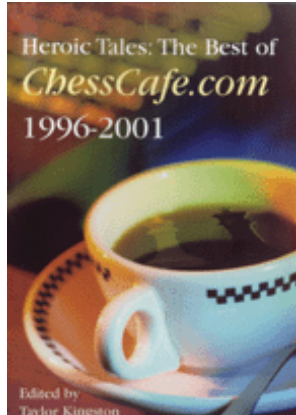




BOOK REVIEWS



A Bygone Era

Eugen Manchester

Botvinnik-Bronstein, Moscow 1951 by Mikhail Botvinnik, 2004 Edition
Olms, Softcover, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 124pp., \$25.00

1951. It was a completely different world. Harry Truman was President of the United States. Joseph Stalin was Secretary General of the Soviet Union. Mikhail Botvinnik was world chess champion. He had become world champion by virtue of his convincing win in the 1948 championship tournament held at The Hague/Moscow to fill the vacancy left by the death Alexander Alekhine.



In March 1951, the champion undertook the first defense of his title against challenger David Bronstein. Garry Kasparov has noted:

“Especially dramatic was the rise of the young Bronstein, a player of vivid, distinctive style to some extent a forerunner of Tal: victory in the first Interzonal tournament (Saltsjöbaden 1948), two gold medals in successive USSR Championships (1948 and 1949)...” (*Garry Kasparov on My Great Predecessors*, Volume 2, p.164). Thirteen years his junior, Bronstein had qualified for the title match by scoring 12-6 to tie for first place with Isaak Boleslavsky in the Candidates’ Tournament held in 1950 in Budapest. He then defeated Boleslavsky in playoff match 7½-6½ to become the official challenger.

The match would be the first championship match held under the auspices of the international chess federation (FIDE). The rules in effect provided that it would be a 24-game match, and in the event of a drawn match, the champion would retain his title. The players fought tooth and nail; 10 of the 24 games were decisive. The lead in the match changed hands several times. However, with his win in the 22nd game, Bronstein took a one-point lead with only two games left to play. It appeared that a new champion would be crowned. However, it was not to be. Botvinnik struck back with a dramatic win in Game 23, pulling even with only one game to go. Then, in a vastly superior position in the last game, the champion offered the challenger a draw and it was match over.

In 2001, the Moscow publishing firm “64” released a book about the match with annotations by Botvinnik, Sveshnikov, Flohr, Lilienthal, Levenfish and Romanovsky. The Swiss publisher Edition Olms has now brought out an English edition, with a Preface by Vladimir Kramnik.

The book was apparently compiled and edited by Botvinnik’s nephew, the

curmudgeonly sole heir to the three-time world champion. It also has notes from Botvinnik's diaries, including his opening preparation and summary of the match. Here is the fifth match game, including Botvinnik's introductory and final notes.

25th March – Game 5

The main things:

- 1) *time*
- 2) *aim for technique – in a superior position (?);*
- 3) *calculate without fear – he is bound to go wrong (isn't he rather weak as a tactician?).*

Endeavor by the 30th move to have a half hour advantage and to stir up trouble in a superior position. Let's go!

Botvinnik-Bronstein Nimzo-Indian Defense Notes by Andrei Lilienthal

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 c5 6 Nf3 b6

Many of those observing this game were convinced that, beginning with this move, the play had developed along new lines, but in fact the first 12 moves repeated the game Alatortsev-Lisitsyn, played back in 1937 in the USSR Championship.

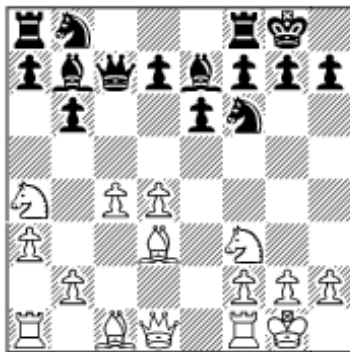
7 0-0 Bb7 8 Na4!

Now it transpires that the position of the bishop at b4 is insecure. The next move, conceding the centre to White, seems forced. However, in the game Taimanov-Botvinnik (Moscow 1963) Black played, not without success, 8...Qe7.

8...cxd4 9 a3

Later it was shown that 9 exd4 is stronger (9...d5 10 c5 bxc5 11 a3 c4 12 axb4 cxd3 13 Nc5).

9...Be7 10 exd4 Qc7



11 b4!

On this move, which is undoubtedly the strongest, Botvinnik spent fifty-two minutes and later he ended up in serious time trouble. He had evidently forgotten about the Alatortsev-Lisitsyn game, since otherwise, of course, he would have used his time

more rationally.

It is interesting to note that the first 10 moves in this game are a repetition of a friendly game Alatorsev-Botvinnik, played in 1934, which was broadcast by Leningrad radio – Ed.

11...Ng4!

Bad were both 11...d5 12 c5 and 11...a5 12 b5 d5 13 c5 bxc5 14 dxc5 Bxc5 15 Bb2 with an excellent game for White.

12 g3

One gains the impression that the weakening of the h1-a8 diagonal should allow Black to gain a dangerous attack. However, Botvinnik evaluated the situation correctly. 12 d5 was weaker because of 12...b5 13 cxb5 Bxd5, while 12 Re1 could have been met by 12...Bxf3 13 Qxf3 Qxh2+ 14 Kf1 f5 and 15 Qxa8 is not possible on account of 15...Nc6 16 Qb7 Nxd4 – there is no defense against mate.

12...f5 13 Nc3

This move sets Black more difficult problems than 13 Ne1, as Alatorsev played in the afore-mentioned game.

The game Petrosian-Kopylov from the 19th USSR Championship (1951) continued 13 Re1 f4!! 14 Bxf4 Rxf4 15 gxf4 Qxf4 16 d5 exd5 17 Rxe7 (17 cxd5 is stronger) 17...Nc6 18 Re1 Rf8 19 Be4 with very sharp play.

13...a6 14 Re1 Nc6

14...Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nc6 16 Ne2 Bf6 17 Bb2 would have led to sharp play.

15 Bf1

Preparing to play the bishop to g2 to strengthen the kingside and in order to begin a pawn offensive in the centre.

15...Nd8

15...f4 followed by the exchange sacrifice looked tempting. However, after 16 Bxf4 Rxf4 17 gxf4 Nxd4 (17...Qxf4 18 Re4) 18 Qxd4 Bxf3 19 Nd5 Bxd5 20 cxd5 Bf6 (20...Rf8 21 dxe6 Rxf4 22 Qxd7 Qb8 23 Rac1 Rc4 24 f4 Qxf4 25 Qe8+ Bf8 26 Qf7+ and White wins) 21 Qc4! Qxc4 22 Bxc4 Bxa1 23 dxe6 White regains the piece with the better ending.

Instead of the text move, the natural 15...Rac8 comes into consideration.

16 Bf4 Bd6 17 Bxd6 Qxd6 18 Bg2 Nf7 19 c5 Qc7

Of course, 19...bxc5 was hopeless because of 20 dxc5 Qe7 21 Nd5.

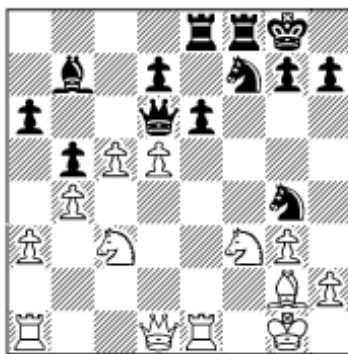
20 Rc1

20 Na4 was more vigorous, when in comparison with the game continuation White succeeds in playing d4-d5 before the black pawn reaches f4. For example: 20...b5 21 Nb6 Rae8 22 d5 etc.

20...Rae8 21 Na4 b5 22 Nc3 f4

In a difficult position Bronstein seeks tactical chances

23 d5 fxg3 24 fxg3



With this move White weakens his e3 square, which subsequently proves fatal. 24 hxg3 was essential, since after 24...exd5 25 Nxd5 Rxe1+ 26 Nxe1 Black would have been in a critical position. Little better for him is 25...Qc6 26 Nh4 Rxe1+ 27 Qxe1 or 25...Rxe1+ 26 Nxe1 Qe5 27 Qxg4 Bxd5

28 Bxd5 Qxd5 29 Rd1.

24...exd5 25 Qd4

25 Nxd5 probably did not satisfy White because of 25...Bxd5 26 Qxd5 Ne3 27 Qd2 Nxg2 28 Qxg2 (28 Kxg2 Qc6) 28...Rxe1+ 20 Rxe1 d6 with a roughly equal game.

It was incorrectly suggested by some commentators that after 25...Qc6 Black would gain a strong attack. In this case White could without fear have won the exchange: 26 Ne7+ Rxe7 27 Rxe7 Ng5 28 Qb3+ Kh8 29 Qc3! etc.

25...Nf6 26 Nh4 Re5

Well played. Black prevents the invasion of the knight at f5 and wrests control of the e-file. The world champion is forced to go into an endgame, where his advantage is minimal.

27 Rxe5 Qxe5 28 Qxe5

It was possible to delay this exchange and play 28 Rd1.

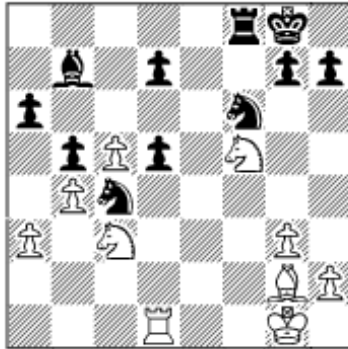
28...Nxe5 29 Nf5

Now if 29 Rd1 there would have followed 29...Nc4 and 30 Nxd5 is not possible in view of 30...Bxd5 31 Bxd5+ Nxd5 32

Rxd5 Ne3, winning the rook. This is where the weakness of the e3 square tells.

29...Nc4 30 Rd1?

The turning point of the game. After the correct 30 Nxd5 Nxd5 31 Bxd5+ Bxd5 32 Ne7+ Kf7 33 Nxd5 Black would have had to fight for a draw.



30...Kh8! 31 Re1

Not possible now is 31 Nxd5 Nxd5 32 Bxd5 Bxd5 33 Rxd5 g6, when the knight cannot move because of the same deadly threat of Ne3. If instead 31 h3, then 31...Nxa3 32 Nxd5 Bxd5 33 Bxd5 Nc2 etc.

31...Nxa3 32 Nd6 Bc6 33 Ra1 Nc2 34 Rxa6 d4 35 Nxb5 Bxg2 36 Kxg2 Ng4 37 Nf5.

37 Ne4 would also not have saved White, for example: 37...d3 38 Nbc3 Nce3+ 39 Kh3 d2 40 Nxd2 Nf2+ 41 Kh4 Ng2+ 42 Kg5 g6 43 Rf6 (43 Kh6 Ng4+ 44 Kg5 Rf5+ 45 Kxg4 Ne3+) 43...Kg7 44 Rxf8 h6 mate.

37...d3 38 Rd6 Rxf5 39 Rxd3 Nge3+ White resigns.

Match score: Botvinnik 2, Bronstein 3

It all turned out the other way round. But, in general, it all turned out correctly, apart from time, strength and the result. It was he who won – with an attack on the king. Flohr 1935 + Romanovsky?

As with most releases by Olms, the production quality is quite good. The addition of the notes from Botvinnik's diaries adds a personal dimension rarely seen in chess books. From a chess point of view, all 24 games have deep notes by an outstanding array of annotators. The translation is choppy in places but overall satisfactory. The keen eye of a good editor of the English edition might have smoothed the translation and eliminated the occasionally annoying typo.

This match has been engulfed in controversy and rumor since it finished. There was the horrific blunder by Bronstein in Game 6, losing a simple endgame. And many have questioned whether or not political pressure was put on Bronstein, who is Jewish, to lose Game 23. The editor is Igor Botvinnik, Mikhail's nephew and apparent sole heir. His dealings with the chess world since his uncle's death have sometimes been stormy and defensive. While not expressly engaging in revisionist history, whenever he has been involved in any way with the publication of works of or by Mikhail Botvinnik, issues that may reflect badly on the world champion have simply been ignored.

Of course, Bronstein himself has been less than forthcoming about this match. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, he has been asked directly whether political pressure was put on him to lose (or 'not win') the 1951 match. A clear 'yes' or 'no' has not been given, just some skilful dancing around the issue. (There are those who would argue that because Bronstein has not denied the charge of political pressure, the obvious deduction should be that it was applied, and successfully. We leave the reader to sort this issue out.)

This book fills a long-standing gap in English-language chess literature. While not resolving the one major controversy surrounding this match, it is overall a very well-done chronicle of this first FIDE title match and should be well received by players and historians alike.

[Order](#) *Botvinnik-Bronstein, Moscow 1951*
by Mikhail Botvinnik



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