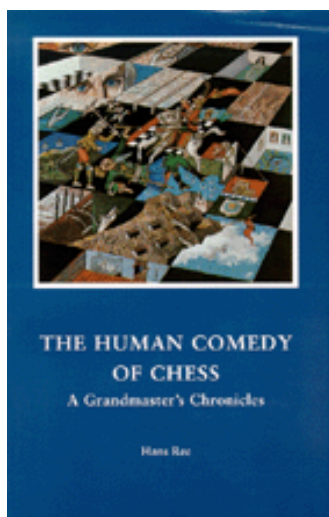




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy
of Chess*

by Hans Ree

A Lesson from the Computer

“This is the end of human chess,” said Genna Sosonko when we were discussing the final game of the match between Kramnik and Deep Fritz. He is a man who likes to pretend cheerfully that only the blackest pessimism is a realistic worldview, but even though I don't share his visions of doom I understood what he meant.

It was not so much the final result of the match, which was 4-2 for Fritz, for with some wishful thinking a paragon of human chess might be able to see a silver lining. Kramnik should have won the first game, as indicated here last week by Karsten Müller and earlier, though not in such a clear-cut manner, by other analysts. Had Kramnik won that endgame and had he not overlooked a mate in one in a later game, the match might have ended equal.

I am aware that I am counting virtual points here, the way Tarrasch did after he had been beaten in a match by Lasker. If he hadn't made a blunder here and a big mistake there, the score would have been quite different from what it had been in real life...

Anyway, losing 4-2 against the computer wasn't so bad. In 2005 Michael Adams lost 5½-½ against Hydra, so one can even argue that humanity has made progress. But there was something else, which was more serious than a point more or less in the final score. In the last game against Kramnik it seemed that the computer was playing on a level where humans could not really understand anymore what he was doing. That was new.

We have learned to accept the fact that chess programs can do many things that are impossible to humans. Calculate millions of variations in a second. Indicate the absolute truth of tablebase positions. Still we could somehow maintain a patronising attitude to the computer. Sometimes they still made ridiculous moves. Even in 2002 an earlier version of Fritz made a move against Kramnik which at first sight looked completely ridiculous and indeed was quite bad. “A real computer move,” we used to say gloatingly. Even when computers were beating top grandmasters regularly, a ‘real computer move’ remained a synonym for a patently silly move.

In 2005 Hydra didn't play silly moves anymore against Adams. He got the highest praise, as it was said that he played like a human, which of course meant that he combined the best qualities of human chessplayers and computers. A new level had been reached.

Maybe it was just an accident, but it seemed that in the last game against Kramnik Fritz reached an even higher level, as in a Hegelian triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. First we had computers which occasionally made ridiculous moves that were indeed very bad. Then came Hydra, the antithesis: it didn't make ridiculous computer moves anymore. And finally there was Deep Fritz, the synthesis on a higher level. In the last game against Kramnik it made counter-intuitive, at first sight ridiculous moves again, but now they were good. If we still laugh, it is about our own ignorance.

What I mean is the rook lift 10. Re1-e3 followed by 11. Re3-g3, which strikes an experienced chessplayer as brutally primitive. Of course such a manoeuvre on the third rank is nothing strange in itself. Tarrasch liked to bring his rooks into play that way and Tal won the first game of his 1960 World Championship match against Botvinnik with the moves 18. h2-h4 followed by 19. Rh1-h3.

But to play Re1-e3-g3 at such an early stage in a Sicilian, that could not be. We know that the attack against the black king cannot be executed in such a simple and primitive way; it has to be prepared by attacking moves of the lighter pieces and sometimes the pawns. At least, we thought we knew that, until we were taught better by the computer.

Deep Fritz - Kramnik, 6th game

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Bc4 e6 7. 0-0 Be7 8. Bb3 Qc7 9. Re1 Nc6



10. Re3 Here it is, a typical computer move as in the good old days, with the difference that we cannot make good arguments anymore to maintain that it is indeed bad.

10...0-0 11. Rg3 Kh8 12. Nxc6 bxc6 13. Qe2 a5 14. Bg5 Ba6 15. Qf3 Rab8 16. Re1 c5 17. Bf4 A strong move. The complications after 17...c4 18. e5 would be to white's advantage.

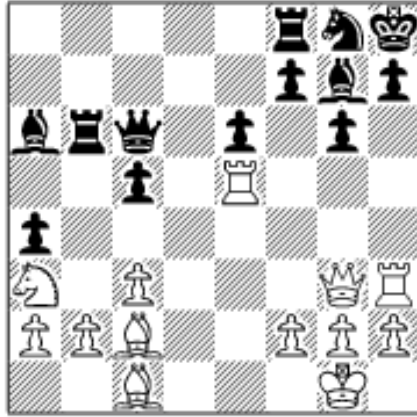
17...Qb7 18. Bc1 Ng8 Probably a bad move. The knight stood well where it was.

19. Nb1 It seems to imitate black's last move, but with a difference: Fritz's move is strong. It prepares to bring its bishop to a better square. The temporarily misplaced knight will find a good square soon.

19...Bf6 20. c3 g6 21. Na3 Qc6 22. Rh3 Bg7 23. Qg3 a4 This must be wrong. He chases white's bishop to a square where it wants to go anyway and puts his pawn on a square where it is vulnerable and will be captured later.

24. Bc2 Rb6 25. e5

A real attack is developing. With the pawn on e5 white threatens to win by 26. Bxg6 fxg6 27. Qxg6

25...dxe5 26. Rxe5**26...Nf6**

The rook could not be taken: 26...Bxe5 27. Qxe5+ f6 28. Rxh7+ Kxh7 29. Qh5+ and mate. On the other hand, with a pawn on e5 white was threatening the familiar raid 27. Bxg6 fxg6 28. Qxg6

27. Qh4 Qb7 28. Re1 h5 29. Rf3 Nh7

Black has managed to defend himself against the mating attack, but now white strikes on the

other wing.

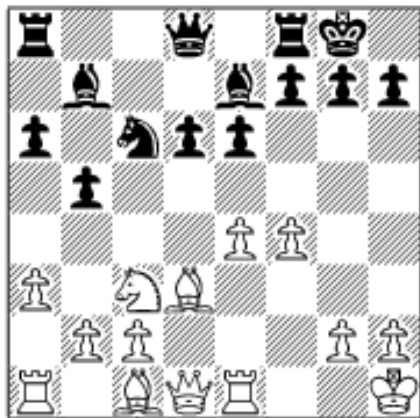
30. Qxa4 Qc6 31. Qxc6 Rxc6 32. Ba4 The time when computers were helpless in any complicated endgame are definitely over. Fritz handles the execution with an iron hand.

32...Rb6 33. b3 Kg8 34. c4 Rd8 35. Nb5 Bb7 36. Rfe3 Bh6 37. Re5 Bxc1 38. Rxc1 Rc6 39. Nc3 Rc7 40. Bb5 Nf8 41. Na4 Rdc8 42. Rd1 Kg7 43. Rd6 f6 44. Re2 e5 45. Red2 g5 46. Nb6 Rb8 47. a4 Black resigned. It was a truly impressive game.

One advantage of the human brain is that it can adapt quickly. Look at the following game from the recent Torre Memorial in Mexico, won by Ivanchuk.

Arencibia • Milov, Carlos Torre Memorial, Merida 2006

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. Bd3 Ne7 6. 0-0 Nbc6 7. Nxc6 Nxc6 8. Nc3 b5 9. Re1 d6 10. a3 Be7 11. f4 0-0 12. Kh1 Bb7



13. Re3

Would white have played this move without the encouraging example of Deep Fritz? I doubt it. And is it a good move? I do not know. For a long time the rook seems out of play, as it should be according to human standards. But then, after 30. Rg3 and 31. h4, it seems to be fully functional after all, though only for a short time. I leave it to you readers to judge if the early rook lift in the Sicilian can really be a contribution to human attacking play. As for

me, I am against it.

13...g6 14. Rh3 Bf6 15. Qe1 d5 16. e5 Bg7 17. Bd2 Rc8 18. Ne2 f5 19. Ng1 Qe7 20. Nf3 Rfd8 21. Be3 d4 22. Bf2 Rd7 23. b4 Qe8 24. Qg1 Ne7 25. Bxd4 Nd5 26. Be3 Bf8 27. Bd2 Nc3 28. Bxc3 Rxc3 29. Qe1 Rc8 30. Rg3 Bd5 31. h4 Rg7 32. Rh3 h6 33. Qd2 Be7 34. Kh2 Qd8 35. a4 Bxf3 36. Rxf3 g5 37. c3 g4 38. Re3 Bxb4 39. Qa2 Qxh4+ 40. Kg1 Rxc3 41. Qxe6+ Kh8 42. g3 Qh5 43. Qxa6 Rxd3 44. Rxd3 Bc5+ 45. Kf1 Qh1+ 46. Ke2 Qe4+ 47. Kd2 Bb4+ 48. Kc2 Rc7+ 49. Kb2 Qe2+ 50. Kb3 Qxd3+ 51. Kxb4 Qc3+ White resigned.

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