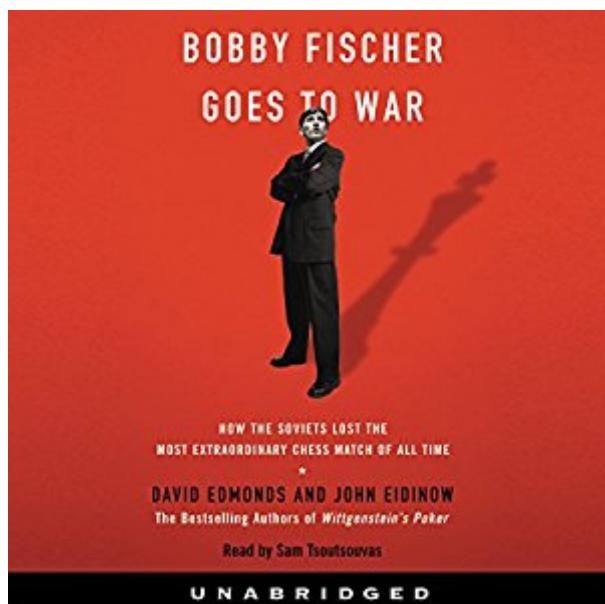


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# Bobby Fischer Goes To War: How The Soviets Lost The Most Extraordinary Chess Match



## Synopsis

In the summer of 1972, with a presidential crisis stirring in the United States and the cold war at a pivotal point, two men -- the Soviet world chess champion Boris Spassky and his American challenger Bobby Fischer -- met in the most notorious chess match of all time. Their showdown in Reykjavik, Iceland, held the world spellbound for two months with reports of psychological warfare, ultimatums, political intrigue, cliffhangers, and farce to rival a Marx Brothers film. Thirty years later, David Edmonds and John Eidinow, authors of the national bestseller *Wittgenstein's Poker*, have set out to reexamine the story we recollect as the quintessential cold war clash between a lone American star and the Soviet chess machine -- a machine that had delivered the world title to the Kremlin for decades. Drawing upon unpublished Soviet and U.S. records, the authors reconstruct the full and incredible saga, one far more poignant and layered than hitherto believed. Against the backdrop of superpower politics, the authors recount the careers and personalities of Boris Spassky, the product of Stalin's imperium, and Bobby Fischer, a child of post-World War II America, an era of economic boom at home and communist containment abroad. The two men had nothing in common but their gift for chess, and the disparity of their outlook and values conditioned the struggle over the board. Then there was the match itself, which produced both creative masterpieces and some of the most improbable gaffes in chess history. And finally, there was the dramatic and protracted off-the-board battle -- in corridors and foyers, in back rooms and hotel suites, in Moscow offices and in the White House. The authors chronicle how Fischer, a manipulative, dysfunctional genius, risked all to seize control of the contest as the organizers maneuvered frantically to save it -- under the eyes of the world's press. They can now tell the inside story of Moscow's response, and the bitter tensions within the Soviet camp as the anxious and frustrated apparatchiks strove to prop up Boris Spassky, the most un-Soviet of their champions -- fun-loving, sensitive, and a free spirit. Edmonds and Eidinow follow this careering, behind-the-scenes confrontation to its climax: a clash that displayed the cultural differences between the dynamic, media-savvy representatives of the West and the baffled, impotent Soviets. Try as they might, even the KGB couldn't help. A mesmerizing narrative of brilliance and triumph, hubris and despair, *Bobby Fischer Goes to War* is a biting deconstruction of the Bobby Fischer myth, a nuanced study on the art of brinkmanship, and a revelatory cold war tragicomedy. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

The 1972 World Chess Championship probably attracted more widespread attention than any other chess championship before or since. Taking place during the Cold War, the match featured a duel between reigning champion Boris Spassky, from the Soviet Union, and challenger Bobby Fischer, from the United States. The book is an excellently detailed description of the match and the events that led up to it. The first few chapters of the book form a biographical background of the two opponents. Bobby Fischer grew up in the United States, mainly in New York City, and was a chess prodigy from a young age including winning many titles while still a teenager. Boris Spassky grew up in the Soviet Union. In the post-war world, the Soviet government saw chess as an important playing field to prove the superiority of communism over capitalism. Spassky, like many other Soviet chess players, would receive government support to enhance their chess skills. For the quarter of a century before 1972, the World Chess Championship was dominated by the Soviet Union often featuring a match only between players from the Soviet Union. Because of this, and the fact that chess was not very popular in the United States, these championship matches attracted little interest in the West. This changed as Fischer fought through the tournaments and won the right to challenge Spassky to the title of World Chess Champion. Fischer had a reputation for bizarre and stubborn behavior and his approach to the championship match was no exception. While Spassky wanted to compete out of the love of chess, Fischer had numerous demands. The book goes into detail about the peculiarities that went into the planning. Some doubted that the match would even be held at all. It seemed that Fischer was most interested in the large prize money, but wanted more. Eventually, a multimillionaire British businessman and chess fan donated a large sum to increase the prize to help entice Fischer to play. Fischer ended up showing up, in Reykjavik, Iceland

for the match, late. Many breathed a sigh of relief when he finally showed up. But the drama would not end there. Fischer demanded that everything be set up according to how he saw fit. This went everywhere from the size of the squares on the chessboard, the type of chair he sat in, and the type of lighting to be used. Many people were frustrated over these numerous objections from Fischer, but for the most part they acquiesced. Game one went by with Fischer blundering causing him to lose. He ended up forfeiting the second game over objections that the match was being televised and claimed that the sound of the cameras disrupted his concentration. More frustration followed. Eventually the match continued with some more exciting games and some mundane ones until Fischer had won after the twenty-first game following Spassky's resignation. Following the championship, Spassky returned to the Soviet Union and continued to play chess, but eventually remarried and moved to France. Fischer became a recluse after the celebrations following his triumphant return to the United States. He stopped playing chess professionally and refused to defend his title in 1975 against challenger Anatoly Karpov. The organizers had apparently run out of patience in dealing with Fischer's antics. The last chapter of this saga would come in 1992 when Fischer and Spassky agreed to a rematch in Yugoslavia. It was the last time Fischer publicly played chess. He became a refugee after the U.S. government issued an arrest warrant for him because the chess match, with the large monetary prize, violated sanctions on Yugoslavia at the time. This is an excellent book detailing the behind-the-scenes actions of the 1972 World Chess Championship. One of the most impressive aspects was the Soviet side of the drama which features many people both working closely with Spassky and others in the Soviet government. This is not a traditional piece of chess literature and there is not much description about the games themselves. I would recommend this book to those interested in chess history.

You couldn't make up a story like this if you tried. Yet it all really happened. The book is very enjoyable and well researched. Although it does not contain a move by move analysis of any games, it is a good read for chess players and non-chessplayers alike. The Match was truly a spectacle rather than a normal world champion chess match, and the Book captures the events and the flavor perfectly. Fischer's unmatched feat of winning his first two of three Candidates (elimination) matches 16-0 (8 wins no losses against Taimanov, then 8 wins no loses against Larsen) in order to qualify to play Spassky, was impossible, yet it happened. In his last Candidates Match he easily beat former Soviet World Champion Tigran Petrosian, although not 8-0. Everyone knew by then that an American, of all people, was going to beat the Soviets at chess -- but only if the match took place, which, because of Fischer's bizarre and erratic behavior, almost didn't

happen. The antics before the match take up the first part of the book. There are way too many to describe here. For example, Fischer makes demand after demand, e.g., size of the table, placement of the camera, the type of lighting and where it's to be placed, how close the audience can sit, the stone carved chess pieces have too many spots in them, etc. He refuses to play unless his demands are met. A millionaire puts up more prize money, doubling the prize. Fischer still refuses to play because some of his many demands haven't been met. Calls from friends and officials all over the world can't change his mind. Then, a call comes from the White House - Henry Kissinger no less - who convinces Fischer to play. Fischer decides to play, he goes to the airport the day before the match is scheduled to begin so he can fly to Iceland where the match is being played, but gets spooked by the paparazzi, runs out of the airport, goes home, and decides not to play. And the whole process of convincing him to play begins all over again. The match finally starts, days late (a story in itself), but the spectacle continues. One example of what kind of spectacle this match became, was the "CIA Chair Tampering" claims that made world headlines during the match. At the beginning of the match, Fischer replaced the plain wooden chair provided for him by the match organizers with his special, and much more comfortable, chair designed by the American chair making firm of Herman Miller. Fischer had taken this chair to each of his Candidate matches and had it flown in to Iceland specifically for his use. The Russians cried foul. Fisher then had an identical chair flown in from the US for Spassky. Later in the match, after Spassky started losing, the Russians came to believe that there was a difference in the allegedly identical chairs. The Soviets charged that Fisher's "special chair" had a mechanism implanted in it to cause Spassky to lose concentration. The organizers gave in to this ludicrous claim and had both chairs x-rayed. The x-rays showed a mysterious un-chairlike object in Fischer's chair but not in Spassky's. More x-rays were then taken a few days later, specifically to determine if Fischer's chair contained an implanted device of some kind. The mysterious object had disappeared! Even today, some of the Soviet participants (not Spassky) believe that the CIA tampered with the chair and used some kind of mind/thought control process to help Fischer. The few examples I've given here are representative of the entire match. The Book covers all the crazy events that happened. Enjoy the Book.

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