

Contents

Explanation of symbols	6
Preface by the publisher	7
Foreword by Garry Kasparov	8
Foreword by Vladimir Kramnik	9
Part I	A brief biography 15
Chapter 1	Zak: first steps 17
Chapter 2	Forward, Kazimirich! 23
Chapter 3	‘Vater’ Bondarevsky. 39
Chapter 4	A promised three year wait 45
Chapter 5	The first setback 59
Chapter 6	Sisyphus’ way 65
Chapter 7	Boris the Tenth 77
Chapter 8	Under the yoke of the champion’s laurels 88
Chapter 9	Olympus awaits the storm. 97
Chapter 10	Slave of honour 103
Chapter 11	Next stop: France 115
Chapter 12	A one-legged dissident 125
Chapter 13	Twenty years on. 134
Chapter 14	A favourable endgame. 139
Chapter 15	Unclear ending 145
Part II	Games 149
	Sundry memories 150
	Best games 155
Index of openings	275
Index of names	276
Bibliography	279

Preface by the publisher

Boris Spassky is one of the chess players I admire the most. When I took over from Allard Hoogland as the publisher of New In Chess, one of my goals was to create an attractive and accessible overview of Spassky's illustrious career in one volume. This book is exactly what I had hoped for. It offers excellent coverage of his life, written by Dmitry Oleinikov, the director of the chess museum in Moscow and one of the best-informed writers on the history of chess in the Soviet Union. What remains shrouded in mystery is why in 2012 Spassky left France to return to Russia. Maybe one day we will know with certainty why and how he 'escaped'. Sadly, there seems to be little hope that Spassky himself will provide the answer to this question.

The collection of over sixty of his most beautiful and important games spans his complete career. Some lesser-known games are the personal favourites of grandmaster and former Russian champion Alexey Bezgodov, who has written five books for New In Chess. Other classic games by Spassky have notes by Dmitry Kryakvin, one of the most creative chess writers I know. And two of Spassky's best games are annotated by Steve Giddins, the translator, who felt these should also be part of this collection. Thanks to the authors for their outstanding job and to Vladimir Kramnik for his touching foreword.

Remmelt Otten
Alkmaar, March 2023

FOREWORD BY GARRY KASPAROV

My first chess idol

Boris Spassky was my first chess idol. In 1969, when I started playing chess, he had just become the World Champion, and my father was rooting for him. The match book *Petrosian-Spassky, 1969* was my first chess book. And years later, on the outskirts of the Olympus, it was precisely under the influence of Spassky's games that I adopted both the Tarrasch Defence and the Tartakower-Makogonov-Bondarevsky System as Black.

At that time, Boris Vasilievich gave me, a young man, valuable chess advice, always treated me with a friendly disposition and, as an elder, called me nothing more than 'Akimych'. His wit is legendary. In 1985, he dubbed the FIDE President 'Karpomanes', and in 1986, at the Olympiad in Dubai, when I began to fight for chess democracy and set about creating the GMA, he said: 'Chess, Akimych, is a monarchical game...' it's a pity that Spassky has not yet written a book – he could tell a lot.

Garry Kasparov,
13th World Champion,
New York, March 2023

A universal and a man with a great soul

The tenth World Champion, Boris Spassky, is the first real modern universal player. Of course, his play is worthy of the most careful study: both to improve your own level of play, and just for aesthetic pleasure. Oddly enough, the tenth World Champion did not find a place in the famous Soviet 'black' book series, and undeservedly little has been written about him in the entire world chess literature. I refer specifically to his creative and sporting path, and not the separate, albeit very bright, episode in his biography – the 'Match of the Century' in 1972. Spassky is known to the general public, of course, thanks to the epic battle with Fischer in Reykjavik. A well-known Hollywood film, *Pawn Sacrifice*, was even made about this, where the role of the tenth World Champion was played by the famous actor Lev Schreiber.

Of course, there are interesting books about Spassky, but still, in my opinion, they are clearly not enough. Perhaps Boris himself is partly 'to blame' for this, as he has been promising for many years to publish an autobiography. Let's hope it actually shows up! And in the book that is now in front of you, you will find the story of Spassky's complex fate, full of ups and downs, and an excellent selection of his games. It makes no sense to recite the Contents page, so I will tell you about my experience of communicating with Boris and about my perception of his play.

In 2000, immediately after winning the World Championship Match, I spent a couple of weeks in Paris at the invitation of one of my seconds, Joel Lautier. I had a rest, talked with Joel and gave several simultaneous displays. One day at the city hall, they organized a reception in my honour, to which Boris was also invited; then we got to know each other. Spassky was already over sixty, he had practically ceased to play in tournaments. I remember we were asked to sit down at the board: play a little, and we will take photos and videos. Boris played 1.e4, I answered 1...e5, he played 2.f4 – the King's Gambit. We moved the pieces, chatted; after 10 moves I looked at the board and I had a terrible position! Fortunately, here we were told that this was enough and we could stop. Of course, I didn't give much thought to the position, but Spassky, too, simply rearranged the pieces without ceasing to communicate with the press. I realized: the highest class had not gone away!

Later, I had the opportunity to verify this more than once. When we met, we sometimes looked at some positions: Spassky very quickly penetrated into their essence, he always hit the mark. He might not calculate the variations right through, but he grasped the direction of the game in fifteen seconds! The following episode is typical. In 2001, we were invited to a tournament dedicated to Korchnoi's 70th birthday, and Spassky beat Short in exemplary fashion in one of the games. Moreover, in a position of a type where Short is traditionally strong, the Englishman was simply played out of sight!

By the way, then we played our only tournament game. True, there was no particular struggle. The rules were quite strict, four 25-minute games a day, and our meeting was the last of the day. I saw that Boris was visibly tired, so with White I offered him a draw after a few moves. He thanked me, admitting that, yes, it was already hard for him. Unfortunately, we never played again, but I still have one tournament game against Spassky in my collection. On the other hand, I played Tal several times, in rapid and blitz.

In 2002, Boris invited me to stay for a week at his dacha in Grenoble. I had a short break between tournaments, there was no point in travelling to Moscow, and I gladly accepted the invitation. Spassky said: 'Come, we can work on chess!' To be honest, I suspected that we wouldn't be doing much, but this did not put me off – it was interesting to talk with Boris.

Indeed, we did not really sit at the chessboard. We ate well, played tennis and took long walks. His wife cooked for us and sometimes Boris himself fried the meat. The cuisine was rather Russian: potatoes, herring... true, we drank wine more often, although there was also vodka. We'd play tennis in the morning, then have lunch. It would start at two o'clock, and could stretch until six in the evening. We'd sit at the table, he would tell stories, then he'd say: let's eat some more, now the wife will cook pancakes... and at eight already we would have dinner! We would spend at least half the day at the meal table; of course, mostly just talking.

I remember that I was surprised by the excellent physical form, the real power of the 65-year-old Boris. We went out after supper and walked in the hills; wild boars rustled somewhere nearby, sometimes we even saw them. I was amazed at how long Spassky could walk – an hour and a half or two; I got tired much earlier. Sometimes we would turn towards the house, and Boris would say: 'Maybe another circuit?' My legs would be falling off, but by nature, apparently, he was very hardy.

I slept in the library, where many old books and magazines were kept. When I first settled in, I thought: wow, how many rarities, I will study them! But there was no time left for reading: we talked all day, and when I

came to the room at 11-12 o'clock, I immediately fell asleep. Then I'd get up in the morning, have breakfast – and all over again!

Often we did not talk about chess at all, but, say, about the Revolution and about the White Russian movement – Boris Vasilyevich was very fond of this topic, he read a lot. In general, I had a wonderful time! I noticeably improved my physical form and learned a lot of interesting things.

Spassky then told me a huge number of stories, often funny, which I remember well. About Fischer, about Botvinnik; he spoke very warmly about Petrosian, and about the others too. He spoke very respectfully about almost everyone. Of course, sometimes he would joke in a friendly way, but in the end, all people have their own troubles. And he was not negative about anyone. Perhaps this reflects his respect for chess. Spassky was well aware of how much work and talent it takes to achieve something. It is understandable that sometimes a person behaves harshly. It seemed to me that Spassky was the most 'understanding' of all the world champions with whom I spoke. He tried not to judge anyone, and this position in life is very close to mine.

Of course, there might be some things he might not like, but in general he has a very healthy psyche. He was not overly strict; about someone he would speak more positively, about someone else less so, but without complexes and hidden grievances. Perhaps that was part of his strength. Of all the world champions I have known, he seems to me one of the most sensible, that is, it is better to say that he has a sensible assessment of realities.

As I said, the main feature of Spassky as a chess player was that he was a true all-rounder. Spassky was a very correct, 'classical' player, who absorbed the qualities of different chess players. He was similar to Alekhine in that he valued time very much. He was an excellent strategist. It seems to me that Spassky invested heavily in every game, and chess was a reflection of his nature. It's nice to watch his play: large-scale, over the whole board. Everywhere he succeeded, captured space, pressed here and there... almost all chess players before him (except perhaps Alekhine) had a pronounced style, but Spassky could successfully play a variety of types of positions.

However, he was never some kind of super-professional. In my opinion, Spassky is very interesting precisely for this. Many great chess players were distinguished by either outstanding strong-willed qualities, or a colossal striving for success, or some kind of insane energy (this is partly true of Fischer). The competition in his generation was very high. Polugaevsky and Geller were terribly hard workers, Korchnoi was also a

hard worker, and besides, he was wildly determined. Tal was a brighter chess player.

It seems that in all other indicators, apart from chess, Spassky was far from being in the first place. He was not distinguished by either physical fitness, or special pressure, or psychological stability. It cannot be said that he had some incredible opening preparation, that he was a beast at the board. And still, he dominated, which means he simply played chess better than his competitors!

Boris subtly remarked that one of the main qualities of a strong chess player is a sense of the critical moment, the point where you need to think carefully and make an important decision. And at other moments you make moves with your hand – they are not so fundamental. When Spassky formulated this idea in a conversation with me, I began to understand: he is right! I always felt it too, but I couldn't articulate it. All top chess players have this: an understanding of the importance of the moment when the decision made here and now will be decisive for the further course of the struggle in the game. And less strong chess players can pass this moment and make a 'simple' move.

In a very general way, this can be called a 'feeling for the game'. Spassky certainly had it, he himself noted it. A chess game is always divided into several critical moments, at which you need to make the right decision. And no one at the board will tell you when this moment comes – you have to feel it yourself: when you need to think hard, and when you can quickly make a move.

When I looked at Spassky's games (very different games, not necessarily all wins), I paid attention to this. Considering his imperfect opening preparation, his opponents sometimes started to press him (especially when he was Black in various Spanish formations, he often suffered). And it is clear to see how he tried to escape from the clutches long before the danger became obvious to everyone. Spassky understood that there was a clamp, and he tried to organize a counterattack, to find an unexpected move. He started counterplay, even if very dubious. I'm sure he understood that this was dubious play, but he sensed very well that it was time to start, now or never!

Spassky felt the moment very subtly; I think this is his hallmark. I wouldn't say that this feeling is 100 percent shared by all top players even now, but it has at least become the norm. But in his time it was still not quite an obvious concept.

Spassky very skilfully combined calculation and positional play. Where necessary, he calculated, and where necessary he switched to positional methods. Back then, chess players were quite clearly divided

into strategists and tacticians, while Spassky had a good balance, he was flexible. And he perfectly varied the rhythm of the game. When necessary, he slowed the game down a little, and where necessary speeded it up, made it sharper. All directly according to the famous football coach Lobanovsky – a variable rhythm! He was probably the first chess player who showed this important skill: to control the rhythm of the game. This threw many opponents off their stride, but Spassky was not embarrassed by the sharpening of play (whether initiated by himself or his opponent) and the strength of his play did not change as a result of this.

Boris is a man of a broad soul, absolutely not petty. This can be judged at least by the same 1972 match with Fischer. It is clear that Spassky could just have refused to continue the match. If he had packed up and left, no one would have blamed him for disrupting the match. To be honest, Fischer behaved in a very ugly way, both before the start and during the match. Most of all, breadth of the soul is needed in order to forgive this. Spassky did not hold any grudge against him.

I am absolutely sure that it was not a matter of money, as evil tongues claim. Surely Boris believed that for some higher reason this battle should not be interrupted. The main reason, I think, was admiration for the genius of Fischer.

Spassky knew Fischer very well, both as a person and as a chess player. He understood very well that Fischer was not behaving like that on purpose, but that he had mental problems. I guess he admired Fischer's genius and that must have prevented him from winning the match. Excessive respect does not help; this is not exactly what is required of you when you play a World Championship match. Boris and I did not talk about this topic, but I am sure that this was his main motivation. He understood that Fischer was unique. And not to let him play a match (or you can read it like this: not to let him become a world champion) would have been a crime against chess. Boris is one of those people for whom these things are not empty words. I'm sure he wouldn't have forgiven himself if he hadn't given Fischer a chance.

I think that in the depths of his soul, Boris is a very kind, or rather, benevolent person. Although outwardly he may look strict and even harsh. He is very human.

Boris has a wonderful sense of humour, and he is not alien to self-irony, which is actually a rarity for top chess players. I remember such an episode. Although Spassky lived in France for many years, he never really learned to speak French (and in this I am similar to him). At some point,

he decided to learn the language, but he was a bit lazy; he is generally lazy. And in his office he hung a sign in a conspicuous place: 'Learn French, you fool!' (Lautier, who was then studying with Spassky, said he saw it with his own eyes.) Although the tablet did not help much, the word about it spread.

The story had a continuation; maybe it's just a story, but I've heard it from several people. Once Korchnoi beat Spassky in the French Defence and, signing the scoresheets, he wrote: 'Learn French, you fool!' This is quite in the style of Korchnoi; but I never heard a cruel joke from Spassky.

In general, I have a very positive impression of Boris – probably, we are close in many things, in our perception of chess and in relation to people. Of all the world champions I have known, in human terms Spassky is the closest to me.

Perhaps, due to various circumstances, Spassky as a chess player did not fully reveal himself, but in any case, his best games are very significant and instructive. I wish you happy reading!

Vladimir Kramnik,
14th World Champion,
Geneva, March 2023

CHAPTER 3

'Vater' Bondarevsky

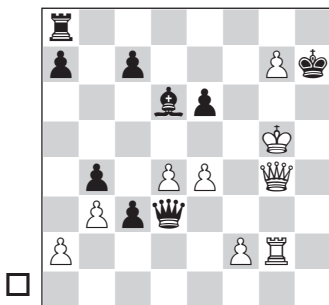
Igor Zakharevich Bondarevsky, one of the first grandmasters of the USSR, national champion in 1940 and a member of the national team in important international matches of the late 1940s, entered Spassky's chess life literally 'hot-foot', returning in January from the legendary Christmas tournament in Hastings (2nd place after Gligoric). By the time of his return, Spassky was in a very bad state. The longed-for 28th 'qualifying' USSR Championship, for which Spassky had been waiting for three years after the depressing Riga defeat against Tal, was coming to an end. More recently, in the middle of the championship, Spassky had been sole leader. In the tenth round, having outplayed Polugaevsky, he could have created a masterpiece 'in the spirit of Kazimirich'.

After the opening, Spassky used his opportunities better, developed an attack which was personally led by the king (♔f1-e2-e3-f3-f4-g5), and the attack became irresistible.

Spassky

Lev Polugaevsky

Moscow 1961



Spassky: 'This position haunted me for years... now I could have won very simply: 34.♔f6 ♕xd4+ 35.♔f7 and, as Kazimirich used to say, it's 'Goodnight, nurse' and it would have turned out to be a 'canvas' (as Borisenko liked to say), but, alas, this did not happen ... I was a player of quality and saw a win in one move. I thought: if there is one move, why should I move my king to f6, then to f7? And so I boldly played

34.♔h5

and, you know, the square b5 just escaped my vision. It just escaped me.’

Spassky had 15 minutes to reach the time control, Polugaevsky only about 20 seconds. There quickly followed

34... ♖b5+ 35. ♘h4 ♙e7+ 36. ♘h3 ♖g5,

and Spassky realized that he had made a mistake, he started feeling bad, and at that moment, as he himself admitted, his fighting spirit was broken: ‘It was all over for me.’ The game had not yet been lost, but by the adjournment it was hopeless, and the analysis showed that there was no salvation. As Spassky recalled: ‘This is my most shameful loss, the most long-suffering game that haunted me for perhaps thirty years.’



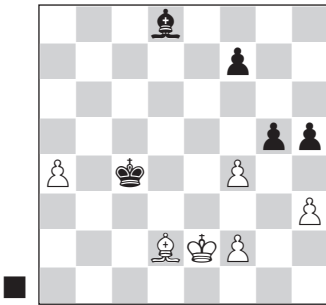
Igor Bondarevsky (left) with Andor Lilienthal after winning the 1940 USSR Chess Championship together.

Spassky’s nerves, exhausted by this game, were not enough for a successful finish. He was still chasing Petrosian, Geller and Polugaevsky out of inertia, but lost to Simagin, and in the penultimate round to Korchnoi, and the issue of reaching the Interzonal Tournament was again decided in the last round, in the game Stein-Spassky.

Spassky jumped right in with Black: he sacrificed two pawns in the opening, in the hope of seizing the initiative (Bondarevsky would later say: ‘A tempting, but essentially bad opening variation’). Stein figured out the complications, extinguished the black initiative, and kept the extra material. The game was adjourned in a lost position for Spassky.

Leonid Stein Spassky

Moscow 1961



Black sealed the move

41...g4.

This is where Bondarevsky appeared and went straight to the analysis of the adjourned position. In the reviews written hastily by the commentators, the conclusion was ‘There is still a stubborn struggle ahead’, and ‘Boris did not bother to delve into the subtleties of the position... meanwhile, the position was by no means lost.’ ‘No,’ said Bondarevsky after a thorough study of the position, ‘the situation is completely hopeless. With best defence, the well-known theoretical endgame of “bishop and pawn against bishop” will arise, in which the white pawn will inevitably be promoted with the help of interferences (decades later, the computer confirmed the grandmaster’s conclusion). You don’t need to play the game out. Instead of winding up your nerves, you need to start all over again as soon as possible.’

Spassky told the arbiter that he was resigning. The Champion of the USSR, Petrosian, as well as Korchnoi, Geller and Stein, went to Stockholm for the Interzonal.

Bondarevsky categorically announced: ‘We need to stop talking about this young player’s bad luck and start talking about his weaknesses.’ And he made a clear diagnosis: Spassky was not mature enough as a chess player to fight for the World Championship. He did not have enough strong-willed qualities, and so could not withstand prolonged stress, nor did he know how to play decisive games. In the field of chess education, Spassky – for his level, of course – still lacked an understanding of certain middlegame positions, and still needed to improve his endgame technique.

Following the diagnosis, treatment was ‘prescribed’, and the ‘doctor’ followed it. Unlike Tolush, who acquired the skills of a coach and teacher ‘on the go’, trying and making mistakes, Bondarevsky was a professional in his field. He seriously mastered chess pedagogy: even before the war he had taught chess in Rostov-on-Don, later discussed methodological issues with eminent coaches, collaborated with the famous methodologist master Golenishchev (chess players are still trained according to his programmes, or on their basis, and not only in Russia). He had experience working with Smyslov, Keres, Geller, national teams of different levels – from the USSR to the railway employees’ chess club, DSO Lokomotiv...

With Spassky, Bondarevsky quickly established a relationship of solidarity and complete mutual trust. Bondarevsky treated Spassky in a fatherly way, and in terms of age he was quite suitable to be his father, and Spassky began to call him ‘Vater’ (but using the polite form of You). The student recalled: ‘Thanks to Vater, a feeling of deep moral support was established in me. All the time I felt a deep scale of personality and felt as though I was behind a stone wall. Vater subtly observed the age gap of twenty-four years. He was never too frank, but at the right time he expressed his opinion. When I did stupid things, Vater never scolded me. He was just silent. And then I knew immediately what I had done. This is a pedagogical talent and a gift from God! He didn’t pressure me. And I was relaxed with him. Vater played an exceptional role in my ascent to the Olympus.’

Bondarevsky temporarily sheltered Spassky in his large three-room apartment on Stachek Avenue: the latter entered the last stage of the divorce proceedings and was able to hold out until he received a ‘compensation’ railway apartment. Right at home, Vater drew Spassky into an analysis of complex middlegame positions from his correspondence games: he played for the USSR national team, which competed in the Correspondence Olympiad for the first time. Bondarevsky was the leader on first board, and in the same year, 1961, he became the Olympic champion and grandmaster in correspondence chess.

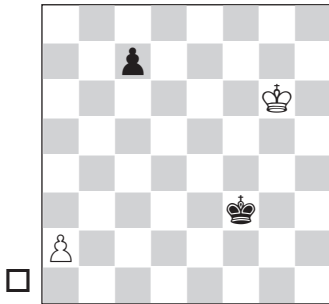
Joint analysis was part of methodically structured training sessions. The quality of the analysis of the 1940 USSR Champion shocked Spassky;

later he said: ‘I was helped by the best computer in the world, of the brand I. Z. Bondarevsky!’ This became especially important in the future when analysing adjourned games, as it gave a sense of confidence, plus moral and practical support. In addition to middlegame positions, to improve the speed and quality of Spassky’s endgame play, Bondarevsky selected studies and typical endgame positions, set them up for Boris, and started the clock.

For example, this study:

Nikolai Grigoriev

Shakmaty v SSSR 1932



1. ♖f5 ♜e3 2. ♜e5 c6 3. a4 ♜d3 4. a5 c5 5. a6 c4 6. a7 c3 7. a8 ♚ c2 8. ♚d5+ ♜e3 9. ♚g2!, winning.

Spassky remembered for a long time how, when solving this study, after 20 minutes’ thought, he pointed his finger at the g2-square, and Bondarevsky exclaimed: ‘Wow! Bravo!’

The co-author of the classical system of Tartakower-Makogonov-Bondarevsky did not like to analyse openings with Spassky (although he was always ready to give practical advice). By leaving the choice of opening weapons to the conscience of his charge, he thus taught him to make independent decisions. ‘He never gave ready-cooked chess food, just for you to open your mouth and swallow,’ Spassky recalled, ‘He knew how to make me work.’

Bondarevsky’s lessons always ended with some kind of ‘entertainment’ – he showed a beautiful combination, an original study, sometimes recalled funny episodes of chess life related to the material they had been studying, which not only helped to assimilate this material, but also supported the ‘fire in the hearth’ – the intellectual activity of the chess player and his interest in the game. In addition to all this, Bondarevsky introduced Spassky to classes with groups of first-class and candidate

masters – based on the old principle of *docendo discimus* ('by teaching, we ourselves learn'). 'I don't know about my students,' Spassky admitted, 'but this work undoubtedly brought me great benefits.'

The practical application of the new knowledge, skills and abilities of the 25-year-old Spassky was timed to coincide with the next, 29th USSR Championship, held in November-December 1961 in Baku. The tournament was strong, victory in it was prestigious, but it did not require such excessive psychological stress as a championship which was also a Zonal. Someone remarked: 'Of all the greats, Spassky knows his own worth the least. Now Spassky needs self-confidence, maybe even arrogance.' The best way to inspire self-confidence was to win the gold medal of the USSR Championship.

At first, Spassky went ahead side by side with Smyslov, then in their personal meeting he forced the ex-champion into a mistake in a confused position and became the sole leader. In his game with Polugaevsky, he sacrificed a pawn and brought a difficult game to victory, and in the 17th round he provoked Tal into a gambling attack and also won. Ten victories, the most – and first place!

Spassky admitted in an interview after the Championship that it was thanks to this victory that he gained confidence in his abilities. This was confirmed by his results in 1962: until the end of November, before the next National Championship, Spassky did not lose a single tournament game and showed himself to be a powerful team fighter. In July, a medal for the best result on the first board and another team gold at the World Student Championships; in September-October, team gold and the best result on third board at the Olympiad in Bulgaria – his defeat of Evans in a King's Indian Defence in 26 moves was called by many the best game of the event and entered the textbooks (Game 13); in October-November, victory in the National Team Championship as the leader of the Leningrad team – and first place on the first board (which, due to its strong composition, was described as 'the Candidates tournament with the participation of Shofman', the latter being the leader of the Moldavian players)...

In the next, 30th National Championship, held in Yerevan at the end of 1962, Spassky allowed himself to 'relax', starting with two zeros, but he finished energetically, without defeat – as a result, 'only' fifth place. And then came the spring of 1963, when Tigran Petrosian methodically squeezed Mikhail Botvinnik from the chess throne. That spring, Spassky said to Bondarevsky:

'Vater, I feel a huge chess power! Should I become World Champion?'

Vater's reaction was laconic but emphatic: 'OK, let's do it!'

INTRODUCTION

Sundry memories

Boris Spassky is a gigantic figure. Any thought about him would be one-sided, so I was a little hesitant if this text was needed. Perhaps it is. I describe only what I saw or what I personally took part in.

I can't say that I talked a lot with the tenth World Champion. However, these episodes are probably of some interest to chess lovers. The time of the action was 2005-2009, the place Russia, mainly Satka. The first time I saw him was in the city of Satka, Chelyabinsk Region, where a school named after him was (and continues to be) held. This was in January 2005. The ex-World Champion was 68 years old, he was in excellent physical shape and enjoyed skiing. His sense of humour was refined and unobtrusive. Once, in my presence, he was talking with a certain benevolent member of a religious sect and, without a shadow of a smile, exclaimed: 'Oh yes! How interesting! I will definitely think about it!' The first impressions from the meeting turned out to be so strong for me that for about a month I spoke with a peculiar Franco-aristocratic accent, involuntarily adopted from Spassky. Then it passed (I don't know, fortunately or not). He gave full-time lectures to the best young players in the Ural region. He liked to talk, including about Alexander Alekhine and Paul Keres. Once at a lecture, we listened to a rather voluminous interview of Alekhine in English. I will never forget how excitedly Boris Vasilyevich showed and commented on the game Tarrasch-Alekhine, Bad Pistyan 1922, with the opening pawn sacrifice. I confess that at this show I got a completely new, much stronger impression from the game, even though it was already known to me. The well-known victory of Keres over Alekhine with a simple queen sacrifice on d7 [Margate 1937] also won the enthusiastic attention of the ex-champion. He also read out the famous letter of Capablanca to his son.

In general, we can say with confidence that Spassky worked in the teaching field with his soul, sincerely striving to be useful. During lectures, Spassky tended to shy away from theoretical discussions and did not seek to cover the latest developments in the opening. However, his opening intuition remained world-class. (The following are examples that prove this quite convincingly.) His coaching activity took a slightly unexpected form in 2007, when Anatoly Karpov and Viktor Korchnoi played for the South Ural team at the Russian Team Championship in Sochi, with the then president of the Chelyabinsk Regional Chess

Federation Mikhail Lozovatsky and grandmaster Evgeny Sveshnikov. But Lozovatsky did not limit himself to this unique achievement – Boris Spassky officially became the team’s coach. I played for this team and saw that the coach was not eager to explain opening subtleties to acting grandmasters. But Boris Vasilyevich studied the endgames he liked with pleasure.

On Spassky’s opening intuition, we often (for several years) discussed with him my experiences in the Tarrasch Defence, which brought me some success and were later included in my book about this opening. Let me remind you that Spassky actually gave the Tarrasch Defence a second life, successfully playing it in his triumphant match in 1969 against Tigran Petrosian. Therefore, the topic was interesting and close to both interlocutors’ hearts. Spassky believed that Karpov had dealt this opening a very strong blow in his match with Kasparov in 1984. I proposed a number of improvements, which were met by Spassky with interest, but also with scepticism. The future showed that the ex-World Champion assessed the position better than I did with computers. In addition to the Tarrasch Defence, we discussed a lot the variation of the Queen’s Gambit Accepted 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.♘f3 a6 4.e3 b5, in which Black strives for maximum simplifications. Spassky said not without humour: ‘But Tigran Vartanovich and I suffered so much, not knowing how to equalize correctly!’ It is clear that such a straightforward path caused Spassky to be somewhat wary. He was right. My devastating loss to Erwin l’Ami at the 2010 Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad showed once again that this idea is, to say the least, controversial.

We also discussed the King’s Gambit variation 1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.♙c4 f5!?. In assessing the critical position arising in the main line 4.♚e2! fxe4 5.♚h5+ g6 6.♚e5+ ♚e7 7.♚xh8 ♘f6 8.b3! d5 9.♙a3 c5 10.♙xc5 ♚xc5 11.♚xf6 dxc4 12.♚xf4 ♙f5, our conclusions were the same – we considered that Black’s position was not worse. I am glad that I managed to ask a question that interested many researchers. In the aforementioned main match of his life against Petrosian, Spassky twice used a harmless continuation against the Petroff Defence, with the exchange of queens, and twice the game quickly ended in a draw. Garry Kasparov, Isaak Boleslavsky and Zenon Franco have all expressed confidence that, if the discussion in the Petroff had continued, Spassky would have chosen a different, more dangerous continuation. However, Boris answered my direct question without hesitation – he would have continued to exchange queens. Spassky, with his amazing instinct, understood that Petrosian himself would abandon the Petroff. And so it happened, which eventually

led Petrosian to defeat in the match. I should add that Spassky played this harmless variation against the Petroff until the end of his career, and almost all the games ended in draws.

In the summer of 2006, I saw a happy Spassky in Satka. He unexpectedly won a two-game exhibition match against Anatoly Karpov, his historical opponent. Faced with a sudden onslaught in a drawn bishop endgame, Karpov lost his head and made a decisive mistake. I can still hear Spassky's jubilant words, 'And then I felt I can still play!'. For several days, this not-so-difficult endgame was the object of study by students and coaches. It is well known that in his later years, to persuade Spassky to play chess was the hardest task. This is understandable (let's say, it's hard to look at the many games of the aged Viktor Korchnoi). As regards the wider intellectual horizons of the 10th World Champion, around the same time (summer 2006), at one of the official events, we had a long conversation about Napoleon Bonaparte, a figure who attracted Spassky with his mystery and ambiguity. Fortunately, I had read a book about Bonaparte by the academician Tarle not long before, and so I was able to discuss the subject even with an expert.

Probably, our last meeting took place in Elista, where the match between Korchnoi and Spassky was held. I ended up in City Chess on other business and, going out for a walk, I saw the familiar powerful figure of the ex-World Champion. Spassky, who had won that day, was in an excellent mood and dictated the opening moves to me. The question followed: 'How would you play here?' I did not find Spassky's move, and he said without any sense of superiority: 'Well, it's difficult.' The move was really shocking, and even Korchnoi after it essentially stopped resisting. How much unused chess power remained in these giants of thought!

I would like to add a few words about Spassky's work and his attitude to certain phenomena of chess and life. He did not like excessively deep analyses. During the joint work at his school in Satka (2005-2007), this manifested itself very clearly. Demonstrating an opening variation, he consciously avoided meticulous study of all the ramifications. This even applied to Breyer's system in the Ruy Lopez, which he loved, in which the ex-World Champion was a recognized connoisseur and creator of many important ideas. This puzzled Evgeny Sveshnikov, and his censure even caused tension between the masters. As Spassky himself told me: 'I see it this way, this is my approach. Sveshnikov has a different one'.

This feature of his clearly influenced his sporting career. Suffice it to recall the bewilderment of Efim Geller when, in an important game

against Fischer, Spassky avoided the prepared and approved opening analysis and ultimately lost ingloriously. There were many such cases. Long analyses were unpleasant for Boris. A romantic and a brilliant player, he voluntarily deprived himself of the most valuable analytical resource. I believe that this factor influenced his early loss of the title of World Champion.

Another important feature of Spassky as a player was complacency in winning positions. The impression one gets is that, having achieved (especially without great effort) an enormous advantage, he would lose a significant part of his interest in the struggle and was often punished for this. Playing in this spirit against the tough Bobby Fischer and Anatoly Karpov was a difficult and even impossible task for him. As for Tigran Petrosian, he himself was not a maximalist player, so Spassky fought with him with success. In reality, Spassky was never an extra-class maximalist player. Why? There can be many reasons. I admit that he simply loved chess as a game too much, just as a game, to be able to strive to work out the variations to the end. Maybe it even seemed to him not quite decent in relation to his opponents.

Romanticism. Who else could leave their rook under attack with a check in the legendary game against Bronstein? [Leningrad 1960, Game 11 in this book] I can't imagine Petrosian, Korchnoi, Karpov or Fischer playing like this. The position was won without these feats of spirit, and analytically, the sacrifice actually should have thrown away the win.

His military childhood could have affected him. This is a difficult topic, but the very physically developed Spassky was clearly tired by the end of important games and competitions.

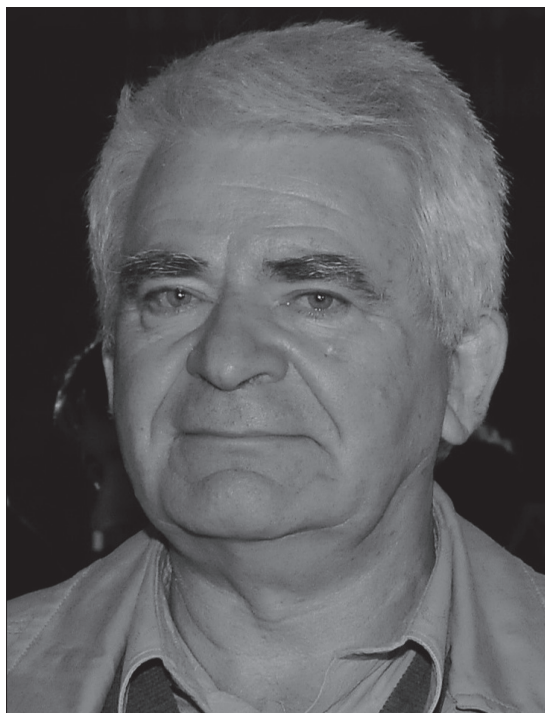
And another moment. The legends that Spassky, by offering draws, put pressure on his opponents verbally, seem to me to be only legends. I do not know other players of this class who are as friendly and correct towards others.

It would seem that all this is strange for such a powerful player. It remains only to marvel at the genius of Spassky and enjoy his work. I regret that in my youth it was not so easy to get to know his games in full or even to a significant extent. People of my generation were mainly brought up on the games of Botvinnik and Karpov. They were brilliant experts, but there is simply nothing in their work that is characteristic of Spassky. It impoverished my play beyond any doubt, as I realized while working on this book.

Regarding the selection of games. A lot of interesting works have been published about Spassky (I will especially note the book by Zenon Franco).

Therefore, I wanted also to cover a number of battles that are a little less known. It was quite difficult to make a choice, as there are many attractive games and the space in the book is limited. I tried to use some general themes that the attentive reader can understand and assimilate (for example, attack and counterattack in a long Spanish Game or the structure of the Closed Variation of the Sicilian Defence for both colours). In each of the games, I tried to highlight something inherent in it. In general, I came to the conclusion that there were no other players in Spassky's era, with such different games, which are simultaneously characterized by both classical, and romantic, and attacking, and defensive style. He was ahead of his time in many ways, and in his universality he resembled Magnus Carlsen – alas, without the latter's athletic qualities. I hope that readers will learn a lot of new things and get real pleasure.

Alexey Bezgodov,
March 2023



Spassky in Bilbao, 2008.

Jump into the ‘inaccessible’ heights

Game 2 Nimzo-Indian Defence

Boris Spassky

Vasily Smyslov

Bucharest 1953

The first game in which Spassky showed the level of his play against one of the best players in the world. He was just 16 years old, which in our day is already a solid age for a player, but things were different then.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♖b4 4.♙g5

Spassky’s favourite continuation over many years. Kasparov was astonished at how many points Spassky collected in this line, which is not approved of by theory.

4...h6 5.♙h4 c5 6.d5



6...exd5

I will not criticise this exchange, especially as theory was practically non-existent here or, at the most, was just beginning to be formulated.

The tempting queen sacrifice can bring success only in the event of mistakes by White: 6...♗xd5 7.♙xd8

♗xc3 8.♖b3 ♗e4+ 9.♙d1 ♗xf2+ 10.♙c2 ♙xd8 11.♖g3 ♗xh1 12.♖xg7 ♗e8 13.♖f6+ ♗e7 14.g4 ♗c6 15.♙g2 ♗d4+ 16.♙d3 and White is better.

More modern continuations include 6...d6; 6...♙xc3+ 7.bxc3 d6; and 6...0-0.

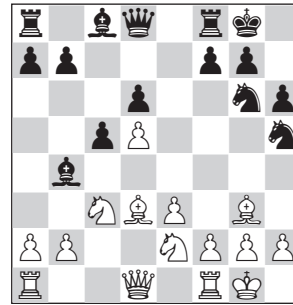
7.cxd5 d6 8.e3 ♗bd7 9.♙b5 0-0

10.♗ge2

Here too Black has many tempting continuations, in which the highly experienced Smyslov simply drowned.

10...♗e5 11.0-0 ♗g6 12.♙g3 ♗h5

13.♙d3



13...♗xg3

Had Smyslov realised what awaited him, he might have preferred immediately to establish a barrier on the kingside: 13...f5 14.♖c2 ♗xg3 15.♗xg3 ♖f6 is unclear.

14.♗xg3 ♗e5 15.♙e2

Later White tried 15.♙f5!?. This does not take the play beyond the realm of unstable equality.

15...♙xc3

A good idea is 15...f5 16.f4 ♗g6 17.a3 ♙a5 with a small plus for White.

16.bxc3 ♖h4

White is also promised a slight initiative after 16...f5 17.f4 ♗g6

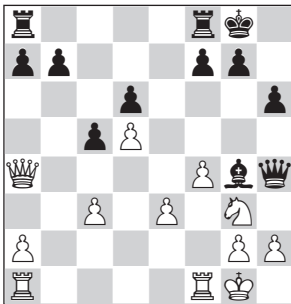
18. ♖b1 b6 19. ♕d3 ♜f6 20. ♗d2 ♕d7
21.e4.

17.f4 ♘g4 18. ♕xg4 ♕xg4

The queen exchange favours White:

18... ♗xg4 19. ♗xg4 ♕xg4 20.f5 g6
21.e4.

19. ♗a4



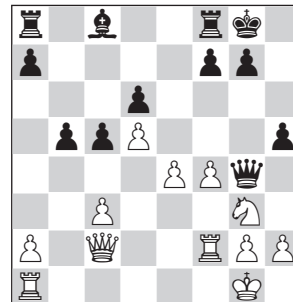
19... ♕c8?

The first real mistake in the game, the question of the value of previous moves remaining open. Smyslov was simply frightened of the complications, perhaps associated with the threat to his bishop, and preferred to hide it in the back of the position. Spassky outplayed him dynamically by making better use of the activity of his pieces and pawns. By the way, purely aesthetically, the return of the bishop looks strikingly ugly, and it is strange to see it played by Smyslov, who preached the search for harmony in chess all his life. It was time for Black to show accuracy and a feeling for danger: 19... ♗e7! 20. ♜a1 ♕d7 21. ♗b3 b5!. His counterplay seems enough for equality, for example: 22.e4 f6 23.f5 (or 23. ♘f5 ♕xf5 24.exf5 ♗b7 25. ♜e6 c4 26. ♗d1 ♗b6+ 27. ♖h1 a5,

and Black is absolutely fine) 23... b4 24. ♘h5 ♗e5 25. ♜f3 g5!, not allowing the knight into f4.

There is also the aggressive attempt to exploit the cramped position of the black bishop: 20.f5!? ♗xe3+ 21. ♖h1 h5 22. ♜a1 ♗xc3 23. ♗f4 ♜a8 24. ♘e4 ♗d4 25.h3 ♕xf5 26. ♗xf5 ♜e5 27. ♗f3 ♗xd5.

20.e4 ♗g4 21. ♗c2 h5 22. ♜f2 b5



An understandable attempt to start counterplay on the queenside, which does not help. White achieves much more by simple play in the centre.

23.e5

Not being distracted from central play.

The later Spassky might have preferred 23.a4 bxa4 24. ♗xa4, unhurriedly attacking the enemy weaknesses.

23...h4 24. ♘f1!

Wisely not allowing the exchange of minor pieces.

The following line is only apparently active: 24. ♘e4 ♕f5 25. ♗e2 ♗xe2 26. ♜xe2 ♕xe4 27. ♜xe4 ♜ad8 28.a4 b4, and White's advantage is minimal.

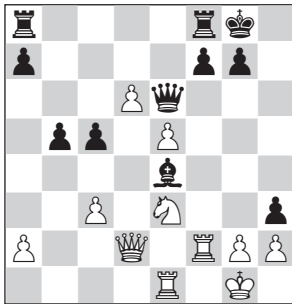
24... ♕f5

Possibly more tenacious was 24...♖e8
25.♘e3 ♗d7 26.♗e4 ♖b8 27.♗af1 h3
28.g4 with a slight white advantage.

25. ♗d2

The grouped black queen, bishop and h4-pawn are only apparently active, but in reality they are harmless and even help White in some ways.

**25...dxe5 26.fxe5 ♙g6 27.♞e1 h3
28.d6! ♙e4 29.♘e3 ♗e6**



30. ♞f4!

The start of a non-standard plan and a very lovely linear attack, with the participation of knight and pawn. In the process, the possible loss of the g2-pawn seems to Spassky to be just a triviality, which does not merit bothering about.

30...♙xg2 31.♘f5!

Many modern engines recommend exchanging on g2, which would probably bring a satisfied smile to Spassky's face. However, even there White is also better. But in the game, everything is over within a handful of moves.

31...♞fe8

Nor is he saved after 31...♞ae8

32.♗e2 ♗g6 33.♘h4.

32. ♞e3 ♞ad8 33.♘xg7! ♞xd6 34.♘xe6!

If the queen is taken back, Black is mated and so the game ends.

Lesson:

Apparently, the chosen variation was more familiar to the young Spassky than to his highly experienced opponent. However, for quite a long time there was an unclear, approximately equal struggle. Black's 19th move changed the situation dramatically. Voluntarily abandoning development, Smyslov, in essence, doomed himself to defeat with his own hands. In the finishing moves, Spassky played very well. The lesson is simple – do not return developed pieces to their original stations unless absolutely necessary.

The strength of doubled pawns

Game 3 Grünfeld Indian Defence

Boris Spassky

Vasily Byvshev

Leningrad ch-USSR sf 1955

A game demonstrating the steely grip of the young Spassky in cases where the enemy turned off the beaten theoretical path, ceding the initiative. The experienced master Byvshev lost, essentially, without resistance.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♙g5

It is interesting that Spassky played this move for the second (and last) time in his life only 33 years later, beating grandmaster Hjartarson.

**4...♘e4 5.♙f4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♙g7 7.e3
0-0 8.♘f3 c6**

Lesson:

In an objectively equal position, an excessive desire to avoid the inevitable can lead to a loss. I am convinced that Fischer saw and correctly assessed the exchange sacrifice, but decided to go for it anyway.

A Spanish battle between two ghosts

Game 54 Ruy Lopez

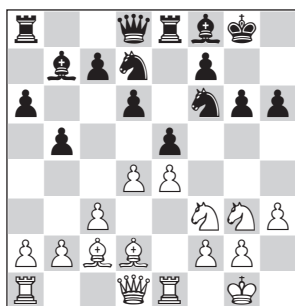
Bobby Fischer 2785**Boris Spassky** 2560

Sveti Stefan m 1992 (5)

Possibly Spassky's best achievement in this 'exhibition match'.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4**♗f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6****8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♗b8**

The Breyer System.

10.d4 ♗bd7 11.♗bd2 ♙b7 12.♙c2**♞e8 13.♗f1 ♙f8 14.♗g3 g6 15.♙g5****h6 16.♙d2**

One of Spassky's favourite lines as White. In this game against his famous opponent of old, he unveils an important novelty, which is still today regarded as the main line.

16...exd4 17.cxd4 c5

In an earlier epoch, Black would have been criticised for 'surrendering the centre'. However, modern players are guided only by concrete variations.

18.d5

I think this is the only path to an advantage. Otherwise, Black will take on d4 with splendid play. The number of possible variations is enormous and this position has since been seen many times. I would add that to me, White's chances seem superior, but this is not easy to prove.

18...♗b6

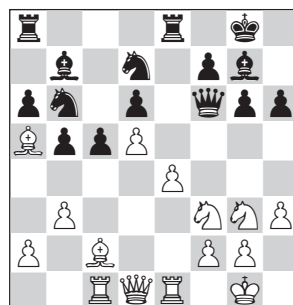
After the logical 18...♙g7 there could follow 19.♞b1!? or even 19.b4.

19.♙a5

There is also 19.a4 ♗c4 (or 19...b4) 20.♙f4 ♗xb2 21.♞b1 ♗c4 22.axb5, 19.♙b3 and 19.b4. In all cases, many variations are unclear and difficult to understand.

19...♗fd7 20.b3 ♙g7 21.♞c1

I like the modest 21.♞b1.

21...♞f6**22.♞b1**

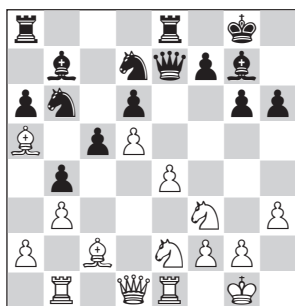
There were grounds to think about the rook's pawn: 22.h4!? h5 (it would be far too arrogant to play

22...♖b2 23.h5! ♖xa2 24.♖d2±)
23.e5! dxe5 24.♗e4 ♖e7 25.d6 ♖d8
26.♗fg5 ♗h6 27.b4 c4 28.♗c5 with
an obvious white advantage.

22...b4!? 23.♗e2

The Fischer of twenty years earlier
would possibly have preferred the
accurate 23.♖c1 ♗c8 24.a3! bxa3
25.♖xa3 ♗a7 26.♗d2 ♗b5 27.♖a4
♖e7, with a slight white advantage.

23...♖e7



24.a3?

A clear inaccuracy from Fischer,
who had not played seriously for
the previous twenty years. The
programmed pawn advance should
have been prepared, of course.
Here too, Black would still have
faced problems after the straight-
forward 24.♗d3 ♗c8 25.♖c1 ♗a7
26.a3 bxa3 27.♖xa3.

24...bxa3 25.♗c3 f5!

This had clearly not been part of
Fischer's plans. Black seizes the
initiative.

26.♗xg7

Also unpleasant was 26.exf5 ♗xd5,
with a clear plus for Black.

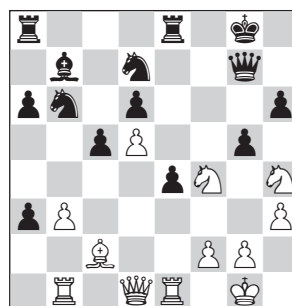
26...♖xg7 27.♗f4

He has just as many problems after
27.♗d2 fxe4.

27...fxe4 28.♗h4

Or 28.♗xe4 ♗f6—.

28...g5



The rest of the game is unnecessary.
Fischer clearly played on just out of
disappointment.

**29.♗e6 ♖f6 30.♖g4 ♗xd5 31.♗xg5
hxg5 32.♖xd7 ♗b4 33.♖xb7 ♗xc2
34.♗xe4 a2 35.♗f1 ♗b4 36.♗g4
a1♖ 37.♗xa1 ♖xa1+ 38.♗h2 ♖g7
39.♖f3 ♖e5+ 40.g3 ♗f8 41.♖g2
♖f6 42.f4 ♗a7 43.♗xg5+ ♗g7**

44.♗h5 ♖e6 45.g4 ♗xf4

Finally, White resigned.

Lesson:

I approach the legacy of the 1992
match against Fischer with care.
However, the value of this concrete
game lies in the introduction of a
new, sharp variation, which brought
Black rapid and easy success.

Triumph of dark-square strategy

Game 55 King's Fianchetto

Julio Borgo 2345

Boris Spassky 2555

Italy tt 1995

In this short game, one is struck
by the energy with which Black