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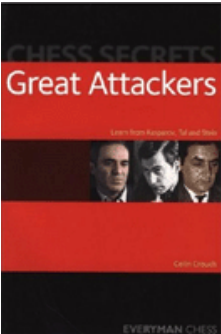
David Vigorito

Chess Secrets: Great Attackers, by Colin Crouch, Everyman Chess 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 269pp., \$24.95

Grandmaster Colin Crouch continues Everyman’s Chess Secrets series with Great Attackers. It’s subtitle is *Learn from Kasparov, Tal, and Stein*; however, this book really considers the games of four players, because Crouch considers the very young Kasparov and a more mature Kasparov to be worth studying independently.

He looks at their career peaks in the ‘70s and ‘80s:

- Garry Kasparov: 1975-78
- Leonid Stein: 1972-73
- Mikhail Tal: 1978-79
- Garry Kasparov: 1978-82



Crouch does not look at Kasparov’s games after 1982, which is an interesting decision that can be justified by the fact that many of Kasparov’s later games are well known and covered in chess literature. Crouch even points out that this book could well have been written earlier, such as in 2002.

This title is similar in format to Crouch’s book *How to Defend in Chess*, except that here Crouch profiles great attackers instead of great defenders. *Great Attackers* begins by looking at the games of a very young Kasparov in the Sicilian Defence. Crouch does not hesitate to point out improvements for the defending side. Rather he prefers to show the development of not only the attack, but of the player. In Kasparov-Sokolov, Crouch considers this position critical:



Crouch queries, “Now What? White is the exchange down, and as yet has no significant open lines.”

Kasparov played **26 a4!!** and Crouch explains how this was the only way to properly fuel White’s attack. He writes,

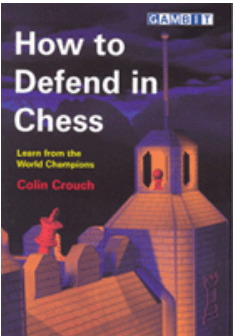
“White needs to open up the black king’s fortress, and he has to do this quickly. If Black is given any chance to return his queen to the queenside, for example with ...Qg8-d8 or ...Qf5-d7, he will have the chance to defend for victory.

“Kasparov would definitely have seen this idea before sacrificing the rook, as otherwise his 22 Rd5 would have been senseless. He would not, though, have analysed everything right through to the end. Even a superb tactician cannot see everything, the human brain has its limitations.

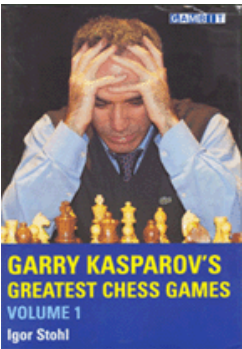
“After you have played through and enjoyed the game, try to go through the critical sideline 26...f5, and try to do it without the help of the board. If you have good tactical vision, you will do well up to 33 Qe2, many moves later, when White has sacrificed a second rook, Black has counter-sacrificed his exchange, White is about to queen a pawn on e8, but Black is a rook up. Is it winning for White? Or is Black winning? Or is it a draw?

“Spare a thought for all Kasparov’s opponents. Imagine what his opponents will have to calculate, once Kasparov finds an interesting

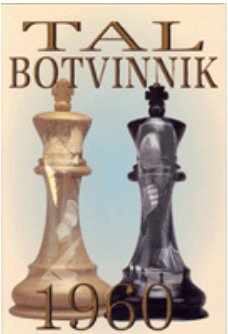
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How to Defend in Chess
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*Garry Kasparov's
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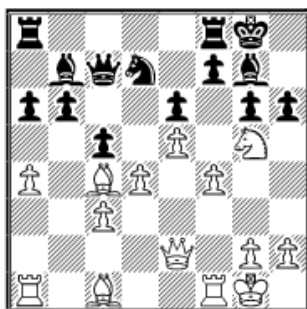


Tal-Botvinnik 1960
by Mikhail Tal

attacking line.”

Crouch also analyses the rest of the game in detail. It is very interesting that he returns to this position later and actually shows how Black could have defended and won! I like that Crouch reveals the “truth” in the position, and I agree with him that this does not take anything away from the victory. Tournament chess is a human battle, and the game is no less instructive. In fact, this example also serves as an illustration of the defensive resources available in seemingly dire positions.

Leonid Stein was something of a mystery to me. He died before I learned to play chess, and, perhaps because he was never world champion, I am not very familiar with his games. Crouch spends several pages discussing the man himself and shows some interesting statistics. Stein had very respectable scores against the top players of his era, to say the least. He was a great attacking player, but, as Crouch puts it, “Stein takes calculated risks, and in every game he calculates not only whether he *should* attack and takes risks, but also whether it is time *not* to take risks.”



In this position Stein had managed to trick a young Karpov into playing a Grünfeld, not exactly an opening Karpov is known to play from the black side. Black had just answered **15 f4** with **15...h6**. Crouch writes,

“If Stein’s last move was highly characteristic of his own attacking play, then this in return is typically Karpovian. Black is not indulging in complicated manoeuvring. He is pushing away one of White’s most dangerous pieces, and saying ‘I don’t believe your sacrifice, I’m not going to lose, and I could well win’.

“Such coolness of response is rare. Most of us, when we see a sacrificial attack by the opponent, see the king being pushed into the open, tend to get anxious, maybe even panicky. Quite often this is of great help to the attacker. If the critical defensive line is avoided, then there will be no refutation, and the element of the bluff will turn into a smooth attacking win. An excellent example involving two former World Champions is the game Spassky-Tai in Montreal 1979, where Spassky fell for the bluff. Here Karpov stayed in full control.

“Now for the critical position. There is not much point in withdrawing the knight, 16 e4? cxd4 17 cxd4? Bxe4 being an outright blunder, so White must sacrifice. Obviously Stein has already decided on the knight sacrifice, but which one?”

Stein played **16.Nxe6** and won. After annotating the game, Crouch returns to the position and spends a lot of time on the alternative 16.Nxf7. I like this approach, because it allows the reader to enjoy the game without much distraction, and then review the critical point in the game in an analysis session.

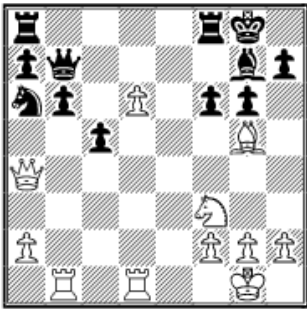
While Tal is the more popular and famous player compared to Stein (for obvious reasons), I have never fully embraced the kind of swashbuckling risk-taking that is more prevalent in the games of players like Tal. The chapter on Tal is also instructive, but for me personally it was less fun to go through. Despite Tal’s popularity and obvious objective strength, his games, despite their attractiveness, never really “spoke” to me. There is too much randomness in the games; too much “bluff.”

In the introduction Crouch emphasizes “that it is best, if possible, to play positionally” and that it is only in a minority of games that sacrificial play is effective. He notes that “good and creative positional chess” can give one the opportunity to take advantage of an opponent’s mistake and that the golden rule is “a player cannot lose a game unless there is a mistake.”

He points out that although nearly every game in the book is a win, the notes reveal that with precise play the outcome should have been a draw or an advantage for the defender. Thus, “it is genuinely positionally acceptable to aim for a win and to create pressure. If in your attack you do not make a mistake, you will not lose.”

However, he also notes that if “a player attacks with extreme accuracy, then the defender has no chances of a win,” or that any inaccuracy by the defender will result in a loss. Therefore, the games in this collection tend to be “highly complicated, probably much more so than in strategic or

The second chapter on Kasparov had many games that I was familiar with, although many of today's young players may not know them that well. One example, Kasparov-Pribyl, had been analysed by Kasparov in *The Test of Time* and was also heavily annotated by Stohl in [*Garry Kasparov's Greatest Chess Games, Vol. 1*](#).



Here Kasparov played **20 d7!**. “Demonstrating excellent attacking instincts...” Crouch quotes both of the sources mentioned, but at the same time he tries to focus on the practical aspect of Kasparov’s attacking play. Although this book looks at very old games (by today’s standards) it does so in a fresh way. Moreover, many players will not be familiar with some of the classic games in this book. Crouch nicely combines the practical elements of attacking play with the cold analysis of modern computer engines. I recommend it.



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