



Thompson's Hippopotamus

by Alessandro Nizzola

“It has almost ruined chess”

Bobby F.

SKITTLES
ROOM



Quotes:

- “A come and get me approach.” Mistakenly attributed to Hugh Myers
- "The most persistent devotee of this opening, J.C. Thompson, was noted for wearing boots and no socks." *The Complete Chess Addict*
- “Mr. Thompson may be the only man who has invented a completely new opening for a century or more!” W. Evans
- “He ought to be psycho-analysed!” H. Golombek



White to Play & Win... With 1.e4

The American Master Weaver W. Adams, during a lifetime of chess playing and writing, was absolutely certain that 1.e4 was a winning move for White, if followed by the Bishop's Game or by the Vienna Opening and by perfect play by White, as he tried to demonstrate in his famous and controversial book *White to Play and Win*. Don't get me wrong, Adams wasn't always 100% successful in his efforts to demonstrate his pull-no-punches theories, but we have to admit that games such as the following one of Adams' seemed to confirm his bold views:

Adams, W - McCormick, E Ventnor City, 1947

**1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.Bc4 c6 4.d4 Bb4 5.dxe5 Nxe4 6.Qd4 d5
7.exd6 0-0 8.Bf4 Re8 9.Nge2 Bc5**



**10.Bxf7+ Kf8 11.Qc4 b5 12.Qb3
Bxf2+ 13.Kf1 Nc5 14.Qa3 Nba6
15.b4 Kxf7 16.Kxf2 Ne4+ 17.Nxe4
Rxe4 18.Qf3 Qe8 19.Be5+ 1-0**

Games like the following one, instead, seemed to remind us that perfect play is, at least in some cases, a very elusive concept for us poor mortals. Oh well.

Adams, W - Kramer, G USA-op Pittsburgh (5), 1946

**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 Bf5 4.Bd3 Bxd3 5.Qxd3 e6 6.Ne2 c5 7.c3
Ne7 8.Qb5+ Qd7**



9.Qxc5?? Nf5 0-1 (*Chess Review*, August-September 1946, page 19).

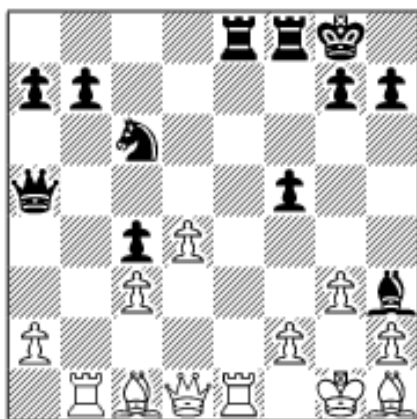
...Or With 1.d4 Maybe?

More recently, correspondence chess world champion 1965-68 Dr. Hans Berliner wrote a book, *The System*, in which he held that 1.d4 is the winning move instead of 1.e4, if followed by perfect play by the first player. Dr.

Berliner was seriously criticized by almost all reviewers of his book, but, as in Weaver Adams' case, games like the following brilliant achievement of Berliner's, seemed to show that Black is really hopeless against perfect 1.d4 play by White.

Berliner, H - Hunnex, G US Open Ch 1955

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.g3 c4 7.Bg2 Bb4 8.0-0 Bxc3 9.bxc3 Qa5 10.e4! dxe4 11.Ng5 Nf6 12.Nxe4 Nxe4 13.Bxe4 0-0 14.Rb1! Bh3 15.Re1 f5 16.Bh1! Rae8



17.Rxb7!! Qxc3 18.Bd2 Qxd4 19.Bxc6 c3 20.Bxe8 Qd5 21.Rxg7+!
1-0 *The System*, p.130

Yes, but... not all of Berliner's 1.d4 games were so smooth and easy victories, to be sure. The following Gruenfeld Defence is a good example that Black can "do something" vs. 1.d4 as well.

Berliner, H - Seidman, H USA 1954

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 Nxc3 6.bxc3 Bg7 7.Bc4 0-0 8.Ne2 b6 9.Be3 Ba6 10.Bxa6 Nxa6 11.h4 Qd7 12.h5 Rfd8 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.Qc1 e5 15.Bh6 Bf6 16.f4 exd4 17.e5 d3 18.exf6



**18...Qg4 19.Qe3 Qxg2 20.Rg1 Qh2
21.0-0-0 dxe2 22.Rde1 Nc5 23.Bg7
Nd3+ 24.Kb1 Nxe1 25.Rxg6 Rd1+
26.Kb2 Nd3+ 27.Ka3 e1Q 0-1**

The Hippopotamus Immortal

Indeed, both of them, Adams and Berliner, were very far from the Truth, and the only thing we can say on their behalf is that they were sincerely wrong. After a lifetime of intense, serious chess playing, researching and studying, I finally

discovered the following illuminating game, which substantiated clearly enough the worst suspicions which I always had - and always tried to deny in the back of my subconscious mind - i.e., that the game of chess is a forced win for White, if he only plays a very simple sequence of moves, based on pushing all the pawns one square, one after the other, so that they'll find themselves on the third rank, creating an unbreakable fortress. Thus we'll obtain the system called the "Hippopotamus" formation. Against this opening, there is simply no hope for poor, hopeless, defenseless Black. Here is one of the most important games in chess history, which should be studied carefully by every serious chess player.

Anderson, J – Amateur St Louis, 1929

**1.h3 g6 2.g3 Bg7 3.f3 Nf6 4.e3 0-0 5.d3 d5 6.c3 e5 7.b3 Nh5
8.Kf2 Qg5 9.Ne2 Bf5 10.a3**



**10...e4 11.f4 Qh6 12.g4 exd3 13.g5
dxe2 14.Bxe2 1-0 *The Gambit*,
August 1929, page 240.**



Let's admit it, folks, Black never had a chance to fight.

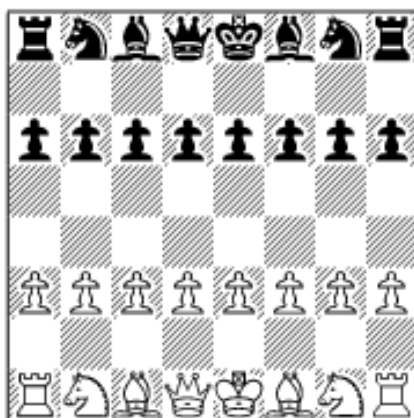
Just a Draw?

But perhaps, I thought, there is a way to draw against the invincible Hippo, i.e., with perfect play by Black too, and what would "perfect play" be, if not copying all of White's incredibly powerful moves, one by one? Please

study carefully the following example, which shows us that chess might be a draw after all.

Silva, J - Rafael, J Portuguese Junior Championship, 1978

1.a3 h6 2.b3 g6 3.c3 f6 4.d3 e6 5.e3 d6 6.f3 c6 7.g3 b6 8.h3 a6



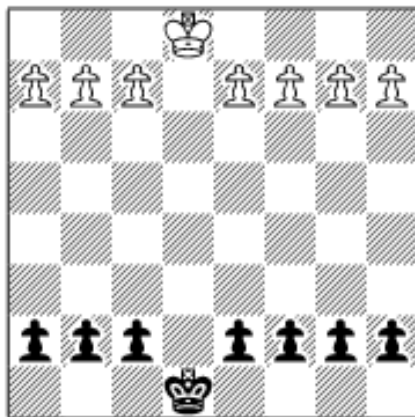
9.a4 b5 10.a5 b4 11.c4 d5 12.c5 d4 13.e4 f5 14.e5 f4 15.g4 h5 16.g5 h4 17.Nc3 dxc3 18.Ra3 bxa3 19.b4 Nf6 20.exf6 Rh6 21.gxh6 g5 22.b5 g4 23.b6 g3 24.d4 e5 25.Bb5 axb5 26.d5 Bg4 27.hxg4 e4 28.d6 e3



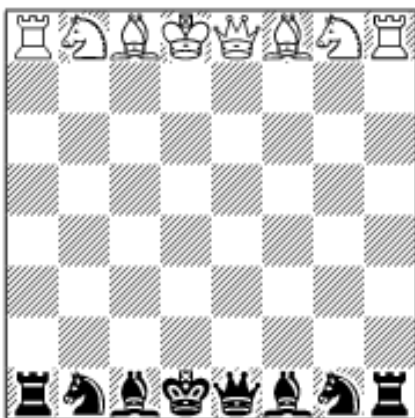
29.Qd5 cxd5 30.Ne2 d4 31.Nxd4 Be7 32.dxe7 Qxe7 33.Bb2



33...Qe4 34.fxe4 cxb2 35.a6 b4
 36.Nc2 b3 37.Ke2 bxc2 38.Rd1 Nd7
 39.g5 Rc8 40.g6 Rc7 41.bxc7 Nb6
 42.cxb6 a2 43.Rd7 Kxd7 44.Kd3
 Ke6 45.e5 Kf5 46.Kc4 Ke4 47.Kc5
 Kd3 48.Kd6 Kd2 49.Kd7 Kd1
 50.Kd8 f3 51.b7 g2 52.a7 h3 53.f7 h2
 54.g7 f2 55.h7 e2 56.e6 Kd2 57.e7
 Kd1



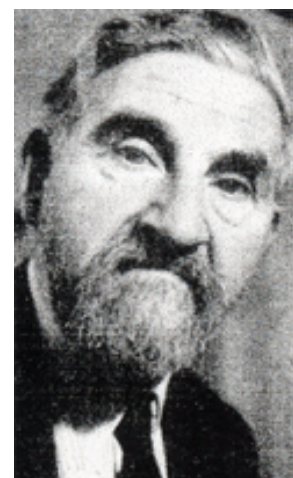
58.a8R h1R 59.b8N g1N 60.c8B f1B
 61.e8Q e1Q 62.f8B c1B 63.g8N b1N
 64.h8R a1R $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ *The Book of Chess Lists*, page 10.



No doubt this game is very near to chess perfection, and it should deserve a better place in chess history. What did you say? Pre-arranged?? Oh, no...

But Seriously...

I am grateful to chess historian Ken Whyld for providing me the following information. John Crittenden Thompson was born 24-1-1889 (location unknown) and died in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 22-7-1971. He was a civil servant. He was considered to be eccentric. In 1957 he wrote and self-published a short pamphlet, entitled *Hippopotamus Chess Opening*, in which he reported a few games



J.C. Thompson

which he had played with this strange system. Of course, not all of his efforts with the Hippo were successful, but he proved to be strong enough a player to defeat both Tolush and Janosevic during simultaneous exhibitions given by these masters. Here are all the games reported in that booklet, with some occasional light annotations from the great man himself.

Tolush - Thompson, J

Simultaneous

1.d4 g6 2.e4 Nh6 3.Nc3 f6 4.Bc4 Nf7 5.Nf3 Bg7 6.h4 h5 7.Qd3 d6 8.Be3 Nc6 9.0-0-0 Na5 10.Bxf7+ Kxf7 11.Nd2 Bd7 12.f4 Bg4 13.Nf3 Qd7 14.e5 d5 15.Rde1 Rhe8 16.Nd2 b6 17.Rhf1 Bf5 18.Qa6 c6 19.Ne2 Qc7 20.Ng3 Bc8 21.Qd3 f5 22.Nf3 Nc4 23.Ng5+ Kg8 24.e6 Nd6 25.Qe2 a5 26.Nxh5 Ba6 27.Qd1 Bxf1 28.Rxf1 Rf8 29.Ng3 Nc4 30.Bg1 Qd6 31.h5 Qb4 32.Qd3 Nxb2 33.Qf3 Nc4 34.Qd3 Nb2 35.Qb3 Nc4 36.Qd3 c5 37.hxg6 Qb2+ 38.Kd1 cxd4 39.Nxf5 Rxf5 40.Qxf5 Rf8 41.Nf7 Ne3+ 42.Bxe3 dxe3 43.Ke2 d4 44.Rh1 Qc3 45.Qd3 Qc6 46.Rg1 Qxe6 47.g4 Qxa2 48.f5 Rc8 49.Rc1 Qd5 50.Rg1 Rc3 51.Qa6 Rxc2+ 52.Kd1 Rd2+ 53.Ke1 Qc6 0-1

Thompson, J - Tartakower, S

Stevenson Memorial, 14.04.1955

1.Nh3 d5 2.g3 e5 3.f3 h5 4.Nf2 h4 5.g4 f5 6.h3 Bd6 7.d3 Be6 8.e3 Qe7 9.Be2 Nd7 10.c3 0-0-0 11.Qc2 Ngf6 12.a4 d4 13.e4 fxe4 14.fxe4 dxc3 15.bxc3 Nc5 16.Nd2 Nh7 17.d4 exd4 18.cxd4 Nd7 19.e5 Bb4 20.Nd3 Nb6 21.Nxb4 Qxb4 22.Bb2 Nd5 23.Qb3 Qxb3 24.Nxb3 Nf4 25.Nc5 Bd5 26.Rh2 Ng5 27.Ra3 Rdf8 28.Nd3 Nxe2 29.Rxe2 Nxh3 30.Nb4 Nf4 31.Nxd5 Nxd5 32.Bc1 Nf4 33.Rh2 g5 34.Re3 Kd7 35.Ba3 Re8 36.Kd2 Rh6 37.Bb2 Rb6 38.Kc2 Rb4 39.Ra3 Rb6 40.Rf3 Rc6+ 41.Kd2 Ke6 42.Kd1 Kd5 43.Kd2 Rc4 44.a5 Re6 45.Rc3 Rxd4+ 46.Kc2 c5 47.Re3 Rc4+ 48.Kb1 Kc6 49.Rd2 Ng6 50.Rd8 Rxg4 51.Rg8 Rg3 52.Bc1 Kb5 53.Rxg3 hxg3 54.Bxg5 g2 55.Be3 Rxe5 56.Rxg6 Rxe3 57.Rxg2 Kxa5 58.Rc2 Kb4 59.Ka2 c4 60.Rb2+ Rb3 61.Rf2 b5 62.Rf7 a5 63.Rf4 a4 64.Rg4 a3 65.Rf4 Rb2+ 66.Ka1 Rh2 67.Rf1 Ka4 68.Rc1 Re2 69.Kb1 Kb3 70.Ka1 c3 71.Kb1 c2+ 72.Ka1 Rd2 0-1

Thompson, J - Griffiths, R

Kent v Sussex, 01.1955

1.Nh3 d6 2.g3 g6 3.f3 Bg7 4.d3 Nf6 5.e4 e5 6.Nf2 Nc6 7.c3 0-0
8.Be2 Ne8 9.h4 h6 10.Be3 Ne7 11.Nd2 d5 12.Nf1 d4 13.Bd2 c5
14.g4 f5 15.Qc1 f4 16.Qc2 Be6 17.b3 Nc6 18.h5 dxc3 19.Qxc3
g5 20.Qxc5? Nd4 21.Bd1 b6 22.Qa3 Rf7 23.Rc1 Rc8 24.Qb2
Rfc7 25.Nh2 Bf8 26.0-0 Rxc1 27.Bxc1 Nd6 28.a4 a5 29.Bd2 Qc7
30.Re1 Nb7 31.Kh1 Bb4 32.Bxb4 axb4 33.Nf1 Qc3 34.Qd2 Nxb3
35.Bxb3 Bxb3 36.Qxc3 bxc3 37.Rc1 Rc5 38.Nd1 Bxd1 39.Rxd1
Na5 40.Rc1 Nb3 41.Rc2 Nd4 42.Rc1 c2 43.Nd2 Rc3 44.Kg2
Rxd3 45.Nc4 Nxf3 46.Nxb6 0-1

Green, A - Thompson, J

Stevenson Memorial

1.d4 g6 2.e4 f6 3.f4 Nh6 4.Bd3 Nf7 5.h4 d6 6.c4 c6 7.Nc3 Na6
8.Be3 Bd7 9.f5 Nb4 10.Bb1 Qc7 11.a3 Na6 12.b4 d5 13.cxd5
Qg3+ 14.Kd2 cxd5 15.Nge2 Qd6 16.Bd3 Nc7 17.g4 e5 18.Kc2 a6
19.Kb2 b5 20.Qb3 Bc6 21.Rhd1 gxf5 22.gxf5 Rg8 23.Rac1 a5
24.Nxd5 Bxd5 25.exd5 axb4 26.Rxc7 bxa3+ 27.Ka2 Qxc7
28.Bxb5+ Kd8 29.dxe5 Rb8 (29...Rg2 was better –
.C.Thompson) 30.Rc1 Qb7 31.Nd4 Rg2+ 32.Ka1 Rb2 33.Ne6+
Ke7 34.Qxa3+ Nd6 35.Qxd6+ Kf7 36.Nd8+ Kg8 37.Rg1+ 1-0

Thompson, J - Richards, W

Civil Service Champ., 29.02.1956

1.Nh3 d5 2.g3 e5 3.f3 f5 4.Nf2 Nf6 5.d3 Bc5 6.Bg2 c6 7.c3 Qb6
8.0-0 0-0 9.b4 Bd6 10.Kh1 Be6 11.Nd2 Nbd7 12.Nb3 Rae8 13.a4
Qc7 14.Nh3 Bf7 15.e3 Bh5 16.Qc2 e4 17.f4 exd3 18.Qxd3 Ne4
19.Nd4 h6 20.Nf2 Nb6 21.Bh3 Bg6 22.Nxe4 dxe4 23.Qc2 Qf7
24.g4 fxg4 25.Bxg4 Nd5 26.Rg1 Re7 27.Bh3 Bh5 28.Rg3 a6
29.Nf5 Qf6 30.Nxe7+ Bxe7 31.Bd2 Bf3+ 32.Bg2 Bxg2+ 33.Rxg2
Bxb4 34.Rag1 Bxc3 35.Rxg7+ Qxg7 36.Bxc3 1-0

Ragozin - Thompson, J

Simultaneous, 08.01.1956

1.d4 g6 2.c4 f6 3.Nc3 Nh6 4.Nf3 Nf7 5.Bf4 e6 6.e4 d6 7.Bd3 c6
8.0-0 Be7 9.Re1 Nd7 10.Qc2 Nf8 11.Rad1 Bd7 12.e5 f5 13.d5
cxd5 14.cxd5 g5? 15.dxe6 Nxe6 (Black's position is bad – J.C.
Thompson) 16.exd6 gxf4? 17.dxe7 Qxe7 18.Nd5 Rc8 19.Nxe7
Rxc2 20.Bxc2 Kxe7 21.Nd4 Kf6 22.Nxf5 Bc6 23.Nd6 Nfg5 24.h4

Nh3+ 25.gxh3 Rg8+ 26.Kf1 f3 27.Rxe6+ 1-0

Tarnofsky, V - Thompson, J

Essex v Kent, 30.03.1957

1.d4 g6 2.e4 f6 3.Bc4 Nh6 4.Nf3 e6 5.Nc3 c6 6.a4 Nf7 7.Be3 Be7
8.Qe2 d6 9.Rd1 a5 10.Bb3 Na6 11.Nd2 0-0 12.0-0 Qc7 13.f4 Kg7
14.g4 b6 15.Qf2 d5 16.exd5 exd5 17.Qg2 Kh8 18.Rde1 Nh6 19.f5
g5 20.Rf2 Nb4 21.Rfe2 Bd6 22.Qf3 Ng8 23.Nf1 Ba6 24.Rg2
Rae8 25.Na2 Nxa2 26.Bxa2 Re7 27.c3 Rfe8 28.Bb1 Bxf1
29.Kxf1 Bxh2 30.Kf2 Bd6 31.Rgg1 Nh6 32.Rh1 Ng8 33.Qh3
Bg3+ 34.Qxg3 Qxg3+ 35.Kxg3 Rxe3+ 36.Rxe3 Rxe3+ 37.Kf2
Re8 38.Bd3 Kg7 39.Kf3 Nh6 40.Ba6 Re4 41.Rg1 Rf4+ 42.Ke2
Nxc4 43.Bb7 c5 0-1

Thompson, J - Lewis, G

Civil Service Champ., 03.1957

1.f3 d5 2.g3 e5 3.Nh3 h5 4.e3 h4 5.g4 Nc6 6.c3 Bd6 7.d3 Be6
8.Bg2 f5 9.Nf2 fxg4 10.fxg4 Nh6 11.0-0 Qd7 12.h3 0-0-0 13.Nd2
Rhf8 14.Nf3 e4 15.Ng5 exd3 16.Nxe6 Qxe6 17.Nxd3 g5 18.b4
Rxf1+ 19.Qxf1 Rf8 20.Qe2 Ne5 21.Nc5 Qf7 22.Bd2 Nf3+
23.Kh1 Nxd2 24.Qxd2 c6 25.Rf1 Qe7 26.Rxf8+ Qxf8 27.Nd3
Bc7 28.Ne1 Qd6 29.Nf3 Nf7 30.Qf2 Qf6 31.Qd2 Nd6 32.Qd4
Qxd4 33.Nxd4 Bd8 34.Kg1 Bf6 35.Kf2 Nb5 36.Nxb5 cxb5
37.Bxd5 Bxc3 38.e4 Bxb4 39.e5 Bc3 40.e6 Bf6 41.Ke3 b6
42.Ke4 Kc7 43.Kf5 Bd8 44.Ke5 b4 45.Be4 a5 46.Kd5 Be7
47.Bd3 a4 48.Bc2 b5 49.Bb1 Kb6 50.Bc2 b3 51.axb3 a3 52.Bb1
Ka5 53.Ba2 Kb4 54.Kd4 Bf6+ 55.Kd3 Kc5 56.Ke4 b4 57.Bb1
Kd6 58.Kf5 Be7 59.Ke4 Kxe6... ½-½

Morgan, J - Thompson, J

London University v Civil Service, 02.03.1957

1.Nf3 f6 2.c4 Nh6 3.Nc3 c6 4.g3 e6 5.Bg2 Nf7 6.d4 Be7 7.0-0 d6
8.d5 e5 9.e4 Nd7 10.Be3 Nf8 11.Nd2 h5 12.f4 Bg4 13.Bf3 exf4
14.Bxf4 Qb6+ 15.Kh1 g5 16.b3 Bxf3+ 17.Qxf3 gxf4 18.Qxf4
Ne5 19.Ne2 c5 20.Qf5 Qc7 21.Nf4 Qd7 22.Ne6 Nxe6 23.dxe6
Qc6 24.Nf3 0-0-0 25.Nh4 Rdg8 26.Rae1 Rg5 27.Qh3 Kd8 28.Nf5
Ng4 29.Rf4 Nh6 30.Ne3 Rf8 31.Nd5 f5 32.e5 dxe5 33.Rxe5 Ng4
34.Re2 Rf6 35.Qh4 Rxe6 36.Rxe6 Qxe6 37.Qh3 Qe1+ 38.Kg2
Bd6 39.Rf3 Qe2+ 0-1

Thompson , J - Jones, D

Govt. Lab. v Fuel & Power, 01.03.1957

1.f3 d5 2.g3 e5 3.Nh3 c5 4.d3 Nf6 5.Nf2 Nc6 6.e3 Be7 7.Be2 Be6
8.Nd2 Qd7 9.c3 d4 10.e4 dxc3 11.bxc3 g5 12.Nf1 h6 13.g4 a6
14.Ne3 b5 15.h3 b4 16.Bd2 a5 17.Qa4 Nd8 18.Bd1 Nc6 19.Rb1 0-
0 20.Nf5 Bxf5 21.gxf5 Nh5 22.Qc2 Rfd8 23.Rg1 Kh7 24.Qb3
Bf8 25.Be2 a4 26.Qc2 Nf4 27.Bxf4 gxf4 28.Ng4 Be7 29.Bf1 h5
30.Qg2 Rg8 31.Qh2 hxg4 32.hxg4+ Kg7 33.g5 Rh8 34.Qg2 Rag8
35.f6+ Bxf6 36.gxf6+ Kxf6 Adjudicated Draw ½-½

Keres, P - Thompson , J

Simultaneous, 03.01.1956

1.e4 Nh6 2.d4 g6 3.Nc3 c6 4.Nf3 f6 5.h3 Nf7 6.Be3 e6 7.Bd3 d6
8.Qd2 Be7 9.0-0-0 Nd7 10.d5 e5 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.Bc4 Nb6
13.Bb3 Qc7 14.h4 Bg4 15.Qe2 h5 16.Qa6 Bc8 17.Qa5 Nd5
18.Qxc7 Nxc7 19.Nd2 Ne6 20.Nc4 0-0 21.f3 Nc5 22.Bxc5 dxc5
23.Na5 Ba6 24.Nxc6 Bd8 25.Bd5 Rc8 26.g4 Kg7 27.gxh5 Bb6
28.Rhg1 g5 29.Ne7 c4 30.Nxc8 Be3+ 31.Kb1 Bxc8 32.Rg2 Nd6
33.hxg5 fxg5 34.Re1 Rxf3 35.a4 Bh3 36.Rge2 Bd4 37.Nd1 Bg4?
(37...Bf1 and Black has chances. The advance of Knight's pawn
should win. – J.C. Thompson.) 38.Rg2 Rf4 39.Ne3 Bxh5
40.Rxg5+ Kh6 41.Rg8 Bxe3? 42.Rxe3 Kh7 43.Rh3 Nf7 44.Bxf7
Rxf7 45.Rg5 1-0

Wilkes, M - Thompson, J

Combined Universities v Civil Service, 21.03.1957

1.c4 f6 2.d4 g6 3.Nc3 c6 4.e4 Nh6 5.Bd3 Nf7 6.f4 e6 7.Nf3 d6 8.0-
0 Be7 9.Qc2 Nd7 10.a3 Nf8 11.b4 b6 12.Ne2 Qc7 13.Ng3 Bb7
14.Be3 h5 15.Rac1 Nh6 16.h3 Bd8 17.Qe2 Qh7 18.e5 f5 19.exd6
a5 20.Ra1 Ng4 21.hxg4 hxg4 22.Kf2 gxf3 23.Qxf3 Bh4 24.Ke2
c5 25.d5 axb4 26.axb4 Qg7 27.Rxa8+ Bxa8 28.Rg1 Nd7 29.bxc5
bxc5 30.Kd2 0-0 31.Ne2 Bd8 32.Qf2 Ba5+ 33.Kc2 exd5 34.Bxc5
Rc8 35.Bd4 ½-½

Thompson ,J - Ross,I

Govt. Lab. v Exchequer, 22.11.1956

1.Nh3 d5 2.g3 e6 3.f3 Nf6 4.d3 c5 5.Nf2 Nc6 6.c3 Be7 7.e3 b5
8.Be2 0-0 9.Nd2 a5 10.Nf1 Bd7 11.f4 c4 12.g4 h6 13.Ng3 e5
14.f5 Nh7 15.e4 cxd3 16.Bxd3 dxe4 17.Bxb5 Bh4 18.Nfxe4

Bxg3+ 19.hxg3 f6? 20.Qd5+ Kh8 21.Bxc6 Bxc6 22.Qxc6 1-0

Janosevic - Thompson, J
Simultaneous, 12.04.1956

1.Nf3 f6 2.e4 Nh6 3.Bc4 Nf7 4.0-0 e6 5.d4 d6 6.Nc3 c6 7.d5 e5
8.dxc6 bxc6 9.Nh4 g6 10.f4 Bg7 11.f5 g5 12.Qh5 0-0 13.Ng6 d5
14.exd5 hxg6 15.fxg6 Nh6 16.h4 Bg4 17.dxc6+ Kh8 18.hxg5
Qd4+ 19.Rf2 Bxh5 20.gxh6 Qxc4 0-1

Interestingly enough, in his booklet, Thompson reported the two following games by well known grandmasters, as if he wanted to demonstrate that the “Hippopotamus” concept, or something very similar, had already been adopted with success by very strong players, past and present.

Horwitz – Staunton, H

1.e4 c5 2.c4 e6 3.f4 d6 4.Nf3 Nh6 5.Be2 g6 6.h3 f5 7.e5 Nc6
8.exd6 Bxd6 9.d3 Qc7 10.Qd2 0-0 11.0-0 Nf7 12.Nc3 a6 13.Kh1
Rb8 etc. ½-½ *Staunton Chess Players Handbook* p. 394, 1850

Furman – Spassky, B

Soviet Championship , 1957

1.Nf3 c5 2.c4 g6 3.e4 Bg7 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Nc6 6.Be3 Nh6
7.Nc3 0-0 8.Be2 f5 9.exf5 Bxd4 10.Bxd4 Nxf5 11.Bc5 d6 12.Ba3
Nfd4 13.0-0 Bf5 14.Rc1 Qd7 15.Nd5 Rf7 16.b3 Raf8 17.Bb2 e5
18.b4 Be6 19.Bd3 Bg4 20.f3 Bxf3 21.gxf3 Nxf3+ 22.Kh1 Qh3
23.Rf2 Ne1! 0-1

To be sure, the chess world hardly noticed Thompson’s innovative opening system, or his fairly decent results with it, but a short article on Thompson and his eccentric Hippopotamus was published in *CHESS*, May 14th, 1955, p.334. Here it is, reported in its entirety.

Thompson’s Pet Hippopotamus
Birth of a New Opening

“The *Hippopotamus Opening* – what is that??” several have enquired since our last issue so labelled every game by J. C. Thompson, whether as White or Black, in the Stevenson Memorial Tournament at Bognor. Well, here are two victories gained, against far from negligible opposition, with his new

opening system, whose main feature is the building of a wall of pawns right across the board from Kk3 to Qk3 on his third rank, with his pieces posted mainly on the second. P-Kk3, Kt-KR3 and Kt-KB2 occur commonly at an early stage, but beyond this the system has an elasticity reminiscent of some Indian Defences.

Two remarks in his hotel lounge at Bognor showed how widely opinions vary about the "Hippopotamus." "Mr. Thompson may be the only man who has invented a completely new opening for a century or more!" (W. Evans, Buckinghamshire champion). "He ought to be psycho-analysed!" (H. Golombek, another Buckinghamshire player).

About eighteen months ago, Mr. Thompson started experimenting against studious opponents in getting the game right away from the "book." The new opening received its public baptism at Bognor last year and after some discussion the name "Chinese" was rejected in favour of one based on the resemblance of the pawn structure to a sleeping hippo.

From his ten games at Bognor, Mr. Thompson scored 3½ points last year and 3 ½ again this. Only 35 per cent.; but he doesn't pretend to be an O'Kelly. With orthodox openings and in such company, would *Mr. Thompson* have scored more than 3½ ? That is the important question.

Letters

In December 2001, thanks to Mr. Richard James, I posted a request for information on the Hippopotamus Chess Opening and on the late J.C. Thompson, in the *Addicts' Corner* column of *CHESS* magazine. Only two gentlemen answered to my appeal, but their contributions were exceptionally interesting. These are reproduced here.

February 1, 2002

Dear Alessandro,

What a pleasure to read in 'Chess' 12.2001 about your interest in this player and his bizarre opening! I too have his booklet on the

Hippopotamus, which contains some bad games. The story of how I got it: When I left school in 1963, I joined the London County Council, to study as a surveyor. There was a chess club, and soon I was playing in the championship and trying to get into the 1st team. One evening, probably in the winter of 1964-65, we were playing against (I think), Government Chemists, in the Civil Service League. In comes this small, unkempt man. Sandy haired, I seem to remember, going grey. Untidy beard. He writes down his name on the scoresheet. J.C. Thompson.

1.f3! A mistake, surely? I will win very quickly no doubt. After confidently building a pawn front and watching his knights migrating via a3 and h3 to c2 and f2, and his bishops slowly fianchettoing, I start to look for ways of using my superior space and development. But it was difficult to see how to break through. In fact, my pieces had to retreat in the face of my opponent's antipositional pawn thrusts. Eventually, my position was torn apart by an unexpected queen sacrifice. Pieces and pawns poured into my half of the board and only a despairing knight fork or some such gave me the chance to draw.

'Oh, that was Thompson's Hippopotamus' Mr. Foley told me later. John Foley was about the oldest member in our team and still one of the best players. All the clocks in his house were set at different times, or ran too fast or too slow. 'It keeps your mind alive' he said.

Old Mr. Foley gave me Thompson's pamphlet, with its handwritten errata slip. I soon got the hang of it. Basically, you offer to commit ritual suicide while hoping to blind your opponent with a handful of sand at the crucial moment. A month or so later, the replay. Thompson again. This time I was ready and won a long, slow, manoeuvring game. Later, I was impressed to find that J.C. Thompson had played in the British Championships. Then even more so, when I read in 'Chess' that Boris Spassky has used a Hippo-like setup in the 16th game of his World Championship match, in an attempt to rattle Petrosian.

If you want a sketch of the great man, he was like the main

character in Stephan Zweig's Buchmendel, completely locked up in himself, swaying, muttering, and, I am sorry to say, he did not take care of himself. There are one or two photos of Thompson in old numbers of 'Chess'. I must have lost the records of the two games I played against him, a pity. But you can be sure that I tried my hand at this most psychological of openings. Advice. Never use it to start a blitz game. The one attached is typical. The opening is a shambles, and I am ashamed of it – but there's a pretty finish!

Thank you for reviving some happy memories.

Yours sincerely,
Keith Spurgin

6th March 2002

Dear Signor Nizzola,

Your appeal in *CHESS* of December 2001 for information on the late Mr. J.C. Thompson was recently drawn to my attention.

He was for about thirty years in charge of the Calibrations Section of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC) and the founder in the early 1950s of its Chess Club, playing for us for over twenty – five years until his death without, so far as I can recall, ever missing a match. Before joining LGC he had flown as aircrew in the Royal Flying Corps in World War – I, came down behind enemy lines and had been taken prisoner.

He did not so much invent the "Hippopotamus" opening as re – discover it. He was in the habit of spending luncheon – break time examining old books and prints in nearby bookshops, market stalls etc. and it is my understanding that he found a work dating from the era before the Laws of Chess had been changed to permit pawns to advance two squares on their first move. (Naturally, the en passant capture had no meaning at that time.) I cannot remember whether it was "Tommy" who told me this, but I believe that it was common in those days for both players to use the "Hippo" formation as a routine method for developing their

pieces.

By the mid-twentieth century *Modern Chess Openings* had gone through several editions and a good deal of opening theory was needed to equip a regular match – player. JCT rather deplored this and sought to use unusual openings, such as the Bishop’s Opening as White and, as Black, such lines as 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 e6. His adaptation of the “Hippopotamus” to match – play came as a useful system playable against any opening and offering flexibility whilst providing a heavily over – protected centre. Obviously it was passive with the Queen held in reserve on the vacated second rank behind the pawn-screen. He would delay castling until his opponent had committed his attack to one side or the other, avoiding pawn – clearances by pushing past an advanced enemy pawn, where possible rather than exchanging. Not surprisingly, some rather blocked positions tended to result and the usual rate of play (39 moves in 90 minutes) did not often allow him to exploit his end-game strength. Nevertheless, there were games in which the position would erupt into a fierce tactical battle and I once saw him castle to great effect when there were no pawns left on that side of the board.

I hope these reminiscences will be of use for you.

Yours sincerely,
Edward W. Godly

5th April 2002
Dear Alessandro,

J.C. Thompson and the Hippopotamus.

I’m sorry it has taken me so long to answer your request for details but here are the two things you asked for:

A copy of Thompson’s handwritten errata slip in my copy of his pamphlet on the Hippo.

A printout of a game I was lucky to win, using the Hippo. This was an off-hand game played at a pub (*The Rising Sun*), where Truro Chess Club met after it lost its usual club room.

I'm looking forward to seeing your article! You probably have a title for it, but if you're still thinking about one, 'Thompson's Hippopotamus' was what I would have called it, *if* I had ever managed to write such a piece!

If you need any more help with research, do let me know. It has been most interesting to correspond with you.

With best wishes,
Keith

Here is the very interesting game mentioned by Mr. Spurgin in his two letters.

Spurgin, Keith Leonard - Woodhead

Friendly Rising Sun, Truro, 23.07.1977

1.c3 e5 2.Na3 d5 3.b3 Bf5 4.Bb2 Nc6 5.e3 Nf6 6.c4 d4 7.Nf3 d3
8.Nb5 a6 9.Nc3 Nb4 10.Rc1 Bc5 11.Nxe5 Nc2+ 12.Rxc2 dxc2
13.Qc1 Bb4 14.g4 Nxc4 15.Nxc4 Bxc4 16.Qxc2 0-0 17.Nd5 Bd6
18.Rg1 h5 19.Bd3 Bxh2 20.Qc3 Qg5 21.Ne7+ Kh8 22.Ng6+ Kh7
23.Qxg7# 1-0

So the Hippo is a win after all?

With Special Thanks To...

- Edward W. Godly;
- Hugh Myers;
- Keith Spurgin;
- Ken Whyld;
- Richard James

Sources:

- *White to Play and Win*, by W.Adams, McKay, 1939
- *The System*, by H. Berliner, Gambit, 2000
- *Hippopotamus Chess Opening*, by J.C.Thompson, Kent, 1957
- *The Book of Chess Lists*, by A.Soltis, McFarland, 1984
- *The Myers Openings Bulletin #14 and #22*, Davenport, 1980s
- *Kings, Commoners and Knaves*, by E. Winter, Russell Enterprises, 1999

Illustrations:

- The Hippo
- J.C. Thompson

© 2003 by Alessandro Nizzola



[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2003 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.