

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	69
The Village Voice (I.S. Herschberg and H.J. van den Herik)	69
Three Positions (M.M. Botvinnik)	71
The Guard Heuristic: Legal Move Ordering with Forward Game-Tree Pruning (Y.-F. Ke and T.-M. Parng)	76
Notes:	86
Thompson: Quintets with Variations (The Editors)	86
On Telescoping Linear Evaluation Functions (I. Althöfer)	91
Review:	94
J. Nunn: Secrets of Rook Endings (H.J. van den Herik and I.S. Herschberg)	94
Literature Received:	96
Computer-Chess Articles Published Elsewhere	96
Chessware Received:	97
Chess Endgames Vol. 3 (K. Thompson)	97
Information for Contributors	97
News, Information, Tournaments and Reports:	98
The 8 <sup>th</sup> AEGON Man-Machine Tournament	98
Report on the Tournament (B. Verbaan)	98
Results and Selected Games (C. de Gorter and B. Verbaan)	101
Man versus Machine for the World Checkers Championship (J. Schaeffer, N. Treloar, P. Lu and R. Lake)	105
The Deep Blue Challenge (M. Ginsburg)	111
The Swedish Rating List (T. Karlsson and G. Grotting)	114
Calendar of Computer-Chess Events	115
The 1993 World Microcomputer Chess Championship (Munich)	115
The 7 <sup>th</sup> Advances in Computer Chess Conference (Maastricht)	117
Correspondence:	118
Limited Competition (I.J. Good)	118
Limited Computation (R. Lopez / M. Newborn)	118
Internet Chess Retrieval (U. Sprute)	119
How the Journal Reaches You	120

## THE VILLAGE VOICE

The global village of computer chess is as avid for news as any real village and certainly more newsworthy than most. Email or snail mail, news travels almost instantaneously. And what they mutter in Madrid today, they muse about in Moscow tomorrow.

Let Richard Greenblatt imply that Chess Masters are not essential for the construction of programs and by return of post Dr. Botvinnik avers that Grand Masters' thoughts must serve as models for all deep programming. Botvinnik makes no secret of his uphill struggle for recognition. Yet he continues to insist on slender trees and a human-like approach.

So Pioneer evolved and his programs now have *sapiens* in their title, stressing their humanity. We salute their author for being one tough survivor among a generation now on the verge of becoming fabulous for keeping up with their times, a chip off the old block, so to speak, who, no sooner given a chip of silicon, proves he is undaunted and may prove to be in the right. Along with the computers at his disposal, his

evaluation function has evolved, now taking into account the subtleties of a figure on the board known by the Russian figure of speech termed trousers. Whether these should be rendered in English idiom as trousers, trews, or breeches we cannot tell. We certainly find the new term a gain to the chess vocabulary and to heuristics in chess programs, even though it is hard to avoid punning on 'truth by trews' or 'breaching the defence by breeches'.

There is much in this issue to show that the struggle between brain and brawn, of chunks versus brute force, is far from over. In this struggle, Botvinnik and his near-contemporary David Bronstein have the virtue of durability. They contested each other for the World title over 40 years ago and now are united in being very active around the latest hardware which is as volatile and ephemeral as *Drosophila*. So, fittingly, Bronstein wins the 8<sup>th</sup> AEGON tournament, in which no machine competitor is even near one tenth of his age. And yet, almost in the same breath, the AEGON tournament is claimed as a victory for the machines because for the first time in history, the programs have won on points. Nor is this all: reporting on that same tournament, this limited victory of the programmer is ascribed to a more human-like approach of the programs to the game. Though clearly on the side of the machines and in the face of his own disbelief, Verbaan is in good conscience impelled to concede that those contraptions now play a game instead of searching for a move.

Verbaan's reluctant admiration is not shared by all. To show how much the struggle still is in the balance IGM Hans Ree, commenting on the same tournament, felt quite differently: he condensed his analysis of even the most spectacular of its games into the apophthegm "the computer does not win — Man loses". Another pointer to our notion that the struggle goes on but need not lead to a permanent disharmony between man and machine is provided by John Nunn. This IGM appears in this issue in two guises, as Bronstein's co-winner of that tournament and as the author of a matchless and faultless book which strikingly combines a plethora of computer techniques to produce the most human of modern chess books. He could not have done without a database, nor without a programmed interface to interrogate it, nor without a sophisticated, wholly-programmed, typesetter. This in no way prevents Nunn from producing a volume of which every human reader must be certain that its author had the human player in his human mind. He is provided with practical tips galore and can rest assured that, for the first time in history, every statement about every complex position is indisputably right.

In the strife, if strife it is, between man and machine, Ken Thompson has intervened again: as reported in this issue he provides more work for IGM John Nunn and his emulators. Ken has supplied the chess world with yet another set of machine truths for human consumption: 39 endgames, nearly all of them new, supplementing and almost completing all there is to know about five-man databases. He proves, in doing so, that research is continuous and it is to be hoped that the questions posed by this research will prove to be more numerous than those answered by it. His work is crying out for translation into human terms and (dare we suggest it?) for a redrafting in terms of the ultimate, that is human, metric.

Let the news travel on through the village, the faster the better: it is certain to be good news.

Bob Herschberg  
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