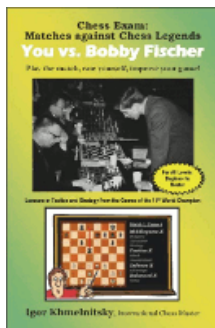




BOOK REVIEWS



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Stats Galore!

Steve Goldberg

Chess Exam: Matches Against Chess Legends, You vs. Bobby Fischer, by Igor Khmelnsky, 2009 IamCoach Press, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 190pp.\$21.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$17.95)

There is no shortage of chess puzzle books to help aspiring players improve their tactical vision, and most are pretty good at meeting this goal. International master Igor Khmelnsky has added a couple of twists to this genre in *Chess Exam: Matches Against Chess Legends, You vs. Bobby Fischer*.

Rather than present a series of "White to win" or "Black to move and mate in two" problems, Khmelnsky provides the reader with dynamic positions from various Fischer games. He indicates what Fischer's last move was, producing the given position. The reader plays the part of Fischer's opponent and is asked two questions. First, the reader must provide his evaluation of the position – is it roughly equal, is one side a bit better, or is one side significantly better. Secondly, the reader is asked to select his choice of move from among, typically, four choices, and asked to justify this move. Usually one or two of the choices are blunders, but this may not always be readily apparent.

The subsequent page in the book will contain Khmelnsky's evaluation of the position, and his analysis of each of the multiple-choice moves.

As an example, let's look at Game Forty in the book:



Fischer is black; the reader takes the position as white. Fischer has just played 45...Kg7-h6. Khmelnsky asks the following two questions:

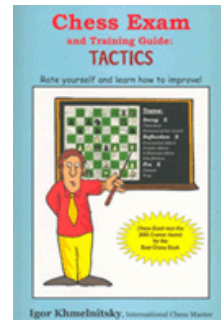
40-1 How do you evaluate the position?

- A) White is Significantly Better/Winning
- B) White is Better
- C) Nearly Equal
- D) Black is Better

40-2 How would you respond? Why?

- A) 46.Rf1xf6
- B) 46.Rf1-f4
- C) 46.Qc7-f7
- D) 46.Qc7-f4+

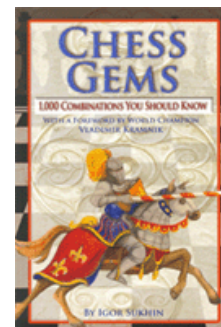
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Chess Exam and Training Guide: Tactics
by Igor Khmelnsky



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On the next page, Khmelnsky explains that this position is from Taimanov-Fischer, Candidate's Match, 1971. He presents a table that is representative of the type of statistical detail found in *Chess Exam: Matches Against Chess Legends*. The table lists the most common answers to the questions above from his students, as well as the percentage for which each answer occurred. The table also notes the "score" Khmelnsky awards for each answer, and a "match result" based on each answer.

For example, the most common answer set, at thirty-nine percent of respondents, was "C-D," meaning choice "C" for question 40-1 and choice "D" for question 40-2. Khmelnsky awards the maximum ten points for this answer, and a game result of "½." Eighteen percent of the people tested answered "C-B," worth six points, and also a draw. Another thirteen percent said "B-D," for which the author also awards six points and a draw. Several other answer options are graded as well. If an answer set doesn't appear, it earns zero points.

The author then provides a brief analysis of the position, with his single-paragraph "Quick observations." This is followed by a more detailed "Summary," in which he explains the results of each of the move choices from the second question above. Khmelnsky doesn't just indicate the correct answer – he identifies the good and bad and the in-between among the various choices, and with both text and variations, explains why each choice is advisable or not.

There are sixty such tests in the book, in addition to twenty warm-up problems, and another twelve post-test problems. There are even two additional "sudden death" problems, for a grand total of ninety-four problems altogether. It appears that presenting such problems is a labor of love for Khmelnsky.

Statistical buffs will enjoy the "Tables and Charts" section toward the end of the book. Using data culled from presenting these problems to players from beginners to grandmasters, Khmelnsky provides the reader a way to generate a "rating" for more than a dozen distinct rating categories. For example, there is an overall rating based on the cumulative score from the sixty problems. More useful, however, are the rating indicators for various subcategories:

- Middlegame
- Endgame
- Calculation
- Strategy
- Tactics
- Attack
- Counterattack
- Defense
- You are Better
- Equal
- You are Worse
- No Sacrifice
- Sacrifice

One's overall rating may or may not approximate one's actual USCF or FIDE rating; of course, a number of factors enter into the accuracy of this calculation. Regardless of the absolute accuracy, the relative differences among the various subcategory ratings can help guide the reader to identify those type of positions with which he or she seems to have more difficulty, and therefore where the reader might want to devote more study time.

Khmelnsky also provides a short list of "Training Tips and Recommendations" as well as ten tips for "What to Do When Facing a Much Higher Rated Player." Tip # 1: "Play slower than you normally would – (1) you may be making better decisions; (2) your opponent may get irritated and lose his composure; after all, in his/her mind, he/she has already won the game and made other plans." But Khmelnsky warns not to go overboard. "But please, don't drag on a completely hopeless position just so you can irritate your opponent. This is not appropriate."

Chess Exam: Matches Against Chess Legends, You vs. Bobby Fischer is quite an informative and entertaining book. Khmel'nitsky has gone to great lengths to identify challenging positions from Fischer's games and readers are likely to enjoy the opportunity to review the relevant portions of these games. The various statistical analyses are icing on the cake to rating-crazed chess fans.

There is a bit of an excess in self-advertising in the book, for other of Khmel'nitsky's works, but the reader can readily overlook this. Just when you may have thought that nothing more could be written about Fischer's games, the author has found another way to examine the beauty and depth of his games, from both sides of the board. Particularly for active tournament players, this book is an excellent path to self-analysis.

[Order](#) *Chess Exam: Matches against Chess Legends,
You vs. Bobby Fischer*
by Igor Khmel'nitsky

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