

Chess, Conspiracy and Crime: Unpacking the Intrigue in Ronan Bennet's *Zugzwang*

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Abstract—Chess functions as both a powerful metaphor and a structural element. It is more than just a game - it is a layered metaphor in which minds wage an invisible battle within and against one another. In literature, it is used as a metaphor, narrative device, and symbolic tool. It has been incorporated to represent the battle of intellect, power play, and strategic planning. This resonates with entrapments beyond the board, capturing the tensions in character dynamics, narrative pacing, and symbolic representations. This paper explores the intricate dynamics of Chess, Crime and Conspiracy in Ronan Bennett's *Zugzwang*. Set in pre-revolutionary Russia of 1914, the narration follows Dr. Otto Spethmann, a psychoanalyst and chess enthusiast who becomes entangled in political intrigues and power plays of various factions. This paper examines the exemplary employment of the chess motif to illuminate the complex tapestry of power politics, moral tensions, and shifting loyalties. It highlights how Bennett uses chess moves to metaphorically intertwine them with crime and conspiracy through impossible choices and dilemmas faced by individuals caught in the machinations of forces beyond their control.

Index Terms—chess, moves, strategies, investigation

I. INTRODUCTION

How impossible for human prudence to foresee and guard against every circumvention! It is even as a game of chess, where, while the rook, or knight, or bishop is busied forecasting some great enterprise, a worthless pawn exposes and disconcerts his scheme. (Fielding, 1743, p. 66)

Fundamentally, chess is a clash between two thought processes. It is a board game that is paradoxically both open and mysterious in nature. It is played on a grid-like board, where all the pieces are open for the players to see, but their moves are always mysterious. It is an exemplar activity that represents the impossibility of human judgement in foretelling and shielding oneself against all forms of evasion. This paper investigates the intriguing aspects of crime and conspiracy set against the background of chess games in Ronan Bennett's *Zugzwang*. It explores the historical settings, political conspiracies, crime components, and character dynamics that are interwoven with both chess elements and elements of chess.

In literature, chess is mostly presented as an allegory for life, war, and clashes of ideologies, etc. It is metaphorically used to portray the horrors of war, life, and death, the conflict between ego and integrity, and the realistic struggle of innocent lives against forces beyond their power and lives lost to protect others. Here, the characters represent chess pieces. Their actions are unpredictable; the 'game' they play is entwined with intelligence, risk, even at the cost of unsuspecting lives. Literary representations of chess can be found in works such as Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Chaucer's *Book of Duchess*, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Writers like Isaac Asimov, Agatha Christie, Edgar Allan Poe, Walter Tevis, and Ronan Bennett have used the concept of chess in their works effectively.

Ronan Bennett is a writer and screenplay author from Ireland. He is well known for the drug and gang crime television series *Top Boy*. He has written screenplays for movies and series, such as *Face*, *Love Lies Bleeding*, *Rebel Heart*, and *Lucky Break*. His novel *The Catastrophist* (1997) won him the Irish Post Literature Award and the Belfast Arts Award for Literature, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel Award. *Zugzwang* (2007) was initially published as a series in the British Sunday newspaper *The Observer*. It contains illustrations from Mark Quinn. For the narrative reference Bennett replicates the 2000 Swiss Team Championship tussle between Daniel King and Andrei Sokolov.

Zugzwang is a German chess term that explains a particular position on a chess board. Here, in order to avoid defeat, the player must constantly move, even though it might be disastrous. Bennett uses this move with exceptional mastery for the progression of the plot. The narration is set in 1914 Russia, a country in the midst of political turmoil and on the brink of revolution. The police struggle with increasing crime, and conspirators take the guise of both friends and foes. The narration unfolds through the eyes of Dr. Otto Spethmann, an eminent psychologist who is tied in a literal and metaphorical chess game with his friend Reuven Kopelzen. As the World Chess Championship approaches, the intensifying political tensions and growing public dissatisfaction render each move, both on the chessboard and by the characters, a source of conflict, intrigue, and anticipation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In literature, Chess is frequently applied to represent the battle for control, struggle for dominance, and complexity of the human psyche. Steven Poole in his *The Great Game* (2007) outlines the connection between the term Zugzwang and its implication to the plot structure of the novel. He provides a brief summary of the narration, highlighting the political intrigue, plot holes, and rushed pacing, which weaken its literary effect.

In *Chess Fret Ronan Bennett's Zugzwang* (2008), Scott Bradfield examines Bennett's fifth novel. He discusses the entangled political conspiracy and the power struggle between various political factions. He compares Bennett's narrative skill to that of Graham Green and Brian Moore. He highlights the brilliant usage of the chess metaphor, which explores the endless game of power.

Damian Da Costa in *Checkmate: Chess Genius and Shrink team up in Fine Thriller* (2007) categorizes Zugzwang as a political thriller. He reviews the plot, highlighting Bennett's recurring pattern of presenting 'dispassionate thinkers dragged into political commitment' by external forces. He applauds Bennett's meticulous historical research and character development within the novel. He comments that although the text is less literary than the author's previous works, it effectively uses the concept of chess to reflect the revolutionary backdrop of Russia.

An Honorable Heir to Joseph Conrad (2007) by Nick Greenslade lauds the complexity of the narrative, psychological nuances, and strategic incorporation of chess as both a narrative framework and a symbolic element. It considers the novel as an effective reflection of Conrad's *Secret Agent*. In the review *Zugzwang* (2007), Nicole Leclerc provides a concise summary of the plot. He commends the clear historical background, well-defined characters, and an intriguing plot with unexpected twists and turns. It notes that even though the narrative style has descriptions of elements of chess, it remains navigable to readers unfamiliar with the game.

Based on previous research, it has been inferred that the text is widely appreciated for its classy employment of chess as a symbol of political conflicts, power dynamics, and psychological intricacies. These reviews emphasize the historical background, character framework, and narrative techniques and structures. However, it lacks exploration of the pivotal role played by the elements of chess in connecting the narrative action with the chess moves depicted as the story unfolds. This provides the required gap for this research to connect the presented chess maneuverers with the crime and conspiracy that form the core of the narration.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses the Qualitative Methodology of Textual Analysis to connect the chess motif with the structure of the plot. It employs multiple literary analysis methods listed below to amplify how chess elevates the novel's analytical concepts.

(a). Symbolic Analysis: Chess is examined as an impactful metaphor to understand the interplay of power and strategy, political intrigue, and character conflicts.

(b). Narrative Analysis: This approach examines how chess moves are closely synced with the structure of the events in the plot, with each move correlating with pivotal decisions and actions.

(c). Thematic Analysis: This method analyses the link between chess, crime, and conspiracy by focusing on both symbolic and actual relevance to the narrative setting of 1914 Russia.

(d). Historical Contextual Analysis: This establishes the novel against the background of the era before the Russian Revolution, aligning its political instability with its struggle for power, and using chess as a vehicle for understanding its historical complexities.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Conspiracy

In 1914, Russia was engulfed in an atmosphere of rising revolutionary sentiments among laborers and students. It began to experience a tug-of-war for dominance among different political factions, such as pro-Germans, pro-France, Tsarist, Bolsheviks, Loyalist, Jews, and original Russians. Within this chaotic world, Dr. Spethmann – a man of science, logic, and behavior analysis–endeavors to find a semblance of sense to protect himself and his loved ones. He is a highly regarded psychoanalyst and an avid chess player. Moreover, being Russian but of Jewish origin, his loyalty and allegiance are persistently questioned.

The central conspiracy of the narration involves a plot to assassinate Tsar Nicholas II. The mastermind behind this dramatic plot is Colonel Gan, the Director of the Okhrana, Russia's secret police. He connives with his set of supporters, such as Peter Zinnorov, the richest businessman in St. Petersburg, Berek Medem, a Polish terrorist, and Reveun Koplezon, a world-renowned violinist, who rally behind his objective. "Gan is pro-German reactionary," Lychev went on. "He is conspiring with his friend Zinnurov and the Baltic Barons and their pro-German allies to kill Nicholas, who is pro-French autocracy. It doesn't matter how many mistakes Koplezon and Medem make. They are given a free hand" (Bennett, 2007, p. 219). Lychev interprets Gan's scheme as an attempt to eliminate the Tzar and install an underaged king in power who will be a mere puppet for his schemes. This will provide him with the power required to crack down on all rebellions and dissent against him.

Each principal conspirator had their own personal agenda to orchestrate this scheme. Financial considerations play a crucial role in Reuven Kopelzon's life. His Polish background and sympathetic demeanor had elevated him to a heroic status among Polish émigrés. He manipulates this trust to spy for the Okhrana. "Why is he doing it? What does Kopelzon get out of it? 'Money,' Lychev said simply. Your friend likes to live well - or hadn't you noticed" (Bennett, 2007, p. 219). Kopelzon's flamboyant lifestyle drove him to work for General Gan. Berek Medem, a terrorist in the eyes of the Russian police is celebrated as a revolutionary by his people. His mission is to liberate Poland from Russian rule, a goal he pursues in alliance with Gan. The motive behind each perpetrator might be different, but their ultimate goal is to assassinate the Tzar.

The entire plot to eliminate the Tzar appears too implausible to be true. As Medem declares, "Those are the plans that tend to succeed," Medem said smoothly, a smile playing around his lips. "They take people by surprise," (Bennett, 2007, p. 206). It is, on the whole, an idea designed by Gan. "It isn't Kopelzon's plot. He didn't dream it up. Gan did" (Bennett, 2007, p. 218). The plot is too fantastical to be achieved, which actually provides the conspirators with confidence in its success. Furthermore, Gan eliminates any individual who investigates or obstructs the advancement of his secret.

The entire scheme begun with the announcement: "The winner of the final section, the winner of the 1914 St. Petersburg tournament, will have the inestimable honour... Saburov paused for dramatic effect. 'Of being presented at the Peterhof to His Imperial Highness Tsar Nicholas II to be created the first Grandmaster of Chess'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 195). Gan then sets his eyes on the possible favorite, 'the great Avrom Chilowicz Rozental' (Bennett, 2007, p. 4). "He had defeated Lasker in 1909, Capablanca in 1911. The year 1912 was his alone: his spectacular run of triumphs... made him one of the most talked about celebrities of the age" (Bennett, 2007, p. 5). Rozental, originating from an impoverished Polish Jewish background, was the most suitable candidate for this task. Kopelzon, with his empathetic and kind-hearted approach, befriends and subsequently manipulates the shy Rozental. The plan to execute the Tzar was simple and straightforward. After winning the tournament, Rozental would assassinate the Tzar during the ceremony where he is made the Grandmaster of Chess.

After the assassination, Lychev went on, 'Gan and his friends will install a puppet on the throne. They'll close the Duma, break the alliance with France, ally with the Kaiser and unleash a patriotic crusade. You have to admire their creativity; Gan is plotting a coup which they will pass off as a revolutionary uprising. (Bennett, 2007, p. 220)

Gulko, the editor of a liberal newspaper becomes the initial victim for uncovering this secret of Gan resulting in his murder. This triggers events that set forth the spark for the narration.

B. Crime

St. Petersburg of 1914 is a city gripped by political friction and social strife. The storyline unfolds from the first-person perspective of Dr. Otto Spethmann. The central crime that connects the beginning and end of the plot is murder. "On a raw March morning, on the Moika Embankment near Politseisky Bridge, two men accosted the respected liberal newspaper editor O.V. Gulko. Witnesses later told the police that the taller of the two appeared to berate Gulko in an agitated manner... the same young man then produced a knife and his companion a revolver. A shot was fired" (Bennett, 2007, p. 3). The murder of Gulko, which begins as a simple transgression, slowly opens up a complex web of political assassinations, power abuse, and anti-government factions.

Gulko was murdered in cold blood on March 14, 1914. He was both shot and stabbed several times. As a prominent social figure and a Jew in Russia, there is much speculation about his murderers. Suspects ranged from the Socialist Revolutionary Party, Black Hundreds, and German agents to a jealous husband.

Three days later, another murder occurs. Alexander Yastrebov, a student at the Technical Institute, is "bludgeoned to death. His killers put his body in a carriage, then pushed it into the canal near Leinner's Restaurant" (Bennett, 2007, p. 3). With the St. Petersburg chess tournament around the corner, the police are pressured to apprehend the culprits. It is into this investigation that the innocent Dr. Spethmann gets mixed up, unprepared, and unaware.

On the fifth day after Gulko's murder, Dr. Spethmann is visited by the investigation office of St. Petersburg Police Department, Minitimer Lychev. He is interrogated regarding the identity of Yastrebov, as Dr. Spethmann's visiting card has been recovered from the corpse. Despite his vehement denial of any knowledge, he is summoned to the police station the next day, along with his daughter, Catherine.

Within a few hours of the policeman's visit, Dr. Spethmann is assaulted in his own office by two assailants. Kavi and Tolya who appear to be Cossacks by look and speech, but have uncertain identities and affiliations. They probe him regarding his political allegiance. "Are you a revolutionary, Otto? A Socialist Revolutionary? A Bolshevik perhaps? Or a member of the Jewish Bund?" "No, 'I protested. 'I certainly am none of those things.'... 'I have no political allegiance of any kind'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 35). Spethmann at several junctures is repeatedly questioned regarding his loyalty and allegiance, which highlights the political turmoil of that era. As he waits for a fatal attack, the assailants spare him but steal the file of a patient, Avron Rozental. At this point, he does not understand that his simple life has been compromised, leading to murkier events.

Desperate to avoid a visit to the police station, Dr. Spethmann enlists the help of Anna Petronova, one of his three principal patients. The other two were Avron Rozental and Gregory Petrov. Anna is the daughter of Zinnora, who has political connections with General Maximilian Gan, the director of the Okhrana. His best efforts are futile against Lychev's relentless pursuit to apprehend the culprits. A couple of days later Lychev arrives at Dr. Spethmann's office

with the latter's daughter Catherine. He presents a jar containing the preserved head of Yastrobov. Catherine denies any knowledge of the individual's identity. On seeing it, "The colour had drained from Catherine's face like water from a sink. We were looking at a human head pickled in formaldehyde" (Bennett, 2007, p. 66). However, both Spethmann and Lychev know that she has lied. "I was thinking not of Anna but of Catherine. She had lied to me. She had recognized Yastrobov's pickled face. I saw it in her reaction. And Lychev was too observant of human nature not to have seen it too" (Bennett, 2007, p. 70). Catherine's involvement imposes further complications to Spethmann's life.

The next morning, Spethmann and his daughter are arrested at their home. During his subtle interrogation, Lychev reveals that Catherine is acquainted with Yasterbov's real name and identity. They were romantically involved and utilized Spethmann's office after hours for their encounters. Additionally, there have been reports of Berek Medem's presence in his office. Lychev's primary objective is to uncover the real name of Yasterbov, to trace his network and identify the individuals to contact whom, he had arrived at St. Petersburg from the interiors of Urals. Ultimately, Catherine's stubbornness wins the day. After a fortnight in prison, Dr. Spethmann is released with a warning: unless he helps Lychev find the perpetrators, he will be under constant surveillance. There will be nowhere he can hide and no one he can trust to help him. "As the bolts were pulled back, Lychev said, 'I need Yastrebob's real name, and I'm going to get it—one way or another'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 95).

His time in prison has its own ramifications for Dr. Spethmann, as events begin spiraling out of control. He is pulled into a web where the identity of his foe, friend, and acquaintance becomes blurred and questionable. Semevshy, the security guard of Dr. Spethmann's office apartment, turns out to be an operative planted by General Gan to surveil on Dr. Spethmann and his patient Rozental. This is revealed when Rozental has a mental breakdown during one of his sessions and flees the office. He is pursued by Dr. Spethmann and, to his surprise, Semevshy. During Semevshy's assault on Spethmann, he is rescued by Lychev and, to the latter's disbelief, Kavi, the Cossak. They disclose themselves as members of the Duma Party. Semevshy is killed, and his body is thrown into the river. When Dr. Spethmann protest, Lychev explains, "... – because I am the only person standing between you and Colonel Gan.' 'I've done nothing wrong, I am a psychoanalyst -' 'With no time for political affairs -yes, we know,' Lychev cut in. 'However, your daughter has managed to implicate not just herself but also her in Yastrebob's plot' 'The minute Catherine spoke to Yastrebob, the very second, both she and you became implicated. As soon as Colonel Gan gets the Chance, he will order your arrest....'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 126). Spethmann soon realizes that his life has been inadvertently taken over by forces against which he has little control. Each move he makes is challenged by crimes and conspiracies that are unfathomable to his faculties.

In a state of desperation, Dr. Spethmann confronts his daughter to ascertain the truth. Catherine gives a comprehensive confession regarding her knowledge of the identity of Yasterbov and his activities and how she has become embroiled with him.

His name, he told her, was Leon Pisker. He had left his small village beyond the Urals two years before to go to Moscow, driven by a passionate desire to do something meaningful with his life, which for him meant writing poetry... Catherine, charmed by his romantic idealism, poverty and good looks, proposed temporary solutions to two of his most pressing problems... (Bennett, 2007, p. 151)

She also furnishes a contact address mentioned by Pisker, '19 Kirochny Street, Near the Preobrazhensky Barracks' (Bennett, 2007, p. 153). Spethmann, trying to extricate himself, decides to help Lychev with his investigation. As the investigation progresses, he is confronted with unsettling truths. He is outraged to discover that his friend Kopelzon is a frequent visitor to the address Catherine mentioned. "Kopelzon was in good form, beaming smiles at friends and admirers, but it was hard for me to look at him without feelings of anger and hurt. If he knew about the house on Kirochny Street, then he knew about Yastrebob, which made his pretended concern for me and Catherine and his outrage at our arrests a hypocritical fiction" (Bennett, 2007, p. 195). He slowly pieces together the underlying causes of the crimes he has been implicated in, uncovering a major political conspiracy centered around the gullible Avrom Rozental.

By this point, Dr. Spethmann has gradually perceived the reasons behind Rozental's psychological breakdown. He explains to Lychev, "Away from the chessboard, he's an innocent, he doesn't understand the world he lives in. I can't help feeling that he is always in danger of being harmed by it" (Bennett, 2007, p. 172). In the process of saving Rozental, Dr. Spethmann puts everything that he holds dear at risk, namely his life and reputation. The more he attempts to disentangle himself from the web woven around him, the deeper he gets embroiled.

The major flaw of Dr. Spethmann is that as a psychoanalyst, he relentlessly tries to bring everything hidden to the surface. This leads him to be implicated in crimes in which he has no involvement. He ultimately finds himself pushed to the corner, cut off from all those who helped him, forced to flee the country of his birth. But, before he leaves, he eliminates the instigator on whom the whole plot hinges – Kopelzon. "He blanched. I did not wait for an answer. I am not sure that he had one. Even as the bullet struck him, he did not believe it" (Bennett, 2007, p. 263). Through this decisive action, Dr. Spethmann completes the circle of events that began with Gulko's murder.

C. *Pawns and Players*

The tale of Zugzwang – as its term suggests – is about the constant moves made by the characters as they helplessly try to extract themselves from the problems that surround them. Dr. Spethmann, through whose eyes the narration unfolds, is unwittingly caught in a tangled web of Chess, Crime and Conspiracy orchestrated by forces beyond his control. As he tries to extricate himself, he is faced with the conflict of differentiating between allies and adversaries. The following figure provides a comprehensive idea about the role each character play as the political drama unfolds.



Figure 1

D. Chess

Chess is often associated with reason and, by extension, with intelligence, especially of the mathematical variety (Seidel, 2017).

Chess serves as a double-edged sword with a unique quality: while all the moves are visibly made on the board to create drama, the real drama is unraveled through the analysis, hesitations, and maneuverers inside the mind of each player. Bennett skillfully uses both the chess elements like pieces, board, rules etc. and the elements of chess like patterns, strategies, psychological break downs to merge the themes of conspiracy, crime and chess. Dr. Otto Spethmann is an avid chess player, who constantly plays with his friend, Reuven Kopelzon. Until the beginning of the narration, he had never once bet him. As the story unfolds, he is engaged in a partially competed game in which he has an edge to win for the first time.

In all the years we had been playing chess together I had never beaten Kopelzon, but in this game I had come out of the opening with a slight advantage. My rather surprised opponent then decided to give up a pawn in return for an attack. defending accurately, I had not only weathered the storm but held on to my extra pawn. However, by the time we reached the present positing I had run out of ideas and my hopes of a first win over Kopelzon were evaporating; I was on the point of offering a draw. (Bennett, 2007, p. 13)

Just before the events began to unfold, Kopelzon has played the following move, a counter for which Dr. Spethmann was not confident in deciding.

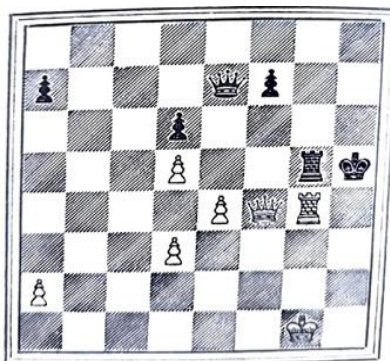


Figure 2. Kopelzon has just played 34...Kh5, attacking the white rook. Exchanging on g5 gives White nothing. What should Spethmann play to keep alive his chances of a win? (Bennett, 2007, p. 12)

With each move Dr. Spethmann and Reuven Kopelzon make on the chess board, a significant twist and turn occurs, which will be unpacked in the subsequent table. The former uses white pieces, and his moves are placed initially, and the latter plays with black pieces, and his moves are placed subsequently.

TABLE 1

Aspects	Chess moves	Crime moves	Textual representation
<i>Preliminary move</i> 34. Rxg4 Kh5	The white Rook has eliminated the pawn. This creates a threat to the Black Rook. The Black King is compelled to move in order to protect its Rook.	Rozental has started therapy under Spethmann. Gulko and Yasterobov are murdered. Lychev, having started his investigation has narrowed down the identity of the culprits. He arrests Spethmann and his daughter, Catherine. During his tenure in prison, Spethmann	“Lychev...held a large revolver in his left hand. He looked us over with his baleful, pale eyes and said, ‘Get dressed, Miss Spethmann. You too, Doctor. You are under arrest.’” (Bennett, 2007, p. 77) “She has betrayed you, Spethmann – your own daughter...your daughter and

		processes the information he had received and the conspiracies he had been unwittingly involved in.	Yastrebov would wait until you finished for the day before entering your office and using it.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 79)
<i>Game Changer</i> 35. Rg2 Rxg2 36. Kxg2 Qc7 37. Qf5 Kh6	White is in an offensive position, and Black is in a defensive position. The White Rook retreats two squares. It is captured by the Black Rook. Which, in turn, is taken by the White King. The Black Queen attempts to find positions to save its King. Its counterpart moves forward to checkmate the Black King, forcing it to retreat one square	Rozental’s exceptional intellect had enabled him to pieced together the subterfuge being woven around him, leading to his psychological breakdown. This unexpected development created an unforeseen glitch in the scheme, resulting in the conspirators selecting a doppelgänger to go on with the plan. During his session with Spethmann, Rozental flees, unable to express his turmoil. Semversky, who follows him, is eliminated by Lychev while trying to protect Spethmann. Lychev tries to tighten his grip on Colonel Gan through his investigation. Zinnurov confuses Spethmann by falsifying Anna’s story about a murder at Kazan to protect Gan. In response, Gan dispatches agents to investigate Semversky’s murder.	“Now it was Zinnurov’s turn to stare. Was it possible Anna had imagined the trip... He shook his head as a deluded imbecile. ‘All women tell stories.’ He said, adopting the confidential, knowing tone men employ when together they generalise about women... Anna is no different” (Bennett, 2007, p. 113) “How many flies are there, Avrom? What are there two of? You keep saying two, Avrom! What do you mean by two?’ he began to bat the air violently with his hands, as though swatting away a black cloud of flies, all the time crying and moaning” (Bennett, 2007, p. 117) “You should return to your post,’ I said to Semevshy. He gripped me by the arm. Gone was the ingratiating. ‘Let’s just see where your patient goes,’ he said.... ‘What do you want with Rozental?’ I said. ‘Let see where he goes and who he talks to.’ Semevsky threw me forwards, the better able to defend himself. I did not fall but recovered my balance in time to see him pull a pistol from his pocket...Only then did I take in the insubstantial presence of Lychev standing over Semevsky’s body.” (Bennett, 2007, pp. 120-121)
<i>Double Attack</i> 38. Qf6 Kh7 39. Kg3 Kg8 40. Kh4 Qb6	Both the White Queen and King relentlessly push the Black King to a corner by trying to block all legal moves. The Black Queen steps in to form a protective shield for its King, which is too late at this stage. Spethmann gets time from Koplezon to contemplate his subsequent move.	Spethmann has two choices to proceed with: assist Lychev with the information collected from Catherine and bring Gan to justice. Or remain silent, leading to Gan’s rise to power and suffering the consequences. He chooses the former by disclosing to Lychev details from Catherine’s confessions. He also makes a deal to recover details about a murder that took place in Kazan, which may implicate Zinnurov.	“I concentrated on two specific variations, two lines. One: co-operate with Lychev. Tell him what Catherine had told me... The second line: refuse to help Lychev. What would be the consequences?... there would be another raid, more time in the cells of the Peter and Paul fortress. The interrogation would be more brutal.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 155) “I will do what you want,’ I told him, ‘But first you have to do something for me.’...I want you to find out about something that may have happened in Kazan in 1889.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 156)
<i>Castling</i> 41. Kh5 Kf8 42. Kh6	The White King closes on the Black King, reducing his chances of victory. Koplezon for the first time requests time to contemplate his next move.	Lychev continues his investigation trying to find evidence to frame Gan and uncover his involvement in various crimes including Gulko and Yastrobov’s murder. Simultaneously, Spethmann tries to bring Petrova’s hidden memory regarding the murders at Kazan to the surface. This is crucial for understanding the connection between Zinnurov and Gan.	“He smiled as at an inward joke. ‘Colonel Gan planned and ordered Gulko’s Murder. Don’t you think justice dictates he brought to account?’... Gan is powerful, as you say, but he has enemies in the government and at court, especially among the Pro-French faction. If I can produce evidence that he was behind Gulko’s murder, Gan will fall.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 174)
<i>King Hunt</i> 42. Ke8 43. Kh7 Qc5 44. Qg7	The Black King tries to evade checkmate. Its escape options are blocked by its own pawns at d6 and f7, respectively. The White Queen controls the board and effectively blocks the Black King.	As Spethmann probes Anna, he reconstructs a tale of deceit and murder. Even when her story is contradictory, he understands that at the age of 13, Anna has encountered a murder scene involving her father, grandmother, and a mysterious person. This resulted in lifelong trauma and sudden bouts of numbness in her hands. He is also informed by Lychev about Koplezon’s deception and his knowledge of the address Yastrebov had. This links him directly to Berek Medem, General Gan, and the plot to assassinate the Tsar.	“Koplezon was in good form, beaming smiles at friends and admirers, but it was hard for me to look at him without feelings of anger and hurt. If he knew about the house on Kiorchny Street, then he knew about Yastrebov, which made his pretended concern for me and Catherine and his outrage at our arrests a hypocritical fiction.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 195)
<i>Blockade</i> 44. Ke7 45. Qg5+ Ke8 46. Kg8 Qc7	The White Queen successfully checkmates the Black King as it attempts to move squares and evade defeat.	As Spethmann tries to rescue Rozental, he encounters Koplezon and Medem. Lychev intervenes and rescues him. He reveals Koplezon’s	“Whose idea, was it?’ I said, looking between them. Koplezon was the first to speak, ‘When I heard the tsar would be receiving the winner of the tournament at

	The White King and Queen maneuver to capture the f-pawn, which will lead to the defeat of the black pieces.	involvement as an Okhrana agent. This ultimately clears the confusion in Spethmann's mind regarding Gan's plans. The entire outcome now relied on Kopelzon. Before any action can be taken, both are framed for a blast and declared as fugitives.	the Peterof.' he said, 'it set me thinking. The winner all alone in a room with the great tyrant? It's the perfect opportunity.'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 206)
Zugzwang 47. Qh6 Qe7 48. Qg7 a6 49. a3 a5 50. a4 Kd8 51. Qf8+ Qe8 52. Kg7 -	Black is in Zugzwang, while White is in complete control. By targeting the f-pawn, the White King can win the game. Kopelzon initially feels that it is a dead draw. However, Spethmann is confident that it is a forced win and ultimately wins the game.	During Spethmann's rescue, Kavi stops Medem, allowing Lychev to save the former. Framed as a fugitive, Spethmann is requested by his well-wishers to leave the country and save himself. As a psychoanalyst, Spethmann has successfully connected the dots, piecing together the conspiracy and the role of the players. He perceives that the whole plot now hinges on Kopelzon, who is scheduled to perform during the Tsar's meeting with the Grandmaster. Kopelzon is intended to assassinate the Tsar, thus fulfilling Gan's scheme. As a last resort, Spethmann reaches Kopelzon's home prior to his performance before the Tsar. It is not only to stop him from assassinating the Tsar but also to finish the game of chess that they had been playing. He shoots and kills Kopelzon, the supposed assassin and secret f-pawn in the political intrigue. Consequently, he not only wins the game but also foils the conspiracy to kill the Tsar.	"You're in zugzwang, Reuven," I said. He stared at the board, not wanting to believe what he was seeing. He had no choice but to move the king away from the defense of the f-pawn. His hand trembled as he moved the king to d8. I played at once, moving my queen to f8. 'Check,' I said quietly." (Bennett, 2007, p. 261)

V. CONCLUSION

Chess – as a game – is an ideal example for logic and unpredictability. While all the elements are laid bare, it still creates unexpected upsets owing to multiple factors such as arrogance, analytical miss calculation, and unforeseen outcomes. This study validates how Bennett develops an intricate and highly technical narrative framework, mapping chess elements such as pins, forks, skewers, and zugzwang and elements of chess like king, queen, and f-pawn onto the novel's shadow politics, underhand dealings, and psychological struggles. It illustrates how each strategic move on the chessboard corresponds with key decisions, pivotal reversals, and escalating political tensions. As Spethmann says, "Strong players lose to weaker ones. If you need proof, look at our game. I've never beaten you before, Reuven – you're a much better player than I – but I'm winning, on this occasion at least" (Bennett, 2007, p. 207). Zugzwang adopts this inference to create end of the seat thriller. By using chess and its moves, it flawlessly interweaves a connection between the crime, conspiracy, and political intrigue of a turbulent nation.

These findings offer significant insight into how chess can be effectively integrated into a narrative as a symbolic and structural device. In addition to literal chess moves, chess elements like Zugzwang can be applied as a psychological state that influences and impacts the psyche of various characters. Chess – with its rule-bound nature – can be aptly used to parallel political conspiracies and counterplots orchestrated by several factions.

Future research could be expanded to comparative analyses with other literary works using chess motifs. This aids in identifying emerging patterns in chess narratives. It also provides rich insights into various chess patterns. Chess and its symbolism can be employed to provide psychological, thematic, and historical depth to plot designs and character development. It can also explore the psychological angle using Freudian analysis to develop the conscious and unconscious motives of characters and events that mirror chess strategies.

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