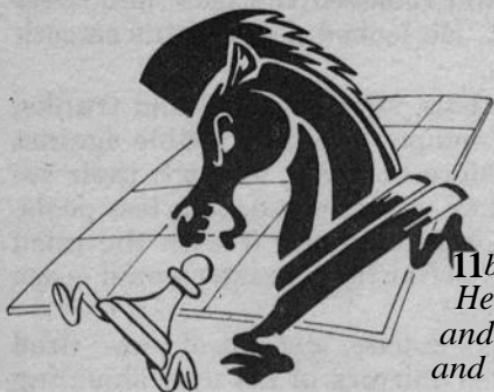


WHEN THE CHESSMEN WALKED

by Tim Colley

art: Marc Schirmeister



The author of this—thing was born in London, England, in 1938. He grew up in Melbourne; Australia; and worked in Australia, Hong Kong, and Toronto in various writing trades.

Developing a functional mini-brain small enough to fit into a chessman was the first stage, but the problems of getting them to move themselves around the board were fearsome. The entire think-tank at Imperial Intellectuals Inc. were stumped until an unknown researcher had his brainwave: forget about electronic control and all the problems of shielding, crosstalk, and power supply—and genetically engineer a living simulacrum for the purpose. . . .

It was an astounding breakthrough. And it was inevitable that these walking, stalking, talking figures start a craze such as the world had never seen. Chess clubs replaced discos, launderettes, and drive-in banks; hamburger franchises fought with each other, sponsoring chess marathons on prime-time TV; several promising small wars in Africa and Asia were successfully transferred to the chessboard with the saving of several hundred thousand lives. It became a mania that swept the world.

But that excitement was nothing when a process was developed whereby the chesspeople could reproduce themselves. *That* caused an absolute ferment. And with typical human greed and competitiveness, the race was on to produce ever more valiant pawns, wiliest bishops, and superior kings. Fortunes were made and lost as the chessmen had their capacities ruthlessly expanded.

Until the bubble burst. The hyperdeveloped pieces with their grossly enlarged heads played a game almost beyond human understanding.

No longer were the neighborhood chess clubs the glittering focus for the crowds. Only the toughest hardcore players frequented them now—and they had reverted to pushing around simple little stylized figures on a board with only sixty-four squares. . . .

And so it is today that you never hear that thrilling, pulse-stirring enquiry that once made you tingle all over:

"Bred any good rooks lately?"