

Retro-Chess
by
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It is one of my earliest memories. I can still replay the video in my mind today. When I was five, my father had this box with a board and these wild pieces inside. I was dying to play even though I had no idea what it was about. Although I never saw my father play the game, I was always interested in anything he had because he was my hero. I remember asking him over and over to teach me the game. At first he suggested that I wait until I got a little older. That only made me more determined to learn. I wanted to show my father that I could do it, that I was smart enough to play.

My father was busy working days and going to school at nights but somehow he found the time to teach me this game called chess. He had remarkable patience because I was far from being a prodigy. I remember really struggling to understand. I had a hard time figuring out how to move the "horse-guy" but after a couple weeks I was able to maneuver the pieces well. I entered a couple tournaments as a kid and did all right. However I lost interest and never played too much chess through my high school and college years although I had a friend that took chess seriously and we played for pizzas from time to time.

Then a couple years ago while I was tinkering around with my computer, I tried out this free chess program that came with some software that I had purchased. To my surprise, it began beating me game after game. I could not believe how far chess programs had advanced especially one that was simply a throw-in. My intrigue turned to irritation as I became obsessed with beating my machine. Night after night I came home from work trying to win and each time I would lose. Then in the wee hours of a Friday night blurred into Saturday morning, I had won. I probably woke the neighbors with my jubilant exclamations. At last, I had conquered that damn machine.

I leaned back in my chair, dusted off my bruised ego and basked in my achievement. Unexpectedly, a revelation hit me. Until that victory, I never realized this game involving logic, reason, mathematics and patience had such a profound effect on my thinking through the years. For every move there was a consequence. It was critical to think ahead, to put a plan together and to move decisively. It favored cleverness, creativity and resourcefulness. It required perseverance and discipline. "Wow," I thought. "What a great business education I had unknowingly received through this ancient game."

Months later, I discovered interactive chess through the Internet. In one evening I played Boris from Russia, Itzhak from Israel and Angryrook from Tasmania. Angryrook? Meeting people around the world through this game was remarkable. My horizons broadened as typed conversations with my foreign counterparts opened my eyes to some interesting ways of thinking.

But then I got in touch with my old grade school friend Dr. Tim who now lives in Cranberry. We were far too busy to ever get together to play chess in person but we could do so interactively through the Net. It was amazing how a very impersonal technology suddenly became personal. The humorous on- line dialogue was as competitive as when we were kids.

We both became pretty good out there in cyberland. But Internet chess was far more than a game. It was not only a means of communication, it was also a great way to promote the pursuit of intellectual excellence. My father probably knew that all along.



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