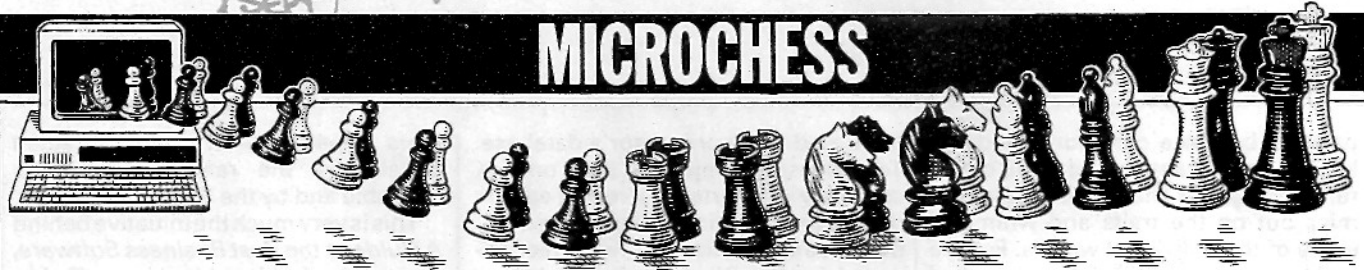# MICROCHESS

Private tuition

Teaching someone to play chess — unless you have the patience of an angel — is a good way of discovering your tolerance level. But teachers and beginners need fret no more: the Chess Tutor for the 48k Spectrum may be the perfect antidote, as Tony Harrington discovered.

It is astounding how slowly the human mind comes to terms with new concepts and rules. If your temperament is anything like mine, no matter how badly you play chess, you'll soon find a distinct edge in your voice as you point out for the umpteenth time the disastrous consequences of a novice's latest move! There are few things I find more irritating than seeing a beginner pick up a white bishop and deposit it on a black square.

Fortunately, provided the would-be-chess player has a Spectrum, there is no reason why any human being should have to waste valuable hours teaching another how to play the game. The *Chess Tutor* from Braveline (£9.95) will do it all for you.

Chess Tutor is an excellent program, well worth its weight in gold to anyone who wants to learn how to play chess. It is also, in my opinion, a great improvement on the self-teach method, where you sit down with an introductory book, chessboard and pieces. To start with, beginners find reading chess moves almost impossible. They confuse the addresses of squares and get into terrible muddles. A phrase like 'Qe3-b6' looks totally opaque and can kill off one's interest right at the start.

Chess Tutor cuts out the muddle by the simple device of displaying animated graphics. When it tells you about the rules governing knight moves, for example, it displays an animated knight, moving smoothly about the chessboard.

Aimed at the absolute beginner it takes nothing for granted. The program is cassette-based. But this is no disadvantage since all the information you require is displayed on the screen. *Chess Tutor* contains a surprisingly large amount of material which covers everything that the out-and-out beginner needs to know about playing chess

— from how to move the pieces, to sophisticated tactical concepts like double checks and skewers.

The use of animated graphics combined with text is outstanding and demonstrates just how valuable computer-assisted learning can be in this area.

The main menu appears as follows when the program is loaded:

Introductory Course one:
1) **The board, starting play, pawns and knights**
2) **Bishops, rooks, queen, king**
3) **Castling exercises, check, checkmate and stalemate**
4) **Stalemate exercises, perpetual check, capture and pins**
5) **Forks, double attacks and skewers.**

Select a number. Which part do you want?

Enter 0 to stop

Chess Tutor is cunningly designed. The master routines, which handle things like the movement of sprites, the graphics display, loading routines and so on, are held in the 'master program routines'. Each of the options on the main menu is a separate set of routines on the tape and has to be loaded separately. If you have loaded Option 1 and want to move on to Option 3, the code for Option 3 would overwrite that for Option 1. In this way the limits of the Spectrum's 48k are overcome.

The sub-menu for Option 1 covers six options: the board, starting play, the pawn (basic), *en passant*, promotions, the knight. The technique for all *Chess Tutor's* lessons is the same. A green and white squared chessboard is displayed in the right-hand half of the screen, with enough space below it for five or six lines of text, plus more text in the left-hand half of the screen. This is used to display the record of moves, and for messages requesting user

responses, like 'Press any key to continue', or 'Input a move'.

The first lesson starts with a point that beginners generally wouldn't consider. The chessboard always has to be positioned with a white square in the bottom right position. This is the only way that a board can be set up so that each player's queen is on the square of the appropriate colour (that is, white queen on a white square, black on black).

When it deals with the rules governing pawn movements, the graphics display is an invaluable teaching aid. To illustrate the two possible moves a pawn can make when it starts off, the 'd' pawn slides gracefully from d2 to d3, then from d2 to d4. The diagonal capture and the complexities of *en passant* pawn takes are all clearly demonstrated in the same fashion.

If there are definite advantages to a computerised, screen-based chess tutor, there is also one, fairly substantial, disadvantage — at least as far as a cassette-based program is concerned Jumping from one section to another is a good deal more complicated than flipping over the pages in a book.

Nevertheless, Braveline has done everything a programmer could do to make moving between sections a relatively painless operation. Selecting, say, Option 5 from the main menu, instead of Option 1 means that the program takes six minutes to load instead of two. This is because the program routines for Option 1 lie immediately after the master routines while Option 5 routines are at the end of the other side of the tape. But that's what you have to put up with when you use a sequential storage device.

Once you press '5' to indicate your selection, full instructions for finding and loading section five appear on the screen. Basically this involves no more

than rewinding the tape, flipping the cassette and pressing PLAY on the recorder; and a message showing you the section code being received (section three, then section four, finally, section five) will appear.

Once section five has loaded there is a 30 second delay while the program merges with the master routines (this happens with each move to a new section) then the display for section five appears.

Within a sub-menu, all the options on that menu are accessible instantly without any further reloading. The concepts in section 5 are the staple ingredients of tactical play. As always, the most basic concepts are explained first of all. The 'fork' is illustrated by simple pawn forks, much used in beginner games, then goes on to more complex matters, like knight forks.

Narrative instructions and advice are excellent. For example, *Chess Tutor* reminds the beginner that pawn forks against pieces are always powerful, even if the pieces are defended, since a pawn's value is less than that of the pieces. It may not be the sort of stuff to keep seasoned chess players awake, but it is absolutely vital for the beginner.

One of the best things about the program is that many subtle little points emerge almost as by-products of the main point being demonstrated. The illustrative position for knight forks, for example, shows a black knight on c6, attacked by a white queen on e6, with a white rook on b3. *Chess Tutor* points out that 'The black knight is under attack, but it is black to move . . .' The graphics display then shows the knight sliding to d4 and forking the rook and queen.

This provides a vivid example not just of the fork, but of the cut-and-thrust that makes chess so rewarding. Defence is turned into attack in a single move. This is the sort of 'intuitive' lesson that beginners will find themselves picking almost without realising while they work their way through the program.

At the end of every lesson a summary screen appears which restates the main points of the lesson. It is amazing how much text the program manages to accommodate. The summary for 'forks' alone contains eight separate points.

If beginners had memories like computers, and could apply their knowledge, a few hours spent alone with *Chess Tutor* would suffice to turn them into very good club players. Since they don't have, it won't. But they will learn how to play chess.

Beginners using *Chess Tutor* in conjunction with one of the handful of good chess programs for the Spectrum should find it an excellent way of getting into the game.

Games section

White: Cray Blitz. Black: David Levy. Notes by Dr John Nunn.
This month's game is another from the match between David Levy and Cray
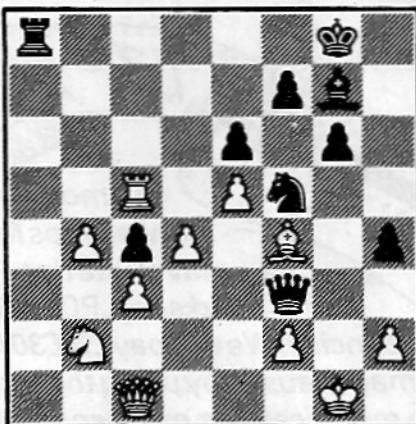
Position after 30 Qh3-f3

Blitz. Last month I described how David beat the computer world champion 4-0 in convincing style, so let's go straight into the chess.

1	e2-e4	a7-a6
2	d2-d4	g7-96
3	Ng1-f3	Bf8-g7
4	Nb1-c3	b7-b5
5	Bf1-d3	Bc8-b7
6	0-0	d7-d6
7	Bc1-f4	e7-e6

(Black has adopted an unusual plan of development to take the computer out of its opening book, but this move is taking the unconventional approach a bit too far. 7 . . . Nb8-d7 was much safer.)

8	e4-e5	

(White sees the chance to gain some space, but this sort of central thrust needs good piece support and is only effective after all the forces have been brought into play. 8 Rf1-e1 or 8 Qd1-d2 would have been better.)

8		. . . d6-d5?

(I'm sure David wouldn't have played this move against a human opponent! His aim is to keep the position as closed as possible to reduce the tactical possibilities, which are the machine's main strength. Objectively the move is bad because it blocks in the bishop at b7 behind a wall of pawns.)

9	b2-b4!	

(If played by a human, this could only have been produced by a beginner or a grandmaster! Basically Black has the initiative on the queenside and White has the upper hand on the kingside. All the books tell you not to touch your pawns on the side where your opponent is attacking, but this position is a rare exception. Black's only counterplay will come from . . . Nb8-d7 followed by . . . c7-c5, and White, unhindered by the books, logically prevents . . . c7-c5.)

9		. . . Nb8-d7
10	Qd1-d2	Ng8-e7
11	a2-a4	c7-c6
12	a4xb5	

(Undoing some of the benefits of the ninth move. 12 a4-a5 was the logical culmination of White's plan, completely blocking the queenside. Action could then only take place on the kingside, where circumstances greatly favour White.)

12		c6xb5
13	Bf4-h6	0-0

14	Bh6-g5?	

(A completely pointless waste of time. White's last move quite correctly aimed to exchange Black's important defensive bishop, but at the last moment White pulls back. 14 Bh6xg7 Kg8xg7 15 Nc3-e2 Nd7-b6 16 h2-h4 Nb6-c4 17 Qd2-f4 would still have given White a dangerous attack.)

14		. . . Rf8-e8
15	Ra1-a3?	

(This is awful. Black's knight at d7 is heading to c4 and when it arrives White shouldn't exchange it because a recapture by the pawn at d5 will turn the somnolent bishop at b7 into a powerhouse of activity along the long diagonal. The position of the rook at a3 sets up a self-fork when the knight arrives, forcing White to make the unpalatable exchange.)

15		. . . Nd7-b6
16	Nc3-d1	Nb6-c4
17	Bd3xc4	d5xc4
18	Nd1-b2	Qd8-c7
19	Rf1-a1	Re8-c8

(Threatening to win a piece by . . . c4-c3. White prevents this, but in doing so cuts the line of guard from a3 to f3, allowing Black to shatter White's king defences.)

20	c2-c3	Bb7xf3
21	g2xf3	Ne7-f5!
22	Ra3xa6	Ra8xa6
23	Ra1xa6	Qc7-b7
24	Ra6-a5	Qb7xf3
25	Ra5xb5	h7-h6

(Finally, David Levy has allowed some complications to start, but only when the outcome of the game has already been decided. White's defenceless king is far more important than his extra pawn.)

26	Bg5-f4	Qf3-h3

(26 . . . Nf5-h4 was tempting, but White's king could then flee the threatened mate by 27 Kg1-f1. Now, however, White's escape route is cut and . . . Nf5-h4 is a deadly threat.)

27	Bf4-g3	h6-h5
28	Rb5-c5	Rc8-a8
29	Qd2-c1?	

(29 Rc5-a5 would have been a more resilient defence.)

29		. . . h5-h4
30	Bg3-f4	Qh3-f3

31	h2-h3	

(Desperation, but there was no defence in any case. After 31 Rc5-a5, for example, Black could have won with the beautiful combination 31 . . . Ra8xa5 32 b4xa5 h4-h3 33 Kg1-f1 Bg7-h6! 34 Bf4xh6 Nf5-g3+! 35 h2xg3 h3-h2 followed by promotion and mate.)

31		. . . Qf3xh3
32	Rc5xc4	Qh3-f3

(Black returns, with all the original threats and more besides.)

33	Bf4-h2	h4-h3
34	Qc1-f1	Ra8-a1

(Deflecting the queen away from the defence of g2 and forcing mate.)

35	Nb2-d1	Ra1xd1
36	Resigns	

END