



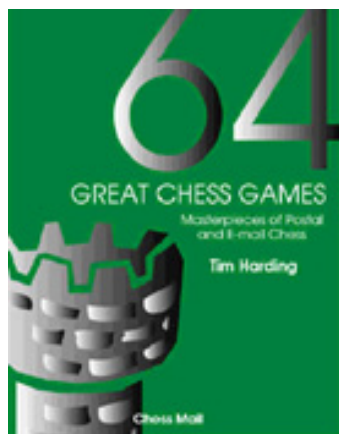
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COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



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by Tim Harding

Interview with a
(Chess-playing) Vampire

This month, The Kibitzer has a scoop. The column is fortunate to be able to present the first-ever interview with the oldest chess player on the planet, Count Dracula. The Count now has email so it was not necessary for our interviewer to actually run the risk of meeting him face to face.

Thank you for agreeing to this interview, Count, and to agreeing to conduct it in English.

It is my pleasure and English is no problem although Hungarian remains the mother tongue for most of the people in the region where I live. Transylvania was in Hungary for most of my life, but now of course we are all Romanians,

I know many languages well and obtaining Internet access recently has enabled me to obtain good practice with your language again.

I think it is fair to say that some readers may be surprised to see this article. Chess is not exactly the activity which brought you fame?

No, indeed. I want to say right away that I never sought fame for any of my activities. Fame was forced upon me: first when my country was invaded by the Turks, and later when that book was written about me. But I think you want to talk about chess first, and the book can be discussed later.

It is customary in interviews like this to ask about when you learned chess, who was your teacher and what great

players you admire.

I learned chess first as a boy, so long ago that I don't remember when. It was the mediaeval (or Arabic) form of chess, with limited piece moves, no modern queen and so on. That was a rather boring game and it was only later when the modern chess evolved that I grew interested. In my youth, I preferred backgammon.

So I did not have a teacher, except books. In the lonely evenings in my castle high up in the Carpathians, few visitors came to play chess with me but from the 16th century onwards I could buy the books and study them. Damiano, Ruy Lopez, Salvio, Polerio, Philidor, I read them all. I was even able to obtain one of the rare manuscripts by Greco and I still have it in my library. From the middle of the 19th century, I could see the game becoming transformed into something deeper and more exciting with every decade after Morphy. He was the greatest up to that time, of course.

Lately, I have been reviewing the games of all the great 20th century players. At first I was attracted most by the style of Tal and then by Kasparov, but lately I find myself admiring Karpov the most. At his peak, he was irresistible. If Karpov had had more blood in him for the first long match, Kasparov would never have become world champion.

Did you ever meet any of these early writers and legendary chess masters?

You have to understand that travel has always been a problem for me, and it was especially so if journeys had to take place during daytime. So I have always preferred winter travel, because of the longer nights.

However, the railway was only built in the 19th century and going by sea is my preferred method. I can have a private

cabin and keep to it in the daytime without any interference. I was able to visit various port cities in the Black Sea and eastern Mediterranean. I visited Venice in the early 16th century and rented a palazzo there for many months. It was already rather dank and dark but that didn't bother me. There were so many exciting people there, such culture! I played many good games of chess in the evenings there. I had to play by moonlight or candlelight, of course.

The next time I went to Italy it was about 1570, when the centre of the chess world was in Naples. I wanted to meet "Il Puttino", that is Leonardo da Cutri, who was then preparing for his return match with Ruy Lopez. He didn't like to share secrets with his main Italian rivals, so I was a welcome sparring partner.

Ruy Lopez was a Spanish priest, and he had visited Italy in the 1560s when Leonardo was in his early twenties, and the Spaniard won. Leonardo was a very weak player then. For example, in one game with Lopez he played the Damiano Defence very poorly: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f6?! 3 Nxe5 fxe5? whereas the Spaniards already knew that 3...Qe7 was better move. Another Lopez-Leonardo game from 1560 went 1 e4 e5 2 f4 d6 3 Bc4 c6 4 Nf3 Bg4 5 fxe5 dxe5 6 Bxf7+ Kxf7 7 Nxe5+ Ke8 8 Qxg4 Nf6 9 Qe6+ Qe7 10 Qc8+ Qd8 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 Nf7+ 1-0. Black was made to look like a patzer here, but when he had the initiative he could do the same kind of things to his opponents.

So Leonardo worked at his game while he was a student in Rome and by the time I met him in Naples, he was a much more capable player. In 1860 he was afraid to play 2...Nc6 because it would allow Ruy Lopez to play his famous opening 3 Bb5, but ten years later the Italians were working out methods against it. They also sometimes played 2...d6 which later became known as Philidor's Defence.

Lopez was the most famous player in the world by 1570 and the top Italians were determined to do something about this. Finally in 1574 Leonardo went to Spain and defeated Lopez; it was like the first unofficial world championship match. A few months later, Paolo Boi did the same and the Italians were top again. They had some Transylvanian assistance, though!

I suppose that your games and analysis of this period are not preserved?

Unfortunately no complete games, although I remember a few of the openings we looked at. They were still good for winning games until about 140 years ago.

Here is the start of one game I enjoyed but the loser wasn't Leonardo, just one of the lesser Neapolitan players. I had White.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Qe7 5 0-0 d6 6 d4 Bb6 7 Bg5 f6

7...Nf6 was possibly better but Polerio won a famous game against that a few years later.

8 Bh4 g5?



9 Nxg5

I suppose this may not be fully correct but it was the spirit of the time - both to be provocative and to allow oneself to be provoked.

9...fxg5 10 Qh5+ Kd8

There are some known games from this period with 10...Kd7 but it's a weaker move

because it blocks the queen's bishop.

11 Bxg5 Nf6 12 Qh4

About 50 years later, Greco was recommending Qh6 instead but maybe my move is better.

12...Rf8 13 f4 exd4 14 Kh1 dxc3 15 Nxc3 Be6 16 Bxe6 Qxe6 17 e5 and I regained my piece, going on to win quite easily.

So that is the earliest known Count Dracula chess game?

It seems so. If I ever find any other ones, I will email them to you. Email is so convenient, don't you think, much easier than using pigeons or bats as messengers. If we had had email in the 1890s, when I was trying to buy my house in London, it might not have been necessary for that poor lawyer Jonathan Harker to make the difficult overland journey to my castle. The contracts could have been sent electronically. Anyway, back to chess.

Would you say that all your early games were played in this bloodthirsty style?

A little joke, ha ha! Well, everybody played like that in those days, until Philidor anyway.

After Morphy's games became well known, the standards of defence and analysis improved a lot. In the 16th century we were all concerned with getting your pieces out fast and then "sac, sac, mate" as Bobby Fischer liked to say.

For example, in my game that you have just seen, it was discovered later that Black gets a good game with 8...Bg4!, instead of 8...g5.

Ruy Lopez was probably a deeper strategist than the Italians but he was getting older when they visited him in Spain. Also, they had learned from him so in 1874 they could beat him.

Can you give some specific examples of how you helped?

Mostly we studied the King's Gambit. Anything we found is certainly known by now, and refuted too. Leonardo was a celebrated blindfold player so it didn't bother him if there was little light; he would stay up half the night analyzing with me at any opportunity.

I don't mean to be impolite but wasn't he worried that you might take a fancy to him?

I always made sure I had fed before we met. I am a rational being, not a monster. All my long existence, I never harmed a friend or a person who was useful to me. You can read in that book how I protected Jonathan Harker from the female "nosferatu" that he encountered when he entered the forbidden room against my advice.

Sorry! So you did study the Spanish Opening too?

In the 16th century, there wasn't the same kind of professional scientific preparation that you have nowadays. There were hardly any examples of other people's games to study. Leonardo liked endgames and we studied those a lot. Against weak players, he always won in the middle game but he considered that Lopez would not be easily defeated in short games.

We did look at some lines against Ruy Lopez's special opening, of course. I remember that we considered 3...Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 was the safest line, but that line did not arise. I gave the same tip to young Kramnik a few years ago and I was pleased to see it worked well.

It was difficult in those days to work on openings after the first five or six moves, because the castling rules were changing all the time and they varied between Italy and Spain. For example, one of the 1874 games Leonardo-Lopez began 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bc4 f5 4 d3 Be7 5 Qe2 c6 6 h3 f4 (Philidor would have approved of the previous moves but not this one!) 7 g3 fxg3 8 fxg3 and now Ruy Lopez made a king's leap from e8 to c7! That was a big surprise for me when I was sent the game in a letter; that would not have been a legal move in Naples or Transylvania.

Maybe that was a surprise for Leonardo?

Possibly, but they were playing in Spain and you had to adopt the custom of the country. It's a bit like the baseball World Series in America where one league has the "designated hitter" rule but in the other league, the pitcher has to bat. So whichever team is at home determines what rule applies. It was probably like that for the Italians and Spaniards with chess. In another fifty years, the modern rules were established — except for Italy where some games were still being played with Italian free castling up to the end of the 19th century.

Did you meet Paolo Boi too?

Yes, he was a really dashing player. On my way home, my ship stopped in Syracuse for a few nights so that I could play some games with him. Many years later he visited me in Hungary but unfortunately soon afterwards he returned to Sicily and was poisoned.

Syracuse was a fascinating city, so ancient and still with a big Greek influence. Archimedes came from there, you know?

He would have been a great chess player!

Indeed, but chess had not been invented in Archimedes' day. It's just as well because if he had wasted time playing chess, he might not have made all his famous mathematical discoveries and inventions, and his city would have been lost in a war.

So you think chess is a waste of time?

Indeed it is, for you mortal humans, but I have so much time that how to waste it becomes my main preoccupation?

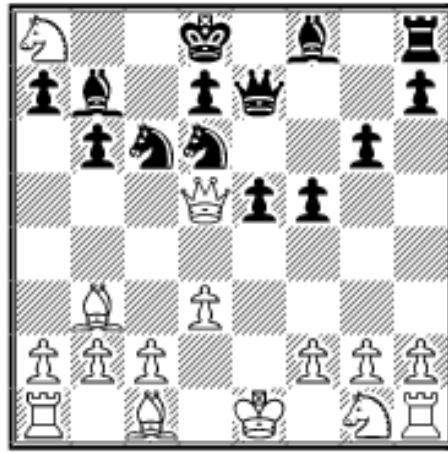
Do you not find it difficult being unable to play chess in the daytime?

Of course; that is the main reason I never travelled to Spain to meet Lopez. He had written all this advice about setting up the board so that the sunlight is in your opponent's eyes. That wouldn't have suited me at all. If people challenged me to a daytime game, I always had to refuse, saying that the day was for business and the night for relaxation. I slept on my ship so that my servants could protect me; I wouldn't have been safe in an inn.

A story published a few years ago was the first to reveal the secret of your interest in chess. Can you please say something about that?

Ah, you are referring to Tim Harding's story about my meeting with the Frankenstein Monster! This was a hitherto unpublished extract from the journal of Jonathan Harker which was excised by Mr. Bram Stoker, from the final MS of 'Dracula' (along with the better-known fragment 'Dracula's Guest' after the publisher insisted that the novel was becoming too long. The chess story was unearthed by Tim Harding and first published in 'Chess' magazine (Sutton Coldfield) 807-8 (December 1978). Later Tim put it on his Chess Mail website and you can read it there now.

Let me remind your readers that we are talking about the position arising after the opening sequence 1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nxe4 4 Qh5 Nd6 5 Bb3 Nc6 6 Nb5 g6 7 Qf3 f5 8 Qd5 Qe7 9 Nxc7+ Kd8 10 Nxa8 b6 11 d3 Bb7.



I was glad to see this published because it shows a better side of me than some of the Harker extracts that did appear before. For example, he writes:

“I had another long talk with the Count, and learned to my relief that he is a keen player of chess. Surely no-one who takes delight in that noble game can be wholly bad? I must revise some of my estimates

of the man.”

The story is about the Borgo Open of 1894. That Frankenstein fellow was not a strong player, but he had a very intimidating presence at the board (for mortal opponents, not for me) and in this tournament he had an amazing string of luck.

Unfortunately, as the story tells, I lost the decisive game, in a winning position, because of an unusual sort of time trouble...

Have you made any new discoveries in that opening variation?

Naturally, it is flattering to have a variation partly named after oneself, so I do keep an eye on developments. As you know, I always play Black in this variation, as I believe that the initiative Black obtains must be worth the rook (really, the exchange) he has sacrificed, even with the black king deprived of the right to castle. It usually is not necessary for Black to attack directly as his positional compensation is manifest; mobile pawns, active bishops, strong knights... I note that the current correspondence world champion, Mr G.J. Timmerman from Holland, appears to share my opinion.

However, 3...Nxe4 wouldn't be part of my normal repertoire

any more, for two reasons. One is that people could prepare for me in that variation, and the other is that my style is changing.

Instead of being “bloodthirsty” as you call it, I am moving from gambits to a more positional style. Under the influence of players like Petrosian, Karpov and Kramnik, I now seek to remove my opponent’s active possibilities from the equation so that I can expose his weaknesses. You might say that this “blood-leeching” technique is more appropriate for a vampire than my former way of playing. I am experimenting with this new style under the username “Van Helsing” on several servers.

**I am glad to see you have a lively sense of humour!
Nevertheless, maybe you can show us a recent example
of the Frankenstein-Dracula Variation?**

Very well. Here is a game I won a few years ago, played by another of your wonderful modern inventions, the telefax. As you can understand, postmen are reluctant to visit my castle so, before email was available in Romania, the fax was my first introduction to correspondence chess.

A. Scotsman – Count Dracula

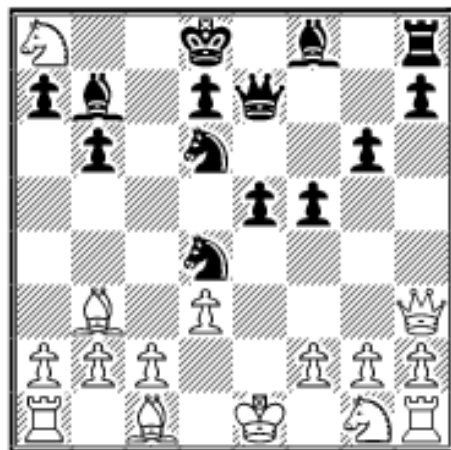
Frankenstein-Dracula Variation (C27)

Fax 1998-99

**1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 Nxe4 4 Qh5 Nd6 5 Bb3 Nc6 6
Nb5 g6 7 Qf3 f5 8 Qd5 Qe7 9 Nxc7+ Kd8 10 Nxa8 b6 11
d3 Bb7 12 Qf3**

My opponent avoids the lines with 12 h4, which used to be favoured.

12...Nd4 13 Qh3



13...f4 14 Nxb6

White has several other possible moves here: 14 c3, 14 Bd2, 14 Nf3. Taking on b6 costs a tempo but gains a pawn and creates a target for White on b6.

14...axb6 15 Bd2

White gets ready to castle without delay.

15 c3 is a book line: 15...N4f5!? 16 Bd2 (16 f3 e4 17 fxe4 Nxe4 18 dxe4 Bxe4 19 Ne2 Nh4 is another known line, where the white Queen is precariously placed.) 16...h5 17 0-0-0 g5 18 f3 Bg7 and it's not clear whether Black can safely avoid draw by 19 Ne2 g4 20 fxg4 hxg4 21 Qxg4 Rh4 22 Qg6 Rh6 given in the book on the Vienna by Konstantinopolsky & Lepeshkin.

15...h5

15...g5 is possibly more accurate? I expected 16 0-0-0 g5 with the same position as in the next note, but suddenly my opponent changed tack and did not castle after all!

16 f3!

16 0-0-0 g5 17 f3 is a better-known line where Black has several possibilities, e.g. 17...N6f5 is the move I liked. It prevents Bb4 and if 18 c3 (18 g4?! Nh4) 18...Qg7, planning ...g4 to embarrass the white Queen.

White is trying to transpose to a grandmaster game by a sneaky move order. Now if 16...Bg7 17 0-0-0! N6f5 18 Re1! (So far Kaidanov-Bareev, Lemberg 1987) 18...g5!? with the idea ...Qe7-f6-g6 was suggested by GM Kaidanov

but I wasn't sure about this.

16...Bd5!?



Despite the result of this game, I doubt whether I played the best moves. It is unusual for Black to exchange these bishops in the “Frankenstein-Dracula” Variation.

17 Kf2?

This costs a tempo in some lines.

17 0–0–0! seems more consistent. I don't understand why White abandoned his plan to castle. His King is certainly less safe the way the game actually went.

Of course computers will tell you White is winning easily but I find they don't usually give good advice in this variation.

17 Bxd5 is also critical, of course: 17...Nxc2+ 18 Kd1 Nxa1 19 Ne2 Nb5! 20 Bc4 Qc5 (This position is more or less forced after 17 Bxd5.) 21 Be1! (Not an easy move to see!) 21...Nd6 22 Qh4+ g5!? 23 Qf2 (23 Qxg5+ is possible but his Q cannot get back to f2 then.) 23...Nxc4 24 dxc4 and now 24...Qxc4 (or 24...Qd6+) is a very unclear line.

17...Nf7

This threatens both his Q and ...f5 and also the N defends the h8-R in some lines. I was just a little worried that he had played the triangulation Ke1–f2–f1 deliberately to lure my N to a square where it couldn't so easily attack the centre.

18 Kf1 Bxb3

The only consistent move, giving White an awkward choice.

**19 cxb3**

White should have opened a-file for counterplay with his Rook, e.g. 19 axb3 Nxc2 20 Ra8+! Kc7 21 Ra7+ Kc8 22 Ne2 Ng5 23 Qh4 Nxf3! 24 Qxe7 Nxd2+ 25 Kf2 Bxe7 26 Ra8+! (His saving move) 26...Kb7 27 Rxh8 Bc5+ 28 d4 Ne4+ 29 Kf3 and White

must consent to a draw.

19...Nf5 20 g3 Qd6

Now White's position deteriorated rapidly.

21 Qg2

Unfortunately he didn't fall for the pretty line 21 Ke1 Qxd3 22 Qf1 fxg3!! 23 Qxd3? g2.

21...fxg3

22 Ke2? A surprise: he moves his K again! He must be lost after this.

I thought the main line was 22 hxg3 Qxd3+ 23 Ke1 Nd4 24 Rc1 Be7!? 25 f4 Trying to break out 25...Nc2+ 26 Rxc2 Qxc2 27 Qa8+ Qc8 The resulting ending is slightly in Black's favour.

22...Qd4 23 Rb1 Bh6 24 hxg3 Bxd2 25 Kxd2 e4 26 Qe2 Re8!?

To get my last piece into play and maximise pressure but other moves are also good, e.g. 26...Nxb3.

27 Nh3 e3+ 28 Kc2 Qc5+ 29 Kd1 Nd4 30 Rc1 Qa5 31 b4 Qxa2 32 Qg2 e2+ 0–1 (White resigned as mate is forced).

I get the impression that we have here something like the Rolling Stones song ‘Sympathy for the Devil’. Down the centuries, whenever there has been great chess played, you have been there?

Not at all; the Devil is a myth but Dracula is real! I have never been able to participate in great chess events as I would have wished. Like yourself, I have been merely a “kibitzer”!

Let’s move on to more recent times. Why did you want to come to England in the 1890s?

Some investments I had made in various European countries had worked out well; I had money in a bank in Zurich and British government bonds that were maturing. Of course the preparation and expense were very great, so I thought to spend several months in England to justify the outlay. Then I would appoint a caretaker and return on another visit later.

Unfortunately the problems with Harker and Van Helsing meant I had to leave in a hurry, and I couldn’t get back to England because of the World Wars in the 20th century.

Did you hope to play some chess in London?

I wanted my visit to coincide with the great Hastings 1895 tournament but it did not work out. My ship failed to dock at one of the English Channel ports convenient for Hastings

because the crew became sick with a mysterious illness. I certainly did not kill them, as that book implies. Why would I do that and jeopardise my own safety?

There was a terrible storm and when I awoke one evening it was to find we had been swept right up the North Sea coast and the ship was dashed on the rocks outside Whitby. Fortunately I was strong and had the power to transform myself into a dog or a bat, so I escaped. Sadly, all my luggage was lost, including my first editions of Steinitz's two volumes of the Modern Chess Instructor. I had hoped the world champion would autograph them for me.

So your holiday in England started with a disaster?

Yes, but fortunately I quickly met a pretty young lady called Lucy who assisted me, and I was able to get to my house in London after a few days. I had taken the precaution of having many supplies, including some boxes with Transylvanian earth, sent overland to London. Once I got there, everything should have been satisfactory. I could buy the latest chess books, go to the theatre in the evening and generally have a good time as intended.

I even met Mr Stoker at the Lyceum Theatre, which he managed for Sir Henry Irving. I knew he suspected something but he was eager to get background information for his book and he did not reveal my secret then. Unfortunately, certain people were determined to hound me...

I think most people were under the impression that you were finally killed on your way back home, yet you are still alive and active as a chess-player?

This is of course the fault of Bram Stoker and his damned book! He over-dramatised some details and changed the endings to a kind of "blitz finish" in the hope of getting better sales. Of course the book has now become a classic and there is nothing I can do about that, or all the wild film versions, but the novel is a novel and is inaccurate in certain major respects.

A lot of Stoker's book is based on facts, as you can see by the way the narrative is constructed from diaries, letters and so forth, but you will note that there is one major character whose viewpoint is never presented. That is mine!

I did in fact escape but it was very traumatic experience and it really took me half a century to regain my strength and

full activity, as well as to regain possession of my old castle. I didn't really succeed in that; it had fallen into ruins though I was able to retrieve the most valuable items from my library.

Another respect in which the book is wrong is the theory that I must kill a human being every night to stay alive. That was never strictly true and for the past half century, there have been excellent blood banks to which I can pay for access; let us just say that the menu is no longer an issue. You have to understand that I did not become a vampire by choice. As Anne Rice has explained in some of her novels, it's a kind of sickness or a strange gift, but a gift very hard to renounce once one has been given it.

Life has improved for me in lots of ways in the past 10 years. I can travel more easily, so long as I am sure to book night flights. Many big cities essentially operate on a 24-hour basis now so there is more that I can do when I am awake. On the other hand, I do still face some restrictions. Going out in broad daylight — like the actor who played me in Mr Coppola's film — is extremely risky for me, and I certainly cannot do it on sunny days.

So how did you manage when you got home and recovered?

I did not really wake up again for many years. Then it was the communist time and everything was restricted. I had little money in Romania, and although I had great wealth accumulated in Swiss investments, there was no way to get that money into Romania. So I did a deal with the government in order to survive.

The 1980s were the time when Dracula tours started to be popular?

Yes, it was all those films based on the book that were to blame, and the communist government wanted hard currency. (I have managed to get some work as a consultant to film crews that come here on location!)

President Ceausescu saw me as a kind of tourist attraction and there was nothing to do but play along with that. The one good thing about this was that they built a new castle in Transylvania to attract the tourists. It's a fake, but quite

charming and I have my private suite where the tourists cannot go. There I can catch up on the decades of top chess that I have missed. It's only now that I am starting to get some freedom again.

You have found a lot of changes in chess while you were “away”, I suppose?

I had to get back to my books in the 1950s and 1960s. Every evening, I spent two or three hours with my chess board. I worked my way through the careers of Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe and Botvinnik. Fischer was world champion by the time I had really caught up. However it's only since the 1990s that I had the comfort and financial security I needed to devote almost all my free time to chess once more.

What a transformation I found! We had no King's Indians and Najdorf Sicilians in the 1890s.

My opening repertoire is still a bit old-fashioned but I am working on it.

So how do you see your chess career developing? Will you play in chess tournaments?

There are several problems about playing normal chess events. One of course is obvious: the playing schedule; only evening rounds suit me. The old Borgo Open is not held any more, alas!

Another issue is that the FIDE drug testing regime might cause a problem since I cannot provide the normal urine samples and a blood test could have unknown consequences. This basically rules me out of serious events where I meet opponents face-to-face.

Fortunately, I have three new ways of playing. I can play

against my computer, I can play rapid games on the Internet Chess Club or other servers, and I can play correspondence chess by email or on the CC servers. I have never had it so good!

You are now intending to play email chess with ICCF?

Yes, my main goal is to obtain correspondence master titles and a high rating with ICCF, the principal correspondence chess organization. Only their titles, ratings and world championship are recognized by FIDE for correspondence play so that's where an ambitious man must play.

However, you have an identity problem?

Yes, this is the last obstacle I have to surmount — apart from my opponents, that is. In ICCF play, you have to be entered by your national federation and you must use your real name. Paradoxically, if I try to enter using my name “Vlad Dracul”, somebody is sure to say it's a “handle” or a “user-name”. So I am making arrangements to have a new legal surname in Romania, one that scares nobody, and I already joined the Romanian CC federation and enter some tournaments. When you are unrated, it is hard to get a high rating quickly so I shall choose my first events carefully.

Fortunately, it's probable that at least one Romanian team will qualify for a high division in the next (2004) round of the ICCF Champions League tam tournament. I am already telling them that I will be available and if I am selected this will be a good chance to play against high-rated title opponents in a serious event. Once I can get a high provisional rating, I can get into other strong events and qualify for the world championship.

Another option is that I may qualify for the final of the Romanian Email Championship soon. The final will be rated

internationally and if I get first or second place, I have the right to enter an ICCF Master Norm tournament even without a published rating.

Will you tell us what your new name will be?

Certainly not. You will just have to be careful if you get any new Romanian opponent!

Are you not worried that your opponents in ICCF tournaments will be using computers?

I can use one too if I want. However, with my centuries of experience, I have a different perspective on chess from most people and I will expect to do well.

Can you please show us one more game?

Here is a game with my “new” style. I think you can see how many opponents will find this baffling. It looks as if White does nothing but play simple moves suddenly the position is won. Towards the end, a little calculation was needed.

Count Dracula-A.Victim
Internet 2001–2, 2001
Scotch Game (C44)

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 Nxd4

Black plays a rare line instead of the usual 3...exd4.

4 Nxd4

The obvious move is best; after 4 Nxe5 Black has no obvious problems. Now I simply permit the exchanges as it must give White a slight time advantage.

4...exd4 5 Qxd4

5 Bc4 may give some advantage but why take a risk?

5...d6

Black sometimes plays 5...Ne7 to transfer that knight to c6.

6 Nc3

Clearly the most flexible move. White plays a necessary move and awaits Black's plan.

6...Bd7 7 Bc4 Nf6 8 Bf4

Clearly my pieces have a bit more scope than Black's.

8...Be7 9 0-0

9 0-0-0 is more aggressive but riskier. That's what I would have played in the 19th century!

9...0-0 10 Rad1 Bc6



Black would probably like to continue with ...Nd7 and ...Bf6 but my reply prevents this.

11 e5 dxe5 12 Qxe5 Bd6 13 Qd4

I had to decide at move 11 whether this too simplifying is there enduring pressure. Since

Black also has a simplification policy, it is a question of whose judgment is correct.

13...Bxf4 14 Qxf4 Qc8 15 h3

This was necessary to hinder a Queen exchange in a position where my Q is clearly more active than his.

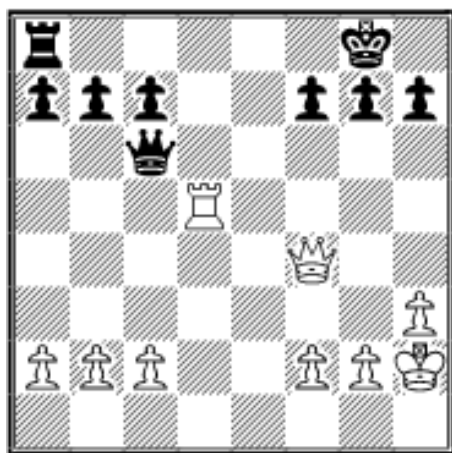
15...Re8 16 Rd4 Re7 17 Rfd1 Qe8 18 Kh2

This rules out ...Re1 because of Qxc7.

18...Re5 19 Nd5

I am happy that all the minor pieces come off because my advantage is in the placement of the heavy pieces.

19...Bxd5 20 Bxd5 Nxd5 21 Rxd5 Rxd5 22 Rxd5 Qc6



Black is relying on the reduction of material and symmetrical pawn structure to guarantee a draw, but he cannot force any more exchanges and I shall show that queen and rook make a formidable strike force. First I must gain space and give Black something to worry about on the queenside.

23 c4

White cannot win this game with piece moves alone. So I threaten b4-b5 to drive his queen from its good post on c6.

23...a5 24 Re5

This has the immediate threat of Re7, attacking c7 and f7.

24...Kf8

He stops that and hopes for ...Re8 but now his h-pawn is undefended.

25 Rf5

Probing for a new weakness.

25...f6

25...Qd7 26 Rd5 Qc6 is not really a tempo gain because his extra move is ...Kg8-f8 and White continues 27 Qh4 threatening the h7-pawn and also threatens Rd8+. These kinds of details probably don't amount to a decisive advantage but Black cannot afford to make any more concessions. In practice, it is hard to defend such passive positions.

26 Rd5 a4 27 Qg4 g6

27...Re8 leads to a Queen ending where White has an extra pawn after 28 Rd7 Re7 29 Rxe7 Qd6+ 30 f4 Qxe7 31 Qc8+ Kf7 32 Qxb7 winning a P in Q ending.

If 27...Kg8 28 Rd7 g6 29 c5 (Threat Qc4+ and Qf7) 29...b5 30 cxb6 cxb6 31 Qd4 (The softening-up process continues with threat of Rd6.) 31...Rf8! (31...b5 32 Re7 zugzwang) 32 Qd6 (not 32 Rd6 Qc5 reaching a drawn endgame) 32...Qc5 (If Black he exchanges queens he loses a pawn.) 33 Qe6+ Kh8 34 f3. Black is hanging on for now but he is certainly not equal.

28 Rd7 h5

Now his king position is weakened further. 28...f5?? loses immediately to 29 Qd4.

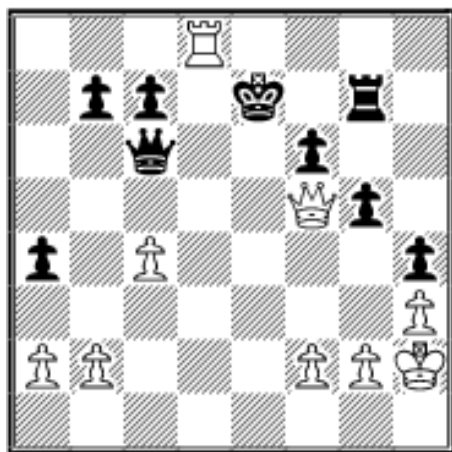
29 Qd4 Re8 30 Qd2 g5!?

30...Kg8 31 Qd3 and the black king must move again.

31 Qd3 Re7 32 Rd5 h4?!

32...Kg7 looked a tougher defence to me but now that Black's pawns are too advanced, White should be able to make progress.

33 Qg6 Rg7 34 Qf5 Kf7 35 Rd7+ Kf8 36 Rd8+ Ke7



37 Rd4!?

After a lot of analysis, I rejected Qc8 here, but the same position arose in the end at move 40.

37...Kf7 38 Rd7+

As 38 b3/38 b4 led to nothing clear, I repeated the position I

had earlier and play the Qc8 option.

38...Kf8 39 Rd8+ Ke7 40 Qc8! g4 41 hxg4 Rxc4

Black threatens mate but White easily stops this.

42 Rd5

In the end, I decided this was better than 42 Qxc4 Kxd8.

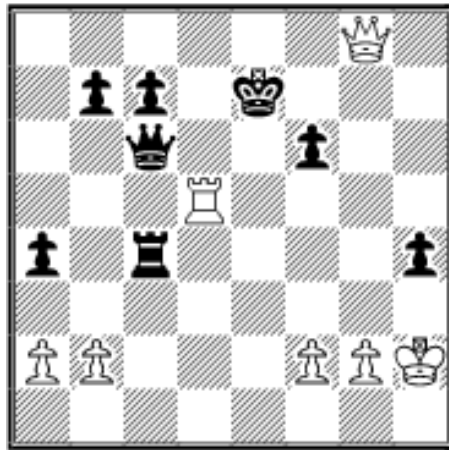
42...Rxc4

Belatedly, Black tries to get active. By removing my c-pawn, he stops me going for King and pawn endgames.

42...Rg5 can often lead to a won King and Pawn ending for White. Black also has to beware of traps like 43 Qd8+ Ke6 44 Rxc4 fxg5 45 Qxc4?? (45...Qe4 46 Qe3) 46 Qg8+ skewering Black's queen! This is the sort of detail a defender can overlook until it's too late.

43 Qd8+ Ke6

43...Kf7 44 Rd7+ Kg6 45 Qe7 and Black's King is getting squeezed away from the edges into a danger zone, e.g.
 45...Kf5 46 Qh7+ (starts the process of driving the King again) 46...Ke5 47 Qh5+ Ke6 48 Qf7+ Ke5 49 Re7+ Kd4 50 Re6 wins the f-pawn with check and that should be enough.

44 Qg8+ Ke7**45 Rd2!**

White guards his second rank. When I was deciding on my 37th move, I had underestimated this move.

45 Qh7+ Ke8! 46 Rd2 Re4 47 f4 (47 f3 Re3) 47...Re1! 48 Qg8+ Ke7 49 Rd8 at first looked like a

promising alternative but I discovered the amazing "save" for Black 49...Rf1! 50 Rf8 Rh1+ 51 Kxh1 Qc1+ 52 Kh2 Qxf4+ 53 Kh3 Qf5+, which seems to draw a rook down!! That is why I didn't play the Qc8 line at first.

45...Re4 46 f4!

Black has quite a large choice but I do not think a permanent defence is possible.

46...Qe8

If 46...Rxf4 47 Re2+ Kd7 (47...Re4 48 Qh7+) then 48 Qe8+ Kd6 49 Re6+ wins Queen for Rook. Or if 46...b6 47 Rd3 Re1 48 Rd8 Rf1 49 Qf8+ as with my Rook on e8 or d8 he cannot draw by the rook sacrifice.

47 Qg7+ Ke6

47...Qf7 48 Rd7+ wins Queen for Rook.

48 Qxc7 Qc6 49 Qh7 1-0.

At this point Black resigned, a little earlier than expected. However, I am winning his h-pawn in most lines and his King remains in constant danger, while 49...Rxf4 (49...Re1 50 f5+ Ke5 51 Qe7+) does not work because of 50 Re2+ Kd6 (50...Kd5 51 Qd3+ Rd4 52 Qf5+ Kc4 53 Rc2+) 51 Qe7+ Kd5 52 Rd2+ Kc4 (52...Rd4 53 Qd8+) 53 Rc2+ etc.

So you are confident that eventually you will become World Correspondence Champion?

Certainly I am. You might say that time is on my side...

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