The Sobriquets of Ultrachess

ALICE GORKI

A violently inhospitable wind slashed sheets of rain over the taxi and across the spacious yard, drenching the long walk that led to the streaming, puddling portals of Xavier's tonight doubly affluent front doorstep. The driver leaped out of his vehicle, anxious to escort me—for I am a very young-looking widow—and I helped him negotiate the interval betwixt us and Mr. Balilinkoff's gale-vexed veranda.

"The weather is inclement, Clem," I remarked, as I tipped him. He thanked me obsequiously, gurgling the thick syrup of his gratitude into the intimidating, raw power of the storm, and went scuttling postaste back to his machine. A door heavy enough for a vault opened, and, as I stepped in, closed behind me. The butler spirited my wet wraps away and reappeared in a trice. I followed him into the drawing room.

"Mr. Balilinkoff is upstairs, Mrs. Gorki. You may go up: or I can announce you."

I sat down by what appeared to be an abnormally elaborate, futuristic chessboard. "You go, Hugo. I'll wait."

While I gazed in temporary solitude on the game-table so beautifully inlaid with gold, ivory, teak and sapphire, I could not but wonder what it was that so drew me to Xavier. Was it my will and desire that I should be hypnotized by this local yokel-cum-culture vulture? Never! He was a far cry from a Renaissance-type gentleman. Beneath a thin veneer of seeming reconditeness (a cheap pose, if there ever was one) there lurked in successive layers, I was sure, a philistine, a bigot and a boor. Nor was he, for all his travels, at all cosmopolitan, but, on the contrary, rather excruciatingly provincial; or, if you will (let's face it, "Gertrude," a spade is a spade is a spade), a loathsome bumpkin—a peasant! (Oh, my dear daughter, whom I have sent to a Finnish finishing school—don't marry a clod, Claudette!)

"May I interrupt your reverie?" Over my shoulder, Xavier's soft basso profundo corruscated upon the immaculate slate of the silence. "What you see before you," he continued, "is an ultrachess board—a game of my own devising. The names of the ultrachessmen are the same as the names of chessmen in chess: kings, queens, rooks, bishops, knights and pawns. But in addition to the names, each ultra-
chessman has its own individual sobriquet. These will interest you. I have here a partial list of sobriquets for the extra pieces, any one of which may appear on the board in the event of a pawn promotion. The sobriquets, in almost all cases, are taken from historical personages, infamous or renowned. He handed me the list, but he did not identify for me any of the dramatis personae on the world's stage who had gotten stuck with these labels:

- The Insect's Homer
- Buffalo Bill
- The Tentmaker
- The Great Pumpkin
- Bloody Mary
- The Escape King
- The Wizard of Menlo Park
- The Gray Eminence
- The Playboy Prince
- The Guardian of All Mankind
- The Cornlaw Rhymer
- Apple Annie
- The Georgia Peach
- The Prophet of Romanticism
- The Jersey Lily
- The Manassa Mauler
- The Sage of Chelsea
- The Red Dean
- The Blonde Bombshell
- Minnie the Moocher
- The "It" Girl
- Stonewall Jackson
- Old Hickory
- The "Oomph" Girl
- The Iron Duke
- The Brown Bomber
- Vinegar Joe
- The Great Commoner
- Diamond-tooth Lil
- The Big Train
- The Hunchback of Notre Dame
- rattlesnake Jake
- The Recluse of Amherst
- Diamond Jim
- Nick The Greek
- The Beautiful but Inefficual Angel
- The Brilliant but Ridiculous Flamingo
- The Yankee Clipper
- Klandike Kate
- Axis Sally
- Tokyo Rose
- The Poet of the Piano
- The Good Gray Poet
- The Weathercock King
- The Insects' Homer
- Buffalo Bill
- The Tentmaker
- The Great Pumpkin
- Bloody Mary
- The Escape King
- The Wizard of Menlo Park
- The Gray Eminence
- The Playboy Prince
- The Guardian of All Mankind
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- The Beautiful but Inefficual Angel
- The Brilliant but Ridiculous Flamingo
- The Yankee Clipper
- Klandike Kate
- Axis Sally
- Tokyo Rose
- The Poet of the Piano
- The Good Gray Poet
- The Weathercock King

WORD WAYS
"Why is this a partial list?" I asked.

"These sobriquets are mostly honorific. I have other lists which are quite different."

"You mean like 'Baby-face Nelson' and 'Pretty Boy Flood'?"

"Quite. You will observe that there are twelve pawns on either side, everyone of which may be theoretically promoted to a queen, rook, bishop or knight."

Xavier stopped pacing the library floor for a moment, and raised an eyebrow at me. "The sobriquets for the starting pieces range from the honorific to the pejorative—the latter being mostly on the black side, though not invariably. The game symbolizes the war between Good and Evil."

"Then why are some of the good guys mixed in with all the bad guys?"

"Because no universe can be held together by purely malevolent forces." He waved his arm in a sweeping, flamboyant gesture to the outer universe.

"Oh, Xavier," I gasped, enthralled, "You're deep!"

This is the way my Lord and Master proceeded to describe the game to me:

1. The board is generated by writing the positive integers, 1, 2, 3, etc., in a spiral on a lattice of squares. Those squares upon which fall the triangular numbers (numbers of the form \( N(N+1)/2 \), where \( N \) is any positive integer) are blacked out to indicate that they are dead (or eliminated) squares, and are not to be played on. It is an interesting fact that, by this process, the triangular numbers form three spiral arms which divide the plane into three equal parts, so that two incongruent symmetries (the three-point symmetry of the triangle and the four-point symmetry of the square) are shockingly and intimately married. As a result of this, the white and black pieces cannot be said to play under equal conditions; but this merely serves to make the game more like unto the battle of life, and, again as in life, just who has the initial advantage is a very moot question anyway.

The spiral is continued until the board is twelve by twelve, with 144 squares in all, but, because 16 of the squares are eliminated, the ultrachess board is actually just exactly double the playing area of the chess board. The kings, queens, rooks, bishops, knights, and pawns are arranged in their starting positions as shown:
The standard Ultrachess Board is 15 inches square, each of the 144 squares being 1 3/4 inches on the side.

2. In ultrachess, the rules of chess are retained intact as much as possible (though these rules, as shall be seen, are augmented). The powers of movement of the pawns and pieces are the same as in chess, and, as in chess, checkmate of the king is the object. Pawns, upon reaching the twelfth rank, are promoted. A king may castle (though on the king's side only) if he thinks it affords him any safety, by moving two spaces toward his (the king's) rook, the king's rook simultaneously moving to the king's bishop's square—while complying with all the rules concerning clearing the first rank, not having moved the king or king's rook, and not castling into, out of or through check, familiar from chess. Pawns move, as in chess, forward one square at a time, except on a pawn's first move when it has the option of moving two squares, and capture only on forward diagonals. The en passant rule is retained for pawn moves (italics are necessitated here, by certain innovated features of the game yet to be described). Of course, castling and capturing en passant will be far less important in ultrachess than they have been in chess, but they are preserved for their nostalgic value, for old-time's sake, and because they do add something to the resources of the game, have already been learned, and, at any rate, can do no harm. The movement of pawns and pieces are
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blocked by the dead squares that lie in their paths; pawns and pieces cannot move on to them and they cannot move across, over or through them. Knights, however, may cut the corner of a dead square (in traveling, for example, from 56 to 87); this alone is permissible. But a knight cannot move from 5 to 8, from 8 to 5, from 4 to 7, or from 7 to 4, for these moves would carry the knight through the center of the dead rectangle, which is unallowable.

5. In ultrachess, each side has six knights, and these knights have a special power. A knight may move not only to a vacant square, but it may also (so long as it moves in a regular knight's path) move atop any other ultrachessman of the same color, except another knight. (The other pieces and the pawns are all made or built to accommodate a knight as a possible rider. This may be accomplished in any feasible way—for example, a hole in the base of the knight made to fit pegs on the tops of the other ultrachessmen.) Thus, kings, queens, rooks, bishops and pawns may be knighted, and the resulting combination pieces have their own powers plus the power of the knight (as long as the knight does not split away from the ultrachessman it is riding, which, of course, it can do at any time). A knighted queen would naturally be the most powerful combined piece, since it could move either as a queen or as a knight (but not both simultaneously, just as an ordinary queen can move either as a bishop or as a rook, but not both simultaneously). It should be remembered, however, that even a knighted queen is just as much subject to capture, even by a lowly pawn, as is any other piece. Knighted pawns can easily go galloping off (in knight moves) to the twelfth rank—if not watched, there to be promoted to knighted queens—or, if desired, bishops or rooks (the knighted pawn cannot be promoted to anything else unless the knight splits off from the knighted pawn before the pawn reaches the twelfth rank—in which case the pawn, arriving at the twelfth rank alone, could be promoted to a knight). When a knight splits away from a pawn or piece which carries it, it may travel in a knight's path either to a vacant square or to another ultrachessman of the same color which it can knight. It should be specifically mentioned that knighted pawns can retreat by means of knight moves. A word about the knighted king—it can be very elusive and hard to checkmate.

4. Experience has shown that ultrachess pawns must be granted one power which is at variance with the powers of ordinary chess pawns. When an ultrachess pawn is blocked by a dead square immediately in front of it, it may still proceed forward by making a one-square forward diagonal move, just as it would in capturing an enemy piece or pawn; but the ultrachess pawn has this privilege only when it is so blocked from making its normal move by a dead square (the pawn retains this special power and privilege when it is knighted, also). In the early development of the game, it was found that this rule was necessary in order that many pawns would not become stranded and ineffectual sitting ducks which could take no really helpful part in the game.

It should be noted, while we are on the subject of pawns, that in ultrachess, there are two pawns on each side which cannot take advantage of the option of moving two squares on their first moves. Now is the time, also, to state that a knighted pawn which has been knighted on its original square, but has not been moved, may,
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if it makes not a knight’s move but a pawn’s move of two squares which brings it along side an enemy pawn, be captured en passant just as in chess.

5. It should be unequivocally understood that when knighted ultrachessmen are captured, both the ultrachessman and the knight atop it are captured. Of course, if the knight can anticipate the capture, it may split away beforehand and escape.

After attending to all this illuminating disquisition on the matter, I thought it high time to essay my first symbolic war against Evil. “May I challenge you to a game of this ultrachess of your invention, Xavier? As the game’s only players, one of us must necessarily become the ultrachess champion of the world, and the other the runner-up.”

“An excellent idea, Custard Cup. Although Russia holds the world’s chess championship, by morning the United States will inevitably hold the world’s ultrachess championship.”

“But when the news breaks,” I replied, “the Soviet press will emphasize strongly our common Russian ancestry.”

“There is just one catch,” said Xavier cryptically.

“What?” I asked ingenuously.

“We may have a hard time maintaining our supremacy in the game, because, from the world-wide fraternity of chessplayers many may defect to ultrachess—for ultrachess puts the naturally strong player who has not spent tens of thousands of hours studying the chess openings on equal terms with the Master Who Has. Knowledge of the chess openings avails one no more than does Grandmother’s book of poetry, in ultrachess. In ultrachess, many preparatory moves may be made—prior to the first enemy contact—for barracading, besieging, defense and/or attack; and if, for one, find it far more interesting.” Thus spake X. Balilinkoff.

“Well, in that case, I hope you will not begrudge me the small advantage that probably goes with the first move, belonging to white.”

“Ahh, yes. You may have whites. The advantage of the first move is very small in ultrachess, but the psychological effect of the sobriquets for the ultrachessmen is very strong, and acts widely differently on different players. I myself play much better on the side of Evil. I suspect that you yourself could not play at all on the side of Good, and therefore I am forced to give you whites, and the unfair advantage of the first move.” Xavier smiled at me in pie-faced innocence, and I began to feel confident of an easy win.


“Stop, my dear. ‘The Word Made Flesh’ is correct.”


“Mrs. Gorki, love of my twilight years, the black king is ‘The Father of Lies.’ ”

WORD WAYS
“Oh. And who are the white and black queens? Would you mind telling me? This is like pulling teeth!”

“The white queen is ‘The Maid of Orleans.’ The black queen is ‘The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street’ (money is the root of all evil, you know!).”

XB finally stopped stalling, and revealed the sobriquets of the ultrachessmen as follows:

**WHITE**

King: The Word Made Flesh
Queen: The Maid of Orleans
King’s Bishop: The Bard of Avon
King’s 1st Knight: The Sage of Concord
King’s 2nd Knight: The Hermit of Walden
King’s 3rd Knight: The Copernicus of the Mind
King’s Rook: The Light of the World
Queen’s Bishop: The Father of Medicine
Queen’s 1st Knight: The Wild Bull of the Pampas
Queen’s 2nd Knight: The Sultan of Swat
Queen’s 3rd Knight: The Roughrider
Queen’s Rook: The Great Emancipator
King’s Pawn: The Lady with the Lamp
King’s Bishop’s Pawn: The Golden Tenor
King’s 1st Knight’s Pawn: Schnozlola
King’s 2nd Knight’s Pawn: The King of Swing
King’s 3rd Knight’s Pawn: The Guru of the Boob-tube
King’s Rook’s Pawn: The Angelic Doctor
Queen’s Pawn: The Little Corporal
Queen’s Bishop’s Pawn: The Wizard of Ooze
Queen’s 1st Knight’s Pawn: The Man with the Soft-boiled Eyes
Queen’s 2nd Knight’s Pawn: The Swedish Nightingale
Queen’s 3rd Knight’s Pawn: The Galloping Ghost
Queen’s Rook’s Pawn: The Lone Eagle

**BLACK**

King: The Father of Lies
Queen: The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street
King’s Bishop: The Mad Monk
King’s 1st Knight: The Sacker of Rome
King’s 2nd Knight: The Iron Chancellor
King’s 3rd Knight: The Desert Fox
King’s Rook: The Scourge of God
Queen’s Bishop: The Landlord of New York
Queen’s 1st Knight: Ethelred the Unready
Queen’s 2nd Knight: The Silver-tongued Orator
Queen’s 3rd Knight: Blood and Guts
Queen’s Rook: The Leader of the Golden Horde
King’s Pawn: The Little Paperhanger
King’s Bishop’s Pawn: The Great Profile
King's 1st Knight's Pawn: The Bird-man of Alcatraz
King's 2nd Knight's Pawn: The Brains of the Confederacy
King's 3rd Knight's Pawn: Little Caesar
King's Rook's Pawn: The Scourge of the South
Queen's Pawn: America's Sweetheart
Queen's Bishop's Pawn: The Last of the Big Spenders
Queen's 1st Knight's Pawn: The Man with a Thousand Faces
Queen's 2nd Knight's Pawn: The Wasp of Twickenham
Queen's 3rd Knight's Pawn: The Universe Wrecker
Queen's Rook's Pawn: The Hyena of Brescia

I have played a lot of chess, but I must admit I have lost my taste for that ancient game after having been Joan of Arc. The game that Xavier and I played lasted until the dawn was filled with chanticleers and motes danced in the first beams of the sun. It had given me a special feeling to identify with Joan, and, although I thought I played fantabulously, and always will think I should have mated the black king, Xavier, presiding over his predominantly evil hosts, made a phenomenal recovery at the eleventh hour, and The Daddy of Fibs got away. I learned to hate Xavier by morning.

The Old Lady was off the board, and Joan, knighted with The Copernicus of the Mind, was dogging The Father of Lies (knighted with Ethelred the Unready) through the rough and mountainous terrain in the center of the board, when the Universe Wrecker, Knighted with The Desert Fox, inexplicably broke away and was queen'd. My Little Corporal (knighted with The Galloping Ghost), which I had intended to Queen, now had to stay behind and defend the rear for Joan.

What horrified me was when Xavier queen'd the knighted Universe Wrecker. He very deliberately opened the drawer on his side of the table which contained extra black pieces, and selected one queen from among many extras. What he chose to put on the board was nothing more nor less than The Bitch of Buchenwald!

My King was exposed to the knighted Bitch, and though I spoke to Joan, and she to me, and though we acted swiftly, intelligently and bravely, 45 minutes and a dozen moves later the Bitch mated us.

I looked up from the board at Xavier, disgusted. "Well, Mr. Balilinkinoff," I said tightly, "I never supposed when I came to pay you a social call hours ago, that you would show me some wretched war-game capable of shooting down the whole night, for, had I known, I would have gladly stayed at home! How very romantic an evening it has been, hasn't it? Just about everything a girl could hope for!"

"Don't be a sore loser, Alice. It was only a game."

"But it isn't just 'only a game'—not to me, it isn't!" I waved my forefinger at the board in a short burst of hysterical anger, "How could you have mated The Word Made Flesh with that—that thing?!"

"It was easy," he said.

**NOTES ON SOBRIQUETS**
Donald A. Drury
Sobriquets for reigning monarchs have been common throughout history—perhaps
as a convenient way to keep track of the successive members of a given dynasty who bore the same name. For some reason or other, the kings of France were more frequently designated by such appellations (whether honorific or pejorative) than those of other countries. Perhaps cultural anthropologists should investigate this phenomenon. All of the following names were applied to French rulers:

**LOUIS:** I (the Debonair), II (the Stammerer), V (le Fainéant—i.e., the Lazy), VI, (the Fat), X (the Quarrelsome), XIV (the Sun King).

**PHILIP:** IV (the Fair), V (the Tall). Also note two Dukes of Burgundy: Philip the Bold and Philip the Good.

**CHARLES:** I (the Bald), II (the Fat), III (the Simple), V (the Wise), VI (the Foolish), VIII (the Affable).

One of the most devastating epithets ever applied to royalty was earned by Ethelred II of England, known as "Ethelred the Unready." England also contributes such appellations as William the Conqueror (William I, he of 1066 and all that), The Sailor King (William IV), Edward the Confessor (last of the line of Anglo-Saxon kings), and Edward the Martyr (who was murdered by his stepmother).

"The Great" is a sobriquet given to kings and emperors of many nations: Alexander the Great, of Macedonia; Charles the Great (i.e., Charlemagne), King of the Franks and Holy Roman Emperor; Frederick the Great, of Prussia; and Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, both of Russia.

Ivan I and Ivan III, both grand dukes of Russia, were known respectively as Kalita (Moneybag) and "the Great." Ivan IV, the first Russian ruler to assume the title of tsar, is best remembered as "Ivan the Terrible."

**Note:** Perhaps a revival of sobriquets for political leaders would be helpful in some situations. The recent prominence of Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, for example, led to a certain confusion with the late Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. This confusion was compounded when supporters of Senator (Eugene) McCarthy accused opposition campaigners of "McCarthyism" during some of the primaries. The term "McCarthyism" is of course derived from the notorious tactics of Senator (Joseph) McCarthy in smearing political opponents with unsupported charges of near-treason, Communist conspiracy, etc. Since the fervent young supporters of Senator (Eugene) McCarthy went so far as to get haircuts and wear "square" clothes as part of the "clean for Gene" campaign, I found the following to be a very useful, immediate distinction between the two Senators McCarthy: Clean Gene, and Dirty Joe.