

## Reaching your peak

Last October, when Alexander Riazantsev shocked everyone to be the surprise winner of the Russian Championship, many pundits suggested that the 31-year-old grandmaster might well have reached his chess peak. But now we hear that the Muscovite grandmaster recently reached another kind of 'chess peak.'

In an official press release of the Russian Chess Federation it is reported that Riazantsev successfully



Alexander Riazantsev is having his peak experience.

climbed to the very top of Mount Elbrus, the highest peak in Russia and in Europe, and one of the world's deadliest mountains. The 5,643m ascent in difficult weather conditions lasted nearly 10 hours – and at the top, the Russian champion played the first ever game of chess there with one of his climbing group.

Riazantsev planned the trip a couple of years ago with a strong chess-playing amateur friend with the objective to play at the peak. Now he hopes his inspiration will lead to more chess played on top of other famous mountains!

## The Wire

The claim is a bit confusing if we look at their track record, but FIDE's commercial partners Agon have announced that they have plans to 'continue improving user experience for chess players and fans alike'. Their latest gimmick to improve everyone's

lot is to strap players up to biometric monitors during the next World Championship match.

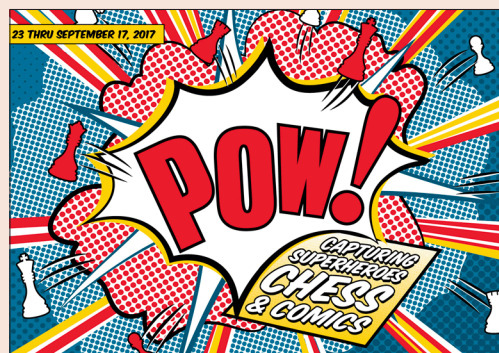
The innovation is being pushed because Agon – or 'World Chess' as they now like to be known as these days – believe there's a market for fans tracking the ups and downs of title contestants during the critical moments of a match. 'Chess matches can be very dramatic, and biometric data gives fans and spectators alike another opportunity to follow the games and relate to them on a much deeper level,' CEO Ilya Merenzon told the press. 'It's not enough to know what the next best move is anymore: you have to know what the grandmaster is thinking. This makes watching the games so much more exciting. This is also one of our efforts to develop the premium broadcasting experience and bring value to chess fans.'

The device and software, currently under development by World Chess, will first have to be approved by FIDE and the players themselves. Contrary to Agon's claim the idea is not as revolutionary as they say and several events come to mind where similar devices were used. One was the Chess Masters Final in Bilbao last year, where Wesley So refused to continue wearing his watch when he found out that his heart rate was visible to his opponent.

## Superheroes, Comics & Chess

In 1935, popular culture was transformed forever when DC published its first book of all-new, all-original comic material. To the delight of millions of kids everywhere, the modern comic book was born. It was the birth of an era that's come to be regarded as the Golden Age of Comics in America, inspiring the birth of legions of superheroes such as Batman, Wonder Woman, Spiderman or the Flash.

So where's the chess? Well, happily leave that to the World Chess Hall of Fame in St. Louis that presents *POW! Capturing Superheroes, Comics & Chess*, an attractive, very colourful and



Pow! Bam! Wham! Another great exhibit at the WCHOF!

not-to-be-missed interactive exhibit that runs through 17 September at the WCHOF with over 200 chess-themed comic books on display. The historic comics collection includes rare editions, such as the earliest chess-related cover, DC Comics' *More Fun Comics* 76, released in 1942; and a 1947 DC Action Comics Superman in *The Cross Country Chess Crimes*. The framed comics adorn the walls of the WCHOF and many have also been made available for free on iPads, so visitors can still read the stories connected to the images on display.

## Carving for champions

Everyone visiting the World Chess Hall of Fame, is welcomed by the amazing sight of the giant wooden King 'Kong', measuring 14 feet 7 inches high, and weighing in at 2,280 pounds, making it the world's tallest chess piece. That record will not be broken, but the chess lovers in St. Louis will be delighted to hear about a



The helmet's done, now on to the chess pieces!

related project, the creation of a giant wooden community chess set.

Although a little smaller in scale and also weight, the tiny Australian Great Southern town of Kendenup honoured its conquering school chess champions by turning old street trees into giant chess pieces. Despite the town having a population of just 1,000, the kids of Kendenup Primary School – with no more than 80 students – punch above their weight as they have constantly been winners in regional and state chess competitions, and even runners-up in the National School Chess Championships in 2012.

So as a gesture to honour the achievements of their year five and six pupils who have excelled against much larger and wealthier schools, the community has come together to raise funds to hire two local wood carvers to sculpt giant chess pieces. The town council was going to cut down the old jarrah trees that stand at the entrance to the main street, but agreed simply to trim them back to leave enough of the trunks to shape.

Darrel Radcliffe, a former alumni, was tasked with wielding his trusty chainsaw and chisel for the biggest carvings he's ever done, starting with a king that will stand almost 4 metres tall (just over 13 feet), to be followed by more of the pieces and pawns. Another local sculptor, David Stockdale, will also carve a giant knight with his chainsaw and chisel to turn the jarrah trunk into public art that will then be moved into the main street.

### Cleveland Scene

One of the main features in a summer issue of the weekly city-wide magazine *Cleveland Scene* was a profile of local librarian Pamela Eyerdam, and the diligent work she does as manager of the Special Collections at the popular Cleveland Public Library (CPL).

Eyerdam has overall responsibility at CPL for the world's largest public chess collection, the John G. White Chess and Checkers Collection,



**Pamela Eyerdam with treasures from the John G. White Collection.**

and this alone is well worth visiting Cleveland just to see. John Griswold White (1845-1928) was a popular local attorney, philanthropist, avid chess collector and bibliophile, whose personal bequest forms the core of the massive chess library and collection he travelled the world over a 50 year period to amass.

When White died, he not only bequeathed his chess collection to the CPL, but also provided with it the John G. White Trust Fund, the annual income to be used for the acquisition of new materials to maintain and upkeep his vast collection. He stipulated that it was all to be kept together in the CPL, and made available freely for all to see and use.

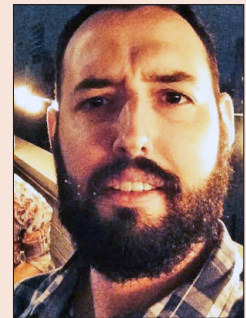
These days, the White collection is known the world over. Eyerdam says the special collections wing (on the third floor of the main library building) gets more tourists than local visitors. Every summer, for example, they host chess researchers from American and European universities. It's said of Eyerdam that she has taken John G. White's philosophies and attitudes to heart by creating an open and welcoming atmosphere that's a rarity among such large chess collections. She says her hospitality is in keeping with the library's 'public university mantra' and the progressive attitudes of John G. White and former Cleveland mayor Tom Johnson.

### More Legal's Mate

Anyone who has ever investigated the ever-growing US scholastic chess operations will tell you that it is becoming a very fierce and competitive market – and so competitive, some have had cause to resort to that other well-known US activity of pursuing legal action.

Recently it was reported in the *New York Post* that a Manhattan tutoring company that claims it taught Tinseltown A-lister Hugh Jackman's kids how to play chess, along with other high-end clients, wants to legally check a former teacher it claims had brazenly stole its pupils.

Chess At 3, which specialises in after-school chess activities using stories about kings and queens, rooks, knights and pawns to teach young clients the art of the game, claims tutor Hugh Kramer went rogue and stole away 24 kids he was teaching



**Hugh Kramer is accused of spreading the chess secrets of his former employer.**

when he resigned from the company.

When he was hired three-years ago, Kramer signed a contract agreeing to return the company's materials and acknowledging that the kids he taught on behalf of Chess At 3 would remain clients of the business, the firm claims in a Manhattan Supreme Court lawsuit.

The company is seeking \$100,000 damages, and wants a court order barring Kramer from teaching its students and using its trade secrets. Apparently Kramer hasn't responded to the charges nor media requests. ■