



Jan Timman in Malmö

I remember a photo of Mikhail Tal and Boris Spassky with a caption in which they were called the dinosaurs of chess. Dinosaurs are supposed to have died long ago. How old were Tal and Spassky when that picture was taken? Tal died in 1992 at the age of 55. Spassky was a few months younger than he. These dinosaurs cannot have been very old, but that's what I think now and probably not at the time when I saw the photo.

More than twenty years ago I read Mario Vargas Llosa's book *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*. One of its characters is a radio journalist who always refers to himself as being 50 years old, when a man is in his best years. At the time I found that funny, but now I think that the journalist was more or less right.

Someone who was not deceiving himself was the film-maker Luis Bunuel. Apparently in his old age he used to address strangers on the street, pointing out some old decrepit passer-by and saying: "You see that poor guy there? That's the film-maker Bunuel. Isn't it terrible? Only last year he was still walking upright."

The previous musings will explain the fact that I was quite pleased when a modern dinosaur, Jan Timman, won the 14th Sigeman & Co Tournament in Malmö, Sweden earlier this month. It was said that he had a guardian angel on his shoulders, escaping from dubious positions several times, but certainly his tactical alertness had something to do with these escapes also.

"Luck will come to those who know how to forge their luck, answered Alekhine energetically when a player complained to him about his bad luck in the tournament." I quote from memory, not knowing exactly where I once read this. The 'energetic answer' has a German ring to it, as in war movies where German officials are always energetically clicking heels, with tense muscles, ready for battle.

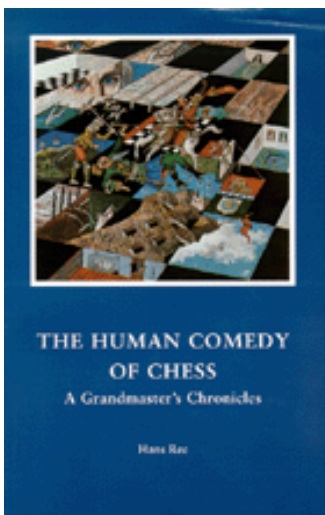
Here is one example of angelic guardianship, or rather, in the spirit of Alekhine, of the tactical resourcefulness of a man who knows how to forge his luck.

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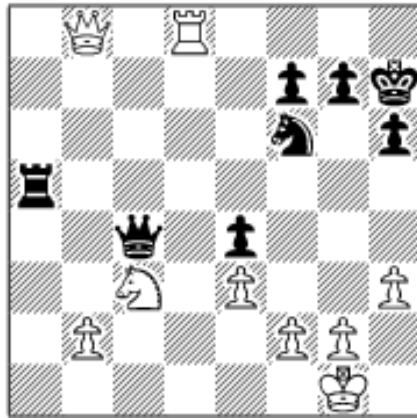
Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

The Human Comedy of Chess



by Hans Ree



This is from the third round, Khenkin - Timman after Black's 33rd move. Igor Khenkin is a pawn up with a good position, but here he has to be careful. 34. Qf4 would have prevented Black's counter attack, for after 34. Qf4 Ra1+ 35. Kh2 Qf1 36. Qf5+ it would be Black who is mated. However the game went **34. Rd8-c8? Ra5-a1+ 35. Kg1-h2 Qc4-f1** Suddenly White is lost; he has no defence against Black's attack.

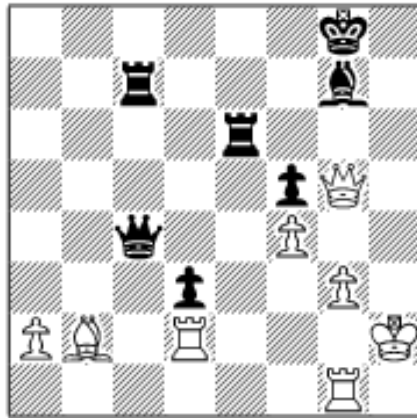
36. Rc8-h8+ Kh7-g6 37. Qb8-g3+ Kg6-f5 38.

Qg3-f4+ Kf5-g6 A repetition of moves, surely not for sadistic pleasure, but just to make the time control.

39. Qf4-g3+ Kg6-f5 40. Qg3-f4+ Kf5-e6 Black is safe and White is about to be mated. In desperation he sacrificed a rook and soon resigned.

41. Rh8-e8+ Nf6xe8 42. Qf4xe4+ Ke6-d7 43. Qe4-f5+ Kd7-e7 44. Qf5-c5+ Ne8-d6 45. e3-e4 Qf1-c4 46. Qc5-b6 Ke7-d7 47. f2-f3 f7-f5 48. Qb6-e3 f5xe4 49. f3xe4 Qc4-f1 White resigned.

Something similar happened two rounds later.



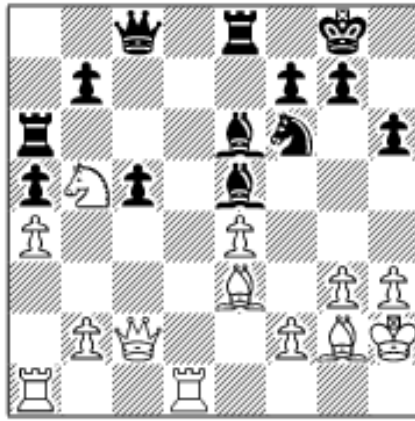
Cicak-Timman, after Black's 43rd move. With 44. Bxg7 Rxg7 45. Qd8+ Kh7 45. Qxd3 White could reach a rook ending with an extra pawn, but it would be a draw. Maybe he wanted more. The game went **44. Rg1-g2 Re6-h6+ 45. Kh2-g1 Qc4-e4** and here White was already in big trouble. He made another mistake and resigned after **46. Kg1-f2 Rh6-h1**

Not to suggest that Timman needed his angel in every game, I'll show his victory over Jonny Hector in which Timman, after a calm veteran's

opening, had a practically winning position already after 16 moves.

Timman - Hector, 6th round

1. Ng1-f3 d7-d5 2. g2-g3 Bc8-g4 3. Bf1-g2 Nb8-d7 4. c2-c4 e7-e6 5. c4xd5 e6xd5 6. 0-0 Bf8-d6 7. Qd1-b3 Nd7-b6 8. Nb1-c3 Ng8-f6 9. h2-h3 Bg4-d7 10. d2-d3 0-0 11. a2-a4 a7-a5 12. Bc1-e3 Ra8-a6 13. Be3-d4 Rf8-e8 14. e2-e4 d5xe4 15. Nf3-g5 Re8-f8 16. d3xe4 c7-c5 An ugly move, terribly weakening his queenside, but already there was no good defense against White's advance in the center. **17. Bd4-e3 h7-h6 18. Rf1-d1 Qd8-b8 19. Ng5-f3 Bd7-e6 20. Qb3-c2 Nb6-c4 21. Be3-c1 Nc4-e5 22. Nf3xe5 Bd6xe5 23. Bc1-e3 Qb8-c8 24. Kg1-h2 Rf8-e8 25. Nc3-b5**



25...Be5-b8 Resigning himself to his fate by giving a pawn that could be protected only by 25...b6, another ugly move that would destroy communication in Black's camp.

26. Qc2xc5 Qc8xc5 27. Be3xc5 Ra6-c6 28. Bc5-d4 Be6-b3 29. Rd1-e1 Rc6-c4 30. e4-e5 Nf6-d7 31. Ra1-a3 Bb3-c2 32. Bg2-d5 Rc4xa4 33. e5-e6 f7xe6 34. Re1xe6 Black resigned.

In the last two rounds Timman tied himself to the mast, like Ulysses with the Sirens, not to be seduced by the lure of real chess. One hand free to make a few perfunctory moves and sign the scoresheet at the earliest opportunity. Earlier he had already played a super-quick draw against Suat Atalik. On the good side it can be said that in the games he really played he made the fine score of 5½ out of 6.

And then, an old chessplayer has to be practical. Burning oneself out in every game may have a romantic appeal, but winning a tournament is a higher priority. Timman is 54 years old and he doesn't find it easy to play a nine-round tournament without a rest day. I had a look at the rating list to see how many players over 50 are among the top 100. There were only four, in order of rating: Anatoli Karpov, who has just turned 55, Robert Hübner (57), Alexander Beliavsky (52) and Jan Timman (54).

Nowadays Karpov plays mainly rapid tournaments and Hübner plays seldomly since he has found what he calls 'a decent profession' as a technical translator. The only dinosaurs from the top 100 who still compete in classical tournaments are Beliavsky and Timman.

But what about Viktor Kortchnoi, the indefatigable? He is just out of the top 100, but undoubtedly plans a come-back.

In his long and distinguished career Timman has won tournaments that were much stronger than the one in Malmö, Sweden the other hand, in the modern chessworld a tournament victory by a 54-year old is almost something for the Guinness Book of Records.

I thought about George Koltanowski, who in 1937 set a world record with a blindfold simul against 34 opponents. 48 years later he wrote in his book *In the Dark*: "I was 82 years old in September 1985. When I am 83, I would like to set a new record (crazy, what?) and play six boards simultaneously blindfold. It would set a record for an exhibition for an 83-year old. And continue each year... Think it can be arranged?"

Koltanowski was to live on till the year 2000, so he had the opportunity to set many new records in this way, which he duly did almost until his death at the age of 96.



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