

## Black knight – Black lines

by Grandmaster Raymond Keene OBE

In spite of some doubtful and slim early attributions to Prokopius Waldvogel of Avignon, it is widely accepted that modern printing was introduced by Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz, circa 1450. In England the baton was relatively swiftly (for the times) taken up by William Caxton with his *Game and Playe of the Chesse*, circa 1470, followed, on these shores, by various publications from the hand of Caxton's successor, Wynkyn de Worde.

Once Gutenberg had opened the door, a veritable tsunami of printed books burst through the floodgates and by 1500 AD around 300 printers had proliferated in Europe, with millions of books published. In contrast, the Turkish Ottoman Empire, established in Constantinople (now Istanbul, after the collapse of the Eastern Roman Imperium to Islam in 1453) regarded printing with something of a jaundiced eye.

When the Muslims initially encountered the printing press, their first reaction was to ban it. In 1485, the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid II declared (with universal support from his scholars) that the printing press should be declared *haram*.

Bayazid forbade the import of the printing press into Muslim lands and even prohibited books that had been printed in Europe to traverse his borders into Ottoman territory. In 1515, his descendant, Sultan Salim I, at a time when the printing press had become increasingly more powerful and no fewer than 20 million books had been sold in Europe, issued a fatwa that anybody caught with a printing press, in any part of the Ottoman imperium, should be executed. The penalty was death.

The advent of printing brought with it a problem which the Sultans had neatly sidestepped, by criminalising the process. The European age of mass communication, widespread dissemination of information and access to views which dissented from officialdom, led authorities, both church and state, to devise forms of censorship to suppress unwelcome opinion.

Nowadays, Wokistas, such as Humza Yousaf in Scotland, or leftie universities, arm themselves with Orwellian weapons, such as the black lines of redaction, cancel culture, or ludicrously convoluted laws against perceived prejudice, such as recent Scottish legislation against so called non crime hate crimes. Another typical woking class tactic is to scream with rage to denounce adverse opinions, held by such luminaries as JK Rowling, Sharron Davies and Dr Hilary Cass, on the “toxic” perils of juvenile gender transition. However, the screamers may experience greater difficulty in creating sufficient noise to drown out the recent condemnation of Transgenderism, as expressed by His Holiness Pope Francis I in *Dignitas Infinita*, the new declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

At the dawn of the printing revolution, retribution and suppression were decidedly more drastic, with ultra Catholic enforcer Sir Thomas More, taking advantage of the firewood season to persecute Bible translator William Tyndale, who at the instigation of English

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agents, it is now thought, was first strangled, then burnt at the stake. Tyndale's translation was the first version of The Bible in English to take advantage of the invention of the printing press. Even in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who famously claimed that she had no desire to make windows into men's souls, Puritan pamphleteer John Stubbs was sentenced to have his right hand amputated in public. Stubbs remained defiant until the end, exclaiming: "pray for me now, my calamity is at *hand!*" As soon as his right hand had been detached, he raised his hat with his left, proclaiming: God save the Queen. Then he fainted.

Chess has played a noble role in the struggle against suppression of the printed word and freedom of the expression and thought.

Thomas Middleton's 1624 play *A Game of Chess* allegorized the events surrounding the proposed, but abortive, Spanish marriage between the Infanta and Prince Charles, later to become King Charles I. It was particularly harsh on Count Diego Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador, represented by the chess piece, the Black Knight. Gondomar was easily recognisable in the play as a result of Middleton's decision to portray the Spanish plenipotentiary complete with a contraption to mitigate his anal fistula.

All plays were censored, but, surprisingly, Henry Herbert as Master of the Revels, passed it for performance; it was a short-lived but scandalous success, doubtless deriving its brief survival due to the temporary absence from London of King James, on a hunting trip, in August 1624. It has been suggested that Herbert was, in fact, and in opposition to King James' policy of placating the hegemonic Spanish world empire, sympathetic to the unprecedented dramatic liberties taken in portraying members of the English royal family.

Herbert's name was revived in the 20th century by that chess loving sci fi series Star Trek, when Captain Kirk was accused in one episode by a group of egregious space hippies of being a "Herbert" aka an official holding rigidly conventional opinions. Since King James I/VI was a partial target of Middleton's chess analogy, it seems that Herbert was, perhaps, less of a toady to officialdom, than might at first have appeared.

This week's game is one of the deepest ever played, a creation of Alpha Zero, the AI brainchild of Demis Hassabis. You read it here first! Years ago [I predicted the elevation of Demis to the Knighthood](#) and now my prediction has come true.

### DeepMind: AlphaZero vs. Stockfish 8 engine

exhibition match, London, 2017/18

Queen's Indian Defence: Fianchetto. Nimzowitsch Variation

At the time of the match, Stockfish was the world computer champion; while AlphaZero had been self-taught within a matter of a few weeks. In a 1,000 game contest between these goliaths, AlphaZero first destroyed that release of Stockfish (+155-6=839), then treated a pre-release Stockfish 9 similarly, exhibiting further wins with a time differential of 10-1.

Of course, AlphaZero was only one of several gameplaying neural networked large language models produced by DeepMind; all learning from first principles to champion's status; with others similarly designed for Shogi and Go. Even Texas Hold'em Poker was not safe.

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This game has been subjected to considerable analysis as perhaps befits the most beautiful of the thousand game series. In the following, unable to cover the whole creative scope, we stop at some of the key moments, leaving the reader links to investigate more, if desired.

One commentator even goes so far as to compare it to the immortal zugzwang game played in Copenhagen in 1923, between [Friedrich Saemisch and Aron Nimzowitsch](#) (see 51. g4!!).

**1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 b6 3. d4 e6 4. g3 Ba6 5. Qc2 c5 6. d5 exd5 7. cxd5 Bb7 8. Bg2 Nxd5 9. O-O Nc6 10. Rd1 Be7 11. Qf5**

But not 11. Rxd5 Nb4 12. Qc3 Nxd5 13. Qxg7 Bf6 14. Qg4, when White receives insufficient compensation for their investment of an exchange sacrifice.

**11... Nf6 12. e4 g6 13. Qf4 O-O 14. e5 Nh5 15. Qg4 Re8**

Still in theory, despite some claims to the contrary. We are following a line from the game: Verhaeren-Medgyes, ½-½, corr., 2020.

**16. Nc3 Qb8 17. Nd5 Bf8 18. Bf4 Qc8**

AlphaZero continues to issue tactical challenges to the world champion: here, should Black wish to eliminate White's powerful black-squared bishop by 18... Nxf4, there follows: 19. Nf6+! Kg7 20. gxf4 Re7 21. Qh3 h5 22. Nxd7! when Black's position has become parlous.

**19. h3 Ne7 20. Ne3 Bc6 21. Rd6 Ng7? TN**



The necessary theoretical novelty: 21... a5, was played in Williams-Meiners, 1-0, corr., 2019.

**22. Rf6 Qb7?!**

Our more contemporary engine chides this move, preferring several alternatives, including 22... h5, ...Nh5 and ...Nd5

**23. Bh6 Nd5 24. Nxd5 Bxd5 25. Rd1 Ne6 26. Bxf8 Rxf8 27. Qh4**

Eying the weakened dark squares left vulnerable after the exchange of the black bishops.

**27... Bc6 28. Qh6 Rae8 29. Rd6!**

Note that, if 29. Rxe6 fxe6! (29... Rxe6?? 30. Ng5 Rd8 31. Qxh7+ Kf8 32. Qxf7 checkmate; or 29... dxe6? 30. Ng5! f6 31. Bxc6 Qg7 32. Qxg7+ Kxg7 33. exf6+ Kxf6 34. Nxh7+ Kg7 35. Rd7+ Kh6 {35... Rf7 36. Rxf7+ Kxf7 37. Ng5+} 36. Nxf8 Rxf8) 30. Ng5 Re7, is winning for Black.

**29... Bxf3 30. Bxf3 Qa6 31. h4 Qa5 32. Rd1 c4 33. Rd5 Qe1+34. Kg2 c3 35. bxc3 Qxc3 36. h5 Re7 37. Bd1!**

Bringing the knight to b3 via d1, and lancing the a2-g8 diagonal, is a brilliant conception.



**37... Qe1 38. Bb3 Rd8 39. Rf3 Qe4 40. Qd2 Qg4 41. Bd1 Qe4 42. h6 Nc7?!**

A far more robust continuation is to interpose 42... Kf8 43. Kh2 before a subsequent ...Nc7.

**43. Rd6!**

And White has accumulated a small, but telling, advantage.

**43... Ne6 44. Bb3**

The legacy Stockfish had missed this move, presuming 44. Rd5 to preserve the e5 pawn. Our assistant 'Pancho', in use here (Stockfish 16), spots 44. Bb3 immediately; and makes no attempt whatsoever to salvage the e5 pawn, which is *en prise*; i.e. vulnerable to capture.

**44... Qxe5 45. Rd5 Qh8**

Even at this point, the Black player supposed, at the time, the position to be a drawn one.

**46. Qb4 Nc5 47. Rxc5 bxc5 48. Qh4!!**

Ignoring the recapture on c5 to set up a double attack on Black's rooks.

**48... Rde8 49. Rf6 Rf8??**



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Absolutely required was 49... Kf8! to meet 50. Qf4 with ...Qg8. The game may then have continued: 51. Qc7 c4 52. Qxc4 Rd8, when Black has no particular difficulties. Nor do 49. c4 or ...g5 offer realistic prospects of holding the dam, but the text move opens the sluices. For all intents and purposes, Stockfish, the world champion engine, could have resigned at this point; but didn't? Surely a 'horizon' limitation effect, because it couldn't be pride, could it?

**50. Qf4 a5 51. g4!**

As 'agadmator' helpfully observes in his excellent *YouTube commentary*, after this move, Black is hopelessly mired in the muddy ground state of Zugzwang! Black struggles for a while, before being inexorably sucked beneath the firmament, and to a terrible end.

**51. d5 52. Bxd5 Rd7 53. Bc4 a4 54. g5 a3 55. Qf3 Rc7 56. Qxa3 Qxf6 57. gxf6 Rfc8 58. Qd3 Rf8 59. Qd6 Rfc8 60. a4** Black resigns 1-0

A couple of further posts follow, to better appreciate this fine work of machine art:

- a) [google](#);
- b) [chess.com](#).

Ray's 206th book, "[Chess in the Year of the King](#)", written in collaboration with Adam Black, and his 207th, "[Napoleon and Goethe: The Touchstone of Genius](#)" (which discusses their relationship with chess) are available from Amazon and Blackwells.