



## C O L U M N I S T S

*The Kibitzer*  
Tim Harding

## Desert Island Chess Books

**THIS MONTH** The Kibitzer will leave opening theory behind for a while to consider a topic proposed recently by a reader: Desert Island Chess Books.

Gerald Grimsley, a subscriber to my *Chess Mail* magazine, got the ball rolling like this:

“I’ve been playing chess for about 30 years (both correspondence and OTB) and hover around the 2000 rating. Anyway, like many chess nuts, I have acquired a large chess library (about 500-600 titles, including all of the Informants). I have both old time classics and new items from Everyman/Gambit. Some books were very useful, others (especially opening monographs/booklets and the like) were not worth the paper they were printed on. You, of course know all about this.

“I think it would be a good topic for the Kibitzer column if you offered your own list of some of the most useful books a serious player might want, books that might actually help his/her game. Hopefully you could include both the classics and newly produced books. I realize that 10 ‘experts’ might have 10 different lists, but there are a few books that everybody would agree on, i.e., Zurich 1953 for example.

“I think that someone with your distinguished chess background could present a list that would make an interesting, perhaps useful (especially if some of these books are readily available), and maybe provocative read. This came to me because I was doing an Internet search to get such a ‘list’ and essentially came up with nothing.”

Last month I invited suggestions and a few readers recommended books that unfortunately I don’t have, so I could not include them in my ten. Extensive as my chess library is, it inevitably has a few gaps!

Here are a couple of the recommendations from others which may well be worthwhile.

Dr. Bernd Gräfrath (Germany) wrote:

“If I could only take one chess book to a desert island, it would have to be the *Oxford Companion to Chess* by Hooper and Whyld.”

Unfortunately this is one of the big gaps in my collection; I know of this book but I don’t own either edition and I never had a proper opportunity to study it. At the time it came out, most English publishers sent me books to review but in the case of Oxford their chess editor who knew me had left and somehow I was left off their review list. Apart from Informator, I actually buy almost no

new chess books. What money I have available for chess literature usually gets spent on classics and on correspondence chess publications.

However, Dr Gräfrath added: “if one is allowed to take several chess books, then the following should be among them (which is not only entertaining, but also great in a more general way): Raymond Smullyan, *Chess Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes*.

Indeed, Smullyan’s work was already known to me and one of the main decisions I had to make was which of two my castaway would bring: the Sherlock Holmes collection or the later *Chess Mysteries of the Arabian Nights*. More of this later in the article.

Here is a suggestion that I rejected, partly because I don’t think as highly of the book as the reader:

“My choice is *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Bronstein and Furstenburg. Even the appalling grammar is a delight.” - Bernard Hanison (England).

I agree with Bernard that there is some excellent material in this book, but the pages given to unannotated games by Bronstein are of no value to the majority of readers. They can get games without notes in a database if they really want them; the verbal explanations and main variations are what the majority of people want. A secondary reason for rejecting this suggestion is that our castaway will have another Bronstein book on his island.

Ned Wall agreed with Gerald Grimsley: “Bronstein's *Zurich 1953* would be an obvious choice.” Indeed, I think the Bronstein would be on most people’s list.

Mr Wall continued “...And one could do worse than a complete run of *British Chess Magazine* but some might think that's cheating.”

Indeed, it would be cheating! A bound volume of one year could be acceptable but not a complete set going back 100 years. Anyway, I decided that no periodicals would be brought.

Now it is time to establish the ground rules and my criteria for selection. Then I will announce my list and summarise the reasons for choosing them. The corner of my office floor will be very relieved afterwards that the weight of this big pile will be removed as the ten titles are returned to their rightful places on the shelves. I do not intend to quote examples from most of the books, as the column would soon become too long. It will do you, the reader, good to hunt these books down and read them cover to cover.

I guess that the Desert Island Discs concept is familiar to many readers. I don’t know if it’s been copied elsewhere but it started on BBC radio soon after World War II. Broadcaster Roy Plomley would invite a celebrity or other interesting person to talk a little about their lives and their favourite music. After Plomley retired, Michael Parkinson took over as interviewer.

This 30-minute programme had a standard format and excerpts from all the ten chosen discs were played. Our castaway will be allowed ten chess books instead of ten musical items.

In addition, the BBC castaway was allowed a copy of the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, plus one non-musical luxury. Instead of these, our castaway will be allowed to salvage from the wreck of his ship a chess set and a copy of

*Nunn's Chess Openings*, the nearest thing we have to a single-volume chess openings bible at present. (In former times, it would have been *MCO* or *Bilguers Handbuch*). I will also allow him a pen or pencil to scribble in the margin of his *NCO* any interesting analysis or "TNs" that he discovers while he is alone on the island with his mini chess library.

For the non-chess luxury, it is best that each reader makes his own private choice. The following are NOT allowed: computers of any kind (no electricity!), a Man (or Woman) Friday, boats or balloons or other means of escaping from the island or communicating with the outside world.

Maybe I will allow the castaway a large bottle of a very good whisky. When it is finished, he can put inside his chess-world-shattering message, re-cork the bottle and commit it to the waves. Some day, somebody may read the discovery he has made after a year alone on the desert island: "The Refutation of the Caro-Kann has been found. 1 e4 c6? 2 h4!!"

To return to our task in a sober frame of mind, I decided that the castaway needs a variety of books covering the whole scope of the game. Opening theory books would soon be extremely boring, and are usually for reference rather than readability; that's why I have allowed a comprehensive openings reference work ("NCO"). No other openings books will be considered, not even my own!

So the ten books will be drawn from the following categories:

- (a) Tournament book (annotated collection of games of one great event);
- (b) Grandmaster biography or game collection (3 titles in this category);
- (c) General game collection (covering high class play over a period);
- (d) Endgame studies (1 book); again ordinary endgame reference works would just be too tedious for our castaway.
- (e) Problems (1 book);
- (f) and (g) Books covering middle game strategy and tactics (1 of each)

plus one other book "hors category", as they say of mountains in the Tour de France cycle race. This is to allow for a book that demands inclusion even if it doesn't easily fit into those categories.

I found that I rapidly selected seven books, plus the dilemma over which Smullyan's book to choose in the problems category. Let's get these off the wrecked vessel and into Crusoe's island hut without further delay.

In category a, tournament book, comes *The Chess Struggle in Practice*,

subtitled “Lessons from the famous Zurich Candidates Tournament 1953” by David Bronstein. This is our castaway’s book one.

The version on my shelf is the 1980 Batsford edition in English descriptive notation (ISBN 0 7134 2496 6), an edition first published in 1978 in the USA by the David McKay Company Inc. It’s a large book: almost 500 pages, hard cover. It was based on the second Russian edition, translated by Oscar D. Freedman and edited after his death by Burt Hochberg. I am sure the work is available in numerous languages and editions but I cannot give you details. Most people would want an English algebraic edition, I guess, but I don’t have one.

Hochberg regrets in his introductory note that for economic reasons some elements of the Russian original are missing or simplified, notably the summaries of results of each round. However, the games and game notes are all there which is what really matters.

True, this tournament was played almost half a century ago and so in one respect it is a snapshot in time, especially with regard to the opening variations featured. However, this book is a classic and it would be hard to find a more recent top-class tournament covered half as well.

With the exception of Botvinnik, who was world champion so didn’t need to play in a candidates tournament, the whole world top was there: Euwe, Gligoric, Najdorf, Reshevsky, Stahlberg, Szabo and an army of Soviet greats: Averbakh, Boleslavsky, Geller, Keres, Kotov, Petrosian, the eventual winners Smyslov, Taimanov, and of course Bronstein himself who had tied Botvinnik in the title match two years earlier. Because there was an odd number of players, somebody had a bye each round. Everyone played each rival with both colours so there thirty rounds, twenty-eight games each: an exhausting schedule. At the end of the tournament which lasted more than a month, Smyslov had amassed 18 points; he was two points clear of Bronstein, Keres and Reshevsky. The first brilliancy prize, however, went to Kotov for his imaginative queen sacrifice against Averbakh, upon which Bronstein rightly heaps praise.



Here Kotov drove the white king out into the open by the incalculable 30...Qxh3+!! 31 Kxh3 Rh6+ 32 Kg4 Nf6+ 33 Kf5 but now he was short of time and decided to repeat some moves to make the time control and adjourn. Bronstein remarks that 33...Ng4 might have been best but Kotov “naturally does not want to ruin such a beautiful and unusual game with a careless move”.

The conclusion was: 33...Nd7 34 Rg5 Rf8+ 35 Kg4 Nf6+ 36 Kf5 Ng8+ 37 Kg4

Nf6+ 38 Kf5 Nxd5+ (taking a pawn avoids the danger of a draw by repetition) 39 Kg4 Nf6+ 40 Kf5 Ng8+ 41 Kg4 Nf6+ 42 Kf5 Ng8+ 43 Kg4 Bxg5! 44 Kxg5 Rf7! 45 Bh4 Rg6+ 46 Kh5 Rfg7 47 Bg5 Rxg5+ 48 Kh4 Nf6

49 Ng3 Rxg3 50 Qxd6 R3g6 51 Qb8+ Rg8 0-1.

Moving to our next category, grandmaster biographies or game collections, I was looking for a combination of entertainment and instructiveness. Many grandmasters have written collections of their games, or had books written about them. Some of these are very conscientiously written books with great analytical depth and insights into competitive chess at a high level: the books by Nunn, Speelman, Timman are among these. Others are shoddy or boring pieces of work, and even the books of games by Karpov and Kasparov do not appeal to me that much.

I actually had three books in this category which were more or less instantaneous choices. While I spent some time studying my shelves, looking for some reason to exclude one of these or replace them by another, my heart was not in it. This castaway would bring, as Books 2, 3 and 4:

*My 60 Memorable Games* by Bobby Fischer (hardly a surprise surely?); I would bring the 1969 Faber edition in English descriptive notation (ISBN 0 571 09312 4). The subsequent algebraic edition has of course been heavily criticised (notably by Edward Winter) and disowned by Fischer himself. Nevertheless, it is some cause of puzzlement to me that such vitriol has been heaped on the publisher (Batsford, under its previous owners) whereas the individual editor and typesetter responsible for the changes and mistakes in this edition have largely escaped personal attacks and have gone on to launch their own publishing business!

*The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal* by Mikhail Tal (1997 Cadogan edition, ISBN 1 85744 202 4) which was first published in descriptive notation by RHM in the United States. It only goes up to 1975 but is by far the best book on Tal, his character and vitality shine through in the combined interview/games format.

*World Champion at the Third Attempt* by Grigory Sanakoev (Gambit, ISBN 1 901983 11 0); also available in Russian and German. (If your German is as good as your English, then choose the German version edited by Harald Keilhack for Schachverlag Kania, because it is a hardback and has more crosstables, and the Gambit edition makes a few minor mistakes over players' names.)

Of course the editor of a magazine principally dealing with correspondence chess has to bring at least one CC book to the desert island, but I think that Sanakoev's autobiography would be of great value to any chess player. Indeed this was recognised by the Dvoretsky/Yusupov school who used many of the fascinatingly complex games analysed by the 12th Correspondence World Champion in exercises and lessons for their students.

When most grandmasters write, they produce a dry piece of technical analysis or, worse, splurge indigestible reams of variations on to the page (no Hübner books on my island, thank you!) or else the player's ego is just too much. With Fischer you have to tolerate this, but one book like that is enough, and Sanakoev (modest and self-effacing) is a good antidote. When he writes about chess, it is also an essay in philosophy and the practicalities of playing postal chess. This is just a beautiful book full of good advice and penetrating

insights. The games are very exciting, too.

Next, our castaway needs a general game collection that features high-class play over a reasonable period. There is not such a great choice here. I don't have the recent Soltis book that attempts to find the 100 greatest games, and from what I hear about it I would not like his approach or choice of games. Trying to score games mathematically seems to me an artificial method which is actually highly subjective while claiming to be the opposite. I am currently putting together a volume of 64 great correspondence games (for publication next year, I hope) and I decided against adopting any approach of that kind.

In the past, Tartakower and J. du Mont collected 500 games in one book, but of course the notes are slight and the book ends too long ago. The castaway needs something of this kind however and fortunately it is available: the Mammoth book of *The World's Greatest Chess Games*, edited by Graham Burgess, Dr John Nunn & John Emms (Robinson Publishing, ISBN 1-85487-876-X). This has 100 games from 1834 to 1997 and they are all worth playing through. Each begins with a note about the players and the game and ends with a few bullet points highlighting the lessons of the game. With 560 pages on fairly cheap paper for £9.99 stg. it represents excellent value, though that's hardly an issue for our castaway.

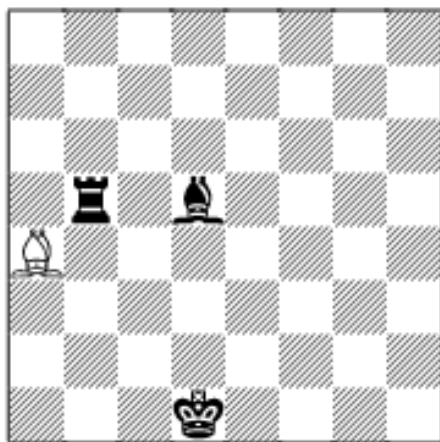
He needs some puzzles to test and entertain him now. For endgame studies, I went back to a favourite book I have owned since my teen years, *The Tactics of Endgames* by Jenő Bán (published in London by Pitman in 1963, in descriptive notation, before the days of ISBNs). This is a little hardback with a green cover; the original was in Hungarian.

Although John Roycroft later wrote a much more comprehensive book about studies, it was drier and difficult in places but the book by Bán is aimed at the practical player who doesn't know anything about studies and comes away knowing a lot. I got to hear of it when Assiac praised it in his column in the *New Statesman*, which used to come out on a Friday. My parents were keen on point-by-points (amateur steeplechasing horse races) because they lived in a farming village and if I was home from school on the Saturday, they would give me a pound to bet for the afternoon. If my horses lost, too bad, I didn't get another pound but if I studied the form carefully I might get two or three winners and come out a few pounds ahead. That's how I got the money to send off to B.H. Wood at Sutton Coldfield for this book the following Monday. I read and re-read it, and it also helped me win a few prizes in Assiac's puzzles because from time to time he used examples from the book!

An algebraic English edition of this book is long overdue in my opinion. Is the author still alive?

Now we come to the problem about chess problems. I never liked regular mate problems at all, and see even less point in them now that computers can solve them so quickly. A few months ago, Conrad Goodman emailed me asking for suggestions of problems he could use in prize competitions on his website - problems that computers couldn't solve! Immediately I thought of Raymond Smullyan, whose books came my way in the early 1980s when they

were published by Hutchinson. Smullyan was (is?) an American professor of philosophy and his problems are of the retrograde analysis variety: that is, you have to make deductions about what has already happened rather than what happens next (or you may have to work out what happened before you can see what must happen next). These are brilliant and highly original and amusing and testing books. Both begin with simple examples of what retro-analysis is about before proceeding to progressively more complex examples.



The problem is posed with this question: “The white king, Haroun al Rashid, has made himself invisible. Where is he?”

In my own words, not the author’s, here is how you go about solving this problem. White is in check but the piece giving check (the a4-bishop) cannot have made the last, checking, move. Therefore the white king must have moved off the a4-d1 diagonal to discover check. Since kings cannot be on adjacent squares, the white king must have just moved from b3, and

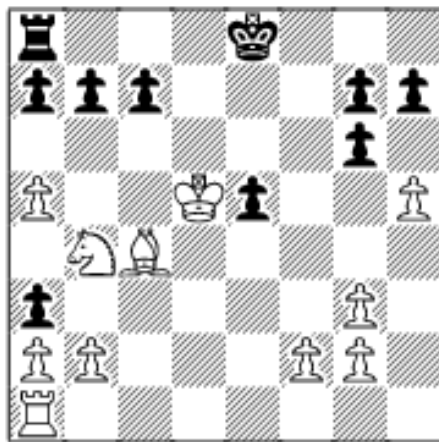
so can now only be on either a3 or c3, but which?

To answer this, consider that apparently on b3 the white king was in check from both rook and bishop which is, at first thought, impossible. However, there is a way! If white had a pawn on c2 and black had a pawn on b4, Black (two moves ago) brought his bishop (from c6 perhaps) to d5, giving check. White blocked the check by c2-c4 and the answer was b4xc3 en passant and double check! Since the black pawn is no longer on the board, White must have captured it (Kb3xc3) last move, and ergo Haroun al Rashid stands on c3!

But which one should the castaway choose: the Sherlock Holmes or the Arabian Nights? It may depend on his literary tastes.

Personally, I prefer the Sherlock Holmes stories and this also has the advantage of being the first and more original book. The dialogues between Holmes and Doctor Watson, carefully written to echo something of the tone of Arthur Conan Doyle’s originals are very pleasing. Moreover, the stories surrounding the problems are also more complex and entertaining in this volume than the sequel.

Here is a problem from the Holmes book (omitting the lengthy Holmesian exposition of the puzzle).



Holmes and Watson see a game in progress and they enter the room just in time to observe White making a knight move to bring about the diagram position. Sherlock Holmes observes that castling is not a legal move for Black now. How did he deduce this?

If you can't solve it, look for the solution next month or buy the book (ISBN 0 09 140531 9)!

Now for the books representing the middle game categories of strategy and tactics. The latter is a much easier choice. I go for Vladimir Vukovic's classic *The Art of Attack in Chess* in the recent algebraic edition by Dr John Nunn (ISBN 1-85744-400-0). I won the original English edition (1965 Pergamon Press) when it first came out, and worked my way through it very carefully. There were not many books in English of that quality in those days but even now, with a few Nunn footnotes to embellish or correct some of the analysis, Vukovic's approach is valuable for the improving player.

In the very first chapter, Vukovic distinguishes the mating square (that square where the doomed king stands in the final position) from the concept of the "focal point": the square from which a player's piece checkmates the opponent's king from close quarters.

Successive chapters then deal in turn with the attack against the uncastled king, attacking the king that has lost the right to castle (another important distinction!) and then the attack on the castled king. There follow detailed examination of types of mating pattern and focal squares before a chapter devoted to the classic bishop sacrifice ('Greek Gift'). Subsequent chapters go more and more deeply into specific aspects of attacking the king (but Vukovic does not deal with cases such as the minority attack where the king is not the target).

Much of the analysis in the book was new; Yugoslav master Vukovic was not afraid to question the judgment of great masters such as Keres and Alekhine. As Nunn points out in his preface, a book like this with a high percentage of original analysis does run the risk of occasional error but "I far prefer original comment to a bland recital of the 'party line'. In any case, it is Vukovic's general principles which will prove of most value to the practical player, and here there can be no argument about the enduring quality of his work." Nunn's own improvements to the translation and presentation of this great work make his edition a must-have for our chess-playing Robinson Crusoe.

When it comes to selecting a book on strategy for our castaway to bring to the desert island, a volume that first appeared in English from the same series as the Vukovic certainly comes into consideration. Grandmaster Suetin's *Modern Chess Opening Theory*

was a revelation in its time (mid-1960s). Not only did it contain detailed analyses of certain complicated variations but it also dealt with general issues



such as variations in which a whole flank was destroyed in the opening with a consequent sharp struggle from the early stages (e.g. lines like the Botvinnik variation of the Semi-Slav or the Poisoned pawn line of the French Winawer). This was one of the first books for the general reader to stress the intimate link between strategic concepts and opening ideas.

Another book from around this time that had some novel material was the RHM compilation on *How to Open A Chess Game* with contributions by various GMs. Most controversial was the suggestion by Larsen that one should not always overly strive for an opening advantage through sharp play because like Newton's laws of motion such action can bring about an equal and opposite reaction.

However, strategy is a more difficult matter than attack and I hesitate to recommend any book that is not very modern. The book most influential on my own development was the single-volume Pachman's *Modern Chess Strategy*, translated and edited by a little-known Irish player Alan S. Russell. Later the full 3-volume Pachman work was translated into English (*Complete Chess Strategy*) but it didn't have the same impact somehow. I suppose all the main examples were too familiar to me by then.

Ideas of positional play, strategy, and the links between opening and middle-game have become subject to all kinds of developments in the last three decades and I hesitate to recommend this book to young players today. This argument applies with even greater force to older classics such as Nimzowitsch's *My System*, the books by Euwe etc. However, which recent book should I recommend instead? I know that there is a strong support out there for John Watson's assessment of Nimzowitsch in the light of later developments but personally I found that book hard going.

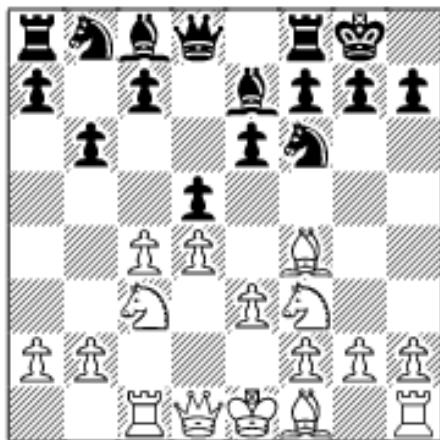
Clearly the Dvoretsky/Yusupov series from the 1990s deserves consideration, but my difficulty here was which of the seven volumes to recommend. The first, *Training for the Tournament Player* essentially dealt with endgames and with adjournment analysis which is no longer a practical issue. Other titles in the series such as *Positional Play* and *Attack and Defence* are well worth study but I have chosen *Opening Preparation* as the book most likely to be of value to you and to our castaway.

First published by Batsford in 1994 (ISBN 0-7134-7509-9), it contains articles by the two main authors of the series and other teachers at their school: Razuvaev, Kosikov, Vulfson and Zlotnik. In all, the book contains 15 separate and complementary articles plus a final chapter, "Samples of play by our students".

The book begins with GM Yusupov writing on "General Principles of Opening Play". Immediately it becomes clear that the whole relationship between opening and middle-game is being redefined in the light of modern grandmaster practice. Important points are stressed: "Modern opening structures are firmly linked to a middlegame plan of action..." (page 12) and "In essence, the entire game is an aggregate of mini-operations united by a general strategic idea that has its basis in the opening you have chosen".

A note by Yusupov in the third illustrative game clearly contrasts with the kind of openings education I got in the 1960s where a typical remark was “Your only object in the opening should be to develop your pieces and get your king into safety for a playable middle-game”. That kind of advice may be good for the total beginner but is very misleading for any improving player with hopes of becoming an expert or master.

**Yusupov-Ljubojevic, Tilburg 1987**, began 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 Nc3 Be7 5 Bf4 0-0 6 e3 b6 7 Rc1.



GM Yusupov explains that the player with the initiative does best to avoid simplification; “every exchange has to have a particular reason, it has to bring some positional or tactical dividends”. Black’s natural 7...Bb7 now fails to cxd5 winning the pawn on c7: “This linking of 7 Rc1 to the potential 8 cd is the first ‘mini-operation’ undertaken in this game by White”.

After the further moves 7...c5 8 dxc5! (to give Black hanging pawns) 8...bxc5 9

Be2 Bb7 10 00 Nbd7 Yusupov remarks: “According to some ancient handbooks, it is here that the players should set about devising their plans. In actual fact I had made my choice much earlier, determining the course of the game with 7 Rc1”.

It is to “Mark, learn and inwardly digest” such pedagogic gems as this that our castaway let the “ancient handbooks” like Fine’s much-vaunted “Ideas Behind The Chess Openings” drift away on the tide, while he made sure to salvage the much more valuable “Opening Preparation”.

Other topics dealt with in this most instructive book include Logic in the Opening, Building An Opening Repertoire, Preparing for a Game and How Opening Novelties Are Born as well as a few chapters dealing with specific opening variations.

My castaway still has one choice left: what type of book should it be? I considered selecting a novel, with the front-runners here being *The Chess Players* by Frances Parkinson Keyes (an historical novel about Paul Morphy) and *The Queen’s Gambit* by Walter Tevis, which was the imaginary story of a female Bobby Fischer type. When it first came out in the 1970s many thought the storyline incredible; the subsequent successes of the Polgar sisters makes the book seem much more plausible now.

However, I was mindful of Mr Grimsley’s request for books that “might actually help improve one’s game”.

Finally, I have adopted a suggestion from Jonathan O’Connor, a former team-mate of mine in the Dublin league and now a successful member of the Irish email Olympiad team:

“My all time favourite chess book is *Chess Combination as a Fine Art* ostensibly by Golz, with a foreword by Keres, but actually it’s a collection of articles by Kurt Richter. As puzzle books go, you never know whether a puzzle will be easy or hard. Also, the theme of the puzzle is rarely obvious. But the most important quality is the prose which is filled with appropriate quotations from Goethe, Schiller and other German poets, as well as a few from Shakespeare.

This email rang a bell and I hunted through some of the more neglected corners of my library to find that I did indeed have a copy of this volume but had never read it to the end. It certainly would provide entertainment, diversion and instruction for our castaway.

The English edition (ISBN 0 273 00036 5) is a hardback in descriptive notation but with an unusual style of diagram. The chapter headings are in red ink, making it look a bit like an old-fashioned prayer book. Altogether it is rather a strange-looking volume, being in the format familiar to readers who own books from the Sportverlag publishing house of the former East Germany. Indeed this book was printed in the GDR by Sportverlag under contract for Pitman Publishing of London (1976). The original German title was *Schönheit der Kombination*, being an anthology of Richter’s writings compiled and edited by Werner Golz, translated to English by one Leslie Franklin. As well as the 11-page article on Richter by Keres there is also a brief introduction to the English edition by the late Harry Golombek.

So the book may look strange, but the content is indeed marvellous.

To recap, here is the list of ten books chosen by my castaway.

*The Chess Struggle in Practice* (Bronstein).

*My 60 Memorable Games* (Fischer).

*The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal* (Tal).

*World Champion at the Third Attempt* (Sanakoev).

*The World’s Greatest Chess Games* (ed. Burgess, Nunn & Emms).

*The Tactics of Endgames* (Bán).

*Art of Attack In Chess* (Vukovic).

*Opening Preparation* (Dvoretsky & Yusupov).

*The Chess Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes* (Smullyan).

and

*Chess Combination as a Fine Art* (Golz).

No fewer than five of these books are in English descriptive notation, which perhaps says something about the failure of chess publishers in recent years to issue really great books!

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