



All the Wrong Moves: A Memoir about Chess, Love, and Ruining Everything

Written by Sasha Chapin

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By Sasha Chapin

All The Wrong Places

Sasha Chapin is a victim of chess. Like countless amateurs before him--Albert Einstein, Humphrey Bogart, Marcel Duchamp--the game has consumed his life and his mind. First captivated by it as a member of his high school chess club, his passion was rekindled during an accidental encounter with chess hustlers on the streets of Kathmandu. In its aftermath, he forgot how to care about anything else. He played at all hours, for weeks at a time. Like a spurned lover, he tried to move on, but he found the game more seductive the more he resisted it.

All The Wrong Questions

And so, he thought, if he can't defeat his obsession, he had to succumb to it.

All The Wrong Reasons

All the Wrong Moves traces Chapin's rollicking two-year journey around the globe in search of glory. He travels to tournaments in Bangkok and Hyderabad. He seeks out a mentor in St. Louis, a grandmaster whose personality is half rabbi and half monk, and who offers cryptic wisdom and caustic insults ("you're the best player in your chair"). His story builds toward the Los Angeles Open, where Chapin is clearly outmatched and yet no less determined not to lose.

All The Wrong Places A Life Lost And Found

Along the way, he chronicles the highs and lows of his fixation, driven on this quest by lust, terror, and the elusive possibility of victory. Stylish, inventive, and laugh-out-loud funny, *All the Wrong Moves* is more than a work of history or autobiography. It's a celebration of the purity, violence, and beauty of the game.

This review has been hidden because it contains spoilers. To view it, [click here](#).

I have been connected to the chess world, sporadically, for many years, first in the sixties, then in the nineties, and again in the present. I have known the pull of the game. I have felt the "obsession". I know people who have been consumed by it. The game has been the ruin of some. It has also been the salvation of others. And, for many, it's just a wonderful pastime.

So, it was with great interest that I heard a current memoir had been written about the subject, and I picked up a copy of *Sasha*. I have been connected to the chess world, sporadically, for many years, first in the sixties, then in the nineties, and again in the present. I have known the pull of the game. I have felt the "obsession". I know people who have been consumed by it. The game has been the ruin of some. It has also been the salvation of others. And, for many, it's just a wonderful pastime.

So, it was with great interest that I heard a current memoir had been written about the subject, and I picked up a copy of *Sasha's* book as soon as it was released.

Sasha Chapin is a good writer. He clearly has studied the history of chess, knows basic openings, and does a good job of portraying behaviour at the board. His book also has some good tips for chess players, albeit in philosophical terms rather than chess specifics. In particular, the book is a tribute to Ben Finegold, and a significant part of the book is the expression of Finegold's teaching.

It is an unusual story. Sasha, with no history of over the board competitive chess, signs up for a tournament as an unrated player. Not unusual. But instead of playing against other unrated or low ranked opponents, he chooses to play against someone rated over 2000, near-master level. Very unusual. He loses badly, then drops out of the remaining games.

Then, rather than playing a series of tournament games to improve and climb the ratings ladder, as most do, Sasha travels to St. Louis and pays for personal lessons from a grandmaster. Interesting, and again, unusual.

Then, rather than entering local easily accessible tournaments to test his newly learned skills, he flies half way around the world for a single tournament in India. He plays badly, and doesn't complete the tournament due to stomach ailments.

The book ends with Sasha entering the Los Angeles Open as a low rated player with limited games

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under his belt, but registering in a top section against high rated opponents. Going into this tournament, Sasha has already decided that these would be his last games ever (maybe). He does very well, winning a game and drawing a couple of others. Chess is a hard game. His achievement at the Los Angeles Open is truly a remarkable story.

That Sasha played so few tournament games as a self-proclaimed chess addict is at odds with what I see from most newly obsessed chess players who sign up to every tournament possible. The author is honest about this, stating his "alliance with the tournament chess scene was brief." It was incredibly brief.

He also says in the book, as a memoirist, "I'm constantly wondering whether any definable portion of my experience is marketable."

This makes me wonder. Was the author genuinely addicted to the game? Or did he temporarily "jump in the deep end" as fodder for publishing a memoir? Was this adventure into chess driven by chess? Or was it driven by a desire to write, an author needing to find an experience to write about? Some of his actions, such as flying to India, unusual for a rating fixated newcomer to chess, make complete sense as a journalist investigating a story. So what was the motivation?

Maybe it was a combination of both; someone in search of a story to write becomes addicted to the subject, at least temporarily.

In any event, Sasha has achieved some success in this difficult game which will forever be part of his story. I will be interested in what Sasha writes next. ...more

All The Wrong Moves

Educated, neurotic Central European boy who writes like a dream and is forever going on with the self-deprecating jokes. Sound familiar?

Well, Sasha Chapin manages to make it fresh. This isn't just because he is unlike Woody Allen, in that Chapin is humane, sympathetic, and not much of a jerk. This is because he's ... Canadian! Seriously, though, I am not sure why, but I suspect it is because despite his hippie high school and his occasional drug use, he's rather a gentleman. He's certainly not Educated, neurotic Central European boy who writes like a dream and is forever going on with the self-deprecating jokes. Sound familiar?

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If you've ever obsessively played some kind of game to the detriment of your real life, or gained insight from such a game into broader issues, then this book will resonate with you. If you've a sarcastic bone in your body, you'll enjoy it. If you're either a masochist who identifies with authors, or a sadist who enjoys hearing stories of others' discomfort, you'll like that too. It's dysfunction-palooza for people who are actually quite functional by someone who is actually quite functional while claiming not to be.

Also, the book ends with the meaning of life tacked on to the only serious (yet quite amusing) description of chess games therein ... or at least very good advice on living it. Really. ...more

All the Wrong Moves is a touching and brilliant portrait of masculinity. Chapin writes with arresting honesty. He humiliates himself in all the right ways. His descriptions of chess and players are luminous and profound and hysterical. He captures the manner in which none of us are truly in control of our personalities. And we explain our idiocies and achievements in hindsight with a philosophy we hope gives them meaning. We watch Chapin's obsession with amateur chess talk him into derailing his All the Wrong Moves is a touching and brilliant portrait of masculinity. Chapin writes with arresting honesty. He humiliates himself in all the right ways. His descriptions of chess and players are luminous and profound and hysterical. He captures the manner in which none of us are truly in control of our personalities. And we explain our idiocies and achievements in hindsight with a philosophy we hope gives them meaning. We watch Chapin's obsession with amateur chess talk him into derailing his life in order to play in tournaments against a ten year old he despises for no reason. And then find himself in conversation with a chess master who brings him as close as anyone can get to the secret of chess and life. ...more

All The Wrong Turn Movies

All the Wrong Moves is a sharp, clever, and meaningful story from an author who has exactly the right tools to tell it. Chapin's account of his journey, compelling on its own, is broken up by asides that effortlessly blend knowledge with narrative. These give the reader an inside look at the professional chess world and offer a robust history of the game.

Luckily, Chapin's passion for chess is infectious, and you'll find yourself enthralled with the subject even if you'd never played before. When All the Wrong Moves is a sharp, clever, and meaningful story from an author who has exactly the right tools to tell it. Chapin's account of his journey, compelling on its own, is broken up by asides that effortlessly blend knowledge with narrative. These give the reader an inside look at the professional chess world and offer a robust history of the game.

Luckily, Chapin's passion for chess is infectious, and you'll find yourself enthralled with the subject even if you'd never played before. When I finished reading, I ended up spending hours on chess.com getting my ass handed to me by players who were almost definitely twelve years old. It wasn't until I was personally trounced by children that I realized how accurately Chapin describes the experience.

From the outset, Chapin makes it clear that he's self-aware enough to know that his deep dive into competitive international chess is a fool's errand, but bold enough to do it anyway. While this might come off as pretentious or obnoxious from a lesser writer, Chapin's unending wit, honest reflection, and remarkable voice make All the Wrong Moves an incredibly riveting read that will stick with you for weeks. ...more

Devoured it within a day of receiving it. I enjoyed the hell out of this delightful book. It had such a perfect balance of new-to-me knowledge, human insight, and wicked humour all the way through. For a memoir about a game, I was moved by the depth of Chapin's insights into himself and the people around him (the healthy dose of self-deprecation added to the overall feeling of honesty). I enjoyed every literary reference and every well-drawn character (his master chess teacher was a scream). It Devoured it within a day of receiving it. I enjoyed the hell out of this delightful book. It had such a perfect balance of new-to-me knowledge, human insight, and wicked humour all the way through. For a memoir about a game, I was moved by the depth of Chapin's insights into himself and the people around him (the healthy dose of self-deprecation added to the overall feeling of honesty). I enjoyed every literary reference and every well-drawn character (his master chess teacher was a scream). It was fascinating to think about the kind of mind that can really master chess, and the people whose cognitive styles that end up coming up short (not much of a spoiler here: Chapin is humble and frank about falling into the latter category). I wish I could read more memoirs like this, that expand my knowledge of human achievement while maintaining an amusing authenticity about our shortcomings. More please Mr. Chapin! ...more

All The Wrong Things

I read the entirety of this book in an afternoon. I carried it around with me while I made tea, and took it into the bath, and curled up with it at night. I dog-eared a good 30% of the pages & kept revisiting passages over and over again. It's just one of those reads.

I was surprised by how funny it was. And it's like... really hard for a book to make me laugh? Which made the ending all the more poignant, when it sort of socked me in the guts with its profundity.

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This book does that to you with ease. It makes you laugh, it makes you question your own life choices, it makes you google words & events, and then it casually, and unexpectedly hands you glistening gems of enlightenment in the form of strange, thoughtful, beautifully twisted and elegantly crafted prose.

I'm floored that this is his debut. It is a deeply touching piece of work, utterly unique, and full of complex ideas & gorgeous, unconventional stories. He's a stellar writer. Needless to say, this book is officially one of my all time favorites. ...more

Many people who read this book seem to think it's some kind of wonderful; I couldn't get there. To me, it seems like a frivolous description of a period of his life centered around playing bad chess.

I play chess, I can appreciate his description of the attraction of the game. I've played tournament chess, he does a pretty accurate characterization of the time in the game when things seem to be going well, right before you make the blunder that kills your chances. Like him, I've been there and I know the feelings. Many people who read this book seem to think it's some kind of wonderful; I couldn't get there. To me, it seems like a frivolous description of a period of his life centered around playing bad chess.

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If you read this story, it is entertaining, and thankfully it's not terribly long, so you can finish it easily

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before you tire of it and put it away. ...more

All The Wrong Things Dramione

I wanted to live in this book forever. It was hilarious, endearing, self-aware and honestly just really interesting. Sasha wanted to be a chess genius - someone who picked up the game and impressed everyone around him with his crazy skills, learned very quickly or perhaps just unlocked from somewhere in his deep subconscious. But when he starts playing - in Bangkok, St. Louis, India, LA, he realizes that his story is not that one and if he wants to be good, he has to play the long game, study an

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I want you to read this book because his writing is amazing and he's clearly just an amazing person. This may be my favourite book of the year - and I think you'll love it too. ...more

i love chess books (not instruction but fiction or memoirs) so i'm giving this five altho there were parts i could have done w/o and i really did not love it. but there were paragraphs that i loved enough to photograph and send to my son, so...a five

All The Wrong Reasons Tom Petty

Read this to learn the secret of chess, and a little bit more

After the author lamented the frequent appearing of the name of Tarrasch in his book, quoting Tarrasch could be unfair, but that quote is, "Chess, like love, like music, has the power to make people happy." This book was a great love story of an amateur with chess, and the story, as much as I wanted it to continue, has an ending, like any game of chess, and all three possible results - win, loss or draw - are ok.

Engaging, eloquent and Unique

Just finished the book and I found it absolutely wonderful. It really resonated with me. I too have struggled with the burden and self-loathing resulting from being addicted to chess but possessing no natural raw talent at all. This book is witty, compelling and even profound at times. And you don't have to be a chess player or know anything about chess to enjoy it. His conclusions and musings eloquently expressed. Highly recommend and enjoyable.

All The Wrong Places Lyrics

Sasha Chapin tames the unruliness of the memoir with an 8x8 grid, while chess kicks his ass.

The conventions of the game are used to bring meaning to the obsessions, impulses, and indignities that are experienced universally, but are most acute when struggling against ones own mediocracy.

Chapin's prose are humorous and self deprecating, As they have to be to describe the humility that comes with learning and struggling to reach ones potential. Chapin is beaten by young children one minute and, old Sasha Chapin tames the unruliness of the memoir with an 8x8 grid, while chess kicks his ass.

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Chapin's prose are humorous and self deprecating, As they have to be to describe the humility that comes with learning and struggling to reach ones potential. Chapin is beaten by young children one minute and, old street hustlers the next, but the hardest beat is that after a certain skill level, chess mastery is about about the luck of genetics. This gives us one more reason to be embarrassed about having a body, but another to laugh at it. ...more

It's mostly fine.