

02-1986 [A-0835] Mephisto - MM III prototype (Ulf Rathsman) (English-language version)
The trigger to bring this item to attention came from none other than Ed Schröder himself! He attended the general membership meeting of the CSVN (Computer Chess Association Netherlands) in Leiden on December 1, 2012. The members opted for a restart of the CSVN, and a completely new board came into being with Jan Krabbenbos as the new president. Always nice to meet old acquaintances such as chess programmers Ed Schröder, Frans Morsch or Bart Weststrate (Kallisto) again.



In the center of the photo is chess programmer Ed Schröder, with on the left the great chess computer collector Hans van Mierlo and on the right historian Hein Veldhuis.

(photo: Roland Hoepelman - December 1, 2012)

In December 2012, Ed Schröder held an attic clearance under the heading 'old Rebel stuff'. Through his website, Ed offered old chess computers, modules and a rare turbokit, among other things. But also an **MM 3 bêta module** with a program by Ulf Rathsman. Collector Hans van Mierlo thus came into contact with Ed, and bought some curiosities from him. This contact revealed that Ed did not remember exactly when he was invited to Jan Louwman's home to talk with Manfred Hegener about a possible contract with Mephisto. The fact that Ed himself did not remember this exactly was reason enough for me as a historian to dig deep into the past! It took me almost one year, and it resulted in several items that I present to you at the end of this item. I hope with this item to refresh Ed's memory a little.... after that, he obviously has the last word!

**Ed Schröder presented this module at its sale on its website as...
MM 3 bêta module with Ulf Rathsman program.**



Ulf Rathsman program. Mephisto MM 2. Although the sticker implies MM 3 that version was never released. Perhaps it was a MM 3 bêta. I remember from those days I had to play a 2-game match against Ulf's program at Louwman's house in Rotterdam under the watching eyes of Manfred Hegener and Ossi Weiner. With great luck my (back then still) TRS-80 program won the mini-match with 1½ - ½ and this sealed the fate of Ulf and I was offered a contract.

(Copyright 2012 - by Ed Schröder)

**Ed Schröder writes the following from
his memories of the past on January 15, 2013**

... Present at Jan Louwman's home were Manfred Hegener and Ossi Weiner, not Ulf Rathsman. The year is definitely not 1986, must have been 1985 although I don't rule out 1984 either. Mephisto at that time was looking for new talent. Business was good but continuity was not guaranteed with the departure of Mephisto I, II and III programmers Thomas Nitsche & Elmar Henne and Ulf Rathsman was beginning to lose ground, not making enough progress. Manfred Hegener turned to the oracle of Rotterdam with the order to find 3 new programmers, 1 for the expensive version, 1 for the middle class and 1 for the cheap class. And so it came to pass that Richard, Frans and I got the job. Jan was generously paid for his services, as is customary in those circles.

Regards, Ed Schröder

Hein Veldhuis: With the above descriptions of Ed Schröder in the back of my mind, I got some suspicion, and started searching the old literature. It was also all some 30 years ago, and therefore it is quite possible that Ed was mistaken about the actual historical facts. And what turns out? Ed played (at Louwman's home) not against a program by Ulf Rathsman, but against the Mephisto MM I with a program by programmers Thomas Nitsche & Elmar Henne! For that, see the following anecdote from an old article by (chess programmer - Dappet) Dap Hartmann...

**Journal CSVN Computerschaak (1989)
Dap Hartmann:
Gallery of Dutch chess programmers – Ed Schröder**

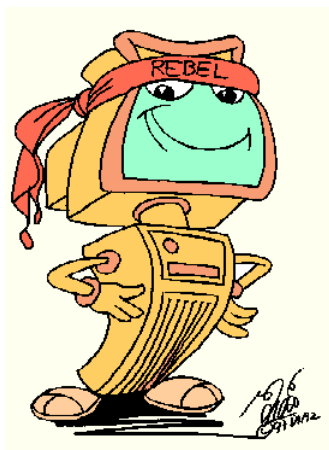
... When Jan Louwman called to inquire about the goings-on, he was impressed by the enthusiastic reports Ed Schröder gave him. At that time, Frans Morsch was already working for the firm Hegener & Glaser (Mephisto). This chess computer manufacturer informed Louwman that they had a vacancy for a few more programmers. Judging by Ed's promising results, Louwman let him know they had someone in mind. A meeting was then arranged at Louwman's home. There Manfred Hegener came to see what was true of the promise. Ed took his computer under his arm and traveled to Rotterdam to give a demonstration. Before Hegener's eyes, Rebel won 1½ - ½ from the Mephisto MM I. Ed Schröder: "I had amazing luck, but what does it matter. My program beat a computer from the Mephisto stable in front of the producer's eyes. I couldn't believe my luck."

Hein Veldhuis: Historically, I rather believe Ed Schröder managed to win with his TRS-80 from the Mephisto MM I. Manfred Hegener was mainly looking to replace Thomas Nitsche & Elmar Henne to find a new programmer for the "middle class chess computers". The Mephisto MM I was at that time a "middle class module" And for Manfred it was actually already established that Richard Lang would take care of the "top class chess computers".

Journal CSVN Computerschaak (1986) Jan Louwman: Ed Schröder and his Rebel

... Ed who was still in the WAO (Disability Insurance Act), wanted to make his hobby his profession and, like Frans Morsch, chose Mephisto. In November 1984, Mephisto commissioned him to write a chess program for the 6502 processor with 4 KB RAM and 32 KB ROM memories. This was no easy task because he needed 16 KB RAM and at least 8 KB RAM in any case. Moreover, switching from the Z80 to the 6502 processor was also a problem; he knew the Z80's "tricks" like the back of his hand, but had yet to learn everything from the 6502.

Hein Veldhuis: November 1984? Come to think of it, this date could very well be correct. It wasn't all that long ago for Jan either. Although Jan contradicts himself, because in a much later interview he comes up with completely different statements!



Magazine Computer-Schach & Spiele (2000) Günter Rehburg: Don't despair - ask Jan Louwman

... Then the time had come. Jan Louwman describes the events of that time as follows: "On the last day of February 1985, a Friday, Manfred Hegener and Ossi Weiner travelled from Munich together with technical staff of the company. They met in Rotterdam with Frans Morsch, Richard Lang and Ed Schröder in my company for a joint dinner, which was used for a kind of preliminary discussion. While Richard Lang had won the shared world championship title with his Psion programme at the 4th Micro World Championships in Glasgow, Ed Schröder and Frans Morsch were still romping around in the amateur camp.

Hein Veldhuis: The last February day of 1985 did not fall on a Friday but on a Thursday! The fact is though that if Jan Louwman expresses himself so explicitly in an interview, you must also know the exact facts, otherwise you should not express them either! I do know of more examples where Jan Louwman came out with incorrect statements. Even in the above article, he makes a mistake, saying that he was introduced to the Novag Chess Champion Mark I at the Horten department store in Düsseldorf just before Christmas 1977. As we know, this chess computer did not come on the market until September 1978...



Ruud Martin (Phoenix Chess Systems) looked at this MM 3 module in March 2013. He noted that there was no memory at all on the original PCB, and therefore wondered how this module had ever been operational. One of the two EPROMs could be read out, but the second one unfortunately could not. Ruud tried the EPROMs in another module, but to no avail. Final conclusion: this module will never be operational again! Soon afterwards, collector Hans van Mierlo sold this module as defective on eBay.



The EPROMs clearly state 'Blitz2'
(Photos Hans van Mierlo - 06.03.2013)



Unknown MM III module

(photo: Steve Blincoe)

There is also an unknown MM III module in Steve Blincoe's (New York) collection. Is this module sometimes also no longer operational? With MM III on the front, a beta version by Ulf Rathsman or Ed Schröder may be present. It would be interesting if Steve Blincoe could show a picture of the circuit board.

Related weblinks

http://www.schaakcomputers.nl/hein_veldhuis/database/files/10-1985,%20Interview%20mit%20Manfred%20Hegener,%20Neue%20Programme%20von%20neuen%20Programmierern.pdf

1985: Interview mit Manfred Hegener

[http://www.schaakcomputers.nl/hein_veldhuis/database/files/11-1986%20\[C-5626\]%20Mephisto%20-%20Rebell%205.0.pdf](http://www.schaakcomputers.nl/hein_veldhuis/database/files/11-1986%20[C-5626]%20Mephisto%20-%20Rebell%205.0.pdf)

1986: Mephisto Rebell 5.0

http://www.schaakcomputers.nl/hein_veldhuis/database/files/03-1987,%20Modul,%20Interview%20mit%20Ed%20Schroder.pdf

1987: Interview mit Ed Schröder

[https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/hein_veldhuis/database/files/04-1989,%20Dap%20Hartmann,%20Interview%20with%20Ed%20Schroder%20\(Dutch%20to%20English%20translation\).pdf](https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/hein_veldhuis/database/files/04-1989,%20Dap%20Hartmann,%20Interview%20with%20Ed%20Schroder%20(Dutch%20to%20English%20translation).pdf)

1989: Dap Hartmann: Gallery of the Dutch chess programmers – Ed Schröder

http://www.schaakcomputers.nl/hein_veldhuis/database/files/08-2000,%20CSS,%20Gunter%20Rehburg,%20Nicht%20verzagen%20-%20Louwman%20fragen.pdf

2000: Computer-Schach & Spiele, Günter Rehburg: Nicht verzagen – Louwman fragen