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THE FUTURE OF GAMES

The *ICGA Journal* focuses on games and computers. The principal aim is to describe programming methods and techniques in such a way that other researchers can apply them in the same domain or preferably in another domain. The more general the description is, the more applicable it may be in other domains. The diversity of other domains is unpredictable. Even the world of games seems to be inexhaustible as soon as it regards variations, improvements, or enlargements of existing games. Besides the world of well-known games, we now and then stumble into the world of unknown games. It is an amazing world.

All games have a history and a future. Old games like chess, Xiang Qi, and Ancient Heian Shogi, have such a long history that one might start investigating the evolution of a game. Are the changes of the rules a result of analogous causes? Can the evolution of the three games mentioned above be compared? Is one evolution in some sense periodic? Can we take an old version and transform it to an appealing variant which challenges the computer-games community? Of these four questions the last one is of special interest to our readers.

In this issue we start with an extensive overview of efficient methods for controlling selective simulations. Brian Sheppard shows that the methods are applicable in the domains of Scrabble, Backgammon, Hold'em poker, bridge, and Go. These domains are characterised by non-determinism, imperfect information, and high branching factors. So, other games with these characteristics may profit from the methods described, too. Not all methods are brand new. Some are already well-known among programmers, but none of the programmers had taken the time to write the intricacies down and disseminate the results among colleagues. Therefore, we are grateful to Brian that he did so. Obviously, we are now waiting for future domains where we can apply these methods.

The second article by Ed Trice ranges from history to future. He elaborates on the question posed in the article on Superchess (Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 239-250): "Is the current configuration of the chessboard the one that results in the most satisfying game?" Trice describes 80-square chess and starts with ideas developed by Henry Bird and José Raoul Capablanca. He shows the strengths and weaknesses of the ideas. Finally, he arrives at Gothic chess. Five programs are briefly described and a Gothic-chess tournament is announced for the autumn 2004. Successes of Gothic chess are mentioned (e.g., 30,000 sets are sold to date). Is the world in a state of a change by Gothic chess? At this moment your Editor sees at least five contenders, viz. Fischer Random, Superchess, Omega chess, Janus chess, and Arimaa. But what about normal chess?

The position of the game of chess seems invincible. FIDE has a worldwide infrastructure, all member countries have chess clubs, chess tournaments, and chess magazines. So far, the five contender games do not have professionals who are attractors of public interest. Let us be happy that we have chess among our games, that we have a regular computer-chess world championship, and that we have frequent matches between the best human players and the best computer-chess programs. We look forward to see which program will be the (new) representative of the ICGA for chess for the year 2004/2005, i.e., the new World Champion born in Ramat-Gan. I look forward to see you all in Israel from July 5 to July 12.

Jaap van den Herik
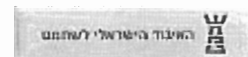
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