

Bobby Fischer in Budapest

by Christian Bell

Bobby Fischer hears about the World Trade Center, calls a radio station in the Philippines. "This is all wonderful news," he says. "I applaud the act. The U.S. and Israel have been slaughtering the Palestinians, just slaughtering them for years. Robbing them and slaughtering them. Nobody gave a shit. Now it's coming back to the U.S. Fuck the U.S. I want to see the U.S. wiped out." His rant was worse than his true feelings. He hates half-wits Nixon and Kissinger using him as a Cold War tool, his mother being stalked by drag-queen Hoover, the Yugoslavia bullshit. But he couldn't cheer for people dying. He admired, though, what he considered the removal of rooks in successive moves.

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Bobby Fischer truly hates the Jews. His mother was Jewish, so he was half-Jewish, which would've worked for Hitler. He loved his mother, though. He claimed the Jews steal his money, control America, are conspiring to control the world. He passes Jews on the streets of Budapest. He grumbles. He bites his lip. He thinks about his mother.

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Bobby Fischer likes Budapest because he can walk the streets incognito. He likes winter's bite, the musty library feel of the old stone castles, the decaying statues of dead heroes on horseback, crumbling streets matrixed in squares. He eats thick goulash, drinks thicker Turkish coffee from a nearby cafe. The city has been a breathing chess board—burned, sacked, freed, pillaged, conquered, freed, occupied, bombarded, and freed again. Turks, Habsburgs, Hitler, Stalin. At night, in the shadowed alleys, he hears the ghosts of invading armies, pounding horseshoes and clanging swords, storming from the west.

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Bobby Fischer likes being considered an eccentric. People think he's nuts, walking the genius/insanity line, ready to implode. He can

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turn it on and off whenever he wants, he tells himself. Some say he's already imploded. He laughs, says, you ain't seen nothing.

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Bobby Fischer invents new chess variations in his apartment. He listens to Hungarian radio, a mixture of polka, metal, baroque, and rap. His games. Random back-row placement. All bishops, all kings, no pawns. He hears footsteps coming up the stairwell. Looks out. Nobody. A board without pieces. A board that is a sphere. A board with infinite squares. He's been playing this one since he was nine, forgotten whether he's winning or losing.

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Bobby Fischer hates anyone using his name. Movies, books, stories, news articles, games. Internet dweebs debating a game he played in 1958. Kasparov, Spassky, even Deep Blue—he cursed them for ever having thought of his name. Whoever's thinking my name right now—burn in hell!

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Bobby Fischer realizes he's his own favorite opponent. He can be both black and white, good and evil, Russia and America. This way, he always wins. He always loses, too, but this is a dark secret, buried beneath the crusted filth of Budapest's angel statues.

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Bobby Fischer sits in a broken recliner, listens to October raindrops hit the window. He hears other lands calling him. Iceland, the Philippines, Japan. Traveling the world board these days was suicidal. The world is all dictators, grandmasters waiting to snare you, drive a hot poker through your ribs. How long before checkmate? He falls asleep in the recliner, dreams of living in a rook-shaped house.

