

John Roycroft's *EGEG*

John Roycroft's book *EGEG*, which had been some little time in gestation, finally appeared in September. It can perhaps best be described as a personal ramble among the highways and byways of chess, spiced (unusually for such a book) by contributions from others. The most important of these is a translation of a recent article "Trends are all very well, but..." by Yuri Bazlov, in which he writes knowledgeably and at length on the artificiality and lack of charm of all too many contemporary studies. Also in this category are a translation of a dialogue "The drama of the chess board" by Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky which I totally failed to understand, an article "3 studies that make me happy" by Steffen Neilsen, two "April Fool" problems from Pal Benko's column in *Chess Life*, a fascinating exposition by David Blundell of one of his recent studies, and a copy of my tribute to Marc Bourzutschky as posted on www.jsbeasley.co.uk.

John's own contributions are of numerous kinds. There are descriptions of things that have happened to him in Russia, including not only incidents in Soviet times but also the Moscow 1998 transit lounge story. There are copies of awards of three tourneys which he judged (BCPS 2012, *phénix* 2006-11, Hero-Towns VII). There is a review of Alexander Herbstman's 1958 book "Downfall of the Black King", followed by a rather sad account of a meeting with Herbstman and his family in Leningrad in 1979. There is his account of a day as a spectator at the 2013 Candidates Tournament. There is a note on the *Test Tube Chess* remaindering saga. There is a mini-lecture "Three stings in the tail" from a meeting at Ostroda in 2015. There is an essay on the generation of a 1958 *New Statesman* study. You name it, it is probably here.

And there are selections of his work: his favourite studies, some other compositions (often showing the delight in the exotic which motivates some of his studies), and games. This is perhaps one area where a little use of the scalpel might have been appropriate; I am not convinced that all the games deserve their place (and one or two of the losers might have been granted anonymity), and I have commented elsewhere on composers who expect people to pay good money to look at copies of their certificates. But these amount to a very few pages out of nearly 400.

Deliberately, there is neither index nor list of contents. I quote from the introduction: "The reader has no choice but to browse, to flip through the pages as if *EGEG* were the Internet, a row of high street windows. Search for something familiar, you'll eventually find. On the way you'll encounter the unexpected, which, if the formula is working, may strike your fancy."

The book is attractively ring-bound, with coloured photographs and a modest but effective use of colour in headings and diagrams, and has been printed on A5 pages using a large typeface. This is beautifully clear, but it allows only 29 lines per page with perhaps ten words per line, which massively increases the page count; for example, my own contribution, which fits comfortably into three pages as posted on www.jsbeasley.co.uk, here spreads over eleven (and sadly some extra spaces which I inserted to push items to the next line and improve the layout have been carried across blindly, even though they now occur in the middle of lines and look rather horrible). But the ring binding means that the pages open out flat, and the large print will undoubtedly help elderly readers.

The book is available from John at £40 including postage to an address in the UK, or £30 for a black-and-white edition which I haven't seen. This is perhaps a little high, but I hope people will buy, both for the content and to thank John for his massive contribution to the endgame study world over the years. To order, and to enquire about prices abroad, e-mail roycroft@btinternet.com.

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