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FINDING NEW BLOOD

At the 1999 Triennial Meeting, the ICCA members will vote for a new Board, but in this very issue the current Board has complained that new blood was hard to find. Is there not a parallel here to the world of chess where until recently Kasparov reigned in splendid isolation and without any successors in sight, even not on the distant horizon? Where would a successor come from? Presumably we would look for someone capable of beating Kasparov. The only serious candidate is DEEP BLUE, not a person but a program that forced him to attend the fact that new blood had arrived in the form of bits and bytes.

We do not know whether the ICCA officers considered nominating a computer program as one of its new officers. What we do know is that the by-laws will be changed and that soon a programmers' representative will be an official Board member. The question still remains whether further changes are advisable. If a computer program cannot be elected as an officer, will the Triennial Meeting allow programs to be a member? Maybe, the Treasurer will support this idea, but your Editor believes that the time is not yet ripe for such a proposal. Unfortunately, as matters stand now, this implies that the new blood stream only comes from Martin Zentner, since all other candidates are members who have deserved their credits over the last two decades.

In contrast with the suggestive reasoning above, we would like to defend the following statement: the older a man, the wiser he is. Now we touch upon the question: to what extent will this line of reasoning be valid? It is well known that mathematicians usually reach their top before they have turned twenty five, whereas psychologists typically are over fifty before reaching their zenith. In his farewell speech (1978) at the University of Amsterdam, Professor Adrian de Groot dealt with the topic that every researcher has his/her ceiling and that for persistent researchers their life task is clear: reaching their personal peak. After the peak, i.e., when growing older, the distance to one's own ceiling usually becomes larger. However, there may be exceptions and exceptional persons.

One of these exceptional persons is also recognised in this issue of the Journal: Ken Thompson. Together with Dennis Ritchie, he has been awarded the U.S. National Medal of Technology for his contribution to UNIX™ and the C language. For the computer-chess community it is regrettable that the U.S. President, who announced the Award, did not mention his formidable achievements in our research domain, namely the chess machine BELLE and his well-known CD-ROMs with the three-, four-, and five-piece databases. The latter results are still a landmark for young researchers, as is evident from Ernst Heinz's note in this issue. Only gradually has some progress been made in this field of research in the last ten years. Here too we are waiting on new blood and a new breakthrough.

Apparently, the old ones are doing well in research as well as in administration. How will this be in the competition in Paderborn? There we expect a change from an old-timer to a newcomer. So far, only CRAY BLITZ has successfully defended its World Champion title, namely as far back as in Cologne 1986. It is up to FRITZ, the 1995 World Champion, to try and repeat this performance, but the competition will be tough. Some thirty participants will be competing, ten of them will be vying seriously for the title. Some of them are old contenders, but many are brand new. Moreover, it has been communicated to us that some old names are identifiers for completely fresh ideas embodied in modern program code.

For the first time the World Championship Tournament will coincide with the Advances in Computer-Chess Conference, both being in their ninth edition. Computer chess has matured, the playing strength is at Grandmaster level, and computer-chess research has been inspirational for other games in such a way that the Advances in Computer-Chess Conference has grown up to a proud Advances in Computer-Games Conference. This issue already forbodes such a development, by reporting on a recent Computer-Amazon tournament.

Clearly, here we see ringing out the old games, ringing in the new ones, shuffle chess and advanced chess among them. So, what is our editorial position with respect to the idea of having three generations meeting (the old ones, the new ones, and the computers)? The answer is that a fully-fledged community favours a well-balanced mix of old and new, since that is best for the community's life expectations. Therefore, your Editor believes that with the new Board and the current group of researchers, the ICCA is well alive and strongly kicking to come to the top.

Jaap van den Herik

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Other (telephone) numbers remain unchanged. There will be a transit period in which both fax numbers are in operation, but that period will be brief.