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A fine for speeding

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A FINE FOR SPEEDING

The Danish are inimitable: Hans Andersen tells the best story illustrating eternity: once every thousand years, a bird alights on a mountain, sharpening its beak on it. Now, when all of the mountain will have been ground down, one second of an aeon of eternity has passed.

In the same spirit, progress in chess may be measured though with a difference. Your Editors do not know how many clocks are running, or measuring the same time at different rates from Andersen's rare bird on high until mechanical thought on deep.

On one thing, though, all unprejudiced top-chess watchers are agreed: the faster the game, the poorer the man, — Man is penalized for speeding. To be boringly explicit about it: as matters stand, the superior human being has every reason to consider himself superior only when at leisure to play the game at his own sedate rhythm.

Yet, as the pages of this *Journal* have tended to indicate over the past years, his superiority erodes fast, as fast as the game speeds up.

This has long been setting a trend: it seems that human Grandmasters, champions and geniuses, while inimitable, have their own rate of invincibility. When confronted with another instrument, a busier bee, they open up a new area of dubiety about which we wish to report.

By those holding that intuition is at the bottom and, indeed, at the very unique rock bottom of all chess, computer-played games have been ridiculed as mere mechanical mock-ups, infinitely remote from human chess by human masters.

The defensibility of these intuitionist views has now been challenged and — in your Editors' opinion — is on the verge of being falsified. None less than Kasparov has experienced a discomfiture: as the pace quickens the Championship fades.

The Munich results, dating back from this year's spring, had already adumbrated it: when five minutes to a side must see the completion of a game, even the best of human players stumbles and succumb.

So, a reasonable spectator of the grand scene might be tempted to grant those inhuman convolutions of silicon an edge. Timidly, such a spectator might hazard that, at ten minutes a side, the computer might be an even fair competitor to Man. Regrettably, we have a worse achievement to record: not at ten, not even at fifteen, but truly and indeed at as much as twenty five minutes a side, that damnable and damned opponent crushes the best we can afford to field in the way of Grandmasters.

Your Editors are as fallible as our esteemed readership: while we were certain that CC in the title of our *Journal* stood for Computer Champion we had no more than a generalized confidence in the ultimate result that the ultimate victory in perhaps the ultimate human endeavour, chess, would go to the computer rather than to man. What we must own now is that we did not foresee the direction of the attack on our presumed human supremacy.

Yet, by hindsight, it was all too predictable: computers speed up, human beings do not. It follows that, where computers are in the ascendant, they should gain their prepotence by speed. This is what we see happening and we can think of no more convincing set of data for our assertion than Frederic Friedel's report in this issue.

So, as we see it, while three or four centuries have served to hone down chess to a fine point at a human, leisurely pace, the fast frenzy of Man's creation is outpacing us, deriving its advantage from going tick-tick-tock where we go at perhaps a thousandth of a tick. We are being eroded from below, it seems, just by fast stupidity. But this stupidity is glorified as intelligence in other circles.

We do not decide between these warring parties, we do not presume to adjudicate between speed and brain. One thing we *do* know as speed increases: we, human beings, are likely to lose a fine point on account of our fine computers' speeding rate.

Bob Herschberg
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