



# MORMON CHESS

**Kris Cassity / Illustrations by Stefanie Clark**

Kris Cassity of Anchorage, Alaska, has a diverse background of experience and achievements. Of special note is the fact that he won a posture contest in third grade and was voted Webelos of the week at the age of eleven. Kris is pursuing his fourth year of undergraduate studies in English, French, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, and General Studies at BYU. He has served a mission in France and Switzerland, and is a Presidential Scholar.

Often new converts or Mormons who have had little association with other Mormons experience some frustration upon moving into a dominantly Mormon society. This frustration is generally unanticipated, and Mormonologists maintain that it is the result of an often misunderstood game called Mormon chess. This game is played frequently among Mormons and is similar to the traditional game of chess, but it has the distinct advantage that it can be played verbally without chess figures or a playing board. An explanation of the fundamentals of Mormon chess should be very useful to those who are unfamiliar with this

game and should be a definite playing asset to those who find themselves frequently defeated and frustrated.

The game is played when two individuals have opposing opinions on the same subject, or opinions which appear to be opposing. The object of the game is for each player to attack the opinion of his opponent and thus make his own opinion appear dominant. When either player's opinion is successfully discredited, the game ends.

To achieve the goal of discrediting the opponent's opinion, each player has a set of verbal strategies, known as "chessmen," that he can use either to defend his own opinion or to attack the opinion of his opponent. Each of these chessmen has different characteristics and can be directed to attack or defend in given patterns. The mark of a skilled player is his ability to make full use of all his strategies.

The first rank of chessmen, which are called "pawns," have limited mobility and limited force. The pawn stratagem is constructed by adding one of the following statements to a statement that supports a given player's point of view:  
 My (A. Sunday School teacher B. Seminary teacher C. religion instructor D. Bishop E. Stake President) said that. . . . Pawns are easily overcome by more sophisticated stratagem, but they are often useful in confusing the issues enough to work to a player's advantage. For example, when confronted by an opposing opinion, a player may say, "My seminary teacher said that was false." Quite obviously, this will divert the discussion to a consideration of the merits of seminary teachers, and thus avoid the main issues.

The second rank of Mormon chess strategies, the "castles," is a more powerful rank than the pawns, but castles are much more limited in number to pawns, for they are harder to

formulate. The castles are formed by making direct statements of logic that support a player's opinion. Castles are very useful, but they have a major weakness: they can only move straight forward in direct logical progressions, and are very vulnerable from the sides.

A castle can be easily upset with an indirect attack: for example, an assertion that such and such a logical statement is a "worldly philosophy." A skillful player will, of course, counter. He may attribute his line of logic to someone who was quoted in a General Conference and thus frustrate his opponent's attack. However, this type of maneuvering is cumbersome and illustrates the vulnerability of castles.



The third rank of chessmen is composed of the "knights." Knights are approximately equal in number and in force to castles, but they are much more evasive. A knight stratagem is formed by paraphrasing a scripture which includes a word or words that might be conceivably construed to relate to a given player's opinion. Knights have the advantage of changing direction in the middle of a move and thus avoiding capture. If, for example, a knight is attacked on the basis that the context of the scripture paraphrased does not support the

responsible player's opinion, that player may reinterpret his paraphrase or allude to other passages of scripture which have similar words and which might also be construed to relate to his position. A duel between knights, often referred to by its French name, "biblebash," is a most extraordinary phenomenon of Mormon chess. A biblebash may last almost indefinitely as each player jumps from scriptural interpretation to scriptural interpretation, never quite able to firmly entrap his opponent.

The fourth rank of players is called "bishops." Bishops are in many ways similar to knights except that they have a greater range of striking

distance. Bishops are constructed by adding, "A general authority said that . . ." to a statement which resembles a given player's opinion. It is not essential that a player remember who the general authority is, the context of his statement, or even the exact content of the statement. All these things might be helpful, but they can detract from a stratagem as well as enhance it. If, for example, a player says that Brigham Young was the General Authority who said such and such, his opponent may well counter with a different quote by Brigham Young which appears to support a different view.

The most versatile and most devastating of all the Mormon chessmen is the "queen." The queen move, sometimes called the "piousputdown," is made by asserting that the opposing player, his opinion, or his assertions are worldly, unorthodox, or anti-religious. Once again, the player need not show how this assertion is true; it is merely sufficient to assert it or to imply it. The queen is a particularly destructive figure because she can be made to attack in virtually any

direction. Opposing queens are thus generally obliged to be kept some distance apart since a confrontation of the two generally means a loss of both. A player who has forfeited his queen is usually at a definite disadvantage in Mormon chess.

The final and most essential chessman is the "king," or the opinion of each player. Kings can never be taken; they can only be put in checkmate. Checkmate occurs when an opinion is exposed to an attack for which the defending player can find no defense and is thus made to appear discredited.

When either player's opinion is in checkmate, the game ends.

With a basic understanding of these fundamentals, the novice player should be well prepared to play Mormon chess if he just remembers not to commit one grievous error: an experienced player accepts defeat unemotionally since he realizes that the next game may well find him the victor. To display anger or frustration in defeat will identify him as a novice.

Remain calm. Remember, this is only a game.

