



## BOOK REVIEWS

### *From the Archives*

Hosted by  
Mark Donlan



*Chess Mazes*  
by Bruce Alberston

## From the Archives...

Since it came online over eight 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](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

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## Instruction vs. Self-Indulgence or, Fwowing Up with Mr. Fab

by Taylor Kingston

*The Power Chess Program, Book 1*, by Nigel Davies, 1998 Batsford Books, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 255pp., \$19.95.

*Chess Under the Microscope*, by Paul Motwani, 1998 Batsford Books, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 256pp., \$17.95.

Grandmasters Nigel Davies of England and Paul Motwani of Scotland have both been involved in chess education for younger and lower-rated players for some years. Davies has served as England’s trainer for the World Junior Championship, while Motwani has extensive experience as a school teacher and chess coach. The two authors are close in over-the-board skill (a FIDE rating of 2515 for Davies vs. 2465 for Motwani as of 1/99), and have produced works close in length and price for the same publisher. Beyond that, though, these two books have little in common. Davies has produced a passable, if somewhat uneven and derivative work, while Motwani... well, read on.

*The Power Chess Program* (not to be confused with Paul Keres’ *Power Chess*, a very different book) evolved from a correspondence course Davies has

offered for some time. It is intended as a two-year (!) course to be taken in study sessions of 3-5 hours per week. This review deals with Book 1, which is apparently the first year's installment.

There are 12 chapters (one per month), each emphasizing a different piece or aspect of the game: the King, the Rook, the Bishop, the Knight, the Queen, the "soulful" (in the Philidorian sense) pawn, the classical center, hanging pawns, isolated pawns, doubled pawns, backward pawns, and semi-backward pawns. Each of these is broken down into sub-chapters, e.g. the "Aspects of the King" are "Attacking Uncastled Kings", "Attacking Castled Kings with Pieces", "The Pawn Storm", and "The Active King". Each sub-section begins with a brief discussion of its theme, two or three illustrative games, followed by six quiz positions. The games are a mix of historic classics (e.g. Lasker-Capablanca, St. Petersburg 1914; Bogolyubov-Alekhine, Hastings 1922; Botvinnik-Capablanca, AVRO 1938), and more modern encounters, such as Spassky-Petrosian, WC 1969; Karpov-Timman, Moscow 1981; Short-Kasparov, WC 1993; and several of Davies' own games.

The results of this approach are mixed: the games are well chosen, but the introductions and annotations are sometimes on the skimpy side. It's not clear whether Davies assumes a certain level of familiarity with many of the concepts, or believes that the illustrative games will explain everything. There are some good points, e.g. "Many amateur players tend to avoid the exchange of queens... The problem with [this] approach is that the logical line of play often involves the exchange of queens and the purely positional exploitation of an advantage in the endgame" but perhaps not enough such points are made. Some readers may wish for more and longer explanations of many ideas. Still, thorough study of what Davies provides should impart worthwhile knowledge.

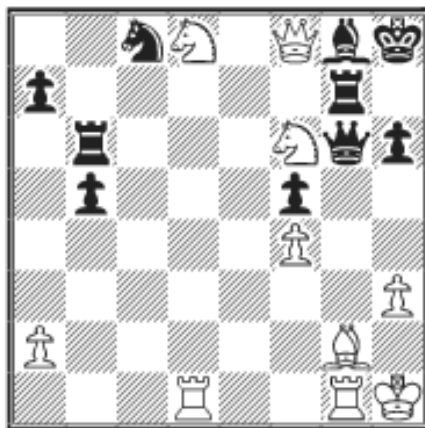
The quiz positions are not necessarily the cut-and-dried "play and win" type where one knows a decisive combination is available. Some are, for example this:



From Stein-Liberzon, Erevan 1965: **1 Qxh6+!! 1-0**. However, others are not so clear-cut and so better reflect a typical situation on the board. As in a real game, one is given no advance indication which positions are of what type.

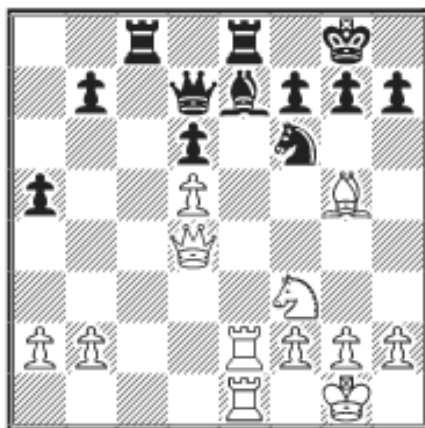
Occasionally Davies is clearly writing for teenagers, as when a move gets a comment like "Kapow!", but for the most part he avoids either "dumbing down" or using a too-sophisticated vocabulary (the importance of this will become clear when we discuss the Motwani book).

As mentioned before, the illustrative games are a mix of old and new. An example of the latter is Davies-Tonning, Gausdal 1994,

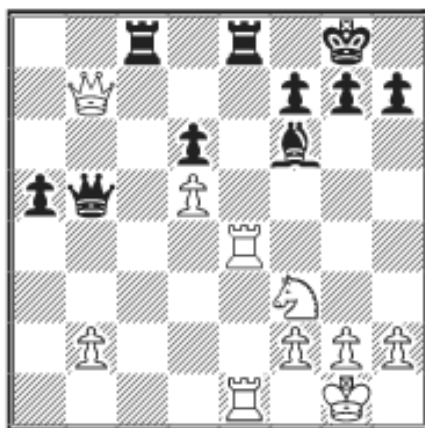


which ended on a highly unusual note: **39 Ne8!, 1-0.**

An older example is the possibly apocryphal Adams-Torre, New Orleans, 1920.



In a very instructive exploitation of back-rank weakness, White plays **17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 Qg4! Qb5 19 Qc4! Qd7 20 Qc7! Qb5 21 a4! Qxa4 22 Re4! Qb5 23 Qxb7!** and wins.



A beautiful and apt example, though its authenticity as a game actually played is uncertain. More important is the fact that, like many of the older games, positions, and annotations Davies uses, it is somewhat shopworn. Some of his examples have been used many times by authors varying from Reinfeld to Kotov. True, this does not detract from their instructional value, and the less-experienced players the book is aimed at are not likely to notice, but it should be noted that Davies is functioning

more as a compiler and presenter of ideas than a generator of them.

One last caveat: TPCP is concerned mainly with middlegame themes. Opening theory is little discussed (except in the section on classical pawn centers), and endgame instruction is slight. We note this not to criticize but to emphasize the student's need for a broad spectrum of instructive works.

Still, much of the book is relevant and worthwhile, some especially good examples being Davies' discussion of the Stonewall, an opening formation encountered frequently at the club level, and his treatment of hanging pawns, a topic somewhat mysterious to average players. On the whole, the pros outweigh the cons.

Instructional books are a bit of a gamble. All make claims, but is there any hard evidence on how much objective improvement readers of Book X make compared to readers of Book Y? We can't say whether TPCP will bump your Elo more than books by, say, Lev Alburt, Rashid Ziatdinov, Yasser Seirawan, C. J. S. Purdy, or even old Fred Reinfeld. However, to paraphrase an old toothpaste ad, we feel that *The Power Chess Program* can be of significant value when used in a conscientiously applied program of chess study, especially for players around the 1400-1700 range. Those below that might benefit more from, say, Chernev's *Logical Chess Move by Move* (a classic recently reissued by Batsford), while those beyond that level might try Silman's *How to Reassess Your Chess* or something by Mark Dvoretsky. While we are not absolutely sure of how much good *The Power Chess Program* may do, it will surely do some, and certainly will do no harm.

We cannot say the same of *Chess Under the Microscope*. Our reaction to it resembles that of the late Dorothy Parker, reviewer for *The New Yorker* under the pen name "Constant Reader". Of a book full of baby-talk she wrote "Tonstant Weader fwowed up." With this book, Paul Motwani has produced a powerful emetic.

The ability to attain a GM title apparently has no relationship to the ability to write coherently and to the point. Presumably Motwani knows something worth telling us about chess, but unlike Davies, he seems to feel we cannot take it straight. Worse, he believes that what we want, even more than chess instruction, is to be deluged with cutesy-poo characters, silly dialogue, pointless acronyms and anagrams, and irrelevant stream-of-consciousness digressions. Some examples of the latter:

"There are two well-known Scottish chessplayers named David Wallace, and the reason why [sic] I am mentioning that is not because they may perhaps be very distantly related to the 13<sup>th</sup>-century hero William Wallace (whose character was portrayed in the film *Braveheart* which won five Oscars)..."

"At other times far away from the chessboard, my wife Jenny and I particularly enjoy meeting friendly and interesting people, especially when there is 'food for thought' such as the delicious Dutch meal *boerenkool met worst* which Tom Fürstenberg's wife Anne cooks to perfection, and in spite of its name I think it's the best!"

"Being a Gemini myself, I like twins or any nice couple. So I composed the present example ... to doubly [sic] celebrate the 27<sup>th</sup> birthday (on 28 January 1998) of my youngest sister Cath, and also the engagement one month earlier to her fiancé Gary Ritson."

Shockingly omitted were mentions of former governor George Wallace, Orson Welles' *Macbeth*, the recipe for *nasi goreng*, or the name of the store where Miss Motwani is registered. To spare the reader excessive unpleasantness we have avoided the worst examples, some of such biliously cloying sentimentality as to make treacle seem like spring water.

Equally bad as these meanderings are the archly cute dialogues with the character “Mr. Fab”, and the interminable rain of acronyms. One example shows both: “...in view of you mentioning the word ‘backbone’, the name ‘Mr. Fab’ becomes even more appropriate since vertebrates (animals with backbones) can be divided into five main groups: **mammals, reptiles, fish, amphibians, birds!**”. This though supposedly Mr. Fab is a microscopic extra-terrestrial being (We are not making this up, honest!). Other allegedly illuminating acronyms include **L.I.Q.D.** (“**lead in quality development**”), **H.O.M.E.** (“**harmony [in] the bpening, middle game, and bndgame**”), and **L.A.U.G.H.** (“**develop at lightning speed, then attack unreservedly, and go home with a point in your pocket!**”).

Let us try our hand at this. How about: “**Many Undisciplined Digressions**” (**MUD**), or **ALPACA** (“**A Lot of Preposterous And Contrived Acronyms**”), or maybe **PINCER** (**Puerilities In Need of Competent Editor’s Revision**), or “**Tedious Wearisome Annoying Drivel Doing Little to Educate**” (**TWADDLE**).

Then there is the matter of the anagrams. Mr. Fab gives us “a curiosity: ‘semya’ is the Russian word for ‘family’, and *semya tree* is an anagram of *master eye...*” We are indeed curious as to the relevance of this. Then there is: “While we are near the topic of statistics, consider the anagram *a tulip woman...* [from] a certain male person’s name...” Those who have difficulty solving that one definitely belong to this book’s target readership. It calls for yet another acronym: **COSINE** (**Cease the Outpouring of Self-Indulgent Nonsense. Enough!**).

At least, though, now we know what it takes to write a chess book! We shall rush into print our own instructive manual, full of esoteric jewels such as “Develop Knights and/or pawns before Rooks” interspersed with amazingly clever acronyms and anagrams of a certain male person’s name. Some promising possibilities: *Klingon star toy, skinny gal to rot, or gnarly stink, too.*

Presumably Motwani is aiming this book at children, but he thuds heavily between two stools. Those young enough not to mind the drivel will find the vocabulary elsewhere too hard, while those with the intellectual maturity to benefit from the occasionally good chess advice will find the intervening babble insufferable.

We don’t care if this book might raise our rating 800 points in two weeks; it’s not worth the distress of reading it. Other than Victor Charushin’s stuff (which at least has sometimes had the excuse of bad translators) this is the worst writing we have ever seen in a chess book. We recommend it only for children of below-average intelligence who enjoy being patronized, or perhaps one might give it to a hated but promising rival whom one wishes to discourage from studying chess. An anagram more apt than “a tulip woman” would be “Wait! A plum? No!”, for *Chess Under the Microscope* is indeed a lemon.



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