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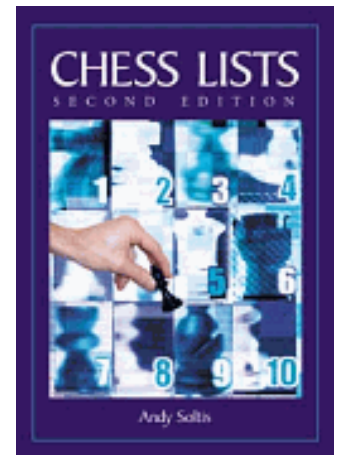


A Disappointing Sequel or Light Fare Under Heavy Scrutiny

Taylor Kingston

Chess Lists (2nd edition), by Andy Soltis, 2002
McFarland & Co., Jefferson, North Carolina USA,
paperback, 248 pages, English algebraic notation,
\$30.00.

Ever since God gave His “Top 10 Commandments” to Moses, “list books” have been popular, reflecting our tendency to catalogue and rank virtually everything. 25 years ago the #1 best-seller was *The Book of Lists*, by David Wallechinsky, Irving Wallace, and Amy



Wallace, who compiled hundreds of lists on every conceivable topic from quantum physics to comic books, including the significant (e.g., historian Edward Creasy’s 15 Decisive Battles of World History), the trivial (10 Well-Known One-Eyed Persons), the entertaining (10 Worst Films of All Time), the sleazy but irresistible (15 Leading Heavy Drinkers of the 20th Century, Sexual Aberrations of 20 Well-Known Men), and lists so strange one wonders how they were compiled (10 Beans and their Flatulence Levels). The editors



apparently considered chess only slightly more important than that last vital phenomenon, giving it but two references: a top 12 player list from Irving Chernev's *The Golden Dozen* (1976), and a mention of Paul Morphy's death among 15 Famous Events that Happened in the Bathtub.

Chess of course actually offers great scope for this line of endeavor. The game has had its share of list-compilers, going back at least to the entertaining Chernev, a sort of chess Robert Ripley. Today Dutch writer Tim Krabbé fills that role ably. Even Bobby Fischer dabbled, with his 1964 *Chessworld* article "The Ten Greatest Masters in History". And of course books of "The Most Instructive / Beautiful / Amazing Games / Moves / Players of All Time" sort are a staple of the game's literature. On the more scholarly side, some of Edward Winter's work fits in the list genre, while the assiduous archivist Jeremy Gaige might be considered the game's ultimate list-compiler, with his carefully detailed reference books *Chess Personalia* and *Chess Tournament Crosstables*. For entertainment, one of the best post-Chernev examples is *The Even More Complete Chess Addict* (1993), in which Mike Fox and Richard James of *CHESS* magazine mixed various lists with Chernev-style believe-it-or-not oddities.

Your reviewer, an inveterate trivia buff, has a keen appetite for this sort of thing, so when a review copy of *Chess Lists* appeared on the doorstep, it immediately leapfrogged over several other titles to the top of our review list.

The author of *Chess Lists*, GM Andy Soltis, is one

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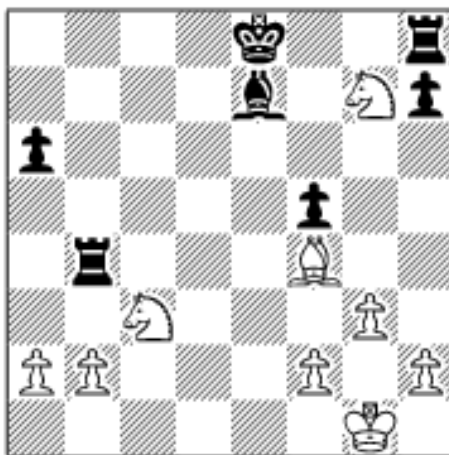
of today's most prolific chess writers, producing regular columns for *Chess Life* and *The New York Post*, and innumerable books, ranging from small monographs to large historical tomes. The quality of his copious work has been highly variable. Some of his early opening pamphlets for Chess Digest were frankly dreadful, while the later histories from McFarland & Co., such as *The United States Chess Championship* (1997) and *Soviet Chess 1917-1991* (2000; review available in the archives), are of better quality. Another list book, *The 100 Best Chess Games of the 20th Century, Ranked* (again see archives), was his last before this edition of *Chess Lists*.

The first version, titled *The Book of Chess Lists*, appeared in 1984. Reviewing it in *Chess Notes* #890, Edward Winter called it "a light work ... an exercise in surface-skimming which is not, however, without charm." The second edition shows some improvement, and if not examined too deeply it is a lot of fun. However, it is your reviewer's duty to examine deeply, and in doing so some of the fun gave way to feelings of disappointment. This review will compare the new edition to the old, and will show some of its enjoyable aspects. However, we must also examine its errors, which are many and varied, including errors of classification, errors of commission, errors of judgment, and errors of omission.

Enjoyable Aspects

As with the Fox & James book, *Chess Lists* aims more at entertainment than scholarship. On that basis it often succeeds, providing several hours of light reading pleasure, whether one skims a few

pages at a time or devours the whole in one sitting. Any chess fan will enjoy *Nineteen Master Games With Illegal Moves*, *Ten Botched Brilliances*, *Eleven Costliest Blunders*, *Ten Geriatric Achievements*, *The Greatest Correspondence Games*, *Ten Cases of Suspected or Confirmed Cheating*, and others of its lists. Some lists involve no games, and many that do can be appreciated just from the diagrams, as with this from *Illegal Moves*:



Motwani-Chandler, Blackpool 1990. Soltis writes “Black may be winning if he plays 30...Kf7 31.Nxf5 Bf6. However, he came up with a stronger idea: **30...Rxf4 (!?!)**. White resigned because he loses the pinned knight

after 31.gxf4 Rg8.” However, neither player (and both are GMs) noticed that Black’s move left his king in check.

Another brevity requiring no board is *Spassky-Lieb, Munich 1979*, an entry from the list *Their Worst Games*: **1.e4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3.Bc4 Nc6 4.d3 Bc5 5.f4 d6 6.Na4? Bxg1 7.Rxg1 Ng4 8.g3 exf4 9.Bxf4:**



9...Nxb2?? 10.Qh5 1-0.

Along with such amusing trifles, there are some thoughtful lists. Especially interesting is *Eleven Non-Theoretical Innovations*, a list of

rules and practices that greatly improved the game and are taken for granted nowadays: time limits, round-robin tournaments, counting rather than replaying draws, tie-break systems, double-faced clocks, ratings etc. Soltis not only lists these, but provides capsule histories of their origins, as with item 7, Hospitality: “It wasn’t until San Sebastian 1911 that the practice of reimbursing travel expenses and providing food money (or meals) and a free hotel room came into practice. Jacques Mieses, the German-born attacking master, was in charge of organizing the Spanish tournament and he pushed for the procedure that eventually put chess on a professional basis.”

The flip side of that list is *Thirteen Radical Ideas*, major rule changes or procedures that were never implemented or quickly died out, such as the rule for the 1880 Zukertort-Rosenthal match that during adjournments, the opponents must remain together to prevent any off-the-board analysis. Some of these ideas are obscure but quite interesting, e.g., “uncastling,” suggested in 1959 to allow a one-move return of a castled king and rook to their original squares. The jury is still out on the more recent ones, such as Fischerandom and Kasparov’s

“advanced chess.”

On the perennial question of “Who was the greatest of all time?” Soltis offers several interesting lists, such as the 20 highest ratings from Elo’s *The Rating of Chessplayers* and the 18 highest ratings ever recorded by FIDE. Lack of greatness is discussed in *Seven Famous Losers*, which includes the hopeless Colonel Moreau (+0 –24 at Monte Carlo 1903) but also some surprising names, such as Donner, Sämisch, and Euwe.

Of particular interest to us was Alekhine’s 15 Improvements. This is the closest we’ve seen to a complete list of Alekhine’s notorious self-preening game score falsifications. An example is Alekhine-Levitsky, 8th match game, St. Petersburg 1913:



Here Alekhine actually played **26.Qg5+?!** and eventually won in 50 moves. But in *My Best Games 1908-1923* he gave the much more impressive **26.Re1 Qh8 27.Qe3! Rd8 28.Nxe5 Kf6 29.Nxg4+! Bxg4 30.Qe5+ 1-0.**

However, several entries in this list are so vague and incomplete as to be useless. And curiously absent is the famous but apocryphal “Five Queens Game”, an analytical variation from 1915 that Alekhine later claimed was a game he actually played. It appeared in *Chess Lists*’ first edition, in fact its very first item, in *Ten Games That*

(Probably) Never Happened. Now, though it was still perfectly appropriate to that list, and virtually obligatory for Alekhine's Improvements, it has inexplicably been dropped. Which takes us to the next topic.

Differences Between Editions

First the basic and obvious changes: from hardback to paperback, from 5½" x 8½" to 8½" x 11", from descriptive notation to algebraic, from 217 pages to 248, from 63 lists to 79.

The new edition's preface says it has "added more than a dozen new lists, updated and expanded most of the others, and greatly increased the number of illustrative games and diagrams." True in part: there are more games and diagrams, and many lists have more entries: 11 Master Games with Illegal Moves is now 19, The 9 Shortest Games Ever Played is now 16, The 8 Longest Games is now 10, etc.

However the preface gives the impression that all the old material has been retained, and 12 new lists added. Perhaps better had this actually been done, but in fact about 28 lists are new, while about a dozen old lists have been dropped. While some cuts (Celebrities Who Play Chess, Musicians I Have Played) will not be missed, neither would some new entries (11 World Class Players Who Got Mated, 8 Games of Living Chess, *Informant* Innovators). To the 2nd edition's credit, most of the new topics are interesting and worthwhile (e.g. The 15 Richest Prizes, The 8 Youngest GMs, 11 Costliest Blunders, 10 Famous Patrons, Alekhine's 15 Improvements, 4 Faked Games), but conversely

almost as many good ones were axed, e.g. America's Best Players, The Best in Time Pressure, The Highest Rated Tournaments, The 10 Longest Running Chess Magazines, The Menchik Club, and several others.

Furthermore, while more games and diagrams are good, in a book of this type they are not a substitute for thoroughness, accuracy, and depth of research. The new edition may be easier on the eyes and more fun to play through, but its superficiality, and level of error, are disturbing.

Errors of Classification

Viewers of the TV show *Sesame Street* may recall the song "One of these things is not like the others / One of these things just doesn't belong."

Unfortunately, it applies to several of Soltis' lists. Examples:

The game Glucksberg-Najdorf, the "Polish Immortal", is in the list Great Skittles. Yet by all accounts it was a serious tournament game, perhaps even played in a Polish championship, if Najdorf's 1975 article in *Jaque* is to be believed. More on this game further on.

Carlos Torre, who quit serious chess at age 21 but lived to 72, is included in the list Tragic Losses, which consists almost entirely of players who, unlike Torre, died young. Yet he is absent from Thirteen Masters Who Gave Up the Game, which consists of players who, like Torre, quit chess young but lived on for many years.

The criteria for Eleven Games That (Probably)

Never Happened are rather unclear and inconsistent. Some entries are truly fictitious, such as games attributed to Napoleon and Stalin, the fabricated 1869 Morphy-Ruggles game, and the Capablanca-Hagenlacher hoax. However others, e.g., Fine-Borochoew at Pasadena 1932, Pillsbury-Lee at London 1899, and Schlechter-Perlis at Carlsbad 1911, definitely did happen, but their scores simply were garbled by later writers. And to say that the blindfold exhibition game Capablanca–Baca-Arús, Havana, 1912, “never happened” is either dubious history or very bad semantics. There are indications that the game was prearranged (see Hooper & Brandreth, *The Unknown Capablanca*, pp. 111-112), and thus it might fit the “faked games” list, but we know of nothing saying it did not actually take place.

Errors of Commission

Some known errors have persisted from the first edition, 18 years ago. In his 1985 review, Edward Winter pointed out several, including statements that (1) Adolf Anderssen was Austrian; (2) *The British Chess Magazine* is “the official organ of the British Chess Federation;” (3) The game Riumin-Capablanca, Moscow 1935, was the only time forfeit of Capablanca’s career; (4) Joseph Henry Blake was editor of the *BCM* in 1930; and (5) Najdorf’s “Polish Immortal” was played in 1933.

In the new edition, statements 1 and 2 seem to have been corrected by deletion. Numbers 3 and 4 are still there and still wrong: Capablanca forfeited on other occasions, for example against Alekhine at AVRO 1938, and Blake was never editor of *BCM*. That error is particularly irksome, since the whole

point of the anecdote as told by Soltis is that Blake corrected his own game score as *BCM* editor.

With #5 Soltis has failed to keep up with ongoing discoveries: he has changed the date to 1935, which in 1984 was thought correct, but evidence surfacing several years ago now indicates 1930 for Glucksberg-Najdorf (see Winter, *Kings, Commoners and Knaves*, p. 306).

There were other errors not mentioned by Winter. Especially glaring, and also retained from the old edition, is the statement that writer Jean Dufresne's "real name was E. S. Freund (Dufresne was an anagram)" (p. 145). This is the reverse of the truth: "E. S. Freund" was the pseudonym, Dufresne the real name, as can be easily checked in *The Oxford Companion to Chess*, Gaige's *Chess Personalia*, or any number of encyclopedias. This is an example of what Winter called Soltis' "unhappy tendency to blunder on simple matters."

In the new edition, the list Great Match Players continues that trend. It starts badly by saying "Steinitz played 27 matches between 1862 and 1896, winning 25 of them." Yet Pickard's *The Games of Wilhelm Steinitz* reports 32 matches, of which Steinitz won 29, and the last ended in 1897. Even throwing out the two odds matches and the 1892 thematic cable match, the numbers come out 29 and 27. However, Soltis clearly *is* including odds matches when he says Lasker played 24, compared to the 22 at even strength listed in Whyld's *Collected Games of Emanuel Lasker*. Therefore Soltis' Steinitz figures are off by about 15%.

Percentages are off also in a new list, *Difficult Opponents*. Soltis gives Vidmar-Tartakower as one of 10 examples of a player with a disproportionately high score against an opponent of approximately equal or better strength. In evidence he gives their lifetime record as $+10 -4 =14$, i.e. 60.7% in Vidmar's favor. Yet according to Divinsky's *Life Maps of the Great Chess Masters* the score was $+11 -9 =17$, only 52.7%, hardly remarkable for near equals. While Divinsky in general and *Life Maps* in particular are known to be less than perfect sources, a cross-check with Gaige's highly accurate *Crosstables* validates Divinsky and contradicts Soltis. Overall, Soltis and Divinsky agree on only two of the 10 entries in the list: Pillsbury-Schlechter ($+8 -2 =9$), and Capablanca-Nimzovitch ($+5 -0 =6$). The others:

	Soltis	Divinsky
<i>Janowski-Chigorin</i>	$+17 -4 =4$	$+16 -5 =5$
<i>Stein-Taimanov</i>	$+4 -0 =6$	$+5 -1 =7$
<i>Korchnoi-Tal</i>	$+13 -4 =27$	$+13 -4 =28$
<i>Bogolyubov-Réti</i>	$+19 -7 =4$	$+23 -8 =5$
<i>Geller-Botvinnik</i>	$+4 -1 =5$	$+4 -1 =7$
<i>Boleslavsky-Kotov</i>	$+7 -1 =5$	$+9 -1 =7$
<i>Smyslov-Szabo</i>	$+5 -1 =11$	$+6 -1 =11$

Gaige's *Crosstables* stop at 1930, so we couldn't check all the entries, but those we did again validated Divinsky and contradicted Soltis. Perhaps

Soltis has relied too much on databases, compared to which *Life Maps* is like Holy Writ. Though only Vidmar-Tartakower is off enough to disqualify it from Soltis' list, anyone accepting his exact figures will be misinformed.

Commenting on Torre-Réti, Baden-Baden 1925, Soltis says Torre was "then at the height of his ability." Yet that tournament was the worst of Torre's career; he finished 10th.

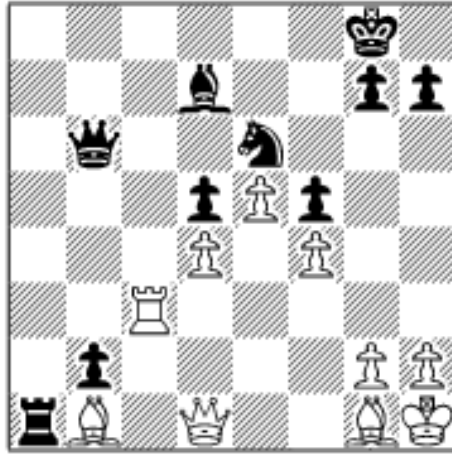
Of David Janowski, Soltis says "Supported by his patron, Leonardus Nardus, he prospered during 1905-1920" (p. 133). In fact, Janowski lost Nardus' patronage in 1915 and seldom prospered after that.

The film *Deadlier Than the Male* is listed in Chess Themes and Scenes in Movies. Chess authors seem confused about its date. Gareth Williams in *Master Pieces* gives 1952, while Soltis gives 1972. They're both wrong: it was 1967.

Misspellings and misnomers occur with a frequency typical for a Soltis book, e.g., "Janowky," "Lidköping" for Linköping, "Matisonis" for Matisons, "*Luzhin's Defense*" for *The Luzhin Defense*, and "mistaches" for mistakes or mustaches, we're not sure which. At least one misspelling caught by Winter in 1985 continues in this edition, "*La Palamède*" instead of *Le Palamède*, the first chess magazine, founded by de la Bourdonnais. Important perhaps only for French readers, but they deserve accuracy too.

Speaking of accuracy, a diagram error leaves an entry in Alekhine's Improvements looking silly.

For this position,



said to be from *Flamberg-Alekhine, Mannheim 1914*, Soltis gives Alekhine's two versions of the game's conclusion: 1) 36...Qb4 37.Rc7 Ba4 38.Qf1 Bb5 39.Qd1 Qa4, 0-1 (*Shakmatny Vestnik*, 1915), and 2) 36...Ba4

37.Qd3 Bb5 38.Qd1 Qa6!, 0-1 (*My Best Games 1908-1923*). However, the attentive reader might wonder why in the first line Alekhine did not simply take the *en prise* rook by 37...Nxc7, or why in the second White avoided such good moves as 37.Rc8+ or 38.Qxf5. The reason: Black's knight was actually on e7, not e6.

We found these new errors in just a few hours of research, and do not claim the above is a complete list. Even if it were, this is, in our opinion, too many mistakes for a book that will surely be used as a reference source by other writers.

Errors of Judgment

Some differences we have with Soltis might be considered "judgment calls," matters of opinion or taste, but we'll list them nonetheless.

In *Their Worst Games*, Soltis gives the aforementioned Riumin-Capablanca. Should this really be considered Capa's worst, rather than Sämisch-Capablanca, Carlsbad 1929, when the great Cuban blundered away a piece on his 9th

move?

Was 1956 really when Keres “came closest to his goal of reaching a World Championship match,” as Soltis asserts in *11 Costliest Blunders*? Keres finished $1\frac{1}{2}$ points behind Smyslov in the Amsterdam Candidates Tournament that year, but at the 1962 Candidates at Curaçao he was only $\frac{1}{2}$ -point behind Petrosian. Perhaps Soltis has a special meaning for “closest” in this context, but if so he did not explain, and objectively $\frac{1}{2}$ is closer than $1\frac{1}{2}$.

In *Eleven Long Thinks*, Soltis repeats a Chernev story about Capablanca and Alekhine taking a combined 3 hours 45 minutes for one move pair in the 11th game of their 1927 match. However he is unsatisfied with Chernev’s level of detail: “What were the moves? Chernev, who didn’t disclose his source, didn’t say.” This is like Scrooge noting Marley’s miserliness; Soltis rarely gives sources.

Speaking of inconsistency, the list *The Nine Greatest Endgame Players*, contributed by Pal Benko, does not include Capablanca (for reasons which Benko explained in *Chess Life* but Soltis omits). However, the first sentence of the very next page reads “For some players all endgames are difficult; for a very few — Capablanca comes to mind — all seem easy.”

The Real Jobs of 30 Noted Players lacks obvious error, but also often lacks interest.

Counterbalancing soccer-player Simen Agdestein, ballet dancer Max Harmonist, and code-breaker Conel Alexander, we have Gosta Stoltz: mechanic,

Jesús Díez del Corral: accountant, Henry Atkins: schoolmaster, and Vincenzo Castaldi: dentist.

Errors of Omission

While *Real Jobs* might have benefited from some deletions, the book as a whole leaves out a lot, in our opinion too much. Examples:

The lists *Odd Deaths of Nine Masters* and *Nine Masters Who Died in Poverty* both omit Alekhine, who fits both criteria quite well. Morphy's aforementioned bathtub demise also fits the former list, but is absent.

The *11 Costliest Blunders* inexplicably omits Bronstein's 57.Kc2?? against Botvinnik, 6th game, 1951 World Championship. Admittedly a shopworn example, but it fits Soltis' criterion as well or better than the others he lists.

Seven Tournament Collapses could have been expanded considerably. Missing, for example, are Boleslavsky at the 1950 Budapest Candidates Tournament, Ivkov at Havana 1965, Fine at AVRO 1938, Torre at Moscow 1925, and Capablanca at St. Petersburg 1914, to name a few.

Soltis could have easily doubled the list *Four Faked Games*. We say easily, because he discussed at least four other pre-composed games in his June 1999 *Chess Life* column.

In the list *Five Chess Myths*, "The Birth of the Marshall Counterattack" indicates another failure to keep up with recent research. It makes no mention of the game Walbrodt-Allies, Havana,

1893, which antedates by 23 years the earliest example Soltis can find of the fabled gambit (see Winter, *Kings, Commoners and Knaves*, p. 151).

Page 33: “Max Euwe took one 202-page book just to compare Bobby Fischer with José Capablanca and Alexander Alekhine — and with absolute conviction.” Soltis, who didn’t disclose his source, apparently means *Bobby Fischer and his Predecessors* (1976). If so, he has neglected to mention that it also compared Emanuel Lasker, with equal conviction.

Discussing the spurious Morphy-Ruggles game, Soltis says “Some years ago Joseph P. Beck of Brooklyn bought a secondhand copy of Johann Löwenthal’s collection of Morphy’s games.” “Some years ago”? A rather imprecise understatement; Beck’s discovery was first publicized in 1935 (see Lawson, *Paul Morphy: The Pride and Sorrow of Chess*, p. 326).

It is good to see Spielmann rightly among The Great Match Players, but why are Euwe and Stahlberg not named among the top players he beat? That same list mentions a 3-game 1905 Rubinstein-Mieses match, but says nothing of their 10-game 1909 set.

As noted above, Soltis does give a list of the top 20 players from Elo’s historical ratings. However there are at least two other relevant lists: Sir Richard Clarke’s top 64, and Keene and Divinsky’s top 64 from *Warriors of the Mind*. These were at least partly included in *The Even More Complete Chess Addict* but are missing entirely from *Chess*

Lists.

Returning to the aforementioned Difficult Opponents list, there are many other candidates, equally as striking or more so than those actually used. A few, in no particular order: Capablanca-Marshall (+22 -2 =28), Steinitz-Blackburne (+28 -10 =7), Rubinstein-Duras (+10 -2 =1), Larsen-Najdorf (+8 -2 =2), Botvinnik-Boleslavsky (+7 -1 =6), Botvinnik-Keres (+8 -3 =9), Korchnoi-Polugaevsky (+21 -8 =30), Petrosian-Taimanov (+8 -2 =10), Pillsbury-Mason (+7 -0 =1), Polugaevsky-Gligoric (+7 -1 =5), Portisch-Miles (+7 -1 =13), Polugaevsky-Seirawan (+5 -1 =3), Polugaevsky-Tal (+4 -0 =1), Smyslov-Euwe (+7 -1 =0), Korchnoi-Szabo (+6 -0 =6), Rubinstein-Tarrasch (+8 -0 =12), Tartakower-Marshall (+7 -1 =11), Teichmann-Spielmann (+13 -3 =12), and Vidmar-Bogolyubov (+5 -1 =4). Granted, these data are all from *Life Maps*, but as we have seen that source is not entirely unreliable.

Ten Cases of Suspected or Confirmed Cheating makes no mention of the Allwermann affair at Böblingen 1999 (see Hans Ree's "Just Incredible" and "To the Harbor" in the [ChessCafe Archives](#)). Yet this was a case of computer-assisted cheating far more striking, sophisticated and important than the 1993 "John von Neumann" incident, which Soltis does include. Other omitted candidates: Petrosian, Geller and Keres at Curaçao 1962 (which Soltis did discuss in *Soviet Chess*), two instances by Petrosian's wife (double-crossing Keres at Curaçao and intervening in Fischer-Kovacevic, Zagreb 1970; see Fox & James, *The Even More Complete Chess Addict*, pp. 224-225),

and Soviet collusion with Spain at the 1986 Olympiad, to name only a few. And for a non-Soviet example, maybe Donner's allegations about what Larry Evans did to Fischer at Buenos Aires 1960 (see *The King*, p. 239).

The 16 entries in Chess Themes and Scenes in Movies include both the obvious (e.g., *The Seventh Seal*, *From Russia With Love*, *Casablanca*) and the esoteric (*Return From the Ashes*, *The Killing*). Yet the list could easily have been nearly doubled: *Lolita*, *Becket*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, *The Omega Man*, *The Blob* (1958 version), *A Matter of Life and Death*, *Blazing Saddles*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1958 version), *The Chess Players*, *Blade Runner*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *8 x 8*, and *X-Men* all emerged from a brief check of *Complete Addict* and our own film-viewing memories. *Harry Potter* was too late for this edition but belongs in the next, if there is one.

Novels With Chess Themes is seriously underpopulated, with only 18 listed. Five minutes' thought brought several omissions to mind. An obvious one is *The Chess Players* (1960), a fictionalized biography of Morphy by Frances Parkinson Keyes. Another bio-novel is *Alekhine's Anguish* by Charles Yaffe, and if we go beyond English works there is *El Aguila Caída*, by Filiberto Terrazas, about Carlos Torre. A chess theme is quite evident in *The Chessmen of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, to name a very famous novelist, and in *The Immortal Game* by Mark Coggins, to name a less well-known one. The absence of John Brunner's *The Squares of the City* is surprising, because Soltis described it at length in his 12/1998 *Chess Life* column. A perusal of,

say, Burt Hochberg's *The 64-Square Looking Glass* could no doubt provide many more. Oh yes, how in the world did Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* not make the list?

The absence of so many relevant items leaves us with a serious feeling of incompleteness, like a book listing "The 7 Commandments", "The 5 Wonders of the World", "Heinz's 37 Varieties", etc. If Soltis edited the Koran, would we see "The 59 Names of God"? Or as a film director, would his titles include *The 300 Blows*, *The 29 Steps*, *Anne of the 600 Days*, *The Five Samurai*, and *4½*? Soltis seems content just to cobble together what's handy (sometimes even leaving out what *is* handy), rather than work to create thoroughly researched lists.

The sense of incompleteness comes not only from lists that are too short, but from the many good lists not present at all. Soltis lists novels with chess themes, why not short stories? The tense *Last Round* by Kester Svendsen, the eerie *Black to Move* by E. W. Chandler, the hilarious *Von Goom's Gambit* by Victor Contoski, are some worthy possibilities. A personal favorite is *Pawn to Infinity*, an outstanding chess-themed science-fiction anthology edited by Fred Saberhagen and including such excellent writers as Roger Zelazny and George R. R. Martin.

If that list seems a bit tangential, how about: Great Tournament Comebacks (e.g., Fischer at Santa Monica 1966, Capablanca at New York 1924), Bad Tournaments by Great Players (e.g., Chigorin at Ostend 1907, Flohr at AVRO 1938, Euwe at

Buenos Aires 1947), One-Event Wonders (i.e., lesser players who rose to unaccustomed heights: Thomas at Hastings 1934-35, Mieses at Vienna 1907), Heavy-Drinking Chess Masters (e.g., Blackburne, Geller, Tal, William Winter, Alekhine), Heavy Smokers (e.g., Winawer, Marshall, Lasker), Chess Automaton and the Masters Who Operated Them (e.g., Turk/Mouret, Mephisto/Gunsberg, Ajeeb/Pillsbury), All-Time Greatest Female Players, All-Time Best Tournament Performance Ratings ... we could go on at length.

Some readers may object that we are complaining too much about what *Chess Lists* is not. One reason we do is price. The 1978 paperback version of Wallechinsky and Wallace's *The Book of Lists* packed about 400 lists, most with at least 10 items, many with 20 or 30, into 519 densely packed pages for a mere \$2.50, about 5/8 of a cent per list. Soltis' book provides 79 generally shorter lists on 248 more diffuse pages for \$30.00, about 38 cents per list, a rate approximately 6000% higher. Even taking inflation into account, that's a steep rise. And comparing one chess list book to another, the 1993 edition of Fox & James' *Addict* comes out better, with 369 fine-print pages for \$16.95.

One reason those two books were able to do more is that they were very much collaborative efforts. *Addict* had at least two dozen contributors, and Wallechinsky & Wallace list 66. Soltis acknowledges several contributors (e.g., Pal Benko, Lubomir Kavalek, Arthur Bisguier, John Watson, Hugh Myers, David L. Brown), but generally seems understaffed by comparison. This

is definitely not a case where “less is more.”

Perhaps your reviewer is somewhat case-hardened. We gave a positive review to Soltis’ *Soviet Chess*, but that book was mercilessly slammed in a *Kingpin* review by Sarah Hurst, who has more expertise on that subject. By the same token, readers less drenched in chess lore than this trivia addict may not share our disappointment.

However, we must call ’em as we see ’em. Of the first edition, Edward Winter wrote “*Chess Lists* is worth having and we suspect that readers, like us, will probably enjoy it more than the contents really merit.” The second edition does not get off that easy. With 18 years to correct and improve, more quantity *and* quality were definitely in order. Readers who can afford \$30 for a relatively small amount of light reading will get some enjoyment, if they are unconcerned about accuracy, scholarship and thoroughness. But those looking for a methodically researched, reliable reference or a serious attempt at a really worthwhile historical work will not find it here.

Order *Chess Lists*

by Andy Soltis

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