



SKITTLES ROOM

## 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*...

[ChessCafe.com](#) is pleased to present the following article by Paris-based journalist. Lev Khariton. Lev has been active in the international chess community for many years and in many ways. The translator of Kasparov's *Kasparov Teaches Chess* for Batsford, he currently is the regular chess columnist for *La Pensée Russe* in Paris. An honorary member of the St. Petersburg Chess Academy, he also occasionally ventures into the playing arena. His best chess performance was the 1991 Paris Championship where he tied for fifth and sixth places with GM Yakob Murei, behind GMs Spraggett, Smirin, Khenkin, and Tiviakov.

## With Love and Bitterness

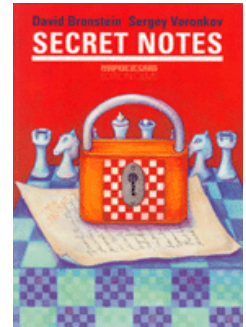
by Lev Khariton

It would not be enough to say that I have always worshiped grandmaster David Bronstein. He was the hero of my generation and those who were a bit older. Frankly speaking, my first acquaintance with chess was inspired by his name. In 1951, when I was only six years old, Bronstein was playing his famous match with Mikhail Botvinnik. Why did Bronstein lose the twenty-third game? How did it happen that the iron-clad Botvinnik lost the twenty-first and twenty-second games? Why did the twenty-fourth game that was to clinch the match turn out to be a bloodless draw? And one more, now hypothetical, question how would things have shaped up for Bronstein if he had won the match?

And that twenty-fourth game is always associated in my memory with one episode. My father and my elder brother had one ticket to see this game in Tchaikovsky Hall where the match was played. Finally, after some quarrel and a “drawing of lots,” it was my brother Boris who went to see the game. However, when he entered the hall, he saw only the last two moves and the peaceful handshake followed by a storm of applause which either was an acknowledgment of Botvinnik's accomplishment of having maintained his title, or was in appreciation of Bronstein's heroic struggle with the all-mighty champion.

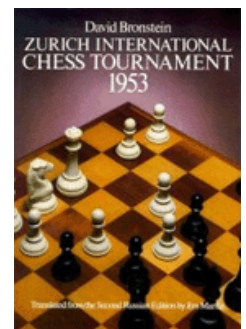
Many years later I had the chance to get acquainted with Bronstein personally. First I met him when he, from time to time, visited our lessons in the junior chess school conducted by Alexander Konstantinopolsky. Later I was lucky to see him on numerous occasions during chess competitions, and even more, I visited him in his small apartment in Moscow! Remembering these unforgettable meetings, I even wrote a series of articles on Bronstein in my

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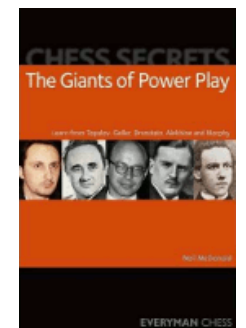
*Secret Notes*

by David Bronstein



*Zurich 1953*

by David Bronstein



*The Giants of Power Play*

by Neil McDonald

chess column in the Parisian newspaper *La Pensée Russe*.



*David Bronstein*

Grandmaster Bronstein has always been known for his originality and for his creative approach to chess. An approach that has yielded good, concrete results. It was because of him that arbiters in chess competitions began to note time spent by chess players on each move, which allows one to realize that a game of chess is a complicated creative and psychological process. And today's "active" or "rapid" tournaments? It was also Bronstein's idea! After the publication of Bronstein's classic – his book on the [Zurich tournament](#) – chess players understood how games should be annotated.

But originality is good and even necessary when it helps to broaden horizons and change reality. However, existing by itself, originality may be detrimental, even dangerous. Reading Bronstein's interview "The Non-conformists' Confessions" published in the magazine *Shakhmaty v Rossii*, I understood that the grandmaster, possibly without being aware of it, went beyond the limits of objectivity. It just so happened that before I read Bronstein's interview in the magazine, I had bought the book [The Sorcerer's Apprentice](#) written by Bronstein and Belgian journalist Tom Fürstenberg. It is a wonderful book with a biography and photographs of the grandmaster (many facts and photographs I had never known about), his games – well-known and recently played, even with computers. However, some points in this book had forced me to take a critical look at the interview in *Shakhmaty v Rossii*.

For many years Mikhail Botvinnik was Bronstein's *bête noire*. I noticed a long time ago that whatever problem you are discussing with Bronstein, everything finally boils down to Botvinnik and that match played almost half-century ago. What irony! The match that actually proved Bronstein's creative superiority became the tragic counterpoint of his life. And even after the death of the sixth World Champion Bronstein writes: "In one of his books Botvinnik says that Goldberg helped him in the second half of his match with Salo Flohr which started disastrously (Flohr +2) but ended in a draw, +2 -2 =8. Flohr, who used to lose on average one game a year, suddenly lost two in one week! There must have been a reason for this and indeed there was! Goldberg's help was instrumental in finding a shop where Flohr could 'buy' a beautiful coat very cheaply!"

We can certainly take issue with Bronstein; for example, Petrosian's losses were even less frequent than Flohr's, but playing against Fischer, Tigran lost four games in a row! But is there any point in arguing? Who can prove anything now that Botvinnik, Flohr, and Goldberg are gone? However, the only regret is that Bronstein has written about his chess colleagues in such a self-deprecating fashion!

No less upsetting is the following "revelation" from Bronstein's book: "During the Budapest Candidates' Tournament Boleslavsky and I had discussed the chances of the next challenger and my friend, who had lost seven games to Botvinnik without winning a single one, was of the opinion that a fight against Botvinnik was hopeless. Once he had had a chance to checkmate Botvinnik in a few moves but missed the opportunity. Of course I had a completely different opinion. I argued that Botvinnik was very strong but one could still play against him successfully. I was sure that I could demonstrate that his strategy was far from perfect. Boleslavsky was leading in the

Candidates' Tournament, but after a talk he had with Boris Vainstein he decided to slow down to allow me to tie for first place with him. Vainstein would try to arrange a tournament with Botvinnik, Boleslavsky and myself for the World Championship. Alas, it did not come about and we had to meet in a play-off for the right to challenge Botvinnik."

How naive we were, carried away by the dramatic and exciting end of the Budapest Candidates Tournament! In the last round Bronstein won a game from Keres catching up with Boleslavsky. And what a game it was! Playing with fantastic imagination, Bronstein, in a well-known variation of the Ruy Lopez, sacrificed a pawn to his formidable opponent. The finishing touch of this unforgettable game was Bronstein's irresistible threat to sacrifice his queen on h7! So, all this was just a well-prepared performance with the kind collaboration of Keres in this tournament – he had nothing to lose, and quite understandably, did not harbor any sympathies for Botvinnik. But if such confessions are made by Bronstein, the man whose sincerity cannot be doubted, what can we expect from the champions and challengers who played for the chess crown later? And why has Bronstein kept silent all these years, hiding the truth? And is it really the truth? I should say – the unwanted truth!

Following this "logic," perhaps, was the entire Bronstein-Boleslavsky match, including a two-game play-off with the score standing equal (6-6); was it just a splendid show? Who knows?

Both in the interview and in the book, Bronstein says that he was not interested in winning the World Title. Moreover, in the book he points out that he would have felt ashamed of being the World Champion in a society where people, living in poverty and misery, had just gone through the most devastating war, GULAG, etc. Quite a noble position, isn't it? But why then did he play in the USSR Championships in 1948 and 1949, winning the title of the Soviet Champion both times?

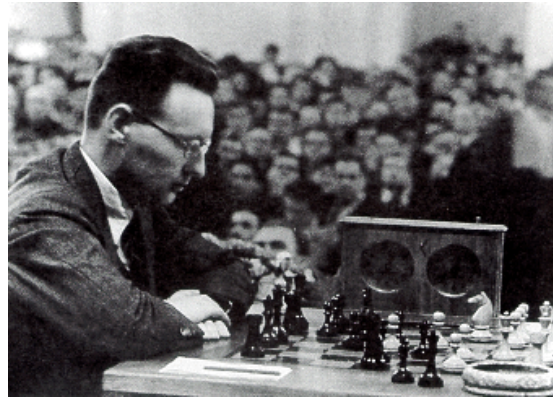
According to what he now says, he should have avoided winning the championship of such a miserable country. Why did he play in the interzonal and candidates' tournaments? Why did he agree to play with Botvinnik? Bronstein's views are very "original," but is there anything shameful if someone is doing something that he loves and achieves the well-deserved superiority in this field? Such a person, I believe, should be praised because in demonstrating his art – in our case, chess – he distracts people from their daily routine and problems. I wonder if Bronstein had won the match, would he still maintain all that he says today?!

"I should have never squeezed anything out of the World Champion's Title," – says Bronstein. Absolutely right! The grandmaster is too noble by his character and nature to "squeeze" any profit from anything. But did Botvinnik squeeze anything from his title? To quote Bronstein, "since 1928 Botvinnik had been aiming at the chess crown." All his life Botvinnik was working as an engineer, first devoting his life to electro-engineering and later to chess computers. Incidentally, Bronstein who adores chess computers, constantly participating in competitions with computers, forgets to mention that it was Botvinnik who was the first to speak in the USSR about chess computers. In the 1960s Bronstein was one of the many who was skeptical about Botvinnik's idea that the machine one day would play against man.

As far as financial remuneration is concerned, Bronstein knows perfectly well that World Championship matches before the "Fischer era" brought nothing but glory. Literary work to which Botvinnik devoted some time was poorly compensated. In those days, in contrast to today, even outstanding authors did not publish their books in foreign languages abroad so as to be paid in hard currency! For many years I have been watching relatively unknown Russian chess players (very far from Botvinnik's caliber!) earning good money in French "opens," never forgetting that Botvinnik and his challengers got nothing out of chess.

Did Botvinnik want to make any political capital out of his title like the present-day champions? Never in his life! Botvinnik never participated in any FIDE leading body, never chaired any Soviet governmental organisation, like Karpov's Peace Fund, or any other prestigious or profitable political

institution.



*Mikhail Botvinnik*

In May 1948, right after winning the World Title, Botvinnik wrote a letter in which he expressed his joy and satisfaction with the Soviet support of the creation of the State of Israel. Certainly, the idea to vote for the foundation of the Jewish state in Palestine was just one of Stalin's cunning manoeuvres to annihilate Soviet Jewry and all those who, like Botvinnik, did not hide their enthusiasm over the decision of the Soviet government were immediately persecuted and their letters filled the KGB files. This is what exactly happened to Botvinnik's letter. Let us not forget that the campaign against the "cosmopolits" was already in full swing and let us pay tribute to Botvinnik's courageous step. Bronstein, who was born in Belaya Tserkov, some 100 kilometers away from Babyi Yar (the place of the mass extermination of Soviet Jews during the Second World War), whose father was a prisoner of GULAG, should have appreciated the noble position of his chess colleague. Botvinnik, as opposed to other Jewish celebrities in the USSR, never tried to cash in on the privileges bestowed upon him by the Soviet authorities. A man of great sincerity, he never allowed himself to be compromised.

A case in point: he turned down the "honour" of joining the Soviet Anti-Zionist Committee, a fascist organisation that recruited many outstanding Soviet Jews, such as Maya Plisetskaya, the world-famous ballerina. She was an active member of the anti-Jewish movement in the Soviet Union. Now living in the West she tells "stories" how she hated the life in the USSR, how she was discriminated as a Jew, how she was thwarted in her foreign tours. But even during the liberal years of "perestroika," when interviewed on Soviet television, she denied that she had had any problems as a Jew! Botvinnik was always averse to such hypocrisy.

In 1976, Botvinnik and Bronstein (as if celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of their match!) were practically the only Soviet grandmasters who did not sign the "collective" letter against the "traitor" Viktor Korchnoi. In a totalitarian society, those who do not know the word "fear" deserve admiration!

For many years Botvinnik called himself *prima inter pares* (first among equals). I think that by this he was referring to his chess strength as well as the creative potential of his rivals. First of all, he had the same rights, no more, no less, than other grandmasters. It was not by chance that in 1952 the members of the Soviet team voted against Botvinnik's participation in the Chess Olympiad, and the World Champion did not go to Helsinki! After Botvinnik's loss in the Title Match to Petrosian in 1963, FIDE called off the return matches – undoubtedly, an unfair decision for Botvinnik, who had twice won the "returns," thus showing his fantastic moral and chess strength. So, what privileges did Botvinnik achieve in Soviet society and in the chess world?

To tell the truth, it was due to Botvinnik that a consistently democratic system of world championship selection was created. The basic advantage of the system was that each time, as a result of a series of competitions, the best challenger emerged to play the Title Match. Bronstein, Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, and Fischer were definitely the world's top chess players in their prime years when they won candidates' tournaments and matches.

In his interview Bronstein declared that "no one except Botvinnik had this idea of winning the title of the World Champion – so great was our respect for the talent and games of Capablanca, Alekhine, Lasker." This is really Bronstein's "interpretation" of chess history!

Is there anything bad, shameful or even vicious, if a man, feeling his strength, wants to achieve the best in his particular field of endeavour? In so doing he only contributes to the popularity and development of his art. Does Bronstein mean that all chess players were supposed to bend down like dead statues in front of the famous champions of the past? After all, Alekhine, Lasker, Capablanca were human, made of flesh and blood, like everyone else! They also wanted to be champions, they also made mistakes... And, finally, they were surpassed by the new generations of chess players. Bronstein says that in the 1930s Botvinnik alone had the privilege of being sent to foreign tournaments, such as Nottingham and AVRO... But was there any other Soviet chess player who deserved to participate in these tournaments more than Botvinnik? And he really proved his strength, almost always winning these chess events. After the Nottingham tournament, Alekhine called Botvinnik the most likely candidate for the World Title. If Bronstein has so much respect for Alekhine, let us ask him this question: Did anybody force Alekhine to make such a forecast?

Certainly not. The great champion felt that he had already been surpassed. So, why should Botvinnik have abstained from his well-founded ambition to win the World Championship?

I had the great luck and honour to know Botvinnik personally, when, in 1974, I was asked to help him with his English. Botvinnik was to go to the USA and Canada to meet specialists in computer programming. Probably never before had a "teacher" had so much respect for his "pupil"! I was sitting next to the living legend! Asking Botvinnik to repeat the forms of the irregular English verbs, I felt that the diagrams of his most famous games were just jumping in my head! I was especially impressed by his modesty. For example, in his apartment there was nothing that gave even the slightest hint of the accomplishments of the great man; when I told one well-known grandmaster how much I was amazed by Botvinnik's simplicity and modesty, he answered, "There is no wonder – he is Botvinnik!"

In the interview with the Russian magazine, Bronstein was asked to name the best chess players of all time. The grandmaster made quite a standard choice citing well-known names. However, he stressed that he preferred them because they had possessed special personal and human qualities. In other words, according to Bronstein, they were "personalities." Is the grandmaster blind, or is he pretending to be blind?

Let us start with Alekhine who was undoubtedly the greatest chess genius who ever lived on Earth. Undoubtedly, he was an extreme anti-Semite as testified by his articles published in *Pariser Zeitung* in 1941. How can Bronstein like the "personality" of the fourth World Champion? "Are the Jews as a race capable of chess?" – asks Alekhine. And he gives the "answer" – "So far there has never been a genuine Jewish chess artist." Well, this question and answer need no comment!

There is no explanation or justification for Alekhine's beastly hatred of the Jews. The mental, spiritual degradation, the senility of the "chess genius" are obvious and disgusting. More than that, he betrays all those – Lasker, Rubinstein, Nimzowitsch – for whom, as he had claimed before, he had so much admiration and respect. Those great chess players who are so dear to Bronstein!.. "Steinitz, the greatest jester in chess history." Dear grandmaster, do you like this "profound thought" of Alekhine?

Incidentally, Steinitz is not among the chess players whom Bronstein considers as the greatest. Perhaps he is not a "personality"? But if we follow Bronstein's logic, Steinitz, who never tried to get any profit from chess, should appeal to Bronstein. Steinitz did not want to play a World Championship Match with Zukertort while the great Morphy was alive, and it was only two years after Morphy's death, in 1886, that the first World Title match was played. Steinitz showed the best example of sportsmanship and

ethical principles, which is easy to admire but difficult to follow. He did not need the chess crown for the crown's sake, as, for example, Karpov almost 100 years later!

Yes, Steinitz did not exploit his title. And this is the most important difference between him and Lasker. Therefore, it is difficult to share Bronstein's admiration for Lasker. The second World Champion demanded high appearance fees and chose wealthy and relatively weak opponents for the Title Matches. There were long periods when Lasker avoided playing chess, thereby preserving his title. After the First World War he was absolutely bankrupt, and that is why in 1921 he went to Havana to play against Capablanca. Actually, he knew that he stood no chance of resisting Capablanca in Cuba, but he also knew that he was actually "selling" the chess crown!

It should be noted that chess historians have done a lot to create a romantic image of Emanuel Lasker. Lasker as a great philosopher, a great psychologist, even a great mathematician... But first and foremost, he was extremely pragmatic and, frankly speaking, knowing Bronstein as I do, I cannot imagine how Lasker, a pragmatist to the bone, can appeal to such an unpractical man as Bronstein.

To understand Lasker's character more profoundly, we must get a glimpse of what he was writing in the *British Chess Magazine* as far back as 1915: "The shrewd English merchant has grasped the meaning of possessions and their power in the world; but he has missed the true inwardness of things, and the rapid evolution of modern times has left him far behind. He is an egoist towards his fellow countrymen. He will not give the masses a share in higher things, as he wants to keep them under his sway as slaves. The Universities of Cambridge and Oxford are reserved for the sons of the rich. He views with suspicion our people, teeming with ideas, eager in pursuit of science, and ready to make any sacrifice. Who among us is not a philosopher? I know not a single German who does not carry in his bosom something of the spirit of Faust. The morale of the Germans is not mere theory. Mother, wife, sweetheart, have bidden their men go forth to battle. It is the genius of Humanity that speaks for this nation."

I ask myself when Lasker was fleeing from fascist Germany, did he remember these naive, if not stupid, words written by him during the First World War? Or, more probably, was Lasker just a hypocrite disguised as the greatest truth-seeker... Certainly, his chess career is unique, but why does Bronstein glorify his personality? In this connection, I have made an interesting observation. Both Botvinnik and Bronstein, people so different in nature and in character, always admired Lasker. Botvinnik even called Lasker, and not without admiration, a "man without illusions." Such is the effect of the complete paralysis of human conscience!

Even more mysterious is the image of Philidor, one of Bronstein's idols. But what do we know about Philidor except for two or three games played with extremely weak players and his aphorism that "the pawn is the soul of the game"? What was so astounding and breath-taking in his personality? Bronstein could have equally appreciated the inventor of *chatrang*! Nevertheless, he calls the enigmatic Philidor a "great head" whereas Botvinnik, with whom Bronstein played the match of his life, began in chess as a "quick-minded boy"!

Bronstein dwells on the idea of setting up an international organisation "Green Chess." "People will meet to analyse interesting games, talk about chess. Chess on 100 or 1,000 squares, chess without two pieces, may be without bishops or knights! They will not play in tournaments... Now there is an electronic line connecting the whole world..." I think that if Bronstein's dream comes true, it will be very sad. Chess, the game that has been so much enriched by Bronstein's artistry, in its present-day form would disappear! It will be sad if every patzer manipulating an expensive computer will consider himself to be a chess player.

And why "Green Chess"? Most likely, analogous to the political parties existing in the West. The organisations fighting for the ecological protection

of nature, and under this pretext, trying to purify the population ethnically, as is the case in France today. Those people who are well-balanced and alert of the danger are afraid of such extreme politicians.

Chess today, at the close of the twentieth century, is going through a special phase of development. On the one hand, the unprecedented popularity of the ancient game. Big and small tournaments; a never-ending chain of tournaments. More than that, chess is penetrating more and more into the primary school educational system. Chess shops are full of books and magazines. Almost every chess player has a computer equipped with brand-new software and the latest database. On the other hand, the world is going through an enormous economic recession. This economic slump and unemployment are not the monsters born out of human imagination, but the realities of everyday life. The people insecure of their future have to tighten their belts. Under such conditions chess, instead of being a game perfecting and developing the human intellect, becomes a luxury product. A "product" which, according to Kasparov, should be lucratively sold. This is what Bronstein should be fighting against!

But Bronstein, the great chess player and writer, does not praise chess. On the contrary, he says the following: "Chess is, generally speaking, a primitive game..." A primitive game?! Stop! Aren't we a bit delirious? But let us quote the grandmaster again: "There is certainly no sense in the movement of chess pieces. It is just the confrontation of two personalities, sitting and thinking over the same position, that matters..." Well, we'd better leave this reading aside! And what shall we do with Bronstein's idea when these "personalities" are on the same electronic circuit, one, let's say, in Melbourne and the other in Norilsk? What about their "confrontation"? Why is the grandmaster sure that only "personalities are playing chess"?

As we have pointed out before, chess is played brilliantly even by people, who, even given the benefit of the doubt, are morally not up to the mark! Undoubtedly, chess by itself, cannot save from moral degradation. Equally true is that a bad man can become a good chess player. The only panacea in this case is the competent and careful word of an outstanding expert such as Bronstein or some other remarkable player. But what Bronstein is saying today is only to the detriment of chess. Any layman reading him now will never send his son to a chess school!

How will chess enter the twenty-first century? As a worthwhile occupation not inferior to any other art, or will chess players play, as today, in the parks next to domino players? Will there be special chess columns in big newspapers, or will chess articles be placed near marriage and funeral ads? All this depends on chess players and chess journalists!

Let us return, however, to the book *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. In almost 300 pages of the book there is not a single mention of Alexander Konstantinopolsky who played a ground-breaking role in Bronstein's chess career. Konstantinopolsky was David's teacher and friend. He was the most knowledgeable expert on chess – I would even say – an academician of chess, if such a title existed. At the same time he was an extremely modest and kind man. This is not only my opinion. I am sure that hundreds and hundreds of chess players who knew Konstantinopolsky will support me. And I really do not understand why Bronstein seems to have forgotten the name of his great and noble chess teacher.

Konstantinopolsky was far from political games, as distinct from Boris Vainstein to whom Bronstein is grateful even today. No doubt, Vainstein did a lot for the young master in his difficult years. But I am sure, knowing the high-ranking position of Vainstein, that it was not difficult for him to help Bronstein. Nor was it any more difficult for Vainstein to help Botvinnik settle down in Moscow.

Political and administrative power creates many possibilities. The chess and human sympathies of Vainstein were evidently on the side of David. However, the awards for the work in the KGB were not given for nothing, and it is not by chance that Beriya, the most awful monster in Stalin's state, once said to Vainstein, "You, Vainstein, are working very well. But if you had

spent five or six years in GULAG, you would have worked much better!" Bronstein recalls how Vainstein, at a meeting of the Soviet Chess Section in 1945, said to Botvinnik, "I don't understand how you will shake Alekhine's hand, covered in the blood of Auschwitz and Maidanek."

Today Alekhine's anti-Semitism is no longer a secret, but at that time Vainstein's shot was a typical political stunt. He put the trump card of a KGB agent on the table! Even Bronstein who was present at the meeting did not like Vainstein's words. Vainstein knew that he was right on target; Botvinnik with his honesty and firm principles would have never agreed to take Alekhine's crown without playing a match! It was not easy for me to write all these bitter words about the man whom I adore since my childhood. And I shall never change my opinion of Bronstein as a chess genius and a remarkable and honest man.

Recently, while on my regular weekly visit to the chess shop "VARIANTES" in Paris, I again lost a blitz-game to the computer program "Chess Genius." I was not upset too much by this loss. I feel that I cannot come to grips with the program. Suddenly I asked the shop's manager if there were any players winning against the program. "No," he answered, "this devil is beating everyone!" And then as if remembering something, he added, "Oh no, when Bronstein comes to Paris and drops in at the shop, he wins against the machine!" I thought if the grandmaster plays so well today, how he must have played, say, in 1950!

In the book *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Tatiana Boleslavskaya, the daughter of Isaak, and David's wife, wrote a very interesting chapter. I cannot help quoting the final words of this chapter: "When I think about Devik I realise that the majority of people are just increasing the population in quantity. Far less those who, by their presence, increase the quality of mankind. I sincerely believe that he belongs in the latter category." Wonderful words!

However, although profoundly admiring this remarkable man, I would not like to overlook the main point. Since time immemorial, we have been taught to believe in the singularity of the truth and diversity of lies. It may seem paradoxical, but in the long run, lies are easily recognizable because of the lack of real diversity. But the truth, when something important is at stake, can change – not in the sense of concrete facts, but as regards our attitude to them. And if we neglect the truth, we run all possible risks. But juggling with the facts is absolutely impermissible.

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This article first appeared at [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) in September, 1998.

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