

Amatzia Avni

**THE AMAZING
CHESS ADVENTURES**
of
BARON MUNCHAUSEN



Introduction

In the late 1990s I published some fantasy chess stories in the Israeli chess magazine *Schahmat*, of which I was the editor at the time. They got a good response, so I thought of producing bizarre tales on a regular basis. I took the legendary character of Baron Munchausen and built my episodes around him.

The Baron series appeared in the British magazine *CHESS Monthly* from August 1999 up to June 2008, almost without a break. Sometimes it was accompanied by a nice drawing by Elite (my niece). After about 20 episodes I asked readers to send me feedback. It turned out to be all positive, so I kept going. On the 50th column the magazine held a contest in which readers tried their hand in composing their own episodes for the Baron. Some nice stories were received and published. In January 2004 a full-colored Baron made the front cover of *CHESS Monthly*.

In 2008, upon the 100th column, I decided to stop. For the present book I selected the better stories from the old columns, revised them and added 16 new ones, obtained many fresh illustrations from Elite and organized it all in chapters, according to content. Thus, this book constitutes a mixture of both old and new.

The adventures depicted are varied, when known facts are interwoven with sheer imagination. With the Baron's help I succeeded in getting acquainted with some extraordinary characters and traveling to captivating times and places.

Enjoy!

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Meet Baron Munchausen

One day he knocked on my door.

“Yes?” I looked at the strange, unfamiliar face. “Can I help?”

“My name is Baron Munchausen,” he said, and walked inside.
Just like that.

I wish I could make it more dramatic and add a flavor of excitement. But the truth was mundane. This bold adventurer, who made trips to the sun and to the moon, who was swallowed by a giant fish, who raced on half a horse and found a floating island made entirely of cheese, simply walked into my place, as if it was the most natural thing to do.

“Why should we be interested?” the readers may well ask.

Well, it became apparent that the remarkable Baron was an accomplished exponent of the noble game of chess and had broken more than a few records in this field. We became friends, and soon held frequent meetings, in which the great Munchausen revealed some of his extraordinary and unbelievable explorations on the chess board.

A selection is hereby presented, for your enjoyment.

Amatzia Avni

P.S. The Baron assures me that every single word of these extraordinary tales is *absolutely true*.

Chapter 1

Amazing Travels

The Baron is engaged in a chess duel with a hammerhead – goes to a remote island on a secret mission – escapes from huge bears in his dream – makes a trip to heaven to fetch a deceased champion for consultation – finds salvation from being grilled in Hell – discovers a remarkable ancient chess book in an African cave – holds a tour in a parallel universe – sends his king to a breathtaking penetration into the enemy's hinterland.

TRAVELING INTO THE DEEP OCEAN

It was some weeks before I saw Munchausen again. I suspected that he was on one of his famous trips, and when he reappeared I found out that I was right.

“Which country have you been to?”

“None.”

“Okay, I stand corrected; which world or galaxy have you been to?”

“None.”

Evidently, he was teasing me. Then he confided that he made a trip to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

“...and I played some chess there, too.”

How is it possible to play chess under the sea? This was unclear to me.

The Baron sympathized as he was reading my thoughts. “Yes, it is possible. Difficult, though.”

We sat in the Baron's veranda and sipped some delicate wine. Munchausen described his wonderful voyage into an unknown territory.

“Now, the Pacific may be nothing special, compared to the oceans on Jupiter; but it is the largest of Earth's oceans, covering one-third of its total surface area. I dived with modern equipment and headed to the lowest known point on Earth, the Mariana Trench, near the Philippines – almost 11 kilometers below sea level. It took me a full half-hour to get to the bottom.”

I was astonished.

“I walked between octopuses, jellyfishes, sea-turtles, flatfishes... I even noticed a white shark. Fabulous creatures.”

I'm sure they are.

Following his colorful description he came to talk about his chess encounter. “My opponent, a scary looking Hammerhead, had brought out of nowhere a chess set, and made a gesture of what I interpreted as *‘let's have a game, shall we?’* Naturally, I accepted the challenge. I don't recall ever playing in such uncomfortable conditions. First of all, it was extremely cold, perhaps minus 300 degrees Celsius...”

I reflected that this is below the absolute zero point.

“Secondly, the sun is so far away that I was in complete darkness. Thirdly, the water pressure was enormous; I thought that I might be ripped apart. Another thing is that the white shark didn't seem particularly friendly...”

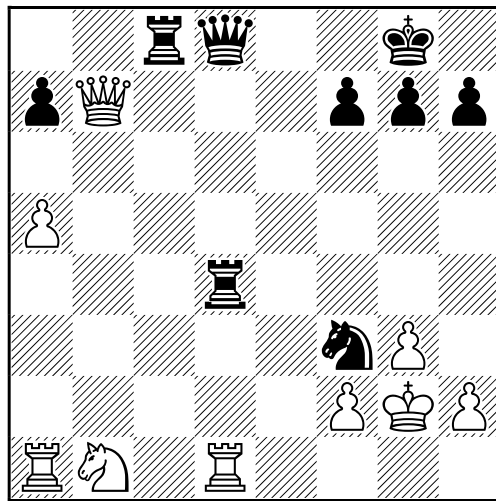
He went on and on to illustrate the hazards he took upon himself.

“We began to play and eventually reached the following position...”

The under-the-sea position is Rodshtein – Negi, YGM Biel, 2010. In the game Black tried 2...♘f3 but lost immediately after 3.♖xd4 ♘xd4 4.♖d2.

BARON MUNCHAUSEN – HAMMERHEAD

Pacific Ocean



White to play

“Believe me, I felt so uneasy, because of the terrible playing conditions. I just made a simple developing move without thinking:

1. ♘a3

“As soon as I played it my rival went very red and I realized that by chance I was suddenly winning, as Black is unable to defend all his pieces and cover his back rank as well.”

1... ♞d2

1... ♞e5 2. ♖xd4. 1... ♖xd1 2. ♖xd1 also leaves him helpless.

2. ♖a2!

This little move has a crucial effect.

2... ♖c7 3. ♖axd2! ♖xb7

3... ♖xd2 4. ♖xd2 is of no avail.

4. ♖xd4 Black resigned.

The weakness of Black's back rank decides. “It is really amazing – I made a natural move (1. ♘a3) and suddenly it was all over!” said the Baron, expressing his astonishment.

The Baron was evidently satisfied. I had a lot of puzzling questions: how were the board and pieces kept stable under water? How did the Baron manage to see the board, let alone his opponent turning red, in absolute darkness? But I thought it was better to keep silent.

“After the game I boarded a nearby submarine and we ascended to sea level.”

This was too much. I could keep silent no longer and demanded to know: “How did you enter the submarine?”

Munchausen was puzzled. “Why, I knocked on the door and they let me in.” He shrugged his shoulders. “What a funny question you've asked.”

“More wine?”

“Yes, please.”