

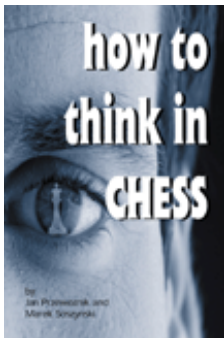


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Eye of the Hurricane

Hanon W. Russell

Botvinnik's Best Games, Volume I: 1925-1941, by Mikhail Botvinnik, 2000
Moravian Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Hardcover, 392pp., \$39.00

From the end of the Second World War to the present, with the exception of a brief hiatus in the early 1970s, Soviet/Russian chessplayers have dominated the international chess scene. And among them, none has been more hardworking than Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik. He was the first to carry the Soviet banner abroad. In fact, his debut in the international arena was unremarkable, finishing fifth among ten at the 1934-35 Hastings tournament. But there quickly followed first at Moscow in 1936, second at Nottingham 1936 and Caissa knew she had a new world class player at her doorstep.



By the time he had emerged as the leading Soviet player and a force with which to be reckoned internationally, Stalin had consolidated his power and had commenced the bloody purges that would terrify the USSR. Mikhail Moiseyevich, however, seemed to live a charmed life in the eye of the hurricane. A challenge to Alekhine was slowly but surely being sorted out, and might well have led to a title match in 1939 or 1940 had war not exploded across Europe. Even then, Botvinnik avoided the firestorm and was able to continue his chessplaying.



Since the early days of his career, the Soviet World Champion had been noted for his deep analysis and thorough preparation. Two of his books are very well known (and at this point, fairly difficult to acquire) in the West: *One Hundred Selected Games* (1951) and *Achieving the Aim* (1981). A three-volume series by Baturinsky, (not, as many have mistakenly thought, by Botvinnik) *Shakhmatnoe Tvorchestvo Botvinnika*, contained 700 games and appeared in the last half of the 1960s; an English version of this series was never published. (Photo: *Match Riga-Leningrad 1928*)

Then, from 1984-87, *Analiticheskie i kriticheski raboti* (Analytical and Critical Works) by M. M. Botvinnik was released in four volumes. The first three volumes have games selected and annotated by Botvinnik, while the fourth contains a collection of his other writings and articles. *Botvinnik's Best Games*, Volume I: 1925-1941 is the first volume of the *Analiticheskie i kriticheski raboti* series.



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We have, unfortunately, a bit of a history with these books. Without dwelling on a sore topic, let it be noted that we had asked for and obtained written permission from the Soviets to publish an English version of *Analiticheskie i kriticheski raboti*. In fact, about half of the 360 games in the original Russian work had already appeared online at **ChessCafe.com** when Botvinnik's nephew and heir Igor got downright ugly with us, making wild accusations and not-so-subtle threats. Still a little green at the publishing game, we folded our tent and went home. There is some regret having done so, but such is life. (The latest episode of an Igor outburst was triggered by the release - by **ChessCafe.com** in electronic book form - of the unpublished training games played by Botvinnik; those interested may consult the first issue of *New In Chess* this year.) (Photo: Match Kan-Botvinnik, Leningrad 1930)



The ignominious Igor notwithstanding, the first two volumes have appeared in English. It is translated by Ken Neat and we are not left wondering about any alleged authorization at all; the flip side of the title page states: "This book is an **authorised** translation of *M.M. Botvinnik Analiticheskie i kriticheskie raboty 1923-1941* (Moscow 1984)." [Emphasis added.]



(Photo: Botvinnik 1933)

This first volume contains a 14-page introduction by Botvinnik, 121 annotated games (one more than the original Russian edition) a few training games, Tournament and Match Crosstables, a Summary of Tournament and Match Results (1923-1941), Translator's Notes and an Index of Openings. There is also a section of over 40 photographs, many rarely seen before. The translation by Neat is competent and certainly better than the work he did with *Kramnik My Life and Games*, which was justifiably criticized.

The publisher is Moravian Chess in the Czech Republic, which in the last few years has established itself as one of the chief sources of historical reprints, as well as the publisher of the highly acclaimed *Quarterly for Chess History*. (**ChessCafe.com** in fact has recently concluded an agreement to make many of the Moravian Chess publications available to its readers in North America and approximately 80 Moravian Chess titles have just been added to our online catalog.)

The book is hardbound, the binding good and the printing quality quite acceptable. The crosstables have a certain "bitmapped fuzziness" about them, but overall, with one other exception, the Czech publisher did a commendable job. The exception? The photographs. Although their quality is certainly better than those described by John Hilbert when reviewing another Moravian Chess release, *Chess in Philadelphia*, someone neglected to check the captions carefully. The caption to one reads "Botvinnik 1937-1941(?)"; the photograph is of Botvinnik shaking hands with Tal, no doubt in 1960 or 1961. Another states: "Pairing of the AVRO Tournament, 1938"; the photograph is Botvinnik about to start play against Petrosyan. There are other examples. (Photo: Botvinnik with his wife Gajane, Leningrad 1936)



But the essence of this book is the collection of games annotated by the great world champion himself. His pursuit of honesty on the chessboard coupled with the very

personal insights he shares with the reader for almost 400 pages will both instruct and touch you like few other game collections.

An excerpt:

Game 50
M.Botvinnik -V.Alatortsev
Master Tournament
Leningrad 1932/33
Queen's Pawn Game

1 d4 e6 2 c4 Bb4+ 3 Bd2 Bxd2+

The immediate exchange of bishops favours White, since now the position is determined and it is easier for him to form a plan. Therefore 3...Qe7, as Keres invariably played, can be considered obligatory.

4 Qxd2 Nf6

Here switching to a Dutch Defence by 4...f5 came into consideration.

5 Nc3 d5

Black cannot allow e2-e4, with an obvious advantage to White.

6 e3 0-0 7 Nf3 b6

Also after 7...c6 it will not be easy for Black to complete the mobilisation of his forces.

8 cxd5 exd5

After 8...Nxd5 9 Nxd5 exd5 there would have been a pair of knights less on the board and the exchange of pieces normally eases the defence in a cramped position.

9 Bd3 Re8 10 0-0

If 10 Ne5 there could have followed 10...Ng4.

10...Nbd7

After 10...Nc4 11 Qc2 Bb7 (11...f5 12 Nxd5) 12 Ne5 White dominates the centre, and his troublesome knight cannot be driven away: 12 ...f6 13 Bxe4 dxe4 14 Qb3+. Therefore Black prevents 11 Ne5 followed by f2-f4. Now he is not afraid of the pin 11 Bb5, when he plays 11...Bb7, and if 12 Ne5 Nxe5! 13 Bxe8 Nc4.

11 Qc2 a6

This move is provoked by the fact that 11...Bb7 is met by 12 Nb5 (12...a6 13 Qxc7, 12...c6 13 Nd6, 12...Rc8 13 Nxa7), and Black does after all want to fianchetto his bishop. He also had to reject 11...c6 because of 12 e4.

12 Racl Bb7



A routine move, and perhaps the decisive mistake. It was essential to play 12...c5 with the threat of 13...c4, when Black would still have had hopes of creating some counterplay on the queenside.

13 Na4 Rc8 14 Qe2 c6

Of course, now all the pawns on this flank will be weak, but what else is there to do? If 14...Ra8 White would have continued intensifying the pressure by 15 Rc2 and 16 Rfc1. At

the same time Black sets a little trap: 15 Bxa6? Bxa6 16 Qxa6 Ra8.

15 Bf5

White transfers his bishop to an important diagonal, and in view of the constant threat of Bxd7 the opponent's pieces will be tied to the defence of the b6 pawn.

15...g6 16 Bh3 Ra8

Escaping from the unpleasant pin.

17 Rfd1 Nb8

Black regroups his forces, in order to restrict the activity of the enemy bishop by ...f7-f5. But it is no longer possible to 'patch up' his position: after ...f7-f5 the position of his king is slightly exposed, which becomes of primary importance on account of the passive placing of his remaining pieces.

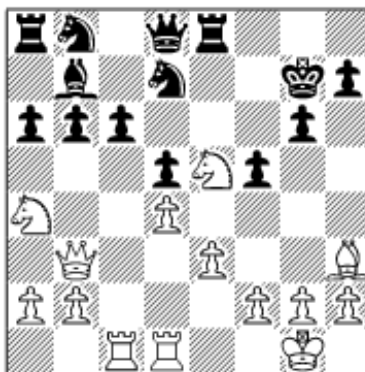
18 Qd3

The queen is aiming for b3.

18...Nfd7 19 Qb3 f5

Now White has a clear goal - to open up the position, in order to launch an attack on the king.

20 Ne5! Kg7



After 20...Nxe5 21 dxe5 Nd7 22 f4 Black again cannot avoid the demolition of his position by e3-e4, for example: 22...Kg7 23 e4 fxe4 (23...dxe4 24 e6) 24 Bxd7 Qxd7 25 Nxb6.

21 e4!

A spectacular blow, by which White realizes his positional advantage.

21...Nxe5 22 dxe5 fxe4

After other replies Black loses material. If, say, 22...Rxe5, then 23 Nxb6 Ra7 24 exf5 gxf5 25 Qg3+.

23 Nxb6 Ra7 24 e6

White has a won position, and this is one of the ways of achieving the win: the black pieces are prevented from achieving any kind of coordination. 24 Qe3 was also possible, with the threat of 25 Nxd5.

24...Ba8



24...Bc8 would have lost a piece to 25 e7. If 24...Re7 White would probably have continued 25 Qe3 Ba8 (otherwise 26 Nxd5, while if 25...Bc8 26 Rxd5), and now, of course, winning the exchange (26 Nd7) is a small achievement, since the attack continues of its own accord, for example: 26 f3 exf3 27 Rxd5 cxd5 28 Qd4+ Kh6 29 Rc8 Qd6 30 Rg8.

25 Nxa8 Kg8

If 25...Rxa8 26 Qb7+. Now White is a piece up, and the remainder is obvious.

26 e7 Rax7

If 26...Rxe7, then 27 Nb6 Rab7 28 Rxc6! Nxc6 29 Rxd5 and White wins.

27 Qb6

Here the sacrifice 27 Rxc6 no longer worked on account of 27...e3.

27...Qd6 28 Qd4

Now there is no way that the knight can be trapped, and the rest of the moves were not essential.

28...e3 29 fxe3 Rxe3 30 Rf1 R3e4 31 Qf2

Forcing Black to waste a tempo on defending the f7 square.

31...Qe7 32 Nb6 Re2 33 Qd4 Re4 34 Qc5

At a moment when the black rook is not on the second rank, the exchange of queens can be offered.

34...Qxc5+ 35 Rxc5 Rb4 36 Nd7 Nxd7 37 Bxd7 Black resigns.

There are those books that take on a certain aura, almost privileged status in every chessplayer's library. *Botvinnik's Best Games*, Volume I: 1925-1941 by Mikhail Botvinnik will be one such book. The price is a little steep, but this hardbound edition will be valued part of your collection for years to come. This book, not to mention the entire three-volume set, should take its place next to Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*, Alekhine's *New York 1924* and Tal's *Tal-Botvinnik 1960*. It is that good.

Order *Botvinnik's Best Games*, Volume I: 1925-1941
by Mikhail Botvinnik



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