TABLE OF CONTENTS

A MUSE A-MUSING

In our dreams, we see her smiling in her sly and inscrutable manner, that dear old Caïssa. Caïssa? Yes, she indeed, the Muse or patron deity of chess, presiding over the board from time immemorial. Do not blame us when we fancy that her smile harks back to the first heresy she witnessed in chess, that incredible proposal, by a fanatical faction, to introduce castling in order to put some spice into a dull, insipid game. Of course, there was a majority of bearded and respectable players who would have nothing of it: castling would destroy the purity of the game and would mean the end of chess as an intellectual exercise. It would introduce the haphazard, the unpredictable, the chaotic into a well-ordered universe. She smiles when recollecting that first heresy and how it was dulled into utter conformity: after a century or so, chess was inconceivable without castling and the heretics had become the orthodox.

While we dream on, she smiles again, this time reminiscing about chess-by-letter. It was decried as yet another heresy. What? Renouncing the board, taking your time instead of enjoying the essence of the game, its play of thrust and parry in instantaneous flashes? "No, never", said the conservative majority, "its very existence will debase the game". Smilingly, Caïssa recalls that it did no such thing and that the heretics of the correspondence faction were not, in the event, distinguishable from the mainstream of orthodoxy.

While we still are dreaming, the scene seems to shift to modern times. Our dream now has a background of electronics and we look on, while Caïssa, still smiling inscrutably, remembers Claude Shannon, that heresiarch, proposing chess-by-program. What? Surely chess is in the human province and no electrons can partake of its nature. Or – and this is almost inconceivable – if they could they would degrade the game, pretending, what orthodoxy forbid, to elevate themselves to human intelligence which, as Nature has ordained, can never invade the purely human worship of Caïssa, our Muse.

We wake up with a shock – was it the village crier who has disturbed our dream? – and remember: as computer-chess aficionados, we have been as deviantly heretical from the chess-is-for-humans orthodoxy when we began and our association is still anathema to more chess-players than the deepest of thought can possibly compute.

With such an heretical predigree, who can wonder that computer-chess practitioners are naturally given to schisms, feuding within their demesne and quick to decry as heretics any who would not agree with their doctrine about the true nature of computer chess? On this finding, many of our well-wishers become disturbed: is not this tendency harmful to our goal? Should we not all speak with *one* voice and preach a salutary, uniform, approved orthodoxy in computer chess to the world at large?

Not so. Allow us to quote, in support, one of those well-travelled and sagacious sons of the Mediterranean who saw the true value of a large diversity of opinion. It is a good thing, he stated, that there are heresies among you – how else, he queried, shall ever the true be distinguished from the false? (This statement is still often treated at length in churches, as the eighteenth of the eleventh of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.)

Your Editors agree with Paul: controversy is not only not harmful, it is the only way to recognize the eventual truth which is fated to have its origin as a dispute between heretics and the current orthodoxy, the latter only recently absolved itself from the charge of heresy. It is therefore that we welcome an unusual amount of controversy arising out of the last issue of our Journal. Whether it is Botvinnik being challenged by Berliner, or by his former comrade-in-arms, Bronstein, whether it is one of your Editors taking up the cudgels against proponents of Chinese Chess-by-program, a double heresy, – all are welcome. Their discussions may not be among the most edifying of exchanges – well, neither was the language in which heresy was discussed and orthodoxy arrived at on many famous occasions, Church counsels among them.

Yet, we maintain: the discussion, even the confrontation is helpful and conducive to the health of computer chess. Following this belief, we feel a duty to extend the hospitality of our columns generously to all heretics. Caïssa, still smiling, will be amused.

<div align="right">
Bob Herschberg
Jaap van den Herik
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Erratum

In the article *Three Positions* by M.M. Botvinnik (*ICCA Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 71-75), two infelicities have occurred. These, while not strictly errors in the narrow sense, still may have led some readers to misinterpret the publication. First, it should have been made clear that Figure 1 contains a serious error and this clarification should have been pointed out at or near the text straddling the pp. 72 and 73. Failing that, a reference to the Note on p. 75 could fittingly have been inserted there. Second, the Note pointing out the error, at the bottom of p. 75, should have been given greater prominence. Perhaps it should also have been made explicit that the Note was Botvinnik's, not the Editors'. In extenuation, the Editors adduce that the Note had reached them when the copy was camera-ready and that, as a consequence, inserting the Note at all gave rise to a correction process under extreme pressure of time. The inclusion of the Note has only been made possible by the printers' unstinted co-operation, well beyond their duties as subcontractors. Nevertheless, the Editors regret any misinterpretation they may have provoked.