



BOOK REVIEWS

Ying & Yang

Ira Lee Riddle

The Tao of Chess by Peter Kurzdorfer, 2004 Adams Media, Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 242pp., \$9.95

Every Move Must Have a Purpose by Bruce Pandolfini, 2003 Hyperion, Hardcover, 115pp., \$17.95

The Tao

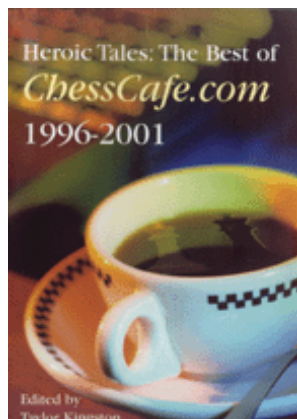
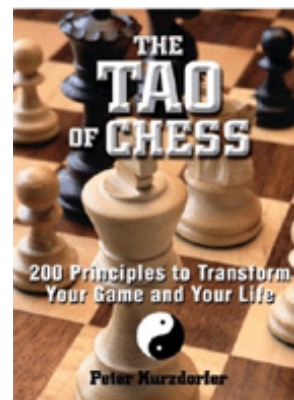
Taoism is a philosophy, a religion, and also an age-old basis for medical treatment. It considers everything (and everyone) to be part of the "whole." One translation asserts that "tao" means "Behavior, understanding," and the constant transition between the two. (As in chess, the player is constantly changing between offense and defense, between strategy and tactics, etc.)

Tao De Jin was published around 260 B.C. and includes, among other parts, (a) how to behave in society (and why to behave in that manner in society); (b) desiring too much is the cause of problems in society (don't grab pawns indiscriminately); (c) the start of becoming successful is overcoming selfishness; (d) allow nature to take its course, and do not interfere; (e) one's will cannot change the world; (f) violence upon others will be returned the same; and (g) a wise one does not distinguish between Self and the World. These ideas are, of course, not exclusive to Tao. Reading them, one hears echoes of the parables of Jesus ("do unto others ...") and parts of both the Old and New Testaments.

Scholars think that the Old Testament was written down around 800-600 B.C., so it is entirely possible that Tao was influenced by some of our Western beliefs. Alexander the Great conquered parts of Asia, so some cultural transferences may have occurred.

The Tao of Chess attempts to meld many of the ideas of Tao with the principles involved in playing chess. The text has two parts, Technical Matters (Chapters 1-22) and Human Matters (Chapters 23-42). Spread throughout are 200 Principles of chess. Actually, there are only 196 of them as two are direct repeats of others and two are rewordings of others.

Each chapter begins with a quote, often not directly chessic in nature. Then, several principles are listed, along with examples drawn from games, many of which are from Kurzdorfer's history.



Chapter 16, for example, is titled "Calculation." Einstein's well-known quote, "Genius is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration." starts off this chapter. Then come the Principles. Principle 76: "Look through the pieces' eyes" tells the reader to let the pieces tell you where they want to go. (This reminds me of so many authors' interviews in which the claim is made that the author never knows how the story will develop as it is being written.)

Principle 77: "Play Blindfold Chess every chance you get." is one of the repeats, this time later on being listed also as Principle 121. Kurzdorfer feels this is important because all players need more practice in following the games in their heads. Unfortunately for the beginner, this philosophy is followed in the book, as diagrams come less frequently than I thought they should have.

Principle 78: "Concentrate on forcing moves," teaches the reader that when doing so, complicated series of moves may be simplified and easier to calculate. By using forcing moves, there are fewer alternative responses to calculate.

Principle 79: "Never miss a chance to attempt to solve any position you come across," says to the reader that practice is always good. ("Practice, practice, practice!") Doing so will build up good habits in your play.

Principle 80: "Decide on your candidate moves and look at each of them in turn," is attributed to Kotov's *Think Like a Grandmaster*. After listing mentally what you can do, look at each one in turn, prioritizing them in order of importance.

At the end of each chapter is a general statement, a bit of chess philosophy; this may be where The Tao of chess is being explored.

On one level, this book is a great compilation of chess sayings and "rules." (Even the price is very reasonable.) It seems aimed at the newer or less-experienced players; experienced ones will already have incorporated these ideas into their chess gestalt. However, I have problems with this approach: (1) Too many of the "Principles" are of the type, "Do this," followed, of course, by the caveat, "unless it is correct to do the opposite." How does the beginner player know when it is okay to disobey the Principle? (2) A relatively inexperienced player, or a lower-rated one, usually cannot keep playing moves in their head beyond 2 or 3 moves. Thus, I think the diagrams should come every 2-3 moves, not sometimes 6-7 moves after the first move being looked at. (3) I noticed that the majority of games seems to involve Kurzdorfer playing, usually winning. Some times, I was curious how a position eventually played out, but no mention was given of the final outcome. (4) Kurzdorfer assumes that the reader can understand what is happening in the diagram too many times. When playing through the games in my head, I sometimes could not figure out why another move was not made. A short mention, such as "moving Nf4 exposes the King to discovered check" would have saved some angst on my part. I did find one typo, where Black's move was listed as White's move instead. (5) A list of Principles would have been nice. While reading through the book, I was often reminded of something previously seen, and needed to leaf through a lot of pages to find it and look at it again. An index would have helped as well.

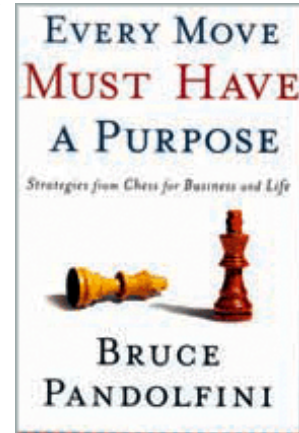
As I read this book, I was constantly reminded of David Carradine's "Kung Fu," in which I was the Grasshopper trying to gain knowledge and Kurzdorfer was the old (well, in this case, elder) knowledgeable guru

dispensing snippets of knowledge that sound deep.

There is little tying together of chess knowledge and philosophies of life. (I wondered for awhile if Kurzdorfer was putting me on with his title and laughing a good bit.)

The Principles are very good ones and, just for having them together in one place, this book is worthwhile. If you want philosophy, this book is not for you.

On the other hand, Pandolfini's *Every Move Must Have a Purpose: Strategies from Chess for Business and Life* does provide a lot of philosophy. This book is also available on a 2-CD audio edition (Listen and Live Audio, Inc.; PO Box 817; Roseland NJ 07068; \$19.95) read by Pandolfini, who has a very pleasant voice for this.



The book is divided into 15 sections or "topics" as follows: (1) Play the Board, not the Player; (2) Don't Ignore a Good Hunch; (3) Play with a Plan; (4) Look at Your Opponents' Moves; (5) Don't Waste Material; (6) Seize the Initiative; (7) Play For the Center; (8) Develop the Pieces; (9) Don't Overextend; (10) Convert Weaknesses into Strengths; (11) Learn from Your Mistakes; (12) Don't Sacrifice Without Good Reason; (13) Seek Small Advantages; (14) Don't Apply Principles Mechanically; (15) Strive for More than you Need.

Each section begins with a chess point, followed by examples of chess situations that extend the point; connections are then made to business situation, and a "rule" ends the section.

No games or positions are analyzed. In fact, there are no diagrams to study! (This led me to wonder which concept came first: the written or the spoken book.)

Is this truly a chess book? On one hand, yes; on the other, no. (Boy, isn't that a good case of duality? Or maybe waffling?) If you pick this book up to learn how to make better moves, you will be very disappointed. But, if you pick it up to learn how to better play chess, you will learn a tremendously good bit of chess philosophy and theory.

Section 13: "Seek Small Advantages" has this chess point: "Every chance to gain the smallest superiority should be considered." Pandolfini invokes Steinitz's claim that one should accumulate advantages, and they will snowball. Tao might suggest as we have heard many time, "A thousand-mile journey begins with the first step." Then, there is also Kurzdorfer's Principle 28: An extra pawn is worth a little trouble. Additionally, Principle 105: Build up small advantages when a combination is not available. As you can see, both authors are saying almost the same thing, just in different perspectives.

Pandolfini points out that "big moves, one that pose blatantly direct threats, don't usually lead to checkmate. They're too easy to spot and correspondingly easier to parry."

To connect this to business, Pandolfini quotes Peter Lynch, "Long shots almost never pay off." (The *Wall Street Journal* called Lynch one of the

greatest investors of all time.) Dell CEO Michael Dell wrote, "Swing for hits, not home runs." Baseball statisticians point out that teams which depend on the long ball rarely win it all, while "small-ball" teams go far on defense and lots of little hits.

Kurzdorfer and Pandolfini say many things in common. Kurzdorfer's book is aimed at chess players; Pandolfini's is perhaps aimed more at business people, and, I feel, should become required reading for any business majors in college. Both are worth reading, but for very different reasons.

Order *Every Move Must Have a Purpose*
by Bruce Pandolfini

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