



## Bobby Fischer Goes to War

By David Edmonds  
ISBN: 9780060510251

### Introduction

Since 1948, the USSR had dominated the World Chess Championships -- evidence, Moscow claimed, of the superiority of the Soviet system. But then along came Bobby Fischer. A dysfunctional and manipulative genius, Fischer was uniquely equipped to take on the Soviets. Against him was Boris Spassky: complex, sensitive, and most un-Soviet of champions. In the summer of 1972, they met in Reykjavik, Iceland, for the most notorious chess match of all time, in a confrontation that held the world spellbound for two months with reports of psychological warfare, ultimatums, political intrigue and cliffhangers. Thirty years later, David Edmonds and John Eidinow have set out to re-examine the story we recollect as the quintessential Cold War clash. Drawing upon unpublished Soviet and US records, they have reconstructed the full and incredible saga as it unfolded on the board, in corridors and foyers, in back rooms and hotel suites, in Moscow offices and in the White House.

### Discussion Questions

1. How would you characterize Bobby Fischer's ascension as a chess prodigy? Discuss how his childhood may have contributed to his obsession with chess.
2. How would you describe Bobby Fischer in one sentence? What, in your opinion, are his strengths and weaknesses and how did they help or hurt his career in chess? Has reading this book changed your perception of the legendary champion?
3. Compare the circumstances of Boris Spassky's upbringing to Bobby Fischer's. If both men were by nature rebellious, how did their single-mindedness express itself off the chessboard?
4. How did Spassky feel about his role in promoting the Soviet cause? In what ways did he align himself with and distance himself from the Soviet regime?
5. The authors point out that there are more possible variations in a game of chess than there are atoms in the universe. Were you surprised to learn of the seemingly infinite complexity inherent in chess? What kind of personality, in your opinion, would most likely be drawn to this game?
6. What were the biggest surprises in the preparation for the match? Who do you feel was driving the agenda -- Fischer or Spassky?
7. At the time of the match, the Soviets and many Americans felt that national pride was at stake. Do you think this was an issue for either Fischer or Spassky? Behind the scenes, which team was able to exert more influence on the outcome of the match, the Soviets or the Americans?
8. In the ongoing negotiations that took place at the match itself, did you feel that FIDE (Fédération Internationale des Échecs) was a neutral party? Which person or individuals, besides Fischer and Spassky, had the most critical impact on the outcome of the match?
9. The authors quote International master and psychologist Bill Hartston: "Chess is not something that drives people mad; chess is something that keeps mad people sane." Discuss this statement in the context of Bobby Fischer.
10. What was the alleged role of the KGB in the match? What are your thoughts on the theory of conspiracy, on either side, with respect to its outcome?
11. In your opinion, what was the turning point of the match? Do you think Fischer's antics were a deliberate psychological tactic to throw his opponent off balance? Compare the tactics used in this match to the tactics in popular contact sports, such as boxing or tennis.

### About the authors

David Edmonds is, and John Eidinow was, an award-winning journalist with the BBC. Their highly acclaimed debut book, *Wittgenstein's Poker*, was a number one national bestseller and was published in over a dozen languages.