



COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree



Footnotes to History

Conspiracy theories are generally not well regarded and especially in the Netherlands they are considered the lowest form of mental life. “So you think there is a conspiracy?” is an almost guaranteed conversation-stopper to diffuse criticism. No decent Dutchman wants to be seen as a conspiracy theorist, as if conspiracies don't exist in real life. But they do.

Certainly not to end an interesting discussion, I must say that I was not quite convinced by Soltis' two articles in the Skittles Room about the supposed “Treachery in Zürich”, but before I come to that I'd like to go into two other cases, to show my credentials as a conspiracy theorist.

A lot has been written on the pages of ChessCafe.com about the games between Keres and Botvinnik in the World Championship tournament, The Hague-Moscow 1948. Did Keres play deliberately below his best to lose his first four games against Botvinnik and if so, can this be ascertained from the game scores?

Larry Evans tried to prove so in the October 1998 issue of *Chess Life* and he has received a lot of criticism for it. Of course it is always difficult to find out if a mistake is deliberate or just a mistake. Even the greatest players make grave mistakes; they blunder pieces and can even overlook a mate



The Chess Cafe

E-mail Newsletter

Each week, as a service to thousands of our readers, we send out an e-mail newsletter, *This Week at The Chess Cafe*.

To receive this *free* weekly update, type in your email address and click Subscribe.

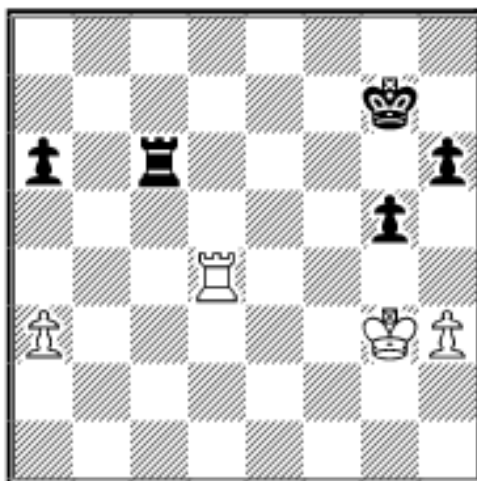
That's all there is to it! And, we do not make this list available to anyone else.



in one occasionally. But some mistakes they do not make. Both beginners and top players can hang pieces, but beginners can commit strategic howlers that a top player never would, just because the move wouldn't even occur to him.

Contrary to Yasser Seirawan, who is on record stating that these four games between Keres and Botvinnik prove nothing in themselves, I think that Evans was right and that he indeed managed to indicate moves played by Keres that were not just mistakes, but moves of the kind that would never occur to Keres, unless he was looking for mistakes to make.

Here I want to present the case that seems most convincing to me.



Keres-Botvinnik after Black's 49th move.

It was their third game, which had been adjourned after Black's 42nd move. Black's last move had been **49...Rc7-c6**, which shows that 50...Rc3+ is

not a threat here.

In the diagram, White has an easy draw with 50. Ra4. In the tournament book the meticulous Euwe just states so, without giving a variation to prove it. Obviously Euwe found this unnecessary, for in fact after 50. Ra4 Black can do nothing to improve his position. Later Smyslov and Levenfish in their book on rook endgames did give a line to illustrate this: 50. Ra4 Kf6 51. Ra5 Ke6 52. h4 gxh4+ 53.

Kxh4 Kd7 54. Kg3 Rf6 55. a4 Kc7 56. Rh5.

They also indicated that White could reach a draw with 50. h4, though a less trivial one: 50...Rc3+ 51. Kg4 gxh4 52. Kxh4 Rxa3 53. Rd6 with a theoretical draw. I think that just passing, were it allowed in chess, would also be good enough for a draw.

But what would we think of a player who, in the diagrammed position, would hit on the following defensive plan: a3-a4 followed by Rd4-d3-a3? Who would even think of this idiotic plan, putting his healthy Rook into the most passive position? Any pupil of the Botvinnik school would be fired immediately because of a hopeless lack of talent if he even hinted at such a plan.

In fact this is what Keres played: **50. a3-a4 Kg7-g6 51. h3-h4 Kg6-h5 52. h4xg5 h6xg5** (the intermezzo of two pawn moves masks the silliness of White's plan a bit) **53. Rd4-d3 Rc6-c4 54. Rd3-a3 a6-a5** and Black duly won.

White's rook maneuver strikes me as the equivalent of a perfectly healthy man crawling into a coffin and then closing the lid. Keres was a great endgame player. Would he do such a thing? You cannot call it a mistake. Mistakes happen, but this maneuver wouldn't even occur to him in normal circumstances. I think I convinced Yasser, but as it was at his birthday party, he may have felt obliged to humour me.

Another case of obvious (to me at least) mischief has attracted little attention outside the Netherlands.

The Interpolis Tournament, Tilburg 1979. Before the last round, Karpov was leading, half a point ahead of Romanishin. In the last round there was

Karpov-Smyslov and Romanishin-Spassky. So, if Romanishin would draw or lose, a draw would suit Karpov fine, but otherwise Karpov would need a win to be first alone.

After the opening, Karpov got a nice long-term advantage: more space, two Bishops. Then he and Smyslov started marking time, moving pieces to and fro without anything of importance happening.

Then something very unusual was noticed. Karpov had left the board, the playing hall and, as it turned out, even the building. He kept away for about three quarters of an hour. Later one of the organisers divulged that he had accompanied Karpov to a bank office to settle some pressing financial matters.

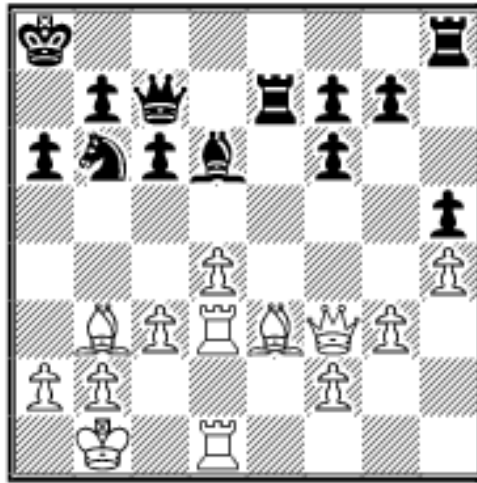
At the time Karpov came back to his game, Romanishin was a good Pawn up against Spassky. After that in Karpov-Smyslov some real chess moves had to be played and Smyslov quickly collapsed.

Here's the game. Have a good look at Black's Knight maneuvers.

White: Karpov - Black: Smyslov Tilburg 1979

**1.e2-e4 c7-c6 2.d2-d4 d7-d5 3.Nb1-d2 d5xe4
4.Nd2xe4 Ng8-f6 5.Ne4xf6+ e7xf6 6.c2-c3 Bf8-d6
7.Bf1-d3 Qd8-c7 8.Ng1-e2 Bc8-g4 9.Bc1-e3 Nb8-d7
10.Qd1-d2 Bg4xe2 11.Qd2xe2 0-0-0 12.0-0-0
Kc8-b8 13.Kc1-b1 Nd7-b6 14.g2-g3 Kb8-a8
15.Qe2-f3 Nb6-d5 16.Be3-c1 Nd5-e7 17.Bd3-c4
Ne7-c8 18.Rh1-e1 h7-h6 19.h2-h4 h6-h5 20.Bc4-**

**b3 a7-a6 21.Re1-e2 Rd8-d7 22.Re2-d2 Rd7-e7
23.Rd2-d3 Nc8-b6 24.Bc1-e3 Nb6-c8 25.Bb3-a4
Nc8-b6 26.Ba4-b3**



**26...Nb6-c8 27.a2-a3
Nc8-b6 28.Qf3-f5 Qc7-
c8 29.Qf5-f3 Qc8-g4
30.Qf3xg4 h5xg4
31.c3-c4 Nb6-d7 32.c4-
c5 Bd6-c7 33.d4-d5
c6xd5 34.Bb3xd5 Nd7-
e5 35.Rd3-d4 f6-f5
36.Bd5-g2 Rh8-c8
37.b2-b4 g7-g6 38.Be3-
g5 Re7-e8 39.Rd4-d5 Bc7-b8 40.Kb1-c2 Ne5-c6**
Adjourned and then resigned by Black.

Ah, the good old days when the time schedule was so relaxed that players could take a time out during their game and visit their bank. Seriously though, not many players would have been able to get away with it. In Karpov's case the arbiters decided that this was not of their business.

And also, who would be so confident that the right result would come, that in the decisive last round he would afford to leave the building for three-quarters of an hour, his clock running? Not many, I think.

But opinions differ. After I had suggested, in a Dutch magazine, that Karpov and Smyslov had agreed to a draw if Romanishin drew, but to a win for Karpov if Romanishin threatened to win. I was sternly reprimanded by Donner, who found that

nothing was proven except my devious character.

Having shown that I am not an apologist for all things Soviet, I now return to Soltis' articles.

Based on a recent article by David Bronstein in the Russian magazine *64*, Soltis discusses what went on behind the scenes of the candidates tournament played in Zürich and Neuhausen in 1953.

It has been amply shown that Soviet political officials showed great interest in chess and that Soviet chess was subordinate to political decisions. That this would happen too in Zürich 1953 would be no surprise.

Soltis writes: “The leadership of the Soviet delegation was a ‘troika’ consisting of Dmitry Postnikov, the deputy chairman of the Soviet Sports Committee, ‘his deputy’ - a KGB officer named Moshintsev, and Grandmaster Igor Bondarevsky, who, Bronstein added, held a position in both ‘organs’.

According to Bronstein, the troika repeatedly emphasized to the Soviet players that ‘no way, no how could Reshevsky be allowed to advance.’”

This sounds quite credible. On the other hand, stopping Reshevsky was a task that the formidable Soviet squad might well be expected to perform by honest sporting means. Probable evil intentions are one thing, actual happenings another.

Soltis uses very strong language. "Treachery", "the

dark age of Soviet chess", "secrets you might expect in a spy novel". I do not think that what actually happened bears out these strong words, even if we take everything that Bronstein wrote at face value.

What kind of mischief did happen? Not much during the first leg of the tournament. By the way, this so-called dark age of Soviet chess had its glories. A candidates tournament of fifteen players, meeting each other twice. I wish the world would see such thing again, but do not dare to hope for it.

The night before the 13th round Bronstein is ordered to beat Reshevsky with Black, a daunting task that Bronstein brings to a good end. Soltis: "So far, just a case of zealous concern by the troika." True enough. Ordering your man to win at all costs may be risky coaching, but when it works, it works.

Then during the second leg things become more serious. In the 24th round Keres as White plays the leader Smyslov, who has as many points as Reshevsky, but one more game to play.

The troika suggests to Keres that he should make a quick draw with Smyslov. But in fact, Keres makes a fight of it and loses.

Indeed, proposing a pre-arranged draw is not the height of sportsmanship. But team captains of many countries would propose the same in similar circumstances, or even propose to grant their main ace an uncontested win. Apparently this did not

happen and it has also to be noted that Keres felt free enough to refuse the proposed draw.

Then an episode follows that is difficult to understand. According to Bronstein, he was told that Geller was ordered to lose against him, to further hinder Reshevsky's chances. Bronstein does not want the win, decides to play for a draw, but in fact he loses.

Apparently Geller had received new orders from Bondarevsky, this time to beat Bronstein. However, again according to Bronstein, the other troika member Postnikov announced that Geller had been stubborn and would be punished. What should we make of this? I don't know. Anyway, Smyslov went his own way, beating Reshevsky and gaining a practically unbridgeable lead.

Then Bronstein plays Smyslov as White. He is ordered to make a quick draw and does so, reflecting: "Even if I win, nothing will change... Somebody else will compensate Smyslov with this half-point, or even 'gift' him with a full point."

Here Bronstein makes it seem as if Smyslov should regard a draw as a great gift. In fact Smyslov had gone through this formidable tournament with only one loss, against Kotov, when Smyslov in a slightly better position had tried an incorrect combination.

Bronstein also makes it seem as if Smyslov would have needed another "gift" in case Bronstein would have beaten him. In fact, with four more rounds to

go, even after a loss Smyslov would still have been a full point up to Bronstein and Reshevsky and he would have one extra game to play, for both Bronstein and Reshevsky would have a bye in these last four rounds. Bronstein certainly didn't give away much, drawing with Smyslov.

Smyslov finished the tournament two points ahead of Bronstein, Keres and Reshevsky, a truly marvelous victory. It cannot be maintained that "gifts" had anything to do with it, even when one considers this draw against Bronstein a gift, which I certainly don't. Whatever the troika had schemed, it had hardly influenced Smyslov's victory.

But, Soltis wonders, what if Reshevsky had played much better than he did, wouldn't there have been other acts of mischief?

Well, what can one say? What if all these great Soviet champions hadn't been good enough to beat the westerners fairly, what devious deeds would have been perpetrated then? But in fact they were good enough, then and now, with only a brief interregnum in 1972.

Soltis' suggestion that the history of Zürich 1953 should be re-written after Bronstein's account seems much exaggerated. To me Bronstein's article seems an interesting footnote to that history. But I can quite imagine that Smyslov was angry about it.

Soltis writes that Smyslov, in his reaction to Bronstein's article, "provides a new twist to the story of the 1950 Candidates tournament."

There Boleslasky had been leading, a point ahead of Bronstein, but had agreed to draw his last two games to give Bronstein a chance to catch up.

Soltis: “But in 64 Smyslov hints that Boleslavsky agreed to the draws after bowing to pressure from Veinstein, the head of a GULAG department and ‘an influential man in the country’. Veinstein wanted to make sure Botvinnik was defeated, and he knew Boleslavsky didn't have a good record against the world champion.”

What Smyslov hints at is not quite a new twist. Bronstein himself tells the same story in his book *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, written together with Tom Fürstenberg. After a conversation with Boris Veinstein Boleslavsky decided to slow down, says Bronstein.

So at least in this respect Smyslov and Bronstein agree, though Smyslov understandably has a less benign opinion of Veinstein's intervention.

In the last two rounds of Budapest 1950 Boleslavsky drew with black against Kotov and with white against Stahlberg.

Could he have done better had he not promised to slow down? Kotov, as White, would not be easy to beat under any circumstances. On the other hand, Ståhlberg seemed tired during the second leg of the tournament, having scored only 2½ points out of his last 8 games.

As White, Boleslavsky was quite strong, having

scored 6 out of 8. It seems to me that Boleslavsky was certainly giving away something when he did not try to beat Ståhlberg and to gain an unshared first place.

Of course one can never tell, but contrary to Zürich 1953, Budapest 1950 might really have produced a different challenger had there been no intervention from Veinstein.

Copyright 2002 Hans Ree. All Rights Reserved.



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

Copyright 2002 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.
"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.