



BOOK REVIEWS

Previous reviews are available
in [The Chess Cafe Archives](#).



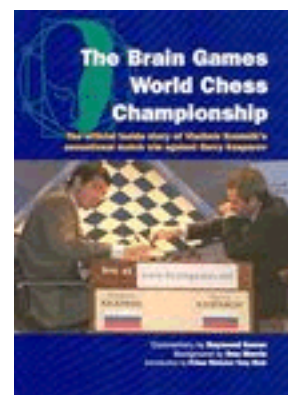
Still Waiting

Taylor Kingston

The Brain Games World Chess Championship, by Raymond Keene and Don Morris, 2000 Everyman Publishers, Paperback, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 128pp., \$14.95 US, £9.99 UK.

As we observed a few weeks ago, world championship matches tend to spawn a large number of books. This is the second on the recent Kasparov-Kramnik match to be discussed here; the other was *Kasparov-Kramnik, London 2000*, by Nigel Davies and Andrew Martin. As our review (see the ChessCafe Archives) made plain, we found *KK* highly inadequate, and advised readers to hope for improvement in later books. Since then we have surveyed a good deal of material on the match, not only this new book but various magazine articles and web-sites. Our review will compare and contrast these various sources, with an emphasis on the Keene/Morris book.

With *The Brain Games World Chess Championship* (hereafter referred to as *BG*), there were grounds for both optimism and pessimism. On one hand, it has the distinction of being the official book of the match: Brain Games Network was the official sponsor of the match, and co-author Raymond Keene its chief organizer. One would hope that the quality of the event's official document would be in keeping with the importance of the occasion. On the other hand, Keene has a long history of substandard and self-congratulatory hack-work: his claim of having authored more chess books than anyone else in history involves speed and quantity far more than quality. These contrary impulses are evident in *BG*, which is in some ways better than *KK*, in some ways worse, and in others merely different.





The two books are exactly the same length, 128 pages. Physically *BG* is a better product: higher quality of cover, paper, typesetting, and photography. In content it is pleasantly free of the personal twaddle found in many magazine and internet journalists' accounts ("Having failed to seduce the stewardess, I spent the rest of the flight with Johnny Walker and Jack Daniels. Upon arrival in London I was amazed at how unsteady a city it was."). *KK* was blemished rather than enhanced by Andrew Martin's pre-game commentaries, a mix of glib malarkey and inept reporting. *BG*'s intros, though not markedly more informative, are at least shorter.

However, the space saved on twaddle and malarkey has not necessarily been put to better use. On the plus side are a few brief, fairly interesting post-game commentaries, discussing such topics as the record of the Grünfeld Defense (bad) and Queen's Gambit Accepted (even) in world championship play, the issue of draw odds for the incumbent, and optimal match length.

Other areas are not as good, though. *KK* spent five pages on a reasonably competent history of the world championship. *BG* spends *twenty-eight* on historical background, from the origin of board games circa 7000 BC to biographical sketches of Howard Staunton and all 14 world champions. Most of these have been recycled from other Keene works; the first paragraph on Botvinnik, for example, was lifted almost verbatim from *Warriors of the Mind*. The bios are of the cliché-ridden encyclopedia article type, and they include some suspect information. For example Staunton is described as "Britain's greatest ever player," a dubious claim that Keene himself seems to belie by including Blackburne but not Staunton among *Warriors*' all-time greats. Lasker is said to have made "no significant contributions to opening theory" and Alekhine is oddly described as "bohemian." The bios include one game each, except for Kramnik's (none). Alexander Khalifman, FIDE knock-out tournament world champion at that time, is not included. The record of Kasparov-vs.-Kramnik head-to-head before the title match is given, but only two full game scores. In this respect *KK* comes off better, as Davies chose to include all 23 pre-match K-K games, with annotations, rather than games of questionable relevance by Zukertort or Euwe.

Of even less relevance are the inane bromides scattered here

The Chess Cafe

E-mail List:

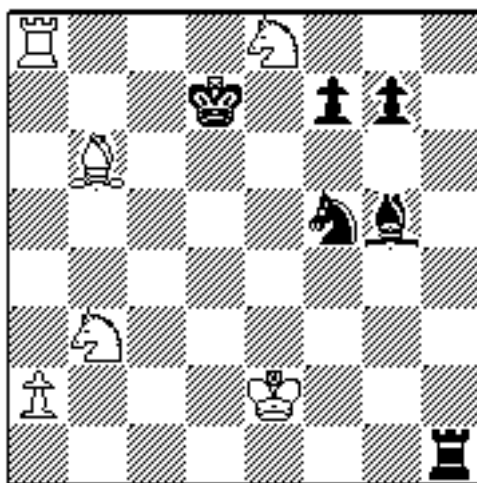
Each week, as a free service to thousands of our readers, we send out a brief e-mail newsletter: *This Week at The Chess Cafe*. To receive this free weekly update, send us your e-mail address. You can remove your name whenever you wish and we do *not* make the list available to anyone else. [Yes, include me on the e-mail list!](#)

and there, by Tony Buzan (“There is only one true intelligence test – and that is life on planet earth.”) and Michael Gelb (“For those given to reflection, chess offers a mirror to self-understanding.”). And while *BG* has more and better photos (counting covers, ten to *KK*’s one), some seem to have been chosen at random. We see tennis player Greg Rusedski, actor Adam Faith (Were these the only celebrities who showed up?), and an incomprehensible apparatus made by “official match artist Barry Martin” who also, we are cryptically informed, “created the visual performance .led.com. on the afternoon of the final day.”

BG is to some extent an advertisement or prospectus for the Brain Games corporation. This is obvious immediately from its cover: a photo virtually identical to that on *KK*, but where on the latter the placard reads “World Chess Championship”, on *BG* it reads “live at www.braingames.net”. Nine pages are devoted to Brain Games’ current activities and future plans, which include world-wide internet competitions in chess, checkers, and XiangQi, and a sponsorship program for young chessplayers. We are given the vital news that one of these youngsters “loves playing football and is a big Harry Potter fan.” These pages, in particular the hype-strewn concluding chapter, are thick with rhetoric clearly aimed at potential investors: “many international physical sports events are currently facing enormous pressures with drugs and hooligan problems. Brain Games offer advertisers and sponsors the opportunity to associate with the power of thought and strategy, to work with the power of the healthy mind. The time has come for ‘the power of the brain’ and not ‘the power of the boot’!” Interesting perhaps for venture capitalists (though we advise caution in view of the recent “dot.com” stock slide), but not for most chessplayers.

All of the above material comes to about 55-60 pages, leaving about 70 for the 15 match games proper. When reviewing the Davies/Martin book, we chose not to discuss the game annotations because it was very likely that someone with more time, talent, and thoroughness would do as good a job or better. Now, with the appearance of *BG*, plus the work of other annotators in recent months, we have some basis for comparison.

There are several factors working against both Keene and Nigel Davies, who annotated *KK*. One, though both are GMs, their past work has already shown a tendency to



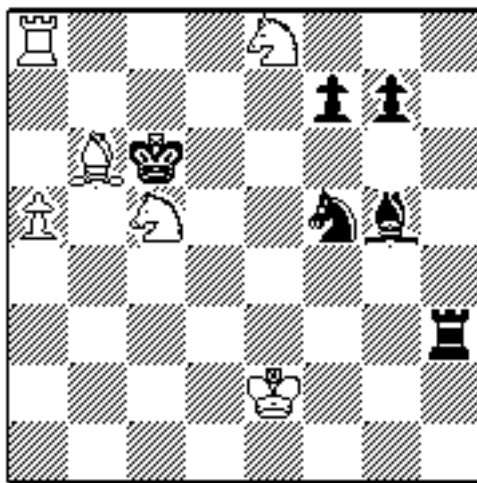
Keene: no comment.

Davies: “**44 a4** As the saying goes, passed pawns should be pushed.”

Kramnik: “**44 a4?** Everyone praised this move, but wrongly so! It was here that there was a clear win after **44 Nc5 Kc6 45 Ra6!** I saw this possibility,

but my classical chess education did not allow me to place my rook so ‘clumsily’. In fact here White wins easily – numerous discovered checks are threatened, e.g. **45...Rh2** (45...Bf4 46 Bc7 Kc5 47 Bf4; 45...Be3 46 Ba7 Kd5 47 Nc7) 46 Kf3 (or 46 Kd3 Rb2 47 Ba7 Kd5 48 Ne4 Bh6 49 N4d6).”

After the further moves **44...Rh3 45 Nc5 Kc6 46 a5** the same game reached this position (*See Diagram*)

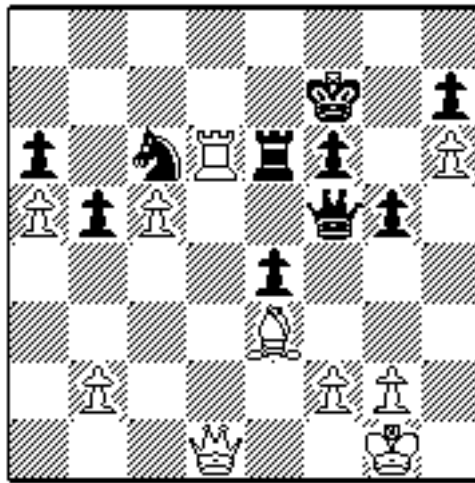


Keene: no comment.

Davies: no comment.

Kramnik: “**46...Re3?** After nearly forty minutes of thought, Kasparov makes a rather bad mistake. During the game I analysed **46...Be3!** and, try as I might, I was unable to find a win.”

Game 6, Kramnik-Kasparov, after **42...g6-g5** (*See Diagram*)



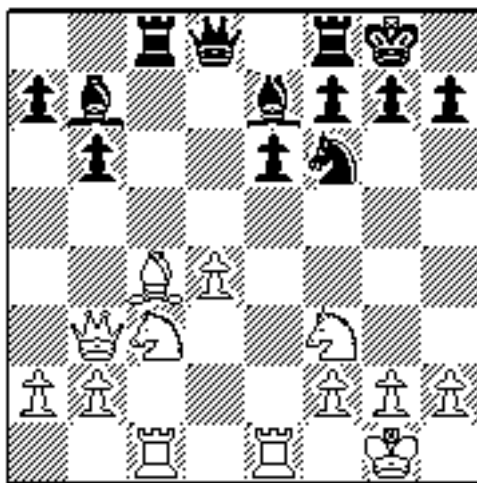
Keene: “**43 Qh5+ Ke7 44 Qd1 Kf7** Kasparov is happy to repeat moves, but Kramnik prefers to probe a little deeper. **45 Rd7+** After a period of reflection Kramnik now hits on a brilliant plan and gives up a pawn to invade the black position with his

heavy pieces.”

Davies: “**43 Qh5+** Kramnik sets a diabolical trap. Will Kasparov fall for it? **43...Ke7** Many of the gathered experts recommended **43...Kf8** at this point but Kramnik had prepared **44 g4! Qe5 45 Bf4! gxf4 46 Qxe5 47 Rxe5 47 Rxf6+ Ke7 48 Rxc6** with a winning rook and pawn endgame. When Kasparov refuses to fall for it, Kramnik switches to plan B. **44 Qd1 Kf7 45 Rd7+! Kg6**”.

Kramnik: “**43 Qh5?** I decided to save time on the clock; **43 Rd7!** was correct. **43...Ke7 44 Qd1 Kf7?** I did not take into account the fact that Black could play **44...Ke8!**, when the plan that I carried out in the game would no longer work. I would have had to reply **45 Rd2!** White retains the initiative, but after **45...Re7!?** it is not easy to develop it.”

Game 10, Kramnik-Kasparov, after **14...Nd7xf6** (*See Diagram*)



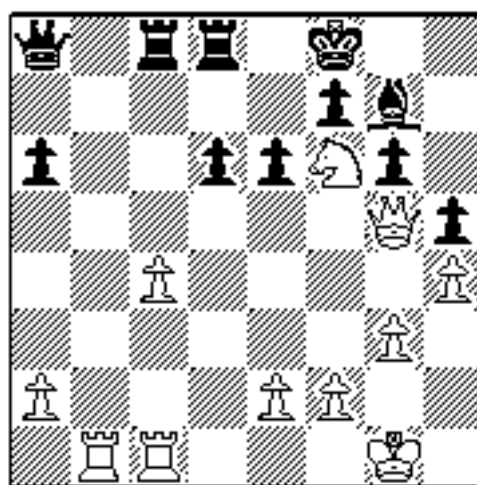
Keene: “**15 Bxe6** This initiates a forced sequence after which White arrives at a promising position. **15...fxe6 16 Qxe6+ Kh8**”.

Davies: “**15 Bxe6 fxe6** Black can hardly refuse. 15...Rc7 is answered by the devastating 16 Ng5

fxe6 17 Nxe6.”

Kramnik: “**15 Be6 fe6?** After 15...Rc7! Kasparov would have solved all his opening problems. The best for White is probably 16 Bc4, but 16...Bf3 17 gf3 Rd7 gives Black sufficient compensation for the pawn. 16 Bf7 Rf7 17 Ng5 Bd6 is pointless, while after 16 Ng5 Qd4! Black has a very decent game, for example: 17 Rcd1 Qh4 18 Nf7 Bc5 19 Re2 Rcf7 ... 20 Bf7 Kh8! ... White has to run for dear life to save himself.”

Game 14, Kramnik-Kasparov, after **28...Qc6-a8** ((See Diagram))



Keene: “**29 c5** Kramnik now sacrifices a pawn, jettisoning his ugly weakness on c4 in hopes of activating his major pieces.”

Davies: “**29 c5?** For the first time in the match Kramnik loses his cool. There was a twinge of panic about

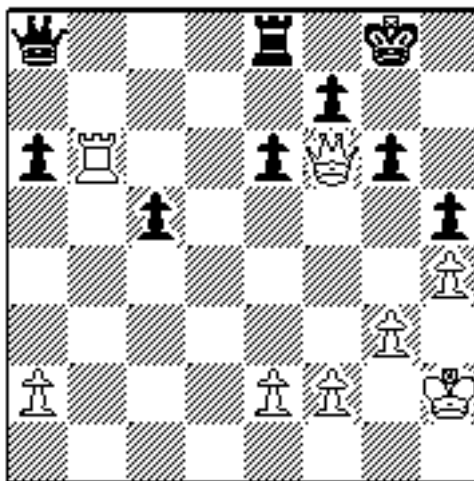
his decision and he would be far better off playing 29 Qf4 Rc5 30 Nh7 Kg8 31 Ng5.”

Illescas: “**29 c5!** A pawn sacrifice that was qualified as dubious but which in fact seems to be good! In any case it

offers White good practical chances to fight for equality.”

Kramnik: “I had to sacrifice a pawn: **29 c5!** in order not to suffer after **29 Qf4 Rc5 30 Nh7 Kg8 31 Ng5 Rf5**, when White is definitely worse.”

After the further moves **29...Rxc5 30 Rxc5 Bxf6 31 Qxf6 dxc5 32 Kh2 Kg8 33 Rb6 Re8** the game reached this position (*See Diagram*)



Keene: “**34 Qf3** Kramnik’s main asset in this position is his vigorous rook and so he heads for a pure rook endgame ... It should be noted that Kramnik himself later advocated **34 Qc3** as the easiest way to draw. **35 exf3 Rc8 ... 36 Rxa6 c4 ...**

Kasparov has a powerful c-pawn which forces the white rook to hurry back to defend. **37 Rd6 c3 38 Rd1 Ra8**”.

Davies: “**34 Qf3!** Kramnik grabs his chance. With such an active rook he will have excellent drawing chances in the rook endgame. **34...Qxf3 35 exf3 36 Rxa6 c4 37 Rd6 c3 38 Rd1 Ra8**”.

Kramnik: “**34 Qf3?** In practically all the commentaries an exclamation mark is attached to this move, but in fact it is a serious mistake. The logical conclusion of the game ...was **34 Qc3!** Of course, I saw this possibility, but in the rush (I had about three minutes left) after **34...Rc8 35 Qc4 Rc6** I did not notice the move **36 Qe4 ...** Now, however, White’s position becomes difficult. **34...Qf3 35 ef3 Rc8 36 Ra6 c4 37 Rd6 c3?** After this move Black definitely does not have a win. But he had available the quite unexpected **37...Kf8!** ... [when] Black’s winning chances are quite substantial.”

Differences between the annotations are obvious and major. Both Keene and Davies pass by several points Kramnik shows to be significant. They are both glaringly wrong on

game 10, move 15, a crucial mistake which more or less sealed Kasparov's doom. Davies comes off somewhat the worse in this sample, especially with his misreading of Kramnik's intent and emotions in games 6 and 14. He also misses more than Keene in games 2 and 14, but Keene's comments there are still superficial or partly wrong. In particular note how in the last example Keene is content merely to quote Kramnik's recommendation and does not bother with any further analysis (one of several such instances). So while *BG*'s annotations may be slightly better than *KK*'s, they cannot be considered adequate.

We criticized *KK* for being an "instant book" prepared in careless haste, sloppy on grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. While *BG* may have gone to press in a similar hurry, it is at least relatively free of such mistakes. We found only one glaring error, this passage on page 124: "During the Kasparov-Kramnik battle as many as 500,000 worldwide were logged on to witness at any one time. And, at a time when sports plays a complex social role, offers an influential model." Somehow in the rush that last verb lost its subject.

Still, even if Keene and Morris are better wordsmiths than Davies and Martin, on balance *BG* cannot be considered much if any better than *KK*, and it certainly is not a full, thorough account of the match. Aside from the important issue of mediocre annotations, there is a great deal more neither book addresses. Day-to-day reporting in both is very weak: it is either absent, shallow, or based on rumor and speculation. Both mention some unspecified problems bothering Kasparov, but neither investigates. Was the \$1.3 million lawsuit brought during the match by Alexei Shirov a major distraction, were other factors involved, or was Kasparov merely blowing smoke? Away from the board, there were several controversies surrounding Brain Games, both in terms of business ethics and the running of the match, the expulsion of journalist John Henderson being one example. Another issue is BGN's 5-year exclusive contract with Kasparov and Kramnik: does the title now belong to Kramnik or BGN? What of the attempt to prevent Kramnik from writing about the match for media other than BGN's web-site? What of the widening gulf between this concept of the world championship and FIDE's annual knockout tournament? What are the implications of BGN's plan to open the world championship qualification process to anyone in the world via the internet?

Perhaps, as some have said, the match was well and smoothly run, and Henderson got what he deserved, or perhaps, as others have contended, ineptitude and thuggery were afoot. Perhaps Keene is an unethical huckster, or perhaps he is a hard-working, innovative entrepreneur. Our objection to the match books we have seen so far is not that they took any particular side on these and other issues, but that the issues were ignored, or subordinated to fluff and self-promotion.

Neither such issues, nor analysis of these highest-level games, can be addressed intelligently in a book that goes to press almost as soon as the match ends. As Edward Winter said in reviewing a spate of books on Fischer-Spassky 1992, "the best one was among the last to appear." We continue to hope that an author or authors with more time, objectivity, insight and conscientiousness, ideally someone such as Kramnik himself, assisted by a competent journalist, will eventually write a definitive book on this important event. Readers who share this hope are advised, as before, to save their money and wait.



[\[The Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Reviews\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Studies\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2001 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.
"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.