

S E A R C H I N G
F O R B O B B Y F I S C H E R

Screenplay by
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Based on the Book by
Fred Waitzkin

Shooting Script
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SEARCHING FOR BOBBY FISCHER

1. A BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH of a young man, all but his eyes 1.
obscured by the long-fingered hand supporting not so much his
head as the weight of his thoughts.

JOSH'S VOICE

In the days before the event, he had
the whole world wondering if he would
show up.

The eyes are riveted to a point nearby, and yet behind them,
vast and mysterious schemes are being plotted.

JOSH'S VOICE

Plane after plane waited on the runway
while he napped or took walks and ate
sandwiches.

The unseen puzzle enthralls and intrigues him. Moving in close
on the eyes -

JOSH'S VOICE

Henry Kissinger called and asked him
to go for his country's honor.

2. NEWSREEL FOOTAGE of the young man emerging from an airplane 2.
shielding his eyes against the low Icelandic sun with his
large hands. He descends the steps to the tarmac and is
engulfed by a crush of reporters and dignitaries and curious
spectators. As he's hustled into the backseat of a waiting
car, the legend - REYKJAVIC, ICELAND, 1972 - appears.

JOSH'S VOICE

Soon after arriving, he offended the
Icelanders by calling their country
inadequate because it had no bowling
alleys.

3. Inside the cavernous Laugersdalholl Stadium, workmen lay 3.
down carpet to muffle footsteps, baffle cameras with burlap,
replace folding seats with upholstered "soundless" chairs.

JOSH'S VOICE

He complained about the TV cameras,
about the lighting, about the table
and chairs and the contrast of the
squares on the board. His hotel room,
he said, had too nice a view.

4. The enormous hall, filled to capacity. Tournament officials 4.
pacing below the stage, checking their watches. Boris Spassky
at a mahogany chess table, waiting, his first move already
made. The Eames executive swivel chair flown in from Buenos
Aires and placed opposite him is conspicuously empty.

JOSH'S VOICE

None of this had anything to do with
chess of course - or maybe it did. If
he won, he'd be the first American
world champion in history; if he lost,
he'd just be another patzer from
Brooklyn.

The young man in the plain dark suit arrives late, settles into
the leather chair, considers the board a moment and pushes his
Knight to his King Bishop's third square. Close on the time
clock on the table, the seconds ticking away.

JOSH'S VOICE

On the 40th move of the 21st game, he
countered Spassky's bishop to King-6
with a pawn to Rook-4 and it was all
over.

5. The cover of Time Magazine featuring the young man's 5.
impassive countenance sculpted onto a chess piece like a
marble bust of a Roman emperor. The covers of Newsweek,
Sports Illustrated and Life.

JOSH'S VOICE

He came home an American hero. He'd
bragged to the world he'd beat the
Russians and he delivered.

6. Seated rather uncomfortably across from Dick Cavett, the 6.
young man explains: "It's like war on a board; the object is
to crush the other man's mind."

JOSH'S VOICE

He could now command the same money
as heavyweight prizefighters. He was
invited to dinner by statesmen and
kings.

7. Henry Kissinger proudly introduces the young man to Richard 7.
Nixon. In the streets of Brooklyn, crowds of people swirl
around him seeking his autograph.

JOSH'S VOICE

Then Bobby Fischer made the most
original and unexpected move of all.

8. The same black and white photograph as before, his face held in his large hand, his eyes intent on his mission. 8.

JOSH'S VOICE

He disappeared.

THE PHOTOGRAPH is swallowed by darkness - and from the darkness comes a voice -

MERLIN

I have a tale to tell ...

9. INT. GROVE STREET THEATRE - DAY (1988)

A flash of light and a puff of smoke and a six year old boy's eyes - widening. Medieval Noblemen and Ladies (and the children in the audience) gasp as the bearded wizard Merlin appears from the smoke -

MERLIN

A great darkness descended
over all of Britain the day our
beloved King Uther died. For 18 years
now we've lived in disorder and
misery, suffering the arrogance and
wars of lesser kings and knights
battling for the crown that belongs to
none of them ...

Under the footlights, the boy, with his mother, father, little sister and friends, watches the magician.

MERLIN

For while there are many among you
who appear worthy, there stands among
you only one who truly is.

Against the painted backdrop, the costumed actors glance curiously among themselves. Eventually, a young man in peasant clothes steps shyly across to Merlin.

MERLIN

Entrusted to me at birth for his
safety, the true-born son of Uther
Pendragon and Lady Igrayne --- Prince Arthur.

NOBLEMEN

This, the son of a king? Impossible!
He's just a stable boy! He cleans our
stalls!

9. CONTINUED:

ARTHUR

I'm not ready.

MERLIN

Yes, you are.

The young stable boy steps away toward a sword embedded in a stone, but then hesitates, glancing back at the magician warily.
To the audience -

MERLIN

Only he who is pure of heart can take
the sword from the stone.

Arthur grasps the handle and pulls the sword easily out.
There's another gasp from the assembled crowd on stage while,
down below, the six year old's parents smile at each other at
the look of awe on their son's face.

MERLIN

The rightful heir to the throne of
England, wiser and greater than even
his father - King Arthur.

As Arthur returns with the beautiful sword to stand at the
wizard's side, the others kneel and bow and scrape.

NOBLEMEN

Long live Arthur - God bless Arthur -
Long live King Arthur -

Distant thunder booms.

10.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - SAME DAY

10.

In the grey gloom of a threatening storm, the boy, his sister
and friends, each with a handmade foam sword, hide in a thicket,
whispering, "Do you see him, I don't see him, where is he ..."

A figure, the boy's father, appears behind them. It takes them
a moment to realize he's there, but when they do, they scatter,
running through a "forest."

Across the park, the boy's mother plants seven candles in a
cake decorated with plastic cars and the words, "Happy Birthday,
Josh." Glancing up, she considers the gathering clouds overhead
with a measure of dread.

Josh dives behind the trunk of a tree and tries to catch his
breath. He hears footsteps and crouches lower as the torn shoes
of someone big walk past. Head close to ground now, he notices
a small dark object in the fall leaves and reaches to unearth
it.

(CONTINUED)

10. CONTINUED:

10

It's an elaborate carving of a knight on horseback. He turns it over in his hands examining its detail before voices draw his glance around the side of the tree.

Close on armies of small faceless men standing in confused disarray. A hand in a tattered wool glove without fingertips shoves a bishop across a marble table and swats at a time clock. Worn-out shoes over mismatched socks tap a cadence like soldiers' drums.

(CONTINUED)

10. CONTINUED:

10.

Wind howls through the trees, but Josh hardly notices. He's intrigued by the figurines on the chess board, plainer than the one in his hand, but still discernible as horses and castles and kings.

*
*
*

Lightning flashes across the checkered battlefield as the overcast sky opens up above, unleashing torrents of rain on the cheap plastic chessmen. Hands rake them from the boards and into paper bags. Elsewhere, people scatter.

Josh's mother groans at the sound of crashing thunder and hurriedly re-covers the cake. He hears her calling him, his father, too, and turns ... to find himself in the shadow of an imposing black man in a torn sweater, muddy pants.

There's a weathered baseball in the man's leathery hand. He holds it out in offering, but when Josh reaches for it, he draws it back. He wants the chess piece clutched in the boy's hand in exchange. His eyes say, It's a fair trade ...

11. INT. JOSH'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

11.

Rain snaking down a window. Dinosaur night lamp on the ledge. Closer, here, drops of glistening liquid from a red and white can of 3-in-1 oil, upside down, fall through space and into the pocket of a brand new baseball mitt. Almost a whisper -

*

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED:

11.

FRED O.S.

You have to be careful not to use too
much of this stuff. Just enough.
Not too much, how's that look?

*
*

JOSH O.S.

Good.

*

Small hands pass bigger ones a washcloth. It rubs at the oil in
the glove, saturating the leather.

FRED O.S.

You want to really get it in there.
Look at it drink it up. What a
great smell that is, isn't it? Now -

*
*
*

They're revealed finally, inside a bunk bed draped with sheets
like a fort, Josh with pajamas printed with cowboys and
Indians, his father, Fred, wearing a look of bewilderment.

*

JOSH

What's wrong?

FRED

I forgot to buy a ball - I can't
believe it. You got to put a ball in
the pocket. A hardball. I -

*
*

JOSH

Here -

Josh reaches across to his nightstand, rummages through the
clutter, and hands his father ... not a baseball, but rather .
one of those tourist spheres with snowflakes in it. He unscrews
it from its base.

*
*

FRED

Yeah, that'll work.

!

He buries the little globe in the pocket and sticks the glove
under the mattress.

*
*

FRED

Now you're set. We'll get a ball
tomorrow.

Josh crawls under the covers. Fred leans in across scattered
baseball cards and kisses his son on the forehead.

FRED

Sorry about the rain.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED:

11.

JOSH
I had a great time.

*

FRED
Hey, you know what, can you believe
this? I can't believe this .. You're
seven.

*

Josh smiles almost as proudly as his father.

FRED
Happy Birthday.

Fred lets the flap of the fort close down and navigates past
toys and games and books and the wrapping paper they came in.
As the overhead light goes out, a nightlight in a socket
automatically switches on.

Silence. Then, inside the fort, a flashlight snaps on,
illuminating the knight on horseback in Josh's hand. Fascinated
with it, he can just hear the pounding of horses' hoofs and
the clang of iron swords which

CONTINUE OVER:

12. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - SAME NIGHT

12.

And in the southwest corner of the park, the black man sits
alone in the rain.

*

*

FADE TO BLACK

13. EXT. PS 41 - DAY

13.

Children spill out the front doors of the school into bright
sunlight and down the steps to the sidewalk where their parents
wait to escort them home.

*

Josh and his friends emerge in a cluster before splitting apart
and waving good-bye. He reaches his mother and little sister
and shows them the art projects from his backpack.

*

*

*

BONNIE
Oh, that's great ... look at this,
Katya ...

14. EXT. GREENWICH VILLAGE - DAY

14.

They move along the sidewalk, Josh, Bonnie, Katya.

*

(CONTINUED)

14. CONTINUED:

14.

BONNIE

What do you think, you in the mood for
a slice of pizza?

JOSH

I don't know, are you?

She keeps walking but glances down at her son puzzled.

BONNIE

You're not?

(he shrugs)

Are you feeling all right?

JOSH

I'm fine.

BONNIE

You're fine, but you don't want pizza.

JOSH

Hey, I know. You want to go watch the
men in the park?

Bonnie considers her son blankly; she has no idea what he's
talking about.

BONNIE

What men in the park?

15. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY

15.

The usual suspects hunched over the marble tables in the
southwest corner of the park - hustlers and junkies and emigrant
masters like Israel Zilber, a mad bearded Russian - playing
chess, backgammon and cards. *

The preferred hustle here is blitz - chess with a time limit
of a few minutes at the outside - a fast and furious progression
punctuated by piece-slamming and clock-banging. *

Money changes hands under a sign that reads, "No Gambling."
The residents of one bank of tables, drug dealers, consider
the lady with the stroller and the little boy.

BONNIE

Come on, Josh, let's go.

Uncomfortable here even if she weren't with her children, Bonnie
tries to pull Josh away. But it's no good; he's fascinated by
the look of the game, the action and the shape of the pieces,
hardly noticing the players themselves.

(CONTINUED)

15. CONTINUED:

15.

A handsome young man emerges from a cluster of spectators to consider the derelict players. The black man from before, nursing a paper cup of coffee, jerks his head at the junkie perched across from him.

VINNIE

Go sit on a bench, man, I got a fish.

The junkie doesn't move - until Vinnie kicks at him under the table. He gets up and stumbles away finally, and the young man approaches. Clearly out of his element, whatever that might be, he offers the black man in a soft voice --

SHIRAZI

Dollar a game?

Vinnie pretends to notice him for the first time, and, after considering him a moment -

VINNIE

Yeah, sure, why not.

As the young man takes a seat, Vinnie sets the hands of his beat-up chess clock and places it back on the marble top.

VINNIE

Two minutes.

The young man nods. The game begins. The chessmen flow into lines of attack, paced by the nerve-racking snap of the clock, and Vinnie plays to the crowd that's moving closer to watch.

VINNIE

You should get out more, you look like a vampire. Is that what you are, a vampire? You look like a vampire.

The cerebral game of chess, as Vinnie plays it, more resembles pinball. His pieces challenge the other man's, joust, ambush, plunge off the rim of the table to the ground.

VINNIE

You know how to kill a vampire? You got to put a stake in his heart. You got to put a stake in his heart, drive it in, bam. You gotta drive it in, you gotta kill him before he kills you, bam. You gotta make sure he's dead, you gotta kill him, bam.

Someone in the crowd whispers the name Shirazi, "that's Kamran Shirazi" and Vinnie glances over to Zilber while he plays. The bearded man nods almost imperceptibly, and Vinnie sneers at the pale young man across from him.

(CONTINUED)

15. CONTINUED:

15.

VINNIE

Is that right, you're Shirazi? You come to hustle me, huh, Grandmaster? You come to hustle a hustler? You come to hustle me?

BONNIE

Come on, Josh, let's go.

VINNIE

I'm talking to you.

SHIRAZI

I don't know who that is.

VINNIE

You're nothing but a fish, Grandmaster. You're nothing, you're a dog. You're the dog of the world. You're a patzer, Shirazi.

BONNIE

Come on, Josh.

Oblivious to the rest, Josh's eyes follow the movement of the chessmen: the diagonal slide of the bishops, the lateral path of the rooks, the L-shaped journey of the knights ... *

VINNIE

You got nothing. Oh, you want to trade queens? Fine, bam, done. *

BONNIE

Josh, come on.

VINNIE

What do you think? You think you're gonna come into my office and take my money, is that what you think? Huh? Look at me when I talk to you, is that what you think? Is that what you think? Huh? Look at me. Is that what you think? Huh? *

Shirazi fights not to look at him even as the flag on his clock falls. Vinnie smiles; the young man has lost the game on time.

16. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - NIGHT

16.

Down on the floor, Josh peers through the arched doorway of a Playmobil castle. In the "courtyard" stands a tableau of small

(CONTINUED)

16. CONTINUED:

16.

plastic figures in Medieval garb - kings and queens and archers *
- and the wooden knight. From elsewhere in the house - *

BONNIE O.S.

You washed up, Josh?

From the castle's tower, a lone prisoner behind barred windows *
watches as Josh moves the wooden knight out from behind a row of *
smaller figures ... *

A16. EXT. PS 41 - DAY

A16. *

The last kids out of the building walk off with their mothers, *
leaving Bonnie and Katya virtually alone on the sidewalk. *

17. EXT. PLAYGROUND - PS 41 - DAY

17.

Bonnie and Katya step into the yard. Kids are jumping rope, *
swatting tether balls, climbing jungle gyms, playing basketball. *

Scanning the yard for Josh, Bonnie spots him at the far end, *
beyond children in motion, on the ground with a checkers board *
covered with small plastic chess men. *

18. EXT. GREENWICH VILLAGE - LATER - DAY

18.

Washington Square looms in the distance up ahead. Bonnie is *
acutely aware of it, and, reaching a corner, turns it with her *
daughter. *

JOSH

Where're you going?

BONNIE

Home.

She shrugs, Where else? Josh looks at her like she's crazy and
points the other way.

JOSH

Our house is that way, Mom.

BONNIE

I know ... I ... thought maybe we'd *
sort of go around ... down to 4th for *
a change. *

JOSH

(pause)

Around what?

(CONTINUED)

18. CONTINUED:

18.

BONNIE
(defeated)

The park.

JOSH

We always cut through the park, it's
a hundred and forty-seven steps
shorter. It doesn't make sense to go
around the park. It's crazy.

*
*
*
*

Chagrined, Bonnie watches as Josh turns and crosses the street
the other way, the usual way, then follows after him.

19. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY

19.

Israel Zilber, wearing a naval cap, sheriff's badge and garish
costume jewelry on his fingers, stares up at the squirrels in
the trees and sings to them in Russian.

BONNIE

Excuse me, sir.

Glancing down, Zilber finds standing before him a nervous woman
clutching the hands of a little girl and boy.

*

BONNIE

I noticed your sign.

Scrawled on cardboard and resting on the table, it reads, GAME
OR PHOTOGRAPH OF THE MAN WHO BEAT TAL, 1953 - ONE DOLLAR. Zilber
strikes a pose ... then frowns.

ZILBER

Where's your camera?

BONNIE

No. My son would like to play a game
of chess with you.

Bonnie fishes a dollar from her wallet and cautiously holds it
out to the drunken Russian madman. Zilber considers the boy
long and critically before snapping the bill out of his mother's
hand like a trout striking a shiny lure.

Josh sits. His face doesn't reach much beyond the rim of the
table. He peers through the chess pieces as if through the
trees of an impenetrable forest.

Zilber moves a pawn. Josh moves a pawn. Vinnie, at the next
table thumbing through a newspaper, glances over.

Zilber brings out a knight. Josh brings out a knight. Amused

(CONTINUED)

19. CONTINUED:

19.

more than intrigued by the image of the young boy and the old Russian, others wander over to watch.

Zilber topples Josh's pawn with a bishop. Josh forays through the "forest" with his queen. Bonnie, amazed that Josh knows how to correctly move the pieces, stares at her son like he might belong to somebody else.

Zilber captures a knight. Josh gangs up on a rook with his queen and a bishop. Zilber slips away, but not before eyeing, briefly and suspiciously, this small boy sitting across from him. At the next table, Vinnie smiles to himself.

Josh tries to protect his king as Zilber advances with his queen. He takes a "poisoned" pawn and the Russian goes in for the kill with an army of men.

ZILBER

Mate.

JOSH

What?

Josh doesn't know what the man means. He doesn't know how the game ends.

ZILBER

It's over. You lose.

Not the least bit disappointed or hurt by the quick loss, Josh gets up from the table. Indeed, he is thrilled to have played. Zilber gathers the pieces and begins setting them back into opening position, all but ignoring the boy.

VINNIE

What's his name?

Bonnie notices the fearsome black drug addict at the next table and doesn't answer.

JOSH

Josh.

VINNIE

Josh what?

BONNIE

(whispers)

Let's go Josh, don't tell him your last --

JOSH

Waitzkin.

(CONTINUED)

19. CONTINUED:

19.

VINNIE

Josh Waitzkin.

Vinnie jots the name down in the margin of his newspaper.
Bonnie almost groans out loud.

*

VINNIE

I'm gonna watch for you, Josh
Waitzkin. Someday I'm gonna tell
these patzers I saw you play here in
the park like Bobby Fischer used to,
and show them this.

*

He stabs a finger at the newspaper. To Bonnie:

*

VINNIE

Your boy used pieces in combination
to attack.

She has no idea why that's significant, of course, but nods
anyway, and leads her kids out of the park before Josh can offer
these derelicts his address.

20. OMITTED

20. *

21. INT. YANKEE STADIUM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

21. *

Bonnie, Katya and Josh (with a backpack) hurry along a corridor.
The roar of the unseen stadium crowd reverberates off the walls.

*

*

22. INT. PRESS BOX - NIGHT

22. *

Print journalists work, and eat, along the long arcing press
desk that looks out over the field. Fred turns away from the
laptop computer in front of him to hug his son and
daughter who've just come in with their mother.

*

1

(CONTINUED)

22. CONTINUED:

22.

SCORER

Hey, Josh, how's it going, you gonna help me out tonight?

The man pats the chair next to his. Josh takes it, splays open a program to the score card page and begins methodically laying out two neat rows of baseball cards according to the starting line-up. The crowd groans and the scorer grabs a table-top microphone -

SCORER

Strike out. Put-out is 2 -3.

(to Josh)

So, what do you think, you gonna write about sports like your dad when you grow up, or you gonna play?

JOSH

I'm gonna play. Second base for the Yanks.

JOURNALIST

They could use a second baseman.

Across the cramped room, Bonnie glances from her son to her husband, who's noting the out on his computer.

BONNIE

I took Josh to the park today. He played chess.

Fred nods absently, types a few words and gestures to a guy with a cart full of drinks.

FRED

I'm sorry, what?

She lets it sink in rather than repeat it.

FRED

Josh doesn't know how to play chess.

BONNIE

Yes, he does. Don't ask me how but he does.

A hard hit line drive finds the hole in the right side and the crowd goes wild. To anyone -

FRED

What field was that?

(CONTINUED)

22. CONTINUED:

22.

ANYONE O.S.

Right.

As he notes the single to right on his computer -

FRED

He played chess in the park ...
-against who?

BONNIE

A horrible old man reeking of alcohol
and urine. And this other ...
horrible man said he used two pieces
together to attack.

Coffee in a cup is handed down and across the tiers to Fred.

FRED

He moved the pieces around with a
drunk at the park, is that what you're
saying?

BONNIE

He plays chess, Fred.

FRED

He doesn't even tie his shoes.

She doesn't claim to understand it, she's just reporting the
facts. Her husband smiles to himself and glances back down at
his work while Josh, shoe laces dangling, notes the hit on his
scoresheet.

23. OMITTED

23.

24. OMITTED

24.

25. INT. WAITZKIN APARTMENT - MORNING

25.

Fred rummages through a closet piled high with junk. His daughter, hiding behind a rack of old clothes, suddenly throws them aside. Clutching his heart in mock horror --

FRED

Oh, you scared me.

She laughs with delight and hides again. Fred sifts through a box and eventually pulls out an old chess set. Katya lunges out from behind the clothes again and Fred again clutches his heart.

FRED

Oh, you scared me.

26. INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

26.

Josh at the table with a variety-pack box of cereal and some toys. His sister runs in with a rusted top. *

KATYA *

Look what I found. *

FRED

Look what I found.

Fred sets the chess box on the table. The lettering-design is from the 1950's. The corners are slit. He lifts the top revealing a clutter of very plain chessmen and a checkered board. *

FRED

Want to play a game?

JOSH

(pause) *

Why?

Thrown by his son's apparent lack of interest, Fred glances over to Bonnie. She shrugs. !

FRED

For fun.

Josh condescends a glance into the box and fingers the pieces like an antique dealer sifting through worthless junk at a thrift store.

JOSH

Let's go to a dealership instead and get some brochures. *

(CONTINUED)

26. CONTINUED:

26.

FRED
(hopelessly)
Bonnie --

BONNIE
Josh, your Dad wants to see you play
like with the ... men in the park.

FRED
It'll be fun. Then we'll go to the
dealership. Okay?

*
*

27. INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

27.

Perched on two thick Manhattan phone books, Josh gains an
overview of the four neat rows of chessmen.

FRED
Go easy on me, it's been a while since
I played.

Josh smiles politely and advances a pawn. Fred brings out a
knight. Josh slides a bishop to the far edge of the board and
glances out the window. After studying the position for several
moments, Fred realizes he can take the bishop with his other
knight and does so throwing a look across the room to his wife.

Josh hardly seems to notice the loss of his man and makes each
successive move with a cavalier disregard for strategy. His
father's moves come after more deliberation, often resulting in
a capture.

FRED
Checkmate.

*

JOSH
Oh ... yeah, you're right.

*

FRED
Sorry. Want to try again?

JOSH
(shrugs)
Okay.

*
*
*

TIME CUT TO:

28. FRED, CHIN IN HIS HANDS, studying a confusing array of
chessmen mid-game. Josh sets his own chin on his hands, more
though, it seems, out of boredom. Katya, watching from the
couch, sets her chin in her hands. Fred suddenly makes a
discovery --

28.

(CONTINUED)

28. CONTINUED:

28.

FRED

This is checkmate again. I got you here.

He points out to his son how, no matter where it might try to hide, his king can't escape.

JOSH

Oh, yeah.
(Fred shrugs, Sorry)
Can we go to the dealership now?

FRED

Yeah, sure, pee and get your coat.

29. INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

29.

Putting on his own coat, Fred watches Bonnie washing the breakfast dishes, all but ignoring him.

*
*

FRED

Yeah, I know, I should've let him win one. I gave him every opportunity.

BONNIE

He wasn't trying to win.

FRED

(pause)

Oh, no?

She shakes her head, keeps working.

*

FRED

Come on, Bonnie.

BONNIE

What, it doesn't matter.

!

FRED

No, say what you mean.

BONNIE

You don't get it.

(he doesn't)

He doesn't want to beat his daddy.

*
*

Fred has to laugh, but the look on her face says it's true. He sighs and takes off his coat.

30. INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

30.

Josh bounds down the stairs, ready to go out. His father's lining up the chessmen again.

*
*

FRED

One more, Josh.

JOSH

Dad --

FRED

Your Mom wants us (to).

*

BONNIE

(appearing)

No, I don't.

*

FRED

She thinks you're throwing the game. Do you know what that means, throwing the game?

(Josh doesn't)

Really try this time.

*

JOSH

I was trying.

FRED

I know. One more, just for fun.

Josh checks with his mom with a glance.

BONNIE

It's just a game, Josh, it's okay to beat him, you won't hurt his feelings.

*

Fred rolls his eyes. Josh sighs and approaches the table, reverses the king and queen his father set up wrong.

*
*

JOSH

It's this way.

*
*

He comes around, lifts the heavy phone books off the chair and places them on the floor. He sits down, lower now, at the same level as the chessmen. He pushes a pawn and peers through the pieces intently and Fred glances across to his wife, a little taken aback by the position his son has assumed. Ominously, she raises an eyebrow.

*
*
*
*
*
*

TIME CUT TO:

31. TWO CAPTURED PAWNS, one black, one white, next to the board. 31. *
Tight on Fred, alone at the board, concentrating long and hard *
before venturing a hesitant move and studying that position
for several moments, making sure to keep a finger on the piece.

32. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - SAME TIME - DAY 32.
Josh and his sister on the floor playing Candyland, drawing
color cards and the occasional gum drop or ice cream float.

FRED O.S.
Your move, Josh.

Josh gets up, hurries out the door, along the hall, down the
stairs -

33. INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY 33.
- into the living room, captures a pawn with his queen with *
hardly a glance at the board, sets it next to the other black *
pawn on the table, and hurries out again. Fred stares after *
him, then back down at this new threat to his beleaguered
knight.

34. INT. KITCHEN - LATER - DAY 34.
Josh on the phone to a friend, hand buried in a box of animal
cookies.

JOSH
I can't, I'm playing chess with my
Dad ... chess ... it's a game, like
Monopoly.

FRED O.S.
Josh?

JOSH
Don't hang up.

He sprints out of the room, then back in not three seconds later
and picks up the receiver. Into it --

JOSH
Hi.

35. INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

35. *

Josh's chair is empty. There are now eight captured black pieces to the one white pawn. Fred puzzles over his next move while his daughter clomps around.

*
*
*

FRED

Katya, do you mind?

She stops making noise, but somehow it's just as distracting. From the couch, where she sits reading the paper and enjoying Fred's discomfort -

*
*
*

BONNIE

Katya, your dad's trying to think.

KATYA

Why?

BONNIE

(with a laugh)

I don't know.

Fred glances over at her long-sufferingly before timidly advancing a pawn.

FRED

Your move, Josh.

JOSH O.S.

I'm in the bathtub.

FRED

I'll wait.

(to Bonnie)

Jesus, what the hell time is it?

Late afternoon light streams in.

*

JOSH O.S.

Dad?

FRED

Yeah?

A35. INT. UPSTAIRS HALL - SAME TIME

A35.

Down the hall, beyond the door at the end of it, Josh's head, just above the rim of the tub, can be glimpsed.

JOSH

Did you move that pawn?

(CONTINUED)

A35. CONTINUED:

A35.

FRED O.S.
I moved a pawn, yeah.

JOSH
Yeah, that one. Move my horse
in front of my king.

*
*

B35. INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUED

B35.

FRED
Your knight?

JOSH O.S.
Yeah.

FRED
Okay.

JOSH O.S.
Did you do it?

FRED
Yeah.

JOSH O.S.
Can we go out now?

FRED
The game's not over, Josh.

(CONTINUED)

B35. CONTINUED:

B35.

JOSH O.S.

Yes, it is.

Fred stares down at the board, then off in the direction of the bathroom, then over to Bonnie and the smug look on her face, and finally dumbly down at the board again.

Moving slowly in on the chess pieces -

JOSH'S VOICE

Bobby Fischer was six when his mother moved the family to a small apartment near Ebbetts Field.

36. The image of the chessmen dissolves into the same black and white photograph as before, of chessmen on a board under the concentrated gaze of BOBBY FISCHER, head in his large hand. 36.

JOSH'S VOICE

At night, when the traffic noise died down, he could hear the roar of the crowd from the stadium.

37. There's no roar now; it's absolutely silent as the image of Fischer is replaced by an old photograph of a four-story brick building above a candy store in Brooklyn, circa 1950. 37.

JOSH'S VOICE

His sister brought home games to amuse him while their mother was at work. Monopoly. Parcheesi. Chess.

38. SILENT NEWSREEL FOOTAGE of the Brooklyn Dodgers, taking batting practice in their baggy uniforms. 38.

JOSH'S VOICE

They learned how to move the pieces from the instructions inside the box.

39. Now there's a faint roar of a crowd as the image of the ballplayers dissolves back to the photograph of the brick building, moving in toward a window on the third floor. 39.

JOSH'S VOICE

Even though she was five years older, she was soon no match for him. It became more interesting for him to play against himself. He'd play both sides of the board equally hard, careful to be fair ...

40. THE PHOTOGRAPH OF FISCHER AGAIN, close on his eyes, staring intently at the chess position below him. 40.

(CONTINUED)

40. CONTINUED:

40.

JOSH'S VOICE
... but he always won.

FADE TO BLACK

41. EXT. CARNEGIE HALL - DAY

41.

Josh and his father emerge from a taxi and disappear into the building's Seventh Avenue entrance.

*
*

42. INT. CARNEGIE HALL, UPSTAIRS - DAY

42.

Cacophony of echoing sounds and music. Stage mothers and fathers loitering and smoking outside hardwood-floored rehearsal halls. As Josh and Fred move along the corridor, they glimpse through the doorways children in leotards, tap shoes and with clarinets.

They reach a door at the end of the hall obstructed by an old crone of a woman with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth. A sign identifies what lies beyond as the Manhattan Chess Club.

*
*

FRED

Excuse us.

The woman considers the man and the boy with the bag of Gummi Bears a long moment before stepping aside, allowing them passage.

*
*

43. INT. MANHATTAN CHESS CLUB - CONTINUOUS - DAY

43.

Yellowing photographs of unsmiling men look down from crooked, dusty picture frames. Cigarette smoke cloaks the deeper recesses of the club. Worn Victorian furniture sits on unpolished wooden floors.

*
*
*
*

Fred surveys the shadowy room and its denizens hunched over oak-and-mahogany chess tables. Josh notices a Coke machine.

!

JOSH

Can I have a Coke?

Fred hands him some change and he moves off, passing a disheveled man in a wrinkled corduroy jacket with a mop and bucket of cleaning supplies, and -

*
*
*

CLUB MEMBER 1

What're you doing -

*

CLUB MEMBER 2

J'adoube.

*

CLUB MEMBER 1

J'adoube? You moved the piece.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

43. CONTINUED:

43.

CLUB MEMBER 2

I did not move the piece, I adjusted
the piece. J'adoube.

*
*
*

Fred's glance finds the table where the two men sit, one
of them holding the clock at arm's length away from the other.

CLUB MEMBER 1

You moved the piece, you took it back.

*

CLUB MEMBER 2

I adjusted the piece.

*

CLUB MEMBER 1

You moved the piece, you're trying to
steal the game, I had a won game.

*
*

CLUB MEMBER 2

I adjusted the piece.

*

CLUB MEMBER 1

I know what kind of guy you are -

*
*

CLUB MEMBER 2

Give me the clock -

*
*

CLUB MEMBER 1

You're the kind of guy when you were a
kid you stole money from your mother's
purse.

CLUB MEMBER 2

Bruce!

CLUB MEMBER 1

Bruce!

Fred watches for Bruce, whoever Bruce is, to respond to his name
and come forth to mediate the dispute. But he doesn't. Indeed, *
the only club employee present appears to be the janitor and he
completely ignores the squabble.

Josh wanders over to a sallow-faced regular sitting alone in a
far corner, restructuring a game from an old issue of Chess *
Life. *

JOSH

Want to play?

Glancing up to see who has spoken, the man's sunken eyes stall
at the bag of Gummi Bears in the boy's hand.

REGULAR

Can I have one of those?

(CONTINUED)

43. CONTINUED:

43.

Josh hands him the bag. The man carefully extracts a Gummi Bear, looks up again and mouths "two?" He gets a nod, takes another and returns the bag. Josh hands him a can of Coke.

JOSH

Can you open this for me?

Fred notices the janitor on the phone now and takes a closer look. There's a scarf draped around his shoulders Fred hadn't noticed before, like veneer on an aristocrat who's hit rock bottom.

PANDOLFINI

(wearily into the phone)

Who you with again ...? The Hadassah chapter in Staten Island ...

(he tries not to groan out loud)

What'd you have in mind? Lecture, exhibition ... ?

FRED

(apologetic whisper)

I'm looking for Bruce Pandolfini.

Pandolfini gestures, Wait.

PANDOLFINI

(into phone)

What are you prepared to pay?

(to himself, tired)

Thirty dollars. Do you have any idea what I'm accustomed to getting for a lecture?

He sighs at the insulting offer and endures the caller's many excuses for why the chapter can't pay more.

PANDOLFINI

Yeah, okay, I'll be there ... I'm agreeing to the thirty dollars ...
yeah, I have it ... yeah, bye.

He finished scribbling the address, hangs up and stares at the phone, then blankly at Fred, still thinking about the call. Eventually his look says, What.

FRED

I work for a newspaper. I was -

PANDOLFINI

I don't know where Bobby Fischer is.

(CONTINUED)

43. CONTINUED:

43.

The haggard chess club manager/janitor steps past Fred who stares after him puzzled by the non-sequitur. He watches as the man moves around the room dumping ashtrays, then approaches again.

FRED

I was talking to the guy at my paper
who writes the chess column. He told
me I could find Bruce Pandolfini here.
Are you him?

Pandolfini neither confirms nor denies it, which Fred takes as affirmation.

FRED

I'm looking for a teacher for my son.

PANDOLFINI

I don't teach anymore.

FRED

He was sure you did.

PANDOLFINI

I don't.

Pandolfini dismisses Fred unceremoniously by carrying on with his chores. Distracted, though, by incessant clock-banging across the club, he glances over:

Across the room, a few of the regulars have wandered over to watch the game of blitz played furiously by the boy whose untied shoes don't even reach the floor. As Fred comes past -

PANDOLFINI

Why do you want your son to play
chess?

FRED

I don't. He does. He taught himself.

PANDOLFINI

Is that right.

FRED

In Washington Square.

PANDOLFINI

Is that right. And you let him do
that.

Fred has had enough. Almost. As Pandolfini comes past with the wastebasket of cigarette butts -

(CONTINUED)

43. CONTINUED:

43.

FRED

He enjoys it.

Pandolfini nods to himself, Yeah, sure, and heads for his "office." Across the club, Fred appears at the table Josh plays at.

FRED

Come on, Josh, let's go.

JOSH

Just a second.

Pandolfini moves to his desk to sift through the mail, but can't shut out the sure slam of the pieces and the swatting of the clock. He resists looking again, but the sounds themselves tell more of the story than he wants to hear.

Suddenly it's still as Josh's opponent stares at an intolerable predicament. Finally, without a word, he knocks down his own king. Josh glances to his father, uncertain of the meaning.

FRED

He's resigning the game to you.
Let's go.

Josh gets up from the table and starts to leave, but then steps back and holds out the last of the Gummi Bears. The man stares at them and the boy, struck by his kindness, and gratefully accepts them.

REGULAR

Thank you.

Pandolfini wedges his mop against the men's room door. Behind him, he can hear the receding footsteps of the newspaper man and his son leaving the club. He gets down on his hands and knees and begins scrubbing out a toilet.

44. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY

44. *

Boys on bicycles race through the chess circle past hustlers playing for crack- and Chinese food money. A crowd has gathered around the table Josh and Vinnie sit at playing blitz. Their hands dart over the board knocking over pieces and hitting the clock at an alarming pace. Fred's among the curious spectators, unable to completely disguise the pride he feels watching his son.

VINNIE

Ooh, don't split your pawns like that
-- people'll think you're a patzer
splitting pawns.

(CONTINUED)

44. CONTINUED:

44.

Pandolfini appears at the edge of the crowd, worn leather satchel in hand, and watches with the calm glance of a man who just happened to be passing by on his way home. Israel Zilber notices him, knows him, nods hello and gestures with a slight tip of his head toward Josh.

ZILBER

Young Fischer.

Pandolfini shrugs. Zilber shrugs. If they hadn't, in fact, been waiting for the last twenty years for the "young Fischer" to appear, the New Messiah, they could perhaps shrug it off convincingly.

VINNIE

That's a passive move, Josh, and
you're going to pay for it. Right now
- boom -

(he takes a pawn)
Don't let me catch you doing that
again. Never play defensive. Always
attack. Even when you retreat,
attack.

Josh mounts a brave attack behind enemy lines. Vinnie parries. Josh keeps coming at him and the pieces fly.

VINNIE

That's good, that's better, I'm in
trouble.

Fred notices the chess club manager and smiles to himself; the guy couldn't stay away, he had to see it with his own eyes. Tight on Pandolfini watching.

45. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - NIGHT

45.

Josh and his little sister inside the "fort," a flashlight in her hand illuminating a chess board. Josh is explaining, in a whisper, how the game works.

JOSH

There's no dice telling you where you
have to move. It's great, you can
make them go wherever you want. It's
like painting a picture.

He finishes making six moves forming a symmetrical wall of chessmen. He motions her to get down lower to look through the pieces at board level.

JOSH

Look at that. Now nothing can get in.

*
*
*
*
*

46. We move past and around the figures, like huge sculptures planted in a dark garden, throwing long shadows - until the spell is broken by his mother's voice - 46. *

BONNIE O.S.
You sneak in here again, Katya?
Come on out, it's way past bedtime,
say good night to your brother. *

47. The girl climbs out saying good night, and pads out of the room. Bonnie starts to follow. 47. *

JOSH
Mom?

She watches him slide the chessboard to the foot of the bed, careful not to upset the pieces, and waits for the rest. *

JOSH
Does Vinnie sleep in the park?

BONNIE
(pause)
To be honest with you I have no idea
where he lives. *

JOSH
Because I was thinking. Maybe he could
sleep in my top bunk instead. Then
when I'm old enough to sleep in it, he
could sleep down here. *

Josh looks to his mother for approval of the idea. He's absolutely serious, concerned for Vinnie's welfare.

BONNIE
You have a good heart. And that's the
most important thing in the world. *

She leans in, kisses his forehead, closes up the fort and switches off the flashlight.

BONNIE
Good night.

JOSH
Good night, Mom. *

48. EXT. 14TH STREET - NIGHT 48.

Music blares as Fred moves uneasily through garish fluorescent light spilling out of discount stores selling cheap clothes and radios and toys. He navigates past vendors hawking jewelry and books, and 3-card monte dealers and shills working in pairs and threes at easily disposed of cardboard tables.

(CONTINUED)

48. CONTINUED:

48.

He passes a store with the same address as that on the piece of paper in his hand. He sees a door printed with -

*
*

Bar Point: House of Backgammon

*

It's blocked by racks of T-shirts. In order to get to the stairs behind it he has to go through the store.

*
*

49. OMITTED

49. *

50. INT. HOUSE OF BACKGAMMON - NIGHT

50.

Scores of players under a layer of smoke sit at cafeteria-style tables sighing, saying "shhh," moving a piece, pushing a time clock, writing on a score sheet, but mainly just sitting on hard plastic chairs staring and thinking.

Fluorescent tubes, some of them out, dangle from the ceiling. The rugs on the floor are torn, the paint on the walls peeling. Broken windows let in the din of buses and trucks and ghetto blasters cruising up Sixth Avenue but little air.

*

PANDOLFINI O.S.

Glad you could make it.

Coming around from behind Fred, he claps a hand on his shoulder, startling him. He's cheerful beyond explanation, a changed man.

PANDOLFINI

How's it going?

FRED

All right.

PANDOLFINI

Great. That's great. So what do you think? Ever been to a tournament before?

*
*

He gestures grandly to the dilapidated room and the tables of frowning men. Fred doesn't know what to think; he feels lucky just having made it up here alive.

FRED

No.

PANDOLFINI

Ah, well, you're in luck then, this is one of the most prestigious. The talent gathered here's the strongest in the country. Everybody's here.

Fred nods uncertainly.

(CONTINUED)

50. CONTINUED:

50.

PANDOLFINI
You want a Coke or something?

*

TIME CUT TO:

51. AT A TABLE NEAR THE WINDOWS, pairs of men sit opposite one another, eyes cast down. Sipping from a Coke, Pandolfini points out to Fred a dark-haired man in his thirties -

51. *

PANDOLFINI
John Fedorowitz. Won the New York
Open in 1989 and the Wikanzee
International in 1990.

*
*
*

Moving to the player next to him, a slightly-built young man with wire-rim glasses sitting on folded legs in his chair as if doing yoga.

*
*
*

PANDOLFINI
Joel Benjamin. Former U.S. champion,
among the six highest rated players in
the country.

*
*
*

His fingers belie his serene pose, moving with a will of their own, wrapping around each other, going into his mouth, quivering indecisively above a rook.

*
*
*

PANDOLFINI
Roman Dzindzichashvili. Two-time U.S.
champion. Few years ago he was ranked
among the top ten players in the world.

*
*
*

Tight on Roman, a large man with a dark beard and an intense stare.

*
*

PANDOLFINI
Asa Hoffmann ...

*

Close on a thin man about Fred's age with black hair.

*

PANDOLFINI
He's the son of two lawyers. Grew up
on Park Avenue and went to Horace Mann
and Columbia before dropping out to
play chess full time.

Hoffmann stares at the board in front of him with a long painful stillness

PANDOLFINI
He plays about two hundred tournament
games a year.

(CONTINUED)

51. CONTINUED:

51.

Hoffmann suddenly bounds from the table as if suddenly unchained. He hasn't won; just made a relatively decent move.

PANDOLFINI

Asa -

Hoffmann responds, comes over beside Pandolfini, yet his eyes remain fixed on his opponent at the table. He doesn't even notice Fred.

PANDOLFINI

What do you make at the tournaments all together, about two thousand dollars a year?

HOFFMANN

Look at that, I got him thinking ... I got him thinking ... maybe I'm gonna win a pawn.

He leaves without answering Pandolfini's question and paces around the table in hopes of distracting his opponent.

PLAYER O.S.

(a desperate whisper)

Bruce. Bruce.

Pandolfini glances to a heavily-perspiring player at another table. The man tears himself away from his game, hurries over and whispers --

PLAYER

My last published rating in Chess Life was eight points too low. How could they do that to me?

The man doesn't wait for an explanation; he knows Pandolfini doesn't have one. He hurries back to his place at the table and mops at his brow with a soiled handkerchief.

TIME CUT TO:

52. A TABLE WITHOUT A CHESS BOARD on it; Coke cans and half-eaten pizza slices and empty potato chip bags instead. Asa Hoffmann's there, eating a Butterfinger and explaining more to Fred than Pandolfini in a staccato cadence --

52.

HOFFMANN

The chess hustling business is bad, down with the economy and OTB and Lotto. Lotto has hurt. It's not a good game for gambling anyway. Chess players are too rational, too conservative. You have to find a true

(CONTINUED)

52. CONTINUED:

52.

HOFFMAN (cont.)
compulsive who happens to play chess.
Someone who's essentially a masochist
and enjoys being humiliated. One of
my best customers was a rabbi. While
I beat him he cursed and screamed,
begging me to have mercy on him. I'd
tell him, "What a fish you are, I'm
gonna crush you." I wasted him over
and over. I took a lot of money from
him. Unfortunately he's dead now.

He shrugs, Tough break, that.

PANDOLFINI
(for Fred's benefit)
You used to play Fischer.

HOFFMANN
(to Fred)
I used to play Fischer all the time.
I lost hundreds of games to him at two
dollars a shot. I was Fischer's fish.

And he's proud of it, nostalgic even. Quickly, though, he snaps
out of it.

HOFFMANN
But that was a long time ago -
Bruce, some backgammon before I have to
get back? Dollar a point?

TIME CUT TO:

53. COKE CANS, BROKEN GLASS, soggy candy wrappers and wads of
toilet paper floating in puddles outside the men's room.
The place has cleared out pretty much, the tournament over.
A player steps through the water on his way out, passing
Pandolfini and Fred at one of the tables.

53.

PANDOLFINI
How'd you do?

PLAYER
Good. Two wins and two draws, tied for
third place. After expenses ... I
only lost a little.

PANDOLFINI
That is good.

Pandolfini nods, appreciatively. The young man nods, Yeah, and
leaves. A silence before -

(CONTINUED)

53. CONTINUED:

53.

FRED

Clearly you had me come here so I could see all this. But if you really wanted me to say no to letting my son play, you wouldn't have bothered. You want me to think you want me to say no, but you actually want me to say yes.

PANDOLFINI

You have no idea what I want.

Pandolfini sips from a Coke can and surveys the debris all around them. Long silence before -

FRED

What do you want?

PANDOLFINI

What is chess, do you think? People who play for fun, or not at all, dismiss it as a game. The ones who devote their lives to it - for the most part - insist it's a science.

Fred doesn't bother offering his opinion; he knows Pandolfini's not really asking.

PANDOLFINI

It's neither. Bobby Fischer got underneath it like no one before him and found at its center - art.

(pause)

I've spent my life trying to play like him. Most of these guys have, studying every move he ever made. But we're like forgers. We're competent fakes.

(pause)

Your son isn't. He creates like Fischer. He sees like him. Inside.

FRED

(pause)

You can tell that by watching him play some drunks in the -

PANDOLFINI

Yes.

Fred's skepticism is challenged by Pandolfini's resolute tone. Silence. Then -

(CONTINUED)

53. CONTINUED:

53.

PANDOLFINI

You want to know what I want, I'll tell you what I want. I want back what Bobby Fischer took with him when he disappeared.

Fred glances around the dilapidated room, his eyes eventually settling on the only other men in it -- two guys still hunched over a chess board in the corner.

PANDOLFINI

Yeah, look at that, they've been at it two days straight, eating pizza and candy bars and they can't stop even though it's over. Don't they have any place to go? I happen to know they both have families at home.

Fred watches the mens' eyes darting and blinking, looking for new combinations and possibilities, even though there's no longer anything tangible left at stake.

PANDOLFINI

You're his father, it's your decision.

Fred's glance shifts to a young woman in shorts tiptoe-ing across the soggy putrid rug. She ineffectually lays newspaper over the mess.

A53. EXT/INT. THOMPSON STREET CHESS SHOP - DAY

A53. *

Inside, beyond a window display of exotic chess pieces, Fred purchases a Staunton set.

*
*

54. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - MORNING

54.

A basketball arcs in slow-motion toward a hoop as if through water. In fact, it is in water, propelled by a current as Josh pushes the plunger of the aquatic toy in his hands.

FRED O.S.

Josh, I want you to meet a friend of mine.

Josh glances up. There's a man in a worn corduroy jacket and long scarf standing beside his father in the doorway.

PANDOLFINI

Hi, Josh.

FRED

This is Bruce.

(CONTINUED)

54. CONTINUED:

54.

JOSH
(pause)

Hi.

Josh returns his attention to his toy. Pandolfini glances to Fred, his cue to leave.

FRED
Yeah, okay, I guess I'll just ...
let you two ... I'll be downstairs ...

He shrugs and leaves. As Pandolfini moves around the boy's bedroom taking an inventory of the kinds of things in it, Josh considers him with a measure of suspicion. All over the floor are old toys and other things he's taken apart.

PANDOLFINI
(off-handedly)
I love water basketball.

55. INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

55.

Fred comes past a beautiful Staunton chess set purchased expressly for the occasion of this first lesson, no doubt, and set up neatly in advance for the teacher. He notices a king and a queen on the wrong squares, corrects the mistake, and crosses toward the -

56. INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS - MORNING

56.

- where Katya "cooks" breakfast on a little stove. To Bonnie, cooking on the real stove, as he comes in -

FRED
They're fine.

BONNIE
You left them up there?

FRED
They're fine. Fast friends.

KATYA
Bacon, Daddy?

FRED
Sure, honey.

As she "cooks" it for him in a bright yellow skillet. Fred toys distractedly with a musical robot on the table.

(CONTINUED)

56. CONTINUED:

56.

FRED

Supposedly he used to really be ...
someone. Some kind of ... master
level something or other.

BONNIE

Used to?

Katya puts a plate of toast and bacon in front of him.

FRED

Thanks honey. He doesn't play
anymore. On the circuit or whatever
you call it.

The robot won't stop. Fred knocks at it to shut it off.

57. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - LATER - DAY

57.

Tight on Josh and Pandolfini concentrating on an unseen board
between them. Finally -

PANDOLFINI

Professor Plum, in the conservatory,
with a rope.

Josh checks the solution and somberly shakes his head, 'no.'
Pandolfini groans. Neither notices Fred passing by the doorway
and glancing in briefly on his way down the hall.

58. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATER - DAY

58.

Fred stares blankly at the half-written sports column on his
computer screen, types a few words. From elsewhere in the
house comes Pandolfini's voice -

PANDOLFINI O.S.

Questron? You have Questron? I love
that.

Fred sighs and tries to write.

59. INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER - DAY

59.

The chess set, untouched. Nearby, pacing slowly, Fred glances
from the ceiling to his watch and up again. He hears footsteps
coming down the stairs, but it turns out to be Katya.

60. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - LATER - DAY

60.

Josh moves comfortably through the debris of his room,
explaining to Pandolfini how certain things work, where he got
them, how he never throws anything out. He shows him a Nerf
crossbow, slips its three arrows on his fingers like long
fingernails.

61. INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME - DAY

61.

Fred back at the kitchen table, sipping coffee and glancing through the Sports page. Bonnie buttons their daughter's coat; they're going out. *

BONNIE

Are you paying him by the hour?

Fred nods glumly without looking up.

62. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - LATER - DAY

62.

Down on the floor again with a Simon toy, Josh repeats its increasingly complex sequence of tones. Down on the floor with him, Pandolfini watches. He's starting to get the picture. *

63. INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

63.

Not far from the chessboard -- still untouched -- Pandolfini slips into his jacket and wraps the scarf around his neck.

PANDOLFINI

I need to talk to your dad a minute,
I'll see you next week, okay?

JOSH

Okay.

PANDOLFINI

I really had a great time. *

JOSH *

Me too. *

Josh shakes his hand. *

PANDOLFINI *

Bye. *

JOSH *

Bye. *

Josh leaves the room, climbs up the stairs. Bonnie comes in from outside with Katya and glances to her husband, surprised that the chess teacher is still here; the sun's almost down. *

PANDOLFINI

The first lesson went very well I think.

FRED

(pause)

Were you guys talking about chess up there? *

(CONTINUED)

63. CONTINUED:

63.

PANDOLFINI
(trying to recall)
No, it didn't come up.

Pandolfini shrugs; Fred stares at him dumbly. Behind them, Josh *
peeks into the room from the hall. *

PANDOLFINI
So I'll see you next Saturday.

Fred isn't so sure. He can't bring himself to nod in agreement *
but does offer his hand. Pandolfini shakes it but doesn't move; *
he stands there like a room service waiter waiting for a tip. *

BONNIE
(prompting)
Fred.

FRED
(to Pandolfini)
Oh, yeah, sorry.

He takes out his wallet, checks his watch and almost groans. He
hands over two hundred and forty dollars.

PANDOLFINI
That's great.
(to Bonnie)
So long.

As Pandolfini heads for the door, Josh climbs back up the *
stairs. Calling out loudly - *

PANDOLFINI
So what do you think, Josh, some Pac Man *
next week? Pac Man and pizza? *

JOSH O.S.
Great. 1

Pandolfini lets himself out. Giving Fred a look that says it *
all, Bonnie turns and leaves to go upstairs. Alone in the living *
room, staring at the untouched checkered board and faceless
chessmen, Fred shakes his head in dismay.

FRED
(to himself)
The chess hustling business is bad?

64. INT. MANHATTAN CHESS CLUB - DAY

64.

The towering form of an ivory knight glides to a halt on a black
square the size of a city block. A God-like hand lets go and
rises heavenward.

(CONTINUED)

64. CONTINUED:

64.

PANDOLFINI O.S.

Mate is four moves from the position
in front of you. Don't move until you
figure it out in your head.

Tight on Josh's eyes riveted to a point straight ahead. Moving slowly down, the crowns of kings and queens and the turrets of castles jut up from below and rise as if lifted by some unseen and powerful force. Josh's dark eyes peer through the pieces long and intently before shifting slightly up.

PANDOLFINI O.S.

Don't look to me for a hint.

JOSH

I can't do it without moving the
pieces.

PANDOLFINI O.S.

Yes, you can. Clear the lines of men
in your head one at a time and the
king'll be left standing alone like a
guy on a street corner.

Josh's eyes dart from piece to piece, trying to clear each line, force each counter-move and remember it, trying to leave the king standing alone.

PANDOLFINI

Here, I'll make it easier for you.

He rakes the pieces from the board with a sweep of his arm. Josh stares at them as they scatter across the floor - though no one else in the club does - then up at Pandolfini as if he must be insane. *

PANDOLFINI

There.

Josh looks back to the board, and that's all it is now, just sixty-four squares with nothing on it. He studies it, or rather the position that used to be there, and finally -

JOSH

Knight to f8.

PANDOLFINI O.S.

Yes!

Josh takes in a breath like someone held long under water suddenly breaking through to the surface. Pandolfini is at last revealed across the table, smiling proudly at his young student.

PANDOLFINI

Give me your book.

(CONTINUED)

64. CONTINUED:

64.

Josh excitedly hands over his sticker book. It's filled with descriptions of games already played and colorful dinosaur and Super Hero stickers, stamps, and Easter seals. Pandolfini digs into his satchel, comes up with a stegosaurus sticker and plants it on a page. Josh admires the sticker itself more than the move it rewards. *

PANDOLFINI

I want to show you something else.

He hunts through his worn satchel. Josh peers around the edge of the table trying to get a look inside. Pandolfini locates a document finally and pulls it out carefully. *

PANDOLFINI

This is very rare.

(doesn't show it) *

It says -- "Master Chess Certificate. Awarded to -- there's a blank here for a name -- for Highest Achievement, on this day of -- blank -- Nineteen hundred and -- blank."

(as he hands it across the table) *

Careful with it. *

Josh takes a look. It's about as official-looking as the diploma the Wizard of Oz gave to the Scarecrow, but to Josh it looks like the Declaration of Independence. He handles it carefully, like it might crumble in his small hands. *

PANDOLFINI

It's a mysterious and powerful thing. It's only been given out ... I don't know, a few times in history, and only then to those who achieve a lot of Master Class Points. Then there's a big ceremony ... and so on. *

JOSH

How do you get Master Class Points? *

PANDOLFINI

You earn them. You just earned ten for that knight to f8.

As Pandolfini makes a notation in Josh's lesson book, he intones solemnly --

(CONTINUED)

64. CONTINUED:

64.

PANDOLFINI

Ten ... Master Class ... Points.

*

-- returns the lesson book and gestures to the certificate. Josh reluctantly hands it over and Pandolfini slips it back through the jaw of his satchel.

PANDOLFINI

Only a few men in history ... but I have a feeling.

He smiles knowingly. Josh beams, thrilled with the idea of someday receiving such a "rare and mysterious" award.

65. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

65.

A Knick charges up the alley for a lay-up, collides with Magic Johnson and hits the deck - all in absolute silence. A referee blows at a whistle but no sound comes out.

FRED

Listen to this -

Fred and Bonnie propped up on pillows in bed, neither paying attention to the game on the muted television. She's reading a magazine. He's reading from a library book called, "Bobby Fischer vs. the Rest of the World." (-c- Brad Darrach)

FRED

(reading)

"Bobby wears a business suit about as naturally as a python wears a necktie. He stands six one, weighs close to 190, and a padded jacket makes his shoulders seem so wide his head looks like a pea sitting on a ruler, someone said."

On the TV, ten huge men in shorts with heads like peas sitting on rulers silently sprint downcourt.

FRED

"He functions like Frankenstein's creature, a man made of fragments connected by wires and animated by a monstrous will. When the will collapses or the wires cross, Bobby cannot execute the simplest acts. Once, when I asked him a question while he was eating, his circuits got so befuddled that he jabbed his fork into his cheek."

Fred glances over to Bonnie amused, then back down at the book (but never to the TV).

(CONTINUED)

65. CONTINUED:

65.

FRED

"But when he sits at the board, a big dangerous cat slips into his skin ..."

66. Moving slowly away, past the TV and the Knicks traipsing off the court at the Garden, past the dresser and the laundry hamper, and retreating out the bedroom door ...

66.

FRED O.S.

"His chest swells. His green eyes glow. All the life in his body flows and he looks wild and beautiful ..."

67. Moving slowly down the darkened hallway and into Josh's room, past the nightlight and cars on the floor, pushing through the hanging sheet and into the "fort," closer and closer toward Josh, tucked in under his covers, asleep.

67.

FRED O.S.

"Sprawled with lazy power, eyes half closed, he listens to the imaginary rustle of moving pieces as a tiger lies and listens to the murmur of moving reeds ..."

A muted rustle of leaves outside Josh's window is eclipsed by the roar of a crowd -

68. EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

68.

Josh, helmeted, warms up with a bat in the on-deck circle. At the plate, one of his teammates smacks a grounder through the legs of a three and half foot third baseman and makes it all the way to second before the ball is relayed back to the infield. The coach, Fred, hollers enthusiastic praise from the sidelines.

As Josh comes up to bat, Pandolfini steps across the risers of the bleachers. In his jacket and scarf, carrying his briefcase, he looks terribly out of place. Josh spots him and waves. The chess teacher waves back and takes a seat next to Bonnie and Katya.

BONNIE

You're overdressed, Bruce.

Josh tags one and the crowd of parents and siblings goes wild. Josh rounds third and dives for home well under the throw that sails over the backstop and into the parking lot.

(CONTINUED)

68. CONTINUED:

68.

BOYS V.O.

Two, four, six, eight, who do we
appreciate - Comets, Comets - yea,
Comets!

*
*

69. EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - LATER - DAY

69.

Mitts reach a pinnacle of ascent before crashing back down on the heads of the boys who threw them.

Josh's team, the Meteors, clearly the victors, sort out the gloves on the ground as their parents envelop and congratulate them.

*

In the midst of the celebration, Josh notices the losing Comets, shoulders hunched as they slink off the field. He watches them until Bonnie and Katya and Fred and Pandolfini, hugging and patting him on the back, block his view.

*

70. INT. JOHN'S PIZZA - LATER - DAY

70. *

A C-shaped jaw-snapping creature careens through a maze eating dots of light. Huddled around the Pac Man machine are Josh, his sister, and his like-jerseyed teammates.

PANDOLFINI O.S.

His chess ideas are like pieces of his
body he's reluctant to give up.

Across the restaurant, Fred, Bonnie and Pandolfini share a table with a big silver dish of pizza.

PANDOLFINI

For instance, he simply can't cope
with being told not to bring his queen
out early in the game. Why shouldn't
he? He's won many a game in
Washington Square doing exactly that.
Why is this suddenly wrong?

FRED

You should try getting him to brush
his teeth sometime.

PANDOLFINI

What he's learning there and what
I'm trying to teach him are two very
different things. Park hustlers play
tactics, not position. They play wild
unpredictable moves, they devise traps,
some of them brilliant, to force their

*
*
*
*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

70. CONTINUED:

70.

PANDOLFINI (cont.)
opponent to think, to take that extra
second - great when there's a clock
running out in a two-minute speed game
for drug money, but it'll cost Josh
dearly in real games.

*
*
*
*
*
*

FRED
He's learning some new words.

*

PANDOLFINI
I was wondering if you could keep him
from playing there so much.

*

Fred nods and is about to say, sure, when -

*

BONNIE
No.

The men glance over at Bonnie as if only now realizing she's
sitting there with them.

BONNIE
It'd kill him not to play in the park.
He loves it.

PANDOLFINI
It just makes my job harder.

BONNIE
Then your job's harder.

Fred stares at his wife, taken aback by her tone. Her look
tells him and Pandolfini, That's final. The teacher yields with
a nod, knowing more than he knew before today: she's the one
he's going to have to contend with on these matters.

PANDOLFINI
Fine. I would though like to start
seeing him twice a week.

*
*
*

A70. INT. KATYA'S/JOSH'S BEDROOMS - THAT NIGHT

A70. *

Bonnie pulls back up the blanket her sleeping daughter has
kicked off, does the same thing for Josh, comes down the hall -

*
*

B70. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

B70. *

- into the room where Fred sits exhausted and goes into the
bathroom to wash up for bed. As much to himself -

(CONTINUED)

B70. CONTINUED:

B70. *

FRED
 Something's got to give ...
 Between the baseball and the music and
 the chess and everything else ...
 something's got to give.

BONNIE
 Let him decide.

FRED
 He's seven. He'd say school.

BONNIE
 No, he wouldn't.

Fred sits in the quiet that's broken only by the splash of
 water in the sink, too tired to get washed up himself.

FRED
 (more to himself)
 Well, something's got to give.

C70. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - DAY

C70. *

Small hands slam the lid of a case over a violin and snap the
 latches shut -

D70. INT. CLOSET - DAY

D70. *

The hands cram the violin case and a stack of sheet music
 onto a cluttered shelf.

E70. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

E70. *

As Fred throws a few items into a suitcase -

BONNIE
 Make sure his laces are tied if
 there's escalators -

A phone rings. She emerges from the bathroom with Josh's
 toiletries.

BONNIE
 And that there's seat belts in the
 cabs -

Fred answers the phone and keeps packing. Bonnie's out the
 bedroom door.

FRED
 Hello? Bruce, where are you?

71. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - DAY

71.

A suitcase. A few items of clothing in it and lots of toys. Josh adds his mitt and ball, a frisbee, Legos and stuffed animals. His mother comes in with his toothbrush and Sesame Street toothpaste.

BONNIE

It's only overnight, Josh.

He contemplates the heap of stuff in the suitcase and eventually removes the frisbee. Bonnie has to smile. Kneels down.

BONNIE

Come here.

JOSH

What.

He comes to her and she hugs him for a long moment.

BONNIE

I'm going to miss you.

JOSH

It's only overnight, Mom.

72. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME - DAY

72.

Fred on the phone to Pandolfini --

FRED

What're you talking about, we're already packed, we're like out the door -

PANDOLFINI V.O.

So unpack, what's the big deal?

FRED

It is a big deal.
(catching himself)

To him.

73. INT. PANDOLFINI'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME - DAY

73.

A claustrophobic three-room apartment decorated mainly with old newspapers and dirty clothes. The man on the phone in the robe over his clothes is clearly a bachelor.

PANDOLFINI

I don't know why I said okay in the first place.

FRED V.O.

You didn't. He wants to do this.

(CONTINUED)

73. CONTINUED:

73.

PANDOLFINI
I should've dissuaded him then.

FRED V.O.
Bruce -

PANDOLFINI
I've played in tournaments. I grew up
playing in them. They have nothing to
do with what's important -

*

74. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - INTERCUT

74.

Phone to his ear, Fred checks his watch.

PANDOLFINI V.O.
- Winning and losing, that's all
they're about.

FRED
What's wrong with that?

PANDOLFINI V.O.
It's not chess, that's what's -

FRED
Chess is art.

PANDOLFINI V.O.
That's right.

FRED
No, chess is you appreciating the
beauty of Josh's game at sixty bucks
an hour -- Will you be ready to go in
thirty minutes or not, that's what I
need to know.

He shrugs to Bonnie who has appeared back from Josh's room.

PANDOLFINI V.O.
Let me talk to him.

FRED
Josh!

75. INT. PANDOLFINI'S APARTMENT - CONTINUED

75.

There are trophies and chess mementos among the clutter in the
room, but they're old and neglected, no longer as significant to
their owner as they may have once been. Into the phone -

PANDOLFINI
Josh, hey, how you doing? You
excited? Listen, I'm not going to be
able to make it, I've got some things I
have to take care of.

76. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - INTERCUT 76.

Fred leaves the room with his suitcase past Bonnie. Josh tries to nod like he imagines an adult might if dealt such a blow, and almost manages to keep the hurt out of his voice.

JOSH

That's okay.

PANDOLFINI V.O.

I'll be thinking about you, though.
You're going to do great, I know it.

(pause)

You okay?

JOSH

Yeah.

77. INT. PANDOLFINI'S APARTMENT - INTERCUT 77.

Close on Pandolfini trying to remain upbeat.

PANDOLFINI

You have a good time, that's the main thing. And I'll see you when you get back.

JOSH V.O.

Okay. Bye.

PANDOLFINI

Don't bring your queen out too
(soon) -

But Josh has already hung up. Pandolfini sets the receiver down and sits and stares at nothing.

78. OMITTED 78.

79. INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - SYRACUSE - DAY 79.

Unseen motors draw basketball hoops up and out of the way, locking them flat against the rafters. A man on a ladder ties back gym rings. Others lug cafeteria tables across the hardwood floor and set them in place and take chessmen and clocks out of boxes. A woman lines up trophies of varying sizes on a platform. *

80. EXT/INT. SHERATON HOTEL - DAY 80.

A cab deposits Fred and his son in front of a hotel. They come in through the doors. As Fred approaches the registration desk, Josh gazes at the lobby like it's the Taj Mahal. *

JOSH

(to himself)

This is great.

A80. INT. SHERATON HALLWAY - DAY

A80.

Running ahead of his father, Josh finds their room and gets the key in the door.

B80. INT. SHERATON HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

B80. *

Josh hurries in and around the room, checking everything - the phone, the tv, the lamps, the shower, sink - reports to Fred as he comes in with the suitcases -

JOSH

Everything works.

FRED

Hey, what do you know.

81. EXT. HOTEL SWIMMING POOL - DAY

81. *

Josh can't get into the pool fast enough. He foists his towel and thongs on his father and leaps into the water already teeming with exhilarated kids.

Fred slowly circles the decking looking for an empty lounge chair and friendly face. Passing other parents at patio tables, he overhears patches of their conversations blending into one another. All are cool and all are lying:

PARENT 1

Chess isn't about living and dying, it's just a game. We don't care if he wins or not.

PARENT 2

He spends a lot of time at it, but it's time well spent. It develops logical thinking, which is important whatever he decides to do in life.

PARENT 3

She doesn't study much, there isn't the time. She leads a very well-rounded life. She just has a knack for the game. She was born with it.

PARENT 4

Are you crazy? We don't want him to grow up to be a chess player. We're just here to have fun.

Fred sees an empty chair, but before he can get to it a guy climbs out of the pool and takes it, leaving Fred standing next to another man watching the action in the pool. Just to make conversation -

(CONTINUED)

81. CONTINUED:

81.

FRED
You here for the --

CHESS FATHER
Yeah, you?

FRED
Yeah.

CHESS FATHER
What's your kid's rating?

FRED
(thrown)
I don't know that he has one. This is
our first tournament.

The guy doesn't waste any time walking away. He can't be
bothered with further conversation; Fred and his son are
nobodies.

In the pool, Josh swims over to a boy sitting timidly on the
steps. Fred notices one more empty chair, takes it but resists
the temptation to chat with the nervous-looking father on the
one next to it. Eventually, though --

KALEV
Which one's yours?

FRED
Over there by the steps.

Fred points out his son in the pool talking to the other
boy, and Kalev looks chagrined.

KALEV
That one's mine. Looks like they're
friends already.

Which means he has to deal with Fred now; which is unfortunate.

KALEV
(eventually)
What's his rating?

Fred considers telling him the truth, that he doesn't know, but
then decides to make something up --

FRED
Fifteen.

Kalev stares at him. Long pause.

KALEV
Fifteen hundred?

(CONTINUED)

81. CONTINUED:

81.

FRED
Yeah.

KALEV
How old is he?

FRED
Seven.

KALEV
Seven.
(pause)
And what?

FRED
A half .. two thirds.

KALEV
Seven and two-thirds ... Fifteen
hundred ...
(Fred nods)
Well, I doubt they'll be playing each
other, Morgan's not even rated a
thousand.
(pause)
Fifteen hundred ...

Fred nods. And on the other side of the pool, a woman at a patio
table is trying to explain something to another parent:

CHESS MOTHER
When my son's playing brilliantly, I
feel ... like the mother of Jesus.

82. INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

82.

Sixty elementary school age children, most of them boys,
climbing on gym apparatus and jockeying for position around the
trophy table, admiring the shiny statuettes.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR
I want to remind you to conduct
yourselves like adults. I don't want
any trouble and you know what I'm
talking about.

He's not speaking to the kids, he's lecturing the parents
gathered on the wooden benches lining the walls of the gym.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR
I expect you to behave yourselves.
You do that and everybody'll have a
good time.

(CONTINUED)

82. CONTINUED:

82.

They all nod, "Of course," but the director levels an icy stare at them.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR

I'm not kidding.

He turns away and several parents immediately give chase.

CHESS PARENT 2

My son can't play with these pieces.
He always uses his own pieces -

CHESS PARENT 3

(overlapping)

My daughter needs her time clock.
She'll be thrown by another clock.

The director whirls around silencing them with a look that admonishes, What did I just say? The parents shirk back, grumbling to each other:

CHESS PARENT 2

It's not fair.

CHESS PARENT 3

This is completely unfair.

83. INT. GYMNASIUM - LATER - DAY

83.

Little placards on the tables identify the little players seated at them by number. Stationed directly behind the kid across from Josh is an enormous man with a big intimidating face and arms folded across his chest like a guard or bouncer.

Josh glances meekly over his shoulder to his own less imposing father. Fred tries to say with a little pat, Don't let this guy scare you.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR

(Appendix dialog .. ending with
"start your clocks.")

That signals the start of play, which begins with gentlemanly handshakes and thirty white pawns advancing one or two squares. Black counters. Josh brings out his queen and Fred winces. The big man across from them almost guffaws out loud.

At other tables, more prudent opening moves are made. Not fifteen seconds elapse before angry voices rise above the click of the pieces against the boards --

CHESS PARENT 4

You think I didn't see that? You think I'm blind?

(CONTINUED)

83. CONTINUED:

83.

CHESS PARENT 5

I don't know what you're talking -

CHESS PARENT 4

Your ear, that's what I'm talking about. You pulled on your ear. You signalled him.

CHESS PARENT 5

I didn't pull on my ear, I scratched my ear. My ear itched, I -

CHESS PARENT 4

You pulled on your ear and my son's down a pawn.

CHESS PARENT 5

I don't appreciate being called a cheater.

*
*

CHESS PARENT 4

No? Well, get used to it because that's what you are.

The two men begin shoving one another before tournament officials can hurry over to pull them apart.

HARD CUT TO:

84. INT. GYM HALL AND LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

84. *

All the parents are herded down a hall and into the adjacent locker room. Some of them seem used to it. The gate slams shut on them ... then opens again and they rush forward. The pairing and rating sheets are tossed in like hunks of meat into the lion's cage and the gate slides shut again.

*
*
*
*
*

85. INT. GYMNASIUM - SAME TIME - DAY

85.

The kids glance among themselves, stunned that their parents have been forcibly removed from the room. It's so quiet now. So peaceful. They burst into applause.

86. INT. LOCKER ROOM - LATER - DAY

86.

Their mothers and fathers move listlessly around the room like fish in an aquarium. Some are buried in chess books.

*

Fred wanders over to the rating and pairing sheets someone has tacked to the wall and considers them. Josh's name is down at the bottom alongside some other unrated 'nobodies.'

*

(CONTINUED)

86. CONTINUED:

86.

Fred notices Kalev perched on a nearby locker room bench. His face is tight, his knuckles white, his foot anxiously tapping against the cold cement floor.

FRED

You're lucky you don't get nervous at these things.

Kalev forces a smile before returning to his vigil. Indeed, about the only parent who doesn't seem nervous is Fred. The locker room gate slides open and every face turns to it expectantly.

*
*
*

A86. INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

A86.

Fred spots Josh and his opponent turning in their score sheets at the Director's Desk. Kalev spots Morgan. As Josh joins his father -

FRED

How'd it go?

JOSH

Easy win.

87. INT. HOTEL VIDEO GAME ROOM - LATER - DAY

87.

The narrow room is packed solid with kids. A mother, with a pocket chess set in her hand, wedges through to her son.

ARCADE MOTHER

Come on, let's go, we got time to go over your endgame.

(she's ignored)

Come on, this stuff's going to rot your brain.

*

She detaches her son's hands from the controls and Josh and Morgan slide in to take over.

LOSING FATHER

Mr. Waitzkin?

Just outside the room, Fred, hanging out with Kalev, turns to a timid man who has come over.

LOSING FATHER

I was wondering if your son by any chance said anything about how my son played against him?

The man hangs on Fred's every word --

(CONTINUED)

87. CONTINUED:

87.

FRED

Yeah ... yeah, he said he played a strong game. He said it was a real tough win.

LOSING FATHER

Really.

FRED

Yeah.

LOSING FATHER

(grateful)

Thank you.

FRED

Sure.

The guy wanders off. Fred watches after him, then glances to Kalev with a shrug.

88. INT. GYMNASIUM - LATER - DAY

88.

The kids back at it, hunched over the chess boards while tournament officials (but not their parents) stroll around the gym.

89. INT. LOCKER ROOM - SAME TIME - DAY

89.

The woman who feels like the mother of Jesus doesn't right now; she's praying in a corner of the showers. The air around her is thick with tension. Fred glances at the pairing sheets on the wall. Another guy steps up beside him.

TUNA FISH FATHER

If your son wins his game and mine wins his, they'll be playing each other in the final round.

FRED

I can hardly wait.

TUNA FISH FATHER

Hey, it's just a game.

Fred nods, but knows otherwise already.

TUNA FISH FATHER

I'm gonna get a tuna fish sandwich, you want one?

FRED

No, that's all (right) -

(CONTINUED)

89. CONTINUED:

89.

TUNA FISH FATHER
I'll bring one back for you.

Before Fred can answer, the guy heads off across the room to a table where parents can buy sandwiches, M&Ms, Doritos and sodas. Noticing a beefy man he thinks he recognizes sitting alone deep in thought, Fred approaches.

FRED
Excuse me, aren't you Billy White?
You used to play fullback for Notre -

WHITE
How can you speak to me when my son
is thinking?

Fred recoils; the look the ex-football player gives him is far fiercer than anything he ever displayed on the field.

90. EXT. GYMNASIUM - LATER - DAY

90.

Josh and Fred outside, tossing a baseball back and forth between rounds. Judging from his high spirits, Josh won again. Fred seems less confident, glancing after each throw to the Tuna Fish Sandwich Father and his son studying chess moves under a tree.

FRED
Josh, maybe we should go over some
openings while we have the chance.

JOSH
I need to unwind, Dad.

Fred tosses the ball back and looks again over to Josh's little studious opponent.

91. INT. GYMNASIUM - LATER - DAY

91. †

Several kids, finished with their games, gather around the number-one board to watch Josh and his opponent, the Tuna Fish Sandwich Son, Petey. Morgan isn't among them.

*
*
*

92. INT. LOCKER ROOM - SAME TIME - DAY

92.

Fred and the Tuna Fish Father try to remain cool and civil as they pace across the cement floor. Morgan appears at the gate to the locker room and reports loudly like a newsboy --

*
*

MORGAN
Josh is in trouble, he's down another
pawn.

(CONTINUED)

92. CONTINUED:

92.

Morgan hurries back down the hall. The Tuna Fish Father glances to Fred and tries to hide his glee behind an insincere assessment --

TUNA FISH FATHER

Don't believe him, your boy'll pull it out.

Using the same reverse psychology tactic, Fred opines --

FRED

No, he's down too much material, he's gonna lose.

They pace some more. Morgan reappears at the gate with another news flash --

MORGAN

Petey just hung his rook.

He hurries off again and The Tuna Fish Father struggles to conceal his unease over this new development. Fred twists the knife --

FRED

He probably sacrificed it for position. He's probably still got the advantage.

The Tuna Fish Father agrees with an unconvincing nod and Fred buries a satisfied smile. They pace around some more until Morgan appears again.

MORGAN

It's all over.

The two fathers wait expectantly for the rest - who won - but Morgan disappears again leaving them hanging.

93. INT. GYMNASIUM - LATER - DAY

93.

Cameras flash as kids come up on stage to receive trophies and handshakes from the tournament director.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR

In fifth place - with four points -
from Hunter - (Name) - congratulations
- In fourth place - with four points -
(See Appendix) -

While waiting for Josh to receive his trophy, Fred overhears the Tuna Fish Father remarking to some other parents --

(CONTINUED)

93. CONTINUED:

93.

TUNA FISH FATHER

I'm trying to be nice. I bring him a sandwich and he pretends to be distracted and doesn't pay me. Can you believe this guy?

Fred realizes the man is talking about him, and hurries over pulling out his wallet.

FRED

I'm sorry, I didn't realize you bought it, I thought they were (free) -

TUNA FISH FATHER

- Oh, now you want to pay me.

FRED

Yeah -

TUNA FISH FATHER

Well, forget it.

Fred tries to get the guy to accept the couple of dollars he's holding out, but the guy just walks away with his son, Petey. *

FRED

No, come on, it was my mistake.

Watching after them, Fred is unaware that Josh is going up to receive the first place trophy. (Appendix dialog). Also failing to realize they hate him too - because his son beat theirs - Fred appeals to other parents standing around - *

FRED

I honestly didn't know. I thought they were free -

CHESS PARENTS

Yeah, sure.

Fred looks around hopelessly as these parents too move away recounting the story of his greed to anyone who'll listen.

CHESS PARENTS

... Now he says he didn't know, after his son wins ... that's convenient ... I heard him whispering moves when his son went to the bathroom ...

So mortified by the "Tuna Fish Episode," Fred completely misses the moment Josh is awarded his trophy.

94. INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

94.

Fred has elected not to stay the night in Syracuse, worried

(CONTINUED)

94. CONTINUED:

94.

perhaps some disgruntled parent might jump him in his sleep. Josh is asleep, on the seat across from him.

Fred replays the whole horrible tournament in his mind as he stares out the window at dark scenery rushing past ... but then glances in at the trophy tucked under Josh's arm, lifts the arm carefully, turns the trophy over in his hands ... and smiles.

JOSH'S VOICE

In school, before he dropped out,
Bobby studied chess books while
his teachers taught other things.

95. THE CLATTER OF THE TRAIN OVER THE TRACKS continues over a black and white photograph of Bobby Fischer, at 13, puzzling over a chess position with his fingers in his mouth.

95.

JOSH'S VOICE

When they told him to put his books
away, or took them away, he studied in
his head.

96. The sound of the train continues over NEWSREEL FOOTAGE FROM THE 1950's, of chimpanzees in space suits crammed into Russian and American rocket capsules, and Boy Scouts with flat tops taking an oath.

96.

JOSH'S VOICE

When a science report came back to
him once with the words NOT SATISFACTORY
written across the top, he wrote under
it, just as big, TOUGH.

97. NEWSREEL FOOTAGE OF A HULA HOOP CONTEST is replaced by an old photograph of balding men, twenty and thirty years his senior, hunched over the chess board young Fischer commands.

97.

JOSH'S VOICE

He was 14 and had already beaten the
strongest adult players in the country
to become the youngest U.S. champion
ever.

The train whistle fades into silence.

98. INT. CARNEGIE HALL, UPSTAIRS - DAY

98.

Josh appears around a corner on a skateboard and navigates past the parents loitering outside the rehearsal halls.

PANDOLFINI V.O.

I'm going to keep chasing that queen
all over the board until she learns to
stay home.

99. INT. MANHATTAN CHESS CLUB - DAY

99.

Close on a small hand on a queen, trying to hide somewhere on the sixty-four black and white squares.

JOSH O.S.

I did all right in Syracuse.

PANDOLFINI O.S.

Yeah, well, I hate to break it to you, but winning one tournament doesn't mean you can ignore time-honored principles.

He's cornered Josh's brazen queen and drops her hard with a bishop. Josh remains thoroughly unfazed.

JOSH

It's nice outside, we should go out.

Pandolfini ignores the comment and begins setting the pieces back up.

PANDOLFINI

I want to take a look at the endgame of the final round, give me your book I'll set it up.

JOSH

You want to go to the park?

PANDOLFINI

No, I want to do this.

Pandolfini takes the score book and begins refashioning the opening position of Josh's tournament game.

JOSH

Ever been to Putter's Paradise? You golf the ball into the alligator's mouth and it comes out it's tail.

Pandolfini hesitates at the comment, not understanding it, before continuing to work on the game. Josh endures it, but then finally can't take it any more, stands up and, from memory, plays both sides of the board, moving and capturing the pieces at great speed from the photographic reference in his head, replaying the entire game in a matter of seconds, ending it by toppling his opponent's king.

JOSH

There. Let's go out.

Pandolfini tries not to reveal just how impressed he is as he pastes a sticker reward into the lesson book and makes a notation.

(CONTINUED)

99. CONTINUED:

99.

PANDOLFINI

Normally, that would be worth 15 Master Class Points, but I'm only giving you 10 because you're a wise guy.

Josh doesn't protest; he's in too good a mood. And, much as he'd like to find fault with his young protege's cavalier attitude, Pandolfini can't. He hands the book back with a smile.

PANDOLFINI

Wise guy.

100. OMITTED

100.

101. INT. LIVING ROOM, WAITZKIN APARTMENT - NIGHT

101.

The Syracuse trophy stands on the fireplace mantle, in the center, as if honoring its importance, or in anticipation of others. Moving slowly toward it -

BEGIN MONTAGE:

102. OMITTED

102.

A102. EXT. TRAIN - DAY

A102.

Countryside spreads out in front of a racing train.

103. INT. TOURNAMENT ROOM - DAY (INSERT)

103.

Moving across and down a long list of names on ratings sheets, arranged according to playing strength, and arriving eventually, near the bottom, on "Josh Waitzkin" -

104. INT. TOURNAMENT ROOM - DAY

104.

Moving over a long line of chess boards, like the grid of a map, before coming down close on a bishop as it's moved by a hand and up to the horrified look on Josh's opponent's face -

105. INT. WAITZKIN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUED)

105.

The lone Syracuse trophy on the mantle now has a mate. Moving closer toward them -

A105. INT. MANHATTAN CHESS CLUB - DAY

A105.

Josh builds a tower with chessmen while Pandolfini sets up a chess problem on the next board.

106. INT. PRESS BOX - YANKEE STADIUM - DAY 106.*
 Deep in right, a Yankees outfielder snatches a ball out of the sky ending the game. Up here in the press box, Fred grabs his coat, shoulders his laptop and hurries out the door - *
107. INT. PENN STATION - DAY 107.
 With Josh in one hand and suitcases in the other, Fred jogs along a crowded platform and onto a train just before the doors shut -
- A107. EXT. HOTEL - DAY A107.*
 Josh and Morgan racing radio-controlled cars around a parking lot while their fathers, holding trophies, watch. *
- B107. INT. HOTEL - DAY (INSERT) B107.
 Moving up the rating sheet to Josh's name, which has risen.
- C107. EXT. WAITZKIN APARTMENT - DAY C107.*
 Bonnie and Katya put Fred and Josh into a cab outside their building. As it pulls away, Bonnie watches after it. *
108. INT. PRE-SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY 108.*
 Alone in the room, Fred works at his laptop, checks his watch, gathers his things and gets up - *
109. INT. PRE-SCHOOL BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER 109.*
 Approaching the playing room with his shouldered laptop, Fred takes a deep breath to prepare himself against the possibility of defeat, and enters - *
 Scanning the room from the doorway, Fred tries to ignore the handful of kids who are crying. He eventually finds Josh's face in the crowd but it reveals little. Fred's, on the other hand, is tortured, desperate for the news. *
 Josh nods slightly and it's all Fred can do to keep from shouting out loud with glee.
110. OMITTED 110.
111. OMITTED 111.

A111. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY

A111.

Vinnie admires Josh's latest trophy, wraps an arm around him, glances over to Bonnie and back to Josh.

VINNIE

I can still take you, set them up.

He hands over his plastic bag of chessmen. Josh takes it to a table, begins setting the pieces up. Vinnie follows, handing Bonnie the trophy like an object of no value, and the private aside -

*

VINNIE

Too much pressure for a kid.

Her smile fades as she watches him perch opposite Josh, push a pawn and hit the clock.

B111. EXT. TRAIN - DAY

B111.

A passenger train rattles past an outcropping of grain silos.

C111 . INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

C111.

Fred and Josh sharing a bed, late night food and televised sports. Fred's eating from a room service tray; Josh from a pizza box.

*

112. INT. VETERANS HALL WAITING AREA - DAY

112.

Adults crowd around the pairing sheets, obscuring their kids' view of them. They have to jump up and down to try to read who they're playing in the next round.

(INSERT) Moving up past the names to Josh's, which has risen considerably.

113. INT. VETERANS HALL - DAY

113.

Against a banner that reads, TRENTON SCHOLASTIC PRIMARY, the tournament's director presents Josh with a big trophy and shakes his hand. (Appendix dialog)

*

114. OMITTED

114.

115. OMITTED

115.

116. OMITTED

116.

117. OMITTED

117.

A117. INT. MANHATTAN CHESS CLUB - DAY

A117.*

Josh throws a tennis ball against the walls of the empty club, chases and catches it with his glove, tries to get Pandolfini to play. The teacher doesn't join in, sets up chessmen on a table. Josh persists, Come on, Bruce. And finally, Pandolfini gets up and plays.

B117. INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

B117.*

Josh on a pay phone to his mother -

JOSH
I'm fine, everything's great. We
just checked in and -
(he spots Morgan coming in
with Kalev)
I got to go, Mom -

He hands the phone to his dad and hurries off.

118. INT. TOURNAMENT LOBBY - DAY

118.*

Josh and Morgan playing Bughouse against two other kids. Fred comes up with a bag of sandwiches, hands one to Kalev, keeps one for himself, and offers a third to the Tuna Fish Father. The man just stares at him.

119. INT. PS 41 CLASSROOM - DAY

119.

Kids at tables making masks, (Appendix dialog for teacher).
Noticing a chess problem on the newspaper covering his table,
Josh begins concentrating on that rather than the art project.
Moving down toward the checkered pattern -

120. INT. TOURNAMENT ROOM - DAY

120.

- the newsprint gray squares turn black and the chess symbols real and looming larger as if one were descending in a plane and swooping past towering molded shiny cliffs. A hand moves one and Josh's opponent cringes.

121. OMITTED

121.

A121. EXT. TRAIN - DAY

A121.

A train disappears into a tunnel.

B121. OMITTED

B121.*

C121. INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

C121.

Tournament officials break up a fight between two distraught fathers -

- D121. INT. GYMNASIUM - LATER - DAY D121.*
The parents stare down with binoculars and video cameras at
their kids chess games from behind a cage overlooking the gym. *
- E121. INT. WAITZKIN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUED) E121.*
Still moving toward mantle, four more trophies on it now. *
- F121. INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT F121.
Fred and Kalev, asleep in chairs. Josh and Morgan, awake,
silhouetted behind sheets of a bed-fort, trading baseball cards. *
- G121. INT HOTEL LOBBY - DAY G121.
The pairing sheet goes up showing Josh's name on top.
- H121. OMITTED H121.*
122. INT. MUSEUM - DAY 122.*
Josh moves a piece and glances down a long line of elementary,
junior and high school kids playing, like him, at opponent-less
boards. Against the wall at the end of the aisle, a banner
announces, "The U.S. Chess Federation and Fidelity Electronics
Welcomes World Champion Gary Kasparov."

In an exhibition of 58 simultaneous games, the famous Eastern-
European chess grandmaster moves briskly past the line of tables
advancing pieces with hardly a glance at the boards.

Reaching Josh's, though, he hesitates, puzzles over his next
move, scratches at his hair, looks around, pushes a pawn finally
and moves away ... before glancing back and meeting Josh's smile
with a pained grimace at the position he left on the board ...
- A122. INT. WAITZKIN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT A122.*
There are no fewer than fifteen trophies up on the mantle now,
along with antique time clocks, score books and plaques and
chess literature in other languages. Fred has to move things
aside to make room for the latest, biggest, trophy.

END OF MONTAGE

123. INT. PS 41 CLASSROOM - NIGHT

123.

Open House Night. Parents, looking like giants, moving past undersized tables and chairs, appreciating their kids' paintings and projects and mobiles dangling from the ceiling. Fred peers into an incubator at newborn chicks.

TEACHER

Mr. Waitzkin.

FRED

Oh, hi, how are you doing?

TEACHER

I'm glad that you could make it.

FRED

Me, too.

(the room)

This is really great.

TEACHER

Isn't it? The children worked hard getting it ready.

They nod at each other, and realize they have little else to talk about. Eventually -

TEACHER

I understand from Josh you just got back from Washington. I think that's super.

FRED

Yeah, it was great.

TEACHER

He told us all about the hotel.

FRED

(with a laugh)

Yeah, well, he was pretty impressed with it.

Bonnie appears with cups of punch, hands one to Fred and exchanges hellos with the teacher. To Fred -

TEACHER

You've been taking him a lot of places lately.

(CONTINUED)

123. CONTINUED:

123.

FRED

I think it's good. I think it's important for a kid to travel, it's a great education. They realize there's more to the world than Washington Square.

TEACHER

Oh, yes, he talks about Washington Square a lot, too.

The Waitzkins exchange a pained glance, wondering perhaps what sort of description Josh gives his teacher of his afternoons with the drunks and the addicts in the park.

TEACHER

Let's see, we've heard about hotels in Syracuse, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington now. That's all he seems to remember there. Not the White House, or the Capitol Building, or the Lincoln Memorial ...

A heavy silence hangs in the air between them. The woman's pleasant tone annoys Fred.

FRED

And you're wondering why that is.

(pause)

It's because I'm a rotten father, you're right. I drag him all over the country for my own selfish reasons.

BONNIE

Fred.

Fred sighs. Bonnie's glance finds a couple of other parents looking over at them, and Josh, with a group of kids, around the one computer in the room. She lowers her voice:

BONNIE

Is Josh falling behind in his schoolwork?

TEACHER

He is but I'm more concerned about other things. Like his friendships.

BONNIE

There's a problem there?

TEACHER

There could be.

(CONTINUED)

123. CONTINUED:

123.

FRED

Well, is there or isn't there?

Bonnie tells Fred to knock it off with a look.

TEACHER

Mr. Waitzkin, I'm sure he's very good at this chess thing, that's not the (issue) -

FRED

Chess "thing?"

TEACHER

I'm sorry?

FRED

Chess "thing?"

TEACHER

I'm sure he's very good, but it worries me ... If I could make an analogy -

FRED

Chess thing.

TEACHER

What if it was, I don't know, say .. cards ... pinochle.

FRED

Pinochle.

TEACHER

For instance.

FRED

Pinochle.

BONNIE

Fred.

FRED

Bonnie, she's comparing chess to pinochle - what am I supposed to say to that?

BONNIE

She's trying to make a point, maybe you should listen. Vinnie thinks he's spending too much time at it, too.

(CONTINUED)

123. CONTINUED:

123.

FRED
Vinnie? Vinnie? Vinnie's a drug
addict, I'm supposed to listen to his
opinion now?

Several parents and kids, including Josh, are watching now.

FRED
(to the teacher)
I'm sorry, but that analogy is a
very bad one. If you want to compare
it to something, compare it to
something that makes sense. Compare
it to math, or music, or art, because
otherwise you belittle it, and him,
and me.

TEACHER
I'm not trying to belittle any -

FRED
But you are. You are. Even in the
way you're looking at me -

TEACHER
Mr. Waitzkin -

FRED
You want to know how good he is?
I'll tell you how good he is. He's
better at this than I've ever been at
anything in my life. He's better at
this than you'll ever be at anything.

Kids are watching in amazement; they never imagined anyone could
speak to a teacher like this.

FRED
My son has a gift. He has a gift.
Once you acknowledge that, then --
maybe -- we'll have something to talk
about.

He gestures to Josh across the room to come, they're leaving.
He escorts him toward the door but then turns back for one last
remark to the teacher -

FRED
Chess is what it's called. Not "chess
thing." Chess.

And he and his boy are gone - leaving Bonnie in the middle of
the room with everyone looking at her. She tries to get out
with a shred of dignity intact.

124. OMITTED

124.

125. OMITTED

125.

126. OMITTED

126.

A126. INT. JOSH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A126.*

Josh on the floor taking apart old toys with a screwdriver.

*

JOSH
What's its number?

FRED
It doesn't have a number, it's a private school. Only the public schools have numbers. It's called Dalton.

Fred tries to read his son's initial reaction to the idea of changing schools mid-term. It's hard to tell; he just keeps unscrewing things, taking batteries out.

*

*

FRED
You can still see your friends whenever you want. After school and on weekends ... when there's not a tournament.

Josh nods mechanically, keeps working. Fred searches for elusive positive inducements and finally comes up with one:

*

FRED
Your friend Morgan goes there.

JOSH
(brightening for the first time)
Morgan goes there?

FRED
He wouldn't go there if it wasn't great, right? It's the best. They've even got a chess class.

JOSH
What's the yard like?

FRED
(thrown)
The yard?

JOSH
Does it have good stuff to climb on?

(CONTINUED)

A126. CONTINUED:

A126.

FRED
(pause)
I'm sure it does, I haven't seen it.
I'm sure it's great.
(pause)
So what do you think?

JOSH
If you say it's great, then it has to be.

The unwavering trust Josh places in his father unsettles him; he's not at all sure this is the right thing to do ... *

B126. INT. KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

B126.*

Fred comes into the kitchen and stares into the fridge. Bonnie's at the table, depressed, even more uncertain than her husband that this isn't a huge misstep.

FRED
She'll take out her disgust with me on him, we can't send him back there.

He finds something to eat in a plastic container and picks at it with a fork while standing up. He shrugs.

FRED
It's a great school.

BONNIE
It's a mistake.

Silence. Fred doesn't care for it. He takes his cold dinner with him to eat upstairs.

127. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - LATER - DAY

127.'

While Bonnie attends to Katya on a swing, Josh and Vinnie share hamburgers and fries from McDonald's Kids' Meals she's bought them.

VINNIE
What was wrong with the old school?

JOSH
I don't know. I guess it was no good.

VINNIE
This one's better, huh?

JOSH
(shrugs)
They have chess class.

(CONTINUED)

127. CONTINUED:

127.

VINNIE

They have a chess class. That's why
you're going there?

*
*

JOSH

(shrugs)

I guess so.

Vinnie nods to himself, clearly disapproving of the change of
schools. Eventually --

VINNIE

Are you okay?

Josh manages a brave nod. Glancing away, Vinnie notices a
larger than normal crowd gathered over at the chess corner.

VINNIE

What the hell's going on there?

It's hard to tell from this distance. The crowd is around one
table in particular and growing. The mystery is very soon too
much for either of them to ignore. It's very unusual. They
exchange a glance, both thinking the same thing.

JOSH

It's Bobby Fischer.

They get up quickly and hurry across the park, reach the
perimeter of the crowd. Already they can hear the slam of
pieces against marble and the banging of a clock. Using his
diminutive size to his advantage, Josh wedges past the frames of
the adults, reaches the inner-circle and sees:

Not Bobby Fischer, but a boy Josh's age, perched opposite
Zilber, taking him apart. His little hands slap the pieces down
cutting off the Russian master's desperate attempts to flee,
toppling his men, knocking them to the ground.

It's a ferocious attack, cold and merciless. He's like a
machine in boy's clothing, devastating Zilber, humiliating him,
crushing him.

Josh stares with morbid fascination. He's never seen anything
like it. This pint-sized Black Knight with long hair and neon-
colored surfer shorts is dispatching the old Russian's few
remaining pieces with vicious glee.

Who is he? Where did he come from? Josh notices an old man
standing behind the boy, watching the slaughter smugly. Who are
these people? Someone in the crowd answers the questions in
Josh's head and it sends a chill down his spine.

SOMEONE IN CROWD

Young Fischer.

"Young Fischer" pursues Zilber's queen and eventually kills her

(CONTINUED)

127. CONTINUED:

127.

off. He chases the old man's king into a corner and then ... all is silent. The Russian stares at his cowering crowned monarch for a long time before glancing up defeated at his young gloating opponent.

BOY

Trick or treat.

Josh turns away.

128. INT. MANHATTAN CHESS CLUB - DAY

128.

Josh and Pandolfini "exercising" with a Rubenstein endgame position. The boy appears more attentive than usual, concentrating on the labyrinthine pattern on the board.

PANDOLFINI

Why's black better? Take your time.

JOSH

(right back)

Black has the advantage because White has more pawn islands. They're weak. They can't guard as many squares.

PANDOLFINI

Which is White's weakest (island) -

JOSH

The isolated pawn. Only the king can save it. Then the double-pawns. They can only move together, and they leave h3 unguarded.

PANDOLFINI

(impressed)

That's right. That's very good. You just earned twenty Master Class Points.

Josh hands over his lesson book for the reward. Pandolfini notes the points and searches his satchel for a sticker. Josh glances away to the sounds of violin scales and tap shoes filtering in past the door that has just opened.

A small figure steps into the club and Josh tenses; it's the long-haired kid from the park, followed by his mentor. The boy begins circling the room slowly and confidently -- eerily unkidlike -- pausing to look over the shoulders of club regulars at the chess tables. His guardian approaches Pandolfini.

(CONTINUED)

128. CONTINUED:

128.

PANDOLFINI
Lowly pawns ... lowly beings ...
until they change into a queen, yes?
Like a -

*
*
*
*

DIMITRI O.S.
Butterfly.

*
*

Pandolfini tenses at the voice. He seems to shrink. This man standing behind him is the last person on earth he expected (or wanted) back in his life. To Pandolfini, recognizing the position on the board -

*
*
*
*

DIMITRI
Cohn-Rubenstein, St. Petersburg,
1909. Studying up on your endgame?

*
*
*

PANDOLFINI
Josh, go get yourself a Coke, we're
through here.

He hands over some change; Josh moves away to the Coke machine.

PANDOLFINI
What do you want?

DIMITRI
Hello, how are you, how have you been,
how's your health ... any one of these
would be appropriate.
(nothing from Pandolfini)
I want to join the club. Actually not
me, my young friend here.

*
*

He gestures to the boy hovering over a game across the room.

PANDOLFINI
I suggest you bring him back in a
couple of years.

1

Dimitri just smiles. One of the regulars at the other table slides a pawn and the kid laughs to himself at the idiocy of the move. Everyone in the club glances over nonplused.

DIMITRI
We'd like an application if it's not
too much trouble.

Pandolfini gets up and goes to his desk. Josh sips from a can of Coke and watches from a safe distance as the boy moves to watch (and no doubt comment on) another game. Pandolfini hands Dimitri a membership application and turns away to tell him their conversation is over.

(CONTINUED)

128. CONTINUED:

128.

DIMITRI

He's been my student since he was four. His parents have given him to me. He does nothing but play chess. No other interests.

*

PANDOLFINI

He goes to school.

DIMITRI

No.

*

PANDOLFINI

Well, that's great, you should be proud of yourself.

DIMITRI

I am.

Keeping his back to his old teacher, Pandolfini "sorts through mail."

DIMITRI

You should watch him play. He reminds me of you. Only he never gives up. It's not part of his character. He's not going to disappoint me.

*

*

Pandolfini ignores him.

DIMITRI

(a whisper)

He's Bobby ... he's come.

Finally, Dimitri steps away, leaving the application behind. Josh comes over and stands beside his teacher. Together they watch the long-haired boy slowly cruising the room like a shark, and Pandolfini absently places a protective hand on Josh's shoulder.

129. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - NIGHT

129.

Fred reads aloud from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein -

*

FRED

" ... and when he knew that the cottage was entirely destroyed, the monster screamed once more in agony and hatred and retreated backward to seek refuge in the woods ..."

(pause)

Then it gets really scary, because

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

129. CONTINUED:

129.

FRED (cont.)
they chase him and - there's torches
and - but we'll do that tomorrow
night. Okay?

*
*
*

He leans into Josh's fort and kisses him on the forehead.

*

FRED
Night, Tiger.

JOSH
Night.

The sheet-flap comes down and Josh stares at his dinosaur night
light. Fred heads out.

*
*

JOSH
Dad?

FRED
Yeah?

JOSH
(pause)
I'm scared.

Fred crosses back through the dark room muttering "my fault,"
opens the closet door and demands --

*
*

FRED
All right, everybody out. You heard
me, get out of there. Yeah, you, too.
Don't look at me like that. And take
your friend with you.
(he closes the closet door)
All right, they're gone.

*

And heads out again.

*

JOSH
Dad?

Fred glances back to his son's bed puzzled; that usually works,
the closet thing.

JOSH
Maybe we shouldn't go to the State
Finals.

Silence ...

FRED
What are you talking about, of course
we're going. That's what we've been
working so hard for.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

129. CONTINUED:

129.

JOSH
If I win ... everybody'll say, "Well,
of course he won, he's the top-ranked
player." But if I lose ... it'll be a
big, big deal.

*

*

Fred's caught off-guard. He's never really considered the possibility that Josh could lose. Their whole fantasy life suddenly seems precarious to him.

FRED
You won't lose, Josh.

JOSH
What if I do?

FRED
You won't.

JOSH
I'm afraid I might.

FRED
No.

*

Fred crosses back to the bed, sits on the edge of it.

*

FRED
They're afraid. They're terrified
of you.

*

*

*

Silence. Josh isn't so convinced of that anymore. He watches the spinning dinosaurs in the lamp.

*

*

FRED
Get some sleep.

He tries to leave again, but Josh's words, more to himself, stop him -

JOSH
Maybe it's better not be the best.

*

Fred chooses not to dignify the remark with a response.

JOSH
Then you can lose and it's okay.

Fred leaves and Josh turns away, staring into the lights of his dinosaur lamp.

*

*

130. And out of the silence and darkness appears NEWSREEL FOOTAGE 130.
OF BOBBY FISCHER returning home victorious from Iceland,
descending the ramp of a plane into a crush of reporters and
well-wishers.

(CONTINUED)

130. CONTINUED:

130.

JOSH'S VOICE

It took people a while to realize
he was really gone. He'd disappeared
before, once for 18 months before his
crushing defeat of Petrosian in
Belgrade.

131. Fischer disappears into the swirling mob around him and the 131.
image dissolves to an empty field somewhere in Brooklyn where
he wanders alone, looking unsure which way to turn.

JOSH'S VOICE

But when he didn't show up in Manila
in '75 to defend his title, they took
it away from him and gave it back to
the Russians.

132. Fischer's face dissolves into a wide view of Ebbetts Field. 132.
It's deserted and dark, but there's a distant echoing roar of a
crowd like the breathing of wind.

(CONTINUED)

132. CONTINUED:

132.

JOSH'S VOICE

People say they've received letters from him over the years, but never show them. They say he's in Mexico talking to promoters. Or in Buenos Aires playing secret speed games against Spassky.

133. THE SOUNDS OF THE CROWD carry over a photograph of the candy store under the apartment building where his sister bought him his first chess board. 133.

JOSH'S VOICE

Some people say he lost his nerve and will never play again. Some people say he's dead.

134. Tight on the original photograph of Bobby Fischer brooding over the pieces, his head supported by his large hand. 134.

JOSH'S VOICE

I think he's laying low and getting stronger, waiting for just the right moment to come back and reclaim his crown.

135. INT. HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - DAY

135.

Bright lights of a minicam shine in Fred's eyes. He's there with a local reporter holding a microphone. Behind them hangs a banner touting this as the NEW YORK STATE ELEMENTARY FINALS.

REPORTER

I'm standing here with Fred Waitzkin. I hope I pronounced that right. Tell me, Fred, what's it like being a chess parent?

FRED

Well, in my case, the hardest part is keeping track of my son's toy cars. That and making sure he eats something other than French fries on occasion.

Two hundred kids roam the large banquet room hunting for their spots at the playing tables. Josh finds his at the Number-One board, elevated slightly above the others on risers. His opponent is already there, chewing his nails.

JOSH

Hi.

(CONTINUED)

135. CONTINUED:

135.

The other boy looks ill, forcing a nervous smile at the prospect of almost certain and probably quick defeat. Across the room near the doors, parents congregate waiting for tournament officials to chase them out.

REPORTER

Your son's the odds-on favorite, I understand.

FRED

He's the number-one seeded player in his division, yes.

REPORTER

So every other parent in this room hates you.

Fred laughs, but he could laugh harder if the comment weren't so true. He glimpses the Tuna Fish Father staring daggers at him nearby.

Josh doesn't appear at all sanguine, scanning the large room from his elevated perch, waiting with a sense of dread for the appearance of the ringer from California.

REPORTER

So while the other Moms and Dads are pacing around wringing their hands, I imagine you'll be off somewhere with a cup of coffee and the Sunday Times.

*
*

FRED

I should try that. No, the competition is always fierce no matter how good you are. One lapse of concentration and it's over. And when you lose a game here, you lose the championship.

REPORTER

You don't really think that's going to happen, though.

FRED

Honestly? No, I don't. Josh is in great shape.

Actually, he isn't. He's just noticed his nemesis stepping into the room under the tutelage of his mentor, both wearing bored expressions of disdain. They cross to the sign-up table where the man scribbles down the boy's name (he's probably unable to do it himself) and are motioned to a board. Taking his more lowly seat there, the boy stares right at Josh up on the platform. Josh looks away.

136. INT. FOYER - DAY

136.*

At the courtesy table, Fred and Kalev watch some other parents across the room blithely exchanging summer vacation plans while they wait for the opening of the banquet room doors. *

KALEV

They can afford to laugh easily, their kids don't have a chance and they know it.

Kalev lights the wrong end of a cigarette and the flame crawls halfway up the filter before he can extinguish it into his drink. Down the long hall, the doors open and out comes Josh's first opponent blank-faced. *

FRED

That was quick.

The boy's parents spot their son and go to comfort him. He seems in shock. *

KALEV

I hate this part.

They watch as the boy's parents offer him sympathetic hugs ... but as his head angles toward Fred and Kalev, they see the big delayed-reaction smile of victory on his face. His mother shrieks with glee and Fred stares at her bewildered.

FRED

No ... it's impossible.

His attention shifts back fast to the doors as Josh emerges. The expression on his face confirms his father's worst fears. He's lost the first round, and therefore the championship itself -- to a patzer.

137. EXT. HOTEL GROUNDS - DAY

137.

Fred and Josh alone in a courtyard in drizzling rain. *

Everything about the boy -- his posture, the look on his face -- declares that some of his life has just been taken from him. And everything about Fred -- his head trying to shake away disbelief, the uncharacteristic distance he keeps from his son as he paces -- confirms that a piece of his life has been taken as well. *

FRED

Seven moves ... seven moves ...
how is it possible to lose in seven
moves ...

JOSH

Maybe I don't really have it.

(CONTINUED)

137. CONTINUED:

137.

FRED
You know that's not true. That's not
why this happened. I don't understand
why this happened. Why did this
happen?

Josh manages a weak shrug.

FRED
Well, think. Take your time. Take
more time than you took losing to that
patzer and figure it out.

Josh doesn't have an answer for him no matter how much time he
takes.

FRED
Did you fall for a trap? Did you
bring your queen out early even though
Bruce has warned you time and again
about that?

JOSH
Maybe he's just better than (me) -

FRED
Don't tell me that kid's better than
you because he isn't.

Josh shakes his head in despair. He doesn't know what happened;
he lost, he didn't win. And he feels like what he is, a loser,
and fears his father doesn't love him as much as he used to.

JOSH
Why are you standing so far away from
me?

FRED
I'm not.

He is and he knows it, but seems powerless to do anything about
it. He stares at the small pathetic figure standing stoop-
shouldered before him and finally gestures him closer. Josh
leans his head against the rough fabric of his father's sport
coat.

JOSH
I'm sorry, Dad.

FRED
It's okay ... it's all right ...
it's okay ...

Maybe if he keeps saying it, it'll make it so.

138. INT. BANQUET ROOM - NEXT DAY

138.

The tournament's director hands Josh a second place trophy, and leads the gathered adults in desultory applause. Returning with it to his designated place on the platform beside the victor of the State Finals, Josh hazards a glance his way only to receive back a derisive smirk.

DIRECTOR

And in first place in the Primary Division, with a perfect six out of six - from Dalton - excuse me, I wish he were from Dalton - from - I'm sorry I don't see a school here - Jonathan Poe.

*
*
*
*
*
*

The boy accepts the heavy first place trophy and lugs it off the stage without bothering to admire it. He joins Dimitri who takes it from him, and, as Fred watches, leads him quickly from the room like they're late for a train to the next tournament.

139. INT. WAITZKIN APARTMENT - NIGHT

139.

The second place trophy isn't among those on the mantle; it's on a pile of dirty clothes and luggage in the corner as if discarded, undeserving of the same shelf as the others. Fred sits alone.

140. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - SAME TIME - NIGHT

140.

In his bunk, turned away from her, Josh endures his mother's assurances to the contrary of what he feels in his heart:

BONNIE

If you never played another game, your father'd think no less of you. He was just surprised. As were you. He didn't think it could happen. He wasn't ready for it.

(pause)

He loves you more than anything in the world.

She waits for him to nod that he understands, but he only keeps staring at the wall.

A140. INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUED

A140.

Fred stares, too, calculating, perhaps, his next move.

141. EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

141.

The Bears, without Josh, throw a baseball around the infield. Fred, in street clothes, hoists a canvas bag full of catcher's gear and bats from the trunk of a yellow cab and hauls it down to the father who's replacing him as coach.

(CONTINUED)

141. CONTINUED:

141.

They speak but can't be heard from up by the car. The guy watches after Fred as he heads back to the cab, then hauls the bag onto the field. Fred glances back, reconsidering perhaps, then climbs back into the cab and is driven away.

PANDOLFINI V.O.

For all his natural abilities, Bobby Fischer studied harder than any player who ever lived.

*
*
*

A141. OMITTED (NOW SC. A142)

A141.*

142. INT. MANHATTAN CHESS CLUB - DAY

142.

The club appears empty. But then, in a corner, two figures can be discerned.

*
*

PANDOLFINI

He woke up every morning thinking about chess and he went to bed thinking about it. He dreamt about it. Why? Isn't it enough to be a natural?

Pandolfini waits for some kind of response. All Josh can manage is a shrug. The sixty-four squares on the table between them are empty; the chessmen lined up along the rim.

*
*

PANDOLFINI

If you don't care about winning, it's enough. But he wanted to win. He had to win. He had to be champion. And in order to do that he had to work. Which is what we're going to do.

*
*

His look says, Right? Josh nods.

PANDOLFINI

Okay. Promise you won't argue moves with me no matter how much you think you're right.

JOSH

I promise.

PANDOLFINI

Everything I tell you, imagine it's coming from him because I know every game he ever played, so in effect he's going to be teaching you and you'll become him.

(CONTINUED)

142. CONTINUED:

142.

JOSH

I promise.

PANDOLFINI

All right, some new rules. No more speed chess.

Josh opens his mouth to protest, but Pandolfini warns him against it with one raised finger, and the boy swallows the objection.

PANDOLFINI

I know you like it. I know it's fun. But it's no good. It ruined Arbakov and it'll ruin you. So no more.

He waits for another nod and eventually gets it.

PANDOLFINI

And no more games in Washington Square.

JOSH

But -

PANDOLFINI

They're patzers and they're teaching you all the wrong things.

JOSH

They're not patzers.

PANDOLFINI

They're losers and unless you want to end up just like them you'll stay away.

JOSH

They're not patzers.

PANDOLFINI

I mean it.

Josh really wants to object, and the look on Pandolfini's face dares him to. Finally, though, he acquiesces to the rule with a nod.

PANDOLFINI

Now -

Pandolfini lines up along the border of the board in front of him one of each piece - pawn, rook, knight, bishop, queen, king.

PANDOLFINI

Which one is you?

(CONTINUED)

142. CONTINUED:

142.

Josh considers the chessmen, his teacher, the question. It makes no sense to him.

*
*

JOSH
What do you mean?

*
*

PANDOLFINI
I mean which one is you?

*
*

JOSH
(pause)
None of them, they're just (pieces) -

*
*
*

PANDOLFINI
This is you -

*
*

As he sets the Staunton king on its square in front of Josh -

*

A142. EXT/INT. VILLAGE CHESS SHOP - DAY

A142.*

- an elaborately detailed ivory figure of an Indian raja.

*

PANDOLFINI
- and this is your army.

*
*

Tight on other figures of the ancient set alongside the king: chariots, elephants, minister, infantrymen.

*
*

PANDOLFINI
Your advisor ... cavalry ...
footsoldiers. They've been fighting
for you for fifteen hundred years -
first in India -

*
*
*
*
*

Tight on other figures, from countries around the world -

*

PANDOLFINI
- then Persia. China. Africa.
Europe. Iceland. Here. Fighting to
protect you. From this -

*
*
*
*

The opposing army, beyond which Josh, beside Pandolfini, peers in through the glass.

*
*

PANDOLFINI
This army. Your enemy. Ordered to
defeat you. "Defeat the king."
Shahmat. Checkmate.

*
*
*
*

143. OMITTED

143.

144. OMITTED

144.

145. OMITTED

145.

146. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - DAWN 146.

An alarm clock sounds. As a small hand reaches out from the fort to shut it off. *

PANDOLFINI V.O. *

Now. Think before you answer - *

147. OMITTED 147.

148. INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING 148.

- a bigger hand comes away from the crown of the Staunton king set on its square in front of Josh. The rest of the board is empty. *

PANDOLFINI *

What's the shortest path to the last rank? *

Josh is still in his pajamas, sleep still in his eyes. *

JOSH *

Straight ahead. *

PANDOLFINI *

How many moves is that? *

JOSH *

Seven. *

PANDOLFINI *

Count them out loud. Show me. *

JOSH *

(touching each square) *

One, two, three, four, five, six, *

seven. *

PANDOLFINI *

That's the shortest. *

JOSH *

Yes. *

PANDOLFINI *

Any other path is longer. *

JOSH *

Yes. *

PANDOLFINI *

You're sure. *

JOSH *

Yes. *

(CONTINUED)

148. CONTINUED:

148.

Pandolfini grasps the king and slaps it down across the squares on several diagonals, reaching the back row in seven moves every time -

PANDOLFINI

One, two, three, four, five, six,
seven - One, two, three, four, five,
six, seven - One, two, three, four,
five, six, seven -

Josh stares at the board as if for the first time, as if he's never played the game before, as if he knows nothing about the game. From behind comes a tinkling of musical notes; his little sister has just wandered in through the swinging kitchen door with a push toy. She's gathered up from behind by Fred who shrugs an apology before whisking her out of the room -

149. INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS - EARLY MORNING

149.

- and into the kitchen. He deposits her at the table and places a toy in front of her. But it makes music, too. He substitutes it with a stuffed animal and steps away to shut off a whistling kettle on the stove. Bonnie hands back to her daughter the musical toy.

150. OMITTED

150.

151. EXT/INT. HOLIDAY INN - DAY

151.

From high above, kids splash around in the hotel pool. Pulling back, a balcony is revealed, then the inside of a hotel room and Josh at the desk studying an endgame position on a pocket chess set. Fred moves past and shuts the sliding glass door, silencing the distracting laughter of the children below. There's no "fort" in this room.

152. INT. TOURNAMENT ROOM - DAY

152.

The director leads the applause for the winner of the tournament: the Black Knight from California, Jonathan Poe. Before it dies down, Josh and Fred, trophy-less, are already out the door.

A152. INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A152.

A chess problem on the board involving eight pieces.

JOSH

Rook to d1.

PANDOLFINI

What about taking on e5?

JOSH

What about it?

(CONTINUED)

*

A152. CONTINUED:

A152.

PANDOLFINI
You didn't consider it.

JOSH
I did.

PANDOLFINI
You didn't. You're still not
considering it. Sit up.

JOSH
I'm right, though. Rook to d1's the
best move.

PANDOLFINI
That's not the point. You didn't
study the board. You're moving before
I know the answer. Give me your book.

JOSH
What for?

PANDOLFINI
Give me your book.

JOSH
Why?

PANDOLFINI
You just lost some Master Class Points,
Tiger.

JOSH
I can't lose points.

PANDOLFINI
No? You just lost some more for
arguing with me.

He takes Josh's sticker book, thick now, and notes the penalty.

B152. OMITTED

B152.

C152. INT/EXT. SCHOOL LIBRARY/YARD - DAY (WAS SC. 155)

C152.

Josh, alone in the library with a pile of chess books including
"My 60 Memorable Games," by Bobby Fischer. Tiring of study, he
moves to a window and peers down at kids on the schoolyard
below, batting at tether balls and playing four-square.

153. INT. WAITZKIN APARTMENT - MORNING

153.

From elsewhere in the building, a tenant tyrannizes his
neighbors with loud music. Here in the living room, Josh
tries to shut it out and concentrate on the position of
chessmen in front of him.

(CONTINUED)

153. CONTINUED:

153.

JOSH
Queen takes rook, bishop takes rook,
knight e7 check, king to the corner,
queen takes pawn threatening knight g6
check.

*
*
*
*

PANDOLFINI
That's what you'd do, I want to know
what Fischer would do.

JOSH
I have to take a break.

PANDOLFINI
No.

JOSH
I have to go to the bathroom.

PANDOLFINI
You just went. Forced mate in seven.

*

JOSH
I can't do it.

PANDOLFINI
Then you'll keep losing.

JOSH
I can't see that far.

PANDOLFINI
Then you'll keep losing.

JOSH
I can't concentrate.

PANDOLFINI
Queen g6, queen takes queen, knight
e7 check, king h8 - will somebody
shut that guy up - knight takes queen
check, king back -

*
*
*
*

Fred appears in the kitchen doorway, phone to his ear.

FRED
I'm calling him now.

PANDOLFINI
- knight e7 check, king h8, rook takes
pawn, king takes rook, rook h3 check,
bishop blocks, rook takes - mate.

*
*
*
*

Josh plugs his ears with his fingers and struggles to please his
teacher.

154. OMITTED

154.

A154. INT. SCHOLASTIC TOURNAMENT ROOM - DAY (WAS SC. 156)

A154.*

Fred stares glumly at the rating sheet. Josh's standing has descended at the same rate Poe's has risen. Nearby, Dimitri condescends to be interviewed by a local reporter.

DIMITRI

The problem is finding players strong enough to challenge him. They're certainly not here.

Josh finds the placard with his number on it at a table on the floor. Up on a platform at the number-one board sits young Poe, waiting for his next victim.

PANDOLFINI V.O.

Do you know what the word "contempt" means?

*
*
*

155. OMITTED (NOW SC. 152)

155. *

A155. INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A155.

Josh doesn't, shakes his head. Fifteen men on the chessboard now.

*
*

PANDOLFINI

It's to think of others as being beneath you, to be unworthy of being in the same room with you.

JOSH

I don't feel that.

PANDOLFINI

Well, you'd better start because if you don't think it's part of winning you're wrong. You have to have contempt for your opponents. You have to hate them.

JOSH

But I don't.

PANDOLFINI

They hate you. They hate you, Josh.

*

JOSH

I don't hate them.

*
*

PANDOLFINI

Look at me. Bobby Fischer held the world in contempt.

*
*
*

JOSH

I'm not him.

PANDOLFINI

You're telling me.

B155. EXT. STREET / WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY (WAS B152) B155.*

Coming past the park - not through it - Bonnie watches Josh watching - and wishing he could join - the hustlers across the street in the chess circle. He looks up at her; she really wants to say yes. But doesn't. Keeps walking, holding Katya's hand. *

156. (NOW SC. 155) 156.*

157. OMITTED 157.*

158. OMITTED 158.*

159. INT. WAITZKIN LIVING ROOM - DAY 159.*

The bass of the music wafts up from downstairs. As Fred traipses down the stairs, Josh and Pandolfini are revealed separated by two armies, black and white, facing one another across the checkered field. *

PANDOLFINI
White's move,. *

Josh knows that, nods to himself, doesn't move. *

PANDOLFINI
Can we expect it anytime soon? *

160. INT/EXT. WAITZKIN APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER - DAY 160.*

Fred emerges from the building, comes around and down the steps to the basement apartment and pounds on the door. *

A160. INT. WAITZKIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUED A160.*

Josh's eyes lift from the chessmen to his teacher and consider him for a long moment. *

JOSH
How many points is it worth? *

Pandolfini almost smiles, recognizing the chesslike problem Josh is setting up, the battle of wills they're about to engage in, and knowing he can win it. *

PANDOLFINI
To make the opening move? *

Josh nods. *

B160. EXT. WAITZKIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUED B160.*

Fred pounds harder. No one answers. He screams at the door - *

FRED
Shut up in there! *

161. INT. WAITZKIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUED

161.*

Pandolfini debates which way to play it.

*
*

PANDOLFINI

Forget the points.

JOSH

But how much is it worth if I do it?

PANDOLFINI

Do it for its own sake. Do it for the love of the game.

*
*

JOSH

I want to know how close I am to getting the certificate.

*

PANDOLFINI

Forget the certificate.

JOSH

But I want to know.

PANDOLFINI

I don't know.

JOSH

What do you mean you don't know?

PANDOLFINI

I don't care.

JOSH

I don't understand.

PANDOLFINI

Not another word.

JOSH

(long pause)

I want to win the certificate.

*

PANDOLFINI

Forget the certificate, it doesn't mean anything. It's a piece of paper. It's a Xerox of a piece of paper. Here, you want it?

*
*

He digs one out of his briefcase and tosses it onto the table.

*

PANDOLFINI

Here, fill it out. There's your certificate. You want another? You want ten? I've got a briefcase full of them, they mean nothing. It's white's move.

*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

161. CONTINUED:

161.

The music and the pounding from downstairs suddenly stop. In the silence, Josh stares at the worthless Xeroxed certificate on the table. Just as he's about to cry -

*
*
*

BONNIE

Get out of my house.

Without looking at her, the teacher gathers his things and starts to leave. But then -

*
*

PANDOLFINI

To put a child in a position to care about winning and then not prepare him is wrong.

*

BONNIE

Get out of my house.

He crosses to the front door just as Fred comes back in. Pandolfini says nothing as he lets himself out. Fred stares after him, then to Bonnie.

*
*
*

FRED

What's happening here?

She leads Josh away upstairs, leaving Fred alone in the dining room staring blankly at the chessmen.

*

162. EXT. FORTY-FIRST AND SEVENTH - NIGHT

162.

Under the neon glare of XXX-rated movie marquees, failed chess masters on folding chairs hustle patzers for nickels and dimes. Pandolfini is among them, angrily slamming the pieces down.

FRED V.O.

I know you don't want to admit it, but he's right -

*

163. INT. WAITZKIN MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

163.

Fred paces back and forth past his wife -

FRED

You wouldn't sign your kid up for little league and then not get him a glove. You equip him -

*

BONNIE

It's over.

*

FRED

Bonnie -

164. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - SAME TIME - NIGHT

164.

His parents' voices filter in from the other room, but Josh can't hear them. He tosses in his sleep. His stiff, seldom used baseball mitt sits on a night stand.

FRED O.S

He's just in a slump. This is a slump, it happens.

165. EXT. FORTY-FIRST AND SEVENTH - CONTINUED - NIGHT

165.

Tight on the pieces as Pandolfini slams them down, humiliating an opponent, taking his money, and angrily setting the pieces back up again.

FRED V.O.

You get into a slump, you get out of it eventually -

166. INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUED - NIGHT

166.

FRED

What you don't do is give up.

BONNIE

This is like baseball to you.

FRED

It's like anything. When you're afraid to lose, you lose. When you lose, you get more afraid, he's afraid.

BONNIE

(interrupting)

He's not afraid of losing, he's afraid of losing your love.

Silence.

BONNIE

How many ballplayers grow up afraid of losing their father's love every time they come up to the plate?

FRED

(right back)

All of them.

Him anyway. She can't believe he admitted it. He can't believe it. But he did. She stares at him, apoplectic. Then -

(CONTINUED)

166. CONTINUED:

166.

BONNIE

He knows you disapprove of him. He knows you think he's weak. But he's not weak. He's decent. And if you, or Bruce, or anyone tries to beat that out of him ... I'll take him away.

*

167. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - CONTINUED - NIGHT

167.

Moving in on Josh, asleep, a door slamming somewhere in the house, probably in Fred's face. Silence then. And -

FADE TO BLACK

168. EXT. L.A. SKIES - DAY

168.

Over an endless grid dotted with kidney-shaped pools and high school football fields, an L-1011 descends through a layer of smog on final approach into L.A.X.

169. EXT. WEST HOLLYWOOD - LATE AFTERNOON

169.

An elderly woman tugs at a hose connected to a spinning

(CONTINUED)

169. CONTINUED:

169.

sprinkler, dragging it to an unwatered patch of her dying lawn. As she's climbing the steps to the porch of her house -

FRED O.S.

Lina?

She hesitates at the voice and turns slowly around squinting into the low sun at the silhouette of a figure on the sidewalk. Eventually, unsure yet hoping -

LINA

Bobby?

Fred comes forward past the picket gate and the woman sees it's not who she thought it was.

170. INT. LINA'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

170.

Photographs, articles and newspaper cartoons of Bobby Fischer cover the walls. It's like a shrine, and Fred moves through it perusing the artifacts.

LINA

He used to stay with me when he was having problems with his mother. I fed him and made sure he had clean clothes to wear. You had to remind him of things like that.

She smiles at the memory of Bobby's eccentricities and her surrogate mother role in his life.

LINA

Everybody wanted something from him back then. I covered for him hundreds of times, fending people off.

Fred glances away from a satirical cartoon Scotch-taped to a wall: Fischer on horseback battling a TV cameraman with a lance while Spassky sits ignored behind him.

FRED

I don't want anything from him.

(pause)

I just want him to call my son.

Lina stares blankly. Countless promoters and reporters and fans have sought her out to get to Bobby over the years, but this she hasn't heard before and it catches her off-guard.

LINA

And tell him what?

(CONTINUED)

170. CONTINUED:

170.

FRED

I don't know.

He really doesn't know. He's not at all sure why he flew these three thousand miles in the first place. He's in crisis; that's all he knows.

FRED

He's an inspiration to the most talented young players in the world. They study while their friends are out playing because they want to be like him. He's God to them.

Nothing from her ... until a slow nod.

LINA

That's right. Leave it at that. Go home.

FRED

I can't.

She considers him not without sympathy; it's mixed though with the belief that he's better off not knowing.

FRED

If you have any idea where he is, please tell me.

Long silence.

171. EXT. DOWNTOWN L.A. - DAY

171.

Skid Row. Fred moving uneasily past porno shops and boarded-up windows.

LINA V.O.

For the last fifteen years, Bobby's wandered the streets of downtown L.A. hiding out under assumed names.

Moving past drunks and junkies huddled in doorways, Fred searches their faces.

LINA V.O.

Sometimes he has a red beard. Sometimes he's clean-shaven. His hair's receded and he favors one side of his mouth.

172. INT. SKID ROW HOTEL - DAY

172.

Fred approaches the registration desk, which is more like a cage, and shows the clerk the picture of Fischer with his head in his hands.

LINA V.O.

He had the fillings in his teeth removed because he heard about a guy in World War II with a metal plate in his head who was always picking up vibrations.

173. EXT. MCARTHUR PARK - DAY

173.

Against a backdrop of Mexican bars and restaurants and clinics with big signs promising the end to your physical woes, Fred stands amidst a group of local chess hustlers.

HUSTLER 1

I saw him in Pasadena handing out religious pamphlets on a street corner.

HUSTLER 2

No, man, he's in D.C., I just -

HUSTLER 1

I went up to him and said, "Bobby, what the fuck are you doing, you look awful."

HUSTLER 3

I seen him hanging out at a Nazi bookstore in Inglewood. He has a discount there.

HUSTLER 1

He pretended it wasn't him. But it was him, moles and all.

174. EXT. SKID ROW - DAY

174.

Fred's glance shifts from a wino passed out on the sidewalk to a guy on a street corner peddling Revelations-doom.

LINA V.O.

He sleeps late, gets up in the afternoon and rides buses around the city listening to talk shows on a transistor radio. Sometimes he goes to the beach to look at girls. Sometimes to the library to gather evidence for his - shhhh - political theories.

(CONTINUED)

174. CONTINUED:

174.

Fred steps past another drunk and disappears inside another cheap hotel.

LINA V.O.

But none of that matters. It's the night that matters. At night, all night, in one cheap hotel room or another, he plays chess. Alone.

*
*

175. INT. LINA'S HOUSE - CONTINUED - LATE AFTERNOON

175.

Fred stares nonplused at the woman who used to take care of Fischer. Eventually -

FRED

What happened to him?

LINA

What do you mean?

FRED

I mean, what happened to him?

LINA

Nothing. This is what he likes to do. He's not interested in anything else and never has been.

176. INT. LOBBY, SKID ROW HOTEL (2) - NIGHT

176.*

A clerk leafing through registration cards. Fred waiting, expecting nothing. The clerk steps away from his desk. As he comes over, Fred turns to leave -

*
*
*

FRED

Thanks.

*
*

CLERK

Twenty-nine.

*
*

Fred stops, turns back but can only stare at the clerk for several moments. Finally -

*
*

FRED

What?

*
*

CLERK

Room twenty-nine.

*
*

FRED

Robert James.

*
*

CLERK

Room twenty-nine.

*
*

As Fred turns to go up the stairs - tight on the registration card filled out by "Robert James."

*
*

177. INT. SKID ROW HOTEL (2) - NIGHT

177.*

Fred moves past doors lining either side of a long grim hallway, looking for Room 29, passing lower numbers, glimpsing residents beyond the few doors that are ajar.

LINA V.O.

He grew up studying chess alone in his room, and still is. So what if there's roaches in the sink, or the window, if there is one, looks out on an alley? What's that got to do with genius? Or happiness?

He reaches an intersecting hallway that seems to lead only to an exit, turns back, finds himself lost in the maze of hallways. The numbers don't seem to correspond to any logic. He comes down a darker hall leading to another. At the end of that one stands a black door. He approaches it slowly. Room 29.

LINA V.O.

At a press conference once, Spassky said, "Chess is like life," and turned to Bobby expecting him to agree. But Bobby disagreed. "Chess isn't like life," he said. "Chess is life."

He can hear sounds from within Room 29. In fact, it's all he can hear. He stares at the door, at the number. He glances off to another sound, from another room, hears all the sounds of the residents, the TV's, the radios, the yelling, and wonders what the hell he's doing here. He turns and leaves.

178. INT. WAITZKIN APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

178.*

The lock turns on the door to the apartment. Fred steps inside with his bag, exhausted and depressed from his trip to California. His daughter comes to him for a hug. His wife doesn't.

FRED

Where's Josh, in his room? I need to talk to him.

BONNIE

Yeah, he's in his room.

FRED

What's the matter?
(she doesn't answer)
What.

BONNIE

(pause)
Go see your son.

179. INT. JOSH'S ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

179.*

Fred pushes the door open. Nothing obstructs it; there's no junk on the floor. Things have been put away. It's clean. Fred approaches the door -

FRED

Josh?

JOSH O.S.

Shhh.

Fred parts the sheet hanging from the bunk. Josh is inside with an empty chessboard, studying the squares, noting moves on a score sheet, staring back down again.

FRED

How you doing?

JOSH

Shhh.

Fred watches his son staring at the board, scribbling the moves, staring back down.

FRED

Look at me, Josh.

Josh glances up, but his eyes reveal little expression. They seem dead.

FRED

You don't have to do this anymore. You can give it up and it's all right with me. In fact, I want you to give it up.

JOSH

How can I do that?

FRED

What do you mean, you just do it.

JOSH

But I have to win.

FRED

No, that's what I'm saying, you don't.

JOSH

(pause)

But you told me I did.

FRED

I'm telling you now you don't.

(CONTINUED)

179. CONTINUED:

179.

JOSH

But I do. I do.

Fred considers him for a long moment, stares at him like he's someone he no longer recognizes.

JOSH

I have to.

Josh glances down again at the empty board. Silence ...

180. EXT. ROOF PATIO - NIGHT

180.*

Fred out on the patio in a weathered chair, alone in the dark, staring out at the lights of Greenwich Village. Bonnie sits down beside him. They don't speak. Until -

BONNIE

I take it you didn't find him.

It seems so long ago Fred set out to find Fischer, but it was only yesterday.

FRED

I did.

BONNIE

You're kidding. What was he like?
What did he say?

FRED

He's got nothing to say to Josh or anyone else.

He stares out at the Arch de Triumph of Washington Square, small in the distance, lit up against the night.

181. INT. WAITZKIN APARTMENT - MORNING

181.

Josh wakes to a muffled sound outside his room, a kind of clinking of metal. He crawls out of bed and pads down the stairs to find his father in the living room putting the trophies lining the mantle into a cardboard box.

FRED

Good morning.

Josh watches his father finish loading the box, carry it past him up the stairs. Sleepy but curious, he follows, comes to his doorway and looks in at his dad clearing a place on a book shelf and lining the trophies up. Once they're all there, Fred glances over.

FRED

These belong to you.

182. (NOW SC. A184) 182.

183. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY 183.

Fred leads his son into the park through the portal of the Arch de Triumph. The regulars at the chess tables see him coming and suspend their games.

Josh glances down the lines of tables for some sign of Vinnie, but he isn't at his usual place.

VINNIE O.S.

Hey, fish.

Josh turns and sees Vinnie emerging from the trees, having just urinated there. He looks like hell but there's a faint smile on his face.

VINNIE

That's right, I'm talking to you.

Vinnie sits down at his table. There's no one opposite him. Josh glances to his dad, who nods, Yeah, go ahead, and he approaches the table -

HARD CUT TO:

184. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - LATER - DAY 184.

Fred has handed over the reins of Josh's chess education to the hustlers in the park. Gathered around a table, they and Fred watch him play blitz against Vinnie.

VINNIE

What's that?

JOSH

Wilkes-Barre Attack.

VINNIE

Wilkes-Barre Attack, where'd you learn that, from a book?

JOSH

From my teacher.

VINNIE

Well, forget it, and play like you used to, from the gut. Get your pawns rolling on the queenside and come after me.

A184. INT. DALTON SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

A184.

Dalton's chess instructor, Svetozar Jovanovic, lectures his young student using a demonstration board. On the chalkboard it hangs from is written -

W - J.R. Capablanca vs.
B - Mattison - Carlsbad, 1923
(Nimzo-Indian Defense)

Josh comes in late, interrupting the lecture, and hands the teacher a note. He takes a look at it, then at the boy.

JOVANOVIC
Aren't you playing in the Nationals
next month?

JOSH
Yes, sir.

JOVANOVIC
Then I don't understand this.

JOSH
Neither do I.

Josh shrugs. Jovanovic folds the note and sets it on his desk but continues staring at it confused.

JOVANOVIC
Well, I guess you're excused then.

Josh takes a seat away from the other kids, and shrugs in response to Morgan's silent query, What gives? As Jovanovic continues his lecture, Josh searches his backpack for something to do while he doesn't play chess and finds some packs of baseball cards.

B184. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY

B184.

Josh and Vinnie's hands darting around the board. A larger crowd than before has gathered to watch.

VINNIE
I see now he didn't teach you to win,
he taught you how not to lose. You're
playing not to lose, that's nothing to
be proud of. You have to risk losing.
You have to risk everything. You have
to go to the edge of defeat. That's
where you want to be. On the edge.

JOSH
But -

(CONTINUED)

B184. CONTINUED:

B184.

VINNIE

But what - move.

Josh slams another piece down and hits the clock. Vinnie counters and Josh counters him, slam.

185. INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

185.

Fred and Josh wander through the showroom pretending they're interested in buying a car.

SALESMAN

Can I help you?

FRED

In a minute - we're just looking around first.

SALESMAN

Take your time. I'll be right over here.

He points to the sales offices across the room before heading over to them. Fred exchanges a conspiratorial glance with Josh before loading up on brochures.

186. OMITTED

186.

187. OMITTED

187.

A187. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY

A187.

Josh playing blitz against Vinnie again. The crowd of spectators has grown larger.

VINNIE

Never play the board, always the man. Play the man playing the board, play me, I'm your opponent, you have to beat me, not the board, beat me.

JOSH

But you're not who I have to (play)

VINNIE

(interrupting)

I don't care, you're playing me now.
Now move.

Josh moves and hits the clock, anticipates Vinnie's next move and moves again before Vinnie's piece is down.

188. EXT. EMPTY SCHOOLYARD - DAY

188.

Training wheels and a wrench on the asphalt. Fred running alongside Josh's bike, hand on the back of the seat, steadying it as Josh pedals and steers.

JOSH
Maybe we should do this after the Nationals.

FRED
Keep pedaling.

JOSH
I could crack my head open. You said that.

FRED
Did I?

The two-wheeler pulls away from Fred's grasp.

JOSH
Dad? Are you there?

FRED
Don't look back.

JOSH
Dad - ?

Fred watches with pride (and horror) as the bike careens around the yard.

189. EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE - DAY

189.

Twenty people around the table now watching Josh and Vinnie.

VINNIE
Better. Move.
(slam)
Good. Don't think. Move.

Another hustler notices another smoking a joint.

HUSTLER
Put that out, man, Josh is playing, show some respect.

(CONTINUED)

189. CONTINUED:

189.

 VINNIE
 (slam)
 Better.
 (slam)
 Better.
 (slam)
 Good.
 (slam)
 Move.
 (slam)
 Good.

 JOSH
 Mate.

 VINNIE
Yeah!

190. INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - NIGHT

190.

Silence except for the tapping of keys. Virtually alone in the place, working late at his computer, Fred notices a figure appear in the reflection in the screen. Turning in his chair, he considers Pandolfini for several moments.

 FRED
 Hello, Bruce.

 PANDOLFINI
 How's it going?

 FRED
 All right.

Fred gestures to a chair, but Pandolfini remains standing.

 PANDOLFINI
 How's Josh?

 FRED
 He's good.

 PANDOLFINI
 Still planning to go to Chicago for
 the -

 FRED
 Yeah.

They nod at each other. Pandolfini shifts around a little uncomfortably.

(CONTINUED)

190. CONTINUED:

190.

PANDOLFINI
I've seen you both at the park.

FRED
Yeah, we've been hanging out there a lot.

PANDOLFINI
(pause)
You think that's a good idea.

FRED
Yeah, I do. He's playing better than ever.

PANDOLFINI
How would you know that?

Of course, Fred can't know it. There's no way he can follow the intricacies of Josh's game.

FRED
You're right, I don't know. What I know is that he likes playing again for the first time in a long time.

Pandolfini's shrug wholly discounts the importance of the remark. Eventually -

PANDOLFINI
I know you think what you're doing is the best thing for him. But I got to tell you I think you're setting him up for the biggest disappointment of his life.

Silence. Fred shrugs to say, Well, that may be, but there's nothing else I can do.

PANDOLFINI
That kid from California isn't spending his afternoons riding bikes and playing Pac Man, I guarantee you that.

FRED
I'm doing the only thing I know how to do for Josh. I don't know what else to do.

PANDOLFINI
Don't let him go down there to lose, that's what you can do for him. You're his father, forbid it.

Fred thinks about it, has thought about it, thinks of nothing

(CONTINUED)

190. CONTINUED:

190.

else almost every waking minute ... but finally shakes his head.

FRED

I can't do that.

PANDOLFINI

Fred, he's going to get killed and there's not going to be much left of him.

FRED

There wasn't before.

PANDOLFINI

No. No, this is different. You have no idea what a fall like this can do to you.

Fred considers the disheveled chess teacher standing before him for a long moment.

FRED

I think I do.

Long silence.

FRED

You know what? You should come down with us. I know it'd mean a lot to him to have you there.

Pandolfini glances away, then back finally, and offers the same shake of the head.

PANDOLFINI

That I can't do.

Fred's shrug says, Well, then that's that. Pandolfini waits around a moment more for a sign that Fred might reconsider what he's said, but when it doesn't come, he turns and leaves.

Fred watches him disappear.

FADE TO BLACK

191. EXT. CHICAGO - DAY

191.

The Chicago skyline juts up into a haze of smog.

192. INT. HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - DAY

192.

Descending from a great height, two hundred identical chess boards in a deserted room are eventually obscured by the crown of a single king.

193. EXT. HOTEL, CHICAGO - DAY

193.

A large banner draped across the entrance of a hotel ripples in the breeze - NATIONAL SCHOLASTIC CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP. A taxi pulls up and delivers Fred, Bonnie, Josh, Katya and, straggling out last, Vinnie.

194. INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

194.

A clerk calls out room numbers to a bellboy as she hands Fred and Vinnie keys and an uneasy smile.

CLERK

Welcome to Chicago.

Across the lobby, Kalev quizzes Morgan on obscure openings from a Russian chess encyclopedia.

JOSH

Hi, Morgan.

MORGAN

Josh, where you been?

JOSH

Fishing.

He pulls out a snapshot of himself and his dad on a dock, posing with a big fish, and hands it to his friend.

MORGAN

Whoa, look at this.

He shows the picture to his dad who stares at it dumbly.

JOSH

No chess boards, no chess books -
I wasn't allowed to even talk about
chess. Just fish. For two weeks.
(to Kalev)
It was my dad's idea.

Kalev nods absently. As the boys huddle to admire the picture more closely, Fred wanders over.

KALEV

Fishing?

Fred shrugs, not at all sure it was a wise move taking Josh fishing before the biggest tournament of his life.

195. INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

195.

The bellboy opens connecting doors to adjoining rooms. Katya's as excited as Josh used to be, running around checking things

(CONTINUED)

195. CONTINUED:

195.

out. Fred tips the guy and glances over to Vinnie, wondering perhaps if he's thinking about stealing something.

VINNIE

Very nice.

196. INT. BANQUET ROOM - LATER - DAY

196.

Kids stream into the room with great decorum and search out their places at the tables. Against a backdrop of trophies, the tournament's director squints into the lights of a minicam.

REPORTER

The 400 young players finding their seats behind me represent some of the strongest chess minds of any age in the country. Traveling from as far away as Alaska and Hawaii, they've come here to compete against each other over the course of the next two long grueling days. To become the National Champion, one must win all seven games, I understand.

DIRECTOR

That's right, Bob.

REPORTER

This is Donovan Clennan, director of the National Scholastic Championship. Tell me, is the next Bobby Fischer somewhere in this room?

The director tries to laugh good-naturedly at this, the lamest and most often asked question.

197. INT. LOBBY - SAME TIME - DAY

197.

Closed-circuit monitors feature the number-one board and two empty chairs. *

Here in the lobby, parents banished from the playing room mill around waiting with equal dread for the beginning of the first round. *

(CONTINUED)

197. CONTINUED:

197.

FRED

This girl you're playing is ranked
82nd. Get through it quick so you
can rest before the next round. I'll
see you in a little while.

*
*
*

Josh nods, Okay, starts to go, then glances back at his father's
voice -

*
*

FRED

Josh ... Good luck.

*

Fred watches with dread as his son disappears into the playing
room, then joins Bonnie, Katya and Vinnie on a bench.

*

FRED

He's all alone.

198. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

198.

Josh takes a seat opposite a girl his age and waits for the
tournament director's signal to begin. As the room quiets down
he waves to Morgan at a nearby table, then glances up to the
platform and the number-one board and Poe. Silence ...

DIRECTOR

Start your clocks.

Two hundred white pawns click against two hundred boards as
two hundred clocks start ticking.

199. INT. LOBBY - DAY

199.

Fred stirring Cremora in a cup of coffee at a courtesy table.
A chess mother comes over and fills a cup from the urn.

*
*

82ND MOTHER

Your son's an excellent player.

FRED

Thank you.

82ND MOTHER

I'm afraid my daughter doesn't stand a
chance against him. She's only ranked
82nd.

FRED

Is that right? 82nd? I'm sure she's
very good anyway.

(CONTINUED)

199. CONTINUED:

199.

82ND MOTHER

The way I look at it, it's a no-lose situation. If she happens to win by some miracle, it'd be fantastic. If she loses, it's to be expected.

Her pleasant manner and healthy outlook on winning and losing reminds him of his own - long ago. Very long ago.

*
*

FRED

I guess that's true.

He excuses himself to escape from the woman - or himself.

*

200. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

200.

Half the games, including Poe's, have ended, the players gone from the room. Josh is still here, though, across from the girl with the nice mother and the lousy rating, concentrating hard on each move. Not one of their pieces has yet been exchanged.

201. INT. LOBBY - DAY

201.

Several of the kids who've finished hang out with their parents in the lobby and coffee shop. Pacing nervously, checking his watch, Fred grows more anxious by the second. Kalev and Morgan come through.

*

KALEV

Josh isn't still in there?
(Fred nods gravely; long pause)

Fishing.

Fred shakes his head in dismay, afraid Pandolfini was right, that he's set his son up for the fall of his life.

202. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

202.

Officials looking as somber and ceremonial as palace guards move slowly past the handful of games still in progress.

Josh's hand slides a bishop timidly across the board, hesitates, withdraws it. Desperation shows in his eyes.

203. INT. LOBBY - DAY

203.

Monitors display the empty chairs at the number-one board. Outside, kids play in the sun.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

203. CONTINUED:

203.

Fred's a mess. He can't believe his son's first game is going on so long. The girl's mother unwisely chooses this moment to approach him.

82ND MOTHER

My daughter's never played so well in her life. I really don't know what to make of it.

Too upset to speak, all Fred can manage is a pinched smile at the woman.

204. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

204.

All but one of the games is over. Josh looks exhausted, eyes hollow and bloodshot staring at the board and eventually venturing a move.

205. INT. LOBBY - DAY

205.

The other kids have finished playing and sit around watching the monitors that now show, from an awkward angle, Josh's game. *

While the girl's mother revels in her having hung in there this long, Fred paces apprehensively. Noticing the Tuna Fish Father watching him smugly, he yells across the lobby at him --

FRED

What are you looking at?

206. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

206.

Weary and battle-scarred, Josh finally corners his opponent's king. Like little adults, they exchange score cards, sign them, shake hands and get up from the table.

207. INT. LOBBY - DAY

207.

They emerge from the playing room, Josh and the girl, as the other kids file in for the next round. His family meets him in the hall and Josh almost collapses on a chair. *

FRED

You okay? *

JOSH

I have to rest. *

VINNIE

The next round starts - now. *

(CONTINUED)

207. CONTINUED:

207.

BONNIE
Are you hungry?

JOSH
I'm too tired to eat.

Bonnie goes over to get him something from the courtesy table.
Fred stares at his son, angry with himself for what he's done
to him.

*
*
*

FRED
It's my fault.

VINNIE
He'll be all right.

Dimitri comes past with young Poe, looking refreshed and
confident.

*
*

VINNIE
Josh? You got to get up, man.

208. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

208.

Jonathan Poe gets up from the number-one table having soundly
dispatched his weeping opponent. Below, Josh, looking like he
might fall asleep any minute, watches him leave the room before
glancing back wearily to his own board.

209. INT. LOBBY - DAY

209.

The Waitzkin camp waits for the outcome of the second game with
their heads in their hands. The door to the playing room swings
open and some kids, including Josh, emerge. The adults on the
couch wait for the verdict, which finally comes in a slight
weary nod.

210. INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

210.

As Bonnie readies a rollaway bed for Vinnie, he sits with
Josh on a couch.

*
*

VINNIE
I've been watching him. He's good.
He's as good as I am but you're better
than me. Which means you can take
him.

*

Josh nods but it's unlikely he believes it.

(CONTINUED)

210. CONTINUED:

210.

JOSH
The better I play, the better I have
to play.

VINNIE
That's the way it works. *

JOSH
When will it end?

VINNIE
Tomorrow.

Josh wishes tomorrow were already behind him. *

JOSH
How are you? Are you all right?

VINNIE
I'm great. I'm friends with the
National Champion.

A210. INT. LOBBY - NEXT DAY

A210.*

Vinnie emerges from the lobby. *

211. EXT. COURTYARD

211.*

As Poe works on endgame tactics with Dimitri between rounds,
Vinnie wanders over and watches. Dimitri glances up with a look
that demands, Do you mind? The Washington Square hustler
smiles.

VINNIE
You know what's going to happen today. *
You're gonna have to face my man Josh. *

POE
Josh is a patzer.

VINNIE
Yeah?

Vinnie leaves without another word. The sneer on Poe's face
pales slightly.

212. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

212.

Josh has moved a little closer to the number-one board. Poe
glances up -

(CONTINUED)

212. CONTINUED:

212.

JUMPCUT to Josh opposite another opponent, closer to the number-one board -

JUMPCUT to Josh, closer still, and -

HARD CUT TO:

213. EXT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

213.*

The playing room is completely empty and still.

*

214. INT. LOBBY ANTEROOM - DAY

214.*

The tournament director steps past a computer printing out the pairing sheet for the seventh and final game - typing "Waitzkin" opposite "Poe" on top.

*

*

*

215. INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

215.

Alone in the room before the last game, Josh stares at the walls, looking for the courage to go downstairs.

216. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

216.

Poe sits at the number-one table like a king, looking out across the sea of lesser human beings below him as he awaits the arrival of that patzer, Waitzkin.

217. INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

217.

An apologetic knock on the door precedes its opening. Josh glances up and sees that it's Pandolfini.

PANDOLFINI

Can I come in?

He waits for Josh's permission which finally comes in a nod. The tall man steps into the room with his battered briefcase, comes closer and sits. Long silence.

PANDOLFINI

How you feeling?

Josh doesn't answer. He considers his teacher in silence, amazed that's he's made the trip yet unsure exactly how he feels about him.

PANDOLFINI

Scared?

(CONTINUED)

217. CONTINUED:

217.

JOSH
(finally)
I can't beat him.

PANDOLFINI
You might be right. I'm not supposed
to say that but you'd know I was lying
if I said anything else.

He opens the briefcase.

PANDOLFINI
I have something for you.

He takes out a framed document, considers it a moment, then
reads from it --

PANDOLFINI
"This is to certify that Joshua
Waitzkin, on this day, the 14th of
May, 1992, has, in the eyes of his
teacher, attained the rank of
Grandmaster."

He hands it to Josh. It doesn't look anything like the fake
Xeroxed certificate the boy so desperately wanted before. This
is one of a kind, on parchment with calligraphy writing.

PANDOLFINI
I've never been so proud of anyone in
my life. I'm honored to call myself
your teacher. *

Josh holds onto the certificate like its gold. He feels the
tears coming and reaches out for Pandolfini.

JOSH
I'm so scared.

PANDOLFINI
I know.

Pandolfini holds onto him tight and they sit there together for
a long time not moving. Finally -

JOSH
Will you stay until it's over?

PANDOLFINI
Will I stay? I wouldn't miss it for
the world.

Josh lets the man help him up and slowly they move toward the
door.

218. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

218.

Eyes dry, Josh climbs the risers and takes his place opposite
Poe at the number-one board.

219. INT. LOBBY - DAY

219.

The same image on the monitors, Josh trying to stay calm under the enormous pressure he feels. Stationed under one of the many screens, Pandolfini feels a presence before he hears him:

DIMITRI
It's unsettling, isn't it, realizing
there are only so many things you can
teach a child ... and that courage
isn't one of them.

Pandolfini chooses not to dignify the comment with a response.

DIMITRI
Good luck.

The old teacher steps away and the doors to the playing room close.

220. INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

220.

Moving slowly toward the certificate propped against pillows on the bed.

221. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

221.

Moving toward Josh as he hears a voice say, Start your clocks. He hits his and there's an echo of a hundred others and the slap of pawns hitting a hundred boards. But Poe doesn't move. Josh glances to the clock as Poe's time ticks away.

A221. INT LOBBY - DAY

A221.

Fred and Pandolfini and Bonnie and Vinnie glued to the monitors. They watch as Poe just sits not moving, and the look of confusion on Josh's face.

B221. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

B221.

Finally, Poe calmly advances a pawn. Josh counters. Poe moves. Josh moves.

222. INT. LOBBY - CONTINUED

222.

Watching the moves on the center monitor -

PANDOLFINI
Kraus Attack of the Slav Defense, hang
back.

VINNIE
Go after him.

(CONTINUED)

222. CONTINUED:

222.

PANDOLFINI

Develop your pieces, don't bring your
queen out.

VINNIE

Bring her out, scare the peasant.

223. INT. BANQUET ROOM - SAME TIME - DAY

223.

Josh's hand reaches for his queen -

224. INT. LOBBY - SAME TIME - DAY 224.

Seeing the hand retreat from the queen, Pandolfini breathes a warning - *

PANDOLFINI
Don't do it, Josh, don't even think about it.

VINNIE
Bring her out.

PANDOLFINI
Keep her back.

225. INT. BANQUET ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY 225.

Josh brings his queen out to the center of the board and Poe laughs to himself.

226. INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS - DAY 226.

Watching the move on the monitors --

PANDOLFINI
Oh, Jesus. (Note: for TV version: Oh, no.) *

FRED
What. *

VINNIE
All right, Josh. *

227. INT. BANQUET ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY 227.

Poe zeroes in quickly on Josh's brazen queen with several men.

POE
You're dead already. I

He slams a bishop down on the queen and Josh feels it like a stake in his heart.

228. INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS - DAY 228.

So does Fred, groaning in pain as if speared in the chest. Pandolfini turns away from the monitor unable to watch anymore. To him:

BONNIE
It's over, isn't it.

VINNIE
Over? Josh is setting him up. I taught him that.

Pandolfini glances over at Vinnie with a hopeless shake of his head.

229. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY 229.

If Poe were confident before, he now feels invincible, chasing Josh's queenless retreating army. So consumed is he with his marauding, though, he leaves his queen momentarily unprotected and Josh topples her.

230. INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS - DAY 230.

Vinnie, the only one in Josh's group to witness the capture, leaps to his feet.

VINNIE

There it is!

Fred and Pandolfini, some distance away, whirl around to check the monitors. Dimitri, too, gazes up at one apoplectic.

231. INT. BANQUET ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY 231.

Poe stares at his fallen queen in disbelief. Finally, he glances up at Josh.

JOSH

Trick or treat.

An expression of pure hatred sets on Poe's face. This patzer lulled him into complacency, but he'll regret it ...

TIGHT ON THE CHESSBOARD from directly above. Moving slowly up, the platform is revealed and the combatants at it, and, higher, players at other tables, and, higher still, the entire room, all two hundred checkered boards and the four hundred kids at them.

232. CLOSE ON JOSH'S CAMP IN THE LOBBY, together now and still 232.
as a tableau, facing a monitor.

TIGHT ON THE TIME CLOCK on the number-one table, the seconds ticking away.

CLOSE ON JOSH, face straining, eyes darting from piece to piece.

WIDE ON THE ROOM, some vacancies at the other tables now.

SOME KIDS IN THE LOBBY, finished with their games, watching the monitors.

TIGHT ON A HUGE WHITE BISHOP sliding diagonally.

HIGH ABOVE THE PLAYING ROOM, more tables unoccupied.

CLOSE ON FRED, nervously watching a monitor.

TIGHT ON A BLACK ROOK sliding horizontally.

CLOSE ON BONNIE staring up at a monitor.

(CONTINUED)

232. CONTINUED:

232.

TIGHT ON THE TIME CLOCK, then high above the only table still active, the number-one table.

CLOSE ON VINNIE watching a monitor. And the hundreds of kids, finished, glued to others.

233. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

233.

Tight on the board. Poe takes a pawn with a knight but can gloat for only the second it takes Josh to knock one of his in response from the board.

He goes after a bishop, topples it. Josh retaliates, capturing a pawn. A white rook falls. Another black knight. A white pawn. A black pawn.

The moves are quick as the players lure each other into a speed game, attacking with increasing and unnerving violence, another knight, another pawn.

A black bishop fells a white rook, the castle falling to the floor in slow motion, and everything stops ...

234. INT. LOBBY - DAY

234.

Seeing it on the monitor, Pandolfini whispers to himself:

PANDOLFINI
That was a mistake.

235. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

235.

Looking at his fallen rook, Josh's body stiffens a little, sensing that the end, for one of them, is near.

236. INT. LOBBY - DAY

236.

The same image on the monitors.

FRED
What was a mistake? Who made a mistake?

PANDOLFINI
(ignoring him)
Look deep, Josh, it's there. It's twelve moves away, but it's there. You've got him.

*

237. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

237.

Josh tries to analyze a long sequence of moves in his head. The seconds tick away on the clock.

238. INT. LOBBY - DAY

238.

Tight on Pandolfini speaking softly to Josh's image on the monitor as if he could hear him --

PANDOLFINI

Take his pawn with your pawn - g
takes f6 forking his bishop and rook -

*
*

239. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

239.

Tight on Josh searching the board -

*

JOSH V.O.

- or I could take with my bishop -

*

PANDOLFINI V.O.

- don't take with your bishop, you
need it to guard e7 -

*
*
*

JOSH V.O.

- g takes f6 -

*

PANDOLFINI V.O.

- he'll take back with either his
bishop or knight -

*
*
*

JOSH V.O.

- his knight or his bishop -

*

240. INT. LOBBY - DAY

240.

Close on Pandolfini again, whispering to Josh's image on the monitor -

PANDOLFINI

- either way, check him with your
rook at c6 -

*
*

JOSH V.O.

- rook c6 check -

*
*

PANDOLFINI

- and he'll have to retreat his king,
probably to f5, hiding behind his rook

*
*

JOSH V.O.

- king f5 -

*

PANDOLFINI

- take on f6 with your bishop -
he'll take back with his knight or his
bishop -

*
*
*

JOSH V.O.

- knight f6 or bishop f6 -

*
*

(CONTINUED)

240. CONTINUED:

240.

PANDOLFINI
- and when he does, and this is
the hard part, sacrifice your rook -

JOSH V.O.
I could attack his rook with my
knight, either c4 or d7 but I don't
have a check.

PANDOLFINI
- capturing at f6 and giving check -

JOSH V.O.
I do have a check, if I sacrifice my
rook for his knight f6 -

PANDOLFINI
- King takes rook f6 -

241. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

241.

Tight on Josh, losing the sequence in his head.

JOSH V.O.
- or do I attack his pawn with my
rook -

PANDOLFINI V.O.
- give him a knight check at d7
forking his king and rook - he'll move
to safety, king f5 - leaving his rook
unprotected -

JOSH V.O.
- or do I make a king move -

PANDOLFINI V.O.
- take his rook with your knight e5 -

JOSH V.O.
- or -

PANDOLFINI V.O.
- and he'll take back with his king -

JOSH V.O.
- or -

PANDOLFINI V.O.
- and you've got him -

JOSH V.O.
I can't see it -

PANDOLFINI V.O.
Don't move until you see it -

242. INT. LOBBY - DAY

242.

Tight on Pandolfini.

JOSH V.O.

I can't see it -

*

PANDOLFINI

Don't move until you see it -

*

*

243. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

243.

Close on Josh, straining to "see" it, pattern after pattern disappearing before his eyes.

PANDOLFINI V.O.

Don't move until you see it -

*

He can't see it and it's killing him. He sucks in a long breath of air to keep from suffocating and stands up.

244. INT. LOBBY - DAY

244.

Pandolfini breathes again, exhausted too from figuring out the sequence.

FRED

What's he doing? Where's he going?

On the monitor, Josh says something to the director, but there's no sound here in the lobby. The man leads him away from the table.

245. INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

245.

The director escorts Josh into the bathroom and stands guard at the door to prevent anyone from entering to coach him. The boy crosses to the end of the stalls, slumps down against the tiles and cries in frustration.

JOSH

I can't see it. Daddy? I'm sorry, I can't see it. I'm sorry.

246. INT. LOBBY - DAY

246.

A monitor. The empty chair at the number-one table. Everyone staring at it, wondering what the hell's going on.

247. INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

247.

Josh splashes water on his face in an attempt to wash the tears away and pull himself together.

248. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

248.

The director leads him back across the all but deserted room to the platform. He takes his seat, wipes at his eyes with the back of his hand and stares at the board.

249. INT. LOBBY - DAY

249.

Close on Pandolfini watching the monitor.

PANDOLFINI

Okay, Tiger, here we go again - g
takes f6 forcing white to take back
with his knight or bishop -

*
*
*

250. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

250.

Josh's hand moves across the board to a knight and hesitates there.

*

251. INT. LOBBY - DAY

251.

PANDOLFINI

No, Josh, g takes f6 -

*

The other kids, even though they don't see it, pick up on Pandolfini's instructions.

KIDS

Pawn takes pawn f6 - g takes f6, come
on, Josh, pawn takes pawn f6 -

*
*

252. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

252.

Peering through the pieces at board level, Josh's eyes dart and search -

PANDOLFINI V.O.

Here, I'll make it easier for you -

†

A252. INT. CHESS CLUB - (FLASHBACK) - DAY

A252.*

Pandolfini's arm rakes all the pieces from the board.

*

B252. INT. BANQUET ROOM - CONTINUED

B252.*

The board empty now, Josh stares at it, constructing and reconstructing, building the moves without the "distraction" of the pieces themselves, his mind visualizing the progression of moves ending in, and it shows in his eyes ... mate.

*
*
*
*

253. INT. LOBBY - DAY

253.

A smile slowly crosses Pandolfini's face.

PANDOLFINI

He's got it.

FRED

He's got it? How do you know he's got it?

PANDOLFINI

He's got it.

254. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

254.

Josh glances up to Poe who's staring back at him with disdain and impatience.

POE

What.

Josh doesn't answer; he just keeps looking at the boy, knowing he's got him, knowing he's won, knowing he's the champion.

POE

Come on, move.

Josh's hand moves toward the knight to push it to e7, but then hesitates and reaches instead in offering to his opponent.

POE

What's that supposed to mean?

255. INT. LOBBY - DAY

255.

Fred stares at the image on the monitor.

VINNIE

What's that supposed to mean?

*
*

256. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

256.

Josh keeps holding his hand out waiting for Poe to shake it.

POE

(irritated)

What.

257. INT. LOBBY - DAY

257.

Close on Pandolfini as it dawns on him what's happening. He smiles to himself at Josh's image on the monitor -- and sees his own reflection in it.

(CONTINUED)

257. CONTINUED:

257.

PANDOLFINI
He's offering him a draw.

VINNIE
A draw? Why?

Pandolfini glances across to Fred, then to Dimitri.

258. INT. BANQUET ROOM - DAY

258.

Poe keeps staring dumbly at Josh's outstretched hand.

JOSH
I'm offering you a draw.

POE
You've got to be kidding.

JOSH
You've lost, you just don't know it.
I've got you beat.

POE
You've got me beat? Look at the board.

JOSH
I have. It's mate in sixteen and it's
going to kill you. Take the draw,
we'll share the championship.

All of a sudden, Poe isn't sure what to believe.

JOSH
Take the draw. Take it.

Long pause ...

POE
You can't hustle me ... Move.

Josh withdraws his hand and places it in his lap. Nothing happens for several moments before he reaches out again, grasps his pawn and takes white's on f6.

In quick succession then, the twelve moves are made, leading to a pawn race, both queens coming back on the board, a check by black and ... Poe stares at his cornered king, and time seems to stand still.

A muffled cheer of hundreds of kids erupts from behind the closed doors. They swing open and the kids pour in.

(CONTINUED)

258. CONTINUED:

258.

Poe glances up from the board destroyed. He tries to make it to the doors and out but finds himself tangled in the mob rushing in.

As Josh watches his opponent's desperate attempt to flee, he feels none of the elation he thought he would beating him, but something else he didn't, something deeper.

The kids and his parents and sister surround Josh, hugging and congratulating him. Vinnie waves the long-saved scrap of newspaper with "Josh Waitzkin" scribbled on the masthead, telling everyone he used to play him in the park.

JOSH
(to Fred)
I tried to give him a way out.

FRED
I know.

And he's proud of him for it. Josh's glance finds Pandolfini standing off to the side; he knows too and is just as proud. Josh sees something else and steps down -

It's Morgan, holding back tears at having lost his own last game, and his father trying to get him to replay the final game of the tournament. Josh puts his arm around the smaller boy's shoulder and guides him across the crowded hall to the doors.

259. EXT. HOTEL GROUNDS - DAY

259.

From the windows, Fred watches as Josh guides his distraught friend across the deserted courtyard. Bonnie comes over beside her husband and watches the two small figures moving under the trees.

Close on the boys:

JOSH
I know what you're feeling and I can't make it go away. I wish I could, but I can't. But you know what? I'm going to tell you a secret.

The younger boy wipes at his eyes as he looks up at Josh, who somehow seems, standing here, much older than the year that separates them.

JOSH
You're a much stronger player than I was at your age.

He puts his arm around Morgan and they move off, walking slowly, talking quietly, beginning to heal.

FADE TO BLACK