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CHESS OR BEYOND?

For some time now an informal solution to the game of chess has been in the making. As always in matters of opinion and even in opinionated matters, views differ. According to some, the game of chess has been solved in the particular and irksome form that passionate players cannot vanquish their machines. To a privileged few, this statement is met with derision; they, a privileged tenscore or so, regularly bring their computer opponent to its figurative knees. With Olympian detachment, we can only conclude that nearly all the hard work has been done and that computer chess reigns supreme. This is not merely expressed as half points or points won even over the top-players of the game, it also comes to the fore in the emergence of explanation tools for chess endgames and of awards for the best annotation.

This is well beyond outplaying the majority; it is explaining the quality of a move to those not perhaps inspired enough to produce the move themselves. In other words, many computers are not only playing better, but, with their program, are capable of expounding the why and wherefore of their moves. Such an explanation takes the form of what is roughly a Grandmaster's comment on the moves. Chess, therefore, to all but a few hundred has acquired the status of solved and explicable.

The question before your Editors is now clear: in a famous metaphor, chess has been dubbed the *Drosophila* of at least one variety of Artificial Intelligence. The *Drosophila*'s genetic make-up having been solved, the question remains: what is the next subject of research? A direction of research, as Vikhrev points out in this issue, should be prospective and even prepared to tack and veer with the winds of change.

Accepting this as a truth, where shall we go? Shall we pursue the course of an *ICCA Journal* where chess is the main subject and even more detailed chess subjects will be the main bill of fare, or should we branch out? A restriction to chess has the advantage of maintaining continuity, but may lose its edge by being overly specialized, interesting to only a handful of experts world-wide.

By contrast, opening up the pages of our Journal to all manner of computer games can be no more than sighting the tip of an iceberg, not even scratching it. Restriction to chess is too limitative, extension to all computer games is unbounded to a degree.

Yet, in the somewhat longer run, such a choice is inevitable and a clear policy is required: shall it be chess for the chess specialists or any computerizable game not solved so far? The choice is up to our readers and strong opinions for our correspondence column are invited: shall the Editors of this Journal provide delicacies for the few or should they rather provide fare for a host of gaming folk? Will our readers, please, help to decide between such extremes as the article by Herbeck and Barth, explicatory in nature, and the approach of Matsubara, Iida and Grimbergen which at one fell swoop extends solved CHESS by way of SHOGI to unsolved GO? We think that the sweeping conclusion of SHOGI and GO is premature.

Nevertheless, the ultimate decision rests with our readers and contributors, your Editors still feel that they find themselves at a crossroads. To put it at its simplest, will the *ICCA Journal*, possibly then most easily available on some Web, be about computer chess or about computer games?

Bob Herschberg
Jaap van den Herik

From time to time the ICCA executive would like to communicate electronically and widely with ICCA members. The recent announcement of the 1996 World Microcomputer Chess Championship is a case in point. Although we have mailing addresses for all members we do not have an email address, a phone number or a fax number for many members.

At present our membership list is maintained both by our Secretary/Treasurer, Don Beal, and by the ICCA Journal Editorial Office in Maastricht. Each quarter we consolidate our records, but there are gaps in the information that we would like to fill. Therefore I ask that every ICCA member send an email with a subject-field of "ICCA contact addresses". Please send the message to icca@dcs.qmw.ac.uk with a copy to icca@cs.rulimburg.nl containing the following contact information:

Name, mailing address, email address, phone number, fax number,
As an example my personal entry would be:

Prof. T. A. (Tony) Marsland, Computing Science Department, 615 General Services Building, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada T6G 2H1, email: Tony.Marsland@ualberta.ca, Phone: +1-403-492-3971, Fax: +1-403-492-1071, Please DO NOT make my information available to third parties.

As is our custom, this data will be used only by the ICCA to maintain contact with its membership. If you wish to make your addresses available to third parties, please explicitly give us that permission at the end of your email. We occasionally receive requests from vendors of magazines and chess supplies for the addresses of our members who wish to receive unsolicited mail.

ICCA Journal readers may be interested to know that information on our publications is now available on the Internet. Our homepage can be reached by <http://www.cs.rulimburg.nl/icca/iccainfo.htm>.

A complete list of all articles, notes and literature reviews published in the *ICCA Journal* is available on the Internet at http://www.cs.rulimburg.nl/interwyk/icca_j_toc.htm.