CHINOOK
The World Man-Machine Checkers Champion

Jonathan Schaeffer, Robert Lake, Paul Lu, and Martin Bryant

■ In 1992, the seemingly unbeatable World Checker Champion Marion Tinsley defended his title against the computer program CHINOOK. After an intense, tightly contested match, Tinsley fought back from behind to win the match by scoring four wins to CHINOOK's two, with 33 draws. This match was the first time in history that a human world champion defended his title against a computer. This article reports on the progress of the checkers (8 3 8 draughts) program CHINOOK since 1992. Two years of research and development on the program culminated in a rematch with Tinsley in August 1994. In this match, after six games (all draws), Tinsley withdrew from the match and relinquished the world championship title to CHINOOK, citing health concerns. CHINOOK has since defended its title in two subsequent matches. It is the first time in history that a computer has won a human-world championship.

From 1955 to 1965, the most well-known checker-playing program was Samuel's (1967, 1959). This work remains a milestone in AI research. Samuel's program reportedly beat a master and "solved" the game of checkers. Both journalistic claims were false, but they created the impression that there was nothing of scientific interest left in the game (Samuel himself made no such claims). Consequently, most subsequent game-related research turned to chess. Other than a program from Duke University in the 1970s (Truscott 1979), little attention was paid to achieving a world championship–caliber checker program.

The CHINOOK Project started in 1989 as an attempt to better understand heuristic search by using an experimental domain that is simpler than chess. Early success in exhibition games against master and grand-master opposition convinced us that we could build a world-class checker player. After petitioning the American Checker Federation (ACF), CHINOOK was allowed to play in the 1990 U.S. championship. This biennial event attracts the best players in the world, with the winner earning the right to play a match for the world championship.

CHINOOK came in an undefeated second in the tournament behind the world champion, Marion Tinsley. The four individual games between CHINOOK and Tinsley were drawn. This placing earned CHINOOK the right to challenge Tinsley for the world championship, the first time a computer had earned such a right in any game.

Tinsley emerged as a dominant player in the late 1940s. He was touted as the next challenger for the world championship when, in 1950, an elementary blunder cost him the chance to play for the title. After quietly retrenching, Tinsley reemerged as an unbeatable force, winning the world championship in 1955. From 1950 to 1992, Tinsley lost an incredible total of only five games! He played eight matches for the world championship, usually winning each by a large margin. He was as close to perfection as is possible in a human. No one else has dominated any game of skill for such a prolonged period of time.

In December 1990, Tinsley visited Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, to play an exhibition match against CHINOOK. The final score was 1 win for Tinsley, 0 for CHINOOK, and 13 draws. It was the closest anyone had come to defeating Tinsley in a match in over 40 years.

The ACF and the English Draughts Association (EDA) refused to sanction the CHINOOK-Tinsley world championship match, stating they did not want a computer playing for a human title. Tinsley confided in us that he was bored playing humans because they were

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no opposition to him. He relished the opportunity to play the computer because of its aggressive style and willingness to take chances. When the ACF and the EDA refused to budge on this issue, Tinsley resigned his world championship title and then immediately signed an agreement to play the CHINOOK match. The ACF and the EDA hastily rethought their position and created a new man-machine world championship: the best human against the best computer. Because Tinsley was the undisputed human champion and CHINOOK had properly earned the right to challenge, the new man-machine title was a convenient way to keep the checker federations happy.

In August 1992, CHINOOK and Tinsley finally did battle (Schaeffer, Treloar, et al. 1993). The match was held in London, England, and was sponsored by Silicon Graphics, Inc. After initially falling behind, Tinsley rebounded and emerged victorious, scoring 4 wins to CHINOOK's 2, with 33 draws. The two CHINOOK wins represented only the sixth and seventh times that Tinsley had lost in the previous 42 years.

Although Tinsley had a close call in London, he was eager to play the computer again. A rematch was set for August 1994.

CHINOOK 1994

Within a few weeks of the end of the 1992 CHINOOK-Tinsley match, preparations began for the rematch. CHINOOK's performance consists of four aspects (Schaeffer, Lu, et al. 1993; Schaeffer et al. 1992): (1) *search,* algorithms for traversing through the $O(10^{20})$ search space; (2) *evaluation function,* decisions about how good a position is; (3) *end-game databases,* perfect information on which end-game positions are won, lost, and drawn; and (4) *opening book,* a database of opening lines to start a game. Compared to the program that played in 1992, important advances had been made to the program in each of these areas.

Search

CHINOOK uses a parallel alpha-beta search algorithm with all the latest enhancements (Lu 1993). CHINOOK 1992 had an average minimum search depth of 19 ply, excluding search extensions (one ply equals one move by one player). CHINOOK 1994 ran on a 16-processor Silicon Graphics CHALLENGE computer (150-megahertz processors) with 1 gigabyte of random-access memory (RAM). The machine had twice as many processors, each five times

faster than in 1992, and four times as much RAM. The improved hardware allowed the program to search a minimum of an additional two ply deeper.

As has been seen with chess programs, deeper search in checkers translates into stronger play. Some studies in chess have indicated that there might be a linear relationship between search depth and performance (Thompson 1982). Experiments in CHINOOK show that there comes a point where increased search depth provides diminishing returns (Schaeffer, Lu, et al. 1993). The data suggest that CHINOOK has already reached the point where little is to be gained by deeper searching; improved performance must come through knowledge enhancements rather than machine speed.

Extensive work was done to improve the quality of the search tree built by CHINOOK. We have seen positions that Tinsley can correctly analyze, even though the solution requires over 60 ply of search! Fixed-depth alpha-beta search is woefully inadequate here. As in chess, the alpha-beta framework has been modified to selectively extend interesting lines of play (search extensions) and to curtail effort on clearly inferior lines of play (forward pruning). A variety of static (heuristic) and dynamic (based on properties of the search tree) techniques were used to create a more intelligent searcher.

One of the major problems in chess and checker programs is deciding when it is appropriate to stop analyzing a line of play and apply the evaluation function. Ideally, the evaluated position should be quiescent; in other words, it should be relatively stable, with no surprises waiting around the corner. Instrumenting the search algorithm allowed us to identify positions where a heuristic evaluation was likely to make a gross misassessment as a result of hidden tactics. A program was created to generalize the features of these positions, to search for any commonalities. The results were surprising: One type of tactical combination accounted for roughly 50 percent of the errors. A further two types accounted for an additional 25 percent of the cases. These latter two features were easily accounted for by adding simple patterns to the evaluation function.

The dominant source of error involved a so-called *two-for-one combination.* Here, the key move would result in a checker being captured, but a double jump ensued for a net gain of one checker. Hard coding the knowledge required to capture one instance of this pattern was easy. However, generalizing this

knowledge to cover all the possible scenarios and exceptions proved to be extremely difficult and error prone. To properly identify all the conditions necessary for the combination involved consideration of 28 of the 32 squares on the board. The alternative to using a set of static rules was to perform dynamic search. Given that the majority of evaluated positions do not have the two-for-one pattern present, the cost of doing the (expensive) search was prohibitive.

All the information about these patterns was captured in what we call *tactical tables.* The essential information required in the position to determine whether the two-for-one combination is present was abstracted into 8,000,000 possibilities. For each scenario, an abstract board position was created containing constraints on each of the squares (such as a white piece must be on this square, or another square must be occupied). A search was performed on this abstract board position to see if the two-for-one combination succeeded. For each possible abstract board, the result of the search, whether the combination works, was added to the tactical table. Because each possibility required only one bit, the entire table required only one megabyte of additional storage.

When a position is evaluated, the tactical table is consulted. The essential features of the position are mapped into an index that is used to access the appropriate bit in the tactical table. If the bit isn't set, then the evaluation proceeds normally. If the bit is set, then we know that the side to move is winning a checker. The program then extends the search to resolve the tactics. It can't simply conclude that the checker is being safely won. It's possible that having played the sequence of moves to win the checker leads to a position where the other side has sufficient positional compensation for the lost material or has, in turn, its own two-for-one combination regaining the material.

The addition of the tactical table and the additional patterns reduced the occurrences of major errors in the evaluation function by roughly 75 percent, significantly improving the stability of the program. The cumulative effect of deep selective search is overwhelming for most human players: CHINOOK does not make tactical mistakes.

Evaluation Function

The knowledge in CHINOOK's evaluation function has remained largely unchanged since 1992. In the two years subsequent to the London 1992 match, all the individual knowledge components were thoroughly tested for utility and completeness. To our surprise, this testing uncovered a number of (glaring) errors in the code and some important gaps in the program's knowledge. Some of these errors could have been fatal in a game. One of the best-worst properties of the alpha-beta algorithm is that its maximum-minimum behavior hides evaluation-function errors. Evaluation-function bugs can remain hidden for years. Often, errors are only detected when a bad score is propagated to the root of the search tree.

The evaluation function remains a linear combination of roughly two dozen major components, each of which contains several heuristic weights. Attempts have been made to tune the weights of the evaluation function through automated processes, such as using linear equations, neural nets, and genetic algorithms. Although these traditional AI approaches appear promising in the literature, in our experience, they cannot compete with the results of hand tuning (although in other domains, such as Othello [Lee and Mahajan 1990] and backgammon [Tesauro 1995], some of these techniques have been effective). We want never to have to hand tune an evaluation function again!

End-Game Databases

CHINOOK 1992 had access to a database containing the value (win, loss, draw) for all positions with seven or fewer pieces on the board and a small percentage of the eight-piece databases. The databases contained roughly 40 billion positions compressed into 2 gigabytes of data. The entire database was available to the program during a game and was compressed in such a way to allow rapid decompression at run time (Lake, Schaeffer, and Lu 1994).

After the 1992 match, errors were discovered in some of the end-game databases. In retrospect, CHINOOK was fortunate not to lose game one of the 1992 match because that result hinged on the erroneous values.

After the match, the databases were repaired and work continued with the goal of building the complete eight-piece databases. The 4 x 4 subset of the 8-piece database (all positions with 4 pieces against 4 pieces, any combination of kings and checkers) was completed in 1994, adding an additional 111 billion positions. For the 1994 matches, the 1- to 7-piece databases and the 4 x 4 subset of the 8-piece databases—148 billion positions—were used. Subsequently, the rest of the 8-piece databases have been computed

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(440 billion positions compressed into 6 gigabytes of disk), and the 9-piece databases are under way.

One of the goals of this project is to eventually construct a perfect checker player. Although building a database of 440-billion positions might seem to be a primitive approach, currently there is not really much of an alternative. Attempts to use standard AI approaches (genetic algorithms [van Belle 1995], neural nets, and function optimization) have produced solutions with unacceptably high error rates. However, brute-force enumeration can have no error. Also, enumeration of the data (with no gaps) allows for implicit addressing, which significantly benefits the data compression. For our application, AI solutions have more errors and poorer data compression and are more expensive to access at run time.

The knowledge implicit in the 4 x 4 database greatly exceeds even Tinsley's capabilities. For example, Grand-Master Don Lafferty played into an ending he thought was drawn, only to discover to his surprise that CHINOOK knew it was a win. Our databases have overturned a number of long-held conceptions about some standard positions in the checker literature. In the 1994 U.S. championship, CHINOOK's end-game database was used to adjudicate the game between Tinsley and Grand-Master Elbert Lowder. Tinsley was trying for the win; the databases said it was a draw. It was the first time in any game that the word of a computer had been used to decide the outcome of a world champion's game.

CHINOOK's deep searches frequently hit positions in the end-game databases. Usually, within a few moves of the start of a game, the program becomes input-output bound on accessing the databases rather than compute bound as most game-playing programs are. In most games, CHINOOK can determine the final result of the game within the first 10 moves, usually a draw. When the program realizes the game is drawn, the problem now becomes one of how to best proceed. Not all draws are equal. The program has to choose between drawing moves to maximize the chances for human error.

CHINOOK was enhanced to differentiate between *strong draws*, draws where there is a chance of inducing the opponent into an error, and *weak draws*, draws where the program has little chance of winning. Instead of returning a score of 0 (equality) for a database draw position, a restricted depth search (with the databases disabled) is performed to get an idea of the nondatabase minimax score. The resulting score is scaled to allow draws to return scores in the range of +1/3 to –1/10 of a checker. Thus, if the program has a choice between playing a strong draw and playing a nondrawing move that yielded a small advantage, the program prefers the strong draw. Most game-playing programs would choose the nondrawing move.

Opening Book

In the last 125 years, a large body of literature on checkers has been published. Much of it deals with an analysis of the opening. Human players study this literature so that they know the best sequences of opening moves. One of the most important parts of grand-master preparation is to find surprises, or *cooks*, in the openings. These are new moves that force the opponent on to his or her own resources, usually in a complicated position, thus increasing the chances for error.

The biggest weakness in CHINOOK 1992's play was in the opening. Opening mistakes were responsible for three of the losses to Tinsley (the fourth loss was a forfeit in a drawn position). To solve this problem, we entered into an agreement with Martin Bryant, author of the commercially available checker program COLOSSUS. Over the years, he built a large database (or *book*) of opening plays; these moves were acquired largely from the published literature. To reduce the probability of an error (all too common in the literature), many of the positions were checked for correctness by his program (using a deep search).

Once we obtained the COLOSSUS database, CHINOOK spent several months verifying each position. The searches were to a minimum of 19 ply deep and used all the end-game databases. The result was that several hundred positions in the book were corrected (usually the result of incorrect human assessments of end-game positions), most of them positions where one side missed a saving draw.

The verification data were filtered to look for new moves in the openings. Given Tinsley's phenomenal memory, one is unlikely to beat him by repeating the best moves in the literature. The only way to win against Tinsley is to surprise him. We needed to find unusual moves that were on main lines of play (so that we had a reasonable chance of getting him to play that line) that were either new or offbeat. Thus, we had to search for new moves, unusual second or third best moves, and old moves that have faded from popularity.
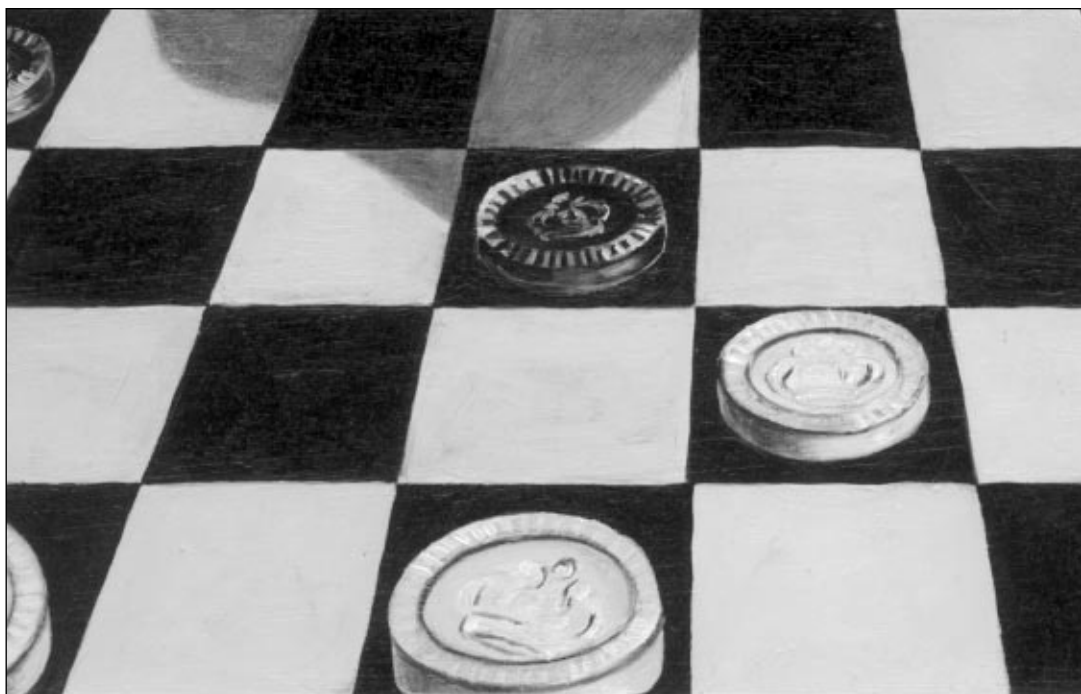
CHINOOK's analysis of the openings was only a small part of the effort. The program flagged over 2000 potential cooks. Each one of these cooks had to be assessed by hand based on its likelihood of appearing in a game and the potential benefits. Less than 100 were flagged for additional investigation.

There are 144 openings in checkers (the first 3 moves are randomly selected at the start of a game). In eight openings, we found so-called *gold moves,* moves that gave CHINOOK a good chance to win the game if we had a chance to play theses moves against Tinsley. We had roughly 30 *silver moves,* new moves that we knew eventually led to a draw but might surprise Tinsley and induce a mistake.

In summary, compared to CHINOOK 1992, CHINOOK 1994 searched better and deeper, evaluated positions better, had access to more and better-quality end-game databases, and had access to 12 times as much (and better-quality) opening knowledge. Given the close result from 1992 and all the advances to CHINOOK in the interim, how could we miss this time around?

Prematch Preparation

Preparing for a world-championship match against a human is not just a programming exercise. Psychology is an integral part of prematch preparation whether the match be man versus man or man versus machine. Several things were done to keep CHINOOK's true strength hidden from Tinsley.

A test match was played in April 1994 against the official world champion, Derek Oldbury (Oldbury took over the title when Tinsley resigned it in 1991). The final score was three wins for CHINOOK, no losses, and nine draws. Interestingly, in all three wins, CHINOOK announced the game as drawn. However, CHINOOK successfully made the draws as difficult to achieve as possible and eventually Oldbury stumbled. It was widely known that the match had been played. However, by agreement with Oldbury, the final score and the games were kept secret until after the Tinsley match. Several people, including Tinsley, tried to uncover this information but to no avail. All Tinsley knew was that we had won.

In July, an 18-game match with Don Lafferty ended in 18 draws. Tinsley came to Edmonton to observe the CHINOOK-Lafferty match, hoping to get some inside information on the program. In our opinion, Lafferty is the second-strongest human player. As Tinsley's protégé, he has access to most of Tinsley's opening secrets. Lafferty is a cautious player who seldom takes risks. In tournaments, he rarely loses a game, but he usually wins enough to capture a top ranking. In contrast, a player such as Grand-Master Ron

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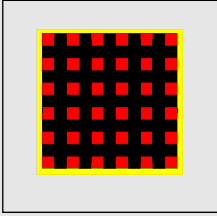
The Decisive Game

The following game was the only decisive result in the 1995 Man-Machine World Championship match between Don Lafferty and CHINOOK. The game was played on January 17 at the International Checker Hall of Fame in Petal, Mississippi. The game is given using chess algebraic notation, where columns are labeled "a" to "h" (left to right) and rows are numbered "1" to "8" (from bottom to top). Black is at the top of the board and moves first.

Black: Lafferty

White: CHINOOK

1. **d6-c5 c3-d4.**
2. **e7-d6 b2-c3.**
3. **f6-g5 g3-f4.** This move was added to the opening book two days before the match started. Although not new (it hasn't been used in grand-master play for over 50 years), it catches Lafferty by surprise.
4. **f8-e7.** Lafferty thought for more than 10 minutes on this move. After the game, he was asked why he didn't play the obvious g7-f6. Lafferty replied that f8-e7 and g7-f6 looked equally attractive and that he had a hard time deciding. In prematch preparation, CHINOOK was able to prove that g7-f6 leads to a draw.
4. **f2-g3.** CHINOOK is now out of its book. With a 21-ply search, CHINOOK switches from h2-g3 to f2-g3 and realizes it has a sizable advantage.
5. **g5-h4 e1-f2.**
6. **g7-f6.** This move appears to be a mistake. CHINOOK expected b6-a5. CHINOOK's evaluation of the position grows from move to move now.
6. **f4-g5.**
7. **h6-f4 g3-g7.**
8. **h8-f6 h2-g3.**
9. **b6-a5.** This move is apparently forced. The black position is critical. White is threatening to push a checker through from e3-f4-g5-h6-g7-f8 and get a king. Unless black can prevent this action, the white king will be able to leisurely attack black's checkers from behind.
9. **d4-b6.**
10. **a7-c5 c3-d4.**
11. **c5-b4.** Some annotators of this game have suggested that this is the losing move. CHINOOK disagrees. If CHINOOK is correct, then the game might have been lost on move 6. It is incredible to think that a player as strong as Lafferty could be losing in only six moves. This is a strong endorsement for preparing opening cooks!
11. **a3-c5.**

12. **d6-b4 g3-f4.**
13. **c7-d6.** The move b8-a7 was expected, but a deep search done while Lafferty was thinking revealed it to be a losing move.
13. **f4-e5.**
14. **d6-f4 e3-g5.** It is obvious that white is getting a king.
15. **b4-c3 d2-b4.**
16. **a5-c3 d4-c5.** CHINOOK announces that it thinks the game is won.
17. **d8-c7 g5-h6.**
18. **f6-g5 h6-g7.** Now the program announces it has seen to the end of the game.
19. **g5-f4 g7-f8.**
20. **e7-f6 c1-d2.**
21. **c3-e1 f8-e7.**
22. **e1-g3 e7-e3.** After the game, Lafferty said he played for this ending. He knew this position was bad, but he thought it was drawable. Lafferty's misassessment illustrates how powerful the combination of deep search and end-game databases can be; CHINOOK had envisioned this position many moves previously. In the following, an asterisk indicates the only move to preserve the win. These moves are played instantly.
23. **b8-a7 a1-b2*.**
24. **g3-f2 e3-d4*.**
25. **f2-e1 b2-a3.** The move d4-c3 also wins.
26. **h4-g3 d4-c3*.**
27. **g3-h2 c3-d4*.**
28. **e1-d2 a3-b4*.**
29. **d2-c1 d4-e5*.**
30. **c1-b2 b4-a5*.** Lafferty completed this move with seconds remaining on his clock. You must play 30 moves in an hour; failure to do so results in an immediate forfeit.
31. **b2-c3 c5-d6*.**
32. **c3-d4 e5-c3*.**
33. **c7-e5 c3-b4*.**
34. **e5-d4 b4-c5*.**
35. **d4-e3.** Black resigns.

King loses several games a tournament, but his aggressive style ensures many wins and a frequent first-place finish. At the end of July, CHINOOK played in the Southern States Championship in Dallas, Texas. The program did not lose a game and finished first, ahead of several grand masters, including Ron King (Lafferty and Tinsley did not play). The following week, the U.S. Championship was held at the same site. As usual, almost all the best players in the world were participating.

Round one produced a surprise: Tinsley was paired against CHINOOK. All four games played were drawn, although Tinsley put CHINOOK under a lot of pressure in game 3. Postmortem analysis revealed a serious bug in CHINOOK's evaluation function that was quickly repaired. In the fourth round, CHINOOK drew its match with Lafferty. Going into the last round, CHINOOK was tied for first with Lafferty, with Tinsley a half-point behind. In the final round, CHINOOK again drew with Lafferty, allowing Tinsley to climb into a three-way tie for first place with a last-round victory over Ron King. It was the first time in over 40 years that Tinsley hadn't finished alone in first place.

In all the games played leading to the world-championship match, CHINOOK's new opening book was concealed. The program was set up to "think" on every move and not play instantly, as most programs do when still in the opening. In effect, no one knew in advance how extensive our opening preparation was. As well, all our opening cooks were disabled, ensuring that we did not accidentally reveal some of our prepared surprises.

In 1992, we switched evaluation functions on Tinsley. All the published CHINOOK games had been played with an old evaluation function. For the match, we used one that Tinsley had never seen before, with different strengths and weaknesses than Tinsley had prepared for. For 1994, we did something similar. Before the start of the match, several parameters were altered to give the program a slightly different style of play. Whether the differences were discernible to Tinsley is not known.

Prior to the world-championship match, Tinsley expressed confidence that he had figured out CHINOOK's weaknesses and that he could exploit them. He did not know that he would be playing an adversary with a different evaluation function, a large opening book, and a faster computer. These changes effectively meant that most of Tinsley's pre-match study of CHINOOK was probably in vain.

The 1994 Man-Machine World Championship

The match was held at the Computer Museum in Boston, Massachusetts, beginning 15 August 1994. Silicon Graphics again sponsored the match. David Levy and Raymond Keene organized and directed the event.

The first six games of the match were drawn. Only in game two did anyone have any winning chances. Tinsley made a mistake early and had to struggle hard to save the game. Afterward, he confided that everywhere he looked he found only losing moves. One move, however, had a ray of hope, and Tinsley "placed his faith in God" and hoped for a miracle; he had found the only path to safety.

One minute before the start of game 7, Tinsley revealed that he had not slept well the night before and wanted to see a doctor. Play was canceled for that day, and Tinsley was taken to the hospital for tests. Nothing untoward was revealed, and Tinsley indicated he would play the next day. The following morning, Thursday, 18 August, Tinsley unexpectedly resigned the match and the world-championship title, citing health concerns. Attempts to convince him otherwise, or to postpone the match, failed. On Friday, he was admitted to the hospital for tests, and on the following Tuesday, he was diagnosed with cancer.

In accordance with the rules, CHINOOK was declared the man-machine world champion. Because we were in Boston, and everything was set up to play a match, the organizers hastily flew in Don Lafferty to challenge for CHINOOK's title. The match ended with 1 win apiece and 18 draws. He scored in game 8 when a bug caused a large misassessment of a position.[1] CHINOOK wore Lafferty's defenses down in game 10. With the exception of game 2 where CHINOOK came close to winning, the rest of the games were uneventful draws.

Although CHINOOK was world champion, the way we achieved it did not rest well with us. We won the title on forfeit from Tinsley and retained the title by drawing the match with Lafferty. Fortunately, Lafferty was eager for a rematch, which was held in Petal, Mississippi, in January 1995. The final score was 1 win to none in favor of CHINOOK, with 31 games drawn. We had several opportunities to modify the program to increase its chances of winning a game; however, we felt it was more important not to lose than it was to win.

In January 1995, Tinsley said he felt good and was interested in playing a rematch with CHINOOK that summer "to regain my title." Within a week of that conversation, he suffered a relapse from which he never recovered. Tinsley died on 3 April 1995. With his passing, we lost not only a feared adversary but also a friend. Every member of our team had the deepest respect and admiration for Tinsley. It was a privilege to know him.

Conclusions

The CHINOOK team's success is owed to Marion Tinsley. When faced with the challenge of a computer, Tinsley could have said no and had the backing of the checker federations. Instead, Tinsley was only interested in playing the best, whether it be man or machine. Our project might have died in 1990 because of a lack of human competition. With Tinsley's support, CHINOOK was able to compete in the major checker tournaments and play matches against the top players in the world. We can only hope that his example sets a precedent for other games, such as chess, where, to date, computers are banned from officially sanctioned events.

The unfortunate events in Boston leave unresolved the question of whether CHINOOK 1994 was better than Tinsley. The lead-up to the 1992 and 1994 matches indicates how CHINOOK had grown in strength. In 1994 and 1995, CHINOOK played 152 games against master and grand-master opposition and 44 tournament games against commercially available programs (COLOSSUS, CHECKERS, and SAGE DRAUGHTS, all strong programs). In this run, CHINOOK lost only one game and was in serious trouble in one other. Both problems were directly attributable to programming errors. In contrast, in 1992, CHINOOK lost 7 of 99 tournament or match games. Of these games, CHINOOK was outplayed three times, lost two because of programming errors, lost one on forfeit, and lost one because we underestimated the importance of a piece of checker knowledge.

Is CHINOOK the best player in the world? With the victory over Lafferty, both the ACF and the EDA recognize CHINOOK's title. The next human-only world championship will be played between Don Lafferty and Ron King. CHINOOK's lifetime record against King is seven wins, no losses, and nine draws. Lafferty, too, has a winning record against King. Whether King or Lafferty wins, the record suggests that CHINOOK is the better player. As CHINOOK continues to improve on a daily basis and with no new Marion Tinsleys on the horizon, CHINOOK's dominance can only grow.

Checkers has a rating system comparable to that used in chess. The latest ACF ratings list the top four players in the world:

CHINOOK	2712
Ron King	2632
Asa Long	2631
Don Lafferty	2625

The rating system predicts that an 80-point rating differential translates into a 60-percent winning probability.

The only goal left to achieve is solving the game of checkers: We want to build a perfect checker player. Toward this goal, end-game database construction continues. At the time of this writing, all the 8-piece databases are complete (440 billion positions), and the 9-piece computation has begun. Every additional database we compute simplifies the task of solving the game. Because of a lack of time, we have not yet begun to research the algorithms needed to efficiently search a space of size $O(10^{20})$.

Over the past six years, we have been consumed by the quest to defeat the unbeatable Tinsley. It was Tinsley's fervent desire to never lose a match to CHINOOK. It is ironic that in the end, both parties got their wish—but not in the way they wanted it. CHINOOK became world champion by defeating Tinsley by forfeit. Tinsley's record remains intact; by resigning in the middle of an even match, his record shows that he never lost a match to CHINOOK over the board.

CHINOOK represents a large AI software-engineering project. Given the enormous amount of time and resources we have expended to achieve dominance over humans in a simple problem domain such as checkers, one wonders how much knowledge engineering is required for harder, more mainstream AI problems.

Come visit our Web site and play a game against CHINOOK: http://www.cs.ualberta.ca ~chinook.

Postscript

In May 1995, Ron King formally challenged CHINOOK for the world man-machine title. Since then, there have been several postponements on King's end. This match will not occur until after the King-Lafferty match in March 1996.

Acknowledgments

Note

1. The bug was uncovered two months later. Warren Smith (NEC) was using the CHINOOK code for some of his research and found an error in the program's checker knowledge. An Or condition was inadvertently expressed as an And. The bug had been introduced when fixing the program after the CHINOOK-Tinsley U.S. Championship match.

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Jonathan Schaeffer is a professor of computing science at the University of Alberta. He received his B.Sc. from the University of Toronto (1979) and his M.Math (1980) and Ph.D. (1986) from the University of Waterloo. His research interests include heuristic search and parallel computing.

Robert Lake is a lead research analyst in the Department of Computing Science at the University of Alberta. He received his B.Sc. (1979) and M.Sc. (1990) from the University of Alberta. His research interests include computer animation of human figures, distributed systems, and virtual reality.

Paul Lu holds a B.Sc. (1991) and an M.Sc. (1993) from the University of Alberta. Currently, he is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Toronto. His research interests include parallel and distributed computing, parallel algorithms, and operating systems.

Martin Bryant is an independent software consultant and has developed several commercially available game programs.