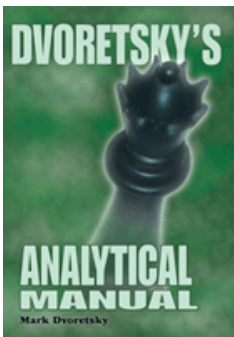




BOOK REVIEWS

From the Archives

Hosted by
Mark Donlan



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From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe.com](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

A Deep Analyst and Original Thinker

by Hanon W. Russell

Jon Speelman's Best Games by GM Jon Speelman, 1997 American Batsford Chess Library, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 240pp., \$23.95

World title candidate and British grandmaster Jon Speelman is regarded by many in the chess community as a player of impeccable character and integrity. Frank to a fault, the three-time British champion is also known as a deep analyst and original thinker. An auto-biographical collection of his games has just been released, and it is everything his fans could have wanted.



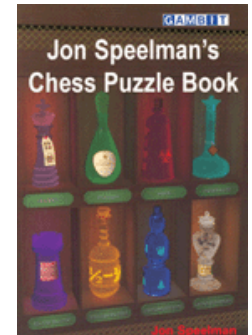
Thirty-eight deeply annotated games trace Speelman's rise through the chess world, starting with games from his youth, his quest for the international master and grandmaster titles, to his qualification and battle in the world championship series and beyond. Speelman's writing style is reserved yet insightful. His respect for other players and his modest approach is a refreshing breeze in these days of ego-centric rage and avoidance of accountability.

He strives to inform and instruct, yet he does not seem to lose his perspective. His wit is present throughout, starting right from the chapter titles (e.g., 'Juvenalia,' 'Reginicide,' 'Prelate Power,' and 'Blood on the Board.')

And, in keeping with his direct approach, there is even a bibliography. When is the last time you recall a bibliography in an auto-biographical game collection?!

In response to readers' inquiries, the book reviews at [ChessCafe.com](#) have presented more than its share of substantial excerpts. Reviewers can say what they will, but it is in fact the book itself that can best speak for itself. The excerpt from Speelman's book is a bit longer than usual, but it

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does clearly illustrate the author's pleasant style and presentation. Rather than present a deeply annotated game, however representative that would be, this week let us take a look at one of Speelman's many entertaining digressions that dot the book. It is taken from the chapter where Jon describes his quest for his international grandmaster title. It is London, 1980, and our hero is in the Phillips and Drew tournament in London...

On fifty per cent with five rounds to go, I now had to face Ljubojevic with Black. 'Ljubo' built up a very good position with 2 d3 against the Caro-Kann, but I fought back, almost to equalize during the time scramble.

After 36 moves we had reached this position when Ljubo picked up his queen and hurled it towards g8.

L.Ljubojevic-J.Speelman

London (round 9) 1980



Unfortunately, it landed three-quarters of the way towards h8! By this stage, I was playing blitz; and I instinctively reached out to correct the move and then reply 37...Kh6. At this point Stewart Reuben stepped in and Ljubo started screaming.

There were other time scrambles going on; and in order to control the noise I believe that we went out into the Hospitality Room where, not entirely altruistically – since I thought that I might still be in trouble on the board – I offered a draw which Ljubo quickly accepted.

It is interesting to compare my memory of the incident with Stewart Reuben's perception, as recorded in the tournament book, published by Pergamon, which he wrote with Bill Hartston: 'There was clearly going to be a desperate time scramble and unfortunately Harry Golombek had appointed me in charge of this one, himself concentrating on another. Suddenly Ljubojevic played 37 Qh8+, one of the most incredible blunders ever played. There is no question but that he intended 37 Qg8+. He moved his hand away and then went back to put the queen on the other square. Simultaneously I moved to prevent this and Jon's hand came forward, presumably to take the queen, although it was not really the move yet, the clock not having been pressed.

'When I told Ljubojevic the queen had been put on h8, he jumped up shouting, not surprisingly, but even so this was unconscionable with many other games reaching the time control. The clocks were stopped and we tried to settle him down. Then Jon offered a draw and everything was settled amicably. Splendid sportsmanship on Jon's part; personally, I would have won the rook. Incidentally, Jon's hand had not after all been going to take the queen but to adjust it to the intended square – shades of too much five-minute chess? The rules theoretically would not permit me to allow this, not that I could have known Jon's intentions. If I had known, would it not have been more in the spirit of the game to let the players have their way?

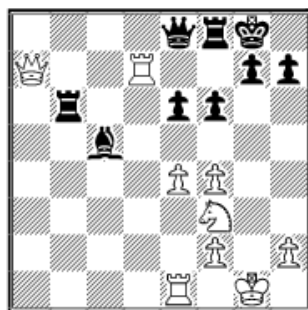
'It is psychologically interesting how difficult it is to ascertain the precise facts about such an incident. B.H.Wood, although standing nearly as close as me, reported that Ljubojevic had made the draw offer.'

This splendid incident had a dramatic effect on my tournament. Not

only had I picked up a valuable half-point from a lousy position, but it was very gratifying to be generally perceived to have acted well in difficult circumstances; and I felt that I had in some sense offered a sacrifice to the Goddess Caissa. Down after the loss to Tony Miles, I was galvanised into action for a big push in the last four rounds, particularly after this great piece of luck against the dispirited Nigel Short. Nigel Short, today the happy possessor of a serious theoretical armoury, approached the game in those far off days practically naked – especially against 1 d4. He therefore decided, after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3, to try the provocative 4... a6?! – and proceeded to outplay me until he fell for a sucker punch:

J.Speelman-N.Short

London (round 10) 1980



Here 32...Rf7 33 Rxf7 Qxf7 would give a small edge. Nigel went for more with:

32...Qg6+ 33 Kf1

And now 33...Rd6 34 Qc7 Rxd7 35 Qxd7 Qg4 puts White very much on the defensive, but 36 Ng1 Qxf4 37 Qxe6+ Rf7 38 Qf5! Qxf5 39 exf5 should just about hold. But

the point of his previous move had been to create immediate threats with:

33 Qg4?? 34 Ng5!

And he had to resign at once.

In the next round, Black against Jan Timman, I decided on a 5...gxf6 Caro-Kann. In a fluctuating battle, he gained the advantage out of the opening, but I tricked him to seize the advantage myself which persisted into a better ending.

I seem to remember a draw offer somewhere, and had imagined that I had made it but he, despite my slight pressure, refused. It may have been the other way round though, since there is the hint of an asterisk by which I record offers – on his side of the scoresheet; unfortunately it appears right on the fold.

In any case, I blundered a pawn and had to defend a nasty position after the adjournment. But I held with some really rather good play – the ending is analysed in detail in *Analysing the Endgame*.

This is an outstanding example of what can happen when the ability to write well is combined with the ability to analyze deeply and then mixed in with some good stories. Jon Speelman has produced a great book that will provide readers with hours of enjoyable reading and keen analysis. It should become a modern classic.

[Order Jon Speelman's Best Games](#)

by Jon Speelman

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