



COLUMNISTS

Hoisting the Hippopotamus

Lev Alburt &
Al Lawrence



American Chess Players Home and Abroad During the Attack

—World Chess Hall of Fame Grand Opening Postponed Until December 16-17—

This month we can't begin as if nothing has happened since our last column, a piece written before September 11 and everything that date now means and changes.

Perhaps real Evil is always mad, since sanity and the mass-murder of innocents are incompatible. Of course, Evil is a special kind of insanity—an insanity-by-design that offers no mitigation of guilt. It's not an involuntarily mental illness. To ram hijacked airliners and their passengers into buildings sheltering 50,000 office workers with photos of husbands, wives and children on their desks and desktops requires a madness that's embraced and cultivated, one achieved only after great effort to mind-meld with Evil. Whether one accepts it as a conscious force with a will of its own or as a mental construct symbolizing the worst in human existence, for the current generations Evil has a face—the flaming, crumbling Twin Towers collapsing in great plumes of dust, again and again, on CNN-replays, into the ghastly rubble-mounds of *ground zero*.

World Trade Tower observation platform held a unique place in chess history

Eventually, after waves of more basic emotions and regrets had washed over your co-authors, we remembered that the World Trade Towers had been host to the first complete world championship held in the US, Kasparov-Anand in 1995, since Steinitz' first official match for the title in 1886 against Zukertort. The previous championship in the US, the final Kasparov-Karpov struggle, held in 1990 at New York City's Macklowe Hotel on 46th Street, saw only its first half take place in the US. The match finished in Lyon, France, with Kasparov the winner.

Actually, the Trade Center championship was one of a kind in US history. Of all three world championships in the US, it was the only one held completely in one spot. The Steinitz-Zukertort match

traveled from New York to St. Louis and New Orleans.



At the top of the World Trade Center on a September six years ago—Kasparov beat Anand in the third and most recent chess world championship on US soil.

Attorney Bob Rice, Kasparov's American agent during those times, held meetings and tournaments down the street at One Liberty Plaza, a building now endangered as a result of the earthquake-like shocks resulting from the terrorist attacks.

Time quickly brings us back to our usual passions, chess among them. Our game, after all, is a pursuit that takes the place of human struggle and that allows the simulation of battle pageantry, strategy and tactics—and the worst result possible is wounded pride. And beyond the military symbolism, chess is about peeling off layers of superficiality to find some subtle new truth on our board.

So we return to chess, but the context of our lives is nevertheless changed forever, like a book that survives a flood in apparently good shape until one turns a page to reveal suddenly the telltale of wrinkled, thickened and pasty pages.

Where were our fellow chess players on the day that changed our lives?

In the Upper East Side of Manhattan, chess with the breath of tragedy

Co-author Lev Alburt was at home in New York City. Despite a comfortable life as a top-GM, Alburt escaped the old Soviet regime in 1979 while at a chess tournament in Germany. He quickly chose to live in the US and is now a dedicated New Yorker, not completely comfortable unless he's in that city, among the throng of seemingly unlimited nationalities. Lev was at home in his upper-east-side apartment on the morning of the 11th, ready to start his day of writing and teaching chess. He turned on New York's Channel 1 to catch the weather and instead saw a picture of the first-struck tower burning. At that time, the general reaction was that the tragedy was an accident due to pilot error. There's precedent for that in the City.

On July 28, 1945, an Army Air Corps B-25 bomber, traveling in rain, fog and mist at about 200 mph and trying for a touchdown at New Jersey's Newark airport, struck the 78th and 79th story of the

Empire State Building at 34th Street and Fifth Avenue, killing the pilot and his two crew members—and 11 people working at their desks on a Saturday. Twice that many were injured. The dead and injured worked for the National Catholic Welfare Service (now the Catholic Relief Services, who still maintains its offices on the 79th floor of the building). The impact left eyewitnesses an unforgettable image—a US WWII bomber sticking half-in and half-out of the world’s most recognizable building. Elevator chains were severed, sending passengers plummeting. One engine of the plane jarred loose and rammed through the skyscraper to land on the roof of a different building. Eventually, The Empire State Building was repaired and improved. It remains a NYC stalwart.

But as Lev watched a second airliner crash into the remaining tower, it was instantly clear that the disaster was intentional. A hundred blocks from the World Trade Center, Alburt wasn’t immediately affected—he continued to view the catastrophe as millions did from Toledo, Trieste and Tokyo—on television. Later in the day, food marts were a bit more crowded than normal. Alburt bought a few extra bottles of water. Still later, he learned that his cousin, who drives to work from Brooklyn to New Jersey, had been trapped the evening of September 11 on the west side of the Hudson, unable to cross a bridge or use a tunnel that would bring him back into New York City and home to his own bed. Hotels were jammed; he slept in his car.

But in Lev’s uptown Manhattan, life seemed normal. Then, three days later, a neighbor came to get Alburt because something was burning in the neighborhood. It was a few minutes before they understood that the wind had changed to come from the south—that what seemed nearby smoldering was the smoke from the far end of Manhattan. Chess work went on, accompanied by the very breath of the tragedy.

The Old World

Al Lawrence, who normally lives an hour’s drive from midtown, was in Europe during the attacks. Before the “new war” and the new, post-Tower-collapse world, Lawrence, as the Executive Director of the new World Chess Hall of Fame and Sidney Samole Museum, was on his way to the seaside resort town of Kalithea, Greece, to make a presentation to the FIDE executive committee meeting being held there on September 8th and 9th. Since this is not an Olympiad year, when the meetings are held in conjunction with the worldwide competition, the meeting drew delegates from approximately 60 countries. Lawrence’s project update on the World Hall of Fame was very well received by the World Chess Federation’s delegates and staff. After all, the Hall is the most exciting new chess project in many years, a real Museum for chess

in a striking building in a center for tourism and a city easily accessible by most of the world, Miami.

The FIDE meeting was organized by FIDE Deputy President **Georgios Makropoulos** (also president of the Greece Chess Federation). At the meetings, he sat on the left of President **Kirsan Ilyumzhinov** at the head



table. On **Ilyumzhinov's left sat** Honorary President Florencio Campomanes, looking much like a diminutive Caesar Romero. Photo: *The 72nd Annual FIDE Congress—the Executive Council of officers faces the audience.*

Despite all the presidents and near-presidents at the table, FIDE Executive Director Emanuel Omuku chaired the meeting, a difference between FIDE and USCF, where the president chairs. Photo: *FIDE Honorary President Florencio Campomanes plays blitz after the meetings.*



Various vice presidents and zonal presidents were at the meeting. Interested spectators, including many FIDE national federation delegates, were in the audience and given the opportunity to speak. Three USCFers attended: Steve Doyle, Executive Vice President of FIDE; Jim Eade, the US Zonal President; and William Kelleher, USCF's FIDE representative. Photo: *FIDE Executive Director Emanuel Omuku makes a procedural point while FIDE Treasurer David Jarrett, of the UK, looks on.*





Photo: US Zonal
President Jim Eade, in
World Chess Hall of
Fame cap, talks over a
FIDE agenda point with
Florencio Campomanes,
now Honorary President
of FIDE.

FIDE's doctor bill

The meeting venue and even the organization was new for Lawrence but the issues seemed déjà vu to the USCF veterans. For example, there was the matter of Dr. Stephen Press, VP of FIDE's Medical Commission, the FIDE representative whom we reported on last month, after he had addressed the US Chess Federation's Annual Convention in August, speaking on behalf of "antidoping"—the drug testing of chess players. It seems Dr. Press had run up a \$200,000 travel and expense bill on similar missions. To put this in perspective—it's 10% of FIDE's annual budget! FIDE officials were distraught over the expense and made sure it wouldn't be repeated.

In a private moment, driving Campo and FIDE ratings director Casto Abundo between the meeting hall and their hotel, Lawrence recounted how Dr. Press, an Englewood, N.J., chiropractor, told the delegates in his August address that if USCF didn't acquiesce to drug-testing of chess players, FIDE might replace USCF as the national federation for the US. The normally poker-faced Campo winced visibly in the passenger's position, while Abundo groaned from the backseat. It appeared to Lawrence that Press had been freelancing. Dr. Press has his own website, www.sport-dc.com, where you can check out his significant credentials (as well as his "free examination" special web offer).

A real top-50 GM or rating-rich on paper only?

Another familiar issue was the case of GM Alexandru Crisan of Romania, rated number 49 in FIDE, with an Elo of 2635. Crisan is a wealthy businessman who's become president of the Romanian national federation. FIDE had received charges that rating reports, showing his recent outstanding performances against less than top-tier players, had been doctored. Before its conference, FIDE had taken the step of requiring Crisan to take part in two tournaments against strong players. Crisan played in only one, with a terrible result.

The discussion was animated, with **Makropoulos, from the head**

table, taking on the role of chief prosecutor. Campomanes spoke for moderation. Ilyumzhinov proposed a match between Crisan and Makropoulos, with the winner making (or in Crisan's case,



keeping) the GM title. But Makropoulos, a strong player, was adamant, saying that neither he nor Crisan deserved that title. Crisan was allowed to speak lengthily, and the issue was debated on and off in a democratic way for several days. In the end, the body followed the recommendation of its

Rules Commission, who reportedly had studied “hundreds of documents.” The judgment was harsh. Crisan stands to lose his GM title, and even his IM status. Photo: Romanian FIDE delegate Margareta Muresan (right) vociferously defends Alexandru Crisan to FIDE VP Steve Doyle (off camera).

After the meetings, FIDE held a special, though informal, session, in which the draft meeting notes were distributed and corrections made. This is an intriguing procedure, leading to better minutes and better understanding of their meaning. It's a step that USCF could have benefited from at times. It's true that about half of the delegates had left, but still a healthy group parsed the proceedings. Photo: After the formal meetings, FIDE staffers passed out a draft version of the minutes. Delegates still in attendance hashed out corrections.



World Youth

Held concomitantly with the FIDE Congress was the World Youth Championships. Lawrence followed the FIDE officials to a nearby hotel where the award ceremony took place. Hundreds sat in front of a huge outdoor stage, applauding each winner. As always, kids were



chess' best advertisement. Cameras snapped throughout the hour-long ceremony, during which FIDE officials took turns handing out trophies and medals. Photo: (left) *FIDE President Ilyumzhinov* with one of the youngest World Youth winners. (right) *These days, kids tend to look and dress the same wherever they're from—dozens of young champs charmed the crowd with enthusiasm and big smiles.*

Traveling on September 11

After the FIDE conference ended, Lawrence drove to Thessalonica, Greece, to fly on to the Euwe Centrum (a library dedicated to world champion

Max Euwe) in Amsterdam. Thessalonica is home to a beautiful central square that ends in an azure sea, and it seemed much of the city was out on what the Spanish would call the evening "paseo." Lawrence had met a German couple who was traveling to Crete, having given them a ride from the airport to the city, and the three were taking in the sites and foods. An oddity of the tour was finding ourselves in the middle of a genuine communist rally, complete with rousing, militaristic music and an abundant red banner, highlighting a gold hammer-and-sickle, with the sea as a backdrop. The event turned out to be a protest against NATO. Lawrence remembers chuckling about the demise of the boogie-man of his "duck-and-cover" childhood, indeed of most of his life, laughing that it was hard to find a good communist rally anymore. Unknown to him, the World Trade Center had already fallen, victim to a new enemy, not so tidily contained within one national boundary.

Hotels were scarce and it was nearly midnight when Lawrence found a vacancy for a quick rest before a 6 AM flight. At the desk, the young woman tried to tell him about New York while she imprinted his American Express card. "Trade Towers fell down!" she said. Lawrence was curious, but he hardly took her words literally. Then, checked into a room with CNN on view, within minutes he was watching the famous replay. He spent the short night on the telephone, calling his wife and trying to call friends in Manhattan. Dazed, he caught his early morning flight, which took off and arrived on time, with no noticeable extra security or nervousness at either the Thessalonica or Amsterdam airport.

The Euwe crew

That afternoon Lawrence had carted his laptop and connecting projector—the same tools he had used at the FIDE conference—to the Euwe Centrum in the heart of Amsterdam. The meeting had

been set up weeks in advance by GM Hans Ree, a former champion of Holland and the most popular chess columnist in the country. (He's also author of the popular monthly ChessCafe.com column *Dutch Treat.*)

The idea of making a presentation seemed surrealistic to Lawrence, given the tragedy at home, but he told himself that everyone's best efforts need to go on. A cultural mission seemed particularly important in the context. Anyway, the talk was really aimed at informing the staff of the long-standing site about the new Hall of Fame across the Atlantic and opening the topic of exchanges of information and artifacts. The staff began with polite condolences about the attacks—as an American in Europe at this time, Lawrence never got used to receiving condolences, but understood their good intent. Photo: *At the Euwe Centrum in Amsterdam: (from left to right) Ton Sibbing, Corten Woude (both staffers) Errit Petersma (Chairman of the board) and GM Hans Ree.*



Herren Gracht 341: An American P-DP in Amsterdam

Lawrence was scheduled to fly out the morning of the next day, September 13, but all international flights to the US had been canceled without rescheduling. During the world wars, civilian victims in Europe who became stranded in cities foreign to them were known as DPs—displaced persons. Many of these victims of their times were put up in makeshift camps until a sponsoring country could be found. Some DPs had to walk hundreds of miles to a home that may have not existed any more.

“Stuck” in the beautiful canal-city of Amsterdam, Lawrence was technically “displaced.” (He certainly felt the powerful urge to be home at such a time.) But the worst “hardship” he faced was a lack of hotel rooms (it was the weekend of Amsterdam's largest annual convention, for broadcasters). Actually, this problem led to anxiety only. Fortunately, the hotel Ree had recommended for Lawrence, the Ambassade Hotel at Herren Gracht (“Gracht” in the address means its on a canal) 341, catered to Americans. So each morning the hotel would receive cancellations, naturally, and he was safe-havened for another day. In fact, the worst “deprivation” was, ironically, having to upgrade to a small suite one evening because it was the only room available. He coined a term for himself, “P-DP”—pampered DP.

Rightly so. The staff at the Ambassade appeared to be out of some



over-promising American commercial—gracious, attentive, ever helpful and particularly kind to the stranded Americans. If you find yourself going to Amsterdam, stay at the Ambassador, in the most walkable, beautiful section of Amsterdam. (Their website, complete with pictures of the charming property, is www.ambassade-hotel.nl. Reservations can be made online, and they get a prompt response.) Photo: *anneke at the desk of the Ambassador—one of a staff who define gracious hospitality. She even wrote a personal note saying how*

much she regretted the attacks.

It really is great to be a chess player

There is a brotherhood of chess. And GM Hans Ree and his wife Lien made that clear. (By the way, they both write for the same newspaper, he on chess and she on art.) They invited Lawrence over for a wonderful dinner that ended, of course, in speed games.

Another day, Hans met Lawrence at this hotel and they walked to the Schak Café, where any visiting chess player should go. It's just across the canal from the famous house of Anne Frank. Photo: *GM Hans Ree at home during after-dinner speed games.*



Coming home—the knight's tour

Of course, all the Americans Lawrence ran into throughout the city could only talk of getting home, and how they were spending hours each day calling all the airlines. Lawrence got lucky; he found a way home, on a different airline, but one that would accept his ticket, on the 17th. Sure, the flight went from Amsterdam to Zurich to Dallas to Newark, taking 20 hours, but the important thing was to get to the States. He'd heard that 30,000 Americans had been stranded flying into Canada, before its airports were closed.

Once he hit Zurich, Lawrence got another break by wading into a line that from its length should have yielded World Series Tickets, and virtually did. He got a flight straight to Long Island's JFK. With dispensation in hand, he headed for the long line at the left. Airport security had now been seriously beefed up. An indefatigable team of smartly uniformed inspectors was well organized for a manual search of any baggage revealed by X-ray to contain suspicious

outlines. Long tables stretched out in straight lines, end-to-end to serve as inspection platforms. *We could set up a simul*, Lawrence caught himself thinking.

A Sharper Image church bizarre

His suit-carry-on held only clothes and aroused no interest, but his roll-on computer bag, filled with wires and circuitry, got a complete, item-by-item check. A courteous and friendly young blond man with crisp English ask him to unpack. “You seem to have quite a lot of *gizmos* in this one, sir. Please be so kind as to open it for me, one compartment at a time.” The line of tables, dressed with white cloths like a state championship at the Holiday Inn, laden with everyone’s electronics, took on a look of a Sharper Image church basement bizarre—all that was needed were the hand-printed price tags and homemade cookies.

The razor’s double-edge

Packed tight with electronics, many of its double-zippered pockets looped together with small combination locks, the bag surrendered its warren of widgets one by one. As each “gizmo” case was unzipped to reveal a new piece of electronic equipment, the inspector’s older colleague would appear from other points of the line to wave an instrument over each component, looking, except for his ears, like *Star Trek’s* Spock using his trusty tri-corder. The second man would then walk his device over to a larger station, where whatever data the tri-corder had picked up was analyzed.

All this was done with Swiss precision and logic, so the search took only a few minutes. All was *gut* until my little zippered bag stuffed with travel-sized toiletries gave up its secrets. Both men frowned at my plastic, double-bladed disposable razor. No whizzing tri-corder was necessary. “I’m sorry,” the younger one said, picking up the dark blue plastic finger like it was a thousand-year-old talisman being smuggled out of Egypt, “this has been banned on the flights.” He continued to hold it, almost at arm’s length. “We can package it in a small yellow envelope and put it the baggage compartment for you, or destroy it.”

“Destroy it,” Lawrence said, using the guard’s word choice to be *klar*. But he felt like they were discussing the fate of a mad dog, not a razor. He barely stopped himself from adding, “It’s of no consequence, *ja?*” As a baby boomer, he’d evidently suffered linguistic damage from a thousand bad movie screenplays of spies bluffing their way through tight spots in the scripts.

Spock moved suddenly up the line in answer to a request for his tri-corder. His young colleague slipped the contraband Gillette back into its niche with Lawrence’s toothbrush, closing the zipper. “He’s gone now. Some of this is crazy.”

Although the razor's value was trifling, Lawrence was grateful for the unexpected display of sense-of-exception amidst the ruthless organization of procedures. After all, what could he have done with the whisker-cutting contraband— threaten to swipe off the unwanted facial hair of a stewardess if his coffee wasn't hot?

On the plane, the new rules showed more signs of haste. At mealtime, the knives were deli plastic, but the forks were metal, with sharp prongs. And in the washrooms, for our convenience—double-bladed disposable razors, colleagues of my nearly destroyed bladed depilatory.

None of these notes are meant to be snide. The times are strange, not the concerns of the people scrambling to codify and implement new rules of the roads at 35,000 feet. In fact, both passengers and airline professionals of all nationalities behaved well in this crazy time of fear and horror—and the petty disturbances of unsure bookings, long lines and sleepless nights in foreign airports. But it was a relief to land in New York, where Lawrence rented a car from a Hertz so crowded with unwanted vehicles that it required a tortuous route just to get off the lot.

World Chess Hall of Fame festivities postponed until December 16-17

Once back, it didn't take long for Lawrence to hear from people who didn't want to get into an airplane for a while. As a result, the World Chess Hall of Fame and Sidney Samole Museum will hold its Grand Opening festivities on December 16th and 17th. Please watch its website (www.worldchesshalloffame.org) for details of the schedule.

No one likes the idea of letting madmen dictate our schedules. Indeed, the Museum itself will open two days earlier than scheduled. But the grand opening, with its historic festivities, will wait—out of deference to travelers. By December 16, we must be ready to celebrate our lives and the important legacy of a worldwide culture with a renewed and reinvigorated fervor.

Please email suggestions for future columns and other comments to AlForChess@aol.com. We enjoy your comments and learn from your criticism.

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