

Chess Connections *Magazine*


A space for kids, by kids



Featuring an
interview with
GM Elect
Joshua Sheng

Photo Credit:
Saint Louis Chess Club

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MISSION STATEMENT

- *Promote chess in all communities, especially school-aged children and under-privileged groups*
- *Provide school-aged chess players a platform to showcase their talents, convey their valuable voices and creative ideas*
- *Build stronger chess communities by sharing experiences, knowledge, information and enjoyment of chess*

We hope that Chess Connections can bring our chess community one step closer, starting ...

ONE STORY AT A TIME

Meet Our Team

Editorial and Design Team

IM Justin Wang, *Editor-in-Chief*

Justin first started to learn chess at age 7 and is currently an International Master. His notable achievements include finishing in 3rd place in the World Youth U10 Championship in 2015 and winning the U.S. Cadet Championship in 2019.



Justin co-founded the non-profit organization Chess In Action with his brother Jason to promote chess especially with underprivileged communities. Justin's goal for *Chess Connections* is to connect with chess communities around the world and positively influence chess players who want to improve in the game.

WIM Ellen Wang, *Managing Editor, Designer*

Ellen is an 8th grader at Horace Mann School in New York. Since starting chess at the age of 6, she has been playing competitively at the regional, national, and international levels. In 2017, she won three international medals in one summer: Bronze at the Pan American Chess Championships G10, Gold at the North American Youth Chess Championships G14, and Bronze at the World Cadets Chess Championships G10. She was also the 2019 K-6 Co-Champion of the Greater New York Scholastic Chess Championships. Recently, she won the 2020 North American Junior Girls Chess Championship, which awarded her the conditional WIM title and a WGM norm.

Around chess, Ellen has been actively engaged in philanthropic work. Together with her 2020 USATE second-place winning team, the Unruly Queens, she has been hosting free online tournaments and camps, and has been a guest speaker at US Chess Women seminars. Beyond chess, Ellen is a strong debater, a passionate flutist, and an enthusiastic tennis player and swimmer.



NM Davis Zong, Jr., *Associate Editor*

Davis Zong is a 9th grader at Hunter College High School in New York City. He qualified for and competed at the U8, U10, and U12 world cadets chess championships and has won both the elementary and junior high NYC Championships. He became a national master in 6th grade.

Davis is a writer and editor for the school newspaper. He also wrote several articles on the USCF website. Davis loves to share the beauty of chess around the world.

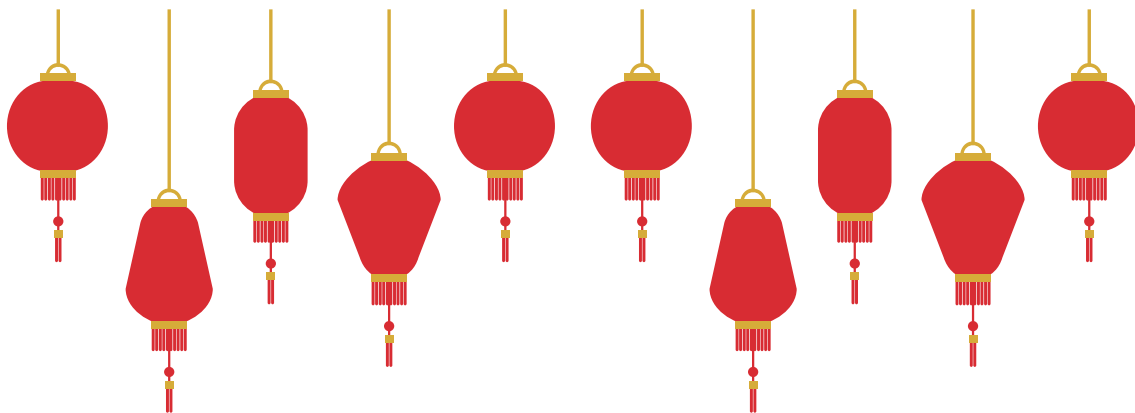


Anjali Lodh, *Designer*

Anjali is an 8th grader from Coralville, Iowa. She is the current Iowa Girls Chess Champion and represented Iowa in the Ruth Haring Girls Tournament of Champions in 2019 as well as in 2020. She co-founded a non-profit chess organization called "Chess Butterflies" dedicated to inspiring young girls to become confident chess players. She is an aspiring graphic designer and loves to design things in her free time. She has also written several articles for Iowa's chess publication, "En Passant." Some of her hobbies include playing violin, trumpet, and playing basketball.



Jason C. Wang, *Advisor*



REVERSAL

A POEM BY EVAN PARK



***In a world of black and white,
Eternal power is denied.***

***The queen as elegant as she can be,
Forced to flee***

***The king as noble as he is,
Hunted around***

***The castle as sturdy as it looks,
Crumbles down***

***The horse gallops rampantly, until imprisoned.
Cornered, confined, constricted.***

***The bishop strides confidently, until stopped.
Trapped, locked, doomed.***

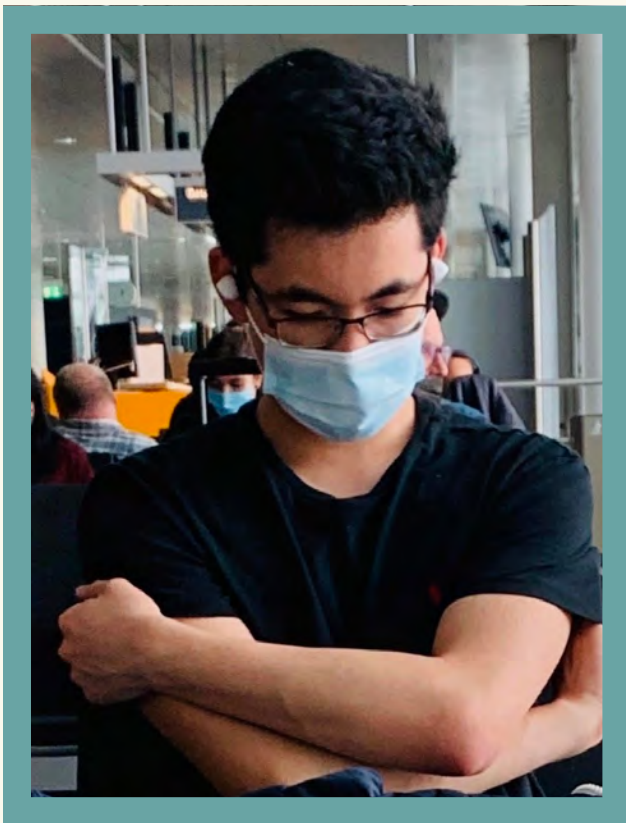
***The ostensibly timid, frail pawn reaches the end,
Becomes as powerful as a queen.***

***Everything will tumble and fall,
The mighty will reach an impassable wall.
The seemingly weak and feeble strong,
Black and white, outcasts belong.***



Evan Park is a FIDE Master living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Evan enjoys reading many different types of books, playing piano, appreciating gourmet food, and of course playing chess.

Interview with GM Elect Joshua Sheng



Joshua Sheng started playing chess at the age of 7 and just finished all of the requirements for his Grandmaster title in October 2021. Some of his chess achievements include a tie for first in the 2016 North American Junior championship, first place in the 2018 Southern California Championship with an unprecedented 6.5/7, third place in the 2019 US Junior Championship, and a tie for second in the 2019 Continental Open. Joshua graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Earth Science in May of 2021.

Q: How were you introduced to chess, and what initially drew you to it?

A: I think the first time I was exposed to chess was when I was very young, and my sister played a bit in school. But, when I was in second grade at school, we'd have after school programs if your parents couldn't pick you up right away. They would have like a bunch of games and stuff, and when I saw people playing chess, I asked them how to play. It's a bit hard to say what initially drew me to chess since it's been so long.

Q: What's your favorite thing about chess?

A: You know, I don't know if I've ever thought about this before. I'm sure that sounds very strange, but, I mean, there's not really too much about chess that I don't like, so it's hard to pick. I guess I'll have to go with the whole thing.

Q: Before college, what was your everyday study routine?

A: Even today, I don't really have a routine for studying. When I was in high school, in the second part of high school especially, I actually didn't study very much at all. I think that my increase in playing ability was largely because I became a more mature person as I grew older. Like nowadays, a lot of us are at this rating range where we're pretty set on our fundamentals. So when it comes to studying for tournaments, it's mostly doing puzzles. And me personally, I really like openings. It's my favorite thing to do. So I spend way more time than normal on openings.

Q: What is your biggest strength as a chess player?

A: I think that nowadays I'm a pretty balanced player. I don't really have a great strength or any great weakness. I think that the main thing that I do better than other people at my rating would probably be openings, because I spend a lot of time doing that and I find it very interesting. When I was younger, I used to be, compared to my peers, pretty good at calculating tactics and I am still pretty good at calculating. But not as good as I would like to be. So I guess my biggest strength would probably be openings.

Q: How did you work on certain holes in your game? Did you do any targeted training pertaining to those weaknesses?

A: I mentioned that for most of my career, my strong point has been calculating and openings. I can't really say that I did anything specific to work around the other things, but I felt like when I grew older, I became more mature. And so I think I'm quite lucky that those things like playing positionally and just thinking about where your pieces should go are something that I became better at as I became older because I just thought more about where stuff should go. And I did a lot of puzzles, so there's a little bit of value there for the same type of thing. They would be about anything. I always dislike when puzzles tell you what they want to. At the beginning, I think that puzzles should always indicate to you that you should play the best move because that's the only puzzle that matters.

Q: What is your favorite tournament that you've been to?

A: I really enjoyed the Millionaire chess tournaments when they were a thing. I have the impression that most tournaments in the US kind of feel like you're an animal being packed into a crate. You know, it's like, okay, go play your games. There's no time to do anything. And the conditions feel pretty bad. But Millionaire chess was very nice. They make it a very comfortable environment, because it almost feels like you're playing a sport or something. I also enjoyed the US Junior Championship in 2019. Part of this was probably because I did really well there. But also having one game a day. I mean, every time I play one game a day, it's probably going to be better than any other tournament. It's just extremely nice to play a tournament, not being exhausted and frustrated the entire time. The tournaments I played in Europe and the US Juniors were just so nice. You have so much time to do stuff if you want. When I was in Europe and I just made my third Grandmaster norm two weeks ago, even for games where I plan to offer a draw very fast, I would prepare for five or six hours because there's so much time to do so. Whereas in comparison, the last time I played with the CCA in the US (the World Open), I showed up to almost every game at least 20 minutes late because I had no way to know who my opponent was and I had to prepare for them before the game. The preparation was also very low quality just because I only had an hour or so. I remember on my last day at the World Open, I actually did not have time to eat between the rounds because I played a very long game with Grandmaster Benjamin Gledura, which I also lost. So that felt pretty bad. I mean, I guess my favorite would probably be the US Juniors. A big part of it would be one game a day, and another big part of it would be because I was surrounded by a lot of my peers. We talked a lot and I spent a lot of time with one of my very good friends there. So yeah, probably that one.

Q: If it's the last round of a major tournament, and you are in a must-win situation, what do you tell yourself?

Generally speaking, I don't really like to change that much in terms of mentality. I know a lot of people that when they're in that situation and they need a win, they're just going to be reckless because a draw and a loss are the same thing. I've never really been able to subscribe to that mentality. So for me, it's always been you just play and see what happens. Obviously you should do your best to avoid drawing. But at the end of the day, if your opponent is playing perfectly, you're not going to win. I mean, basically my view of it is that winning in chess has very little to do with the person who wins. It's mostly about the person who loses. So there's not really too much you can do about it in that case.

Q: Do you like to practice chess online, with blitz games? Would you recommend that as a way to improve?

I mean, I don't really have enough data to say concretely whether or not it helps you or it's bad for you. But I would say that there are so many other things you can do to work on chess nowadays. So that just has to be the worst way to do it. Like, there's so many other things that you can do. There's so much information out there. Obviously blitz is fun. It's fun to play, especially with your friends. But there's so many other things that you could do in chess that it's very difficult for you to imagine that blitz has a real benefit. There are a lot of players who are very good at blitz and it does not seem to me that their skill in blitz has increased their chess skill. If anything, usually the opposite.

Q: What's the longest game you've ever played, and how did you stay focused for so long?

I don't remember, but maybe around almost two years ago, I played a game with Ashritha Eswaran and where I was much higher rated than her. I was looking better through a large portion of this game if I remember correctly, I messed up and we had a queen and pawn vs. a queen and pawn. This game was only 90 minutes for 40 moves with 30 minutes of sudden death. But this game lasted for, I think, around five and a half hours. We were playing at 1:30 in the morning and this was a 140 move game. Eventually I won, probably because she was tired. That'd be my guess. She made some bad blunder at the end. How do you stay focused? I mean, really it's just easier if you were playing on the attacking side because you have less to worry about. Most people understand that subjectively, compared to defense, it takes less time and energy. In terms of being focused, I mean, if you really want to win, it's impossible to get distracted.

Q: When and how did you start focusing on openings?

A: I mean nowadays especially, I talked to a lot of people who are pretty new to the game. So I know a lot of players who are like 1500-1600 and in college or whatever. And all they talk about is like, oh, I got this new course from chessable or whatever. I don't know. I always feel like it's a pretty weird thing for weaker players to get fixated on, because it's such an irrelevant part of the game. When I was first playing chess, the computers were not super important, but now they are. And so everybody is always using computers on their openings and such.

Q: How do you study openings before tournaments?

A: What most people (I think) do at the GM level, is that they have PGN files on their computer with the moves and usually some notes and texts about the opening. Usually this can get pretty big. I have some files that are like 50 pages long or something. But basically there'll be some files which are all very extensively checked with the computer beforehand. So before the tournament and before individual games, I'll review the stuff. Sometimes it's easy to forget because it's very difficult to remember that type of volume of information. But I think for the level that I'm at, it's pretty adequate to just like, look before the game and play. At higher levels it's more important to memorize everything.

Q: How would you suggest practicing a new opening?

A: That's actually a really interesting question. A lot of people ask me this, even players who are pretty strong, around 2300-2400, they ask me, how do you know what to do with your pieces in the specific pawn structure or whatever of this opening?. Honestly, I don't really subscribe to the idea that you have to practice or deeply understand every opening you play. If you know theory, you're a good player and your opponent deviates, in my opinion things like understanding the opening, what pawn structure you should aim for, where you should put your pieces, etc. is not really related to the opening. I think that's really more of just chess. You should be able to just do that when you play. So I don't really practice openings much at all. Sometimes I'll play training games with my friends, but usually that's not really about the opening. That's more about getting in shape for a tournament. So yeah, I don't really do much practice for openings. I don't really enjoy playing online either. I think for most players, specific practice probably has more value than it does at my rating range.

Q: For endgames, which are pretty much the opposite to openings, how do you like to study?

A: I don't think it's a very rare sentiment to have that I have not studied endgames seriously in a pretty long time. I think a lot of relatively young players also don't really like studying endgames because they're pretty boring. I mean this is something where apart from theoretical positions, they can be pretty hard. A lot of playing endgames is about having a good mentality or experience. Realistically speaking, a lot of stuff is based on your mentality as you play. A lot of players, if they're losing or worse, struggle to get invested in the game. And I was like that before. But now I've become much better at holding that type of stuff. And the same goes when I was younger; obviously I was much weaker than I am now. So if I would be winning, I would often just assume that I'm winning by myself; it didn't always work that way.

Q: Do you have a favorite chess player, one that you look up to?

A: Well, I like Kasparov a lot. I think his play is something that, well, I don't know if consciously or not, but it's something that I've always tried to emulate.

Q: What percent of chess do you think is mental, and what percent is technical?

A: I would say probably more than 90% is technical. I mean a lot of people who don't play chess believe that there is a great correlation between how smart you are and how good you are at chess. And I think this correlation is at best, it would be very weak. I know a lot of good players who are not very smart and very good and a lot of very smart people who are not very good. I mean, the way the game works, there's just so much that's not transferable to other things. But I think that your mentality really does determine how well you will do. I mean, there are some players that are pretty smart players, but if they lose, they get really upset about it. And some people, if they lose, they think like, oh, now I lost, I'm really bad. And they can't get it together for the next game. Whereas other people are the opposite. I definitely fall more into the latter category. I would say that your mentality does matter, but realistically speaking, I think the only thing about this game that really matters for how good you are is how much you studied.

Q: Do you think psychology plays a big role as well?

A: I think the role of psychology is, I'd say, really overrated. I think a lot of people think that you have to try to get in your opponent's head and make your opponent feel weird or whatever during the game. I don't think this really matters too much, but it does fall into what I was saying earlier about how your mentality is very important. For example, a lot of players who I don't think are inherently terrible or anything, often second-guess themselves when thinking. I don't really want to make this too much about specific people, but it's a pretty common issue. And it's because they're not confident about their situation that they have in the game which a lot of times is problematic.

Q: Is there anything you do before a tournament to help you be more confident?

A: No, I never really did any specific preparation for that. It was always interesting because before, I used to have a very pessimistic perception of my position. I would always think that it was worse than it was. And I always thought this was funny because most people when they talk to me, they would tell me like, wow, you play so confidently, how do you do that? And I just didn't understand it at all because I wasn't consciously thinking about it. I mean, the way I always approach this is just try to play the best move. So since we're on the subject, let me think about when I played Levy Rozman. So this game was pretty recent, like a few months ago. And in this game I got a pretty good position out of the opening. And I was eventually winning and then I messed up but that's not particularly important. The thing I wanted to bring up was that there was a position where he wanted to make a pawn break in the center. And in this position, he thought for 30 minutes making this decision and ended up castling and playing the pawn break next move. When in reality, there is no difference. If he played the pawn break first, I would have moved my rook and then he would have castled and then we would have had the same position. So basically he spent 30 minutes doing nothing. And that's a part of what I was talking about. He wasn't confident in his decision there, so he'd wasted more time than he needed to.

Q: So do you think confidence plays a big part in preventing time trouble?

A: Yeah. I mean, I think this is pretty much the main reason, if not the only one, why there's time trouble at all. I know a lot of players who are IMs and such and they obviously know what they're doing, but they just think about the most bizarre things during the game, something that wastes time.

Q: Recently, you earned your last GM norm - Congratulations! Where did you earn these three norms and what will be the next step for you?

A: Thank you. I remember getting my IM title in 2016 through the North American Junior Championships. I always feel really weird saying that because I don't really think you should be able to earn titles through tournaments like that. So I've been an IM for like five years, which is really a crazy thing to think about. And so I didn't actually make my third IM norm, which would have made me an IM the standard way, until like 2018, I think. But then, pretty soon after that, I made my first GM norm and it was at a round robin tournament in Berkeley, where I was about to go to school. And so I got one here and then I didn't play that much while I was in college. After I graduated, I was able to play in Charlotte and I got one there. And my last one was in Budapest, like two weeks ago, as I said. In terms of my next step, I mean, it's a really weird question because there's not really much between being a GM and being the world champion, but I don't think I can be the world champion. I would love to, but I'm not good enough. I think that telling myself otherwise would be rather dishonest. So most likely I have to focus on other things for the time being. I'm doing some applications to grad school here, and job applications as well. I mean, I would love to go further on chess but before that, I need to have some financial security. My parents have been very kind to me so far and I don't want to stress them further than I need to. But I do have plans to keep going. I really enjoy the game and there's not really any other reasons you need, right?

Q: What role did your coaches and parents play in your chess career?

A: I used to have a lot of coaches. I think around 2015, I was running three coaches every single week, which is also rather costly, I would imagine. But I think my coaches have helped me a great deal. They taught me a lot of things that are very important about chess. And obviously I wouldn't be able to play chess without my parents. I mean, most young children are going to be funded by their parents, since tournaments cost money, and they cost a lot of money, which is unfortunate, but that's how it is. And obviously they're a pretty big part of us playing. They also did not want me to leave school. I don't know if that decision was wrong or right. I mean, it's really like grass is a greener type of thing. But, yeah, they've been very supportive of my career overall.

Q: How has chess helped you with other things in your life?

A: I mean, this is something that most of those things are not really tangible, so I don't even know if chess has an impact on those things. I guess the most concrete is that I met a lot of people that I like a great deal. Some of them I've been very good friends with for a very long time. So that's the first thing I can say is most tangible. It is also probably the reason why I got into the university I did, or a big part of the reason that I did. Although at the same time you could argue that if I didn't play chess, my grades would've been better. So maybe I still would've gotten in. I don't know if it really has that many tangible benefits, but I guess, I mean, I just think it's fun. So I guess there's that.

Q: How did you balance competitive chess playing as well as schoolwork?

A: I mean, I think most people I know who go to college and play chess don't really manage time at all. They just don't do chess at all. And then after school they play chess, unless they go to one of the chess universities. I have some friends at UT Dallas and they do some chess training every week or so with their stationed coach there. But for me, when I was in school, I just didn't study chess at all. There wasn't really time to, or if there was time, I would be doing something much less productive. When I went to regular school, I would mostly just play during the summer or during the winter when there wasn't school. And that pretty much stayed the same through college. In 2019, in the summer after my first year of college, it was rather convenient because before the US Juniors and the associated tournaments, I spent some time in China with my parents. This was pretty nice because my parents were working there. So I had nothing to do during the day and I was able to study for like six hours a day for like three weeks or something before the tournament. And I think that was very helpful, but it's not like I have some insane, school-chess balance. It's not like you do this amount of chess every day and this amount of homework every day. I just didn't do chess. And then when there is time to do chess, you just do it. Did I have more time in high school? This is a really weird question because going to high school feels worse, but you probably do have more time. I mean, it's very strange because in college, you don't go to class for seven hours a day. So during high school, I also didn't really study that much chess during the school year. I guess I should say it doesn't really matter between the two, because that dynamic didn't really change. I would still mostly study and play when there wasn't school during the summer or whatever.

Q: Did you participate in any other extracurricular activities?

A: So, when I was in high school, I participated in — I'm not really sure exactly what to call it. We called this something that it wasn't when we were in high school; we called it DECA, but it wasn't the decathlon. There was this, it wasn't really a club because it was technically a class, but it felt like a club. There's a thing called academic competition. We would play in these, I guess in a very upper-class trivia competition basically. There's a quiz bowl (NAQT), which you guys have probably heard of. I played in quiz bowl, on the team for my school. And I also played in the science bowl and the ocean sciences bowl which is organized by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association. That was a lot of fun. In 2017, we had a trip to the national championship in Oregon and in 2018 it was in Colorado. That was where I spent most of my mental effort during high school. I guess you could say it's a little bit similar to chess, but I mean, that's also a weird thing to say, because I would hate it when people tried to compare things that aren't chess to chess. So I guess that was the main extra curricular I did. Also, when I was in high school, I ran a chess club there, which was really just because people told me it was better for college. But apart from that, not too much. I guess I did band in middle school and high school, but then I stopped in high school because it was no longer fun for me.

Q: What major did you claim in college, and what do you plan on pursuing in the future?

A: In college I studied environmental earth science and I did a minor in food systems. The minor is, I mean, I have some interest in the subject, but I'm not really sure what it does in terms of employment. It's just that I had already taken a lot of the requisite classes just by accident, so I realized I was able to finish at the same time as my major. Looking back, I'm not sure if all of these decisions were correct. I mean, people always tell you that you need to go to college because without college, you won't be able to get into a high paying job, but I can't get into a high paying job anyways right now. So what was the point? So more likely than not, I will eventually have to do some graduate school. Right now I'm in the process of applying for PhD programs. And, this is extremely unpleasant. There's a lot of things to do. Once I'm finished with that, I'll go back to applying for jobs in the field. I mean, it's a weird juncture because I'm not too sure of what's going to happen for the rest of my life. I've always thought that the subject was interesting, but I might be the kind of person that takes more enjoyment from doing something boring for most of the time and then doing something fulfilling in the hobbies.

Q: Do you see chess as a big part of your professional career?

A: I mean, I would really love to play chess professionally. If any rich people out there want to donate any money to play chess, I'd be very happy about that. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be happening in the near future. So more likely than not, I will not be able to be a professional player; not really out of my choice, but that's how it is. And very rarely do people's experience live up to their dream. So yeah, I guess, because it has to be this way. Chess would probably just be something that ends up happening for fun. I mentioned that, for the time being, I will work on becoming financially stable and such, but I mean, really my goal with employment is just to make enough money to sustain the things that I enjoy doing. And the first of those things is chess.

Q: Have you noticed a trend regarding the popularity of chess nowadays?
What are your thoughts about the portrayal of chess in the media?

A: I've always viewed chess as something that's very unpopular, but recently or in the last year or so its presence has increased a lot online. And what are my thoughts on representation and the media? I mean, this is a really weird question because most chess media is not targeted at people like me. It's more towards beginners. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that, it should be, but it's just that as a result, it usually becomes pretty difficult for me to understand it. But I think that most people in the real world have a very glamorized perception of just things like, oh, this is what smart people do, because it mirrors all these other things in life. My favorite and least favorite thing at the same time is when people who don't know anything about chess try to tell me what chess is like. It's the best thing ever. They'd be like, you know, chess is like life. And this aspect, you have to work hard to do this. And it's like, what does that even mean? I don't know. It's a very strange concept. So yeah, I mean obviously it's cool if chess is popularized because having more money in chess is very good for other people, right. But at the same time, it contributes to this, misconstruing of the game as something that it's not. So there are pluses and minuses, but mostly pluses, I think.

Q: Can you tell us something about the book you recently came out with, *Mastering Chess Logic*? What inspired you to write it, and why do you think logic is so important in chess?

A: I just love chess books. I used to have like 200 of them on my bookshelf. But when I was going to college, I ended up selling most of them, which is sad because I really do love chess books. One of my favorite authors is probably Jacob Aagaard. I'm very fortunate to have actually met him at a chess camp and I actually was able to get my book signed by him. So that was very cool. During high school I met one of my English teachers, who was an absolutely fantastic guy. He made me interested in writing and so I have a lot of experience with chess literature. So I thought it'd be an interesting thing to do. And one of my friends actually, who co-wrote the book with me, if you want to say that, wrote a book not that long ago with my other friend and so he had experienced it and he asked me if I wanted to write a book and I was like, okay, sure. And we were actually able to do this very quickly. I think he first approached me with the idea of the book in January or February, and we were able to finish by May. We were pretty much done with the writing portion by May. He told me that I write very quickly. I just don't think that writing a chess book is that absurdly hard. In terms of the role of logic in chess, I mean, I think the title is a little bit ambitious there. I think that our perception of what we wanted to do going into the book ended up being slightly different from what came out. But the general idea hasn't really changed too much. And the idea there is basically just that I want people to think about what they do when they play the game. Like so many people, even IMs and such, they'll make a move and I'll be like, so why did you play this move? And they'll just give me the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard in my life. And it's just like, please just think about what you're doing, that's all I want. You obviously know all this basic information, just take your basic information and just think about it and then think about, okay, so this is what I should do. I mean, everything we do in chess is related to making a decision at the board and when an IM is telling me that he didn't trade Queens because he was afraid of Rc3-b3 in the Carlsbad structure, it's just like, are you serious, man? There's no way. But I think it's something that a lot of people need to think about when they're playing.

Q: Do you have a plan for another book?

A: Not right now. As I mentioned, I need to work on other things, pertaining to financial stability. And I don't think it's a big secret that you don't get paid a lot for writing books about how to play a board game. So yeah, not immediately, but it's something that I enjoyed a great deal. And I'm a great admirer of Aagaard's work and he has a publishing firm. So in the future, I would really like to write something under his company, but I don't have any set plans made for that right now.

To All My Teachers

by Oliver Torgersen



Harvest

Apples with sweet

Potatoes,

Pumpkins and

Yellow corns.

Turkey

Ham

All lie in

Nice plates.

Kindness helps

So much from my

Generous teachers,

I thank all of you

Very much!

In this

Nice day I wish you all the

Good blessings of Joy and Health!





MERRY CHRISTMAS!

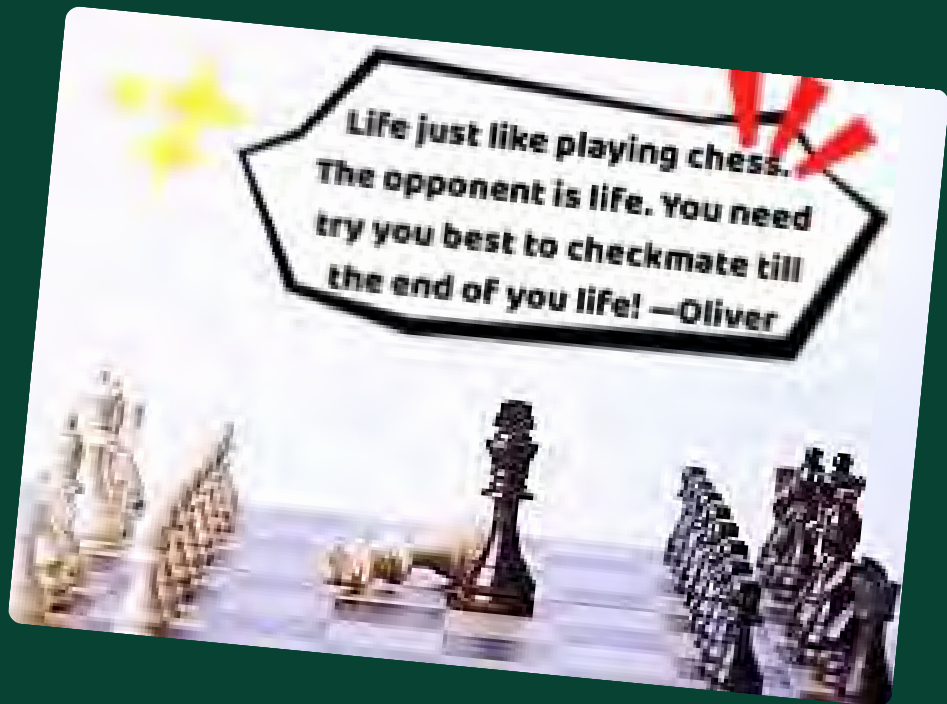
by Oliver Torgersen

MANY
ENDLESS
REJOICING ONLINE IN
REMARKABLE
YEAR OF 2021 WITH YOU!



CHRISTMAS IS HERE AND THE
HAPPIEST TIME OF THE YEAR!
REUNITED WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS
IN COMPANY OF A CHRISTMAS TREE WITH
SANTA'S SPECIAL GIFTS
TO EVERYONE!
MANY BEST WISHES TO
ALL OF YOU AND
SEE Y'ALL NEXT YEAR!





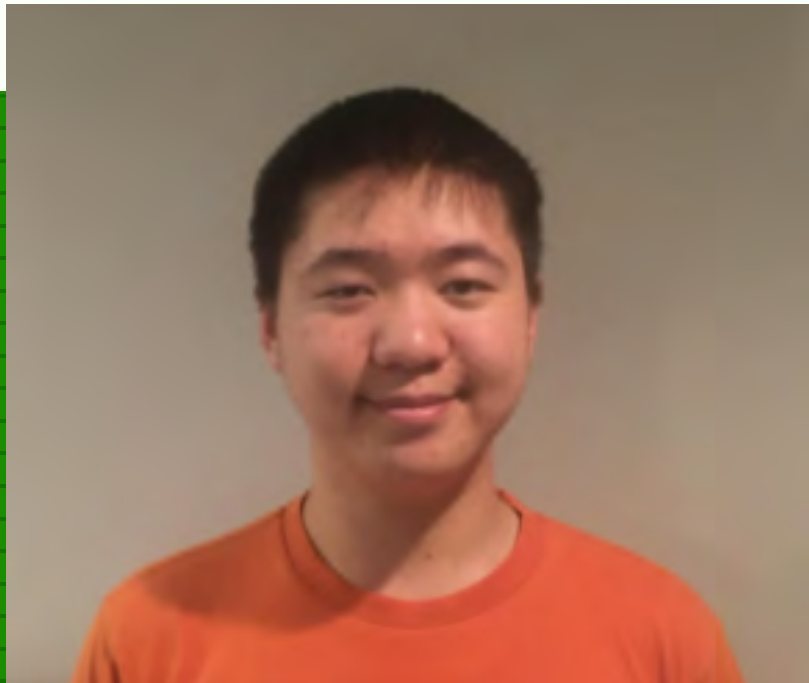
I am Oliver Torgersen. I am 9 years old and live in Texas! I learned to play chess about two years ago and started playing online tournaments earlier this year. My favorite activities are playing chess and fishing. Chess and fishing aren't as different as you might think - in both you have to develop a strategy, adjust as you go, and out-think your opponent. Whether I am mating my opponent's King, or reeling in a big Redfish, both make me feel great!



CHESS AND GO

What Cultural and Historical Insights Tell Us About the Most Popular Board Games of the East and the West

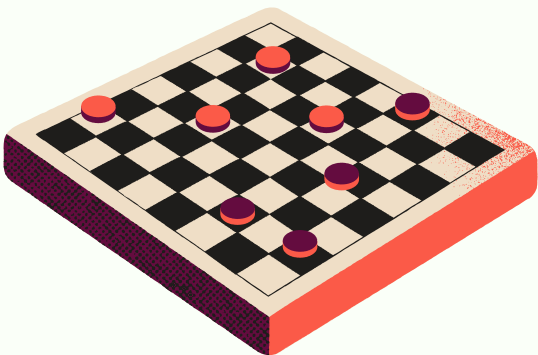
By Justin Li



Everyone knows about chess (I mean this is literally a chess magazine), but what about Go? Go, literally translated as the surrounding game, is an ancient Chinese board game with numerous fascinating similarities with chess. For example, there are two players, each represented by white or black, fighting his/her opponent. Each side has pieces used to capture objectives, and both games require immense amounts of strategy and calculations. These elements make up the idea of an intense battle of wit, strategy, and calculations between two driven players. In fact, the differences are much more interesting, especially the ones rooted deep in the culture and history of the games.

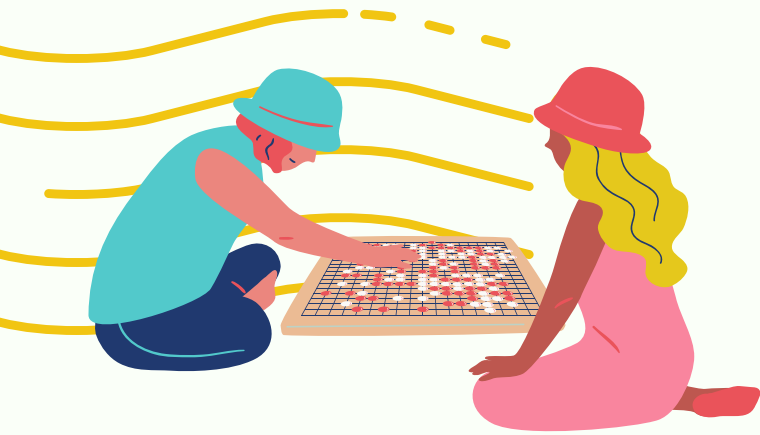
Hello everyone! My name is Justin, and currently, I am an 11th student living in Knoxville, TN. I am rated 1559 USCF, and I started playing chess in 4th grade. Due to the pandemic's effect on my community, I have dedicated my time to working and interacting with the local community to promote chess. After co-founding Rocky Top Chess, a non-profit organization that strives for the promotion of chess in the East Tennessee region, with fellow chess players and parents to build a community, I have directed over 30 online tournaments and assisted in a handful of in-person tournaments. In addition, I am also a volunteer instructor at the Knoxville Chinese Christian Church, and I have taught over 50 students. My love for both the game and the community has driven me to continue to share my passions with my friends, family, and anyone who wants to pick up a new hobby!

For starters, Go is played on a square board with many lines creating what can be described as an enlarged tic-tac-toe board of a 19 by 19 grid. Starting with an empty board, the player with black stones places a black stone, called a black stone, down at a vacant intersection. Then, white places a white stone. One after another, the two sides battle it out, aiming to surround more and more “land”, as well as capturing the opponent’s pieces whenever needed. Once a group of opponent’s stones is completely surrounded, this group is captured, and the player can gain more territory by capturing and reducing the opponent’s territory. Once the board is filled (all territories are occupied) and when both players agree that no further moves are necessary, the game is completed, and points (territories) are counted to determine the winner. Let’s take a look at the similarities. Both games are played alternately by white and black. Both games involve strategy, having a plan of attack and defense is the difference between the average and the best.



A game of Go at the mid-game stage.

Both games require heavy calculations and seeing just one move ahead can lead to gaming winning plays. In fact, even calculations themselves are similar, since each player attempts to find the best move for both sides by expanding a “what-if” tree in the mind. In short, chess and Go are mind games in which two players face each other in a battle of intellect. However, there are more interesting differences between these two board games. When you look at the beginning position of a chess board versus a Go board, what stands out? While chess has all available pieces on the board from the beginning, Go starts on an empty board with no pieces. A full versus empty board makes a huge difference when it comes to game strategy. In chess, the goal is to destroy the opponent’s defense in order to deliver a checkmate to the enemy king. At the end of a chess game, a majority of pieces have been eliminated, so chess is a destructive game from a full board to a near-empty board with much fewer pieces. However, the primary objective of Go is to efficiently gain as much territory as possible while occasionally capturing opponent’s stones.



When a Go game is completed, the board is full of black and white stones. Thus, it is a constructive game from an empty board to a full board. In short, chess is a destructive game while Go is a constructive game.

Furthermore, what about the pieces themselves? If you take a closer look at the Go pieces, you will realize that they are all the same: a simple circular stone. The equal pieces in Go may seem completely crazy to chess players. Many players find that the strengths and weaknesses of the pawns, bishops, knights, rooks, and queens bring character and life to the game. Basically, all pieces in Go are the same while the pieces in chess have different weights or power. Essentially, with all equal pieces, Go is a constructive game where we start with an empty board and end up with a board full of stones representing occupied territories with different pieces, and chess is a destructive game where we start with a board of all pieces ready to attack and typically finish with a nearly empty board in a close battle. The difference between these two board games can be explained through their cultural and historical backgrounds.

The history of chess is a bit convoluted, but most would agree that modern chess became extremely popular in Europe during the 12th -15th century as the game reflected the societal architecture in medieval Europe. During this time, Europe was in a state of heavy conflicts, and many wars were fought in an attempt to control other nations. A king led his army to attack another nation in order to beat the other king's army for victory. So, this pattern matches and represents the destructive nature and different weights of each piece in chess. On the contrary, Go was invented more than 3000 years ago in China when there was little development and there were vast, open lands waiting to be claimed by different tribes. The land of ancient China was like a vast, empty board, and there were many primitive tribes with no existence of a king or a queen. Everyone was about equal. At the time, a tribe consisting of many equal members desired to gain more territory by occupying open land as well as capturing opponent's members through fights. This is essentially well aligned with the Go game philosophy by surrounding more points or territories on the board.

Despite their unique differences, chess and Go have withstood the test of time to have gained international popularity. Both games have created wonderful communities, bringing in players from all over the world that share a passion for the same board and pieces. While the differences between chess and Go can be traced to the interesting historical and cultural differences in the eras in medieval Europe and ancient China, respectively, when the games were gaining popularity, it does not stop our love as players for these wonderful games.



A GOOD GAME



By Lucas Liu

**I look down at the chessboard,
Trying to find a good move, I lean forward.
What if I win? I can't help but wonder,
I try not to make a bad blunder.
Figuring a way out of my position,
I see a way to draw by repetition.
I think if I should take the chance,
I make a move to make my pawn advance.
The tension is building up,
To calm down, I take a sip of water from my cup.
My time is starting to run low,
I play faster but still slow.
A plan builds up in my head,
I calculate deeper and across my face, a smile is starting to spread.
I make my move and immediately know it is good,
He seems to have withstood.
But then I find a weakness inside his defense,
I tear him apart from the inside, it stops getting intense.
I run outside, celebrating my victory,
Getting first place isn't very easy.**



Hi! My name is Lucas Liu. I'm a 4th-grader at Somerset Elementary School in Washington state. I started playing chess at 6 years old. I like playing logic games and solving riddles, so it makes sense that I like playing chess. To me, chess is a game with many opportunities. It has many different variations that may look like a losing move, but after careful calculation, it becomes a dangerous move for your opponent. My NWSRS rating is 1563 and my USCF is 1235. Covid-19 has blocked us all from playing OTB games for one and a half years, making us play online. However, before Covid-19 I mainly played NW rated games. During the period of covid, I started playing USCF rated games. In a way, Covid-19 helped me get better at chess. If there's one thing I learned, it's that you must keep attacking. You will never win a game by defending all the time.

The Sport of the Mind: Chess

By David Li

Introduction: What is Chess?

Chess is a two player board game with an 8x8 board with black and white squares, and 32 black and white pieces (16 pieces per side.). The goal of the game is to use your pieces to checkmate the other king. A king is the most important piece in a chess game. The chess term checkmate means to make it so that the king has no place safe to move. Once the king is checkmated, the game is over. It is simple to learn chess, but it takes time to improve.



The Experience I had with Chess

I started playing chess in about the middle of kindergarten, and I already enjoyed it. I made friends, played matches, and had fun! However, I wasn't very good at the start. So that is what sadly made me lose my interest in chess. Then, I came back somewhere in second grade. That's when I found out that just my performance in school made my brain gain knowledge and develop more. This development in my brain is also what made my chess skills develop too! I was suddenly way better at chess, and loved it a lot. So then, I practiced and practiced, and that is what caused me to improve a lot. I was liking it more and more, so that's when my mom hired a chess teacher to help me improve, and that was also the time I got a chess.com account. Then, from third grade to now, I was getting way better and liking it so much more! That's when I got a tournament ID, for the USCF(U.S. chess federation) to be able to identify you and your rating, recent games, etc. Then, I never gave up chess, not even until this day.

The Connection between Brains and Chess

Quite some people refer to chess as something related to brains, minds, etc. Why? Well, in the game of chess, your brain needs to know and remember how all the pieces move, good moves, threats, and many things. This is important for the game, and a very good exercise for your brain. In addition, chess is stumping: it's not as easy as it looks. In the game of chess, things might not always go your way. Plus, you can have a hard time concentrating on the game. Your opponent might also be a very slow mover, making you impatient. But as you play more chess, you will find out that you're getting better at those skills! Plus, the game of chess is nonviolent; even the smallest insult is not allowed. You can only say positive things, or things that are related to chess. This will also help you be more calm and patient. So, other than chess being a fun sport, it is also helping your brain! What a win-win!

Try it!

Now that you've read about my opinion about chess, what do you think? I suggest it is time for you to join in with the fun and start your amazing experience with the game of chess. Chess can be played by anyone! There are actually 25-30 million people who play chess in the United States alone. In the world, there are estimated to be hundreds of millions who play chess. Well, what are you waiting for? Find a good website, (I suggest chess.com) and join in with the fun!

Thanks for Reading!

David Li is in 7th grade and lives in Chicago. He first learned chess when he was 5 years old at an after-school program. He's a passionate player and enjoys studying everything from openings to endgames. He's excited to see more tournaments and chess life in 2022!



TEACHING CHESS

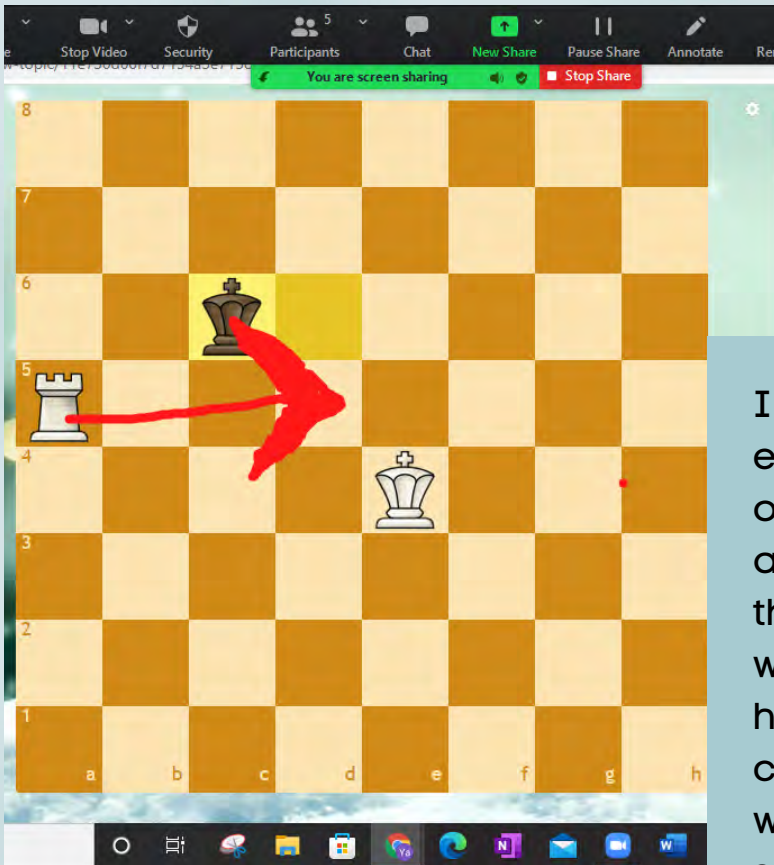
Why I'd Like to Say Thank You

By Lulu Huang

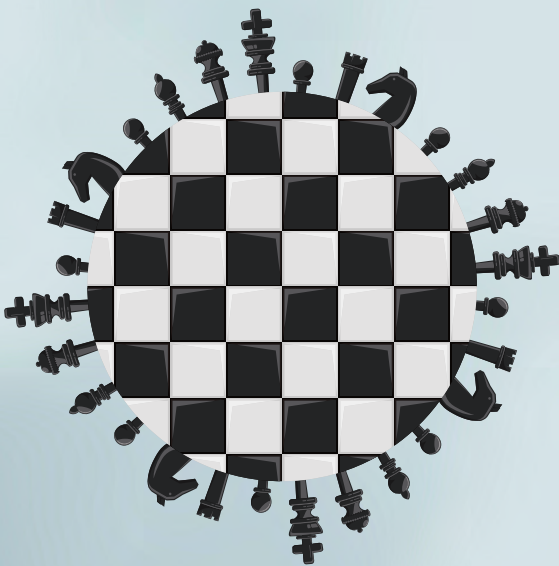
Why do I teach chess?

Back in this summer, when I was 12 years old, I received an offer from Hope Chinese School Tysons Corner to be their Intermediate Chess teacher. I had quickly accepted, enthusiastic after just having finished teaching my first chess class at Phoenix Chess Club for two months, where I had received glowing reviews despite my young age. Time passed quickly, and before I knew it, the fall semester had begun.





I brought a positive, eager energy to my first class--but my one student brought even more. I almost ended up teaching double the regular class time because I was too nervous to tell him that I had to end the class. At long last, I closed the meeting, unsettled and worn but grateful I had a student so eager to learn and show off his previous knowledge. It was from here, this first class, that I decided to become a stronger, more outspoken teacher. Luckily for me, I had a chance to experiment with this newfound determination--a couple of lessons later, two more students joined the class.



Soon after the arrival of two more students, I figured out my flow. The first student really liked magic tricks, but, as he was a child, had the habit of showing them off during class. My other two students also had interests they were excited to share. Thus, I hatched a plan: they'd get five minutes after class to share and do whatever they wanted. It worked like a charm; whenever one wanted to show off something they had or wanted to do, I would tell them to solve the puzzle first and they'd be free to do it in the five minutes following the end of class. A similar system came for drawing on the screen, or annotating--if my students wanted to draw, they'd have to show the answer with their drawing, or that drawing would have to go. Alternatively, if they correctly solved a puzzle or a problem, they could receive a certain amount of seconds to scribble all over the screen depending on the difficulty. Despite these rules, my students' liveliness never dimmed, as did mine.



What is a discovered check?

Your answer:

WHITE TO MOVE - Find the four best discovered attacks.



Your answer:



Also by the second class, I had begun creating homework, in which I would spin together questions and puzzles sourced from various softwares. Some puzzles were others' examples, some were original, many expanded on the original question if it was from someone else. Each piece of homework always had at least one question about defining a topic I had taught in class; a number of them asked for the students to use critical thinking to decide what pieces could perform the topic. Because the chess course was intermediate, the students didn't have a set starting point like beginners had. As I had quickly learned, evaluation and understanding of their level was vital, and homework was one of the myriad of ways to do so. And while it was rather time-consuming and required quite a bit of creativity, I enjoyed it nevertheless.

I love teaching my students. That's why I teach. Every class, I open the meeting with excitement, forever trying my best to help my students find the passion in chess that I had found. My pride is in keeping my students similarly enthusiastic, but understanding the concepts I teach them each class. And not only did my teaching help my students, but it also helped me. I no longer stutter when I try to speak, and I look forward to each Sunday that I teach on. So, sincerely, I want to tell my students:

Thank you for being my students!



About the author:

Lulu Huang is an eighth grader in Virginia. She has been playing chess since she was four. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, she had 1660 USCF rating points. She qualified for the 2021 FIDE World Women Fast Chess Championship (Queen's Chess Festival) "USA national team", and she also received Top 10 in the 2021 US Junior Chess Congress U12 section. Outside of chess, she enjoys competing in Future Problem Solving, qualifying for internationals two years in a row, and various math tournaments.





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