

Kasparov Versus Deep Blue: Computer Chess Comes of Age

Reviewed by Hans Berliner

**Kasparov Versus Deep Blue: Computer Chess
Comes of Age**

Monty Newborn

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This book was published after the 1996 match between Kasparov and Deep Blue, but before the 1997 match in which Kasparov was defeated. Given the hype and speculation following that event, I find it difficult to believe that anything I say in this review will persuade anyone to either buy this book or pass on it. However, here goes.

Monty Newborn is a phenomenal raconteur. His stories are truly wonderful, and his introductory tale of a conversation among a group of birds watching early attempts at human flight is probably worth one third the price of admission. However, Newborn is not a strong chess player, and he repeatedly does not face up to this. He makes assertions about chess playing and chess strength that are patently ridiculous to anyone who understands chess and computer chess. Why he did not find someone who is a good player to help him write this book is a total mystery to me.

Newborn gives a lot of the history of computer chess. In this he also shows his lack of skill as a chess player, deeming things that were technologically interesting but unsuccessful to be worth more attention than those things that were highly successful. Also, there is the impression that this book was rushed into publication, possibly on the anticipation that Deep Blue might defeat Kasparov in 1996. There is a picture on page 166 in which Peter Jensen, a part-time helper on Deep Thought,

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is misidentified as “Andreas Nowatzky”, someone whom Newborn obviously did not know or take the time to find out about.

Also, while the material presented by Newborn is sound as far as it goes, it is very slanted toward technical mishaps and other irrelevant trivia when he could have presented games that show the gradual growth of playing strength. It is significant that a coterie of computer chess achievers have not understood much about chess itself. It is highly commendable that these individuals have achieved all that they have, based principally on generation innovations tested against older versions.

However, when such individuals write about their work, it becomes quite clear that they really do not understand what they have or have not achieved. It is as if someone swam the English Channel and his report is that he just kept putting one arm in front of the other until he touched shore. True, yes, but not very informative. Related to this schism between the technologists and the chess players is the fact that the 1996 Deep Blue was dominated by the technologists, and once Kasparov understood its weaknesses, he had no trouble bringing it to its knees. However, in 1997 chess understanding was invoked in a number of small innovations, and this created an entity that played so well that Kasparov became flustered as his tricks were turned aside, and he eventually went off the “deep” end. The real story of *Computer Chess Comes of Age* should be written about what the Deep Blue team did between the matches of 1996 and 1997. I hope this book will be written some day. In the meantime, I will give Newborn’s book a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10 and hope that someone who knows more about chess will revise it.