

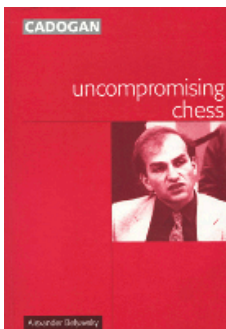


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Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [ChessCafe.com 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.com](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

Warrior to the Bone

Uncompromising Chess, GM Alexander Beliavsky, 1998 Cadogan, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 192pp., \$18.95

The annotated game is the basic building block of chess literature. Put a collection of games together, and you can build a great variety of structures: a tournament report, a survey of opening theory, a treatise on positional play, the story of a chessplayer's life.

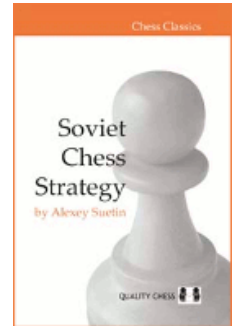
In recent years we have been blessed with a number of fine game collections by GMs who have found ways to make the form express their distinctive chess personalities. For example, Polugaevsky made his *Grandmaster Achievement* tell the story of his passionate obsession with his pet Sicilian variations. And of course everyone likes Shirov's *Fire on Board*, which captures the liveliness of Shirov's style even in the parts that follow the conventional autobiographical format.



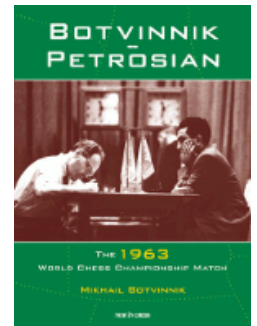
Alexander Beliavsky

There's every reason to expect Alexander Beliavsky's new book *Uncompromising Chess* to exhibit many of the same virtues as Shirov's: plenty of tactical fireworks further illuminated by the analysis of the strong grandmaster who created them. For twenty-five years Beliavsky has been one of the world's most formidable players. Born in Ukraine in 1953, he belongs

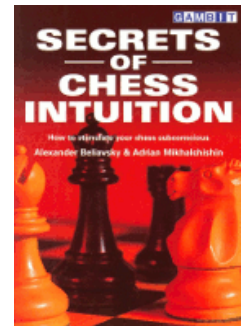
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by Alexander Beliavsky
& Adrian Mihalchishin

to the generation that reached maturity in the waning years of the Soviet chess empire: his contemporaries include Karpov and a number of talented countrymen such as Romanishin. Beliavsky won the World Junior Championship in 1973. In pursuit of the world title he's gone as far as the quarterfinals, losing a tense match to Kasparov in 1983. Most notably, he's won several very strong GM tournaments, including four Soviet championships.

Though his accomplishments are impressive by any standards, Beliavsky has often found himself just missing the short list of world-class players. He has a tendency to be somewhat streaky and erratic, a trait that often goes with an aggressive style demanding maximum tactical alertness. Sometimes Beliavsky will race off to a big lead in a major tournament, then fade in the stretch. He goes through periodic slumps. But when he's in top form, there are very few players as frighteningly powerful.

Uncompromising Chess features seventy-one fully annotated games, almost all of them victories against top-flight grandmasters. The book is the latest in the distinguished Cadogan series, which includes *Fire on Board* and books by Smyslov, Tal and Botvinnik. The layout is crisp and Ken Neat's translation reads fairly smoothly. Sometimes the word choices show signs of an overly literal rendering: in the notes to game sixty-seven, for example, we learn that having a Slovenian passport "saves a mass of time," and that 51 h3 is an "imperceptible but important subtlety." But this is a minor complaint; the vigor of Beliavsky's writing comes through well enough.

I imagine that any grandmaster who undertakes a project of this kind must sense the ghost of Mikhail Botvinnik hovering around the writing table. It was Botvinnik who set the standard for personal collections fifty years ago with the publication of his *Selected Games*. Perhaps Beliavsky, who tends to be a traditionalist, feels this influence more acutely than most. He writes with a lighter touch than Botvinnik, but there is no doubt that Beliavsky has taken the master's example to heart, making sure that his notes are thorough and above all objective. Though there are no losses in this collection, we should not suppose for a moment that this is an exercise in vanity, in which the author pretends to have seen everything or to have deserved every point. Often Beliavsky acknowledges that a spectacular finish was possible only because his opponent overlooked a saving resource.

Selecting a game that's representative of Beliavsky's style is not a simple task. He gets more than his share of quick knockouts, but his wins against his super-GM peers tend more typically to be dramas in three acts: topical theoretical duels, double-edged middlegames, arduous endgames. Perhaps the hallmark of Beliavsky's style is simply the willingness to do whatever has to be done to score the full point. One of my favorite examples is this engrossing Groningen 1993 battle with Shirov:

Belyavsky-Shirov

Groningen 1993

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Bf4 e5 8 Bg5 a6 9 Na3 b5 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Nd5 f5 12 Bd3 Be6 13 Qh5 Rg8 14 g3 Nd4 15 c3 fxe4 16 Bxe4 Bg4 17 Qxh7 Rg7 18 Qh6 Nf3+ 19 Ke2 Ng5+ 20 f3 Nxe4 21 fxg4 Qc8 22 Qe3 Qxg4+ 23 Qf3 Qxf3+ 24 Kxf3 f5 25 Nc2 Kf7 26 Nce3 Ke6 27 Nxf5 Ng5+ 28 Kg4 Rf7 29 Rhf1 Ne4 30 Rad1 Raa7 31 Nde3 Rad7 32 Kf3 d5 33 g4 Bc5 34 h4 Nf6 35 Rde1 b4 36 Re2 bxc3 37 bxc3 Bxe3 38 Rxe3 Ne4 39 Kg2 Rc7 40 Rb1 Rb7 41 Rb3 Nd2 42 Rxb7 Rxb7 43 Re2 Nb1 44 Rc2 Na3 45 Rf2 Nb1 46 g5 Nxc3 47 g6 Rd7 48 g7 Kf7 49 h5 Kg8 50 h6 Kh7 51 Ne3 1-0

Beliavsky's notes on this game take up seven full columns, too much to reproduce in full even in this expansive medium. In addition to the diagram captions, taken from the book, I will mention a few high points. On moves eleven through eighteen, a healthy dose of current Sveshnikov theory, including some analysis of Sveshnikov's own recommendation, 14...Rg5. A very detailed discussion of the alternatives to moves twenty-five and thirty, just after the transition to the endgame. A note explaining that 46 h5 would have been more accurate than g5, and that the outcome might have been in

doubt had Shirov tried 47...Ne4 48 g7 Nf6! 49 Kh3 Ng8! 50 h5 Rc7 51 Kg4 Rc1!

Most of the games in *Uncompromising Chess* get comparably full treatment; so while instruction may not be the main purpose of the book, I don't think you will be disappointed if you pick it up hoping to learn something. If you like sharp openings, for example, you will find several lucid overviews of current grandmaster practice, in variations ranging from topical Slavs and QGDs to less trodden paths such as the Scotch and the Winawer Gambit. Beliavsky is particularly good, I think, at explaining which features of a given position are the essential ones, for example what a player needs to think about when formulating a plan in the early middlegame.

Beliavsky has a distinctive world-view, which colors his annotations in an interesting way. It is well known that in contrast to players like Karpov, who like to be fully in control, Beliavsky prefers to see chess as an inherently risky enterprise. Reading this book, it becomes evident that Beliavsky carries his risk-taking philosophy almost to the point of fatalism. He quotes with approval Napoleon's motto, "We will engage in battle and then we will see." He thinks even grandmasters delude themselves when they suppose that the outcome of a game is entirely in their hands. So Beliavsky stoically accepts imperfections and strokes of blind luck as the natural by-products of any tense struggle.

The psychological acuity that makes Beliavsky a tough competitor also serves him very well when he turns to the task of autobiography. In *Uncompromising Chess* he tells the story of his chessplaying life in a subtle and, I think, very compelling way.

Perhaps Beliavsky's account is best appreciated for what is not. Anyone who has read a few Soviet chess biographies must have noticed a certain predictable boilerplate approach to the narrative part of the enterprise: The stern but kindly mentor at the Young Pioneer Palace. The awe and excitement the young upstart feels in his first encounter with the celebrated local master, who once drew a match with Bogatyrchuk. After a setback, the obligatory period of scorching self-criticism. After a victory, the resolute quest for ever mightier achievements...

I don't mean to suggest that there's anything wrong with ambition and hard work, only that such unrelenting exhibitions of square-jawed heroism can have a stupefying effect on the reader, somewhat like that of corporate mission statements. After too much of this, one longs for a spicy anecdote, a personal revelation, a flight of fancy, even a good rant.

A few Soviet-bred GMs have managed to flout the orthodox literary conventions, most memorably Tal in his digressive and irreverent account of the first Botvinnik match. And I'm happy to report that Beliavsky has chosen to follow Tal's antiheroic example rather than haul out the old reliable boilerplate. In *Uncompromising Chess* you will find no thunderous chapter headings like "Storming the Fortress" and "Scaling the Heights": just one game after another with personal and chessic insights flowing naturally from context and the author's passing moods.

The most enjoyable passages are the deftly drawn portraits of his fellow grandmasters. Beliavsky's interest in the role of personality in chess clearly goes far beyond the practical value of assembling psychological profiles: he really wants to know how all the great players manage to summon the strength of character one needs to play at the highest level. He thinks Kasparov's most distinctive trait is tremendous mental stamina, especially his capacity to work between tournaments. Karpov he sees as a natural-born gamester who could just as easily have excelled at Parcheesi or banking. Speculating about the secrets of chess longevity, he contrasts Korchnoi's passion with Smyslov's serene detachment. I know that this is all familiar territory, but I feel certain that reading Beliavsky will give you a fresh and interesting view of it.

While Beliavsky on Smyslov is full of warmth and generous appreciation, Beliavsky on Beliavsky tends to be modest and self-critical. In particular he

is always candid about the rigors of the professional life. I was a little surprised to learn that even for a player with his credentials, the loss of a few dozen rating points can make the difference between Category XVI invitations and banishment to the chancier and less rewarding world of the Open circuit. This actually happened to Beliavsky in 1996, when his FIDE rating had temporarily dipped to 2610. A sign of his resilience is that he was able to work his way back up to 2710 in the January 1998 list.

Recalling his stint working as a second to Kasparov in 1993, Beliavsky makes a characteristically self-deprecating observation: "The help that I rendered him was insignificant, since even in my best state I am ill-suited for training work, for the reason that I am able to generate serious chess ideas only when I achieve a high degree of concentration, and for me this is possible only during a tournament game."

This passage may raise a few eyebrows among those who have heard that massive opening preparation is one of Beliavsky's main strengths. But it is quite consistent with the tone of the book: Beliavsky repeatedly takes care to draw distinctions between the things he has to do and the things he really lives for. So like any other GM he'll sift through gigantic databases, but he misses the old days with his teacher Boleslavsky, when opening analysis was more of a quest for truth.

Of course we are always entitled to a measure of skepticism. Beliavsky, in his capacity as autobiographer, must be aware of the fact that idealism generally makes a better impression than pragmatism. In his case, however, the professed idealism comes with a certain amount of hard evidence: more than once his maximalist aspirations have led him to throw away a first-place finish rather than coast to victory with a quick draw.

The foreword to *Uncompromising Chess* ends with a quotation from the Stoic Roman philosopher Seneca. In many books we may dismiss such things as mere literary flourishes, but Beliavsky demands to be taken more seriously than that. Chess journalists like to describe Beliavsky as a "fighter" or "warrior" mainly, I suppose, because when he sits down to play, crowds of animated spectators will soon gather around the board. Reading his book one comes to understand that these are not mere epithets: Beliavsky really is a warrior right down to the bone, decorously respectful toward his comrades in arms, ready to cast a cold eye on momentary changes in fortune. For me it is this quality above all that makes *Uncompromising Chess* a book worth reading and worth keeping.

Order [Uncompromising Chess](#)

by Alexander Beliavsky

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