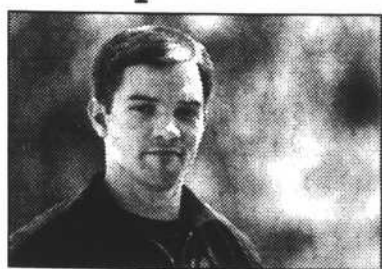


# Go outside and play

## Computer technology threatens basic interaction



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In February 1996, an unprecedented event occurred. For the first time in history, an IBM-built supercomputer known as Deep Blue became the first computer to participate in world chess tournament competition. Its opponent, Gary Kasparov, is revered by many chess experts as the greatest player in history.

In a six-game bout for Master of the Universe, Kasparov emerged victorious with a score of 4-2 spread over three wins, two draws, and one loss.

Many people in the computer industry were stunned. An article in *Popular Science* had predicted Kasparov would be defeated by the IBM supercomputer.

As scholars, scientists and computer aficionados chewed on the results of this first battle, IBM and Kasparov wasted no time in scheduling a rematch for May 1997.

The rematch favored the IBM supercomputer and its large team of technicians and programmers in a second six-game bout. With a score of 3.5-2.5, Deep Blue emerged victorious after game six on May 11, 1997, after pulling off two wins, three draws (at half a point each) and one loss. IBM was awarded a first prize of \$700,000 by tournament heads to Kasparov's mere \$400,000.

Somewhere in the middle of the excitement, buried beneath debates between chess enthusiasts and heads of large computer conglomerates, the meaning of the competition got lost.

It's important to understand the nature of the matchup. On one hand, there was the human — a single man with superior talent and understanding of the game of chess, who represented the preservation of human intelligence and its place in society.

On the other hand, there was Deep Blue — a supercomputer built by dozens of computer technicians and programmers, which implemented advanced properties of parallel processing and operated on a master control program with the following components:

- A brute force search for mate positions
- Defensive target programming and threat detection
- Delta discard logic based on the "Encyclopedia of Chess Openings"
- The added logic provided by anonymous Grandmasters of chess
- Additional heuristic (discovery) methods

allowing the supercomputer to be modified between games by the programming staff in the attempt to defeat the opponent's chessplay.

Where did the advantage lie? You be the judge.

I felt that something, a truly humanistic quality, was lost — not only in the original idea of spending years to build a "chess" computer designed solely to beat a Grandmaster, but also in the fact that Kasparov lost the rematch.

Technology was used to abuse a portion of humanity. It was taken too far. IBM proved computers can, barring certain variants and conditions, outperform humans in such basic and traditional rituals as chess.

What does this prove? Involving such substantial resources to build Deep Blue, the entire competition seems worthless unless we have gained something from it.

One of the earliest purposes for the design and perfection of parallel-processing supercomputers was for military intent. Deep Blue was thought by industry experts to have been based on the SP/4-x Supercomputer Complex which was designed by contractors working for the United States Air Force and Space Command, also built by IBM in 1993.

It was designed with intent of analyzing tens of thousands of strategic moves in warfare and combat situations for potential use in a state of battle.

I can award greater merit in the use of supercomputers for this purpose, albeit one of possible defeat and destruction. Yet, there seems to be an underlying danger even in this scenario. The government/military might rely too heavily on computers in combat situations, and, in the process, spend less time drawing from and perfecting human theories and tactics.

If supercomputers and personal computers (which perhaps are more relevant to us) govern too many aspects of our daily lives, we risk reaching the point where we may cease to function without the Internet or personal and business-related financial programs that only function through the use of computers.

Think of all the things Deep Blue's programmers and computer scientists could have spent their immeasurable time and energy on.

Perhaps they could have worked with NASA in perfecting the function and detailed mathematical procedures required to safely pilot and maintain an operating space shuttle. Sure, there are many people dedicated to these tasks, but like cancer and AIDS research, the more people involved the better.

A lot of people dismiss aspects of pure scientific research such as that carried out by S.E.T.I., the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, to be worthless and a waste of time. To me, that seems a far more ambitious and centrally human pursuit of information and increased understanding than a bunch of people building a glorified chess robot.

At least listening and scanning for extraterrestrial life has the potential to increase our knowledge of the universe and build human (or unknown) connections we have yet to comprehend.

Computer science and technology move quickly and set things such as the Internet, super-fast computers and DVD videos in our laps.

Do you want to see the day when you don't have to leave your living room to do your grocery shopping, pick up your mail, talk to your neighbor, or even have your children get an education without physically attending school?

It could be a reality faster than we think and, in some cases, already is.

Personally, I want my children to be able to speed through supermarket aisles on shopping carts and bang into my heels. I want them to know what a playground is and learn how to write letters.

I want them to experience and interact with the world outside their front door, talk to their neighborhood friends and citizens in their community, and interact with their peers face-to-face so that "going out to play" doesn't turn into staying in and interacting merely through video-phones, interconnected video games and pagers.

**Cooper's Law:** *We owe it to future generations to improve our world without bulldozing through common logic and losing a sense of who we are.*

We owe it to ourselves.



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