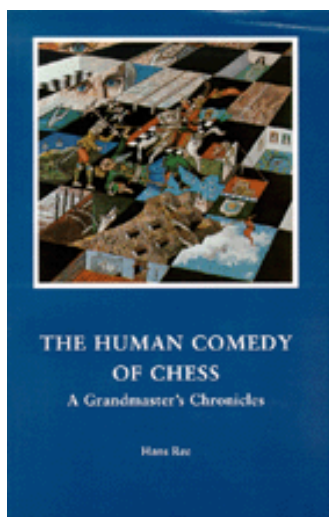




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy
of Chess*

by Hans Ree

Youthful Sin

In the chess bookshop I found a small book in Dutch with the intriguing title *Smerig Spel?* (*Dirty Game?*) and I was a bit disappointed to see that it was written by Johan Krajenbrink, who is a well-known Dutch draughts player. So it wasn't about chess. When I put it back the friendly bookseller told me that he had a few damaged copies that I could get for free. "It's not about chess, but there are a few tricks in it with universal value," he said grinning.

Indeed, I found that tricksters in draughts and chess had much in common. For instance, according to the laws of chess a pawn on h2 needs at least five moves to promote, but clever blitz players have often done it quicker by putting the pawn on the right moment somewhere between two squares. h2-h4-h5½-h7 takes only three steps. Apparently draughts players know the same trick, for Krajenbrink confesses that once he won a blitz game by promoting one of his men a move too early in this way. His honest excuse is that he needed the point dearly.

A subject not treated in his book is that of buying, selling or just giving away full points, but I doubt very much if the world of draughts is clean in this respect. The practise is so endemic in practically all sports that draughts can hardly be an exception.

Personally I never did it and though I certainly don't regret this, it sometimes gave me the embarrassing feeling that I wasn't a real pro at all, but only a freeloader that posed as one. As I have written before, the incorruptible must appear unbearable to those who in a tough struggle for life are forced to compromise with virtue.

Rather to my surprise I found that even the great fighter Viktor Korchnoi has given and taken free points, though it was in a very distant past.

In the August issue of the British monthly *Chess* there was a report by Vladimir Barsky on a lecture that Kortchnoi gave at the Moscow Jewish Community Center. After the lecture there were questions and answers.

A chess fan from Tiraspol asked: "Do you remember Anatoly Lutikov? Have you ever played classical games against him, and if yes, where? He spoke well of you. He ended his career in Moldova, regrettably, by hitting the bottle."

An innocent question to which it would have been easy to give an innocent answer, but Kortchnoi, always outspoken, answered: "Have I played classical chess with

him? He was virtually the only chess player I had negotiated a couple of games with. Once I needed a win and won. The next time he had to win. The King's Gambit had arisen (I was playing Black). Later Svidler told me that I had very good winning chances. I disappointed him by saying: Sorry, but I had to lose."

About Lutikov's love of the bottle Kortchnoi said: "There were quite a few in the chess world who had a sober outlook on life; but while taking this sober look at the world they could not help but start drinking."

I looked in my database for the game Kortchnoi mentioned and I suppose this is it.

Lutikov-Kortchnoi, Semi-finals, Russian championship, Leningrad 1951

1. e2-e4 e7-e5 2. f2-f4 e5xf4 3. Ng1-f3 Bf8-e7 4. Bf1-c4 Ng8-f6 5. Nb1-c3 Nf6xe4 6. Bc4xf7+ Ke8xf7 7. Nf3-e5+ Kf7-e6 8. Nc3xe4 d7-d5 9. Qd1-g4+ Ke6xe5 10. d2-d4+ Ke5xd4



It is well-known that Kortchnoi, especially in his youth, liked to grab material, but this is a bit extreme.

11. c2-c3+ Kd4-e5 12. Bc1xf4+ Ke5xe4 13. Qg4-f3+ Ke4-f5 14. Bf4xc7+ Kf5-g6 15. Bc7xd8 Rh8xd8 16. 0-0 Nb8-c6 17. Qf3-g3+ Kg6-h6 18. Rf1-f7 g7-g5 19. h2-h4 Rd8-g8 20. Ra1-f1 Bc8-e6 21. h4xg5+ Rg8xg5 22. Qg3-h4+ Rg5-h5 23. Rf1-f6+ Black resigned.

At least they made a spectacle of it and one can understand that about fifty years later Peter Svidler found it amusing to analyse the game.

Kortchnoi must have been 19 or 20 years old when he played this game. I don't think this little sin of his youth will damage his reputation as a knight without fear or blame.

In July of this year Viktor the Indefatigable won an open tournament in Quebec. It wasn't a very strong tournament, but on the other hand it was already the third tournament that Kortchnoi had won this year, after the Beer Shiva rapid tournament and the György Marx Memorial in Hungary. In the Rilton Cup tournament in Stockholm he finished a half-point behind the winners Akesson and de Firmian, which proves that at the age of 73 you can't win them all.

Here is a nice game from the Quebec tournament, against the Canadian IM Jean Hébert. Kortchnoi's reputation as a pawn-grabber is very one-sided. What he always liked to do was to unbalance the game and at appropriate times he is just as willing to shed material as to grab it.

Hébert-Kortchnoi, Quebec Open, Montreal 2004

1. Ng1-f3 Ng8-f6 2. c2-c4 b7-b6 3. d2-d4 e7-e6 4. e2-e3 Bf8-b4+ 5. Bc1-d2 Bb4-e7 6. Nb1-c3 Bc8-b7 7. Bf1-d3 d7-d5 8. c4xd5 e6xd5 9. Qd1-a4+ c7-c6 10. Nf3-e5 0-0 11. b2-b4 Be7-d6 12. f2-f4 White's set-up seems a bit illogical, as Ne5 and f2-f4 are usually connected with a kingside attack, not with play on the queen's wing with Qa4 and b2-b4. Kortchnoi now takes strong measures to punish White.

12...b6-b5 13. Qa4-b3 a7-a5 14. b4xa5 b5-b4 15. Nc3-e2 Nb8-a6 Here White can win a second and even a third pawn with 16. Bxa6 Bxa6 17. Nxc6 Qd7 18. Nxb4, but this would lead to his doom quickly.

16. Ra1-c1 c6-c5 But now White has to accept the pawn sacrifice, as otherwise Black would be clearly better.

17. Bd3xa6 Bb7xa6 18. Ne5-c6 Here and also at the following moves, White has a very difficult choice. After 18. dxc5 Bxe5 19. fxe5 both 19...Ne4 and 19...Ng4 would give Black a strong attack.

18...Qd8-d7 19. d4xc5 Ba6xe2 20. Ke1xe2 Also after 20. cxd6 Qg4 Black has an attack, though the position would remain quite unclear, at least to me.



20...Bd6xf4 21. Qb3xb4 Or 21. Nd4 Be5, again with a dangerous attack.

21...Qd7xc6 22. Qb4xf4 d5-d4 23. e3xd4 Qc6xg2+ 24. Ke2-d3 Qg2-g6+ 25. Kd3-c4 Nf6-e4 26. Bd2-b4 At first I thought that White could still put up resistance with 26. d5, but then a newspaper reader (Ardjan Langedijk from *New in Chess*) pointed out 26. d5 Nxc5 27. Kxc5 Qd3 and Black wins.

26...Qg6-a6+ 27. Kc4-b3 Qa6-d3+ 28. Kb3-b2 After 28. Ka4 Rfb8 Black threatens both 29...Qb5+ and 29...Rxa5+ and mate.

28...Rf8-b8 29. Rh1-d1 He resigns himself to his fate. After 29. a3 Black would win with 29...Qxd4+ 30. Kc2 Rxb4 31. axb4 Dc3+

29...Rb8xb4+ 30. Kb2-a1 Qd3-e2 31. Rc1-b1 Ne4-c3 31...Qxa2+ was mate in two, but this is good enough. White resigned.

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