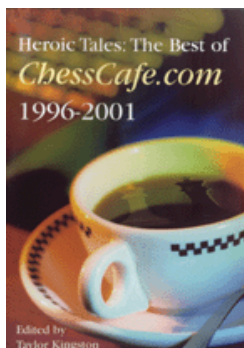




SKITTLES ROOM

From the Archives

Hosted by Mark Donlan



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From the Archives...

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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...*

Letter from France

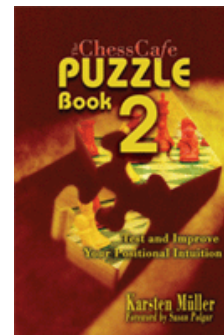
Tony Kosten

It is during this part of the year (from February to December) that I most miss not being in England. Forced to wander around in shorts and t-shirt in the baking sun; barely able to manage the few steps to the local bar where there is little to do apart from drink cold beers and watch half-dressed young ladies sauntering by. It is at this time that my mind returns to the country of my birth. How I miss those bracing Force Eight south-westerly gales, those refreshing April showers and sublime grey-black skies. But enough of my problems.

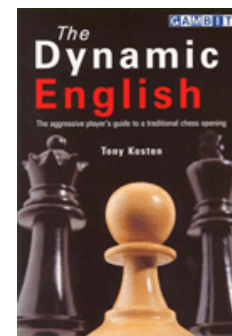
Clearly sensing my suffering, the editor of this August magazine thoughtfully sent me the last two issues of *Kingpin*. I found them hilarious, although one or two of the more serious items seemed rather negative in tone. In the article ‘The Voice of Reason’, *Kingpin* No.24 (p.18), I can vouch that much of what Nigel Davies says is true, but I should like to mention that having had the good fortune to play for the same team as Garry Kasparov in France (Auxerre), I found him to be friendly, helpful and excellent company. He is really not so nasty; we rarely read of the work he does for charity, for which he normally insists that there is no publicity. As for Salov’s remark, it is well known that he and Kasparov are not on friendly terms, to say the least. The truth of the matter is that Kasparov is in a different class to players like Salov; the reason why his rivals are beginning to catch up with him is that he devotes far too much time to the pursuit of potential sponsors and the ‘mediatisation’ of chess and far too little to studying the game. If he were to devote all his energy to his play there would be little doubting his real stature.

I wonder if people like to moan in Britain because of the weather, or because they are so peeved at the lack of serious chess tournaments. One thing that struck me immediately was that Ray Keene seems to be the butt of as many jokes as when I left England some six years ago. I fail to understand what it is about him that seems to arouse such dislike in so many people. I for one was very happy when he was working for the

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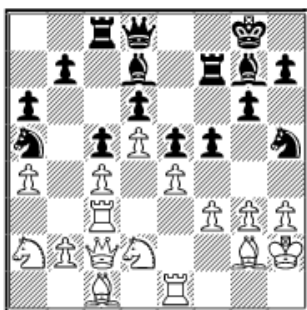
BCF; we never had so many decent tournaments. I was always delighted both to play in his events and go to his parties (whenever I was invited, and sometimes when I was not). It is often easy for people who do little for chess to criticise those who do a lot. Of course, Keene's activities were not entirely altruistic but, there again, if you wish to make any money out of the game in England I am afraid that you cannot afford to behave selflessly.

I was stunned to learn, on p.18 of *Kingpin* No.25, that according to Mr Rob van Gompel (of no known Elo) '2500+' is 'weak GM level'. Presumably this is a typing mistake, as it is difficult to think of Kasparov, Karpov & co. as weak all being over 2500. Or perhaps the author meant to say that GMs of around 2500 are weak, which is again somewhat unlikely. I am a mere 2540 and always thought (mistakenly, so it seems) that I was a reasonably strong GM. In my experience I would say that 95% of my Grandmaster opponents are lower rated than I. Anyway, if the author seriously thinks that I am a weak player I would be more than happy to play a match against him for any sum of money he cares to throw away.

I seem to be wandering a bit. I did suggest to the editor that I write an article showing weak players being crushed by strong titled opponents, for if there is one thing that is guaranteed to annoy me it is the presumed public interest in games where strong players succumb to the less talented. You can thrash the living daylights out of some patzer ninety-nine times and no-one takes the slightest bit of notice. However, if by some misfortune you happen to lose a game to him, you can count on it being published all over the place with appropriately smug notes. Perhaps I am just being paranoid, but if the master complains that he has been travelling for eighteen hours, couldn't get to sleep until four o'clock in the morning and was woken up two hours later by people drilling in the street (probably all true), everyone smirks knowingly. In short, I would like to have had the opportunity to redress the balance a little and publish some of the ninety-nine games that got away, but the editor's response was decidedly lukewarm.

This brings me to the real point of my article. A few weeks ago I had to give a training session for some youngsters and I decided to prepare a sheet of tactical problems which I hoped would keep them busy during my tea break. I picked the positions at random from Chessbase and one of them was, quite by chance, the following gem from John Nunn:

Li Yang Hsu – John Nunn
Manila (Olympiad) 1992



Black wins with an introductory knight sacrifice, followed by a superb queen sacrifice:

1...Nxg3! 2 Kxg3 Qh4+! 3 Kh???

I imagine John Nunn must have been furious at this. Had White wanted to refuse the queen, why did he take the knight on g3? 3 Kxh4 f4 4 Kg5 Rff8 5 Rg1 h6+ 6 Kxg6 Be8# would have been

far prettier.

3...Qxe1 4 Nf1 fxe4 5 Ng3 exf3 6 Bxf3 Nxc4 0-1

For those of you with long memories, this queen sacrifice is itself reminiscent of the following classic:

Yuri Averbakh – Alexander Kotov
Zurich Candidates 1953



30...Qxh3+!! 31 Kxh3 Rh6+ 32 Kg4 Nf6+ 33 Kf5 Nd7

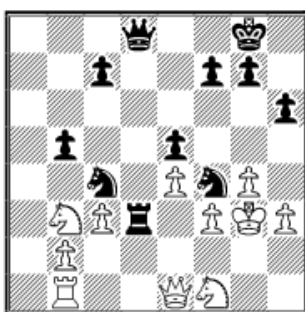
33...Ng4! would have kept the white pieces away and would have simplified matters somewhat. Aided by the adjournment at move forty, Black still finds a way to win.

34 Rg5 Rf8+ 35 Kg4 Nf6+ 36 Kf5 Ng8 + 37 Kg4 Nf6+ 38 Kf5 Nxd5+ 39 Kg4

Nf6+ 40 Kf5 Ng8+ 41 Kg4 Nf6+ 42 Kf5 Ng8+ 43 Kg4 Bxg5 44 Kxg5 Rf7 45 Bh4 Rg6+ 46 Kh5 Rfg7 47 Bg5 Rxc5+ 48 Kh4 Nf6 49 Ng3 Rxc3 50 Qxd6 R3g6 51 Qb8+ Rg8 0-1

One week after the training session, at our local weekend tournament (only a small event with a tiny first prize roughly equivalent to first prize at the British Championship I suppose but all you can really expect for a tournament without a sponsor and with only eighty or so paying players) I reached the following position:

C. Roche – Anthony Kosten
Clermont-Ferrand 1996



You can imagine my surprise when I saw:

45...Qh4+!

Clearly, Black's position is so good that other moves, such as 45...Qf6, would have won very quickly as well, but there is nothing like a queen sacrifice for bringing the spectators flocking to the board. I could see them all whispering to

each other: 'Kosten's blundered away his queen' or (French) words to that effect.

46 Kxh4

Obviously 46 Kh2 Qxh3+ 47 Kg1 Qg2 is mate.

46...Rxf3 47 g5

Both ...g5 mate, and ...Rxf3 mate were threatened.

47...Rxf3+ 48 Kg4 h5+ 49 Kf5 Rf3

A big choice. 49...Ng6 and 50...Ne7 mate was the quickest, whilst 49...Nd3 50 g6 Nd6+ 51 Kg5 f6 mate and 49...Rd3 50 Nc5 Nd6+ 51 Kxe5 Ng6 were also possible. There are so many 'solutions' that this would make a fiendish study!

50 g6

I had hoped for something like 50 Nfd2 Ng6+ 51 Nxf3 when both 51...Nd6 and 51...Ne7 force mate with a rook and queen less.

50...Nh3 mate

50...Ne6 mate was not bad either!

After my opponent resigned, a kindly old gentleman who had been watching at the side of the board asked me, with genuine astonishment,

'Did you really calculate to the end of the game when you sacrificed your queen?' I very nearly replied, 'I had meant to put it on f6 but my finger had slipped, and after that I just had to bluff my way through', or something to that effect, but I thought better of it. Whenever I attempt to be funny, people who know me in Clermont-Ferrand look at me strangely and then, when it dawns on them that I have tried to make a joke, say knowingly: 'Ahah, the English sense of humour' or, more simply, 'So British!' Strangers find this sort of humour even more perplexing. Little do they realize that in England nobody understands my jokes either!

ChessCafe.com would like to extend its thanks to *Kingpin* and Anthony Kosten for permission to reprint the above article. *Kingpin* is a humorous chess magazine that contains entertaining and instructive articles by masters on all aspects of the game.

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