

Everything you always wanted to know about chess, but were afraid to ask !

Contrary to some popularly held beliefs, chess is not simply a complicated board game played predominantly by East Europeans and swotty nerds who look like grown-up versions of Harry Potter !

The game of chess mirrors real life and for the participants provides drama and pathos on a par with the excitement provided by participation in other sports. Each player is like a premiership manager whose pieces are his/her squad of players that need to be deployed to best effect during the game. While the purpose of the game is to checkmate the King, (ie to attack and encircle him with so many pieces that he is threatened with capture and has no valid escape), in reality, given the range of her movements, the Queen is the most powerful piece on the chess Board ! Like the mythical Irish mother of old she is both an attacker and defender, a formidable lady who both cossets her king from attacks and goes in "studs up" when throwing shapes at the opposition.

Each side is comprised of 16 pieces of differing relative values, viz 8 pawns whose value is one point each along with two rooks (five points each), two Knights and two bishops (all 3 points each). The queen's value is nine points, which indicates that the only female on the Board is a match for three bishops ! In effect, on the chess board, the queen is a cross between Xena Warrior Princess and Buffy the Vampire Slayer and is more than a match for any of her male opponents ! Furthermore, the bishops can only move diagonally reflecting a rather one-dimensional outlook, (as in real life ?) although they can be deadly when working together during a game. The knights are the only pieces who can jump over squares occupied by other pieces and they move in an "L" shape giving them a Graham Norton like flamboyance. The king, who has to be protected at all costs, is allowed a special move during

the game called "castling" which enables him to manoeuvre away from the centre of the Board, usually out of immediate danger. A bit like all of Woody Allen's film characters, the king frequently skulks in one of the corners riven by self-doubt until most other pieces are swopped off to the point where he can emerge relatively free of previous dangers.

In summary the game of chess can be seen as a proxy for real life, involving considerable conflict, the battle of the sexes, football, religion, idiosyncratic tv personalities, neurotic film directors and strong female characters whose programmes populate the teen tv market and who invariably visit violence and mayhem on an assortment of stereotypical male baddies in the best possible taste !