



## SKITTLES ROOM

### *From the Archives*

Hosted by  
Mark Donlan



*Chess Mazes*  
by Bruce Alberston

## From the Archives...

Since it came online over eight years ago, [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

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In 1949 G.H. Diggle, a British chess author and historian created a record in London Banks League Chess by losing a game in seven moves. Later, he sent the score on a Christmas card to the late C.H. O’D. Alexander who, with a flash of genius, sent a card in return awarding him the title of “Badmaster.” Proudly adopting the appellation, the Badmaster went on to contribute regular columns to the British Chess Federation. As the Badmaster himself notes: “[The Badmaster] has now mingled from time to time with three generations of eminent players ranging Isidor Gunsberg to Nigel Short, and rambled extensively round the highways and byways of provincial chess. It is in these obscure haunts, as well as in the higher circles, that he has observed great Chess Characters and overheard many weird chess utterances...” G.H. Diggle passed away several years ago; we were delighted to receive permission from the then 90-year young Badmaster to use items from his Badmaster series.

## The Baron

### G.H. Diggle

It has always been accepted that “the greatest of them all” from 1843-1851 was Howard Staunton, and from 1851-1858 Adolf Anderssen. But Dr. N. Divinsky, in a very fine article in the current *British Chess Magazine*,” unexpectedly introduces a third claimant – that “vague and seemingly unknown player,” Baron Tassilo von Heydebrand und der Lasa. For though the Baron never played in a set Match or in a Tournament, but was confined by his

Ambassadorial Duties to club and fireside chess, he beat Anderssen 4-2 in serious “friendlies” in 1845/6, and Staunton (+5 -4 =3) in 1853. Moreover Dr. Divinsky has unearthed 79 games (comprising the above and an additional sixty, all against such masters as Hanstein, Jaenisch, Mayet, Bledow, Bilguer, Lange, Horwitz, Szén, Buckle, Löwenthal, and de Rivière). Against this formidable array, the complete Chess “Who’s Who” of the period except for St. Amant, Kieseritzky and Harrwitz, der Lasa emerges with the splendid score (counting draws as one half) of 53 to 26 (winning percentage 67).

Clearly, he was one of the great “undervalued” players of chess history, with his strength thrust into the background by his massive services to the game as author and antiquarian. Whether the Baron would have been a “World-beater” in the rugged competitive chess of those days, with no time limit and few adjournments, is uncertain. It is probable that he met Anderssen before, and Staunton after, these masters were at their best. Dr. Divinsky says that in 1845 both der Lasa and Anderssen were 27 years of age, “in the full flower of their chess talent.” But der Lasa “bloomed” somewhat more quickly than Anderssen, who at that time rarely got away from Breslau for first class practice. According to Dufresne, it was not until the early months of 1851 that Anderssen really sharpened up his chess in preparation for the Great London Tournament by playing over 100 games with Mayet, Falkbeer, Max Lange and himself.

And of the 1853 series with Staunton, der Lasa himself wrote to the *City of London Chess Magazine* after the English master’s death in 1874: “During his stay in Brussels I had the pleasure of making with Staunton a dozen games. One of these we played late in the evening – you will find it reproduced in the *Chess Player’s Chronicle* 1853 p. 293. In the outset the game was in favor of Staunton, but playing then negligently, he lost it somewhat abruptly (the Baron is scarcely fair to himself here – Ray Keene awards him two exclamation marks for his 24th move, which caused the “abrupt finish” [*Howard Staunton, the English World Chess Champion*, p. 147].) The next morning he wrote me a note saying, “I have got so severe an attack of my old enemy, palpitation of the heart, that I dare not undergo the excitement of chess – I hope to be more myself tomorrow.” And again: “I regret to say I am still suffering, and think it better to wait another day before I have any mental labor.” Fortunately he recovered after the rest, and some of their subsequent games, though uneven in quality, contain magnificent chess on both sides.

The Baron kept up a friendly correspondence with Staunton for over thirty years, and always brought out the English champion’s kindlier side. In his last letter (November 1873) Staunton spoke in affectionate terms of other players recently deceased: “I was sorry to lose Lewis and St. Amant, my dear friends Horatio Bolton and Sir T. Madden, and others of whom we have been deprived, but for Jaenisch I entertained a particular affection. He was truly an amiable and upright man.”

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