



BOOK
REVIEWS

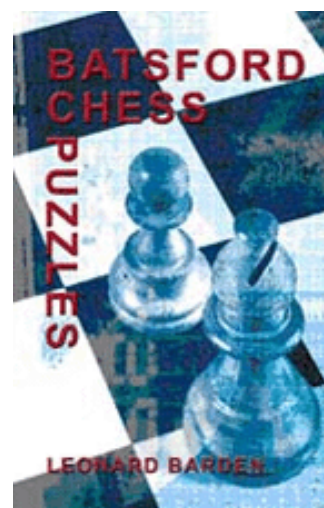


Puzzling History

Glenn Budzinski

Batsford Chess Puzzles, by Leonard Barden, 2002 Batsford, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 176pp., \$21.95

It was with mild surprise that I noticed that the author of *Batsford Chess Puzzles* was Leonard Barden, former British champion and occasional member of English Olympiad teams. His name has hardly been a household word lately; Barden has been providing a daily puzzle in the *London Evening Sentinel* and writing “weekend chess columns to both *The Guardian* and *The Financial Times*. *Batsford Chess Puzzles* is a collection of some of these chess puzzles. In the Preface to the book, Barden offers that “The selection comprises 300 of the best of more than 20,000 puzzles published in national chess columns.”

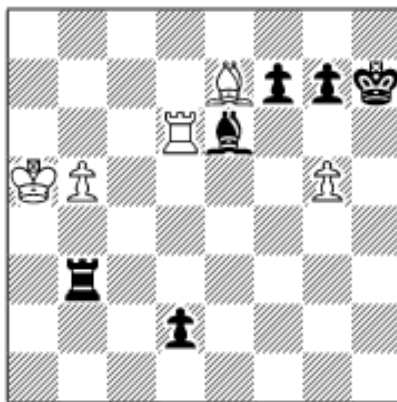


The 300 puzzles are divided into 11 chapters, each covering a different theme, and a final, unnumbered chapter, which provides the puzzle solutions. For example, Chapter 1, “Test Your Talent”, consists of 11 positions that have been used to test the abilities of other players; “First Round Knockouts”, Chapter 2, which includes 25 positions, asks the reader to find a win in two moves or less, etc. Remaining chapters are titled “Checkmates in Two; Longer Mates; Winning Tactics; Learn from the Champions; Beat the Masters; Missed Opportunities; Strategic Chess; Endgame Challenges; Tough Nuts and Party Tricks.” Virtually all positions in Chapters 3 and 4, which involve solving for mate, as well as many of the “Test Your

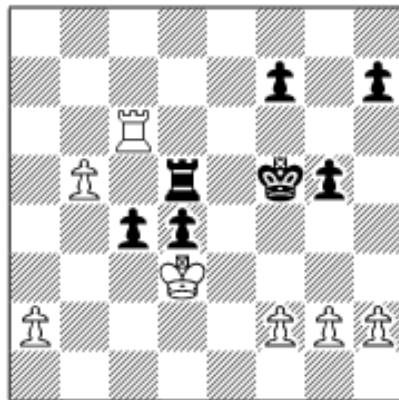
Talent” and “Tough Nut” positions are composed problems. (Positions that one would expect to find in a problem composition book.) Virtually all other quiz positions, which represent the majority of the book’s contents, are taken from actual master games. Many of the games are relatively recent, from the 1990s and later, and are between recognized grandmasters from around the world; it was also not surprising to also find games involving many lesser-known British players.

Accompanying most positions is a story, sometimes no more than a few sentences, other times several paragraphs in length. Regardless of the length, the narrative usually consists of an interesting piece of trivia about one of the players or an explanation of the uniqueness of the position.

For example, there’s the story of Sammy Reshevsky versus Al Horowitz from the 1942 U.S. Championship, position #183. Barden writes “Defeat for White here would concede the title to Reshevsky’s rival Kashdan, who wanted to turn pro but needed the US crown to launch his career. Worried by White’s b5 pawn, Horowitz (Black to move) simplified by 1...Bc4 2 Rxd2 Rxb5+ when all pawns are on the same side of the board so that Reshevsky easily drew a pawn down. Then he won the tie-match by a wide margin, and poor Kashdan had to return to selling insurance. How, in the diagram, could Black have won the game and so changed the course of chess history?”



The solution is 1...Ra3+ 2.Kb4 (if 2.Kb6 then Ra2 and Bg4 wins) Ra7! 3.Bf8 Rd7 or 3.Rxd2 Rxe7 4.b6 Kg6.



Earlier in the book, one finds the following position from the game Kasparov – Timman, 2000 Wijk aan Zee.

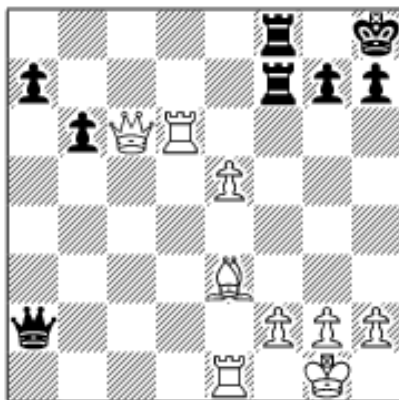
According to Barden, “The large Dutch audience watched in glum silence as the Russian world champion ground down the hometown hero. Then came a

buzz of discussion as Timman suddenly launched ...c4+ to produce this diagram. You can see the clever idea, Black plans to meet 1 Rxc4 by 1...Rxb5 2 Kxd4 Rb2 when material parity is restored, the Black rook is active, and Kasparov’s win has evaporated.

But Kasparov’s expression remained a confident sneer. He captured the other way 1 Kxc4, Timman promptly replied 1...d3 and the spectators got really animated. Surely the Black pawn is en route to touchdown...it can’t be stopped...Kasparov has blundered! How did the game finish after 1 Kxc4 d3 ?” After 1. Kxc4 d3 2 Kxd5 d2 3 g4+!, Black resigned since ...Kxg4 (or Kf4) loses to 4 Rc4+ followed by Rd4, when White wins the d-pawn before it queens.”

Another interesting story was the following tidbit about Ossip Bernstein, which accompanied a position from his game against Victor Kahn from Paris 1926. Barden recounts that “Ossip Bernstein used to claim he was the only grandmaster who had lost three fortunes. Son of a wealthy Jewish family and successful Tsarist advocate, he was 1911 Moscow champion and played in the great tournament of St. Petersburg 1914 but had to flee penniless from the Bolsheviks. Resettled in France, he became one of France’s most prosperous financial lawyers only to lose it all again in the Wall Street crash. Then in the 1930s he tied a match with world champion Alekhine, and created yet another fortune until this, too, was seized by the Nazis in 1940. Finally he achieved a life-long dream when he flew back to his beloved Moscow as No 1 board for France in the 1956 Olympiad – but the excitement brought on a heart attack.”

Even the associated game position is of interest:



It is evident that Black has pressure, but how can he bring the point home? What did Bernstein play as Black, here? The solution is 1...Rxf2 2.Rxe6 Qe2!, which forces mate.

I have no issue with the vast majority of positions that I reviewed in this book. Most

appear to be appropriate for the chapter under which they're contained. In terms of difficulty, they are about typical for newspaper chess column positions. Thus, the player of average skill can expect to spend a few minutes or longer on each. Some positions, however, especially those culled from grandmaster games, may prove to be quite challenging and require more time.

I also subjected a sampling of solutions to "actual" (as opposed to "composed") positions to computer analysis. The only one that produced a significantly different result was #101, a position from a 1998 UK League game between two unknown players.



The reader is told that "White (to move) has a wide choice, but he knew the standard trick in this type of position and scored a rapid win. Can you work out what happened?" After having searched for a forced win for a number of minutes in vain, I turned to the solution given in the back of the book, only to discover that, alas,

there is no forced win. Barden offers 1. Qh5 g6? 2.exd6 Bxd6 3.Qxh7+ Kxh7 4.Rh3+ Kg8 5.Rh8 mate which is, indeed, a "standard trick" leading to a rapid win. However, inclusion of the question mark in the solution is of little consolation to the

reader, who is unaware beforehand that he is being asked to find a “helpmate”. After the move 1.Qh5, Black, in fact, may be able to obtain an advantage with almost any kind of defense at all. For example, Fritz gives both 1.Qh5 f6 and 1.Qh5 g6 2.exd6 f6 3.dxc7 gxh5, as leading to better positions for Black.

There is no question that the anecdotes and stories are entertaining. However, as pointed out by Edward Winter in his *Chess Notes* column at ChessCafe.com, Barden stumbles more than once in getting some of his facts and positions correct. For the unsuspecting reader, it is an unfortunate aspect of the book, something that could have been prevented if a knowledgeable editor had reviewed the text before publication.

The entertainment value remains however and despite its flaws, this should become one of the more popular puzzle books on the market today.

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by Leonard Barden

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