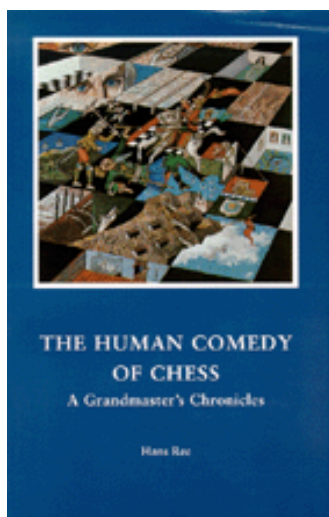




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy
of Chess*

by Hans Ree

Memories at Corus

Habitual visitors of the Corus tournament were either shocked or delighted by the spectacular change of scenery. In former years the playing hall had been decorated with unassuming billboards of small auxiliary local sponsors, but this time the walls were covered with an enormous mind-blowing panorama of stars, cosmonauts, deep-sea divers and big balloons in the form of chess pieces.

On the day of the opening ceremony I went to sit at one of the playing tables, to simulate the experience of the players. I looked at the psychedelic panorama, sniffed the smell of fresh paint and glue, and suddenly I was reminded of the old chess café that I used to visit almost every day during the sixties, and of Gerrit Lakmaker, who was also known as Gerrit the dancer, Gerrit the glue-sniffer or just crazy Gerrit.

He was a prominent member of the crowd of artists and artist-followers that used to meet in the cafés near the Leidseplein square in Amsterdam, where my chess café was located also. Occasionally Gerrit came to our place, for he loved chess and was a competent player. His visits were allowed, but not really welcome, for he was the glue-sniffer and one smelled it heavily. When he tried to become a member of VAS, one of the oldest Dutch chess clubs and at the time the strongest of the country, he was refused membership after some heart-breaking internal discussions, for it is cruel to deny entrance to a true chess lover.

All this came back to me and I felt that Gerrit had been vindicated now that the smell of glue had been introduced to the playing hall of the chess élite. Only briefly, though. After one or two rounds the smell was gone, or maybe I had become used to it.

One of the dominating colors of the decor is red and this inspired Tom Bottema, the chief of the press service, to a discourse on color psychology. Tom knows his journalists, and what kind of stories they like to hear.

He explained the indeed very low percentage of draws during the first half of the tournament by the predominance of red, which according to color psychologists stimulates aggression. Especially the big red curtain facing those who were playing with white, would ensure a sharp opening struggle.

Tom made sure to emphasize that this was only his personal opinion and that it had not been the intention of the organisers to force aggression on the players by making them see red. This was wise, for some might not like it to be used as

guinea pigs in an experiment in color psychology.

One thing Tom failed to mention was that the big balloons painted on the walls were not red, but of a dazzling orange. Color psychology has something to tell us about orange too. While red is the color of noble and forceful emotion, orange stands for hysterics; for the vacuous excitement of the bawler.

American psychologists found that young children with severe behavioral disturbances showed marked improvement when orange colors in their surroundings were replaced by civilised blue. One psychologist, Darrell Townsend, even defined an 'orange personality type'. The orange personality likes noise, lacks concentration and has a pathological need for immediate gratification. All through his life he acts as a spoiled child. At the Corus tournament we saw plenty of the noble red, but sometimes hysterical orange took over.

I am at the age that any chess event tends to remind me of a chess event from the past, in this case the tournament in Hastings, 1981/82. This traditional tournament was stronger than it is nowadays, but no where near as strong anymore as in its glory years, otherwise I wouldn't have been invited.

Neither the playing hall nor our lodgings could be called glorious. My tiny hotel room had an electrical heater that had to be fed with coins and even then proved powerless against the winter temperatures. Usually the players were sitting downstairs in a communal room where it was at least warm.

I have sad memories of that tournament, not only because I played badly, but also because during that period the Dutch IM Johan Barendregt, who had been a good friend, was dying.

There was however, one funny scene. We were watching a darts tournament on TV in the communal room and heard what the players were earning over the year. This caused great consternation to Laszlo Szabo who stood from his chair, shouting agitatedly: "What are we doing here? We should throw darts!" In fact the dart players were earning a lot less than they do now, but it was already enough to make a great player like Szabo jealous.

Well, if he judges chess on the basis of the income it generates, the average chess professional can always feel jealous. At the Corus tournament I read a newspaper interview with Pieter Hopmans, one of the participants in group C. He is a professional poker player and told the interviewer that on an average day, consisting of four hours of play, his winnings on the internet were between 800 and 1,000 euros.

This year he intends to go on a year-long vacation trip around the world, together with his girlfriend. Yes, I suppose he can afford it, I thought jealously. No Dutch chess player, past or present, has ever even approached such earnings. Had I devoted my life to the wrong game, as Szabo had already claimed for all of us in 1981?

I think not, for pleasurable and exciting as an evening of poker can be, it cannot provide the intellectual satisfaction of chess.

The German GM Matthias Wahls, who last year changed his profession from chess to poker, readily admitted this, but, he went on to explain in the German magazine *Schach*, poker has something that chess is lacking: an abundance of amateurs with weak character and big ego who strongly over-estimate their playing strength and can be rifled by the pro's.

Beating the weakies day after day seems mind-numbing in the long run and maybe Wahls agrees, for apart from playing he has founded a poker academy.

As the events in the main group of Corus are well-covered on several websites, I will stay for awhile with group C, which in itself is quite a decent tournament with eight grandmasters, and where a chess amateur like Hopmans is an exception.

Just before the tournament one of the pro's, the Dutch IM Yge Visser, had good news for his friends: his problems as White against the Sicilian were solved, as he had come across the Van Duijn gambit. This gambit is called - at least in the Netherlands and Germany - after the Dutch political activist and writer Roel van Duijn, who has employed it regularly for almost fifty years.

Yge Visser - Ahmed Adly (Egypt)

Corus C

round 4

1. e2•e4 c7•c5 2. a2•a3 e7•e6 3. b2•b4 c5xb4 4. a3xb4 Bf8xb4 Roel was always happy when his opponents accepted the gambit this way. He liked White's strong center after 5. c3 and 6. d4

5. Bc1•b2 Ng8•f6 6. e4•e5 Nf6•d5 7. c2•c4 Nd5•e7 8. Nb1•a3 Nb8•c6 9. Na3•c2 Obviously Visser is not following Van Duijn, but the Russian Alexei Bezgodov, who wrote a book about the variation with 2. a3. I wouldn't like to spend two moves to commit my knight this early to c2, but in favor of the manoeuvre it can be said that it forces black's bishop to a5, where it stands worse than on b4.

9...Bb4•a5 10. Ng1•f3 In similar positions Bezgodov plays Qg4 first, which indeed seems more promising.

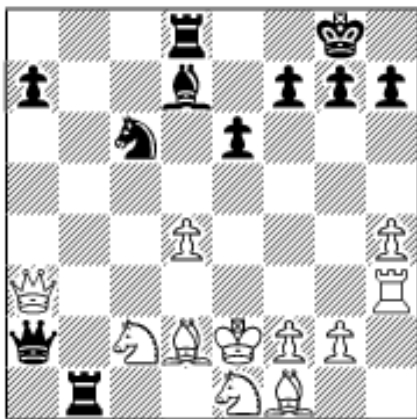
10...0•0 11. h2•h4 d7•d6 12. e5xd6 Qd8xd6 Now if White continues quietly he will have very little for his pawn, so he takes strong action.

13. Ra1xa5 Nc6xa5 14. Qd1•a1 Attacking a5 and g7.

14...Na5•b3 15. Qa1•a2 Nb3•c5 16. d2•d4 Qd6•a6 17. Qa2•a3 Nc5•a4 18. Bb2•c1 White's play is based on the awkward position of Black's queen and knight. Adly finds an interesting solution. He sacrifices a piece to take over the initiative.

18...Ne7•c6 19. c4•c5 b7•b5 20. c5xb6 Qa6•a5+ 21. Bc1•d2 Qa5xb6 22. Qa3xa4 Qb6•b1+ 23. Ke1•e2 Bc8•d7 Material is about equal, but White's pieces don't work well and his king is in danger.

24. Nf3•e1 Rf8•d8 25. Qa4•a3 Ra8•b8 26. Qa3•c1 Qb1•a2 27. Rh1•h3 Rb8•b1 28. Qc1•a3 White should have played 28. Ra3, after which the outcome would be still in doubt.



Now Black can decide the game by a nice combination.

28...Nc6xd4+ 29. Nc2xd4 Bd7•b5+ 30. Nd4xb5 Rd8xd2+ 31. Ke2•e3 Rb1xe1+ 32. Ke3•f3 Rd2xf2+ 33. Kf3•g3 Qa2xa3+ White resigned.

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