

CATALOGUE OF ITEMS IN THE CHESS EXHIBITION AT THE HUMANITIES MUSEUM, PRE-ENLIGHTENMENT WING

A unique insight into a remarkable game.

BY ALEX SHVARTSMAN

'First Contact' commemorative limited edition set (United States, 2019)

Marble pieces, marble board

This set and a variety of other commercial products were manufactured to celebrate the discovery of Earth by the Confederation of Civilized Species. In his first broadcast speech, the Elscean ambassador praised the game of chess as a "uniquely human invention, which offers considerable insights into the native psyche". The rook pieces were sculpted to resemble the CCS starship that landed in Tanzania.

This set was available exclusively through a broadcast channel dedicated to direct-to-consumer merchandise sale via television platform. (See twentieth-century culture exhibit.)

CCS novelty set (Taiwan, 2027)

Plastic pieces, vinyl roll-up board

The white pieces were designed to represent various Earth military equipment and infantrymen, and the black pieces imitated CCS enforcement ships, shuttles and drones. Representative of period games and toys designed to emulate the hypothetical armed conflict between Earth and CCS forces. Manufacture and sale of such xenophobic products was banned by decree of the Unified Planetary Authority in 2032.

Improvised set (Gdansk POW camp, Poland, circa 2037)

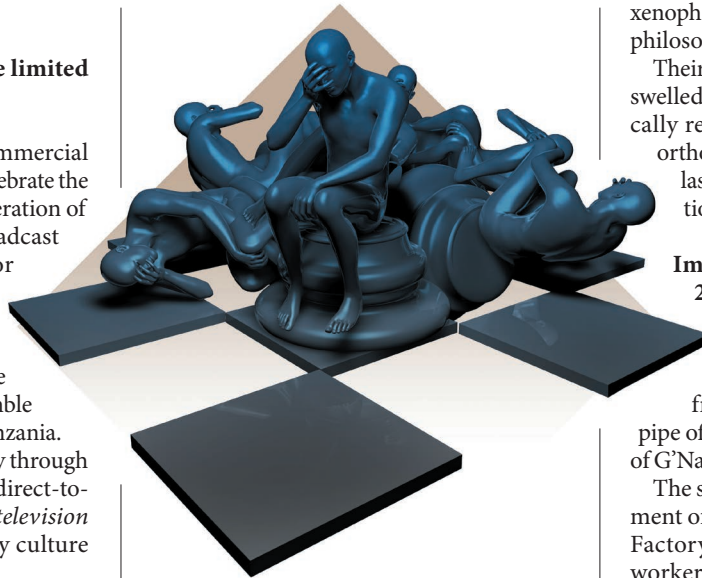
Aluminium wire pieces, cloth board

The 2034 Unified Planetary Authority resolution to petition for CCS membership resulted in civil war against a number of regressive factions that opposed this move. After order was restored, the CCS generously offered to remove the Regressive combatants and ideologues.

This set was made from bent cuts of aluminium wire and a board drawn on white tablecloth by some among the 2 million

Regressives who awaited deportation in the Gdansk facility in late 2030s.

The museum



collection contains a number of similar improvised sets from some of the 312 other POW camps around the globe. (Consult Archives catalogue for detailed listings.)

Xiangqi set (China, 2041)

Jade pieces, cherry wood board

Until recently, this item was not a part of the chess exhibition as it was widely believed to be a different game. (Note the checkers-like playing pieces and unusual board.) However, famed G'Naktian scholar K'Ten'Gh recently published a paper to the contrary. He discovered that the game's name means 'imitation chess' in Mandarin, a language once spoken by its players.

Despite K'Ten'Gh's best efforts, the rules of this chess variant remain lost.

Hand-carved set (Cuba, circa 2050)

Rosewood and maple pieces, walnut board

This exhibit is a sample of the handcrafted art objects the Naturalist communes exported in order to purchase medicine and a limited range of other goods not proscribed by their ideology.

A late offshoot of the Regressives movement, the Naturalists didn't actively oppose humanity's strides towards enlightenment but chose to practise passive resistance and live in primitive communes. Their

xenophobic ideology barred technology and philosophy that originated off-world.

Their dwindling numbers were somewhat swelled by the remnants of other ideologically resistant communities (the Amish, orthodox Jews, etc.), but despite this, the last Naturalist commune ceased operations by 2070.

Improvised set (Sector 6367, circa 2090)

Polyvinyl chloride pipe pieces, steel board

This improvised set was made from cuts of white and silver PVC pipe of varying lengths. A checkered sheet of G'Naktian steel was used as a board.

The set was confiscated by UPA enforcement officers in a 2092 raid conducted on Factory 71351's living barracks. Factory workers suspected of harbouring regressive tendencies were enrolled in intensive re-education programmes.

'First Contact' commemorative set, centennial edition (Humanities Museum, 2119)

G'Naktian construction polymer pieces, Elscean utility resin board

Although this item is not from the pre-enlightenment era, the curator felt it was an appropriate end-cap to the chess exhibition. Copies of this set were manufactured to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of first contact and subsequent human contributions to the Confederation of Civilized Species culture, however minor they might be.

The fact that the set has elicited virtually no interest from the museum's human visitors speaks volumes to the success we've enjoyed as a species in assimilating into Confederation culture and joining our fellow sentients in enlightenment.

The commemorative set continues to appeal to the museum's off-world patrons. We recommend it as a quaint and unique curio of aboriginal Earth culture. Copies are available for sale in the museum gift shop. ■

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ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY