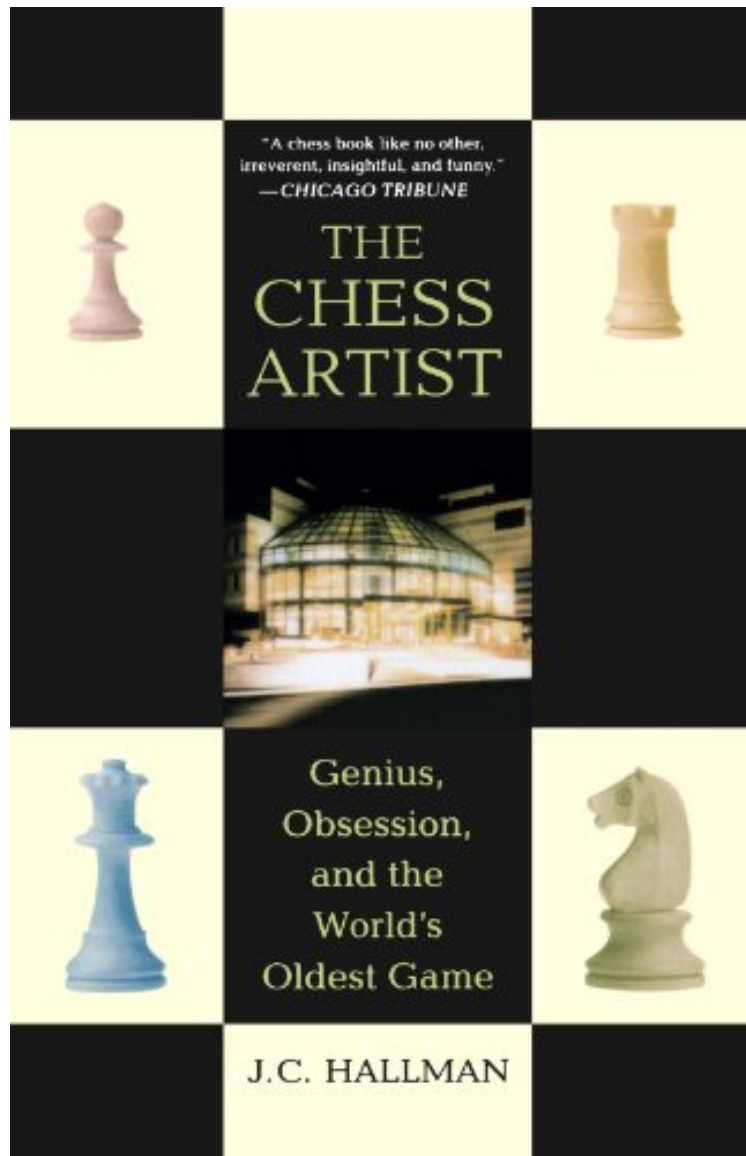


[Download] The Chess Artist: Genius, Obsession, and the World's Oldest Game

The Chess Artist: Genius, Obsession, and the World's Oldest Game

J. C. Hallman

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J. C. Hallman : The Chess Artist: Genius, Obsession, and the World's Oldest Game before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Chess Artist: Genius, Obsession, and the World's Oldest Game:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great use of language. Rather depressing tone.By Prof. CentenniusJ.

C. Hallman's study of chess and the people who play it is part travelogue, part history, part psychological analysis, and altogether an essay containing beautiful language and depressing descriptions of those he meets and what he sees. Most of the book concerns a trip he takes to Kalmykia with Glenn, an African-American master level chess player to see a city devoted entirely to chess and to meet the country's president who also heads FIDE, the international chess federation. Hallman describes the country as bare, impoverished, and shoddy. That is also how he sees most of the chess players wherever they may be. Still he has great command of imagery and metaphor. This would make a fascinating study for its stylistic grace alone. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The beauty of exploration

By Mariano Sana
Time saver tip: only read this review if you have read at least 5 reviews already. At the time of writing my review, there are 34 reviews already in, and the average rating is 4 stars. I don't need to tell you what you will find in the book (the facts and topics that it covers), since it's all out there, quite accurately. Therefore, I will only give you a few points that may only make sense after you have read a number of reviews. I think the review that, as of this writing, is featured at the top of the list, by T. K. Kenyon, got it exactly right: this book is about obsession/addiction, and it's all about the journey. Hallman masters description (from people to landscapes to subcultures) and mood (his journey through the world of chess goes through many stages and he shares how the journey affected and changed him). Absolutely refreshing, a continuous invitation to keep reading. This book's subject matter, therefore, is not chess. The subject matter is, again, obsession (the word is even in the title of the book). Those reviewers that note aspects of chess not covered by the book as if these were flaws didn't get it. They approached the book with specific expectations. The book is not a chess treatise. It does not have to cover all aspects of chess. What would be the point, for example, in having the book covering the international chess scene if, as all reviewers noted, Glenn Umstead cannot compete at that level? I am a chess player myself, but not even close to the level of obsession personified by Glenn Umstead--not now, anyway. My journey through the world of chess had ups and downs. As another reviewer put it, Hallman has a love/hate relationship with the game. Put me in the same camp. I almost felt like the book had been written exclusively for me. Hallman takes you on a journey through the glory and darkness of chess. No wonder chess lovers liked the book a lot less than nonchess players! They don't want to see the (many) unpleasanties. In just a few years, it seems that Hallman was able to grasp, and put in print, all the feelings that the game can generate. Who cares that he didn't solve a murder mystery in Kalmykia? That part of the book is about exploration, frustration, and pushing it like a madman. Hallman is not a chess master, but obsession is quite contagious. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Meaning of Life

By Robert E. Branca
For a modest price here, you put in your dime and you get some entertainment. However, not unlike a lot in life, you will only get out of it in proportion to what you put into it. I found the book to be thought-provoking, but I doubt that the average reader would agree. I am not so sure I understood what the author was trying to say. I virtually concluded that the author wasn't so sure either. That becomes the joke on us all, including the author. This book is like a movie with an unresolved ending, where the audience is left to believe what they want to believe about what happens next. Chess, at one point in the book, becomes more than a metaphor for life. Chess is life, and for many portrayed in the book, life is chess. Chess is posited as divinely ordained and figuratively, literally, and mathematically equated with the DNA of life as we know it. As an avid amateur social chess player, I enjoyed the world-wide stroll around the various venues and the attempted glimpses into the souls of the wide range of characters presented along the way. If you are at all challenged, intrigued, amused, or hooked on the game of chess, and if you are at all a bit of a philosopher, this book will make you ask yourself "why?". It may be just for the transitory fun of it, or for darker, deeper reasons you don't necessarily want to learn. Make of it what you will: this book; the game of chess; life's journey.

In the tiny Russian province of Kalmykia, obsession with chess has reached new heights. Its leader, a charismatic and eccentric millionaire/ex--car salesman named Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, is a former chess prodigy and the most recent president of FIDE, the world's controlling chess body. Despite credible allegations of his involvement in drug running, embezzlement, and murder, the impoverished Kalmykian people have rallied around their leader's obsession---chess is played on Kalmykian prime-time television and is compulsory in Kalmykian schools. In addition, Kalmyk women have been known to alter their traditional costumes of pillbox hats and satin gowns to include chessboard-patterned sashes. The Chess Artist is both an intellectual journey and first-rate travel writing dedicated to the love of chess and all of its related oddities, writer and chess enthusiast J. C. Hallman explores the obsessive hold chess exerts on its followers by examining the history and evolution of the game and the people who dedicate their lives to it. Together with his friend Glenn Umstead, an African-American chessmaster who is arguably as chess obsessed as Ilyumzhinov, Hallman tours New York City's legendary chess district, crashes a Princeton Math Department game party, challenges a convicted murderer to a chess match in prison, and travels to Kalmykia, where they are confronted with members of the Russian intelligence service, beautiful translators who may be spies, seven-year-old chess prodigies, and the sad blight of a land struggling toward capitalism. In the tradition of *The Professor and the Madman*, *Longitude*, and *The Orchid Thief*, Hallman transforms an obsessive quest for obscure things into a compulsively readable and entertaining weaving of travelogue, journalism, and chess history.

From Publishers Weekly During a postcollege stint as a blackjack dealer in Atlantic City, freelance writer Hallman discovered the chess community that thrives in dealer lounges. There he met 39-year-old chess master Glenn Umstead, who performed exhibitions while blindfolded and had "hoped to become the world's first black grandmaster." The two became friends and embarked on an exploration of the chess subculture, a grand tour that took them from Princeton to prisons, from windowless rooms to the "giant electronic chess room" of the Internet Chess Club (ICC). At his first tournament, in Philadelphia, Hallman found "watered-down machismo and bent personalities." He visits the chess-obsessed characters of Manhattan's Washington Square Park: "In winter chess players could be found in the park dressed in huge down jackets, the only problem presented by the cold being the difficulty of moving pieces while so encumbered." He interviews Claude Bloodgood, a high-ranking chess player serving a life sentence for murdering his mother who once reputedly tried to use chess to escape from prison (he denies it). Much of the book is devoted to a fascinating visit to Kalmykia, an impoverished Russian province, whose president, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, is "a not entirely unsympathetic supervillain with a kooky plan to dominate the chess world," evident in his 1998 construction of Chess City with its centerpiece, the Chess Palace, a five-story glass pavilion. Interweaving art and literary references along with the game's 1,200-year history, Hallman summarizes the many meanings and metaphors of chess in the final chapter: "Chess had come to represent intimacy, economics, politics, theories bleeding from rhetoric to outrageous science." Chess enthusiasts will enjoy this delightful tour. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Booklist This is a book that chess players should not be without. Not only is it a voyage through the subculture of chess; not only is it a portrait of two men, an American chess master and a Russian dictator, obsessed with the game; not only is it a history of the game whose origins stretch back nearly a millennium and a half; not only is it all that, it's also an exploration of the complex psychology and philosophy of chess. Traveling with his friend, a rather eccentric chess master (eccentricity and a unique kind of intelligence seem to be vital components of the successful chess player's mind), the author samples many aspects of the subculture: chess clubs, theme parties, even a match played against a prison inmate. But the most fascinating part of the book, the part that demonstrates just how powerful a hold chess can have over a person, is the author's trip to Kalmykia, a small province in Russia where the dictator is also a suspected murderer and a bona fide chess prodigy. In Kalmykia, chess is compulsory in school, and here the author finds "Chess City," a self-contained mini-metropolis dedicated to the game. Educational, fanciful, entertaining, this is a book that will make every reader see the game of chess in an entirely new--if slightly weird--light. David Pitt Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

"This is a quirky, thoroughly enjoyable travelogue on the often surreal world of competitive chess--with stops at big-city tournaments, a chess-mad Asian satrapy, and a prison. J. C. Hallman does a nimble job of weaving chess folklore with his own observations about the different kinds of obsession over the game." ?Andy Soltis, grandmaster, chess journalist and author of *Karl Marx Plays Chess*

"Hallman is a talented writer whose vivid prose and keen journalistic eye offer chess culture the compliment of intelligent impressionistic portraiture, full of powerful, haunting images of the 'demonic gods' of the chess Olympus and the chess underworld." ?Cathy Forbes, chess journalist and author of *Meet the Masters* and *The Polgar Sisters*

"The whole history of chess is here, from the Crusades through the Internet, and its byzantine, mad, and fascinating story--rendered by J. C. Hallman with deft clarity and an unrelenting display of wit--culminates in a broken-down Russian republic where even warlords play the game. If Dostoevsky had written a book about chess being a form of religious fanaticism, *The Chess Artist* certainly would have been it." ?Tom Grimes, author of *City of God*

"J. C. Hallman has written an important book about the place of chess in contemporary society. In elegant and accessible prose, he covers the history of chess, the Russian obsession with the game, and the competitive perils of professional players. This book should be read by anyone who has ever pushed a pawn forward. A crucial addition to the literature of chess." ?Chris Offutt, author of *No Heroes*