



## The Haunting

Jon Edwards

*Bobby Fischer, The Career and Complete Games of the American World Chess Champion*, by Karsten Müller, REI 2009, 408pp., Hardcover: \$79.95, Paperback: \$39.95

Just how did he get so good?

We were haunted by Robert James Fischer long before he died. The young kid from Brooklyn who skipped school to engulf chess literature at the New York Public Library, who took his rating from 1830 at age twelve to qualify for the Candidates tournament just three years later, who took the American and then the World chess scene by storm, winning methodically and with style all of its highest honors, and who, after disappearing, reemerged sporadically with a uniquely eccentric blend of odious ideologies and breathtaking opening discoveries.

Like no other player, Fischer energized the game. With an unrivaled fighting spirit and devotion, he single-handedly demolished a Soviet chess machine that had dominated its highest levels. He inspired tens of thousands of new adherents, and leaves behind an astonishing legacy of some of the world's greatest chess. We are, as they say, still searching for Bobby Fischer, and there is today no better aid available for that endeavor than this comprehensive new volume from Karsten Müller.

From the start, this new book was a daunting project: insightful annotations for all of Fischer's 736 tournament and match games, original analysis that combines observations from the decades of literature with the realities of modern approaches, wonderful period photographs that have not previously been published, and enlightening essays about Fischer by the American grandmasters best qualified to comment, Larry Evans and Andy Soltis.

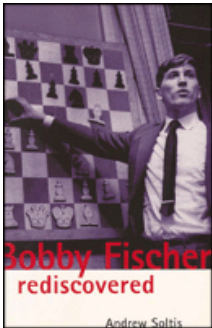


*Fischer vs. de Souza, Mar del Plata 1959*

In full disclosure, I helped to edit and proofread this book. I have therefore had the privilege to read it though many times, from its early drafts through the final, fully polished offering. What impresses most is Karsten Müller's dedication to the project, a reflection of his heartfelt conclusion that Fischer, so totally consumed by chess throughout his life, deserves recognition as the

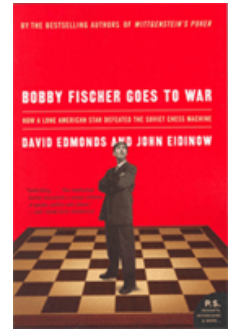
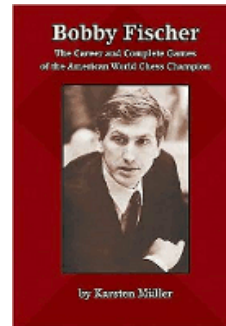
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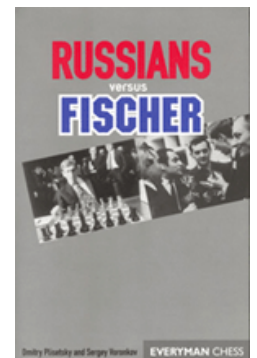


### CHESSTHEATRE

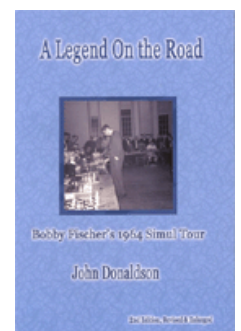
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world's best player. Lasker, Karpov, and Kasparov reigned much longer. But Müller is right that Fischer's performance from 1970 to 1972 far surpassed any three year period in the history of the game. His 6-0 match wins against Taimanov and Larsen remain unequaled. By the time his match against Spassky began, he had a 125 point ELO lead over the Russian champion. Simply said, you won't find that discrepancy anywhere else in world championship history.

Some readers may dispute the claim, but what is important here is that Müller approaches the annotations with the respect that Fischer's games deserve. Beginners and club players will benefit from the comments throughout about general strategic considerations and by watching Fischer's opening repertoire as it evolves. More advanced players will appreciate Müller's care in explaining many of the finer points of Fischer's careful technique as well as Soltis's detailed opening survey. And all will enjoy the foreword by Evans, a summary of Fischer's life that combines personal insights and touching vignettes.

How did Fischer prepare? Judge for yourself from this extract from the book:

Here from the introduction and game 152: "At one point, Fischer started to learn Russian so that he could read the important literature on the game in the original. He often locked himself up with stacks of books and magazines. And this paid high dividends. For example, in his game against Reshevsky...

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.Nc3 Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Bc4 0-0 8. Bb3 Na5? Fischer had read the refutation in the Russian magazine Shakmaty v SSSR. 9.e5 Ne8?**



**10.Bxf7+!! Kxf7 10...Rxf7 11.Ne6 loses the queen. 11.Ne6 dxe6 11...Kxe6?** loses the game: 12.Qd5+ Kf5 13.g4+ Kxg4 14.Rg1+ Kh5 15.Qg2+-, **12.Qxd8 Nc6 13.Qd2**" and Fischer went on to win.

How refined was Fischer's judgment? Here, a remarkable observation in game 683, the seventh game in Fischer's match against Petrosian:



"**22.Nxd7+!!** At first glance, it looks wrong to exchange the strong knight for the bishop, but in this position it is not important what is exchanged, but what remains on the board. White gets a clear edge, full control and easy play in the resulting endgame. For Fischer, this was certainly an easy decision because he liked to play with rook(s) and light-squared bishop against rook(s) and knight, and showed that the long range pieces often coordinate better together."

As is evident from these excerpts, the author, grandmaster Karsten Müller, comes to the endeavor with impressive credentials. His books on chess tactics, [The ChessCafe Puzzle Book](#) and [The Magic of Chess Tactics](#), have been best sellers because they provide original and ingenious challenges for players of many levels. Combine that with his acclaimed endgame books, [The Secrets of Pawn Endings](#) (with Frank Lamprecht) and [Fundamental Chess Endings](#), and you have a grandmaster fully up to this challenge.

If I have a quibble with this modern chess classic, it is that the book contains no meaningful discussion of Fischer's political ideologies. Purists are likely to counter that his personal beliefs have no place in this analysis of Fischer's chess career, and those familiar with Fischer's beliefs may breathe some relief. The author and publisher obviously agree. It is hard for me to imagine, however, how any diagnosis of Fischer's immense talent would not include some discussion of the role that such views might have contributed to his talent. Were these views a natural outgrowth of his fanatical talent and the chess-centric nature of his education, or did his brain, perhaps wired for such political views, inspire his chess?

Rather than dwell on such trifling thoughts, permit me to conclude that any aspiring player, with this book seriously at hand, will not only be further haunted by Fischer, but will also improve quickly.

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