

5. A Glossary of Useful Terms

William Harston

*I cannot be didactic
or lucid, but I can
be quite obscure and practi-
cally marzipan.*

Mervyn Peake

Backward Pawn A pawn which, through defect in education or inherent lack of ability, makes a stupid move, Intelligence tests do not confirm the popular belief that black pawns are more dumb than white pawns. Persistent crass stupidity can lose a pawn all his friends. He is then known as an isolated pawn.

Bad Bishop One who consorts with actresses or those of a theatrical persuasion. In the early days of the Reformation, any bishop seen participating in the Stonewall variation of the Dutch defence on Black's QB1 was liable to immediate excommunication. Only centuries later, after discovery of the Finchley Central (q.v.), was this variation expunged from the Vatican's list of forbidden openings.

Blockade A paramilitary manoeuvre to prevent the opponent from obtaining supplies or refreshment between moves. This is simplest accomplished by an allied detachment strategically placed to form a long instant queue at the tea counter as soon as they see him coming.

Capablanca It is not generally known that this Cuban World Champion was born in England under the name of Whitehead. After an unsuccessful attempt to interest Bertrand

Russell in joint authorship of a work entitled *Principia Scacchistica*, he emigrated to Havana and Latinized his name. There he wrote the book on his own and called it *Chess Fundamentals*. After defeating Lasker for the World title, he acknowledged the helpful advice given by his Irish neighbour Al O'Keane; 'You'll never get anywhere with a name like Whitehead.'

Counterpoint A musical device to help chessplayers add up their wins. Originally invented by J. S. Bach as a personal favour to Philidor to enable the latter to total his points between writing operas. Philidor later earned enough to buy a pocket calculator, which accounts for the relative lack of contrapuntal writing in his later works. His gratitude, however, is clearly shown in the mating combination known as 'Philidor's Legacy', which he bequeathed to Bach in his will. Unfortunately Bach was already some forty years dead by the time the will was read. We can but speculate on what a fine chessplayer he might have become had he lived long enough to inherit.

Deciduous A term of abuse originally applied only to pawn formations. If a pawn structure is riddled with so many weak and isolated pawns that something is bound to drop off pretty soon, then the whole structure is termed deciduous. Later the expression was loosely applied to any bad position. By an etymologically interesting back formation, the term 'evergreen' was applied to the game Anderssen–Dufresne 1852. The ninth game of the 1951 Botvinnik–Bronstein match is known as 'The Deciduous Game'.

Diagonalization The process of winning a game by means of a mating combination along one of the long diagonals. A bishop in Finchley Central (q.v.) is an essential prerequisite to diagonalization. The originator of this term is reputed to be the English mathematician and grandmaster Dr J. Nunn: 'If he takes my pawn, I'll diagonalize him.' (BBC tape, 3.10.78; wiped later the same day.)



Dragon Variation The name of this Sicilian defence variation has often been mistakenly attributed to a fanciful resemblance between the black pawn formation and the profile of a mythical beast. This is all too whimsical to be true. A far more convincing derivation is from the tendency for theoretical arguments and analyses of this wretched opening to drag on and on and on.

The Benoni, however, is indeed so called because the black pawns look like a bunch of bananas. A single Benoni pawn is correctly termed a benonus.

Finchley Central To develop a bishop on the long diagonal. The long diagonal was first discovered, and named after, the Irish musician and explorer Lonnie Donegal, on a visit to North London while searching for a short route from a1 to h8. The term Finchley Central was later taken to Europe where it

appeared in early manuscripts in the corrupt form 'Finchentro' and later 'Fianchetto'. Bishops developed on long diagonals are said to be 'in Finchley Central' or 'Finchley Centralled'. Bishops on slightly shorter diagonals are said to be in Muswell Hill, Hendon or Golders Green according to the desirability of the diagonal. That the influence and power of Finchley Centralled bishops was known even before the Russian Revolution, is clear from Karl Marx's expressed last wish to be buried 'in Finchley Central'. He spoke metaphorically, of course, but the pall-bearers took him at his word. Unfortunately they were short of the correct fare on the Northern line and found themselves having to alight at Highgate.

Grünfeld's Defence Colourblindness. Grünfeld had terrible problems with his eyes and invented his eponymous defence by pure accident. Trying, one day, to play the King's Indian, he mistakenly pushed the black QP one square too far on his third move. He blamed this error on a combination of his own short-sightedness and the brown-and-yellow squared board on which the game was played. All the squares looked green to him, and he could not tell the difference between Q3 and Q4. Nevertheless, the game turned out very well, and Grünfeld realized that he had created a fine new opening. Since he had invented it by pure accident, he felt that the opening ought not to bear his name, so he coined the descriptive term 'Green square' (or, in German, *Grünfeld*) Defence. The similarity to his own name he staunchly maintained to be total coincidence. When accused of Narcissistic nomenclature, Grünfeld's Defence was always colourblindness.

Half-passed Pawn Thirty minutes after Pawn o'clock.

J'adoube An expression denoting unwillingness to move the piece touched. The derivation comes from an old English phrase, 'Shut up', formerly the conventional response to: 'You've touched that piece, you've got to move it.' Later the introductory sentence was omitted by the aggrieved player, and the piece toucher would automatically say 'Shut up'

without the need for prompting. This was taken into middle High Flemish where it appeared as *Schodop* and later came into old Northern French as *J'odeupe* or *J'adoube*. 

Nichya Russian for draw. The word was an attempt by Stalin to pronounce the name of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose advocacy of conflict seemed very peaceful by the great Leader's own standards. Hence the name came to signify any conflict which ended amicably. Following his invention of *Übermensch*, incidentally, Nietzsche attempted to market a game called *Überschach* for *Übermenschen* to play in their spare *Zeit*. The game took place on a vast board with huge pieces which nobody could lift. Commercial success eluded him and Nietzsche sank into a deep depression during which he wrote '*Also Schach Zarathustra*'. He cheered up when Richard Strauss bought the musical rights, and *Übermensch* comics became popular.

Pasadoble 1. An *en passant* capture made by a doubled pawn;
2. Two connected passed pawns.

Petrodollar Prize money earned by Petrosian, said to have a major influence on the Soviet Union's balance of payments.

Rook Ending A cryptic crossword clue reference to the letters OOK. Thus 'Start of Botvinnik's rook ending volume (4)' clues the word 'book'. Beware, however, if the number of letters in the answer is '(7,3,9)', when it is far more likely to be 'Smyslov and Levenfish' who actually did write a book on rook endings. Orthodox rook ending players prefer unleavened fish.

Troubled Pawn When three pawns of the same colour find themselves standing on the same file, the one with trouble is the original resident who started life alone in his block, only to be joined later in the game by two unwelcome lodgers. His living space must now be shared between the doubled pawn and the trebled pawn. Hence the name.

Viola da Gamba Any opening variation in which either player sacrifices a medium-sized stringed instrument.

Zugzwang An ugly German word which on no account should be pronounced or even attempted in correct Teutonic fashion. There are only two acceptable ways to say this word in English: 'wugzang' or 'Volkswagen'. The latter is recommended as a good descriptive term for a state best avoided and from which it is difficult to extricate oneself having made the mistake of getting into it in the first place. Far better than being in Volkswagen is to be in Bentley or Daimler. But remember that whereas in Volkswagen any move is liable to be fatal, moving when in Bentley or Daimler can carry prohibitive fuel costs.