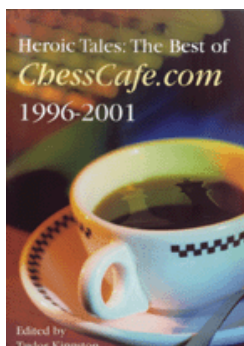




SKITTLES ROOM

From the Archives

Hosted by Mark Donlan



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From the Archives...

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

MASTER JACOBSON Part Two

by Tim Krabbé

Now and then Nardus hosted a kind of chess salon, afternoons when Peltz showed his latest games to a group of chess acquaintances, most of them journalists. The tacit understanding was that Peltz’s views could be published: this was his way of propagating his own commentary on his games. He himself never wrote about chess.

Sitting among Nardus, Jacobson, sometimes Fajman, Quinter de Jong, Loyd and Lindgren when they weren’t out of the country, and a small number of other privileged insiders, there was Peltz with his birdlike perch, his spry countenance, his *decency*, looking like a lost citizen from the real world. He confirmed that impression by treating the suggestions of Quinter, who was no more than your everyday amateur player, just as seriously as those of the attending masters and grandmasters. Quinter also seemed out of place; a broadly built, cigar-smoking individual most often dressed in a three-piece suit, bearing no trace at all of his early career as a ballet dancer. These days he had a talent agency, and, attracted by the supposed mystique that shrouded chess, had zoomed in on Peltz. Perhaps Peltz recognized in him a brother non-chessplayer and looked to him for support, but Jacobson thought it was folly to let such a character sit with the group.

Going over the Brisbane games, everyone held their breath at the last one, that of the Bomb. Without blinking an eye, Peltz played beyond it, and at the seventeenth move said: “Is it OK with you all if we start here?”

“Mister Peltz,” said Nardus, “was that Bomb actually bluff?”

Peltz gave a quick smile and said, “Bishop e2 doesn’t work here, Black takes on f2.”

On his walk home after such afternoons, Jacobson felt dizzy at the thought of that little guy’s speed and lucidity. None of the insights were in themselves beyond him, but the self-evidence with which Peltz would distill a plan or a move out of all those divergent implications of a position boggled the mind. He didn’t calculate, he knew; chess was his mother tongue.

But he wasn’t going to be world champion. In light of chess history, Peltz was no more than an amusing late bloomer whose qualification for a world championship match was more than he deserved. Neishtadt was much too strong for him.

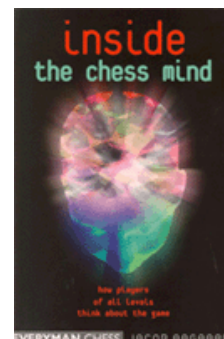
During one of those sessions, when it came up that Jacobson and Peltz had gone to school together, Jacobson mentioned their old game and their 1-0 score. He noticed a slight irritation in Peltz that passed immediately, and realized he had committed an indiscretion by mentioning the old score that could never be settled now.

The reprimand had followed immediately. To Jacobson’s astonishment, Peltz promptly showed the old game at dictation speed. Jacobson seemed

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to be seeing it for the first time; with Peltz moving the pieces, and masters and grandmasters for an audience, he was struck by the crookedness, the stupidity, the horrible talentlessness of his own play; especially compared to the 12-year-old Peltz's crystal-clear effectiveness.

Nardus had asked if he could publish the game, and, after a quick glance at Jacobson, Peltz had shaken his head and said, "That remains our game, doesn't it, Daan?"

Jacobson stood in such awe of Peltz the chess player that it took days before it dawned on him what it meant that Peltz had been able to show that game on command. A grandmaster of his caliber knew thousands of games by heart, but most likely not a thirty-year-old school championship game. He must have gone over that game often – he was one step away from the world title but still couldn't bear having blown that school championship.

Oh, Jacobson would have gladly remained eighteen forever so Peltz would be always twelve: a small boy in tears who had found out that you couldn't overthrow the established order just like that.

Every time Pepijn sent a move, Jacobson remembered the correspondence game again. He received an address change from someone whose profession was "pawn" and who announced his move from d2 to d4; a watercolor representing the display window of a toy shop, inside which, if you looked closely, you could see a miniature chess board showing the new position; a series of Polaroid photos on which Pepijn lugged a pawn across a giant chess board in a park. In a package delivered in his absence, which Jacobson had to pick up at the post office, was a real chess knight, its head fitted onto the base with a piece of paper on which he found, not until several minutes later, the words: "I'm going from d4 to b5 all in one piece."

Without a doubt Pepijn was a nice, sensitive boy who thought he was pleasing Jacobson with those surprise gifts. But they irritated him. He had agreed to a game of chess, not asked to peek into a child's soul.

Early December, toward Saint Nicholas day, Jacobson received a marzipan chess board with an arrow pointing from b5 to a3. "May this put you in a marzipensive mood," wrote Pepijn.

Jacobson immediately ate the board.

The game itself also irritated him. After a few moves it had dawned on him – stupid klutz that he was – that he shouldn't have played the Sicilian. Instead, it would have been better to leave theory as quickly as possible. Now it was too late. A correspondence game was no ordinary game; Pepijn could choose the sharpest systems and look them up in books. For the time being an old newspaper would suffice, for Pepijn was boldly following the path that led to the Brisbane Bombshell. And now, after the marzipan move, Jacobson had to decide whether, just like Peltz against Feoktistov, he would dare to play 8...d5.

That was remarkable indeed.

It was out of the question that Pepijn was repeating the moves of the world's most talked-about game by accident. True, he was following the loser, but if Jacobson now played the Bomb, how would he respond if Pepijn chose the drawing line that Feoktistov had spurned? Simple: that variation was a draw between grandmasters; with his superior technique, and playing against a schoolboy, Jacobson would have no trouble winning precisely such an even endgame.

He had to laugh at himself: what a chess player he was. Here he was worrying about winning a game he hadn't wanted to play in the first place! If Pepijn chose the drawing line he could have his draw. Jacobson would send him a copy of his own column from the Amsterdam Tribune with that variation, and a draw offer. Then the boy would have to be really impertinent to want to continue.

Anyhow, he couldn't let a schoolboy call his bluff, and he played the Bomb. There was some pleasure in the realization that, as the opponent of someone in whom he had momentarily seen a reincarnation of Peltz, he put himself in Peltz's shoes.

Now Jacobson was looking forward to Pepijn's next move. But a week went by and it hadn't come. And after ten days it still wasn't there. And that in spite of the fact that it was a forced move; any novelties wouldn't occur till later in the game.

Was Pepijn no longer looking forward to the next move? Jacobson still

could see the joy in the mouse-face when he had agreed to the correspondence game. Suddenly he had the feeling that Pepijn had taken this much time between moves all along. He took out his calendar to check. The simul at Wilhelmus had been on October 28. It was now December 15 – a month and a half for seven opening moves! Every one of which had been in the paper.

Good grief.

He himself had always mailed his move on the next day at the latest; Pepijn had done all the dawdling. Why? Did it have something to do with the fact that Pepijn had no address but only a post office box number? Was there some reason it took a long time for him to receive Jacobson's moves?

Or was Jacobson falling into the trap that threatened every master who agreed to play a correspondence game against an amateur? The thought had been with him all along. Frequently, the amateur had assistance, strong assistance. Before you knew it, you were playing against an entire club. At that point you had on the one hand a master who really didn't feel like playing the game, and on the other some good amateurs who did nothing but analyze the position. Jacobson wouldn't be the first to lose such a game; world champions had gone before him.

Was Pepijn making him play against the Wilhelmus chess club? Webster had said that there was no more chess club at the school. Against a regular chess club? Was Pepijn getting advice from a strong chess player he knew? By mail perhaps, which could be why it took so long? And what did the Brisbane Bombshell have to do with this – was Pepijn connected with chess players who knew a refutation and was that why he was following Feoktistov?

But whatever the reason, a twelve-year-old boy who was allowed to play a correspondence game against a real master was definitely expected to show some enthusiasm for that game.

Jacobson took a postcard and wrote: *De Jong - Jacobson: 0-1 (overstepped time).*

He cut the unused stamp off the self-addressed envelope, threw away all Pepijn's drawings and forms that he still had, and mailed his postcard.

He forgot about the correspondence game.

Peltz was a candidate for Sportsman of the Year. Enjoying the prospect of feeling embarrassed when watching as prosaic a man as Peltz appearing at something as pseudo-festive as the Sportsman of the Year show, Jacobson turned his TV on. But Peltz didn't come; he was absent due to "personal circumstances." He was chosen just the same, and now the show host announced the scoop that Peltz was to have contributed: the city of Amsterdam was a candidate for the organization of the Neishtadt-Peltz world chess championship match.

Nine defensive sacrifices on one and the same square was something that had never been achieved before, so what did it matter if the city was full of sounds, and of people carrying bottles of wine on their way to one another's places. But whenever the Bottomless Pit was finished, there was always a dual solution too, and if Jacobson eliminated that, the mate would be gone or it could be done in three moves instead of nineteen. It was as if he was trying to write a perfect detective story and suddenly noticed that the second chapter was about irrigation projects in Ethiopia. If he scratched that, all the women in the story would be called Rodrigo, and if he gave them their own names back, then the corpse would be alive on the odd pages.

It was driving him crazy. And finally, Jacobson didn't care anymore whether the Bottomless Pit would be beautiful, or whether it would be appreciated; now it was only his will to create the Bottomless Pit, against the Bottomless Pit's will not to be created at all.

Peltz came in fourth in a tournament in Spain, two points behind Feoktistov, and also behind Katsnelson, a seventeen-year-old Latvian, and his own second Loyd. The interesting thing was that with Black he had not played the Sicilian, as if he wanted to avoid the question whether he still dared play the Bombshell.

Jacobson looked at Peltz's games with a certain irritation. Frequently, players had a style that was the opposite of their character: the dull ones would play wild, the wild ones dull. Peltz was dull and played dull. All

his games went to the park or to the beach; there was never an emergency landing in the Azores. It made you wonder if he was aware of the irony that he had achieved his greatest success with something as uncharacteristic of him as the Brisbane Bombshell.

Was it because he momentarily couldn't think at all anymore? – sitting in the chair at the dentist, Jacobson suddenly saw how the Bottomless Pit had to be constructed. He knew that it would still take an enormous amount of work, but from now on that would go automatically. Just like the Bottomless Pit would be a machine that produced a mate in nineteen moves, so he would be a machine that would at one point have produced the Bottomless Pit.

One evening he shifted a knight – and there it was: the Bottomless Pit. It existed, it lived, it worked. In awe, and with a lump in his throat, Jacobson stamped the umpteenth diagram, the last one. One day, a chess researcher would find that diagram among his papers, and it was for him that he wrote underneath: *Mate in 19; "The Bottomless Pit," Daniel Jacobson*, hour, date, year. He got up from his table, walked over to the window and, although he didn't like talking out loud when he was alone, he said it: "The Bottomless Pit is finished."

Now he wasn't any longer the creator of the Bottomless Pit, but the first person to actually see it. Pawn, pawn, pawn, knight, knight, rook, rook, queen, bishop ... mate! Again and again: firework ignition, clockwork precision.

The next morning, on the tram he took to go see Nardus, who had agreed this one time to be shown the Bottomless Pit, Jacobson suddenly had a horrifying thought: what if Black on his eleventh move didn't play rook to e4 but rook to e3?

He felt sick.

Nardus was unable to help him: after rook e3 there quite simply was no mate.

He was going to have to start from scratch.

"Come on, let's play blitz," said Nardus.

Almost two months after he had declared himself the winner, Jacobson received another letter from Pepijn de Jong.

Dear Mr. Jacobson:
I have to apologize for keeping you waiting such a long time in between moves. But I have to go to the hospital from time to time, and then I'm unable to answer you. In fact, I have just spent another month in the hospital, otherwise would have wanted to write to you sooner. I really hope you will continue playing me. In case you do, I'm sending you my next move: 9.c4xd5
I'm really hoping the game can go on.
Pepijn de Jong

It was an altogether different letter from the ones before, an impersonal computer printout without return envelope or drawings. What was it again that he had written? *Overstepped time* – Jacobson wanted the ground to open and swallow him up. Pepijn, in the hospital with tubes coming out of his nose, his head one great white bandage, had been told that IM Jacobson was no longer playing. He had been so happy with that game; chess was his only pleasure in life.

Jacobson wrote back immediately. He apologized, expressed his hope that Pepijn would be spared further hospital visits, and made his countermove.

This time Pepijn's reply came within two days, and after that the game continued at a normal pace. Just like Feoktistov had done in Brisbane, Pepijn disregarded the drawing line; he continued on the path that had led to White's demise. He had to have an improvement, or think he had one. It was now four months after Brisbane, and still no one had published a refutation of the Bombshell. And yet, there almost had to be one – "Anyone still playing 8...d5 is naïve," a French magazine had written. No one had dared to do it.

The overstepping of the time had left its mark. Jacobson was no longer IM Jacobson, but Mr. Jacobson. The post office box had been replaced by an ordinary address. There were no longer any surprise gifts or return envelopes. Every time, Jacobson received the same spare computer printout with the game's notation and the new move added and

underlined.

He had murdered Pepijn's spontaneity.

The Neishtadt-Peltz match was awarded to Amsterdam. At a press conference, Peltz made a brief speech that, Jacobson decided after hearing three words, might just as well have been given by the third secretary of the chess federation. Not a word about the mincemeat Neishtadt would be made of – propaganda for the game of chess. Jacobson knew once and for all that it wasn't jealousy that made him hope Japie Peltz would not become world champion. Chess was too regal for the boy from the pet shop.

On his twelfth move, Pepijn played bishop e3. Feoktistov had castled here – this was the long-awaited first move by Pepijn himself, his attempt at refutation.

The envelope still in his hand, Jacobson felt disappointed. Bishop e3 was a patzer move. He still remembered looking at it for a second at the time, probably like everyone else, but Black just exchanges on e3 and White has an ugly weakness.

So here it was. He almost felt cheated now that it was clear he had *not* been cheated. He had indeed been wasting his time on a schoolchild. The touching self-assurance of the boy: *he* wasn't going to be fooled. Stupid Feoktistov, Pepijn had thought, why doesn't he just play bishop e3?

Jacobson wrote his countermove on a postcard: pawn takes bishop. But something told him he had to watch out. For the first time in his game against Pepijn he set up the position on the board. If there was something hidden in the Brisbane Bombshell, it was well hidden. What he remembered about Pepijn from the simul was that he had studiously avoided positional errors like bishop e3. If he wasn't careful, a game Pepijn de Jong (12) vs. IM Jacobson might soon be publicized around the world, a game in which the naïve master had played the Brisbane Bombshell and been clobbered by a schoolboy who had found a sensational refutation.

And suddenly he saw it. If Black captured the bishop, White would not recapture, but would win the black knight with a *Zwischenschach*. And then all of Black's pugnacious pieces would suddenly be ten years older and he would simply be a pawn down.

How simple.

There it was, just like that, on the board at *his* place, the move that the world had been looking for. If Feoktistov had seen this, Peltz could have kissed his world championship match goodbye, and if it became public knowledge, the Brisbane Bombshell would go down in history not as a triumph of the imagination but rather as a holdup with a toy gun.

He took the bishop: there was nothing better.

For two days Jacobson kept hoping that Pepijn would recapture. In that case bishop e3 would be a fluke, and then Jacobson would reveal that move, together with the *Zwischenschach*, to the world – and *he* would be the one who had refuted the Brisbane Bomb.

Pepijn didn't recapture; he gave the *Zwischenschach*.

How could it be that the miracle move turned up in the game of a twelve-year-old boy who, as Jacobson had been able to see for himself, was not good at chess?

In the correspondence game Pepijn de Jong - IM Jacobson, Black was a pawn down without compensation.

The registration period for the World Composition Tournament expired without Jacobson having been able to correct the Bottomless Pit.

That was a defeat, of course, but he was now becoming more and more absorbed by his game against Pepijn. There was something very strange about that game. He thoroughly understood the position and set profound traps, but Pepijn wasn't falling into any of them and was holding on to his advantage. OK, it was correspondence chess; the normal differences in strength didn't count; diligence made up for the lack of insight – but would Pepijn be devoting even more time to the game than he did?

He was reminded of a classical chess story. He knew it from one of the

first chess books he had ever possessed and had retold it in one of his own.

Three chess masters are passengers on a ship: two younger masters and an older one. The old master is losing all the blitz games and is being laughed at. But, says he, that is because of the limited time. His insight is greater, and if only he had more time, that would show. Therefore he proposes a wager: in a simul against the two of them he will score at least one point. One game with White, and one with Black, *blindfold*.

He is laughed at even more loudly. A simul? And blindfold? What nonsense. The wager is accepted, and the young masters agree to sit in separate cabins so that they could not help each other. Ship stewards deliver the moves.

Of course the old master makes the two younger ones play against each other. No matter how it goes, he will score precisely one point and win the wager.

Jacobson had always thought it a weak story. Why did the young masters have to be in separate cabins? Only because for the sake of the story they shouldn't be able to see each other's positions. But they would discover that they had been playing against each other right after the games, so what did the old master gain by his deceit?

In blindfold chess it didn't make sense, but a correspondence game was perfect for something like this. The cabins were houses, the stewards mailmen, and in the middle sat, laughing, the old master: Pepijn.

Who *was* the unknown opponent? A suspicion, almost too wild to think out loud, occurred to Jacobson.

When he had put his nineteenth move into the mailbox, Jacobson sniffed the air: springtime. He was in an excellent mood; the move he had just mailed was his response to his mysterious opponent's missed opportunity to push his advantage to where it might become decisive – his first weak moment.

Jacobson decided to go for a walk. At the entrance to the zoo, he suddenly saw a girl whose face seemed familiar, and a second later he noticed next to her Jaap Peltz and another, younger girl. They were Bianca, Peltz's oldest daughter, and one of her sisters. That Bianca was by no means so ugly anymore, although still awkward-looking. She had to be about seventeen.

Peltz also noticed Jacobson.

"Hello, Daan," he said.

"Hey, hello, Jaap," said Jacobson.

They shook hands and became silent; they had never been relaxed in each other's company. The 1-0.

Jacobson shook hands with the girls too, and was about to be on his way, but Peltz also seemed to be affected by the spring air. "Are you free?" he said. "We're going to the zoo. Come on, join us."

A couple of times Jacobson saw heads turning toward Peltz. Once he had to sign his autograph, which he did hurriedly, with an apologetic gesture toward his daughters who weren't stopping.

At a kiosk, Jacobson, after asking Peltz's permission, treated the girls to ice cream. He and Peltz also had some. Suddenly the girls burst out in high-pitched laughter. Jacobson saw the reason: an elephant had an erection, and a slimy thread trailed down from his huge member. Jacobson felt greatly embarrassed having to see this in the company of a father and two young girls, and he expected Peltz to lead his daughters along in a hurry. But Peltz stuck around and joined in the laughter. He seemed more at ease, more approachable than ever. Had success actually changed him?

Peltz reminisced about Wilhelmus. They had been there together for only one year, and they hadn't had many of the same teachers. Suddenly Jacobson knew, with alarm, that he was going to say what he had kept inside, ready and phrased, for at least twenty years.

They got to the sea lions just as they were being fed. The animals were swimming by with tremendous tail strokes; Peltz let himself get splashed, laughing. Jacobson followed the sea lion who had done that and who now, willy nilly, played a role in the history of chess.

“Hey, Jaap,” he said. “We never have much contact.”

“No, that’s true.”

“I mean the two of us specifically. It seems sometimes we avoid looking at each other on purpose. That’s not necessary.”

“No, of course not,” said Peltz. He nodded, embarrassed; Jacobson realized that this conversation was just as difficult for him.

“It’s because of this one-zero. The game I won against you that time. It still stands between us.”

A smile appeared on Peltz’s face, and he nodded slowly. “Yes, maybe it’s time I did something about that,” he said.

“You want to know my fantasy?” Jacobson said, swept along by the unprecedented intimacy. “It’s your last game against Neishtadt, with the score still even, and you adjourn in a winning position, but he’s got a rambling rook. You know, that’s what I call this rook that keeps checking, and you can’t take it on account of stalemate. I have mapped that sort of thing out. And then you call me, and you win because I tell you how you can get rid of that rook.”

“This rambling rook doesn’t happen that often in practice,” said Peltz. “But if it gets to that point I’ll certainly take you up on your offer.”

They were sitting by the water, opposite a group of motionless flamingos. Peltz was telling an anecdote in which Bianca, one of his economics books, and a headstrong teacher played important roles, but Jacobson was only half listening.

In front of his eyes, a bishop was dancing on e3, surrounded by jubilant little exclamation marks.

“Hey, that last game of yours against Feoktistov,” he said when there was a lull in Peltz’s story. He had to swallow hard, and felt the eyes of the chess world upon him: no one else would get a chance to discuss the Brisbane Bombshell with Peltz this casually.

“Yeah, yeah,” said Peltz, laughing.

“What do you do if he plays 12. Be3?”

He saw a nervous glint in Peltz’s eyes, but he immediately regained his composure. Jacobson held his breath: he had touched something.

“Hey, Dad, you guys are not going to...,” said Bianca.

“I just take on e3,” said Peltz.

For a moment, Jacobson didn’t know what to say. Peltz’s answer was ludicrous. Even insulting: at the level where you “just took” on e3, bishop e3 was a patzer move.

“Queen a4 check,” said Jacobson, and his heart was pounding in his chest.

Peltz tried to remain serious, but couldn’t, and an awkward grin spread over his face.

“Jesus,” said Bianca, “In that case I think I’ll go pee.”

“*To the bathroom, sweetheart, you go right ahead.*”

“Pawn gee seventeen eighteen,” said Bianca, and then she really got up and walked away, followed by the younger sister.

Peltz looked straight at Jacobson. “I see,” he said, and he nodded. “Good move. Where did you get it?”

“I saw it.”

“How do you mean: saw it.”

Jacobson had it on the tip of his tongue to say that a twelve-year-old boy had played it against him in a correspondence game.

“We lowly creatures see something once in a while.”

“I thought you were only interested in chess problems these days.”

“Sometimes not.”

“Are you going to publish that?”

“Are you going to play that?”

Peltz shrugged his shoulders. He had already recovered. “They don’t play d5 anymore, do they? I guess it’ll show up in a correspondence game or something like that.”

They fell silent, looked at the silent flamingos. The girls returned, their faces ready to look bored as soon as their father started talking about chess again.

Peltz continued his story about the teacher, but precisely because he was doing his best to make the conversation seem as relaxed as before, you could sense that it was awkward now.

Bishop e3 had touched something.

On the way back Jacobson was besieged by breathtaking thoughts. So Peltz also knew the refutation to the Brisbane Bombshell. That in itself was not so amazing. It was natural that he had kept that knowledge to himself. But now a twelve-year-old boy and the challenger of the world champion were the only ones, as far as Jacobson was aware, who knew the secret of 12.Be3.

Did they know *each other*? Had Pepijn got bishop e3 from Peltz?

And now Jacobson saw something that he had always seen but that only now entered his mind. Pepijn’s name was Pepijn de Jong. Quinten’s name was Quinten de Jong. Both De Jong, both close to bishop e3. They even looked alike, if you knew.

Pepijn was the son of Peltz’s manager.

Shivers ran down Jacobson’s spine. *I guess it’ll show up in a correspondence game; maybe it’s time I did something about that 1-0...*

The mysterious opponent was Peltz. And Peltz knew he was playing against Jacobson; he had invited him along to the zoo to sound him out and see if he knew also.

He was using Pepijn to get even – he could not live with their 1-0.

After he got home, Jacobson looked it up. Agency Quinten de Jong had a post office box number he recognized: from Pepijn’s letters written before he had overstepped the time.

This must have been the scenario: Pepijn had started playing the correspondence game himself. Perhaps he had asked Peltz for advice one time, or else Quinten might have said something – in any case, Peltz had heard about the game and had seen his chance to get even with Jacobson. The long silence around the overstepped time must have related to that: Pepijn had resisted when they were taking his game away from him. But why had it taken two months before Peltz came up with the excuse of Pepijn’s hospital stay?

Jacobson checked old issues of his chess magazines. Right after the tournament in Spain Peltz had been on tour in Africa. He had returned on February 22nd.

It was late February when Jacobson had received Pepijn’s letter asking if he could please continue to play.

It was of course cheating on Peltz’s part to have wanted to get even in this manner, but Jacobson’s anger subsided quickly. This was actually very beautiful. It wasn’t only he who recognized in Peltz the central opponent in his life; Peltz also saw in *him* a father he had to defeat at least once.

For weeks on end Jacobson was on the verge of disaster, but he fought, supported by the feeling that holding on to the 1-0 would mean that, of the two of them, he was the true chess player. He analyzed down to the deepest depths, wrote pages and pages full of notes. Never before had he felt he understood a game this completely. And like a seriously ill patient who slowly recovers, his position improved. He took advantage of every small inaccuracy that even Peltz would commit, and as the summer went by he got counterplay, he didn’t have to lose anymore; a draw came within reach. Sometimes he had the feeling that *he* was the one who was cheating. Peltz had his family and the upcoming match against Neishtadt,

while Jacobson could devote himself completely to their game.

The Bottomless Pit was forgotten; at best he could now shrug his shoulders over the fact that he had misled himself for such a long time. That lofty struggle of the artist against his medium had been a pretext, a self-imposed exile for failed chess players. Scavenger hunts instead of voyages of discovery; the real chess was simply one-on-one, a street fight with an uncertain outcome.

And what if this titanic battle was a metaphor for his life? The opening was long past, and he had come out of it in a losing position. But he had arched his back, he had fought, and everything was possible once more.

He would not make the mistake of thinking there was still a future for him as a tournament player, but why not as a correspondence player? The normal differences in strength meant nothing there. Insight against diligence; so what if he represented diligence? Diligence sprang from love – that was precisely the beauty of it: in correspondence chess, one's love for the game was part of one's strength.

He wrote to the Correspondence Chess Federation for information about the proper channels one needed to follow to get a shot at the world championship.

Once in a while he thought: I'm crazy. It isn't Peltz at all. I'm putting all my soul into a game against a twelve-year-old boy.

In early September Pepijn announced he would be absent for two weeks. During those two weeks, Peltz held a brief training camp with his seconds in Tunisia.

On his arrival in Amsterdam Neishtadt declared that he thought Peltz was an interesting opponent and that it wouldn't surprise him if Semyon Katsnelson would be his next challenger.

Because of another inaccuracy by Peltz one week before the beginning of the match, Jacobson even got an edge. He wondered how things should go from there. Peltz's situation was already having an effect, and if Jacobson played on it might be taking advantage. Maybe Peltz would let his seconds continue the game. That would do it injustice; it had to remain a pure Peltz - Jacobson.

But winning was unimportant. To have battled Peltz under even conditions and to have held on to his 1-0 was enough. Jacobson decided he would make a gesture: he would offer a draw. In a way, a draw was more honorable than a victory; a lesser god simply didn't beat Peltz without creating the impression that Peltz hadn't really tried.

The opening ceremony of the match for the world championship between Neishtadt and Peltz took place in the *Muziektheater* in Amsterdam. Jacobson was one of only a few people to attend wearing black tie. He could understand the way he was being looked at; he wouldn't have done it if he had not planned his own ceremony there as well.

There was a ballet for sixteen dancers dressed in white and sixteen in black; a choir sang a chess song composed for the occasion. Jacobson kept a steady focus on Peltz, right next to Neishtadt in the front row. So this was where life had taken Japie Peltz, who had blundered a queen against him. Now, the prime minister, the Russian ambassador, and the Queen had gathered to celebrate the coincidence that there were a few connections in his brain that facilitated chess insight. None of them had any idea that that same brain held a raging obsession with a blown chess game for a school championship.

Jacobson felt pleasantly sentimental now that the last minutes of the last, decisive game between Peltz and himself were ticking by. It almost seemed that those dancers and singers were performing for no one but Peltz and himself. What a splendid décor for the big moment! Peltz would accept that the score between them would forever be 1-0 for Jacobson, and at the same time *he* would accept that the chess spirit had made the error of choosing Japie Peltz.

Peltz won the draw and chose White for the first game.

In a space roped off with braided cords there was a reception for dignitaries, chess officials, and other special guests. Jacobson observed, from his side of the cord, the Queen being introduced to Neishtadt and his entourage. A moment later she was standing among a group of people that included Peltz and his wife and children. Once she burst into laughter;

perhaps one of the girls had said she thought chess was just a bore.

It was only after the Queen had left the reception that Jacobson was able to get Peltz's attention.

They stood facing each other, separated by the cord. Jacobson held out his hand, and Peltz, looking a bit surprised, shook it.

"I'm offering a draw," said Jacobson.

"A draw? What do you mean?"

"I don't think it is reasonable to play on." He had to restrain himself to keep from saying: my position is better.

"What are you talking about?"

"Our game."

Peltz looked at him glassy-eyed.

"Our game? What game?"

"Our correspondence game. I know that you are Pepijn. I already sensed it before bishop e3, but I didn't dare believe it at the time. You became Pepijn in February." But the way Peltz was looking at him made the words harder and harder to get out.

"Pepijn who?"

"Pepijn de Jong."

Peltz backed away. He shook his head and looked at Jacobson as if he was afraid of him. There was a moment of silence.

"I can play queen c6 now," said Jacobson. "I'm better then. But I'm offering a draw."

"There is some mistake here," said Peltz. He hesitated, wanted to say something else, but then turned on his heels and walked away.

Jacobson stood by the cord, looking in his direction. A couple of times, Peltz looked back as if to see if Jacobson was still there, but as soon as he saw him he looked away.

At the agency of Quinten de Jong, he got the answering machine. Jacobson called ten, twenty times, but each time the same lifeless voice answered. On his chess board, with the position after 51...Qc6, the pieces stood around as if there were no chess rules anymore. He couldn't bear being in the house, went out, paced up and down the street, got an idea, ran back to his telephone.

Webster asked if Peltz was going to be world champion.

"There is something I want to know about a student," said Jacobson.

"That all depends, it may be none of your business."

"Pepijn de Jong. He plays chess. He played in the simul that time."

Even as he was talking he could hear Webster get very quiet.

"Pepijn de Jong?"

"Yes."

"How close are you to the boy?"

"Not especially."

"Better grab a hold, all the same. He's dead."

"Dead? That's impossible."

"I was at the funeral," said Webster. "Really awful."

Pepijn had died almost a year ago, on December 8. Just after Saint Nicholas Day; just after the marzipan chess board that had been his last move before the "overstepped time." *Overstepped time* – how must that have struck the parents? The stamped self-addressed envelopes, the

drawings had ceased to come because Pepijn was dead. Someone else had continued to play for him. But not Peltz.

Jacobson again called Quinten de Jong, and this time he left a message.

A few minutes later he got a call back.

Paintings covered the walls, but all Jacobson could look at was a large framed photograph of Pepijn, laughing, with a pawn in his arms at a giant chess game in a park.

“Two weeks before his death,” said Quinten. “At that time we also took those Polaroids for you.” *He* had continued the correspondence game, and now he apologized. “I’ve gone too far. But that way he was still a little bit alive. That’s why I did it.”

Pepijn had had leukemia; he always knew he would not live to see twenty. He had been in seventh heaven with his correspondence game against Jacobson, but during that same period his condition had rapidly deteriorated; during the last weeks he had been in and out of the hospital.

Some time after his death, as he returned from a trip with Peltz to Spain and Africa, Quinten had thought of continuing the game for Pepijn. He had seen bishop e3 once when Peltz was analyzing with Fajman. Quinten had never asked Peltz for advice because he didn’t want him to notice that he had filched bishop e3, but especially because he wanted to play for Pepijn all by himself.

“But sometimes I almost forgot him,” said Quinten. “I’ve spent entire days analyzing the game, I’ve passed up work for it. It really was an exciting game, didn’t you think?” Jacobson nodded.

“At times Jaap would ask me what was the matter with me that I was spending the whole day staring at a pocket chess set. Said he couldn’t use a manager who wasted his time on chess. I’m well aware you guys think I’m a ridiculous patzer. But now I have shown you something. And against a master like you!”

“You’re a pretty decent player,” said Jacobson.

“I could never have done it in a regular game, but in a correspondence game things are different. Of course I started with an advantage, because of bishop e3. I had good chances, but now I think it’s a draw. I’m offering a draw.”

What’s he talking about, thought Jacobson. He really is a patzer. He doesn’t even see how bad his position is.

But he felt that in this particular case it would be inappropriate to refuse a draw. What the heck. He shook Quinten’s extended hand: draw.

Quinten made a funny noise and disappeared from the room for at least five minutes.

“I have taken advantage of you,” said Quinten. “After all, you’re a professional. I figure you normally charge a fee for correspondence games against amateurs. What do I owe you?”

Jacobson made a quick calculation. If he wanted to get paid for what he had really put into this he could easily ask a hundred guilders a move.

The game had lasted fifty-one moves, but the premature draw had cost him a few moves. Fifty-one times fifteen... what if he were bold and asked for fifteen hundred?

Once again he glanced at the photograph of Pepijn holding the pawn in his arms; a little kid he had thought to use for an errand boy. Pepijn was not a name you should have to die with when you are twelve.

“Would two thousand guilders be OK?” asked Quinten.

Jacobson shook his head. “It was nothing, really,” he said.

“Thank you,” said Quinten. “That’s quite a gesture.”

They analyzed their game until early morning. Jacobson felt funny seeing the pieces of *his* game in the hands of this odd customer of a ballet dancer. But Quinten wasn’t one of those annoying players who only want to prove they were better all along, and he treated Jacobson with the

respect he deserved as a chess master. He deferred to his judgment, and when shown some of the brilliancies Jacobson had seen, he said: "Wow, that's beautiful!" Of course, over the board he couldn't forever hide the fact that he was after all an amateur, a beginner, a patzer. But that made only more admirable how resilient he had been, how much he had seen for Pepijn.

For a patzer, Quinten had turned in a top performance.

Jacobson had fled the commotion of the press room and was sitting in the dark hall peering at the stage where Peltz and Neishtadt were playing their first game in the match for the world championship.

For Neishtadt, it was pretty near the hundredth time, but Peltz, no matter that he was sitting on that podium for the very first time, remained Peltz, insignificant and unmoved, someone who didn't quite know how to deal with being the vessel into which had been poured such a strange thing as chess talent. Playing chess was just something he found he could do, the way someone else finds a pot of gold in his back yard.

Maybe Japie Peltz would actually become world champion.

Jacobson's thoughts wandered to his game against Quinten. He had been crazy to accept a draw. He had had another look at it: after queen c6 Black was practically winning. It also irritated him that he had refused those two thousand guilders. An uncalled-for gesture – Quinten paid his psychiatrist too, didn't he?

He should still try to get that money; after all, he was a professional chess player.

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