

Petrosian, T., 2015. *Python Strategy*. Glasgow: Quality Chess UK Ltd.

This book, my edition is a 2022 printing of the 2015 version, is a reprint of Petrosian's *The Strategy of Soundness* which originally appeared in Russian. However, that book itself was put together by editor Eduard Shekhtman as Petrosian died in 1984 before completing the book himself. The 2015 English edition, renamed *Python Strategy*, was itself further lightly edited by Oleg Stretsko. I shall leave aside consideration of the philosophical question of what constitutes authorship partly because I can't do philosophy on a Monday morning but mostly because the game annotations included in the book are most certainly by Petrosian himself. Had Petrosian lived to finish the book himself the choice of games might have been different, the selection of autobiographical writings too might have been different. It is, therefore, a little like Eric Morecambe playing the piano. The right notes are there, just not necessarily in the right order.

If you have any interest in the ninth World Champion, chess history, or simply like to play through great games and read what one of the players thought about them then this book is well worth investing a mere £17.05 (Amazon price correct at time of writing).

What do you get for your money? Actually rather a lot. To start with you get 111 games mostly annotated by Petrosian himself. Petrosian would often write his annotations promptly after the game for bulletins or magazines and he had expressed a desire that he did not want to revise them or bring them up to date. Nevertheless, for those interested, there is an appendix written by Karsten Mueller called *Under the microscope of the computer*. Mueller finds four typical errors in Petrosian's analysis.

1. 'Missing tactical options - especially in unbalanced, complicated positions.
2. Defence is in general more difficult for humans than attack, and even Petrosian misses a few moments.
3. Intermediate moves.
4. Stopping the analysis too early: assuming that matters are clear and decided when the fight is not yet over.'

To which my response is 'So what?' Petrosian was playing over the board to a time limit. If you want 'perfect' chess then by all means play through computer v computer games or the tiresome, never ending series of draws in top level correspondence chess. But, if like me, you prefer chess as a human struggle, player v player, then there is far more pleasure to be found in the pages of this book.

In addition to the games, each of the sixteen chapters starts with either a brief introduction by the editor or, much better, a piece by Petrosian himself either that he wrote or in interview. A particular delight is an article he wrote about his preparation for his championship match against Botvinnik.

Quality Chess must be congratulated for updating and publishing this book. Indeed, they seem to be making a great virtue of publishing books about past players including some surprising choices, Gregory Levenfish for example. Most chess players seem to spend most of their 'book money' on opening works. That's fine, and certainly the correspondence player cannot afford to be too far behind the opening times in their favourite openings, but I think

there is much to be said for preferring books like this one. So, should you win against me in future by playing an engine cooked novelty on move 18 which Ntirlis gives then, grand. I am looking forward to preferring another Quality Chess book, maybe Mark Taimanov's *I was a Victim of Bobby Fischer*.

Adam Spencer