

**THE  
BIG BOOK OF  
CHESS**



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CHESS**

**ERIC SCHILLER**



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## DEDICATION

The game of chess has often provided distraction and relief in troubled times. I had originally intended to dedicate this book to the people of the city of Baghdad, which was at one time the chess capital of the world. As I was writing this book, however, the great tragedy of the tsunami occurred. So I dedicate this book to those still suffering because of all of the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the events of late 2004. I hope that chess may bring some comfort, or at least necessary distraction, in such difficult times.

This book contains information I have gathered over the course of four decades of playing chess and studying the game. Most of this information comes from the vast sea of chess literature. Near the end of the book, you'll find a section of recommended reading that includes the primary sources I used for writing this book. The body of knowledge accumulated makes chess one of the most thoroughly studied human activities. Countless writers and researchers have toiled away to create this wonderful body of literature. They all deserve thanks and credit for bringing these facts into the historical record.

A number of individuals contributed to directly or indirectly, or inspired, some of the material presented in this book. I thank Maurice Ashley, Pavel Blatny, Hal Bogner, Graham Clayton, Calvin Duif, Chris Duncan, Andrzej Filipowicz, Ray Keene, Stewart Reuben, Tony Saidy, and John Watson for helpful ideas and discussion. Thanks, too, to Fernando Rodriguez, Carla Hummel, Elizabeth Karnazes, Ratko Knezevic, Richard Shorman, Academic Chess, ChessDryad ([www.chessdryad.com](http://www.chessdryad.com)) and the Long Island Chess Museum ([www.clipart.co.uk](http://www.clipart.co.uk)) for photos.

The quotations presented come from a wide variety of sources, including a variety of web sites. I found the Kent Chess page ([www.kentchess.org/links/quotations.htm](http://www.kentchess.org/links/quotations.htm)) to be very helpful, and also the Chessville site ([www.chessville.com/misc/Quotes/misc\\_trivia\\_quotes\\_misc.htm](http://www.chessville.com/misc/Quotes/misc_trivia_quotes_misc.htm)).

The dedicated staff of Cardoza Publishing, who had to oversee the complicated process of putting this book together, have my eternal thanks.

A wonderful team examined the book at proof stage and made valuable contributions pointing out errors. Cardoza Publishing joins me in thanking Erin Dame, Carl Palmateer, Joe Williams, Warren Norred, James Sampatra, and Scott Thompson.

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# INTRODUCTION

Chess is a sea in which a gnat may drink and an elephant may bathe.

—*Indian proverb*

My goal is to introduce you to “The Royal Game” — from the rules and some of its leading players to the exotic locales where chess is a part of daily life. I hope that you will share my fascination with the game after you have traveled through the pages of the *Big Book of Chess*.

This book is intended for easy reading, not as a reference work. I’ve included plenty of tips and advice on how to play well, but my main goal is to provide answers to the sorts of questions asked by beginning players and by those who are simply curious about chess and the people who play it.

I’ve been playing the game for many years, and enjoy it so much that I’ve written many books on the topic. I even spend my time teaching chess to others because I want them to appreciate chess the way I do. After reading this book, I hope you’ll start to love chess, too.

I will cover many topics, from how the pieces move, to playing chess online. Please keep in mind that in this one book I can only scratch the surface of these many topics. I hope that when you finish reading it, you will go out and seek more information on the aspects of the game that have attracted your interest. Entire books, and even series of books, have been devoted to each of the topics I will mention. *The Big Book of Chess* will simply introduce you to the game and whet your appetite for more!



# CHAPTER 1

## The Ultimate Mind Sport

Chess is as much a mystery as women.  
—Cecil Purdy

For centuries, chess has stood as the ultimate mind sport. The frequent references to chess in literature and movies are due to the general perception that anyone who plays chess must be intelligent. As a result, many writers include chess among the attributes of heroes and villains, to underscore their mental abilities.



*Good vs. Bad in X-Men* (© 20th Century Fox, 2000)

You might think that after all these years, some other game would rise up and knock chess off its esteemed pedestal, but chess has evolved into such a unique game that no other competitive mental activity can displace it.

Even before the very first international chess tournament over a century and a half ago, the results of chess games have been recorded. Thanks to the heroic work of chess fans all over the world, there are now databases containing not just the results, but every single move, of millions of chess games. Armed with this data, statisticians have worked out many interesting characteristics of the game of chess.

For example, the balance of the game is demonstrated by the winning percentage enjoyed by the player who has the privilege of moving first. It turns out that moving first is certainly an advantage, but not a great one. The player with the first move wins about 55 percent of the time. Chess games are not necessarily won or lost—quite often, neither player wins, and the result is a draw. In fact, about one-third of all chess games end in draws, with a higher ratio in professional competition and a much lower one in scholastic play.

The rules of the game have remained constant for the past few centuries, with only very minor modifications, mostly made to accommodate the use of chess clocks and the new digital timers. Of course, many changes have been proposed, and a huge number of chess variants exist with altered rules, different kinds of moves for pieces, differently shaped chess boards, and other variations. Still, despite passionate and sometimes professional promotion, not a single one of these variants has gathered any significant international following. Most of the variants are short-lived, and for good reason. It seems that designing another board game with the balance, elegance, and staying power of chess is beyond the reach of mere mortals. It has taken over a thousand years to perfect this magnificent game, and it remains the most popular. No other strategy game comes close to its ubiquitousness. Even in the electronic gaming age, chess remains the number one game in the world.

## ***Why Do People Play Chess?***

Chess is so interesting in itself, that those who have leisure for such diversions cannot find one that is more innocent, but advantageous, to the vanquished as well as the victor.

– *Benjamin Franklin*

People have been drawn to the game of chess for at least 1,500 years. It is the second most popular sport in the world, trailing only soccer. There must be something about the game that attracts such a passionate and devoted following.

Since chess is not an athletic sport, competition is open to everyone. Professional chess does require a great deal of stamina, and physical conditioning has become a great part of the modern chess scene. For casual play, however, it really doesn't matter what kind of physical shape you're in. Chess is even played by those who are blind and unable to see the board. Special chess sets allow them to play by touch, instead.

This non-reliance on physical strength or agility is one of the reasons why many find chess so appealing. Once you know how to play the game, you can look forward to playing it for the rest of your life. You won't have to give it up just because you grow old or ill. In fact, some grandmasters have been active on the professional scene into their 90s!

Of course, most people play chess because they find it fun and fascinating. I hope that as you read this book, you'll discover why. Let me point out a few reasons that people enjoy chess, sometimes to the point of addiction.

Intimate conversation without a word spoken; thrilling activity in quiet; triumph and defeat, hope and despondency, life and death, all within 64 squares; poetry and signs reconciled; the ancient East at one with modern Europe—that is Chess.

—*John Holland Rose*

First, as with any other competitive activity, the thrill of victory provides a great feeling. Because chess is a purely mental contest with almost no element of luck involved, a person can take great pleasure in demonstrating prowess at the chessboard. But the greatest satisfaction is internal. It isn't just the pleasure that comes from making a brilliant move; it is the wonderful feeling that engulfs you as the correctness of your strategy permeates your consciousness. The feeling of discovery is a bit Zen-like --- a sudden explosion filling the mind.

Second, since chess games in formal competition are recorded, and as I mentioned earlier, there are millions of them available, a chess game can earn a player a small slice of immortality. Every chess player dreams of playing some brilliant, never-before-seen strategy that will be admired throughout the world and will be referred to in newspaper columns and chess books as long as the game is played. Countless people are known to history only through some example of fantastic chess play that found its way into the chess community.

Everyone can define chess in their own way. But in the first place, chess is sport, because what we are really interested in is the name of the winner. However, I think that one's desire to win is not productive, unless it is grounded by one's striving to fight and to create something beautiful. But on the other hand, one can't be constantly winning when occupied with creating masterpieces. With me, however, as long as I have a desire to seek something new and to play beautiful games, I continue to win.  
 – *Garry Kasparov*, Thirteenth World Champion

Whether or not a player's impressive chess play finds its way into the data stream, it can still be fun to show off the move to others who play the game. They will be suitably impressed, and of course, that's a nice ego boost, too. In most sports and competitions, it is impossible to show off a move unless the highlight has been recorded on video. In chess, you can demonstrate exactly what happened in a game by simply setting up the chessboard and replaying the moves.

It is even possible to achieve chess immortality without playing a competitive game at all. Chess scholars analyze the commentaries of the great players, and often find some flaws. Although most of this work is now done with the assistance of powerful computer programs, lessening the originality of the new analysis, it is still possible to earn international recognition by pointing out errors in prominently published commentaries.

Since chess has existed for centuries, you may find it surprising that creativity and originality continue to play a large role in the game. The strategy of the first dozen or so moves of the chess game has still not been worked out with precision, even with all the computer assistance available. Every year, important new moves are still discovered even in the early stage of the game. Players and analysts can contribute important ideas in the opening, and they are rewarded by having their names attached to specific chess strategies.



## INFINITE VARIETY

**There are more possible chess games available than there are electrons in the universe!**

Another reason people enjoy chess is that, from a purely sporting standpoint, chess offers more opportunities for pulling off an upset than any other competition that does not involve a significant element of luck. Chess is such a complicated

game that even the best players make some sort of mistake in almost every game. Often a player in a superior position will overplay the position and allow the opponent to strike back with a successful counterattack. Even the greatest chess players, including Bobby Fischer, have lost games to much less skilled opposition.

## Did You Know?

The World Champion boxer Lennox Lewis is a big fan of the royal game. During the 2000 World Championship match in London, Lewis was training in England and very much wanted to come down and visit the match to see Kasparov and Kramnik in their title bout. However, his trainers said “no way,” so he had to be content with reports from Roy Snell, the head of security of the chess match. Roy “Knuckles” Snell was actually a boxer himself, and he kept the world heavyweight champion informed about everything that was going on down in London.

“I honestly don’t like him playing chess,” said Emmanuel Steward, Lennox Lewis’s trainer. “I mean, I see him sitting there for ten minutes thinking four moves ahead before he makes one. And he actually does the same thing in the ring—he thinks too much.”

Informal competitions offer even greater chances to defeat a superior opponent. Professional players often give exhibitions, playing many opponents simultaneously. If you face off against a top professional who is facing fifteen or twenty opponents at the same time, you can devote that much more time to the analysis of the position. Sometimes even young children can defeat an experienced master under these circumstances.

Chess is one of the few activities in which players of all ages compete on a level playing field. At major open tournaments, you can find competitors as young as five years old and those who are well into their 90s. Hikaru Nakamura, still a junior, is now one of the top American players, having already won the U.S. Championship title. In the last century, Bobby Fischer won the United States championship at the tender age of fourteen. Hikaru is now a Grandmaster of chess, but he isn’t nearly the youngest in the world. Later I’ll go into more detail about the current record-holders.

For the most part, in chess competition boys, girls, men, and women all participate in the same section. There are specific championships for various age groups, and titles reserved for women, but in the overwhelming majority of events you’ll find both men and women playing. This leads to many opportunities to make friends—and sometimes more romantic liaisons. Half a century ago, women were a

rarity in professional chess. Now, women achieve impressive results in professional competition. Judit Polgar, who earned her Grandmaster title at age fifteen, is ranked solidly among the top ten players in the world.

Chess is also a great way to meet famous people. Many sports stars and celebrities enjoy chess, and often turn up at major professional chess events. Though most don't compete in tournaments, a large number of celebrities take private chess lessons and play with their friends and colleagues. Sometimes it can even become an obsession. For example, while filming *Around the World in Eighty Days*, Jackie Chan commented on "The Tonight Show" that whenever Arnold Schwarzenegger wasn't needed for a scene, the actor-turned-governor would sit in the corner playing chess. This is hardly a new phenomenon. Back in the golden days of Hollywood, Humphrey Bogart was an even more enthusiastic chess player, and quite a skilled one, too.

There have even been tournaments where only celebrities play. One such tournament was held in 1989 in the Mexican town of Mazatlan. Alongside this event, a World Championship of rapid chess took place. The chess stars and competing celebrities, including Morgan Fairchild, Erik Estrada and Claude Akins, mingled throughout the event.

During the 1993 United States Championship in Los Angeles, the hotel at which the event took place saw a massive influx of members of the World Wrestling Federation, who were about to perform in a nearby arena. To onlookers' amusement, the chess players and wrestlers were often found together in the bar.

## The Phish Story

You might think it quite odd that a musical performance might be interrupted so that the musicians could take time out for a little chess, but it actually happened in quite spectacular fashion a few years ago. The immensely popular band Phish decided that they would feature chess on their 1995 tour by playing a chess game against the audience. The idea was that members of the audience could vote on a move during the intermission, and this move would be played on a giant demonstration board erected on stage. The band would then have until their next show to decide on their response.

I had been participating in the San Mateo International Futurity, an internationally ranked chess tournament featuring local masters, masters from Finland and Spain, and the most promising young stars from northern California.

With two tough games scheduled for Sunday, a night off at Shoreline Amphitheater seeing the brilliant and innovative group Phish seemed like

the right way to relax before the difficult confrontation against a rising star whose national ranking was almost identical to my own. Since the pressure was on him to earn his international ranking, which I already had, I wanted to relax. Chess was the farthest from my mind as I entered the lawn to enjoy my first live Phish show.

What greeted me was a strange sight indeed. On the left side of the stage, there was a huge chessboard, with all the pieces in their proper places. I had no idea what was going on, but escaping from chess might prove to be impossible.

After the first two songs, the band explained what was going on. They are all big fans of the Royal Game and when they're on the road, they spend a lot of time doing battle at the chessboard. They would be challenging the audience to a game of chess on this national tour, with one move played at each concert.

During the set break, people were invited to gather at the Greenpeace booth and vote on the audience move. Of course I headed there, and introduced myself as a professional and the current champion of northern California. Many moves were suggested by the public. I explained why I felt that the choice should be between attacking the bishop with a pawn and bringing out the other knight. Eventually, the advance of the pawn from a7 to a6, kicking the bishop, was selected by vote.

I was then asked to make the move on the stage, which sounded like fun, so I readily agreed. I was escorted backstage where I met band members Page, Mike Gordon, Trey Anastasio, and Jon Fishman. They are genuine fans of chess, which I was very happy to discover, because chess suffers from such a geeky image that to find such terrific alternative musicians with a love for the game was really rewarding.

Of course, most chess players are just ordinary folk. Still, chess acts as a sort of universal language, and if you travel, you are sure to find chessplayers almost everywhere you go. Chess is so popular that almost all nations are members of FIDE, the World Chess Federation.

The list of the strongest chess playing nations might surprise you. The map on the next page shows where the top chess powers are (from darkest to lightest), based on the average ranking of each nation's top ten players. You should be aware that "nation" has a different meaning for FIDE than for the United Nations. Each of the countries that makes up Great Britain, for example, is a distinct chess territory with one vote. Chess long ago recognized the status of the Palestinian people by granting them their own federation. FIDE has tried to find a way to let all the people of

the world participate in chess, even when they have to dance around a few political landmines.



If any man plays at chess and should quarrel in consequence and kill his opponent, such homicide shall be accounted involuntary and not voluntary ... for he employeth himself in a lawful work.

– *Pope Innocent III* (c. 1200)

## ***Where Did Chess Come From?***

The Master said: Are there not games played on boards? To play them would surely be better than doing nothing at all.

– *Confucius*

The origins of the game of chess remain a fiercely debated topic. Just about everyone agrees that an early form of the game was in use back in the sixth century, and likely before. It is generally believed that modern chess is derived from an ancient game known as *chaturanga*, a game played in India with four equal armies on a four-sided board. Archaeological evidence of what might be pieces used in a related game back in the second century was uncovered in 1972. Over thirty years later, the origin of chess remains shrouded in history.

I believe that the game of chess received a modified version of the old name, *chaturanga*, to become *chaturang*. That name can still be found in such far-flung places as Cambodia, where it remains the word used for the game. As a linguist, I find the evidence for an Indian origin of the game quite persuasive, but some

people, primarily in China, argue that the game was invented there. I'm not going to get into an academic debate here. There are many books on the history of chess, and lots of resources on the World Wide Web. So, in what follows, keep in mind that I'm presenting the views of scholars and authorities I happen to agree with.

Assuming that chess had its origins in Buddhist northern India sometime in the first half of the first millennium, the spread of the game throughout the world can be traced. One plausible scenario is that the earliest expansion went along with the spread of Buddhism, especially into Southeast Asia. Chess may have been present in China as early as the sixth century.

As you can tell, I've been walking on eggshells while laying out a scenario for the early history of the game. People who are into chess history can be quite obsessive and very defensive about their theories, not unusual in a community of researchers. I have not done any formal research into this tricky area, except to do some linguistic reconstruction. If you are interested in passionate arguments and claims of definitive analysis, you can join the pursuit of truth yourself, or just follow the action in journal articles, books, and on the Internet. One interesting site to check out is "On the Origins of Chess" ([www.mynetcologne.de/~nc-jostenge/index.htm](http://www.mynetcologne.de/~nc-jostenge/index.htm)).

As the world entered the ninth century, still quite a long time ago, things became a lot clearer and less controversial. A flourishing city played an important and even critical role in the expansion of chess: Baghdad.

## Baghdad in the Eighth Century

By the end of the eighth century, chess had spread westward and had become popular in the Muslim world. Nowhere was chess more prominent than in the ancient city of Baghdad, especially during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid. The caliph was one of the most important figures in the early history of chess, but of course, he is better known as that fellow who had to listen to those thousand and one tales told by Scheherazade.

He not only played chess, he also encouraged those around him to play chess, too—even the slaves! It is said that he spent ten thousand gold pieces purchasing a slave with high chess skills, who earned her lover's freedom by defeating al-Rashid in a match. Another legend claims that the caliph sent a magnificent chess set to Emperor Charlemagne, who was also reputed to play the game. Scholars don't think much of these legends, but one of Scheherazade's tales seems more plausible—until you consider that the rules of chess had not yet been modified to include powerful queens. They did, however, include promotion of a pawn to a new Vizier—the name of the piece at the time—with more limited powers than the modern queen.

## From Burton's Translation of the Arabian Nights Tales

She [Tawaddud] said, It hath reached me, O auspicious King, that when the damsel was playing chess with the expert in presence of the Commander of the Faithful, Harun al-Rashid, whatever move he made was speedily countered by her, till she beat him and he found himself checkmated. Quoth he, "I did but lead thee on, that thou mightest think thyself skilful: but set up again, and thou shalt see."

So they placed the pieces a second time, when he said in himself, "Open thine eyes or she will beat thee." And he fell to moving no piece, save after calculation, and ceased not to play, till she said, "Thy King is dead!-Checkmate." When he saw this he was confounded at her quickness and understanding; but she laughed and said, "O professor, I will make a wager with thee on this third game. I will give thee the queen and the right-hand castle and the left-hand knight; if thou beat me, take my clothes, and if I beat thee, I will take thy clothes." Replied he, "I agree to this;" and they replaced the pieces, she removing queen, castle, and knight.

Then said she, "Move, O master." So he moved, saying to himself, "I cannot but beat her, with such odds," and planned a combination; but, behold, she moved on, little by little, till she made one of her pawns a queen and pushing up to him pawns and other pieces, to take off his attention, set one in his way and tempted him to take it. Accordingly, he took it and she said to him, "The measure is meted and the loads equally balanced. Eat till thou are over-full; naught shall be thy ruin, O son of Adam, save thy greed. Knowest thou not that I did but tempt thee, that I might finesse thee? See: this is check-mate!" adding, "So doff off thy clothes." Quoth he, "Leave me my bag-trousers, so Allah repay thee;" and he swore by Allah that he would contend with none, so long as Tawaddud abode in the realm of Baghdad.

In any case, it seems to be solid historical truth that Harun al-Rashid was a great popularizer of the game of chess. It is reported that anyone who showed considerable skill at chess was most welcome in his court. He is known to have been absolutely lavish with his rewards to those who demonstrated their skills and managed to impress him. The details may be the stuff of legend, but the caliph is a historical figure who is enshrined in the annals of chess history.