

The scene is a café table, anywhere from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Around it, a group of chessplaying friends; on it, such refreshment as their taste and the time of day may dictate, and a board and men. One of the group puts a few men on the board, and turns it so as to face the others: “White to play and win,” he says, or “White to play and mate in four,” or perhaps he asks some question such as “What was the game to this position?”

This is the world of chess fantasy. It is not the accident-dominated world of normal play, where the occurrence of a brilliancy depends not just on the winner’s insight and experience but also on the loser’s inadvertent co-operation in making the right blunder to create the opportunity; rather, it is the chess equivalent of the novel or short story, where the characters have been placed just where they need to be and every man on the board is there for a purpose. And it is a world of pure enjoyment, untarnished by the sorrow of defeat (except for the poor old Black king, who always seems to get the worst of it).

So forget about rating points, give yourself a rest from trying to find a new twist in your next opponent’s favourite opening, take out a bottle and a glass, settle yourself down in your favourite armchair, and start reading. You will find endgame studies, problems that have been set in national or international solving competitions, studies and problems in variant forms of chess, “how did we get here” problems, jokes and curiosities ranging from Thomas à Becket to the Loch Ness Monster, and a small selection of puzzles and oddities from fields other than chess. This is chess for fun, chess for pleasure; chess as it should be.

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