

# Ex Acton ad Astra

## The Golden Age of a Chancer

John Nunn has recently commented on the decade of decline that led to Batsford's insolvency in 1999, but he arrived behind the scenes too late to witness goings-on during the publisher's – and Raymond Keene's – 1980s heyday. Batsford insider and Keene crony Osama len Baden uncovers some of the secret history of what Nunn calls 'a golden age'.

**A**t the end of his recent *Grandmaster Chess Move by Move* John Nunn relates how the frustrations of botched typesetting and derisory royalties led him to become a typesetter and publisher himself – and he chronicles his problems doing business with Batsford in the troubled climate of the 1990s. In contrast he refers wistfully to the previous decade, when he was principally a player and author, as ‘the golden age for international chess’.

The 1980s were also the years of plenty for Batsford’s chess list. But the slanting golden light left many pools of darkness, both inside and outside the publishing house. At the heart of the shadows sat Batsford’s ‘chief chess adviser’, grandmaster Raymond Dennis Keene. There is much still to tell about both Batsford and Keene, and neither story, in the 1980s at least, can be told on its own.

The new material in this piece is drawn from the forgotten archives and private worlds of the publisher and the adviser/impresario. The surrounding narrative of 1980s events, as well as offering a context for those unfamiliar with the period, will make it possible to compare the happenings in those private worlds with the versions put out in public – by Keene, Batsford and others.



In early 1982, prompted by his wife’s social ambitions, Raymond Keene moved from a small flat behind his mother-in-law’s house in Acton to a comfortable apartment at the top of a porticoed terrace in Queen’s Gate Place, Kensington. His life now had to shift gear to meet the expenses of upward mobility, and aloft in his SW7 eyrie he presided over his financial and political involvements in the golden age. But the charmed years of risking and winning slurred his judgement, and as his luck turned the Acton Chancer was dangerously slow to adapt. At the end of the 1980s, half in denial and half in deceit, he would lay claim to a triumphal decade. But to observers among both friends and public many of those ‘successes’ had damaged rather than enhanced his reputation.

How had the same friends and public seen Keene back at the start of the 1980s? His public standing was under pressure even before the removal van set off from Acton. He would later claim that he was playing some of the best chess of his life in 1981, but a new generation was coming to the fore and he was slipping down the British rankings. Fading too was the prestige earned from his well-

regarded books of the late 60s to mid 70s: *Flank Openings*, *Aron Nimzowitsch: A Reappraisal*, *Leonid Stein – Master of Attack*.

It was now ten years since Keene had abandoned an academic career at Cambridge in favour of chess, after the eminent supervisor of his PhD on Thomas Mann’s *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*) had refused to admit he was wrong on a point of detail. Keene had commented that Visconti’s 1971 film of the story showed the central character, von Aschenbach, with a daughter, but the supervisor told him this was nonsense because von Aschenbach was gay and would not have had a child – arrogantly maintaining this position even when Keene cited the page of the book on which the daughter was mentioned by Mann. Keene had decided he preferred to work in a field where those who were demonstrably wrong could be made to pay the price – by losing the game, in the case of chess.

But somewhere in these ten years Keene’s devotion to his craft as a writer had faltered, and by the time he left Acton his potboiler period was well under way. High-speed production, often involving the reuse of his *Spectator* columns and other journalism, was becoming the norm. He even occasionally claimed in private to have ‘written’ books in ten days or less. One such was *Dynamic Chess Openings* (1982). But despite this trend the cynicism he exhibited fell short of 1990s levels, when he would extend his rehashing to other people’s work. His 1992 *Complete Book of Gambits* plagiarized an article by John Donaldson in *Inside Chess*, and Batsford’s American distributor, Henry Holt & Co, paid Donaldson \$3000 in damages. At least the Raymond Keene of the 1980s generally only plagiarized himself.

These were still the earlier years of Keene’s long trek from minor sleaze to grand villainy. He was a relatively small-time rogue, happy to accept a second’s fee without doing any work, or to overspend the budget of a world championship match by a few thousand pounds. And even if he was helping himself to rather more towards the end of the decade than the beginning, the amounts involved were still several zeros short of the sums in play at the turn of the century, when Keene would conjure millions away from those ill-advised enough to invest in his businesses, and become the subject of innumerable articles in the investigative magazine *Private Eye*. The 1982 Keene was not yet the wholly unprincipled swindler who in the late 90s would refuse to repay £60,000 to his former brother-in-

law David Levy, and he was not yet so mired in unsavouriness himself that he was unable to detect it in others, as would happen in 2000 when a heroin-addicted secretary in his employ stole £19,000 in cash from his home.

By and large Keene's private reputation – his standing among those who knew him personally – was holding up rather better in 1982 than his public one. It is true that he had faced serious criticism – most notably from Korchnoi over his conduct as a second at Baguio in 1978 – but he was also the beneficiary of genuine good will from many quarters. Several of the American players who came to maturity in the 70s had admired both his early literary efforts and certain features of his play. He was also well thought of by members of the younger British generation, including Speelman and Short, who were given chances of international competition at the small winter tournaments Keene organized in the late 70s and early 80s at the Marina West Guest House in Brighton. These were pleasantly informal events where anyone could help themselves from the bar and note their drinks on a sheet of paper – or two sheets in the case of a popular Finnish grandmaster. The likeable and cultured Jan Timman, world no 2 in 1982, was a good friend of Keene, as was the relentlessly cerebral Robert Hübner. And Keene had many Argentinian admirers who were grateful for his visit during their country's political isolation in the 1970s. No less a keen amateur than Jorge Luis Borges had called Keene in Buenos Aires asking to meet him. One evening in the spring of 1982, with the Falklands War in progress, Miguel Quinteros phoned Keene to say he hoped it would not affect their friendship.

Keene appreciated the affection shown him, while allowing himself the occasional criticism in respect of his friends. Hübner, he said, was clearly an exceptionally clever man, but an incident involving the plastic frog in gondolier's hat and striped jersey at the end of Keene's bath had shown that he suffered from the standard German lack of a sense of humour. Keene had indicated the frog with the words, 'Look, Robert – Der Toad in Venedig'. Hübner, a fluent English speaker, had just looked blank, and had difficulty even when the joke was explained to him.

The contrast in perception between those who knew Keene 25 or more years ago and those who have dealt with him more recently was typified in a

response of Icelandic grandmaster Margeir Petursson, who has compensated many years' neglect of his chess career by amassing a banking fortune. At the 2004 Mallorca Olympiad he threw a business party, and in one conversation Keene's name was mentioned. Petursson's eyes clouded for a second as he searched his memory. Then it came to him: 'Ah, Raymond Keene . . . yes. A nice man . . .'

And surprising as it may sound, Keene was indeed a 'nice man' – or at least a man with a nice side to him: an intelligent and interesting conversationalist, able to make and take a joke, and a generous entertainer not only at home but also in restaurants and on nights out. The dark side was there, of course,

but it was not yet in the ascendancy. He simply belonged to the common category of those who are more agreeable socially than in business.

In fact though there was never a wholly clear-cut distinction between Keene's social and business lives. The frequent and lavish home entertaining began soon after he and his wife settled into their new apartment, but it was evident from the start that he was weighing carefully the actual or potential benefits offered by his guests. His special talent was to appreciate not only who could be of present service, but to pinpoint those who would one day be useful, perhaps many years hence.

So on the one hand many of the regulars on Keene's early 80s guest lists were of obvious value to him: American IM Jonathan Tisdall, who telexed 'local colour' and 'ringside commentary' for the world championship books when Keene was on another continent; or the former England international who at the end of the night sometimes had to be held under the cold tap of Keene's bathtub (while the frog looked on) before he was sober enough to face the many flights of stairs, but who would write sections of Keene's books when Keene was too busy; or the specialist typesetters who brought Keene his latest proofs; or Stewart Reuben, whose accounting skills could make almost any chess event a financial success – for Reuben and his partners at any rate; or personalities from chess politics who might be passing through London, such as Florencio Campomanes; or people with connections in real politics, like Dominic Lawson, son of Mrs Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer.

On the other hand it was harder, perhaps, to see why Keene made sure Harry Golombek and Sir

Stuart Milner-Barry were always present, while only occasionally remembering to invite the popular and respected Bob Wade, whose work in junior training had made a great contribution to British chess, and whose library was the main research tool of Batsford authors. True, Golombek and Milner-Barry were a direct link to another 'golden age' –



'Gary's Friend' Eric Schiller: 'with him the possibility of disaster was never far away'

they had known Capablanca and Alekhine – and they bore the distinction of having been Enigma code-breakers, although this subject was off-limits in conversation as Bletchley Park was still officially a secret. But this was not why they were always invited, nor was it simply because Keene understood that these elderly people had few social activities and much enjoyed attending. Had kindness been the main motive then Wade, who on occasion was heard to lament that his social life was not all it might be, would not have been so often forgotten. The truth was that with Golombek and Milner-Barry Keene was playing a long game, and how exactly these two amiable old gentlemen could help him would only become clear some years later.

In the summer of 1982 the spirit of optimistic engagement with the future at 15E Queen's Gate Place contrasted with the diffidence enveloping 4 Fitzhardinge Street, where several of Batsford's lists were struggling. Chess was one of the excep-

tions, and it was starting to be viewed as a possible counterweight to underperformance elsewhere. There were already one or two encouraging signs. The 'instant book' *Massacre in Merano* (1981) had not only sold well but had elicited respectful astonishment in the publishing trade at the speed of its appearance. Much, though, would depend on whether later in 1982 the chess list could deliver its first blockbuster – in the form of an openings encyclopaedia bearing the name of wunderkind Gary Kasparov. If this fulfilled expectations Batsford would be well placed to sign the first western contract with Kasparov for a biographical work. Keene was pivotal to all these projects, and at this time in their history Batsford had no doubts about their formal association with him being good for business.

*Batsford Chess Openings* appeared on schedule in autumn 1982. From the reading public's point of view the list of contributors was intriguing, including as it did both Gary Kasparov and Eric Schiller. It was inevitable that questions would be asked. Had Schiller written most or all of the book? Had Kasparov written anything at all? The campaign for clarification would start the following year, led by Edward Winter.

On proofs of the first edition of *BCO* Schiller was credited as 'Compiler'. He objected to this word and eventually appeared as 'Research Editor', but perhaps 'Compiler' more accurately described his contribution. A few of the chess sections were written by Jonathan Tisdall and John Fedorowicz, and Tisdall wrote the introductions to each opening, but the greater part of the first edition was drafted by Schiller. During the summer of 1982 he sat in the Acton flat, now occupied by Tisdall, with one eye on the page of *BCO* he was writing and the other on the television. This became both eyes on the television during the soccer World Cup, with *BCO* continuing to be generated in background mode. Keene was frequently asked by worried colleagues if Schiller was competent for the task. The reply was invariably that it was unfortunate to have to use Schiller but he was a necessary 'workhorse' – the word Keene always used – since no one else would be prepared to take on this huge job. In addition he was 'Gary's friend' (a nickname often used at the time to mock Schiller) with both the access and the Russian-language skills necessary for communication with Kasparov, who did not yet speak much English.

Kasparov did make a contribution, but not until the first proofs were ready. There were logistical

problems, because Batsford wanted to publish *BCO* before the Olympiad at Lucerne in October, but this meant proofs would somehow have to reach Kasparov while he was playing in the Moscow Interzonal in September. Keene would be going to Moscow, but the difficulty was how to transmit new batches of material as they arrived from the typesetters. In those days it was hard to send anything to Moscow at speed. A Foreign Office friend of Batsford managing director Peter Kemmis Betty came to the rescue. This contact, referred to in telexes simply as 'Lamont', arranged for the proofs to travel in the diplomatic bag, which went from London to Moscow on Mondays and Thursdays.



Burning the midnight oil as Larry Christiansen's second, Moscow 1982

Keene was thus able to visit Kasparov's hotel room after the games with fresh copy for Kasparov to annotate. About one hundred pages in total were amended in this way. Eric Schiller returned from Moscow before Keene, bringing with him some of Kasparov's corrections and thus speeding up production of the final version. Keene loyally credited Schiller in a telex to Batsford: 'Eric invaluable in Moscow, facilitated Kasparov contact and worked very hard on *BCO* . . . Would it be possible to contribute to his expenses? He deserves it.'

Less fulsome were comments on Keene's own performance in Moscow. Larry Christiansen, whom Keene was supposed to be assisting in the Interzonal, touched on the subject in an interview with *Sunday Times* journalist Nick Pitt in March 1990:

'Keene was my second in Moscow in 1982. Shall we say he didn't live up to my expectations. He

was paid \$3,500 by the American Chess Foundation, but he seemed more interested in making book deals than helping me. We were two weeks in Moscow. I had just one adjourned game . . . a very complex rook ending, and he showed up inebriated and collapsed. Why me, God? I thought.' (See also *Kingpin* 32.)

In fact Keene's business agenda in Moscow went beyond even Kasparov, Christiansen and the book deals. He was a British Chess Federation delegate and already nurturing political ambitions of his own, and the Interzonal was an opportunity to network in the run-up to the FIDE elections that autumn. In a well-stocked Merano restaurant the year before Keene had wined, venisoned and cigarred the incumbent president, Fridrik Olafsson, but he had since realigned himself when he saw that Campomanes was likely to win in 1982. A visit by Campomanes to one of the Queen's Gate Place soirées had gone badly wrong, however, when Jonathan Tisdall, after several glasses of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape Keene always provided, tackled the presidential candidate over the scandals and corruption with which he was already linked. Keene had slunk out of his own living room in despair and gone early to bed.

The first edition of *BCO* sold spectacularly and was highly profitable, despite its considerable production costs. The contract signed between Batsford and Keene on 16 June 1982 shows an advance of £3,800, possibly a record for a chess book. To set this against contemporary pay-scales, Karpov and Andersson received £2,850 each for sharing first place at the 1982 Phillips & Drew Kings, one of the year's strongest tournaments. An accompanying letter from Kemmis Betty to Keene makes clear that Keene will share the £3,800 with Tisdall and Schiller, but there is no financial provision for Kasparov in either the letter or the contract. Nor is there any mention of *BCO* in an internal Batsford document listing the contracts signed in the late 70s and early 80s with VAAP, the Soviet publishing bureaucracy. It is clear is that neither Batsford nor VAAP officially treated Kasparov as an author of *BCO*.

On the other hand there was nothing ambiguous about the authorial presence of Eric Schiller. The published work, in which according to Edward Winter a clear majority of the pre-1945 references contain mistakes, stands as a monument to its 'research editor'. Fortunately for Batsford most readers judged the book more by the quality of its

modern material, and here Kasparov had done a good job in the openings of which he saw proofs. He had concentrated his attention on ensuring that in the sharper lines the most important recent games were present.

*BCO* ran up considerable printing and typesetting costs. The bill for the latter was around £10,000 – which like the advance may have been a record for a chess book. In the final chapter of *Grandmaster Chess Move by Move* John Nunn notes the difficulty of processing chess text in the era before computers could offer what-you-see-is-what-you-get page previews, and when most of what appeared on screen was in code. A design innovation in *BCO* was that notes would always be on the same double spread as the columns of main moves to which they referred, so a browsing reader need never chase a note over the page. But the task of formatting in this way turned the typesetters' task into a highly technical one, necessitating much mental juggling of text, and they charged accordingly for their services.



Eric Schiller drafted the first edition of *BCO*. Kasparov contributed later by annotating the proof pages.

Reprints were made and a prosperous future for the title seemed assured. The following year Keene auctioned Kasparov's handwritten amendments to raise money for the Friends of Chess. As will

**'Arranging the USSR v Rest of the World match in around eight days was perhaps the most spectacular of all Keene's efforts as a chess impresario'**

become clear, it was no coincidence that this was Harry Golombek's favourite charity. The winning bid of £300 was made by a Mr Helmut Glaser of Singapore, and the proofs were duly handed to his representative at a lunchtime reception in the Fitzhardinge Street offices on 7 July 1983. It was unfortunate that Batsford did not take photocopies. This meant that when Edward Winter began to express doubts about the extent of Kasparov's involvement in the book, they lacked the principal piece of evidence with which to counter his allegations. In September that year Keene told Winter that in exchange for a cheque for £50 to the Friends of Chess he would obtain a photocopy of the material that was now in Singapore. Winter took up the challenge, but Keene's ensuing attempts to contact Mr Glaser with a request for copies were in vain. Over the next few years, however, some twenty Kasparov original pages missed at the time of the auction would come to light when offices were tidied.

The *BCO* 'research editor', meanwhile, was making other appearances for Batsford, although with Schiller the possibility of disaster was never far away. A typical accident around this time was his treating the public to an advance snippet of *The Schliemann Defence*, in which he attempted to improve on analysis by his co-author Leonid Shamkovich but made a gross blunder, losing a queen in a couple of moves. This was pointed out by a reader of *Players Chess News*. Shamkovich was furious, as the impression was given that he had been party to the oversight. Batsford were also angry, because Schiller was in breach of contract by quoting sections of the book before publication.

The latter part of 1983 saw Keene achieve the political and organizational coup of bringing to London the Candidates semi-final matches – Korchnoi-Kasparov and Ribli-Smyslov. Keene suggested to *Financial Times* journalist Dominic Lawson that they co-author a book on the event, with a textual section by Lawson and notes to the

games by Keene. Lawson was only a competent amateur at chess, but what interested Keene was his contact with the highest levels of government – Lawson's father had recently been appointed by Mrs Thatcher to run the British economy. The connection would pay off when Mrs Thatcher was persuaded to attend the opening ceremony of the 1986 world championship match in London. Although Lawson would go on to a distinguished career in journalism, editing both the *Spectator* and the *Sunday Telegraph*, he was the junior partner to Keene in 1983 on what was in any event his first book, and at Keene's behest he was obliged to submit his text for Campomanes's approval. To Lawson's credit the FIDE president was sufficiently irked by what he read to ask for several changes.

1984 brought another organizational triumph for Keene. The second USSR v Rest of the World match took place in London from 24 to 29 June, sponsored by the London Docklands Development Corporation. Arranging this match in around eight days was perhaps the most spectacular of all Keene's efforts as a chess impresario. The opening speech was made by Brian Walden, a former member of parliament and a well-known TV broadcaster. When the moment came to acknowledge Keene's achievement, his words were: 'And Raymond Keene – what can one say of him?' This was appropriate to Keene's finest hour, but also to less distinguished moments in his wide-ranging career. It will not be easy to find an epitaph for Keene – Walden may have made the best suggestion so far.

But there was also a failure in 1984. On 15 April, towards the end of a BBC TV programme on Kasparov's Candidates final victory over Smyslov, Keene and fellow BCF official David Anderton, gamely assisted by interviewer Jeremy James, stage-managed an appeal for a sponsor to enable half of the forthcoming Karpov-Kasparov match to take place in the UK. With a knowing smile James asked what was needed 'to make sure part of the match is held outside Russia', to which Anderton slowly and clearly replied: 'A sponsor with a large purse, and a bid by the 10th of May.' Asked if he was 'already involved in under-the-scenes manipulations to try to get the match to London', Keene replied: 'Yes, I'd very much like to get the match in London. There was a general feeling that getting the semi-final was impossible. This

isn't impossible, it's just unlikely, so I think we have a very good chance.'

But the 'very good chance' was not enough. Despite the far bigger TV audiences in those days for such a programme (because there were so few channels), no offers were forthcoming. Keene and Anderton would have to wait another two years to stage a world championship match in London.

Keene was endlessly inventive when it came to finding ways of reusing what he had already published. It was also in 1984 that, again acting as a representative of the British Chess Federation, he persuaded the insurance firm Legal & General to sponsor a syndicated weekly column that would be distributed to local newspapers around Britain. The flimsy sales pitch for which Legal & General fell was that many newspapers would use the free material as the basis for regular articles (even if they had never run a chess column), and in their gratitude would be bound to give Legal & General a mention. Unsurprisingly nearly all the columns so distributed were recyclings of old Keene journalism, and also unsurprisingly they led to very few

mentions of Legal & General. When it dawned on the insurers a couple of years later that they were not getting much for their sponsorship money, Keene promptly found

another gullible company, Peterborough Software, and continued the syndicated column for a further two years.

One of the attractions for Keene was that almost any semi-recent piece of his would do, and his sister Jackie could easily take charge during his many absences abroad. The opening lines of a letter she wrote on 29 September 1986 in connection with the syndicated column, in which she refers to the world championship match then about to conclude in Leningrad, capture the spirit in which the siblings operated over many years: 'On reflection, I think it better to wait until the end of the match and then just reproduce whichever *Times* article suits the situation.'

The satisfaction Keene had from the success of the USSR-World match in 1984 was counterpointed by a galling detail in his private life. He spoke gloomily one evening of a bet he had with Jackie's husband, computer chess pioneer David Levy, on their becoming millionaires before their fortieth birthdays. Levy would turn forty in 1985 but had

**'Keene knew he had a dangerous rival for the *Times* column in William Hartston... it was essential that the contest did not degenerate into a tawdry free-for-all which might be decided on nothing more than journalistic ability'**

clearly made his million. Keene had a few years in hand, but foresaw no possibility of reaching the target in time. Levy and Keene were good friends and Levy was always helpful and supportive, but Keene clearly resented being outdone by his brother-in-law. Still fresh in the memory of Keene's private circle, for example, was Levy's glamorous participation in the freeing of Ronald Biggs, whose legal defence against extradition he organized after the Great Train Robber was kidnapped from Rio to Barbados in 1981. (See *Kingpin* 36.)



David Levy: friend, brother-in-law and rival

All in all 1984 was a relatively tranquil year, but the two that followed were tumultuous both for world chess and for Keene. They would be good ones for Batsford, who had upwards of a dozen titles a year coming out, and who cashed in on the spate of world championship matches with an 'instant book' on each occasion.

1985 started with intense worldwide publicity for chess when Campomanes curtailed the first Karpov-Kasparov match, announcing that they would replay later in the year. Keene's political instinct told him this was the moment to withdraw his support for Campomanes and throw his hat into the ring as a candidate in his own right. He would soon become a vociferous critic of the termination, conducting his denunciations of Campomanes with

a characteristic blend of fervour and inaccuracy.

In the interval before the rematch Keene achieved two long-cherished ambitions. At the same moment his venal instincts got the better of him, and what originally appeared an inconsequential incident – the swindling of money from the British Chess Federation at the Tunis Interzonal – would return to haunt and humiliate him.

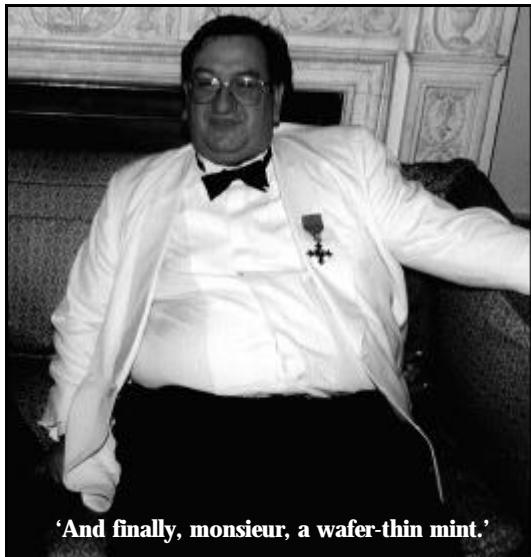
Harry Golombek had been *Times* chess correspondent for several decades, but by the mid-1980s his health was failing. Keene wrote the weekly *Spectator* piece, but this was a limited readership. For both political and financial reasons he needed a grander platform. He had had his eye on Golombek's column for some time – hence the currying of favour with the old man through the constant invitations to the Kensington parties and the solicitous attention to his preferred charity. Apart from the auctioning of the Kasparov proofs, Keene had often slipped references to the Friends of Chess into articles and tournament bulletins.

Keene knew he had a dangerous rival for the *Times* column in William Hartston. The problem with Hartston was that he was a good writer – certainly a better one than Keene. So it was essential that the contest did not degenerate into a tawdry free-for-all which might be decided on nothing more than journalistic ability. Keene placed his faith in the relationship he had carefully built up with Golombek. He knew there was a chance of becoming a sort of heir designate to the column if Golombek favoured him as his successor and advised *Times* management of this. But the most important part of the operation would be to pounce the instant that Golombek, for any reason, was *hors de combat*. Whoever got in at that moment as 'temporary replacement' was clear favourite to inherit.

It was in mid-1985 that Golombek's health deteriorated to the point where help was needed. As hoped, he recommended Keene as a stand-in while he was ill. But for a while things did not go according to plan. Despite Keene's anointing, Hartston managed to contribute some articles. Keene fought back, determined to show it was he who was playing the dominant role in the hiatus. Hartston was kept at bay, and by the time Golombek finally announced he would not be able to return Keene had done enough to ensure his own succession.

Once appointed Keene gave an early indication of what his approach would be. In game 11 of the 1985 world championship rematch Kasparov levelled the scores to two wins apiece when Karpov

missed a fairly elementary back-rank tactic. The *Times* report raved, unrecognizably to most players, about one of the great combinations of chess history. So impressed were the editors with Keene's sensational story that it appeared on the front page. When Jonathan Tisdall took him to task later that morning for breach of journalistic principle, Keene was unrepentant. 'Look', he replied, 'I got chess onto the front page. No one's ever done that before.'



'And finally, monsieur, a wafer-thin mint.'

The other long-term ambition that Keene fulfilled in mid-1985 was the acquiring of an honour, the Order of the British Empire. The key to this was the other old gentleman who was a regular guest at Keene's parties. Sir Stuart Milner-Barry KCVO, CB, OBE had retired from a distinguished civil service career not only with several honours himself but also with excellent contacts in the department administering them. The British honours system has fallen into disrepute, but the damage has been done more by politicians and their cronies than civil servants. Sir Stuart Milner-Barry, at any rate, always came across as a model of old-school integrity.

In late 1984/early 1985, following Keene's organizational achievements with the Candidates semi-finals and the USSR-World match, Sir Stuart could support Keene's nomination with a clear conscience and in the belief the award was justified. The timing was fortunate, though, because had the question of recommending Keene arisen a year or two later then Sir Stuart might well have lost some

sleep. By then Keene would have been accused of using a national newspaper column for his own political ends and of misspending the budget of a world championship match. He would also have failed in his bid to become the FIDE general secretary, and be facing expulsion from the BCF over the Tunis fiddle.

The last mentioned of these was the first to occur, in mid-1985, but it would not become public for two years. Just as Keene was taking delivery of both the *Times* column and his OBE he once again succumbed to the temptation to help himself to a fee by pretending to be a second at an interzonal. This time he did it in collusion with his old rival Tony Miles. But Miles would own up to the deception in 1987, and the fall-out would do serious damage to them both.

But in late 1985 there was no hint of the trouble to come. The year ended on a high note for Keene and Batsford when Kasparov won the rematch to become world champion, and the 'instant book' *Manoeuvres in Moscow* sold out in eight days.

The new champion's coronation naturally also marked a high point in 1980s chess. But whereas the golden age would continue for several years, carried forward by the great series of Kasparov-Karpov matches, the World Cup tournaments and the general air of vitality and wellbeing in which chess basked at that time, it would be a different story for the Acton Chancer. The reasons for the falling off in his fortunes after 1985 lay in Keene himself. Given his buoyant mood following the successes of 1982-85, there was little likelihood that he would do anything other than roll for even higher stakes in 1986. But his judgement was crumbling under the weight of overconfidence. Without realizing it he had already blundered badly at Tunis, and worse was to come.

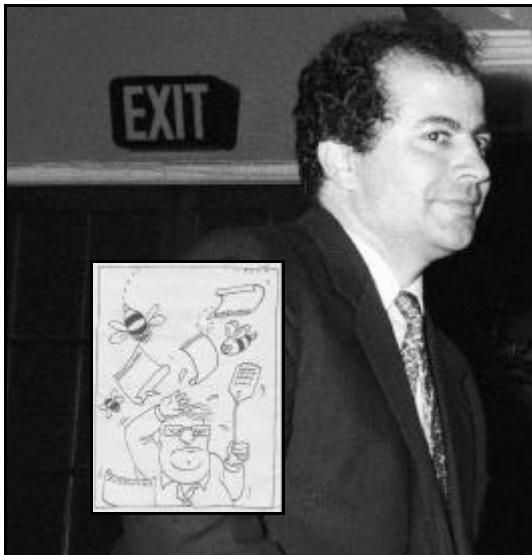


1986 brought Keene's organizational and political ambitions of the 1980s to a head. He succeeded in bringing half of a Kasparov-Karpov world championship match to London, and he ran for the post of general secretary of FIDE on a ticket with Brazilian academic Lincoln Lucena. Keene's idea was to rule world chess from the general secretary's office, which he planned to move to London. He did not stand for president because the voting structure meant large numbers of third-world delegates effectively controlled the outcome, and he believed there was more chance of persuading these members not to vote for Campomanes if the alternative was

another third-world candidate.

Keene planned to campaign on his own behalf in his *Times* column, but the conflict of interest with his journalistic responsibilities was for once so overt that he felt obliged to visit the editor, Charles 'Gorbals' Wilson, to discuss the matter. He returned from the meeting exultant, describing how he had told Wilson about Campomanes's corrupt and despotic tenure as president and convinced him the Times should throw its weight behind the campaign to unseat him. Keene quoted Wilson's enthusiastic endorsement: 'Let's f\*\*\* the Filipino.'

Meanwhile Keene had control of a section of the home-based chess media. The *British Chess Magazine* answered to the British Chess Federation, where Keene was an official, and pressure was brought to bear on the *BCM*'s editor Bernard Cafferty. The BCF's own publication, *Newsflash*, was in the hands of Keene's sister Jackie and his brother-in-law David Goodman.



Troubled chess café owner Aly Amin and (inset) a cartoon satirizing Keene from his magazine  
*Zugzwang*

The London leg of the 1986 Kasparov–Karpov match ran smoothly enough, or at least it appeared to – the financial problems for which Keene and Reuben were responsible only revealed themselves a few months later. There was, though, one slightly surreal irritant for Keene in the form of a megalomaniac Egyptian café owner from Camden Town. Keene had met Aly Amin in 1983 and they had immediately hit it off, preparing plans for joint

domination of the chess world during their first evening together in Chalk Farm Road. Amin promised to put up a prize for a *Spectator* competition, and this was the cause of their relationship rapidly souring. The news that a female reader had won the prize roused the traditionalist in the Egyptian. He swore he would never give the prize to a woman, leaving Keene high and dry. The ensuing antagonism between the two culminated in Amin producing a rival bulletin and book at the 1986 world championship, and in his losing a court case the following year after he had tried to scupper a Thames TV/Keene publishing project.

The frustration of not being able to hurt Keene took its toll on Amin, already an alcoholic and greatly stressed by the need to hide this from fellow Muslims. For a few years he dreamed of revenge and fantasized about epic chess events he would organize, but at the same time he was racked by guilt at spending his way through his girlfriend's inheritance. Each night he would retire to the flat above the café to drink himself into a stupor, eventually killing himself this way.

Amin's guerrilla assaults over the years never seriously threatened Keene, but fending them off was a drain on his time and resources. This was particularly true in the summer of 1986, when the world championship match was in progress and the FIDE election looming. Each game day the venue at the Park Lane Hotel became a distribution point for the latest polemic from the 'Caliph of Camden'.

Through the autumn of 1986 the Lucena/Keene presidential campaign moved ahead. Away from public view David Levy undertook some unofficial duties, becoming something akin to a one-man dirty tricks department. To try to undermine the allegiance of the francophone African delegates to Campomanes, who routinely bribed them and other third-world representatives with air tickets and gifts paid for from FIDE funds, Levy commissioned for distribution in Dubai a French-language flier full of trumped-up or exaggerated charges against Campomanes, under the headline 'Le Dictateur des Echecs!'. Ironically post-election reality upstaged Levy's fiction, with Campomanes's conduct vindicating some of the exaggerations. The statement in the flier that Campomanes wanted to be 'president for life' did not look serious in 1986, but within a few years the question being widely asked was if rather than when Campomanes would one day step down.

Even at the crux of his life's ambitions Keene was too lazy to proof-read his own campaign brochure.

There were some strange turns of phrase in Lucena's profile – he was described as 'steadily constant', for example – and the spelling was worthy of the *Times* column: 'Brasil', 'Brasilian', 'Sao Paolo'. Of the five words in the title of the newspaper Lucena wrote for, two were present and correct.



Tony Miles' allegations led to Keene's resignation from the BCF, and ultimately to his own mental breakdown

But as it turned out neither a better brochure nor a better campaign would have made any difference. Keene was a gifted pragmatist and well versed in the darker political arts, but he had hooked up with an even more adept practitioner. The world champion was vital to the Lucena/Keene campaign's hopes of swaying the third-world vote, but at the very last minute Kasparov informed them that they no longer had his support. By implication Kasparov was saying that he was prepared to let Campomanes win, even though he had spent nearly two years since the termination of the 84–85 match condemning Campomanes at every opportunity.

Keene and his supporters did not understand Kasparov's motive at the time, but with hindsight it appeared that he wanted Campomanes in situ to increase support for the breakaway Grand Masters' Association, which would be launched the following year. In his public utterances Keene kept quiet

about Kasparov's role in his campaign's debacle, choosing instead to blame Lucena and others. With large royalties in the offing from a second edition of *BCO*, Kasparov's treachery had to be accepted.

1987 began at an all-time low for Keene, who was suffering the twin hangovers of Dubai and the Karpov–Kasparov match. It was in January that the extent of the shortfall in the world championship budget became clear, and that month Keene and fellow organizer Stewart Reuben were hauled before the BCF Management Board. BCF Finance Director Mohammed Amin (no relation to Aly Amin) gave an account of events in a conversation with Nick Pitt of the *Sunday Times* on 7 March 1990. His remarks were quoted in *Kingpin* 32 but bear repeating here.

'The world championship match was a complete shambles financially. We had an agreement with the GLC/LRB [Greater London Council/London Residuary Body] whereby any surplus would be returned to them, and any shortfall would fall on the BCF. It looked tricky for a while but then there was extra sponsorship. All forecasts suggested a surplus of £40,000 to £50,000, and they were still saying that after the match.'

During the match my belief, whatever they say to the contrary, is that Stewart and Ray set out with the objective of spending the money down to zero and they missed – by about £17,000. They wanted to spend it all and they overspent. They were very lavish, they spent £18,000 on taxis. Atlas Cars had an account and eventually the last £4,000 was settled after writs arrived at the BCF.

In January 1987 – after the match – at a Management Board meeting, Ray and Stewart signed agreements that they would return their fees, of £6,000 each, if the event showed a loss. At the meeting David Anderton threatened to resign if they didn't . . . They have since pleaded poverty. In Stewart's case that is reasonably accurate. He has reached an agreement that he will work off the sum in future.

Ray has tried to resile from the agreement. He has never actually said sue me. Last September he was offering various copyrights to the BCF, but they were not worth the sum involved.

Until early January 1987 we thought we were in the black on the world championship match. In October 1986 the projected profit was down to £25,000. All of a sudden the story changed and writs started to appear.'

A few months later a third hangover was added when Miles came clean about what had happened at Tunis. By an arresting twist Keene the fundraiser had become Keene the pilferer – the £1,189 he and Miles falsely claimed from the BCF had actually been raised by the Friends of Chess. But now that Keene had his hands on Golombek's column there was no longer any need to keep up pretences.

The BCF set up an inquiry, and while it was pending they reached an agreement with Keene's solicitors. Keene would resign from the BCF, and the BCF would accept publicly that the resignation was not connected with the inquiry. The disastrous consequences for Miles' mental health – one night in late September that year he jumped over the barrier at Downing Street, determined to tell Mrs Thatcher that Keene was trying to kill him – were described in Nick Pitt's January 1991 feature in the *Sunday Times*.

Keene in contrast rebounded strongly, and with typical chutzpah promptly announced in *The Times* the founding of the 'English Chess Association', explaining that he had resigned from the BCF because he was 'disillusioned'. The ECA took its place in a sequence of ghostly chess organs created by Keene for ends which were normally financial/sponsorial or political/electoral, but in the case of the ECA had more to do with saving face. Among others which, during the 1980s at any rate, showed few signs of life were the 'Commonwealth Chess Association' (1982) and the 'Commonwealth Women's Chess Association' (1985).

Some of Keene's activities hereabouts give the impression of prefiguring in miniature the techniques he would apply in his more ambitious larcenies towards the turn of the century. He first encouraged the public to give to the Friends of Chess and then helped himself to the donations. Later he would persuade people to invest in a company (Brain Games Network plc) and then siphon off the money raised. And those insubstantial chess associations parallel the hollowed-out corporate entities that played a part in his business chicanery.

1987 was a less turbulent year for Batsford than for Keene, although they did lose their long-serving chess editor, Paul Lamford. One of Robert Maxwell's sons made Lamford an unrefusible offer, and he left to work at Pergamon. The chess list was ticking over well in the run-up to the next big event, the already commissioned second edition

of *BCO*. In November there was the fourth world championship match in three years – and the fourth 'instant book', a product the public did not seem to be tiring of. Keene would look back on these match books with some pride, telling a questioner on the internet in February 2007 that he felt they ranked among his best literary achievements.

David Levy joined the Keene/Batsford delegation in Seville during the 1987 match. Neither his first million nor the advent of his forties had stilled Levy's restless search for ways to further increase his wealth. During a walk around Seville's cavernous Gothic cathedral he paused in front of the vast altarpiece, which looked to be covered in at least an acre of gold leaf. 'Now that's the way to make money,' he exclaimed. 'Start a religion!' The group looked at him, expecting to see a grin, but his expression was thoughtful.

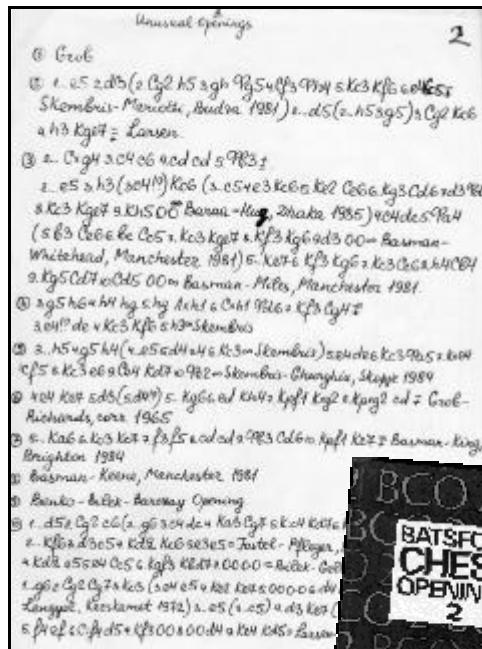
The manuscript of the second edition of *Batsford Chess Openings* was delivered to the Fitzhardinge Street offices in the summer of 1988. This time not

one of the 795 pages was by Eric Schiller. Substantially more than half were in Kasparov's handwriting and the rest in that of another, unidentified, Russian. A catastrophe occurred almost immediately. The precaution of sending the manuscript round the corner to be photocopied backfired spectacularly when 70 pages disappeared in transit.

One evening at the beginning of the 80s Paul Lamford's briefcase had been stolen from the King's Head pub in Bayswater. Inside was a new manuscript by Schiller, so of course there were jokes about nothing of consequence having been lost, a public-spirited thief, etc. But readers were not to be spared, because it turned out that Schiller had made a photocopy. This habit of his was fortunate in the case of *BCO2*. He had played a part in conveying the manuscript from Kasparov to Batsford, and while it was in his possession he had copied it.

Schiller had not contributed to the writing of *BCO2* (except for the numbering of pages 536 to 795, which appears to be in his handwriting) but he believed he was owed some sort of residual author's credit. Batsford on the other hand did not want to debase a genuine Kasparov product by leaving Schiller's name on the title page. They were also anxious to avoid another onslaught from Edward Winter, which was thought more likely if Schiller's name was present. But Keene supported

Schiller, and Batsford were prevailed upon to credit him as 'Adviser' – although the only useful 'advice' he could have supplied was on how and where to hand over the cash part of Kasparov's remuneration. In any case the days of Schiller's usefulness as an intermediary with Kasparov were drawing to a close. Kasparov's English was much improved since the early 80s, and as world champion he now had far greater autonomy in his dealings.



Kasparov on the Grob:  
a manuscript page  
of BCO 2 in the maestro's  
own hand

The 416 Kasparov pages that returned from the photocopying trip also survived being discarded by Batsford after publication and are now in a private collection. [Kingpin is grateful to the owner for making a copy available for the purposes of this article. See details of the auction of the original on our website – Ed.] They consist only of chess text and symbols, and contain very few crossings-out. Did Kasparov marshal entire openings in his head, formatting them unerringly into columns and notes, or is the manuscript simply a clean final copy? The 300 or so pages in another Russian hand also have few corrections. There are various possibilities, but a likely explanation is that Kasparov prepared a rough draft of the whole work but did not have time to write up all of the final version. He there-

fore delegated part of this task to a helper.

So *BCO1* was, up to proof stage, mostly the work of Eric Schiller, while Gary Kasparov was the principal author of *BCO2*. Notable by the sparseness of his input on both occasions was 'co-author' Raymond Keene. And he would once again contrive to keep his workload to a minimum in his final collaboration of the 80s – a crowning opus which perfectly partnered Keene's laziness with his co-author's incompetence. The spawn of this unpromising union now features regularly on all-time-worst lists. By a gruesome irony, the project was designed by its publishers as a vehicle that would enable Keene to return to the serious writing of his youth. They certainly ended up with 'vintage Keene', though not of the sort intended.

### **'Warriors of the Mind' perfectly partnered Keene's laziness with his co-author's incompetence'**

The origins of this fiasco lay in a well-intentioned proposal made to Keene some time in the mid to late 80s by two old acquaintances: the Honourable Julian Hardinge, heir to a peerage but at the time manager of a Covent Garden bookshop; and Julian Simpole, a Brighton-based teacher and the secretary of the spectral 'English Chess Association'. Like others in Keene's circle they remembered the relatively well-written works of his early years and were dismayed by his long slide into literary mediocrity. But as Keene's writing worsened, most of those around him gave up trying to persuade him to raise his standards, because it was clear he had no interest in doing so. The exceptions were Hardinge and Simpole. They believed Keene had it in him to write another 'real' book if the conditions were right and if he had a free choice of subject. This was the basis of the proposal they made to him and which he accepted.

Their belief was misguided, because the author of *Flank Openings* had long since ceased to exist. That Raymond Keene disappeared at the time he lost the conviction that there was any reason to write a good book rather than a potboiler if both were going to earn him similar amounts of money. By the late 80s his parties were starting to celebrate Reinfeldian output levels – 50 books published, 60, 75. Keene was completely untroubled by the implications, greeting the appearance of his 50th book with boundless unquestioning pride.

So Hardinge and Simpole's trust was betrayed. What they ended up paying for was *Warriors of the*

*Mind*, a book purporting to use statistical analysis to compare the great players from different generations and produce an overall league table. The calculations were to be supplied by co-author Nathan Divinsky, a professor of mathematics who, notwithstanding the gravitas of his title, had more than a hint of the buffoon about him. He had risen through the ranks of TV chess commentators, from humble origins in his native Canada to a stellar double appearance on top-billing British chat show *Wogan* during the 86 world championship match. This was achieved by astutely cultivating the eccentricities and larger-than-life demeanour that were by now requisites for any academic thinking of a career in broadcasting. His strong suits were hair that could balloon Einstein-style when needed and a well-executed bon vivant/racconteur persona.



Maths professor Nathan Divinsky, who handled chat show hosts more impressively than he did statistics

Statistics, however, did not appear to be Divinsky's forte, and when his calculations arrived they did little to allay the suspicion that Harvard or Cambridge would not be his next posting. His formula had produced a sequence that no chess player would take seriously. Alekhine, famously, was 18th. Keene asked Divinsky to check his figures, but they came back unrevised. Divinsky's statistical method was intended to be the underpinning of the book and its main selling point. In fact he had produced a strong argument for his many opponents who held the view that statistics were incapable of revealing anything meaningful about the subject under discussion.

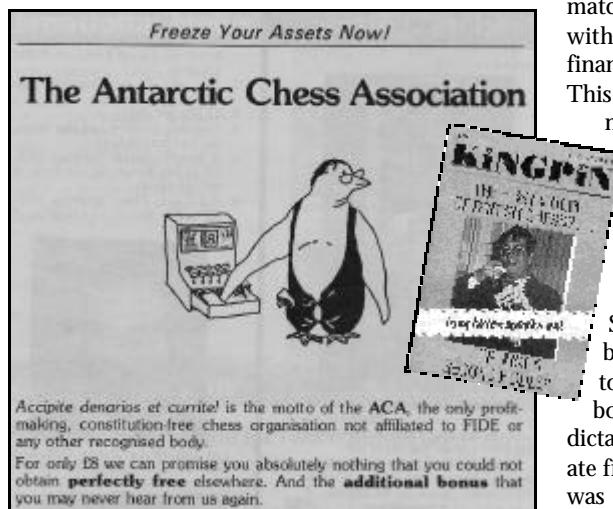


How to write a chess book: *Warriors of the Mind* was cobbled together from *Times* and *Spectator* columns

Keene confessed in private that he had grave misgivings. One option was to inform Hardinge and Simpole that the book was unpublishable and would have to be scrapped. Keene was reluctant to do this as he would lose royalties, and so production continued. His job was to supply pen-portraits and games for each of the players figuring in the league table. Instead of the original material Hardinge and Simpole had been promised, Keene's part of the manuscript was submitted mostly in the form of photocopies of old *Spectator* and *Times* articles, with a few adjustments marked in felt-tip.

The book received the critical savaging it deserved, and it thus echoed the note on which Keene was finishing the decade. His *Times* column – plodding, perfunctory and full of factual and typographical errors – was being condemned in many quarters. Fortunately for him the chances of being fired were slim, since it would embarrass the newspaper's management to admit they had made a mistake in their choice of correspondent. But articles critical of Keene were starting to appear more often in the wider chess press, following the lead given by *Kingpin* and Edward Winter. *Kingpin*'s Summer 1989 cover returned to the attack over the Tunis episode – 'The First Violin of British Chess . . . Or Just A Second Fiddle?' – supported by new material from Miles himself, who was emerging from the period of mental disturbance that had peaked in autumn 1987.

In addition to the litany of public censure, attitudes were also hardening towards Keene within his personal circle as the 1990s dawned. But a core of stalwarts stayed on, among them Hardinge and Simpole, in spite of their disappointment at the panning of *Warriors of the Mind*, and perhaps unaware of the extent to which they had been duped. And Keene had not lost his ability to make a good first impression on those who knew nothing about him. Sent to cover a Keene charity simul, *Daily Mail* sports writer Jeff Powell penned an awestruck portrait on 14 October 1991 of 'this charming, multi-faceted man'.



*Kingpin* broke the Tunis story and poked fun at the ghostly chess organizations conjured up by Keene (aka The Penguin)

Batsford's chess list entered the 90s in good shape, boosted by a strong showing from *BCO2*, but decline and fall lay ahead. Keene would play his part in this, managing to be both a financial and a public relations liability – in abject contrast with his performance in the early 80s. It would have been hard to come up with a worse start to the new decade – apart, possibly, from a three-volume set of Eric Schiller's Best Games – than Keene's recommendation to publish Divinsky's *Batsford Chess Encyclopedia* (1990), described by Edward Winter as '... a shambles full of mistakes, misjudgments and misprints from cover to cover'. Batsford on the other hand chose to call it 'completely new' and 'the definitive work of reference', even though Divinsky had copied entire sections from Harry Golombek's *Encyclopedia*. In 1992 there followed the Donaldson plagiarism incident referred to ear-

lier. Keene was doubly a disaster on this occasion – the \$3000 settlement the following year was the result of his refusing Donaldson's original modest request for \$200.

Keene's reputation took a battering from other directions in the early 90s, and within a few years he would turn his energies away from chess. In January 1991 the *Sunday Times Magazine* published Nick Pitt's feature on the Tunis affair and the Keene/Miles relationship, exhibiting Keene in a highly unfavourable light to a wide audience. In 1993 Keene persuaded *The Times* to contribute substantial sponsorship to the Kasparov–Short match. Organizational blunders then combined with a dismally one-sided contest to produce a financial and public relations disaster for the paper. This was an occasion that, loss of face or no, *Times* management must have been strongly tempted to dispense with Keene's services.



By now though, and not just for Keene and Batsford, the golden age had slipped away. Soon even more would be lost. The top players bickered through the wan 1990s, pausing only to throw an interested glance towards the cheque book of the corrupt and murderous Central Asian dictator who replaced Campomanes – an appropriate figurehead perhaps, since by this time chess itself was coming to resemble a failed third-world state. Computers were the army in the wings, preparing to intervene and assert their authority. They staged their coup in 1997, defeating a world champion and robbing chess of much of its mystique in the eyes of both public and players.

And Raymond Keene – what can one say of him? Discredited but unbowed, the Chancer lumbered forward on his long trek to infamy. He still had a few more dice to roll. The lucrative but risky mass fleecing of investors at the start of the new millennium would bring him to the peak of his corruption and notoriety.

At this crisis the two great weapons he won in the 1980s would serve and shield him, like the cloaks of invisibility of myth. How many of those investors did little research on Keene but confidently placed their cash with him in the belief that they would be most unlikely to be swindled by a man who wrote a column in the *Times* newspaper, and on whom Queen Elizabeth had conferred the Order of the British Empire?