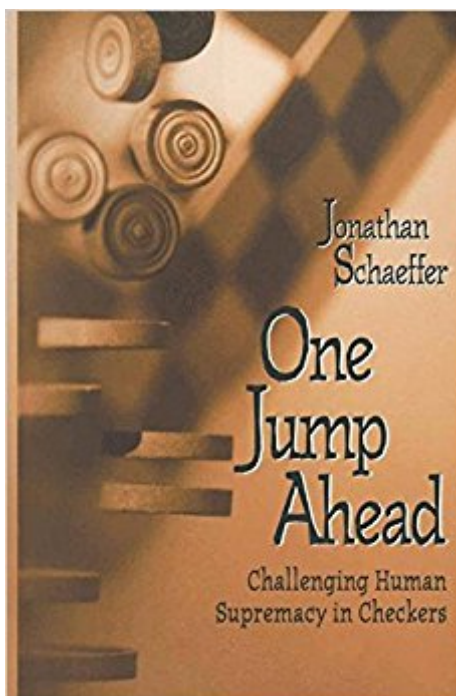The book was found

One Jump Ahead: Challenging Human Supremacy In Checkers

Synopsis

The new edition of this extraordinary book tells of the creation of the world champion checkers computer program, Chinook. In only two years, Chinook had become a worthy opponent to the world champion, and within four years had defeated all the world's top human players. Jonathan Schaeffer, the originator and leader of the Chinook team, provides an engrossing account of failures and successes. He describes the human story behind the program and his own feelings in learning from mistakes and technical problems in a continuous effort to improve Chinook's performance. Beginning in 1988, we follow the development of Chinook from an innocent question asked over lunch through to the final match against then world champion, Marion Tinsley, and ultimately to its recent triumph, perfecting checkers. As the story unfolds, readers are introduced to its key figures, and to the rules of checkers and the basics of computer game programs. As a result, all those interested in computing and games will enjoy this book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"...We get a close look into the embarrassingly low-rent, codger-populated world of championship checkers... and a few painless lessons in the game itself... But the most memorable passages deal with Schaeffers's own bittersweet reactions. His brainchild does so well that he can see, all too clearly, its almost tragic effect on the cloistered society of checkers - and on his fellow human beings." Newsweek " Schaeffer's personal involvement in the Chinook project, along with his engaging and open story-telling makes the book surprisingly gripping." A.K. Dewdney

The scientists who developed Chinook rigorously proved that Chinook can never lose, i.e. computer checkers has been solved.Ã Â Author Schaeffer detailed the process on the web site of the journal Science in July 2007, and the story has since been reported in the Chicago Tribune, The New York Times, USA Today, Discover Magazine, as well as on MSNBC and CNN, among others.

With an interest in both checkers and AI, I thought that these book was a very interesting and honest portrayal of Dr. Schaeffer's attempt to build the world's best checker's program to ultimately beat Marion Tinsley. Having taken part in a few computing competitions myself, I can attest to the level of fixation and stubborn desire to win that can overtake someone. While the book is light on technical details, it does talk about the different components of the search algorithm and some of the problems that they had along the way while building the program. Also, if you are interested in checkers, the book contains great detail about Marion Tinsley and the other leading checkers players at the time.

Amazing that something as seemingly boring as a book about writing a program to play checkers could be this interesting. Author does an excellent job of bringing the people in the chess and computer science communities to life.

First off - i don't play checkers, and prior to reading this book, i didn't want to. Second - i do research in game AI (although significantly different than the type of work described here) and even went to a few conferences with the author, though we've never spoken (he had a reputation for being a bit of a jerk). So my review is from the point of view of a non-checkers playing engineer.First off, the book is incredibly meticulous in keeping track of what happened when. The author apparently asked everyone he knew to email him about various events because he often quotes long passages from other people. For example, he might describe a game he won or lost and then ask the person he played against and the judge of the match to describe it in their own words.Second, i thought the book was pretty easy to understand. i know computers so maybe i'm not a good judge there but he did a good job explaining checkers (and chess, which comes up) so that i understood what was going on.Third, he makes checkers seem interesting, or at least as much as i think he can. Apparently normal checkers isn't interesting but in tournaments they play odd varieties like two ballot (explained in the book) which makes for a much more interesting game than i would have expected. He also makes it easy to understand why checkers is a hard game

requiring a lot of skill, which i wouldn't have guessed before this book.Fourth, the author lets you know that he is a jerk. He doesn't appear to do anything to hide his faults or make you like him. In the book he repeatedly apologizes to people for how he's treated them. Honestly, i liked the author a lot more after reading this book. His issue is that he's very focused, driven and competitive and that results in things like snapping at his students and not giving his family enough attention. It doesn't necessarily excuse it but it makes the author easier to understand. It's also a pretty major accomplishment for an autobiography - not once did i get the feeling that the author was lying, exaggerating or trying to tell you how to think (except for his constant effort to convince you that checkers and checkers players are great people). He's just a guy trying to be honest, and i respect that.Fifth, the book was a great look at how well technology did and didn't work in the '90s (computers were constantly crashing and network lines going down) and how tournaments come into being (sponsors, venues, judging, sportsmanship, personalities, press and a lot of other issues that i thought would be boring but weren't).Finally, the book isn't quite the success story you might expect. The majority of the story is about how the author failed, quite often because he did something stupid he knew he shouldn't do (like optimizing code so much that he broke it). At the end of the story (and many, many years of research), the computer is maybe finally good enough to be world champion but no one will ever find out because the real champion resigned due to health problems and shortly after that died. i think it's hard to overestimate how much the author respected the guy he could never beat.This doesn't seem like the kind of book anyone should really enjoy reading. An engineer describes how he wrote a computer program? Even engineers read it because they have to, not because they enjoy it. But i really liked this book. If you aren't a computer person, i honestly don't know if you'll like it, but give it a shot, i think just about anyone would enjoy this book.

I tried to become a tournament-level player myself in the late 1980s but it took more obsession than I was willing to make. Instead I ended up in grad school in Computer Science, the other side of this book.Nevertheless, the book was fascinating not only for the story but for seeing Schaeffer's view of people I had met back then - Tinsley, Lafferty, Walker, Markusic, Noel Boland, Gene Lindsay, a few others.

This book tells the story of an ambitious computer scientist who sets out to write a program that can beat the World Checkers Champion. He succeeds, although it takes him six years to achieve his goal. On the technical side, the book describes how the checkers program works, and how much effort it took Schaeffer and his team to make it play well enough to beat the human Champion. On

the human side, it tells the story of the amazing Dr. Tinsley, probably the best checkers player who ever lived, who had beaten all his opponents, who had become bored with the game, and who finds in the computer a fresh opponent that has no fear for him, that plays for the win, that is actually fun to play against.The most intense passages of the book are the ones where Schaeffer, as the operator of his program, has to watch his creation make moves he doesn't trust, but cannot do anything about. The most intriguing aspect of the book is that the way in which Chinook calculates it! s best moves doesn't come close to how man does it. (Or how we think we do it.)Chinook's is a fascinating story. The book is very well written, and reads like a thriller.

Once I started to read this book I found it difficult to put down. Granted I am addicted to playing checkers against my computer when taking breaks at work, but still.... This is very interesting material for checkers players and computer programmers alike.However, I do have a couple of problems with the book. First, it is very poorly edited. There are a number of grammatical mistakes, [one right on the first paragraph], the author at times goes into unnecessary tangents and, in general the book is too long and repetitive. In addition, it bothered me that, perhaps because of the author's familiarity with chess, he decided to use chess notation to describe the games. This makes it more difficult for checkers players to follow the games while reading the book. The author/editor should have made the effort to use checkers notation or to provide better diagrams.

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