



## Book Review

### **Chaturanga: A Boy's Adventure on the Silk Road**

**By Andrew C. Katen**

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One of my passions is mentoring geology students and young professionals to help them define pathways to achieve career goals ([Mercenary Musing, September 14, 2009](#)). I strive to be honest and frank about the potential benefits and drawbacks of various choices and particularly with respect to careers in the exploration and mining sector.

I am a [mentor](#) for the Society of Economic Geologists and receive occasional inquiries thru that organization. One of them came six years ago from this book's author, Andrew C. Katen.

Andrew was completing a Bachelor of Science degree in geology at a small college in Colorado at the time. He had previously obtained a degree in biology and a Master's in defense and strategic studies from universities in the US Heartland. He had worked as a teacher at middle school and college levels, in national security, emergency management, and as a risk consultant.

We had a long conversation and I spoke frankly about the exploration and mining industry, economic and financial aspects of the resource sector, geopolitical considerations, and possible career pathways. Andrew was an older, non-traditional student with a family and I likely helped convince him that starting a career as a junior exploration geologist with no previous experience was probably not in the cards.

A few weeks ago, I heard from Andrew Katen again. His career path continues to diverge from anything traditional. He had become a successful novelist with the publishing of "Chaturanga: A Boy's Adventure on the Silk Road" in 2015.

My interest was piqued upon reading a synopsis of his book with its glowing reviews. But it was no doubt heightened by my previous work experience on either end of the book's journey: as a geological mapper in Xinjiang, China in 2005 and as an analyst in Armenia in 2009. I immediately offered to write a review in return for a signed copy.

The title, *Chaturanga*, comes from an ancient Sanskrit board game that spread throughout the regions of the Silk Road over many centuries. According to the book's frontispiece, many different versions survive today. In Europe, it evolved into the game of chess.

The book is a travelogue that focuses on a 14-year old American protagonist who is invited to accompany his petroleum geologist father on a trip to secure pipeline contracts in the oil and gas fields of the Caspian Sea. Many adventures and episodes of intrigue follow as the pair, accompanied by trusty companions that include a Turk logistician and a Russian spy, eventually follow the old Silk Road across the present-day countries of Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and finally into the autonomous Xinjiang province of China and the ancient outpost of Kashgar.

Andrew obviously studied Central Asia in detail and has honed a sharp ability to educate by melding the region's geography, history, geopolitics, economics, and vast energy and mineral resources into a fast-paced tale filled with epic adventures and episodes of intrigue.

Although the book is geared for early teens to young adults, I found it quite entertaining. Perhaps you will too after buying it instead of the newest ultra-violent video game for your teenage sons.

There are endless and ongoing geopolitical uncertainties, conflicts, and difficulties in this huge area that spans over 3600 km. Recently, they include: renewed war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over long-disputed territory; the continuing struggles of many countries for partial control of the petroleum resources of the Caspian Sea; and banishment of the Uighur and Kazak peoples to so-called "re-education camps" in Xinjiang, China.

In my opinion, this is an ideal time to read a new novel on the old Silk Road.

I offer a toast of congratulations to Andrew Katen with the final snifter from a bottle of 20-year *ArArAt*, a product of Armenia and a much appreciated gift after my work in that country in September of 2009. It is renowned as Winston Churchill's favorite brandy; I heartily concur:



You can check out "Chaturanga: A Boy's Adventure on the Silk Road" at [Chaturangabook.com](http://Chaturangabook.com).

Ciao for now,

Mickey Fulp  
Mercenary Geologist



The [Mercenary Geologist Michael S. “Mickey” Fulp](#) is a Certified Professional Geologist with a B.Sc. Earth Sciences with honor from the University of Tulsa, and M.Sc. Geology from the University of New Mexico. Mickey has 35 years experience as an exploration geologist and analyst searching for economic deposits of base and precious metals, industrial minerals, uranium, coal, oil and gas, and water in North and South America, Europe, and Asia.

Mickey worked for junior explorers, major mining companies, private companies, and investors as a consulting economic geologist for over 20 years, specializing in geological mapping, property evaluation, and business development. In addition to Mickey’s professional credentials and experience, he is high-altitude proficient, and is bilingual in English and Spanish. From 2003 to 2006, he made four outcrop ore discoveries in Peru, Nevada, Chile, and British Columbia.

Mickey is well-known and highly respected throughout the mining and exploration community due to his ongoing work as an analyst, writer, and speaker.

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