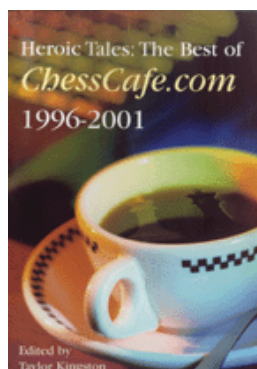




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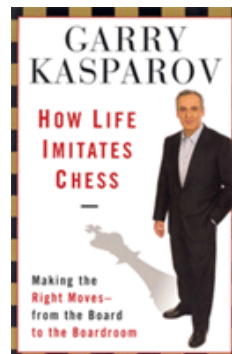
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Question Success

Steve Goldberg

How Life Imitates Chess, by Garry Kasparov, 2007 Bloomsbury Publishing, Hardcover, 225pp., \$25.95

Garry Kasparov's new book, *How Life Imitates Chess*, is part autobiographical and part textbook of life lessons. It is similar to Josh Waitzkin's [The Art of Learning](#) (reviewed [here](#)) in that both books utilize the author's hard-won experiences at the chessboard and applies them to an entirely new endeavor. Waitzkin left chess for the martial arts and Kasparov left chess for politics. *How Life Imitates Chess* is the story of Kasparov's decision-making method.



Kasparov's political fortunes remain to be seen; however, he is putting his very life on the line in his attempt to reform the Russian political landscape. Yet readers of *How Life Imitates Chess* will not find a detailed manifesto of Kasparov's political positions or deep insight into the machinations that went into piecing together his coalition of disparate opposition groups. Nor is it a simple step-by-step guide to achieving greatness. "This isn't a cookbook," Kasparov says, "and I'm not offering a recipe for your success." Rather, "Everyone must create his own successful combinations with the ingredients he has. There are guidelines for what works, but each person has to discover what works for him."

Indeed, that is what Kasparov does in this book – he looks back to discover what has worked for him and continues to apply these lessons in his new life. "This would be a very different book had I completed it before my dramatic career shift from chess to politics," Kasparov states. "I needed time to absorb the lessons that my life in chess had taught me."

The table of contents provides a small measure of what to expect in the book:

- Opening Gambit (the introduction)
- Part I
- Ch. 1: The Lesson
- Ch. 2: Strategy
- Ch. 3: Strategy and Tactics at Work
- Ch. 4: Calculation
- Ch. 5: Talent
- Ch. 6: Preparation
- Part II
- Ch. 7: MTQ: Material, Time, Quality
- Ch. 8: Exchanges and Imbalances
- Ch. 9: Phases of the Game
- Ch. 10: The Attacker's Advantage
- Part III
- Ch. 11: Question Success
- Ch. 12: The Inner Game
- Ch. 13: Man vs. Machine
- Ch. 14: Intuition
- Ch. 15: Crisis Point
- Endgame
- Epilogue
- Glossary
- Acknowledgments
- Index

Throughout the book Kasparov provides fascinating glimpses into segments of his career or those of others, in or out of the chess world. Interspersed between these historical reviews, the reader will find real-life applications of the skills at hand. For example, Kasparov explains that "An imbalance is any lack of symmetry that can be exploited to one's advantage...A game may appear to be deadlocked, but when you play like a master and diligently consider all three MTQ [material, time, quality] factors, imbalances always exist."

He then reviews how he misjudged the imbalances in a case combining both chess and politics:

In 1993, I committed the dreadful mistake of launching an attack from a position of weakness. This wasn't at the chessboard, however, but in chess politics. Ever since the international chess federation, FIDE, had interrupted my first world championship match in 1985, I had feuded with their leadership almost without pause. In the run-up to my 1993 world championship match with Nigel Short, the Englishman called me with a tempting offer: to launch our own Professional Chess Association and play the match outside of FIDE. Here at last was a chance to break away from the corrupt bureaucracy and introduce chess into the world of modern sport.

Short was the first Western challenger for the world title since Bobby Fischer in 1972. With his involvement I thought we could generate tremendous interest and rally the world's grandmasters against FIDE. Just a few years before, I had created another professional players' union, but it had foundered when the Western GMs formed an opposition bloc. Suddenly here was Nigel, the last president of the Grandmaster Association, offering to join forces. Now, I thought, we could really unite the chess world. This turned out to be a terrible blunder, the worst of my career. After we made the announcement, it quickly became apparent that I had misjudged the situation. Short had no such support. I had overextended. Suddenly we were on our own and were immediately portrayed as 'renegades' and 'hijackers of the world championship.' FIDE essentially excommunicated both of us and held an alternative world championship match parallel to the one Short and I played in London. Thus began a schism in the chess world that has never properly healed. I was so eager to achieve my goal that I was oblivious to how unlikely the plan was to succeed. I failed to correctly evaluate my position and in so doing ignored several fatal imbalances.

Much of the advice Kasparov offers is of the rather common sense variety:

- "Make good decisions and you'll succeed; make bad ones and you'll fail."
- "Develop your talents, improve your skills, and seek out and conquer the challenges that will push you to the highest level. And to do all this we first need a plan."

Of course, sometimes simple common sense is what we need the most. "If you play without long-term goals," Kasparov admonishes, "your decisions will become purely reactive and you'll be playing your opponent's game, not your own. As you jump from one new thing to the next, you will be pulled off course, caught up in what's right in front of you instead of what you need to achieve."

There are times the book seems a bit repetitive, but then interesting insights appear. Chapter 11, "Question Success," is perhaps the most important section of the book. It is aptly subtitled "Success is the Enemy of Future Success."

Kasparov explains: "One of the most dangerous enemies you can face is complacency. ... Satisfaction can lead to a lack of vigilance, then to mistakes and missed opportunities. Success and satisfaction may be our goals, but they can also lead to bad habits that will impede greater success and satisfaction."

And there's more. "Winning creates the illusion that everything is fine. ... Question the status quo at all times, *especially* when things are going well. When something goes wrong, you naturally want to do it better the next time, but you must train yourself to want to do it better *even when things go right.*" He later adds, "The moment you believe you are entitled to something is exactly when you are ripe to lose it to someone who is fighting harder."

Kasparov skyrocketed to the world championship title at the age of twenty-two and remained at the top of his game for nearly two decades. This was only possible by completely internalizing this philosophy of always questioning, always pushing, and not being afraid to move out of his comfort zone. These are the methods of his success and can be the methods of our success as well, in chess and in life.

The chess player reading *How Life Imitates Chess* will enjoy Kasparov's analysis of his classic battles with Karpov, his surprising loss to Kramnik in the 2000 World Championship match, and his discussions of Botvinnik, Tal, Bronstein, Kortchnoi, Spassky, the Polgar sisters, Deep Blue and myriad other past and present players. The historian will appreciate Kasparov's look at both well-known and lesser-known military battles, those steeped in literary studies will enjoy the many pithy quotes from Goethe, Wolfe and others, and the businessman will appreciate the brief case studies in the book.

Near the end of the book, Kasparov writes, "The next part of my life will contain many new challenges. I have new goals, new people in my life, and I have left behind the only vocation I have ever known. And yet as foreign as this new course seemed at first, my life in chess has left me well prepared." In the end, chess is just a game. But if we can internalize its lessons, life can indeed imitate chess. Just watch out for those poisoned pawns.

Order *How Life Imitates Chess*
by Garry Kasparov

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