

The thriller gambit

VIKTOR KORCHNOI'S eagerly awaited autobiography, *Chess is my Life*, (Batsford, \$6.35) is now available in New Zealand. In contrast to most chess autobiographies, Korchnoi's does not follow the pat formula of anecdotes interspersed with games, but rather has 125 pages of fascinating insights

into the life of a top-flight Soviet grandmaster. The book can even be read as a thriller. Is grandmaster Antoshin really a KGB agent? What happened to Taimanov on his return to the USSR after losing six games to Fischer? How did Petrosian escape the same treatment? How is it that some of the

most promising Soviet players never travel abroad? Korchnoi answers these and other questions, and volunteers some candid opinions on the relative merits and styles of his contemporaries in the USSR. He is determined to kick back at the Soviet system which he has been vehemently critical of since his dramatic defection from Russia in 1976. But his views are all the more worth reading because he is now stateless and owes no allegiance to the USSR chess fraternity.

His frequent outbursts against Petrosian, however, do throw some doubts on his impartiality. Apart from describing some of their "under the table" incidents in the 73 Candidates' battle, Korchnoi talks of Petrosian's plush house on the outskirts of Moscow and his elevated position in the Soviet hierarchy. At one point he says, "we should not belittle Petrosian's talents and merits", but in the next paragraph he agrees with Botvinnik that, in chess, Petrosian is a "de-

stroyer of values in the process of creation". However, he finally concedes that one "cannot help but admire the devilish determination and ingenuity of the man". But of late Petrosian has not had it all his own way. Since losing his quarter-finals match last year against Korchnoi, he has been laid off as chief editor of the Russian weekly chess newspaper 64. Korchnoi also has a great deal to say about Karpov, and particularly about his behaviour in their 1974 match which Karpov won, thereby capturing the World Championship because Fischer failed to defend it. He seems to be preoccupied by Karpov's manners and the fact that he considered him — at that time; I don't know his present opinions — to be no more talented than the grandmasters he had beaten in the cycle. When Korchnoi made similar statements to the Yugoslav daily *Politika*, the pressures of Russian disfavour ultimately led to his defecting to the West just after he had won the IBM tournament in Holland.

Commenting on his match with Karpov, Korchnoi claims that he was supported by the intelligentsia while Karpov had the Communist Youth Organisation on his side. Karpov's determination to win keeps Korchnoi well occupied and he recalls after the 21st game (annotated below), "I remember what a hateful glance Karpov threw at me before he resigned".

Despite its idiosyncracies (or perhaps because of them), Korchnoi has written a classic in the literature of 20th century chess and, to quote the blurb, it's a uniquely revealing portrait of life at the top of international chess. Compelling bedtime reading!

The 72 games included in the Korchnoi book are set out in the last 35 pages, and the majority are unannotated. If anything this section is a bit of a let down, but the few games that Korchnoi has annotated do liven it up. One of the games he put notes to was his quick win against Karpov from the candidates' final.

Moscow 1974
QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENCE

V. KORCHNOI	A. KARPOV
1. d4	Nf6
2. Nf3	e6
3. g3	b6
4. Bg2	Bb7
5. c4	Be7
6. Nc3	O-O

This was a fairly new move at the time. Formerly 6... Ne4 was usually played, but now modern theory considers 7.Bd2 gives White a slight advantage.

7. Qc2
 After 7. O-O Ne4 Black has better chances of equalising. Korchnoi had tried 7. Qd3 sev-

eral times but after 7... d5 the Queen finds itself on the wrong square.

- 7. ... c5
- 8. d5 exd5
- 9. Ng5 Nc6

Karpov varies from the 5th game of the match in which he played 9... g6 and got an excellent game. Against it, Korchnoi had prepared the reply 10.h4 leading to great complications, which he had studied with Bronstein, the only one of his seconds he trusted.

- 10. Nxd5 g6
- 11. Qd2!

* A fine move which defends the knight on g5 and places the Queen on an important file.

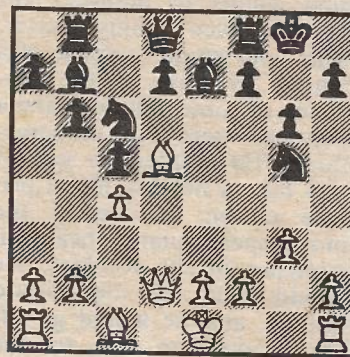
- 11. ... Nxd5?

Karpov spent only eight minutes on this move. Afterwards Botvinnik pointed out the correct line in 11... Re8, when exchanging on e7 gives Black a big lead in development. Korchnoi thought that White should get a slight advantage though, after 12. Nxf6 Bxf6 13. Ne4 or even 12. b3.

- 12. Bxd5 Rb8?

Again played quickly, this time after only three minutes thought. Karpov, a relatively frail young man, must have been extremely tired at this stage of the match; normally he has low blood pressure and it was rumoured that it was down to 30 over 60. Best was 12... Bxg5 13. Qxg5 Qxg5 14. Bxg5 with a much superior ending.

KARPOV



KORCHNOI

- 13. Nxh7 Re8

Or 13... Kxh7 14. Qh6 ch Kg8 15. Qxg6 ch Kh8 16. Qh6 ch Kg8 17. Be4 f5 18. Bd5ch Rf7 19. Qg6 ch.

- 14. Qh6 Ne5
- 15. Ng5 Bxg5

After 15... Bf6 16. Bxf7 ch White mates in three moves.

- 16. Bxg5 Qxg5
- 17. Qxg5 Bxd5
- 18. O-O!

But not the fatal 18. cxd5? Nf3 ch! and picks up the Queen.

- 18. ... Bxc4
- 19. f4 Resigns

During this emotionally and psychologically bruising match Karpov lost 4 kilograms (and he weighs only 52). It was said that after this game, with three remaining, he gave up eating. (?)