

CHESS CLOCK OF DEATH

Written by  
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Based on  
*Chess and the Law:  
An Anthology of Anecdotes  
and Analogies*

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**OVER BLACK:**

*The chess-related killings in this film  
are based on actual events.*

*The travels of the chess clock are not.*

*Many names have been changed, and  
certain other elements have been fictionalized.*

**PRE-LAP:** HORSESHOES CLOPPING, and CARRIAGES CLATTERING.

FADE TO:

**EXT. NEW YORK CITY, FINANCIAL DISTRICT (1865) - DAY**

**TITLE:** *57 Broadway, New York City (November, 1865)*

A bustling street-scape, as HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGES and DELIVERY WAGONS pass in front of a row of five-story, BRICK BUILDINGS.

On the crowded SIDEWALK, most of the PEDESTRIANS are MEN wearing heavy wool OVERCOATS and BLACK HATS (a mix of bowlers and top hats). The few women pedestrians wear dark dresses, beneath embroidered jackets.

It's a SUNNY day, but cold (the men and women all wear gloves, and scarves).

As the TITLE FADES OUT, the camera moves toward the middle brick building, which bears the metal numbers: "57."

A tasteful BRASS SIGN is mounted by the door:

*EMPIRE STATE STOCK AGENCY*

A UNIFORMED DOORMAN HOLDS the DOOR for RUSSEL WOOD, who is exiting from the *Empire State Stock Agency*.

RUSSEL is UNATTRACTIVE. He has pale and pock-marked skin, with rodent-like facial features framed by patchy, mutton-chop sideburns. Thirty-two years old, and five feet tall, he is SCRAWNY: barely one hundred pounds.

An expensive overcoat billows on his thin frame. He CARRIES an OVERSIZED LEATHER-BOUND BOOK, and a BLACK TOP HAT.

DOORMAN  
(cheerily)  
Have a pleasant lunch, Mr. Wood.

RUSSEL WOOD IGNORES the DOORMAN, and DONS his BLACK TOP HAT (adding half a foot to his meager height).

He OPENS his BIG BOOK, and STARTS READING as he simultaneously STEPS into the STREAM OF PEDESTRIANS.

As Russel wends on his way, oblivious to those around him, the BIG BOOK proceeds before him -- like the bow of a recklessly-driven boat -- PARTING the oncoming PEDESTRIANS.

The perturbed pedestrians make way for this odd man, as a CLOSE-UP shows the BOOK'S TITLE -- embossed in gold-leaf:

*CHESSE PUZZLES OF EUROPE*

Looking back (over Russel's shoulder), we see the DOORMAN open the door for the firm's MANAGER (obese, with a walrus mustache).

But the doorman does not get the door fully open in time for the fast-waddling MANAGER, who SNAGS the GOLD CHAIN of his POCKET WATCH on the DOORKNOB.

MANAGER  
(bellowing)  
Russel! Wait!

The MANAGER STRUGGLES to disentangle the CHAIN.

MANAGER (cont'd)  
Oh, for the love of...

The Manager finally FREES the watch CHAIN, and makes it out to the sidewalk. He CUPS his HANDS, and YELLS:

MANAGER (cont'd)  
I need you to do those accounts!  
Please don't forget to return!

RUSSEL KEEPS GOING, without looking back.

The exasperated MANAGER THROWS UP HIS ARMS.

RUSSEL is now MUTTERING to himself (ANGRILY):

RUSSEL  
Forget? How? I live above the damn  
office! Your indentured accountant.  
Hidden in the attic. Always at work.

PEDESTRIANS cast curious looks at RUSSEL, as he absentmindedly WANDERS OFF of the SIDEWALK and into the busy STREET. He is so engrossed in a chess puzzle that he does not see a HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE HEADED TOWARD HIM.

At the last second, the CARRIAGE DRIVER yanks the REINS, causing the HORSES to VEER, and the CARRIAGE SWERVES. It BARELY MISSES RUSSEL (who doesn't flinch, being unaware).

CARRIAGE DRIVER  
(livid)  
Out of the street, you muttonhead!

RUSSEL LOOKS UP, BEFUDDLED. CORRECTS his COURSE. Continues reading as he WALKS. More PEDESTRIANS MOVE out of his way.

FADE TO:

**EXT. SMITH'S CHESS EMPORIUM - DAY**

Upper middle-class PEDESTRIANS (more women than men) move along a SIDEWALK in front of a row of RETAILERS: a tack shop, a tailor, a candlestick maker, a silversmith, and, in the middle -- a small shop with its name painted on a blue-and-white canvas awning: "HERMAN SMITH'S CHESS EMPORIUM".

RUSSEL WALKS into view, from the right. He is still reading while walking, and still causing problems for other PEDESTRIANS. He STOPS. He seems surprised to have arrived at his destination. He CLOSES his BOOK and moves toward the door. But then he steps back to look at the merchandise in the WINDOW. He sees something special.

So do we: an ornate CHESS CLOCK, with a pair of hour-glass SAND TIMERS held in BRASS BRACKETS attached, on opposite sides, to a CENTER ROD extending up from a ROUND BASE.

The two SAND TIMERS are DISPLAYED in their VERTICAL positions (parallel to the CENTER ROD). The fallen SAND in each timer is in the lower clear glass chamber, forming two CONICAL PILES (the sand in one timer is white; the sand in the other timer is black).

Behind the clock sits its BLACK LEATHER CASE, decorated with STENCILS OF CHESS PIECES made of WHITE LEATHER. It has a metal clasp on the side, and a leather handle on top. The case is propped open, showing its purple, VELVET LINING.

RUSSEL'S EXPRESSION speaks volumes: He MUST SEE this chess clock! He HURRIES INSIDE, now moving with purpose.

**INT. SMITH'S CHESS EMPORIUM - DAY**

A small BELL attached to the door JINGLES, as RUSSEL THROWS OPEN the DOOR and makes a BEELINE for the front COUNTER.