

An "obsessive" movement of the "compulsive" self-driven decline of chess master Bobby Fischer.

"I love the darkness of the night. It helps me focus," said chess champion Bobby Fischer. The night with its dark silence inherently contained the essence of what he longed for: for Bobby, it was all about sharpening his focus to look for the next brilliant move. While in his game, he was able to achieve an incredible power of concentration that he felt gave him almost superhuman abilities in playing challenging board games. If sound was his talisman, then noise—unwanted, intrusive sound—was his kryptonite. If he could block everything around him, he could not only play at his best, but perhaps better than anyone had ever played! His memory was prolific, and when he identified possible movements or dissected notable matches, he often sent missions to others in a way that showed incredible insight---- with many outcomes leaping from his fertile mind and outlining innovative games. He studied the game incessantly since childhood and had stored in his keen mind a collection of knowledge about how earlier greats had approached chess and managed to defeat opponents.

Chessplayers, the grandmasters, despite myths about their ability to see and organize their offense or defense, do not possess magical power. By knowing the many variations and proven strategies, they can identify what is in store with their study of such chess ideas. Knowledge of previous effective tactics is the foundation of their attack, and often it can come down to whether the opponent recognizes what you're doing, knows the defense or counterattack to prevent it, or simply makes a mistake. A single piece, even a pawn, can be a material advantage with gravity over the opponent, enough to force him or her to resign or reluctantly accept a draw. Memory is another possible *magic trick* in that what one sees in incredible performances of recovering what happened long ago may not be a sign of genius as one might expect; an obscure endgame from twenty years ago used opportunistically at just the right moment may not be what it seems to one who is obsessed with rethinking such techniques in his mind. It may have happened two decades ago and is long forgotten by everyone except grandmasters like Bobby Fischer who rewinds and plays such tactics almost incessantly in his active mind.

Memory and retention, especially memorization, increases with quietness, just ask a librarian. Bobby Fischer suffered from *hyperacusis* - acute and persistent sensitivity to noise and even distant sounds. And for someone like Bobby, intrusive sounds and their ability to interfere with the "gold standard" of his focus were like the intrinsic value of the various chess players. Some were pawns that he could dismiss or endure, while others in this hierarchy of deafening threats were powerful evil queens who threatened almost omnipotent. In stressful situations such as competitive chess, a man knew "what sound" could shatter the "area of hyperfocus" he needed to compete at his best. Some "white noises" he could just blend into the background, such as traffic on a nearby motorway, while some, especially those generated by others, due to negligence, irresponsibility, ignorance, and no thoughtfulness on the part of others, were much more difficult. During his high anxiety state, such sounds in Bobby's mind also fueled his paranoia about the evil intentions of those who didn't want him to win or succeed. It corrupted his great desire for perfectionism by excelling in a board game that encompassed his entire identity, and his success in it brought him fame, respect, and admiration.

In the 1970s, cigarette advertising was banned on the radio, President Nixon's landmark trip to Red China and the World Chess Championship in early 1972 were played in Reykjavík when the American up-and-coming Bobby Fischer challenged Boris Spassky, the icon of the Soviet chess machine. The chess program of the state, which had produced chess champions who had shown their superiority in chess by holding the world championship title for 34 years; the title was a holy grail that the Soviets had no intention of releasing without a dirty fight. They made an effort to gain dominance because they felt that the chess title was a sign that showed the superiority of the entire Soviet system. That the precocious Brooklynite was a lonely American chess genius took them by surprise because the Soviets had spared no energy in their nonsense industry, which was dedicated to churning out a plethora of world-class championships. As the first game progressed, most experts predicted that it would end in a draw. Inexplicably, Fischer messed up in the 29th game where the physical positions of the two opponents were equal and sacrificed his bishop for two pawns in what seemed amateurish. Then Fischer complained about the "whirlpool noise" coming from one of the cameras backstage, but the lens protruded through the banner of the Icelandic Chess Federation to promote the event. Despite Fischer's protests, no change was made to the location of the camera or its use. In the 45th game, Spassky had a bishop and three pawns against Fischer's five pawns, and he decided to use his time allocation to postpone the day's game. In accordance with the code of conduct, Spassky sealed his game in a brown envelope and handed it to the

Icelandic chess leaders. This allowed both players to diagnose the issue overnight, but when play resumed and Spassky's sealed move was inserted, Bobby seemed tired and anxious, as if a night of anxious deliberation had only made his condition more dire. Fischer took the first step in a matter of seconds and exchanged quick movements, but the Soviet GM's position only got stronger. Fischer with the timer running left his seat to run backstage and complained loudly about the noise emanating from the same camera as yesterday. The Icelandic officials, after consulting with the TV producers, agreed to disassemble the camera. When Fischer returned to his seat on the stage, 35 minutes of allotted time had passed, and when it soon became clear that Spassky was on the verge of dominating a pawn by getting into his opponent's backboard, Bobby stopped his clock and surrendered before attempting his fifty-sixth move. His mood was dark, but after hastily leaving the stage, he reasoned that the distraction of the camera noise was to blame for his loss. The next morning, on July 13, Bobby announced through his U.S. delegation that he would not be performing on the main stage unless all cameras were removed. He further claimed that only he could determine what was bothering him but rejected any attempt to inspect the facility to check new measures taken to improve the situation before the game resumed. He lost the second game because he didn't show up on time, and an angry crowd of spectators shouted what many disappointed spectators experienced: "Send him [Fischer] back to the United States!" Despite the interest of U.S. President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's second phone call to Bobby asking him to continue, Fischer had already booked a flight to abruptly return to New York City on the scheduled day of the third game. Spassky agreed to move the game to a ping-pong room backstage, and Bobby, despite being assured that he would have complete privacy, did not agree to it until just an hour and a half before he had been disqualified, with Spassky declared world champion. Fischer arrived eight minutes late, but the men shook hands and Spassky, who played white, took his opening chance. Bobby responded by answering and then looked at the lens of a TV camera staring at them and started screaming. "I'm leaving!" Spassky announced that he was returning to the table on the main stage to continue the game there, and the officials pleaded with Bobby to approve the presence of the "silent camera" which was a closed way of projecting the game to the audience watching on the screen on the main stage. No copy would be kept, and Bobby somehow accepted this rather dubious explanation and continued the official match play. They ended up playing arguably a great game that was slightly better than the beautifully executed sixth game of the match; and after 45 games, Bobby's positioning was so strong when a game was suspended that the next day when play resumed, he agreed to return to the main stage to finish the game. Fischer arrived 15 minutes late and found Spassky already gone, as Spassky immediately resigned after seeing Bobby's unsealed movement, both players avoided meeting anything because the Soviet entourage was on their way back to their hotel. The sixth movement was key and featured Fischer's bold offensive that forced Spassky to surrender and is aptly described as comparable to the artistic precision of Mozart or Beethoven in composing the music for their largest symphonies. In the win and the defeat, both players showed skill, penetration and mastery. After twenty games, the score was **11 1/2 to 8 1/2** in Fischer's favor, and Bobby only needed two draws or one win to snatch the championship from Spassky with four games remaining. The Soviets, now desperate or crumbling under the pressure of impending defeat, grasped at straws when their delegation accused the Americans of "influencing Spassky's game by chemical or electronic means." The police in Reykjavik began an investigation that involved analyzing air samples on the stage, scraping exposed surfaces to find clues, trace amounts of foreign substances and even resorting to X-rays on Spassky's chair. The Russians demanded that the lighting equipment be inspected for hidden "bugs", but when the policeman unscrewed the glass globe, all he found were two petrified, dead houseflies! When the 21st game began on August 31, 1972 and was postponed later in the day, it looked like Fischer would soon reach the winning tally of 12 1/2 points. The next day, admitting that his fate had been sealed at the end of the previous day, at 12:50 p.m., Spassky officially resigned by phone call rules, and Fischer won the match, capturing the coveted world title. It was a game that was never forgotten because both players were in their prime. In chess, the level of your rival's play matters because it brings out the best in your own playing strategies and play. Outfielder Willie Mays' return to the diamond "circus" in 1954 at the Polo Grounds in New York only came about because left-handed golfer Vic Wertz hit a 420-foot huge drive to center field.

At the end of 1970, Bobby Fischer had not played a single official chess game since he won in Iceland. Like the Renaissance artist Michelangelo, Bobby Fischer suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder [OCD]. It was the motivating dynamo behind his success as well as the cause of his destructive "end game." He suffered from it severely, as well as depression and signs of Tourette syndrome - everything lay on a similar spectrum of anxiety disorder to OCD, and it is often difficult when one disorder is prevalent over another. The OCD disorder explains Bobby's symptoms and mental state quite comprehensively and practically; OCD, with its intense anxiety, was arguably the root cause of Bobby's hateful delusions and paranoia spewing towards others, especially Jews. Ironically, the anti-Semitism and hateful propaganda that he publicly and at inappropriate times espoused is depressing because Bobby, like his extended family, were Eastern European Jews. He seemed to have no control, cursed like the profanity of a Tourette-afflicted man to vent his anger and hatred towards the Jews. He grinned at the widespread, hateful misconceptions that turned Jews into scapegoats historically spread through the dark recesses of the human mind, and this is an important distinction between his paranoia. He did not conjure up insane fantasies that "his dog controlled his mind and ordered him to murder people like the killer "Son of Sam" in New York. No, his delusions were an

extension of what many with bad intentions believe or propagate. Of course, taken to extremes, it reveals in itself his extreme nervousness and his dysfunctional mind. Bobby's thinking evolved into false logic to undermine and attack entire classes of people he felt had harmed him. OCD is often an abnormal extension of what may in some cases be a desirable outcome, and it is not driven by irrational thoughts but by irrational fears, anxieties, and emotions that overwhelm the sufferer. "I feel this way, so it must be true." The housewife who wants a clean house can't stop scrubbing the compulsion, the banker who wants to make sure the vaults are locked can't stop checking the lock, the hypochondriac who is afraid of germs who just can't stop washing his hands. The house is clean, the safe or door is closed and bolted, and my washed hands are cleaned spotlessly – "I know it, I see it, but I can't find it. I feel like I just have to repeat my actions, and to my surprise, this increases my anxiety and the need to repeat my actions compulsively." Bobby had enemies, especially in the competitive world of international chess. The Soviets, especially in their desire to dominate the professional chess world, cheated and colluded with each other to maintain their diagonal vibe, but Bobby's paranoia was a gross distortion of potential threats or skulls. A person can be noticeably on the right track and still *go crazy*. He became convinced over time that the Soviet KGB wanted to assassinate him for winning the world title from Boris Spassky in 1972 as revenge for their embarrassing defeat on the world stage. He feared a KGB plot to kill him, he simply didn't want to contact anyone he didn't already know. He feared that the postage might contain poison or explosives, and in restaurants he brought with him an antidote that he believed would neutralize poison that the Soviets could slip into his meal or drink. Bobby was quoted as saying that he had had his dental fillings removed for fear that the Soviets were sending harmful radio waves through his metal fillings; authors defend him, saying he was misquoted but Bobby was afraid that the flushed silver and mercury were causing damage to his body and it was causing irritation to his gums. His missing fillings, torn teeth, pulled crowns, and dental implants added to his vagrant appearance; with his now-tousled dress, unkempt hair and beard, and out-of-shape comfort, he made him almost indistinguishable from the downtrodden homeless people of Los Angeles. In the summer of 1992, after refusing to compete because "the Russians were scammers" and that he was simply "waiting for the right offer" ---poor", he lived in a small room that was barely 35 square meters including a bed and toilet. Even paranoia has enemies and we can't rule out a possible espionage intrigue as recently reported on Havana syndrome, but it's the irrational lengths he went to alleviate his fear of these perhaps believable threats that exposes his OCD mentality. Bobby saw repairmen working on rooftops as "the Israeli secret service." At best, his hypochondria was just another arrow in his vibration of OCD painting traits.

His long-awaited rematch with Spassky in early September 1992 violated U.S. law and UN sanctions against war-torn Yugoslavia over Serbia and Montenegro's atrocities against Muslim minorities. Violations of Executive Order 12810 issued in June 1992 prohibited all trade agreements or commercial ventures in the isolated areas of Yugoslavia and threatened civil penalties of up to \$10,000 per offense and imprisonment of up to 10 years. Bobby, who had not filed U.S. taxes for 15 years, dismissed the significance of the U.S. Treasury Department's moratorium order. Twenty years of inaction did not prevent Bobby Fischer from defeating Boris Spassky in 30 fights, and Fischer was now \$3.5 million richer. Unfortunately, much of that prize money could be confiscated for payment of U.S. fines and penalties imposed for violating its penalties and IRS tax evasion. It was by no means a memorable game, but what to expect after his long break from competition.

In the fall of 2007, he had soured on the well-meaning Icelandic people, who had offered him safe haven after his legal problems with the American government. Like the Jews, the Soviets, the United States, his disappointment with the Icelanders became ingrained because just his struggle to live day to day among them had, as before, been experienced many times before, no matter what environment it was, ignited his anxiety and illness. In his youth, he knew the Jews. He was one of them, and he recognized their flaws and flaws because their flaws and flaws had caused him emotional pain. He began to identify with those who slandered them and began to believe in the superiority of the Aryan race because it validated his negative experience of growing up immersed in such a society. Aryan hatred of inferior Jews was a confirmation of his personal difficulties that he experienced during his formative years due to intense anxiety, but he would have experienced such dysfunction in any society, even among the German elite. Every society becomes a villain because his experience in everyday life will inevitably be marred by personal turmoil. His inner suffering projected his negative emotions onto others with distorted projections, igniting the fear that fueled his credulity in his holistic support for the most vile racial stereotypes. A psychiatrist, Dr. Magnus Skulasson, who knew Bobby well towards the end of his life, claimed that the term *insane* did not apply to Bobby. In fact, away from triggering stresses, Fischer behaved friendly, charming, and was in touch with reality if one did not venture into sensitive areas or forbidden subjects. In medical terms, he was nervous, but not insane. No matter how bizarre his antics were, he never really lost touch with reality. Not easy to distinguish compared to Bobby's illogical behavior, especially when he is away in foreign cultures in a fearful exile. Once, while at the Tokyo cinema for the screening of the American film *Pearl Harbor*, Bobby clapped loudly and applauded the Japanese Zero aircraft that sank the *USS Arizona*--- he later said that he was surprised that no one else there was involved in what was embarrassing for Japanese audience.

Perhaps the roughest public radio came on September 11, 2001. *Radio Baguio* in the Philippines was in exile in Tokyo and called him to comment on the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Fischer: yes, well, that's wonderful news. It's time for the United States to get its head kicked in. It's time to finish off the United States once and for all.

Interviewer: You're happy with what happened?

Fischer: Yes, I welcome the ceremony... the United States – I want to see [the United States] wiped out.

As a child, there was Judaism that alienated him, then Christian fundamentalism which he faithfully followed until he split until he split church leaders, then transcendental meditation with Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, atheism, and towards the end of his life he learned Roman Catholicism. The latter's emphasis on love, humility, and forgiveness of sins through confession was not in keeping with Bobby's most ardent anti-Semitism: "Unfortunately, we are not strong enough to wipe out all Jews at this time. So I believe we should engage in the killing of Jews. What I want to do is to provoke people against Jews to the point of violence. Because Jews are criminals. They deserve to have their heads broken open." Unfortunately, Adolf Hitler could not be more succinct in embracing hatred. Bobby Fischer was a portrait of grief, regret for what could have been, and was surrounded by quicksand of perhaps physical and certain traumatic psychological pain. He felt that he himself was "persecuted by the Jews" and often said in public that "the Holocaust never happened". As Adolf Hitler wrote in his manifesto *Mein Kampf*, Bobby would parrot, "Jews are not the victims, they are the victims!" Previously, when he was lonely, he visited his sister and her family in Palo Alto, California. Joan and her husband, who was a researcher at Stanford University, as well as their three children, were Jewish, but after repeatedly putting up with Bobby's rants against Jews, they asked him to leave. His inability to be considerate of the sensitivities of others was profound and led to the alienation of family and friends. He just couldn't stop or avoid the urge to spew out his hateful rhetoric.

Bobby Fischer may have been the greatest chess player who ever lived, but his formidable genius cost a lot. He became a pathetic figure who died at the tender age of 64 from kidney failure after he had steadfastly refused dialysis, even though he was warned of dire consequences. He was an uncooperative patient who made life difficult for doctors and nurses. He refused a fixed catheter and painkillers and demanded to be told what he would eat and who he would meet on his deathbed, as well as those he wanted on the back list. The ward's nurses secretly applied morphine patches to his body in places Bobby had no sight of to relieve his pain. He was incurable and was nevertheless sent back to his apartment in December 2007 and cared for by the family of his close friend, Garðar Sverrisson, who lived two floors below him. His wife had nursing skills and did what she could to provide nursing homes to Bobby. On January 17, 2008--- after being readmitted to hospital, he passed away peacefully. There are 64 squares on a chessboard, one for each year of Fischer's life, but due to his mental illness, he was much less able to survive each of those precious years than he was able to master the fate of his chess players among these light and dark checkered squares. Unlike chess, life was a game he could never beat. His luminous glow contrasted with his pitch-black darkness--- both fueled by his untreated OCD. May he be forgiven. Rest in *quiet* peace, Mr. Bobby Fischer.

By R. Anthony Saritelli

August 31, 2022---Fifty years after Fischer's last winning move, which would force Boris Spassky to give up and win the World Chess Championship in Iceland.

Dedicated to all OCD sufferers and the people who reduce their anxiety.

References:

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