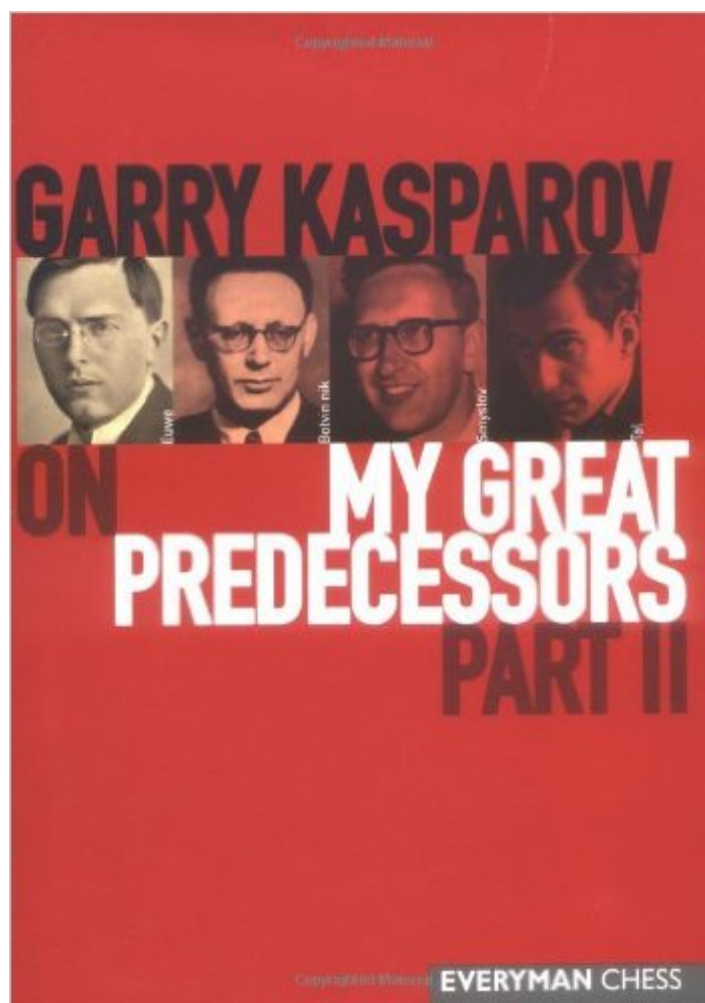


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Garry Kasparov On My Great Predecessors, Part 2



Synopsis

The battle for the World Chess Championship has witnessed numerous titanic struggles that have engaged the interest not only of chess enthusiasts but of the public at large. The chessboard is the ultimate mental battleground and the world champions themselves are supreme intellectual gladiators. This magnificent compilation of chess from the mid-20th century forms the basis of the second part of Garry Kasparov's long-awaited definitive history of the World Chess Championship. Garry Kasparov, who is universally acclaimed as the greatest chess player ever, subjects the play of his early predecessors to a rigorous analysis. This volume features the play of champions Max Euwe (1935-1937) Mikhail Botvinnik (1946-1957, 1958-1961 and 1961-1963), Vassily Smyslov (1957-1958) and Mikhail Tal (1960-1961). However, this book is more than just a compilation of the games of these champions. Kasparov's biographies place them in a fascinating historical, political and cultural context. Kasparov explains how each champion brought his own distinctive style to the chessboard and enriched the theory of the game with new ideas.

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Customer Reviews

A series of books on past world champions by Kasparov, is sure to get a lot of attention and it certainly did for the previous volume. There are a lot of reviews available on internet written by more qualified reviewers for both the books. In those reviews you can find a lot of information about the accuracy of historical facts etc. So I would give here just my personal opinion. If you have read first

volume, then chances are your opinion of this book would be slightly better, but not too different. The books are not masterpieces, but they are really very good. The paper quality, binding, printing and diagrams are excellent. But what I like most about these books is their exceptional value for money. There may not be anything new in the material presented here regarding history of chess or the background of a tournament/match. But it's all compiled for you here in a fun-to-read manner. Maybe there is an error in an annotation. But as a player of average strength, I am not likely to notice it. More importantly to me, the annotations are not superficial, yet most of them are easy to follow. Some of these may be from other sources, but again, I get them compiled for me. Moreover, at many places, Kasparov compares different annotations and provides his evaluations. There are ample diagrams that go with this, and it makes the book a good read for an average player. There are many insights about how a player contributed to development of chess, e.g. Bronstein's contribution to KID. Kasparov also discusses how a player and his games had an effect on him. It gave the book a personal touch. On numerous occasions, you get some juicy stuff regarding a game or a particular move.

In 1988 I had the opportunity to meet Tal and Smyslov, and to make short interviews with the two. I asked Smyslov for his opinion about chess of the 70's and the 80's, and especially about the young champions (then) Fischer, Karpov and Kasparov. Smyslov answered, that neither of them brought something new to chess. In fact, he included all the champions of his days in the list, including himself. "I don't see a progress since the days of Capablanca and Alekhine, and I still recommend to learn first of all from the two", he said. "What about Fischer or Kasparov?", I asked. "They had'n't brought something new to chess", he answered. I find it interesting, because Kasparov himself tells in the book, that Botvinnik demanded from him to play "like Capablanca". Both sayings can tell us something about the Soviet School spirit, that put Capablanca as the ideal chess player. But isn't there any progress at all, since the 30's? Kasparov himself, claims, naturally, for a major progress since then. I wonder. I asked Tal, about computers, that won't be fooled by his unique style and sacrifices. Tal, that looked very bad (I didn't recognise him by the old pictures I had), smiled and said: "Let me play against a computer. It will blow up within a minute, BOOM!". Unfortunately I don't share this thought of the late champion, but Kasparov surprised me, by telling in the book, that even today with computers, the majority of Tal famous combinations are not totally proved to be wrong. Reading this book gave me a very good idea about history of the game from the mid 30's to the early 60's. Euwe, for example, was always seemed to get the crown by an accident that happened to the drunk Alekhine.

(This is my short review, I may post a longer one on my web site.) I have had this book for over a month now, and I have spent many, many hours reading this book and deeply analyzing the games that are given here. (I should also let you know that I am a chess-master with a fair size library, and that I am fairly well-read when it comes to the stories and the lives of the various World Champions.) I think a comment on my review of the first volume is in order here, as it generated a great deal of e-mail - some of which was clearly negative. First, it is just one man's opinion! Secondly, if you check any of the popular web sites like ChessBase, you will find poking holes in the analysis of the first book has become something of a national sport for some people. (In particular, see the series of on-going articles by GM Karsten Mueller.) When I first received this book, I had anticipated learning a great deal about these players that I did not know. In particular, good books on Euwe's life (in English) are fairly hard to come by. (This volume covers World Champions five through eight, i.e., Euwe, Botvinnik, Smyslov, and Tal.) I particularly enjoyed the chapter on Max Euwe, who was World Champion from 1935 to 1937. I had once read, (in a book by a popular American writer); that "Euwe possessed a rather dry style," and that he was a strategist and a deep thinker. (he was) But here we see a different side of Euwe, he is pictured as a great tactician who was not afraid to enter into complications if the position called for it! (I found the combination against Speyer given on page 15 to be especially pleasing.) Overall, I really enjoyed this chapter ... and the look into the life of a multifaceted man that many call the last amateur World Champion.

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