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EXPOSE

Computers & Cheating on the Internet

Sunday; March 14th, 2004. By: LIFE-Master A.J. Goldsby I

** The use of chess-playing programs is not allowed ** unless you have a (C) label. ["help computers"](#) explains. **

The standard blurb you see when you log onto "The Internet Chess Club" ... under "Blitzin."
(Nearly EVERY Chess server has a statement of this type that you see when you first log on.)

See the article - about cheating - in the April, 2004 ... of [Chess Life](#).

I just wanted to write an article about the cheating that goes on today on the Internet.

It seems that chess is plagued with this problem, it seems that it is impossible to escape from it, no matter where you go. It also threatens to ruin the future of chess as a viable recreation or sport.

Take postal chess, for example. The cheaters are everywhere, you cannot really get away from it. When a {young} player - who has been playing chess less than a year, and only has an OTB, (OTB = "over-the-board"); rating of UNDER 1000 - can draw a veteran postal player in an e-mail tournament in a game that lasted nearly seventy-five moves ... it becomes obvious that something is going on. (The rules of this one organization explicitly forbids the use of computers in any fashion, but I guess just about everyone feels free to completely ignore this little 'glitch.')

Many experienced tournament players tell me this is commonplace. I personally do not feel that someone who cannot play real chess at say the 1400 USCF level, has any business with a POSTAL Title of **ICCF IM** or **ICCF GM!!!** Period! It is a joke when a player who has no real skills of his own, is awarded a title based on the strength and speed of his or her computer.

I know a strong postal player who is in his fifties. (Approximately.) He holds a respected postal title. And while he was never able to reach the OTB Master level, his USCF rating is a very respectable 2000+. (He also has been playing postal chess for close to 45 years, winning great postal games long BEFORE the computers were even a factor!) So you can understand my shock and surprise when he told me certain things - quite frankly - during a long telephone conversation. First, he told me that I was, ... "kicking against the pricks." He told me that, "the use of computers is a fact of modern life, and that you may as well get used to it!" He STRONGLY advised me not to play postal chess without consulting the computer. He said, in effect: "The first time that you are human, and miss a tactic - you will be beaten by a player who is vastly inferior to you ... but checks the computer for every single move." He also told me that if I wanted to play postal chess that I should at least "blunder-check" my variations for

possible human oversights. I was both terribly shocked and disappointed to learn this. (To say the least!)

The rules of MOST respectable postal organization EXPRESSLY forbid the consultation of outside parties for analysis. This INCLUDES the use of ANY computer program. (Check the rule-book of virtually any group to verify this.) ***Are there no honest players left today?***

Now take Internet chess. Most servers today are completely over-run with cheaters.

Two of my (former) favorite variants of chess, crazy-house and wild-five ... it is virtually impossible to get an honest game of chess in these chess sub-types. One player on ICC told me he had won over 150 games in a row. This coupled with his ridiculously high rating, means that it becomes obvious that this person is a BLATANT cheater. (His OTB rating is \leq 1300.)

One admin on another server told me that players felt free to cheat at wild-5 and crazy-house (zh) chess simply because no one had ever figured out a reliable way to check this type of chess for possible use of a chess engine. (Yes there are engines for these sub-types of chess!)

About two years ago, I became convinced that one player on ICC was cheating. He often would play in - and win, with great ease - the nightly blitz tournaments. He was (supposedly) a respected FM. But today his handle has the "(C)" designation next to it. (C=computer) He was finally busted. But it seemed to take an eternity - for me, anyway - for this to happen.

But what prompted this article was the recent "[Dos Hermanos](#)" qualifying tournaments on the "Internet Chess Club." ([ICC](#)) I played in several sections in this event ... and also watched many of the games from this 'net spectacle. And it is blatantly obvious that something is clearly rotten in the state of Denmark. (Just a saying in America, no disrespect to any Europeans here.) Apparently many players could not resist the temptation, when first prize is like 5000 Euro's.

In one event/section, I only lost two games; but both of these were to players I felt clearly were using a computer. (When ANY player makes 20-30 PERFECT moves ... in only 1-2 seconds, one can very safely assume that they are cheating.) Later in this same section, the player who defeated me early on was tossed ... "on suspicion of using a computer."

The cheating in this event was simply ludicrous - at least in the preliminaries. MANY FM's were tossed, about 15 fairly well-known IM's, and even **ONE FIDE GRAND-MASTER**, (handle = "Garompon"); WAS BOOTED!!! All of these were done on suspicion of using a computer. The sad part about it - is that this player, (The GM in question.); is also an OFFICIAL ICC VENDOR!! (At least he was, at the time that I last looked him up on ICC - using the "finger" command.)

Now I greatly suspect that many of these players are fish - who are simply posing as titled players on the Internet. (Which says something for the extremely shoddy nature of the ability of this server to check the ID and credentials of these players.) But this cannot account for all of these, some of these players I know personally. **(This is truly incredible.)**

One FM - that I have knocked heads with many times in real, OTB events ... was one of these. I watched one of his games on the Internet. Since I knew him personally, I felt free to tell him, "That sure looked like a computer program towards the end of that contest. As far as I can tell, you played the final phase of that game PERFECTLY ... and very, very, **VERY** fast." His

response floored me. He sent me the following tell, which as close as I can remember, is word-for-word. He said, "It WAS a computer!" I typed, "You are kidding, right?" He typed, "HECK NO! I know this kid." (The opponent he had just defeated.) "He often has beaten me from lost positions by using his chess engine ... to <take over> the game after a certain point. I finally got smart and learned how to beat him at his own game!" (With certain interfaces, you can set up a <HOT KEY.> [Say F8.] This key can then be hit at any time when it is your move, and the chess engine that you have previously designated will complete the game for you!) I said a few words, and then I signed off. (I was too shocked and stunned to try and pretend ... or make any attempt at normal, pleasant conversation.) I thought to myself ... HOW FAR HAS THIS TREND GONE???

There are many ways to combat this. Cheaters should be dealt with VERY harshly!!
(Maybe banned for life from certain servers?)

The interface could be designed so that NO DIRECT CONTACT with a program that allows chess engines is possible. (Maybe ONLY the actual client program should be used.) Also, all computers should have to connect a special portal - thus instantly identifying themselves.

Any use of WINBOARD *must be banned* from ALL chess servers!!

Some servers - like "Play-Chess" - use a constant spy-program to watch the games of lower-rated players. A chess engine can be ascertained ONLY from the moves actually made by that player. (You see announcements all the time on this server. "So-and-so" was caught using a chess engine and has had their ELO rating deleted.) But this is not all of the answer, one of the administrators told me that high-rated players ... and TITLED players ... are not checked. Apparently, the spy program can make a mistake in the case of a GM.

This trend has gone on long enough. It is time to expose the cheaters and deal with this problem, head on - - - in a real and meaningful way. One cannot ignore this problem any longer!! [\[contact\]](#)

<< The strong [Dos Hermanas online KO tournament](#) held on the ICC last month disqualified both finalists after the event was over for computer cheating! (GMs Alexander Riazantsev and Julio Becerra.) From what I hear, discussion of what happened has been forbidden in the ICC chat channels, with violators getting the boot. >>

<< No matter how good a server is at detecting computer cheating, it's still fairly easy to do if you have another computer. The [latest issue](#) of the American magazine *Chess Life* preys on every player's paranoia with an "is your opponent cheating?" cover story. It's a worthless question because you'll simply never know for sure unless the server itself detects it by monitoring the player's computer. If you suspect someone enough for it to bother you, simply don't play them anymore.>> - - - **Mig Greengard** in his [ChessBase column](#).

April 19th, 2004; 1154 hours: I figure fair is fair. I logged on to [ICC](#) and asked around. I got to talk to one of the senior ICC administrators. I asked him <<Birdsman>> to verify or dispute the above information. His first response was to threaten me, and tell me I could be BANISHED permanently. **FOR LIFE!!!** (Just for discussing it or asking questions!) After repeating this threat ... more than once ... this same admin told me that I was NOT allowed to discuss it. He (also) said, "no one knows for sure if they were cheating or not." He said that: ... "only Speedtrap is allowed to make this determination." He did verify - directly or indirectly - several items. (Such as discussion of the topic was forbidden. WHY??? What are they trying to hide???) He also stated

that one of the individual involved had been removed from the ICC official vendor list.

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