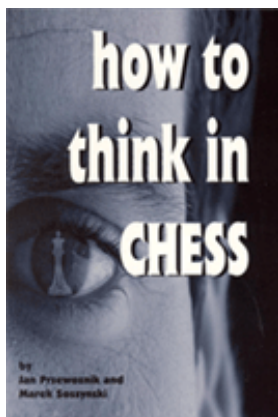




## COLUMNISTS

*Dutch Treat*

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## Ivanchuk's Angels and Demons

Last Saturday the MTEL tournament in Sofia ended. It was won by Alexei Shirov, who overtook Magnus Carlsen by beating him in the last round.

Many fans will rejoice that the former fire-raiser on board has won this elite tournament. Carlsen also has a big band of fans, who might be slightly disappointed. But for me and many others, the main and sad news about this tournament was the downfall of Vassily Ivanchuk, who had been 3rd on the FIDE rating list as recently as January 2009.

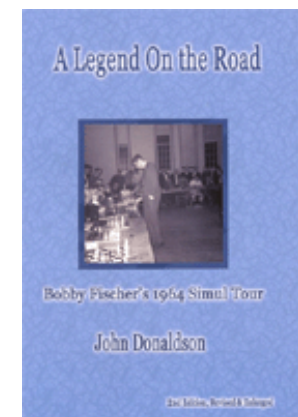
The year 2009 has not been good for Ivanchuk and on the April list he had already dropped to 12th place. At the Grand Prix tournament in Nalchik, where he shared last place, he had won the special prize for the viewers sympathy, a consolation prize that may not have warmed his heart, as he is quite used to being the darling of the public.

Levon Aronian, apart from winning that tournament, gained the special prize for sympathy of the women, as if he were the incarnation of Capablanca. Winning both the tournament and the ladies sympathy seems the perfect combination.

Sofia was a disaster for Ivanchuk. He started out losing with White to Shirov in only 24 moves, after having made one mistake after another. In the next round against Wang Yue he lost an ending where he had the tiny advantage of the two bishops, which he could have traded at any moment for an extra pawn, but with opposite-colored bishops. Instead, he went into a pawn ending that was lost by force. Quite a nice pawn ending by the way, that will find its way into anthologies.

It went from bad to worse. During the next days we watched him dropping down on the Live Top List website, where the provisional

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ratings of top players are calculated every day.

After the ninth round, with minus five, Ivanchuk dropped out of sight on that site because he had gone under 2700. The next day after the last round, when he had finally won a game, he emerged with a provisional rating of 2702.9 – is it really sensible to use decimals in ratings? – in 30th place. Still sad.

In his column in the latest issue of *New in Chess* magazine, Garry Kasparov wrote, among other things, about Ivanchuk. He praised him for a few fine games and remarked that “poor Mayakovsky took his own life at 36 years of age, unaware of the benefits the seasoning of years can bestow upon genius.”

Geniuses approaching middle age, take comfort from Ivanchuk and stay with us for a while!

“But unfortunately for Ivanchuk and the chess world,” Kasparov writes, “his angels travel arm-in-arm with demons. Tragic time management, inexplicable blunders, you never know what to expect.”

Kasparov thought about Ivanchuk when recently he saw the film *Righteous Kill* with Al Pacino, who plays a hard-nosed cop.

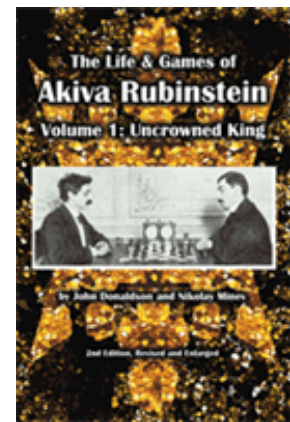
In the opening credits, Al Pacino is giving an informal simul while reminiscing about Bobby Fischer. “He became world champ, didn’t he? But then he went bleeping nuts!”

Kasparov concludes: “The great Vasily’s games rarely fail to provide pleasure and inspiration. But occasionally he just goes bleeping nuts!”

This was written before he had seen the games in Sofia.

As Ivanchuk is a great player, his failures can also have the sign of greatness. His draw against Dominguez from the fourth round showed enterprising opening play and fine middle game strategy, and it would have been a pearl of the tournament if he had not missed a clear win several times. I don’t know if the tragic time management mentioned by Kasparov played a role, but it seems likely.

The next round saw a violent and complicated game against Topalov with mistakes being made by both players. On the way they may both have



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been winning, but had it ended in a natural way with a drawn rook ending, the game would have been applauded as a great battle. Instead it left a bitter taste as Ivanchuk, the instigator of the wild adventure, blundered away the draw that had been in hand for a long time.

Take a rest, is the prescription for Ivanchuk given by many commentators. This certainly seems good advice. Recently I have been re-reading Botvinnik's book of memoirs, *Achieving the Aim*. Somewhere he writes that from September till April he had been playing too many games, 50!, with an exclamation mark, as if 50 games in 8 months were outrageous.

I have not counted Ivanchuk's recent games, but I think for him Botvinnik's 50! would be abstinence.

Siegbert Tarrasch used to condemn commentators who would write that certain positions were unclear. If a position was unclear, the commentator should not be satisfied until it became clear to him.

Sounds good, but more easily said than done. Tarrasch himself often solved the problem by giving a strong opinion that he would squarely contradict not much later.

I feel not qualified to give a deep analysis of this game. One thing is clear: Kasparov's dictum that Ivanchuk's angels and demons walk hand in hand, really applies here.

***Ivanchuk – Topalov***  
**5th MTel Masters Sofia**

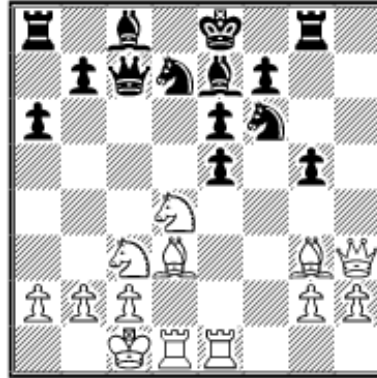
**1. e2-e4 c7-c5 2. Ng1-f3 d7-d6 3. d2-d4 c5xd4 4. Nf3xd4 Ng8-f6 5. Nb1-c3 a7-a6 6. Bc1-g5 e7-e6 7. f2-f4 Bf8-e7 8. Qd1-f3 Qd8-c7 9. 0-0-0 Nb8-d7 10. Bf1-d3 h7-h6**

The main idea of this move, often played by Walter Browne in the 1970s, is 11. Bh4 g5 12. fxg5 Ne5 13. Qe2 Nfg4 which, *n'en déplaise à Tarrasch*, can only be called unclear.

**11. Qf3-h3 Nd7-c5**

A risky move. Browne used to play the safer 11...Nb6.

12. Rh1-e1 Rh8-g8 13. Bg5-h4 g7-g5 14. e4-e5 d6xe5 15. f4xg5 h6xg5  
16. Bh4-g3 Nc5-d7



Up till here everything had been played before, but now Ivanchuk uncorks a violent novelty.

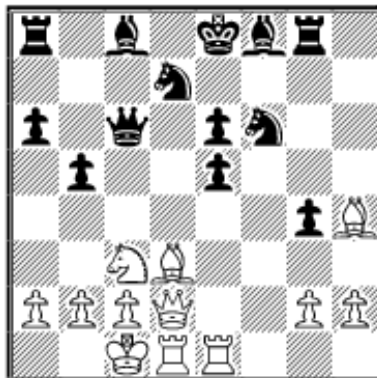
**17. Nd4xe6 Qc7-b6**

If Black would take the piece at once with 17...fxe6, White would follow up his attack with 18. Qh6.

**18. Bd3-c4 g5-g4**

Here Black had a rich choice of moves, all of them with unclear consequences: 18...fxe6 19. Ne4 or 18...Nf8 19. Bxe5

**19. Qh3-h6 f7xe6 20. Bg3-h4 Be7-f8 21. Qh6-d2 Qb6-c6 22. Bc4-d3 b7-b5**



### **23. Nc3-e4**

And here White had a choice. The best move was probably 23. Rf1, which some annotators have worked out to a clear advantage for White. There is also 23. Be4 or the nice 23. Rxe5, after which 23...Nxe5 would fail to 24. Bxb5, winning Black's queen.

### **23...Nf6-d5 24. Re1-f1 Bc8-b7 25. Rf1xf8+**

Beautiful. The piece sacrifice is followed by an exchange sacrifice. But is it sound?

### **25...Nd7xf8 26. Qd2-h6 Rg8-g6 27. Ne4-f6+**

Another spectacular move, but Black could have obtained a clear advantage after this. Instead, 27. Qh5 has been recommended, playing for the attack a rook down in a totally unclear position. Well, who knows?

### **27...Rg6xf6 28. Bh4xf6 Nd5xf6**

This should have led to a draw. Black had good reason to play for a win with 28...Qc7, with the idea of returning the piece by 29. Bg7 0-0-0 30. Bxf8 Nf4 with a clear advantage for Black.

### **29. Bd3-g6+ Nf8xg6 30. Qh6xg6+ Ke8-e7 31. Qg6-g7+ Ke7-e8**

Here and later White can force a draw by perpetual, but he doesn't want to and he doesn't have to.

### **32. Qg7xf6 Ra8-c8 33. c2-c3 b5-b4 34. Qf6-g6+ Ke8-e7 35. Qg6-g7+ Ke7-e8 36. Rd1-f1 Qc6-c5**



46. Qb7-c8+ Ke8-f7 47. Qc8-d7+ Kf7-f6 48. Qd7-d8+ Kf6-f5 49. Qd8-f8+ Kf5-e4 50. Qf8-a8+ Ke4-d3 51. Qa8xa6+ Qf4-c4 52. Qa6-a7 g4-g3 53. h2-h3 Qc4-b3+ 54. Kd1-e1 Kd3-c2 0-1

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