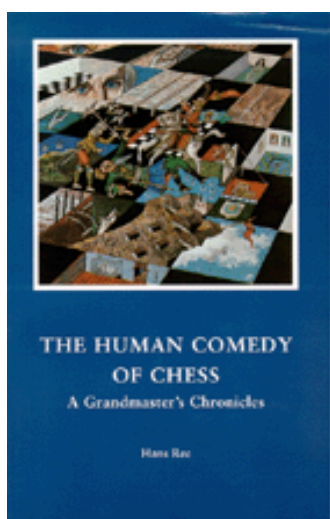




## C O L U M N I S T S

*Dutch Treat*

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy  
of Chess*

by Hans Ree

## Controlled Mental Disturbance

Loek van Wely is a strange character. Apart from being a fine chessplayer he has many other pleasant traits. He is honest and outspoken and he likes to win big money prizes, but mostly for honor and not because he wants to hoard his treasures, for he easily gives them away to good causes, such as a small master tournament near his home city. But this good and generous man changes into a fire-spitting monster as soon as a journalist comes along to take down his opinions on the world and his colleagues.

It has been said about Botvinnik that he forced himself to hate his opponents, to be able to fight with full motivation. About Kortchnoi more or less the same has been said and Kortchnoi himself has cheerfully admitted that there is a lot of truth in this allegation.

But this was only about opponents! Loek van Wely however is quite indiscriminate when he is pumping up his adrenaline level.

During the past two weeks the European team championship has been held in the Bulgarian city Plovdiv, as it was twenty years ago, in 1983. I was a member of the Dutch team then and when we arrived at the airport the sky was blue and the sun was burning hot.

At that time there had been press reports about members of the Bulgarian secret service who had been murdering Bulgarian dissidents living abroad by means of an umbrella from which poisoned darts were shot. When we stepped down from the plane, Genna Sosonko, perspiring and looking at the clear blue sky, said: "If one of us sees a man with an umbrella, we'll warn each other, right?"

On the eve of this year's European championship Van Wely gave an interview to Renzo Verwer, for the Dutch magazine *Schaaknieuws* (Chess News), in which he struck out against his teammate in Plovdiv, John van der Wiel.

"When you go before the wind everything is easy. Even Van der Wiel can play well then," he said. And also: "After making a draw against Van der Wiel for example, I collapse for a moment and think: how is it possible? How terrible."

Opponent or teammate, it doesn't seem to make a difference. Teimur Radjabov, who might be one of his opponents on first board in Plovdiv, was called 'a gigantically cowardly coyote' by Van Wely in the interview.



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*Secret Matches:  
The Unpublished  
Training Games  
of  
Mikhail Botvinnik*

It seems as if he can only flourish in an atmosphere of extreme tension. It's an intrinsic part of chess at the top, he thinks: "You don't have to be an extreme bastard to get to the top, but being a bit tricky cannot hurt. You shouldn't be naïve, but realise that you're in the bad world outside, where everyone is trying to fuck you. You should never speak out quite openly, rather operate like a snake."

'Controlled mental disturbance' is what he intends to make into a formidable weapon in this world of vipers, all of them disturbed in a shrewdly controlled way, and he finds it a pity that it has taken him so many years to realise this.

For a while Van Wely worked together with Veselin Topalov, and even Topalov and his manager Silvio Danailov, though they were supposed to be his friends, pulled little tricks on him, he says, to find out his opening secrets or to intimidate him, which might be useful later, when they would play against each other instead of working together. Van Wely doesn't blame Topalov. All the top players use these little dirty tricks, he thinks.

Is this paranoia or just a realistic view of a world of hard competition? I cannot quite make up my mind. The stark picture he draws is far removed from the way I experienced the top players, during the period when I played them regularly. But maybe they didn't feel obliged to open their box of dirty tricks to beat me. Or the world of top chess may have hardened during the past decades, as many other areas of life have.

Recently Van Wely worked together with Ruslan Ponomariov and what he tells about their collaboration should quench speculation about Ponomariov deliberately sinking his match against Kasparov. In fact he prepared quite seriously for it, so much so that Van Wely complains about the hard work he had to do for seven weeks, without a day of rest.

"Really, many prisoners of war were better off," he says. And of course there were frictions there too, for he cannot live without them: "Pono is really bullshitting, he is fucking you all the time. He wants to be treated like Ruslan the Great, but I didn't do that."

At the time of this writing Ukraine and the Netherlands have not yet met at the European championship, so Ruslan the Great and Loek the Fire-spitter haven't yet had opportunity to continue their conversation.

During the first round of that championship Ponomariov made news when his game against Evgenij Agrest, who played top board for Sweden, was declared lost for Ponomariov because his mobile phone rang. Apparently it was his birthday, so this might have been an ill-timed congratulation message from one of his fans.

It seems to be a harsh rule that declares a forfeit just because a phone rings, but there is something to be said for outlawing phones in the playing hall.

Nowadays mobile phones can be bought that are also chess computers, with access to databases and full powers of analysis. Phones that do not ring, but just gently purr, waiting for their owner to put a critical position on the board, are unacceptable too.

Soon there will be metal-detection ports at the entrance of the playing halls, as already proposed several years ago by Vladimir Kramnik. But will it help? One is reminded of a brutal scene near the end of *The Godfather I*, when Al Pacino after entering a restaurant is thoroughly searched by members of a rival gang. Then he goes to the men's room, where one of his helpers has hidden the gun he needs.

Top players already have trainers, seconds, computer experts and physical therapists working for them. In the future *The Chief Hider of Pocket Fritz* may become one of the more important dignitaries at a champion's court.

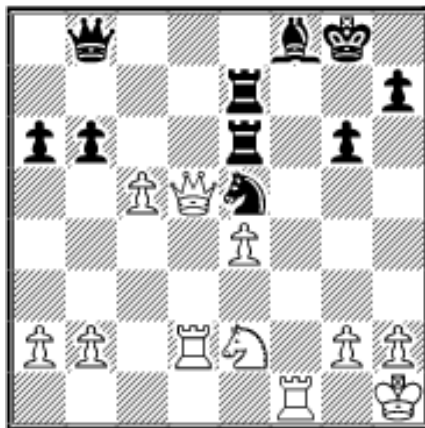
### **Agrest (Sweden) - Ponomariov (Ukraine), European Championship, Plovdiv, First Round.**

**1. Ng1-f3 Ng8-f6 2. c2-c4 b7-b6 3. Nb1-c3 Bc8-b7 4. d2-d3 Bb7xf3 5. e2xf3 c7-c5 6. d3-d4 c5xd4 7. Qd1xd4 Nb8-c6 8. Qd4-d1 g7-g6 9. Bf1-e2 Bf8-g7 10. f3-f4 0-0 11. Bc1-e3 e7-e6 12. 0-0 Nc6-e7 13. Qd1-a4 Ne7-f5 14. Ra1-d1 Nf5xe3 15. f2xe3 Qd8-c7 16. Kg1-h1 a7-a6 17. Be2-f3 Ra8-a7 18. Rd1-d2 Rf8-c8 19. Bf3-e2 Qc7-b8 20. Qa4-b3 Bg7-f8 21. e3-e4 d7-d6** It's curious to see how the irregular pawn formation from the opening has straightened out into a common hedgehog position.

**22. f4-f5 Nf6-d7 23. f5xe6 f7xe6 24. Be2-g4 Rc8-e8 25. Nc3-e2 Nd7-e5 26. Bg4xe6+** 26. Bh3 would be difficult for Black in the long run, but the direct method chosen by Agrest seems quite good too.

**26...Re8xe6 27. c4-c5 d6-d5** A necessary in-between move. Otherwise Black's position would fall apart.

**28. Qb3xd5 Ra7-e7**



Here Ponomariov's phone rang and that was the end of the game. After 29. Nf4 Ng4 20. g3 Ne3 - the endgame after 20...Qe5 21. Nxe6 is quite bad for Black also - 21. Nxe6 Nxd5 22. Rxf8+ Qxf8 23. Nxf8 Kxf8 24. Rxd5 White would have been a pawn up with excellent winning chances. So, maybe Ponomariov didn't lose much by bringing in his phone, but his fate is a warning to the communication-crazies who shudder at the thought that they might be cut off from the world, if even for a few hours.

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