



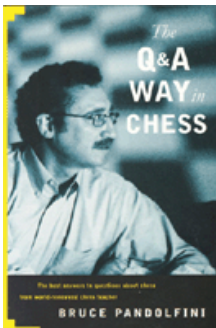
## COLUMNISTS

## The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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## Chess Book Writing

**Question** I am an amateur who has a relatively large chess library. There is a question I have been thinking about for a long time. It may be too complex to answer. Some books in particular, possibly game biographies, are known for their terrific fine points. I am talking about the writing. I like the books of people like the king of chess, David Bronstein. He does not give a lot of analysis in terms of variations, only when it is necessary. Somehow, and I do not know how he is able to do it so well, he captures the essence of the game in prose mainly, using good old verbal language. Then I am thinking about other chess books, such as those by Keres, Timman, Botvinnik, Alekhine, Kasparov, and Fischer. I am not sure where the high qualities of those works can be found. Is it merely in the variations? They do not seem to be as entertaining as those by Bronstein. Nowadays, it seems, much of their analysis is supported by computers. As soon as the software is able to do it, which may happen any day now, the same computer analyses may be spewing out wonderful prose to go along with it. Where will the excellence be then?  
**Sander Kubelik (Spain)**

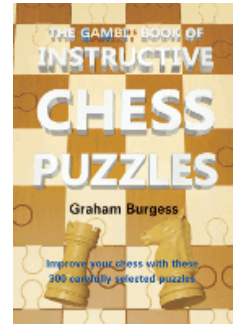
**Answer** I'm not certain what you're asking, but I see that you're attempting to raise serious issues, so I'll try to address some of your comments. I agree with you that Bronstein was a wonderful thinker and writer. His book on the Zurich 1953 Tournament, regardless of translation, is surely one of the great chess books. Undeniably, all his writing, such as that in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, is illuminating and delightful. Moreover, Bronstein did champion a style that is hard to equal. Perhaps, you're right. Maybe no one else has ever done a better job of conveying big chess ideas in language, supported by pertinent analysis.

But let's not use the gifts of one writer to bring down the equally fine though different qualities of others. While there may be more variations in the printed presentations of those you've cited (to be sure, there are), finding those ideas in the first place, making sure they justify the narrative flow of each game's arc, and staying with the most relevant material to bring out what's truly remarkable about each offering is both very hard to do and well-worth it to those of us who have the skills, desire and wherewithal to exploit such renderings.

Alekhine, Botvinnik, Keres, Timman, Fischer, Kasparov, Bronstein (and others) are or have been great players. But they've also developed the theory and culture of the game we all love by virtue of their insightful writings, whether they've relied on a lot of prose or not. Hey, prose is not irrelevant, but prose is not what especially chess is about. If you want prose, read Shakespeare. If you want chess, however, don't ignore Kasparov and crew. And let's not fault them because they are presently able and willing to check their analysis with software. We have wonderful tools in today's world. If such modernizations can enhance our lives, we'd have to be foolish not to use them.

**Question** I am wondering how to teach children from books. In particular I want to be able to help young children, five- to eight-years old. I have old but good books by Reinfeld, Horowitz, and Chernev, and I have newer books by Schiller, Silman, Keene, Soltis, Kasparov, King, and many first-rate writers of chess books. I have tried to find books with a good deal of analysis and many descriptions in words. I am hoping these famous authors write so clearly that my students can readily understand the concepts under consideration. In the past, this has worked for me. Do you think I am doing the right thing? Are there other types of books that would make greater sense? Please assume, of course, that my students are pretty good readers for their ages. I'd appreciate

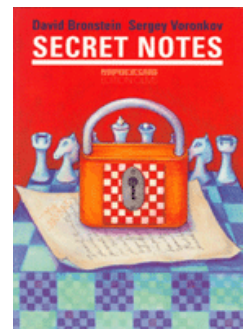
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accessible:



*Gambit Book of Instructive*

*Chess Puzzles*

by Graham Burgess



*Secret Notes*

by David Bronstein  
& Sergey Voronkov



*Test Your Chess*

by Daniel King



your opinion on what I have written about the kind of books I think are outstanding. As I have said, what I have been doing has worked for me.

**Jonathan Reiser (USA)**

**Answer** The writers you've listed are all terrific, though you may want to be careful about mixing up notational systems. Some of the older texts rely on descriptive notation and students might become confused shifting back to algebraic. The other concern is about words in general. No matter how well written the material, chess is a highly visual game. Young students in particular want to tackle problems. They prefer seeing pictures and they don't desire to read much about the pictures. That's just the nature of the beast. They're more interested in finding shots, and that's a perfectly valid approach to studying chess. So, as far as the types of books I think you should focus on, I would go with problem texts, requiring students to solve real game puzzles. The examples can be organized into sections for didactic purposes, but there's nothing wrong with showing random patterns, simulating conditions more like actual play, when a genie isn't standing nearby directing one's attention. There's nothing wrong with encouraging kids to read good chess books, but you might find it more congenial to concentrate on the practical over the abstract. But if doing what you're doing works for you, why not go on doing it?

**Question** I grew up in Puerto Rico (do you know Julio Kaplan?) and now I am a chess fan living in Mexico. I have gathered a huge pile of chess books through the years in Spanish and English, though I have books in other languages too. There are not many chess teachers in Mexico. Therefore, it is important to have contact with good printed works and publications. Every month I read your article in *Chess Life* on Solitaire Chess. I enjoy playing through the games and scoring the points to see how I am playing that month. Why don't you publish a book of these columns? I would like to see some of the ones from the past and a book would be a great way to offer those columns. Do you know of any books like that written by other people? They can be in Spanish or English. Thanks for all your columns and I want to tell you I like them very much. **Manuel Rodriguez (Mexico)**

**Answer** I indeed remember Julio Kaplan. He had true chess talent, is a deeply intelligent and sensitive person, and I liked him very much. I don't know if you have a connection to him, but I haven't seen Julio for years, probably since the late 1970s. As far as a collection of my columns goes, I did put fifty of them together into a book appropriately entitled *Solitaire Chess*. I think it's still out there, somewhere, and so maybe you could track it down and see if you'd like it. I have to say however, even though I write such a column, I'm not sure it's as effective as I'd like it to be. Moreover, I wouldn't place too much faith in its evaluations of playing ability. Such artificial means to determine actual skill always fall far short, even when they're done well.

I think there are a number of books out there like that. Horowitz has an out-of-print collection you might be able to unearth. And there are others who write such columns, most of whom do an admirable job. I've always liked Daniel King's book *How Good Is Your Chess?* I think he does a nice job on considering alternatives and he provides a system of fairly reasonable scoring. I don't know if his book has been translated into Spanish, though the English in it is quite good. You might give his book a try.

**Question** I have been teaching several teenagers in my club. I am not a chess coach and I am not a strong chess player. I am not a grandmaster. But I know the game's fundamentals and I like teaching chess. (I am a proud construction worker by trade, and I am happy also teaching chess.) I usually begin my teaching by going over the moves and rules, the pieces and board, chess notation, some simple mates and tactics. I usually show a few variations from e-pawn openings. I stress a bunch of direct principles – the center, development, castling, open lines, answering threats, etc. If you had to recommend one book, and only one book, to help students learn as much as they could about chess, and if they already knew a few things about the basics, what book would you recommend? **James T. Winwood (USA)**

**Answer** There are probably hundreds of books that could satisfy your need and prove to be engaging. I wouldn't even know where to begin. What you

could do is take a few of your charges to a bookstore or library with a section containing many chess books. Then go through the books with them, taking note of their reactions and how they feel about each one. That possibly would produce the relevant information you're seeking. But let's recommend two books anyway, just to play along. Why don't you get a copy of [\*Lasker's Manual of Chess\*](#). It's a great book. I also think that Michael Stean's *Simple Chess* is an exceptionally fine book. Practically any reader could take pleasure in Stean's compact but gem-loaded offering.

**Question** Recently, a friend showed me a copy of a book signed by Bobby Fischer. Aside from the fact that it has some value as memorabilia, it also had sentimental value for him, since Fischer actually signed it for him many years ago. You have obviously been around for a few years and may have acquired your own copies of books, signed or not, some of which may have special value for you. Are there any books or writings that stand out in your memory that you prize owning? **Mary Fusco (USA)**

**Answer** I probably have a garbage heap of stuff I've accumulated through the years. That's why I have three storage units and waste a ludicrous amount of money every month in rent. Most of what I have is of no real value. Some of it has personal significance, but the overwhelming bulk of it should be thrown away. Naturally, I have some books that maybe would be attractive to others. I doubt that I would ever sell any of them, and how much money are we talking about anyway?

I've told this story before, but it's only recently that I've remembered all its details, as I wrongly tried to tell it to a friend and then realized what I had forgotten. When I was a teenager I worked one summer at Walter Goldwater's University Place Bookshop in Greenwich Village. Walter was then president of the Marshall Chess Club and an expert book dealer in a number of subjects. One day Bobby Fischer came in needing some money. Fischer wound up selling a bunch of his books to Walter for a song. I think there were about fifty books, and I don't recall what Walter eventually did with the lot. But Walter did let me buy a few of them, though he didn't sell them cheaply. I believe it cost me an entire week's salary. The books I got I wanted for two reasons. For one, with all the magical power they conveyed, those books had been owned and read by Fischer, the chess god. But, also, they were wonderful books no matter who had previously possessed them. There were Polish endgame books by Galikowski, a magnificent book on tactics by Lisitsin, and several other foreign language delights.

One of them was a book by Lipnitsky in Russian. It was threadbare, but it looked intriguing. Nevertheless, I didn't realize how fully intriguing it was until a few weeks later. Having put it aside for a bit, I thought I'd drag it to the Marshall and look it over more intently. Or maybe I was just trying to show it off and tell people from whom I had gotten it. When Raymond Weinstein saw me looking at it, he immediately identified it as Fischer's copy. He claimed (and since others have backed this fact up), that Fischer had carried it around with him on his travels for a full year. Furthermore, as Weinstein asserted, that was the very book that Fischer himself had said helped him become a grandmaster. That revelation (whether true or not) was both astonishing and thrilling to hear. But there was one more surprise yet to come (I guess I hadn't looked at the book as carefully as I should have – and I surmise neither had Walter Goldwater). Leafing through its first pages, Weinstein found what I had unfathomably missed: Fischer's actual printed signature (that's how he signed in those days). Probably, to this very day, that's the one book prize I value the most.

#### **Question of the Month**

The best answers will be published below.

*Which chess book would you most cherish if it were personally inscribed, author to you?*

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**The Q & A Way** is based in large part on readers' questions. Do you have a question about preparation, strategy or tactics? Submit your questions (with you full name and country of residence please) and perhaps Bruce will reply in his next [ChessCafe.com](#) column...

*[Yes, I have a question for Bruce!](#)*

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