



Robots' Gambit

by Richard
Wilson

They were the ultimate in chess players, but they knew some human moves, too!

THE TALL young man and the robot walked side by side down the path from the factory. The young man worked there; the robot had been manufactured there.

The young man saw his fiancée waiting for him at the curb in her convertible. "Hi, Carol," he called.

"Hello, Mike." Carol Mercer was twenty-four, her hair the color of autumn leaves and her voice crisp and bright. "Who's your friend?"

"He's for Dad," said Mike Hobbs. "Birthday present for the old gentleman. Got room for three in the front?"

The robot stopped, with Mike, at the curb. He stood there expressionless, his eyes looking at Carol, his slim frame dressed neatly in a blue serge suit. The face was that of a man of sixty, and it had a thick white moustache which matched the shock of hair on his hatless head.

"You bought that?" asked Carol, incredulous. "You bought a *robot* for your father?" Her eyes flashed angrily. "Are you out of your mind?"

"But I got him wholesale. I had to get him for Dad after your father bought Mr. Morphy. If there's one thing Dad likes to do, it's to keep up with the Mercers."

"The whole thing is ridiculous," snapped Carol. She tossed an auburn mass over her shoulder. "Just because

my father gets a mechanical monster to play chess with, your father doesn't have to have one. He could have borrowed ours."

"Oh, he could, could he? Well," said Mike, "it just so happens that your father won't let anybody else play with Mr. Morphy. In fact, Mr. Mercer won't even play chess with my dad any more. Says he's too busy proving something with the robot—something about a robot assimilating all the best strategy of his opponent until he can't be beaten by the human being who trained him."

"I think the entire matter is too childish to discuss," said Carol Mercer. "Two mature, retired men in their prime of life caring about nothing but chess, chess, chess. And now you aid and abet the mania by buying another stupid robot for—for just exactly what it would have cost us to put up our pre-fabricated house. Really, Mike, you don't have any consideration for me—for us. If that's all you think of our engagement you can consider it off!"

CAROL BURST into tears, but checked them instantly. She took off her glove and then her engagement ring. She handed the gleaming circlet to the robot. "Here, robot," she said. "Obviously he thinks more of you than he does of me."

The robot, reacting as he had been trained, automatical-

ly extended a hand and let the ring fall into his pink, flesh-oid palm.

"Carol, wait," said Mike. But she put the car into gear and sped off, leaving him and the robot standing on the sidewalk.

Mike took the ring from the mechanical man and stared at it for a moment before stuffing it into a pocket.

"Women!" he said. "They're one hundred per cent pure unadulterated emotion, without an iota of logic."

The robot, who was one hundred per cent logic, without an iota of emotion, adapted his response to the situation. "You're right, sir."

Mike hailed a cab. The driver watched his two fares get in. He leaned back and whispered to Mike: "That gentleman with you, mister, isn't he a robot?"

"Yes."

"That'll be a dollar extra, then. Licence bureau ruling. Says we got to consider robots the same as trunks."

HENRY HOOBS was deep in a chess problem when his son and the robot walked into the study. Hobbs was lean, bald, hawk-faced and, at the moment irritable. He was muttering to himself.

"Mercer solved this one in twenty minutes, did he? When I've been at it for an hour? The prevaricating old rascal! More likely his me-

chanical man solved it, if anyone did." Hobbs moved a knight tentatively, then banged it back to where it had been. "Twenty minutes, indeed!"

He hadn't seen them come in.

"All right," whispered the son. "Now!"

Two voices, one human and one mechanically tinny, began to sing "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday, dear father, happy birthday to you!"

The older man sat back in his wheelchair and blinked his eyes rapidly. Then he took out a handkerchief and honked loudly.

"My dear Michael. Thank you. And thank you, too, sir." He put on his eyeglasses and held out a hand. "Forgive me if I don't get up. Damned doctor says I have to stay put. Don't believe I've had the pleasure, sir."

The robot, reacting as taught, bowed, ignoring the outstretched hand. "Your servant, sir," he said.

"I beg your pardon? What's all this ceremony nonsense? My name's Hobbs. What's yours? Sit down, sit down; pull up a chair for the gentleman, Michael."

"His name will be up to you, Dad. He's a robot. And he's yours to wheel you around, or fetch down books, or cook, or send to the store or—" he paused slyly—"maybe you could teach chess."

The elder Hobbs was overcome, but his excitement kept the emotion momentary.

"Son," he said, "you couldn't have done a nicer thing. Of course I'll teach him chess. Now, Mr. Robot, we'll have none of this master-servant foolishness. You're as dignified a looking gentleman as ever I've seen, and it will be a pleasure to have you with us. Welcome to our home. Now, as for names. Mine is Henry, and yours—yours will be—let me see—yours will be Jose. We'll shake hands on that, Jose."

THE REAL old gentleman and the synthetic one clasped hands. Hobbs was aglow, and Jose's face broke into a warm, almost unmechanical smile.

"Jose Capablanca, you know," explained Hobbs to the robot. "The Cuban chess genius. A much greater man than that mechanical Paul Morphy, that flash in the pan that Old Mercer named his robot after."

"Mr. Mercer has this theory you heard Carol mention, Jose," Mike said to the robot. He stopped for a moment at the thought of the girl, then pushed his personal problem to the back of his mind. After all, it was his father's birthday. "About a mechanical chess player being able to outplay the man who taught him after the robot had absorbed the rudiments of the game.

Well, Dad and Mr. Mercer have been playing each other for years, and there's never been a clear-cut decision. One of them will win occasionally, and then the other, but they're about evenly matched."

"I don't like to be immodest, son," put in Hobbs, "but I do think you overstate the case for Old Mercer. He has a certain amount of flair but, really, he's not in my class."

"That remains to be proved," said Mike. "The way to prove it conclusively would be for you to teach Jose everything you know about chess and then match him against Morphy, who's been taught everything Mr. Mercer knows. Wouldn't that do it? The robot who won that match would show beyond a doubt that his teacher was the better player."

As Mike paused, Jose the robot felt his wheels of logic spinning inside him and made the perfect move. He sat down opposite Hobbs.

"Would you teach me the game, Henry?" he asked. "I'm very anxious to learn."

Hobbs slapped his knee and chuckled. "Delighted, Jose, delighted." As he set up the pieces he said to Mike: "Wait till Jose tangles with that Morphy. It'll be murder, son—sheer black-and-white murder."

course, bent over a chess board. His heavy forehead was creased with more than the usual number of lines and his mouth was set in a pout that was out of place in a man of his years.

Sitting across from Mercer was the mechanical man he had named for Paul Morphy, the nineteenth century chess wizard. The robot was calm and relaxed. He had just moved.

"An Alekhine combination, by Jupiter!" said Mercer. "I recognise it now. He used it against Tylor at Margate in—let me see—1937. Where the devil did you pick that up, Morphy?"

"From you, sir," the robot replied. He had been made in the form of a heavy-set man, grey-haired and comfortable-looking. "You've taught me everything I know about chess."

"Yes, yes, of course," said the man. "But it certainly is a shock to see something like that coming back at you... Carol, my dear, hello. Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh, father, that Mike is a beast. I hate him!"

"What's he done, the cad?"

"He took all the money we were going to use to build our house and spent it—simply threw it away!"

"But your house is all bought, Carol. The pieces are all stacked in the old barn out back. Finest pre-fab outfit I ever saw. All you have to do is hire the assemblers to put it

CAROL SLAMMED the door behind her. Her father was in the library, of

up when you're married."

"We're not being married." Carol dropped to her knees and put her head in her father's ample lap. "I gave him back his ring," she sobbed. "I hate him, the selfish brute!"

"Now, now." Mercer patted her auburn head with a clumsy hand. "It can't be as bad as all that. What exactly did he do that was so terrible?"

"He took all that money and—" she glared at Mr. Morphy—"and bought a robot. For *his* father to play chess with. The fool!"

MERCER considered this. "Why, that addle-pated old copy-cat! Never had an original idea in his life. Shows up in his chess game, too. Strictly an academician, Hobbs is. A plodding, long-winded player without invention. So now he's got a robot, has he? Hmm."

"Oh, you're all alike," cried Carol. She flung herself to her feet. "You and Mr. Hobbs and Mike—and of course the robots, who never were taught to do anything else. Chess, chess, chess. That's all you ever think about. Nothing else matters to your narrow souls!"

"Now Carol, you once were fond of the royal game. I remember what fun we had together, when your mother was still alive, teaching you the moves."

"That was when I was

twelve, father—half as old as I am now. By the time I was thirteen I was sick and tired of the stupid game. Gambits, combinations castling, *en passant*, Philidor, Reshevsky! It's a foolish game for foolish people who could be doing important things with their energy. Check! Checkmate! Phooey!"

And she kicked Morphy on his simulated ankle. The robot made no sign.

"Carol!" said her father, sharply. "Go to your room. You may come down when you've stopped being a child. The idea of a grown young woman acting this way over a silly lover's quarrel!"

"Now, Mr. Morphy, we'll see about this little combination of yours—or mine, or Alekhine's, or whosoever it is. I'll just take your queen, you see, with my rook. Weren't expecting that, were you?"

"On the contrary, Mr. Mercer," said the robot. "I had planned it. My move is rook takes knight—check! Then I think you will see that the end is inevitable."

Mercer confidently lifted a hand to remove the offending white rook with his king, but then stopped. He frowned. He glowered. He saw his doom. He gave a little strangled cry of frustration.

And he kicked the robot on the ankle.

"I WILL not go," said Carol to her father. "The

whole thing is stupid, ridiculous, fantastic. Two robots playing chess against each other to decide whose master has more right to his vanity. What nonsense!"

"I have explained to you, Carol," said Mercer, "that we require two judges for this tournament. Michael will be one and you will be the other. Old Hobbs and myself are disqualified because in effect, we ourselves will be playing, with each robot using the best of what it has learned from each of us. It will settle once and for all the question of who is the better player—me or Hobbs. Not that I have any question in my mind, but I've got to convince old Hobbs."

"I will not see that Mike Hobbs. I haven't seen him for two months and I will not see him now."

"But for two months you have been miserable, young lady. Mike has called; he's sent flowers, he's written and wired and acted in every way like a gentleman. You love him; you know it and I know it. But if *he* isn't convinced of it very soon, you'll lose him, and then you'll have real cause to be miserable. Morphy, Miss Mercer's coat, please."

The robot had it ready.

"I won't go," said Carol, putting her arms into the sleeves. "It's ridiculous. Do I look all right, father? What nonsense—a robot chess tournament! Is my mouth on

straight? I'm only going to please you, father, you know."

"I know, my dear. Is the car here or shall we take a cab?"

MIKE HOBBS opened the door. "Carol!" He moved to take her in his arms, but she pushed him away with dignity.

"I'm here in an official capacity only, Michael. I'm to be a judge at this adolescent tournament, to see that your father's robot doesn't hide any knights up his sleeve."

The study of the Hobbs home was crowded. Officials and selected members of the local chess club; the editors of a chess magazine; photographers, and a wire service reporter were waiting for the mechanical battle to begin. It promised to be a short contest, as chess went, because the robots would be playing with clockwork precision, moving their pieces almost instantaneously on the basis of their stored-up knowledge of the complicated game. A television camera was trained on the board and the empty chairs at the table, and a motion picture camera was ready to record the game and project it later in slow motion so it could be studied by slower human minds.

"Carol," said Mike, "please take back the ring." He was talking to her in a quiet corner of the room. "It's been lonely without you. Let's forget that silly quarrel. I love

you, Carol. Don't you love me?"

"The man I loved was a considerate, intelligent man who was going to marry me and move into a house of our own. He wasn't the man who let the bits and pieces of the house gather dust in a barn while he spent all the money on a robot. I don't see how we can live in a barn, with a house all in pieces."

"We'll have that money again. I've already saved a lot toward it and in another few months we'll have enough."

"Another few months! Maybe in that time you'll be able to find another girl. It won't be me—you robot fancier!" She tilted up her nose and walked into the hubbub at the centre of the room.

THE WIRE service reporter was talking to Mike's father.

"As I understand it, Mr. Hobbs, neither robot has played against anyone but his master—the so-called Morphy against Mr. Mercer and Capablanca against you?"

"That's correct. In addition, the robots have not been allowed to read any books on chess. They read amazingly well, you know, never forgetting a thing. My Jose has become an excellent chef on the basis of his reading of cookery books."

"I see," said the reporter. "And so, if the robot Morphy

wins the tournament, Mr. Mercer will be adjudged the champion, and if the robot Capablanca wins, you will be the better man?"

"Exactly."

The mechanical contestants sat down at the board, Morphy's heavy-set frame filling the chair and Capablanca's wiry manufactured body alert on the edge of its seat.

Carol, Mike and their fathers took their places close to the contest table. The cameras began to grind as Jose Capablanca, the host robot, shook a black and white pawn in his cupped hands to determine who would have first play. Morphy won the white and opened with his queen's pawn. Capablanca went into the Dutch defence. Quiet settled over the room as the play proceeded with superhuman rapidity.

The robot Morphy won the rapid-fire game with checkmate in fewer than two dozen moves, and the audience applauded.

"That's my boy!" cried old Mercer.

THE SECOND game got under way, Mr. Hobbs' robot playing white this time. The play was too fast for human minds to follow completely, and at the end of ten minutes Morphy tipped over the black king. "I resign," the robot announced.

Hobbs beamed.

"I protest!" shouted Mr.

Mercer. "He should have played to the finish."

His daughter and Mike, as judges, overruled him.

"Apparently it was impossible for your robot to win, father," Carol said. "It went too fast for me, but the films undoubtedly will show why he resigned. Be a good loser, Pop."

Mercer grumbled, but was secretly pleased by the interest with which his daughter—who professed to hate the game—was following each whizzing move.

The tournament went on. Game after game was played.

Mercer's robot won the third and fourth. The fifth was a draw. But then Hobbs' robot cut into Morphy's lead and pulled ahead. Capablanca took a two-game advantage, held it through another draw, then won the decisive game.

The entire tournament had been played by the robots in less than three hours.

"We won, Dad!" said Mike. "I knew we could do it."

HOBBS waved away the congratulations. "It was very novel and interesting. The robots must play a return match sometime soon, Mercer. But I'd much rather play a living game with you, old man. One we can relax over, with cigars and a drop of port. The lightning chess makes me dizzy. What do you say, my friend?"

Mercer struggled to be gracious and succeeded. He smiled and held out a hand to Hobbs. "Of course," he said. "But your Capablanca is a better man than my Morphy. No doubt of it."

The old man swallowed, then said with an obvious effort: "And you're a better player than I am. I always knew it, but pride kept me from admitting it. Yes, I'd like a man-to-man game. How about tomorrow night?"

Carol shot a fond glance at her father. "The old boy's really a good sport, deep down," she said to Mike. She drew him away from the group of professional chess enthusiasts who were clustered around the robots, examining them and talking to their owners.

She squeezed Mike's hand. "I think I can be just as good a sport about something much more important than chess—important as that is to our Pops. Seeing your father tonight reminded me that he uses a wheelchair. I'd got so used to seeing it that I'd forgotten. And of course he had to have a robot—for a lot more important reasons than my father got one."

"Darling," said Mike.

"I'm sorry I made such a fuss about the house," said the girl. "We'll have it put up whenever you say. I can wait a few months because I know we'll be spending the rest of our lives in that house. If"—

Carol added—"if you'll let me have the ring again."

Their kiss was interrupted by the flash of a photographer's camera.

"Perfect," said the Press photographer. "When Judge Meets Judge. Or Robot Chess Match Doesn't Lack Human Element. Which caption would you prefer?"

"Either one," said Mike, blinking. "So long as the picture goes on the page with the rest of the wedding announcements."

"WHERE ARE the robots?" asked Hobbs. "I haven't seen them since the crowd left."

"They were in the room with us for a while," said Carol. "They were sitting off in a corner sort of chuckling to themselves while Mike and I talked about our house. We decided we want it on the opposite corner of the property from your house, father."

"Fine, fine," said Mercer. "But where are the robots? And can they communicate with each other?"

"Of course they can," said Mike. "As Carol said, we were talking and looking through the instructions for assembling the pre-fab. The robots were still there when we left to join you here in the living room."

"Well, I was just in the study and they're not there now," said Mercer.

Mike and Carol went

through the house, room by room, but the robots were gone.

"You don't suppose they ran away?" asked Hobbs. He was nervously trundling himself back and forth in his wheelchair. "Perhaps off to the chess club? Or off to a carnival to play on exhibition? They seemed to like the touch of publicity they got tonight."

"They wouldn't do that," said Mike. "It's not in their makeup, and I mean literally. They're made to serve their masters to the best of their ability, and they wouldn't do anything to inconvenience them."

"Well," said his father, "they're gone. And where the blazes do you look for a runaway robot?"

THEY SEARCHED the house again, and the grounds, then drove to the Mercer home. The robots weren't there, either.

Mike and Carol looked into the old barn behind the house.

"Mike! Our house! The sections! They've been stolen!"

But Mike was grinning with a glimmer of suspicion. "Come on!" he said. He took Carol's hand and ran with her to the other end of the property.

There, under improvised searchlights, where nothing but a foundation had existed that afternoon, stood a house, completely fabricated. They hear hammering coming from inside it.

"Mike!" said Carol. "Do you suppose—"

Her unfinished question was answered as the hammering stopped and the two robots appeared at the front door.

"Jose and Paul, you clock-work rascals!" said Mike. "What have you been up to?"

"The robots smiled proudly.

"The plans were very complete, Michael," said Jose. "And yours and Miss Carol's wishes were obvious."

"We couldn't help hearing

your conversation," added Paul. "Our ears were made to be very sensitive."

"We hope our service has been satisfactory," said Jose.

"You darlings!" said Carol. "I could kiss both of you, you—you champions! Aren't they champions, Mike, both of them, through and through?"

"Right," said Mike, "my love."

"Now we can be married right away," she said. "Mike—this week end!"

"Check, mate!" said Mike.



The Reckoning



The results have been most gratifying, as ballots have poured in on the November issue, in the forms of voting coupons, letters, and postal cards. All were counted. You rated the stories in order of preference from 1 to 7—but all ties were rated as you listed them. When you disliked a story, it got a rating of 8; when you thought a story really outstanding it rated 0. And here's the way the stories finally came out.

1. Delay - Temporary (De Vet)	2.92
2. Quest (Banister)	3.23
3. Early Bird (Russell)	3.44
4. Why? (Silverberg)	3.60
5. Audition (Arnett)	3.92
6. Pursuit (Smith)	4.11
7. The Heirs (Cox, Jr.)	4.20