facing down the entire group, proceeded to take up a collection for the stricken champion, who was penniless in Portugal. As Dr. E later wrote, "Tartakower was never a 'joiner,' and he hated mass demonstrations."

I'm not sure how long Max and I stumbled that night through the freezing fog. Our adventure, which marked the beginning of a long friendship, ended only after we asked a bobby for the way back to the Savoy.

Dr. E, I had discovered, was easy to be around and easy to talk with. He also possessed a fascinating quality: He was the first grandmaster I had ever met who was genuinely concerned about the plight of his fellow masters. Although his years as president of FIDE were still only a glimmer far ahead in history's tunnel, he spoke passionately about promoting chess worldwide so as to improve the lot of grandmasters.

The Summer of '46

In 1945 and 1946, I played chess virtually non-stop. Following my winter campaign in Hastings and London, I returned to the United States to prepare for an upcoming U.S. Championship match against Steiner, which was played from May 4 to 18. After winning that contest, I launched my summer campaign in Europe, which included doing battle at Groningen, Holland, in August and September in the first major tournament after World War II. A few days following that event, I departed for Moscow to participate in the second U.S.A.–U.S.S.R. Team Match.

Since I arrived in Amsterdam a week or so before the Groningen tournament was to begin, Dr. E invited me to stay at his home, where I got to know his wife and three beautiful daughters. Family dinners, chess talk and analysis, and old-fashioned socializing filled several delightful days until our departure for the tournament.

In the great Groningen International, Dr. E scored his last major triumph, tallying 14–5 to finish only a half point behind Botvinnik in a tournament that had all of the world's top players except for Reuben Fine, Paul Keres and Samuel Reshevsky. My showing was a respectable and deeply disappointing $9\frac{1}{2} - 9\frac{1}{2},$ which was good enough to share 10th–12th with Alexander Kotov and Dr. Tartakower. I say "disappointing" because in round 11 against Dr. E, I experienced the worst mental blackout of my career. Tied for third at the time with Vassily Smyslov at 7–3 and having already drawn
or defeated all of the tournament leaders, I reached a winning position after move 47.

Dr. Max Euwe—Arnold Denker
Groningen, 1946
Nimzoindian Defense


Botvinnik—Alexander (U.S.S.R. vs. Great Britain Radio Match, 1946) continued ... P-QR4 in this position, when White was able to work up a winning attack. The text was my attempt to improve on Black’s play.


Soviet sources suggest 22. ... RxR!, followed by 23. ... NxBP.

23. P-B5?


After playing 47. ... P-B6?! (still better was 47. ... Q-K3), I was told that there was a Transatlantic telephone call from my wife back in New York. With plenty of time on my clock, I took the call. The news was bad. In my absence, Fine and Reshevsky convinced Maurice Wertheim, captain of the U.S. team, that they should occupy the top boards in the upcoming match against the Soviet
Union. But as U.S. champion, I had a claim to the top board, and as I pondered the injustice of this sneaky action, I began to see red. Here's the result.

48. B-Q8 P-B7??

A line with winning chances for Black is 48. ... Q-N8ch, followed by ... Q-R7ch and ... Q-B2.

49. QxNch KxQ 50. P-K8=Qdis.ch. K-N2 51. QxQ P-B8=Qch 52. K-B2 Q-Q7ch, and Black resigns

So demoralized was I by this defeat that even though I had already drawn as Black with Botvinnik and Smyslov, I managed to score only 2½–5½ in the remaining eight rounds. To his credit, Dr. E was equally upset about the outcome of the game, especially since he had offered a draw a few moves earlier. As for the Soviets, they eyed my loss askance, doubtlessly ascribing to us the same motives that influenced the outcome of key games among themselves.

During the Groningen tournament, Dr. E quietly demonstrated that he was firmly on the American side in the turbulent early years of the Cold War in Europe. He wrote a speech in Dutch for me to deliver over radio, and everyone remarked on how well I represented the United States.

This tiny success, along with thousands of other little victories, were crucial for tamping down anti-Americanism. And speaking of anti-Americanism, I will never forget the banquet following the Groningen event, when the Swedish player Erik Lundin received a round of applause because his country sent a shipload of wheat to Holland, while the United States received no similar appreciation, even though it was sending far more food and clothing. “The problem,” Dr. E told me, “is that you do not superintend the distribution of your goods, and they land up on the black market.” Indeed, when my wife was at tea with a Dutch family one afternoon, the lady of the house found herself without sugar. She quickly telephoned her “black-market man,” and the sugar (marked from America) arrived a few minutes later.

Max the Mum

When Max visited New York briefly in mid-1947, I had the opportunity to repay a few of his many favors. We went on a boat trip around Manhattan, and the former world chess champion was as pleased as a child by the Statue of Liberty. We dined at Cabana Carioca, a lively Brazilian restaurant known for its lightly clad dancers and delicious food; and when we went over to the Yorkville section of Manhattan on East 86th, Max surprised me by being one
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Dutchman who did not drink beer. He also surprised my wife Nina by showing up with flowers at the Lenox Hill Hospital just before she gave birth to my son Mitchell. I hadn’t said peep, but he had his quiet ways of finding out.

Max was quiet in another way. He never discussed his heroism during the Nazi occupation. Yet not only did he write letters to Alekhine asking the latter to intercede on behalf of the Dutch martyrs, Dr. Gerard Oskam and Salo Landau, he also put his life or at least his liberty on the line for several others.

I learned of one instance from Max's friend, Hans Kmoch, the famous in-house annotator at Al Horowitz’s Chess Review. Hans was living at the time on Central Park West somewhere in the Eighties. His wife Trudy, a Jew, had constant nightmares about her interrogations and beatings in Holland by the Nazis. Hans had little money, and Trudy spent much of the day in bed screaming.

Enter Nina. My wife was working in the New York City welfare system and managed to get them part-time assistance. Hans then confided in me about how Dr. E greased palms and used his influence to save Trudy's life by keeping her out of a concentration camp. But mind you, I heard this from Hans, not from Dr. E, who was always Max the mum about his good deeds.

Mr. President

In 1970, Max Euwe was elected president of FIDE, a position he held until 1978. His efforts in that post to hold together both Fischer-Spassky I in 1972 and Korchnoi-Karpov I in 1978, though widely reviled at the time, are universally acclaimed today. He also presided over a massive expansion of FIDE from 72 countries to 106. And no wonder: he visited more than 100 countries as FIDE president, tirelessly promoting chess. A journalist fittingly dubbed him “The High-Flying Dutchman.”

There is a lot about Max's life in chess that could be discussed at great length. As a theorist, he introduced the Scheveningen Variation of the Sicilian Defense and edited Chess Archives, which served for nearly two decades as the pacesetter in opening analysis. As an author, he wrote far more voluminously than any other world champion, including Alekhine, who published 17 volumes.

But my subject is Max Euwe as I knew him.

The years passed, and we met regularly, if briefly, during the Olympiads of the 1970s. True, his stuffed schedule precluded repeating our leisurely get-togethers of yesteryear; yet when I decided to return to competitive chess after an absence of 15 years and was
seeking a few invitations to European events, Max got the job done, unlike the American representative of the time who pronounced my request as undoable.

Twice during the 1970s I visited Max in Amsterdam. Since he had given up teaching in 1957, one might have thought that his life had slowed down. Not at all. As president of FIDE and as a consultant for various computer companies, his plate was loaded. Yet there always seemed to be some space left over for an old friend. For most people, work expands to fill the time allotted; but for Max, time expanded to complete the work allotted.

What Max wrote about Savielly Tartakower ought to be said of Dr. E himself: “Without men such as he, the chess world would not have been nearly what it is. It is not the rules and the precepts which make the chess community; it is the individuals.”

**Our Final Farewell**

The FIDE Congress in Atlanta was over, and Max and I were back at the airport—this time to say good-bye. During his stay in Atlanta, he appeared to be more relaxed than I had ever seen him. No longer president of FIDE, he had time to reflect at length upon the future of chess. He believed that the royal game would soon become a required subject in schools throughout the civilized world, and he enumerated the many benefits therefrom. He also had high hopes for social experiments involving chess that he had initiated in Africa.

Max radiated optimism and good health. And like all of his other friends, I felt bright and important in his presence. As he walked to the plane, I noticed the same spring in his step as on arrival. Imagine, therefore, my shock when learning of his death from a heart attack on November 26, 1981, just three months after what turned out to be our final farewell.
Chapter XVI

An Offer I Couldn’t Refuse

When someone wins a U.S. national championship, he is hit by a barrage of unusual business offers. Although my title was for chess, which was not one of the more popular pastimes back in 1944, I still received numerous offbeat proposals.

One of the oddest was to become president of the Southern Nevada Disposal Service, a beautifully named garbage company. The starting salary was munificent, but it was an offer that I both could and did refuse after discovering that the company was Mafia controlled.

Another proposal came from a chicken farmer in Toms River, New Jersey. He reasoned that anyone with enough brains to become a chess champion could surely find a plan to fatten chickens more economically. A dubious idea. Often, I recall Weaver Adams, a master who inherited a chicken farm and who was—so to speak—a white man clear through. He wrote a book, White to Play and Win, lived in a white house on White Street, chewed antacid pills that left the inside of his mouth perpetually white, and raised only white chickens that laid white eggs. Predictably, Adams’ business was soon no more than a shell.

There were other offers and endorsements, plus the usual phony land-development schemes. All came to nought. Then, about a year later when things had quieted down, I received a phone call from an old man named Koback, who owned a pharmacy in Hartford, Connecticut. It involved...

An Offer I Couldn’t Refuse

The year was 1946. Mr. Koback read that I was going to Moscow to play in a 10-board chess match between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Cold War was on, and the U.S. State Department hoped to improve relations between “the two super powers” by sponsoring this international competition. Mr. Koback suggested that we discuss over dinner a matter that “could prove quite profitable for the two of us.”
We met the following Sunday in New York at Lüchow's, a great old German restaurant down on East 14th. Koback was a tiny, frail man, and he came with his only daughter, a dark-haired, bright-eyed woman of about 30. He also brought along a thick folder filled with pictures, maps and old news clippings that he used to illustrate points in his story.

Koback's family owned the only chemist's shop in Tuapse, a small Russian town on the Black Sea. And it was to this small town that many Russian nobles fled some 30 years earlier to escape the Bolsheviks. The Kobacks collected millions in gold and jewels by arranging passage to Turkey for aristocrats and members of the haute bourgeoisie. But the Kobacks quite literally had to run for their lives when the Communists discovered their trade. They left behind a fortune in buried treasure.

Old Koback showed me on maps where portions of the treasure were hidden, and he provided photographs and news clippings of his family posing in front of their Tuapse shop. "All these years I was hoping for a change in government," he said in a voice made hoarse by emphysema, "but I realize now that it is not to be in my lifetime. I want my daughter to enjoy some of this wealth." Koback claimed that the Soviets were anxious to make 50-50 deals because of their dire need for hard currency, and he asked me to represent his interests. "Half of all you recover," he concluded, "will be yours, and by the most conservative estimate, that should amount to half a million dollars."

My mind began to swim. Half a million bucks, maybe more! Such talk occurred only in the movies. I could become rich without having to work for it. Here was an offer I couldn't refuse.

One week later, in August 1946, I was off to Groningen, Holland, to play in the first great chess tournament following World War II. Most of the top players were there, including the cream of the Soviet crop. I planned to play myself into form for the U.S.A.–U.S.S.R. match scheduled for September. And I made an interesting draw with Mikhail Botvinnik, who won the tournament a half point ahead of Max Euwe.

At Groningen, however, my mind was not on chess. All I could think about was how to approach the Soviets with my secret. One of the "Russian" group was Salo Flohr, the famous Czech star who landed up living in Moscow after his country was overrun by the Nazis in 1939.

You do know Grandmaster Flohr, don't you? This delicate and diminutive man spoke English and seemed more worldly and sophisticated than the other members of his delegation. Although
only 38 years old at the time, he no longer enjoyed the kind of prestige that prompted FIDE in 1937 to designate him the official challenger to Alexander Alekhine. His great tournament victories at Hastings 1931, 1933 and 1934, Moscow 1935, Podebrady 1936, etc. were only trophies from a better time. Gone from his game was the aggressive yet flawless positional play of yesteryear.

Domenech—Salo Flohr
Rosas, 1935
Sicilian Defense


Too early. White merely weakens his Q3 and Q4 squares. How Black goes about exerting control over these sensitive points—plus White’s QN3—is the story of this game.


This move locks up White’s Q4.


And now White leaves a hole at QN3. He had to try 10. N-B3 B-QN5 11. R-B1.

10. ... N-Q2!

So simple, so direct. Black will trade off White’s good Bishop on K3 and obtain absolute control over White’s Q4 as well as the Queen’s file.


The alternative is to dispute the Queen’s file with 17. N-B1 N-N6 18. RxR RxR 19. R-Q1 RxR 20. BxR BxP, when Black wins a pawn.

17. ... R-Q2 18. P-KN3 QR-Q1 19. P-B4 PxPch 20. PxP
The difference between the Flohr of 1935 and 1946 was how often he could produce games such as this one.

Black may also win with 24. ... N-N6, a move that he makes with much greater effect three moves hence.

Black can queen his KBP about four moves before White can promote his QBP.

At Groningen, Flohr and I talked a lot and became good friends. He asked me to call Nina, my wife, who was still in New York, and to have her bring a suitcase of goodies for Raisa, his wife. What a celebration we had when Nina arrived. It soon seemed natural that I should reveal the secret to Salo. To my astonishment, he was not even slightly surprised and acted as if the matter were routine. He promised to arrange a meeting in Moscow with the relevant government people.

Specialists in Soviet history tell me that this easy intercourse between one of Stalin's subjects and a Westerner strikes them as unbelievable. Certainly, it was unusual. The explanation is that even the Iron Curtain of Stalin had rents here and there—tiny breaches through which the dictatorship served its interests. Fortune hunters, for example, were tolerated if they were apolitical and if they deposited hard currency in Soviet coffers. You scratch my pocket-book, and I'll scratch yours was the philosophy.

Mission to Moscow

On my first day in Moscow, Flohr phoned to say that all had been arranged and that he would pick me up the following morning. The meeting was held at the Hotel Moskva, where I was introduced to two men who looked like my idea of members of the secret police. We talked a bit, and they agreed to arrange everything to my satisfaction. Money division, no problem. Transportation to Tuapse, again no problem. They would provide a private airplane. The only problem was how to explain my remaining in Moscow after the American team departed.
The next day Salo and his wife arrived early at our hotel with a solution. Nina would feign illness and check in at a hospital for treatment. And I, as a devoted husband, would stay on. The plan seemed very clever, but my wife would have none of it. "They'll poison me," she said, "and toss you off the airplane, making it look like a good natural death." Such variations occurred all the time when Stalin was the Soviet king, and Nina insisted that we select instead the variation of leaving with our group.

What to do? After talking all night, we decided to trust Salo. We turned over our maps and offered him half of our share. If all went well, we would still make more money than we ever dreamed possible. In return, Salo promised to cable us when the treasure was or was not recovered. "Met your father in Tuapse" (or the reverse) was the simple code.

Back in New York, while awaiting the cable, I telephoned Mr. Koback and related all that happened. He listened quietly, and if he was displeased with my handling of the matter, he gave no sign. Weeks passed. Then came the cable. It read, "Never met your father in Tuapse." I was heartsick and drove all the way to Hartford to show Old Koback the message. He seemed less upset than I, which I attributed to his illness. As for his daughter, he said that she was off visiting some friends.

Such a sad ending to what promised to be a pot of gold at the end of my personal rainbow! Still, I soon got used to the idea of working for a living and forgot about the crushing episode.

Salo's Gold

Years later, someone told me that Salo got divorced (in truth, his first wife died) and was living with a much younger woman, which seemed hardly surprising given that divorce was routine in the ci-devant Soviet Union. But after hearing that he and his lady were travelling back and forth to Prague, Czechoslovakia, I became curious. Foreign travel was an expensive proposition for Soviet citizens: They had to pay not only their fares but also healthy bribes to procure exit visas. Much later I heard a rumor that the two travellers married and moved into Moscow's elegant Ukraina Apartments, whereupon my suspicions grew like mushrooms in a hothouse. Was Salo's sudden affluence some of my money finally coming out of hiding? Surely, a chess instructor could never afford to live at the Ukraina among Soviet nomenklaturshchiki.

I was tortured with doubts for many more years until a Jewish refusenik claimed that he saw Salo and wife tooling around Moscow in a Nova Zeiss. That was the last straw. I hit the ceiling over Flohr's
duplicity. Unable to sleep, I knew that there would be no peace until I confronted him.

One day in the early 1980s, I cabled Salo with news of my impending arrival in Moscow and asked him to pick me up at the airport. But a woman named Elena, who claimed to be his second wife, came instead. An attractive, dark-haired woman in her early 60s, she drove me to their apartment. She explained that Salo was away and that we would see him the next day. No surprise, I thought, since he lectured all over the country. I slept well that night, and after a hearty breakfast, Elena and I set out to meet my old confidant.

On the way she suddenly revealed that Salo had suffered a stroke and was resting at a medical facility outside the city. Wild thoughts rushed through my mind. Why hadn’t she told me sooner? Why? Why? Abruptly, she swerved from the main road and drove up to an ugly, low building that abutted a much larger one.

As we entered, a buxom woman clad in slovenly nurse’s garb got up from a desk and led us down a long, dark and deserted hallway. She paused only a moment to unlock the door to a small room before returning to her post. The dusty room was nearly bare with only a bed and a tiny barred window. There was no closet. The bed was so diminutive that it looked more like a child’s crib, and on it lay someone with a wrinkled neck and gray head with his face turned to the wall. Was it the great Grandmaster Flohr, or was Elena playing some kind of game? I was frightened and confused, not knowing what to think.

Elena bent over and gently rubbed the person’s back. I watched raptly as he slowly turned his head and looked up with a totally blank expression. A few seconds passed, and Elena whispered in the man’s ear and motioned for me to come closer. Just as I leaned over, he let out the most frightful cries that I have ever heard. He was trying to speak, but there emerged only wild screams. The scene was so overwhelming that I could not think clearly. Yes, the figure in bed resembled Salo, but it was a scaled down version that could not have weighed more than 80 pounds.

The commotion brought with it the bosomy nurse and a hypodermic needle. Soon peace and calm returned. Although no more than 15 minutes had elapsed since our arrival, I felt sapped and was unable to speak all of the way back to Moscow.

Entering Salo’s apartment, I unabashedly poured myself a tall glass of vodka neat, tossed it down, and literally fell into a large leather chair, legs splayed and hands draped over its arms. As Elena moved to and fro, preparing something to eat, I began to study her
more closely, nagged by the feeling that we had met somewhere long ago.

**Salo’s “Wife”**

Elena must have read my mind. She said, “You still don’t recognize me.” I confessed that she was right and then said that there was something familiar about her. “I must have gained too much weight,” she replied with a smile, “for you to recognize Koback’s daughter!” My jaw dropped. I could see a slight resemblance, but I could not imagine what she would be doing in Moscow. And that’s when her story came pouring out.

After I returned to the United States in 1946 and brought Elena’s father the bad news, the old man sent his daughter to Moscow to check out my story. She met Salo at one of his chess lectures, and it was love at first sight. She said they later married and lived happily until Salo’s stroke.

“That’s all well and good,” I interrupted, “but what about my money?”

“There was no money,” she answered.

“Then where did you get the money to live so well?” I flashed back in the bottom-line spirit that her bare assertion was not necessarily the naked truth.

Elena walked across the living room and reached into a drawer of a china cupboard. She removed a very official looking document and handed it to me. “This is the last will and testament of Salo’s father,” she said, “who was one of the richest men in Czechoslovakia. It was he who left us all that money, which is why we were constantly travelling to Prague. I suspected that you felt cheated, but I knew it would have been useless to protest our innocence. You had to come and learn the truth for yourself. Just imagine your suspicions if I had wired that you could save yourself a lot of bother because Salo was too ill to see you.”

**Salo’s Father**

On the flight back to New York, I was haunted by my thoughts. What a way to pause at life’s exit! And, too, I was saddened by my distrust of Salo and Elena. She was correct—I had had to see for myself.

That’s when the first bombshell dropped. In Florida, word reached me that Salo staged a remarkable recovery and that he and Elena moved to Prague where he died some months later. (In fact, he died in Moscow.) But the real blockbuster was the second bomb-
shell, and it dropped only when I received an issue of a Russian chess magazine devoted to the late Grandmaster Flohr. There were several of his best games, a list of his greatest tournament victories and a section with photographs of Salo with celebrities. In one of the photos he was playing a simultaneous against a group of boys. The caption, if memory serves, read:

*Salo Flohr's annual exhibition at the Maribou Orphanage—the only home he ever knew as a boy.*
Dr. Ossip Bernstein was a broad-shouldered giant of a man with an intellect to match. Wearing a blue beret on a Kojak-shaven head and sporting an FDR-style cigarette holder cocked upwards at a jaunty angle, he shuffled along like the huge, six-foot-four-inch bear that he was.

You never had trouble spotting him in a crowd.

We first met in January 1946, at the “Victory” International in London. From the moment he strode into my hotel room and announced himself, we became like old friends. The normal routine was for him to visit my room every evening following the tournament round; and from his ubiquitous briefcase, he would dump on my bed a treasure cache of the most wonderful canned foods. Ham, cheese, butter, pate, caviar, crackers—all the good things that were impossible to find in England at the time. My single contribution to the party was Nescafe coffee which I had so presciently brought from the States. (Just to give you some idea of the English diet in the immediate post-WWII years, I clearly recall losing 22 pounds in a stay of six weeks.)

You can talk about playing baccarat in Biarritz or summering along the Cote d’Azur, but for me, the high life was sitting in an overcoat on a hotel bed in wintry London, doing justice to Bernstein’s gourmet goodies and listening to his stories about the great masters of the early 1900s. And this man, who was born in 1882, relished nothing more than talking about David Janowski, Jacques Mieses, Akiba Rubinstein, Karl Schlechter, Siegbert Tarrasch, Mikhail Tchigorin and other chess immortals.

By analyzing various positions with Bernstein, I quickly discovered that even at age 63 he remained a strong player. I could see why Edward Lasker once wrote, “I believe Bernstein had true world championship caliber,” and why chess encyclopedist Harry Golombek described Bernstein’s style as “massive and sparkling.” Yet the subject of this lavish praise, who is remembered chiefly for losing several famous games to Jose Capablanca, remained a lifelong amateur. He once went 18 years without competing in an important
Clearly, a chess career so slight yet so distinguished was suggestive of a substantial second life away from the board. As Bernstein and I pored over chess positions in the cold, bombed-out London of nearly a half century ago, my friend told me his story.

The Fate of Fortunes

To sum up Ossip Bernstein's life in seven words, he made two fortunes and lost three.

Born in Imperial Russia as a member of what Marxists call the *haute bourgeoisie*, Bernstein wanted for nothing as a youth and in 1906, took a doctorate of law from Heidelberg. Ever a capitalist at heart, he quickly established a highly successful practice in Moscow as an international financial lawyer. From 1906 to 1914, he added to his family's already considerable fortune, while simultaneously making a name for himself as a strong grandmaster.

Bernstein first attracted attention as a master in 1903 when he finished second behind Tchigorin in the All-Russia Championship, defeating the winner in their individual game. From 1905 to 1914, he participated in nine international tournaments with astonishing success for a part-time amateur. His best result was a tie for first with Rubinstein at Ostende 1907, one of those dinosaur-sized tournaments of yesteryear. The two men each scored $19\frac{1}{2}-8\frac{1}{2}$ in a 29-player field.

Bernstein also played some extravagant games at Ostende. Take a look at the opening of Bernstein–Savielly Tartakower: 1. P-Q4 P-KB4 2. P-QB4 P-K3 3. N-QB3 N-KB3 4. P-K3 P-Q4 5. B-Q3 N-K5 6. N-B3 P-B3 and now 7. P-KN4!! Typical of my brilliant friend. But Bernstein's most remarkable game of his most active period in chess has to be the following corker, which Irving Chernev once nominated as the most brilliant and most misunderstood of all drawn games:

Dr. Ossip Bernstein–Aron Nimzovich
St. Petersburg, 1914

Nimzoindian Defense


Amazing, isn't it? In addition to its distinguished middlegame play, this struggle is celebrated as an early illustration of the hyper-modern principle of controlling central squares with pieces rather than pawns. The game seems eerily before its time and provides the
kind of cold shivers offered by Velasquez’s Views from Villa Medici, two 17th-century harbingers of Impressionism.


In his much-ignored annotations to this game, Georg Marco explains that 16. ... Q-N4 can be adequately met by 17. P-B4.

17. QxN R-R1 18. B-QB3 Q-K1

Dr. Tarrasch termed this move “difficult to comprehend,” while Wolfgang Heidenfeld in Draw! failed to comprehend it correctly. As for J. Cena’s notes in O.S. Bernstein: Parties d’echecs, they are tellingly vague at this juncture. Only Marco writes insightfully, “Evidently Nimzovich wishes to reply to 19. R-R1 by 19. ... RxRch 20. BxR Q-R1, with an attack against the Bishop as well as against the KNP. With ... Q-K1, Nimzovich has thus prevented his opponent from disputing his control of the QR file (by opposing Rooks). He may also have considered continuing 19. ... N-B3, followed by 20. ... Q-R5.”


Marco punctuates this move with two interrogatives, whereas we in less rigorous times adorn it with one. Interestingly, Heidenfeld, Cena and even Dr. Tartakower in Moderne Schachstrategie, his book on Bernstein, pass by this move and in consequence completely misrepresent what occurs later. Marco recommends 22. R-B3 for White, concluding that the first player would be up a sound pawn after 22. ... P-KN4?! 23. PxNP N-B1 24. P-R4 N-N3 25. P-N3! (Marco refutes 25. P-R5 in an analysis of stupefying length).


In the tournament book, Dr. Tarrasch writes, “White fears naught and captures the Pawn, as he has calculated to a hairline how he can best parry all attacks.” In variations, as it were, so writes nearly everyone else. But as we shall see, White stands to lose this position.

29. ... Q-N4

Marco terms this move the point of 26. ... P-B5. Black threatens ... QxB, ... N-Q6 and ... N-R6ch.

30. B-R8!

My friend Bernstein does the best that he can.
30. ... N-Q6?

All of the lads except Marco adorn this move with an exclamation point. Indeed, the move appears immediately destructive, threatening 31. ... R-K8ch as well as 31. ... Q-K6ch. But it also permits White to save himself with a blinding display of defensive pyrotechnics. The winning move is 30. ... R-K7!!, and I direct the reader to Chess Review (November 1935) for the concrete variations.

31. P-R4!!

This move is really extraordinary because at first glance it seems to increase White's difficulties. After all, Black simply plays...

31. ... Q-N6 32. R-R8 B-B1 33. B-K4!!

Black's win suddenly vanishes. He cannot play 33. ... RxB because of 34. RxBch K-B2 35. Q-B6, mate.

33. ... Q-B7ch 34. K-R2 QxRPch 35. K-N1 N-K4 36. BxN QxB 37. B-R8!

A beautiful echo of 30. B-R8!!.


White holds the draw ever so narrowly.

47. ... RxR 48. Q-N4ch K-B2 49. QxR QxBP 50. Q-B5ch, draw

The perpetual check is forced, given 50. ... K-K2 51. Q-K6ch K-Q1 52. Q-N8ch!. As Harold Nicolson ought to have written of this game and instead wrote of Sir Henry Channon's dining room, "Baroque and rococo and what-ho and oh-no-no and all that. Very fine indeed."

Following the St. Petersburg tournament of 1914, Bernstein did not compete in another major master event until Berne 1932. He was far too busy surviving that hurricane called history. "The Revo-
olution of 1917 in Russia," he would later write, "had thrown me out of my professional and customary routine, and the successive waves of civil war had hurled me from pillar to post until I finally landed in Paris."

Those few words encompass a lot of adventure. Bernstein came close to losing his life at Rostov-on-Don in 1917 while on a business mission; and he, his wife and two small children later fled from Moscow to Kiev, eventually landing up in Odessa, where he was arrested by the Cheka, the Red secret police.

"This arrest," wrote Ossip's good friend Edward Lasker, "took place during the 'Red terror,' when the mere fact that a man was a member of the well-to-do bourgeoisie stamped him as a criminal. Bernstein's crime was his role as legal adviser to bankers, industrialists and trusts. There was, of course, no court trial. One of those sadistic minor officials, who always show up on the wake of revolutions when executions are the order of the day, had a firing squad line up Bernstein and a number of other prisoners against a wall. Then, fortunately, a superior officer appeared who asked to see the list of the prisoners' names. Discovering on it the name, Ossip Bernstein, he asked him whether he was the famous chess master. Not satisfied with Bernstein's affirmative reply, he made him play a game with him; and, when Bernstein won in short order, he had him and the others led back to prison and later released."

Yes, I know—yet another story about a last-minute reprieve from the firing squad. But Bernstein was absolutely convincing when he described at length how his hands were shaking when playing against the officer, and I believed his story then and believe it still.

In 1919, Ossip and family escaped from Odessa on a British ship. By a circuitous route through Bulgaria, Turkey, Serbia, Austria and Norway, the exhausted Bernsteins washed up in Paris in 1920 with barely enough money to live for a month.

It was sufficient. Having lost his inherited first fortune, Ossip now set about amassing his first self-made fortune—and succeeded. But he then lost this second fortune in the world financial crash of 1929 and 1930. Whereupon, he built a second self-made fortune which he then lost when fleeing to southern France and eventually escaping to Spain after the Germans captured Paris in 1940. He was lucky that he did not also lose his life because he was interned by the Vichy regime, usually a prelude to being turned over to Adolf Eichmann's lads.

"My wife and I knew that we had to get out of France," Ossip told me. "We headed for Spain on foot, walking through the Pyrenees at night over mountain roads and hiding in caves during the
day from the Germans and their collaborators. Denker, try to imagine what it was like: two people in late middle age running for their lives, stumbling along in pitch darkness, tripping over rocks, and skinning our hands and knees every 20 minutes or so. Once, I fell flat on my face, which completely knocked the wind out of me. After several absolutely exhausting days, tortured by thirst and with our clothes in tatters, we reached Spain, and I vaguely remember passing unconscious from a heart attack. Thanks to some of my friends in Spain, the Spanish border police did not send us back. We were among the lucky few."

In 1945 Bernstein returned to Paris, reestablished contact with his son (a prisoner of war in Germany for five years), recouped a portion of his financial losses, and later played first board for the French at the 1954 Olympiad in Amsterdam.

**Second Chess Career**

Bernstein's second chess career, beginning with Berne 1932, was less compelling in terms of tournament results than his first. He scored respectably, not spectacularly, and on occasion, as at Groningen 1946, disastrously. But the great veteran could still bite as he proved by nearly devouring Alexander Alekhine in a Paris training match of October 1933. That match was drawn, +1 –1 =2, but Bernstein did most of the chewing. In 1940 he won a grandiose, though seldom published consultation game from Alekhine.

*Ossip Bernstein et alia–Alexander Alekhine et alia*

*Paris, 1940*

Queen's Pawn Opening

1. P-Q4 N-KB3 2. N-KB3 P-QN3 3. P-KN3 B-N2 4. B-N2 P-N3 5. 0-0 P-B4

Alekhine spent 40 minutes trying to avoid an isolated Queen pawn. He cannot play 10. ... BxN because of 11. BxB NxP 12. Q-N5ch. And if 10. ... BxP, White has 11. N-KN5!.


Bernstein feared no one over the board, and he voluntarily mixes it with Alekhine rather than win a pawn via 18. RxN NxR 19. BxR RxB 20. Q-K4 R-QB1 21. P-QB3. The game becomes very complicated, but big Ossip luxuriated in complexity much like a rhino
The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories


What a shot!

22. BxR RxB 23. Q-K7 B-B1!! 24. Q-K4

24. ... R-Q1?

For once, Alekhine falters. He would have had excellent drawing chances with 24. ... BxR!! 25. QxRch K-R2 26. Q-K8 (White must avoid 26. Q-K4? N-B3!!) 26. ... B-B4!! 27. QxPch K-R1 28. B-R5 B-N3 29. R-Q1 N/B4-Q6 30. RxB NxB 31. N/QN3 QxN.

25. R/6-Q1! N-B7 26. R-Q2 QxB 27. RxN/2 B-B4

Black can offer slightly better resistance with 27. ... QxQ, followed by ... P-B4 and ... B-B4ch.

In 1954, at age 72, Bernstein had his last hurrah by tying for second with Miguel Najdorf (behind Chile's Rene Letelier) in a UNESCO-sponsored event in Montevideo, Uruguay. Moreover, my old friend, who was probably smarting from a newspaper article describing him as "the Grandfather of Chess," captured the First Brilliance Prize by obliterating Najdorf in one of the prettiest games of the 1950s.

Ossip Bernstein—Miguel Najdorf  
Montevideo, 1954  
Old Indian Defense


Black rejects the obvious move, 12. ... B-N2, because he fears pressure on Q6 after 13. QR-Q1 0-0 14. P-B5.

13. QR-Q1 0-0 14. B-KB1! N/4-N2 15. P-R3 P-KB4?!

Black tries for counterplay, but he ought to hold his chess cards closer to the vest with 15. ... P-QR4.


This maneuver threatens what White eventually plays on move 21.


The sacrifice must be accepted.


Another shot.

25. ... P-B6


26. R/4-K4! Q-B4


27. P-N4 PxP 28. PxP Q-N3
29. R-K8!!

White's combination is studded with one stunning move after another. The main variation is 29. ... QxQ 30. RxRch K-R2 31. B-N8ch K-N3 32. RxB, mate.

29. ... B-B4 30. RxR/R8 RxR 31. PxR Q-R4 32. R-K4 Q-R6 33. B-KB1 QxP 34. R-R4ch!

Simple, elegant, conclusive.

34. ... PxR 35. QxQ NxQ 36. BxBch K-N1 37. P-Q7, Black resigns

The final and finest jewel in the crown of Ossip Bernstein's chess career.

**Surreality Becomes Reality**

One lovely Paris day in 1953, my wife Nina and I found ourselves in the Bernsteins' cozy apartment on Rue des Marronniers. We were their guests for lunch, and as we entered the dining room, my wife, an art historian, could not take her eyes off a large Chagall canvas hanging above the server. Noticing her admiration and astonishment, Ossip said, "I guess you are wondering how we can afford such a priceless work of art?"

Whereupon, our host related a story about how his good friend Marc Chagall, whose work prompted poet Guillaume Apollinaire to coin the word "surrealist," fled Paris in 1940 before the advancing Germans, leaving Mrs. Bernstein the key to his apartment. When the Germans arrived, Mrs. B. rounded up several Russian friends, some of whom were former nobles working as taxi drivers; and in the dead of night, they transported Chagall's paintings to a friend's barn in the countryside. If the Nazis had captured these paintings, they would have either burned them as examples of Jewish "decadence" or sold them into private collections.

After the war, Chagall returned to Paris, fearing that his paintings had been destroyed. When he learned the real surreal story about
what had been done, he was so overcome with emotion that he left the room, returning minutes later with a sketch in which a guardian angel in the likeness of Mrs. B. floated protectively over a farmhouse in a beautiful pastoral setting.

From this sketch Chagall created the painting that so riveted Nina's eyes.

When Ossip finished the story, Mrs. B. and Nina went out to the kitchen to fuss over dessert and coffee. We sat drumming our fingers on the table until Ossip grabbed a chess set and his trademark blue beret. "Denker," he announced, "it is a fresh summer day in Paris. Let's get out of here."

A few minutes later, we were seated at an outdoor cafe on a narrow, Left Bank street. A light breeze cooled us. As Ossip ordered coffee and liqueurs, I emptied the pieces on to the board and glanced across the street. "Hotel Rue de la Harpe," read a sign. The hotel appeared to be one of those small, spotless Parisian hostelries run by formidable French females.

Ossip set up a position which had an interesting legend both behind and in front of it.

During the 1970s, a rumor circulated that the above position occurred in a Bernstein–Capablanca game played in Moscow circa 1914 and that Bernstein resigned at this point. But a Russian farmer, so the story goes, became so intrigued with the final position that it preyed on his mind day and night. Until, one afternoon, the truth dawned on him: Bernstein should not have resigned! The farmer worked out a win for White and mailed the analysis to Tigran Petrosian, then the editor of 64. Unfortunately, the letter lay unopened until Anatoly Karpov assumed the reins. Karpov, so the story goes, read the letter and turned it over to Mikhail Tal, who was so impressed with the analysis that he went looking for the farmer at his collective. Alas, the poor fellow had passed away.
But on that cloudless blue day back in 1953, as I sat sipping on a brilliant yellow-green chartreuse, Ossip told a different story about the same position. "I first saw the position," he said, "just a few years ago while on a business trip to Spain." At a chess club in Madrid, a Spanish lad asked Ossip why he had resigned a won game and showed him the position and some clever analysis.

"I hated to disillusion the kid," Ossip told me, "but the entire story was a hoax to publicize a very beautiful and exciting problem. Capa and I never arrived at such a position. Still, as you Americans are always saying, never let facts get in the way of a good story."

Have you figured out White's win? Well, forget about the obvious 1. P-Q8=Q, which loses to 1. ... N-B2ch. The solution:

1. N-B6ch K-N2


The threat is 7. B-Q1ch P-K7 8. BxP, mate.

6. ... P-K7 7. B-K4 P-K8=N

Black must prevent 8. B-B3, mate.

8. B-Q5


The threat is 11. B-K8ch.

10. ... N-QB2 11. B-R4 and wins

Black cannot adequately parry the threat of 12. B-Q1ch.

Ossip and I worked out the variations meticulously, reckoning on every line except one. We overlooked what Capablanca used to call a "petite combinaison" on the part of our two queens. They mercilessly attacked the weaknesses in our indefensible position when we returned to Ossip's apartment six hours overdue!

"Am I Not a Chess Idiot?"

Tolerant of human weakness, Ossip Bernstein was a man who laughed readily and genuinely at himself. During the Zurich tournament of 1934, he missed a winning knight maneuver against the
Swiss master, Fritz Gygli, and exclaimed to Emanuel Lasker, “Am I not a chess idiot?”

“That seems to be a reasonable explanation for that move of yours,” Lasker responded.

“Will you give me that in writing?” Ossip asked.

“Gladly,” said Lasker. And Bernstein proceeded to draw up a quasi-legal document to the stated effect.

Ossip also exhibited an obvious love and compassion for his fellow human beings. His was a wonderful philosophy of acceptance so rare these days. Once, in the presence of his eight-year-old granddaughter, he asked in his usual booming voice, “Denker, do you know why we grandparents love our grandchildren so much?”

Innocently, I answered that I did not.

“Because they are the enemies of our enemies,” he replied, the customary twinkle in his eyes.

Only years later—well after Ossip’s death at St. Arroman in the Pyrenees on November 30, 1962—did I grasp the depth of that remark. You see, he enjoyed making combinations even when away from the chess board.

Selected Games

**Alekhine vs. Bernstein: Professional vs. Amateur**


QN3 P×P 34. P×P R-R4 35. P-N3 R-R8ch 36. K-N2 R-QB8 37. R-Q3 K-N2 38. R/Q3-K3 N-R4 39. N-N4 R-QR1 40. R-B3 R/1-R8 41. R/KB3-K3 P-B4, White resigns. Ossip Bernstein lost a much larger number of games than he won against Alekhine, but this obscure training game is one of several elegant victories that he managed to post.
Chapter XVIII

Isaac Kashdan: The Gentle, Scientific Grandmaster

Here is how the New York Times reported the death on February 20, 1985, of a famous American chess master: "Isaac Kashdan, one of the foremost chess players in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s and for many years the chess editor of the Los Angeles Times, died Wednesday at his home in West Los Angeles. He was 79 years old and is survived by his wife of over 50 years, Mrs. Helen Kashdan, and a son, Richard."

But for me, "Isaac Kashdan, one of the foremost chess players in the United States," was simply "Kash"—a flesh-and-blood man whom I knew well and deeply respected. And, yes, whom I liked very much.

In the most important sense, Kash was unlike other grandmasters. I never detected a trace of anger or violence in the man. Against the backdrop of New York City in the Depression 1930s, his gentle and kind ways made him seem almost too civilized. We were the Young Turks back then, and we stepped on a few toes. But not Kash. I remember occasions when he became annoyed at some unkind or nasty remark. He would never react meanly, though he did have a quiet humor leavened, when necessary, with sarcasm.

Kash was, then, different from the rest of us. And so was his chess. As a player, he resembled a scientist, holding a position up to the light and turning it this way and that, rather than a warrior readying for the kill. But don’t misunderstand me: Isaac Kashdan was a very great player indeed. At the 1928 Hague Olympiad, he scored +12 –1 =2 on first board to take the gold medal. His overall score in Olympiad play of +52 –5 =22 is second to none among American grandmasters. In 1930, after defeating Lajos Steiner in match play, he again travelled to Europe, winning three strong tournaments, and finishing second in a fourth. Kash played 49 games in Europe that year, winning 36, drawing 10 and losing three. Against the flower of European masterhood, he scored 41–8.
over 83 percent), setting a pace more appropriate for Swiss system

Subsequently, Kash finished second to Jose Capablanca at New
York 1931 and to Alexander Alekhine at Pasadena 1932. During his
heyday from 1928 to 1934, he and Salo Flohr were regarded as the
two strongest challengers for Alekhine's crown, given the world
champion's disinclination to permit Capablanca a rematch. Indeed,
Kash played the world champion to a virtual standstill, losing only
once in, if memory serves, six or seven tournament games. No
wonder that Alekhine himself once predicted that Kashdan was his
most likely successor.

Kash's strength was in the endgame, and he was often called der
kleine Capablanca. In the middlegame, there was the slightest
touch of rigidity: He loved the two Bishops too much. In this
limited sense, it would not be preposterous, though admittedly un-
kind and inaccurate, to call him der kleine Janowski. "What he
lacked," Reuben Fine once wrote of Kash, "was knowledge of the
openings, and the willingness to risk tactical adventures; eventually,
in spite of his comprehensive grasp of the game, his overcautious-
ness began to take its toll." I think that Reuben is too hard on Kash,
forgetting that this world-class grandmaster also had to make a
living during the Depression years. Kash's problem was not caution
but lack of practice.

The central tragedy of Kash's chess life was his failure to win the
U.S. Championship, which might have provided him with the
economic wherewithal to pursue chess full time. From 1928 on-
wards, Kash was clearly the best player in the United States, but the
aging Frank Marshall was attached to his title. Kash bargained and
haggled with Frank for years until Marshall voluntarily relinquished
the crown. The result: the first modern U.S. Championship tourna-
ment in 1936. But by this time, Fine and Samuel Reshevsky had
surpassed Kash.

In 1942, Kash came within a move—that is, a move by Al
Horowitz—of winning the cherished title of U.S. champion. He was
sitting on a final score of 12½-2½ as he also sat and watched
Reshevsky (12) struggle to save an endgame two pawns down. And
sure enough, Horowitz missed a win at the 58th turn. A playoff
match was arranged between Reshevsky and Kashdan that Sammy
won, 7½-3½. The tally is deceptive because not only did the two
grandmasters trade victories in the first four games, but also
Reshevsky had few easy wins in the match. Kash's victory in game
two ended Sammy's unbeaten streak in U.S. title play at 76 games.
In game four, Kash did something that many of us thought im-
possible: He methodically ground Reshevsky into submission. Virtu-
ally no one did that back then. "I had butterflies in my stomach playing over that game," wrote GM Arthur Bisguier in *Chess Life* shortly after Kash's death, "because I knew from hard experience in the 1950s the difficulty of squeezing Sammy."

*Isaac Kashdan–Samuel Reshevsky*

*U.S. Championship Match, 1942 (Game 4)*

*Ruy Lopez*


White enjoys an advantage in space. He wants to prevent ... P-Q4 and must be prepared to meet Black's play on the Queenside with a forceful attack on the King's wing.


This waiting move appears to lose by force. Black needed to play 16. ... P-KN3 with a defensible position.

17. N-K2 Q-B1

Once again, Black dithers. Instead, 17. ... P-QN4 could have been played immediately.


This move shortens Black's agony. The only try is 28. ... P-R3.


36. ... R-K1 37. Q-Q7 R-Q1 38. Q-K7 R-KB1 39. R-KB1 B-K4 40. R-Q3 Q-B1 41. R/Q3-KB3 Q-K1 42. RxN QxQ 43. RxB BxB 44. RxBch KxB 45. R-QN7 P-B5 46. PxP, Black resigns

"Kashdan plays perfect chess all the way through," wrote Reuben Fine of this game, "and makes Reshevsky pay for some slight inaccuracies in the opening." Slight indeed!

In his Chess Life comments, Bisguier hit on another truth about Kash's play: "So Kashdan was a positional player. But there is one qualification to this statement: He belonged to an older generation of players that still sought truth at the board rather than the point. Thus, when the occasion demanded, he let loose with risky, sacrificial attacks." All of which explains Kashdan's "Immortal Game," a masterpiece against a player of IM strength that in its outrageous sacrificial extravagance dwarfs many more celebrated brilliancies.

Boris Siff-Isaac Kashdan
New York, 1948

Nimzoindian Defense

More enterprising is 8. P-K3.


Too enterprising. Safer is 12. 0-0.


White has the right idea, but he ought to have started earlier.

19. ... QR-K1 20. QR-N1?!

Objectively, this move may be okay. But it permits Black a strong attack that will require perfect defense to repulse. More prudent moves are 20. N-B1 or 20. BxB.


22. ... N-B4!

In for a penny, in for a pound. Black will find himself hustling to
make a draw if he retreats with 22. ... R/6-K2.

23. PxR Q-N6ch 24. B-N2!!

After 24. K-R1, Black would have to take a perpetual check with 24. ... NxKP 25. Q-Q3 N/3-N5! 26. PxN Q-R5ch 27. K-N1 Q-N6ch, etc.


Black threatens 27. ... N-N5ch!, followed by mate in three.

27. N-B3?

The move that saves the game is 27. N-B1!, e.g. 27. ... N-K7ch 28. K-R1 Q-B7 29. N-N3! NxNch 30. K-R2 N-B8ch! 31. K-R1 N-N6ch.

27. ... R-K7!!!

Shades of Rubinstein.

28. NxR?

White suffers from shell shock. Otherwise, he would certainly have tried 28. Q-N3, which holds out longer.


If 33. NxQ, Black finishes with 33. ... N-N6, mate. In the mating position, Black is down two Rooks and a Queen!

**He Gave as Well as Received**

Kash was a giver. In 1933 he and Al Horowitz started *Chess Review*. A fine problemist and *Kriegspiel* player, Kash set up several feature departments in what developed into a great magazine. But the Depression years were tight; food itself was no sure bet; and Kash sold his interest in *Chess Review* to work at odd jobs in order to support his family. When his second son required special medical
care and a warm climate, Kash and Helen moved to California. It was a great sacrifice because in those days New York was America’s only chess town.

Still, it was not long before Kash got things going in California. He promoted tournaments, and he wrote a chess column for the *Los Angeles Times* after Herman Steiner’s death in 1955—a column that he held until a disabling stroke in 1982. He was the spark plug behind the famous Piatigorsky Cup tournaments of 1963 and 1966, though his lasting memorial will be the series of Lone Pine tournaments from 1971 to 1981. With financing from his good friend Louis Statham, he turned tiny Lone Pine (pop. 900) into the pre-eminent spa of world chess.

As remarkable as Kash’s accomplishments were, I will remember him for other things—for those magical moments when memory holds the door. There was the time, more than a half century ago, when Kash, Helen and the rest of the American delegation were on an ocean liner headed for the 1933 Folkestone Olympiad. Al “Buddy” Simonson had gone a few drinks beyond his limit, and he proceeded to pass out in Kash and Helen’s stateroom. But no matter, never mind—as was said of the philosophical dispute between Bishop Berkeley and David Hume. Kash simply smiled philosophically and let him sleep. “We all know that Buddy can’t handle more than one drink,” he said.

Or there was the formal dinner at the Hastings tournament of 1931–1932. The Colonel Nawab Sir Umar Hayat Khan, the patron of famous Indian master Sultan Khan, took a liking for Helen Kashdan. He offered Kash 150 English pounds for her to join his harem. “It will be much easier for you to replace her,” he told Kash, “than for me to find another Helen at my age.”

Many men might have taken offense. Kash retold that story many times with undiminished enjoyment.

**Selected Games**

*Isaac Kashdan: The Grandmaster of Velvet Chess*


Minimalist attacking play in the style of Capablanca.

The Great Depression was a terrible time for most people, but like all periods of history, it had compensations. For chess at least, the Depression years provided the backdrop for America's most successful era internationally. Imagine having to select an Olympiad team from this star-studded array of talent: Weaver Adams, Sidney Bernstein, Arthur Dake, Reuben Fine, Al Horowitz, Edward Lasker, Isaac Kashdan, Alexander Kevitz, Frank Marshall, Fred Reinfeld, Sammy Reshevsky, Anthony Santasiero, George Shainswit, Albert Simmons, Herman Steiner, George Treysman, Robert Willman and others. Is it any wonder that American teams dominated the Olympiads of the 1930s?

Unfortunately, many of these players were unable to compete in Olympiads or other events in Europe because of what the poet Gray called "chill penury." Back then, defrayed travelling expenses and honoraria were unknown; a master competed merely for the honor of representing his country. Players had to pay their own way, though a few were fortunate enough to have patrons willing to foot some of the bill. Lack of money, then, and little else kept us from achieving even greater things. Had we been allowed (and had we been capable) of fielding three teams, I firmly believe we would have walked away with all three medals in the Olympiads.

The American chess stars of the 1930s congregated in New York City, and from this fiery cauldron of competition emerged a tall, slender young man with bright black eyes and a long nose that seemed to keep watch over a ribbony moustache. This man had an optimistic approach to life and was quick to see the humor in most situations. He was gentle and sensitive, as befitted a young man descended from a long line of rabbis. He loved chess and unselfishly dedicated his life to the game. Though he was very poor until late in life, I never heard him complain. Al Horowitz, one of four sons born to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Horowitz, was a truly rich man.
Where Chess Review was Born

Al might have remained “just another” of those now nearly forgotten masters of the 1930s had it not been for the Great Depression. Working as a trader at the Wall Street firm of Hoit, Rose & Troster, Al found that by 1932 he could no longer make a living. And so, strictly for economic reasons, he abandoned Wall Street! “I returned to chess,” he used to say, “on the theory that I could win a quarter a game and that a quarter could buy a meal.”

Al also turned to something else—a marvelous undertaking that would captivate him for the rest of his life. In 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, he got the idea that chess would have a much larger following if it had a modern magazine with lively articles and photographs. He took on Isaac Kashdan as his partner, borrowed money from his friend Fritz Brieger, and rented a loft at 60–10 Roosevelt Avenue in Queens—the manager where Chess Review was born.

Starting a business when everyone else was ceasing business proved tough sledding. As the years passed, one partner after another came and went. Lesser men would have despaired, but Al had faith. To keep the magazine afloat, he wrote books (all told, about 20) and barnstormed the country for months at a time, giving free simulc to all who subscribed. And sometimes the tours brought their own rewards:

Al Horowitz—Amateur
Los Angeles, 1940
Vienna Game


What follows is an astonishing combination.

Al's courage in adversity shone through during one of his barn-storming tours. On February 17, 1940, about seven miles west of Carroll, Iowa, he and travelling companion Harold Morton, the New England champion, met head on a motor van driven by one Frank Robbins. Morton was killed instantly, and Al wound up in St. Anthony's Hospital in Carroll with severe internal injuries. Although Al lost the hearing in his left ear, he wasn't fazed. He now had the advantage, or so he quipped, of being able to turn a truly deaf ear to bothersome people.

Chess players hung together in the poor old days. In 1936, Al and I shared a room at the Lincoln Hotel in New York. The night manager, an Indian named Chief Hall, was a loyal member of the Manhattan Chess Club, and he saw to it that we stayed at the Lincoln on a “due-bill.” (To this day I have no idea what a “due-bill” may be. All I know is that we never paid rent.) We also shared all of our worldly possessions (zilch), and whoever hustled a few quarters that day bought dinner. When there were no quarters, our dinner was bread, beans and coffee procured after standing for hours in a blocks-long bread line.

Al and I prepared opening variations together for unsuspecting masters—variations that we got a chance to try out that summer at the U.S. Open in Philadelphia. This tournament was organized by the American Chess Federation, a body that merged with the National Chess Federation in 1939 to form the present-day U.S. Chess Federation.

But as I was saying, in a strong field of a dozen of the country's top players, Al finished first, and I tied for second with Arthur Dake. In spite of our success, we had to borrow money to get back to New York because the tournament director ran off with the prizes. Here is Al's best win at Philadelphia, an effort of sustained attacking and sacrificial virtuosity that compares more than favorably with many of today's brilliancies:

Isaac Kashdan–Al Horowitz
U.S. Open, 1936
Reti Opening

White bites. The correct course is 15. P-B3 B-K3 16. P-QN4, when White has a good game.

15. ... PxPch 16. N-R3?

16. ... N-B5!! 17. PxN KPxP


If 29. BPxP, Black has 29. ... P-B6, winning immediately.

29. ... NxPch 30. BxN BxBch 31. K-R1 P-N6! 32. RxP RxR 33. RPxP R/1-N1 34. PxRP QxP! 35. B-N4ch R/1xB 36. QxRch RxQ 37. RxQ R-N7 38. N-K1

On 38. R-R2, Black plays 38. ... R-Q7.

38. ... R-KB7!

Amazing, isn't it? Black is still attacking even with pared-down material.


This little-known gem is unquestionably one of the classic attacking games of 20th century chess.

That same year of 1936, thanks to another example of Fritz Brierger's generosity, the first modern U.S. Championship was held at the old and elegant Hotel Astor in New York City. It was a great tournament, with as many as 500 spectators a day straining to get a look at the games. The newspapers ran photographs and daily reports. At long last, chess appeared to come of age. But there were still many tough years ahead before Chess Review began to pay off.

Al was a marvelous mimic and storyteller. His descriptions of how the rabbis in his house sat around the table and debated the Talmud were so vivid that when I visited his home in Brooklyn, it seemed as if I had already met the other guests. And as a chess
master, Al was of the highest rank. He played in eight U.S. Championships, placing as high as a tie for third in 1944. The top spot always eluded him, though several times he began with a dazzling string of wins, only to fall apart in the final rounds. Incredibly, $3\frac{1}{2}$ decades separated his first championship in 1936 from his last in 1972, just one year before his death. In 1941, he challenged the then invincible Sammy Reshevsky to a match for the national title and lost a very hard-fought encounter, $+0 -3 =13$.

Al's chess style was as sharp as a Ninja sword, and drastic fireworks were common in his games. For example, in the following position, Black has just played 21. ... R-K1, a natural enough move. But imagine his shock when Al announced mate in seven!

Al Horowitz–Alex Kevitz
New York, 1931

![Chess board with moves]


Many of Al's better games possessed a panoramic quality. They were heroic affairs with involved conceptions. As in the win over Kashdan, he never stinted his imagination. And, too, he could defeat the greatest.

Samuel Reshevsky–Al Horowitz
New York, 1955
King's Indian Defense


Black breaks first.


White threatens 19. P-R5 P-N4 20. P-R6 B-R1, but Black counters
with an excellent maneuver.


This pawn push is more than an attacking move; it also defends against White's threat to stick a Knight on K4 and squeeze Black into submission.

24. PxBP

Not a bad move, but a more active idea is 24. BxKP PxP?! 25. P-N4!.


"This little combination," wrote Hans Kmoch in Chess Review, "fails against a grand one." White's best hope was 34. RxP B-N3 35. R-KN1.

34. ... NxBPch!!


35. KBxN Q-K4! 36. R-QB1 NxB 37. QxB QxN!!
Al lets down a bit. He could have scored the point right away with 37. ... Q-R7ch 38. K-B3 RxN 39. P-B5 R-R3, threatening 40. ... R-R6 and 41. ... Q-B5ch.

38. P-B5 Q-K4?

Once again, Black falters. The winning line is 38. ... Q-R7ch 39. K-B3 R-R2 40. P-Q6 K-B1 41. P-B6 R-R6 42. P-B7 RxQ! 43. PxR=Q Q-B5ch 44. K-N2 R-N7ch.

39. P-Q6ch K-B1 40. Q-K6?

Sammy returns Al's favors. He could have offered considerable resistance with 40. P-B6 RxP 41. P-B7 R-B1! 42. PxB=Q R/1xQ.

40. ... Q-R7ch 41. K-B3 R-R2 42. P-Q7

If 42. P-B6, Black has 42. ... R-R7!.


"You Can Take Rat Poison on It!"

Next to George Treysman, Al Horowitz was the best odds-giver in the United States. He would never hesitate to grant Knight odds to players strong enough to warrant only pawn and move. Yet he was successful thanks to psychological tactics and engaging banter, not to mention a natural genius for the game. “The penguin,” he would declaim grandiloquently when pinning an opponent’s piece, “is mightier than the swordfish.” And if his opponent reached to make a devastating move, Al would lean over and inquire confidentially, “We are playing touch move, aren’t we?” The flustered opponent would usually withdraw his hand automatically and deny ever having touched the piece! I remember one time when Al had a lost position against Buster Horneman, a local amateur. Al told Buster the winning move. The moved looked good, but naturally, Buster was suspicious. “Can I trust you?” he asked. “If I tell you it wins,” Al answered, “you can take rat poison on it!”

Al tirelessly publicized chess wherever he went. “It’s a great game!” he used to exclaim. “No matter how bad one is, there is always somebody worse. If you lose to a 10-year-old, then select a nine-year-old, and so on, down the line, until you have met someone slightly worse than yourself.” When Al took over the New York Times chess column in 1962 from an aging Hermann Helms, who had written it gracefully for over 50 years, his infectious enthusiasm helped to convince the editors of that staid institution to run col-
umns three times a week. Al kept the column until October 1972, when illness compelled him to leave Reykjavik, Iceland, during the Fischer–Spassky match.

Al burned the candle at both ends. On the average, he put in a full day at *Chess Review* before popping in at the Marshall Chess Club around 7 p.m. A few hours later he could be found kibitzing at Fischer's 42nd Street Emporium, and still later at about 11 p.m., he would wind up the day playing skittles at the Manhattan Chess Club, offering Knight odds to all comers until closing time. Then off he would go to his favorite delicatessen for a late-night snack of hot dogs and beans or for a second hot pastrami sandwich to chase the one that he ate for lunch.

Where food and most other things were concerned, Al was a confirmed New Yorker. One report had him lamenting the absence of hot pastrami sandwiches in Iceland while he was still at the Fischer–Spassky match. At any rate, to conclude Al's typical day, he dragged himself off to bed at about 4 a.m. after smoking the last of his third pack of cigarettes.

I once asked Al why he never took a vacation, since I felt that some fresh air and exercise would do him good. Jokingly he replied, "Are you trying to kill me?" Is it any wonder that he never had the stamina to play through a tournament at a consistently high level? The wonder to me was that he was able to do as well as he did given his devotion to awful health habits.

Al "retired" in 1969 when he sold *Chess Review* to the USCF. For the first time in his life, he wasn't poor, though he kept up the breakneck pace.

I last saw Al shortly before his death. He looked emaciated. Years of heavy smoking and a total lack of exercise wrecked his circulatory system. He knew that he was dying and fought back the tears when we met. Then, with a faint smile, he said, "We had some good times, didn't we?" Ours was the saddest of partings. Death came a few weeks later, on January 18, 1973. He was 65.

Israel Albert Horowitz will be remembered always as a rare, unselfish worker for the royal game—a man who, as we used to say, brought oil for the lamps of Caissa. His place in the lore of American chess will forever be secure.


Chapter XX

The Paderewski of Chess

If you are ever down Argentine Way and happen to meet a group of excited chess players crowded around a small balding man, the odds are that you have stumbled upon Moishe, Miguel, Mieczyslaw or Mendel Najdorf holding court on the second floor of the elegant Buenos Aires Chess Club.

How do I know?

Well, I know Mendel, as he is called by his friends. And I also know the allure that he exerts. This virtuoso of the chess board, who moves pieces to the correct squares as fluently as Paderewski played the piano, draws people to him like a magnet attracts iron filings. He is beloved throughout the chess world as being among the most generous and gifted of great masters.

In spite of unbelievable adversity, Mendel has never given up on life by surrendering to bitterness, though Lord knows he had reason to do so. Suffice it to say, Mendel became Argentina's greatest grandmaster by staying on in the country following the Buenos Aires Olympiad of 1939. This young Jew, born in 1910 and a native of Poland, had no illusions about a future in his Nazi-occupied homeland.

Mendel the Master

As a chess master, Mendel is renowned for the breadth of his endeavors. Not content with tournament and match competitions, he took up blindfold chess, playing 45 games simultaneously back in 1947. By the reckoning of some folks, he is the sans voir world champion, though many authorities argue the case for either George Koltanowski or Alexander Alekhine.

Najdorf also made a run at the world title for regular chess back in the late 1940s and early 1950s, competing in two candidates' tournaments. He came fifth at Budapest in 1950 and sixth at the famous Zurich 1953 fixture. In addition, he missed becoming "Champion of the Western World" when he lost two highly publicized matches to Sammy Reshevsky in 1952 (+4 -8 =6) and 1953.
In the 1970 "Match of the Century" between the late U.S.S.R and the World, he scored +1 -1 =2 against Mikhail Tal.

That, in brief, is the story of Mendel's "serious" chess. It is also the least interesting part of his story as a chess master, since it was obvious to everyone that he would never become world champion without studying opening theory—something that he had no intention of doing because of professional workaday obligations. Unlike, say, Frank Marshall and Reshevsky, he could not work full time on chess. Indeed, Mendel worked scarcely at all on chess. He and his friend, GM Carlos Guimard, labored instead at building an insurance business that eventually grew to over 100 employees and made both of them rich.

The most interesting thing about Mendel as a grandmaster is his style and how that style contributed to his winning numerous mixed tournaments ahead of men who excelled him in high-category candidates' events. Besides winning at least a dozen international tournaments in Mar del Plata, he took first prizes at such stellar events as Amsterdam 1950 (ahead of Reshevsky) and Havana 1962 (ahead of Boris Spassky, Vassily Smyslov, Lev Polugaevsky et alia). Typically, he tallied lopsided results of 80 percent and higher in these and other tournaments.

Mendel had a knack for mowing down the bottom half of mixed tournaments, and this facility earned him a reputation as a risk-taking tactician rather than a positional player. Which is flatly wrong. Yet the source for this disinformation is none other than Mendel himself! Just read his charming "Salad Days" article in the July 1964 Chess Review in which this crafty and witty man annotated three of his best games: an early tournament contest, a simul-taneous effort and a quickie at Queen Rook odds. Forget about deep positional victories over Mikhail Botvinnik, Boris Spassky and many others. Mendel gave us instead what he values in chess, and we then carelessly concluded that blinding brilliancy defined the Najdorf style. In an issue of La Nacion (1944), Mendel described the following miniature as his best game, while in the "Salad Days" article he called it "one of the most brilliant of...[my] youth":

Miguel Najdorf–Frenke or Sapiro
Warsaw, 1927 or Lodz, 1929
French Defense

Where and when was this game played? Mendel gives his opponent as one Frenke and the where-when as Warsaw 1927, but Raul Castelli in his ¡Najdorf! lists the opponent as one Sapiro and the where-when as Lodz 1929. Such confusion reigns because while my
friend has a flawless memory for chess moves, he seldom pays attention to niggling details such as chess opponents and venues.

5. N-KB3 KN-B3 6. B-Q3 B-K2 7. 0-0 P-QN3

A better move is 7. ... 0-0.

8. N-K5 B-N2 9. NxB ch PxN

On 9. ... BxN, White intended 10. P-KB4, with a solid initiative.

10. NxB!!

Referring to himself in the third person, Mendel writes, "He was fascinated by the magic of combinations and sought particularly for that continuous sacrifice of pieces which, aimed for attack on the enemy King, reckons without regard for material since, in the end, the goal will have been reached....He was not content with a simple routine victory but probed for the hidden and the spectacular."

10. ... KxB 11. Q-R5ch K-N1


12. R-K1 N-B1

13. RxB!!

A sacrifice designed to open lines.


The threat is 16. Q-N4ch and 17. Q-N7ch.

15. ... B-KB1 16. R-K1 B-B1 17. Q-K8

White penetrates to the eighth rank and threatens 18. RxN.

17. ... B-Q2

Nothing works at this point. If 17. ... Q-K2, White finishes


The above game, along with the famous Glücksberg–Najdorf “Polish Immortal,” represents Najdorf’s style for many people. And Mendel certainly plays along with the myth that he is merely a tactical child of nature. In truth, he achieved his famed shutouts against the lower half of tournament tables with a style that was half-Capablanca and half-Lasker. He took positional rather than Tal-like tactical risks.

Miguel Najdorf–Carlos Bielicki
Mar del Plata, 1965
Reti Opening


Many of Mendel’s games, like those of Jose Capablanca, are difficult to play but easy to play over. The current game is simplicity itself: Mendel gambits the Queen Rook pawn, and the moment he wins it back, the game is over. That’s all.


Finis, the Black lady is trapped.

Occasionally, Mendel lets the cat out of the bag and reveals how hard he strives for the kind of easy simplicity that only results from skilled application of positional principles. Here is a victory—a victory highly praised by Bobby Fischer—over Paul Keres, along with some of Mendel’s notes in quotation marks:

Miguel Najdorf–Paul Keres
Los Angeles, 1963
Dutch Defense

1. P-Q4 P-K3 2. P-QB4 B-N5ch 3. N-B3 P-KB4

“Now the game changes to the Dutch Defense. I believe, after N-QB3, that the Dutch is not best because Black’s KB is normally his best piece and should be preserved at K2 or Q3. It was my first time to play this system, and I believe that next I should not play the normal P-KN3, but rather P-K3 and castle quickly.”
4. P-K3 N-KB3 5. B-Q3 0-0 6. N-K2 P-Q3 7. 0-0

"White could play P-QR3, obligating the exchange of Black's Bishop. However, why lose a tempo for this when Black's KB is not strong here. You must never have fear of poorly placed pieces. Don't force your opponent to make a good move!"

7. ... P-B4 8. P-QN3!

"To bring the QB, my last undeveloped piece, into play on the long diagonal."

8. ... N-B3 9. B-N2 P-K4?

"A strategic error. Why? Because Keres has opened the game too early; White has better freedom of movement. Don't open the position when you are less developed than your opponent. Black should have played for a closed position. The right move was 9. ... B-R4 or Q-K2, to improve the KB and prepare for P-K4 later."


"Now it is clear that White is better. Black's KB at N5 looks like a big pawn, and White's pieces are more actively placed."

11. ... B-K3 12. N-N3!

"Whenever the opponent has two or three pawns advancing together, you must prevent their advance. Now Black must make the sad move P-KN3 and weaken his King's position by increasing the scope of White's QB. Because after 12. ... NxN; 13. PxN, QxP; 14. B-QB4 wins Black's QB. If 13. ... BxP; 14. BxBP gives a winning position."

12. ... P-KN3 13. P-B4!

"A good move and very easy, because every time you want to utilize a better position, you must open the position even if you have to sacrifice."


"The Knight has accomplished its purpose at N3 and is now looking for a better strategic square. White's play is very clear. He must remove the QB and weaken the defense of Black's King. Black's KB is useless."

16. ... Q-K2 17. N-B4

"No special moves by White are necessary—only the logical ones."
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17. ... N-Q1 18. Q-B3 R-QB1 19. QR-Q1 P-QR3

“Black clearly wants to play P-QN4 and inactivate White’s KB.”

20. B-B4!

“It is the moment to dispose of Black’s best piece. Without this QB, Black’s game collapses.”


23. ... R-QB3

“The difference in action of the two Bishops must now be compared. If 23. ... Q-QB2; 24. P-K7ch, R-B2; 25. Q-Q8ch, winning. If 23. ... N-K5; 24. Q-K5, N-B3; 25. N-Q5 or R-Q7 wins.”


“Very simple. The exchange and two pawns is enough to win.”

27. ... K\times Q 28. N\times Pch K-K1 29. N\times R N\times N 30. R\times P P-N4 31. P\times P P\times P 32. P-KR4 R-QR3 33. P-R3 B\times P 34. B\times B R\times B 35. R\times P, Black resigns

And so, one sees that Mendel also wins games against the greatest masters and makes the victories look easy. I believe that his notes to the above game, which employ phrases such as “very easy,” “very clear” and “very simple,” constitute a tiny testament of his style. Add to this simplicity a willingness on his part to take positional gambles against lesser lights, and you explain his celebrated results in mixed tournaments.

**Mendel the Man**

The year was 1946, the place was Groningen, Holland, where 20 of the strongest masters in the world met to play in the first important chess tournament following World War II. Mendel Najdorf was on hand representing Argentina, and we struck up a friendship that has lasted to this day. Although I played earlier that year at Hastings and London, Groningen was my first major international test. Men-
del showed me the ropes, imparting some great insider advice for which I am still grateful.

One day, while we were lunching together at the Hotel Frigge, something happened that will forever remain fresh in my memory. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a shabbily dressed woman shuffled over to our table and asked if she could sit down.

The woman said that she had news for Mendel. Now, “news” of a certain genre is the detritus of war; and settling into a chair, she told Mendel that she witnessed his wife and other family members going to the Nazi ovens. She showed him some family mementoes. The two began to sob, and she bared a forearm to show her camp number. Whereupon, the sobbing turned to uncontrolled weeping. The two got up together and left.

To an innocent American, this—the saddest scene that I had ever witnessed—was almost unbelievable. Oh, yes, I knew that a madman had struck across Europe and destroyed tens of millions of people. But my knowledge was gleaned from newspapers and newsreels. Normal men, as French philosopher David Rousset has observed, do not know that everything is possible; and I lacked what psychologists call “felt knowledge” until that awful afternoon nearly a half century past.

Finally, Mendel heard the news for which he had waited since that day in late September 1939, following the conclusion of the Buenos Aires Olympiad, when he elected to remain in Argentina. Stranded in a foreign land with no money and a language barrier to surmount, this young Polish Jew created a new and prosperous life for himself, all the while dreaming about being reunited with his family. The dream was now shattered.

Mendel eventually remarried, fathered two daughters who both became medical doctors and settled into the sweetness of life recovered. Until, that is, his new wife developed cancer and quickly passed away. He visited us in New York, and although I knew how hard he was hit by this second tragedy, he never uttered a word of complaint. Mendel’s considerate behavior earned him the love and respect of all his friends.

**Mendel and Me**

It is always a tremendous pleasure to meet up with Mendel, and when I was invited to participate in the 1948 Mar del Plata International, I was desperate to play. To spend evenings talking and pushing wood with Mendel and to acquaint myself with Buenos Aires, the pearl of South America—well, few delights, to paraphrase
the poet Swinburne, could more surely consume a chess master’s desire.

The problem was that the invitation arrived just as I was planning to give up chess. My wife Nina and I were living in a small apartment in Forest Hills with two growing boys, and she demanded that Mar del Plata be my final chess fling. As I agreed to her conditions, I couldn’t help recalling George Bernard Shaw’s observation about desire fulfilled: “There are two tragedies in life. One is to lose your heart’s desire. The other is to gain it.”

Still, I set out for Mar del Plata determined to conquer the chess world. But I played despicably. After starting well with two wins and six draws, I reeled off seven straight losses before recovering with draws in the final two rounds. My total was 6–11, which was good enough to tie for 16th–17th in an 18-player field. What hit me was the gambling bug, and my ups and downs in the tournament were like a graph of my luck at the roulette and card tables.

After arriving in Buenos Aires, I hooked up with Grandmaster Gideon Stahlberg, a hard-drinking Swede who, like Najdorf, was a member of the Class of ’39 that decided to sit out the war in Argentina. He promptly introduced me to his foolproof system of winning at roulette, which fit in nicely with daily poker games and sessions of trente et un. In about a week I was broke and had to borrow money from Mendel just to survive. I also began losing chess games like a child.

I gave up poker and jettisoned roulette, but trente et un fascinated me. Well-dressed gentlemen with immaculate silver manes and the graceful gaits of retired matadors sat at the tables behind mountainous stacks of chips. They were invariably accompanied by beautiful women and always played for high stakes. From one of the croupiers, I learned that these men, who accorded with my idea of how aristocrats ought to look, were the famous cattle barons of Patagonia.

They were also my financial saviors. I reasoned that these gentlemen must eventually lose, and each day for no longer than 20 minutes, I bet against their largest bets. Soon, I recouped almost all of my losses and paid back Mendel. Luck or insightful strategy?

Whatever the answer to that question, there has never been any luck in Mendel’s results against me in five-minute chess. Although our friendship dates back over 40 years, we always play chess, as Edward Lasker used to say, for blood. Back in 1981, during the Korchnoi–Karpov title match at Merano, we played speed chess virtually every day. I would have lost a lot of lire except that I placed
some large bets with him on Karpov and wound up nicely ahead, even though my wife threw some expensive champagne parties.

Mendel got his revenge in Moscow during the first Kasparov-Karpov match back in 1984. He would invite me to the National Hotel for dinner with him and his wife, and afterwards we would repair to his suite and play past midnight. Showing no mercy, he beat me like a baby. There was one evening that I came out ahead a measly three rubles; otherwise, I lost miserably.

Only once have I seen Mendel at a complete loss when playing speed chess. That was at Wijk aan Zee in 1971, when he challenged his personal chess nemesis, Tigran Petrosian. In tournaments, Petrosian ran up a huge plus score against Mendel, who seemed helpless against the great Armenian, though he could hold his own against Tigran-tamer, Boris Spassky. Well, Tigran whipped Mendel game after game, and the more the former won, the sadder the latter looked. The scene was pathetic. Najdorf could not win a single game. His customary witty banter deserted him, and he began to look up at me piteously. I was deeply saddened by the cruel spectacle.

**Mendel in the Mood**

Mendel is never better than in a chess ambience. At tournaments, the moment he makes a move, he jumps up from his seat as though pricked by a pin and rushes nervously out of the playing enclosure into the public gallery. He will then wail that he has a lost game (translation: he is about to win) or buttonhole passersby with the invariable question, "Wie stehe Ich?" or "How do I stand?" On one occasion, he distractedly asked this question of a bespectacled young man wandering outside the playing enclosure, who replied only with a scornful smile. The bystanders roared as Mendel blushed, for he had addressed the question to his opponent!

One evening back in 1978 at the time of the Buenos Aires Olympiad, Mendel invited me to the world famous Buenos Aires Chess Club. As you enter what was once a large private home, you face an imposing wooden staircase. To the left and right are spacious rooms for chess, but the real action takes place on the second floor in the club room where Mendel holds court amid huge leather armchairs and sofas. As people sit about sipping coffee or enjoying a snack, our hero talks grandly about chess. When the soliloquy eventually yields to passionate Latin disagreements, Mendel usually challenges the opponent to a speed match at odds from 10 to 20 to one. To refuse the challenge would be to concede error.

Suddenly, it's Mendel in the mood. With a wide grin, he beats out
a friendly banter while winning game after game to the vast amusement of the gallery. Finally, he orders drinks for everyone, including the opponent. These days, holding court is his great love. He thrives on it.

And if you look closely, you can see him grow larger as the evening moves on.
(l.) Here I am as Young Master Denker and looking none too thrilled. The year: 1917. (r.) As a young buckaroo. Photographs from the Denker collection.
At the 1944 U.S. Championship, I won the game of my life against chess immortal Reuben Fine. Immediately afterwards, I made life a bit rough for the always gracious Ruby. Photographs by George Miller. courtesy of *Chess Life*.
Joe Reinhardt (center), the referee of the Denker-Steiner U.S. Championship Match, is about to make a move. Herman Steiner (right) and I respond, “Whoa there, Nelly!” Photograph from the Denker collection
Nina and I with Handsome Herman of Hollywood and William Bendix in May 1946. Photograph from the Denker collection.
In New York chess circles, no invitation was more prized than dinner with Maurice and Cecile Wertheim at the great man's penthouse on East 70th. Nina and I never looked better! Photograph from the Denker collection.
My moves have always driven 'em nuts. This moment is from Denker-Julio Bolbochan (Manhattan Chess Club vs. Buenos Aires Jockey Club Match, 1947). Photograph by Leslie Gross.
I always swung for the fences, on and off the chess board. Photograph courtesy of *Chess Life*. 
My Queen and I in 1944. Photograph by George Miller.
Trust Nigel Eddis, the premier photographer in chess, to make me look good. Here I'm at the 1985 U.S. Open in Hollywood, Florida. Photograph by Nigel Eddis.
I had to fight back the tears at the 1993 U.S. Open while accepting induction into the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame. Photograph courtesy of Chess Life.
Performing chess labors at my home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The book I'm holding is an updated edition of my games collection: *If You Must Play Chess*. Photograph by Henry Fichner.
Chapter XXI

An American Original

"You know that, I know that, but these silly people don't know that."

—Alexander Alekhine (Manhattan Chess Club, 1932)

What if I were to tell you that a young man did not learn the moves of chess until age 17, that he did not play in his first tournament until age 20, and that by age 21 he was a member of the world championship American team at the Prague Olympiad of 1931?

Right, but I'm not nuts. The young man was Arthur Dake, a player who had in the words of chess immortal Reuben Fine, who knows of what he speaks, "a natural gift for the game which has rarely been equalled."

Arthur arrived in New York in the late summer of 1929 with only a sailor's duffel bag slung over his shoulder and a determination to meet and beat the great masters of the greatest city on earth. "Grand Central Station," Arthur would later say, "was so big and my hometown, Portland, so small, that it took me 30 minutes to find my way out of the place."

Believe him. Arthur never tells lies and is incapable of cynical calculation. Not, mind you, that these fine qualities are expressions of freely made moral choices. They are not. They are simply part of the man—a natural gentleman of childlike earnestness with an authentically powerful mind that is without a reflective, intellectual cast. When Larry Parr, the co-author of this book, went to interview Arthur at his home in 1984, he was greeted even before reaching the porch. In the middle of the front yard, Arthur slapped Larry on the back, thrust a piece of devotional literature at him ("One Day at a Time"), and hustled him into the living room to the roar of Victory at Sea, which is what Arthur calls "inspirational music."

Larry thought that meeting the 74-year-old Dake was a lot like running into a tornado of chitchat. Imagine, then, what Arthur was like back in 1929! Imagine what electricity this kinetic and frenetic
man generated on the New York chess scene.

First, though, I want to pause for a deep breath and ask if you’ve heard the story about...

**Playing Pots with Alekhine**

One evening about 60 years ago at the Manhattan Chess Club, Arthur and I found ourselves pushing wood with Alexander Alekhine at 25 cents a game. A large crowd collected around our table as the world champion took the first three pots, whereupon I won a couple. Arthur then mopped up by winning six off the reel.

As Arthur’s streak mounted, Alekhine’s face went from red to purple. The humiliation of reaching into a little black coin purse to fetch more quarters, combined with surrendering his seat at the board, enraged the champion. He challenged Arthur to a match, who begged off. “Everyone here knows that you would slaughter me in a match, so why play one?” said Arthur. Mollified for the moment, Alekhine levelled the challenge a second time after Arthur kept winning.

“Look Doctor,” Arthur said tactfully, “I know you are the better player and are merely off-form this evening.”

Gesturing at the spectators surrounding the board, Alekhine replied, “You know that, I know that, but these silly people don’t know that!”

Here was the great Alexander Alexandrovich Alekhine, who stood astride the chess world with arms akimbo like the Colossus of Rhodes, challenging a then virtually unknown American master from Portland, Oregon, to a match. The scene would have been sad if it had not been so funny.

Alekhine’s next disaster against Arthur came a few months later—to be exact, on August 28, 1932. At the Pasadena International, Arthur became the first American to defeat the world champion in tournament play.

*Arthur Dake–Alexander Alekhine  
Pasadena, 1932  
Caro-Kann Defense*  


Much that is pure hokum has been written about this move. Walter Korn says that Alekhine desired “to lure a possibly bookish novice into the unknown,” whereas Reuben Fine uncharacteristically cops out with, “A peculiar place for the Bishop, but Black
wishes to force a clarification.”

Clarification, indeed. Arthur tells the story this way: “Alekhine and I had spent the previous day analyzing the Panov Attack against the Caro-Kann. So as a psychological ploy, he played into our analysis—all the while searching me with his famous piercing stare. But I looked him right back in the eye and played 6. N-B3. He then visibly weakened and tried the inferior 6. ... B-K3.” Boundless and often careless confidence was Arthur’s stock in trade.


The threat is 16. NxQP.

15. ... R-R2

There exists a photograph of Alekhine pondering this move. Arthur is sitting back cockily in his chair, chin resting on his left hand, while Alekhine is bent forward, arms folded on the table, intently studying the position.

16. R-K2 B-K1 17. QR-K1 P-B4?

Black needs to play 17. ... P-KN4.


This bolt from the blue proves decisive. Of course, if 24. ... BxN, White wins easily after 25. R-N7ch K-R1 26. R-QB7dis.ch.


29. P-Q5!!

Awarded two exclamation points by Fine. “I wanted to trade Queens against history’s greatest attacking player,” admitted Arthur, “but after 29. QxQch KxQ, the Black King marches to Q4, with a hard win for White.” Arthur’s frank statement that he feared
the world champion even when enjoying a clearly winning position points up the man's utter inability to dissemble. He always says what is on his mind, a trait that is morally praiseworthy and socially dangerous.

29. ... P-K6! 30. P-B4!

This move puts the win in the bag, which means that players far weaker than Dake could now defeat Alekhine.


From Kecskemét in 1927 through Bad Nauheim in 1936, Alekhine lost four games in regular tournaments. As Fine wrote of this battle, "To beat Alekhine was always a notable feat."

**But Not Grapes of Wrath**

When Arthur finally found his way out of Grand Central Station, he headed directly to the Seaman's Institute on the Bowery, where he met a world-class checker master, Kenneth Grover. The two men set up a chess-and-checker stand on Coney Island, taking on all comers for a quarter a game. Thus began his immersion in the chess subculture of New York.

Within a month after Arthur's arrival in New York City, the stock market crashed. Customers quit coming to Coney Island; members dropped out of the Manhattan and Marshall chess clubs; students became scarce. Al Horowitz helped by giving Arthur some of his students—an act of extraordinary generosity during the Great Depression. But the future "Grandmaster from Oregon," to quote the title of Casey Bush's recent book about Arthur, had no family in New York and, therefore, no safe harbor away from street reality. Just procuring a place to sleep and an occasional meal of hot dogs and beans became an epic struggle.

Arthur, loose-limbed and gangly to begin with, grew as thin as the shiny seat of his pants. He was suffering for what he would later call "fame and glory, art for art's sake." His diet narrowed down to water, coffee and green grapes. Indeed, Ruby Fine explained only half-jokingly that Arthur eventually gave up chess because "he couldn't live on grapes any longer."

Arthur tried everything to stay in chess. He and Grover ran poker games in their midtown Manhattan digs just off Sixth Avenue and 52nd Street. But the two gamesmen found that line of play too double-edged. Characters like Damon Runyon's Dave the Dude, Harry the Horse and Black Mike Marrio were all too common. Said
Arthur, "We took cuts out of large pots and were doing well. Until, one night, six thugs with 'heaters' appeared, and Ken and I decided to get out of the poker business."

Looking back at how Arthur lived in those days, I am amazed that this naive and friendly Westerner survived at all, let alone became a great master. For in addition to the fine qualities mentioned already—so inimical to survival in the street canyons of Manhattan—my friend was generous to a fault. If he had only a quarter to his name, he was willing to go halves with another in similar need.

But don't get me wrong. For all his generosity, Arthur was a mensch, not a milquetoast. At age 16, he shipped out as an apprentice seaman aboard the S.S. Bearport bound for Shanghai. "I was a self-styled Jack London," said Arthur.

Shanghai in 1926! It was the most wide-open city in the history of the world, and my friend learned all about life and a kind of love in that fascinating cesspool of squalor and taxi girls. In 1929, Arthur picked up some more pointers in a Sochi nightclub from a leggy Russian dancer, whose officer boyfriend kept patting his leather pistol holster. Another lesson came one afternoon aboard ship when Arthur fought a four-round boxing match against a tough Filipino. "We hated each other's guts," Arthur grins, "but after half killing ourselves became close friends!"

That's the way Arthur was—a two-fisted guy in chess and life who, nonetheless, never had a mean thought. He may have lived on grapes, but I warrant that they never tasted bitter in his mouth. They were grapes of the vine, not of wrath.

A Speed Demon

That Arthur could squash Alekhine in speed chess ought to surprise only youngsters under 75. For the young Oregonian was a speed demon. A typical victory was a 12-0 rout in September 1935, of a field that included Fine, Horowitz, Sammy Reshevsky, yours truly and virtually every other top American master.

Arthur had a lot of Bobby Fischer in him. There was the same meteoric rise, and having analyzed with both of them, I can say the same gift for summing up positions quickly based largely on intuition. Neither man had to plod through lengthy variations to find good moves, and both men made chess look easy by the speed with which they played. Like the young Viswanathan Anand of the current day, Dake and Fischer played entire tournament games in a few minutes. That is the good news about Arthur's play.

The bad news is that this natural genius, like nature itself, had
the attention span of a hummingbird, a common failing in brilliant minds that are untamed by formal intellectual training. Arthur never studied chess in a disciplined fashion, never slowed down long enough to record analysis for future reference (there was always a game going somewhere, and Arthur had to be there!) and never adopted a sane tournament regimen. So often in his career, Arthur started tournaments with a string of wins and ended them with a skein of losses from trying for victory in drawn positions. On one occasion, he had Jose Capablanca within a move of resignation but cockily played as quickly as the famous Cuban. And lost. What did not come easily for Arthur, often came not at all.

Arthur’s opening repertoire was modern even by today’s standards. He played the English because of its positional nature and the Sicilian because it was still relatively unhooked. None of us feared his opening play, but we dreaded his handling of endgames, the classic preserve of the natural player. His opponent in the following game described Dake’s performance as “wizardry”:

Anthony Santasiere—Arthur Dake
U.S. Championship, 1938

27. ... P-R5

The idea is to play ... N-R4, threatening the weakling on B4.

28. Q-K2!

Now White threatens Q-K7 in the event that Black tries ... N-R4.


About this move, the amazed loser wrote, “I considered my chances very good, since Black’s Queenside pawns are on the same colored squares as my Bishop. But what Dake does with his Knight is sheer magic, surely one of the finest played endgames in the literature of chess.”

This natural move loses. Santasiere noted that 35. P-R4! would have saved the game by preventing an immediate ... P-N4, which decisively cramps White's Bishop.


Demonstrating a deep understanding of this ending. The obvious 40. ... NxP is met by 41. B-Q2, with at least a draw for White.

41. B-B4 NxBP 42. BxP NxBP 43. BxP N-B6 44. B-Q8!

The best try, since ... P-R6 for Black only seems to draw. Santasiere points out that after 44. B-B5 NxP 45. K-B4 K-B3 46. P-N4 P-R6 47. BxP NxB 48. P-N5ch K-K3! 49. P-N6, Black wins with 49. ... N-B5!. Dake now succeeds in winning by the narrowest of margins.


White wins the Knight with 58. K-B5 but loses the game after 58. ... K-K3.

After Arthur won the Marshall Chess Club championship in 1931, he climbed America's chess ladder at a dizzying pace. Shortly following the Prague Olympiad of that same year, he tied for first with Akiba Rubinstein and F.D. Yates at Antwerp; finished third with Fine at Syracuse 1934; tallied 11-1 to tie with Fine and Herman Steiner for first at Mexico City 1934–35; etc. etc. But he made his real mark at the three Olympiads in which he represented the United States. His overall result of 75.6 percent (+27 –4 =14) is second among American players only to that of Issac Kashdan.

At the Warsaw Olympiad of 1935, Arthur scored +13 –0 =5 to turn in the best single result of that event. "I was visiting the country of my heritage," Arthur once said, "and touched all the right pieces." As a special prize, the Polish-American hero received a valuable painting of Polish rural life by the artist Wasilewski. "But it was on the ship trip back aboard the S.S. Pilsudski," Arthur often says, "that I won my most wonderful chess prize—my wife, Helen."

The couple were wed in November 1935, and although Arthur and Helen crisscrossed the country on a series of simultaneous tours (with Arthur achieving in Milwaukee a career-best simul score of +71 –0 =1), the energy and the money began to dwindle. Arthur taught chess in the Milwaukee public schools in 1936–37. He was part of a program promoted by Arpad Elo of later ratings fame.
In April 1937, Arthur's daughter, Marjorie, was born. Shortly thereafter, his chess career died. He would not play seriously again until the Lone Pine tournament of 1973, following his retirement as a supervisor at Oregon’s Department of Motor Vehicles. Here was the kind of play that the chess world lost for 35 years:

_Albert Simonson—Arthur Dake_
_U.S. Open, 1935_
_English Opening_


_Simply 8. N-B3 will do._


_An extraordinarily provocative move._

19. NxBP

_White launches what appears to be a crushing attack._


_And Black must resign, right?_

23. ... N-Q5!!

_Wrong! For now on 24. NxQ, comes 24. ... NxP, mate._

24. B-N4

_But Black is surely dead after this move? Note that White loses the Knight after 24. KR-K1 Q-N1._

24. ... Q-B1!!

_Suddenly, all becomes quite clear: Black is winning._

This little-known defensive pearl of American chess is published here for the first time in a book.

**Righting the Wrong**

Somehow, in the awards shuffle of the early 1950s, Arthur got dealt out of a grandmaster title. Don't ask me why. Here was a master who had an equal or plus score against every leading American player except Reshevsky. Against Fine, Arthur scored 7 wins, 7 losses and 8 draws; against Kashdan, 1 win and 6 draws; against Steiner, 5 wins, 2 losses, 3 draws; and so on. “The failure to recognize him as a grandmaster,” wrote Walter Korn in *America’s Chess Heritage*, “reflected on the system, not on the person.”

Arthur proved Korn’s point beyond argument when at Lone Pine in 1974 and 1976, he finished ahead of such strong young players as Larry Christiansen, John Fedorowicz and Yasser Seirawan. Several youngsters, who wondered if this unknown old geezer could take a punch, found themselves wondering what hit them. Among his victims in the 1976 fixture was Ken Rogoff, a young comer who had finished second a year earlier in the U.S. Championship.

*Arthur Dake—Kenneth Rogoff*

*Lone Pine, 1976*

*English Opening*


White is playing a Sicilian Defense with an extra move.


Black had to try 24. ... N-K1. Now White breaks at Q4 and explodes a nice little booby trap three moves down the road.

25. P-Q4 N-Q1 26. PxP PxP
27. RxP! QxR 28. B-N4 Q-R2

If 28. ... B-N4, Arthur intended 29. Q-KB2, followed by 30. BxR.
29. BxR N/2-K3 30. B-Q6

Black threatened ... NxBP.
30. ... N-KB2 31. P-B5 N-B4 32. B-B4 R-K1 33. Q-B4!

White energetically pursues his advantage.
33. ... N-K4 34. BxN RxB 35. Q-B7 Q-N1 36. N-R5 Q-N1 37. RxB NxR 38. QxN RxKP 39. QxRP

With his accustomed impeccable technique, Arthur makes winning a won game look easy—even against a fierce Young Turk like Rogoff.
39. ... R-K7 40. Q-N5 R-K8ch 41. K-B2 R-Q8 42. Q-N7 Q-KB1 43. B-K4 R-Q7ch 44. K-N3 R-Q1

If 44. ... Q-Q3ch, White plays 45. K-N4.
45. Q-QB7 R-B1 46. Q-Q7 R-Q1 47. Q-QB7

Here and a bit later, Arthur repeats moves to gain time on the clock.

At age 66, Arthur misses 61. B-K6, which forces immediate resignation.

If my worst enemy were to accuse me of never having done a
good thing, I could point in reply to righting the wrong done to Arthur Dake. In 1986, I was able to convince FIDE to award this great player the GM title for his many fine performances during the 1930s.

From time to time I run into my friend at tournaments. He is a good deal older and slower than the young chess speedster of yesteryear, who used to quip, "I'll dake it off," during lightning games. But he is otherwise unchanged—still childlike in his friendliness, still generous to a fault and still ambitious in chess. In 1991, he was inducted into the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame.

Thus I give you Arthur William Dake, a decent and considerate spirit, and an American original if ever there was one. I look forward to meeting with him for many years to come.

Helen Dake, Arthur's wife of 58 years, has just died. In a moving memorial in the July 1994 Chess Life, my friend wrote about his loss and about what he values in life:

At the 1935 Warsaw Olympiad, I scored 15⅓–2⅓ to post the best absolute result of that event; and I can still remember thinking during the trip back aboard the S.S. Pilsudski that the greatest chess prize of my life was a famous painting of Polish rural life that I had just received.

That's when I met 26-year-old Helen Gierwatowski during the intermission of a shipboard movie. Helen, who was returning to America after visiting her ancestral Poland, simply turned around and smiled at me. That's all.

Some six weeks later, after a whirlwind romance, we married on November 14, 1935. And this remarkable person, who was truly my most wonderful chess prize, became my wife for 58 years until her death on April 1, 1994.

Let me tell you about my Helen. She was a lady who unfailingly prayed the rosary every morning, who never failed to say "I love you" every evening; who supported me in my efforts to become a chess professional during the Depression '30s; who baked celebrated lemon meringue pies for the Altar Society and Oregon blueberry muffins for a former Chess Life editor and good friend [Larry Parr]; who travelled to Rome, Paris, and Poland, thanks to the generosity of our daughter Marjorie; and who passed away, fittingly, on Good Friday with a palm-leaf crucifix in her hand.

I fell in love with Helen at first sight, but I never imagined back then that like a flower in perpetual unfolding, Helen
would reveal over the years an ever-more textured human soul that somehow grew in generosity and faith in Our Lord.

For me, Helen was an ever-evolving wonderment of strength and wisdom; for others, she proved that by working in the shipyards during World War II and at Hartford Insurance for the ensuing 20 years, one could be a normal, healthy person yet also be fully alive.

My Helen, who for so many decades bravely played the role of a “chess widow,” has now left me a chess widower. I grieve the loss of my mate of a lifetime.

**Selected Games**

*Arthur Dake: The GM of Natural Moves*


K. O. MOTT-SMITH–ARTHUR DAKE (Marshall C.C. Championship Prelimi-
Chapter XXI 233

N-B3 16. QxNP NxP 17. KR-Q1 NxNch 18. BxN Q-N1 19. QxKP P-QR4
R-B1 B-N7 30. RxB Q-B3 31. B-Q3 B-N7 32. B-Q6 BxR 33. BxR P-R6,
White resigns

DAVID POLLAND—ARTHUR DAKE (Marshall C.C. Championship Prelimi-
39. P-QR4 R-N2 40. R-N4 B-KI 41. B-B3 Q-Q1 42. K-Q3 R-Q2ch 43. M-

ARTHUR DAKE—ANTHONY SANTASIERE (Marshall C.C. Championship Prelimi-
43. P-B5 R-QB2 44. N-R2 B-R3 45. R-K2ch K-Q2 46. KxP R-R3 47. P-B6ch
58. K-K6 KxB 59. P-B5, Black resigns Eine echte Dake-Partie, as the Germans
would say.

ARTHUR DAKE—AL HOROWITZ (Marshall C.C. vs. Manhattan C.C. Metropo-


QB1 28. R-K5 Q-B6 29. B-K2 Q-B6?! (A better move is 29. ... Q-B1, intending ... Q-N5) 30. QxQ RxQ 31. B-N4 R/6-B5? (A probable draw is 31.
... R-B8) 32. BxPch BxB 33. RxP RxP 34. RxP RxP 35. R-K7 R-K5 36. R-Q7
R/Q5-Q7 R-N5 42. R-Q5 R-N5 43. K-N2 R/N1xP 44. R/Q5-Q7 R-N5 45. K-
R3 R/N4-N5 46. P-R5 R-KN4 47. P-B4 RxRPch 48. K-N2 R-QB4 49. RxPch
R/Q6-QR6 R-B6 55. R-R8, Black resigns Many young masters, who have been
nurtured on Informants, imagine that the opening is all. The older masters
used to spend a lot of time studying endings and could routinely create fin-
ished productions such as this fine game.
Chapter XXII

Move Over, Valentino!

The first time that I saw boyish, handsome Herman Steiner was in the early 1930s at the Manhattan Chess Club, where he was playing a match against Reuben Fine. He lost narrowly.

The impression that Herman made was striking—a one-time boxer, he was well built in a wiry way. But this impression was also fleeting. I did not really get to know him until years later when we were both playing in the 1934 Syracuse International. I had agreed to share a room with Sammy Reshevsky, blithely unaware of his special wakeup alarm system. And the very first morning, Sammy shattered my dreams with the loudest wailing and lamentations that I had ever heard. He was praying.

"Stop complaining and go back to bed," I said.

"Don't you realize we've lost the Temple?" he mumbled.

That was more than I could take, and later the same day, I moved across the hall to Herman's room. There, the attack on my sleep was of a different kind. Thinking back across the decades, I still have not decided which would have been better for my chess: staying with Sammy and losing some sleep, or hanging out with Herman and getting practically no sleep at all while learning all about life and ladies.

You may talk about the Valentinos and Navarros, but they had nothing on the man whom we would later call Handsome Herman of Hollywood. He was one charming devil with a disarming smile and a twinkle in the eye that women could not resist. The most beautiful women imaginable literally fought just to share him. I had never seen the like and did not complain because it permitted me to enjoy the overflow. Herman, wherever you are, I want you to know that I will always be grateful.

Admittedly, however, I exhibited no such gratitude at the time in our individual game, which is given here because it was our first tournament battle and set the tone of future encounters.
6. N-K5 B-K2!

This move allows White to build up an almost automatic attack. Black could have achieved practical equality via 6. ... B-Q3 7. P-KB4 N-K5 8. 0-0 0-0, with the idea of building a counter-Stonewall formation with an eventual ... P-B4.

7. 0-0 NxN 8. PxB N-Q2 9. P-KB4 P-B4

Black wishes to blockade the center by preventing P-K4.

10. P-QN3! N-B1?

Not good. Black ought to have tried ... P-QN3 and ... B-N2 rather than the text move, which decentralizes the Knight and prevents castling.


Black eschews a final chance to offer some resistance by 16. ... N-N3 and ... 0-0.


21. N-Q5!

The position is ripe for violent measures. If 21. ... PxN, White wins right off with 22. PxQP B-Q2 23. P-Q6.

21. ... B-Q1 22. BxBP P-KN4

"The text," I wrote in *If You Must Play Chess*, "is a last desperate attempt to secure some counterplay. Black's position reminds one of a poultry yard during an approaching storm."
What happened in the tournament to early-to-bed, early-to-rise Sammy Reshevsky? While Herman and this grasshopper were out partying (was this the tournament where Herman and I came back at 4 a.m. with a parking sign and put it in bed with one of our sleeping friends?), Sammy gathered points like rosebuds to win the Syracuse event easily with a score of 12–2.

A Child of Nature

"Herman," my good friend Al Horowitz once said, "has the body of a grown man and the uncontrollable spirit of a young stallion." Right, but I don't think that even Al knew how apt the description was. Herman was a child of nature, warm and friendly as a lap dog and totally spontaneous and uninhibited. No matter how tight a spot he squeezed himself into, he always wiggled out thanks to his boyish and buoyant enthusiasm.

Horowitz used to tell the story of how Herman, during an Olympiad game, once touched the wrong piece and was forced to move it. He jumped up from the table, rushed about the room gesturing with the guilty finger, and screamed, "Fingerfehler! Ich habe einen Fingerfehler gemacht." That was Herman to a "T."

Herman's perky ways did not always sit well with his chess. Of course, he was an outstanding master, winning the U.S. Open twice, representing the United States at four Olympiads (scoring well at the Hague 1928 and Prague 1931), and racking up two or three excellent international results such as first at Berlin 1931 (ahead of Ludwig Rellstab, Fritz Saemisch and Lajos Steiner), second at Brno 1932 (just behind Salo Flohr) and third at Pasadena 1932 (tied with Reshevsky and Arthur Dake). But too often he was as irrepressible over the board as away from it.

Herman probably holds the all-time record for playing Rook lifts to the third rank with the intention of sliding the piece over to the Kingside. Most of us understood what he had in mind and countered victoriously on the Queen's wing. For a drastic example of Herman's singleminded approach, turn elsewhere in these pages to "Starry Knights in Hollywood," which contains the first game of my 1946 match with Herman.

Still, Herman's style made for fascinating if not always winning chess. One of the tournament books about the 1952 Stockholm Interzonal had as much space devoted to Herman's games as to those of Alexander Kotov, who won that event by three points. Herman scored only 50 percent at Stockholm, but he kicked up plenty of dust even in defeat.
On those occasions when Herman curbed his drastic ebullience, usually when representing the United States in international team matches, he played formidably. In the U.S.A.–U.S.S.R. Radio Match of 1945, a 10-board affair, Herman was the only American to make a plus score, defeating Igor Bondarevsky on board six, 1½–½.

Igor Bondarevsky–Herman Steiner
Bogo-Indian Defense


White prevents Black from playing the freeing move, 14. ... P-K4.

14. ... N-N3 15. P-K4 R-Q1

Herman eyes White’s Queen pawn which was, as he put it, “an attractive target.”

16. P-QR4 B-Q2

Black would drop a piece after 16. ... Q-Q2? 17. P-R5 QxPch 18. QxQ RxQ 19. N-B3!.

17. P-R5 N-B1 18. QxP

Herman notes that White had a promising alternative in 18. NxP.

18. ... B-K1 19. P-K5 Q-Q2!

This subtle move gains time for the following Knight maneuver, which brings further pressure against White’s pawns. As mentioned, Herman was not a partisan of the kind of positional play in this game. For a more representative example of his play, just read on to Evans–Steiner.

31. K-K3?

Steiner tabbed this innocent advance as the decisive error. Bondarevsky had to try 31. N-R4, with an unclear, complicated position after 31. ... R-B3 32. R-B5 B-B5 33. P-N5 RxR 34. PxR Q-N2 35. N-N6 R-KB1 36. NxB PxN 37. R-Q1.

31. ... B-B5 32. R-B3 Q-K1 33. Q-R3

The maneuver, 33. R/3-R3, is too slow because of 33. ... R-N4 34. Q-B7 R-B1 35. QxP RxP, when Black threatens ... R-N7 followed by ... R-K7ch and ... P-B4.


This move threatens 44. ... Q-B8ch and 45. ... Q-QR8.

44. K-Q2 Q-N7ch 45. K-B3 Q-B8 46. P-B5 Q-QR8!

Herman has him and does not let go. If 46. ... QxP or 46. ... PxP, White gets counterchances with 47. R-N7.

47. K-B2 B-Q6ch!!

This beautiful move caps a fine counterattack beginning with 33. ... P-B3!.


White loses his Queen after 52. R-QR2 R-N4ch 53. QxR Q-Q8ch.

**Hot Hollywood Hunk**

In 1932, at age 27, Handsome Herman headed west to California. In July 1933, he took over the chess column in the *Los Angeles Times*, which he would edit until his premature death in 1955.

If Southern California were a chess desert when Herman arrived,
he soon transformed it into an oasis. He opened a club at 108 North Formosa Avenue, his celebrated Hollywood Chess Group, and attracted such famous students as Humphrey Bogart, Louis Hayward, Margaret Sullavan and Billy Wilder. Others who might happen by on those warm, lotus evenings in Old Hollywood included the likes of film greats Lauren Bacall, John Barrymore, Charles Boyer, Myrna Loy and the breathtaking Linda Darnell, whom Reuben Fine described as the most beautiful woman he ever saw.

Herman had found heaven as the hot Hollywood hunk of chess. He married a concert pianist named Selma and sired two sons, Eugene and Armin. They lived in a large and tastefully appointed home, a wedding present from Selma’s mother, that also housed the Hollywood Chess Group. Of course, as a master of the attack, he continued to check out and mate numerous budding starlets seeking the favor of someone who knew the famous actor Humphrey Bogart or the mega-mogul Billy Wilder.

Where women were concerned, Herman broke bread with the poet Richard Armour: “I am not very covetous,/I do not crave a lot./The things I want are limited/To what I haven’t got.”

And if Herman loved Hollywood and its pulchritudinous attractions, his love was returned. That Steiner charm worked wonders, and many of the golden women and powerful men of Old Hollywood helped him to promote chess by working the royal game into movies and press releases. On the set, Herman could get away with just about anything, including flirting with leading ladies. During the filming of Cass Timberlane, he told Lana Turner, “Don’t play chess. Sitting at a chess board for hours might make you fat and spoil that perfect figure.”

Herman’s many friends even found bit parts for him in their films. One of Herman’s more prominent roles was as Adolf Hitler, whom he certainly resembled after pasting down his shiny black hair and clipping his mustache.

“The Goal of My Ambition”

Don’t get me wrong. Handsome Herman may have been a playboy, but he remained first of all a man of chess. More than anything else, he longed to become United States chess champion, which he once described as “the goal of my ambition.” After his greatest international triumph, first prize in the London “Victory” International of 1946, he challenged me to a match for the national title that I had won in 1944.

I accepted readily. Not only was the $5,000 purse munificent by the standards of the mid-1940s, but I had no reason to believe that
the pattern of our previous results, beginning with the above Syra-
cuse game of 1934, would alter in the proposed 10-game match.

I was right and won 6–4. The story of that match, which took
place in Los Angeles in May 1946, can be found in Chapter IX. My
purpose here is merely to report that I was not guilty of wounding
Herman’s spirit. Always an incorrigible optimist, he attributed his
loss to the strain of raising funds and issued another challenge for
the following year. But as luck or skill would have it, I lost my title
in the fall of 1946. Sammy Reshevsky scored a lopsided result of
16–2 in that year’s championship. ’Nuff said.

Herman’s championship quest eventually succeeded. In 1948, he
topped a 20-player field that included Isaac Kashdan to cop the
title. It must have been a sweet victory. Certainly it was richly
deserved. And what gave Herman considerable satisfaction was to
win the championship by playing chess his way.

Larry Evans—Herman Steiner
U.S. Championship, 1948
King’s Indian Defense

11. B-K3 P-B4

For the sake of Kingside play, Herman was always willing to
ignore positional considerations.

N-Q5

Andy Soltis claims a favorable ending for White after 17. QxQ,
18. QR-Q1 and N-Q5. He is quite right.

QR-Q1

Grandmaster Soltis notes that White wants to bear down on the
Queen file, while Black wants to work on the Kingside. Unfortu-
nately, Herman could not play 21. ... P-B5 immediately because of
R-KN1.


This ending is about equal, though Black is the guy who can do
the pushing.


The point of this move is to answer 39. ... RxP with mate after 40. R-N8ch.

39. ... R-K8!

Both sides are playing colorful chess. Not only does White threaten 41. R-KN8, mate, he also answers 40. ... RxN with 41. R-QN8ch.

40. ... P-B8=Nch!!

In Chess Review Hans Kmoch termed this move “a miserable minor promotion.” It is also a heart-warming way to push wood in a U.S. Championship.

41. K-N1 N-N6ch 42. RxR RxRch 43. K-R2 N-B8ch 44. K-R1 N-K6ch 45. R-N1 RxRch 46. KxR NxP, White resigns

One day in late November 1955, during that year’s California State Championship, Herman felt ill. He called a doctor, who visited him at his home. During the examination, Herman died of a heart attack. It was the end of a journey that began only 50 years earlier in Hungary—a journey that took him first to New York and international chess fame, and then to Old Hollywood where this man-child stopped living before growing old.
Selected Games

Herman Steiner: Caissa's Casanova


Chapter XXII


In this lost position, Fine claimed a draw by three-fold repetition, which was disputed by Steiner for reasons that are today unclear. The match referee eventually ruled in Fine’s favor, though not before ordering the two young masters to play out the game to a conclusion. Here is the unofficial and very pretty finish: 47. K-B3 K-N2 48. N-B5 N-Q3 49. NxBch K-N3 50. B-Q3ch N-K5 51. BxNch PxBch 52. KxP PxN 53. R-K7 R-R7 54. P-N6 RxP 55. RxPch KxP 56. P-Q5 R-R8 57. P-Q6! R-Q8 58. P-N7! RxP 59. R-K5ch!! BxR 60. P-N8=Q B-N6 61. Q-N5ch, Black resigns.


R4 16. R-N1 Q-Q4?! (With 16. ... R-B1, Black could have withstood 
immediate onslaughts) 17. B-K4 Q-Q2? (Absolutely necessary is 17. ... Q- 
Pch BxN 23. QxB Q-KB2 24. QxQch KxQ 25. R-Q3 R-B3 26. R-K1 QR-QB1 
N5ch K-Q2 41. R-N7ch K-Q3 42. R-N7 P-K4 43. RxN PxR 44. RxR PxP 45. 
B-B6 R-R3 46. BxB RxBch 47. K-N3, Black resigns In this match, Herman 
proved no match for the then 20-year-old Larry Evans, who triumphed 10–4. 
The above powerful attacking effort, replete with Herman’s trademark Rook 
lifts to the third rank, was the veteran’s single bright spot.
III

Chess Among the Bowery Boys
Chapter XXIII

For George Treysman
the Pay Was the Thing

“You castle your way, and I’ll castle my way....”
—George N. Treysman

In 1928, at the age of 14, I was accepted as a junior member of the Manhattan Chess Club, which in those days occupied the entire ground floor of the Sherman Square Hotel on 71st and Broadway.

Everything about the Manhattan was structured and ordered, even to how members should behave and dress. One advertisement for the institution read, “A Club for Gentlemen of Discernment who Enjoy the Royal Game.” If the club secretary, L. Walter Stephens, frowned at you, it was because you failed to pass muster. “Young man,” he would announce in his best Princeton accent, “you are improperly accoutered.”

Given this sheltered upbringing in chess, the reader may imagine my astonishment when years later I visited the Stuyvesant Chess Club, an absolutely unique institution of a kind unfortunately gone forever. The Stuyvesant, which was located on New York’s lower East Side at 14th Street just west of Second Avenue, was a completely different world, filled with people who would rather play chess than eat. It was as if I had crossed some unseen border and wandered into a foreign land. Here few people spoke English, and most conversations were in Russian, Yiddish or Polish. It was a good thing for me that chess is a universal language.

In the Bohemian atmosphere of the Stuyvesant, there were no restrictions on noise; and people wore what they felt comfortable in or what they could afford. You could hear shouted epithets such as “dummkopf!”, “patser!”, “pfuscher!”, “schlemiel!” and so on. Everyone was a chain smoker. The fumes were, as Norman Lessing has written, “thick enough to cut in chunks.” The smoke reminded me of a Holmesian London fog, and the light bulbs with their green mandarin-hat shades above the tables resembled street lamps vainly
The club consisted of a long loft in an old brownstone, half a story above street level. There were chess tables out front, card tables to the rear and still further back a small kitchen whence emanated coffee, tea and sandwiches—all served at the chess tables so as not to disturb games in progress.

The host, Jacob “Yankele” Bernstein, was short, fat and greasy-looking, in addition to being completely bald and having a neck like a wrestler’s. Happily married to Anna Casement, a plump woman with a last name that still echoes loudly in Irish history, he wore a perpetual grin on his face and was usually friendly and pleasant. The exception was when someone walked out without paying a bill—a practice that he nonetheless tolerated. He loved chess people and was quite a strong player. It was said that Yankele could not have paid his own bills were it not for the poker games that he cut on the second floor, directly below his own quarters on the third.

That he ran a gambling parlor—right beneath the night sticks of his wife’s numerous brothers and cousins on the police force—was proven when the cops raided the club and hauled him into court. Luckily for Yankele, the judge was a chess player who asked, “If yours is not a gambling establishment, then tell me, ‘Who is the U.S. chess champion?’”

“Arnold Denker!” replied Yankele, and the case was immediately dismissed.

Yankele never reformed himself. He was too easy-going for the conventional world. One story has him asking a question at a Wilson-for-President rally: “Mr. Wilson, is it true that if you’re elected, every man will have work?” When Wilson answered yes, Yankele protested, “But Mr. Wilson, I don’t want to work. I’m a gambler.”

“King of the Put Down”

I visited the Stuyvesant Chess Club many times over the years and got to know some very interesting characters. One of them was George Nelson Treysman, the “King of the Put Down” and the self-proclaimed ruler of chess on Manhattan’s East Side.

A one-time waiter with a penchant for spilling soup on customers whom he disliked, George soon found it necessary to earn his living at chess. Medium in height, gaunt and emaciated-looking with high, knobby cheekbones, Treysman’s face resembled the death mask of a Mongol warrior. The single redeeming feature was his eyes. They were deep-set, like two black coals resting in a pool of water, and
when he laughed they fairly rippled and overflowed until tears streamed down his cheeks.

Treysman could have been a fine actor, since he had just the right amount of ham in him. There were times when he would feign royalty, and he carried it off so well that I think he began to believe it. Once, when I inquired about his background, he twirled his ever-present white shawl about his neck in a single sweeping motion and replied, “Don’t you honestly feel that you are in the presence of nobility when you are in my company?”

Although Treysman never cracked a chess book and played in no more than a half-dozen tournaments, he had a natural talent so great that he could hold his own with the best. Were it not for his heavy smoking, poor diet and totally undisciplined lifestyle, he might have gone far. At age 55 and well past his prime, he finished third in what was the first master tournament of his life—the 1936 U.S. Championship!

George Treysman—Isaac Kashdan
U.S. Championship, 1936
Nimzoiindian Defense


The aggressive idea behind this move is in keeping with Treysman’s training as a coffeehouse hustler.

George Treysman—Arthur Dake
U.S. Championship, 1936
Ruy Lopez


Black should have played 9. ... N-B3. Both of these masters were known as unbooked, natural players.


The only move was 16. ... P-QR4, when Black can probably get himself untangled.


Black’s last chance was 20. ... K-R1, followed by ... P-N3, ... B-N2 and ... P-B3. The second player would then have had so-so drawing chances.


Treysman’s years in coffeehouses, spent grinding out games day in and day out, provided him with an excellent technique, which he demonstrated in this struggle.

George never gave tournament chess more than a passing doff of the cap. Except in 1936. In that year he not only came within one or two moves of winning the U.S. Championship, he also went 32 games without defeat—a skein that began with the Rice-Progressive Chess Club Championship, continued through an arduous qualifying tournament for the U.S. Championship finals, and ended in round 10 of those finals when a very weary Treysman played a ghastly game against my friend, Al “Buddy” Simonson.

The Odds-On Favorite

As an odds-giver Treysman was the king. He had no peer, not even the great Al Horowitz. Indeed, George had to be tops just to survive. Knowing his strength, players would haggle with him and demand outrageous odds for risking their money. He would usually agree—but not before insulting his prospective opponent for demanding such an unfair advantage. All the while he knew that he was going to play, but he wanted the opponent to feel that he had driven a hard bargain. When first witnessing this performance, I was truly shocked, not realizing that it was merely a ritual like the mating ceremony of storks to establish dominance.
In *The World of Chess*, Anthony Saidy and Norman Lessing describe the course of a typical Treysman hustle:

George would approach his prey courteously enough. “Would you care for a game of chess, sir?”

This usually produced a wary response. “Chess? No, I don’t think so.”

“Pinochle, maybe? Clabriash?”

“Not interested.”

“Casino, dominoes? Maybe you’d like to shoot a game of pool? They got a nice pool hall across the street.” The customer would try to wave him off but George was a hard man to shake. “Ping-Pong, tiddlywinks? What’s your best game? I’ll play you anything you want and give you odds, that’s how much I think of you.”

By this time the man was angry. “Okay, I’ll play you chess. What odds will you give me?”

Then the game would begin. George was a master of psychological warfare. With the saddest expression in the world, he would look out into the ever-present audience and wail, “You see, this is the kind of low-life that I have to put up with in order to live.” Other times, he would belittle an opponent’s move by pointing out its threat to the kibitzers. “Look how crude and low his plan is,” he would say. Then he would make a move and extoll the beauty and artistry of his own play. Of course, he always neglected to point out the real threat behind his move, which was far different from what he revealed to the onlookers. And when an opponent finally grabbed the bait, he would finish him off and ask, “How can you be such an idiot to believe everything that people tell you?”

A good question. Yet idiots were never wanting.

Take Jack Richman, the owner of a Lower East Side delicatessen, a happily married family man, and model material for one of those manic Manhattan melodramas. You see, Jack caught the chess bug, an affliction absolutely fatal to family life and financial limb back in the 1930s and 1940s.

Jack and George soon developed a relationship based on negative symbiosis. Jack worked all day at his delicatessen, played blitz chess all night against George at the Stuyvesant, and returned to work in the morning with neither sleep nor the previous day’s receipts. George was no better off. He too went sleepless by taking his winnings to the race track and then losing them.
Here's the money trail:

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Delicatessen cash register  ────> Jack's pocket

Race track cash register  ←────> George's pocket
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After losing business, wife, children and home, Jack took up residence on 42nd Street where he sat shoulder-to-shoulder with George in all weather, hustling the "suckahs" for quarters. Dressed always in two complete suits, Jack said that the inner garments were his weekday wear, the outer apparel his Sunday best and that he wore both because he could not decide which he liked better.

When cadging smokes, Jack would invariably ask in his thick Noi Yawk accent, "Hey, ya got a Shysterfield?" Unfortunately for Jack, I was a confirmed Camel man, having appeared in nationally published cigarette advertisements.

By the mid-1950s both men were going downhill fast, holing up near Times Square at the New York Chess & Checkers Club or, as we called it, the flea house. One day, George and a young Allen Kaufman, who is nowadays the distinguished executive director of the tony American Chess Foundation, were swapping news when a ratty-looking Richman slouched in.

"See that guy," George rasped like someone suffering from throat cancer, "I made him into a chessplayer!" By which he meant that he had ruined his life. And when looking at Jack, you couldn't help thinking about the words of the writer who moaned, "I am not actually unhappy; it is something worse than that."

Unlike George, Jack had a softer side. True, he would malevolently tell opponents to "Break a leg!", which he rendered into his imprecise Yiddish as "Brach a füss!" or "Break a foot!" Yet when confronted with a gratuitous kindness that even his suspicious mind could not fault, he would say, "Brach nicht kein füss!" or "Don't break a foot!"

George's coffeehouse games do not survive. Certainly, he played extremely aggressively in these sporting contests and sought tactical complications relentlessly. The pay, after all, was the thing. The following tournament games, in which the opposition was well below Treysman's level, give a fair idea of his coffeehouse play:
Chapter XXIII

Barnie Winkelman–George Treysman

U.S. Open, 1936

Budapest Defense


Black threatens ... B-KN5, followed by ... BxB and ... N-N5.

15. K-R1 P-QB3?

Although Black wins this game brilliantly, the text move leaves White with a defense. The correct idea is an immediate 15. ... P-B4.


19. ... B-B4

20. B-B4?


20. ... N-N5! 21. PxN BxNch 22. B-B3 R-R7!, White resigns

The finish would be 23. B-Q2 KRxB 24. RxR RxB.

George Treysman–Milton Hanauer

U.S. Championship, 1938

Queen’s Gambit Accepted


Black ought to have tried 12. ... P-QN3 13. B-KN5 B-N2, with a playable position.


Doing It His Way

To play successfully at odds required more than attacking technique; it required quick-witted chutzpah. On one memorable occasion, George was extending Queen odds to an opponent just a bit too strong for such an overwhelming advantage. So he devised a new way of castling by which he put his Rook immediately on K1. The adversary scratched his head and inquired how it was that when he castled, his Rook ended up on the Bishop’s square, and when George castled, it ended up on the King’s square. To which George replied, “You castle your way, and I’ll castle my way, okay?”

“Okay,” agreed the patzer.

Another Treysman technique for confusing the opponent and saving precious seconds in time pressure was to grab a salt or pepper shaker when queening a pawn. “I’m not a cheater!” George would exclaim indignantly. “Don’t I always take the salt shaker when White and the pepper when Black?”

Sometimes, when all else failed, George would lean across the table and lower his voice to a confidential tone. “Do you realize,” he would ask, “that you are matched against the founder of the Treysmanic School of Chess?” To this day I have yet to discover what or where that school was, but it sure had the power to intimidate.

For the spectators, the show was great. For his opponents, it was quite another matter. George was fond of singing songs as he played, and he always hit his best rhythm when a win was within reach. There was the tender favorite, “Who Hit Nelly in the Belly with a Flounder?”; and he simply loved another song with a refrain
which went, "They call me Shirley just because my hair is curly." But my favorite was "In Spain, they say, the chess reigns plainly in the main."

Treysman rarely played against equals. His greatest joy came from giving odds and insulting his opponents. It was said that he could curse in seven languages, though he always did so with a smile.

George led a lonely and, at the end, a depressing life. In his final years before dying of throat cancer in 1959, he was reduced to sitting mute at the chessboard and to writing out insults on a scratchpad. This veteran gamesman, his ravaged neck wrapped in discolored gauze, expected no pity and received none.

Looking back across the decades, dozens of pictures flash before my eyes of George hustling chess. But for some reason, I often fix on the night that he was playing Charles Jaffe, who had once been a leading player (he defeated Capablanca in a tournament game) and who was by that time a sickly old man. Jaffe, who made some money publishing works in Yiddish, had a bad game, and George was riding him hard. When he threatened to tear Jaffe limb from limb and to feed him to the crocodiles, the latter stood up and sent all the pieces flying across the table and stomped out.

Not to be upstaged, George looked around, spread out his palms in an elaborate shrug, and asked with the most innocent tone and face in the world, "What kind of variation is that for a nice Yiddish writer?"

Selected Games

George Treysman: The Coffee-House Grandmaster


260 The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories


Chapter XXIII


I'm an honest man. I follow the rules and believe that the rules are to be followed. So it was quite a surprise to answer the doorbell one afternoon in 1944, shortly after winning the U.S. Chess Championship, and to find two burly FBI men who wanted to question me.

Their visit had to do with Norman Tweed Whitaker, a man whom I had met several years before, when I was in my early twenties. At that time I was staying in Chevy Chase with my dear friend Isaac "Izzy" Turover, a professional chess player turned successful Washington, D.C., lumber dealer. My purpose for being in the area was to give a series of exhibitions and lectures. I met Whitaker after my first local simul, and we hit it off immediately.

A scion of a socially prominent Philadelphia family, Norman seemed sprinkled with gold dust. His father, Herbert Whitaker, was a noted mathematics teacher, while his mother enjoyed repute as a champion whist player. At one of Philadelphia's outstanding high schools, he served as president of the student senate, vice president of his class (1908), president of the engineering club, vice president of the debating society, president of Phi Sigma fraternity and, to be sure, president of the chess club.

Yet Whitaker was not particularly attractive. Born in 1890, he was about five feet nine and rather stocky at 180 pounds. His complexion was ruddy, and his light brown hair was chopped to a crew cut. One would hardly give him a second look. But when he smiled, his whole face lit up. And his eyes—they fairly spoke to you. His manners were those of a Southern gentleman, and when alone with you, he spoke with so much enthusiasm that he just carried you along. Further, he had the benefit of a fine education at Georgetown and Oxford, the personal presence of a man who once wielded power (he served as an Assistant Secretary of the Interior during the Teapot Dome scandal of 1922), and the intellectual self-assurance of an outstanding scholar of German literature. When he turned on the charm, he made you feel as if you were the only
person in the whole wide world who really mattered.

No wonder that I was completely fascinated by Norman. We dined together at the very finest restaurants, and he even introduced me to one of his favorite pastimes, the Sport of Kings. We also played a lot of chess, and during the two weeks that we spent together in 1935, I was able to see why he had won the Western Open, which is today known as the U.S. Open, in 1923 and 1927 and why he owned a 2–1 record against Sammy Reshevsky.

Samuel Reshevsky–Norman Whitaker
Western Open, 1927
Queen’s Gambit Declined


Stormin' Norman played a hard, attacking game that was as short on subtlety as his so-called Whitaker Gambit (1. P-K4 P-K3 2. P-Q4 P-Q4 3. B-K3). His finest achievement was clear second at the Eighth American Chess Congress, played in July 1921. He scored 8–3 to finish a half point behind David Janowski, whom he defeated in their individual game. In that tournament, he also beat Frank Marshall, who trailed badly at 6–5. Other successes included a match victory over Jackson Showalter in 1918 and a drawn match with Fritz Saemisch in 1960. Together with Glenn Hartleb, he authored 365 Selected Endings (1960), a superb collection that is written in both English and German.

Norman could trade tactical blows with the best of them, as is demonstrated in the game below against Marshall. Just take a gander at the pretzel-like position following 27. ... R-KB1.

Frank J. Marshall–Norman T. Whitaker
New York, 1911
King's Gambit Accepted


A better move is 12. ... N-R3. If White then tries 13. NxP, Black has 13. ... B-N5.


Strange to say, one thing did bother me about Norman. How could he always be so well-dressed and spend so much money without working? In the end I convinced myself that he had inherited a fortune. By the time I left Washington, D.C., we were good friends. Yet it was the last time that our paths crossed. Over the years he sent me postcards with interesting positions from his games, and he occasionally dispatched a congratulatory telegram about something I did. It was just such a message that brought those two husky FBI gentlemen to my door on that sunny afternoon in 1944.

They had been tailing Norman for some time. He had given them the slip, and I was suddenly their hottest lead. Their goal was to find out where he and a confederate, Gaston Means, hid $100,000 (about a million crisp ones in today's dollars) that they received 12 years earlier from the wealthy socialite and Washington Post co-publisher, Evalyn Walsh McLean. Mrs. McLean thought she was providing them with ransom money for the kidnapped Lindbergh baby. Years later Norman would maintain steadfastly that for good and honest reasons this money was handed over to three strangers at the Highway Bridge entrance to Washington, D.C. Few people believed him, and in the press Norman was called "The Fox."

Mrs. McLean's lettuce was never recovered despite years of intensive searching. Whitaker served time on Alcatraz Island. He stood up to it in good style and could even be witty about this episode in his life. As he once noted, he robbed only the rich because there was so little to be had from the poor. "Anyway," as he put it, "there would be no sense of achievement." He took pride that some of his frauds made the textbooks.

The Lindbergh fraud was still better. It made the front pages. For weeks, Norman and Gaston Means, a paunchy ex-Justice Department agent and a bag man for bigwigs in the bribe-ridden Harding administration, basked in the notoriety of being this nation's most callous cads.

Headlines in the New York Times from May 1933 read, "Means and Whitaker on Trial in Capital"; "Washington Court Is Thronged as Flier [Charles Lindbergh] Testifies in Means and Whitaker Case"; "Whitaker Is Also Found Guilty of Plot to Mulct Mrs. McLean in Lindbergh Case." And so on. No wonder that years later, when Norman used to visit the offices of Chess Review, Al Horowitz would roar, "Come on in, Norman, and pull up an electric chair!"

The era of Bonnie and Clyde was also the time of Norman and Gaston. I do not know much about the road Mr. Means travelled to reach the apex of infamy, but I can trace Norman's trail from
Georgetown Law School graduate and Washington, D.C. patent attorney to supposed chief kidnapper of the Lindbergh baby and criminal louse.

In 1916 Norman was practicing law in Washington, and America had yet to enter World War I. Whatever views he had about Woodrow Wilson's decision in April 1917 to involve America in the war, Norman was determined to remain at peace. According to records at the Bureau of Investigation, the forerunner of the FBI, he moved from state to state, animated by the noble desire to keep ahead of draft notices. Only on November 16, 1918, five days after the war ended, did Norman appear at Fort Dix, New Jersey, to serve one day before being discharged for "defective vision."

In November 1921, Norman and brother Roland, plus sisters Dorothy and Hazel Whitaker, were arrested for violating the Dyer Act that banned transport of stolen cars across state lines. The Whitakers had latched on to the family values issue over seven decades before Dan Quayle and Bill Clinton; the four were saying via concrete deed that an upper-middle-class family that steals together stays together, albeit under lock and key.

Their racket, as described in the New York Times of February 26, 1922, involved "a nationwide plot to recover insurance on automobiles claimed to have been stolen and transported from one State to another." Although disbarred in 1924, Norman kept the courts at bay on the criminal counts for nearly four years. But on July 16, 1925, the Times reported that Norman had left Philadelphia the day before to serve two years at Leavenworth, "chained to United States Deputy Marshal Knox."

There followed an episode of comic relief.

On December 5, 1930, local police arrested Norman in Pleasantvale, New Jersey, for putting slugs in a pay telephone! A bit later, he played the role of chief of the Soviet secret police in America to peddle phony secrets to one Ralph Easley, head of the anti-Communist National Civic Federation. He raked in a tidy 20 G's for that scam—or about a quarter million in today's so-called currency.

The Lindbergh Sting

On March 1, 1932, someone kidnapped the 18-month-old Lindbergh baby from the famous aviator's estate near Hopewell, New Jersey. That same month, Norman was found guilty in Tampa, Florida, on a charge similar to his earlier Dyer Act conviction. Out on appeal, he jumped bail and headed north to cash in on the agony of the Lindberghs. Time was of the essence because the baby could turn up any moment, alive or dead. (And as it happened, dead.
Colonel Lindbergh identified the remains—fractured skull and all—on May 13, 1932.)

Norman and Gaston teamed up. The latter, claiming to be a go-between who was merely extending his good offices, had already secured $100,000 in ransom money from Mrs. McLean. That was in March 1932. Norman then played the role of chief kidnapper in a second scam to squeeze an additional $35,000 from the lady. Introduced to Mrs. McLean at her South Carolina vacation home as "a dangerous killer" known as "The Fox," Norman lived up to his billing. "His behavior," wrote George Waller in *The Story of the Lindbergh Case*, "was quite in character for an underworld boss. His eyes shifted continuously, surveying the room. Then he insisted on examining the entire house...searching for hidden microphones." In the style of Edward G. Robinson, Norman threatened to machine-gun the thrilled society matron in the event of a double cross.

Candor compels me to admit that Norman and Gaston did not have to play a grandmaster combination to dupe Mrs. McLean. For by all accounts, this socialite, who owned the midnight-blue Hope diamond and the 92½ carat Star of the East, also owned an unrated brain. As David Brinkley writes in his amusing *Washington Goes to War*, "When she [Evalyn] complained to Daddy Walsh that walking to school was 'a little trying to my dignity,' he produced for her a blue victoria coach drawn by two prancing sorrels and driven by a coachman in silk hat and gloves. Said Evalyn, 'My own preference, generally, is for show.'"

And a show, after all, is exactly what Norman and Gaston gave her. But the two conmen failed to consider the paradox that Mrs. McLean's reputation as a dim bulb could accidentally throw light on their dark doings. When she asked a friend at the *Washington Post* to help her pawn a two-foot rope of diamonds to raise the $35,000, that friend contacted the great lady's attorney. Said Mrs. McLean's savior later, "I suspected that Evalyn was in the hands of unscrupulous persons who were endangering her life and her property."

By late June 1932, Norman sat in a New York City jail waiting to be extradited back to Washington, D.C. Described in newspapers as "a suave and smiling prisoner" and termed "a mighty cool proposition" by then police commissioner Mulrooney, Norman managed to escape charges of bilking Mrs. McLean of the initial $100,000. He faced trial the following May only for the failed conspiracy to defraud the intended victim of an additional $35,000.

Back in the 1920s and 1930s, villains were nothing if not brazen. As Norman boarded the train for Washington, his young wife stood at the gate and, as was reported in the *Times*, "blew kisses in his direction." The jury in Washington, however, did not blow kisses; it
slapped both him and Means in the chops with a two-year sentence.

And the $100,000? Means told the jury that a man with a red lantern stopped him on the aforementioned bridge and whispered "Eleven," supposedly a password between Mrs. McLean and himself. He thereupon handed over the greenbacks on the assumption that she was calling off the ransom deal. Means, who got 15 years for the initial successful scam, died in prison.

Did Norman somehow latch on to the missing money as was assumed by those FBI agents who knocked at my door? When asked that question back in 1932 by New York City Deputy Police Chief John J. Sullivan, our boy answered, "I got none of it. I wish I did."

Too bad that Chief Sullivan, an Irishman with a brogue more Hibernian than a dram of the Blushful Hippocrene on St. Patrick's Day, did not know chess. He would have realized that a great master such as Norman would first make sure of his material compensation before sacrificing a major piece of time in prison.

**Discovered Check**

When Izzy Turover saw how close Norman and I were becoming, he warned me about the man. But such were Norman's powers to charm that nothing could have made me believe that this kind gentleman was a swindler, including Izzy detailing to me one of his pet schemes.

Norman would establish residence in a small town and open a good-sized bank account. Next, he became active in civic and church affairs. After some months, during which he built up an impeccable credit rating, he would buy a new car at the local Cadillac agency on a Friday afternoon after the banks closed. He would pay by check, and the following day he would drive to a nearby town and offer to sell the car for cash. Invariably, the used car dealer would alert the Caddy dealer, who would hotfoot it to the nearby town with the sheriff in tow. When all the smoke cleared, along with the check on the following Monday, Whitaker would be sitting pretty with a fine case of false arrest. Most dealers paid big bucks to keep the news out of the press.

As Norman grew older, he spent his summers in Germany, where there was a good market for his skills. But despite his brilliance, I quite accidentally discovered one occasion when he met his match. A case, you might say, of *Deutscher Über Norman*. The nemesis was Herr Kurt Rattmann, a fine gentleman whose chess bookstore in Hamburg is famous. Even Bobby Fischer has been there and marvelled at the collection.
One day Norman came in and immediately ingratiated himself, falling madly in love with his host’s exquisite taste in books. Soon he was lying on the floor of the shop surrounded by some 30 rare volumes, insisting that he could not live without them. But, sad to say, he had no cash and would give Kurt his personal check. By complete coincidence, Rattmann had heard about Norman through a German family that he bilked the previous summer. Politely, Kurt told Norman that he would be happy to send the books to his hotel, where he could surely get his check cashed.

That was it. The cash never materialized, and Norman left Hamburg sans livres. It was one of the rare times that he was bested. Another time was in his declining years. You see, confidence men tend not to age well because they eventually lose their self-confidence. Their physical presence and charm deteriorate; their manner becomes forced and therefore unconvincing; and their scams degenerate from the stuff of Robbing Hood to the ordure of social pathology. And so, in 1950 at age 60, Norman found himself in Moyamensing Prison near Philadelphia, charged with nine counts of molesting a 12-year-old girl.

At some point Norman slipped from being a colorful high-roller to being an off-color and failed old man, though as with most bad hats, Norman possessed even in his salad days an enormous capacity for self-pity. Thus, shortly after being sentenced in the Lindbergh case, he sent a “personal and confidential” letter, dated September 19, 1933, to Arthur Garfield Hays of the American Civil Liberties Union. “The Whitakers,” he wrote, “reached this country in 1666. I am the last of the line, and...I am bitter indeed at the unfairness in the U.S. Courts as I daily languish in my 5’ x 7’ cell in a filthy jail. My business, my reputation, and my family have all been ruined through the cruelties done me.”

And the cruelties Norman did to the innocent? Well, he just could not think in such terms, remaining a notorious trimmer—on one occasion in old age, he memorized an eye chart in advance to keep his driver’s license—until the very end, which came in May 1975. Suffering from emphysema, Norman died broke and alone, closing out his days drearily at the Cobb Memorial Hospital in a place called Phoenix City, Alabama.

As I say, I follow the rules and believe that the rules are to be followed. That’s because most of us eventually get our just deserts.
Selected Games

Norman Whitaker: Rough-and-Tumble Tactician


The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories

Yet another active idea, though it is more or less forced because after 9. R-KN1 B-KS I 0. RxP, Black traps the Rook by 10. ... B-N3) 10. ... BxR 11. BxB P-Q4 12. PxP PxP (Black is also in the mood for a fight; otherwise, he would have selected the more circumspect line, 12. ... NxP 13. R-B1 0-0 14. BxN QxB 15. N-B7 Q-R8ch 16. K-K2 QxQch 17. KxQ N-Q2) 13. R-B1 B-B4 14. P-N4 P-QR3 15. PxB PxN 16. P-B6 N-R3 17. B-QB3 P-N5 (Questionable, as the move encourages White to clear the Bishop file for his Rook; preferable were such moves as ... N-B4, ... 0-0 or ... N-B2) 18. R-B1 N-B4 19. N-B5 P-N3?! (This counter-attacking combination, which involves the sacrifice of a piece, is typical of Whitaker; but more feasible alternatives are 19. ... R-KN1 or 19. ... K-B1) 20. P-B7 Q-Q2 21. BxN QxN 22. RxN PxR 23. BxR RxP 24. B-KB3 (White correctly avoids a draw by repetition via 24. B-Q3 Q-N8ch 25. Q-Q1 Q-B4, etc.) 24. ... P-Q5 25. PxP P-B5 26. P-Q5 P-B6 27. P-Q6 Q-K3ch 28. K-B1 B-B4 29. B-B6ch? (White could have won by 29. P-Q7ch QxP 30. Q-K1ch K-B1 31. QxPch K-K1 32. Q-N8ch K-K2 33. Q-Q8ch QxQ 34. B-B6ch! K-K3 35. B-N4ch!) 29. ... K-B1 30. Q-B1 Q-B5ch 31. K-N1 Q-N5ch 32. K-R1 Q-Q8ch, draw Factor forced the pace in this game, but it is hardly accidental that Whitaker often found himself in donnybrooks, chessic and otherwise. The notes to this game are based on detailed annotations by Stasch Mlotkowski in the October 16, 1929 issue of The Bethlehem Globe-Times.


R8ch, White resigns


Chapter XXV

Road to the Rapture

At one time, Joe Noel was one of the best checker players in the United States as well as a darn good chess player. This fey, young god, who in his beauty and fate reminded me of the doomed British officers described by Vera Brittain in *Testament of Youth*, could have been successful at almost anything. Instead, he chose to live by his wits, which were considerable, rather than by honest work.

Blessed with an impish sense of humor, Joe led the life of a Greenwich Village bohemian, which was, in fact, what he was. Carousing like a gypsy, he gambled and smoked heavily, staying up most of the night. Although usually broke, he somehow managed to throw some great parties in his single-room Village pad.

Our paths first crossed in 1932 when he was a sophisticated 24, and I a naive 18. I was amazed that despite his dissolute ways—indeed, probably because of them—Joe was adored by the ladies. They literally blossomed when he paid them the slightest attention. Some even paid for the privilege of his company, and each in turn thought that she might reform him. It was all part of “the enthralling fun of overhauling you,” as Professor Henry Higgins would say.

But Joe proved immune to improvement and remained set on self-destruction. He often said that he wanted no more out of life than to leave it laughing. Everyone felt that this claim was youthful bravado. He was far too intelligent not to realize that he was slowly committing suicide. Yet events demonstrated that there was something inside this man telling him that the world was a big joke—a cosmic jest. The real world, man’s life after death, was where better things awaited all of us. “Only fools take this life seriously” was his invariable assertion when we discussed weighty issues.

If I live long enough, perhaps I will someday understand why so many brilliant people entertain such crazy thoughts.

A Hand with a Tale

Joe was quite a hand with a tale. He could summon an image to a listener’s eye by recapturing every detail of a story. I remember his
account of how he was once stranded in Pittsburgh, Pa., without return fare to New York.

Joe wandered over to the YMCA where rooms were then 35 cents a night. While walking through the lounge, he noticed a few chess games in progress and learned that a club was holding its weekly meeting. He seated himself beside one of the games, kibitzing by recommending silly remedies to the player whose position was already beyond hope. Finally, the loser got up and said, “Look, if you can do better, then why don’t you tackle him?”

That’s what Joe wanted. After all of the stupid suggestions, the prospective sucker surely believed that he had a fish on the line. They started playing for quarters, and Joe was soon several dollars ahead, whereupon the sucker had second thoughts about who really had the fins and gills. He asked Joe to wait and returned with the club champion. “I reckon that he’ll give you a better fight than I did,” said the disappearing patron.

Realizing that he was no match for the club kingpin and desiring to hang on to desperately needed money, Joe calmly extended his hand and introduced himself. The champ was surprised by Joe’s name and then replied with a voice full of contempt, “You mean THE Arnold Denker, our current U.S. champion? Are things so bad in New York that you have to come out here looking for suckers?” And with that, the champ angrily stalked off, while Joe escaped with his ill-gotten gains.

Joe was a great one for scheming to relieve people of the needful. One scheme involved playing a very simple endgame for quarters. The position consisted of three connected passed pawns for both sides plus the two Kings.

![Chessboard Diagram](image)

**White or Black to Play and Win for Quarters**

Joe worked at this position until he knew it cold. The endgame looks simple, but it requires perfect timing. While travelling the hinterland playing checkers, he would always snare a few chessplayers by offering draw odds. The stronger players usually
accepted this challenge, and the onlookers would back their local heroes with cash. For a period, the trade was very lucrative, but like every other dodge, it didn’t last.

Then there was the time that Joe pasted on a fake moustache, donned dark glasses and wandered over to the Coney Island boardwalk where chess and checker pros took on all comers for a quarter per go. He did okay for about three weeks, but the disguise must have failed him in the fourth. Three broken ribs and multiple concussions were the penalty. He never saw the attackers, who were at least three in number and who struck him from behind as he entered his car.

On another occasion, Joe strolled into Fischer’s Emporium on 42nd Street with a young lady whom he introduced as his “bride.” Of course, she was really a he in the person of a very strong young player. The plan was to let “her” beat the brains out of unsuspecting suckers. Unfortunately, before the team had a chance to get started, an acquaintance strolled in and wanted to know where the masquerade party was being held.

That piece of ill luck did not, however, mark the last of the bridal scheme. Joe and his “bride” decided to take their marriage of convenience on the road where the chances of being unmasked were far less. As they sped around upstate New York, they were very successful until one evening at the Utica Chess Club. In the middle of an exciting game, Joe’s “bride” heeded nature’s call by absent-mindedly running into the men’s room. A club member called the police, and the “couple” left without stopping to collect their winnings.

A Better World

Joe died of cancer in 1948, just short of his 40th birthday. As I stood beside the coffin, flashes from his life and his stories illuminated my mind. I also thought about his final years when he was no longer well enough to barnstorm the country. When, in fact, he sat garbed in a ratty overcoat in Washington Square Park, so bleak and leafless during the winter months, and eked out a living by hustling for quarters. Gone was the former self-assurance; gone also was the great sense of humor. From time to time, he still came up with grand schemes, but there was no longer energy to see them through.

Yet give Joe Noel credit: To the last he maintained that this life was just a stepping stone to a better world.
Chapter XXVI

The Poetaster of Chess

If, one afternoon, you were to leaf through the yellowed and crumbling pages of the old American Chess Bulletin, you would eventually come upon the name of Anthony Edward Santasiere. The name was not very prominent—at least, not at first. You would have to run your finger clear down the crosstable of Lake Hopatcong 1923 to find "Santasiere" at the bottom. The young master, who was born in 1904, scored $2\frac{1}{2}-10\frac{1}{2}$, the mirror image of Frank Marshall and Abraham Kupchik's winning scores. Yet Tony drew with both Marshall and the brilliant David Janowski, who finished third.

You might conclude that this Santasiere, whoever he was, could split points with grandmasters but lacked steadiness. Which was true enough. But for the moment, all I am telling you is that even though Tony and I competed against each other in the 1930s and 1940s and often discussed chess, I knew little more about him than you.

Okay, okay, I'll relent. I knew that beginning in 1927 this very shy person taught mathematics at the famous Angelo Patri School (P.S. 45) up on Fordham Road in the Bronx; that he briefly studied music at Julliard or, as it was known in the 1920s, the Institute of Musical Art; that he won his first Marshall Chess Club Championship in 1922 at the age of 17; that he was an extremely poor young man of French-Italian ancestry, the 12th of 13 children, whose education at City College was paid for by Alrick Man, a wealthy, elderly chess devotee; that Frank and Carrie Marshall, who treated Tony as a second son, prevailed on Man to act as he did; that Man asked in return only that Tony spend his summers at the former's estate. And that's all I knew.

I was simply unable to breach the many barriers that Tony erected.

Until, that is, I moved to Florida in 1970. I soon discovered that Tony, who preceded me south by five years, was a truly sensitive and even beautiful person. Mind you, Tony was not much to look at. Most people would never turn their heads when passing him on the street. He was short, kind of squat, dark-skinned with close-
cropped, curly black hair. A wag at the Manhattan Chess Club once remarked that if you put a lunch pail under his arm, he could gain entry into any factory in the country. That was the Tony most people saw. The Tony I saw was—to quote Hermann Helms—"a teacher, chess master, artist, musician, poet, novelist, philosopher, chef, motorist and bridge expert."

But I am getting ahead of my story. Before either of us retired to Florida, we were both ambitious young men in New York City fighting for our place beneath Caissa’s sun.

**The Small Ceremonies of Life**

Anyone who reads Tony’s paens to romantic gambiteering in the *ACB*—or negotiates his posturing prose in *Materialism Moribund* (1942)—and then plays over his actual games will probably conclude that this chess master was also a master of humbug. For Tony had a predominantly defensive style and rarely attacked until the opponent had overextended himself and was obviously without defensive resources. Yet Tony had the *chutzpah* to say that the Queen’s Gambit stank like a dead mackerel while himself playing the soporific Reti Opening. He once wrote of Jose Capablanca, "Through him we see clearly that the anti-artist, the anti-Christ, ends only with ashes, dust!" But here is one of Tony’s typical slog­ging, Capablancaesque games, albeit a game in which he humbles a giant of chess:

*Anthony Santasiere–Reuben Fine*

*U.S. Championship, 1938*

*Reti Opening*

35. K-Q4?!


There is no telling what chess peaks Tony could have scaled with international experience. He played abroad only once, a small tournament that he won in Milan, Italy, in 1953.

In the above game, Tony played very well indeed. But it was not the slash and burn chess that he preached so vehemently. “Do as I say, not as I do” was often his motto.

To focus Tony Santasiere in my memory’s eye—to see clearly the man walking and talking, cooking and creating, and, as he wrote of a trip abroad during the 1950s, “eating spaghetti every day in my beloved Italy, with the wonderful wine, and loving it all”—is to recall that he was smitten with art and with “love.”

In fact, too smitten. Tony lived for what he termed “the Five Ps”: painting, poetry, prose and piano playing. He painted over 400 oils (a few are worth collecting), penned poems by the thousands, and produced prose for the ACB more empurpled than a stockbroker’s
face on Black Tuesday. And in all of these pursuits—which also included three novels, 13 books of essays, 14 collections of short stories and 30 tomes of a “personal journal”—he championed what Henry Adams called “conservative Christian anarchy.”

Come again?

The phrase is impossible to define except by example. For Tony, life was sweet agony—a boiling existential melting pot of grand opera, high tragedy, pulsating climacteric, aesthetic Armageddon, and at intervals, what he called “my Black Dog” of dark depression. Which is why, I believe, he admired the Spanish so intensely.

“The Spanish genius,” Tony once wrote, “is for excess. There is the Catholic, so truly holy and humble; there is the anarchist (atheist), wild and savage....As I lived among the Spanish of all classes, there came to me a feeling of long suffering, infinite fatigue, skepticism, pride—but also humility—a blending of despair and love and faith. The weather, too, is not kind—Castile with its ‘nine months of winter and three of hell.’ But in the South, where they drink sherry by the dozens of glasses, there is gaiety, even abandon—but always with undertones of tragedy.”

I cannot show you Tony’s paintings and have little space here for his poetry. But his chess writing—well, he churned out thousands of pages in the ACB as its “games critic” from 1930 to 1963. Here is how he evaluated a move from a Sicilian Defense between Bobby Fischer and Mikhail Tal (Candidates’ Tournament, 1959): “This ‘come and get me’ stuff is allied to juvenile delinquency. A mature person, who is also a chess master, would love in a more enduring fashion. He would avoid the more sensuous temptations. White’s pawn sacrifice here is unsound—true, it is a clarion call to mortal combat, but it’s unsound.”

Or here is what Tony wrote following the move, 12. QN-Q2, in a Fischer–Keres Ruy Lopez from Zurich, 1959: “That these many moves should be the ‘best,’ and to be played automatically without question is a cause for alarm to a lover like me. What it really means is that a full fourth of the game is already a corpse—handled and fashioned by millions. How sad these fruits of the drive for material security! What can we do about it? It is for youth to be alive—I warn youth not to be dead, and memorize their elders. Youth gains far more with fearless life and the daring speculative challenge!”

Note the phrases, “material security” and “fearless life.” Tony inveighed against materialism, yet he embraced the cotton-wool security of being a public school teacher. Possibly he did so because of early poverty; certainly he shied away from the artist’s fearful life. In my view, he sought emotional refuge in the small ceremonies of
life, relishing gay dinner parties, companionable conversations and the intellectual respect accorded chess masters by lesser lights. As he wrote of an evening following a simultaneous in Pittsburgh, "Later, amid many refreshments, mostly liquid, I read my recently completed (quite remarkable) essay on 'Chess' (43 pages). It was an historic occasion."

Historic? Reading a 43-page essay to a captive audience? I wonder if Tony ever understood that he was not doing great things but doing little things in a great way. I hope not.

**Gambits without Attacks**

During a dispute with Tony in mid-1961, Grandmaster Larry Evans argued correctly, if cruelly, that Tony played gambits in the spirit that others played the Reti. "His games," wrote Evans in *Chess Life*, "are characterized by plodding, timidity, and opening repetition. He enters even the 'romantic debuts' such as the Vienna and King's Gambit with reams of prepared analysis, strives constantly to keep the draw in hand and prevent complications from getting away from him over-the-board. Where are the glorious games which qualify Santasiere as the darling spokesman of romanticism?"

In many respects Tony's style was similar to Sammy Reshevsky's except that he prepared lines against prospective opponents (something that Sammy was far too lazy to do) and that he lacked Sammy's capacity to concoct astonishing defenses when all looked lost. Note the game below from the 1946 U.S. Championship in which Tony surprised Sammy with a King's Gambit and then in a better position offered him a draw when Sammy had to play 23 moves in 2½ minutes. "In my thinking at the time," wrote Tony in confirmation that he lacked fire in the belly, "I discounted his time trouble...and paid him all due respect as the best Queen endgame player in the world....I considered a prior offer of a draw plain common sense."

**Anthony Santasiere—Samuel Reshevsky**

**U.S. Championship, 1946**

**King's Gambit Declined**


In 1960 Tony played 9. B-K3! against Al Horowitz in a Marshall–Manhattan Metropolitan League match (see games section at the end of this chapter). Not only is the move an improvement, it remains unbooked until this day!


White may not be winning here, but he is close to it. And, as noted, Black was in horrendous time pressure. The key line is 23. N-B6ch PxN 24. RxRch QxR 25. QxN, when Black must find 25. ... B-Q5 so as to prevent 26. B-B3. After 25. ... B-Q5, White can try 26. P-QN3 Q-K7 27. Q-K6ch QxQ 28. PxQ P-KB4 29. P-KN4 PxP 30. P-B5 P-KR4 (not 30. ... K-N2? because of 31. BxPch!) 31. K-N2. The well-known annotation, “with difficult play for both sides,” best describes this position.

So, was Tony a chess hypocrite—a player who talked like a tiger and played like a Tigran? I don’t think so because he had the heart of a romantic, and in his manic moments, he played an astonishing brand of attacking chess that must have helped to sustain his amour propre. He won the New York State Championship four times, captured the championship of the Marshall Chess Club six times, defeated the likes of Al Simonson (+3 –1) and Fred Reinfeld (+3 –0 =3) in match play, held down a board for the United States in the 1945 U.S.A.–U.S.S.R. Radio Match, and competed in four U.S. Championships, finishing third in the 1946 fixture. In 1945, he played well enough in Peoria to win that year’s U.S. Open. The following game gives us Tony as Swashbuckler:

Larry Evans—Anthony Santasiere
U.S. Open, 1946
Vienna Opening


40. ... BxB!!

Both the winner and the loser deserve credit in this kind of battle royal.


The Blushful Hippocrene

When Tony heard that my wife, Nina, and I had moved to Florida, he invited us over for one of his celebrated gourmet dinners. It was the first of many unforgettable get-togethers, which were usually shared with others among his chess friends. Aside from serving us marvelous food, Tony would play the piano, recite some of his recent poetry and discuss his paintings which covered the walls of his home. Later, after the table was cleared, the skittles began and the chianti flowed.

Tony was never without his chianti, which he stored in huge five-gallon jugs beneath the grand piano. And it was under the influence of this Blushful Hippocrene and the fellow-feeling generated during numerous hospitable evenings of the early 1970s that Tony and I became fast friends.

Sometimes Tony visited my place. On each occasion, he brought Nina a small gift accompanied by a very personal poem. After dinner we would adjourn to my chess study and analyze a few of the gambits that he invented. Although I considered his ideas to be totally
anti-theoretical and consequently unsound, I had difficulty refuting them over the board. He was a virtuoso of his famous Santasiere's Folly, 1. N-KB3 P-Q4 2. P-QN4, and of his less famous Santasiere's Dally, 1. P-K4 P-K4 2. P-KB4 PxP 3. N-KB3 B-K2 4. B-K2. Indeed, Tony was still a virtuoso of tournament play when he first arrived in Florida back in the 1960s. For two or three years, he won every tournament that he entered.

After Tony developed a heart problem, his doctor advised him to avoid tournament stress—advice that he occasionally ignored. Unfortunately, age and illness slowed him down considerably, and he was no longer the warrior of yesteryear. Now and then, however, Tony created the kind of attacking games that he lauded in his chess polemics.

Anthony Santasiere–Dr. Juan Gonzalez
Florida, 1969
Santasiere's Folly


Tony suggested 10. B-Q3 as a more active idea.
10. ... B-N2 11. 0-0 R-B1 12. R-B1 Q-K2 13. Q-N3 B-N1?

The equalizer is 13. ... P-K4.


This Bishop exchange enables White to occupy K5 with his Knight.

21. ... BxB 22. NxB Q-QB2 23. B-B3 N-B3


If 31. ... P-K6, White plays 32. Q-R2ch.
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There is a mate in four.

Felix and Oscar

Tony shared his lovely, white-stucco home out on South 29th Avenue in Hollywood, Florida, with a young man named Hector. After a few visits, I realized that they were homosexuals. I was not shocked in spite of my complete ignorance of the subject. Spending time with the two men afforded me an opportunity to study how their homosexual relationship worked in real life; and to my great surprise, they had the same petty arguments, the same personality clashes and the same differences in taste that one finds almost anywhere.

Hector, for example, played the part of Felix to Tony's Oscar. He was a compulsive cleaner who went absolutely wild if anything was out of place or if there were a few crumbs on the table. Tony was a total Bohemian who was bothered by nothing. When he finished cooking, the kitchen looked as if it had been dynamited. After dinner, he joined his guests, while leaving the dishes on the table for Hector to handle. Hector would become infuriated because he could not force himself to ignore the mess until the guests left.

One day, Hector asked me to speak with Tony about his sloppy habits. I did so just once. It seemed to make a world of difference for a while, but Tony relapsed within a few months. They returned to complaining about each other's annoying habits.

The bickering became so bad that Tony visited me alone and asked that I talk Hector into seeing his parents in Michigan for a few weeks. Tony said that he needed time alone to think—about Hector and, perhaps, about the conflict between homosexuality and his faith in the Jesus Christ of the Roman Catholic Church. I agreed to give Hector money for the vacation and not to tell him that Tony was reimbursing me. Sure enough, the ploy worked. But after Hector was gone only a week, Tony began to miss him and solicited my opinion about whether Hector would return.

All in all, then, theirs was a relationship in which each man had some qualities that the other needed. When Hector returned a couple of weeks later, he found Tony hospitalized with another heart attack, which proved to be his last. Tony felt better when he saw Hector, but he never recovered and died on January 13, 1977. When a lawyer opened Tony's will, there was a beautiful poem to his loyal friend Hector to whom he deeded his property, including the house.
"Important as an Antidote"

Make no mistake about it. Tony's was an earnest life of manifold satisfactions. He participated in 34 consecutive championships of the Marshall Chess Club, went 37 years without missing a season in the Metropolitan Chess League, organized chummy little master tournaments and dinner parties at his apartment and enjoyed a national forum in the *ACB* for over three decades to air his chess views and publish his games. What was said of Savielly Tartakower in Europe was also said of Tony Santasiere in New York: No tournament was complete without him.

In a letter written well after Tony's death, IM Anthony Saidy stated, "It is true that Santasiere wrote badly, wrote poetry that was embarrassing, had extreme views—yet, in carving out a niche as our most flamboyant contemporary romantic, he was unique. He was important as an antidote."

"Important as an antidote" to people who are afraid to write "embarrassing" poetry? "Important as an antidote" to people who could never conceive the thoughts in Tony's self-epitaph, "What I would like to have said of me ultimately is simply—'He loved all things beautiful; he loved the hearts of people; he loved God'?"

Yes, that gets it just right.

**You Asked Me for a Poem**

All you ask
is a poem,
a dream of other worlds
and other days,
neither the loneliness
of an isolated pawn
nor the never-satiety
of a whore,
a light so far away,
so beckoning gently,
so dear and sweet and true.
You want only
a poem.

All you ask
is just a poem,
a spirit bold and warmly soaring—
not the cancer of ennui,
nor the fear of doubled rooks,
nor the surfeit of mountaining dominions,
nor the hunger for divorce—
but a God,
a flashing stroke of Grace,
a call to Duty,
a warm embrace,
a light reflected
on lovely crystal,
a haunting memorial musical—
not bliss
but disaster surmounted Heroically—
'tis that you want and need—
a poem.

—Anthony Santasiere (1957)

Selected Games

Anthony Santasiere: Gambits without Sacrifices?


Best Game in the 1951 Marshall Championship.


IV

Chess Among the Scholarati
As I mentally rummage through the years and try to capture with memory’s eye the great players of the last several decades, I find one characteristic common to almost all of them: a bitterness about and rebelliousness against the inequitable social and economic conditions of the real world. Not, mind you, that they wrote revolutionary tracts and participated in protests.

Far from it. Although most masters viewed chess as a game in which recognition came through concrete accomplishments rather than through accident of birth or dumb luck, they did not see chess as a weapon in the class war. For them, playing the royal game was a purely personal statement against social injustice. Indeed, most masters were profoundly removed from political categories of thinking and entertained bizarre rather than radical ideas. Alexander Alekhine, for example, seriously believed that chess could help heal the rift of the early 1930s between China and Japan; and he further argued that a new kind of chess, which incorporated features of both the Oriental and Western games, could “promote better understanding between the nations of the East and West.” Oh my.

The metaphors of thought generated by chess do not travel well intellectually. When chess masters and others employ them to explain events beyond the 64 squares, they usually land up wrenching reality into unrecognizable shapes. The world is not only not a chess board; it is infinitely more than a chess board. Just take a look at what Emanuel Lasker wrote during the early days of World War I. He makes perfect sense until he summons the truths of chess to seek the truth about the Great War.

The world seems seized by insanity. The nations hate one another, human life is without value and all culture seems to have lost its price [value?]. Yet one must not lose hope. From all this evil, good will come. We chess players know that. Sometimes when our position is bad we do not fear; we hope that the opponent will attack. In the attack the weak spots of
our position will be made manifest and we shall suffer in proportion, but after the whirlwind of attack has passed, if we have only fought bravely, a new position is constructed that has strong powers of resistance. And so we may trust this terrible war may pave the way for an era of happiness. (The New York Evening Post)

Good coming from evil? “Happiness” paved by the bones of a million rotting, staring corpses at Passchendaele? “This terrible war,” to use Lasker’s phrase, paved the way for communism and nazism, socialism and fascism, nihilism and, to quote the title of Julien Benda’s book, Le Trahison des Clercs.

That’s the nonsense created when chess masters use their art to explain the world beyond it.*

Now, among masters who used chess for the apolitical purpose of validating themselves as human beings, there were two main groups—the killers and the intellectuals. For the killers, the only important thing was to win, and that end always justified the means. For the intellectuals, winning was important but so were the purity and beauty of their creations.

High among the intellectuals was a short, pudgy, bespectacled and very private young man, who had one of the zaniest senses of humor—tellingly tinged with acid—that anyone could imagine. His name: Fred Reinfeld. His accomplishment: he sold more books about chess than any other author in Caissa’s long history.

I call Fred the man of a hundred books because that is about the number he wrote. Books mainly on chess but also 14 volumes on coin collecting and another five on popular science. No one will ever know the exact number of books that he penned, since he ghosted numerous works credited to others. Frank Marshall’s My Fifty Years of Chess was written by Fred (in three weeks for $100), and Samuel Reshevsky’s classic work, Reshevsky on Chess, also came from this intellectual’s typewriter.

Already I can hear the groans. Reinfeld, an intellectual? The man who wrote more potboilers than the Sicilian has sacrifices? If one means by “intellectual” the likes of Sidney Hook and Lionel Trilling or Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt, then Fred falls into the pseudo category, along with all the rest of us. If one associates the word with less lofty company, then he certainly was an intellectual who, by the way, wrote simple, flowing and occasionally elegant prose. His book, They Almost Made It, a volume devoted to inventors who were forerunners of the giants to whom history gives credit, is a fine work; and his The Great Dissenters, which won the Thomas Alva Edison Foundation Award of 1959, is a distinguished
physically, Fred was not much of a looker, growing bald early in life. But mentally, he had it all. A man who researched and wrote as many as 13 books a year, Fred was a walking EGO where the openings were concerned and could recite entire tournament books from memory. I remember preparing an opening variation based on one of Jose Capablanca's games from San Sebastian 1911. Without batting an eye, Fred recited the opening moves of that game and announced the result. He did the same thing with the great German classics, which he knew by heart. Every time I tossed out lines from Goethe, Schiller et alia, Fred finished them effortlessly. He also spoke several other languages.

The Two Mr. Reinfelds

Conventional wisdom holds that there were two Mr. Reinfelds—an early Good Reinfeld who wrote works such as Colle's Chess Masterpieces and Keres' Best Games of Chess, not to mention fine tournament books of Cambridge Springs 1904 and Warsaw 1935, or the lovely interpretive efforts, The Unknown Alekhine and Nimzovich the Hypermodern; and a later Bad Reinfeld who gave us Chess in a Nutshell and other acorns.

The conventional wisdom gets it partly right. But in defense of the Bad Reinfeld, many of his later works for beginners, while certainly annoying to "serious" chess players, served well their targeted audience. His 1001 Brilliant Ways to Checkmate and 1001 Brilliant Chess Sacrifices and Combinations are still two of the best books around for sharpening tactics.

In Nimzovich the Hypermodern, we see Fred at his best and at his worst. He simultaneously provides elegantly written, profound insights and potted history. "Le Style est l'homme meme," he quotes Georges Buffon; "Some minds are stronger and apter to mark the differences of things, others to mark their resemblances," he quotes Francis Bacon from Novum Organum; and so on. Nice stuff. But in the same book, he writes that Frank Marshall enjoyed "an excellent life-time score in his games with Nimzovich" (the latter had a plus score); that Akiba Rubinstein "almost invariably" lost to Nimzovich (Rubinstein had a plus score); and that Efim Bogolyubov lacked "the necessary self-control" to push pawns against Nimzovich and his "system" (Bogo enjoyed a large plus score).

Do not, then, read Fred's chess books for precision history. But he did take the time to select good games for his collections, to place these games and their strategical ideas in excitingly drawn contexts, and to produce or reproduce analysis that has worn
remarkably well. When Paul Keres wrote that his games were “beautifully annotated by Mr. Reinfeld,” he was correct rather than generous to say so—just as Max Euwe was properly, not effusively grateful for Fred’s fine translation of his From My Games, 1920–1937.

Master Behind the Author

That Fred produced accurate and deep analysis should surprise no one who played him over-the-board. His chess was precise, positional and poisonous. In the 1933 New York State Championship, he scored 9½–1½ to top a field that included the likes of Reuben Fine, Tony Santasiere, David Polland and yours truly. During the 1930s he was the single American player who posted a plus score against Sammy Reshevsky, defeating him twice and drawing him thrice in five games. Fred attributed his success against Sammy to an easygoing, fatalistic attitude. “Unlike Fine,” he wrote, “I was not his rival. Hence my first feeling in playing Sammy was one of relief rather than fear. It was no disgrace to lose to this great master—that could happen to anyone. I had nothing to lose; I had shed my responsibilities; I was carefree as one rarely is in tournament chess.”

Fred Reinfeld—Samuel Reshevsky
Western Open, 1932
Queen’s Indian Defense


This pawn offer, in conjunction with White’s seventh move, became hot opening theory 50 years later in the first Kasparov–Karpov match of 1984–85. In game two, Black played 5. ... B-K2 (instead of 5. ... P-B4 in the current game), and there followed 6. 0-0 0-0 7. P-Q5 PxP 8. N-R4.


In coming decades, Black began to play 8. ... B-N2.


Black does all he can to prevent P-K5 by White.


White breaks through brilliantly. Just a week or two later at a strong international tournament in Pasadena, California, Fred not only managed a draw against Alexander Alekhine, he also defeated Sammy a second time as Black in a Grunfeld Defense: 1. N-KB3 N-


19. ... PxP 20. P-B5! N-B1


On 25. ... N-B4, White intended to continue as in the game.


28. ... PxN 29. QxKBP K-R1 30. R-KB7 N-N3, and Black lost on time

After 31. QxN, Black could resign in good conscience.
By the late 1930s, Fred had become an expert squeezer, seldom losing a game and seldom winning one. He scored +1 –2 =13 in the 1940 U.S. Championship, a kind of result virtually unknown back then. But on days when he felt primed for a fight, he played some of the most exciting chess of the late 1930s and early 1940s. The following game from Ventnor City received a special prize as "the showpiece of the tournament":

Olaf Ulvestad–Fred Reinfeld
Ventnor City, 1939
Queen’s Gambit Declined


This move weakens the dark squares in an attempt to win early.


If Black does not attack now, he will lose the game on strategic grounds.


30. ... Q-Q7ch 31. K-N3 Q-N4ch 32. K-R3 Q-Q1! 33. R-Q1! Q-B1ch 34. Q-

Playing with fire.

41. K-R4!

White appears to be winning.

41. ... K-N1!!

Black saves himself with this problem-like move.

42. P-K6 N-B3 43. QxQch KxQ 44. R-Q7 K-K1! 45. RxNP N-Q1 46. RxP NxP, draw

The following year, in the preliminaries of the 1940 U.S. Championship, the same opponents with the same colors and with the same result performed a remarkable encore to the current game. Reinfeld saved himself with another problem-like move that was played to the same square (KN1), though on his 39th turn rather than 41st.

**An Entertaining Introvert**

Getting close to Fred was far from easy. Sensitive people, who struggle against shyness in their youth, often become remote as adults. Fred was like that. But those of us who came to know him discovered a humorous and entertaining introvert. Like Donald MacMurray, whose story is related elsewhere in these pages, Fred had that rare facility to see humor in almost everything; and when he laughed, he roared so hard that you lost control with him.

There was, however, another side. Like many chess masters, Fred could turn mean and biting when encountering minor-league tyrants who so often perpetrate injustices in our little world of chess. When dealing with these antagonists in person, he would cock one eye in apparent disbelief, toss his head from side to side and issue a clucking sound. This routine never failed to cut 'em down to size.
As for disputes in print, Fred could be astonishingly vitriolic and often, for all of his pen puissance, ineffective. I remember Fred's quarrel with Robert Lewis Taylor, a writer for *The New Yorker* who published a piece on the 1940 U.S. Championship. Fred described Taylor's style as "compounded of breathless inanities smothered in pixillated whimsy" and noted that *The New Yorker* described Taylor "with unnecessarily brutal frankness" as "A Reporter at Large." Nasty stuff.

On May 29, 1964, Fred Reinfeld died. He was only 54 years old, but during his short span on earth, he greatly enriched the world of chess by writing three or four great books and numerous good ones. As for his much-despised potboilers, he usually boiled an honest pot as Dorothy Sayers once said of Charles Williams, and he enlarged the market for serious chess literature by introducing the game to millions of Americans. Some of today's chess writers who attack Fred would be unable to earn a living had the object of their scorn not paved the way.

And that, let me tell you, is a savage irony.

*In the world of chess, Emanuel Lasker enjoys a reputation as one of Caissa's wise men. Albert Einstein thought highly of him as a mathematician, and Ernst Cassirer praised Lasker's *The Comprehension of the Universe*, an ambitiously titled work on philosophy that was published in 1913. Yet much of what Lasker wrote on non-chess subjects is today badly dated. His apologias for Stalinism, published during the height of what historians call the Great Terror, and his dabbling in non-Marxist socialism suggest that he observed society *sans voir*. Here is one of his monumentally naive celebrations of the German nation, which was reprinted in the *British Chess Magazine* of April 1915:*

The shrewd English merchant has grasped the meaning of possessions and their power in the world; but he has missed the true inwardness of things, and the rapid evolution of modern times has left him far behind.

He is an egoist towards his fellow countrymen. He will not give the masses a share in higher things, as he wants to keep them under his sway as slaves. The Universities of Cambridge and Oxford are reserved for the sons of the rich. He views with suspicion our people, teeming with ideas, eager in pursuit of science, and ready to make any sacrifice. Who among us is not a philosopher? I know not a single German who does not carry in his bosom something of the spirit of Faust.
Chapter XXVII

The morale of the Germans is not mere theory. Mother, wife, sweetheart, have bidden their men go forth to battle. It is the genius of Humanity that speaks to this nation.

Selected Games

Fred Reinfeld: Der Kleine Reshevsky


Irving Chernev, the Robert Ripley of Chess, had a lifelong romance with the royal game. From the time he learned the moves from his father at age 12, he fell in love with chess, and it was a monogamous marriage. Whenever we met, out popped his pocket set (without which he would have felt undressed) followed by the famous Chernev question, "Have you seen this?"

I will never forget how Irving's face would light up when demonstrating positions. Searching out chess treasures and sharing the jewels with players who appreciated them was probably his greatest joy in life. When I once asked him what he would do without chess, his reply was instantaneous, "How does one live without fresh air?"

At the time I was too young to appreciate the full meaning of Irving's rhetorical question. Years later, after getting to know him better, I came to understand what he meant. To support his family, Irving had to labor at unpleasant jobs in the paper industry—all the while feeling the claustrophobic frustration of a talented man who needs to break out. Without the pleasure and creative satisfaction afforded by his private little chess world of contemplation and writing, he might not have carried on. He might have lapsed into the awful bitterness of a failed romantic.

Chernev the Master

Young players are always asking me if Irving Chernev was ever a master. That's because Irving quit playing chess about 30 years before he quit writing about it. "I played in...tournaments," he once wrote, "to see how well I would do against some of the best players in the country. But I wanted to enjoy chess as well as to play it, and competing in those tournaments was not chess to enjoy."

Irving probably had in mind a number of New York state championships and the 1942 and 1944 U.S. championships. That's right, he was strong enough to qualify for two national closed tournaments, scoring a respectable +4 -7 =4 in the 1942 fixture. Fischer-like or even Denker-like? Not at all. But making 40 percent in the
U.S. Championship and holding Al Horowitz to a draw in the process is certainly a solid master result. Which, *en passant*, is exactly what Irving Chernev was—a solid master. He could play supple and smooth chess even at 10 seconds, and I can still recall him winning some very strong rapid transit events at the Marshall Chess Club, including a tournament in June 1932, when he defeated the late, great Reuben Fine.

*Irving Chernev–Albert Pinkus*
*U.S. Speed Championship, 1944*
*Colle System*


In the 1944 U.S. Championship for regular chess, Irving slipped considerably, though against George Shainswit, later a member of the U.S. Olympiad team, he played one of the most exciting games in the event.

*George Shainswit–Irving Chernev*
*U.S. Championship, 1944*
*Nimzoindian Defense*


Wrote Shainswit, “The attack at all costs! In an ending White’s Ps would fall like ripe apples.”


Shainswit pointed out that on 18. Q-R5, Black would actually win after 18. ... NxB (if 18. ... R-KN1?, White forces mate with 19. QxPeh!, etc.) 19. Q-R6 PxB 20. P-B6 Q-K6ch.

18. ... PxB!


White continues to play very strongly and does not fall for 21. B-
21. ... Q×R!!

A brilliant defensive Queen sacrifice that demonstrates fine positional judgment.

22. Q×Q P-B3! 23. R-K1

Shainswit suggested the alternative of 23. P-KR4, which is best answered by 23. ... PxP.

23. ... R-N1!!

Black finds the only defense. Shainswit pointed out that it is curtains after either 23. ... NxB 24. R-K7 R-B2 25. R-K8ch or 23. ... B-Q2 24. RxN QPxR 25. B-K4!!, followed by 26. P-Q6 and 27. B-Q5ch.


According to GM Fine, White has nothing after 25. R-R3 R-N2.


In mutual time pressure, the two players concluded peace.

The above game is not, as already hinted, typical of Irving's generally solid positional play. For Irving at his conservative best, the reader should consult his fine victory over Harry Baker in the 1942 U.S. Championship, a game that can be found in the appendix to this chapter. After all, my subject here is not primarily Chernev the Master but Chernev the Chess Lover.

**Chernev the Chess Lover**

No one ever devoured chess lore like Irving did. "I have probably read more about chess and played over more games," he once plausibly claimed, "than any man in history." I recall how he would show up at the Manhattan Chess Club with his little black note-
books—five of them! One for games, one for good stories, one for curious chess facts, one for endgame studies and one for problems. Moreover, he was constantly adding material to these notebooks. Like those actors on television with their American Express cards, Irving never left home without them.

Back in 1943—heavens, a half century ago!—Reuben Fine wrote jocularly about how Irving “plagued and amused hundreds of friends” with material from his little black books. He was like the child in The Mikado who knew his facts and floored you with them flat. At the long gone Hawthorne Chess Club out in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, Irving became known as “Mr. Believe It or Not” because of the astonishing positions and historical nuggets that he would toss out during his visits in the 1940s and 1950s. One of the club members most adept at solving Irving’s positions was the then 13-year-old...Bobby Fischer.

While on the subject of Irving’s visits to the Hawthorne club, I confess to having smiled ruefully while reading a particular paragraph in the obituary for Irving in Chess Life (December 1981). In addition to telling us that Irving was born in January 1900, in Russia, and died in September 1981, in San Francisco, the author of the obituary notes that Jack Collins, Bobby Fischer’s chess coach, was “another Hawthorne regular.” Well, I should say so! The Hawthorne club was nothing more than the private home of Jack and his sister, Ethel.

In my opinion Irving put his enormous chess research to good use. He authored nearly 20 books, many of which are still in print. His The Russians Play Chess (1947) is an excellent anthology of Soviet masterpieces, and no one can fail to be entertained by the material in The Fireside Book of Chess (1949, co-authored with Fred Reinfeld), Practical Chess Endings (1961), Wonders and Curiosities of Chess (1974), and so on. I also like his first book, Chess Strategy and Tactics, which appeared in 1933 and was co-authored with Reinfeld.

Any reader wishing to anger me could do no better than to attack Chernev and Reinfeld’s work by mumbling, “All these two guys do is give us the same old games and positions.” Crikey! The games and positions seem familiar only because “these two guys” did the hard pioneering work of hunting and gathering the material.

To compare Chernev and Reinfeld as writers is to do both an injustice. Irving wrote more carefully on average than Fred, and Fred wrote better on occasion than Irving. Nothing that the latter produced can match the former’s books on Alexander Alekhine, Edgar Colle, Paul Keres and Siegbert Tarrasch. The net result: Most of Irving’s books remain in print, most of Fred’s are forgotten,
except for three or four works that look like staying around for several decades.

All of which brings me to *Chessboard Magic!*, one of my favorite Chernev books. The subtitle, "A Collection of 160 Brilliant Chess Endings," describes the work perfectly; and the contents highlight Irving's strength as a chess author. He spent years culling publications for the 160 compositions, and he created in *Chessboard Magic!* what Grandmaster Fine called "common ground where the problemist and the player...meet on equal terms." The positions in the book are seldom foreign to normal play, and when they are, the themes are immediately eye-catching. "How pretty!" one wants to say.

![Chessboard Magic!](image)

Vladimir Korolkov  
White to Play and Win  
*Chess in U.S.S.R., 1940*

"Can such things be?" was the exclamation of the *New York Post*'s one-time chess editor, Horace Bigelow, who was thrilled with the beauty of this master work.

1. R-N1

White threatens 2. B-Q7, mate.

1. ... Q-N5 2. BxB PxB 3. R-QB1

The threat is 4. RxP, mate.

3. ... P-QB6 4. R-Q1

Once again, White threatens RxP, mate.

4. ... P-Q6 5. R-K1

Yes, RxP, mate, again.

5. ... P-K6 6. R-KB1

Again!
6. ... P-B6 7. R-KNI

Same threat!

7. ... P-N6 8. R-KR1

And again!

8. ... P-R6 9. RxP Any 10. R-R4, mate!

Before studying the next endgame composition, settle back, close your eyes, and imagine Irving saying, “Have you seen this?”

Mark Liburkin

White to Play and Win
First Prize—Vechemya Moskva, 1933

“Stunning” is the only word for this problem. Playing over the solution gives one goose bumps of joy. As Irving wrote, “No wonder it won first prize in a composing tourney!”

1. N-K4ch

Black threatened mate on the move by 1. ... P-B8=Q, as well as 1. ... B-K4 and 2. ... K-Q7, mate.


Black wishes to keep his Bishop on the diagonal to threaten mate. If 4. ... BxP, White is out of his troubles after 5. B-Q4ch.

5. P-K8=N! B-R1 6. P-B5 B-K4

Otherwise, White plays 7. P-B6, blocking out the Black Bishop.


First, an underpromotion to a Knight; now an underpromotion to a Bishop. And the move is forced because it is stalemate after 9. P-N8=Q K-B5ch 10. QxB P-B8=Qch 11. NxB.

A third underpromotion, this time to a Rook. And once again, the move is necessary to avoid stalemate after 12. P-K8=Q K-B5ch 13. QxB P-B8=Qch 14. NxQ.

12. ... B-B3 13. R-K6 B-N2 14. P-B6, and White wins

This Bishop is finally driven off.

I call it magic. Irving called it *Chessboard Magic!*

**Chernev the Rabbi**

How Irving became “my rabbi” is a story that is both unusual and universal. Every chess enthusiast plays a variation on its basic theme.

Back in the early 1920s, a man named Ben Danziger rented an apartment in a building owned by my father. I had just learned the chess moves from my brother and regarded Ben as one of the great players of all time. He would polish me off unmercifully, usually while holding conversations with his wife and children. I think that he enjoyed my enthusiasm about coming back for more punishment.

As the months passed, Ben slowly stopped talking to his family during our games and began paying more attention to the board. When he began to lose regularly, he revealed a secret weapon, his nephew Irving, who arrived the following Sunday and proceeded to mop the floor with both of us at the same time.

You can imagine my innocent astonishment. “How,” I asked myself, “could anyone beat me so easily after I vanquished the Great Danziger?” I was completely shattered, though I did maintain enough presence of mind to study Irving’s play carefully and to learn a great deal about handling openings.

Naturally, I was interested in learning more about Irving and discovered that he and his family had left Russia in 1904 to come to the United States. He lived in Brooklyn and would continue to do so until 1968, when he moved to San Francisco. On his part, Irving took such a deep interest in my chess progress that his Uncle Ben soon began calling him “my rabbi.”

One Sunday afternoon, I made my first draw with Irving. After that game, he told me, “I think you are now ready to join a good club.”

The year was 1928. The club I joined was the Manhattan. Believe it or not.
Selected Games

Irving Chernev: A Chess Lover, Not a Chess Fighter


Edward Lasker was witty, versatile and a friend of every chess player. A Renaissance man, he was also “a gentleman of the old school”—one of the last. In two sentences, that was my friend Lasker.

In worldly affairs, Edward enjoyed great success, though he was so modest that you would never know it. In 1911 he graduated cum laude from Berlin’s prestigious Institute of Technology with degrees in both mechanical and electrical engineering. He would eventually become a successful inventor and back in the 1950s was among the first scientists to take an interest in computer chess. As a gamesman, he was an illustrious chess master and author, as well as the founder of the American Go Association. Such was his fascination with go, the Japanese equivalent of chess, he once tried to talk an employer into transferring him to the Land of Nippon.

However, do not imagine that Edward was an idiot savant type who spent his life competing in chess and go tournaments when he wasn’t playing bridge and backgammon. Not at all. He was well versed in literature and music, and his friends included such intellectual icons as Albert Einstein, Marcel Duchamp and Ernst Cassirer, not to mention the musical wizards Mischa Elman, George Gershwin, Sergei Prokofiev, Moritz Rosenthal, Richard Strauss and the like.

Many, indeed too many, decades ago I affectionately dubbed Edward “the Gray Fox” because of his crafty chess play and patrician elegance. We first met in the early days of the Great Depression, and unlike most masters I knew, this man of perhaps 45 years was always well-dressed, well-groomed and evidently affluent. His wealth, combined with that Lasker charm, wit and old-fashioned pleasantness, made him an asset at all social gatherings.
To get a handle on Edward's life, you must first know how long ago he was born. In 1885—near Breslau, which was then in Germany and is today the city of Wroclaw in Poland. He learned chess from his father at age six and succumbed to its awful fascination. At age 17, he violated his mother's orders and went to a local chess club to play against Harry Pillsbury in a blindfold exhibition.

Caissa clearly got a grip on Edward that the goddess never relaxed. The young man eschewed medical school in Breslau for an engineering course in Berlin, largely because that famous city was in those days the chess capital of the world. The two centers of chess life were the Cafe Bauer and the Cafe Kaiserhof, where grandmasters like Richard Teichmann, Jacques Mieses and Kurt von Bardeleben quaffed espresso and plotted chess stratagems at all hours of the day. Edward loved this chess ambience. In 1909 he defeated Erich Cohn in a match to win the championship of Berlin and in 1913 finished fifth at Scheveningen to gain the international master title of the German Chess Federation.

In 1912, Edward's employer, the German equivalent of General Electric, sent him to London. There, he won the city championship, and as it turned out, a very important offhand game from Sir George Thomas, England's strongest chess player and, some say, the greatest badminton player ever.

Edward Lasker–Sir George Thomas  
City of London C.C., 1912  
Dutch Defense


Let he who is without chess sin cast a second question mark. Not only does Sir George permit Edward to play an immortal move, but our English cousin unwittingly performed a signal service to American chess. From strictly a chess angle, Black ought to have played 10. ... BxKN.
11. Q×Pch!!!

White may or may not have announced mate in eight at this point.


Small-minded types typically ask, “Wouldn’t 14. P-B4ch mate a move earlier?”


White sacrifices his Queen and mates with his King!

The real importance of this oft-anthologized game did not become apparent until two years later during the first days of World War I, when Edward was interned for three months in England as an enemy alien. He gained early release and permission to leave for the United States thanks to the intervention of a high British official who had witnessed Lasker’s victory. Fortune favors the fortunate—as someone ought to have said by now.

And so, on October 21, 1914, Edward sailed for New York and arrived, presumably, near the end of the month. “For the magnificent weekly rental of $2.50,” he wrote in his memoirs *Chess Secrets I Learned from the Masters,* “I found a room on 59th Street, not far from the Manhattan Chess Club’s quarters at Carnegie Hall. On Seventh Avenue, within a block from the club, a restaurant served excellent meals for 35 cents, and I found a chess pupil at the club who paid me ten dollars for chess lessons.”

Unfortunately, Edward could not also find a job in New York. He embarked on a simul tour to make money. In Chicago he met Julius Rosenwald, the head of Sears & Roebuck, who hired him as a safety engineer. He remained with the company from 1915 to 1919. Whereupon Edward was hired away by Ernest Gundlach, president of the Chicago Chess Club, bombastic piano player (“When he tickled the ivories, they always stayed put,” Edward used to say)
and owner of a pioneering business devoted to introducing electric
cow-milking machines.

“My particular job,” Edward once wrote, “was to improve the
machine wherever improvement was needed. I spent many months
on dairy farms in Michigan, Minnesota and Iowa, which acquainted
me intimately with American farm life. I had to get up at 4:30 every
day, to get my experimental milking machine ready for the morning
milking. Breakfast was served at six, and after that I had nothing to
do until the evening milking, a maddening prospect which I gradu­
ally learned to evade by helping the farmer take in the hay.”

Edward Lasker—suave and debonair man about Manhattan—
raking hay and, perhaps, adorning his mouth with a sprig of straw?
Difficult to believe, even though he used to swear to these ad­
ventures.

In 1921 Edward deserted moo-cows in favor of developing an
electric breast pump to secure mother’s milk for premature infants
too weak to nurse. “I made five times as much money as earlier,”
Edward once told me, “but for the next decade or so, I had to put
up with friends calling me a ‘chest player.’”

By now, Edward was in the grip of what he labelled “the energy
of success”—that awe-inspiring vitality which drives a man who sud­
denly realizes that contrary to all of his expectations, he is destined
to become filthy rich. It is a wonderful, joyous energy that builds
on itself, and Edward soon teamed up with a Dr. de Havilland, the
father of Olivia, to procure patents for some of his discoveries. One
of these, a liquid silver polish that required no rubbing, became an
instant success. From 1925 to about 1950, Edward ran his own
electro-medical manufacturing and design company, becoming the
first man to demonstrate direct-writing electrocardiography, which
is to say, the squiggly lines one sees on an electrocardiogram.

Lest the reader imagine that Edward lived one of those enviable
“charmed lives” celebrated by film biographer Michael Korda in his
book of the same title, let me assure you that he did not. His first
marriage to Cecile Heller in March 1920, ended tragically in
November when she perished at the tail end of the awful influenza
epidemic of 1919–1920. His second marriage in 1927 to Hertha
Fuerth was childless, and the two divorced in 1937. He did not
marry again, and although he enjoyed a long friendship with many­
time U.S. women’s champion May Karff, he would eventually die
very old and quite alone without immediate survivors.

Lasker the Lesser

Edward was sometimes called “Lasker the Lesser” in reference to his
chess standing vis-a-vis a famous distant relative, Emanuel Lasker. Yet Edward won the U.S. Open five times, and in 1923, he narrowly lost a match to Frank Marshall for the U.S. Championship. Although Edward continued his normal work routine during that match, he won the first two games and was clearly outplaying his famous opponent when Lady Luck struck him a hard blow following the adjournment of game seven. Leading 3½–2½, Edward was hit by an attack of kidney stones and rushed unconscious to Walter Reese Hospital in Chicago.

Need I say more? Anyone who has experienced the pain of kidney stones knows what happened next. Edward lost the adjournment and eventually the match, 8½–9½.

In 1924 Edward played in the famous New York International, which was won by Emanuel Lasker ahead of Jose Capablanca, Alexander Alekhine, Efim Bogolyubov and several other great masters. Edward did well in this fast company by scoring 6½–13½ to finish 10th in an 11-player field. In six games against the terrible trio of Lasker, Capa and Alekhine, he scored four draws and obtained at least three won positions.

Note the phrase, “three won positions,” because Edward failed to win any of them as well as several other “won positions.” Following the first half of the New York event, Alekhine correctly diagnosed Edward’s biggest problem as being unable to put the finishing touches on tough games. Wrote Edward in his memoirs, “Alekhine … said that I would probably make similar mistakes in the second half of the tournament. He argued that masters who frequently blundered in winning positions, very likely did not have the physical constitution needed to make a successful tournament player.”

“Successful?” That’s a relative term, and most of us would consider five U.S. Open titles to be plenty successful. Yet Alekhine had a point. Edward possessed a fine feel for the opening and early middlegame, building up strong positions and pulling off numerous elegant combinations against strong grandmasters. But there was too often a “but” a bit later in his games.

Edward Lasker–Ernst Gruenfeld
Vienna, 1951
English Opening

Edward shows his exquisite intuition for the initiative. Quite a
few players would have feared losing the Queen pawn and have headed for a slightly inferior ending after 17. N-K5 BxP 18. BxPch KxB 19. RxB.

17. ... QR-Q1 18. N-K5 KR-K1 19. P-B4 R-K3?

Black only expected 20. P-Q7. Otherwise, he would have played 19. ... P-B3.

20. BxPch!!


Black is putting up a tough fight, which eventually takes its toll on Edward.


The first slip, and it ruins Edward’s positional and tactical masterpiece. He could have won in a few moves with 29. R-K1, followed by N-B6.

29. ... B-K5 30. R-K3 B-B4 31. N-B6 RxQP

Black finds the only move, thereby giving White another chance to go wrong.

32. NxB BxB 33. R-KB1?

White should play 33. R-Q1.

33. ... B-K3 34. P-R3 P-N4 35. R-QB3 P-R4 36. R-QN1 B-Q2 37. R-B3 K-B1 38. R-Q1?!

Oh boy. White must suddenly fight for a draw, when he could still have tried for a win by 38. R-K3 B-K3 39. RxB PxR 40. K-N3 R-R2 41. R-K1 R-K2 42. R-K5. Edward’s handling of this ending reminds me of his earliest chess tragedy, a debacle that goes unmentioned in Chess Secrets I Learned from the Masters. In 1904, Edward had a chance to tie for the Berlin Championship by winning one of those notorious “won endings.”

Edward Lasker–Kurt Moll
Berlin Championship, 1904

Edward played 1. P-B4 and lost after 1. ... P-B3. He missed the stunning line, 1. P-B6!! PxP 2. P-B4 K-Q4 3. P-N5 BPxP 4. PxP K-K3

At Hamburg in 1910, Edward scraped out an astonishing stalemate draw against Dr. Moritz Lewitt by playing a combination—also missing from Chess Secrets—which was every whit as brilliant as the one he missed against Moll. Such is the equalizing justice of chess.

Edward Lasker—Dr. Moritz Lewitt
Hamburg, 1910

Edward escaped with 1. P-R5!!!, threatening 2. RxP RxR 3. R-K8ch R-N1 4. RxRch KxR, stalemate. The game continued: 1. ... P-B8=Qch 2. R/N1xQ PxR=Qch 3. RxQ R/l-N1 4. R-B8!! R/7-N3ch 5. BPxR RxR 6. P-N7ch K-N1, stalemate!


Just one of the numerous chess tragedies in Edward’s life.

An Embarrassment of Analysis

On a wintry day in 1932, after I had spent most of the afternoon playing at the Marshall Chess Club, Edward asked me to join him for dinner. I accepted at once. During the Great Depression, anyone with a high—I.Q. stomach instantly devoured free eats; and after a short walk, we were seated at his favorite watering hole in the West Village, Lee Chumley’s, just a block off Seventh Avenue at Barrow Street. In the words of one advertisement of the time, Chumley’s was “Where Chessplayers Find a Friendly Club-like Atmosphere.” Indeed, the food and the conversation were delicious, and we later rattled off a few skittles games. What a wonderful evening—and so unlike one that followed about five years later.

It was February 1937. Nina and I had been married for all of six weeks, and we were living on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. After dinner I went out as usual to buy the next day’s newspapers and bumped into Edward on his way to Chumley’s. Like any young married buck who had yet to be tamed, I tagged along. The
two of us, plus Hermann Helms, proceeded to spend several engrossing hours analyzing a variation of the Tarrasch Defense that I had used against Sammy Reshevsky in the 1936 U.S. Championship.

When I next looked up, it was into the eyes of a plainclothesman whom my wife sent looking for me. Nina called the police when I failed to return by midnight, suggesting to them three places where I might have stopped off. What an embarrassment of analysis: I had overlooked the main variation!

To my credit, I was never again so inconsiderate. As for Edward, he explained everything so beautifully to Nina that thereafter he became her favorite dinner guest. Of course, he never failed to bring flowers or chocolates, which endeared him even more.

All of which explains, at least in part, how Edward came to spend a week with us nearly 40 years later in December 1975. He was in the process of celebrating his 90th birthday and visited us in Florida. We decided to host what turned out to be a lovely party. Among those who attended were Dr. Juan Gonzalez, a strong Cuban master who once won the U.S. Speed Championship, Florida master Ed Celorio and the never-to-be-forgotten Anthony Santasiere. Of course, we chess players soon organized a speed tournament, and as a concession to Edward's age, we gave him 7½ minutes to our five. He did fine, winning a brilliant game against Dr. Gonzalez, thereby avenging a defeat some 28 years earlier in the 1947 Havana International.

During the party, Bobby Fischer telephoned. The story behind this call is related at length in Chapter X. Let's just say that Edward and I became involved in an effort to lure history's greatest player back to competition. We even helped to arrange a meeting between Bobby and Viktor Korchnoi. Nothing came of it.

Said a saddened Lasker about my efforts, "No one can bring Bobby back. It's high time you resigned." Edward was wrong. Fischer–Spassky II proved that one person could bring Bobby back.

Bobby himself.

**Chess Labor Organizer**

Edward Lasker loved chess and its masters as only a man of chess can. He was sympathetic to the struggles and privations of professionals, and decided to help. In 1946 Edward became a kind of chess labor organizer and set up what was, so far as I know, the first organization in this country for chess professionals, the Association of American Chess Masters. The aim was to safeguard the rights of masters and to set minimum performance fees.
Sad to say, the organization was born at a time when many masters were underbidding one another in order to stay alive. Other players such as Reuben Fine and I were leaving the game altogether because it presented a financial dead end. All you needed to do was to observe the shocking fate of my friend, Al Horowitz, who spent months every year barnstorming the country and giving simul for a buck a board. Edward’s organization died a speedy death.

Edward’s chess play, on the other hand, remained strong well into the 1940s. In the 1942 Marshall Chess Club Championship, he played a final serious game against his old foe, Frank Marshall. This time around, he followed up on his accustomed opening and early middlegame acuity to win one of the finest and least known American games of the 1940s.

Edward Lasker–Frank Marshall

Marshall C.C. Championship, 1942

Nimzoindian Defense


The position would be about equal after 14. ... B-B6.


This powerful move not only prevents Black from playing ... R-Q7, it also prepares the coming exchange sacrifice.

21. ... Q-Q3 22. R-Q1 QxR

Edward remarks that if Marshall had suspected what was coming, he would have played 22. ... Q-K2, when White keeps a strong initiative by 23. Q-N3 R/2-Q2 24. R-KB4.

23. RxN!! RxB

The problem with 23. ... PxB is 24. BxPch KxB 25. Q-B4ch.

24. R/Q1 xR
24. ...Q-R8ch


This kind of quiet killer is called a coup de repos and threatens 28. Q-B8ch. It is the main point of Lasker's combination.


The end comes after 31. ... P-B4 32. RxPch! PxR 33. QxPch K-R3 34. Q-N5, mate.

After moving to Florida in 1970, I saw less and less of Edward. On occasional visits to New York, I would run up to 5 Riverside Drive at 72nd Street and keep him posted on chess news about his many friends abroad. I still possess a critical note from him after one of these brief get-togethers. It reads: "You call that a visit? Next time you get to NY you better plan on spending some real time with me." It was the last note that I ever got from him.

He died a few weeks later on March 23, 1981.

Selected Games

*In Chess for Fun & Chess for Blood, Lasker gives the name of his adversary as “H. Holbrook;” though one suspects that the opponent in this slaughter was actually the well-known Chicago master, Herman Hahlbohm.


I was 15, the year was 1929, and Herbert Hoover had just moved into the White House—thanks in part to the popular Republican slogan, "Two chickens in every pot, and a car in every garage." America was booming. But lurking around the corner was the worst economic depression since Napoleonic times. If you think that inflation is bad, try deflation. Try functioning in an economy where the price of wheat dropped from six dollars a bushel in 1929 to six cents in 1932.

Blissfully unaware of the blade balanced above our individual fates, we young innocents were playing chess in a tournament to determine the best high school team in New York City. It was then and there that I first saw a tall, pencil thin, balding gentleman with watery blue eyes. He wore a baggy suit and bow tie and stomped from table to table in old-fashioned lace-up boots collecting scoresheets.

I had just laid eyes on Hermann Helms, the leading chess journalist in the United States. But to a young person, he looked so old and frail that when he leaned over my table to ask for the scoresheet, I feared he might topple over.

Hermann was on the scene because it was the final round of the tournament, and given his interest in young players, he wanted to gather material for his weekly columns in the *New York Times* and *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. For the latter newspaper, he wrote on chess from 1893 until it folded in 1955.

Born in 1870, Hermann was by 1929 the *de facto* Dean of American Chess, though it was not until 1943 that George Sturgis, the first president of the U.S. Chess Federation, formally bestowed the title on him. The Dean is, of course, an honorary member of all American chess clubs, and never was an honor more richly deserved than in Hermann’s case.
“Mr. Helms,” as he was respectfully and affectionately addressed even by friends of decades standing, was quite simply the most important journalist in American chess history. Until his retirement in 1962 from the New York Times, he reported foreign and domestic chess news at this flagship newspaper for over 50 years. He also wrote columns in the New York World for 15 years, and in the New York Post and New York World and Telegram for 10 years each. In 1904, he founded the American Chess Bulletin, “a magazine devoted to the interests of all branches of the Royal Game, home and abroad,” that served as this country’s sole chess journal of record until Al Horowitz founded Chess Review in 1933. “Mr. Helms” published and edited the ACB until his death in 1963 at age 93.

As an organizer, Hermann’s most visible legacy remains his work at the great New York International of 1924, which resulted in Alexander Alekhine’s classic book on that tournament. Those of you who own a copy can still read Hermann’s name on the title page along with that of Alekhine. But Hermann took greatest pride in his work as the chess impresario who organized simultaneous exhibition tours for Alekhine, Jose Capablanca, Emanuel Lasker, Geza Maroczy and Frank Marshall. His was the intelligence behind the two most impressive simuls that I have ever witnessed, the exhibitions by Capablanca and Alekhine in, respectively, 1931 and 1932 at the old Seventh Regiment Armory in New York City. Each of these chess supermen played 200 opponents, divided into 50 four-man teams. And what teams they had to face! I played in the Alekhine exhibition (for the game, see Chapter XIV) and recall seeing the profiles of virtually every top young New York master along the line of the Great Russian’s advance.

Married on March 30, 1898, to May Whitney of the Long Island Whitneys, Hermann could neither support his patrician wife’s accustomed style nor bring himself to use her money to support his chess style. And so, with May encamping at the swanky Hotel Windermere on Manhattan’s upper West Side, the two often lived apart, though remaining happily married. May was a member of the Whitney family’s celebrated Mozart Sextet and a composer of note, writing such standards as the “March of Freedom” and the “Yankee March.” Hermann and May dedicated the latter piece to their only child, Thelma, who in her brief life positively glowed with the Helms ethic of service. A Red Cross nurse, she died at age 40 of a heart attack from overwork. I can tell you that May was heartbroken and followed some two years later on July 5, 1943.

Master of the Attack

In his day, Hermann played many a brilliant game. Before retiring from tournament competition in favor of chess journalism and
organizing, he drew or defeated such greats as Harry Pillsbury and—repeatedly—Frank Marshall. Now, don’t look for circumspect defensive maneuvers in Hermann’s chess because circumspection was not part of his game. The courtly “Mr. Helms,” like so many of his generation, believed in current sacrifices for future gain, the chessic equivalent of deferred gratification.

Frank Marshall—Hermann Helms
Brooklyn C.C. Championship, 1897
Ponziani Opening


Both Marshall and Helms were members of the red meat school of chess. For the record, Hermann continued to take games off the maestro until as late as 1925, when he scored the full point in a Brooklyn vs. Marshall club match in the old Metropolitan Chess League.


Although born in Brooklyn, Hermann spent his early childhood in Hamburg, Germany, and Halifax, Nova Scotia, where a school mate taught him chess. At age 17, he returned to the United States and settled in Brooklyn. He first caught the attention of the chess world by playing with Harry Pillsbury, soon to become the Hero of Hastings, on a Brooklyn Chess Club team that captured the Metropolitan Chess League title of 1894–95. Later, he competed in five cable matches against England and twice won the New York State Championship. Hermann’s evergreen game is emblematic of his style:

James F. Smyth—Hermann Helms
New York, 1915
Dutch Defense

1. P-Q4 P-KB4

As White, Hermann loved to play the Vienna; and as Black in Queen Pawn openings, he counterattacked from move one with the Dutch. Three generations have known Hermann’s opponent in this famous game as simply “Smyth.” For the record, James F. Smyth, a transplanted Englishman, was a certified public accountant. On the afternoon of May 28, 1915, at the Manhattan Chess Club, he chal-
lenged Hermann to a practice game, and the reader is now playing over the result.


Black already aims his pieces at White’s Kingside.

7. P-QR3 P-QR4 8. 0-0 0-0 9. Q-B2 N-B3 10. P-K4?!

This thematic break is out of place here. Al Horowitz’s idea of 10. N-QN5, attacking Black’s King Bishop, is much better.


This game has been described as a “preachment on foraging,” which means that White cut his own throat by thoughtlessly grabbing pawns. But a closer examination reveals that White is lost in this position and that the pawn grab is not much worse than passive defense.


Has White repulsed the attack?

21. ... R/1-B4!

The threat is 22. ... R-R4 and 23. ... QxRP, mate.

22. BxR/4

Tony Santasier—chess master, painter and so much more—did a lovely oil of this position.
By 1929, Hermann was more or less retired from serious chess, except on those rare occasions when Carrie Marshall, Frank's lady, browbeat him into playing for the Marshall club in key Metropolitan Chess League matches. Still, he never lost any of his love for the game and turned out religiously every Friday night for the Marshall speed tournaments.

I can still picture Hermann playing in those rapids which he enjoyed so much. He remained painfully strong even into his late 80s and scored many a victory over some of our best young speedsters. As he quietly shifted the pieces back and forth, his long bony fingers reminded me of a spider creeping across its web. His voice, too, was remarkable. It came up from the stomach with a deep, guttural tone that resonated across the room whenever he announced a check.

Always a sportsman, indeed a crack cricketer in his youth, Hermann never played on when his position called for resignation. On one occasion, when a young upstart continued pushing wood in a hopeless position, Hermann let out the "harrumph" of a miffed walrus and said, "I believe that my health will hold up at least until the end of this game!"

Un Parfait Gentilhomme

In a phrase, Hermann Helms was a perfect gentleman. He may be the kindest and most considerate human being whom I ever met. He believed in and, what is infinitely more important, practiced the old-time virtues of hard work and honor, frugality and forthrightness. No man was ever more decent or had a sweeter smile. This pillar of the Strong Place Baptist Church in Brooklyn represented the radiant side of the Protestant spirit just as surely as L. Walter Stephens, the chess organizer and an ordained Presbyterian clergyman, represented its dark side of hypocrisy and pinched joylessness. George Orwell ought to have been thinking about Hermann instead of someone else when he wrote, "The fact to which we have got to cling, as to a life-belt, is that it is possible to be a normal decent person and yet to be fully alive."

You could literally see Hermann's image smiling up at you from every warm and cozy page of his American Chess Bulletin. In the issue of May 1912, he broached the touchy subject of freeloading by non-paying "subscribers." In "An Appeal, But Not a Squeal," he proposed "to deal good-naturedly with delinquents. Some, possibly, may deserve expulsion, but expelled people are very apt to nurse grievances, let alone grouches. Our patience is inexhaustible; still, we would appreciate a statement of intention on their part." Whereupon, after noting that subscribers were 352 years and 11 months in arrears, Hermann reproduced the following paragraph
written by a newspaper editor in North Dakota:

A certain fastidious woman in this town kneads bread with her gloves on. That’s nothing. The editor of this paper needs bread with his shoes on. He needs it with his shirt on. And if subscribers of this paper don’t pony up mighty soon, he’ll need it without a d-mn thing on—and North Dakota is no Garden of Eden in the winter.

In spite of poverty, Hermann was somehow both secure and contented. He loved his work because he thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of chess and, yes, respected its people. Unlike other players of his strength, he always found time to analyze with us Young Turks. Many was the time that we sat up past midnight solving minis and playing “pots.” On one occasion, when I was acting as teller, he and a young Isaac Kashdan played *Kriegspiel* until 4 a.m.

Hermann’s office at 150 Nassau Street, whence emanated the *American Chess Bulletin*, was tiny and cluttered from floor to ceiling. With the help of Miss Catherine Sullivan, a rather ample motherly type who took him to task for staying out too late at night, he somehow produced his magazine as well as chess columns for several newspapers. In spite of Miss Sullivan’s devoted and poorly paid labor as secretary-assistant for over 35 years, Hermann lost money on the *Bulletin*. Yet he carried on cheerfully even when conditions went from bad to worse during the 1930s.

The sheer decency of “Mr. Helms” was probably the quality that most endeared him to everyone. During the worst days of the Great Depression, when he was surviving on soup and mush (in part because he had lost most of his teeth), he never complained and always managed to help out struggling players. But not, mind you, with handouts. He was too understanding of human nature to offer charity and would instead ask indigent masters to report on chess events that he could have easily covered himself. What’s more, “Mr. Helms” helped out everyone equally and at great personal sacrifice. If he had been rich, such largesse would have been appreciated; but coming from someone in whose shiny old trousers you could clearly make out your reflection—well, such generosity gave a deeper meaning to the much-abused word, “compassion.”

In my mind, Hermann Helms will always be the Grand Old Man of American Chess. He had all the right instincts and represented all the right values. He never complained of his own lot, and if he left behind no material wealth, he bequeathed his contemporaries a treasury of good will and future generations—in the form of his *American Chess Bulletin*—a 60-volume legacy of classic chess writing and publishing that will never pall.
But let Hermann speak for himself. Here is a letter that he wrote to the mother of a small boy who needed some playmates. Note the lucid prose and the infinite sweetness of his old-world courtesy.

January 13, 1951

Mrs. R. Fischer
1059 Union St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dear Madam:

Your postcard of Nov. 14th, mislaid in The Eagle office, has just reached me.

If you can bring your little chess-playing boy to the Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza, next Wednesday evening at eight o'clock, he might find someone there about his own age. If he should care to take a board and play against Mr. Pavey, who is to give an exhibition of simultaneous play at that time, just have him bring along his own set of chessmen with which to play. The boards, I understand, are to be provided.

I will also bring your request to the attention of Mr. Henry Spinner, secretary of the Brooklyn Chess Club, which meets Tuesday, Friday and Saturday evenings on the third floor of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It is quite possible that Mr. Spinner may know a boy or two of that age.

Yours respectfully,
H. Helms
Chess Editor.

Always "respectfully." That was "Mr. Helms," a perfect gentleman.
Selected Games

Hermann Helms: Circumspection Was not His Game


sparkling style—a monument, properly, to Mr. Helms the Chess Master”—Grandmaster William Lombardy.


K-K2 29. Q-R7ch B-N2 30. QxB, mate In appearance, Helms was frail. Perhaps a few of his younger opponents continued games until mate on the chance that he might not make it.


“Our youngster at his sparkling best,” wrote Anthony Santasiere of this game, which was played a month before Helms’ 75th birthday. Helms was legendary for maintaining his strength in lightning chess until almost the end of his very long life.

James F. Smyth: The Negative Immortal

The winner of the following game is the long-suffering loser of the famous Smyth–Helms brilliancy that every chess player admires at least once. Helms, who had a great heart, never missed a chance to publish Smyth’s wins by way of compensation.

Smyth must have sent the game below to Helms a week or so after writing this letter (dated March 17, 1926):

When I played against Dr. Lasker at the old Cosmopolitan C.C. (New York City) long ago, a little incident occurred which might interest you. Loeb and I had a board in consultation against the Doctor and he played a Ruy Lopez. In reply to B-NS, we played ... N-QS, a move originated, I believe, by Bird and at that time being used a great deal by Janowski in Paris. Dr. Lasker smiled and said in German, ‘That is after Janowski.’ Several moves later, we played a move that was away off the book. When the Doctor saw it he smiled again very broadly and said, ‘That is a long way after Janowski.’ I intend to remind him of that incident if I am able to be at the Mechanics’ Institute on the 22nd. If I win, I will be very proud to send you the score, but do not anticipate any such ending.

Afterword

About the Authors

by Grandmaster Lev Alburt

Three-time U.S. Chess Champion

The authors of this book are Grandmaster Arnold Denker, U.S. chess champion from 1944 to 1946 and founder of the Arnold Denker Tournament of High School Champions; and Larry Parr, editor of Chess Life from 1984 to 1988 and Glasnost News & Review from 1988 to 1991. Mr. Parr, who has received numerous awards for his chess writing from the Chess Journalists of America, currently works as a Russian analyst. This book, which is about the many memorable chess men whom Grandmaster Denker has known, is a fully equal collaboration between the two authors. It is also one of the finest chess memoirs of its kind.

After defecting from the Soviet Union in 1979 and arriving some time later in the United States, I came to know GM Denker. And I want to assure readers of this book that the real-life Denker is the same man who so lovingly records in these pages the foibles of his Damon Runyon–like chess friends and himself. It seems as if Arnie is always on the cutting edge of life, living every minute to the fullest. No one seems to enjoy sitting at outdoor Parisian cafes or at Lee Chumley’s in New York more than he. No one relishes fine food, good drink and memorable chess conversation more than my good friend. His has been a charmed life, which he relates in this moving remembrance of people past.

I am also a close friend of co-author Larry Parr, whose prose I have long admired. The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories is above all else a beautifully written book, which is alternately sad and happy, serious and witty, insightful and self-effacing. Larry can take credit for transforming a life well-lived into a life well-written.

As a chess warrior, GM Denker has been called the Noblest Roman of Them All. When he wins, as in the following game against
one of the great players of the 20th century, he looks like a con­quering Caesar crossing the Rubicon and pursuing poor Pompey:

Arnold Denker–Reuben Fine
U.S. Championship, 1944
Nimzoindian Defense


In the most important game of his life, played in the elegant Grand Colonial Ballroom of the Hotel Park Central at 7th Avenue and 55th Street, Arnie gives the great Grandmaster Fine a pawn in the opening. Back in 1944, this powerful sacrificial line was a novelty.

7. ... NxN 8. PxN BxP 9. R-N1 B-R4?


Black ought to try 15. ... P-N3. Fine thinks that the position is still a game after 16. B-N5 Q-Q4 17. P-B3 B-B3 18. N-N4 K-N2!.

16. P-N3 P-N3

If 16. ... N-B3?, White wins with 17. NxP!.

17. Q-R4! Q-Q1 18. KR-B1 P-QN4

The prettiest loss hereabouts is 18. ... N-R3 19. QxB! PxQ 20. RxB.

21. R-B5!! BxR!?! 

Hit by the shock of White’s shot, Fine misses the better 21. ... QxRP! 22. BxR QxRch 23. R-B1 Q-B4 24. BxPch K-N2, when there is still some play left.

22. BxB R-KB1 23. B-B4! B-B3 24. BxQ BxQ 25. BxQRP, Black resigns

Thanks to this victory, Denker won the 1944 U.S. Chess Championship and received the first brilliancy prize of $100 offered by Maurice Wertheim.

There is a flip side to the chess coin of being a Noblest Roman. Ancient republican virtue dictates that in defeat N.R.’s must run themselves on swords. One is not allowed to play a peaceful draw and live to fight another day. Take the game below. GM Denker tries to drive a spike into Black (26. P-N4??), but his lunge is brought up short by a counter-spike, 26. ... P-KN4!.

Arnold Denker–Arthur Dake
U.S. Championship, 1936
Nimzoindian Defense


White closes the position because of the threatened ... BxN.

24. ... B-Q2 25. Q-R4 N-R2 26. P-N4??

White impales himself rather than make a temporizing move. “The dashing devil-may-care attitude of youth,” wrote Al Horowitz in 1938 about the Denker of that period, “is clearly exemplified in this brilliant young New Yorker. The attack is both his strength and his weakness....[F]requently he tries to attack where defense is necessary or where the position does not warrant aggressive tactics.” In
his collection of best games, *If You Must Play Chess*, GM Denker responded unrepentantly, “P.S. I still like to attack. If this be treason, make the most of it!”


26. ... P-KN4!

A surprising thrust that skewers the impetuous Denker.


**Selected Games**

*Arnold Denker: The Man Who Must Play Chess*

To know a great chess master is to know his games. Here are a half dozen of GM Denker's lesser-known efforts—all of them as effervescent as the man himself!


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The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories is already being hailed as an instant classic. This Damon Runyon–like work will be around well into the 21st century to inform future chess generations about such greats as Bobby Fischer and world champion Gary Kasparov as well as the “guys and dolls” of the New York chess scene during the fabled Golden Era of the 1930s and 1940s. In the Introduction, five-time U.S. Chess Champion Larry Evans writes that the authors capture “some of the most raucous and colorful figures in 20th century chess” with a “Dickensian precision.”

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