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## OUR HOSTILE FRIEND

They chuckled at Demosthenes: here was a weakling with a high-piping voice and a stammerer at that, aspiring, no less, to an orator's career. All the best Athenians chuckled, or at best bestowed a pitying smile. Nothing daunted, Demosthenes went down to the beach, just a mile from the heart of Athens, where Poseidon incited the waves to drown out Stentor's voice and started practising. Lest he have too easy a job, our would-be orator filled his mouth with pebbles, always easy to hand, and practised and practised and practised.

By this brute-force approach, as is well reported, poor young Demosthenes outargued them all and, what is more, outvoiced them all. Do you require a witness to this feat? Well, his speeches survive to the present day, those of his opponents were not even recorded.

Enough of classical allusion: Demosthenes, the handicapped, to us is closely similar to Deep Thought and all its illustrious predecessors. Handicapped surely, congenitally considered unfit to play the game, – had it not been that they took up the challenge and responded in spite of self-imposed handicaps, such as pebbles and chips – yet another manifestation of the limits of silicon.

Now what would have been the proper reaction of a well-breath Athenian to a pip-squeak, upstart orator? Don't ask us: we cannot respond, for we have no record of how they reacted in Athens, Greece. However, we have a current, contemporary (1990) record of how they did react in Athens, Georgia or, for that matter, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Very recently, IGM Hans Ree, no mean player of Amsterdam, no mean city for all that, went on record on the behaviour of flesh-and-blood players when they saw computer chess cavorting. The humans chuckled with glee while silicon blustered and blundered.

Even so, Ree has to admit that "[m]eanwhile it cannot be denied that chess computers are getting results that a few years ago would be unthinkable." A grudging compliment, yet a compliment. And, of course, IGM Hans Ree *will* scoff at the claims of computer researchers: Weren't they financed by the Pentagon which also funds astrologers, dolphin researchers and self-styled clairvoyants?

Yet this scoffer is a champion of the wildest claims of computer chess. Far from denying that the future World Champion will be a program, he positively wishes for silicon to vanquish the human, for brawn to oust brain, "for then there would be no more reason to improve on the [computer-chess] program, since no one will notice this improvement ..."

Thank you, our hostile friend, for your learned and perceptive ridicule. At least you grant us, the international computer-chess community, the implicit victory: even in your *view*, sceptical resident of the Athens of the North, silicon will carry the day chippily, as it did, in a rather more pebbly way, with Demosthenes.

Your prediction has been noted and, chuckle as you may at the capers of the junior Demosthenes, we are glad you do not begrudge him the palm of victory in the end.

Welcome, unbeliever, to the band of the elect.

Bob Herschberg  
Jaap van den Herik

Those willing to follow Hans Ree's reasoning more closely are referred to his August 1990 article in *New in Chess*, Vol. 7, No. 5, pp. 49-51.

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