

Ivan the Terrible`s Formidable Chess Partner

By Julian Scutts

Scene: The Kremlin.

Â Ivan IV (the Terrible): Your move, peasant: (aside) Clever for a peasant. I wonder if he saw the point of my last move. I'll have his queen unless he's very very careful. To download Â version on BFBS Radio:Â Â

Â

Â Ivan the Terrible's Formidable Chess Partner

Â Â Â Scene: The Kremlin.Â Ivan IV (the Terrible):Â Your move, peasant:(aside) Clever for a peasant. I wonder if he saw the point of my last move. I'll have his queen unless he's very very careful.Â MOVEÂ So he moves his pawn forward. Shall I take it? What, and let his queen escape! Now, for a sacrifice, I'll move my bishop so.Â MOVE / MOVEÂ Aha! He refused the bait. He moved that pawn again. The fool!! I'll take his queen even sooner than anticipated. But not just yet.Â MOVE / MOVEÂ That's strange. He moves his knight so as to threaten check or takemy castle. A diversionary tactic. I am not that easily fooled. Now I'll close the net.Â MOVEÂ That shook him! His queen is lost. Either she stays where she is - to be taken by my knight, or takes my bishop only to fall foul of a defending pawn. In my youth I occasionally lost a game, but since I became Czar, only one man was foolhardy enough to declare checkmate. The game was never finished, being suspended when I suddenly remembered a treasonable act committed by my opponent. No, we were never able to finish the game.Â MOVEÂ So he moves. He has obviously given up hope of saving the queen. He moves that pathetic little pawn forward again. I'm not one to despise a pawn, mind you. It's very insignificant is its strength. The isolated pawn is indeed a risky thing, but together pawns can form formidable chains of defence - or attack. But why should I be concerned with pawns when I can have his queen, ha ha!Â MOVEÂ Funny, he didn't even bat an eyelid. It's almost as if he were leering like one on the point of triumph, not defeat. What did he say his name was? Vladimir? He came as a replacement for Alexej, who's abed with fever. He made all the outward gestures of deference of one in his station, yet lacks that servility so typical of his class.Â (Aloud) Black to move!Â (Aside) What lean hands he has. His skin has the texture of an ancient parchment, so dry.Â MOVEÂ So, he takes the bishop, and the way is open for that pawn. It can advance to the final row, and .. he could bring my king into check, if not worse..! No, Alexij must have told him. The man's no fool.Â (Aloud) Peasant, we are the Czar. To some we are known as the Terrible. Should any mortal man seek to gain advantage over us, the Czar of all the Russias, the successor of Constantine and Byzantium, that man had better look well to ensure the continuation of his well-being, to reflect as to how his interests are best served. We suggest you that you move your knight to protect your castle.Â MOVEÂ (Aside) He obliges, but now my king has no escape route in the case, the most unlikely case, that he moves that pawn to the final row. He must have got the message. Even so, it was very cunning how that pawn wormed its way toward the final row. Just to be on the safe side, I'll move my bishop to the position where it can dislodge his knight. In these parts the Church has wisdom enough to comply with the wishes of the Emperor. Only in the swabbling and disunited west has there been a cleavage between Church and State, Pope and Emperor, the will of the ruler and the manifest interests of the ruled.Â MOVEÂ So he moves, he moves the pawn. Just one more move and it reaches the final row, the field that turns the humble pawn into a deadly queen.. I can feel another of those attacks coming on ..Â (Aloud) Sirrah! Sirrah! Go fetch my salts, advise the doctor I require his care. Oh, and inform the executioner to sharpen his axe just in case his services are required at extremely short notice.Â (Aside) My move. In only two moves I could take his pawn with my queen. One move too late, though. Surely he realizes.Â (Aloud) We need fresh air. Page, bring a stool for our feet. They are as heavy as lead. Bring warm water in a bowl to bathe them. They are as cold as ice.Â Peasant, give us a little more time to consider our next move. We are indisposed.Â (Aside) It is as though some enemy had poisoned me. But why now? It was little short of a miracle that I survived the murderous plots of those scheming Boyards. They poisoned those whom most I loved, yet I, the heir of supreme power, lived on - the Grand Prince of Muscovy, the Czar of all the Russias, the successor of Byzantium and Rome. Poisoned that I was, a prey to those dancing shadows that haunt men's minds, a captive of fear, an exile from the confidence of all and from the blissful land of sleep. I survived because I struck whenever danger threatened, or seemed to threaten - my apologies to the innocent. In rage I slew my son, my only son. My anguish and perhaps my merit was greater than that of Abraham. And my consolation? That Providence decreed that I should rise to a greatness not shared by other men. It was I that made Russia mighty and respected among all nations. It was I who extended her borders in the icy north, conquered Khasan and Tartary. Yet shall I possess of all lands lapped by the Baltic Sea and deliver holy Constantinople from the unbelieving sons of Hagar. I have opened the frozen seas of the west to the plying of trade, and made a compact with Elizabeth, Queen of England. I have overthrown the corrupt and treacherous brood of Boyards. Even when I had Moscow set on fire, I had the interests of Mother Russia at heart. And shall I now be humiliated by a peasant? Once a soothsayer said to me: "Let the emperor fear none but the peasant's enmity, for he that turns the soil knows no difference between the beginning and the end". I feel so weak. Were he to make that final move, I would lack the strength even to call the guard.Â (Aloud) Peasant, leave our presence. We shall continue the game tomorrow --- Doctor!Â SilenceÂ MOVEÂ

Eerie Voice: Checkmate.