

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

BY CHRISTINE MCBURNEY



PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE: ON THE GRASS IN FRONT OF THE KELVIN SMITH LIBRARY, THE FACULTY AND STUDENTS GO HEAD-TO-HEAD IN THE ANNUAL LIVE-FIGURE CHESS MATCH.

IF IT'S SEPTEMBER, IT MUST BE CHESS AT CWRU—THE LIVE-FIGURE VARIETY THAT IS PART OF A CAMPUS CELEBRATION OF THE HUMANITIES.

On September 18, under a perfect blue fall sky, faculty and students tried to kill each other on the grass oval in front of the Kelvin Smith Library.

The Live Figures Chess Game was one of several events in honor of CWRU's fourth annual Humanities Week, the celebration of the humanistic disciplines on campus: classics, English, history, philosophy, modern languages and literatures, religion, music, art history and art, and theater. The game was played like a typical chess match, but with two variations: The pieces were human, and the game had been played beforehand, though the result was not made known. This was the third year that the match was part of Humanities Week.

Awaiting its cue from inside the library, the faculty team lined up in formation. Tom Bishop, associate professor of English and the director of CWRU's Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities, noted the psychological benefits of the game. "It's a chance for faculty and students to get together and 'kill' one another on a level playing field for a change." Sam Savin, interim dean of arts and sciences and the white king, crown and all, mused that all that glitters is not gold. "I'm just a pawn in the end." Jacqueline Nanfito, assistant professor of Spanish and comparative literature, exclaimed from beneath her tiara, "When else do I get to be queen for a day?"

Let the game begin.

After a trumpet fanfare, the faculty emerged from the library and marched regally onto the lawn. The pawns carried rakes, hoes, and other garden tools, wielding them as if they were medieval instruments of torture. Then the student team, dressed in black street clothes and, mostly, construction paper hats, emerged from Thwing Center and sauntered onto the lawn.

On the faculty side, it was clear that education was the mission when they created their costumes. Paying fashion homage to those humanities jokesters Monty Python, assistant physics professor Dan Akerib was an instantly recognizable amalgam of characters from the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. With a Playskool horse strapped to his chest and clanking two coconut halves together as he galloped, Prof. Akerib graciously accepted a round of applause.

Prof. Bishop, appropriately, donned a long bishop's frock

with a gold embossed cross on the front. In the crowd of about seventy-five, one spectator wondered aloud about Prof. Bishop's having something like that in his closet. Beating a copy of the Geneva Bible with his staff, Prof. Bishop explained the historical accuracy of his props. "Enough people were killed because of this book."

With the pieces settled on their appropriate squares, which were meticulously painted blue and white courtesy of plant services, emcee Philip Taylor, the Perkins Professor of Physics, encouraged the crowd to move in closer. "This is not Oxford or Cambridge. Come on the grass." He then introduced the team members as well as the two "generals," players who would direct the pieces to advance on and "kill" one another until one side was triumphant.



REAPER MADNESS: AS "DEATH," LATIFA ODOM EAGERLY AWAITED THE DEMISE OF THE CHESS PIECES.




BOARD MEMBERS: CHEMISTRY MAJOR SAQIB ALI (LEFT) AND PHYSICS PROFESSOR DAN AKERIB STAND BY FOR THEIR NEXT MOVE.

played the game under rules that gave them thirty minutes for the entire match.

Prof. Taylor also announced that an extra player would be in this game: Death. With a nod to Ingmar Bergman's classic film *The Seventh Seal*, in which a knight on his way back to Sweden from the Crusades plays a game of chess with Death, Prof. Taylor introduced undergraduate chemistry major Latifa Odom. Shrouded in a black cloak, she gleefully stalked the sidelines, ready to remove taken pieces.

After a few safe moves, things turned bloody. As Cather Simpson, assistant professor of chemistry, was taken out of the game, she was dripping in what appeared to be blood. Prof. Simpson then pulled out planted ketchup packets from her coat pocket.

Thirty minutes after it started, the game was over. The faculty had beaten the students. Dr. Shapiro said he'd like to see the match played live next year. "It would be tricky and more interesting for the spectators, and the commentary would be more immediate."

Undergraduate psychology major Patti Carpenter, who played the black queen, was philosophical. Twirling her scepter, she pointed out that the faculty had won only two of the three games played. "We'll get them next year." 

Christine McBurney can beat her son in checkers and is a huge fan of Ingmar Bergman and Monty Python films.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL MILNER



DRESSED FOR CHESS: THE FACULTY'S JACQUELINE NANFITO, AS QUEEN, AND TOM BISHOP, AS A BISHOP