

## **Welcome to Yorkshire (but beware of the Moon)**

By Tim Wall

Darts player: *"Stay on the road. Keep clear of the moors."*

Chess player: *"Beware the Wolf Gambit, lads."*

*'An American Werewolf in London', Slaughtered Lamb scene*

We've all been there, haven't we? A place that somehow you don't feel quite welcome. You walk into a picturesque village pub, like The Slaughtered Lamb in 'An American Werewolf in London,' (<https://youtu.be/bHItywaQVi4>) and get the feeling that you've intruded into a private world and it was about time you were 'on yer way'.

I've been playing a lot recently in Yorkshire – in the Woodhouse Cup, the county's famous Saturday league, for Leeds Central, and for Yorkshire in the traditional Wars of the Roses match with Lancashire. While I'm not a proper native of Yorkshire (I've lived many places in the North, but I can't trace my ancestry back to Sean Bean or Geoffrey Boycott), I have to say I have been made to feel welcome, and no one has sent me out on t' moors on a cold night to face a werewolf (or even the Wolf Gambit: 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Na3 e5!?).

It's generally been a fun experience, especially when playing team chess. Either warm beer (or the famous Yorkshire tea) has been on tap, and a curry afterwards with teammates has either helped the celebrations (or eased the commiserations).

Playing for Leeds – not the best team in the league, or the worst – there's an eclectic bunch of people: A postgrad student doing vital medical research, a globe-trotting patents lawyer, a retired English teacher with rich stories of chess in Botswana and Papua New Guinea, an Iranian guy who insists on taking selfies with his phone during games, a former immigration detention officer with a heart of gold, and an ex-Irish international with a gambit for every occasion. The list goes on.

What is it that we play for? Is it glory, or riches? Or the smell of victory over Lancashire or Bradford in the morning? Hardly. It's a bit old-fashioned to say so, but it's the camaraderie that I like. And Yorkshire people are good at that.

### The J'adoube Gambit

Sometimes discovering this spirit can be tricky, however. At the recent Doncaster Congress, I played a wild end-to-end game in the last round (against someone who shall remain nameless, but wasn't from Yorkshire). Now this player attacked me from the word go, with a swashbuckling ...g5 gambit in the opening, and followed up with a series of sacrifices of varying soundness. That kind of hustling I like (when I was younger it might have been me pushing the g-pawn), but some of the accompanying actions, less so. Every move this player played, the piece was askew, anywhere except for the centre of the square. The effect was quite disconcerting, and yet it seemed to be the kind of minor infringement that didn't merit a complaint to the arbiter.

And yet... each move it bugged me, and I ended up j'adoubing my opponent's pieces in my own time. In combination with the hustling play, it felt like I was being hustled this way, too.

### Not Like Botvinnik

Then – and this is no chess player’s fault – the fire alarm went off, probably tripped by kids trespassing on school grounds. And on and on, and off, and on, for what seemed like half an hour. Staff at the school where the congress was being held didn’t seem to know how to switch it off, and after general confusion among the arbiters, we all stood around in the yard like prisoners in *The Great Escape*, kicking our heels for another 15 minutes before the games were resumed.

Presumably it wasn’t just me who felt their equanimity was completely wrecked. I nearly won the game after many adventures, but then went to pieces in the dying seconds and had to resign a rook down after my opponent’s king had wandered all the way up the board, evading my increasingly exasperated checks. I have no excuses, I just didn’t cope with the situation. (That’s presumably why Botvinnik used to train by having opponents blow smoke in his face.)

As a clubmate of mine is fond of saying, ‘there are only two kinds of chess games: Ones you win, and learning experiences’. What’s the learning experience here, you may ask. Well, try not to get flustered if you suspect your opponent of sharp practice [actually, you can pity someone who thinks they have to resort to it], try not to get flustered when a piercing fire alarm gives you a headache, and remember that the experience of playing chess is more often about the camaraderie than the financial outcome.

Oh, and by the way, if you do find yourself at a league match in The Slaughtered Lamb and your team just got a jammy win, don’t ever ask about that five-pointed star on the wall. And keep clear of the moors, especially when there’s a full moon.