Monster mashing

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THE REPRESENTATIVES from Hong Kong in this year's Commonwealth Championship in London were a couple of monsters. Namely, Monster X and Monster Y, two experimental chess computers entered by the manufacturers Novag, who have sponsored the championship since its inception in 1983. Evidently Novag noted comments made by the human opposition scrunched up by the prototype Super-Constellation that played 1984, who had christened the Super-C "the Monster". Certainly Monster Y lived up to its new name in the first two rounds this time. After defeating an internationally rated Englishman in round one, it nearly beat international master Daniel King in round two. Then everybody took them seriously.

Anyone who has suffered ignominious defeat at the paws of a home chess computer will be pleased to learn that the two Novag Monsters fared somewhat worse this time. Monster X scored 2½ and Monster Y 3½ out of 11 games (compared to the winning score of eight points made by Canada's Kevin Spraggett and Pravin Thipsay of India). However, as the 67-player field was primarily composed of international-strength opposition, the results do not mean that innocent members of the public will be any safer in the near future. Indeed, all the signs are that these computers — whether they move the pieces themselves, verbally insult you, or just play good moves — will continue to terrorise many players at home and even at clubs.

Therefore this week I am proud to present the Grandmaster Recipe for Obliterating Presumptuous Electronic Computers (GROPEC). The principle behind not being bullied by your home model — even if objectively it is stronger than you — is to outsmart it. Psychologically. One way is to aim for the endgame, as computers are notoriously weak in this aspect. This may sound paradoxical, as one might assume computers could be programmed to play many simple endgames perfectly. In fact they can and do. No, the problem lies in the fact that before the endgame the gods have placed the middlegame. A machine programmed to keep its king safe in a complex middlegame somehow has to have new instructions to use the king aggressively when the endgame is reached, for example. This transition to the endgame is not an easy task for a monster.

But the method I prefer for reminding the computer who is boss is much more fun. Computers are strongest in pure calculations, in open positions with many captures. Therefore, begin with a slow, closed opening. Try to acquire a position where long-term strategical and positional considerations are the most important. Gradually build up your pieces around its king — but taking care not to menace it with any direct threats. With luck, even a Super-Constellation will not notice the storm clouds brewing in a fashion that would be blatantly obvious to any human player. Then, only when you are sure the attack will succeed, do you launch into the monster's king. Rip open its pawn cover with a sacrifice or two and send the heavy artillery in. If the poor thing doesn't get checkmated it should at least blow a fuse.

This week's game, although between two live people, is actually a good example of the sort of sophisticated play that computers hate. Kevin Spraggett, a player well on the way to grandmasterdom, delicately probes weaknesses in his opponent's pawn formation before finishing him off with tactics.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED

	K. SPRAGGETT	D. KING
1.	c4	e6
2.	Nc3	d5
3.	d4	Nf6
4.	c×d5	e×d5
5.	Bg5	Be7
6.	e3	0-0
7.	Bd3	Nbd7
8.	Qc2	c6
9.	Nge2	Re8
10.	0-0	Nf8
11.	Rab1	

This move, initiating a minority pawn attack (with a later b4 and b5), is a familiar theme to experienced players. But many computers might be baffled by White's 11th.

| 11. | ... | Ne4? |

I'm sure Danny King knows all about minority attacks, but this is the wrong response. Better is 11... Ng6, aiming for kingside counterplay with ... Bd6 next move.

12.	B×e7	Q×e7
13.	B×e4	d×e4
14.	b4	a6
15.	Ng3	f5

This necessary weakening pawn move is a consequence of Black's 11... Ne4. Spraggett responds energetically.

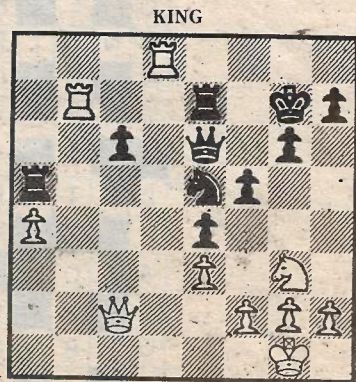| 16. | d5! | Ng6 |
17.	d×c6	b×c6
18.	Na4	Be6
19.	Nc5	

White's positional advantages are evident: he has a powerful knight outpost on c5, while Black's bishop is limited in scope by its own pawns.

19.	...	Ne5
20.	Rfd1	g6
21.	a4	a5?

King's last move prepared 21... Bd5, a better choice. Now by suddenly swapping his good knight for the bad bishop, Spraggett forces a penetration to the seventh rank with his rook.

22.	N×e6!	Q×e6
23.	b×a5	R×a5
24.	Rb7	Re7
25.	Rd8 ch	Kg7?

Not 25... Re8 26. Qb3! Rd5 27. R×e8 ch Q×e8 28. Rb8 winning Black's queen, but 25... Kf7! was still not clear. King had overlooked the elegant cross-pin which now finishes the game.

KING

SPRAGGETT

| 26. | Re8! | Resigns |