

HOW TO BECOME WORLD CHESS CHAMPION

By Bob Basalla

At some point in our lives, most of us have stared at that distant, gleaming Everest peak and thought, “Why couldn’t I reach that summit someday?” Of course, if we are not delusional, we know that it will never happen. The title of World Chess Champion resides beyond our grasp, forever fantasy. After all, most of us stink at this game we love, relative to the playing elite.

But circumstances need not always be this way. Dr. Bob’s *Comprehensive Guide to Gaining the World Chess Title* (Patzer Press, 2023) surprisingly reveals many pathways to achieve your fervently desired goal. Sherlock Holmes purportedly published a monograph detailing 114 distinct varieties of cigar ash. So why couldn’t there be 114 or more ways to cop the Caissic crown? Having thoroughly thought through the permutations, but space being limited, I have distilled the best bets into the following truncated list. Choose one and head for glory!

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BY THE TRADITIONAL METHOD

First, we have to acknowledge the process successfully employed by all the World Champions up to this day. It combines the following attributes, in varying degrees: innate talent (think Capablanca, and also Morphy, had there been a title to attain in his day), drive/desire/devotion (Alekhine), will to win (Fischer), concentration (Smyslov), deep study (Botvinnik), preparation (Kasparov), imagination (Tal), iconoclasm (Steinitz), prudence (Karpov), objectivity (Anand), tenacity (Petrosian), cunning (Lasker), accuracy (Kramnik), universality (Spassky), confidence (all), an aura of destiny (Carlsen) and perhaps a bit of luck (Euwe, who won over Alekhine because of the latter’s drinking and lack of preparation during their first match). While the Traditional Method is available to all in principle, since so few of us can hope to reach, let alone sustain, such excellence, there has to be an easier way. Well, read on...

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BY ASSERTION

In this method one achieves top chess honors by simply *declaring* that one is World Champion! Don’t snicker, it worked once. After Wilhelm Steinitz defeated Adolf Anderssen in 1866 he immediately began touting himself as the World Champion. The thinking was this: Morphy crushed Anderssen 7–2 in 1858, becoming the consensus best player on the planet, especially since Howard Staunton, the other main claimant, declined to play the Louisianan. Then, when soon afterward Morphy left public chess forever, the mantle of “best player” kind of devolved back to Anderssen, Steinitz rationalized. Therefore, after beating the German schoolteacher 8–6, Steinitz deemed himself #1. Since most of us schlubs would not prevail against an Anderssen–quality master “mano a mano,” the best approach would be to challenge the current champion to a no stakes match, and when he (Magnus Carlsen as of this writing) does not respond, forfeit him! To cement your claim more firmly, also send challenge letters or

emails to all the main title contenders. Their non–response will bolster your bold contention. By this method I am already World Champion of checkers, Parcheesi, badminton, tennis, ping pong, bowling, golf, poker, boxing and mixed martial arts (all weight classes), archery, Fooseball, competitive eating and many other games and sports too numerous to mention. But I have magnanimously left chess to you...

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BY CHEATING

Though distasteful to many, criminality can prove quite effective. Of course, one would have to be more subtle about it than the butt–stupid schemes recently alleged. However, as magicians will readily admit, if they are honest, there are numerous ways to perform almost any trick, so clandestine computer assistance should not be impossible as you rise up the rating ranks. Admittedly, such sustained chicanery might eventually become suspicious, though. Likewise, the Lucretia Borgia concept (poisoned pawns perhaps?) is probably too risky and impractical (someone might notice opponents or rivals continually keeling over). Blackmail could work if you could find “dirt” on each player you encounter up the competition ladder, but even if you somehow could, the research cost would be prohibitively expensive to all but billionaires. The same applies to bribery. Bribery might once have been viable, since in the past professional players (“chess bums”) were financially bereft. Not as much anymore. And the reverse blackmail of continued “hush money” would bankrupt all but the top 0.0001%. Intimidating your opponents with veiled death threats is a gamble, as you are likely to find one crazed “title or bust” fellow fanatic who would accept your gambit by calling your bluff. (The severed head of a chess knight in their bed is hardly intimidating enough. I know.) Impersonating the World Champion after plastic surgery, kidnapping, and identity theft might allow you to feel like the Champ for a few days or weeks but such a superficial reign would be fleeting at best. Who could act nerdy or strangely or egotistical enough (depending on the champ at the time) not to be found out?

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BY ACCLAMATION

Convince the chess bureaucrats to unanimously select you as the next World Champion, with a term beginning immediately and lasting as long as you do. Of course, to do so and make it stick and be recognized everywhere one would first have to become global dictator (arguably an easier task in our time than consistent super–GM play). I alluded to the consequences of this approach in my piece “Chess in 2042” in *The Chess Journalist* (2022).

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BY INHERITANCE

If a close friend or relative held the title you could perhaps invei-

gle them into bequeathing you the Championship in their will (natural causes, naturally; I am not suggesting you prematurely off them). The Federation and others might object, but you would have a legal document to support your claim. The chief sticking point here is that very few of us know or are related to the current Champion. I wrote of a player, Sam Lopez, who inherited his master rating in my account of Tasmania 1909: International Chess and Tiddlywinks Congress (1979/1986/2021).

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BY BEATING A WEAKER CHAMPION

Somehow finagle an opponent you are sure to defeat onto the chess throne and then snatch the crown with ease! The only difficulty comes in achieving the title for your patsy, which involves the same problems you were working to get around in the first place. Infinite regress looms. An item in my *Whole Board Catalog of Chess Books and Equipment (My Sister* by Aron Nimrodovich) suggests a possible solution to this conundrum.

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BY CUSTOMIZATION

At any one time there is more than one World Chess Champion. There is one overall champ, to be sure. But there is also a Women's World Chess Champion, a World Junior Chess Champion, a World Blind Chess Champion and so on. Why not one more? Customize a World Championship tournament with as many specifications as you need to emerge the victor. And if no one else but you qualifies to participate, oh well. For example, as winner of the "World Retired Dentist Living in Berea, Ohio, named Bob Chess Championship," I could shorten that mouthful of a title, to technically, but truthfully, say that I was a World Chess Champion!

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BY SCHISM

Create your own splinter chess federation and have yourself elected as its first official Chess Champion, or to be more legit, win a quad among the board members. Not that long ago there was an era of alternative federations and concomitant championships, so you have precedent in your favor.

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BY CREATING YOUR OWN "CHESS"

Unlike Monopoly or Scrabble, the name of chess is not proprietary. Anyone can call anything "chess" without legal retribution. A slight change in rules, or even a wholly different game can be labelled "Chess," and as the top practitioner of this newly dubbed variant you are naturally the World "Chess" Champion. Furthermore, following in the tradition of Lewis Carroll, words can mean what you want them to mean when you say them. That means "Champion" may also be redefined to apply only to you, thereby making you a readymade titleholder! Legally changing one's name to "World Chess Champion" would do the trick as well.

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BY DIVERSITY HIRE

With the exception of Anand, all previous World Chess Champions have been white; and without exception all have been male. Should in the future certain elements succeed in constructing a one world, woke-minded government, those of minority, oppressed, or preferred status may try to wind their way up the stifling bureaucracy to place themselves in position to be chosen as a diversity hire for World Champion within the subsumed Ministry of Chess Affairs. Don't worry if you are a patzer or do not even know the moves. Merit will no longer be an issue as only redressing the previous inequitable unbalance in appearance will count. Despite my impeccable patzer credentials, that leaves me out, but then I am not privileged to be eligible for such reparations, am I?

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BY YOUR BETTERS DISAPPEARING

This might sound macabre to some, but think of it. If all the chess players more skilled than you suddenly ceased to exist you would by default be the World's best player! Instead of fruitlessly attempting to scale the chess ability mountain one might level the mountain so as to stand astride a more manageable molehill. Unfortunately, for most of us far down the pecking order, this would require a body count that would make even the most prolific serial killer wince. And remember, just to be sure, one would have to take down quite a few others on our populous planet to have any chance that your Championship claim was and remained true. Not to mention the difficulties in removing only certain folks and not a lot of others innocent of being better than you. I touched on this grisly scenario in a (so far unpublished) short story.

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BY CHANGING THE CHAMPIONSHIP CYCLE

One might have to invest a few decades to reach the decision-making tiers of the chess federation but, once getting there, you could enact a change in the championship cycle, morphing (or Morphing?) it into a lucrative TV reality show for weekly knock out games culminating in a ratings week Championship Match. But slyly having oneself made the show's producer and editor, one could steer the final game into a winner-take all contest between the survivor and—you, where you hold all the cards (an Immunity King, for instance). Voila! You win the title in front of millions of witnesses! I fleshed out this schema in my short story "*Chess Comes Down to Reality*" (2004).

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ON OTHER WORLDS/MANY WORLDS

Who said the "World" in World Chess Champion had to be Earth? Become an astronaut, go to the Moon or Mars and pull out a magnetic set. Just be sure, not as drastically as murder, mind you, that none of your co-explorers are particularly Royal Game adept. In the far future there may be many "World" Chess Champions. And if you subscribe to the Many Worlds Hypothesis in fundamental physics you don't even have to do anything to be top dog. Most Many Worlds interpretations decree every physically allowable event has to exist, if not here, then in another universal realm. That means that since it isn't forbidden by the

laws of physics, somewhere/somewhen or whatever, you *already* are/have been/going to be the World Chess Champion! An infinite number of you in fact. Of course, there still remains the philosophical question of whether all those “yous” are really “you.” I personally vote no, but you may have another opinion.

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BY CYBER–MELDING

Perhaps in the future humans could be “enhanced” by integration with a computer entity. There is talk of this futuristic possibility even now. If it occurs in your lifetime, and you have a choice, remember to merge with a device with awesome chess–playing potential. Then find a way to discourage others (hopefully not involving sabotage, but hey, whatever it takes...) from following in your brain–steps. Co–Champion with “Bob,” or however you choose to refer to your cyber symbiont, wouldn’t be all bad.

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BY TIME TRAVEL

Should such a sci–fi device ever become workable one could go back in time with a concealed top of the line chess computer (see Cheating above...) and handily defeat the befuddled top players of any selected previous era. But take note, your victory may not be long–lived as time travelers from *your* future armed with even more powerful chess engines could swoop in to change history any number of additional times. I examined some of the permutations in my short story “*The Young Turk Confounds.*”

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BY SUPERNATURAL MEANS

Voodoo or other forms of sorcery (of dodgy reality at best) might be a way to ascend to the heights of chess against the resistance of others, but again as with poisoning, probably not without notice. Ditto for receiving wishes from a genie or other equivalent entity, or selling your soul to Satan for chess hegemony. Though perhaps more real than the above, the same basically applies to hypnosis or other forms of mind control causing players to continually fall for your traps. The latter was explored in my short story “*Caissa’s Chosen.*” It didn’t end well. Korchnoi allegedly played against the ghost of Maroczy, a process, which if true, would open the door to consultation assistance from the beyond. Don’t hold your breath. Besides, séances at the board might be a wee bit conspicuous to some.

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BY ABANDONMENT

For this scheme, first become the world’s leading psychiatrist or religious leader or some other extremely persuasive personage. Step two: badmouth chess, or more particularly the World Chess Championship, as corrosive to societal norms. Devalue it with your every utterance until the public uproar is so great that the governing federation would have to drop it just to survive. Step three: just calmly walk over and pick up this “useless artifact of a late and unlamented era” and safeguard the people by placing it permanently in your safe keeping, for the greater good don’t you know...

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BY VONNEGUT’S DICTUM

In his novel, “*Mother Night*”, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. promoted the concept “You are what you pretend to be.” That is, if you live a certain way for long enough, even if it is merely a façade, it might as well be said that that is what you are. Given enough time, what you “really are” melds into the reality you are faking. So consistently act like the World Chess Champion and with each passing year you asymptotically approach the reality you desire. Or maybe I’ve misread old Kurt...

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BY OBIT

If all else fails you still have this last gambit. I know of someone whose obituary claims that he was “many times Ohio champion” when he actually never in his life played in even *one* of the championship tournaments! The people who posted his obit, not being chess folk, of course just entered it as fact. And practically all who habitually or for research purposes scour the notices from then on won’t likely notice either. Thus, in a certain (very limited) way you can rest for all eternity in the knowledge that at least some among we–the–living consider you (the schemer) to have been the World Chess Champion!

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Obviously, I’m concluding long before Holmes’ 114 cigar ash types, but you get the idea. The schemes only get wilder from here. And I’m sure there are many more ways out there which I did not come up with—yet. But this compendium ought to warn you off underestimating me.

THE END



Bob Basalla is a retired dentist who lives in Ohio. Photo by Stacia Pugh, Director of Marketing & Promotion *Progress With Chess.*

We invite the CJA readers to suggest additional ideas and send them in for the following issue.