



The Immortal Game: A History of Chess

By David Shenk

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A fresh, engaging look at how 32 carved pieces on a board forever changed our understanding of war, art, science, and the human brain.

Chess is the most enduring and universal game in history. Here, bestselling author David Shenk chronicles its intriguing saga, from ancient Persia to medieval Europe to the dens of Benjamin Franklin and Norman Schwarzkopf. Along the way, he examines a single legendary game that took place in London in 1851 between two masters of the time, and relays his own attempts to become as skilled as his Polish ancestor Samuel Rosenthal, a nineteenth-century champion. With its blend of cultural history and Shenk's lively personal narrative, *The Immortal Game* is a compelling guide for novices and aficionados alike.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Those curious about chess and wishing to learn more about the game (but not too much more) will welcome this accessible, nontechnical introduction. Shenk (*The Forgetting*) succinctly surveys the game's history from its origins in fifth- or sixth-century Persia up to the present, touching along the way on such subjects as his own amateurish pursuit of the game, erratic geniuses like Paul Morphy and Bobby Fischer, chess in schools today, computer chess and his great-great-grandfather Samuel Rosenthal, who was an eminent player in late 19th-century Europe. To heighten the drama, Shenk intersperses the text with the moves of the so-called "immortal game," a brilliant example of "romantic" chess played between Adolf Anderssen and Lionel Kieseritzky in London in 1851. Appendixes include transcripts of five other great games, along with Benjamin Franklin's brief essay "The Morals of Chess." Readers will come away from this entertaining book with a strong sense of why chess has remained so popular over the ages and why its study still has much to tell us about the workings of the human mind. 50 b&w illus. (Sept.)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

David Shenk is the author of four previous books, including *The Forgetting*, an acclaimed study of Alzheimer's, and *Data Smog*, about information overload in the Internet age. The greatest asset of *The Immortal Game* is its accessibility. Through an educated layperson's knowledge of chess, Shenk focuses on his subject's more intriguing points and leaves arcane rehashes of famous games for more technical texts. (An appendix obliges those who revel in such details.) At its most engaging, the book meditates on the ways that chess can enrich lives. Given its brevity, Shenk's overview sometimes sacrifices depth to coverage, though such an approach barely decreases the pleasure even an interested "wood-pusher"—chess slang for a weak player—might take away from this passionate and well-researched history.

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From [Booklist](#)

Versatile author Shenk has conceived a bright idea for marching through the history of chess. His title a double entendre, Shenk alternates narrative passages on the ancient lineage of chess with move-by-move analysis of a spectacular 1851 contest that lore has dubbed "the immortal game." Shenk is also an Everyman-guide, and his attitude is one that many readers will share—he is attracted to the game's infinite possibilities but also intimidated by its difficult body of analytic knowledge. Trying to master chess has deranged more than a few, such as artist Marcel Duchamp and former champion Bobby Fischer, but it has also given great pleasure to others, such as Benjamin Franklin. Seeking a reason for the popularity of chess from its Persian and Indian origins 1,500 years ago to the present, Shenk decides it lies in chess' fluidity as metaphor. It was plainly conceived as a war game, but feudal European society found deeper meanings within it, as cognitive psychologists and logicians do today. Rangy, anecdotal, and nontechnical, Shenk's is popular chess history at its most readable. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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