

**Spassky At A Safe Distance, Issue 7**  
**or**  
**“Why Do All World Chess Champions Go Mad?”**  
**(Extended Issue)**

**1: Introduction**

**2: Spassky’s Senior Speculation**

**3: Story + Bonus**



**1**

Anyone who has played a game of chess – or better yet: lost a game of chess – shouldn’t be surprised to learn that those who devote their lives to that game – and, especially those who become World Champion of it – usually wind up mistaking barbers for serial killers, cameras for communist hypnotic devices, and anarcho-capitalism for a sensible political philosophy. Even if you’re not surprised by this, I’d recommend you stick along for 2, where I’ll be guiding you along the story of the most notable [deranged] World Champions the game has seen – a story I imagine even a checkers player can appreciate.

Benjamin Franklin furnishes this week’s story: The Morals of Chess. It’s really an essay, where the Founding Father/Lightning Rod Inventor/The-Guy-on-the-Hundred-Dollar-Bill, details the gentlemanly way of playing chess.

(This edition, sadly, forgets tenant number 9: ‘Tis Excufable Fore To Employe One’s Mufket Shoulde One’s Opponente Favoure 1.d4 or 1.g6 – Bodye To Be Difpofede Of Somewhence Acutely Fmellye)

**Paul Morphy:**

We'll start our World Champion saga of Insanity with American legend Paul Morphy (1837 – 1884).

If The Sandman had sprinkled any grain of Dream of Domination into a Victorian chess player, Paul Morphy would've expelled it from their eyes before they even started to water.

At 21 he had dismantled the chess talent of the U.S, and was looking for a greater challenge. Morphy found this challenge in the Goliath of Victorian-age chess, Adolf Andersen, but when he tried to arrange the match on his side of the Atlantic, Andersen excused himself by stating that he couldn't travel that far – probably owing to complications of the eye, proceeding excessive wink-wink-ing.

What did Morphy do? He took a steamer to France, where Andersen was staying, hoping to arrange the match.

Morphy challenged Andersen in Paris, but – woe is me! – the poor blighter suddenly had a train to catch: from Paris to Anywhere But Paris.

Whilst Andersen was playing Nomad, Morphy passed the time by destroying chess legends like Barnes, Löwenthal and Harwitz, until finally public pressure forced Andersen into France, into Paris and into a match with Morphy – Andersen consenting to this after it had been confirmed that Morphy was sick with gastroenteritis.

But even with his entrails doing cartwheels, Morphy beat him, and returned to America a hero, hailed as Champion of the World – although no such title had been officially established.

He had studied to become a lawyer, and tried to become a lawyer, but couldn't become a lawyer, because the Civil War happened, and knowing The Name of the Law wasn't nearly as valuable as knowing the Name of Making Someone Un-alive.

He tried again to become a lawyer, after the war, but no-one wanted to hire him because no-one could quite believe that a world-star, such as himself, would ever resign himself to such a miserable occupation. Or maybe they foresaw what would happen next?

Morphy went crazy, and no-one really knows why. He liked arranging women's shoes in semi-circles, and when he wasn't doing that he was talking to himself, or playing hide-and-seek (with particular emphasis on the "hide"-part) with barbers – convinced that they wanted to kill him.

His family tried to get him admitted to some Psyche-ward, or Asylum, but – having studied law – Morphy knew his rights so well, and could argue so skillfully for his own sanity, that they could not make a convincing case against him.

Morphy was consumed by his illness for the rest of his life; he died after an attempted bath in 1884.

**Bobby Fischer:**

We jump forward in space-time now to the World Championship 1972, and Iceland. (The title of World Champion was introduced in 1886, and first claimed by Wilhelm Steinitz) The current reigning WC is Soviet Golden Boy: Boris Spassky (It's a funny name, alright! So

what, I nicked a funny name? Don't pretend you wouldn't christen yourself Spassky if you had the option to!)

But we don't care about Spassky, we care about his opponent, Bobby Fischer: an eccentric American Grandmaster, who has earned the seat across from the Champion through destroying his competition so utterly that his actions must constitute some human rights violation.

The Soviets have kept the World Champion of Chess title behind the Iron Curtain since 1948, recognising it as their national sport. They were obsessed with the game. Every young Soviet was drafted into chess programs to assess their natural abilities – the talented ones being high to militarily trained to maintain the Chess King's Crown under ironclad guard.

Enter Bobby Fischer, prodigy with little but ambition and chess books for weapons against the Soviet Chess Machine.

And in no time at all, Spassky – the one with the funny hair – will stretch his hand over his losing position, resigning the crown to Fischer.

It was a big deal – Fischer was like 70s Ronaldo or Tyson, but just a bit of a nerd.

Bobby had been under the press' pressing pressure for a long time; they loved covering his eccentricities: the unreasonable demands for matches, the unwillingness to play under too bright lights, or with the vague hum of a camera – a good portion of the Championship was actually played in a little ping-pong room. But at last he got good coverage!

Or at least for a time...

Shortly after winning the championship, Fischer said he felt empty. Maybe that explains why he sought meaning in the doomsday cult The Worldwide Church of God. It was also at this time that Fischer started disappearing from chess, becoming isolated.

He was challenged by Soviet superstar-prodigy Anatoly Karpov for the World Champion title in 1975, but Fischer's demands for the match were so

Lick-Your-Elbow-Whilst-Tying-Yourself-Into-A-Double-Knot ridiculous that the match couldn't be played. Fischer forfeited his title, and Karpov became champion.

Those unfortunate few who had met Fischer at this time reported disturbing things. Fischer was idolizing Hitler, denying the holocaust, perfectly fitting the picture of an antisemitic (insert literally anything bad)-ist.

(Note: He had a Jewish mother)

Radio interviews from 1999 and 2006 prove the validity of all these claims. What he said on September 11th 2001 won't surprise you.

What happened next is a bit unclear, but – as far as I can make it out – Fischer got Catfished by some Bulgarian girl, somehow got indicted by the U.S Senate, and ended up in Japan with an invalid passport. He was detained, had nowhere to go, because no-one wanted to have him.

Eventually, Iceland – where he won his title 1972 – felt bad for Fischer, and flew him up North to make him an Icelandic citizen.

He died shortly after, but to many he was dead already.

**After That Mess + Modern Day:**

World Champions were sort of sane after this point. The Bonus tells the story of the greatest rivalry in chess: Karpov vs Kasparov – I won't spoil who came out on top, but know that both of them were kind of sane.

The lot that came after them were also of sound mind, leading us to the current champion, Magnus Carlsen – the only Norwegian with a triple digit IQ. (I'm allowed to make that joke, I have practically exclusively Norwegian blood in me. I'm too stupid to get mad at) Carlsen is the Mozart of chess, best there ever was, and a thorough bore to write about. So this concludes the saga.

**[NOTE: This issue does NOT make fun of mental illness; I'm simply telling the stories of the most interesting Champions of Chess, and those two just happen to have gone bonkers. I should advise anyone who thinks I'm making fun of mental illness to a) Get their eyes checked, and b) Tap on their forehead and listen for an echo.]**

**Short Story of the Week: [Benjamin Franklin's Essay on the Morals of Chess](#)**

**Bonus: [My Favourite Chess Documentary -- Bobby Fischer Against the World](#)**