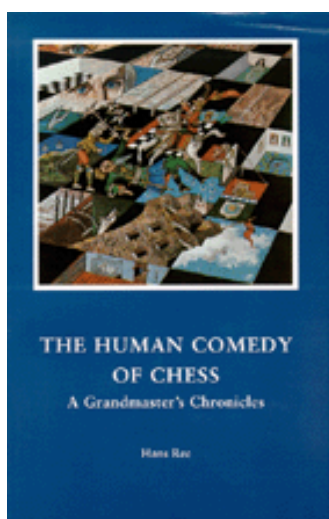




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy
of Chess*

by Hans Ree

An Envelope at the Airport

The open tournament on Curaçao, a Caribbean island that is still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, was won this year by Boris Gulko with 6½ points out of 9 games. Shabalov, Hübner and Greenfeld had the same score, but Gulko had met stronger opposition. Jan Timman finished half a point behind the leaders.

Two years ago he had won the Curaçao Open and if I correctly remember the story that one of the organisers told me later, he had won a prize of \$10,000.

The day after that tournament of 2001, this organiser brought Timman to the airport, together with Dutch IM Hans Böhm and his wife. Böhm had not played in the tournament, but he had been in charge of press contacts and general public relations.

On their way to the airport Timman said suddenly: “We must go back. I left the envelope with my prize money in the safe-deposit of my hotel room.”

But there was a chance that they would miss their flight that way, so the organiser proposed something different. He would deliver them to the airport, then return to the hotel and come back and bring the envelope. If they had boarded the plane by then, the organiser would remit the money to the Netherlands.

And so it was done. He found the envelope, drove quickly to the airport and found Timman and the Böhms still there. But in the meantime another problem had appeared. The flight to Amsterdam had been overbooked and for Timman, Böhm and his wife only two seats were available.

This was extremely inconvenient, for both Timman and Böhm had important obligations in the Netherlands. But to depart together and leave Mrs. Böhm alone on the island would not have been very chivalrous.

Again the organiser found a solution. On a small island where everybody knows each other problems can be fixed. As the *Van der Valk Plaza Hotel* in Willemstad, Curaçao's main town, had been an important sponsor of the tournament, the organiser could persuade KLM Airlines to offer a deal to the waiting passengers. The first one to give up his reservation for this flight to Amsterdam would be able to prolong his holiday for a few days, free of charge, at the Van der Valk Plaza.

And indeed an extra seat became available this way. Timman and the Böhms



happily boarded the plane and the organiser sighed with relief. But his troubles were not over yet.

The next day he got a phone call from Hans Böhm. Yes, they had arrived in Amsterdam alright. Thanks again for the assistance. But unfortunately something unpleasant had happened. After all the excitement Jan had inadvertently left his envelope with his prize money on a seat in the departure lounge. Would the organiser be so kind to enquire if this envelope had been found?

Well, it may have been found, but as it turned out, it had certainly not been delivered to the lost-and-found desk.

One imagines the reaction of the lucky finder of this \$10,000 envelope. His first thought may have been: "What a lucky find!" But his second thought was probably less joyful: "Where is that money from and who might be the owner?"

If the finder were a chessplayer, there might be a good chance that he would realise that the envelope was left there by Jan Timman, who, for all his great learning and wisdom, is often oblivious of practical matters. More likely however, he wouldn't know the name Timman at all.

But what he would certainly know is that the flight from Willemstad to Amsterdam is notorious for cocaine smuggling. Cocaine carriers, their merchandise swallowed and carried in small sacks inside their stomachs, at great risk to their life, as the sacks sometimes burst open, abound at Willemstad airport.

And then you see an envelope with \$10,000, left on a seat in the departure lounge; the conclusion seems obvious that this has something to do with drug trafficking.

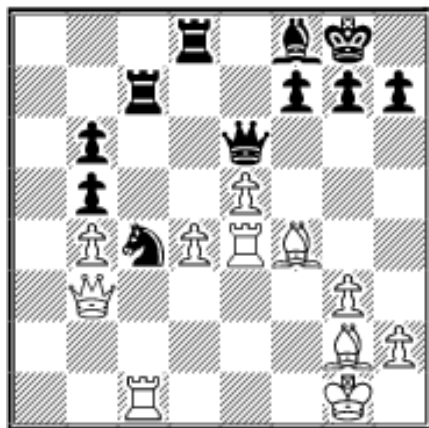
It is a well-established fact that drug barons tend to behave quite unfriendly when other people grab their money and run. The finder of the envelope, not so happy anymore, looks to his right and his left. He doesn't notice anything unusual, but still there is a creeping feeling that his life might be in danger. On the other hand, just leaving the envelope there would be such a pity...

We leave him alone in his predicament and jump back to 2003 and this year's tournament. As I indicated earlier, Gulko won it and Timman shared fifth place with a half-point less. But it could easily have been different. Here is the game they played in the next to last round

Gulko - Timman, Curaçao Open, Willemstad 2003

1.Ng1-f3 Ng8-f6 2.c2-c4 e7-e6 3.Nb1-c3 Bf8-b4 4.e2-e3 c7-c5 5.Bf1-e2 0-0 6.0-0 d7-d5 7.a2-a3 Bb4-a5 8.d2-d4 Nb8-d7 9.c4xd5 e6xd5 10.b2-b4 c5xb4 11.Nc3-b5 Nf6-e4 12.a3xb4 Ba5-b6 13.Qd1-b3 Nd7-f6 14.Nf3-e5 Bc8-e6 15.f2-f3 a7-a6 16.Nb5-c3 Ne4xc3 17.Qb3xc3 Ra8-c8 18.Qc3-e1 Nf6-e8 19.Ne5-d3 Ne8-d6 20.Nd3-c5 Rf8-e8 21.Be2-d3 Be6-d7 22.Ra1-a2 Bd7-b5 23.Qe1-d1 Bb6-c7 24.Ra2-e2 Nd6-c4 25.g2-g3 b7-b6 26.Nc5-a4 Bc7-d6 27.Qd1-b3 Rc8-c7 28.Rf1-e1 Qd8-c8 29.Re2-c2 Qc8-h3 30.Bd3-f1 Qh3-f5 31.e3-e4 Qf5-d7 32.Na4-c3

**d5xe4 33.f3xe4 Re8-a8 34.Nc3xb5 a6xb5 35.e4-e5 Bd6-f8 36.Re1-e4 Qd7-d5
37.Bf1-g2 Ra8-d8 38.Bc1-f4 Qd5-e6 39.Rc2-c1**



White's last move was a horrible blunder, for now Black could force immediate resignation with 39...Nd2. But both players didn't notice what might have happened and the game went on:

**39...Rc7-a7 40.Rc1-d1 Ra7-a4 41.Re4-e2
Ra4xb4 42.Qb3-c3 Qe6-f5 43.Bg2-e4 Qf5-g4
44.Be4-f3 Qg4-f5 45.Bf3-e4 Qf5-g4 46.Be4-f3
Qg4-f5** Draw by repetition. It seems to me that White could have played on, but Curaçao is a very pleasant tourist island, with sun and

beaches and many-colored fishes and charming Dutch-colonial architecture, so enough was enough.

Games, results and other information about the tournament can be found at www.curacao.com/chess.



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