

**Title:**

Playing Chess in Russia - The Agony of Victory

**Word Count:**

480

**Summary:**

Russians have a thing for chess and, frankly, are very good at it. Being from San Diego, I thought chess was something you put photo albums in.

**Keywords:**

russian, chess, russian chess, checkmate, playing chess, searching for bobby fisher,

**Article Body:**

Russians have a thing for chess and, frankly, are very good at it. Being from San Diego, I thought chess was something you put photo albums in.

**Playing Chess**

Playing chess requires thinking ten or twelve steps ahead. If I wanted to understand the Russian mind, I had to learn to play chess. If nothing else, it would be a good way to pass the time. This I was told by Robert, an American living in the same town as me.

I wasn't particularly excited about learning, but gave in one day after growing tired of staring out the window. I had seen the movie, "Searching for Bobby Fisher". What more could I possibly need? How hard could it be?

After beginning the game, Robert took pity on me after I apparently made some moves that were questionable. He explained why he was making particular moves and the resulting implications for my king. The game proceeded slowly while he explained strategies to his inattentive student. Then the magic moment occurred.

I imagine every teacher suffers from the occasional embarrassment of being outdone by a student. I like to call it beginner's luck and invoke the empirical evidence at horse racing tracks and Las Vegas casinos. If you're a first timer, you will always win. It doesn't matter if you're betting on a horse because of the color scheme or hitting on black jack while already holding 19 in your hand. It just happens.

With our chess game, Robert had made a particular move and was in the process of

explaining it. I sat staring at the board and thinking deep thoughts, which is to say I was wondering what was for dinner, etc. Just then, I noticed something on the board, moved my rook and declared, "Checkmate!"

Robert stared at the board. Then he started laughing. Then he wanted to play again. Being a good sport, I immediately announced my retirement as a chess player.

Unfortunately, I couldn't leave my victory alone and gloated to a few people about it. Make no mistake, Robert would beat me a million times if we played a million games, but you have to live in the moment!

Within a few days, karma struck and I began to pay for my gloating. People would start showing up at my apartment with chessboards and, of course, vodka. The games were so laughably one-sided it was ridiculous. Typically, I would make two moves and then hear "Sah!" which I believe meant "check!" in Russian.

My humiliation occurred more or less every day for roughly a month. Some of the victorious would even come back for a second pounding. Finally, I had to take the dramatic step of refusing to answer the door.

In the end, I set the game of chess back a few hundred years and Robert had his vengeance.