



Conspirators

How jealous I was in 1962 of the young Amsterdam player John Bink, who was asked to attend the Candidates Tournament in Curaçao as an assistant of the press service. Why hadn't the press officer Berry Withuis asked me to join him in Curaçao? Maybe because he thought it would be better for me to do the final exams of my high school, but who would think of school exams when there was a candidates tournament, one which would be run in large part by the Dutch?

It was a tournament of the kind they don't hold anymore, with 28 rounds scheduled for eight players who would meet each other four times. After the third leg Tal had to be taken to a hospital, which meant that the others had an extra free day, but nevertheless it remained an enormous exertion of physical strength, lasting almost two months.

At the start Tal and Fischer were the favourites, but in fact all the Soviet players had a chance to become Botvinnik's challenger. Apart from Tal, they were Petrosian, Keres, Geller and Kortchnoi. Only Benko and Filip, strong as they were, were considered to be outsiders

At the Amsterdam chess cafe at Leidseplein, where masters, aspiring masters and ordinary coffeehouse players used to meet, occasionally some tournament bulletins dropped in, sent from Curaçao and taking a lot of time to reach us. I still remember the headline of the first installment: "Can a giant beat a giant?" A variation on the old philosophical problem about the irresistible force and the immovable object.

Later it would become clear that three of these giants indeed couldn't or wouldn't beat each other. Petrosian, Keres and Geller drew all games between them, often without even a resemblance of a struggle. If anyone had suggested at the time that they had made a deal, I would have considered this scandalous slander. But actually they had, and the eight free days they gained this way were an important advantage in this grueling battle.

But it was not important enough to serve as a full explanation of Petrosian's victory. For this, the gap of 3½ points between him and Fischer was too big. Petrosian was probably the strongest player at the time. He went undefeated through his 27 games, only twice – against Benko and Tal – being in serious danger of losing.

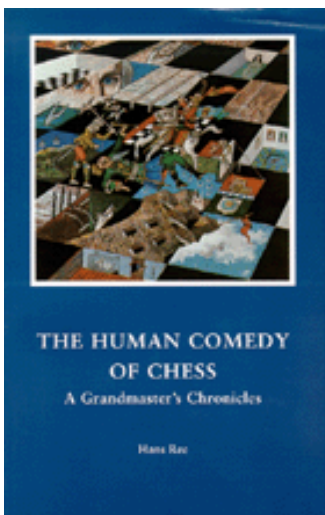
A trip to a Caribbean island may be a favorite prize for a TV quiz show, but it has never been my dream of a holiday. For the players who had to stay there for almost

COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

The Human Comedy of Chess



by Hans Ree

two months the tropical heat must have been an ordeal. Indeed, from Jan Timman's recently published book about the tournament – *Curaçao 1962, The Battle of Minds that shook the Chess World* – it appears that there were many complaints.

A local journalist reported that the wives of the Soviet players had said that they suffered a lot. As this could be taken for ingratitude, the report was promptly contradicted by Mrs. Rona Petrosian and Yuri Averbakh, who declared that the heart-warming hospitality of the islanders made up for the small inconveniences.

But after the tournament Petrosian felt free to speak bluntly in an interview for a Polish sports paper: “The climatic conditions there were terrible and the hall where we played was so poorly prepared for the two-month tournament that I am deeply convinced none of those who authored the new regulations would have been able to sit and watch there. And we had to play there!”

This interview somehow reached Curaçao, where a local newspaper reacted angrily: “This Russian, so adulated and applauded on Curaçao, who made such a pleasant impression on all and sundry, turns out, as a Communist, to have romped all over our island as a wolf in chess sheep's clothes.”

Apparently, like Fischer (“You're all Russians to me!”), the newspaper found no reason to make a distinction between an Armenian and a Russian. This was quite common at the time.

What Petrosian as an alleged amateur could hardly say to the Polish magazine was that first prize in the tournament had been a miserable \$750. I think the press service assistant may have earned more.

I do not remember what I thought at the time about Fischer's famous article in *Sports Illustrated*, titled *How the Russians Fixed World Chess*. We are now almost sure that, apart from his loose use of the word ‘Russians,’ Fischer was right when he accused Petrosian, Geller and Keres of an advance agreement to draw all their games.

Later this was confirmed by Kortchnoi, who himself has been suspected by some to have been party to the deal also. Wrongfully, I think, though it seems that this was not because Kortchnoi was above such schemes. In his recent auto-biography he wrote that Keres would have been wiser to agree to another pact and if I understand this correctly, he means a pact not with Petrosian and Geller, but with him, Kortchnoi.

Timman has few doubts about the truth of Fischer's accusations and in the games that the three conspirators played among each other he limits himself to brief comments such as: “A fine game, in the sense that it looks like a real one” or, even more cynical: “It seems as if the combatants did not discuss their games in too much detail, with the result that they are not always boring and trivial.”

The one position from these games treated in detail by Timman is from the last game between Keres and Petrosian in the 25th round. The final position was

singled out by Fischer as a clear proof of their teamwork, as according to him, Petrosian agreed to a draw after 14 moves in a winning position.

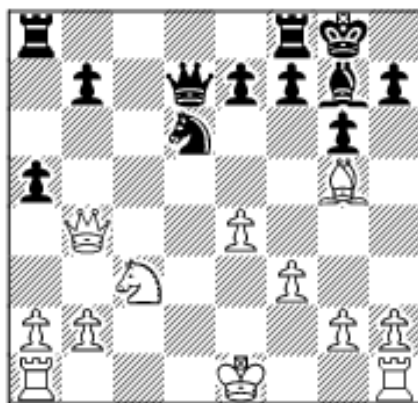
Keres - Petrosian, Curaçao 1962, 25th round.

1. e2•e4 c7•c5 2. Ng1•f3 Nb8•c6 3. d2•d4 c5xd4 4. Nf3xd4 g7•g6 5. c2•c4 Ng8•f6 6. Nb1•c3 Nc6xd4 7. Qd1xd4 d7•d6 8. c4•c5 Bf8•g7 9. Bf1•b5+ Bc8•d7 10.

Bb5xd7+ Qd8xd7 11. c5xd6 0•0 12. Bc1•g5 A weak move, but when the result of the game is known beforehand, one doesn't care much about opening niceties.

12...Nf6•e8 13. Qd4•b4 From bad to worse. Here White's queen is quite exposed.

13...Ne8xd6 14. f2•f3 a7•a5



Draw agreed, though Black's advantage is obvious. Proving the forced win that Fischer claimed to exist is however not easy. Timman agrees with Fischer's verdict and a brief outline of his analysis goes like this:

15. Qa3 (15. Qb3 a4 is even worse for White)
15...h6 16. Bf4 Nc4 17. Qb3 Rfc8 and now:

A. 18. Rd1 a4 and everything leads to a winning advantage for Black

B. 18. 0-0 a4 19. Qb4 Nxb2 20. Nd5 Nd3 21. Qxe7 Rd8, after which Timman gives 22. Be3, giving up the exchange, as relatively best for White.

Variation B however is not convincing, because White can save the exchange with 22. Bc7.

But I do not really think that the saving 22. Bc7 refutes Fischer's opinion about the game's final position. Black has an ample choice of good moves and in variation B I propose (instead of 19...Nxb2) the quiet 19...e6 20. Rd1 Qc6, after which I don't see how White can survive the pressure on his queenside. It's not quite a clear-cut win though.

In the end, Petrosian won the tournament with 17½ points out of 27. Keres and Geller shared second place with 17 points and Fischer, their nearest rival, had 14 points. Quite a success for the conspiracy, though the three giants could have done without it.



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