

Let's get blitzed

Tim Wall

"Yes, I have played a blitz game once. It was on a train, in 1929." (Mikhail Botvinnik)

Excited by the end of the summer holidays and the rain/sleet/snow-filled slow-motion build-up to Christmas party season? No, me neither. The leaves on Alexander Kotov's analysis tree will soon be falling faster than gambit pawns in a 19th century chess divan, and that can mean only ONE thing: The dreaded League Season is upon us.

Roll on the club AGM, where you are incautiously persuaded to captain a team of aged hermits called 'The Uncontactables.' They don't bother with such modern communication devices as email, WhatsApp, SMS or Facebook. Heck, they even struggle with Alexander Graham Bell's new-fangled acoustic tin-can telephone.

Herman and his reclusive pals are raring to go, however, for some state-of-the-art, nerve-wracking... slow chess.

En Garde, sir! Wind up your weapon of choice, whether it be a Sutton Coldfield Saturday Night Special, Howard Staunton's Patented Pendulum Timepiece, or just a simple hourglass, and you're off! It's an hour and thirty minutes for 36 pulsating moves, and then the thrill of... adjournment, or even better... adjudication.

None of those fancy increments, nor quickplay finishes neither...

Yea, even though we enter the Year of Our Lord Magnus Two Thousand and Eighteen, they still make movies like this, all set in sepia or black-and-white, with Michael Caine going grimly 'Oop The North,' or George Smiley tinkering with his tailor.

But all is not doom 'n' gloom, oh no. Because we have a sparkling new competition to sink our teeth into: The UK Open Blitz Championship. If you like something a bit more fast-slash-furious, the format – 15 rounds at a swift 3 minutes plus 2 seconds per move, may be more your cuppa.

There's still time to enter the eight regional heats, which take place this Saturday, September 8, from 11am-6pm.

The heats and the final combined have a total prize fund of £5,000. (That's 50 first prizes at the Golders Green Rapidplay, 100 hours of tuition with GM Danny Gormally, or 333 copies of Bobby Fischer's "My 60 Memorable Games," in case you were wondering.)

The first prizes are £1,000 in the Open Final, and £500 in the Women's Final, and smaller cash prizes in the heats.

The games are also FIDE rated, so you can have the pleasure of gaining (or losing) several Elo rating points an hour.

As it's a new competition, there's a strong element of experimentation involved – as it's not yet clear how popular the event will be in its first year.

As of 3 September, there were 127 entries across the 8 locations, meaning that there are excellent chances to qualify for the national finals on December 1 in Birmingham.

The top 2 players in each heat qualify for the Open Final, and the top 2 female players (not already qualified for the Open) in each heat go through to the Women's Final.

The fun part will be to work out just where the flood of last-minute Grandmaster entries will be: Belfast, Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London, Manchester or Newcastle? Will the night train crossing the border, or a low-cost flight over the water, bring you the best luck? And what happens if Mikhail Botvinnik or a certain 'Dr. Drunkenstein' show up?

Then the only other question remains: 'How do I get myself in shape for 15 games of blitz?'

A bleary-eyed online midnight blitz marathon? A wild evening 'Oot on the Toon,' 8 pints of lager, and 3 cups of coffee the morning after? Or a quiet evening studying Dvoretsky's endgames and a cup of cocoa?

The choice, as they used to say on 'Blind Date', is yours.