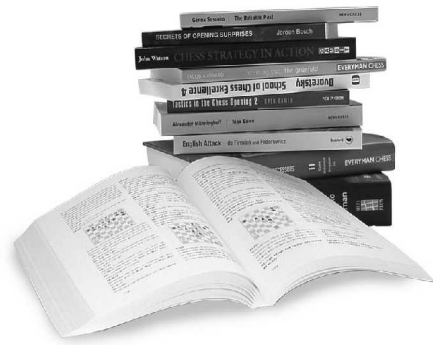


# ROWSON'S REVIEWS

by JONATHAN ROWSON



If you are looking for an excuse to grow a beard, try writing a chess book. Nothing is more likely to make you lose track of the outside world, stop admiring yourself in the mirror, and tolerate that post-stubble, pre-fuzz melange that makes most of us draw our blades and stop nature in her tracks. To produce a worthwhile chess book you normally have to get to the heart of hundreds of positions, and communicate your findings without any traces of blood. And not only should the book be accurate and accessible, but also distinctive and stylish. It is possible to achieve this kind of balance, but not without letting yourself go for a while.

I have been in my 'bunker' trying to finish a book of my own over the last few weeks, but I recently came out to see what various chess publishers wanted me to review. I decided to shave before taking a look, and the first thing that grabbed my attention was *Curaçao 1962* by Jan Timman (New In Chess). I looked at this book first because the covering note alerted me to the photographs inside (publishers please note: taking time over the covering letter you send to reviewers is a good idea!). I flicked through for a few minutes, and felt like I was reading a celebrity gossip magazine for chess historians.

I was particularly arrested by a wonderful photograph of Fischer visiting Tal in hospital, taken by

Richard Cantwell. Tal, clad in white pyjamas, is lying on his side ignoring his breakfast tray, in favour of the pocket set that lies next to it, upon which Fischer is playing a move. If you squeeze your eyes really tightly together you can see enough of the position to tell that it is very complicated. There are many more quality photographs, and these alone are worth the cover price. However, what makes this book particularly valuable to somebody like me, born 15 years after the tournament took place, is all the wonderful background stories about the players and the political context, and how these factors may have influenced the moves on the board:

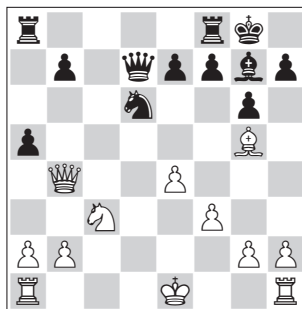
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**Paul Keres**

**Tigran Petrosian**

Curaçao 1962 (25)

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cd4 4.♘d4 g6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♘d4 7.♖d4 d6 8.c5 ♙g7 9.♙b5 ♙d7 10.♙d7 ♖d7 11.cd6 0-0 12.♙g5 ♘e8 13.♖b4 ♘d6 14.f3 a5 1/2-1/2**



Draw? I imagine it is clear to most readers that Black has at least some initiative, and possibly more, because it remains to be seen if White will have time to finish development. This was one of the games that Fischer considered to be evidence of a 'Soviet plot', in which the top Soviet players would draw among themselves to keep their energy in order to beat the other players, especially Bobby himself. As far as Fischer was concerned, the diagrammed position is 'winning' for Black. I must admit that I found this hard to believe at first, and when I consulted Fritz 8, he seemed to share my view that Black was merely better, though without offering any clear path of resistance. However, Timman provides some compelling analysis to corroborate Fischer's assessment:

15.♖b3 a4 16.♖b4 a3 and at the very least Black will have a dangerous pawn on b2.

15.♖a3 h6! 16.♙f4 ♘c4 17.♖b3 ♖fc8 and now:

A) 18.♞d1 a4! 19.♖b4 (19.♞d7 ab3 20.ab3 ♘b2 and now after 21.♘d1 'Black would swap on d1 and penetrate with his rooks, causing death and destruction' (strong language from Timman!) or 21.♘d5 ♞a1 22.♘d2 ♞h1 23.♘e7 ♘h7 24.♘c8 ♞d1 sneakily winning the rook) 19...♖e6 20.0-0 (20.♘d5 ♘b2 21.♘e7 ♘h7 doesn't help White) 20...♘b2 21.♖b2 ♙c3 22.♖b7 ♖a2 and the a-pawn is unstoppable in the long term.

B) 18.0-0 a4 19.♖b4 ♘b2 20.♘d5 ♘d3 21.♗e7 ♚d8! 22.♙e3 (22.♘f6 ♙f6 23.♗f6 ♚a6!) 22...♙a1 23.♚a1 ♗e7 24.♘e7 ♘h7! and Black should be winning.

This analysis seems persuasive to me, but even if you disagree that the position is ‘winning’, doubtless Petrosian is strong enough to see that he could have continued without any real risk while posing his opponent serious problems. This example alone doesn’t prove anything about a ‘Soviet plot’, but it is one of many examples given in the book that are, at the very least, mysterious. There are other factors that might account for Petrosian’s decision. For instance 8.c5!? looks unusual and this may have knocked him off balance. Moreover, this game was played in round 25 (out of 28!). Perhaps Petrosian knew his position was much better but had already decided that a draw from this game would be a good result.

Curaçao 1962 is oozing with nostalgia, but my feeling is that you don’t have to be particularly interested in the history of chess to enjoy the material. As you might expect when the best players in the world get together for two months, there were lots of fantastic games. Many of these games are annotated with Timman’s usual élan, and combined with the quality of the photographs and the richness of the background narrative, the book stands out as something that any self-respecting chess book lover should own.

**Fire on Board Part II: 1997-2004** Alexey Shirov (Everyman)

begins with ‘The Struggle without Limits’ – a remarkably candid (if perhaps a little bit plaintive) description of Shirov’s career since the publication of the best-selling ‘Fire on Board’. This chapter includes Shirov’s thoughts on his match with Kramnik and the subsequent disillusionment when it failed to lead to a match with Kasparov in the way it was intended to. We also learn about the ups and downs in his personal life, legal and financial difficulties, and the challenges of fatherhood. As such, it gives us a rare and valuable insight into the mental and emotional tribulations of an elite Grandmaster and how these factors away from the board can affect a player’s capacity to concentrate on chess. For example, shortly after beating Kramnik, Shirov scored 2½/9 in Dortmund and some think that it was partly because of this poor result that he was not considered a worthy challenger to Kasparov from a marketing point of view. However, you cannot help but sympathize with Shirov when you discover that he returned from his match with Kramnik to an empty house in Tarragona, with his ex-wife and daughter unexpectedly departed and his bank account ‘cleaned’. In the circumstances 2½/9 in Dortmund, even for Shirov, seems like an impressive result!

Moving on to the games, these days I realise that very few people play through all the analysis of every game in detail. Most chess players are more likely to flick through until they find something that grabs their attention. This makes nuggets of insight like the following particularly valuable: Shirov-Topalov, Sarajevo 2000: After 1.e4

e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙g5 de4 5.♘e4 ♙e7 6.♙f6 gf6 7.♘f3 a6!? Shirov writes: ‘This move became popular after Morozevich started employing it in 1998 with success. The legend says that Morozevich once showed the move to Boris Spassky and the reaction of the former world champion was “OK, but isn’t 7...a5 more logical?” Then Spassky insisted on analysing his idea and I think his plan was ...a4, ...♘d7, ...b6, ...♙b7, ...♚a5, ...♗a8 and so on. The result of the analysis is unknown to me. Shortly before the Sarajevo tournament I played... against Spassky... in a rapid game, and afterwards we had a talk about the different lines in the French. He didn’t tell me the “7...a5 story” but he did inform me that, in his opinion, 8.c4!? was the way to challenge 7...a6...’ Shirov went on to use this idea to beat Topalov in a very direct attacking game that began: 8...f5 9.♘c3 ♙f6 10.♗d2 c5 11.d5 0-0 12.0-0-0 e5 13.h4 b5! 14.d6!.

In addition to the extensive introduction, and fantastic games with personalised notes, Shirov’s thoughts on creativity are illustrated with a full explanation of his now famous 47...♙h3!! move against Topalov in Linares 1998. More generally, Shirov has been extremely generous and open about his games and his experience of chess life at the highest levels, so this book is highly recommended.

**Boris Gelfand: My Most Memorable Games** (Olms) is another collection of magnificent games, again with some value added. I have to admit that when I was growing up I didn’t like Boris Gelfand very much, not because of anything he

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had said or done to me personally, but purely because he was the guy who kept on crushing the Grünfeld, which was one of my favourite openings at the time. Although we don't know each other well, it has since become clear to me that Gelfand is one of the more pleasant elite players and I no longer take it personally when he plays 8.♖b1 and wins in spectacular fashion; in fact sometimes I quite enjoy it. However, for me he remains the nemesis of the Grünfeld, and if I ever have to play him as Black I will almost certainly play a different opening!

The following abbreviated extract comes from the first chapter called 'My favourite Variation': The Grünfeld Exchange with 8.♖b1!

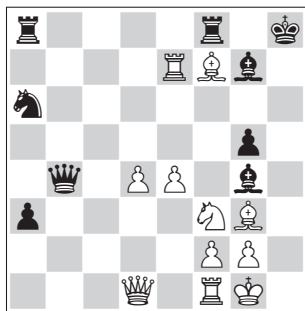
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**Boris Gelfand**

**Alexey Shirov**

Polanica Zdroj 1998

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f3 g6 3.c4 ♘g7  
4.♗c3 d5 5.cd5 ♗d5 6.e4  
♗c3 7.bc3 c5 8.♖b1 0-0  
9.♙e2 cd4 10.cd4 ♖a5  
11.♙d2 ♖a2 12.0-0 ♘g4  
13.♙g5 h6 14.♙h4 a5 15.♖b7  
g5 16.♙g3 a4 17.h4 a3  
18.hg5 hg5 19.♖c7! ♗a6?  
20.♖e7 ♖b2 21.♙c4 ♖b4  
22.♙f7 ♗h8**



'It looks as though White's rook is trapped and that his attack was incorrect. But I had prepared a surprise for my opponent.'

**23.♗d7!!**

'This is main move of the game, and I am proud to have foreseen it quite a long way in advance. For his part, Shirov called 23.♗d7 a 'prosaic' move (I have to agree with him!) and was afraid of an even more imaginative idea: 23.♙e6! ♗f3 (23...♖e7 24.♙g4 and the a-pawn is still far and White already has a material advantage) 24.♖g7 ♙d1 25.♙e5!! The point of Alexey's idea. Now mate in two is threatened and 25...♖b5 is the only defence.'

Wow. These are incredible ideas at the best of times, but what fascinates me is not the moves in abstract, but that this kind of stratospheric complexity was held in the minds of these great players during the game. It's not just that Gelfand had anticipated putting his rook en prise with 23.♗d7!! and that Shirov felt that giving the rook away on e7 was more appropriate, because most GMs can see such ideas when they have to. What is more impressive, and what very few GMs can do, is to see these ideas through to a correct assessment and use that assessment as a basis for good decisions over the board. The fact that players like Gelfand and Shirov can do this is what makes games between them so enthralling. The following (abbreviated) analysis is fairly typical for the kinds of ideas Gelfand shares with his readers:

After 25...♖b5 26.♙d5 'The bishop tries to protect his more important colleague' but this is met with 26...♗f5!! Gelfand goes

on to show that White has no path to an advantage.

As if that wasn't enough, after 26.d5! Black's best move is apparently 26...♖b2! 'finally reaching the bishop' - Gelfand.

By this point I felt I was getting the idea: the side that manages to sacrifice the most material wins! Gelfand then gives the line 27.♖g8 ♗h7 28.♙b2 ♖g8 29.♙a3! ♙c2 30.♙f5 ♗h6 31.♖c1 ♙a4 32.e5 'And White is better, but it is hard to claim something more being a rook down!'

**23...♙d7 24.♗g5 ♖b6 25.♙e6!  
♖e6 26.♗e6 ♙e6 27.♙e5!?  
♖f7 28.♖h5 ♗g8 29.♖g6 ♙d7  
30.♙g7 ♖g7 31.♖d6 ♗h7**

'Alexey misses an excellent practical chance, which is strange, as he is, in my opinion, maybe the best defender in the chess world. 31...♗c7!! was the best try, when Gelfand gives the line: 32.♖c7 ♙h3! 33.♖g7 ♗g7 34.gh3 ♖a4!! 35.♖a1 ♖d4 36.♖a3 ♖e4 and says 'Theory considers such a position drawish, but as far I know, a lot of strong grandmasters question this assessment...'

33.♖c6 ♖a5 34.♖c1! would keep control, but finding that before the time control would have been difficult.'

**32.♖a3 ♗c7 33.♖e3 ♗e6  
34.d5 ♗g5 35.f4 ♗h3 36.♗h1  
♖a2 37.f5! ♗g5 38.f6 ♖g6  
39.f7 1-0**

It is great to see a collection of Gelfand's games because I think they deserve to be more widely known. It is not that the general chess public don't know who Boris Gelfand is, but perhaps it's fair to say that he doesn't have as clear an image as players of a similar strength, including Shirov, even though many of Gelfand's games

are every bit as wild as Shirov's and often more so. My one quibble with this book is the fact that most of the games, and some of the annotations, have been published before. This also applies to Shirov's book, and is a more general concern about games collections of the world's top players.

In his preface Gelfand admits: 'The majority of the games presented here were annotated in their time for publications such as *New In Chess*, *Chess Informator* and others. Specially for this book I have analysed all the games and extracts anew.' I don't doubt that each game and extract was revisited, but at times I did wonder about the extent of the revision. For instance, when I looked at Gelfand-Adams page 125 and Gelfand-Delchev page 197, I found the notes to be almost identical to those in *ChessBase Magazine* in both cases. The English had been tightened and corrected where necessary, but not really changed. However, being charitable, this might simply mean that the original notes were already close to perfect and didn't need changing! Moreover, when I looked at a few more examples I found many cases where there really were extensive changes to the notes or where variations and assessments had been verbalised so as to give a clearer 'story' of the game.

In any case, I am not sure of the best way to deal with this issue of replication, and I have faced the same problem myself of wanting to include similar or identical material in books that I have already used in magazines. Most readers are not badly cheated by this, because they will rarely have seen all the material before and whichever

medium is used will normally offer some fresh perspective on the notes. However, on the specific matter of how this issue applies to games collections, I do think authors and publishers could make more effort to add things above and beyond the annotated games. This might be anecdotes, testimonials of other players (in Gelfand's book this is given by a short preface by Kramnik and introduction by Dirk Poldauf), advice to the reader, or photographs. In any case there should be something to make the book cohere as 'a good games collection' rather than just 'a collection of good games', and this is especially relevant when the games are well known.

Which brings me to **Gary Kasparov's Greatest Chess Games Volume 1** by Igor Stohl (Gambit). While this book might give readers some pleasant moments, I find it a bit pointless. The selected games are wonderful of course, and the annotations are by no means bad, but they are somewhat dry, and given that most of these games are extremely well known, and that many of them have been analysed by Kasparov himself elsewhere, I am not sure that the chess world really needed this book.

Ideally Kasparov's greatest games should be analysed by the man himself, and I hope we can look forward to that happening in due course. Until then, the role of guiding us through his greatest games should go to somebody who has known him well throughout his life, played against him frequently, or analysed with him extensively (ideally all three). Stohl makes good sense of Kasparov's games on an

intellectual level, but he does not have the necessary background to bring them to life in a more visceral way, which is what these extraordinary games deserve.

In the preface Stohl admits that he had doubts about whether he was the right person to write about Kasparov, and that 'Gambit...did a good job in overcoming my initial reservations.' I think Stohl should be commended for his bravery in taking on this task, but I also think that his initial apprehension was fully justified and that Gambit made a mistake. I do not know the author at all, but my impression from Stohl's analysis in this book and from his previous work, *Instructive Modern Chess Masterpieces*, is that he is an earnest and diligent worker, strong player, and a highly accomplished analyst. Even so, I just do not think he was the right man for this job.

We are told on the inside cover that 'the emphasis is on explaining Kasparov's decisions and the principles and concepts embodied in his moves' but I didn't sense this emphasis in the notes. Kasparov's biggest 'conceptual' idea, I believe, is the one he has written about in many places including his first predecessor book; that chess is a game of three dimensions (material, quality and time). This is not mentioned at all.

More to the point, Kasparov is a living legend. The heart of his appeal as a player and a person is his passion, which reveals itself in his deep love of chess and his strong sense of purpose. Sadly, I don't feel that this passion has been captured by the book, and therefore I cannot recommend it. ■