

# CHESS REVIEW

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# THE MORIARTY GAMBIT

By FRITZ LEIBER

Mr. Sherlock Holmes delved shoulder-deep in the large tin box where he stored the neatly red-taped records of his cases and handed me a tall black boxwood chessman of the pattern named for our mid-century czar of British chess Howard Staunton.

"Have a care with it, Watson," he said. I thought I discerned the reason for the warning. The piece was a King and the tiny cross which tops the crown had been broken off and was now tied to the neck of the piece by a length of black thread.

Then my good friend continued, "For it is the sole memento of my first encounter with the mighty Professor Moriarty of detestable memory—an encounter which occurred over the chess board."

"You astound me, Holmes," I said. "I never dreamed you played chess or had bothered to give the noble game more than a moment's thought. I assumed you spoke your one word on chess in connection with the Amberley Affair, when you said that an ability to play it well was one mark of a scheming mind."

My friend smiled at me—a little teasingly, I fancied. "That was Holmes Limited speaking," he said. "Your pardon, dear fellow, but I must say that you often give undue weight to the somewhat prosy remarks of Holmes Limited, while remaining deaf to the inspired utterances of Holmes Unlimited."

"What's this about there being two Sherlock Holmeses?" I demanded. "Now I'm more at sea than ever!"

"Then give me the wheel, Watson, and let me pilot you into harbor. You recall how when we first shared lodgings and you tried to solve the little mystery of my profession, you noted down that my knowledge of literature, philosophy, and astronomy was nil? Likewise my knowledge of history, etcetera, except insofar as it related directly to crime or the current scene?"

"I do," I admitted. "Holmes, I've always been rather embarrassed by those amateurish deductive efforts—"

"Please. You perhaps also recall how, soon after making your astute observation—yes, Watson, it was!—you began to discover that I was well up in all sorts of obscure and even dilettante fields—medieval manuscripts, speculative continental philosophy, the literature of *Sturm und Drang*, and exotic zoology, to name but a few?"

"That's certainly true," I agreed. "And now that you mention it, I recall being once or twice vaguely bothered by the discrepancy between my two observations. I wondered which was mistaken."

My friend laughed outright. "Good old Watson! Simultaneously seeing and not seeing the two Holmeses! Dear fellow, both your observations were completely accurate. Your failure was in not realizing that they related to two different persons."

"Make it a little clearer," I said shortly, somewhat nettled at his patronage.

"Gladly. Holmes Limited (whom we might also call the Practical Holmes, the Man Inside, or even the Stay-at-home Holmes) is a shrewd sensible fellow with specific aims in life and sufficient means of achieving them, a good businessman, who knows among other things that a person can get only so much thought-lumber into his mental attic.

"Whereas Holmes Unlimited (Holmes the Adventurer, the Man Outside, the far-ranging Sherlock) is a maddeningly energetic dreamer, a modern Alexander who firmly believes that no mental or physical realm is beyond his conquest, and who knows of a certainty that the more lumber a man puts in his attic, the bigger his attic becomes."

"I begin to discern your meaning," I said. "But then which Holmes is the real Holmes?"

"Neither, my dear chap! Or both! One's as valid as the other. Put it this way: I have discovered that each Holmes is superbly effective if given the proper work to do. So I share out my life's activities between them. Thus far it has proved a capital arrangement!"

I shook my head. "As a medical man I'm not sure I can approve the encouragement of such a large split in the human personality. There are dangers in such subjective legerdemain, Holmes. Moreover, I don't know how Gregson and Lestrade, to name but two, would react to your admission that you are a kind of Jeckyll-and-Hyde."

"I do!" Holmes carolled. "They'd say they'd suspected it all along and out with a strait-jacket. Seriously, dear doctor, it is my belief that most men have such a split in them, though perhaps not yawning as wide, and furthermore that they'll profit most by admitting the fact and giving each *persona* his proper employment—make the Inside Man secretary of the little self-organization and the Outside Man roving correspondent. Or to put it as acutely as I am able, a man has most chance of happiness and success in this world if he makes his Limited Man Treasurer of his human concern and his Unlimited Man President."

I nodded thoughtfully. "There's wisdom in that, I'll agree, but tell me, Holmes,

how did you ever come to play chess—and of all things a game with Professor Moriarty?"

"Not merely play the Royal Game, Watson, but play it so inspiringly—or schemingly, if you will—that a season of first-class competition would have turned me into a recognized master. For that bold opinion I have the sober word of my one-time chess crony the redoubtable British master Henry Edward Bird. You see, it was Holmes Unlimited who learned chess and he never does things by halves."

"Moreover my encounter with Moriarty was no offhand game at Simpson's Divan or St. George's or the Mephisto—though for a time I frequented those chessic haunts—but in the first round of the London International Tournament of 1883, although (for a reason which will become clear at the end of my narrative) you would look in vain in the entry list of that competition for a Prof. Moriarty or an S. Vernet. (During my brief chess career I used my grandmother's maiden name.)

"You might assume I would have been entered in the Minor Tournament, improbably called the Vizayanagram by reason of the Maharaja of that state having contributed £200 to the prize fund. For the Vizayanagram had a formidable entry list, including von Bardeleben, Gussip, and Izzy Gunsberg, who'd been the player inside the Mephisto automaton.

"But Eddie Bird persuaded me to attempt the Grand Tourney and then browbeat Minchin and Steel (the organizers) into permitting my entry—on his own vouching for my ability and by hammering at the point that they had already allowed the entry of three other comparative unknowns: a J. Mortimer, a Rev. A. B. Skipworth, and a mathematician named Prof. Moriarty.

"We'll show them, Sherlock," Eddie assured me. 'At least we'll show up that conceited mathematician. I lost an offhand game to him at Birmingham. He's insufferable!'

"Even then I knew a little more about Moriarty than Eddie did. I was aware of his two celebrated mathematical papers and also that there was something dubious about the man. I looked forward to observing Moriarty while under the strain of an intellectual competition that allows no secrets of temperament to be kept wholly hid.

"As to showing him up—or any other player in the tournament, for that matter—truthfully, I wasn't quite as confident as Eddie of my ability. But I resolved not to betray my misgivings to Eddie Bird or anyone else. A confident manner can't substitute for brains, but it can catalyze them wonderfully.

"April 23rd, 1883, Watson. The Victoria Hall of the Criterion was electric with the presence of the warring masters and the buzz of the crowd that had gath-

ered to observe and adore them. Zukertort was there, and Steinitz, and Blackburne, and Tchigorin—the four eventual high-scorers in that order—four chess giants, Watson, four full-foreheaded full-bearded men at the apex of their intellectual powers.

"Zukertort—a neat little Pole with a proud military bearing. He'd been an army doctor like yourself, Watson—served with the Prussians on three campaigns. Expert pistol shot and fencer. Had mastered twelve languages and twice twelve fields of knowledge. Zukertort Unlimited was a fantastic example of the Outside Man given free rein, Watson! He was to win 22 of the first 23 games he played in this tournament to cinch the £300 first prize.

"Steinitz—club-footed, lame, but a giant, Watson, the father of modern chess. A narrower genius than Zukertort's but a deeper and more tenacious one—three years later he was to beat him for the world's championship in a match held in America.

"Tchigorin—handsome, flashing eyed, with a glare that went right through you. A Russian tiger of chess. A virtuoso to the fingertips, scorning the illumination of theory and books but playing chess nonetheless like a man who could see in the dark. (All of them, by the by, were outstanding blindfold players.)

"And England's own incomparably brilliant Blackburne. A mild-mannered man, Watson—but on the Continent they called him the Black Death!"

Holmes eyes were shining. I sensed what his enthusiasm for the game must once have been. Then he said more reflectively, though still a-glow, "Watson, I truly believe that any one of those four men might have been a Holmes or a Moriarty—though perhaps Steinitz would have fitted best the Professor's role and Zukertort my own. It was a decade that matured men for mastery, fantastically ambitious, faintly theatric feats of the intellect. Some day, Watson, Holmes unlimited will write a monograph on chess mastery and enthusiasm as an index to a nation's intellectual vitality and—do not laugh, pray!—the relationship between the number of chess masters in a country and the excellence of its espionage system."

He laughed then and continued, "Back to 1883. As you can imagine, young S. Vernet felt somewhat awed in the presence of these adult prodigies—awed, and most depressed about his own chances. However, his spirits revived somewhat when he discovered that his first-round opponent was to be, by the luck of the draw, Prof. Moriarty. At least, S. Vernet thought, he wouldn't have to face one of the giants at the onset.

"Little did he know! Watson, can you picture Moriarty at the chessboard? That pale high-domed forehead, the curious

reptilian sway—why, they were made to overawe a chess opponent!

"I had White for the first game. Ignoring my outstretched hand, Moriarty shot me one searching contemptuous look from those deep-sunk eyes and then touched the lever that set my clock ticking. London 1883 was the first tournament in which were used chess-clocks, that ingenious, characteristically British invention of T. B. Wilson of Manchester.

"Nettled, I advanced my Queen's Pawn two squares and Moriarty instantly retorted in kind. I offered the Queen's Gambit and—oh Watson, if you knew chess and if we had a board and men I could show you the game move by move, for it is engraved on my memory."

"Holmes," I said, standing up, "I have a confession to make. I am something of a chess amateur myself and have a board and men in the bottom of my trunk."

"This is a revelation of unsuspected depths," Holmes said, gazing at me quizzically. "Watson a woodpusher!"

Somewhat stung, I replied, "Not quite a dub. While I was convalescing there from my wounds, I won the championship of the base hospital at Peshawur."

"Deeper and deeper! My dear fellow, why didn't you ever tell me?"

"To be perfectly truthful, Holmes," I said, "I always feared your disapproval. I thought you must scorn chess as a frivolous waste of ratiocinative energy. So when we first roomed at Baker Street, I hid my chessmen—just as I got rid of my bull pup."

"But you should have deduced I was a chess addict, Watson. You knew I reveled in cryptograms, problems, and analysis of all sorts. Moreover, it ought to have occurred to you that no strongly intellectual man who used the anodynes of morphine and cocaine could possibly have failed to try the supreme mental anodyne of chess."

"I can only say that you never gave me the impression of being the sort of man who would even tolerate chess."

Holmes shrugged. "In a way your observation was most accurate, Watson. Holmes Limited detested chess and still does. But for the moment that mean little cost-counting man is off somewhere. So quick, Watson, out with your chessmen before he comes back, and I will show you my most electric experience in the world of 64 squares!"

Within minutes my chessmen—a small battered Staunton set—were arrayed in proper fighting order on their dingy cream-and-green board. Holmes began to move his pieces with never a hesitation for memory searching, though pausing now and again to comment.

HOLMES

1 P-Q4  
2 P-QB4

MORIARTY

P-Q4  
...

"Offering the Queen's Gambit, as I said, Watson. But the Professor did not

take my bait."

I could not resist interrupting to say, "How I wish I'd been there, Holmes! I visualize it as the historic encounter between young Paul Morphy and Adolf Anderssen."

"Not a bad comparison, Watson. Anderssen also was a mathematician—though otherwise an amiable enough man, I gather. But to continue—"

2 . . . . P-K3  
3 N-QB3 P-QB4

"He played the Tarrasch Defense, Watson, some time before the move was made popular by Dr. Siegbert Tarrasch—another medical chess master, as I suppose you know. Unquestionably Moriarty was a chess researchist of the first water."

4 PxQP BPxP

"And now, astonishingly, he offered me in turn the von Hennig-Schara Gambit years before it was introduced at the tournament at Duisburg. In view of these circumstances I prefer to call it the Moriarty Gambit—a designation doubtless the chess world would never accept, but nonetheless the only valid one for me."

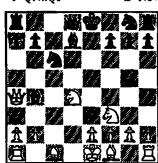
5 QxP N-QB3

"I was of course unable to take his Queen's Knight with my Pawn because it would leave my Queen en prise to his. I saw I could probably retain the advantage of a Pawn by retiring my Queen to its original square, but in so doing I would yield the Professor a sharp initiative. I didn't want that, so on an impulse I made a more aggressive move with my Queen."

6 Q-QR4 PxP  
7 N-KB3 P-Q5  
8 N-QN5 B-Q2

"His Bishop aimed at my Queen in most sinister fashion, but now I saw my opportunity, Watson, to win a Pawn and simplify the position."

9 QNxQP B-N5t



"I reached out my hand to interpose my Queen's Bishop, but just in the nick of time I saw Moriarty's devilish trap. If I interposed and if he then took my Knight with his, and I his Bishop with my Queen, he would win her with a Knight check at his Q7. The Professor had undercut me! I made the only move that would avert the catastrophe, though seeing that my King would be desperately harried in consequence."

10 K-Q1 NxN  
 11 QxB NxN  
 12 KPxN B-R5f

17 . . . . R-K5f  
 18 PxR P-KN4f  
 19 K-N3 QxR

"A double check, Watson—something few players ever suffer and survive, as I imagine you know. I looked up and saw that the Professor was smiling faintly, while his head had ceased its rhythmic sway as his eyes cruelly fixed on my terribly threatened King.

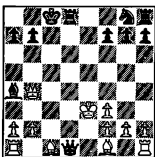
"Incidentally, Watson, Moriarty and I were moving our pieces and tapping our clocks in rapid-fire fashion. The rate of play in the Major Tournament was 15 moves an hour, but that snail's pace was not for our brightly-lit minds. A few heads turned at other tables. A few spectators moved to watch us."

13 K-K2 Q-Q8f  
 14 K-K3 . . . .

"My King had escaped by the skin of his royal teeth from Moriarty's marauding Queen! But his unguarded situation in the center of the board was desperate. Moriarty played—"

14 . . . . O-O-O

"—casting his own King into safety and adding his Queen's Rook to the heavy pieces concentrating against my monarch. At this point Moriarty said to me quietly yet harshly, his lip curling, 'I give you six moves more, Mr. Vernet. Seven at the most.' I made no answer. I had just seen a possibility on the board that electrified me. At once I moved—"



15 B-Q2 . . . .

"Now his Queen, so free a moment before, was threatened in turn and could not escape except by taking my Rook. Moriarty shot me a strange look, yet his manner was still contemptuous as he quickly played—"

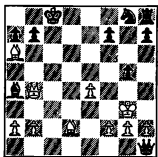
15 . . . . QxR  
 16 B-QR6 . . . .

"And now, having sacrificed one Rook, I was offering him the other!"

16 . . . . R-K1f  
 17 K-B4 . . . .

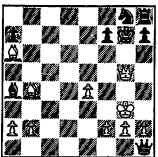
"At long last now Moriarty studied the board for several minutes. He saw I would mate in two if he at once captured my Rook. Realizing his King made more air at all costs, he made a counter-sacrifice and then drove off my King before capturing."

† = check; ‡ = dbl. check; § = dis. ch.



"As he took my second Rook, leaving himself still one Rook ahead in material, he glared at me defiantly. I surveyed the board and said quietly, 'It is mate in five moves, Professor Moriarty.' And then I did a rather extraordinary thing, Watson—I reached across the table and for a moment lightly laid my right hand on his left shoulder. He drew back with a snarl. We played the next moves rapid fire, for mine left him in each case no alternatives."

20 QxP† K-Q1  
 21 Q-B8f K-K2  
 22 B-N4f K-B3  
 23 Q-B5f K-N2  
 24 QxNP mate



"And now in this moment of my triumph, the meaning of my shoulder-touch must have become clear to Moriarty. It was an epaulette mate—the black Pawns standing to either side of his King, like epaulettes on the shoulders of black royalty, prevented him from moving aside from my Queen's fatal check.

"In retrospect I like to think that my shoulder-touch also foreshadowed the day when I hailed off the Napoleon of British crime to British justice.

"But that was in the future. At the time my gesture merely added to the completeness of my chessboard triumph and to Moriarty's chagrin at his defeat.

"He gave me a look, Watson, that went through me like a knife. If ever murder glared from two eyes it was then. His fingers writhed, making claws. It must have cost him a titanic effort not to attempt to strangle me then and there.

"He snatched up his vanquished King and pressing sideways his thumb with terrible pressure snapped off the cross

on the crown. Then he dropped the fragments on the center of the board, stood up, and glided rapidly from the room.

"I have always thought, Watson, that Moriarty's unique manner of admitting defeat symbolized his renouncing of chess in favor of a deadlier form of competition against his fellow man. Incidentally, Watson, I don't believe he ever connected the S. Vernet who ended his chess career with the S. Holmes who terminated his crime career. Perhaps his dark egotistic mind deliberately forgot Vernet's appearance. From a sort of courtesy I never revealed the connection to him, even atop Reichenbach Falls.

"Meanwhile the first round of London 1883 went on around me. Zukertort was already brewing against Blackburne that is widely recognized as the most celebrated chess combination of all times. The few spectators drifted away from my table, and I sat there gazing at Moriarty's shattered King, my mind furiously active in a new direction.

"I had just perpetrated a notable chess brilliancy—for a double check countered in three moves by a two-Rook sacrifice surely merits that description—yet I felt no elation from it. My imagination was obsessed by the glimpse I had caught of the black depths of murderous malignancy in Moriarty's soul.

"It occurred to me that the study and if need be the nullification of such evil constituted a worthier challenge for a ratiocinative man—a more pressing task in the service of society, if you will—than weaving nets to trap boxwood Kings. The Limited and Unlimited Holmeses had a conference then and there, and as a result of it I did one of the few shabby things I've ever been aware of doing in my life, Watson. I pocketed the fragments of Moriarty's King and I walked out of Victoria Hall and never went back or sent any word. Eddie Bird never spoke to me again.

"That's why you won't find Moriarty's name or mine in the tournament records. They were expunged for our most unmanly, un-British retirement from the tourney.

"Yet I am convinced I did the right thing. There are times, Watson, when a man simply must give up chess. As I slowly moved past the boards of the mighty competitors I now would never meet, I noted among the observers a noble-visaged full-bearded man in a white suit far finer than that on the back of any one of the pondering chess masters. It was Baron Ignatz Kolisch, the Austrian grandmaster of the game who had given it up in order to devote all his mental energies to creating winning combinations on the stock market.

"I pressed past the wise and wealthy baron—who must have had a very sound Inside Man indeed—and quietly left the Criterion."